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OUR LADY AND SALVATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: A REACTION PAPER

It is difficult for an Anglican to present a reaction to a lecture such as that presented by Father Hinnebusch, and at the same time to represent typical Anglican thought on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church. We hold within our Communion those who would maintain a reverent silence concerning her place in the economy of salvation, being satisfied with the liturgical texts in the Book of Common Prayer which do her honor, and being positively concerned "with the unique glory of the incarnate Son of God" and believing "that Marian developments detract from this"¹ On the other hand, these evangelicals do not wish to dishonor her, preferring to see her within the context of Holy Scripture and the incarnation festivals of the Church

In the twentieth century there has been a marked growth in Marian devotion in the Anglican Communion. The restoration of the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham in England has revived the pilgrimage as a devotion to the Mother of God, and in some provinces, including the American Episcopal Church, the festival of the "Falling Asleep" is being restored. The proposed calendar of the American Church gives it the simple title: St Mary's Day. In other provinces her Conception, her Nativity, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Purification are to be found in the *sanctorale*. But we must look to the hymnals of the Anglican Churches to find the distinctly Anglican Marian devotions in which we may find a common bond. In the hymnals she is "higher than the

¹ John de Satgé, *The Blessed Virgin Mary, "Toward an Evangelical Re-appraisal"* (London, 1963), 105

cherubim, more glorious than the seraphim"² We "Sing of Mary, pure and lowly, Virgin-mother undefiled . . .",³ and there are the beautiful Marian hymns of John Keble and Bishop Ken in the English Hymnal. The central Anglican point of view was expressed succinctly by Bishop Pearson in the seventeenth century: "We cannot bear too reverend a regard unto the *Mother of Our Lord*, so long as we give her not that worship which is due unto the Lord Himself. Let us keep the language of the primitive Church. Let her be honoured and esteemed, let Him be worshipped and adored"⁴

No Anglican, to be sure, would dispute Father Hinnebusch's statement that Mary's openness at the Annunciation is the point of convergence of all preceding salvation history. Our Lady, at this point, is Virgin Israel, summing up in her own person all that Israel has been called to be. At the same time she is the prototype of the Church, completely open and obedient to God. Father John Macquarrie says, "We are not thinking so much of Mary's priority in the Church as we are of the parallels between her and the Church. What we see in Mary, we ought to see in the Church. Her free, cooperative obedience in the incarnation is demanded also of the Church, if God is to be present and active in our world of today"⁵

Father Conrad Noel, the founder of the Order of the Church Militant in England, which in turn became the inspiration for the Order of the Catholic Commonwealth in the Episcopal Church in the United States, must be rejoicing in Paradise today as we heard the Blessed Virgin mentioned in solidarity with the poor of Yahweh. This was one of the major themes

² *The Hymnal of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, 1940. The Church Pension Fund (New York, 1961), Hymn 599

³ *Ibid.*, Hymn 117. *The English Hymnal*, Humphrey Milford (London, 1906). Hymns 216, 217

⁴ Paul Elmer More, *Anglicanism* (New York, 1957), 538

⁵ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (New York, 1966), 354

of his writing and thought, for he saw the "Saving Remnant" of Isaiah narrowing down to just a few faithful servants of God waiting for the "consolation of Israel" (*Luke 2:25*). They were Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, Joseph and Mary

We must not forget that Jesus also is identified with Israel. In fact, He is the true Israel who recapitulates in His own Person the whole history of the People of God, and the old Israel is transformed, yes, transfigured in Him. The complete identification with Israel and the Church is to be found in Him, and the role of the Blessed Virgin is purely ancillary. This does not detract from her person, but glorifies it "Behold, the handmaid of the Lord"

The true center of ecumenism is Christ Himself, but we are beginning to realize throughout the Western world that there can never be a true ecumenism without recognition of the Blessed Virgin Mary as an agent of the incarnation of the Son of God. Professor Bulgakov has said that the marked difference between Protestantism and Orthodoxy is the absence of devotion to the Mother of our Lord.⁶ In 1949 the Archimandrite Lev Gillet went on pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Walsingham. He said afterwards, "I shall only say that at Walsingham one strongly feels the hope that the person and prayer of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, may act as a powerful magnet to unite all Christians."⁷

Father Hinnebusch speaks of her as the perfect witness to the faith, and this is evident from St. Luke's Gospel where the incredulity of Zacharias is contrasted with the faith of the Blessed Virgin and her faith is compared with the faith of Abraham. Beside all this, St. Luke presents her within the

⁶ E. L. Mascall, & H. S. Box, *The Blessed Virgin Mary, "Our Lady and the Reunion of Christendom,"* 128

⁷ *Ibid.*, 129

whole context of the Gospel, from the Annunciation to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Each time we get a glimpse of her, we see her as the handmaid of the Lord.

Maintaining a *reverent silence* on the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, yet keeping in mind that in all Anglican Prayer Books the collect for the Holy Eucharist on the feast of our Lord's Nativity declares that our Lord took "our nature upon him . . . and was born of a pure Virgin," we remember that "the saints speak of the love for God as not just their response to God's love for them, but somehow as the very movement of God's Spirit within them, God being on both sides"⁸ So "she is openness to love" and this is the miracle of the divine grace which God wills His Church also to exemplify in the midst of a world of alienation.

Remembering that our Lord the Holy Spirit always takes the initiative, in the Church as in Mary, we see that as she is the Blessed Theotokos, so the Church continues to bring Christ to the world. As she is *kecharitoméne*, so we are to be *kecharitoménoi*, "full of grace," accepting "the saving presence and action of God."⁹

I am grateful to Fr. Hinnebusch's paper in that it speaks to me as an Anglican brought up in the tradition of teaching and preaching within the context of Holy Scripture in the light of the ancient Fathers. Our Anglican fear of Mariology is gradually being dispelled by the exciting theological developments since Vatican II, especially in releasing Catholic truth from the rigid definitions of the past, allowing it to be expressed in thought-forms we are beginning to understand because we are using similar language

Undoubtedly, in the great ferment taking place in modern Christendom, the figure of Blessed Mary will gain greater prominence as Christians see her in the bright light of our Lord's incarnation, and in His Body the Church, for she is His Mother and ours. As the Holy Spirit overshadowed her,

so He must overshadow the Church until all men can see the "woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" and whose "child was caught up unto God, and to his throne."¹⁰

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⁸ *Principles of Christian Theology*, 297

⁹ Fr. Paul Hinnebusch, O P, *Our Lady and Salvation in the Twentieth Century*, 61.

¹⁰ Revelation (Apocalypse) 12 1b and 5b