

WHAT ARE THEY SAYING ABOUT MARY TODAY:
A REVIEW OF CURRENT LITERATURE

Keeping track of the theology concerned with the Virgin Mary is as demanding as it is for «systematics» (also known as *doctrinal theology*) in general. Much has happened in Mariology in the half-century since the 2nd Vatican Council. In a 1994 review of German language studies on our Lady the Swiss-born head of the International Marian Research Institute at the Marian Library (University of Dayton, Ohio), Johann Roten, SM, commented on the almost exponential growth of Mariological activity in the span of two decades, from timid retrieval in 1973 to 1993. We could extend that cut-off date to the present.

What was the situation after the Council? In the post-conciliar confusion Karl Rahner once remarked: «Some of our Catholic doctrines are in danger of being silenced to death». In a foreword to his famous novel of 1932, *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley wrote that the most efficient thought control is silence about truth. More harmful than denial was the embarrassed silence about the holy Virgin from pulpit and podium by teachers and preachers. In the article *A New Marian Dogma* [«The Furrow» 49 (January 1998), pp. 15-21], Donald Flanagan commented that Pope Paul VI's «beautifully written and long-awaited Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*» built on ideas proposed in *Lumen gentium* and indicated further lines of development for Marian doctrine and devotion, yet did not make the hoped-for impact. Indeed, said Flanagan, «it signally failed to overcome the apathy consequent on the Council».

I would add this further comment, that *Marialis cultus* seems to have received a warmer welcome, a readier acceptance in the wider Christian world than among many Catholics. There were some perceptive Catholics, however, who prized highly Paul VI's Marian efforts, among them the exegete Raymond E. Brown, SS (d. August 8, 1998). Speaking in December, 1981, Brown said: «I am not a prophet but I think that, when this century is finished, this Pope, maligned because he was so subtle, may prove to have been the most adept interpreter of Vatican II. I do not know if Paul VI read modern biblical criticism; but if I had to phrase where it leads to in relation to Mary, I could not have phrased it better (he then quoted *Marialis cultus*) as follows: “The

Virgin Mary has always been proposed to the faithful by the Church as an example to be imitated, not precisely in the type of life she led and much less the socio-cultural background in which she lived and which scarcely today exists anywhere"» («Menlo Papers»: Mary Symposium, December, 1981, 450th anniversary of Guadalupe, St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, CA).

Returning to the article by D. Flanagan, he followed his comment on the disappointing results of *Marialis cultus* by noting: «it was left to the persuasive vigor and the persevering tenacity of Pope John Paul II to recall the Church effectively to its Marian heritage».

The exuberant revival of Marian and Mariological writings in the German language described by fr. Roten can be matched in other languages, as well as among religious congregations, especially those bearing a Marian designation, like my own Carmelite Order. How do I intend to proceed in this address? For many years, soon after the Council, starting in 1967, I have presented a «Survey of Recent Mariology» at the annual convention of the Mariological Society of America, printed in the proceedings «Marian Studies». I have dipped into recent years of the Surveys to answer the question posed by the title of this address, with particular emphasis on the ecumenical dimension. The January (1998) issue of «The Month» provides a good example of reborn interest in Mary, doctrine and devotion. The lead article is by James Hanvey, SJ, Heythrop College, *Reflecting on Mary*, followed by Gerard MacCarthy, looking to the New World in «The Virgin of Guadalupe». Anne Winston-Allen writes on the theme of her recent book *Rosarium Revisited: the Name of the Prayer*. There is a book review of *Toward a Theology of the Body* by Sister Mary Timothy Prokes (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996), with illuminating insights on the Blessed Virgin.

Following the format of my yearly *Surveys*, I now begin with three recent items of special interest, and will then continue with a set of rubrics from magisterial documents through scripture and tradition, doctrine (general and particular), liturgy and devotion, and ecumenism.

The opening trio are one from Scotland (Iona), two and three from America (Gaventa and Pelikan).

First is the title *Iona the Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*, edited by Gilbert Markus and Thomas Owen Clancy (University of Edinburgh. 1995, 271 p). The preface is dated for the feast of St. Columba, June 9, who, «wishing to be a pilgrim for Christ» (his words), left his native Ireland in 563 to settle on tiny Iona in the Hebrides. Both British and Irish postal services got out a stamp to commemorate the anniversary of his death, 597-1997. He is not to be confused with a man with a similar name, who was also a voyager «Christopher Columbus»,

a mix-up that has occurred in some continental publications. The book has seven poems, Latin plus English translation, from the zenith of Iona's influence, 563 to 704. The book was brought to my attention by Esther de Waal's review in «The Tablet», August 17, 1996. She wrote: «This is a book for serious reading. But it is also a book for praying with and singing with». She singled out the 8th century Cantemus *in omni die*, on Mary the God-bearer at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation, beginning with «Let us sing every day, harmonizing in turns, together proclaiming to God a hymn worthy of holy Mary». Also: «the Mother of God made a tunic of seamless weave; Christ's death accomplished, it remained thus by the casting of lots». Reviewer de Waal's own anthology from the Hebrides was published recently in *Carmina Gadelica: the Celtic Vision*. Her *Celtic Way of Prayer* came out in 1997 (Doubleday, NY). J. Philip Newell's book, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (Paulist, Mahwah NJ, 1997), contains a chapter, *Listening for God in All Things: Carmina Gadelica*, songs and poems of the Gaels, ancient prayers that survived the Calvinist ice age of the Reformation and were taken down a century ago by Alexander Carmichael (d.1912). These traditional compositions praising the goodness of creation, were passed down from parents to children, despite the slaps and scoldings of schoolmasters and ministers. Deeply Christological, they are filled with the memory of Mary his Mother. One example, a prayer at the deathbed of a loved one: «Sleep this night in the breast of thy Mother. Sleep, thou beloved, while she herself soothes thee; sleep thou this night on the Virgin's arm, sleep, thou beloved, while she herself kisses thee».

The second introductory item is by the American Lutheran (he joined the Orthodox Church recently) Jaroslav Pelikan. Concluding half a century of teaching he delivered at Yale University autumn 1995 the lectures in *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (Yale University Press, 1996). It complements his prize-winning 1985 *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*. Pelikan brings together in his book many earlier studies, in rough chronological sequence, starting with the Epistle to the Galatians. One chapter takes its title from Dante: «*the face that most resembles Christ's*».

I found especially valuable Pelikan's comments on Mary as the obedient and faithful new Eve, in chapter three, *The Second Eve And the Guarantee of Christ's True humanity*. Against a-historical attempts to reject the New Eve tradition as hopelessly anti-woman, he argues for fairness, writing that one need not defend stereotypes, yet «historical justice demands that both sides of the dialectic be included». The same authors who are castigated as irremediably «patriarchal» offered a strong counterpoise «in their even more extensive interpre-

tations of woman as embodied in Mary, the “Woman of Valor”, *mulier fortis*, who as descendant and vindicator of the First Eve crushed the head of the serpent and vanquished the devil». Back in the fifties, as a young scholar, Pelikan was called upon, by way of «damage control» to replace an earlier article in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the severely judgmental entry in the classic eleventh edition (1910). With characteristic openness Pelikan’s *Britannica* article, *Mary the Mother of Jesus*, concludes as follows: «Even those non-Roman Churches which have most vigorously criticized the “Mariolatry” they claimed to find in the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption have frequently addressed praises to her in their hymnody that they would have hesitated to express in the prose of their dogmatic theology. Thus, in ways she could never have anticipated, all generations have called her blessed».

The third initial special entry is also from the United States: *Mary Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* by the Protestant scholar, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, Beverly, Roberts Gaventa (University of South Carolina Press, 1995, subsequently paperback 1999 from Fortress, Minneapolis). Dr. Gaventa uses literary analysis to explore the picture of Mary in four early Christian narratives, respectively the Gospel of Matthew, Luke Gospel and Acts, John’s Gospel and the second century *Protevangelium* (First Gospel of James). To her four sources she puts such questions as these: What does Mary say and do? How do others speak to her or about her? In what ways does she change as the story develops? Though conversant with modern biblical criticism which investigates the background, the «before», of the narratives, and respectful of the Church’s subsequent interpretations, the «after» aspect, Gaventa’s is a «literary quest», rather than historical or theological. The author’s perceptive insights are remarkable assessments of what she calls «just glimpses». The Mary of St. Matthew is both «threatened» and «threatening». For Luke she is «disciple, prophet and mother». In John she is glimpsed at Cana and Calvary. The First Gospel of James is assessed as a second century picture of Mary, and Dr. Gaventa does the reader the great service of a full translation. In a subsequent address at a Princeton ecumenical gathering, September 30, 1996, she pursued the line of her book: «When poor and imperiled Christians turn to Mary as the Mother of Sorrows, consciously or not they touch a thread in Matthew’s Gospel». On the same occasion, apropos of Luke’s portrait of Mary, she said: «If we can say that Mary is a disciple, even the first disciple of Jesus, then we have taken an important step together. And, if we can say that Mary is a disciple, then is it not a Protestant sort of thing to affirm that Mary is, symbolically speaking, the Mother of Disciples, even the Mother of Believers?».

Now, to offer some briefer references across a spectrum of approaches, starting with the magisterial statements Avery Dulles, SJ (made Cardinal in 2001) in an address of November, 1997 (America, January 31-February 7, 1998, «Mary at the Dawn of the New Millennium»), had this to say: «For John Paul II Mary is the primary patroness of the advent of the new millennium. As the Mother of Christ, she is preeminently an advent figure: the morning star announcing the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. Like the moon at the dawn of a new day, she is wholly bathed in the glory of the sun that is to come after her. Her beauty is a reflection of his». It would take volumes to adequately report on this pope's addresses and letters, reaching back into his episcopal documents and recalling the Polish family piety of young Karol Wojtyła. His coat of arms is a bare cross and in its shadow, the lower right quadrant, the capital letter M, with words from St. Louis de Montfort (d.1716): *Totus tuus* (I am entirely yours).

Between September 1995 and November 1997 John Paul devoted his Wednesday audiences to an extended catechesis on Marian doctrine and devotion, concluding with a topic very close to his heart, Christian unity. That 70 instruction set has been published as *Theotokos: Woman, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God* (Pauline Publications, Boston, 1999).

The inexhaustible treasure of patristic writings is being increasingly studied, also in English translation. In 1989 Kathleen McVey published Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns (in the Paulist Press Classics of Western Spirituality, NY). Ephrem's hymns are filled with praise of Mary. Here is a short bit from him, so incredibly rich in a few lines that I take every opportunity of quoting it. The translation is by Robert Murray, S.J.:

«The Church gave us the living bread
for that unleavened bread which Egypt gave.
Mary gave us the bread of refreshment
for the bread of weariness which Eve gave».

Fr. Murray's explanation opens up its riches: «In this complex typological parallel the Eucharist in the Church is the antitype of the Passover bread in Egypt, and this is then paralleled by Mary's relationship to Eve, also expressed in terms of bread. This is now rather a metaphor suggested by Genesis 3, 15 ("in the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread"), but it cannot fail to suggest Christ's body itself, born of Mary; since the Eucharist is Christ's body under another form, the Church and Mary are implicitly thrown into the closest relationship».

The American Jesuit Brian Daley published in 1998 (St. Vladimir's Press, Crestwood, NY) *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies*. Along with a dozen homilies Daley, who does both a splendid introduction and the translations, offers John Damascene's canon for the Dormition. Readers of «The Tablet» may recall the 1992 Christmas number with fr. Daley's defense of the virginal conception in response to the denials of the American Bishop Spong and the British theologian G. Parrinder.

Moving into the Middle Ages a number of publications can serve as a sampler. «Cistercian Studies» for 1997 (vol. 32) ran a series on *Aelred, Sermons on the Birth of Mary, Her Purification, And Assumption*. A 1998 issue is on *Our Lady of Citeaux* (vol. 33: 2). Often attributed to St. Bernard, but in fact by Ogier of Locedio (d.1214) is the widely circulated medieval lament *Quis dabit capiti meo..* («who will give tears to my head and my eyes?»). The Latin and an English translation are in the 1996 *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature And Medieval Society*, by Thomas H. Bestul (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia). The conclusion of this lament, in praise of John the Disciple, captures its charm: «O happy and blessed John: the Lord has committed to you a treasure of great privilege. The Lord will repay you a reward for love, a reward for the affection which you always had toward his mother who was commended to you. You are blessed by Christ, and blessed by his mother whom you loved with a pure heart. May all who love her be blessed by her. And above all, blessed be her Son, our Lord, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns for ever and ever».

A third medieval reference: the 1997 second edition of *Medieval Latin*, a textbook from the University of Chicago, edited by K. P. Harrington, revised by Joseph Pucci, gives as the initial item in a section *Varieties of Medieval Latin, Part 5 (1100 to 1350)* St. Anselm's famous third prayer to Mary: «when the mind is troubled by fear». This is the occasion to recommend a truly great book that is still in print (initially as Penguin paperback 1973): *Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm* by Sister Benedicta Ward, SLG. Worthy of recall with equal enthusiasm are the writings of Sir Richard Southern (d.2000) on St. Anselm, also on Anselm's Saxon secretary and companion in exile, the monk Eadmer, early defender of the Immaculate Conception, a view not held by Anselm himself.

Readers of a certain age may share my sense of recognition in words of Eadmer (d.1124) from Southern's *St. Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape*. He is speaking to his community at Glastonbury in 1121, after his return from an unsuccessful bid for a Scottish bishopric. He urges his monks: to restrain the forwardness and insolence of those

young men who open their mouths solely that they may appear to know, and who give free rein to whatever their loquacity may suggest, thinking themselves great when others in their simplicity will listen to them. «I know there have been people like this - perhaps I was one of them - so I can easily believe that now there are men such as I formerly was. But now I am an old man with white hair, and many things which in my youth I thought important, I now hold of no account».

Under the heading «liturgy and devotion» here are a few of many possibilities. Msgr. James D. Crichton's latest book (the 17th from this liturgical pioneer) is *Our Lady in the Liturgy* (in both Ireland and the United States). Along with the major Marian feasts of the Roman calendar he takes up the lesser commemorations, also two helpful final chapters *Some Marian Chants And Prayers'* and *The psalms in Marian Feasts*. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN (the American publisher of Crichton) devoted the Winter 1997 issue of *Liturgical Ministry* entirely to our Lady; among contributors is the English Methodist, David Butler. The expert on early prayers A. Hamman OFM urged students to concentrate on Mary's place especially in her major liturgical feasts: in a «Marianum» article, 1990.

In 1987 the Holy See issued 46 new Marian votive Masses. The general introduction is valuable, as are the forewords to each entry, explaining the ancient origin of many of the prayers. In «Marianum» 58 (1996) J. Castellano Cervera, OCD of Spain, wrote in 1996 of the unique liturgical presence of the Blessed Virgin, in accord with the conciliar statement (liturgy constitution n. 103) that the Mother of Jesus is «inseparably joined to her Son's saving work».

An ancient custom connected with Christian use of the psalms applies psalm headings and concluding prayers, so that the psalm is seen/read as either the voice of Christ or of the Church praising the grandeur of God, invoking his assistance. Cf Joseph Jungmann, *Christian Prayer Through the Centuries* (Paulist, NY, 1978). The Prayer of Christians continues that practice, as exemplified in the version in use in North America for Ps 44/45. Many years ago Jaroslav Pelikan, the Lutheran reminded American Catholic liturgists of the ancient use of Ps 44/45 as illustrating the bond between the Virgin Mary and holy Church. Initially used in the office for virgins, that psalm was soon extended to the Church and to the Mother of the Savior for our Lady. Currently this psalm occurs on February 2, in the office of virgins and holy women, and regularly in vespers of the second week titled «the marriage of the king». The introductory antiphon through the year is «The bridegroom is here; go out to welcome him», changes at Eastertide to «Blessed are they who are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb, alleluia». The opening words of the psalm are: «My heart overflows with noble words. To the king I

must speak the song I have made, my tongue as nimble as the pen of a scribe». In perfect accord with the century-long tradition this is the prayer that follows psalm 44/5, as said in North America: «When you took on flesh, Lord Jesus, you made a marriage of mankind with God. Help us to be faithful to your word and endure our exile bravely, until we are called to the heavenly marriage feast to which the Virgin Mary, exemplar of your Church, as preceded us».

In iconography illustrating the bond between Mary and the Church Ps 44/45 sometimes provides a text, e.g., v.10: «the queen stands at your right in gold of Ophir» along with words from the *Song of Songs*. A prime example is the apse of S. Maria in Trastevere, the glorified Christ embraces his Mother; the scroll in his left hand reads «come, my chosen one», the other scroll «oh that this left hand were under my head». This is the gesture with which the Risen Savior summons and embraces his Church. Recall the final chapter of Cardinal de Lubac's great book, *The Splendor of the Church*.

It has been said that the second Vatican Council recovered the image of the Church as «the people of God», succeeding the strong emphasis from the twenties, illustrated par excellence by the 1943 encyclical on the Church as the «mystical body» of Christ. No single comparison exhausts the almost infinite riches of the Church in relation to Christ. There is scope for revival in depth of the biblical and patristic depiction of the Church as bride of Christ, an extremely important heritage under some attack of late. The Council came close to understanding the Church as bride of Christ in terms of the Virgin Mother of God, glorified archetype of the Church, at the end of the final chapter of dogmatic *Constitution on the Church*, n. 68: «In the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church as she is to be perfected in the world to come. Likewise, Mary shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come, as a sign of sure hope and solace for the pilgrim people of God».

No attempt is made here to take up the complicated subject of «apparitions». There is an enormous popular interest among many Catholics in claims that the Mother of God has appeared in one or another place and often delivered a message of some sort. Official positions by Church authorities are very reserved and this field of popular piety is so vast I have not attempted to get into it, although it is the type of thing I am asked about often by phone. When I tell the reporter I have no personal experience of the alleged claim but am willing to set forth the criteria by which the responsible authorities make their judgments, starting with the local bishop, the inquirer usually signs off.

Roman Catholic devotion to the Rosary of Mary is well known. It is made up of the Our Father and the familiar Hail Mary prayer along with reflections on major mysteries of our Lord's life and his Mother's share therein. Fr. Nicholas Ayo CSC did an excellent study in 1994: *The Hail Mary: a Verbal Ikon of Mary* (University of Notre Dame Press). There are two fascinating chapters on the Rosary in a book by the distinguished Anglican theologian Austin Farrer (d. 1968). The quotation is from the expanded American edition of *Lord I Believe: Suggestions for Turning the Creed into Prayer* (Cowley Publications, Cambridge, MA, 1989). Of the Rosary he comments there was a time he would have characterized as «vain repetition» the «fingering of the beads». He learned better: «but now if I wished to name a special sort of private devotion most likely to be of general profit, prayer on the beads is what I should name». His previous censure, he added, was from ignorance, his subsequent view from experience. Here are a few quotations: the Rosary «supplies us with a chain of scenes...so well chosen that everything in heaven and earth crowds into them...». «The difficulty of meditative prayer is to keep hold of the thread and not to stray; and it seems almost too good to be true, that I can have an unbreakable thread, not the gossamer of my ideas but the jeweler's beads and wire between my finger and thumb». Through Mary we live the joyful mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries (middle chapters of Mary's history), and the glorious mysteries. «For the joyful mysteries have cemented a unique bond of love between her Son and her, and we desire to follow it to the end; not only through Easter and Pentecost, but on into Mary's death and glory. For he who did not abhor her womb took her to himself in her death, and crowned her with glory in heaven».

This address began with a reference to Johann Roten, Swiss Marianist, director of the IMRI (International Marian Research Institute) Marian Library University of Dayton. His paper offered a sweeping pointillistic theological survey of Mary, faith and culture. One of his stimulating comments was that «kneeling constitutes the litmus test of mariological discourse and its genuine inculturation». The American Lutheran Jaroslav Pelikan expressed it even more succinctly: «worship is the metabolism of Christian life» (Commonweal, November 17, 1995). For Mary and ecumenism and this study/paper there is no better closing note. For the 25th anniversary (1964-1989) of the conciliar constitution *Unitatis redintegratio* Avery Dulles quoted these statements: The «soul of the whole ecumenical movement» is a call to «change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians». «The reconciliation of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ transcends human powers and gifts...therefore we place our hope entirely in the prayer of

Christ for the Church». Dulles' comment was: «Theologians must do their work but they must direct their hopes elsewhere...The churches can gain a more accurate understanding of each other's true positions and a deeper respect for their shared commitment to the gospel. They can achieve a large measure of common witness, common worship, and common service to the world». Dulles' essay is in the book edited by Thaddeus Horgan, SA, *Walking Together: Roman Catholics And Ecumenism Twenty-Five Years After Vatican II* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990).

EAMON CARROLL, O.Carm.