

Marian Studies

Volume 45 *Mary and Religious Education:
Proceedings of the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting
of the Mariological Society of America, held in
New Orleans, LA*

Article 6

1994

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Recommended Citation

Mannion, M. Francis (1994) "The Marian Formation of Christians: A Pastoral Perspective," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 45, Article 6.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol45/iss1/6

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THE MARIAN FORMATION OF CHRISTIANS: A PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

*M. Francis Mannion**

The title of my presentation, "The Marian Formation of Christians," suggests a certain ambiguity—one I hope more of richness than of confusion. To speak of "the *formation* of Christians" is to indicate something with an immediately accessible content. But what does it mean to speak of "the *Marian* formation of Christians"? Nothing esoteric or out of the ordinary is intended here. I am simply invoking the fundamental insight of modern Marian renewal and of the Second Vatican Council, according to which the role of Mary in the ongoing life of the church is fundamentally that of enabling the formation of disciples in the image of Christ. The Marian dynamics of Christian life have an intrinsically christological terminus; they exist for no other purpose than the formation of Christian believers. The correlative principle is that there is no adequate formation in Christ that does not involve a Marian dimension. To be formed most deeply as disciples of Christ is intrinsically to assume the posture of Mary vis-à-vis the Christian mysteries of salvation. In its deepest theological and anthropological structure, formation into Christ is Marian formation.¹

This assembly, unlike many, is, of course, convinced of the veracity of this dynamic two-sided principle. The sources of the principle in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in the official teaching of the church are well known to you.

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¹For an exploration of this theme in one of its most notable modern expositors, see Johann G. Roten, "Hans Urs von Balthasar's Anthropology in Light of His Marian Thinking," *Communio* 20, no. 3 (1993): 306-333.

There is no need for me to elaborate or argue them here. However, you will probably agree that, since the Council, we have been more effective in advancing the Marian dimension of the church in theory than in pastoral practice. Despite the heroic efforts of scholars such as yourselves, the Marian dimension of Christian life is not today adequately elaborated, advanced or expressed in the concrete life of the church. The Marian dynamics of Christian life appear presently to be in a state of suspension. My task in this presentation is to attempt an explanation for this suspension and, more usefully, to suggest some positive directions forward. I speak not only as a theologian, but as a pastor; hence, the "pastoral perspective" I offer.

In the first part of my talk, I want to look at the question of Christian formation in a general way and to analyze the problems and challenges that beset it. In the second part, I will focus more specifically on the Marian dimension of Catholic formation and the necessity of some significant development and advancement in this area.

Christian Formation Today

Let me begin with some general considerations regarding Christian formation. By "formation" I do not mean the task of formal catechesis only. I mean the very purpose for which the church exists: the formation of humankind into the image of Christ. In this sense, every aspect of the church's life may be seen to be directed to formation. This includes not only catechesis, but the official liturgy of the church; and it includes also the whole plethora of Christian activities and exercises captured loosely by the term "the devotional life."

There are many ways to analyze the problematic dynamics affecting the church's ministry of formation in the areas of liturgy, catechesis and the devotional life today. I want to suggest one that I think is both incisive and comprehensive. It is borrowed from George Lindbeck, the distinguished Lutheran professor of theology at Yale University. In his already classic book entitled *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck argues that the recent history of Christian theology and practice is beset

by what he calls an "experiential-expressive" framework.² Lindbeck regards this as deeply problematic and he argues against it the need to assume an alternative framework, which he names the "cultural-linguistic." Lindbeck's scheme is, in my opinion, enormously helpful and insightful. While there are problems with it from a Catholic point of view and, indeed, even from a more orthodox Protestant one, his fundamental convictions are quite capable of being assumed into a Catholic framework.³ They can provide a heightened consciousness regarding present theological and pastoral difficulties and considerable direction about the nature of their resolution.

The matter with which Lindbeck essentially deals is the structure of the process by which religious reality is mediated, or, more particularly, the modern understanding of that process. In the experiential-expressive framework, which has its origins largely in Schleiermacher and Kant, experience of the divine is immediate, interior and anterior to religious ritual, traditions, doctrine and symbols. According to Lindbeck, the various thinkers of this school, which includes Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, "all locate ultimately significant contact with whatever is finally important to religion in the pre-reflective experiential depths of the self and regard the public or outer features of religion as expressive and evocative objectifications (i.e., nondiscursive symbols) of internal experience."⁴ This conceptual movement is condensed in the revolutionary "turn to the subject" that has its roots in the eighteenth-century German Enlightenment. According to Lindbeck, the habits of

²George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), esp. 15-45.

³See, variously, William C. Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Bruce D. Marshall, ed., *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); Walter Kasper, "Postmodern Dogmatics: Toward a Renewed Discussion of Foundations in North America," *Communio* 17, no. 1 (1990): 181-191; also the various essays in *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 392-472.

⁴Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 21.

thought which this movement has fostered "are ingrained in the soul of the modern West, perhaps particularly in the souls of theologians."⁵ Experiential-expressivism has become the operative framework for the description of reality and for the prescription of practical affairs in the worlds of culture and religion.

The philosophical and religious "turn to the subject" stands as a permanent feature of modern Christianity. We cannot turn back beyond it philosophically or theologically; nor should we seek to do so. It has had some important results in overcoming a certain extrinsicism in Catholic theology and spirituality and in opening the way for a new discussion of "experience" as a theological and pastoral category. Theologians like Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan have sought to harness "the turn to the subject" with positive, if not total, benefit.

Yet this philosophical and cultural movement has generated and encouraged some deeply negative phenomena, both in cultural and ecclesial life: radical subjectivism, rationalism and individualism. The effects of these upon the whole range of Christian institutions has been decidedly negative. The Bible, the sacraments, the spiritual tradition, established forms of life—all are easily rendered devoid of their authoritative character and sometimes regarded as little more than conceptually limited, time-conditioned and culturally relative objectifications of generic religious experience. In my opinion, the hegemony of experiential-expressivism is one of the most fundamental causes of disorder and disorientation in the life of the church and its formative ministry today. I want to look in turn at the effects upon liturgy, catechesis and devotional life. As will become clear, the fundamental problems identified are replicated in each of these areas.

The effects of experiential-expressivism on Catholic liturgy may be variously stated as a lessening of its symbolic power, a rejection of its critical mediatory agency vis-à-vis God's action in the world, and a refusal of its sacramental authority. The Catholic worship system, traditionally revered as the objective action of God through Christ in his church, is reconceptualized

⁵Ibid.

(and therefore repracticed) as the symbolic externalization of the unmediated religious experience of individuals and communities.⁶ Nathan Mitchell has put his finger on the pulse of this phenomenon by identifying in recent times a significant shift in Catholic attitudes toward the liturgy when he asserts that the "sense of the sacred has moved, shifted its location." Experience of the divine today is detached from its traditional location in the worshipping church and now "is located 'inside,' in the personal history and geography of the self." As a result, "the sacred is closely attached to the *self*, not to rituals celebrated and shared in public." Modern American Catholics, according to Mitchell, "look for the holy to reveal itself, not in the awe-inspiring rites of baptism and Eucharist, but in the awe-some precincts of the self."⁷

With this focus on the priority of the inner and the personal, divine grace is regarded as immediate, as non-mediated. Thus, it is thought, sacraments do not act to mediate divine grace (as traditional Catholic theology holds), but only to articulate, express and celebrate divine grace constitutionally present and active in the world. The primary liturgical symbol, in this understanding, is the worshipping congregation itself, not the sacramental rites and symbols.⁸ The rites and symbols of the liturgy are consequently regarded as temporary, provisional, secondary and experimental. They lose their revered, solemn, God-bearing status. Indeed, when connected with the anti-ritual and anti-sacramental bias of our culture (itself derived from Protestantism), the rites and symbols of the liturgy are viewed as a threat to the operational priority of the religious experience of individuals and communities. One should not exaggerate the extent of this problem or suggest that it is not resisted by many voices and elements in the academic and pas-

⁶For a more extensive development of this point, see M. Francis Mannion, "Liturgy and the Present Crisis of Culture," in *Liturgy and Spirituality in Context: Perspectives on Prayer and Culture*, Eleanor Bernstein, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 1-26.

⁷Nathan Mitchell, "The Sense of the Sacred," in *Parish: A Place for Worship*, Mark Searle, ed. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 74, 72, 69, 71.

⁸For a critique of this perspective, see M. Francis Mannion, "Catholic Worship and the Dynamics of Congregationalism," *Chicago Studies* 33, no. 1 (1994): 57-66.

toral life of the church. Yet, it is fairly widespread, especially at the level of popular liturgical and pastoral theology.⁹

The effects of the experiential-expressive paradigm on catechetics are equally problematic. Lindbeck himself addressed this matter explicitly in an essay some years ago when he wrote: "The Baltimore Catechism may have been grossly inadequate, but at least it gave the young Catholic the sense that he knew what he believed and did not believe. Now, some reports from college campuses suggest that Catholics are even less certain on these points than liberal Protestants, and much less so than conservative ones."¹⁰ In applying Lindbeck's insights to catechesis, Owen Cummings points out that the experiential-expressive approach fails because of its inability to initiate men and women adequately into Christian faith, understanding and practice.¹¹ Experiential-expressive catechesis is, in other words, formatively inadequate because it misunderstands the very nature and process of formation. The catechetical schemes represented by Thomas Groome, Gabriel Moran and other experiential-expressivists appear, in the light of Lindbeck's analysis, to be too naïve and overly optimistic about the ability of some unmediated religious experience to achieve the level of mature Christian faith. Catechesis in this framework operates on the conviction that "a few direct experiences would suffice to develop the (religious) skills that children require. Where this happens, faith is self-legitimizing, impervious to examination or argument, and has its home in the private imaginings of the believer or in the sheltered world of religious communities."¹²

Not surprisingly, the experiential-expressive model of catechesis is generally anti-doctrinal. It stands in opposition to cat-

⁹For example, see James Empereur, *Worship: Exploring the Sacred* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987); Tad Guzie, *The Book of Sacramental Basics* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981).

¹⁰George A. Lindbeck, "The Crisis in American Catholicism," in *Our Common History as Christians*, John Deschner et al., eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 56-57.

¹¹Owen F. Cummings, "Toward a Postliberal Religious Education," *The Living Light* 28 (1992): 315-324.

¹²Robert L. Wilken, "The Christian Intellectual Tradition," *First Things*, no. 14 (June/July, 1991): 13.

echisms and manuals of formal belief. It pays little attention to the systematic and detailed transmission of the information of faith. It is convinced that the creation of an individual spiritual universe based on personal experience takes precedence over conceptual knowledge of doctrines, scriptures and initiation into the traditional language of faith. Because of its intuition that the individual is naturally religious, it concludes that this religiosity needs only an environment of freedom, creativity and imagination to come to expression.¹³

The experiential-expressive framework is no less troublesome in the arena of Catholic devotional life. By devotional life, I mean all those personal, familial and communal practices and exercises of Catholic life beyond the arena of the official liturgy and the formal catechetical ministry of the church. This includes Bible reading; spiritual reading; the study of faith; household rituals, prayers and symbols; faith-inspired works of charity; fasting; examination of conscience; retreats and spiritual direction. These practices and exercises are interwoven into family life, work, recreation, education. They intersect with all the joys and tragedies, crises and challenges of ordinary life: birth, illness, death, estrangement, love, forgiveness.¹⁴ Traditionally, the complex of activities described under the heading "the devotional life" has been localized and centralized in the institution of the household and has its orbit in what in modern times we speak of as "the domestic church." It has its anthropological foundations in the family as a sacred, divinely ordained social institution.¹⁵

¹³For contrasting positions, see Michael J. Wrenn, *Catechisms and Controversies: Religious Education in the Postconciliar Years* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991); Michael Warren, ed., *Source Book for Modern Catechetics* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1983); Dermot A. Lane, ed., *Religious Education and the Future* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

¹⁴For an excellent statement on the devotional life and popular religiosity, see the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, pars. 1667-1679.

¹⁵See Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986); Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-nineteenth-century America* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); M. Francis Mannion, "Modern Culture and the Monastic Paradigm," *Communio* 20, no. 3 (1993), esp. 522ff.

Traditional Catholic devotional life may be described as concrete, practical and local. It is imbued with a deep sense of the sacred order of everyday existence and the hierarchical structure of social relations. However, within the culture of modernity, in which subjectivism, individualism and rationalism have been in the ascendancy, the devotional life has become privatized, psychologized and esoteric. It assumes the shape of etherealized and unmediated individual spirituality. Its institutional grounding is no longer family, household, community or church, but the individual. Today, it is increasingly detached from the forms prescribed by tradition and is restructured in the idioms of psychotherapy, the support group and New Age consumerism.¹⁶

Catholic devotional life increasingly assumes the character of the "Sheilaism" so memorably described by Robert Bellah and his co-authors in *Habits of the Heart*. Bellah describes the now infamous "Sheilaism" as follows: "Sheila Larson is a young nurse who has received a good deal of therapy and who describes her faith as 'Sheilaism.' [These are her words:] 'I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice.'"¹⁷ In our perspective, the fundamental problem with such a devotional life when assumed into Catholicism is that it does not work and it yields, in the long run, only the depleted and minimal self described so well by Christopher Lasch.¹⁸ It is fatally flawed by its lack of connection to the spiritual tradition and the constellation of saints, narratives, piety, and sanctifying exercises that constitute that tradition.

¹⁶See Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

¹⁷Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 221. See also Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993).

¹⁸See Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warren Books, 1979), and *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival in Troubled Times* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1984).

The Language of Tradition

Let us now look at Lindbeck's alternative framework for the understanding of culture and religion: the cultural-linguistic. This model, which has its conceptual origins in Max Weber, Emil Durkheim and Ludwig Wittgenstein and its more recent expressions in Peter Winch and Clifford Geertz, operates both descriptively and prescriptively vis-à-vis the constitution of cultural and religious reality. Religion, in the perspective proposed by Lindbeck, is viewed as "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought."¹⁹ It is not a matter of *sui generis* internal states seeking and finding outward expression, but a matter of a religious symbol system mediating, shaping and effecting religious experience. In the description of Clifford Geertz, religion is a "system of symbols"²⁰ that acts to mediate the religious reality of a community and without which no religious reality is established. In short, the symbol system is constitutive of religious experience and not derivative of religious experience, as experiential-expressivism holds.

The religious symbol system, according to Lindbeck, represents a "medium in which one moves, a set of skills that one employs in living one's life."²¹ "To become religious—no less than to become culturally or linguistically competent—is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training. One learns how to feel, act, and think in conformity with a religious tradition."²² Thus, "To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its terms."²³ Becoming a Christian is a matter of learning, interiorizing and practicing the scriptures, doctrines, sacraments, prayers, moral wisdom, spiritual writings, and communal protocols of the church.²⁴

¹⁹Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 33.

²⁰See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), esp. chapter 4: "Religion as a Cultural System," 87–125.

²¹Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 35.

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*, 34.

²⁴Lindbeck's insights here are sympathetically reflected in the writings of Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair C. MacIntyre, William H. Willimon and others generally associ-

Despite its relatively recent formulation, the conceptual and practical framework of the cultural-linguistic paradigm of culture and religion is in fact fundamentally consistent with the ecclesial self-understanding of Catholic tradition. It can enrich the church's own understanding of how it itself is constituted and how it operates.²⁵ To elaborate this point, we may turn again to liturgy, catechesis and the devotional life.

The cultural-linguistic paradigm is able both to reorient and enrich ecclesial understanding of the formative operability of liturgical worship. In the cultural-linguistic model, the power, authority and critical character of the church's sacramental complex is strongly underlined. There is the clear understanding that without the sacramental and liturgical mediation of Christian faith, the mysteries of salvation have no presence in the world. Without liturgy and sacraments, the construction of the Catholic Christian world simply does not take place. It is through the liturgy and sacraments that Catholic Christianity constructs its culture and establishes, maintains and advances its attitudes, outlooks, responses and motivations in the face of the complexities of creation, history and culture. The Christian shape of the world is constructed in the liturgy, and the character of the world to come is imagined, symbolized and set forth.²⁶ Christian sacramentality is anterior to, holds authority over and is critically necessary to the experience of divine presence, activity and grace. The sacraments are not a secondary human creation, but, as the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls them, "God's masterpieces" for the salvation of the world—a diverse, multifaceted system that

ated with the traditional/communitarian expression of postmodern and postliberal theology.

²⁵Colman E. O'Neill comments that any Thomist "will have a basic sympathy for the cultural-linguistic analysis" ("The Rule Theory of Doctrine and Propositional Truth," *The Thomist* 49 [1985]: 425). See also Owen F. Cummings, "Cyril of Jerusalem as a Postliberal Theologian," *Worship* 67 (1993): 155–164.

²⁶For more extensive treatment of this feature of liturgical operability, see David N. Power, *Unsearchable Riches: The Symbolic Nature of Liturgy* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1984); also the various essays in Mary Collins, *Worship: Renewal to Practice* (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987), esp. 57–132. The reader will note the points at which these authors take exception to some of the inherited principles of Catholic sacramental theology.

emerges from the creative activity of God in creation and history; a marvelous drama of signs and symbols, words and actions, music and imagery, times and seasons, persons and places; a drama that constitutes the very shape of God's presence and activity in the world.²⁷ The liturgy is not merely the gratuitous symbolic celebration of worshipful experience; it is the divinely ordained cultural-linguistic mediation of that experience and the very possibility of that experience.

In the area of catechetics, Owen Cummings has shown that Lindbeck's framework both recovers and enriches the traditional genius of Catholic formation. Catechetics, Cummings claims, is not primarily or fundamentally the process of identifying and giving expression to the interior religious intuitions of catechumens or of Catholics in ongoing formation (as experiential-expressivism holds). Catechetical formation is, rather, the profound, comprehensive and dynamic immersion of the person in the tradition of the church. The task of religious education is "the internalization of the tradition" through immersion into the liturgical, scriptural, doctrinal and moral culture of Catholicism.²⁸ This view of catechesis embraces what experiential-expressivism resists: the transmission of information, memorization, detailed religious literacy, and the initiation of the person into the complexities of the tradition even prior to the possibility of full understanding. The postliberal or postmodern catechesis of which Cummings speaks is not a simple return to the catechetical theory and practice of the church before the Second Vatican Council. It does not mean catechetical restorationism, but rather the renewal of the church's fundamental intuition about the nature of catechesis through both a *ressourcement* in touch with catechetical tradition and an *aggiornamento* that takes account of the genuine insights into human formation made possible by modern philosophy, the social sciences, and culture theory.²⁹ In Cum-

²⁷*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par. 1091.

²⁸Cummings, "Toward a Postliberal Religious Education," 318ff.

²⁹See Eric D'Arcy, "The Universal Catechism and Anglo-American Philosophy," *The Living Light* 27, no. 2 (1991): 140-150; "The New Catechism and Cardinal Newman," *Communio* 20, no. 3 (1993): 485-502; also E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Lynne V. Cheney,

mings, words, "What we need today in religious education is a formation that is intellectually rich and deeply traditional, but concerned at the same time with the personal and affective dimension of faith."³⁰

In the area of Catholic devotional life, the cultural-linguistic understanding stands in strong contrast to the therapeutic, self-exploratory, introverted and privatized concern of experiential-expressive spirituality. To put the matter graphically, spirituality in the cultural-linguistic model is that of the icon, while that of the experiential-expressive model is that of the mirror.³¹ The mirror suggests self-absorption, self-contemplation, retreat within, dependence on personal resources. It implies self-centering, self-consolidation and an excessive fascination with one's own creative possibilities. The icon, on the other hand, suggests contemplation of the divine, fascination with the utter otherness of God; it connotes openness to revelation and outward-looking engagement with the drama and the *dramatis personae* of salvation. The Catholic understanding of spirituality has always viewed matters in this way. Cardinal Newman aptly pointed out that Christian spirituality is authentically generated when Christians "go out of their own minds into the Infinite Temple" of the Christian tradition, when they give their eyes, voices, bodies, time, rest and leisure to Christ and to the whole spiritual order in which Christ has been embodied, expressed and celebrated over the ages.³² Charles Taylor, the English Catholic philosopher who teaches at McGill University in Toronto, has pointed out that human beings find themselves not by self-discovery but ironically only by engaging the great heroes, the dramatic wisdom, the great achievements of the spiritual tradition.³³

American Memory: A Report on the Humanities in the Nation's Public Schools (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, n.d.).

³⁰Cummings, "Toward a Postliberal Education," 323.

³¹See M. Francis Mannion, "Mirrors, Icons, Money, Sex and Power," *Caelum et Terra* (forthcoming).

³²John Henry Newman, "Lectures on Justification," in *A Newman Synthesis*, arr. by Erich Przywara (London: Sheed and Ward, 1932), 373.

³³Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

The cultural-linguistic model implies the renewal of Christian devotional life and spirituality by a renewal of its rich dramatic texture and character. It means a renewal of the concrete character of Christian engagement with the holy in the face of privatization and psychologization. It requires not least a new attention to the household as the primary devotional arena and thus the creative restoration of familial and communal devotional traditions. On a personal level, it calls for a renewed engagement on the part of Catholics with the treasury of wisdom contained in the lives of the saints and the great spiritual writings.³⁴ All in all, the way forward in the devotional life is the way of the icon, not of the mirror.

Mary in Liturgy, Catechesis and Devotion

I want to turn now to the matter of the Marian formation of Christians. Hopefully, you will recognize the relevance of my analysis so far to the condition of the whole Marian dimension of Catholic life. It should not be surprising that experiential-expressivism is greatly to blame for our current problems in the area of Marian belief and practice. This is not to say that there are not problematic factors particular to this area of Catholic life.³⁵ Overall, however, it is likely that the hegemony

³⁴Regarding the renewal of household rites, the official rites contained in the *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* may be a useful place to begin—although, in my view, this collection is far too ascetic and academic to be actually effective.

³⁵Mariologists and other scholars were rightly concerned during much of the twentieth century with correcting a certain doctrinal and devotional isolationism in Marian belief and practice. Yet, the redressing of excesses and imbalances probably generated an overreaction, so that Mary was unwittingly placed in the background of Catholic life. The ecumenical movement, too, offered its own set of challenges. Among the more interesting aspects of the ecumenical movement is the common scholarship of great substance on Mary that has emerged in the Christian churches. Yet as ecumenical scholars reexamined Mary's place in Christian life—often with the tools of historical-critical methodology—and sought to construct a more biblically reliable picture of Mary, a somewhat overly intellectualized and ascetic picture emerged that was not conducive to a reinvigorated Marian spirituality. Again, the modern liturgical movement, in its proper and valuable desire to reform the liturgy, often found itself pruning away the very elements of the liturgy in which the Marian aspect found its habitual place: the devotional, the poetic and the popular. Nevertheless, the achievements and gains made in the modern ecclesiastical movements should not be played down or underestimated. The criterion of doctrinal adequacy, liturgical proportional-

of the experiential-expressive paradigm is responsible for many of the fundamental problems today in this area.

In the church's worship life, the Marian element continues to be regarded today as part of the excess of Catholic liturgical expression. The celebration of the solemnities and feasts remains for the most part rather minimalistic in parish practice. The traditional festive and celebratory ethos of Marian feasts has been drastically shorn away. The solemnities and feasts of Mary have taken on a rather dry, abstract and intellectualized character. Mary and the saints are no longer effectively represented in the art and iconography of churches. All in all, Mary has little symbolic or ritual presence in modern Catholic liturgical celebration.

In the area of catechesis, it is not surprising that the person of Mary and the Marian doctrines are rarely part of formation. When the content of catechesis is minimalistic and the imparting of information is rejected, when the focus is on internal states and the elaboration of personal religious attitudes, the Marian falls into the background of catechetical practice. Mary's role in the ongoing life of the church is mentioned only in passing, without elaboration, and as of merely secondary importance.

Likewise, a Catholic devotional life that is increasingly therapeutic and individualistic and is forged esoterically apart from the concrete structures of traditional expression and practice is not likely to look to Mary or the saints for inspiration.³⁶ Many of the elements of Catholic devotional life—Marian prayers and household devotions, the great literature on Mary, pilgrimages, the Angelus, the rosary—have been abandoned, without anything equally powerful or spiritually impressive replacing them.

Mere complaint or lament, of course, is not enough. The question is: what is to be done? There are no quick or easy an-

ity, ecumenical sensibility and pastoral oversight of the Marian dimension of Catholic life demands ongoing and careful attention.

³⁶Psychotherapeutic reductions of Marian theology and devotion conspire to quicken this process. See, for instance, Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

swers. Hopefully, what I have been saying so far does offer some useful direction. If the formative life of the church is generated and advanced by its symbol system, then the renewal of the Marian dynamics of Catholicism in great part depends on the renewal of the various elements of the church's own Marian symbol system.

However, a number of cautions are in order here. The place of Mary will not be renewed by an unrefined program to restore the Marian theology and practice of the period before the Second Vatican Council—although we can well learn from that period the genius of a well-articulated and concretely practiced Marian symbol system. Alternatively, a continuation of the experiential-expressive convictions and practices of the past thirty years would merely mean a continuation of our present troubles. The options emerging from feminist, liberation and political theologies and represented in theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Johnson and Leonardo Boff—though these are well attuned to the symbolic—are flawed by the agenda to reconstruct the Marian in a manner at least ambiguously committed to Catholic tradition. The only option, in my opinion, is that held out by the unrealized agenda to effect fully the theological, liturgical and spiritual vision of Vatican II.³⁷ Entrenched forms of conservatism, liberalism and radicalism do not serve the church well. Our best hope lies in a creative traditionalism, a dynamic orthodoxy, an imaginative conservatism. In short, a crucial key for the ongoing renewal of the church lies in the renaissance of its creative, dynamic and imaginative aspects. In relation to the Marian element, I suggest that a crucial key is the renewal of the church's Marian imagination. This involves both a *ressourcement*, by contact with the church's ancient poetic orthodoxy and tradition, and an *aggiornamento*, by contact with modern poetic and symbolic expressiveness. Let us look once again at liturgy, catechesis and devotional life, this time specifically in relation to the Marian dimension.

³⁷On this general point, see the essay entitled "The Continuing Challenge of the Second Vatican Council: The Hermeneutics of the Conciliar Statements," in Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 166–176.

I have in mind some very practical directions here. In relation to the liturgy, the solemnities and feasts of Mary require considerably more attention to their poetic, ritual and symbolic elaboration than has been evident in recent decades. I recall the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception in the first parish to which I was appointed twenty-one years ago as a newly ordained priest. It occurred a few days after my arrival in the parish. The pastor, a genial and kindly man, assigned himself the main morning Mass. I walked into the church just as he was beginning Mass. He began by saying: "This morning we gather to celebrate one of the most glorious and magnificent feasts of the liturgical year." The only problem was there was no feast, no magnificence, no glory except in his own mind—and in his own memory of earlier days. There was no adequate image of Mary present, no music, no flowers, no ministers (except an altar boy), only a brief and terse homily—very little to stir the imagination!

Pastors are prone to that sort of abstraction; theologians even more so. But what is not enacted is not encountered; what is not symbolized is not engaged! To be magnificent and glorious, the solemnities and feasts of Mary need celebration with glory and magnificence. That means excellent and inspiring Marian liturgical music, the restoration in our churches of beautiful and stirring images and representations of Mary (and of the saints); it means setting up shrines to Mary for special occasions, and the renewal of the processional and the ritual. It requires priestly attention to the prayers of the day and the preparation of well-shaped and effective admonitions. Not least, it means a renewal of Marian homilizing. It is perhaps in this area more than in any other that the Marian imagination is most critical, and yet suffers most. Marian homilies of the old-fashioned sentimental variety remain commonplace among an older generation of clergy. Among my generation, the pattern is to translate into a popular idiom the results of historical-critical scholarship on Mary. The homiletic results are excruciatingly dull! In these, the implicit and sometimes explicit message is often the need to be vigilant about all things Marian. The younger generation of clergy preach a more therapeutic Marian spirituality: Mary as a gentle, non-threatening and non-

judgmental member of the ecclesial support group—the twelve-step Mary!

For the renewal of the church's Marian imagination, I do not think we can do better than look to the Fathers of the church, whose writings on Mary have been restored to Catholic consciousness in modern times by patristic scholarship and in a popular way by scholars like Hugo Rahner, Louis Bouyer and Henri DeLubac.³⁸ As I reflect on the homiletic style of the Fathers, it seems to me that two characteristics are evident that are crucial to imaginative homilizing: the first is a poetic rather than an abstract or purely conceptual modality of expression, and the second is an inherent invitation to the Christian to enter and identify him- or herself in the mystery being celebrated.

By way of example, we find in the Marian imagination of the Fathers rich resources for the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God and for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On the theme of Mary, Mother of God (which has a strong connection to Christmas and to the Solemnity of the Annunciation), both the powerful poetic character and the invitation to Christian self-involvement in the mystery celebrated are marvelously verified in the Fathers. Listen to the following quotations—no doubt very familiar to you but unfamiliar to many parish priests. The first is from an anonymous fourth-century source: "Every soul carries Christ within herself as in her womb. But if she is not transformed through a holy life, she cannot be called Christ's mother. Yet whenever you receive Christ's word within you, and let it live in your heart, and build it up with your thoughts as in the womb, then you can be called Christ's mother."³⁹ What a powerful and engaging statement! The second quotation is from St. Gregory the Great: "He is above all the mother of Christ, who preaches the truth; for he gives birth to our Lord, who brings him into the hearts of his hearers; and he is the mother of Christ, who through his

³⁸The popularization of patristic mariology has never been, in my opinion, more beautifully presented than in Hugo Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. Sebastian Bullough (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961).

³⁹*De caeco et Zachaeo* 4 (PG 59:605); translation from Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, 73.

words inspires a love of our Lord in the spirit of his neighbor."⁴⁰ Patristic homilizing is replete with such magnificent Marian poetry. We must have the confidence that Christian imagination did not end with the death of the last of the Fathers! It can be renewed in every generation, as Hans Urs von Balthasar and others have amply demonstrated in our own time.

The celebration of the Immaculate Conception demands similar imaginative homilizing. If there were such a thing as homiletic malpractice, very many homilists would now be in jail, not only for their poor theology and inept, dull attempts to preach on this theme, but also for their proud yearly public declarations of ignorance of the very meaning of the solemnity! The Immaculate Conception is not, as this gathering knows, a conceptual puzzle to be solved. It is rather a complex, multi-faceted drama enacted and celebrated for the salvation of the world. It has the character of a kaleidoscopic work of inspired art, inviting believers to reflect upon and appropriate their noble identity and vocation.

As Cardinal Ratzinger has pointed out so well in his little book *Daughter Zion*, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception has its origin in part in Christian reflection on the high dignity and vocation of the community of the church. The cardinal points to the Epistle to the Ephesians in which the New Israel, the church, is described as holy, immaculate, luminously beautiful, without spot or wrinkle.⁴¹ The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is a paean of praise to the glory of Christian life.⁴² In my own parish, we sing the words of John Wesley,

⁴⁰Homily 3 on the Gospels (PL 76:1086); translation from Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, 77-78.

⁴¹Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John M. McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), esp. 62ff.

⁴²Perhaps one of the reasons the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is held at some distance in modern Catholicism has to do with its ecclesiological implications: that the church is glorious, holy and beautiful. In an age that habitually rejects such claims, it is not surprising that the theme of the Immaculate Conception is regarded with suspicion. By the same token, it is interesting that John Macquarrie, the Anglican theologian most sympathetic to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, holds a high theology of the church and has indeed explicitly called for a renewal of pride in the church. See the essay entitled "Pride in the Church," in John Macquarrie, *Theology, Church and Ministry* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1986), 105-112.

no mean ecclesiologist, at the end of Mass on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception for this very reason and to make this very point:

The Church's one foundation \ is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation \ By water and the word;
From heav'n he came and sought her \ To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her, \ And for her life he died.⁴³

The modern homilist can, in my view, do no better than return again and again to the patristic sources and be inspired anew by their self-involving poetic and find in them new and imaginative ways to express and celebrate Mary's person and role in the life of the church.⁴⁴ In my opinion, the Mariological Society of America could provide a great service to the church by commissioning accessible compendia of the patristic sources for the solemnities and feasts of Mary throughout the year. These could serve as inspirational sources for modern homilizing. The Society could well turn its energies also to sponsoring and encouraging a new era of creativity in Marian hymns and music, and, not least, in Marian art and iconography.

⁴³Text in *The Collegeville Hymnal* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 489.

⁴⁴Henri DeLubac has set out the fundamental interpretive principle here: "In the Church's tradition the same biblical symbols are applied, either in turn or simultaneously, with one and the same ever-increasing profusion, to the Church and Our Lady. Both are the New Eve; Paradise; the tree of Paradise, whose fruit is Christ; the great tree seen in his dream by Nabuchodonosor, planted in the centre of the earth. Both are the Ark of the Covenant, Jacob's Ladder, the Gate of Heaven, the House built on the mountain top, the fleece of Gideon, the Tabernacle of the Highest, the throne of Solomon, the impregnable fortress. Both are the City of God, the mysterious City of which the psalmist sang; the valiant woman of the Book of Proverbs, the Bride arrayed for her husband, the woman who is the foe of the serpent and the great sign in heaven described in the Apocalypse—the woman clothed with the sun and victorious over the Dragon. Both are—after Christ—the dwelling place of wisdom, and even wisdom herself; both are a 'new world' and 'a prodigious creation'; both rest in the shadow of Christ" (Henri DeLubac, *The Splendor of the Church*, trans. Michael Mason [Glen Rock, NJ: Deus Books, 1963], 200). DeLubac comments: "There is in all this something much more than a case of parallelism or the alternating use of ambivalent symbols. As far as the Christian mind is concerned, Mary is the 'ideal figure of the church', the 'sacrament' of it and the 'mirror in which the whole Church is reflected'" (ibid.).

What may be proposed for the renewal of the Marian element of Christian catechesis? If Lindbeck's understanding of the character of Christian formation is valid, then the key is the immersion of catechumens and believers in the Marian culture of Catholicism.⁴⁵ Without getting into disputes, I state my conviction that liturgy is the inspiration for catechesis. Catechesis on Mary, then, is a systematic reflection on the liturgical celebration of faith; it is Marian *mystagogia*. This certainly includes teaching children thoroughly and well the Marian doctrines of the church and teaching them to pray the great Marian prayers. All this is possible under the rubric of *mystagogia*. This kind of catechesis can be conducted in great part in relation to the liturgical solemnities and feasts of Mary. In my view, the most effective catechesis in this area as in others will be that which engages the imagination: wherein the imagery, names, titles, symbols and representations of Mary are practically and effectively presented, explored and correlated, and wherein the self-involving response of those being catechized is generated and advanced.

Let me suggest one approach to Marian catechesis that, as a newly ordained priest assigned to teaching part-time in a primary school, I found most effective. This is to explore with children and adults the various litanies to Mary. The names and titles of Mary are not mere decoration, but are imaginative crystallizations of inspired Christian conviction about Mary in salvation history. These names and titles constitute a rich set of images, metaphors and similes that generate formative insight. A catechist might, for instance, move through the Litany of Loreto line by line, letting the spiritual imagination of students be touched and unfolded. A modern litany of sorts is found in a simple Marian hymn. The language and imagery here are very potent for catechetical exploration:

Mary the Dawn, Christ the Perfect Day;
Mary the Gate, Christ the Heavenly Way!
Mary the Root, Christ the Mystic Vine;

⁴⁵Lindbeck's treatment of Marian doctrine requires critical evaluation from the point of view of Catholic doctrine. See his *The Nature of Doctrine*, 96-98.

Mary the Grape, Christ the Sacred Wine!
Mary the Wheat-sheaf, Christ the Living Bread;
Mary the Rose-tree, Christ the Rose blood-red!
Mary the Font, Christ the Cleansing Flood;
Mary the Chalice, Christ the Saving Blood!
Mary the Temple, Christ the Temple's Lord;
Mary the Shrine, Christ the God adored!
Mary the Beacon, Christ the Haven's Rest;
Mary the Mirror, Christ the Vision Blest!
Mary the Mother, Christ the Mother's Son;
Both ever blest while endless ages run. Amen.⁴⁶

Catechesis of the kind I am promoting here is not mere frivolity—at least not when it is conceptually guided by a cultural-linguistic framework that, on one hand, fully engages the doctrinal teaching of the church and, on the other, has its operational modality in the perennial poetic expressiveness of the church.

Much of what I have said about the Marian dynamics of the liturgy and of catechesis in their formative aspects applies also to the more general area of the devotional life: that complex of extra-liturgical and extra-catechetical rites, symbols, exercises and practices traditionally centered in the Christian household. The challenges toward renewal in this area are monumental, because they imply a profound cultural renewal centered on the family. Pope John Paul II's affirmation that the family stands as "the way of the church" means that human existence is, in its fundamental anthropological structure, familial.⁴⁷ Accordingly, the devotional life of Christians has a fundamentally familial structure. There are surely historical resources in the theme of Mary's motherhood and that of the Holy Family that can be invoked here for the task of renewing the family and the centrality of the Christian household. Are there other concrete steps we can take in the area of the devotional life? I think so. First, pastors can promote the restora-

⁴⁶Text in *Hymns, Psalms and Spiritual Canticles* (Belmont, MA: BACS Publishing Co., 1983), 221.

⁴⁷Pope John Paul II, "Letter to Families" for the International Year of the Family, *Origins* 23, no. 37 (1994): 637-659.

tion of spiritual reading, including spiritual reading of a specifically Marian kind. The classical selections offered in the Office of Readings for Marian solemnities and feasts would be an excellent starting point. There are also the great Marian sermons of the Fathers and of later Christian writers; these need to be opened up to Catholics. At the more popular end of the scale, there are the simple yet beautiful writings of poets like Caryl Houselander; we need new compendia of these. Second, the project to restore Catholic household prayer needs to be advanced both in a general way and specifically in its Marian dimension. We may be coming to the point at which the post-Vatican II aversion to the rosary, the Angelus and traditional Marian prayers is at an end. I find children fascinated by these exercises. We need to encourage these devotions in a gentle and imaginative way. Third, the restoration of retreats, pilgrimages, and days of recollection on Marian themes needs recovery, if Christian spirituality is to remain intact in a secular and esoterically fascinated age. Fourth, introducing a Marian element to the practice of counseling—including that of the sick, the dying, and bereaved—would be most profitable. Fifth, bringing a stronger Marian dimension to the pro-life ministry of the church would surely be most fruitful.⁴⁸ Sixth, Marian spirituality and devotional life could be brought into dialogue with modern writings on the feminine and with those strands of feminism and the women's movement consistent with Catholic faith. Seventh, restoring a Marian thematization to the role of motherhood, pregnancy and care for children would surely bring great spiritual insight to a very troubled area. Eighth, promoting new kinds of Marian art for the home, including liturgically based seasonal art, would be most valuable. The bishops of Ireland attempted something akin to this some years ago with considerable success. In all these areas of development, the Latin church would do well to look both to the Catholic and Orthodox East for inspiration and guidance.

Finally, we cannot ignore the brightest hope that the Marian dimension of Catholic life in all its imaginative, poetic and cel-

⁴⁸See John Seward, *Redeemer in the Womb: Jesus Living in Mary* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

eboratory richness can be recovered in the Catholic church in the United States. It is present and operative in Hispanic households, neighborhoods, communities and parishes—on occasions great and small throughout the year—when Our Lady of Guadalupe is venerated. It is said often that Hispanic Catholicism may be the salvation of North American Catholicism. In the area of Marian devotion—despite the dangers of ideology and politicization sometimes operative—that hope seems well-founded.

Conclusion

Those of us old enough to have been raised before the Second Vatican Council have strong Marian memories. I find these memories potent even in the minds of Catholics who have lapsed in the practice of the faith. We cannot and should not try to recover the days of our childhood faith. But my ongoing surprise at the strength of Marian memories among Catholics continues to convince me that a key to renewal in all dimensions of church life, including the Marian, lies in the renewal of the Christian imagination. As I said earlier, the imaginative resources for the liturgical, catechetical and devotional renewal of the Marian formation of Christians already exist in the heart of the church and in the treasury of the Second Vatican Council. It is the task of the present generation of theologians, pastors and educators to mine these treasured resources, to renew them and to restate them for the good of the whole church and the glory of God.