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MARY'S FAITH AS RESPONSE TO GOD'S GRACIOUSNESS

In this paper I would like to treat the following points: the biblical notion of faith; Mary's faith and the divine maternity; Mary's response as totally a grace (gift) yet totally free; Mary's faith and redemption; the object of Mary's faith; the growth of Mary's faith; and finally, Mary's response of faith as a type.

I. The Biblical Notion of Faith.

The theological renewal of recent years has convinced Catholic thinkers of the need to return to the primary and full meaning of faith as found in Scripture. Long years of making distinctions between the virtues had led to an all but exclusive concentration on faith as the intellectual assent to revealed truths. We even insisted—with perhaps too much vehemence—upon the reality of a faith which can exist even in a believer in the state of mortal sin.¹ This stunted form of faith, *fides informata*, is surely something of a caricature of the real thing. And even faith as distinguished from the other virtues is not very biblical.

So, in treating of Mary's faith, we are treating of it in its full biblical impact: as her full response to the self-giving of God. For the biblical meaning of faith surely includes the notions of confidence,² firm hope,³ trust and obedience,⁴ as well as intellectual acceptance of facts.⁵ Indeed, faith to the scriptural writer sums up the total attitude man must have toward God in His saving acts. Two great examples stand out: Abraham and Mary.

¹ *DB* (edit. 1963) 1578.

² *Mt.* 14:31.

³ *James* 1:6.

⁴ *Rom.* 4:20ff.

⁵ *Heb.* 11:6.

Scripture highlights the case of Abraham by showing how men had refused God: the tower of Babel incident brings the whole sad story of sin to a stunning climax, leaving men scattered and confused on the face of the earth. The narrative, says von Rad, breaks off 'in a shrill dissonance.' Man is not only alienated from God but has even ceased to communicate with his fellowmen. At this point God chooses to break into human history, not by terrifying and unilateral action, but by gracious invitation to dialogue. The salvation of the human race becomes dependent upon the acceptance of Abraham. Abraham changed his whole way of life, abandoned all past allegiances, to give his total commitment to God. The whole man, intellect, will and affective life, was committed to this divine Person who promised that in Him the whole plan of salvation was being worked out. So, it is no accident that St. Paul, in giving us his classic description of justifying faith, chooses the example of Abraham.⁶

The faith of Mary is even more perfect. Here is the most complete example of faith as total response, as a living answer, as a whole attitude of life, as once-for-all commitment, as resounding "yes" to God's offer of personal encounter. In Mary is found the fullness of the personal "I-Thou" relationship of love between a gracefilled human being and God.

II. *Mary's Faith and the Divine Maternity.*

The Blessed Virgin is not called "blessed" by Elizabeth⁷ merely for becoming the biological mother of Christ's human nature. No, for according to Scripture, she is so great because she becomes mother of God by faith, through her personal assent. As Karl Rahner says:

Because the divine motherhood is described from the start not as a merely physical occurrence, but as taking place through a free,

⁶ *Rom.* 4:18-25.

⁷ *Lk.* 1:45.

personal, grace-inspired act of faith, the whole mysterious event is at once singled out from a mere private destiny, a biographical relationship of Mary to Jesus, her son, and inserted into the history of faith and redemption.⁸

Mary, then, is in the line of those great figures in sacred history, such as Abraham and Moses, upon whose right decision our salvation depends. And St. Luke makes a point of describing how God waited upon her free decision. And only with her words "Be it done unto me according to thy word," did the Son of the eternal Father come down to earth, take upon Himself our flesh, enter into our human history. By her free consent she becomes involved in the tremendous and mysterious drama being acted out between God and the human race.

If, therefore, we wish to grasp or at least to form some idea of what is meant when the faith says she is the mother of God, the mother of the incarnate Word of the eternal Father, we must never view this motherhood as a merely physical one, but see it as a free, personal act of her faith, with the context of sacred history.⁹

The welcome Mary gives to God at the Annunciation was far from a passive thing. As Father Burghardt says, it was incredibly active on all levels. "In the spiritual order her faith, like all genuine faith, was the quickening response of her mind to a manifestation of God. In the moral order her consent was the loving response of her will to an invitation of God. In the physical order her conception was the living response of her body to the activity of God: 'the holy Spirit shall come upon thee'."¹⁰

III. *Mary's Response as Totally a Grace (Gift) yet Totally Free.*

In their traditional praises for Mary, Catholics realize that she would be nothing, were it not for the free grace and will

⁸ K. Rahner, *Mary, Mother of the Lord* (New York, 1963) 54-55.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰ W. J. Burghardt, *Theotokos: Mother of God*, in E. D. O'Connor (edit.), *The Mystery of the Woman* (Notre Dame, 1956) 21-22.

of God. But we have not always made this clear to our separated brethren; and too often it may seem that faith—whether of Mary or any Christian—is sort of our contribution to the saving process. Now this is the last impression Our Blessed Lady would ever want to give. For she realized far more than we, that whatever she did was only possible because God did it in her and through her.

When Christ said "Blessed are the poor", it refers to the *anawim*, those true followers of Yahweh who recognize that they are nothing of themselves; they presume nothing; they are so self-effacing that they can be completely open to "other." Thus Mary's poverty, humility and hidden life are meant to make it evident that what happens through her is solely because of the grace and mercy of God. As she herself admits in the *Magnificat*, it is because of her lowliness that God could do great things for her, and because of all this will nations call her blessed.¹¹

Max Thurian, in his wonderful book, *Mary, Mother of all Christians*, presses home this point, that Mary should be the glowing example to Christians that faith and response are totally God-given, that we can in no way merit it for ourselves, that we can but thank God for His loving mercy. He sees her faith as perfect submission, obedience and trust: the openness of the true handmaid willing for anything which accords with God's word.¹²

Mary is the living proclamation of the mystery of the grace of God which always predestines us, precedes and prevents us, before anything good can emerge from our hearts. Mary in her humble poverty and unique election, is the most perfect expression of the all-powerful and full sufficiency of that grace. Everything in her sings: "Soli Deo gloria"—to God alone be the glory!¹³

Thus, Mary is the living answer to any type of Pelagianism.

¹¹ *Lk.* 1:46-49.

¹² M. Thurian, *Mary, Mother of all Christians* (New York, 1963) 60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

But we should not play down the true freedom and cooperation of the Blessed Virgin—or any Christian—in responding to God's grace. When we are given something, whether by parents, friends, outward circumstances, or chance, it can never be truly ours to the degree that we possess God's freely given grace. For when God gives something, it really becomes ours; and this not in spite of it being a grace, but precisely because it is one. Because God is all powerful He can bring about what He wills, even to make His infallibly efficacious grace accepted by man according to man's own internal free-will response. Thus

when God willed the Blessed Virgin, through her free consent to her motherhood, to open the world to the eternal mercy of God, this consent was in its very essence her act. It belongs to her and cannot be taken from her. She is and remains for ever the person who for us and for our salvation and in this sense in our name, uttered that word of consent through which the Word of God was made flesh.¹⁴

The divine motherhood of Mary, then, is inseparably God's grace alone, and her own act. It is not physical motherhood imposed on her; rather it became also her grace and her deed, as she placed her entire self, body and soul, at the service of God and His plan for our redemption. Our Lady's response of faith is what we might call the active receptivity of the true believer.

God's free grace and man's free consent: these are the two elements of the divine-human dialogue. To minimize either is to try to reduce the transcendent mystery to human size. Catholics and Protestants have often misunderstood each other precisely on this mystery, Protestants thinking that we downgrade God's grace by exaggerating the role of human freedom and cooperation with God; Catholics suspecting that their separated brethren deny free will under the influence of God's grace. Perhaps in the unassuming but fully responsive faith

¹⁴ K. Rahner, *op. cit.*, 60.

of Mary there is food for fruitful dialogue. Her very freedom and obedient consent were both truly hers and yet were themselves a grace bestowed by God.

IV. Mary's Faith and Redemption.

I would like to say a word here about Mary's faith at the Annunciation as it relates to redemption itself. Whatever her awareness of her Son as God, she was surely aware of a redemptive role for Him as Messiah. The Incarnation is already the decisive act of redemption—all the more so if we hold with Durrwell that once God the Son willed to take upon Himself human nature in its fallen state, alienated from God, He is inevitably faced with return to the Father through redemptive death and resurrection.¹⁵ She did not, then, merely consent to give birth to a God-man, who would go on—by a sort of additional decision—to be our Redeemer. In other words, in this very event of the Logos becoming man, redemption is already pre-defined, although it remains to be worked out on the cross. And Mary was a part of the whole picture. She is at the all-important point of salvation history as she who receives into herself the whole salvation of the world in an act that has both official and personal meaning. Her very acceptance is grace-given; that is, she does not initiate but does actively accept and cooperate. Her cooperation, then, is performed by the very power of the redemption suffusing her, and itself bringing about her acceptance of it.

Her response is decisive for herself, since she had been pre-redeemed precisely because of the redemption to be wrought through Christ in consequence of her free consent. But it is also decisive to the salvation of the whole world. For in Christ's coming we have the inauguration of God the Father's final and ultimate plan of salvation, being worked out in the historical and visible order and in Him history and grace, office and per-

¹⁵ F. X. Durrwell, *The Resurrection* (New York, 1960). See, for example, pp. 44-45.

son, official mission and charism, sign and signified are irrevocably united. By her full and humble submission, Mary allows this redemptive plan to have its ideal working out in her. She is the supreme instance of redemption as coming and as accepted. In the words of Karl Rahner,

Mary is she who is perfectly redeemed... Everything comes together in her: her own grace, and the salvation of others; the receiving of salvation according to Spirit and faith, and the acceptance of it according to the flesh; official service and personal charism; pure passivity and spontaneous act; action, and submission to being acted upon—all reach at once their highest fulfillment and their complementary unity.¹⁶

Now, since the Church is the visible unity of the redeemed who through grace are joined to Christ by free response, then Mary is of necessity the supreme instance of that event which is the Church; she is the type of the Church as such.

V. The Object of Mary's Faith.

As in any true faith, Mary's response was not to any individual truth or series of truths, but to the divine Person of God. The beauty of recent treatments of faith has been precisely this emphasis upon faith as personal encounter. It is total commitment to God as present reality, not merely abstract truth; it has an existential here-and-nowness that never allows faith to sit back and rest on its oars. It is continually being renewed. And such, surely, is the quality and object of Our Lady's response.

But, we can ask, did Mary believe in God, in God in Christ, or in the God-Christ? All of these come into the picture. First of all, she was a Jew, with her whole background of the most explicit and deep monotheism. And there is no reason to believe that God treated Mary any differently than the first Christians,

¹⁶ K. Rahner, *Mary and the Apostolate*, in *The Christian Commitment* (New York, 1963) 119.

to whom His triune nature was revealed very gradually. Thus, her first response of love and obedience as a child would have been toward God as known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Now, at the time of the Annunciation, did Mary realize that her Son was truly divine? Was the mystery of the Trinity revealed in some way? There is no agreement even among Catholic scholars.¹⁷ But there seems to be a growing disinclination to answer in the affirmative. This is particularly so, in view of growing discussion about the psychology of Christ Himself. Many hold that He was not humanly and psychologically aware of the full import of His personality and mission till He began to grow up. This full awareness has even been ascribed to Him at the time of His baptism in the Jordan, when the Holy Spirit came upon Him.

There is no need for us to decide this question. But it has its bearing upon Mary's understanding. It seems quite certain that Mary did not have explicit and conceptualized knowledge about the Trinity and Jesus as the Logos-incarnate at the time of the Annunciation. Even Laurentin and Lyonnet, who hold to some awareness of Christ's divinity at this time, speak of it more as a lived attitude, knowledge more intuitive than reasoned.¹⁸

It would seem, then, that Mary was given an explicit awareness only of the messianic role of her miraculously conceived Child. He was to be one in whom and through whom the salvation of the world would come about, if she gave her consent. Thus for many years she has a growing and deepening faith in God as present not only to her soul, but in a special messianic way present in her son, Jesus. For a long time, then, her personal response is to the gracious God who is working out His mysterious design of salvation in Jesus.

¹⁷ See R. Kugelman, C.P., *The Object of Mary's Consent in the Annunciation*, in *MS* 11 (1960) 60-84.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84. Cf. R. Laurentin, *Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II* (Paris, 1957) 174; S. Lyonnet, S.J., *Xaire Kexaritomenē*, in *Bibl* 20 (1939) 131-141.

It is just impossible to say when Our Lady would, then, come to full awareness of who her Son was. It could be argued that Christ taught His divinity quite clearly, so that unprejudiced minds would acknowledge it. Yet how hard it was for the Apostles! Mary's mind was unclouded by concupiscence, it might be urged. This is true, and yet it may well be that Christ did not expect belief in His divinity until the Paschal mysteries were complete. In any case, it does not seem to me in any way irreverent to think that Mary made her first total act of faith in Christ the God-Man at the very moment of His death.

Death, for Christ, was the ultimate freely-willed and accepted act by which He willed to divest Himself of "all that was flesh" in order to return to the Father and the "new life of Spirit." This death is but the negative side of return to the Father; the positive side is the Father's acceptance, evidenced in the immediate glorification and pouring forth of the Spirit upon Him. Now Mary gave herself completely to God as she joined in the sacrifice of Christ; thus it is that her total act of self-emptying is the negative side of the one same act by which she is also sanctified by the Spirit as she becomes the first partaker of the glorified life of Jesus.¹⁹ For, is not Mary the Church? And was not the believing Church truly born from the side of the dying Christ? Here it is, then, that Mary as the Church makes the first act of faith in the triune God revealed in her Son, the God-Man.

VI. The Growth of Mary's Faith

Now we come to the difficult subject of the growth of Mary's response to God. There surely can be no question about the fact. For just as she grew in grace and holiness, so she also grew in the depth and quality of her total commitment. But there are three areas of interest: (1) Did Mary respond to her own initial justification? (2) Is commitment or total response

¹⁹ See F. X. Durrwell, *In the Redeeming Christ* (New York, 1963) 281-286.

a once-for-all thing, or repeated? (3) What can we say of difficulties and "crises" in Mary's life of faith?

1) *Did Mary respond to her own initial justification?*

It has been generally held that Mary was granted *per se* infused knowledge from the first instant of her life, so that she could actively respond by an act of faith and love to the divine action whereby she was conceived immaculate.²⁰ It is usual to hold also that this knowledge was permanent, giving Our Lady permanent use of reason from the very beginning, permitting her to make repeated acts of the supernatural virtues. Modern Catholic writers can have no quarrel with this, as long as such opinions do not go overboard in attributing to Mary all sort of unnecessary knowledge. In fact, one recent writer supports this idea of Mary's response to the act by which she was initially justified—but he does so in a most interesting and provocative hypothesis. Actually, Pendergast²¹ is not talking at all about Mary's specific case, but about the problem of how original justice would have been passed on, had Adam not sinned.

In his view the preternatural gifts are not something "tacked on" to man's original condition of grace, but were to be the natural outgrowth of Adam and his descendants living this life of intimate knowledge and friendship with God. Man's spiritual powers would have exercised such dominion over material things in general that the so-called "preternatural gifts" would have been the result. Another result would have been that parents would exercise such a good influence upon the unborn child, even, that it would have been capable and ready to make a free act whereby it would cooperate in the reception of its own state of innocence at the moment it received a ra-

²⁰ See F. J. Connell, *Our Lady's Knowledge*, in J. B. Carol (edit.) *Mariology* 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 318-321.

²¹ R. J. Pendergast, *The Supernatural Existential, Human Generation, and Original Sin*, in *DR* 81 (1963) 1-24.

tional soul. The only type of knowledge necessary in order to so choose God would be the same as is required by those who today speak of the possibility of children who die without baptism being illumined enough to understand God as their last end and as rewarder, a God whom they must then choose or reject once-for-all.

Pendergast is interested in showing how parents are truly involved in the propagation of original sin. According to him, once sin enters the world, the whole harmony is disrupted, the spiritual no longer controls the material elements. Not only does the guilt of sin pass to each child, but the example of the parents and of the entire milieu is so corruptive that the child grows up—not as he would have in the state of innocence, disposed to good and seeing nothing but good—but disposed to self-seeking, and seeing bad example on every side, so that his own pre-reflexive acts are self-centered. As soon as reflexive acts begin, he almost immediately adds personal sin to the original sin he was born with.

Now, all I suggest from this is the following. Mary is unique; she is conceived in grace, probably accompanied by a free response of love. Now it is true that her parents cannot be "the effective causes of a spiritual disposition which demands an act of charity," as Pendergast conjectures for a non-fallen set of parents,²² but could not the same situation be brought about precisely by God's *gratia sanans*?

Is this also to suggest that Our Lady, even as a little child, grew up fully aware of everything, and making fully free acts of response to God? Not at all. In fact, recent studies on the psychology of Christ, and which bring out all His human qualities, would suggest that He—and all the more so Mary—

²² *Ibid.*, 14. Some object that since the human embryo at this stage is only one cell, it is impossible for it to serve as the organ for sense-faculties of such perfection as are needed for intellection. It can be answered either that the human soul can operate with infused species, apart from a body; or—and perhaps more cogently—that animation by a human soul does not take place till some time after conception. Cf. p. 15.

went through all the stages of infant psychological sensation and pre-reflexive awareness before coming to the fully human acts of the maturing person.

2) *Is commitment or total response a once-for-all thing, or is it repeated?*

Is Mary's deep and whole-hearted response to God to be seen more as an ultimate orientation of her whole life once-for-all, a fundamental option, or is it something re-done each time she made an act of faith? Theologians today think that people do not choose fundamentally with each act. On the contrary, such fundamentally decisive acts are rare; they give finality and tone to a whole series of lesser actions and decisions which are virtually connected with them. Karl Rahner is of the opinion that a person, as long as he is pointed toward God, makes only one total commitment, in the sense of fundamental option. (Of course the sinner who has deliberately rejected God, will have to return to Him by a new radical and free choice).

Freedom is the capacity for something total. . . . Freedom is always the self-realization of man choosing objectively in regard to a total realization, a total disposal over his existence in the sight of God.²³

One does not at any given moment see the full scope of this; nor is the depth and radicalness of this self-disposal to be found in every act of freedom. Each act engages us in the total venture in its own particular way, and all the individual acts are inserted into the entirety of the one whole act of freedom which sums up one's whole life.

In the biblical and Augustinian concept of the heart in the concept of subjectivity in Kierkegaard, in that of action in Blondel, etc., there is always appreciation of the fact that there is this basic act of freedom, embracing and marking the whole of existence. Of course this act is realized by means of man's particular acts, by

²³ K. Rahner, *On the Theology of Freedom*, an as-yet-unpublished lecture given at Georgetown University, Nov. 30, 1964.

means of acts which may be localized in space and time, and which may be objectified as regards their motives: it cannot be performed in any other way. But it cannot be simply identified in objective reflexion with any such individual acts, nor is it to be identified simply with the pure moral results of the sum of these individual acts, nor . . . simply with the moral quality of the last of one's freely performed individual acts. The concrete freedom of man in which in the sight of God he disposes of himself as a whole in procuring his own definitive status in the sight of God is the unity in difference (no longer capable of being reflected on) of *option fondamentale* and of one's individual free acts, a unity which is the concrete being of the free subject who has realized himself.²⁴

This is to say that no one single act can be picked out as containing the totality of a man's commitment. It would seem to suggest that certain crucial acts of freedom are decisive, yet new knowledge and circumstances permit somewhat different nuances; whereas our "everyday actions and free choices" are made in the light of the fundamental ones. Yet even these ordinary decisions cannot be left out when looking at the total picture of a person's ultimate commitment and orientation.

Now, it would seem legitimate to apply the same type of reasoning to Mary's free responses to God. In the beginning—whether at her conception or as she grew up—she certainly made an ultimate commitment of her entire being to God, a never-to-be-revoked response of submission and openness and love. Onto this are grafted her subsequent free acts, each helping to complete and to nuance her total response of faith.

But two acts of free response to God seem especially important in her later life, namely that of the Annunciation, and that which followed upon her realization that her son was in fact the very Son of God. Without in any way changing the direction of Our Lady's orientation, surely these must have substantially amplified her involvement.

Karl Rahner sees her whole life as revolving around the one

²⁴ *Ibid.*

ultimate commitment of free cooperation in becoming the Mother of God. "Mary really did only one thing: she conceived her son. Everything else was simply the unfolding of this single theme of her life. She did not merely say "yes" once, in one great moment; she sustained that yes, patiently, silently, constantly, in the serene assurance of the true believer, in the mature simplicity of real greatness, without repentance, like divine grace itself: sustained it throughout a whole lifetime."²⁵

One question arises. Why are all our free acts not ultimate? Is it because of concupiscence which almost always obscures the full issue, beclouds our minds and restricts our view? Would not the ideal thing be to be able to give ultimate finality to our every act, instead of adverting only to some rather proximate goal when we sweep the floor, prepare a class, or play a game of golf? If so, were even the simplest free will acts of Mary ultimate ones? Probably not; for while she enjoyed an inner harmony unknown to us, she is still very human, and human life is mostly made up of innumerable free acts about small things. To think of each as a new ultimate commitment would seem out of keeping with her human condition, and give a certain ponderousness to her whole life. Rather, her abiding commitment—which was a whole way of life, a lived attitude—gave the basic orientation to her daily free decisions, while they in turn buttressed and solidified this fundamental option and made it enter into every nook and corner of everyday life.

3) *What can we say about difficulties, crises, and questions in Mary's life of faith?*

First, with regard to asking questions. Our faith, the Church teaches, must be reasonable. We must be sure God is really speaking, and the more extraordinary the thing revealed, the more need to verify this. Mary's questioning of the angel at the Annunciation, then, was perfectly normal. The difference be-

²⁵ K. Rahner, *Mary and the Apostolate*, in *The Christian Commitment* (New York, 1963) 130.

tween hers and that of Zachary was that she was perfectly open and ready to accept the evidence of the signs God offered, while Zachary must have displayed the unreasonable doubt and prejudice all too characteristic of men's usual attitude.

Secondly, we must not see the Blessed Virgin's life as one unbroken, serene response to God. She is truly the woman of sorrows, whose heart was pierced with a sword, who lost her twelve-year-old Son, who found Him again—but only to discover in His mysterious words that she was beginning to lose Him to a greater mission of accomplishing His Father's business. Commitment to God in faith is no guarantee that all is going to be easy: the flight into Egypt, seeing her all-good Son rejected by His own countrymen, watching the prejudice and plots grow into the terrible scenes of the Passion, all these bear witness to the fact that she "didn't have it easy."

Catholics are sometimes too prone to think of Mary in an idyllic way, as if she saw what was in store for herself and Christ right from the beginning. We tend to forget that her whole life was passed under a veil of faith which allowed her to neither see nor comprehend. Such a view

would deprive Mary of her greatness and of her great suffering, both of which are derived from the darkness of a faith which surrenders unconditionally to an uncomprehending mystery and an unknown future. Mary's life of faith on this earth is much closer to our own than the pretty pious legends that have gathered around the Holy Family. If we realize this, Mary's example will have a very much more powerful impact upon our own lives—she experienced the same difficulties in her life as we do in ours, but always she submitted, in faith and prayerful meditation, to the incomprehensible events of her life, of which God was the author.²⁶

New studies about Our Lord emphasize His identify with us; that without taking upon Himself personal sin, He truly took upon Himself the consequences of our sinful nature, so that He

²⁶ E. Schillebeeckx, *Schillebeeckx Writes about Mary*, in *Ave Maria* 100 (Nov. 14, 1964) 8.

truly suffered fear, discouragement, sorrow and pain, as well as the more pleasant feelings of joy and love. Indeed, Christ even truly experienced real temptation.²⁷

Now, if such be the case with Jesus, all the more so with Mary. And this brings us to the third point: can we speak of Mary as going through "crises of faith." Guardini, in his book *The Life of Faith*,²⁸ insists that there must be development and reconstruction of faith at certain periods to correspond with critical developments in life. For example, attention to self and one's small world is the only world of faith psychologically possible in the child. The real struggles of thought and life, in the true sense, have not begun. When the growing child begins to realize that he is not the center of everything, he must readjust. The world begins to open up to the teen-ager; awareness of immeasurable longings, of need for respect from the world, urging to self-will and independence and freedom, all these have to be integrated into a new commitment. Weathering of this crisis produces the beautiful and eager idealistic faith of youth. Later come the crises of maturity, the need to combat cynicism and failure, the need to achieve stamina, steadiness, understanding and even tolerance. This is the mature faith of loyalty and conviction and strength.

Can we assume, then, that Mary was dispensed with all this? I don't see how. Certainly her freedom from concupiscence is very much involved in any consideration of these questions. But we may well have swept too many problems under the carpet merely by saying that she was exempt from all concupiscence both in *actu secundo* and in *actu primo*. Can we really say that Mary was beyond what seem to be the normal psychological and emotional problems of commitment and response that are experienced by the average person who is growing up? Father Alban Maguire, at this Society's convention in 1963, gave an

²⁷ F. X. Durrwell in *The Resurrection*, and *In The Redeeming Christ* gives a good explanation of such theology.

²⁸ R. Guardini, *The Life of Faith* (Westminster, Md., 1961).

excellent paper on Our Lady's freedom from concupiscence.²⁹ Here he wisely refers to Karl Rahner's theory of concupiscence, for Rahner does not explain freedom from concupiscence as the absence of all spontaneous and natural desires arising from the sense power apart from the complete control of the spiritual powers. Rather, concupiscence in the theological sense "is man's spontaneous desire, in so far as it precedes his free decision *and resists it*."³⁰ Without pretending to be able to give details, this would prudently seem to allow for much similarity between Mary's responses of faith and commitment and our own. For even though such crises and difficulties never resisted her will—much less overcame it—she would not in any way need to be conscious of her freedom from concupiscence; her every act of free choice and response to God, then, could have been beset with all the problems of all of us. Moreover, as Rahner admits, concupiscence must not be confined to the sense appetites as opposed to the spiritual appetites; thus there are

²⁹ A. Maguire, *Our Lady's Freedom from Concupiscence*, in *MS* 14 (1963) 75-96.

³⁰ K. Rahner, *The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia*, in *Theological Investigations* 1 (Baltimore, 1961) 360. An extensive quotation is necessary to explain. "In the concrete man of the present order free personal decision and self-determination are not capable of perfectly and exhaustively determining the operative subject throughout the whole extent of his real being. The free act does indeed dispose of the whole subject, in so far as it is as free act an act of man's personal centre, and so, by the root as it were, draws the whole subject into sympathy with it. And yet man's concrete being is not throughout its whole extent and according to all its powers and their actualization the pure expression and the unambiguous revelation of the personal active centre which is its own master. In the course of its self-determination, the person undergoes the resistance of the nature given prior to freedom, and never wholly succeeds in making all that man is into the reality and the expression of all that he comprehends himself to be in the core of his person. . . . Concupiscence consists essentially in the fact that man in this regime does not overcome even by his free decision the dualism between what he is as nature prior to his existential decision and what he becomes as person by this decision, not even in the measure in which it would absolutely speaking be conceivable for a finite spirit to overcome it. Man never becomes wholly absorbed either in good or in evil." p. 368-9.

involuntary spiritual conative acts prior to man's free decision. Therefore, Mary is not immune to spontaneous movements of pride, desire for self recognition, praise and so on. The fact that her will completely dominates them—once it comes into deliberate action—does not rule out the existence and problem of such things. Indeed, are not such movements part of the "life of flesh," part of the human condition of our fallen race? Mary as the New Eve is waging a very real war with Satan, not an imaginary one. We are doing her scant justice if we abolish the reality of her struggle. In Rahner's terms, freedom from concupiscence is what permits Mary to come to the full actualization of the potentiality of herself as a person. She is able by her free existential decisions to become wholly absorbed in good.³⁰ But this is certainly not by having no acquaintance with evil.

VII. *Mary's Response of Faith as a Type.*

Her faith is, first, the perfect fulfillment of the Old Testament type found in Abraham. His response set in motion the history of salvation in its initial stages. Mary, on the other hand, sets in motion the eschatologically definitive stage of God's redemptive activity in Christ. Abraham is the first Israelite, the father of believers. Mary is the first Christian, the mother of believers.

Secondly, as mother of all believers, Our Blessed Lady is the archetype of Christian response. She is the perfect Christian in her total openness to God's saving grace and to His will for her. Her whole life is the re-affirmation of her unconditional "yes," a life in which she uses her grace-given freedom of response to bring her complete being—body, soul, and all her powers—to the fullest actualization of God's design for her as an individual person, and also as a member of the redeemed People of God.

This brings us to the last point: Mary in her response as a

³¹ *Ibid.* See last sentence of footnote 30.

type of the Church. In the beginning, Abraham, the father of believers, embodied all Israel in himself: he received God's promise for Israel and effected the initial act of faith which set in train the whole series of blessings of the Old Testament. At the Annunciation we have a new embodiment of Israel, Mary. She received the promise of God for the New Israel, the Church, and set in train the definitive redemptive acts.³² Thus Mary represents the believing Church and inaugurates it.

The task of the believing Church is to continue through space and time the spousal fiat of Mary, her whispered yes. This community of the redeemed has for vocation to cooperate in the work of redemption by loving faith, and so bring God to birth in the human frame. The Church, therefore, is a collective Mary, and Mary is the Church in germ.³³

This last sentence should be pursued further. By her free response at Calvary she sacrificed all that meant anything to her, her very essence, her possession of Christ according to the flesh. And in her the whole Old Testament Church, Israel according to the flesh, consented to its own death. Right after Christ's death resurrection takes place; it is now that Mary, too, begins to live the risen life of Jesus with whom she is joined. Mary, then, as type of the whole Church is the embodiment of redemption fully offered and fully and freely accepted. In other believers the grace of the Church moves only slowly toward its completion, and will attain it only after centuries. But it was complete in Mary by the end of her lifetime. Because of the perfection of her response to God's grace, this "grace covers its whole trajectory in her; its action, measured in thousands of years, which leads the Church to final resurrection, has already reached its goal in Mary. In her the history of the Church is already complete."³⁴

REV. WILFRID F. DEWAN, C.S.P.
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³² Thurian, *op. cit.*, 61.

³³ Burghardt, *op. cit.*, 22.

³⁴ Durrwell, *In the Redeeming Christ*, 286.