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## MARY: THE WOMAN COME OF AGE

*Talk presented at the September 7, 1985, conference of the Western Region of the Mariological Society of America, held at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, California, and published here because of its scholarly value and because it closely anticipates the theme chosen for the 1986 National Convention: Mary and Vatican Council II.*

We celebrate this November of 1985 the twenty-first anniversary of the most extensive consideration of the Blessed Virgin Mary by any council in Church history. In November also, an episcopal synod in Rome will examine the results of the Second Vatican Council twenty years after it closed. On November 21, 1964, feast of the Presentation of our Lady, the Fathers of the Council promulgated the dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, as the Church's own self-analysis, that the face of the Church as bride of Christ might shine forth to the world with her God-given beauty. The final eighth chapter is "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." The same day, the Council published its decree on ecumenism; the opening Latin words, which give that document its name, express their hopes: "the re-establishment of unity" (*Unitatis redintegratio*). The Marian chapter of the Church constitution has some important sentences about the Mother of God and Christian unity, and the statement on ecumenism has more on this sensitive issue which has so often caused even violent controversy between Protestants and Catholics.

As we turn our thoughts to the conciliar teachings we remember Pope John XXIII's prayer for the Council: "O Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of Jesus, who art present in the Church and dost infallibly guide it, pour forth, we pray, the fullness of thy gifts upon the ecumenical council" (first paragraph) . . . and the final paragraph: "O Holy Spirit, renew thy wonders

in this our day, as by a new Pentecost. Grant to thy Church that, being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of blessed Peter, it may advance the reign of our Divine Savior, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Amen."

Before the Council Pope John had said, "Devotion to Mary is the royal road to reach the teachings of the Divine Master, and to bring our lives in all their aspects into conformity to that vocation which is ours, as St. John puts it in his first epistle, that we are called to be and in fact are the Sons of God (1 John 3, 1)" (Nov. 13, 1960). The comparison of love of our Lady to the king's highway leading to Christ is an ancient and beloved comparison, and the present Holy Father has used the same example of devotion to Mary being a royal road to Christ (June 28, 1980).

In his opening speech to the Council (October 11, 1962), John XXIII said, "Mother Church rejoices that, by the singular gift of Divine Providence, the longed-for day has finally dawned when—under the auspices of the Virgin Mother of God, whose maternal dignity is commemorated on this feast—the Second Vatican Council is being solemnly opened here beside St. Peter's tomb." Frequently quoted from this opening address has been the pope's advice to the Council to pursue its work courageously, studying authentic doctrine "through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another." The next sentence is equally important for Christian thought and study about our Lady: "For it is the latter [i.e., the way in which the deposit of faith is presented now] that must be taken into great consideration, with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character."

If we take twenty-one as the age of majority, we can apply that total to the period since the Council. It has taken that time for the conciliar portrait of the holy Mother of God to come of age. The two decades since the Council closed on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1965, have been a time of trial. Through this painful coming of age (like a prolonged

pregnancy) has taken place the growth of the Spirit-inspired understanding of the true place of the Mother of the Lord—ancient truths about her recovered and sometimes stated in new language.

In the fall of 1962, just as the Council was beginning, the British historian E.E.Y. Hales gave a lecture at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. His topic was the First Vatican Council, held 1869/70. At the end of his conference Dr. Hales recalled that Pius IX (1846-1878), pope of the First Vatican Council, had said all general councils went through three phases. According to Pius IX, the preliminary phase, after the Council had been announced but before it began, was the phase of the devil—this was the case in the nineteenth century, when there was much advance acrimony. The second phase, with the Council underway, was the phase of man. But the final third phase, when the Council made its decisions, was the phase of God, for then God took over from human beings to ensure that true decisions were taken.

Dr. Hales said that it seemed that the pre-conciliar period of the Second Vatican Council was escaping the phase of the devil, and I am sure that all of us, remembering the halcyon late fifties and early sixties, can recall how high our hopes were, confident of the immediate great things the Council would accomplish: enormous increase of vocations to priesthood and religious life, strengthened family life, and many other blessings. Finally, the English historian suggested that there seemed good ground for hoping that the devil had been cheated of his phase, and that as the Council occurred the second phase would be governed by men of good will and the final joyful phase of God would then follow.

Like the rest of us, including the historians who might have been expected to remember that periods of serious upset have normally followed the ecumenical councils, Dr. Hales was taken by surprise at the disturbances in the aftermath of the Council. Along with the national, and often international, unrest of the late sixties—on college campuses, in the political arena and elsewhere—the Church was to undergo grave upset, and only now are we recovering from the trauma of those years.

If the "phase of the devil" of Pius IX's phrase did not affect the period just before the Council, and if throughout the Council there was a positive blend of the phase of men of good will and of God's gracious protection, it would not be inaccurate to call the period after the Council a "phase of the devil" in a number of respects—but only on the condition of never forgetting that the final victory is God's, and that the Spirit of God has associated to himself in his triumph over Satan the "woman clothed with the sun" who crushes the head of the serpent, and who is the Virgin Mother of the Savior, the Son of God who became man for us and for our salvation. It would argue a great lack of confidence in the Holy Spirit and in the Church of Christ to harp on the difficulties of the past two decades. Surely it is more to our purpose to consider some of the great truths about the Mother of God presented to us by the Second Vatican Council and now more evident after the painful challenges of recent years. I offer you examples of studies and developments about the Blessed Mother. Fr. Neal Flanagan, O.S.M., will speak to us on this same program of "Mary of Nazareth: Lady for All Seasons," drawing on the magnificent materials from biblical studies, his special competence.

I have chosen examples from early Christian history, from the current liturgy, and from recent events. Each year I do a survey of the latest writings about our Lady (which appears in the annual of the Mariological Society of America, *Marian Studies*), and even if I were to limit myself to English alone it would be difficult to keep up with the publications about her. She is indeed an "inescapable woman," who exercises an attraction, even for non-Christians, in art and literature as well as in theology and piety. Scholarly societies for the theological study of the Blessed Virgin continue to meet in a number of countries—in France, Spain, and every year without fail since 1950 also here in the United States. The Mariological Society of Germany has resumed its meetings after missing ten years. An Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary was founded in England in 1967 and has grown steadily, sponsoring, in addition to regular meetings in a number of English cities, international conferences, the last of which was held in Dublin, April, 1984, and the next

planned for Chichester, England, September, 1986. An American Ecumenical Society began in 1976. International Mariological and Marian Congresses have been held under the auspices of the International Pontifical Marian Academy at four-year intervals since 1950; the last was held in Malta, 1983, and the next will be in Germany, 1987.

### *Virgin Mother of God*

In the Marian chapter of the Council we read, "The Virgin Mary, who at the message of the angel received the word of God in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world, is acknowledged and honored as being truly Mother of God and of the Redeemer" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 53). I take from the Council the truths about our Lady that are at the heart of the Catholic faith: Mother of God and virginal Mother of Christ. More than ever, the conviction that Mary is Mother of God is necessary, absolutely indispensable, for correct understanding of the incarnation, of the saving truth that the Son of God became man. It is impossible to exaggerate the incarnational doctrine that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God become man, our brother in the flesh. From the New Testament to the present, from the earliest creeds—at baptism and at the eucharist—to the present day, in every part of the world—East and West, old world and new world, and third world—this good news is repeated over and over. With St. Paul, the Christian Church never ceases to proclaim that in the fulness of time the Father sent his Son, under the Jewish Law, born of a woman, that we might become sons and daughters of God, co-heirs with Christ.

Even were we to be somehow deprived of the double gospel witness to the truth that Mary conceived virginally the Son of God, in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, we would still have the even earlier written word of St. Paul to the community of Galatia, "When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject of the Law, to redeem the subjects of the Law, and to enable us to be adopted as sons" (Gal. 4, 4). The apostle is contrasting the humble origin of Jesus to the glory of his being the Son of God. He is extending the

paradox of "born of a woman, a subject of the Law" to freedom from the Law for all who are called to adoption as children of God, empowered by the Spirit to cry out, "Abba, Father!"

St. Paul is underscoring the common human condition in order to strengthen the comparison and contrast—from the status of slaves to the dignity of children of God. The Father has sent his Son among us as the child of a human mother. God has confounded human wisdom, has upset rational calculation, by making the incarnation the means of our manumission. As he teaches, by becoming a subject of the Law, even to being made a curse for us (Gal. 3, 13), Jesus has delivered us from the slavery of sin and dread of death. In St. Paul's theology of the birth of Jesus, his Mother is not named; Paul writes simply "born of a woman." Yet this is the first biblical witness that Mary is the Mother of God, for St. Paul is teaching that Jesus is both Son of God and son of Mary; his divine sonship and his true humanity are authenticated by his birth from a woman, our sister Mary. The weakness of being born of a woman is open-ended for St. Paul: the immediate meaning is the lowly birth of Jesus, but the way lies open to the mystery of the Virgin Mother, as in the infancy gospels.

Even apart from the fuller picture of the Mother of Jesus in St. Matthew and St. Luke, the brief reference in Galatians set the stage for the veneration the Virgin Mary would come to enjoy among her Son's followers. It was unthinkable that the mother of the one come to fight sin and defeat Satan should herself be less than holy. From the standpoint of religious psychology, it was impossible there not be a great interest in the human mother of one who was said to be God-become-man. The voice of the anonymous woman in Luke, chapter 11, became the voice of the ages, even as our Lady prophesied in the Magnificat. Mary had accepted in faith God's choice of herself to be the mother of his Son made man, and, in the strength of God's grace, she had triumphed over concupiscence and sin beyond every other daughter of Eve.

The lessons of St. Paul and the evangelists Matthew and Luke were not lost on the early Christians. The thoughts of Paul echo still in our current liturgy, as in the second of the Sunday prefaces:

Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Out of love for sinful man, he humbled himself to be born of the Virgin.* By suffering on the cross, he freed us from unending death, and by rising from the dead he gave us eternal life. . . .

We find the same sentiment in the *Te Deum laudamus*: "You, Christ, are the king of glory, the eternal Son of the Father. When you became man to set us free, you did not spurn the Virgin's womb; you overcame the sting of death, and opened the kingdom of heaven to believers."

St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), who defended the title, Mother of God, at the third ecumenical council (Ephesus, A.D. 431) said, "If our Lord Jesus Christ is God, how can the holy Virgin who gave birth to him not be called *Theotokos* [the Greek word for Mother of God]?" He said also, "The Virgin gives birth in the flesh to a divine person who has existed from eternity before her." St. Proclus of Constantinople (d. 446) said Mary was not the mother of a deified man, but the mother of God made man. In a sermon on the Annunciation, St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. 638) addresses our Lady, "Oh Virgin, you will bear the Word of God . . . not without humanity in the way that he is eternally begotten of the Father, but as made flesh and man without change or confusion, without mutation or diminution." St. Augustine (d. 430) noted that the Son chose his mother, which eliminates any absurd suggestion that Mary gave a beginning of existence to the divine Word. St. John of Damascus (d. ab. 750), noted for defending the veneration of sacred images, said that the words "Mother of God" were the compendium of the doctrine of the incarnation.

The triune God is not the prisoner of his own nature. God can freely assume a completely human existence without ceasing to be fully God, and this is exactly what Christians believe took place when the Son of God became also the son of Mary. "In the incarnation God becomes personally involved with us, becomes the subject of a human life and experience, without any compromise of the divine nature" (John Saward). The title *Mother of God* is not in the Bible, although the underlying truth is certainly scriptural. The Gospels do state explicitly that the mother of Jesus conceived



him virginally: she is the Virgin Mary, her Son had no human father. For the new creation in Christ, the final Adam, God chose another means than the normal way of procreation. With sovereign freedom, the Father sent his Son as the true child of Mary, our brother human being, with his conception occurring not by agency of a human father but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

A later development in the Church's understanding, especially in the fourth century and common by the Council of Ephesus, A.D. 431, was that the Mother of Jesus remained always a virgin. This was a further aspect of her life-long consecration to the mission of her Son. The Church's conviction of our Lady's perpetual virginity rests on its own Spirit-guided intuition, which came to the surface in the fourth century after the Roman persecutions ended, when many Christians took up lives of consecrated virginity and celibacy. Reflecting on the meaning of Mary, the Christian people reached the appreciation that both Jesus and his Mother had left to the Church the teaching and example of this way of Christian life and dedication.

### *Mary and Her Son's Redemptive Mission*

The two major doctrines about our Lady, that she is Mother of God and Virgin Mother, are the scriptural roots for honoring her. From this first grasp of the place of the Mother of Jesus in God's redemptive plan, the Christian faithful gradually achieved a fuller appreciation of her holiness and her involvement in the mission of Jesus. In its first document, on the sacred liturgy, December 4, 1963, the Council said that Mary is inseparably joined to the saving work of her Son (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, n. 103). A year later, in the constitution on the Church, the Fathers repeated that truth:

Embracing God's saving will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son. In subordination to him and along with him, by the grace of almighty God, she served the mystery of redemption (*Lumen gentium*, n. 56).

Within a few decades of the New Testament, writers were explaining that the obedience of Mary helped cancel out the pun-

ishment incurred by ancient Eve, whose disobedience led to the tragedy of the fall, when she was deceived by the tempter-serpent. This insight was also voiced by the Vatican Council II: "She was the new Eve, who put her absolute trust not in the ancient serpent, but in God's messenger. She had a share in the victory over the serpent that was promised to the first parents, already in the first book of the Bible" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 63). The Council devotes a paragraph to St. Irenaeus (d. ab. 202). Born in Smyrna, ancient Christian city (Apoc. 2, 8) now in Turkey, Irenaeus ended up as bishop of Lyons in France at a most difficult time, with the Church facing not only Roman persecution but also the even more virulent danger of a form of thought called gnosticism, which described God as so remote that Christianity was impossible, and which taught a contempt for creatures, including the body of Jesus.

Irenaeus' writings—two of his books have come down to us—are filled with hope and joy. The importance of his idea of our Lady as the New Eve is almost beyond measure. The Swiss theologian, Father Hans Urs von Balthasar, has a chapter on Irenaeus in a book recently translated into English: *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. II (San Francisco, 1984). Von Balthasar concentrates on the beauty of God's work, which he finds brilliantly set forth by Irenaeus, including Mary in her association with her Son the New Adam. Irenaeus is the first major Christian biblical theologian. His books are 1) *The Detection and Overthrow of the Knowledge Falsely So-called*, an answer to gnostic errors, and *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, which came to light only in 1904, a sort of adult catechism, not in question-and-answer form but in narrative style. In both books, the obedient Virgin Mary appears as counterpart to the disobedient first Eve.

The setting of the references to Mary is all-important: Irenaeus is developing St. Paul's teaching of the recapitulation of all things in Christ. With the coming of Christ, history has entered a new phase. God's plan, which began with the first parents, achieves fulfilment in Christ, the New Adam. "In the fiery zeal of his soul Abraham roamed the whole world to find his God—God had mercy on him, who sought him in loneliness and si-

lence and revealed himself to him through the Word as in a ray of light" (*Demonstration*, as quoted by von Balthasar). Von Balthasar comments on this Irenaean comparison between the great Old Testament man of faith and the Blessed Virgin, woman of faith of the New Testament: "so Mary is really Abraham's daughter and in her Magnificat inherits Abraham's longing and exaltation" (*The Glory of the Lord*, p. 163).

"The Lord, summing up afresh this man [Adam, first man], reproduced the scheme of his incarnation, that he, being born of a virgin by the will and wisdom of God, might copy the incarnation of Adam, and man might be made, as it was written in the beginning, according to the image and likeness of God" (*Demonstration*). Irenaeus defends the reality of the body of the Savior, born of the Virgin, suffering and dying. For him, to say that the Son of God was "made man" and that he is a "suffering" Jesus come to the same truth. He writes, "The Son of God came to endure suffering" (*Demonstration*, 86). He concludes a description of the life of Jesus: "All these things . . . are signs characteristic of the flesh which Jesus took from the earth, the flesh he has recapitulated in himself, thus saving the work that came from his own hands."

In contrast to the disobedient Eve, who became for herself and the whole race the cause of death, the Virgin Mary, handmaid of the Lord "became by her obedience the cause of salvation both for herself and the whole human race" (*Detection* . . . , book 3, 22, 4). "The knot which Eve's disobedience had tied together was unravelled by the obedience of Mary. What the Virgin Eve had bound by her refusal to believe, the Virgin Mary has unbound by her belief" (also from book 3, 22, 4; both quotations are in the Council's *Lumen gentium*, n. 56). Further on in the same book, we read: "Though Eve had disobeyed God, Mary was persuaded to obey God so that the Virgin Mary might become the advocate of the Virgin Eve" (book 5, 19, 1).

*The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* repeats the Eve-Mary contrast:

The Lord came to seek back the lost sheep, and it was man who was lost; and therefore he did not become some other formation, but

he likewise, of her that was descended from Adam, preserved the likeness of formation; for Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience. (translated by Ross Mackenzie)

By the time of St. Jerome (d. 420), as the Council noted, it had become an axiom to say, "Death through Eve, life through Mary" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 56). It would take an additional conference, or even a series of lectures, to describe how the New Eve/Church and the New Eve/Mary are related. A century ago, Cardinal Newman (d. 1890) appealed to the tradition of Mary as the New Eve in support of the Immaculate Conception, for her immunity from original sin is an important component of the victory over sin and Satan that the New Eve/Mary shares with Christ her Son and Savior. Mary's Assumption—her present union, body and soul, with the victorious Christ—also harks back to the early Christian grasp of the Mother of Jesus as New Eve, joined to her Son's conquest even of death.

### *Mary Assumed into Heaven*

It is thirty-five years since our Lady's Assumption was defined as dogma by Pope Pius XII. Many of the hopes then expressed for the good that would come from the solemn definition have not been realized, and there have been those, even among loyal Catholics, who wondered at the opportuneness of proclaiming as dogma a truth already held for centuries, especially in view of the adverse reaction of Protestants, even of the Orthodox Church. An extremely interesting article has just appeared by the former superior general of the Mill Hill Missionaries, Fr. John Wijngaards ("Body and Soul: Reflections on the Assumption," in *The [London] Tablet* for August 10, 1985). The author confesses that he too had wondered at the wisdom of the definition, until a recent flight to Uganda convinced him otherwise. His fellow travelers were a Belgian couple, Catholics happy to have a priest as their companion on the trip back to their diplomatic post. The conversation turned to their family; they had

lost a daughter, but told Fr. Wijngaards they were not worried "because by now she will have been assumed into a new life."

To the puzzled priest, they explained they believed in reincarnation; in fact they wondered whether the soul of their daughter had taken on new birth in a white or black skin, since they were living in Africa. This led Fr. Wijngaards to reflect on how widespread belief in reincarnation is becoming in Europe. It is even higher in Britain (27% —and of that English group 35% are Catholic). Reincarnation had its origins in Indian religions, back to the sixth century before Christ. With this outlook, suffering in the present is a paying-off for shortcomings of a previous existence. Similarly, the disasters of this life can always be made up in an existence still to come. The Hindu concept is that spirit is immortal, but the body as matter is perishable: "The body is a mask and the world an illusion." Christian belief—recall St. Irenaeus!—is that by becoming man God endorsed the value of human realities. Our smallest human efforts do matter, and there is an awareness, awesome indeed, of the finality of our lives. "It makes us appreciate the gift of every single day . . . what we make of ourselves now is what we will be—forever" (Wijngaards). Fr. Wijngaards noted how strongly and comfortingly belief in our Lady's Assumption differs from reincarnation. He put it clearly:

What was eternally valuable in Mary was not a faceless indistinguishable drop of spirit, but her unique, individual, unrepeatable personality. God put the seal of triumph not only on her soul but on her body, on everything Mary has been throughout her earthly existence . . . liberated from death and given timeless value.

### *Our Lady in the Liturgy and Devotion/Consecration*

The first constitution from the Council was on the liturgy (Dec. 4, 1963). The fifth chapter of this document is on the liturgical year. The Church, Bride of Christ, celebrates throughout the year the principal events of the saving work of her Bridegroom, especially his resurrection. The whole mystery of Christ unfolds through the Church year, from the conception and

birth of Jesus until his ascension and the sending of his Spirit at Pentecost with the expectation of his blessed final return. In this way, the powers and merits of the Lord are made present and we are enabled to enter into these mysteries and be filled with the Savior's grace. The Council placed the Mother of Jesus in this central consideration of Christian worship, instructing us that in celebrating the mysteries of Christ we are to honor with special love the Blessed Mother of God, for she "is joined by an inseparable bond to her Son's saving work" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 103). The Church looks to our Lady with love, seeing in her the most excellent fruit of the redemption wrought by her Son. In holy Mary, Mother of God, the Church contemplates with joy, as in a faultless model, that which the Church herself, as Bride of Christ, desires and aspires to become.

In the Constitution on the Church there are two paragraphs on "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin in the Church," beginning, as did the liturgy document, by stating simply "Mary was involved in the mysteries of Christ," and continuing "and so the Church appropriately honors her with special reverence: from the earliest times she has been venerated under the title, Mother of God. The faithful have fled prayerfully to her protection in all perils and needs" (*Lumen gentium*, no. 66). Here the Fathers of the Council were quoting the most ancient prayer to our Lady that we possess (from perhaps as early as A.D. 300), found in Egypt early in this century on a papyrus fragment written in Greek and identified as a primitive version of the beloved *Sub tuum praesidium* which some of us likely recall in Latin and set to music or in English as "We fly to thy patronage, oh holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us from all danger, oh ever glorious and blessed Virgin."

The Greek word translated "protection" is in fact much more tender than the Latin *praesidium* (which can mean a fortress) or the English "protection." It means "compassion," and I am reminded of the comment in a recent book on God's compassion, a comment in which our Lady also enters. The book is *Compassion: A Reflection of the Christian Life*, by D. P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison and H.J.M. Nouwen (Doubleday, N.Y., 1982, also Image paperback):

"The mystery of God's love is not that he takes our pains away, but that he first wants to share them with us." The intimacy of this divine sharing is revealed by the Hebrew word for compassion (which affects the Greek also). The Hebrew word, *rachamin*, refers to the "womb of Yahweh God." "This compassionate relationship between God and man is expressed in Christ's infinite-charity in assuming the human condition by becoming the 'fruit of the womb' of the Virgin Mary. This is the model for all compassionate behavior" (I am quoting the review by Carson Daly from *Fidelity*, March, 1982).

Among the ways in which we honor the holy Mother of God, the Council mentioned veneration, love, invocation and imitation. We were also urged to avoid the extremes of too little and too much, for "true devotion" to the Blessed Virgin "consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion nor in a certain vain credulity," and we are encouraged equally to avoid "the excess of narrow-mindedness" (*Lumen gentium*, no. 67). The role of Mary is a common object of misunderstanding between Protestants and Catholics. Protestants fear that Catholics put Mary in place of Jesus, and give her false honor. One of the best simple answers to this problem comes from the lay theologian, Dr. Germain Grisez, expert in moral theology, in his address of May, 1985, to the Mariological Society of America ("Mary and Christian Moral Principles"). He said, "Mary is a subordinate but real moral principle of our Christian lives. . . . In human relationships generally, closeness to someone close to a friend does not displace intimacy with that friend but intensifies it. This general rule holds true in our relationship with Jesus and Mary."

I have suggested that the post-conciliar two decades have been a time of purgation as well as a time of trial, and am convinced that by such painful happenings, affecting both public and private devotion to our Lady, we are being led by the Holy Spirit to a deeper and finally even warmer estimation of our Blessed Mother, in her true glory as Mother of God and great model and mother of the Church and of us all. Recall that Cardinal Suenens, at a charismatic gathering in California some years back, stressed the great things the Council taught about the Mother of Christ and the intention of the Fathers of Vatican

II to reinforce healthy devotion to our Lady, in no way to reduce it. He did note, however, in his book *A New Pentecost* that the reaction against many forms of Marian devotion was an opposition to devotions that remained on the edge of liturgical renewal, that were too dependent on private revelation and too remote from biblical theology. In his recent article in the English Catholic weekly, *The Tablet* ("Why I am a Catholic"), February 23, 1985, the now-retired Cardinal Suenens wrote,

This Church, (moreover), has enabled me to understand the mystery of Mary, whose sole purpose, yesterday and today, is to lead us to Jesus. Mary has helped me to transpose into my life the words of the angel to Joseph, "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit."

A fairly common Marian devotional term has been "consecration to Mary." The Second Vatican Council spoke of dedication to Mary, of which consecration can be regarded as an especially strong form. In his book *Pastoral Liturgy* (New York, 1962), J. Jungmann, S.J., had a section "From Patrocinium [Latin for "patronage"] to Consecration," which traced the emergence of the term consecration to our Lady as replacing the earlier sense of her patronage and our being the clients of this heavenly patroness.

Pope Pius XII consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a radio address to Fatima in October, 1942, and renewed it on a number of subsequent occasions, as the present Holy Father has also done. But there is an urgent need to clarify what is meant by the word "consecration" as a Christian term and particularly "consecration to Mary, or to her Immaculate Heart." The urgency is the more pressing because of the badly bungled reporting, also in the Catholic media, of the act of entrusting to the Blessed Virgin which Pope John Paul II recommended for the feast of the Annunciation on the weekend of March 24-25, 1984, concluding the jubilee year of the Redemption.

The papal request was widely reported simply as "a consecration to Mary, or to her Immaculate Heart." The fact that the



Holy Father called it "an act of entrusting of the world to the Blessed Virgin" was overlooked. What was missed was the intensely Christ-centered character of the "act of entrusting," that it was basically an association with the consecration that Jesus made of himself to the Father's will and to his redemptive mission, that, after the example of our Lady and with her assistance, we too are to enter into the consecration Jesus made of himself, just as in the Eucharist (Prayer Three) we beg the Father to send upon us the Spirit of his Son to make us an "everlasting gift," that is a permanent victim together with Christ.

Recall the Council's succinct statement—the Blessed Virgin Mary is inseparably joined to her Son's saving work, or the line this West Coast Mariological Society quoted in its invitation to this day of celebration: "Mary figured prominently in the history of salvation and in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith. Hence when she is being preached and venerated, she summons the faithful to her Son and his sacrifice, and to love for the Father" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 65). The Eucharist is, of course, one of our principal ways of entering into the sacrifice of Jesus, the Son of Mary.

It is true that such language as "consecration to Mary, to her Immaculate Heart" is to be found in the March, 1984, "act of entrusting," as the pope said also in his dedicatory prayer at Fatima, May 13, 1982. He obviously includes echoes of the formulas of Pope Pius XII from the forties. The first part of the "act of entrusting" reads: "Embrace, with the love of the Mother and handmaid of the Lord, this human world of ours, which we entrust and consecrate to you . . .," but the heart of the formula runs:

Behold, as we stand before you, Mother of Christ, before your Immaculate Heart, we desire, together with the whole Church, to unite ourselves with the consecration which for love of us your Son made of himself to the Father: "For their sake," He said (as we read in St. John's gospel), "I consecrated myself that they also may be consecrated in the truth" (Jn 17, 19). We wish to unite ourselves with our Redeemer in this His consecration for the world and for the human race, which in his divine heart, has power to obtain pardon and to secure reparation . . . How deeply we feel the need for

the consecration of humanity and the world—our modern world—in union with Christ himself! For the redeeming work of Christ must be shared in by the world through the Church.

Only at this point, after the emphasis on the consecration of Jesus and to Jesus, does the act of entrusting turn again to our Lady:

Hail to you, who are wholly united to the redeeming consecration of your Son . . . Mother of the Church! . . . Help us to live in the truth of the consecration of Christ for the entire human family of the modern world. . . . In entrusting to you . . . O Mother . . . the world, all individuals and all peoples, we also entrust to you this very consecration of the world, placing it in your motherly Heart.

Pope John Paul II had explained in advance this profound Christ-centered meaning of consecration in the homily at Fatima, May 13, 1982, when he went there on pilgrimage in thanksgiving for surviving the assassination attempt of the year before, May 13, 1981. The pope commented on our Lord's words to his Mother and the beloved disciple:

In Christ, at the foot of the cross, she accepted John, and in John she accepted all of us totally. Mary embraces us all with special solicitude in the Holy Spirit. For as we profess in our Creed, he is "the giver of life." It is he who gives the fulness of life, open towards eternity. Mary's spiritual motherhood is therefore a sharing in the power of the Holy Spirit, of "the giver of life." . . . Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means drawing near, through the Mother's intercession, to the very Fountain of life, that sprang from Golgotha . . . Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning beneath the Cross of the Son. It means consecrating this world to the pierced heart of the Savior, bringing it back to the very source of its redemption. Consecrating ourselves to Mary means accepting her help to offer ourselves and the whole of mankind to him who is holy, infinitely holy: it means accepting her help, having recourse to her motherly Heart, which beneath the Cross was opened to love for every human being, for the whole world—in order to offer the world, the individual human being, mankind as a whole, and all the nations

to him who is infinitely holy. . . . "For their sake I consecrate myself," Jesus had said (Jn 17, 19). By the power of the redemption the world and man have been consecrated. They have been consecrated to him who is infinitely holy. . . . The Mother of Christ calls us, invites us to join with the Church of the living God in the consecration of the world, in this act of confiding by which the world, mankind as a whole, the nations, and each individual person are presented to the Eternal Father with the power of the Redemption won by Christ.

The Holy Father returned from Fatima Sunday morning May 16, 1982, and at noon in St. Peter's Square repeated the prayer he had said in Portugal: here are some of its lines:

Hail to you (Handmaid of the Lord) who are completely united to the redemptive consecration of your Son! Mother of the Church! Enlighten the people of God on their paths of faith, hope and charity. Help us live with the whole truth of Christ's consecration for the entire human family in the modern world. Entrusting to you, O Mother, the world, all men and all peoples, we entrust to you also the same consecration for the world, placing it in your maternal Heart. . . .

The pope's words make clear that consecration, as an act of religion, is properly directed to God alone, and that consecration is not simply a human act of religion, not something we do, or can do, independently of God's call, of the divine initiative. In the Bible, man never consecrates himself, for he is incapable of so doing. God calls the human being; the election and vocation come from God. Human efforts to scale the skies led to Babel and confusion. The prophets of Baal screamed and slashed themselves all day long without avail, but the God of Elijah answered the prophet's prayer and sent fire on the drenched altar of sacrifice (1 Kings 18).

"The holy one of God" (Matthew 1, 24) is the one the Father has consecrated and sent into the world (John 10, 36). He is Jesus the Messiah, there is salvation in no other. Any genuine Christian consecration can only be a sharing in the consecration of Christ, a participation in his self-consecration: "For these I consecrate myself, so that they may be consecrated in truth" (Jn 17, 19). Any consecration we make can only be a response to the

consecratory action of God, to his gift in Christ Jesus. The Savior shares his own self-consecration in various ways, he communicates his holiness to us by many gifts, for example, the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, his holy word, his Spirit and his Mother. "When we open ourselves to these gifts then we too are *consecrated*." (See George T. Montague, S.M., to whom I am indebted for much of the material in this section, *Behold Your Mother*, Marianist Resources Commission Bulletin, vol. 12, no. 1, Document 63, February, 1981, Dayton, Ohio.)

On Calvary, Jesus gave his Mother to the Church in the person of his beloved disciple, who responded consciously by taking her "unto his own," a phrase that means more than simply "into his home." It means rather "into the things of his own, those matters closest to his heart, affairs of deep concern to him, a spiritual space"—we might say "having the mind of Christ." St. John's words, "took her to his own," mean the beloved disciple's wholehearted acceptance of Jesus' gift of his Mother, the new woman of the new paradise. To accept Mary as the Savior's dying gift means to accept also all that she represents. Mary and the Church are inseparable; to accept the gift of our Lady from her Son as a means of being united to the Savior's own consecration means to receive her within the fellowship of his followers. The union of Mary and the Church guarantees the incarnated realism of what we call "consecration to Mary," and here Fr. Montague's words repeat what Irenaeus suggested at the end of the second century.

Pope John Paul II speaks constantly about our Blessed Mother and, in his tireless travels, invariably prays at the Marian shrines of the countries he visits, from his first foreign trip to Our Lady of Guadalupe, January, 1979, to his most recent apostolic journey to Africa, which was the twenty-seventh of the series. From August 8 to August 19, 1985, he visited seven African countries. At the shrine of Our Lady of Togo on August 8, he greeted representatives of the animists, a nature-centered religion, praying with them and telling them also of "Mary's unique place among the friends of God as mother of his well-beloved Son." In Cameroon at Marienberg, named for our Lady, the cradle of evangelization since 1890, the pope said, "With Mary, we believe that nothing is impossible to God." It is not strange that the percep-

tive reporter, E. J. Dionne, in a feature article in *The New York Times Magazine* for Sunday, May 12, 1985 ("Determined to Lead"), said this about the pope: "John Paul is an intellectual. But he is dedicated to the intellectually unfashionable symbols of popular Christianity: relics and statues, devotions to the saints and, above all, to the Blessed Virgin Mary."

### *Feast of the Annunciation and Our Lady's Birthday*

The act of entrusting to our Lady for the feast of the Annunciation, 1984, concluded the Holy Year of the Redemption. At the beginning of that jubilee year, in 1983, the pope had said, "From Nazareth to Calvary there is . . . a continuous line of development in an undivided and indivisible design of love." In the same vein as the pope's words, early Christian authors wrote of the "mysteries of March," joining the feast of the Annunciation on March 25 and the Lenten remembrance of the Passion of Jesus. In the current Church calendar, March 25 has regained its old name, Annunciation of the Lord, a good example of the liturgical riches that have been opened up for us in recent years. The office of readings for March 25 has this from Pope St. Leo the Great: "He who is true God was . . . born in the complete perfect nature of a true man, whole in his own nature, whole in ours. By our nature we mean what the Creator had fashioned in us from the beginning and took to himself in order to restore it." Pope Leo exercised great influence on the ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), which proclaimed the full humanity as well as full divinity of Jesus and his perfect unity as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. From the First Ecumenical Council (Nicea, A.D. 325) through I Constantinople (A.D. 381) through Ephesus (A.D. 431), which proclaimed that Mary may be rightly called Mother of God, there is a clear line of affirmation that Jesus is both true God and true man. The guarantee of his being our human brother is that he was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary. The entrance prayer for March 25 (my translation) builds on the ancient faith of the Church and St. Leo's clear explanation: "Oh God, you willed that your Word truly take human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Grant,

we beseech you, that we who publicly acclaim our Redeemer as God and as man may merit to share also in his divine nature. . . ." The preface for March 25 includes the words: "He came to save mankind by becoming a man himself. The Virgin, receiving the angel's message in faith, conceived by the power of the Spirit and bore your Son in purest love."

God the Son made human life his own at every stage. He sanctified the very first stage of life as he did the other stages—a Christian answer to the anti-life mentality. "The first stage of the great adventure of being a human being begins in the womb at conception . . . God the Son made that first stage his own, thereby sanctifying it . . ." (John Saward, in an article that has been very helpful, "The Theotokos in the Theology of the Church," paper read at a conference on The Mother of God in Eastern Theology and Spirituality, Sept., 1983, published in *Chrysostom* 6 [Spring, 1984], bulletin of the Society of John Chrysostom [London]).

The feast of the Annunciation, first kept at Constantinople, extended to the West in the seventh century. Christmas had replaced the pagan feast of the rebirth of the sun at the winter solstice, to hail Jesus Christ, true light of the world. March 25, nine months before Christmas, coincides with the spring equinox. It used to be thought that Jesus died on March 25, even that the world had been created on that date. For many centuries, the legal year began on March 25: As late as 1752, dating was from this feast of the Incarnation in England, although the adoption of the Gregorian calendar that same year threw off the coincidence of tax dates and civil holidays with the feast of the Annunciation or "Lady Day," as it was known in England.

Christians of centuries past saw a parallel in the Latin Gospels, where Gabriel greets Mary with the word *Ave* (hail) and the risen Jesus on Easter morning greets the women with the same word *Avete* (plural form of "hail," Matthew 28, 9). Some years ago, we dropped the genuflection at the words of the Sunday Credo, "By the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man." A genuflection is still required only on March 25 and December 25, but other times we are asked to bow at these phrases. We Americans are not much used to bowing, and so

have not paid much attention to the rubric to bow at these words, but a reverence in body as well as in spirit can help us rejoice in the continuing mystery of the Annunciation, the central truth that God became man as the son of the Virgin Mary.

Tomorrow, we keep our Lady's birthday, which inaugurates the bimillennium of her birth. The liturgy for September 8 describes the holy birth of Mary as the dawn of redemption. The Nativity of Mary is among her most ancient feasts, first kept in the East, but as early as the seventh century also in Rome. The liturgical prayers always link our Lady's birthday to her mission as Mother of God. The gospel reading for September 8 is the genealogy of Jesus from St. Matthew, and it recalls his Mother's membership in the Chosen People. In the feast-day readings, St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740) relates the coming of Mary to the coming of Christ in poetic words:

The radiant and manifest coming of God to men most certainly needed a joyful prelude to introduce the great gift of salvation to us. The present festival, the birth of the Mother of God, is the prelude, while the final act is the foreordained union of the Word with flesh. Today the Virgin is born, tended and formed, and prepared for her role as Mother of God, who is the universal King of the ages. . . . let all creation sing and dance and unite to make worthy contribution to the celebration of this day. . . . Today this created world is raised to the dignity of a holy place for him who made all things. The creature is newly prepared to be a divine dwelling place for the Creator" (from *The Liturgy of the Hours*, v. IV, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1975).

The antiphon for the *Benedictus* at morning prayer is: "Your birth, O Virgin Mother of God, proclaims joy to the whole world, for from you arose the glorious Sun of Justice, Christ our God; he freed us from the age-old curse and filled us with holiness; he destroyed death and gave us eternal life."

*Conclusion: Titus Brandsma, O.Carm., Martyr and Marian Scholar*

On Sunday, November 3, 1985, Pope John Paul II is to beatify a Carmelite priest from The Netherlands who died in Dachau

on July 26, 1942. He is the martyr Titus Brandsma, O.Carm., put to death for his witness in defense of the faith and human dignity. Already in the mid-thirties he opposed Nazi persecution of the Jews, and from the German invasion of Holland was a marked man. His enemies knew well the enormous influence Fr. Brandsma exercised, as a respected professor at the Catholic University of Nijmegen, also as national chaplain of Catholic high school teachers. The Dutch bishops made him their spokesman when the Nazis attempted to place ads in the thriving Catholic press.

Of small stature and consistently poor health—he would have joined the Franciscans as his brother did, but was not strong enough, so became a Carmelite instead—Fr. Brandsma's apostolic activities matched the work of several people taken together. When the Gestapo arrested him in January, 1942, he commented how odd it was to be going to jail at sixty. The many people whose lives he touched in every walk of society remember best his tireless availability and charity, which would be tested to the limits of heroism in his kindness even to the bestial guards at Dachau.

Internationally known as an expert in spiritual theology, particularly the medieval mystics of the Low Countries, he lectured in Canada and the United States the summer of 1935. These conferences were published as *Carmelite Mysticism: Historical Sketches* (Chicago, 1936; again as *The Beauty of Carmel*, London and Dublin, 1955); they breathe the spirit of the Blessed Virgin, Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

When the Catholic University of Nijmegen was founded in the early twenties, Fr. Brandsma was one of the first faculty members and served as rector the year of 1932-1933. His inaugural address on "the notion of God" is still quoted, not least for the epilogue on our Lady, which somewhat astonished some of his colleagues, little accustomed to so public a tribute to the Mother of God on a formal academic occasion.

We like to act and speak in images and similitudes. We like examples and help. We have an image for developing our representation of God. Once there was a Virgin who became the Mother of God



made man, who gave us God as the Emmanuel. He died on the cross to make us live in union with God and to fill us with his grace. Thus, he was also born in us in the nature of grace, in order to bring into its own the union with God in the order of nature, to make that union even more interior and superabundant. Thus, the Mother of God gave us that interior union with God, while she presented herself as an example of the profoundest communion. Let us keep that example before our eyes. It is more than a mere example. She is called to direct our gaze to God. Just as we, led by revelation, recognize God in the child in her arms, so may she lead us through our intellects to the contemplation of God in all that he has created, in order that, as he lived in her, he may live in us and through the deed born of us be revealed in us. (translated by Joachim Smet, O.Carm.)

He hardly ever gave a talk without mentioning Mary. At a Marian celebration in August, 1931, he said, "Like Mary we are to become God-bearers, and God's heralds." At a Marian Congress in Belgium, 1936, he said that we "like Mary" are to "conceive the Word, allow him to grow within us, and give him birth on behalf of the world around us." During a retreat, he affirmed: "No one was more like God than she whom he chose as his mother. Our union with her, the imitation of her life, are the surest guarantee of our union with Jesus, of our imitation of Christ her Son."

When he was arrested in January, 1942, and given only a few minutes to get ready, he changed from his Carmelite habit into his black suit and forgot his rosary. A Protestant minister found one for him in prison. He gave that rosary to the nurse at Dachau who administered the fatal injection; she later returned to her Catholic faith to become a witness in the cause of his beatification.

By a near miracle—maybe more than near!—even the Gestapo records on Fr. Brandsma survived, although all such papers were to be destroyed as the Allies moved in. It was, in fact, a man in the employ of the Gestapo, a former priest, who risked his life by saving them. Many photographs of Father Titus have survived, for he was a very well-known person in the Netherlands. In the Marian Library at the University of Dayton there is the

book from the 1932 National Marian Congress held at Nijmegen, thought up by Fr. Brandsma and carried out splendidly in spite of objections that such devotional forms might suit a "Latin" world but not a Dutch setting. The Congress report contains a number of his talks and many pictures.

For many, the favorite photograph of Fr. Titus, "the dangerous little friar," as German police records describe him, shows him smoking his inseparable Dutch pipe. It was taken away from him soon after he went to jail, and he simply rearranged his day, dropping from his schedule the smoking periods to spend even more time in prayer and solitude. People knew that when he turned up they were in for a joyful time, as he said, "At feasts we must maintain our joy so high and so noble that Jesus and Mary enjoy staying with us until the end of the feast. Our feasts should be a confirmation of our faith and of our love for God."

Retreat notes from the year before the war, almost as if Fr. Brandsma had a premonition of the union with Christ that awaited him, include these lines:

Let us prepare ourselves. Union with Jesus promises suffering. It was because of Mary's most intimate union with Jesus that the greatest suffering struck her. We follow Mary who shows us the way—to understanding, and to share in the sacrifice of Jesus. Then . . . resurrection and ascension. We have deserved it. God has let us deserve it. Our place is reserved! We will not let it slip from our grasp. We will say to Mary: Keep my place for me, I am coming!

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