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Marian Mariology

CHAPTER 48



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 48

Unity in the Church Through Mary

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

There are many titles by which we address Our Lady, in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. In the most recent of these titles, we say, “Mother of the Church, pray for us.” What are we asking for when we make this invocation? We are asking Our Lady to obtain for us all the graces we need to live up to what we profess when we say, “We believe in the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church.”

The first of these graces for which we pray, and the most fundamental is unity. It is also the one grace that on the testimony of the modern popes, the Church most desperately needs. Twenty years ago, Pope Paul VI lamented that, “there is so much talk of unity; and so many trying to go their own way” (Dec. 3, 1969). In the past two decades, the situation has not changed, except that the need for unity has become increasingly grave.

Over the centuries, the Church has turned to Mary in time of crisis. Today it is the crisis of disunity.

If we are to recover that unity in the Church which is her primary mark of identity, we must look to Mary, follow her example, and beg her to obtain from Jesus what He so earnestly prayed for on the night before He died.

If we further ask what it is that unites the Church's members, in Christ and with one another, the answer is easy. Faith, obedience and love unite the members of the Mystical Body, even as unbelief, disobedience and selfish refusal to love always divide.

Unity of Obedience with Mary

At the Annunciation, Mary told the angel, "Let it be done to me according to your word." In one sentence, she was teaching all believers until the end of time the indispensable condition for union with God and unity among the followers of Christ.

Obedience to the will of God, as manifested through His appointed representatives, is the precondition for unity in the Church founded by Christ. During His public ministry, Christ told the Apostles, "He that hears you, hears Me, and he that despises you despises Me." He told Peter that he was the Rock on which the Church would be built, so that whatever Peter bound on earth would be bound in heaven, and whatever Peter loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven.

After His Resurrection, it was Peter again to whom Christ gave the triple commandment, "Feed my lambs ... tend my sheep ... feed my sheep."

After Christ's Ascension, it was again Peter who took the initiative on Pentecost Sunday and guided the young Church by his Christ-given authority.

As Catholics we simply take for granted that obedience to Church authority means obedience to the successor of the Apostles under the successor of Peter. We have no difficulty recognizing that, although Mary was the Mother of Christ, she was obedient to the Vicar of Christ in her day. We further take for granted that since apostolic times, the unity of the Church depended on obedience to the divinely established authority in the Church.

Every break in Catholic unity, since the first century and into our times, has been the result of disobedience to ecclesiastical authority finally vested in the Bishop of Rome.

Moreover, every division among Catholics can be finally traced to the same cause. The enemies of Christ know this. That is why they try to sow the seeds of discord among professed members of the Church. They know that Catholics are the most powerful force on earth in defending the stability of the family, the indissolubility of marriage, and the sanctity of unborn human life. But on one condition; Catholics must be united among themselves if they are to present a united front for the rights of God to a proud and self-willed humanity.

Invoking Mary as the Mother of Catholic solidarity is an imperative in modern society. But on our part, we must co-operate with the graces that our prayers obtain through Mary. We must be obedient to those whom Christ has appointed and ordained in His Church to exercise authority in His name. We must especially recognize in the successor of St. Peter the visible foundation of Christian unity.

Unity of Love Through Mary

Mary's practice of charity was the outgrowth of her love of her Son. No sooner did she conceive Him at Nazareth than she hurried to bring Him, yet unborn, to her kinswoman Elizabeth who was with child. At Cana, her concern for the guests — "They have no wine" — prompted her to ask for a premature miracle that she was sure Jesus would perform, which He did. On Calvary, Christ entrusted all of us, in the person of John, to be mothered in the spirit by His Mother in the flesh.

All of this tells us that Mary is at once our model and mediatrix of charity, as the irreplaceable ground of unity in the Church.

Historians of early Christianity tell us that one of the main reasons for the phenomenal growth of the Church was the phenomenal practice of charity among the Christians.

The Savior's prediction that, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another," was literally fulfilled. It was the superhuman charity of the followers of Christ which attracted whole nations to accept Christianity.

So it has been for two millennia. Where professed Catholics live out the charity they profess to believe, the Church has remained united.

But when charity wanes, unity declines. And where love weakens, discord follows as sure as the night follows day.

The same Paul VI who complained about disunity in the Church, on the same occasion said, "There is so much talk about charity, yet in certain ecclesiastical circles there is a wind of bitter criticism, which cannot be that of Pentecost."

By now some of us have memorized St. Paul's discourse on charity in his Letter to the Corinthians. To be noted is that he speaks of "charity," and not merely "love." Christ is love, indeed, but a love which is not merely natural. It is love that is born of grace and infused into the soul by God.

To obtain this kind of supernatural love, we need constant help from Christ, through the intercession of His Mother Mary. In the measure that we receive this divine help, and put the grace into practice, we shall be fostering unity in the Catholic Church.

Another name for the Church is the "Community of Love." But this means a lifetime of sacrifice. It was the price which Christ paid to bring the Church into being on the Cross. It was the price that Mary paid when she offered her Son of Calvary. It is the price we must pay by surrendering our dearest possession, which is self, if we wish to fulfill Christ's prayer, "that all may be one, even as You, Father, in Me and I in You, that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You have sent Me" (John 17:21).

Selfless charity is the cost of peaceful unity in the Church. It is also the magnet which, for two thousand years, has attracted millions to enter a Society whose members witnessed to the presence of Christ on earth as the Incarnation of Divine Love.

End

Final Chapter