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# *Marian Mariology*

## Chapter 6



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 6

### The Blessed Virgin in the History of Christianity

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

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Christianity would be meaningless without the Blessed Virgin. Her quiet presence opened Christian history at the Incarnation and will continue to pervade the Church's history until the end of time.

Our purpose in this meditation is to glance over the past two thousand years to answer one question: What are the highlights of our Marian faith as found in the Bible and the teaching of the Catholic Church?

#### New Testament

The first three evangelists were mainly concerned with tracing Christ's ancestry as Son of Man and, therefore, as Son of Mary. St. Matthew, writing for the Jews, stressed Christ's descent from Abraham. St. Luke, disciple of St. Paul, traced Christ's origin to Adam, the father of the human race. Yet both writers were at pains to point out that Mary's Son fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah about the Messiah. He was to be born of a virgin to become Emmanuel, which means "God with us." Luke gave a long account of the angel's visit to Mary to announce that the Child would be holy and would be called the "Son of God" (Luke 1:36).

What are we being told? We are told that true devotion to Our Lady is shown in a deep love of her as our Mother, put into practice by the imitation of her virtues- especially her faith, her chastity and charity.

These are the three virtues that the modern world most desperately needs.

- Like Mary, we need to believe that everything which God has revealed to us will be fulfilled.
- Like Mary, we need to use our bodily powers to serve their divine purpose no matter what the sacrifice of our own pleasure.
- Like Mary, we are to be always sensitive to the needs of others. Like her, we are to respond to these needs without being asked and, like her, even ask Jesus to work a miracle to benefit those whom we love.

No wonder the new ***Catechism of the Catholic Church*** makes this astounding profession of faith: “We believe that the most holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven her maternal role toward the members of Christ.” It all depends on our faith in her maternal care and our trust in her influence over the almighty hand of her Son.

End

St. John followed the same pattern. He introduced Mary as the Mother of Jesus when He began His public ministry. In answer to her wishes, Christ performed the miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana in Galilee. What happened then has continued ever since. Most of the miraculous shrines of Christianity have been dedicated to Our Lady.

It is also St. John who tells us that Mary stood under the Cross of Calvary as her Son was dying for our salvation. Speaking of John, Jesus told His Mother, “This is your son.” To John, He said of Mary, “This is your Mother.” The apostle John represented all of us. On Good Friday, therefore, Christ made His Mother the supernatural Mother of the human race and made us her spiritual children.

### **Mother of God**

In the early fifth century, a controversy arose in Asia Minor, where the Bishop of Constantinople claimed that Mary was only the Mother of Christ (Greek= ***Christotokos***). He was condemned by the Council of Ephesus in 431, which declared that “the holy Virgin is the Mother of God (Greek=***Theotokos***).

St. Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, was mainly responsible for this solemn definition of Mary’s divine maternity. It was St. Cyril who thus composed the most famous Marian hymn of antiquity. It is a praise of Our Lady as Mediatrix with God:

*Through you, the Trinity is glorified.  
Through you, the Cross is venerated throughout the world.  
Through you, angels and archangels rejoice.  
Through you, the demons are driven away.  
Through you, the fallen creature is raised to heaven.  
Through you, the churches are founded in the whole world.  
Through you, people are led to conversion.*

Every other title of Mary and all the Marian devotion of the faithful are finally based on the Blessed Virgin’s primary claim to our extraordinary love. She is the Mother of God. She gave her Son all that every human mother gives the child she conceives and gives birth to. She gave Him His human body. Without her, there would have been no Incarnation, no Redemption, no Eucharist; in a word, no Christianity.

## Mary's Virginity

Logically related to her divine maternity is Our Lady's perpetual virginity. From the earliest days the Church has taught that Mary was a virgin before giving birth to Jesus, in giving His birth, and after His birth in Bethlehem.

All of this is already stated or implied in the Gospels. In St. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, all the previous ancestors are called "father." But then we are told there came "Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ" (Matthew 1:16). St. Luke twice identifies Mary as "virgin," who "knows not man."

Already in the early Church, those who questioned Christ's divinity were the same ones who denied His Mother's virginity. As explained by St. Augustine, "When God vouchsafed to become Man, it was fitting that He should be born in this way. He who was made of her, had made her what she was: a virgin who conceives, a virgin who gives birth; a virgin with child, a virgin labored of child-a virgin ever virgin."

Given the fact of the Incarnation, its manner follows as a matter of course. Why should not the Almighty who created His Mother have also preserved the body of which He would be born? But this appropriateness of Mary's virginity makes sense only if you believe that Mary's Son is the living God.

## Immaculate Conception

Mary's freedom from sin, present at her conception, is already taught by St. Ephraem in the fourth century. In one of his hymns, he addresses Our Lord, "Certainly you alone and your Mother are from every aspect completely beautiful. There is no blemish in you my Lord, and no stain in your Mother."

By the seventh century, the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception was celebrated in the East. In the eighth century, the feast was commemorated in Ireland, and from there spread to other countries in Europe.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, some leading theologians, even saints, raised objections to the Immaculate Conception. Their main difficulty was how Mary could be exempt from all sin before the coming of Christ. Here the Franciscan Blessed John Duns Scotus (1266-1308) stood firm and paved the way for the definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Blessed Pius IX in 1854.

In the words of Pope Blessed Pius IX, "We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception...was preserved from all stain of original sin, is a doctrine revealed by God and therefore to be believed firmly and constantly by all the faithful."

Four years after the definition, Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette in Lourdes, identifying herself as the Immaculate Conception. The numerous miracles at Lourdes are a divine confirmation of the doctrine defined by Pius IX. They are also a confirmation of the papal primacy defined by the First Vatican Council under the same Bishop of Rome.

## Assumption into Heaven

Not unlike his predecessor, Pope Pius XII defined Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven. On November 1, 1950, the pope responded to the all but unanimous request of the Catholic hierarchy by making a formal definition:

By the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare and define as divinely revealed dogma: the Immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever Virgin, after her life on earth, was assumed body and soul to the glory of heaven.

The day after the definition, Pius XII told the assembled hundreds of bishops his hope for the future: May this new honor given to Mary introduce "a spirit of penance to replace the prevalent love of pleasure and a renewal of family life stabilized where divorce was common and made fruitful where birth control was practiced." If there is one feature that characterizes the modern world, observed the Pope, it is the worship of the body. Mary's bodily Assumption into heaven reminds us of our own bodily resurrection on the last day, provided we use our bodies on earth according to the will of God.

## Mother of the Church

Never in the history of Christianity has any general council spoken at such length and with such depth about Mary as the Second Vatican Council.

This is not surprising in view of the extraordinary devotion to the Blessed Virgin in our day. What the Council did was put this devotion into focus and spell out its doctrinal foundation.

First a quiet admonition. The council "charges that practices and exercises of devotion to her be treasured as recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries." True Marian piety consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain empty credulity.

Rather authentic devotion to Mary "proceeds from true faith by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, and are moved to filial love toward our Mother and to the invitation of her virtues (*Constitution on the Church*, 67-8).