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MARY, TYPE OF THE CHURCH: ESCHATOLOGY REALIZED

(Presidential Address)

*Matthew F. Morry, O.P.**

When the Ecumenical Council Vatican II included the considerations of Mary, the Mother of God, in its deliberations concerning the Church, there were murmurs of difference among some mariologists. With sufficient reflection, however, the conciliar program became both intelligible to and welcomed by mariologists generally. With the clarification of her relationship as a member of the Church, the need for elucidating Mary's relationship in the Incarnation to the Saving Act of Jesus Christ became the urgency. While the nature of her relationship to her Son was solidified and proclaimed with the necessary distinctions, the study of Mary's relationship to the Church experienced the kind of nervousness which might well precede the clarification of her function in the Saving Act while clearly a member of the Church. Was this manner of considering Mary's function in Salvation History an attempt to downgrade Mary's role? Was the conciliar study an acknowledgment that previous claims concerning Mary (i.e., the unique position accorded her in some quarters of Catholic thought and devotion in previous centuries and to the eve of Vatican Council II) were clearly excessive and lacking the necessary witness of Revelation in both the written record of the Scriptures and the lived Tradition? Were those correct who voiced an opinion that the pious, devotional style of theologizing about Mary was a mere ploy to control both human behavior and human thought in matters of

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theological investigations, so as to secure better the nature and extent of authority in the Church? Is it accurate to style Marian devotion as due to a particular ethnic/cultural identity? Is the intellectual/theological/liturgical consideration of Mary, the ever-virgin Mother of God, an instance of a male-domineering mentality vis-a-vis the intellectual, psychic, and social position of the female in the Catholic Church? A careful study of chapter eight of the document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, will provide a clarification for the claims of such positions.

The Council affirms: "Wherefore this sacred synod, while expounding the doctrine on the Church . . . does not, however, intend to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified. Those opinions therefore may be lawfully retained which are propounded in Catholic schools concerning her, who occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and also closest to us."¹ Accordingly, if this National Meeting of the Mariological Society of America has need for an apologia for its ongoing investigation concerning the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body, the Council's affirmation states it with eloquent clarity. Likewise, the Council's statement affords me the opportunity to contribute to such cooperation for achieving a clearer understanding of Mary's position and function.

To enter into an examination of the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body demands, then, a consideration of the relationship between the Mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body, the Church, if we are to clarify and grasp the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Eternity resounds still today in the world, with all the determinations of the Divine Will, in continuous and constant presence to all human beings: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). "When the designated time

¹*Lumen Gentium*, no. 54, cited here and below in the translation appearing in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1977).

had come" (Gal. 4:4), God, in a concrete fashion, proclaimed his everlasting will that "He wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth" (I Tim. 2:4; cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16). "Before the world began God chose us to be holy" (Eph. 1:4). "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (I Thess. 4:2).² We profess that Jesus the Christ came down from heaven for us, to save us, as even his inspired name denotes: "You must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). The Incarnation is God's proclamation that he is fulfilling the promise made to our fathers, to Abraham and to his children for all times (cf. Lk. 1:55).³

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word, assumed human nature as a conjoined instrument to serve Him in the Saving Act.⁴ In an analogous fashion, He has joined to Himself those to whom He has brought the Good News, that they may also "bring the good news to the poor . . . to heal the contrite of heart" (Lk. 4:18), "to seek and save what was lost" (Lk. 19:10). It is now the People of God—the Body of Christ, the Church—which is the instrument to proclaim the Good News. This People of God is effective, for, though it is a society of the saved, it enjoys a personal unity in all of nature. This unity is the unity of one Lord, one faith, one baptismal character (cf. Eph. 4:5). Thus, the Body of Christ, the Church, proceeds from Christ and is the principle which joins the baptized with Christ and with one another. The Church is unique in all of nature, for its life is the life of the Spirit: we have all been baptized in one Spirit to form one body (cf. I Cor. 12:13, Rom. 8:9–11); "in him you are being built into this temple, to become a dwelling place for God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2:22). Along with this unique unity and life, the Church possesses a mode of existence which defines her and gives her true being. The Church is at once of earth and of heaven, temporal and eternal, historical and transcendent. The Church is in process of dynamic actualization, for she is the People of God, the Body of Christ—through the death, res-

²See Mt. 6:10, II Thess. 2:13, Eph. 1:4.

³See Gen. 12:13, 13:15, 17:7, 18:18, 22:18; M. Morry, "The Magnificat: Reflections," *Marian Studies* 38 (1987): 63–77.

⁴St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summae Theologiae*, III, 8, 1 ad 1um.; 7, 1 ad 3am; 18, 1 ad 2um; 19, 1c; I-II, 112, 1 ad 1um.

urrection and glorification of the Lord Jesus; through the activity of the Spirit within her; and through the graces of the sacraments. Now, the very being of the Church defines her destiny to be the Reign of God begun by God on earth. The Church remains that Reign of God in its thrust to the eternal presence of God, when Christ gathers all to Himself into that Glory He has won for us and with which He has signed us (cf. Jn. 17:21-23, Col. 1:15-20). The pilgrimage undertaken here in our human and historical moment contains its own pain and suffering. Yet, in the measure we partake of the pain and suffering of our Lord and Redeemer, we partake of His glory (cf. Rom. 8:17, I Pt. 4:13, Phil. 3:10-11).

So, the Lord and Savior has come to the believer and has raised the believer to glory, "for upon us the end of ages has come" (I Cor. 10:11). This is the eschatological reality, God present to us—to the Church—with all the nuances of the divine presence. This is the intervention into human history of God in Jesus the Christ: "The time has come, 'he said' and the kingdom of God is close at hand" (Mk. 1:15, Mt. 4:12-17, Lk. 4:12-17). "For you must know, the kingdom of God is among you" (Lk. 17:21). This, then, is the nature of the Church, the Body of Christ; it is the eschatological reality. "The Church to which we are all called in Christ Jesus, and in which by the grace of God we acquire holiness, will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven, when will come the time of the renewal of all things" (Vatican II, *LG*, 48; cf. Acts 3:21). So, while we are *of* the world and living *in* this world, we are not *for* this world but, as believers, we must live in the present age and in the age that comes. Believers may give heed to the cry of the good thief, "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Lk. 23:42).⁵ Such is the qualifying dynamism of the believers' existential identity: always seeking God and the things of God, even in the midst of the crassest human events and details. In a true sense, we are achieving our real identity when we are ac-

⁵In striking fashion, the Scriptures proclaim how the Church experiences the Eschatological reality: She is the very Body of the Redeemer. The Saving Act of Jesus defines what the Church is and is to become. Cf. Tit. 2:15; II Tim. 1:10, 2:10; I Tim. 1:15; Mt. 10:22, 24:13, 19:25; Lk. 13:23, 18:26, 15:2, 19:10.

tively aware of the teaching of Paul: "For the world as we know it is passing away" (I Cor. 7:31). It is now that God is present to us, that God intervenes and is present to us. We have to be conscious that we are involved in, actualized in, the Reign of God. This Reign of God is not a territorial or only an historical intervention in our being, rather it is truly the defining of our very being. The Church is Eschatological Reality, processing yet now-possessing.

While we confront and must perforce engage in temporalities, we are made for the presence of God; we are identified in the dynamism of the Divine Presence so that not even the gates of hell can prevail against us (cf. Mt. 16:18). Wars, taxes, floods, illnesses we may indeed encounter, but *the reality* for the believer remains the constancy and power of the divine in us, the divine before us, summoning us to the mode of existence of the "saved," of those called to share in the unity of Jesus and His Father in the Spirit. We *are* the Church! We are called to glory! The Church, then, this company of believers, is in pilgrimage, experiencing both her own trepidation, her wariness and the power of the sustaining action of the Spirit in her. It is the Church's experience of this sustaining action which strengthens her to move onwards in confidence; for even if believers fail, God is ready to support them (cf. Lk. 22:31-32). The Church has the divine guarantee that not even the demonic powers can prevail against her (Mt. 16:18). Further, it is the destiny of believers to be with the Lord Jesus in paradise.⁶

Eschatology considers God's entry into the history of human beings in Jesus the Christ.⁷ The reality of the Saving Act is now the history of the human being. In this Saving Act, the being of the believer is that the believer is now both in process and possession: *in process* of fulfilling the demands of the Saving Act—faith in Jesus, obedience to His word and discipleship to follow him; *in possession* of the presence of the Spirit, in each believer and in the Church. In partaking of the Eucharistic meal, the believer experiences the divine presence now transforming and bringing him/her to participate in the future,

⁶See Lk. 23:43, I Thess. 4:17, Phil. 1:22-23, I Thess. 5:10, II Cor. 5:8, Rom. 6:8.

⁷See above, note 5.

to share that perfection of Christian existence—the salvific reality of the *eschaton*.⁸

Now the Church proclaims her self-awareness of this transcendent mode of existence as her identity. The Church has proclaimed the Assumption—the eschatological fulfillment in Mary of her own (and the Church's) divinely appointed destiny:

But since it had pleased God not to manifest solemnly the mystery of the salvation of the human race before he would pour forth the Spirit promised by Christ, we see the apostles before the day of Pentecost "persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus . . ." (Acts 1:14), . . . Finally the Immaculate Virgin preserved free of all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords. (*LG*, 59)

But while in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph. 5:27), the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. (*LG*, 65)

"When the fullness of time came God sent His Son, born of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). Note that Mary is the one who is to be present, to be personally the God-Bearer, when God determines that the Eschatological Reality is to become a fact. All that God had proclaimed to the Chosen People was then done with, over. All that He had demanded of the past was now to be the reality! Jesus, in His sermon on the Mount, delineates this clearly: "It was said . . . But I say to you" (cf. Mt. 5-7). Now Mary, as Mother of God and Mother of the Church—who we are, stands as the very type of what we are to be now that Eschatological Reality is in us: People of faith, of repentance ("Unless you repent . . ."), of unity, of love. We are to live now in the

⁸"It was necessary to find a new way of expressing the fundamental Christian affirmation of the Christian faith, that in Jesus Christ the new age had come, but had done so in such a way that is still remained to come, so that Christians live both in this age and in the age to come. . . ." (p. 69, C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* [2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978]). R. Schnackenburg cites for us that Christian perfection is the "way of life reflecting the salvific reality of the eschaton" (1:173, in his *Christian Existence in the New Testament* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968]).

Reign of God, the Eschatological Reality of God's presence. Mary is the type of the Church.

Vatican II succinctly expresses it; the Church has reached her fulfillment in Mary: "She is hailed as . . . [the Church's] type and outstanding model [most conspicuous *exemplar*] in faith and charity" (LG, 53). The actualization in the anti-type, the Church, is the imaging, reflection, fulfillment of the perfection, of the reality present in the type. The type and anti-type involve both the earthly history and the eternal fulfillment. The earthly embraces all that is Jesus the Christ—His Incarnation, life, death, and His Church. Jesus is in full possession of the eternal fulfillment, even while His Church is in pilgrimage. The Church is experiencing the eternal reality of her eschaton even now, while approaching the final moment of full possession. Each believer shares this eschatological experience of the Church-in-pilgrimage, for each enters the Saving Act and reaches for glory in the Risen Lord and Savior.⁹ Thus, now, in the Church we find the reality that is Mary in process of actualization (LG, 48, 50). Mary is, then, the type of the Church as she (the Church) makes her pilgrimage with the word brought to her in Jesus the Christ, making her pilgrimage within the dynamism of the eschatological presence. As type, Mary communicates and shares her religious significance, one conveyed and intellectually grasped in terms of a Christian context. Mary has her own religious significance, for it is God Who from eternity "chose and prepared for His Only-Begotten Son a Mother in whom the Son of God would become incarnate" and who would give birth to Him.¹⁰

It is God Who identifies and prepares Mary for her role in the Saving Act, a role which she carried out in time and continues now in the eternal presence of God. Mary is the type of the Church-in-pilgrimage, for she too lived and experienced the eschatological presence in the human historical dimensions of the believer. She is the type of the Church, for she received the word of God in obedience and acted on that word

⁹Cf. Eph. 1:3-14.

¹⁰*Ineffabilis Deus* (8 Dec. 1854), in H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum* (Ed. 34; Barcinone: Herder, 1967), no. 2800.

as a true disciple: "Rightly, therefore, the Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man's salvation through faith and obedience" (LG, 56 and 63). Mary's response in faith led her to know God's presence. Her response in faith entered her in the mystery that is God in His eschatological presence; hence, the need for Mary to ponder the divine actions in the eschatological presence (see Lk. 2:19, 51). One must avoid confusing *knowing* and *comprehending*. Mary knew who her Son was, still she was constantly encountering, trying to understand, to comprehend in the human degree, the self-revealing divine dynamism of the Eschatological Presence. So, Vatican II reminds us that Mary is "the image and beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come . . . a sign of certain hope" (LG, 68).

To grasp Mary as type of the Church-in-pilgrimage, we must avoid seeking to reflect upon her from a purely human, natural socio-cultural context. Rather, we must seek to encounter Mary within the reality, the Incarnation, in which she abided—and abides—in the presence of the Divine Being. For the individual believer, the reality of one's existential being is not the purely human, natural socio-cultural milieu of the present. Believers must be responsive to abiding in that supernatural, transforming, socio-cultural context of God, present to us and transforming us. It is for each of us believers to appreciate that "I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me (Gal. 2:20). We are put into a sphere which at once transcends and is transforming each believer now. For the believer, to live *in* the world is not to live *as* the world (immersed and transformed into the limitations of a purely natural, material existence). Rather, to live in the world is to be aware and sensitive to the delimitations being exercised by this material world, while reaching out to the reality to which we, as believers, are raised: to be one in Christ, one in the Father through the operation of the Spirit in us."¹¹ We must be aware, therefore, sensitive to this world. Our physical nature places the burden of need for food, clothing and some form of shelter. But, because we lack the best supply of food, clothing or shelter—

¹¹Cf. Eph. 1:3-14, Col. 1:15-20.

must that be the measure of us as believers? Or, do we recognize in our response to these human, natural, material demands the ongoing need for us to be believers, persons reaching out for and continuing on our pilgrimage toward eschatological fulfillment? To say that there is a difference between the "I" as a human being (person), with all the human limitations, and the "I" as believer, the person raised to share in the glory of God, sounds quite simple to understand. But what is the truth of this existential situation? Am I as believer responding as believer, conscious of and sensitive to the fact that I am a person of glory, that there is the eschatological fulfillment of being to which I am called and in process of attaining? In order to appreciate Mary as type of the Church-in-pilgrimage, one may not displace Mary from the context of her Eschatology realized and, under the pretense of making her more human, place her abruptly in a wholly human, material context. What does it mean to be human for a believer? The believer is one who has been saved, raised up, who is enlivened and now dynamic with the life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit in Eschatology realized.

That the image of life on the strictly human level undergoes changes—in household concerns, politics, work, cultural responses—must not be taken to mean that the context of one's reality as a believer is subject to the same vagaries of temporal change. The context of the believer's life is Christ, Who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. We should not consider Mary as a woman whose horizon was her village of Nazareth in the early first century, while our horizon is the entire world. Her horizon is what our horizon is to be also—the very dynamic, effective, transforming presence of the Glory of God. We are speaking of the Reign of God which is present and thrusts us forward to life and existence in the eternal, loving Divine Presence. That is the source of Mary's being, her existential situation; that is to be the source of being, the existential situation, of the Church as well.

Receiving God and giving God, experiencing the world and responding in faith—Mary is the type of model of the Church in her Eschatological reality: hearing God's Word and acting on IT, rather than on the word of the world. Mary has this role

for us; as St. Thomas Aquinas noted, she entered into the Incarnation when she gave her consent in the name of all human beings.¹²

At the designated time, God sent His Son, born of a woman. The designated time is the moment of the fulfillment of God's will to save His people, the Church. So, Jesus is the presence of God saving His people and raising them to share His glory. At the designated time, Mary expresses her utter trust in God's word; she *believes* and enfleshes the Divine Redeemer. She speaks for the saved, the Church, and enables the Church to live now the experiences of her temporal moment and eternal fulfillment in Jesus. In the designated time, Mary, as her son Jesus, learned obedience through her suffering—she experienced the sword of contradiction in the rejection of her Son by His people (even unto His death on the Cross) (see Lk. 2:34, Phil. 2:8). Within the designated time, Mary is the true disciple who acts on the word of God she receives. Uniquely, Mary is God-bearer to His People, the Church. In Mary, who is her type, the Church receives the faith, obedience and discipleship to continue her pilgrimage to her own eschatological fulfillment—her perfection in the freedom of the glory of the sons of God (Rom. 8:21).

¹²*Summa Theologiae*, III, 30, 1c.