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Marian Mariology

Chapter 15



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 15

The History of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

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

The Fatima consecration to Our Lady has an ancient history. It is all the more important to see something of this history in the light of some reservations and even criticism of what we know goes back to the early centuries of the Church.

A key to the meaning of consecration is the expression *servus Mariae*, “slave or servant of Mary”. Historians have found this term in African sermons from the fifth and sixth centuries. One of the earliest Marian prayers expressing this title is that of St. Ildephonsus, Archbishop of Toledo in Spain (died 667), in which he prays to Mary.

Therefore I am your servant (*servus*) because your Son is my Lord. Therefore you are my Lady (*Domina*) because you are the handmaid of my Lord. Therefore I am the servant of the handmaid of my Lord because you have become the mother of my Maker (*Theotokos*, p. 107).

However, in the East we have what may be the oldest formula of consecration proper in the writings of St. John Damascene (c.675-753), the last and one of the greatest Greek Fathers of the Church. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin was uninhibited. In his prayer, he says:

The angel then took the chalice and Host in his hands. He gave Lucia the Sacred Host and shared the chalice between Jacinta and Francisco. While doing this, the angel said:

Take and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, horribly outraged by ungrateful men. Make reparation for their crimes and console your God.

Then prostrating himself with the children and repeating with them the prayer, "Most Holy Trinity...." the angel disappeared from their sight.

There are some profound implications in the foregoing narrative.

The Real Presence. Fundamental to everything else is the profession of faith in Christ's presence in the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus Christ is in the Blessed Sacrament in all the fullness of His humanity and divinity. He is present everywhere, "in all the tabernacles of the world."

What deserves to be emphasized is the fact that it is literally Jesus Christ who is now on earth, present in every tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.

What further needs emphasis is that this Jesus Christ is offended by the outrages, sacrileges and indifference of so many people in the modern world. Not coincidentally, this is almost the verbatim language of Our Lord in His revelation at Paray le Moniel to St. Margaret Mary.

End

O Lady, before you today we take our stand. Lady, I call you Virgin Mother of God and to your hope, as to the surest and strongest anchor, we bind ourselves. To you we consecrate our mind, our soul, our body, all that we are. We honor you as much as we can (Homilia I in Dormitionem, PG 76, 720A). *Theotokos* p. 109.

With the Catholic Reformation in the sixteenth century, entire religious communities included consecration to Mary as part of their rule of life. Among these, the best known form is that of St. Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), founder of the Company of Mary and the Daughters of Wisdom. He emphasized a Christocentric aspect of the consecration. "This," he explained, "consists in giving oneself entirely to the Blessed Virgin in order to belong entirely to Jesus Christ through her." Significantly, in the opening sentence of this prayer Our Lady is told, "We consecrate ourselves to thy Immaculate Heart." Approved by St. Pius X in 1907, this is still the best known formula of consecration to Mary. Thirty-five years later, Pope Pius XII issued a new form of consecration during the Second World War. He directed the faithful to address the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, declaring that, "In thee and in thy Immaculate Heart, at this grave hour of human history, do we put our trust; to thee we consecrate ourselves, not only with all of the Holy Church ... but also with the whole world, torn by discords, agitated with hatred, the victim of its own iniquities."

Pope Pius XII made this act of consecration twice in the same year. The first time, he spoke by radio in Portuguese. His audience was the thousands of pilgrims who had come to Fatima on October 13, 1942, to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the closing apparition of Our Lady.

Pope Pius XII repeated the consecration in St. Peter's Basilica on December 8, 1942. In both acts of consecration, the Pontiff was openly responding to the most formal revelation of God's will at Fatima, to establish devotion to Mary's Immaculate Heart throughout the world. Moreover, in the act of consecration in Rome, the Pope made an allusion to Russia.

Ten years later, on July 7, 1952, Pope Pius XII issued the Encyclical *Sacro Vergente Anno*, addressed to the Russians. He dedicated and consecrated "all the peoples of Russia to that same Immaculate Heart," as he had done a decade earlier for the whole world. This was a direct response to the request of Our Lady, made at Fatima in 1917.

In view of the phenomenal changes in the Soviet Union that have since taken place, it is worth quoting at some length from Pope Pius XII's historic encyclical of 1952. He began by explaining what occasioned his writing to a nation that was professedly atheistic.

Dear people of Russian, health and peace in the Lord!

While the Holy Year was happily drawing to a conclusion, after it had been given to us by a divine disposition to solemnly define the dogma of the Assumption into Heaven, body and soul, of the Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, we received numerous expressions of the most lively exultation from people all over the world; many of them sent us letters in thanksgiving, in which they also earnestly begged us to consecrate the whole Russian people, which is experiencing such suffering at this moment, to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary.

There is a special need, therefore, to invoke the Mother of God in favor of a people who are literally cut off from the Vicar of Christ.

These supplications were particularly pleasing to us, for if our paternal affection embraces all people, it is addressed in a particular manner to those who, although separated for the most part from the Apostolic See by the vicissitudes of history, nevertheless still retain the name of Christian, but find themselves in such a situation that it is very difficult for them to hear our voice and to know the teachings of Catholic doctrine, and that they are even pushed by deceitful and pernicious contrivances to reject faith in and even the very idea of God.

The Pope then gave a long historical summary of the relations between Russia and the Bishops of Rome. He closed with citing the ceremony of March 19, 1930, at St. Peter's in Rome, when Pope Pius XI ordered that the Leonine Prayers after Mass were to be offered for the conversion of Russia. They were called Leonine because they were prescribed by Leo XIII for the whole Church. They consisted of the Hail Mary, three times; the Hail Holy Queen with versicle response and oration, and a prayer to St Michael the Archangel. To these were added, in 1944, three invocations to the Sacred Heart, recommended by St. Pius X. Until 1930, these prayers were said for the preservation of the Papal States. After the Lateran Treaty with Italy in 1928, Pope Pius XI changed their purpose; they were to be said for Russia's return to the faith.

Pope Pius XII then went on to explain why the Holy See had to be so critical of the Russian situation. The Bishops of Rome had no choice.

When it is a question of defending the cause of religion, the truth, and justice and Christian civilization, we certainly cannot keep quiet....Doubtless we have condemned and rejected - as the duty of our office demands - the errors which the instigators of atheistic Communism teach, or which they do their utmost to propagate, for

Adoration and Reception of the Holy Eucharist

Among the Marian communications of Fatima, none is more important than the need for faith in the Holy Eucharist.

So basic is this fact that, without it, there would not be the Fatima so strongly endorsed by the Catholic Church.

We can recognize three stages in the Eucharistic dimensions of Fatima. Each stage adds to the meaning of the previous one. Together they give us an insight into the meaning of the Blessed Sacrament that needs so much to be understood today.

Apparitions of the Angel

In 1916, the three shepherd children had several apparitions of an angel, as described by St. Lucia in her formal deposition to ecclesiastical authorities. Among these appearances, the most significant was the last one in that year.

The children had been previously instructed by the angel to kneel down, touch their foreheads to the ground, and repeat three times the following prayer:

My God, I believe, I adore, I hope, and I love you! I ask pardon from you for those who do not believe, do not adore, do not hope and do not love you.

While saying this prayer, the angel whom they had seen before appeared to them. He was holding a chalice in his left hand, while the Host was suspended above the chalice.

Drops of blood fell from the Host into the chalice. The angel left the chalice suspended in the air, knelt down beside the young shepherds and had them repeat with him another prayer:

Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference with which He is offended. And, through the infinite merits of His most Sacred Heart and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg of you the conversion of poor sinners.

Moreover, consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart means “returning beneath the cross of her Son. It means consecrating this world to the pierced Heart of the Savior, bringing it back to the very source of its Redemption.” Here again is a profession of faith. But now it is faith in the power of Christ’s death on the cross to redeem a sinful world.

The more overwhelmed we are by the massive evil in the world, the more we must join ourselves in spirit with Mary as she stood under the cross and watched her Son bleeding to death on Calvary. We must believe that, “the power of the Redemption is infinitely superior to the whole range of evil in man and of the world.” In other words, consecration to Mary means trusting in the power of intercession to overcome the ocean of evil in the world.

Consecration of Ourselves

Again there are two levels of consecration, but now of ourselves personally to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

It first of all means “accepting her help to offer ourselves and the whole of mankind to Him who is holy, infinitely holy.”

This is less obvious than it may seem. We speak directly to Christ and ask Him for what we need. But He wants us to go to Him through His Mother.

We may say there are two “scandals” in Catholic Christianity. The first is the scandal of the cross; to believe that God actually became man so He might be able to suffer and die for us on Calvary. The other scandal is that He wants us, in humility, to reach Him through the intercession of His Mother. To believe these two truths and act on them is to have discovered a great treasure.

Finally, consecration to Mary means “accepting her help - by having recourse to her motherly heart, which beneath the cross was opened to love for every human being.”

In practice, this means praying to Mary in all the myriad forms of Marian invocation approved by the Church. Our faith in her power before the throne of her Son must be manifest in how we act on the faith we profess. Those outside the true Church may be scandalized at the numberless Hail Marys we recite and the numerous shrines built in her honor. But for us who believe, it is not strange at all. For too many centuries we have been saying the *Memorare* and telling her, “Never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help or sought thy intercession was left unaided.” Centuries of experience have taught us how infallibly effective these petitions to Mary have been.

the greatest wrong and the detriment of the citizens; but, far from rejecting the wayward, we desire their return to the straight path of the truth. Even more: we have unmasked these falsehoods, which are often adorned with a semblance of the truth, because we love you with the heart of a father and we seek your well-being.

However, thirty-five years of tyrannical oppression of Christianity by the Communists did not destroy the faith of many of the people in the Soviet Union. It is especially their Marian faith that has sustained them heroically even through martyrdom.

We know that many of you preserve the Christian faith in the secret sanctuary of your own conscience....We know furthermore, and that is for us a great hope and a great consolation, that you love and honor with ardent affection the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and that you venerate her images. We know that in the city of Moscow itself there is a temple - alas, withdrawn from divine worship - which is dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven; and this is very clear testimony to the love which your ancestors and you yourselves bear to the Most Holy Mother of God.

Then the capstone of the Pope’s message to the Russian nation. It was the fulfillment, to the letter, of Our Lady of Fatima’s request for consecrating Russia to her Immaculate Heart.

So that our fervent prayers and yours should more easily be answered, and to give you a special sign of our particular benevolence, just as some years ago we consecrated the whole human race to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, so today we consecrate and we dedicate in a very special manner all the peoples of Russia to this Immaculate Heart...and we implore this most clement Mother to obtain from her Divine Son heavenly light for your minds, and for your souls the supernatural strength and courage by which you will be able to avert and surmount all errors and godlessness.

Twelve years later, on November 21, 1964, Pope Paul VI spoke to all the assembled bishops at the Second Vatican Council. He took this occasion to reconsecrate the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Addressing her as *Auxilium Episcoporum*, “Help of Bishops,” he recalled the previous consecration of his predecessor, Pius XII. Then he pronounced his own prayer to Our Lady.

O Mary, while acknowledging Jesus Christ as the one true Savior, we entrust the whole human race to your Immaculate Heart. Deliver mankind from the scourges deserved for its sins, grant peace to all the world; a peace founded on truth, on justice, on freedom and on love.

The Pope told the Council Fathers that he was sending the Golden Rose on a special mission to Fatima. In this way, he would officially associate his act of consecration with the Blessed Virgin's requests in Portugal.

Eighteen years later, Pope John Paul II came to Fatima to offer his gratitude for surviving the attempt on his life, which occurred in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981. In the first anniversary of the planned assassination, the Holy Father renewed the previous acts of consecration. It was on this occasion that he gave the most detailed and authoritative explanation we have of what consecration to Mary means. His analysis will be treated in the next chapter.

Pope John Paul II wanted to remove the last vestige of doubt in anyone's mind as to whether the world - and Russia - had been collegially consecrated to the Mother of God. So in 1984, he wrote to all the bishops of the world inviting them to join him in the collegial Consecration.

This, the final and decisive act of consecration, was made by the Holy Father on March 25, 1984. It was universal, solemn, public and collegial the deepest sense of the word. Implicit in this act was the inclusion of Russia, identified among the people who are "most in need."

One of the pities of our time is that there were - and still are - those who criticize the popes for not having consecrated Russia to the Immaculate Heart. But the unbloody revolution of the early nineties, that reversed the bloody revolution of 1917, should convince even the worst skeptic that Mary's promise of Russia's conversion is being fulfilled.

The Meaning of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

In the homily he gave on May 13, 1982, Pope John Paul II explains what consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means. His analysis is historic. It is the first time that a sovereign pontiff provided such an in-depth explanation. But more importantly, the analysis became necessary because of the confusion in so many people's minds. What exactly does the Church understand by this consecration and what are its implications for devoted Christians in our day?

The doctrinal basis for our consecration is the prior fact of Mary's spiritual motherhood. On Calvary, Christ entrusted us, in the person of St. John, to His Mother's care, when He told her, "Behold your Son."

That was the beginning of Mary's mediation. On Calvary, Christ also entrusted Mary to us, again in the person of John, when He told the apostle, "Behold your Mother." That was the beginning of our consecration to Mary.

In God's providence, Mary is the chosen mediatrix of grace, from her Divine Son to us. Correspondingly, we are to entrust ourselves to her maternal care. Another name for this entrustment is consecration.

One more feature of this entrustment is brought out by the Pope before he explains the meaning of consecration. Why precisely should we entrust ourselves to Mary's Heart? The answer is most revealing:

On the cross, Christ said, "Woman, behold your son!" With these words, He opened in a new way His Mother's heart. A little later, the Roman soldier's spear pierced the side of the Crucified One. That pierced Heart became a sign of the redemption achieved through the death of the Lamb of God. The Immaculate Heart of Mary, opened with the words, "Woman behold your son," is spiritually united with the Heart of her Son, opened by the soldier's spear. Mary's heart was opened by the same love for man and for the world with which Christ loved man and the world, offering Himself for them on the cross until the soldier's spear struck that blow.

By entrusting ourselves to Mary's heart we are, in effect, entrusting ourselves to her love.

As we finally ask, what exactly does our Marian consecration mean, Pope John Paul II tells us it means four things, each building on the preceding. The first two he calls consecration of the world, the second two he calls consecrating ourselves.

Consecration of the World

Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means "drawing near through the Mother's intercession, to the very Fountain of Life that sprang from Golgotha." It is therefore an act of faith which realizes that with Christ's death on the cross, His humanity became the channel of all the grace that the whole world needs to be saved. We profess this faith by recognizing in Mary the Mother of the Savior who gave her Son the humanity by which He now communicates His blessings on a sinful world.