

1950

## Toward a Systematic Treatment of Mariology

Francis J. Connell

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Connell, Francis J. (1950) "Toward a Systematic Treatment of Mariology," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 1, Article 10.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol1/iss1/10](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol1/iss1/10)

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](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

## TOWARD A SYSTEMATIC TREATMENT OF MARIOLOGY

In view of the exalted dignity conferred by God on the virginal Mother of His Divine Son, the important part she took in the work of man's redemption, and the place attributed to her in Catholic devotional life, the scientific treatment of the doctrines concerning Mary—Mariology, as we call it—must be regarded as an essential portion of the course in dogmatic theology given in our seminaries to the candidates for the priesthood. At the same time it must be remembered that the special emphasis that is now placed on this phase of theology is a comparatively recent development. It is true, there have always been saints and scholars who pondered and wrote extensively on the prerogatives of Our Blessed Lady; but the manuals of theology, almost up to the beginning of the present century, gave comparatively little space to Mary, and then only in connection with her divine maternity, sanctity and virginity. The *Summa* of St. Thomas limits its Mariological doctrines to a few questions in the Third Part, in the treatment of the entrance of the Word into the world. The commentators of the *Summa* confined themselves, generally speaking, to proportionate limitations, so that up to the last decade of the nineteenth century the theology of Our Lady was usually given in textbooks merely as a part of the tract on the Incarnation.

Even today some theologians incorporate Mariology into the tract on the Word Incarnate, though they accord it the dignity of a special article or section. Thus, Tanquerey treats Mariology in one of the articles under the heading *De consecrariis utriusque Mysterii*, following the tracts on the Incarnation and the Redemption. Van Noort presents Marian

theology in one section of the treatise *De Deo Redemptore*. Hervé devotes one part of his tract *De Incarnatione* to the theology of Our Blessed Lady. However, during the past half-century it has become the much more common practice of theologians to make Mariology the subject of a distinct treatise, under the title *Mariologia* or *Marialogia* (e.g. Herrmann and Paquet). Such, for example, is the method adopted by Pohle, Hugon, Zubizaretta, Diekamp and Lépiciér.

To some it may seem quite unimportant whether the theology of Our Lady is presented as a separate tract or as a part of the tract on the Incarnation and Redemption, as long as the treatment is adequate. I think, however, that there are advantages to the system of the separate tract over the other method, even granting that the content is the same in both cases. When the various theses are united under one heading, the priest in later life can remember and co-ordinate the main points of theology concerning Our Lady if he wishes to present them in a sermon or instruction. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of Marian theology to propose it as a distinct subdivision of the body of theological truth; and it brings out the important fact that Mary's part in the divine plan to restore the human race to the friendship of God was far wider than merely providing the Word Incarnate with a body in which He was to endure suffering.

There seems to be little doubt as to where the treatise on Mariology should be placed in our theological manuals—after the treatment of the Redemption. It is interesting to note how a modification in this matter has accompanied a development of Marian theology. St. Thomas, concerned only with Mary's part in the entrance of the Word into the world, discussed the functions and the prerogatives of Our Lady in connection with the Incarnation itself, before treating of the Redemption. In Paquet's tract *De Incarnatione* the same order is followed, with the somewhat incongruous consequence that, although

the author fully supports the doctrines that Mary is the co-redemptress and the dispenser of all graces, he considers these acts of participation in the Redemption, before he treats *ex professo* the Redemption itself. But the favored place for Mariology is after the tract on the Redemption.

However, a few years ago, at a Mariological Convention in France, the Abbé Bonnichon, of the Grand Séminaire of Tours, a member of the Société Française d'Études Mariales, suggested a different plan for incorporating the theses on Mariology into the seminary course of dogmatic theology.<sup>1</sup> His idea was to divide up the Mariological doctrines and to apportion the various theses to the pertinent portions of the various tracts of the course. He argued that if Mariology is taken as a separate tract it will inevitably be regarded as a "minor" tract, and thus will very probably be treated only hastily and sketchily by the professor in the limited time which the seminary schedule permits. Moreover, he believed that if all the doctrines concerning the Blessed Mother are taken under one separate heading, Marian theology will not be properly incorporated into the student's theological scheme. The majestic cathedral of theological truth, he says, must be conceived as it was constructed by the divine Architect, and the integration of Mariology into this cathedral is necessary if we would not spoil the beautiful design of God's wisdom. He believes, too, that if the students are given the thesis concerning Mary's part in the distribution of graces before they have had the tract on grace, they will not grasp the full import of the spiritual motherhood of Mary. His suggestion, in detail, is as follows:

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception would be taken in the traité *De Peccato*, for thus will be shown the superabundant compensation that God has provided, even through

<sup>1</sup> Abbé Bonnichon, *Rapport sur la pratique de l'enseignement de la théologie mariale*, in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Études Mariales*, 1936, Juvisy, 1936, pp. 49-75.

a mere creature, for the permission of evil in the world. The study of the divine maternity would naturally come in the first part of the tract on the Incarnation, and with the divine maternity Mary's perpetual virginity would be treated. After the theses on the plenitude of grace conferred on the Word Incarnate, would come a corresponding thesis on the sanctity of Mary. Mary's share in the work of the Redemption would be incorporated into the tract *De Deo Redemptore*, as also—according to Abbé Bonnichon—the doctrine that Mary died. The treatise *De Ecclesia*, he says, would be the proper place for the doctrine of Mary's queenly dignity and authority, and connected with this would be the doctrine of her Assumption. Finally, he would include in the tract *De Gratia* the thesis on Mary's universal mediatorship of grace.

Abbé Bonnichon defends his method in these words: "For our future priests Mariology would be, through all the theses that compose it, inseparable from the other dogmas; the mystery of Mary would be completely bound to the mystery of Jesus; the divine plan, in which Mary's constant collaboration exercises no little causality, would appear in all its sweetness. Our seminarians could not think of the Incarnation without relating it to the divine maternity; they would not conceive the dogma of the Redemption without Mary's co-merit; the mediation of the God-Man, the unique Mediator, would not be disassociated from the subordinate mediation of Mary, and thus each would be the better understood by them. The consequences of this benefit, both for the spiritual life of the priest and for his instruction in preaching and catechizing, are very evident".<sup>2</sup>

I am presenting this suggestion of Abbé Bonnichon in detail, not because I wish to argue in its favor—in fact, I still prefer the method of a single, distinct tract on Mariology—but because it is important for those who teach Mariology in a

<sup>2</sup> Abbé Bonnichon, *art. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

seminary to know that such a method has been proposed, and hence they can and should adopt it to the extent, at least, of briefly bringing in the pertinent doctrines of Mariology in connection with the doctrines in the various tracts to which they are related. It is of interest to note in this connection that the method advocated by Abbé Bonnichon was followed to some degree by Father McGuinness, C.M., in his *Commentarii Theologici*, published forty years ago.

In recent years particularly, theologians have endeavored to find a basic principle of Mariology—a fundamental truth about Our Blessed Lady from which the other doctrines relative to her logically flow. Such a basic principle we have, for example, in the treatise *De Deo Uno*, the divine *aseitas*; and in the tract of grace, in the truth that grace is a participation in the divine nature; and in the treatise on the Incarnation, in the doctrine of the hypostatic union. Some have proposed as the basic principle of Mariology the doctrine of Mary's divine maternity; but the difficulty arises: "How does it follow from this truth that Mary had a share in the work of the Redemption?" For there is no intrinsic connection between the divine maternity and Mary's participation in the work of the Redemption. Others claim that the fundamental principle of Mariology is the doctrine of Mary's association with the world's Redeemer—the doctrine that Mary is the new Eve, associated with the new Adam, or the *principium consortii*, as it is called. But again, the difficulty presents itself: "How does this doctrine include the divine maternity?" And, even if it could be shown to be thus included, does it not seem incongruous to treat the divine motherhood as something secondary or subordinate? Others have proposed as the fundamental Mariological principle: "Mary is the Mother of the divine Redeemer" but again there is a difficulty, in the fact that, although this principle contains the truth that Mary had a part in bringing the Redeemer into the world, it does

not seem to demonstrate her participation in the actual work of the Redemption or in the distribution of all graces.<sup>3</sup>

In 1936, at a meeting of the Société Française d'Études Mariales, Father Eugene Druwé, S.J., proposed a view which he derived from Scheeben.<sup>4</sup> According to him, the basic principle of Mariology is the doctrine that Mary possesses a materno-sponsal character. In other words, by the one act of conception of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity she became both the Mother (physically) and the Spouse (morally) of the Person of the Word. For, her motherhood was unique in that the Person Whom she bore existed before His human conception and birth, and the conception did not take place until Mary had given her free consent. Hence, it follows that the relation contracted by Mary toward the Word was at the same time and indissolubly, a relation of Mother and a relation of Spouse. The same conclusion results from a consideration of the association of Mary with her divine Son indicated in Sacred Scripture (*Genesis*, 2:18) and proposed in tradition, especially in the well-known Eve-Mary parallel. Since the relation between Eve and Adam was that of marriage, we can find analogously a relation of espousal between Mary and her Son. The union of Adam and Eve involved the formation of the latter from the former; the union between Jesus and Mary involved the formation of His body from His Mother's virginal flesh. The union of Adam and Eve produced in the physical order the entire human race; the union of Christ and Mary brought about the spiritual rebirth of all mankind. Hence, in the unique materno-sponsal character of Mary we find her physical motherhood of the Word Incarnate and her spiritual motherhood of the entire human race.

From this concept, it is argued, we can deduce the perfect

<sup>3</sup> On the various opinions in this connection cf. G. M. Roschini, O.S.M., *Compendium Mariologiae*, Romae, 1946, pp. 4-12.

<sup>4</sup> E. Druwé, S.J., *Position et structure du Traité Marial*, in *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Études Mariales*, 1936, Juvisy, 1936, pp. 9-34.

sinlessness of Mary. For, since marriage is by its very nature an indissoluble union, the union between Mary and her Son could never be sundered by sin, whether original or actual. Again, as the Spouse of the Word, Mary was pledged to inviolable virginity, and that from the very dawning of reason.

As the predestined Spouse of the Redeemer, Mary was to aid Him in the task of the Redemption. Her first act of co-operation consisted in giving Him the body in which He was to suffer, and thus to prepare the matter for the all-holy sacrifice of Calvary. Just as all His acts contributed toward meriting for men the graces of salvation, so the actions of Mary, His Spouse and Associate, were directed toward meeting—at least *de congruo*—those same graces. By virtue of the same close association with her Son, Mary was destined to die, but also to enjoy, like Him, an anticipated resurrection from the tomb. From the same principle it follows logically that she must be associated with Him in the government of His kingdom; and even as He is ever interceding for us in heaven, so she must be associated with Him in this act of prayer to obtain all the graces needed by the children of men.

This theory, as developed by Scheeben and Druwé, is certainly sublime in many respects, yet it does not lack difficulties. The concept of Mary, as the Spouse of the Word, does not seem to derive much support from tradition. In fact, the traditional idea seems to be that Mary is the daughter of God the Father, the Mother of God the Son and the Spouse of God the Holy Ghost. Moreover, it does not seem to follow from the fact that Mary freely gave her consent to the office of Mother of God, that she also consented to share in the work of the Redemption.

Consequently, there are other theologians who believe that we should be satisfied in accepting as the basis of Mariology two distinct principles—that Mary is the Mother of God and that she is the Associate of the Redeemer in the entire task

of man's redemption. Although both principles were actually realized in one and the same person, they are not necessarily conjoined; hence, we should regard them as two formally distinct principles, which cannot be reduced to any more general principle.

Father Gabriel Roschini, in his *Compendium Mariologiae*, for all practical purposes accepts the theory of the twofold principle. He says: "It must be granted that the idea of divine maternity is entirely distinct from the idea of association. However, this does not prevent us from speaking of *one* supreme principle of Mariology—not indeed of one *simple* supreme principle, which is impossible, but of one *complex* supreme principle, since these two ideas (namely, divine maternity and association), although they are entirely distinct, are nevertheless ordained to each other and intimately connected. . . . Hence, the first principle of Mariology, which is one, though complex, is: 'Mary is the Mother of God and the Associate of the Redeemer.' In this one concept, or complex principle, we find the definition or essential idea of the object of our science, Mary, and from this essential idea we can deduce all the conclusions of Mariology. By reason of this unique twofold mission the Blessed Virgin was created and adorned with the singular privileges directed toward its attainment."<sup>5</sup> Then Father Roschini goes on to define Mariology as "that portion of the science of theology which treats of the Mother of God and Associate of the Mediator."<sup>6</sup>

I have said that for all practical purposes Father Roschini agrees with the theory of two distinct principles, for, although he does speak of a single basic principle, he admits that it is complex—that is, equivalent to two separate principles.

I have devoted considerable attention toward this question, which to some may seem hair-splitting, because I think

<sup>5</sup> G. M. Roschini, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

that it should be considered by those who wish to treat Mariology systematically—and also because I think that the lengthy discussions on this point which have engaged the European theologians indicate the great interest that is being taken to-day in the scientific aspect of Mariology, particularly with relation to her part in the redemption of mankind.

In the treatment of Mariology, perhaps more than in any other portion of theology, there is danger that devotional influences may affect the scientific method of procedure. It must ever be borne in mind that devotion to Our Lady must be based on the teachings of theology, not *vice versa*. In fact, I do not hesitate to say that devotion to Mary, whether in the priest or in the lay person, is likely to become immoderate and even superstitious, unless the one who practises the devotion is able to explain, at least in a simple way, the reasons for it—reasons based on the sound tenets of Catholic faith as propounded by the official magisterium of the Church or by reliable Catholic theologians.

Hence, the professor of Mariology must consider it his duty to explain clearly and thoroughly, the theological foundations of the Catholic belief in the prerogatives and functions of Mary and of the ardent devotion to her which is expected of every practical Catholic. We must remember that the Catholic attitude toward the Mother of God is one of the stumbling blocks of present-day Protestants, and it is very important that Catholics—especially priests—should be equipped with an adequate knowledge of this portion of theology, in order that they may be able to explain and to defend the Catholic position. Great caution must be employed in the use of statements which, though they can be correctly understood by Catholics, might convey a false or superstitious meaning to those who are not familiar with the Church's teachings—such expressions, for example, as: "Sometimes we can obtain a favor more readily by praying to Mary than by praying to

God. . . . No one who practises true devotion to Mary can be lost. . . . Whatever favors God gave to any creature He must have given also to Our Blessed Lady."

Our teachings must be based, directly or indirectly, on the revealed word of God, contained either in Scripture or in divine tradition. I do not intend to discuss the use of Scripture in Mariology, for that will be done competently at the next session. But I do wish to assert emphatically that in the exposition of tradition the professor must be familiar, above all, with the full import of the famous Eve-Mary parallel, which is found even in the writings of St. Justin and St. Irenaeus. No one contends that all the implications of this parallel were known to the early writers; but it surely admits of great development and its antiquity seems to mark it as a portion of divine tradition.

In the use of arguments from congruity (*argumenta convenientiae*) we must be especially on our guard against any undue exaggeration. There is, indeed, a legitimate use of such arguments, but it must always be in accord with the Providence of God. In other words, if we know that a divine action or decree has actually been accomplished, and it is evident that some other divine action or decree is in accord with it, we have a good argument for the existence of the latter. Thus, theologians, with the approval of the Church, have argued from reasons of fitness that certain sacraments revive, even though there is no direct argument for this in revealed sources. So, too, in Mariology we can use the argument from congruity to conclude that, since the Word Incarnate associated His Mother with Himself in the acquisition of all graces, He also associated her with Himself in the distribution of all graces. And the Church seems to have given approval to this conclusion. But to assert that Mary's initial grace surpassed the consummated grace of all angels and men combined—although one might propose it as a *probable* opinion—could not be pre-

sented as a certain conclusion if one attempted to argue merely on the grounds of fitness, because God loves His Mother more than He loves all men and angels.

In conclusion I would say that the most important function of the professor of Mariology is to recognize the deep importance of this tract and to impress his students with the fact that this portion of theology is not a mere devotional exposition of the Blessed Virgin's dignity and intercessory power, but is a truly scientific treatment of the unique place that God has given Mary in the economy of human salvation. Outside the Catholic Church today, even among those who retain the doctrine of Christ's divinity, Mary is regarded only as the woman whose physical co-operation was required for the birth of Christ. We must be steadfast in asserting that Mary is the Mother of men as well as the Mother of God, and that her intercession is needed for the light and strength so necessary that human beings may direct their steps toward life eternal. And we fervently hope and pray that the Society which we are forming here in America, the land of Mary Immaculate, may become a potent factor toward bringing our fellow countrymen to realize their need of recourse to their heavenly Mother so that they may find the way to peace and good will among men.

VERY REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R., S.T.D.,  
*Catholic University of America.*