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Charles W. Neumann

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THE DECLINE OF INTEREST IN MARIOLOGY AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Little else comes to mind more deadening at a society's convention that to treat the decline of interest precisely in the subject that has brought the society together. Yet the task is a necessary one, if in no other name than that of facing reality. From the very terms of the title assigned for this paper, three approaches to the topic suggest themselves.

First, decline of interest in Mariology, while evident, ought not to be accepted as an adequate description without *measuring the extent* of the decline. This will be our first section. It deals with the present.

Next, the problem of decline is qualified as *theological*. Since things theological are generally in crisis today, specialized Marian theology, of course, shares the lot of theology at large. A brief survey of how this theological crisis has affected Mariology will help us understand the *causes* of the decline of interest in the latter. This will be the object of our second section, where the perspective broadens to include the immediate past.

Finally, the phenomenon of decline is rightly presented as a *problem*, that is, we are invited not simply to document its existence but to endeavor to deal with it as a remediable situation and to suggest solutions. This will form our third section, which concerns the future of Mariology.

It should be noted that, as the title of the paper indicates, our considerations are limited to the precise matter of interest in Mariology itself and do not directly take up the broader question of Marian devotion or the place of Mary in the lives of Christians today.

I. The Extent of the Decline of Interest in Mariology

In his *Seven Lamps of Architecture* John Ruskin advises that it is not the calumny that does the largest sum of mischief in the world, but rather "the glistening and softly spoken lie, the amiable fallacy," what he calls "the zealous lie of the partisan, the merciful lie of the friend, and the careless lie of each man to himself." To qualify the present state of Mariology in terms other than decline of interest would be to expose oneself to telling such a lie. Determined not to do so, we ought nonetheless to recognize that not all the picture is bleak. Monsignor Austin Vaughan eloquently sketched it for us in balanced terms of challenge and hope last year in his presidential address. Our investigation opens with some of the evidence on which his case for the balanced verdict rests.

1) Status of Marian Literature

The annual survey of Marian literature that Father Eamon Carroll has been giving us, along with René Laurentin's biennial *Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie*, would not suggest that the presses have stopped rolling for Marian authors, still less that the authors have laid down their pen. Obviously the volume of titles is well below the mark of the flood of writing that followed on the Marian celebrations of the 1950's, when for the period 1958-1966 Besutti's bibliography listed more than 7000 titles. Since 1966, in fact, their number has drastically dwindled. But, in the opinion of Gerard Philips, "the quality of the scientific works is meanwhile on the rise," and "the interest in action rather than in the analysis of abstract essences can be a guarantee of realism." He is happy over a literature which, though less abundant, will be "marked by a more dynamic character,"¹ to the ultimate benefit of Marian theology.

2) *Wider Interest in Study of Mary*

A diminution in the number of works specifically on Mary, moreover, has been somewhat compensated for by the treatment given her in works outside the field of Mariology. Laurentin observes that "often beyond Mariological boundaries it is in the detour some qualified specialist makes... that one can find insights that are scattered through a variety of publications."² Fr. Carroll too notes that some of the most important considerations "occur within books and essays dealing with other theological topics."³ In the light of the oft-lamented particularism of Mariology this development is one of the most promising.

The bibliographical surveys will also reveal that unusually significant contributions are being made not in book form but in periodicals, "where a good half of scientific research is carried on today."⁴ Among scholarly Marian periodicals *Ephemerides Mariologicae*, especially since its reorientation in 1970, promises well.⁵ *Marianum* has met with harsher judgment,⁶ though here again opinions are divided.⁷

In his most recent bibliographical *Bulletin* Laurentin summarized the situation as follows:

The diminution in Marian writings is less than at first sight ap-

¹ Gérard Philips, *La Vierge au II^e Concile du Vatican et l'avenir de la Mariologie*, in *Maria*, 8 (Paris, 1971) 41-88 at 80.

² René Laurentin, *Crise et avenir de la Mariologie*, in *EphM* 20 (1970) 53-62 at 61.

³ Eamon R. Carroll, *Survey of Recent Mariology*, in *MS* 20 (1969) 137-167 at 137.

⁴ Laurentin, *loc. cit.*

⁵ Carroll, *Survey of Recent Mariology*, in *MS* 22 (1971) 91-111 at 93. Theodore Koehler, *Nova et Vetera in Mariology*, in *MLS* 2 (1970) 99-109 at 108.

⁶ Donal Flanagan, *Postscript to Lumen Gentium, Chapter Eight*, in *ITQ* 38 (1971) 67-71 at 71.

⁷ Koehler, *op. cit.* 107. Laurentin, *op. cit.* 53.

pears. Certainly they are more reserved and have smaller press runs. Studies on mediation, coredemption, and queenship, so numerous from 1926 to 1960, have fallen to almost nothing, but other sectors are expanding—patristic theology, the theology of the Holy Spirit, Christian anthropology, and ecumenism. Studies on Mary's virginity are multiplying because of the questions raised by currents of thought on demythologization and sexuality. In quantity the amount of literature surpasses the low stage prior to the flood released by the Marian celebrations of 1950-58. Sobriety and a critical sense may have replaced generosity of expression, but standards and quality have gone up.⁸

3) *Ecumenical Study of Mary*

What is most significant from an ecumenical viewpoint is the number of constructive books and articles about the Virgin Mary authored by Protestants, a development without parallel since the 17th century. Especially in Germany during the last decade several impressive works characterized by a concern for correctness have appeared on the origin of Marian devotion, on Luther's thought concerning Mary, as well as in critique of Catholic positions.⁹ Interest in Mary ecumenically has not yet taken the form of specialized dialogues of the kind held among Catholics and Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and others, on Baptism, the Eucharist, and the ministry. An evolution as a whole, however, is taking place in the direction indicated by Vatican II and comprising the investigation of biblical and patristic sources, a return to essentials in the portrait of Mary, a shedding of artifice, and so on.

Unique in the field of specialized systematic theology and belying any unqualified assertion that interest in Mary is dead is the remarkable initiative of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary in holding an International Ecumenical

⁸ Laurentin, *Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie*, in *RSPT* 54 (1970) 269-328 at 269.

⁹ *Ibid.* 316.

Conference on the Virgin Mary in the Church Today, at London last April. Since its foundation in 1967 the Society has been holding reunions at which scholarly papers are read, and has quietly published several expertly written pamphlets.¹⁰

4) *Mariological Congresses and Societies*

Published Marian research continues to be greatly stimulated by the series of International Mariological Congresses that have assembled scholars, most recently at Santo Domingo in 1965, at Lisbon in 1967, and at Zagreb in 1971. Later at this convention Fr. Eamon Carroll will bring us up to date on the Zagreb congress. Participation in these events on the part of Protestants has grown from the single representative at Santo Domingo beyond the half-dozen at Lisbon.

The status of Mariological societies, on the other hand, is not even. "Societies of Marian studies are disappearing, dwindling in number, growing old, or turning in on themselves," Laurentin notes, "except in Poland and perhaps in Italy."¹¹ Self-effacingly he omitted mentioning the French Society which, in the opinion of Donal Flanagan, "continues along its scholarly, unruffled path. . . . The work of this Society seems to me, at least, to be the most complete and significant response from any Marian group to the challenge of Vatican II."¹² Our own Society figures nowhere as high in the estimation of the last author cited:

Marian Studies from 1965 to 1969 inclusive gives a panoramic view of the shock syndrome Mariology has been through and its effects. The Society, quietly confident in its annual proceedings in the years before the Council, has since that event shown . . . a certain sense of tension. The overall impact of its proceedings has been to make

¹⁰ Carroll, *A survey. . .*, in *MS* 22 (1971) 102f.

¹¹ Laurentin, *Crise . . .* 53.

¹² Flanagan, *op. cit.* 71.

one feel that here is a group which has somehow lost its way temporarily.¹³

To cushion the force of that judgment, while we weigh seriously what the words say, it would perhaps serve to recall that we have companions in our misery—self-declared companions in misery with whom the Mariologist used to be reproached for not often enough associating. I mean the biblical scholars. Witness this excerpt from a book review: "It is hardly news that biblical scholars worry about the current decline of serious interest in scriptural studies among seminarians and lay people."¹⁴ And the book in question speaks yet more woefully of "a collapse of the [biblical] movement as a dominant and cohesive force in American theology"¹⁵ brought on by forces within and outside the movement.

What are some of these forces that have proved such a nemesis to Mariologists, and now even to biblical scholars, suggesting to both of them that they are not in the mainstream of American theology?

II. *Causes of the Decline of Interest in Mariology*

One could not hope to give here an exhaustive analysis. It is task enough to condense the growing bibliography already addressed to this topic.¹⁶ We shall begin with the broader unrest in theology as a whole and move to the specific area of Marian theology.

¹³ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁴ Frederick Moriarity, reviewing the title of the following note in *TS* 32 (1971) 132-135 at 134.

¹⁵ Bernard C. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1970) 255 pages at 61.

¹⁶ In addition to the articles cited throughout this paper, cf. the set of 14 articles entirely given over to the subject in fascicles 1-3 of *EphM* 20 (1970) 5-225; Heribert Mühlen, *Neuorientierung und Krise der Mariologie in den Aussagen des Vaticanum II*, in *Cath.* 20 (1966) 19-53.

1) *Rationalizing Tendency in Theology*

In general terms the theological effort today seems to have stumbled over the initial question whether it should concern itself with the revealing God at all, or should instead study man, creator of his own destiny. Some would suggest theology yield place to the discipline of religious studies. The focus of this discipline is man, for the while man in quest of God, perhaps ultimately man as the humanist without religion.

What is at issue in the crisis is the whole notion of the act of faith in the revealing word of God.¹⁷ Philips speaks of a rationalizing tendency to "flatten" all mystery to the human level of understanding, and he adds:

For a long time ahead there will probably arise no new heresy, either in Mariology or elsewhere, but a progressive abandonment of every attitude of faith. Much more is at stake in the religious events of today than is generally thought.¹⁸

Little wonder, then, that with doubt cast on the whole pattern of salvation and man's need of it, Mary's role therein escapes attention. As the Anglican A. M. Allchin aptly puts it:

It may be that the reason why for many, Catholic as well as Protestant, the question of Mary seems remote and unimportant, is because the particular things for which Mary stands are neither seen nor understood. It seems as if we were trying to incarnate the presence of God in the world through our own efforts, without sufficiently realizing that if it is to be the presence of *God*, and not just of certain ideas, or words, or concepts about God, then that presence can only become real . . . in so far as we are learning to be

¹⁷ Philips, *Mariologie et théologie postconciliares*, in *EphM* 20 (1970) 23-29 at 24.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 25.

¹⁹ A. M. Allchin, *Mary, Virgin and Mother: An Anglican Approach*,

open, receptive, obedient to the Word of God, so that the Holy Spirit may work his re-creative work in us.¹⁹

2) *Changes in Focus of Theological Interest*

Where a notion of revelation theology is still held, the radical tempo of change has so deeply unsettled minds that they are torn between, on the one hand, the most fundamental questions about the being and nature of God, His relationship to mankind, His revelation in Christ, the role of the Church etc., and, on the other, such vital questions of the hour as atheism, violence, war, population explosion, ecology, race, women, youth, the aged, drugs, abortion, contraception, etc. Most would agree with Karl Rahner in thinking that where theology remains alive, it will hardly have "the time, the fancy, or even the right to compose works on the Trinity as thick, for example, as that of Ruiz de Montoya."²⁰ (Be it said in passing that interest in Trinitarian theology would unfortunately be yet more difficult to document than our present subject—and no consolation is intended in the remark.) Paul VI's description of the theologian's double task comes to mind: to give the People of God the integral message of divine revelation and to listen to them for their preoccupations and problems in order to help find solutions.

Today's theologian probably scores higher on the second task than on the first. At any rate, listening is the price of speaking the relevant word; speaking at any other price is fatuous, unless one is resigned to the lack of an audience. Hopefully the posture of Mariology in this regard today is not exactly that of having tried to speak and been ignored, but that of still listening. Mary herself was noted for this. Theologians may not yet have found the words about Mary that most aptly fit

in *MLS* 1 (1969) 96-112 at 112.

²⁰ Karl Rahner, *L'avenir de la théologie*, in *NRT* 103 (1971) 3-29 at 11.

the above preoccupations of contemporary man. Until the words are found it is indeed wise not to speak, even at the price of losing interest for the while.

3) *Anti-doctrinal Bias in Theology Today*

In speaking about his subject the Mariologist suffers the handicap today of having been most accustomed to discourse on the doctrinal level. The shift of interest in our day has moved from doctrine to ethics, from orthodoxy to orthopraxis.

The lack of interest in what Mariologists say may thus focus not precisely on the person of whom they speak but on their manner of speaking of her. One may have serious reservations about *Jesus Christ Superstar*, but it stands as one example of how the medium can secure for even the most unlikely message a hearing in some quarters enthusiastic. The price to pay need not be religious error; it does seem, however, to demand reliance on an approach other than the exclusively doctrinal. One cause of the relative disinterest in Mariology today remains the deafness with which any doctrinal presentation is greeted.

4) *Decline of the Marian Movement*

Further diagnosis of the decline of interest in our subject brings us from the field of general theology into the precise area of Mariology itself. Laurentin's often repeated diagnosis of the waning of the Marian movement is presumed to be well known.²¹ Reaching a climax in the Marian festivities of the last years of Pius XII's pontificate—and no climax is in-

²¹ Cf. Laurentin, *Court traité sur la Vierge Marie* (5th ed., Paris, 1968) 223 pages at 90-95; *The Virgin Mary in the Constitution of the Church*, in *Conc.* 8:1 (October 1965), British edition, 79-86; *Mary in the New Age*, in *ME*, 8 (Chicago, 1967) 27-29, 78-84; *The Present Crisis in Mariology* (Dayton, 1968) 407 pages at 1-24.

tended to be sustained—the movement found several of its goals for the moment successfully reached, and it yielded to other preoccupations within the Catholic Church, movements known generally as biblical, liturgical, ecclesiological, missionary, catechetical, and ecumenical. At the Council these, in turn, came more into their own. In time each of them has been attracted by what was excellent in the Marian movement and has rediscovered Mary to some degree, often in neglected aspects of her meaning and function.²²

5) *Attitudes of Mariologists*

In part the decline of interest in Mariology may be attributed to attitudes found among some Mariologists, such as clanishness, defensiveness, an aloofness from the rest of theology, a partisan spirit of claiming for their subject a domain apart from the ordinary theological methods and sources. Reserve continues to be expressed over the particularism implied even in the term "Mariology."²³ Where sterile in-fighting came to characterize sectors of Mariology, loss of interest on the part of those who were not party to the debates naturally followed.

6) *Change in Mariological Method*

Generalizations regarding attitudes are difficult, and allusions notoriously susceptible of misinterpretation. But attention should be drawn to at least one of the struggles within the field of Mariology—this not a sterile struggle—where what is actually readjustment might give the outsider the impression of partisan divisiveness. I refer to the two conceptions of method in Marian theology that met each other at the opening of Vatican II. Philips repeatedly cites Father Carlo Balic's opinion that the difference between the first and final draft

²² Laurentin, *The Present Crisis* . . . 379.

²³ Laurentin, *Crise* . . . 56.

of Chapter Eight of *Lumen Gentium* is summed up in this difference of method.²⁴

Proponents of the earlier draft followed a method with its point of departure in the papal magisterium, where Mary had figured with increasing frequency; they proceeded by way of exact speculative analysis of the concepts and principles involved, sought probative texts in Scripture and tradition, were preoccupied with constructing a solid doctrinal system, and expressed warm concern throughout for Mary's "privileges", building on previous positions endorsed by the magisterium. Advocates of the other method began with the earliest scriptural and partistic sources of Marian doctrine, proceeded more by way of positive study, traced the evolution of the history of salvation and Mary's role in it, followed the subsequent development of Marian doctrine and devotion, and generally avoided polemic encounters, though not espousing any false irenicism.²⁵ Energy spent in the confrontation of these two methods was not all energy lost; however, the ensuing reassessment and, along with the rest of systematic theology, the shift towards the second method have been for the whole of Mariology the occasion more of silent growth so far, rather than of any strides of renewal that catch public attention.

7) *Demythologization*

More serious than any of the above causes of the Mariological malaise is the trend of demythologization regarding the Christian kerygma, a trend characteristic of much contemporary theology. Defensible as an "effort to see that the statements of the faith proclaimed of old might be heard in a credible way acceptable to the men of today,"²⁶ demythologization has

²⁴ Cf. Philips, *L'Eglise et son mystère au deuxième Concile du Vatican*, 2 (Paris, 1968) 210; *La Vierge* . . . 75.

²⁵ Philips, *L'Eglise* . . . 209.

²⁶ Rahner, *op. cit.* 12; cf. also his *Theological Dictionary* (New York, 1965) 121-123.

gone to excess especially in the hands of the amateur, and become "the mode and a kind of vertigo" in which "Christians indulge without any preparation."²⁷

In what concerns us, the historicity of Mary's role especially in the infancy narratives has been questioned. The treatment of the virginal conception of Christ as simply an open question, if not the actual doubt cast on it as historical fact, in quarters where this doctrine was assumed to be part of the deposit of faith is the most obvious development. Many have been prematurely led to view Mary only in terms of symbol or myth.

While the study of Mary has particularly suffered from this impact, it is essential for the Mariologist to appreciate how demythologization is a much broader phenomenon and how it appears in the context of the whole intellectual movement of our time:

We could make a synoptic table in which the following phenomena would appear almost side by side: abstract art, atonal music, the reduction to a minimum of scenario, plot and action in a prominent trend of the modern theatre, the lack of descriptiveness in many scientific expressions which can only be expressed in formulae and can only be comprehended by purely mathematical thinking, existentialism in philosophy, and finally the demythologizing of the New Testament in theology. In all these almost contemporary phenomena we can detect a great 'undertow of abstraction'. . . . This abstraction has produced a loss of reality by depriving us of corporeal figures, concrete history, and vivid reality; indeed the very meaning of 'abstract' is 'that which has been taken away.' We have lost our 'names' and have been given 'numbers' instead; in place of what we can imagine and grasp with our senses—for example, melody, imagery, space and time—we have figures, notions, formulae, rhythms, outlines, and contours. . . . [Demythologization] is a consequence of the present universal threat of the dissolution of history into the mere historicity of human existence.²⁸

²⁷ Laurentin, *Supplement to the 1968 Dayton Course* (Dayton, 1970) 43 pages (hectographed) at 20.

²⁸ Heinz Zahrnt, *The Historical Jesus* (New York, 1963) 91.

Hence the deep roots which demythologization has in contemporary culture and the expression it represents of insights acquired in contemporary psychoanalysis, sociology, ethnology, and investigations of the theology of knowledge all give ample assurance that this phenomenon cannot be assumed to be a passing fad. If it is responsible for a crisis of interest in Mariology, its influence has to be grappled with, for it will not just go away. A word about the Mariologist's abiding concern with it in the future can serve as the transition to the third section of our paper.

III. *The Future of the Problem of Diminished Interest in Mariology*

Etymologically, "problem" contains the idea of "throwing forward" and suggests that an attempted diagnosis of the causes of declined interest in our subject should lead us to move into the future with some notion, gained from our reflections on the past, of where to apply our forces, and thus to bring to the problem some measure of solution.

1) *Demythologization*

The most timely concern of the Mariologist would seem to be in properly coping with demythologization. For this, no effort to perfect our knowledge and command of exegetical method can be too costly. In speaking of the infancy narratives, Philips sums up exegetical opinion in reminding us, "In our day no one takes these narratives for stenographic accounts." His word to the exegetes will hopefully be as well taken: "The exegete who extracts from these narratives their religious content ought not to think himself constrained to set aside as something unverifiable or sheer fantasy either the historical event or the corporal element which are both woven into the web of these accounts." Encouraging for everyone is

his observation that "serious authors are trying to bring to light the spiritual values of Mary's assent to the divine will and of her virginity"²⁹ as narrated in these accounts.

In his *Survey* last year³⁰ Fr. Carroll drew our attention to the efforts, in my opinion very effective, of René Laurentin to restudy the spiritual meaning of the doctrine of Christ's virginal origin, the historical and corporal elements of which Laurentin holds to be part of the deposit of the faith. A wealth of enlightenment is contained in his latest *Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie*³¹ and in the supplementary pages of his 1970 Dayton course.³² In the latter especially he shows how the virginal conception, less a privilege of Mary than a characteristic of Christ's birth, was for the Fathers of the Church a sign, on the one hand, of the preexistence of the Son of God, and, on the other, of the gratuitousness of salvation. By this sign our salvation is shown to have begun as a new creation stemming again from divine *agape* rather than from human *eros*, totally a divine initiative pursued amid a poverty of human means that involved even refraining from using man's fundamental power of fruitful sexuality. To reduce the account of Christ's origin to pure symbol without either historical or biological reality would be, then, to abandon the impact of his virginal conception is a sign, to make the infancy narratives a language of empty words, and to set up at the threshold of the Gospels a credibility gap more formidable than the obstacle which some find in the miracle itself of the virginal conception. Laurentin's conclusion incorporates, it seems to me, an ideal response to the challenge of demythologization:

In the meantime, the crisis should not be dramatized. The present condition is perhaps better than the formalism and the battle of

²⁹ Philips, *La Vierge*... 80f.

³⁰ Carroll, *Survey*..., in *MS* 22 (1971) 99-102.

³¹ Laurentin, *Bulletin*... 291-304.

³² Laurentin, *Supplement*... 21-30.

words which unconsciously repeated formulas drained of their meaning. This crisis has shown that one cannot be content with a material affirmation of the virginal conception as an incomprehensible prodigy. It invites us to rediscover the sense of mystery by an experience committed to the well-understood demands of evangelical poverty in all its aspects. It is by this prophetic, demanding experience that beyond certain clouds and storms of today and yesterday we will rediscover the true light on the virginity of Mary—sign of salvation.³³

In this light the most promising area of progress in Mariology for the future is plausibly taken to be a biblical and positive theology.³⁴

2) *Theology of the Holy Spirit*

It is a commonplace to observe that western Mariology, like western doctrine on the Eucharist or the Trinity, has too long been deprived of the theology of the Holy Spirit so developed among our Orthodox brothers. The three study sessions of the French Mariological Society from 1968 to 1970 represent pioneering work. Until this convention our own Society has not addressed itself formally in a convention paper to the relationship of Mary with the Holy Spirit. Appropriately we have asked for enlightenment and stimulus from a representative of the Orthodox tradition in the person of Father Alexander Schmemmann.

Our need is great. Mary's role in the Annunciation, for example, has ordinarily been portrayed only as Christ's Mother, without sufficient attention being paid to her fidelity to the Holy Spirit. This, even though Christ reminded us (*Lk.* 8 and 11) that her true worth does not lie in a simply maternal relationship to Christ as to an individual. Her role in Christ's

³³ *Ibid.* 30.

³⁴ J. A. de Aldama, *Sentido y tarea de la mariología*, in *EphM* 20 (1970) 63-69 at 67. Cf. also Philips, *La Vierge* . . . 71f.

redemptive mission, in turn, has not often enough been associated with the Church's role therein, both due to the dynamism of the Spirit. Again, her maternal role in our regard, of which Father Theodore Koehler will speak later on this program, must be understood in connection with the Holy Spirit—a connection only alluded to in the generally mistranslated end of article 65 of *Lumen Gentium*, where it is said that Mary "brought forth Christ, who was for *this* purpose conceived *by the Holy Spirit* and born of her, namely, that through the Church He might be born and grown in the hearts of the faithful also."³⁵

Vatican II, which only indirectly enjoyed the insights of Orthodox tradition with its rich pneumatology, will nevertheless be known as the Council more taken up than any of its predecessors with the Holy Spirit. Progress in the appreciation of His role in the history of salvation is discernible in the Council's documents from one session to the next. Evidence enough is at hand, thus, to guarantee the timeliness of this frontier of theology where we are invited to investigate a relationship of Mary's that in its way toward explicitness has hardly progressed beyond the bare terms of the Creed.

3) *Christian Anthropology*

Karl Rahner has perhaps the longest record among Catholic theologians of our day in summoning his colleagues to the elaboration of a Christian anthropology. He is not misunderstood as advocating a humanism to replace the study of God, which is properly the theologian's work, but an anthropology rightly located in theological context. For, as is known, God in Himself is not the direct object either of theology or of the revelation on which it is based; their object is rather

³⁵ *Lumen Gentium* art 65: "... quae genuit Christum, ideo de Spiritu Sancto conceptum et de Virgine natum, ut per Ecclesiam in cordibus quoque fidelium nascatur et crescat."

God's saving deed toward us, in which it is given us to know something of God Himself. Hence Christian theology, rightly conceived of as the study of God, cannot thrive without the study of man—least of all today when there is hardly tolerance for any metaphysical approach toward God savoring of classical medieval theology, whereas the study of man and his concerns, including his relationship to God, stirs response. Christian anthropology, then, is both orthodox and timely—a happy coincidence not universally realized in today's oft-promoted relevancies.

In such an anthropology Mary has two titles to be considered:³⁶ 1) She represents the most radical and intimate cooperation of any creature in the mystery of salvation; and 2) hers is a feminine cooperation, the most neglected aspect of whatever studies of man have thus far been made by theologians.

In several of his more recent writings, Laurentin summons the Marian theologians to develop an "anthropological dimension," to explore the human and feminine import of Mary's role.³⁷ Dr. Massingberg Ford's paper at our convention will thus meet another timely need high on the priority list of the Mariologist today.

Again we sense that we are only at the threshold of a fascinating series of discoveries, even in a document as known for its Marian import as St. John's Gospel, where women play a role as yet insufficiently studied by the theologian. We sense, too, and with a certain relief, that we are emerging from an era in which Mary was portrayed as a model exclusively for womankind. With meaning for both sexes, she now appears

³⁶ Laurentin, *Bulletin* . . . 291.

³⁷ Laurentin, *Mary and Womanhood in the Renewal of Christian Anthropology*, in *MLS* 1 (1969) 77-95 (a later translation of chapter 15 in his *Present Crisis* . . . 315-336); *Court traité* . . . 98f; *Marie et l'anthropologie chrétienne de la femme*, in *NRT* 99 (1967) 585-615; *Crise* . . . 58f.

rather as the model of every human person because of the way she received and radiated Christ in faith. Thus she is not simply a feminine ideal, but the supreme realization of the human in the feminine.³⁸ By studying her we can be led on a true course toward a better appreciation both of what is specifically feminine and what is human.

Sir Kenneth Clark struck this same note of timeliness in a remark of his during one of his television lectures on *Civilization*, a propos of the place Mary had in the heart of the Christian of the Middle Ages:

The stabilising, comprehensive religions of the world, the religions which penetrate to every part of a man's being—in Egypt, India or China—gave the female principle of creation at least as much importance as the male, and wouldn't have taken seriously a philosophy that failed to include them both. . . . It's a curious fact that the all-male religions have produced no religious imagery—in most cases have positively forbidden it. The great religious art of the world is deeply involved with the female principle. . . .

In talking about the twelfth and thirteenth centuries I said how great an advance in civilization was then achieved by a sudden consciousness of feminine qualities; and the same was true of eighteenth century France. I think it absolutely essential to civilization that the male and female principles be kept in balance.³⁹

4) *Hierarchy of Truths and Ecumenism*

A fourth inviting field of inquiry for the Mariologist stems out of article 11 of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, where theologians are reminded "that in Catholic teaching there exists an order or 'hierarchy' of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith." With his eye cocked in the direction of the papally proclaimed Marian dogmas, the Mariologist has probably been too defensive at the mention of "hierarchy of truths."

³⁸ Laurentin, *Mary and Womanhood* . . . 81.

Donal Flanagan indicts him for having left this "conciliar insight . . . sadly unemployed in the years since the Council." Observing that there is no intention of suggesting that "some Christian truths are negotiable and others not", he goes on:

If the place of Mariology within Christian theology is properly grasped and the mutual interrelation of Christology, ecclesiology and Mariology is clearly seen, these so-called 'Marian' truths appear for what they fundamentally are: truths about the nature of Christian salvation, as salvation in and through Christ and his community, not just doctrinal information about Mary. They represent in theological terms, not embarrassing pietism posing as theology, but true gains in the field of the doctrines of Christian anthropology and eschatology which we ignore to our loss. Mariology is basically a theology about salvation. It is not at its deepest level a doctrinal treatment of Mary as a saving figure; it is, fundamentally viewed, a doctrine of man being saved and becoming through the gift of God the free collaborator of God the Saviour.⁴⁰

E. J. Yarnold goes farther in essaying another interpretation of the 'hierarchy of truths':

. . . Articles of faith about Mary cast light upon the essential Christian beliefs about Christ. They can be Christian dogmas only insofar as they do this. In this respect there is no hierarchy of doctrines. But where there is a hierarchy is in the immediacy of the connection of the saving work of Christ with a particular verbal formulation of doctrine. Some doctrines can be couched in such a form that they make no explicit mention of Christ at all. In this sense they could be regarded as of secondary rank; but the connection with Christ must be there, and in this all doctrines are equal.⁴¹

³⁹ Kenneth Clark, *Civilization* (London, 1969) 353 pages at 177 and 230.

⁴⁰ Flanagan, *op. cit.* 69.

⁴¹ E. J. Yarnold, *Marian Dogmas and Reunion*, in *Mth* 3 (1971) 177-179 at 177.

In an article incorporating subsequent commentary on the Decree, some of it from the magisterium, George Tavard sees the "hierarchy of truths" in several perspectives. It can refer, he observes, not only to the Church's teaching but also to her life, and "the Mariological doctrines, which are not included in the Creed, have at times held a prominent place in the Church's life."⁴² Entertaining the hypothesis that the "hierarchy" may suggest a distinction between doctrines related to the end and doctrines related to the means of salvation, he observes that the distinction

may be very fruitful, especially if we can place the sacramental, ecclesiological, and Mariological doctrines among those relating to the means. (I think, however, that ecclesiological doctrines belong also, in part, to the end; and by considering Mary 'in the mystery of Christ and of the Church,' the last chapter of the *De ecclesia* would seem to place Mariology also, partly, among the doctrines relating to the end.)⁴³

Having recourse to Pope John's distinction between the deposit of the faith and its formulation, he echoes in part, again as a hypothesis, Yarnold's interpretation of the "hierarchy":

Thus one can wonder if some doctrines as taught in the Church or as asserted by the magisterium (e.g., the recently defined Mariological doctrines or papal infallibility) do not belong to the formulation rather than to the deposit of the faith. That is, the purpose or essence of such a doctrine would lie not in itself but in its contribution to the defense, illustration, or enhancement of a truth which is central to the Christian mystery.⁴⁴

These three authors are cited only as examples of those who have put their hand to a task which has hardly been taken

⁴² George Tavard, "*Hierarchia Veritatum*": *A Preliminary Investigation*, in *TS* 32 (1971) 278-289 at 282.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 288.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 289.

up by Mariologists. Its ecumenical import is more than obvious.

At the same time ecumenical concern precisely would demand that the Mariologist see his task not simply in terms of the Mariological dogmas as they are called, and their place in the "hierarchy of truths", but rather in a yet broader context which can serve even more forcibly to remind him of his role in the ecumenical dialogue. For the main ecumenical question is not the Mariological dogmas or even Mariology itself, but, as A. M. Köster observes, a complex of questions that have their most crucial application in Mariology, such as

a theological theory of knowledge, especially of the relation of Scripture, tradition, the development of dogma, and the magisterium; theological anthropology; the theology of grace in general and Original Sin in particular; the question how man thinks of life after death and the intercessory prayer of those who have gone on to the Lord; the question how, under and with God, under and with Christ, the creature can and should exist, be holy, work, and be considered in the communion of saints.⁴⁵

Karl Barth's words in this same sense are well known: "The exact equivalent of this creature [Mary] is the Roman Catholic concept of the Church. . . . The Church in which Mary is venerated . . . must be the Church of the man who cooperates with grace on the basis of grace."⁴⁶ Between sessions of Vatican II he wrote of the "Mariological dogma" as having "its uncanny relationship to the essence and functions of the Church."⁴⁷ Gerrit Berkouwer put it succinctly: "If ever there came a crisis in Mariology, this crisis could not be limited to Mariology, but would cause a revolution in the total doctrine

⁴⁵ A. M. Köster, *Mariologie und Theologie heute*, in *EphM* 20 (1970) 105-126 at 118.

⁴⁶ Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 1/2 (Zurich, 1939) 157.

⁴⁷ Barth, *Thoughts on the Second Vatican Council*, in *ER* 15 (1963) 361.

of the Church.”⁴⁸ In this light, the increasing interest Protestant thinkers are taking in the investigation of Mary shows from their side the openness and seriousness with which many are ready to approach the dialogue. Catholic Mariologists have seldom had a task more cut out for them in the ecumenical world.

5) *Mariology within Theology*

In the straits in which contemporary theology generally finds itself, a condition many have described as chaotic, Mariology has a function of service towards the other areas of theology, particularly systematic theology. “As the Virgin herself, the study of the Virgin ought to have a function of service toward theology as a whole, not simply a relationship of using theology.”⁴⁹

Philips even asks whether the time has not come to forego any special theological treatise on Mary and instead simply bring to light the Marian dimension of the different treatises of dogmatic theology, as the Incarnation, Original Sin, the Redemption, grace, and eschatology. The great Scholastics, he notes, did not have a treatise on Mary, nor do the Eastern theologians today yet.⁵⁰ It might be added that the presence of Marian insights in a variety of literature not specifically on Mary, a contemporary phenomenon singled out above, moves in the same direction.

For all its demands, such a task of revision can be rich in benefit for the whole theological endeavor.

6) *Mariology and the Sense of the Faithful*

A final sector of promise beckons the Mariologist. This time

⁴⁸ Gerrit Berkouwer, *The Conflict with Rome* (Grand Rapids, 1958) 178.

⁴⁹ Laurentin, *Crise* . . . 55.

⁵⁰ Philips, *Mariologie* . . . 28.

it is a matter of being of service not to his colleagues among the theologians but to the Christian people at large in the area of Marian devotion.

The question of the decline of Marian devotion or the "piety void" lies outside the scope of this paper, whose title centers on the fate of Mariology proper. Attention should be drawn, however, to Philips' observation that Marian devotion and practices of piety will in the future fall more within the program of scientific Mariology.⁵¹ Pope Paul's request that the last two International Mariological Congresses discuss the history of Marian devotion is more than a first step in this direction. The same can be said, proportionately speaking, for the French Mariological Society's studies in 1966 and 1967 which concentrated on Mary's intercession. The whole impact of Vatican II, in fact, is toward avoiding the dangerous vivisection of the Christian message into dogmatic concerns on the one hand and pastoral concerns on the other. Theology is meant to be lived, not merely speculated upon. Piety, to be authentic, must find a level corresponding to that of doctrine. This will demand less a multiplication of specifically Marian devotions than a recognition of Mary's place in all Christian devotion. Perhaps too much anguish has been spent on lamenting the demise of many of the devotions, and too little heed given to devotion itself.

Without rancor one might wonder what purpose in Christ's plan for his Church is being served by the priest, catechist, or Catholic theologian who inveighs against devotion to Mary. One is also permitted to wonder whether the place Mary has occupied in the Catholic heart is quite as empty today as some of the clergy and some theologians, for reasons of dubious merit, would have us believe. Time, of course, will tell. Most of us rightly do not want to have to wait in order to find out. At any rate, we shall never be able to settle the matter

⁵¹ Philips, *La Vierge* . . . 82.

by discussing it heatedly, or voicing our convictions more soberly and charitably, or citing our favorite theologian—or even simply by a sociological survey, though that assuredly fits within the picture. What is most required is a theological study of the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*).

A century ago there appeared the reprint of Cardinal Newman's *Rambler* (1859) essay *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, toward the end of which he says:

In most cases when a definition of dogma is contemplated, the laity will have a testimony to give; but if ever there be an instance when they ought to be consulted, it is in the case of doctrines which bear directly upon devotional sentiments. . . . The faithful people have ever a special function in regard to these devotional truths.⁵²

In an excellent article entitled *The Sense of the Faith and the Cult of Mary* Philips observes that this entire subject remains to be studied. His article spells out how the guidance of the Spirit concerns not only the "theoretical assertion" of the Creed and the magisterium, "but also the ways of moral and religious life when these are universally practised. Indeed, they then contain a speculative judgment on their legitimacy or on their native aptitude to promote Christian life."⁵³ Recognizing that this application of the rule of the sense of the faithful in the Marian domain is only very recent, he optimistically hazards the guess: "If one were to proceed with a test and organize a large-scale survey on the points of Marian doctrine that the average Christian considers as belonging to the faith, I think that one would obtain a rather surprising result" in a positive direction. Yet Philips would expect the faithful to forget to mention among the doctrines to be believed about Mary

⁵² John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (Sheed and Ward ed. with introd. by John Coulson, New York, 1967) 118 pages at 104.

⁵³ Philips, *The Sense of the Faith and the Cult of Mary*, in *ME* 9 (Chicago, 1969) 8-10 and 55-62 at 9.

the one that asserts the legitimacy and utility of having recourse to the intercession of Mary through formal invocation. It is not that they neglect the practice of devotion to Mary; it may even be intense; but often they do not realize the doctrinal presuppositions of this cult.⁵⁴

Mariologists are thus invited to bring to light the involvement of doctrine in devotion, to consult the sense of the faithful regarding devotion, to bring to more distinct articulation the doctrine that is implicit in devotion, to uncover among the riches of the sense of the faithful an instinct of how to act toward the Mother of the Lord, to nourish this sense of the faithful.

Speaking of Marian apparitions, in the study of which his expertise is acknowledged, Laurentin observes in one of his latest writings:

The question at stake is that of a faith that today is shaken in its cultural framework and remains dissatisfied with the abstract and formal teaching that still characterizes preaching and ecclesiastical administration. The underlying need is for a lived contact with God in an action, a gift of self, a community wherein one finds drive, fervor, and hope. This is what many Christians think they find in these heavenly apparitions. . . . What must be noted is that this frowned-upon area of apparitions is not without its values: a drive, a conviction, a capacity of communicating, of fighting, and a hoping—values whose possibility of purification and development should be explored. If the whole affair of apparitions is exasperating and degrading, it is in part because it has been abandoned to itself, even despised.⁵⁵

Perhaps something similar should be said as we assess the worth of Pentecostalism as it has appeared in the Catholic Church recently. Is it a genuine hunger for God that is not

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 55.

⁵⁵ Laurentin, *Bulletin* . . . 313.

being satisfied in other ways? Was there a time when it was being satisfied in experiences other than the Pentecostal? What is the significance of the fact that "Catholic Pentecostals return to practices they had abandoned: rosary, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, devotion to Mary?"⁵⁶

Conclusion

Throughout his *Civilization* television series Sir Kenneth Clark made the point that "lack of confidence, more than anything else . . . kills a civilization. We can destroy ourselves by cynicism and disillusion just as effectively as by bombs."⁵⁷ This is advice which Mariologists, and theologians as a whole, would do well to ponder. If we bring our investigation to a close on an optimistic tone, then, it is not in a gesture of offering bromides to rally our spirits. Rather, for effectiveness in our work it is vital to share the confidence which qualified experts tell us they have as they view the future of Mariology. The competence of Canon Gérard Philips in the study of both the Church and Mary is well known, and his opinions have been frequently cited in this paper. He can stand as spokesman for other Catholic scholars as in several pronouncements over the last three years he strikes a consistent note of confidence regarding the Mariology of tomorrow:

Far from becoming superfluous, Mariology is becoming more productive of insights and more irreplaceable. But a certain kind of Mariology must change its methods. Campaigns of propaganda and the exuberance of sentimentalism are no longer appropriate. The theology of the Virgin in the midst of the Church . . . is something quite different in its depth of seriousness.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kilian McDonnell, *Catholic Pentecostalism: Problems in Evaluation*, in *Dialog* 9 (1970) 35-54 as digested in *TD* 19 (1971) 46-54 at 50.

⁵⁷ Clark, *op. cit.* 347.

⁵⁸ Philips, *Mariologie* . . . 28.

Mariology stands before a future profoundly different from its past, perhaps less brilliant on the surface, but more productive within. Its rejuvenation is a fact; it has been purified and deepened, not impoverished. Similarly, though so much more demanding, the intensification of our devotion is more precious than the extension and multiplication of pious practices.⁵⁹

On as shifting a terrain as that on which we stand, it is difficult to say exactly what one must expect, undertake, or abandon. One thing, however, is certain: the sincere and enlightened Catholic can find no motive for defeatism, though he will sometimes have the impression of having to pass through fire.⁶⁰

There is no reason to be discouraged. To lament the progressive demolition of Mariology does not witness to a particularly lively spirit of faith with regard to the Incarnation of the Word of God. . . . Authentic Mariology runs no risk of fading away; within an enlarged synthesis it will command attention even more forcefully than in the past. A crisis can become beneficial, like a thunderstorm that clears the atmosphere and enables us to breathe a purer air.⁶¹

REV. CHARLES W. NEUMANN, S.M.

Saint Mary's University

San Antonio, Texas

⁵⁹ Philips, *La Vierge* . . . 84.

⁶⁰ Philips, *Mariologie* . . . 23.

⁶¹ Philips, *L'Eglise* . . . 212.