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# **INTRODUCTION: THE BLESSED VIRGIN’S RELATIONSHIP TO THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION—BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, AND THE EUCHARIST**

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*Sister Danielle M. Peters, STD,  
President of the Mariological Society of America*

It was a special privilege and joy for the 68th meeting of the Mariological Society of America to take place on May 16–19, 2017, at the Schoenstatt Center of Lamar, TX, in the shadow of the Confidentia Shrine, one of more than 200 replicas of the original Shrine in Schoenstatt, Germany.

The theme of the conference was “Mary and The Sacraments of Initiation.” It will be followed by next year’s topic, which will explore the relationship of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the sacraments of vocation and healing. As is customary, we invited the local ordinary to join us for the conference or at least for part of it. Unfortunately, Bishop Michael Mulvey, STL, DD, was unable to come, but he sent a letter to Father Thompson, the secretary of the MSA.

“No human mother can limit her task solely to the procreation of new human beings; she must also undertake the task of nourishing them and educating them. So it is with

the Blessed Virgin Mary.”<sup>1</sup> Thus wrote Paul VI in *Signum Magnum*. Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, had already asserted that “This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation ... lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. ... By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth...until they are led into the happiness of their true home.”<sup>2</sup>

How exactly are we to understand Our Lady’s motherhood in the order of grace?<sup>3</sup> Does this occur when the sacraments are administered and in post sacramental formation of Christians? At issue is the singular unique cooperation of Mary with the Savior in the entire work of redemption. As spiritual mother, Mary gives birth to Christians and nurtures them spiritually. Her ongoing maternal role includes a formative and educational influence on every child of God. This formation aims at the fostering of the supernatural life and divine grace received with the sacraments but is not limited to it.

The Christian life, as we well know, does not simply begin with human dispositions and endowments, but with sacraments assisting neophytes in becoming a new creation in Christ. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) explains that being “a new creature” signals a new level of existence, comparable to a second birth. The neophyte

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<sup>1</sup> Paul VI, *Signum Magnum*, Apostolic Exhortation on Venerating and Imitating the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Model of All Virtues (May 13, 1967), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (November 21, 1964), 62.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

becomes a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4; cf. Gal 4:5-7),<sup>4</sup> and in virtue of this profound spiritual transformation are called to a corresponding way of life set apart from others.<sup>5</sup> Endowed with these gifts of God’s Love, Christians nevertheless experience the dichotomy of being in this world yet not of this world. The Fathers of the Church ... frequently teach us that the mysteries of Christ, which the Church, our virgin mother, celebrates in the sacraments of Christian initiation, were “accomplished” in Mary, the Virgin Mother: the Spirit who sanctifies the womb of the Church, that is, the font of baptism—to bring forth children of God, sanctified Mary’s womb so that she might bring forth the firstborn of many brothers and sisters (see Hebrews 2:11-15); the same Spirit who, on the day of Pentecost, came down upon the Blessed Virgin with an abundance of gifts, comes down from heaven upon the newly baptized in the celebration of the sacrament of confirmation; the body and blood—that Christ offered on the altar of the cross for the life of the world and that the Church offers daily in the eucharistic sacrifice— are the same body and blood that the Blessed Virgin Mary brought forth for our salvation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press 1994), 1265.

<sup>5</sup> For more see: John Paul II, *Christifidelis Laici, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World* (December 30, 1988), 15.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Excerpts from the introductory commentary to the Mass “Holy Mary, Fountain of Light and Life.” See: *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Volume 1, Sacramentary, (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 79. <https://udayton.edu/imri/marty/c/collection-of-masses-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary.php>

The articles in this issue of *Marian Studies* shed light on Our Lady's role in and for the sacramental life of the Church and each Christian. Although a crucial component of Mary's role for the Mystical Body of Christ, the theme receives only marginal attention in recent theological, magisterial, or pastoral documents.<sup>7</sup> To my knowledge, the 2017 and 2018 MSA meetings represent the first time that two academic conferences have investigated the Marian dimension of the Sacraments. It is hoped that the articles derived from these conferences will not only reap fruit for scholarly investigations but also for pastoral applications.

Dr. Ann Astell's article "*Tota Pulchra Es: Mary, the Song of Songs, and the Sacraments,*" demonstrates that the ancient sacramental understanding of the lyrical images of the Song of Songs gradually fused with the Church's understanding of Mary, the God-bearer. The Marian interpretation of the Song of Songs began in the early Church and came to its full flowering in the High Middle Ages. The liturgies for Marian feasts and the verse-by-verse commentaries, linked Mary as "full of grace" to the sacraments of the Church. This insight, in turn, inspired catechetical visual art to intermingle the metaphors of the Song with the iconography of the sacraments.

At the 2017 MSA conference, Fr. Antonio Larocca presented a paper on "The Maternal Presence of Mary in the

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<sup>7</sup> The following magisterial documents offer subtle references to Mary's educational task: John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in our Time (October 16, 1979), 73. Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation* (March 25, 1988), 7. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, Encyclical Letter on the Splendor of Truth (August 6, 1993), 120. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City, Washington, D.C.: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, c2000), 2599.

Sacramental Life of the Church” in Latin America, highlighting “The Mystagogical, Catechetical, and Pastoral Itinerary since the Aparecida Document.” Although signed and promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI, we know, that the Aparecida document bears the penmanship of Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, the president of its editorial committee. The concern of the future pope was “that Our Lady would be a “transversal element” of the document ... as indeed happened later.” Fr. Antonio’s paper investigated “the grace of Christ, the epicletic action of the Holy Spirit and the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the sacramental life of the church.” In addition, it draws attention to a pastoral catechetical model, the procession of the Divina Pastora in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. It is hoped that Fr. Antonio’s paper will appear in a future issue of *Marian Studies*.

My article in this present issue explores the Immaculate Conception as “a forceful sign of God’s grace operative within the neophyte. In response to the PAMI Document, *The Mother of the Lord: Memory, Presence, Hope*, the article compares the privilege of the Immaculate Conception to the gift of baptismal grace and establishes the relationship of the sacramental rebirth to Mary’s *fiat*.

Fr. Miller then introduces us to The Baptismal Spirituality of St. Louis de Montfort. During many parish missions especially among the poor, the missionary apostolic established post-baptismal catechumenates explaining Our Blessed Mother’s role in the generation and nurturance of the Life of Grace in the souls of the faithful. Fr. Miller’s article explores de Montfort’s charism in the light of contemporary pastoral needs.

The sole presentation exploring Mary's relationship to the sacrament of confirmation at the 2017 conference was given by Dr. Jacob Phillips and titled: "Confirmation in the Spirit by Conformation to Mary: The Gifts of the Spirit in Mariological Perspective." Drawing on the origins of confirmation, the article notes that this sacrament is fundamentally Marian in texture, and stimulating an orientation in the soul by which Christ can be brought to birth in human life. Broader implications of this argument surround the interrelation of nature and grace whereby theological discussions in our day often fail to present Mary as link of the natural and spiritual realms.

The next article in the present volume is Msgr. Calkins' exploration of "Mary's Presence in the Mass according to St. John Paul II: Precedents and Comparisons." Based on his extensive research of this topic, Msgr. Calkins compares John Paul II's teaching to the works of theologians and mystics.

Fr. Dwight P. Campbell, the current vice president of the MSA, speaks to us about "St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868) and Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament." His article explores the theological underpinnings of the title, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, focusing on St. Peter Eymard's insights on Our Lady as the most perfect adorer of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The article by Sr. Theresa Marie Chau Nguyen, OP, examines Mary's role in relation to the Church and the Eucharist, according to Hans Urs von Balthasar. She argues that the participation of the faithful in the Paschal mystery takes a feminine form insofar as the Church, when celebrating the Eucharist, participates in Mary's bridal

response to God, which enabled the *sacrum conubium* at the Incarnation. Likewise, it is Mary's disposition in the believer that makes Eucharistic existence the pulse of ecclesial existence.

Fr. Edward Looney's article is on "Theological Themes in the Marian Eucharistic Meditations of Fr. Daniel A. Lord, SJ." In 1952, Fr. Daniel A. Lord, SJ, known to many as the Hollywood Priest, published a spiritual classic *Christ in Me* (The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin), a compilation of thanksgivings following reception of Holy Communion. Of the more than 60 meditations, ten focus on making thanksgiving with Our Lady, in union with Our Lady, and in imitation of Mary. Fr. Edward's article demonstrates the profundity of Lord's Marian Eucharistic meditations and the rich theological insight they provide.

Richard May's article ponders the invocation to "Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament." He explores the historical development and theological foundation for this title, drawing from the writings of the saints which bring to light the close association between Mary and the Eucharist.

As is the custom, this issue of *Marian Studies* concludes with the presentation of a "Select Marian Bibliography, 2016-2017" compiled by Fr. Thomas A. Thompson, SM, the secretary of the MSA.



