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MARIAN DEVOTIONS: IN AND BEYOND *MARIALIS CULTUS*

Vatican Council II is often blamed, or praised, for the loss of devotion to Mary within the Church. It is pointed out as fact that prior to the Council devotion to Mary flourished, while immediately afterwards it suffered an almost immediate demise. The elements within the Council held to be responsible for this change are as follows:

1. *The promulgation of the one document on the Church (Lumen gentium) with a chapter on Mary appearing at its end, treating her as first within the Church.* Though such action might have gratified a minority of Catholics and appeased Protestants, most of the faithful would see it only as a diminishment of the person and role of Mary. Instinctively they would look for a separate document on Mary alone, extolling her as above as well as within the Church.

2. *The strong emphasis in the Council upon the humanity of Christ and upon Christ as our sole savior and intermediary with God.* If, as prior to the Council, Christ's divinity were accentuated and his self-declared dual role as judge and savior of the world were retained, then the need for Mary as our intercessor with Christ—as Christ is with God—would remain. But the Council stressed the human Christ who is abundantly merciful and compassionate and who is our constant and efficacious intercessor. Our need for a second intermediary, then, would seem superfluous and even downright blasphemous.

3. *The priority given to Sacred Scripture as the embodiment of the initial and fundamental tradition of the Church.* The enthusiasm for Scripture sparked thereby has tended to distract from attention paid to later Tradition in which Mary

mainly appears. The Mary of this later tradition, often god-like in her qualities, does not seem to be the same as the simple Jewish woman of the gospels. Therefore, eliminate her.

4. *The reform of the liturgy, with its insistence on the centrality of the Eucharist and other sacraments, and the substitution of the vernacular for Latin as the liturgical language.* Largely because the liturgy had been foreign in language and otherwise isolated from the people, popular devotions—including the most popular marian devotions—arose to satisfy the need for intelligible worship. But now a renewed vernacular liturgy itself could and should satisfy this need, thereby rendering other devotions, Marian devotion included, unnecessary.

5. *A more positive outlook on the world, life, and death.* Not so much seeing Christ in the act of redeeming the world but viewing the world as already redeemed seemed to be the tenor of the Council. Thus, with sin and its consequences no longer at the fore, Mary—the refuge of sinners, gate of heaven, help of Christians, and so on—seems not so desperately needed now. If, with the Protestants we are already saved by Christ, then, like them, we are in no need of Mary.

6. *Ecumenism.* The Council's thrust toward dialogue and unification with other Christian churches and other religions has led to a de-emphasis upon things that divide. But, since the Reformation, devotion to Mary has been central in the division of the Catholic Church from other Christian bodies. Therefore, we should let her and devotion to her quietly recede into the background while, with our Protestant brothers and sisters, we proclaim Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior.

Yet, it must be acknowledged that Mary features more in Vatican II than in any other ecumenical council and, many argue, in ways that best befit her and her magnificent vocation. She is prominently there in the very first words of Pope John XXIII as he opens the Council, also in the introductory words of the conciliar fathers in their address to "all

people and nations" as they begin their work. Though she does not have a document all to herself, she climaxes—or at least finalizes—in a long and detailed chapter, the first—and perhaps most important—document of the Council, *Lumen gentium*. Her name is invoked or mentioned in other documents of the Council. And the papal brief closing the Council begins and ends with the acknowledgement of her presence and protection throughout. Further, Pope John expressly opens the Council on the feast of the Divine Maternity (11 Oct.), and Pope Paul closes it on the feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 Dec.).

It may be that such recognition of Mary's presence and authority arises from deep levels of the Catholic psyche, vitally operative within the Council as elsewhere in the Church, but it is also plausibly argued that it is peripheral, a pious though anachronistic nod in the direction of Mary. Central to the Council are the non-marian teachings and declarations mentioned above, and these, it would seem, have tended to exclude rather than include Mary and diminish rather than encourage devotion to her.

I think that, initially, this has been the case. But perhaps, in the long run, the Council will be seen to have done right by Mary, not so much because of what it said about her (though this also) but, rather, because of its emphasis upon other essentials of the faith. Having got them rightly and properly placed, according to the exigencies of our time, it has cleared the way for fresh and creative approaches to Mary in and for the contemporary world.

NEW DIRECTIONS

For all the fine things the Council said about Mary, it recognized that there is so much else that can and should be said. In the preface to its chapter on Mary (*Lumen gentium*, chap. 8), it emphatically declares that it "does not . . . have it in mind to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which have not yet been fully

illuminated by the work of theologians (no. 54)." Thus Cardinal Suenens, one of the more prominent and creative voices at the Council, has recently stressed the incompleteness of its declaration on Mary: "I felt we needed to say more . . ."¹ Pope John Paul II seems of like mind when he asks for "a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church."² And Pope Paul VI, in *Marialis cultus*, speaks continually of the "development" and "growth" of devotion to Mary. For him, too, the Council did not say the final word either about Mary or devotion to her, nor did he consider his own word as final.³

In this paper, I would like to suggest the direction of further development of marian devotion as rooted in marian theology (the two must go hand in hand), not only in and for the future but also as it is already occurring here and now.

When we speak of devotion in a religious sense, we generally have in mind prayer, specifically, some set of prayers definite in kind and number. Thus, we speak of devotions (plural) of (or to) Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Jude, St. Ann, etc. It is a matter of saying some particular prayers in a specified context. But there is a stronger sense to the word. St. Thomas defines it in terms of service: it is the prompt or ready will to serve God and others as leading to God.⁴ We ourselves have this sense in mind when we use the word as a verb or adjective or adverb, as when we speak of devoting one's life to a cause, when we refer to a devoted friend, or when we sign off a letter with the phrase "Devotedly yours" and mean it. This is the meaning of the word as it is used by St. Louis De Montfort when he speaks of "true de-

¹John Catoir, "Cardinal Suenens Calls for A New Pentecost," *America*, 6 June 1987, 457-59. In the interview recorded here the Cardinal explained: "She is not merely an historical figure; from the beginning she has been given an ongoing mission to bring Christ to the world" (p. 457).

²*Redemptoris mater*, no. 48.

³*Marialis cultus*, introduction and *passim*.

⁴*Summa Theologiae*, IIa IIae, q. 82, art. 1; art. 2, ad 3.

votion to our Blessed Mother." He certainly has prayer in mind, deep prayer and many prayers, but he is thinking primarily of service, indeed of "slavery," to Mary.⁵ St. Thomas, too, is aware of the link between prayer and devotion—prayer is one of the causes of devotion—but its principal connotation is readiness to serve, though, we may suppose, the service may take the form of prayer.⁶ When, therefore, we speak of devotion to Mary we ought to begin again to have this meaning in mind and heart. Prayer to her, yes, but more—a readiness and eagerness to know and serve her.

For this, however, we must first overcome a continually gnawing question that Protestants have long since asked and many Catholics worry over: Why devotion to Mary at all or to any of the saints? Why not be devoted to, that is, be ready to serve, God alone? One may answer with the Church at large that devotion to Mary or to any of the saints *is*, if it be right, devotion to God. The whole of their vocation, both on earth and in heaven, is to point beyond themselves to God and, by what they were and are, show us the way. True, this is the why and wherefore of Christ. He, after all, *is* the Way as well as the Truth and the Life. But Christ, though one, is also, paradoxically, multiple. As St. Paul tells us, He is composed of many members, each a vital part of him, reflective of him, and meant to help lead others into his fullness. In being devoted to the saints, therefore, I am *ipso facto* being devoted to Christ and to the Triune God at the heart of Christ.

⁵"Absolutely speaking," says St. Louis, "we are slaves of Jesus; 'relatively' we are the slaves of Mary. Mary and Jesus, having but the same will and the same power, have also the same subjects, servants and slaves." See his *True Devotion*, Part I, ch. 2, 68-77.

⁶*Summa Theologiae*, art. 3. Thomas may well have had in mind the numerous congregations and societies of Mary proliferating throughout Europe in his day, some of them serving Mary by knowing and making her known, others by works of charity and justice—much as the Legion of Mary does in our own time—but all of them grounded in prayer to Mary and to God through Mary. Cf. A. D'Amato, *La Devozione a Maria Nell'Ordine Domenicano* (Bologna: Edizioni Studio Domenicano, 1984), 49-55.

Another reason for such multiple devotion, that is, devotion to Mary and the saints and not just to God or Christ in isolation, is simply that God wants it this way—like the mother preparing a cake for a dinner for some friends. Her four-year old daughter kept asking if she could help with the cake. Mom first said no because she had to get it done quickly and, of course, it had to be done right. But soon she relented, gave the child a bowl, had her pour some flour and milk in it, helped her mix it up with a spoon and pour it into the pan where the rest of the ingredients were. Then the two of them placed the pan in the oven. That evening when the cake was brought in to the pleasure of all present, the mother announced: "This is the cake Kathy and I made together." The child's eyes lit up, for she was happy to receive her due congratulations.

Now, the mother surely could have baked the cake by herself and maybe even done a better job of it, at least a quicker job. But, as the mother herself discovered, what gave her most pleasure that evening was not her cake or her own expertise but the joy her daughter took in her part in it. So must it be with God. He could build the world alone and build it well and quickly. But it is not the world that pleases him as much as our part in building it. Or rather, for God the world *is* our creating it with him. It is not his own act of redeeming that contents him, as much as his and ours together. It is our joy that makes for his, as it should be his that makes for ours. Thus he has his angels and saints to help him build up the world and redeem it, and he wants us to call upon them and one another to get the job done and to serve one another in the common task. It is the difference between an isolationist religion and one that is ecclesial; a religion that is individualistic, just the one God and me, and one that is communal, the Triune God and all of us together—in heaven, purgatory, and on earth—in mutual love and service; a religion that is absolutist, with God or his representative running the whole show, and one that is Christian, with all of us doing our bit, helping, "devoted to" one an-

other and to God in and through one another, toward the good of all.

But with Mary, there is more to it than this. Like the rest of us, she is one of God's children and helpers, and she is part of the Mystical Body of Christ. The long tradition of the Church, beginning with the Scriptures, tells us that in this she excels. With God and under him, she is the cake-baker *par excellence*; she is the heart of the mystical body, as Christ is the head. And so, we look to her as guide and inspiration, to learn what it is to be a true child, a humble servant of the Lord. We look to her, as the Council and theologians since would have us do, as "the faithful disciple" and "first among the faithful." But the tradition and the experience of the Church to the present day tell us something more. Elsewhere I have tried to argue theologically that though Mary as a person is all and only human, and so infinitely below God and Christ as God, yet as the embodiment of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit's quasi-incarnation, as St. Maximilian Kolbe insists) and mother of God, her holiness is not simply a difference in degree from the rest of the saints but rather of kind. She is not only within the Church, as the Council was at pains to proclaim, but, with God and Christ, is also above it.⁷ Let me here suggest the same conclusion from a brief analysis of the psychology of prayer and of the devotion that arises out of it.

THE WAY OF PRAYER

When we Christians pray to God, we use images and ideas. This is part and parcel of our human condition. It is also encouraged and aided by the event of the Incarnation: God himself giving us proper images and ideas of himself, that we might hear, see, look upon, and touch the word of life (1 John 1:1). But we are to realize that God is not the

⁷See my article "Mary in Contemporary Culture," *Review for Religious* (May/June 1989): 323-36.

image or idea; he infinitely transcends anything we might imagine or think about him. As at the Transfiguration, we are to move beyond, or rather within, the humanity of Christ to his divinity. But what is it, experientially, to do this?

First of all, it is to let all images and ideas and desires go and abide in the dark, with the silent trust that God is filling our emptiness and is the light too bright to appear except as dark. "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you . . . So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing" (T.S. Eliot, *East Coker*). Secondly, it is to realize the praying of the Spirit within us who is crying "Abba, Father" and asking for what we need since we ourselves do not know, having left, for the moment anyway, all the world behind (Rom. 8:16,26-27). It is letting prayer happen, rather than making prayer. And thirdly, and most apposite to our present concern, it is to transcend not just our images and ideas of God but also all our ordinary categories or modes of thought. It is to surrender to another kind of knowing within us, in which what we know is not before us as an object to behold but rather behind us as the one beholding.⁸

⁸Such experience has been conceived and expressed in sundry ways, in the Eastern World, certainly, but also in the West. Besides the commonsense distinction between intuition and reason, there is the whole Augustinian-Platonic tradition of reminiscence in which knowledge of God is not argued to objectively but "emerges" out of memory or some other deep recess of soul. Thomas Aquinas, for all his Aristotelian preoccupation with cognitive, objective knowing, allows for the possibility and fact of the grace of the *lumen gloriae*, sacred rapture, and prophecy, to say nothing of faith itself, in which knowledge arises from within through union with God rather than from without through the senses. There is Eckhart's "spark" of the soul, source of a mode of knowing other and higher than cognitive and objective. Blaise Pascal, having himself *experienced* the distinction between the two modes of knowing, gave striking expression to it in his memorable: "The heart has reasons that the reason does not know." In more recent times this higher knowledge appears in the Jungian unconscious, understood not simply as a receptacle of previous thought and activity but also as *ontologically* prior to conscious

Thus, normally when we pray, we consciously distinguish between God and his angels and saints, between God and nature, between God and ourselves, between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each has his/her/its proper category, and much of our philosophy and theology is bent on maintaining proper distinctions. But as prayer deepens, though distinction may remain, an underlying unity emerges, so that now God and nature blur and blend, the angels and saints and ourselves—together with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—become immersed and all but lost in the one divine Presence, or what we may take to be such. So in the concrete practice of prayer, we may begin with an image of Christ or Mary or one of the saints and address our thoughts and words accordingly. We may think of the ocean, some river or forest, some friend or enemy, someone in need. Then we may find ourselves almost unconsciously speaking, interiorly or exteriorly, the word “God,” recognizing the one Presence beneath all our multiple concerns. That Presence may be fleeting, but, when there, it is all *in* all and all is in it. Where now does nature leave off and God begin? Where is that still point at which God’s life becomes mine

thought and anteriorly dynamic. And it has been given theological formulation by a number of contemporary theologians. Karl Rahner, for example, speaks of the priority of pre-apprehension and subjective consciousness over objective or thematic knowing: “This subjective consciousness of the knower always remains unthematic . . . It is something which goes on, so to speak, behind the back of the knower, who is looking away from himself and at the object. . . .” Something has already taken place, he says, “in the fact that a person comes to the objective reality of his everyday life both in the involvement of action and in the intellectual activity of thought and comprehension, he is actualizing, as the condition which makes possible such involvement and comprehension, an unthematic and non-objective pre-apprehension of the inconceivable and incomprehensible single fullness of reality” (*Foundations of Christian Faith*, London: Darton Longman and Todd, 1978, 18, 69, as cited by Fergus Kerr, who, however, with Wittgenstein as weapon, critiques the “Cartesian” bent toward the subjective self and its underground, transcendent mode of knowing. See his *Theology After Wittgenstein* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986], 12-13, and *passim*).

and mine his? Where does Mary, in addition to being herself, become God?⁹

This last question we may ask of other saints besides Mary. But Mary, in the lived tradition of the Church, has special claim to it. Not that she has ever seriously been regarded as God or goddess, but that wherever she has been *there* has been God even more than herself. So her love-bond with the Holy Spirit—she is the Spirit's spouse as is no other creature. So intimate is this union of hers with the Spirit, as proclaimed by the Church, that Protestants continue to protest that where they see the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church sees Mary.¹⁰ And there is her equally intimate union with Christ, the total Christ, such that she alone is Mother

⁹Negative theology of God is, of course, quite acceptable: we are, or should be, quick to admit that when we talk about God we really do not know what we are talking about, God being infinitely beyond our poor powers of thought. But with the angels and saints, and heaven in general, we are less diffident; we tend to rest secure in image and idea; they *are* who and what we imagine and think them to be. But here too we can use more than a little negative theologizing. The *whole* of the Afterlife is beyond imagination and conception: "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it so much as dawned on man what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). What is that ultimate union between God and the saint? What does it "look like"? What, indeed, does the disembodied saint and non-bodied angel look like? In beholding the saint, will we be lost in God? In contemplating God, will we see still more of the saint? Such questions should be raised, if only to caution us against a facile, materialistic approach to the saints and God and the ineffable union between them.

¹⁰For an experiential as well as theological treatment of the Holy Spirit as feminine by a Catholic theologian, see Donald Gelpi's *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), esp. pp. 215-238. Gelpi searches Scripture and Tradition for the "Breath" (Spirit) as feminine and, with clarity, depth, and freshness, subjects his findings to a plausible, "corrected," Jungian analysis. Only in passing, however, does he treat of Mary's and the Spirit's relationship. He does counter the objection that the Spirit, being the spouse of Mary, must be conceived of as masculine: "nowhere does the New Testament describe Mary as the bride of the Holy Breath or the Breath as her husband. Neither infancy gospel even hints that in Jesus' conception the Breath functioned as an impregnating male principle" (p. 221).

not just of Christ in his humanity but also of Christ as God. The totality of Mary's being is wrapped up in God. She is the lowly servant who is *not*, precisely that she might "magnify" the Lord, that he might become all in all. So, when we think of Mary, we are by that very fact thinking of God; when we pray to her, it is to God we are praying; when we are devoted to her, it is God himself who has our devotion. In speaking of devotion to the saints, St. Thomas says that what legitimizes it is that it "terminates" in God, for God alone, properly speaking, is to have our devotion.¹¹ This does not mean that we begin with devotion to the saints and then after a time we advance to that of God, ending finally with him alone. Rather, in the very act of each of our prayers and devotions, our mind and heart reach and terminate in God. Why else do I pray to a saint? What can she or he do for me apart from God, since alone they have no power, alone they simply are not? At least unconsciously, all of my prayer and devotion is toward God, however it may be channeled along the way.

And Mary, simply by being who and what she is, makes this quite clear. She continually holds God in her arms or, as at Guadalupe, in her womb, and she herself is constantly held by the Holy Spirit who is the Love of Father and Son. Other saints may channel our prayer, our devotion to God. Where Mary stands, *there*, in its fullness, is its term.

This ought not to be construed as a diminishment of God or of Christ's redemptive act. To use the old and quite legitimate translation of her hymn of praise, Mary "magnifies" the Lord, that is, she shows us more of God: makes God present among us such that now we can see *her*, that is, see God now not just with the masculine face of Christ, but, on the closer look that Mary provides, also with God's quite feminine heart. This is why Mary is there in our prayer even when we do not *consciously* think of her. Simply by thinking of the Christian God, we are thinking of Mary. For she has altered drastically the conception of God. All these cen-

¹¹See note 4.

turies seeing God in the arms of this woman—as in the many paintings, statues, icons, hymns and poems, where Mary and Jesus are all but fused into one, the God child so close to, surrounded and embraced by so gentle yet strong a woman—we cannot help but see God as tender, merciful, compassionate—our Mother as well as Father.¹² So too, for Christ's work of redemption. As suggested above, it is we who impose exclusivity upon Christ's power, insisting that he is our sole redeemer. He is that, but, as both Paul VI and John Paul II with the whole of Catholic tradition have insisted, inseparably involved with him in the work of redemption, as in all else, is Mary.¹³ Christ does not like to work alone; he is not an isolationist. He is communitarian from beginning to end. He it is who saves us, but more is involved in that "he" than we credit; and most involved is Mary.

MARIAN DEVOTION: TODAY AND TOMORROW

In light of the above, perhaps we may now consider briefly some of the specifics of devotion to Mary as touched upon in Pope Paul's *Marialis cultus*.

1. *The liturgy*. Pope Paul VI speaks of the need for harmonization of devotion to Mary with the liturgy and points up Mary's prominent place in the new reformed liturgy. In the restored "General Calendar," Mary is present not only in and through her many specific feasts but she also has a seasonal place within the liturgy such as at Advent and Christmas. And Pope Paul demands respect and reverence for ex-

¹²I think especially of Our Lady of Vladimir and other like icons, such as that which the western Church venerates as Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Mother and child are almost one body and it is the Mother who is prominent, and, in the latter icon, protective of her apparently frightened child.

¹³*Redemptoris mater*, nos. 1, 26, 27, and *passim*: "... in the Incarnation she [the Church] encounters Christ and Mary indissolubly joined ... (no. 1)" "... from the very first moment, the Church 'looked at' Mary through Jesus, just as she 'looked at' Jesus through Mary" (no. 26). "Mary belongs indissolubly to the mystery of Christ, and she belongs also to the mystery of the Church from the beginning ... (no. 27). *Marialis cultus*, no. 25: "Certainly genuine Christian piety has never failed to highlight the indissoluble link and essential relationship of the Virgin to the Divine Saviour."

tra-liturgical devotions to Mary. As long, he emphasizes, as they conform to Scripture and liturgy, and are sensitive to the spirit of ecumenism, they are to be preserved and fostered, and even new devotions, springing from the needs and temper of our times, are to be encouraged.

Two observations are offered on this particular text:

a. It is true that there are many feasts of Mary throughout the year, but most practicing *Roman* Catholics by far do not know let alone experience them. For the most part, they are weekday feasts. But how many Catholics attend Mass on weekdays? Excluding Christmas, there are three holy days honoring Mary in a specific way, and two of these many Catholics cannot or do not observe, at least in common worship. This leaves only two times in the year that most Catholics find Mary in their central act of worship, hardly enough to tell them their current Church takes Mary seriously. Prior to Vatican II, the case was similar, except that the holy days were more regarded as of obligation and so the feasts of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption were more universally observed. Also, at each and every Mass, Mary was visibly present, not just in the one mention of her name in the Canon, which most people missed then as now (so brief and fleeting is it), but in the prayers said vocally by all immediately after Mass. *Each* Sunday, as each weekday, the faithful were reminded by their Church of Mary and her place in their daily lives. We might well learn from the Byzantine rite in this. Here, at each of the liturgies, one cannot be unaware of her presence; her name is spoken time and time again and her image (icon) is prominently displayed before the altar along with that of her Son and is often kissed by the faithful immediately upon receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. As mentioned above, we need not have Mary visibly, consciously, before us to be devoted to her. If we have her Son, if we have God, it is because it is she who is bringing him to birth among us and it is her maternal heart that we find in God. But, unless we now and again consciously think of Mary, we will not only forget her but also lose our *Christian* God.

b. The other observation is by way of emphasis. It is to underscore Pope Paul's empathy for extra-liturgical devotion to Mary and his call for the creation of still other devotions, born out of the needs of our time and culture. There have been and are those who would limit such devotion, if not altogether scrap it, contending that our worship should be only biblical and strictly liturgical. This smacks of the *sola scriptura* complex which strips away the full rich tradition of the Church, in belief and practice, and ignores the perennial need of humankind to express its creed in multiple ways. It is shallow in its psychology, sociology, and anthropology, and is totally ignorant of the deeply religious heart. It is, therefore, good and reassuring to find at the center of the teaching Church a reiteration of the Church's ancient practice of encouraging true devotion to Mary, both in old and newer forms. True, the best of non-biblical aspects of Mary are grounded in Scripture and appear in the liturgy (feasts of the Immaculate Conception, Assumption, Queenship of Mary, etc.), but these were raised to such high status only because the Church had her ear to the ground, as it were, listening to the mind and heart and spontaneous devotion of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*). Whatever the minority opinion, it seems, at least as evidenced in *Marialis cultus*, that the Church will continue to listen broadly and deeply and not be hedged in by the kind of neo-fundamentalism that limits God, and his mother, to the Bible and current canonized worship.¹⁴

¹⁴We might note also John Paul II's encouragement of new Marian devotions and spirituality: "Marian *spirituality*, like its corresponding *devotion*, finds a very rich source in the historical experience of individuals and of the various Christian communities present among the different peoples and nations of the world . . . I am pleased to note that in our own time too new manifestations of this spirituality and devotion are not lacking" (*Redemptoris mater*, no. 48). For a refreshing new look at the need for pious devotion to Mary as well as other saints, see Gerald Arbuckle's "In praise of popular piety," *The Tablet*, 13 May 1989, 542-44. Notes Fr. Arbuckle (until recently of the East Asian Pastoral Institute in the Philippines), even liberation theologians, who once thought such devotion served only to help maintain the *status quo* among the poor, now "recognise that liberation is impossible unless it begins from within the religious aspirations and practices of the people themselves" (p. 544).

2. *The Rosary*. During the past five or six centuries, the greatest popular devotion to Mary has been the rosary, and *Marialis cultus* treats it as such. However, it is not to be forced, says the pope. Rather "the faithful should feel serenely free in its regard. They should be drawn to its calm recitation by its intrinsic appeal" (no. 55). The pope notes the scholarly research that has in recent times uncovered more of the value, spiritual and psychological, of this ancient mode of praying, and he beautifully and restrainedly describes its various elements and their unity.

It is a "gospel prayer," he reminds us, revealing—through the watchful, contemplative eyes of Mary—the principal redeeming acts of Christ. The pope emphasizes its contemplative nature. It is by no means to become "a mechanical repetition of formulas." Rather, "it calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual [and community] to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord's life" as seen through Mary (no. 47). With delicate balance, right distinction, and proper emphasis, he compares the rosary with the Liturgy. It is as though the rosary were the Liturgy taken home with us, the one continually reminding us of Christ's life, death, and resurrection actually made present to us in and through the other. The pope notes that Christ is central in the rosary, as in all else truly Christian; but, we may add, here as elsewhere, Christ does not stand alone. As in paintings and icons and poem after poem, he is in the "atmosphere" of Mary, who, indeed, begins the rosary with her annunciation and ends it with her coronation: Christ in her womb and in her glory. Throughout, it is the man and the woman together who make for the whole Christ and the redemption of the world.

All this may be nice in theory, many may argue, but the fact is that the rosary is no longer the popular devotion it once was, and it survives in our day only as an anachronism. But the rosary, as everything else religious, ought not be judged on the basis of popularity. If at one time it was popular, well and good. It may yet enjoy a revival, as, indeed, it has revived over the past ten to twenty years, as far

as I can judge. What we must do is see it in itself, for its intrinsic worth and possible value for today's Christian. Those who practice the rosary find it a beautiful and powerful prayer, and this is the testimony of the mature in prayer, even more than beginners. And it would be good for others to consider praying it, especially, I would say, the sophisticated in religion, those who theologize, who examine and reexamine their faith and try to make sense of it in terms of the intricacies of the modern world. The rosary will be a reminder to them that they are not just to think about their faith but are also to pray and live it, are to be "devoted to" God in spirit as well as mind. It will also remind them that, though faith can indeed become a complex affair, basically it is very simple: "I believe, Lord; help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). The simplicity of Mary and her prayer reminds us of the utter and absolute simplicity of God, which is the term of all our thinking and striving, however complex things may be in the in-between time.

3. *Pilgrimage*. One of the devotions to Mary only hinted at by *Marialis cultus* is that of pilgrimage: a great thing in the past, but also expanding in the present, giving the lie to all who claim Mary and devotion to her are passé. Here is Mary seen to be very much alive in our contemporary world. Recent statistics on the number of pilgrims to the various shrines of Mary are overwhelming. Says John Eade in a recent issue of *The Tablet*:

The last forty years have seen a vast increase in the numbers of Christian pilgrims. They travel to shrines dotted about Europe, the Americas, Africa and South Asia. Some of the international shrines are visited by several millions of pilgrims in a year—more than four million to Lourdes, five million to Medjugorje, between three and four million each to Czestochowa and Fatima, many again to Guadalupe and Our Lady of the Snows in the Americas. A recent survey of Christian pilgrimages throughout the world identified about 8,500 active shrines.¹⁵

¹⁵J. Eade, "To be a pilgrim," *The Tablet*, 6 Aug. 1988, 895-96.

Most of these, by far, are shrines of Our Lady. The vast majority of the pilgrims are Catholic or Orthodox, but there are also large numbers from other churches or from no church or religion at all. And here Mary may be seen as quite definitely leading to and not away from God. One need only visit one or other of her shrines to be made aware of this. People are there worshipping Mary, but only because within her and all around her it is the Lord who is magnified. Critics ask: Is it Mary or only an illusion or delusion of the visionary? Whatever it is, it shows the thirst for the divine that people have and the divine with a mother's caring love. And such universal thirst, we may not unreasonably suppose, argues that some real fountain must be there, whatever the shape and coloring particular individuals may give to it.

4. *Contemporary Aspirations—the Marginal.* Pope Paul calls for new ways to express devotion to Mary. He wants us to move beyond Mary's historical, socio-cultural milieu to Mary's life as valid for every time and place—to what in Mary, he says, "has a permanent and universal exemplary value" (no. 35). He asks for a new way of looking at Mary, gleaned mainly through a proper reading of the gospels and attention to the needs and concerns of our time. He speaks mainly of Mary in her relationship to the modern woman, but his words here can and ought to be applied to all the marginalized of the world. Mary, he says, is exemplar of motherhood and virginity, but she is also model and inspiration for all who would set the world upside down and right side up. She is one with "those who would support, with the Gospel spirit, the liberating energies of man and society" (no. 37). We are to find in her "a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions (cf. Luke 1:51-53) . . . a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile (cf. Mt. 2:13-23)" (no. 37). And we are to see her "not as a Mother exclusively concerned with her own divine Son, but rather as a woman whose action helped to

strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ (cf. Jn. 2:1-12), and whose maternal role was extended and became universal on Calvary" (no. 37).

Pope Paul wrote *Marialis cultus* in 1974. Since then, men and women theologians and some few poets have been re-discovering Mary along these lines and offering her as such to our world. But the faithful themselves anticipate. Before the theologians discuss and the poets sing, we find Mary spontaneously there among the marginalized: as Our Lady of Guadalupe, for the poor and outcasts of our southern hemisphere and now much of the northern hemisphere as it is populated from the south; at Medjugorje, in a land impoverished both in body and spirit; in the Philippines, at a time of political crisis, when the oppressed had only her to cry out to; and, of course, at Lourdes, for the perennially marginalized sick and dying. Again, some dispute whether or not this is Mary or simply the embodiment of a people's need for her. But, if the need is there, there also *is* Mary our mother who, like God and with God, anticipates our needs. And I would suggest that she is so intimate to us, so loving and caring toward us, not simply because she is one of us and preeminent among us, but also because, like her Son and with him, she also stands above us. Like God himself, she can bend so low only because she is so high; she is so immanent only because of her transcendence. She is Mary, the lowly servant, first among the faithful, our guide and exemplar in all that is right and just. But she is more, much more than this. And it should be one of the tasks of future theology—rooted in the Scriptures certainly, but in the rest of Tradition too, and nourished by living devotion—to suggest ever more clearly and reverently just what and how this may be.

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