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MARY AND THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE*

Students in a parochial school heard their teacher scoff at the idea of learning to recite the Rosary of Mary.

Parishioners were startled to hear a priest advise them to make their Marian devotions at home.

Some young people, upon being questioned, made the response that they never even think of Mary, let alone pray for her help.

Preachers avoid the topic of Mary as model of women and indeed say very little about Mary these days.

To say that Marian devotions have fallen to a low point would be bordering upon an understatement. The fact seems to be that Mary and all that pertains to her have been relegated to the shadows and fringes of renewal within the Church. For some the topic of Mary is an embarrassment, for others it proves simply boring.

Was it the liturgical renewal with its emphasis upon Christ, upon the altar, upon simplicity that ushered Mary out? Or, was it the second Vatican Council, in refusing a separate document to Mary, that has cast the pall of silence upon discussions about Mary? Or, was it, perhaps, Pope Paul VI's proclamation of Mary as Mother of the Church that opened the chasm between Mary and contemporary man?

Although these are reasons offered for the silence prevailing today concerning Mary, those acquainted with the phenomenon readily recognize how specious are such allegations. Far from excluding Mary, the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* notes

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This is an expanded version of a paper read by Fr. Morry at our 1971 meeting. It did not appear in last year's Proceedings because the author was unable to meet our deadline. We are happy to publish it here in the belief that its message has lost none of its freshness and timeliness.

that, "In celebrating this annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, Holy Church honors with special love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God."¹ Far from casting silence about Mary, Vatican II dedicated the entire eighth chapter in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* to the Blessed Virgin Mary, precisising and elaborating her role in salvation history, her place in the Church and the Church's relationship to Mary.² Far from seeking to create a chasm, Pope Paul VI pointedly states: "We especially want it brought out clearly that Mary . . . is completely ordained toward God and toward Christ Jesus, our one Mediator and Redeemer."³

Still, the fact itself is clear: the cult of Mary is largely unintelligible and unacceptable to contemporary man.

I. *Estrangement of Mary and Modern Man*

A. *Difficulties about Mary*

There is a recurring word popular in our day that is applied also to Mary's relationship to modern man. It is *relevance*. But it is applied to Mary in its pejorative sense, i.e., Mary is irrelevant to contemporary man. The reasons to support this contention may be: Mary does not fit into contemporary structures; she is outside of contemporary thought processes; she is alien to our culture for she belonged to a culture long since passed away.

Some argue that the difficulty about Mary lies with her friends. It is alleged that the overzealous and excessive claims put forward by some of her devotees have offended and proved repulsive to others. In any case, Mary is found unacceptable.

B. *Difficulties about Modern Man*

Still, there is the possibility that the reason for the estrange-

¹ Ch. 5, n. 103.

² See: nn. 54, 69.

³ *Exploring the Mystery of the Church*, in *PSp* 10 (1965) n. 2, 140.

ment may lie with modern man. There may be a lack of supernatural faith. Obviously, if God, if Christ is meaningless, then Mary will share similar obscurity. The humanism of contemporary man looks to man since "man is the measure of all things simply because he is in that position and has no choice."⁴ As H. J. Blackham explains: "Humanism proceeds from an assumption that *man* is on his own and this life is all and an assumption of responsibility for one's own life and for the life of mankind."⁵ "If man is on his own, there are no gods to ape. If reason is a human and social property, nobody can be affronted by its use, and its limits are the limits of its use, not a frontier which it is forbidden to penetrate."⁶

Since humanists assume man is on his own, there is little doubt this means an exclusion of God, for "as they assume that man is on his own and this life is all, humanists are virtually atheists."⁷ "The humanist's refusal of worship because the object of worship is not to be found is quite explicit."⁸ What the humanist is indicating is the absolute autonomy of man and of human reason: "the faith of the humanist is first of all in reason;"⁹ "reason is the final standard for the humanist."¹⁰ There is no criterion, then, outside of or above man, for the "inadequacy of humanism from a Christian point of view is an inadequacy measured by a criterion that belongs to a system of ideas which humanists reject."¹¹ Hence, as there is no God, there is no supernatural order, no salvation, for "a society that is held together by the fear of hell and the hope of heaven is not a company of men and women to which it would be safe

⁴ H. J. Blackman, *Humanism* (Baltimore, Md., 1968) 199.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

or congenial to belong."¹² What meaning can Mary or Marian cult have for men of such persuasions?

What meaning can Mary—a virgin and mother—have for a society in which the family is in the process of deterioration? The signs of this deterioration are certainly evident: a rise in divorces, multiple spouses, commune living, abortions, any style of birth control, etc.¹³ Tensions within the society and the evolving culture seriously challenge the very stability of the family. More families are on the move, and this mobility is not one of a pattern but a response to the stresses of the society which may prove quite erratic. As demands upon the woman's time and energies rise, her influence within the family and upon the family diminishes.

The change-process within the culture is sometimes pointed up in dramatic fashion: the blurring of the difference between the sexes. In remarks to an American Medical Association meeting, Professor Harold I. Lief observed that no other activity can any longer be exclusively identified as part of the masculine role, "no behavior is demarcated as masculine or feminine any more."¹⁴ Again, demands for women's liberation are other signs that social structures and patterns are within this change-process. One result of this crisis in family stability is the fear that this may be the portent of the end of the present type of society. So, how communicate Mary, her cult to a society in the tension of change?

The contemporary estrangement from Mary may be not so much a desertion of the Mother of God as it is contemporary man's flight from reality. Why do I say a "flight from reality", especially in view of the fact that so many today demand the "real" thing, demand truth, openness? But examine what is reality for the modern man. It is the existentialist's construct.

¹² *Ibid.*, 197; Vatican II recognized the humanist situation, see: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, nn. 7, 10, 55, 56.

¹³ See the survey article: *The American Family: Future Uncertain*, in *Time* (December 28, 1970) 34-39.

¹⁴ *Behavior Today* 1, n. 29 (Dec. 28, 1970) 1.

It is a world directed to the proportions of man, circumscribed and embraced by the love of man for man. It is a world in which man seeks to achieve protection by introversion. It is a reality into which no god has entered or enters. Simply, it is man pursuing man in his attempt for satisfaction. What it achieves is man facing the horror of the despair of the meaninglessness of existence, or as Camus wrote: "We constantly live toward the future which we should dread because it is death in disguise."¹⁵

With contemporary man all there is and what counts is the *present*. If Mary belongs to an existence that is future and unending, then what possible relationship can there be between Mary, whose existence transcends human categories, and modern man, whose existence is without roots in a past and without fruit in a future? Obviously, in such a context a Marian cult would not be entertained at all.

Along with the so-called explosion in knowledge there has appeared another phenomenon less progressive and more troublesome: skepticism. Some point to it as a product of the current upheavals from renewal. Others view it as a consequence of society's change-process. To some, again, it is an awakening in human knowledge reacting against years of dogmatic utterances. But for others it is a sign of the new values placed upon the person, a sign of the person's search for authenticating realities.

In skepticism each reassessment of knowledge seems to be greeted with scoffing, doubts, equivocations or outright denials. "Credibility-gap" has become a watchword by which to uproot structures or depart from the establishment. This skepticism makes no distinction in its doubts; it questions all. Nor has this skepticism remained purely speculative; it has become the energy, the reason behind behavior. At the level of Church and state it is the authority of the rulers that is questioned or ex-

¹⁵ Quoted in F. J. Sheen, *Footprints in a Darkened Forest* (Meredith, New York, 1967) 10.

plained away. At the level of the family it is the authority of parents which is resisted and finally disavowed. To a skeptical generation, then, how does one communicate Mary or any devotion to her when her identity rests upon authority, even though it be divine authority?

The situations presented are related. In fact, they sustain one another and aggravate one another. Finding himself without family stability, facing a lack of truth or certitude, finding himself in a world empty of meaning without past or future, separated from God, modern man is *lonely*. At the moment he comes to some knowledge about himself and his needs, modern man discovers that his yearnings are not being satisfied. And the anguish of loneliness which fills modern man is so well expressed in his cry "to be concerned," "to care," "to love." The vehicles to escape the prison of loneliness have become so familiar: alcohol, drugs, sex, thefts, acts of physical violence, involvement, erecting new structures, withdrawal from the establishment. But the very factors that aggravate the loneliness of modern man cut him off also from contacts in which his goal would be eternal and not merely the present ideal that can be embraced now. Thus modern man finds himself thrust in upon himself, and the loneliness becomes a fear that can express itself only in despair. What can Mary mean to such men?

II. *Suggestions For the Possible Resolution of the Estrangement of Mary and Modern Man*

A. *Suggestions to the Difficulties About Mary*

The estrangement of modern man from Mary is real, so too are the difficulties in which modern man finds himself. Still, the estrangement is not irrevocable. Mary is relevant to contemporary man for in a sense she has never been out of touch with him. But this must be communicated to modern man.

My suggestions to resolve the estrangement of Mary and modern man will take the form of attempting to resolve the difficulties described above about Mary and modern man.

The observation is made that Mary is irrelevant. Yet the reasons proposed for Mary's irrelevance—that she does not fit into contemporary structures; that she is outside of contemporary processes; that she is alien to our culture—betray a gap in modern man's awareness and understanding of any relationship of Mary and mankind.

Closer examination will bring out the point I wish to stress here. The dictionary describes "relevant": bearing upon or relating to the matter in hand.¹⁶ So, to be relevant, Mary must "bear upon or be related to the *matter in hand*." In our situation of Mary and contemporary man what is the "matter in hand?" To answer this question we must examine those involved in the relationship we are considering: Mary and contemporary man. We may presume the identity of contemporary man for the present, but let us look closer at Mary.

"Our Lady belongs to the wonderful works of God, the *mirabilia Dei*, which are made manifest to man so that they may praise His holy name and acknowledge His merciful designs in regard to mankind."¹⁷ Mary's identity for us rests on: her relationship to God—"Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you" (*Lk.* 1:29); her role in salvation history—"Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? For the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (*Lk.* 1:43-45);¹⁸ her relationship to man-to-be-saved—"Seeing his mother and the disciples he loved standing near

¹⁶ Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Merriam, Springfield, Mass., 1961).

¹⁷ P. F. Pocock, *Mary and the Mystery of the Church*, in HC 1 (1964) 22.

¹⁸ See also *Jn.* 2:1-11.

her, Jesus said to his mother, 'Woman, this is your son' " (*Jn.* 19:26-27).

But we must be cautious in identifying Mary. There is Mary the young Jewish woman who lived many centuries ago, a member of a rather insignificant and obscure nation, and who gave birth to a child. But Mary's identity for us does not rest solely upon her social and cultural existence; rather it is her existence in salvation history that properly identifies Mary, the Mother of God and of all the faithful.

So Mary is totally God-oriented, this is the sum of Mary's identity. It is under this identity that Mary is to be presented to modern man. Now the "matter in hand" is the salvation of all men. In this context Mary, certainly, is relevant to contemporary man. The reasons, then, proposed that Mary is irrelevant are not convincing, for it is not solely to contemporary structures, thought processes, or to culture to which Mary is related but to man who seeks salvation.

Again, some object that too much has been said about Mary, that she has been oversold by her devotees. But does this add up to a sufficient reason to put down the Mother of God? We are able to separate the bombast from the substance, *if we care*. Simply, we don't ignore things we are interested in or concerned about because someone is shouting about them too loudly.

B. Suggestions to the Difficulties About Modern Man

How approach the difficulty regarding the displacing of supernatural faith with humanism? There are two points I wish to emphasize here: first, to communicate the word of God; second, to place Mary properly in the context of Salvation History. Obviously the first point leads to the second.

Since faith is a conviction about God and the things of God, we must communicate the word of God. This apostolate the Apostles clearly recognized: "we will . . . continue to devote

ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word."¹⁹ Still, in our zeal to be contemporary we must avoid communicating what Vatican II describes as our own wisdom, and not remain too abstract.²⁰ This thought is aptly expressed by a contemporary author: "We must translate ourselves there, to where the Word is, if we are to succeed in bringing the word from there, the past, to where we stand."²¹

The basic assumption about humanism is its insistence that man is the measure of things; that reason is his final standard; and that man is responsible for his own life. To this assumption faith is to be offered. For we accept God's revelation by faith, and it is by faith that we seek the salvation of God revealed to us in Christ.²² But faith, as St. Paul states, comes through hearing: "But they will not ask his help unless they believe in him, and they will not believe in him unless they have heard of him, and they will not hear of him unless they get a preacher" (*Rom.* 10:14). And the teacher must make it clear that it is the word of God and not man's word that the hearer receives.²³ Within this context of God's word, then, we may consider Mary and her response in faith to the divine reality.

The Good News is about God, about His relationship to man, about His action with respect to man and man's final end,

¹⁹ *Acts*, 6:1-5; also, *Rom.* 10:14-17.

²⁰ Vatican II; *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*: "the task of priests is not to teach their own wisdom but God's word . . . If it is to influence the mind of the listener more fruitfully, such preaching must not present God's word in a general and abstract fashion only, but it must apply the perennial truth of the gospel to the concrete circumstances of life" (n. 4).

²¹ J. Ratzinger, *Priestly Ministry. A Search for its Meaning*, in *Eml.* 76 (1970) 495.

²² R. Bultmann and A. Weiser, *Faith, Bible Key Words*, 3 (ed. Kittel, New York, 1961) 87; J. Alfaro, *The Dual Aspect of Faith: Entrusting Oneself to God and Acceptance of the Christian Message*, in *Conc.* 21 (New York, 1967) 59, 61.

²³ Cf. *I Tess.* 1:3-10; *I Cor.* 5:2; *Eph.* 1:13.

about His election of Mary. We may now describe Mary as she fulfills the role to which she was called: she conceived Christ and gave birth to Him; she raised Christ; she was concerned about Christ and was involved with Him in the saving work. We may present Mary as a model of faith, for "She remains the woman who took upon herself, in God, the universality of the world and salvation in her own particular historical context, by receiving Christ and giving birth to Him. The situation is no longer the same, but Mary remains a model in the way she accepted her own situation in order to receive and radiate Christ in faith."²⁴ Further, we may present Mary as a human ideal, for Christ saved us in His humanity. As it is on the human level that Christ attracts us, we must be drawn to Mary for it was by the work of Mary that the humanity of Christ was constituted.²⁵ But Mary then returns us to Christ from whom she received her place in salvation history and her existence in the order of grace.

The difficulty about Marian cult relative to family instability is a most vexing problem, yet admitting an answer. Families find themselves in societies tense with the problems of education, changing structures, the changing feminine situation, and the like. Yet, the dimension of an eternal end is missing. I would stress here that one's personal salvation polarizes man's day-to-day activities. A mistake would be to attempt to identify Mary with the contemporary scientific-technological culture. Mary's role pertains to that mode of existence in which modern man may achieve his personal salvation. Eternal salvation is to reach beyond oneself. Mary stands as the example that it is possible to man—she reached and gave birth to the God-man in whom all humanity may now be transformed. It is Mary's Son who states: "whoever listens to my words and believes in

²⁴ R. Laurentin, *Mary and Womanhood in the Renewal of Christian Anthropology*, in *MLS* 1 (1970) 80; M. F. Morry, *Mary and the Crisis of Faith*, in *MS* 20 (1969) 70-88.

²⁵ Laurentin, *op. cit.*, 80-81.

the one who sent me, has eternal life" (*Jn.* 5:24). In Mary's motherhood we can see how God transforms man's world and man's life: "Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved" (*Jn.* 3:16-17). It is now the world that possesses the divine presence so that man may raise his life to an eternal existence. A witness to the entrance of the divine into man's world is Mary. She remains a constant reminder that all of man's existence is not used up or terminated in contemporary society. There is eternity, and one does not wash out of one's life his eternal end even though the present life is engulfed with difficulties.

There is another serious aspect to be fruitfully pondered. It is the biblical conjugal symbolism of the relationship of God and His people. St. Paul (*Eph.* c. 5) precises it to marriage between Christ and the Church as the model of the marriage-sacrament.²⁶ The Christ-Church marriage is a mystery of many facets, but basically it is the model for all marriages between a man and a woman. Suddenly, human marriage is not simply a contract but the mediatory-saving act given and received. Suddenly, the family is not merely the unit for a political state but the antitype of the spouse of Christ, the Church.²⁷ As the antitype of the Church, then, the family

²⁶ While St. Paul concretizes the analogy to the relationship of Christ and the Church, the analogy had its foundation in the earlier biblical witness: *Hos.* c. 2; *Is.*, 51,17,21-22; 52: 1-2, 7-8, 12; 54:4-8; 61:10-11; 62:4-5; *Song of Songs*; *Jer.*, 31:17-22; *Ez.* c. 16; *Ps.* 45 (44); and see *I Cor.* 11:2-14.

²⁷ Cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 11: "For from the wedding of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born. By the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism these are made children of God, thus perpetuating the People of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church." St. Thomas had already enuniated this aspect of the marriage sacrament: "Some propagate and maintain the spiritual life through a uniquely

comes forth as the reservoir of holiness, as the object of divine predilection, as the vehicle of divine communication.²⁸

But the Church, the spouse, finds all that she is and aspires to be in Mary²⁹ who in the archetype of the Church.³⁰ The Church is fruitful in bringing forth numerous holy children to God; Mary's fruitfulness brought forth the Incarnate Son of God.³¹ In Mary the Church is immaculate, saved, already glorified.³²

Thus, as the Church finds all that she is and aspires to be in Mary, so too the family—the basic element of the ecclesial body—finds its archetype is Mary. In Mary the communal life of the spouses finds its profoundest and most exalted expression of conjugal love. For in Mary the spouses find the fruit-

spiritual ministry; that is the concern of the Sacrament of Orders. Others do it through a ministry that is both corporeal and spiritual; this is carried out in the Sacrament of Marriage, which unites man and woman so that they may beget offspring and rear them to worship God" (*Contra Gentes*, IV, 58).

²⁸ There is a double antitype involved here: the relationship of husband to wife as antitype of the relationship of Christ to the Church; then the communal life of the spouses as antitype to the Church. Cf. *PSP*, 15 (1970) 122-124.

²⁹ Cf. *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, c. 5, n. 103; *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, nn. 64, 65.

³⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Church and World* (Herder and Herder, N.Y., 1967) 132: "The Church flowing forth from Christ finds her personal center in Mary as well as the full realization of her idea as Church."

³¹ *Ibid.*: "This fruitfulness, therefore, which was previously predicated of the Church as prototype of the fruitfulness of the members, when, from being born, passively, in baptism, they actively bring forth the life of Christ, in themselves and in the Church—this paradigmatic fruitfulness is, in Mary, so far surpassed, raised to such potency, that she not only does what the Church does—bring forth Christ—but does it archetypally, in that she lets the Head of the Church take flesh in her, him whom the Church will, in turn, deliver from out of herself. The process on the ecclesial level, whereby the soul born of Christ in turn conceives and bears him, in the order of the body, this process is elevated to become an archetypal process in which Mary, preserved from original sin by the grace of Christ's cross, conceives and bears him in the order of the Head."

³² Cf. *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, c. 8, n. 68.

fulness of the communal life to be not simply that of the sex-relationship but the proto-typal realization of marriage between God and man. In Mary's response of faith the spouses find the principle and exemplar of their own response to the groom, God. Since the biblical symbolism of the marriage of God and humanity signifies essentially love, the response of the spouses must be a response of faith and also of love. Mary typifies for humanity the response of love, for in her bridal consent (*fiat*) she was acting in the name of the entire human nature.³³ Now love is the essential condition for each soul to bear the fruit of God—"By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples (*Jn.* 13:35)—and Christ Himself gives testimony of this response of love from Mary—"My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice" (*Lk.* 8:12).³⁴

So, while Mary is the exemplar for spouses, she is also source of encouragement, of confidence to the spouses in their routine of domestic life that they are indeed spouses not only of one another but also of God. In their trials, their anguish about daily living, the tensions they must bear from an often hostile society because of their ultimate commitment, the spouses will find again in Mary the exemplar who was no stranger to profound suffering and sorrow. While it is Christ who brought the Church into being by His passion, Mary "took part, as an intermediary, in this creation by the universality and unrestrictedness of her *fiat*, . . . Her presence with him at the cross, her agreement of His abandonment of her to the Church in the midst of His dereliction on the cross, her eternal role as the woman in labor (*Rev.* 12), show how fully her self-surrender is universalized to become the common source, the productive womb of all Christian grace."³⁵

³³ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, III/30/1c.

³⁴ See also *Lk.* 11:27-28, but in conjunction with *Lk.* 1:38, 45.

³⁵ Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 137.

The marriage-sacrament enters really into that mystery of the relationship God-Mary-Church. Marriage need no longer remain an obstacle to true personal identity; rather it brings out the role of the spouses also in salvation history. The spouses will find in Mary illumination and an understanding of their role since she is for spouses, as she is for the Church, archetype of the sponsal response to God's love.³⁶

In his flight from reality modern man has devised a reality without a god, and with only the present. The present demands that modern man seek satisfaction in the world and in other men. Is this, then, the sum of modern man's flight from reality? What is the essential point of our lives? "We are witnesses," observes Marcel, "and that is the expression of our mode of belonging to the world."³⁷ But witnesses to what? Man must witness "that there is in the depth of Nature, as of reason which is governed by it, a fundamental principle of inadequacy to itself which is, as it were, a restless anticipation of a different order."³⁸ So, man must give hearing to the past, observe the present, be aware of the future. And this expanse of past, present and future is the expanse of salvation history.

Salvation history is the story of man's flight from God and of God's pursuit of man. Mary is very much a part of salvation history, as Sacred Scripture instructs us. Mary is the instrument of God's "instant" pursuit. For it was through Mary that the Savior of man entered the world. Since Mary's *fiat* the world of man, all that reality man identifies as his environ-

³⁶ It is clear that what I have said here briefly and in epitomized form barely begins to express the fruitfulness of the basic idea being examined of the biblical conjugal symbolism of God's relationship to His people. There are the Marian and Ecclesial dimensions, as also the familial (domestic) and personal dimensions; along with which must be examined such elements as the sacraments, redemption, the apostolate, faith, hope, love, grace, unity, etc.

³⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism* (The Citadel Press, N.Y., 1967) 97.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

ment, has not been the same. Where contemporary man in his flight seeks solace in the love of man for man, Mary lays before the eyes of the world God's love for man. To modern man's reality in which no god has entered, Mary brings God Incarnate. To that agonizing cry of Camus that we should dread the future "because it is death in disguise"³⁹ Mary brings the eternal life incarnate.

If our mode of belonging to the world is to give witness not only to the temporality of the existential moment but to the transcendence which is present at each existential moment, contemporary man will find the exemplar of such witness in Mary. Mary involved herself. Whether in things purely mundane, or in those belonging to the expanse of salvation history, Mary involved herself with the sure confidence of the *faith-full* witness: she visited Elizabeth who was expecting the birth of her child (*Lk.* 1:39-56); she spoke up on behalf of the married couple at Cana (*Jn.* 2:1-11); she gave her consent to the Incarnation (*Lk.* 1:38); she fulfilled the Law in presenting the Child at the temple (*Lk.* 2:25-27); she joined with the Apostles in continuous prayer (*Acts* 1:14). As involvement and witness are contemporary man's mode of expressing his identity, he finds the exemplar of total involvement and witness in Mary. For Mary lays before contemporary man involvement in temporal and eternal affairs; she brings to contemporary man witness to the world and to the Creator of that world, God. We may conclude that it is Mary's role in salvation history, in a certain sense, to put an end to man's flight from reality since that is why she brought God among men.

We have noted the seriousness of the phenomenon of skepticism among contemporary men. Some view skepticism as flowing from the societal change-process. Others see it as a protest against dogmatic pronouncements, or as a sign of personal authentication, or as a product of renewal. But, is it

³⁹ See note 15 above.

really a product of renewal? Skepticism and renewal are antithetical. There is no renewal in skepticism. It remains the exercise of skepticism to question, to doubt, to place all *possible* positions in phase against each other with no hope or promise of resolution or composition. Renewal, on the other hand, denotes to make over, to make anew. Renewal demands a resolution, or at least some form of composition that may be compromise. For to make something over, whatever the reality, demands a cessation of questioning, a resolution of doubts; it demands a decision. One thing must be chosen over against or in place of another and *used* to accomplish the making over. Therein lies the impotency of skepticism: it never accomplishes anything since it does not come to a decision.

When it is stated that skepticism is a consequence of society's change-process, this is an attempt to identify legitimate change, even evolution, with a state of stagnation. The change-process in society betokens a form of progress. Skepticism stands in negation to any progress; it opts to remain as it is. The change-process in society may arouse questions, difficulties, tensions. We are well aware, however, that there is a goal: to seek improvement.

There is a pervasive weakness in skepticism, for it proclaims its own contradiction. What can be more dogmatic an issue than the stance of skepticism that nothing can be held with certitude but everything must be questioned, all judgment must be suspended? Hence, if the skeptic is to take issue with dogmatic statements, it may not be precisely on the grounds that they are dogmatic for skepticism proclaims its own position dogmatically. Further, skepticism is a misleading sign of any person's search for authenticity. How can any person achieve authenticity with an intellectual commitment to no certification, and to inbred contradiction? Authentication must insist upon decision, upon commitment to a goal which no skeptic can support.

Similarly, there is a lack of relevance to the skeptic's questioning of authority. If all judgments about statements, po-

sitions or whatever are to be suspended, what finally is accomplished? If the skeptic opposes or rejects authority, then he is no longer a skeptic but a *convinced* rebel. The difference is significant.

The skeptic lacks faith that his own intellectual abilities can attain any certitude or truth. He lacks faith in other men, in their abilities for accomplishments. Contemporary man also betrays a lack of faith in divine realities, a lack of conviction about God and His word revealed to us. And it is precisely to this lack of faith that Mary, the exemplar of faith, responds.

No one can deny that Mary knew her moments of questioning, or of wonder. She questioned the angel about how the Incarnation was to take place (*Lk.* 1:34). She questioned her Son about his stay in Jerusalem (*Lk.* 2:48). Mary stood wondering at the words of Simeon (*Lk.* 2:28-35). Mary confronted authority when she voiced the difficulty at the marriage feast at Cana (*Jn.* 2:1-11). What were Mary's thoughts and emotions on Calvary where lack of confidence in her Son was all too evident?⁴⁰

Mary questioned, she wondered, she withdrew into silence. But in each case the results set her apart from the barrenness of the skeptic. Mary questioned the angel. For what reason? To get an answer. Her consent to the angel's message is proof of Mary's readiness to accept the answer of her faith (*Lk.* 1:45). Here we have an approach to modern man's skepticism. Mary's questioning with faith produces the birth of the Savior; the skeptic's questioning remains barren. Mary gives an example of a way in which questioning may be fulfilled—when the questioning is accompanied by faith. And for contemporary man this may mean faith, at least, in his own intellectual abilities.

⁴⁰ Any conclusion about Mary's emotional state would be conjecture. Of this, however, we can be sure: whatever her own confidence in her Son, the absence of His intimate followers betrayed their lack of confidence. She was witness to that absence.

Mary wondered, and in her wonderment withdrew into silence (*Lk.* 2.19, 33, 51). But again, Mary's wonderment was a wonder seeking understanding. If Mary remained silent, if she took the event, the statements into her heart, it was to *probe* them. She did not merely suspend judgment. With her own intellectual abilities she set about seeking to understand, while accepting all that was taking place because of her faith in the power and word of God.

When Mary voiced her observation about the lack of wine at the marriage at Cana she was, in effect, confronting authority: "Woman, why turn to me?" The ensuing miracle is sign enough of what faith can effect before authority. While contemporary man's skeptical confrontation with and about authority—ecclesiastical or civil—produces distrust, disdain, rebellion, Mary's confrontation brought about the fulfillment of the request laid before the authority because of her faith.

On Calvary (*Jn.* 19:25-27) once again Mary confronted authority. While her position remained wordless, Christ voiced the answer of God—for the sacrifice of this Son, God gave to Mary all men to be her children. Once more Mary's faith became fruitful before authority, in contrast to the nihilistic attitude of contemporary man before authority.

If the contemporary skeptic is honestly looking for answers, for understanding, for a satisfying response from authority, we may offer him an exemplar in Mary. For Mary conveys not only the fact that faith is necessary if there are to be answers, understanding and fulfillment in this world, but that the faith must have an ultimate dimension—faith in God.

Finally, the paradox: modern man sensitive to, concerned and vocal about overpopulation is *lonely*! Without family stability modern man misses the basic at-one-ness which might have averted his loneliness. When truth or certitude is lacking, when love is betrayed as self-interest, when there is no complete commitment to another, when all has been tasted and the world is without meaning, without God, loneliness results.

Still, loneliness does not happen all at once. Nor does loneliness arise only because of neglect or being ignored by another. The lonely man contributes to his loneliness. When one gets into the drug scene, when one indulges in sex or alcohol, or when one gets involved in active anti-establishment protests, such an individual begins to isolate himself from his family, his friends, his acquaintances. Yet, why does one isolate himself? May not the reason be because of a fear that he is uncared for, unloved because of a defect in himself? Isn't the bizarre behavior a symptom of the despair the lonely man is experiencing?

Whatever one may wish to call it—kindness, care, concern—the basic cure for loneliness is love. If you do not care about another—about his need, about his pain, about his isolation, about his humanness—you do not give yourself to the other. You do not love the other. And love is giving self to other to the point that giving self is taking up other.

Sacred Scripture reveals to us that God takes up humanity to Himself in Mary, the Mother of God-Incarnated. Sacred Scripture further instructs us that this happened because Mary gave herself, she loved.

Mary certainly does not seek to alleviate the loneliness of modern man by distractions. She simply shows she cares by giving herself. She gave herself at the Annunciation. In her consent (*fiat*) Mary gave herself in order that the divine will be accomplished. The Incarnation was not solely for the well-being of Mary; it was, rather, for the salvation of humanity.⁴¹ God has preserved the record of Mary's total giving of herself to the accomplishment of salvation: "Behold, I am the hand-maid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (*Lk.* 1:38).

While Mary's *fiat* at the Annunciation signaled her love for all men, her visit to Elizabeth individualized, concretized

⁴¹ Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 134.

Mary's involvement with men and expressed her love on this personal plane. St. Luke's words—"Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country" (1:39)—graphically portray the care, the concern of this young woman for her kinswoman. It was not messages, gifts or other tokens that Mary sent Elizabeth, Mary went; Mary stayed. Mary gave herself to Elizabeth.

There was, also, the occasion of that other plainly human concern, Mary's love for the married couple at Cana (*Jn.* 2: 1-11). So the wine had run out. Really, what concern of hers? Mary cared enough to speak up, to get involved. St. John indicates Mary's love somewhat startlingly: "Do whatever he tells you" (vs. 5). She loved God so well, what could God return to that love except love?

St. John, again, expresses very simply the extent and depth of Mary's love: "There was standing by the cross of Jesus his Mother" (19:25). The mother lovingly consented to the sacrifice of her Son.⁴² But her love remains eternally fruitful "until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect."⁴³

Certainly God has a purpose in preserving these events about Mary for us. To modern man in his loneliness we offer Mary whose love helps a man to understand the brotherhood of all men: Mary gave herself at the Annunciation in the name of all mankind; her Son died for all men. Mary's love helps to understand that truth and meaning are in the world, for God is in the world. With Mary as guide, certainly modern man may be directed out of his loneliness into oneness with other men, into a world of truth and meaning, into love, which is ultimately the encounter with God in which God gives Himself to man who gives himself.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the problem about modern man and Mary, it is

⁴² *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 58.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, n. 62; cf. also Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 137.

clear that to understand Mary she must be considered within the context of salvation history. One may raise the problem of contemporary life in the family and society, or of modern man's flight from reality, or the prevalence of skepticism and the presence of loneliness among men of our day. If it is important to keep in mind contemporary man's frame of reference, it is of even greater necessity to be mindful of Mary's true role. Mary is no feminine liberationist, but she is the woman from whom God sought her consent to conceive and give birth to the Savior. Mary is no crusader for birth control or abortion; rather she was fruitful in her virginity. To harrassed spouses Mary is the exemplar of the communal response to God's call and love. To man fleeing a meaningless, possibility empty reality, Mary offers the instruction about man's place in reality as witness and his role in the expanse of salvation history. To the contemporary skeptic Mary offers the answer of faith to all the questions and doubts and withdrawals, and that faith must have an ultimate dimension. Since loneliness is as a cry of the man who is unloved, Mary gently, simply gives herself. She loves the lonely man in our midst, for she is his mother in the order of grace.

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