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Mary and the Fullness of Time

JEAN DANIELOU, S. J.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Jean Danielou, S. J., is widely known in Europe and America for the great influence he has had in current theological thinking. Born in France in 1905, and ordained a Jesuit priest in 1938, he is now a professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris, and an editor of *Etudes*.

Father Danielou's major interests have been the Greek Fathers, the theology of history, and the development of the Ecumenical movement. Many Americans became acquainted with him when he taught at the University of Notre Dame summer school in 1950.

His first work to be translated into English was *The Salvation of the Nations*, (Sheed and Ward, 1949). This present reprint is a selection from a work written in 1948 and published in the United States in 1951: *Advent*, a book which deals with the issues involved in conversion to Christianity.

*(published with ecclesiastical approbation)*
MARY AND THE FULLNESS OF TIME

JEAN DANIELOU, S. J.

The part played by Our Lady in the whole economy of salvation and in the inner life of every Christian, is coming more and more into view in contemporary Catholic life. Some people are worried by this, because it seems to widen the gulf between us and our Protestant brethren. But if, as I think, we are, in our Mariology, faithful to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, tending gradually over the course of years to a more exact understanding of the truth contained in Holy Scripture, then this cannot prove a lasting cause of separation between Christians.

What I should like to show is that the function the Catholic Church gives to Mary, in all essentials - and I shall not go into all the various forms of devotion that have grown up around it - is not something we are adding to the teaching of Scripture nor a throwback to paganism, nor the sublimation of this or that instinct, but something that comes to us from the mind of the Word of God Himself, as it comes to be more clearly understood over the course of centuries by the faith of the community and the tradition of the Magisterium, acted upon by the Holy Ghost, who is always at work in the Church. What we are dealing with is one of the most mysterious of all truths - no concession to reason, but rather a grave difficulty for reason - that a woman was chosen to be the Mother of God, and that, according to God's unchangeable plan, this woman was to have the same relationship to the members of Christ as she had to Christ Himself. And if, as I intend to try here, we can show people that Our Lady's role tied in with all that had gone before in the Old Testament, that will be the best way to justify our view of the part she still plays in history, and especially in preparing the nations which are still in expectation of the coming of Christ.

The Blessed Virgin had a most crucial role in the first coming of Christ. In her culminated all the expectation of the Jewish people, insofar as all the preparations, aspirations, inspirations, graces, prefigurations which had filled the Old Testament, all came together and were summed up in her; it is true to say that at the eve of Christ's coming she was the epitome and incarnation of the long waiting of twenty centuries. The whole of
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the Old Testament seems to come together in her with a more ardent longing and a more complete spiritual preparation for Our Lord's coming. 

Omnis vallisimplebitur, et omnis collis humiliabitur. "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low."

The work of the Old Testament was one of education: mankind, rugged, coarse, as yet unformed, still utterly carnal-mined, must be made able, bit by bit, to take God's gifts, to receive the Holy Ghost. It was a long, progressive work of training. And the training culminated in the soul of the Blessed Virgin; and if we can say that in some sense her soul is outside time, and that in her eternity is present, then we may also say that she was prepared by the education of the whole of her people: she is the marvelous flower sprung out of Israel, the final point in the mysterious work of the Holy Ghost in the souls of all the prophets and all the holy women of Israel.

All that was done in the soul of Sara, in the soul of Rebecca, in the soul of Rachel, in the soul of Ruth, all that was accomplished in the souls of all the great women of the Old Testament, was brought to its perfect fullness in the soul of Mary. It is, in fact, absolutely true to say that in her "every valley was filled, every mountain and hill brought low." That is to say, in her Our Lord's path was smooth before Him.

A SENSE OF GOD

What was this education that Israel, and through Israel all mankind, had to be given that it might become a fit path for Our Lord? They must first be given a sense of God. Primitive Israel had no sense of God, or, rather, had a totally wrong and gross conception of Him. To them everything was God, and yet nothing was God. Primitive mankind tended to divinize everything, but never came near the true God. To them the smallest stone that stood up, the smallest tree on a hilltop, the smallest spring, was a hidden and wonderful presence of something divine. It was, fundamentally, idolatrous, adoring the creature as if it were creator.

The first step in the Holy Spirit's education of humanity was, then, to wean it from idol-worship, and lead it to acknowledge and recognize the one true God. Throughout the history of the Jews we feel the tension going on, the people forever hankering after their idols. Whenever they
came in contact with the Egyptians, the Chanaanites, the Babylonians, we see how they are drawn, how the primitive element comes forward, because they were still carnal, still close to carnal nature.

God used a sort of violence to drag them away from their naturist leanings, from the powers of earth and of plants, to lead them back to recognizing the one Holy God, Who is a transcendent, a devouring God, a God Who is, in a way, hard to bear for a humanity as yet fragile, new, for whom the weight of God is almost too heavy. That was what Rilke meant when he said of the angels: "Their presence is the first degree of the terrible." Mankind must try to get used to bearing God, although His weight on their shoulders is so great that they try at first to get away from it. Throughout the history of Israel God is constantly reproaching His people for being unfaithful, because they went to adore in high places and under every green tree. In chapter sixteen of the book of Ezechiel they are told: "And. . . after all thy wickedness. . . thou didst also build thee a common stew and madest thee a brothel house in every street. At every head of the way thou hast set up a sign of thy prostitution, and hast made thy beauty to be abominable, and hast prostituted thyself to every one that passed by, and hast multiplied thy fornications." Israel had been given the honor of being chosen the only bride of Yahweh, and every turning to false gods was unfaithfulness to Him.

It was quite the contrary with the Blessed Virgin; she came at the end of this long, slow process of education, and had the perfect sense of God and His unity. If we compare her fidelity with Israel's infidelity, we see how the mystery of the education of Israel was being perfectly fulfilled in her: she is the Virgo fidelis, the faithful virgin, who was never anything but faithful, whose fidelity was the perfect answer to the fidelity of God; she was always entirely consecrated to the one true God.

The liturgy, then, is quite right to apply to her the words of the spouse in the Canticle, for it is the nuptial song for the marriage of the Word with His people, the poem of the Covenant, and she it was, who after so many infidelities, gave, by her fidelity, all mankind's answer to the faithfulness of God. One might say that this aspect of Our Lady is the one most closely connected with the Father, the source of the unity in the Trinity.
The mystery of the education of Israel is, in the second place, the mystery of grace, the giving of divine life to mankind. And we can see that, at the beginning, Israel had no notion that this was what was happening. They thought God had chosen them to give them temporal goods, to lead them out of the slavery of Egypt where their life was so hard, where they made bricks out of mud and ground-up straw under Egyptian overseers; they thought that God led them across the desert simply to give them the promised land, a land literally flowing with milk and honey, milk for them to drink, honey to eat - a land of plump cows, giving birth to fine calves, a land of bees whose honey would feed the children of Israel. This is what they were interested in, this what they hoped for from God. And God, in His goodness and patience, God, who knows His creatures - "for I know what man is" - and takes men for what they are, took mankind as it was at the beginning, just as He takes each of us as we are at our beginnings, and to draw them to Him, gave them at first what they wanted. Therefore, once He had chosen His people, He promised them first a certain happiness on earth, then, having given them various goods, He tried bit by bit to make them understand that these were not the things that mattered, and gradually began to withdraw these things from them; little by little He was putting the mystery of the Cross into the mystery of Israel - that mystery by which He takes from us the things we are too fond of, so that by emptying us of self He can fill us with Himself.

You find this mystery at the very core of Jewish history: it is the mystery of the just man suffering, which we find in the Book of Job, that strange book in the very heart of the Old Testament, the mystery of a soul being tried by God when it does not itself see what evil it has done - a thing both repugnant and meaningless to the Jewish mind. Job himself did not as yet know what the answer was. He could only cling to his knowledge of his own innocence, and adore God's plan which he did not understand. The plan was in fact quite intelligible and extremely wise: God was teaching Job, and through him all his people, that He had never promised His friends the goods of this world. Remember what Pius XI said at the canonization of a certain Italian saint: that to see what God thinks of the goods of this world you have only to look at the
people He gives them to; He can hardly have bound Himself to give them to His friends since He gives them so liberally to His enemies as well.

The inequality with which the goods of this world are distributed, which has no relation at all to the order of merit, is proof positive that God attaches no importance to them, and that the real goods are goods of the spirit. Throughout the history of Israel God was trying to detach His people from material goods, and lead them to see that it was goods of quite a different kind that He had in store for them. But we know how hard it was for the people to understand this teaching, for when Christ at last came the Jews were disappointed; they hoped for an earthly king who would give them power over other nations, but instead of such glory they saw a crucifix. And even on the eve of the Ascension the Apostles asked Christ: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

In Our Lady we see the perfectly successful result of this education. Saint Bernard says of her that the only thing she ever asked for was grace: *Et semper inveniet gratiam.* She did not imitate Solomon by asking for wisdom. She asked for grace because grace is the one thing we need. She was, therefore, perfectly wise; in her, that is to say, the work of wisdom was perfectly accomplished, and being perfectly wise - and *sapientia* means the same as *recta sapere*, to savor the right things, to savor the things of the spirit - she had the taste for spiritual things, she asked for grace and got it. *Ave Maria gratia plena.* She was blessed to hear those wonderful words: "(Thou art) full of grace." Why "full of grace"? Because she wanted grace, and wanted only grace, because she fully understood that "but one thing is necessary," and therefore obtained it. Here again she was the perfect fulfillment of God's education of Israel.

**GOD OF ALL NATIONS**

And, finally, God wanted to teach the Jews that He was the God of all men, and not simply of Israel. That is perhaps the high point of the whole drama, that is where the "stiff-necked" race found it hardest to accept God's plan for it; it is certainly the great paradox of that plan. God began by choosing Israel; for nineteen centuries Israel was the only one, and despised all other peoples, who had, indeed, not been so cho-
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sen; yet, bit by bit, God tried to make this people He had chosen understand that He had not chosen them for themselves, but to be an instrument for carrying out His designs in regard to the other nations. At first Israel took this to mean that they were to exercise dominion over the others, that they were to be in the first place. Only gradually did they see God's plan - that they were to prepare for the Savior's coming, but that once He had come, they were to fade into the background among all the other nations of the earth. And this was what they could not accept; they refused to join the ranks as one nation among all the others.

In Our Lady we see quite the reverse; in her, the fruit of the Jewish people, we see acceptance of the plan, and universal charity. She was not only a daughter of Israel, but she was the one through whom Israel flowed back into a common human current; she was at once daughter of David and Abraham, and Mater divinae gratiae, universal mediatrix, mother of all mankind. She fully realized the promise made to Israel that they would have a special work to do which should affect the whole race. And Mary, born of the race of Abraham, forever a Jewess, is at the same time the mother of all men. She was the one who accepted to be no longer a Jew, who allowed her heart to expand to the bounds of the earth, who renounced the privilege of her birth, only to receive a far greater privilege of universality. The Blessed Virgin, the culmination of Jewish history, is the perfect thing that God intended that history to produce.

This gives us the key to the suffering of her heart. What died in Mary's heart on the eve of Christ's Passion was the merely human love she still had for Christ as her human Son; what was born in her heart on the day He rose was her universal motherhood of all men. For this to happen, it is quite true to say that something in her heart had to die: it was the end of a great happiness, of the thirty-three years she had lived with God-made-man. That is why, when Christ indicating John, said to her, "Woman, behold thy son," a sword pierced deep into her heart.

It was the end of a marvelous reality; at that moment she went beyond the love concentrated on the humanity of Jesus, she opened her heart wide enough to include the whole of humanity; this could only be done by death, by that death of the heart, by as deep a suffering in her
heart as Our Lord had in His Body; for this, too, this growth of charity, this outgoing of love that was to embrace the world, could only come about through death. In each of our lives it comes about through death, when we go beyond our own narrow limits to enlarge our hearts to the compass of Christ’s heart; and just the same thing happens in the history of every nation inasmuch as, to enter into the body of Christ, it too must go beyond its particular narrowness, give up its imperialism. This is just one aspect of the mystery of Christ drawing all things together by His Cross.

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