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Marian Mariology

CHAPTER 27



The veneration of Mary, when properly understood, permeates the entire life of the Church; it is a dimension of dogma and of piety, of Christology and of ecclesiology. This dimension needs to be made explicit today in connection with the problems of humanity. Mariology expresses something fundamental to the Christian life itself, to the Christian experience of the world.

Sound Mariology has always been understood in Christological terms. If the Gospel revealed nothing more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God and man, was born of Mary, this alone would be sufficient for the Church to love her and to draw theological conclusions from pondering this relationship of Mother and Son. We need no other revelations. Mary is a self-evident and essential *datum* and dimension of the Gospel.

Chapter one centers on Catechesis flowing from Byzantine Marian spirituality with commentary by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M. Chapter 2 discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

Chapter 27

Mary, the Handmaid of Humanity

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

Pope John Paul II's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is so deep and so pronounced that it is not surprising she finds a place of honor in almost everything he says and writes. In one country after another where the Pope visits he seeks out the Marian shrines and there speaks at great length on the Mother of God. In Poland he spoke at the shrine of Our Lady of Jasna Gora where he addressed the following prayer to the Blessed Virgin:

“Once more I consecrate myself to you in your maternal slavery of love. Totus Tuus! I am all yours! I consecrate to you the whole Church -- everywhere and to the ends of the earth! I consecrate to you humanity: I consecrate to you all men and women, my brothers and sisters, all the peoples and the nations. I consecrate to you Europe and all the continents. I consecrate to you Rome and Poland, united, through your servant, by a fresh bond of love.”

“Mother, accept us! Mother, do not abandon us! Mother, be our guide!”

In Mexico, the Holy Father spoke in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and pronounced that stirring prayer to the Virgin of Guadalupe in which he once more made an act of consecration:

been the Handmaid of the Lord. God is the Master of our destiny; He is the Lord of our fame; He is the only One who determines how great we shall be and what we will achieve.

If we wish to do great things, He is pleased. But what we do must be done on His conditions and according to His plans, and not ours. Mary learned how to become the Woman of History without intending to; she learned from the Son she bore that God chooses those who are little in their own eyes to do great things for Him. She knew, how well she knew, what her Son meant when later on He taught, "Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart." She learned from experience that God uses humility to do what He wants, to save and sanctify the world.

There is in all of our hearts an ambition to greatness, in everyone of us. The key to greatness is to remain small. The more humble we are, the greater we shall become. As Mary's Son foretold, "Those who humble themselves will be (infallibly) exalted", even on earth but especially in heaven; not only in time but for all eternity; and not only before men, but what is most important, in the eyes of God.

End

"Mother of Mercy, Teacher of hidden and silent sacrifice, to you, who come to meet us sinners, we dedicate on this day all our being and all our love. We also dedicate to you our life, our work, our joys, our infirmities and our sorrows."

In the Land of St. Patrick, the Pope declared that "the goal of my journey to Ireland is the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock." At the shrine, before an estimated crowd of 500,000 people, the Pope confessed, "It has been my custom to make pilgrimages to shrines of our Lady, starting with my earliest youth, and in my own country."

The papal coat of arms of the present sovereign pontiff has only one inscription, the letter "M", standing for "Maria". All of this is by way of introduction to the present conference.

My intention is to focus on the words spoken by this devoted client of Mary in the United States on the last day of his visit to our country in 1979. It was October 7th at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The formal address was to be given to the several thousand religious women gathered from all over the nation. But, before giving his official talk, the Holy Father spoke to all the faithful on the Blessed Virgin Mary. And this is what he said.

"My first desire in this National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception is to direct my thoughts, to turn my heart, to the Woman of salvation history.

"In the eternal design of God, this woman, Mary, was chosen to enter into the work of the Incarnation and Redemption. And this design of God was to be actuated through her free decision given in obedience to the Divine Will. Through her "yes", a "yes" that pervades and is reflected in all history, she consented to be the Virgin Mother of our Saving God, the Handmaid of the Lord, and, at the same time, the Mother of all the faithful who in the course of centuries would become the brothers and sisters of her Son.

"Through her the Sun of Justice was to rise in the world. Through her the great Healer of humanity, the Reconciler of hearts and consciences, her Son, the God-Man Jesus Christ, was to transform the human condition and, by His death and resurrection, uplift the entire human family.

"As a great sign that appeared in the heavens in the fullness of time, the Woman dominates all history as the Virgin Mother of the Son, and as the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, as the Handmaid of humanity.

"And the woman becomes also, by association with her Son, the sign of contradiction to the world and, at the same time, the sign of hope whom all generations shall call blessed: the woman who conceived spiritually before

she conceived physically; the woman who accepted the Word of God; the woman who was inserted intimately and irrevocably into the mystery of the Church, exercising a spiritual motherhood with regard to all peoples; the woman who is honored as Queen of Apostles, without herself being inserted into the hierarchical constitution of the Church.

“And yet this woman made all hierarchy possible, because she gave to the world the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. This woman, this Mary of the Gospels, who is not mentioned as being at the Last Supper, comes back again at the foot of the Cross in order to consummate her contribution to the salvation history. By her courageous act she prefigures and anticipates the courage of all women throughout the ages who concur in bringing forth Christ in every generation.

“At Pentecost the Virgin Mother once again comes forward to exercise her role, in union with the apostles, with and in and over the Church. Yet again she conceives of the Holy Spirit to bring forth Jesus in the fullness of His Body, the Church, never to leave Him, never to abandon Him, but to continue to love and serve Him through the ages.

“This is the Woman of history and destiny who inspires today; the woman who speaks to us of femininity, human dignity, and love, and who is the greatest expression of total consecration to Jesus Christ in Whose Name we are gathered today.”

There are many facets of Marian faith and Marian piety contained in this not too long preliminary address which the Pope gave the day before he left the United States. We can only choose a few for special consideration. I would like to choose the following: Mary, the Woman of Freedom; Mary, the Sign of Contradiction and of Hope; Mary, Queen of the Apostles; and Mary, the Woman of History.

Mary, the Woman of Freedom. The Holy Father stressed the fact that the Blessed Virgin freely chose to become the Mother of Christ and therefore the Mother of God. We believe that under God’s providence, the salvation of the world depended on Mary’s fiat -- be it done to me. This tells us especially two things. First, that God, although almighty, wants our voluntary cooperation to redeem ourselves, and that we must cooperate with Him so that others might be redeemed.

There are only two ultimate mysteries in Christianity: in heaven, the Trinity; on earth, man’s liberty. It is a mystery that we cannot comprehend. But though it is a mystery, it is something that we must believe, that the God Who made the sun, moon and stars, Who made us “without us” will not redeem us “without us”. That is the first lesson. Mary’s liberty determined man’s redemption.

The second lesson is that Mary, although not able to sin since she was impeccable, (meaning that Mary was preserved by an extraordinary grace from God from ever being capable of offending Him by deliberate sin), yet though she was impeccable, Mary was still able to choose. This bears more emphasis than it is commonly given. We are so accustomed to identifying freedom as choosing between good and evil that we forget that the highest use of our liberty is not to choose “not to sin”, it is rather to do more than we have to do or that we are obliged to do. In a word, to choose to be generous.

Like Mary, then, we can freely choose to give God more than He demands under the pain of sin. We can choose to love God with our whole heart and not just to avoid His punishment.

Mary, the Sign of Contradiction and of Hope. She is, indeed, a sign of contradiction because, humanly speaking, it seems contradictory to obtain by yielding and to receive by giving. Yet that is what Mary teaches us. We gain most when we give most; we grow when we give up; we merit before God when we surrender. You do not explain that - you believe it. But beyond being the sign of contradiction, Mary is also the sign of hope because we see in her what marvels God can do in human nature. She was told by the angel (and she believed it) that “nothing is impossible with God”. How we need to remind ourselves of that. Mary’s whole life proved how right she was. Mary shows us what to hope for from God - everything! Provided we give God everything!

Mary, Queen of Apostles. The Holy Father declared that Mary, “without herself being inserted into the Church’s hierarchy (she was no bishop or priest) yet this woman made all hierarchy possible, because she gave to the world the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.” If our zeal is truly apostolic, if we want to win souls for Christ and for heaven, if we are ambitious to conquer the world, let us look at Mary. By her hidden conformity with God’s providence and her generous cooperation with His Will, she became greater than all the apostles. Indeed, she was their Queen. From the beginning of the apostolic age in the first century until the end of time, God uses the obedient, the docile and the simple to achieve His redemptive designs. Those who are most submissive to the will of God do the most in the apostolate. Brains, ability, education, money, these are all meaningless. God builds His kingdom on obedience. He saves souls through conformity to His Will.

Finally. **Mary, the Woman of History.** Mary has remained for all ages the model for all mankind to imitate. The prophecy she made in the Magnificat, “all generations shall call me blessed”, had been literally fulfilled. But what a paradox. She has become “the Woman of History” only because she had