

Marian Studies

Volume 39 *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth
National Convention of The Mariological
Society of America held in East Aurora, N.Y.*

Article 17

1988

Observations on the Paper by Dr. Little

Charles W. Neumann

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Neumann, Charles W. (1988) "Observations on the Paper by Dr. Little," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 39, Article 17.
Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol39/iss1/17

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact mschlangen1@udayton.edu, ecommons@udayton.edu.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE PAPER BY DR. LITTLE

I am confident that I echo the sentiments of all who have just heard Dr. Little's profound and fascinating paper when I thank her for the rare treat she has given us. I agree with the main theses of this masterful presentation, which might be summarized as follows:

—The Pope locates "entrusting: in the *mother*-child relationship, not the father-child relationship;

—Entrusting is of the essence of motherhood;

—Fatherhood implies distance, whereas immediacy is associated with motherhood;

—Motherhood is mediational, essentially human; thus motherhood "is never directly attributed to God";

—"The fullness of motherhood is properly found in women, whereas the fullness of fatherhood is found only in God. . . . The fullness of motherhood found in Mary corresponds to the fullness of fatherhood found, not in Joseph, but in God the Father";

—Motherhood is at the center of the New Covenant, because the Father entrusted his Son to a mother.

Against the background of my total agreement with these theses, I have but a few questions for clarification that came to me after I was given the paper to read last night in preparation for this role as discussion leader in an emergency:

1) Might the statement, "The Old Testament is properly symbolized by the male patriarchs and prophets, while the New is best symbolized by Mary herself," be nuanced or qualified along these lines: The Old Covenant is symbolized by only male prophets, whereas the symbols of the New Covenant are both Christ (New Adam) and Mary (New Eve)? Or again, the Old Covenant was the word preached by males, the New is the Word born of a woman?

2) If it is true that "the battle to end abortion, surrogacy and feticide must be fought primarily by women, for the entrusting involved in conceiving a child directly involves women, not men," what advice can be given by women to males who wish to support the pro-life movement in the most effective way?

3) When it is said that "the *maternal* faith of Mary precedes the *male* witness of the apostles," one notes a sharpening of the gender difference, compared to John Paul's statement in *Redemptoris Mater* 27: "This heroic faith of Mary 'precedes' the apostolic witness of the Church"—an insight he insisted on even more (though again without highlighting the gender difference) in his Christmas 1987 address to the Curia when he stated that the *Marian* dimension of the Church is prior in time and superior in dignity to the *Petrine* dimension of the Church. But granting the legitimacy of Dr. Little's building on the Pope's comparison and sharpening the gender difference between Mary and the apostles, does any conclusion follow for *other* women found alongside the apostles in the pages of the New Testament, e.g., the women whose announcement of the empty tomb preceded the faith of the apostles in Christ's Resurrection?

4) Although one cannot be expected to say everything in a single paper, there is in *Redemptoris Mater* a truth about Mary as mother more fundamental than "entrusting," which is the focus of the paper. For entrusting is the response to Christ's gift of Mary to each and to all of the disciples. But, as the Pope states, the more fundamental and prior reality about Mary as mother is her *presence* to each and all, the most frequently mentioned theme in *Redemptoris Mater*, the theme to which he returns no less than twenty-seven times in the encyclical. Thus the question: What are the specific marks or dimensions of the maternal presence of Mary to us, compared, for example, to the presence of the Risen Christ to us, or the presence of any of the other saints to us from within the Risen Christ?

The last three questions concern the intriguing notion of "entrusting."

5) It is stated—rightly, I believe—that “entrusting, according to John Paul II, continues to find its most basic expression in response to a *mother's* love rather than to *Christ's* love” (emphasis added). Can this be among the reasons for the Pope's consistent use in *Redemptoris Mater* of “entrusting” rather than “consecration” when Mary is in question? Only twice in the encyclical does he even take up the term “consecration,” neither time with Mary as object: 1. (48:3) “consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary”—a description of the Montfortian spirituality; and 2. (39:1) “spousal love, the love which totally ‘consecrates’ a human being to God”—an intriguing allusion to the riches of a spirituality of marriage.

6) In this light, is it perhaps a slip of the pen that accounts for the one place in the paper where it is said that “only a mother can offer the assurance we require that we not only can believe what [Christ] says, but also safely entrust ourselves to the Person He is”? Might one not say rather, for example, “surrender ourselves”? Consistent with the author's thesis, the Pope never once in *Redemptoris Mater* speaks of entrusting ourselves to Christ (if memory does not fail).

7) Finally, twice in the paper the Pope is cited as saying that the “Father *entrusted himself* to Mary.” I have the hunch that the paper's author must have felt discomfited by such an expression, in the light of the thesis that entrusting is of the essence of motherhood: Mary would end up sounding like the mother of the *Father* if the Father entrusted *himself* to her. May I offer the solution that actually the Pope does *not* use this expression, but rather is mistranslated in the English of these two passages, even in the Vatican translation. The principle Latin verbs in the encyclical that are properly translated “entrust” are *committere* (used most frequently), *commendare*, and *dedisse*. None of them appears in the two passages where the Father is said to have “entrusted himself” to Mary. Rather, in one passage (39:2), he says, “It was the Eternal Father who *relied on* (*se credidisse*) the Virgin of Nazareth, giving her his own Son in the

mystery of the Incarnation." And in the other passage (46:2), he says, "In the sublime event of the Incarnation of his Son God *availed himself (usus est)* of the ministry, the free and active ministry of a woman." Thus, with these two corrections in the English translation of the encyclical, the main thesis of the paper emerges yet more forcefully: Entrusting is of the essence of motherhood, and as a term is properly used only where the mother-child relationship is found. I think the English translators became so enthusiastic over John Paul's "entrusting" that they began using the term rather too freely in their translation of many other verbs in the encyclical where the meaning is different. Thus, in any context where, in the English translation, "entrusting" seems to be extended beyond the mother-child relationship, one had best consult the original Latin of *Redemptoris Mater*.

CHARLES W. NEUMANN, S.M.
St. Mary's University
San Antonio, Texas