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THE DIVINE MOTHERHOOD, THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF MARIOLOGY

IMMENSE work has gone on in the field of Mariology during this last one hundred years. During most of those years, the work was concerned with a careful analysis of the various dogmas and privileges of the Mother of God. These efforts have brought Mariology to a stage where there is a growing interest in the basic principle that underlies the whole structure of this science.

Today Mariologists are unanimous in agreeing that some principle must be found that will be the master-key to the understanding and organization of the science of Mary, for until this is found, Mariology will not be on a completely scientific basis.¹

The Magisterium of the Church has been carefully observing the findings of Mariologists, and has frequently spoken on this important subject. It has aided Mariologists with its authoritative pronouncements, whether they be of the solemn or of the ordinary type.

What is the teaching of the Church about the basic principle of Mariology? Since the definition of the Immaculate Conception, she has been teaching that the divine motherhood is the central theme in the life of Mary that gives meaning and color to her whole existence. It is along this path that the Magisterium is leading the Mariologists of today as they seek to work out in a systematic way how all things in the life and existence of Mary flow from her divine motherhood.

But the fact that the Church has been teaching this repeatedly does not mean that all the phases of this complex

¹ Cf. F. J. Connell, C.S.S.R., *Toward a Systematic Treatment of Mariology*, in *MS* 1 (1950) 60; J. A. de Aldama, S.J., *Mariologia*, in *Sacrae Theologiae Summa*, 3 (Madrid, 1956) 336; G. M. Roschini, O.S.M., *Il primo principio della Mariologia*, in *Mm* 9 (1947) 90.

question are solved and that all difficulties have vanished. These utterances of the Magisterium have merely put us on the right track; they tell us in what direction the solution lies; they guard us from error. They do not tell us *why* and *how* the divine motherhood is the root and source of all the wonderful privileges and graces of Mary.

This brings us face to face with a practical difficulty. Manuals of Mariology report that there are different opinions on what constitutes the basic principle of Mariology. A survey of these opinions can be found in Roschini,² or in the list drawn up by Father Cyril Vollert;³ or by C. Dillenschneider.⁴ These various views have all been helpful in shedding light on this vexing question; all have been honest attempts of devotees of Mary to bring greater clarity of understanding into the science of Mariology. While this is beyond doubt, it still remains true that many of these opinions are not in accord with the actual teaching of the Church.

The Church herself has never formally condemned any of these opinions. But it is highly significant that the Magisterium has not even suggested the possibility that the solution might lie in a different direction.

I have purposely brought up this question in this introduction because I think it has great bearing on what is to follow. It is more than an academic question.

In this paper we shall discuss: (a) What is meant by a basic principle of Mariology; (b) the precise sense in which we take the divine motherhood; (c) its relationship to Mary's association with the Redeemer; and (d) the theological justification of our thesis.

² Roschini, *Mariologia*, 1 (Rome, 1947) 324-337.

³ C. Vollert, S.J., *The Fundamental Principle of Mariology*, in *Mariology*, ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M., 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 38-73.

⁴ C. Dillenschneider, C.S.S.R., *Le principe premier d'une théologie mariale organique* (Paris, 1956).

I

BASIC PRINCIPLE, ITS NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES

Speaking in general, theologians are in accord when they describe a basic principle. By a basic principle they mean a primary truth with which other truths are logically connected in some way. This primary truth must be the root and foundation of all the prerogatives of Our Blessed Lady and must enable us scientifically to understand her grandeur, privileges and offices. In the words of Father Bover, its function is to explain "her mission or providential vocation in the economy of human salvation."⁵

It should, in addition, have these qualities: it must be a truth that is formally revealed; it must give us an adequate definition of Mary; it must be absolutely firm, sufficiently fecund, and thus guarantee the unicity of the science of Mariology.

When we analyze the nature of this basic principle, we find that there is less agreement among the authors. Some have sought a principle that is a point of departure of rigorous deductions: i. e. an ontological principle with which all other truths are essentially connected. From such a principle, by way of rigorous deduction we should be able to prove all other truths of this science.

Against this tendency, others maintain that the basic principle of Mariology is only a *logical* principle, or a principle of intelligibility. Father Dillenschneider observes that "there is no master-principle in Mariology that will permit us to deduce by rigorous inference all the particular graces of the Virgin and every detail of Marian Doctrine that have been evolved; such a procedure is based on a false principle; that God is bound to grant Mary every grace and privilege that

⁵ J. M. Bover, S.J., *Los principios mariológicos*, in *EM* 3 (1944) 15.

humanly speaking we think He should have accorded her.”⁶

Recent writers emphasize the great differences between a science like Mariology and a science like theodicy.⁷ In theodicy there is a basic ontological principle from which every other truth can rightly be deduced. This is so because theodicy is part of metaphysics, and between the aseity of God and His attributes there is a necessary connection *ex natura rei*. Since God is Pure Act, of necessity He is eternal, simple, etc. It could not be otherwise.

Mariology is a different kind of a science. Mary does not necessarily exist. She exists only because God determined that she should be predestined to be the Mother of God and that she should play a unique role in the salvation of the world. Her existence, her graces and privileges all depend on the free determination of God. God was not forced to create her, but freely chose to bring her into existence. Therefore, everything about Mary ultimately depends on the free will of Almighty God. This science is only *providentially* necessary.

With this in mind, the only way we can know why Mary received this or that grace is by examining each one in the light of the eternal decree by which Mary was predestined to come into existence. Later on we will see in greater detail how the graces and privileges of Mary are interrelated, not *ex natura rei* as in theodicy, but simply *ex ordinatione divina*. Hence, we can understand their interrelation and interdependence only by consulting revelation, since it is there that we can discover the purpose underlying God's will in the present economy of salvation.

Is there one simple principle, or are there two basic principles of Mariology? This is a question that has seriously engaged contemporary theologians. Since the basic principle

⁶ Dillenschneider, *op. cit.* 15.

⁷ Cf. Elias de la Dolorosa, C.P., *La maternidad de María, principio supremo de la Mariología*, in *EM* 3 (1944) 38 f.

of Mariology must furnish the key to the understanding of the whole mission and existence of Mary, it must not sacrifice any part of her life and work. It is admitted that the two most essential features of the life of Mary are her divine motherhood and her association with the Redeemer. If it is maintained that the divine motherhood is the basic principle of Mariology, does this not exclude her association with the Redeemer? Are not these two concepts formally distinguished from one another?

Feeling that a single principle tends to emphasize the divine motherhood at the expense of her association with Christ, some writers suggest that Mariology is governed by *two* distinct basic principles: the divine motherhood and the principle of association.⁸ Some authors have even endeavored to weld these two concepts into a synthetic formula, hoping to solve the difficulties in that way.

Proponents of the divine motherhood as the simple basic principle of Mariology have carefully weighed the pros and cons of the arguments advanced. They conclude that there is no need of two principles when one is sufficient. The association of Mary can only be properly understood in the light of the divine motherhood.

II

THE DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

While theologians from the earliest days of the Church have been unanimous in agreeing that the divine motherhood is the greatest of all Mary's privileges and the fundamental reason of her grandeur and dignity among all creatures, it is

⁸ Cf. de Aldama, *op. cit.* 336-337. I would like to point out that while Dillenschneider defended this opinion in his previous writings, nevertheless, in his more recent work *Le principe premier d'une théologie mariale organique*, he defends only one basic principle of Mariology.

surprising that when this term is applied to our present question there is such a variety of senses in which it is employed. Sometimes its content is infinitely rich, and at other times it is limited to its most essential notes.⁹

What is important is to consider the divine motherhood as it is actually presented in the pages of Sacred Scripture. Revelation does not merely tell us that Mary became the Mother of Christ and hence her maternity is truly divine; it also tells us that she became the Mother of God the Redeemer. Scripture does not present the motherhood in an academic fashion; it presents the concrete, historical reality to which Mary was predestined.

Examining the divine motherhood a little more closely, the following are some of the general distinctions that authors make. According to Father Elías de la Dolorosa,¹⁰ we may consider it:

(1) *Physically or physiologically* in so far as Mary, because of the special action of the Holy Spirit, clothed the Verbum with flesh from her own maternal substance. In other words, viewing it this way, we consider the maternal activity of Mary concurring in the human generation of the Verbum.

(2) *Theologically* considered, the divine motherhood envisions the metaphysical relationship that was established between Mary and her Son. The *terminus a quo* of this relationship is Mary, and the *terminus ad quem* is the Person of the Incarnate Verbum; and the foundation of this relationship is based on the physical maternity.

(3) *Morally* considered, we view the conscious, voluntary activity of Mary in becoming the Mother of God. In order that her activity in becoming the Mother of God could be truly supernatural and consequently meritorious, it was necessary

⁹ Cf. G. de Yurre, *Suárez y la transcendencia de la maternidad divina*, in *RET* (1941); ref. from Elías de la Dolorosa, *art. cit.* 40.

¹⁰ *Art. cit.* 40.

that Mary fully understand and freely will to become the Mother of God. Had this not occurred, it would not have been a truly human act.

These three aspects coalesce into the actual motherhood of Mary; in reality, they are three dimensions of the wonderful supernatural reality which we call the divine motherhood. But all three aspects, with all that they imply, are necessary to have a true notion of the motherhood of Mary.¹¹

The physical fact of the motherhood of Mary as well as the metaphysical relationship that is thereby established are sufficiently stressed by all authors. But it is only in more recent times that the moral dimension of her maternity has received sufficient attention. The moral aspect of her conscious activity in becoming the Mother of God sheds considerable light on our present question, because it brings out clearly the meaning of Mary's *fiat* at Nazareth.

What did Mary give her consent to when the Angel appeared to her at Nazareth? Did she merely give her consent to become the Mother of God? Or was she asked to give her consent to much more?

When the Angel appeared to her he announced to her the divine plan for the salvation of the human race and the part that she was predestined to play in this drama. She was asked to give her wholehearted consent to this plan and to the part she had been chosen to play.

Actually we must say that the Angel asked Mary to give her consent to three things:

- (1) to become the Mother of God, the Redeemer;
- (2) since consenting to this meant that she would be en-

¹¹ Cf. M. J. Nicolas, O.P., *Le concept integral de maternité divine*, in *RT* 62 (1937) 58-93; 230-272; G. Rozo, C.M.F., *Sancta Maria, Mater Dei* (Milan, 1943) 14; C. Koser, O.F.M., *De constitutivo formali maternitatis B. M. Virginis*, in *ASC* 11 (1953) 79-80.

gaged in the salvation of all human beings, she was also asked to become the spiritual Mother of all men in *actu primo*;

(3) to co-operate with the Redeemer in the work of human salvation.

Mary gave her consent fully and without reserve. By her consent she dedicated her whole life and existence to her Son and His salvific mission. And immediately she became the Mother of God the Redeemer, the Head of the Mystical Body, and *initialiter*, the Spiritual Mother of all those for whom the Verbum had become Incarnate.

That this is the meaning of her consent is confirmed by the words of Pius X in his encyclical *Ad diem illum*:

But the Virgin did not conceive the Son of God solely that, by receiving human nature from her, He should become Man, but also that, through the human nature that He received from her, He might become the Saviour of men. . . . Consequently, in the same womb of this most pure Mother, Christ assumed not only mortal flesh, but a spiritual body as well, consisting of all those who were to believe in Him.¹²

Mary pronounced but one *fiat*. She did not give her consent to be the Mother of the Redeemer, then to become the spiritual Mother of men and later on to be intimately associated with her Son in the work of the redemption. She merely consented to the plan of God as announced by the Angel, with all that this plan demanded.

The divine motherhood is unique in every sense of the word. Ordinary motherhood has reference to a given individual and the caring for that individual until he is able to take care of himself. Mary's motherhood was to go far beyond that. For she was to be associated with her Son in His life's work. According to the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus*, in the one,

¹² ASS 36 (1904) 452.

eternal decree Mary and her Son were predestined for one thing: for the salvation of the world.¹³

It is only when we consider the motherhood of Mary in its concrete, historical setting, as it was actually willed by God from eternity, that it can be the basic, unifying principle of Mariology. It is, therefore, not the *maternitas nude sumpta* but the *maternitas adaequate sumpta*. Therefore, when we speak of the divine motherhood, we mean all that it implies. There is no need of using any descriptive adjectives because when we speak of the divine motherhood purely and simply, we have said everything.

III

THE ASSOCIATE OF THE REDEEMER

In modern papal documents, it is common to refer to Mary as the *Alma Socia Christi*, the loving associate of the Redeemer. The relationship of this phase of the life of Mary to her divine motherhood is the crux of our present problem. Failure to see how these two are related has led some authors to conclude that there is no such thing as a simple, basic principle of Mariology.¹⁴

Their case rests on these assumptions. First, the notion of mother and associate are formally distinct; and since both are necessary in order fully to understand the mystery of Mary, there must be two fundamental principles in Mariology. Furthermore, a fundamental basic principle must be related by way of necessity to all other aspects of the science. However, there is only a nexus of fittingness between Mary's maternity and her association with the redemptive work of Christ. Therefore, presupposing that both are necessary, they hold that there are two basic principles in Mariology.

¹³ *ADSC* 6, 836.

¹⁴ Cf. the authors referred to in footnote 8.

These objections that at first sight seem so weighty can easily be answered in this way.¹⁵ First, by admitting that there is a formal conceptual distinction *ex natura rei*, between the idea of motherhood and that of association. But from that it does not follow that there is not a real nexus between the two *ex ordinatione divina*. Metaphysically and *de jure* these two terms are not mutually inclusive, it is true; however, *de facto*, as these terms refer to Mary, they are necessarily inseparable.

Mary who was predestined to be the Mother of God was likewise predestined, because of her divine motherhood, to be associated with Christ in the work of the redemption.

The second objection that there is only a nexus of fittingness and not of necessity between the maternity of Mary and her association with the redemptive work of Christ, is closely allied with the first objection. The first objection states that the two are formally distinct; therefore, a monolithic Mariology based on one principle is an impossibility. This objection maintains that the only relationship between the two is one of convenience, which is but a confirmation of their contention. To this it can be answered that *a priori* we could only conclude that it was fitting that the associate of the Redeemer should be likewise His Mother. We could go no further. But revelation gives us the answer to *why* Mary became the associate of the Redeemer:—because she was the Mother of the Redeemer. The fittingness or suitability of the two being united can only be properly evaluated in the light of God's wisdom which decreed not only the inseparability of the two, but that the office of the associate should be rooted in, and be an extension of, her divine motherhood.

¹⁵ Cf. P. Mahoney, O.P., *The Unitive Principle of Marian Theology*, in *Thom* 18 (1955) 457-460.

IV

THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION

Keeping clearly in mind what was said in the preceding pages, it is our considered opinion that the divine motherhood, in the sense declared above, is the only basic principle of Mariology. It alone is a revealed truth that sheds light and meaning on all the truths of Mary that are contained in revelation. It fulfills the following conditions:

(1) *It accounts for the reason of her existence.*

Only the divine motherhood sufficiently accounts for the place of Mary in the present economy of salvation. She was created and endowed with every possible grace for one reason: that she should be a worthy Mother of God, the Redeemer.¹⁶

(2) *It constitutes her supreme excellence.*

Theologically, excellence in a human being designates the closeness or proximity of a person to God. It is this Mother-Son relationship that distinguished Mary from all other creatures and formally designates the unique and singular way in which Mary is related to her Divine Son. It actually defines the specific type of a relationship she had toward God in the supernatural order.

(3) *It is the root and source of all her personal prerogatives.*

All the personal prerogatives of Mary are ordained to the divine motherhood as means to an end. These prerogatives were personally bestowed on Mary for no other reason. She would not have been Immaculate, Full of Grace, or Assumed into Heaven unless she had been predestined to be the Mother of God. All these privileges are rooted in the divine mother-

¹⁶ Cf. M. Llamera, O.P., *La maternidad espiritual de María*, in *EM* 3 (1944) 78.

hood as it was willed by God in the present supernatural order of things. They are not connected with the divine motherhood *ex natura rei*, but they are necessarily joined to it because God so willed it. He willed that she should have these singular privileges because of her closeness to Christ, the God-Man.

(4) *The ultimate reason for her association with the Redeemer.*

As to why Mary was chosen by God to be the associate of the Redeemer, there can be but one answer. God chose Mary to be actively engaged in the work of human redemption only because she was the Mother of the Redeemer. Mary alone among all the creatures of God could have actively played a part in the human drama of redemption, because Mary alone had the aptitude for this office. It is sometimes said that one person could have been chosen to be the Mother of God and another to co-operate actively with the Redeemer in His salvific mission. Abstractly speaking, and prescinding from the actual plan of God for the salvation of the world, this is perfectly true; but in the present economy of salvation only the Mother of God could have been chosen for that purpose.

This is so because the associate of the Redeemer was the mediatrix between her divine Son and all of humanity. A mediatrix must stand between the parties that are to be reconciled and must be distinguished from them. Since Christ was God, Mary was naturally distinguished from Him, and because of the "certain infinite dignity" that accrues to her from her divine motherhood, Mary is distinguished from all other human beings. This dignity sets her apart from all others, no matter how holy they may be or whatever graces they might have received.

Not only that, but in virtue of the divine maternity, Mary entered into the hypostatic order.¹⁷ I think it can safely be said that only a person belonging to the hypostatic order could

¹⁷ Cf. de Aldama, *op. cit.* 342.

have had the aptitude that was necessary actively to work for the salvation of the human race.

It must be remembered that Mary was elevated to the hypostatic order in order that her activity could be ordered to the salvation of all people, herself excluded. In other words, in becoming the Mother of God, she consented not only to the Incarnation but to all the circumstances and conditions that accompanied this fact. And in the present economy the Incarnation was, of course, soteriological. In short, the divine motherhood was not only a personal privilege of Mary; it was destined for the salvation of all men.

The way Mary actively co-operated with the Redeemer is another way of proving that without this prerogative, Mary could never have been chosen unless she were the Mother of the Redeemer.¹⁸ Mary co-operated in our salvation by way of merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, and redemption. Let us examine each of these more closely.

In her work of being associated with the Redeemer, Mary merited *de congruo* all that Christ merited *de condigno*. Which means that Mary was able to merit grace for all human beings. She merited on Calvary not only the right to distribute graces to all, but she actually merited the substance of grace for all. It is admitted by all theologians that this is something no one else but Mary is able to do. Why, then, was Mary able to do this? Because her activity had a unique quality in virtue of her being the Mother of God, for as Mother of God she pertained to the hypostatic order and it was this that gave such unusual dignity and value to her acts.

In addition, because Mary abdicated her maternal rights on Calvary as her part in the Sacrifice of the Cross, she was also able to make satisfaction for the sins of the world. She was able to make satisfaction only because of Christ, but her

¹⁸ For a fuller treatment cf. de Aldama, *op. cit.* 422-447; also Mahoney, *art. cit.* 470-475.

satisfaction was different from that of others in that she was able to atone not only for the penalties due to sin but for the sins themselves. This was so only because of the truth contained in the axiom *honor in honorante*. After Christ, and in complete dependence on Christ, only the maternal activity in His Mother was able to offer such honor to God as to atone for our sins.

The sacrificial character of Mary's activity is even more pronounced. A sacrifice is the offering of something to God in order to proclaim His complete dominion over us; and in the present order, to make reparation for sins. Christ offered Himself as a Victim for the sins of the world, but Mary in her own way, offered the same Victim and for the same purpose. Christ offered His human life, and Mary, His Mother, offered the life that she had given to Him. She was chosen to immolate her own Son in so far as it pertained to her to do so for the Salvation of the world. This immolation consisted in the abdication of her maternal rights over her Son.¹⁹ A mother has the right to give life . . . preserve life . . . defend the life of her offspring, because the child is the continuation of her own life. In this sense, only Mary could have offered such a sacrifice, for only she had this capacity.

And finally, this act of the *Alma Socia Christi* was, in some way, part of the price that had to be paid to free the world from sin. The price that Christ paid was the shedding of his own Precious Blood, but this life also belonged to Mary. She had rights over her Son that no one else possessed or could possess. These rights she willingly relinquished in payment for our sins.

Thus Mary participated in the drama of our salvation. She was chosen for this office, ultimately, because of the soteriological dimensions of her motherhood. Had she not been the Mother of God, she could never have been so intimately bound

¹⁹ Cf. Benedict XV, *Inter sodalicia*, in *AAS* 10 (1918) 182.

up with the salvation of the world, because she would not have belonged to the hypostatic order.

As the Mother of God she actively had a share in the acquisition of all graces, and as such she continues the work she began at Calvary. Rightly therefore does the Son allow His Mother to distribute the graces which both acquired.

(5) *The measure of her spiritual motherhood.*

The spiritual motherhood of Mary is patterned after her divine motherhood. In the present order the one is intrinsically related to the other. Since her divine motherhood elevated Mary to the hypostatic order, she was ordained and united to the Head and the members of the Mystical Body. She became the Mother of the Head as well as the Mother of all the members; physically, the Mother of Christ, and spiritually the Mother of men. Her divine motherhood was the cause as well as the measure of her spiritual motherhood.

That is why Terrien could rightly say that the two maternities of Mary—physical, in reference to Christ, and spiritual, in relation to men—are united among themselves and related in the same divine plan. Since that is so, is it not justifiable to hold with him that “basically, they constitute only one maternity, the divine maternity in all its fullness?”²⁰

(6) *The Queenship.*

“For this have I come into the world” Christ answered when questioned if He was a king. Mary was born not only to be the Mother of God, but also to be the Queen of the Universe. Pius XII has told us that there is no possible doubt but that Mary is the Queen of the Universe because she is the Mother of God.²¹

²⁰ J. B. Terrien, S.J., *La Mère de Dieu et la Mère des hommes*, 1 (7th ed., Paris, 1900) vi.

²¹ Pius XII, *Ad coeli Regnam*, in *AAS* 46 (1954) 633.

(7) *It is thoroughly Scriptural.*

From the prophecy of Genesis to the Woman of the Apocalypse, whenever Sacred Scripture speaks of Mary, she always appears as the Mother of the Redeemer. All her graces, privileges and offices are always united with or flow from this one fact. This is especially true if we examine the gospel accounts of the Annunciation and the place of Mary on Calvary. Viewed in this way, according to Dillenschneider, her motherhood is personal, soteriological and universal.²² The divine motherhood is the key to the understanding of Mary.

(8) *It is actually taught by the Magisterium.*

As has been shown by Fr. Hogan in his paper read at this convention, the Magisterium at the present time teaches that the divine motherhood is the basic principle of all Mariology. Two classical texts of Pius XII can be quoted in support of this statement, the one in the *Fulgens corona*, and the other in an allocution to the World Union of Feminine Catholic Organizations.

In *Fulgens corona* he says:

Among all the holy men and women who have ever lived, there is only one about whom we can say that the question of sin does not even arise. It is likewise clear that this unique privilege, never granted to anyone else, was given to Mary by God because she was raised to the dignity of Mother of God. . . . A higher office than this does not seem possible; since it requires the greatest dignity and sanctity after Christ, it demands the fullest perfection of divine grace and a soul free from every sin. Indeed all the privileges and graces with which her soul and her life were endowed in so extraordinary a manner and measure, *seem to flow* from this sublime vocation of Mother of God, as from a pure and hidden source.²³

²² Dillenschneider, *op. cit.* 145-172.

²³ AAS 45 (1953) 580.

Addressing the *World Union of Feminine Catholic Organizations* he was even more emphatic: "The dignity of Mother of God has called down on Mary outstanding graces and extraordinary privileges, her preservation from original sin and from every personal fault, the splendor of virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, the intimate participation in all the mysteries of the life of Christ, His sufferings, His death and resurrection, the continuation of His work in the Church, and His sovereignty over all creatures; all that was given to her so that she should be the Mother of God and because thus she was to fulfill a unique role in the Redemption of the world."²⁴ What more need be said? It would be hard to imagine a text that brings out more clearly and explicitly the relationship that exists between Mary's divine motherhood and all her graces and privileges.

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²⁴ AAS 49 (1957) 912.