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Marian Mariology

CHAPTER 23



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 23

Mary, Mother of the Church

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

There is a special appropriateness in speaking on Mary, Mother of the Church at this time.

We are speaking on a Saturday, which from post-apostolic times has been considered Mary's Day. Why, because, as the Fathers of the Church explain; of all the followers of Christ, Our Lady was the only one whose faith did not falter at all after the Savior's Crucifixion. She remained the Valiant Woman not only under the Cross but after the Cross. She was absolutely certain that what her Son had foretold would come to pass. Just as He freely allowed Himself to be crucified, so He freely would raise Himself by His Divine power from the grave.

We are coming to the close of your annual retreat, and I am speaking to a community whose name includes the title, Mary, Mother of the Church. There is more than passing value in better and ever more deeply understanding what your name signifies, and what therefore it implies especially for you.

We are also living in post-conciliar times, when we are reaping both the harvest and some of the problems facing this Church since 1965, when the Second Vatican Council was completed. It was one of the glories of the late council to have emphasized Mary's Motherhood twice over:

'Mary, Mother of the Church, help the bishops and priests of the Church to love the Church as you love her, and be willing to sacrifice themselves for the Church, as you sacrificed yourself for your Son and with Him under the Cross.'

'Mary, I look forward to meeting you in the Church Triumphant where you will remain our Mother beyond time into all eternity.'" Amen.

End

The world of mankind and therefore the Church which is to nourish mankind with God's grace, never needed a Mother more than today. How terribly the people today need to believe that God loves them, in spite of:

- massive injustice and persecution
- widespread war
- persecutions in almost every nation
- suffering, destruction of the innocent, and the fruits of selfishness which are sometimes heading to despair.

This lonely, suffering world needs to believe -- Oh how it needs to believe -- there is a God who still loves them, and a Mother of God who cares for them.

Living up to the Title

We close with our third question: How are we, and with emphasis, going to live up to this invocation of Our Lady as Mother of the Church?

Let me suggest this. We are to pattern our lives on the life of Mary by the practice of her motherly love:

1. This means that we become more than ever aware of other people's needs, as was Mary.
2. That we respond to these needs as did Mary. She went, we are told, with haste to help her cousin Elizabeth.
3. That we grow in compassion, which means that when we see suffering, whether physical or spiritual, we strive to do what we can to alleviate other people's pain -- and with emphasis -- that we ask Mary's Son to bring peace to the hearts of a suffering humanity.

Let me end with a prayer:

"Mary, Mother of the Church, help me to become more like you in my own loving and tender sympathy towards everyone whose life I touch.

'Teach me something of your kindness in my thoughts, your gentleness in my speech, and your patient cheerfulness under trial.'

- Mary, the Mother of God.
- Mary, the Mother of the Church.

During this meditation, I would like to ask three questions again and briefly answer them, while reflecting on their meaning and on their implication in our spiritual lives:

1. What do we mean when we address Our Lady under the title of Mother of the Church?
2. Why is this title especially appropriate for our day or more accurately, especially appropriate for modern times?
3. How are we to live out this title in our own lives; and particularly, how are you religiously honored with this title of Mary to live up to your name?

Meaning

1. When we say that Mary is the Mother of the Church, we first of all mean that she is the Mother of Him who instituted the Church:
 - who is the invisible Head of the Church.
 - who suffered and died on the Cross to confer grace on the Church.
 - who made the Church what she is, the universal sacrament of salvation.
 - who, together with us His members, forms the Mystical Body which is the Church.
 - This, then, is the first meaning of Mary's title. She is the Mother of the Church by giving us the One, without whom there would be no Church.
 - This bears emphasis. God had to become man to bring into being the Church He instituted. And it was Mary who gave Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the human nature that the Son of God assumed, and assuming became Incarnate, and being Incarnate, then proceeded to incarnate the Church.
2. Moreover, when we say that Mary is the Mother of the Church we mean that she, in her own way, always is subordinate to Christ, and

contributed to the forming of the Church.

- She was the Mother of Christ not only in giving Him birth, but through all His years at Nazareth, then in Palestine during His public ministry, and especially on Calvary.
3. And again, with emphasis, Mary was uniquely designated Mother of the Church by her Son as He hung upon the Cross. As we have heard so often, but never too often to repeat, the apostle John represented all of us when the Savior told him, "Behold your Mother". She is therefore Mother of the Church by a clear, unique and irrevocable designation. It was the dying Redeemer who told her to care for us as her children; and told us to look upon her as Our Mother.
- The place and occasion were perfect: Under the Cross for Mary, and on the Cross for her Son.
 - Mary is never more important as our Mother than when we are under, perhaps best under our cross, in our effort to be like her Son.
4. Once again, Christ decided to go to heaven ahead of His Mother. There was a reason. He wanted her to remain on earth for some fifteen years (as tradition has it) before her own Assumption. Why? So that, just as she had been Mother to the Physical Christ, she might continue as Mother of the Mystical Christ, His Church, in the Church's infancy. And the history of the young Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles and the Letters of Saint Paul surely needed a Mother's loving care.
 5. Finally, as in all the days since her Assumption, Mary continues to Mother the Church from heaven, where she is our powerful intercessor with her Divine Son. Saints tell us that just as Christ is the universal Mediator with the Heavenly Father, so Mary is the mediatrix with her Son.
- Here I especially recommend the writings of Saint Louis de Montfort and his *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* for your reflective meditation, to better appreciate what we mean when we invoke Our Lady as Mother of the Church. (Go to: [www.pamphletstoinspire.com/Mary/Total Consecration for Saint Monfort's writings on this subject](http://www.pamphletstoinspire.com/Mary/Total%20Consecration%20for%20Saint%20Monfort's%20writings%20on%20this%20subject)).

Appropriateness

The titles of Our Lady are so many and so rich that to the non-Catholic they seem scandalous and even to some Catholics they are bewildering.

We address Mary as:

- Mother of Christ
- Mother of God
- Mother of Divine Grace
- Mother most pure
- Mother most chaste
- Mother inviolate
- Mother undefiled
- Mother most amiable
- Mother most admirable
- Mother of Good Counsel
- Mother of Our Creator
- Mother of Our Savior

And so the Litany goes on. It is especially rich in the Eastern Church where, I am told, there is one feast of Our Lady for every day of the year.

Why, then, should the title Mary, Mother of the Church, be particularly appropriate for our times? There are several reasons, but one mainly deserves some explanation. We are living in the Age of Communication, when the whole world is becoming a global village. We are conscious of our relationship with people in distant lands; and are living in a day when the worst enemy of Christianity blasphemously calls itself Communism. All of this suggests the need for elevating our communitarian consciousness to a supernatural level; and look upon the growth of social sensitivity with the eyes of faith.