



# LIGHT & LIFE

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## MARY, OUR MOTHER

By Fr. Paul Duffner, O.P.

“When the fullness of time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman...” (Gal. 4:4). The woman St. Paul referred to, as we know, is Mary, the Virgin Mother of Jesus, the Savior of mankind. All of her privileges, all of the graces showered upon her, and the great dignity with which she is honored, flow from the fact that Mary is mother of a divine Person, Mother of God.

But there is another great truth that is evident from the study of the Scriptures and from the pronouncements of the Church; namely, that Mary is also the Mother of all mankind.

Through the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived in her womb the Savior of mankind. From her He took His human flesh and blood, just as does every child born of a human mother. In the order of grace, she is also mother of each of us. We will examine that truth a bit, to see how this is so, and when it became so.

## NOT A MERE FIGURE OF SPEECH

As we saw, when we speak of being a member of Christ’s Mystical Body, we are not speaking in a figurative or metaphorical sense. It is true in a very real sense. So too, when we speak of Mary as our Mother, this is not just a figure of speech. It is true in a very real and wonderful way.

She is not only the Mother of Christ’s physical body, in the natural order; she is also the Mother of Christ’s Mystical Body in the supernatural order, the order of grace.

Every mother cooperates with God in bringing new life into the world. In the natural order all human life comes

from God, but through the mother. In the order of grace, all life comes from God, but through Mary.

## MARY’S UNIVERSAL MOTHERHOOD

To understand Mary’s relationship with the whole human race, we must understand that her place was unique in a similar way that the place of Eve was unique. The Fathers of the Church in various ways contrasted her role to that of Eve. For example:

— Christ is the counterpart of Adam, the new Head of the human race. Mary is the counterpart of Eve, the new Mother of the human race.

— Eve is mother of those who die in Adam (and who need redemption); Mary is the Mother of all who live in Christ (of all the redeemed). At the invitation of the fallen angel, Eve associated herself with Adam’s disobedience, bringing death. At the invitation of the Angel Gabriel, Mary associated herself with Christ’s obedience, in the work of restoring life. As St. Irenaeus expressed it: “The knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience. What the virgin Eve bound through her unbelief, Mary loosened by her faith.” (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 22, n. 4)

— Eve is our mother according to the body, through which death and the other effects of original sin are transmitted. Mary is our Mother according to the soul — insofar as its life (divine grace) comes through her. In a word, a woman (Eve) was associated with Adam in the downfall of the human race; so a woman (Mary) was associated with Christ in its restoration.

## WHEN DID MARY BECOME OUR MOTHER?

We all know when Mary became the Mother of Jesus. At the moment of Mary’s consent to the words of the Angel Gabriel, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit

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Assumption of the Virgin Mary - Guido Reni

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# THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

## Mary as Virgin and Mother, Model of the Church

By Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P., S.T.D.

I recently had a discussion with an Evangelical friend who informed me that *Theotokos* (Mother of God) was not in the Scriptures. Since he is a Bible Christian, he does not believe that the Bible teaches this doctrine unless the word is found there. Yet the idea permeates the Scriptures and the early Creeds. Indeed, as both mother and virgin, Mary is intimately connected to Christ and His Church. The bishops at Vatican II clearly taught this necessary relationship.

And finally in Chapter VIII special consideration is given to the Blessed Virgin Mary, both in the mystery of Christ, whose mother she is and in the mystery of the church whose maternal and virginal type she is. In this final chapter, in the form of a final flourish, the whole exposition about the mystery of the Church is recapitulated.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of Mary as the motherly and virginal type of the church because she is the Mother of God cannot be underestimated. In her we see the summit and explanation of what it means to be a member of the Church. If anyone should claim that because the Catholic Church is made up of sinners, the means of salvation are not with her, one need only point to Mary to show these means are sufficient. "For in the mystery of the Church, which is itself rightly called mother and virgin, the Blessed Virgin stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar of both virgin and mother."<sup>2</sup>

Mary as Virgin and Mother is intimately the personal model of the Church which as a society is a Virgin and Mother. The Church is mother because she communicates grace in the sacraments; she is virgin in the purity of her faith, communicated through the ministry of the Word by doctrine. Both doctrine and sacraments are the foundation of the continual sharing in the life of the Trinity by sanctifying grace.

Since the Church is a communion with the Trinity, the "singular dignity of the God-bearer (Mary) is evident from her contact with the divine Persons themselves."<sup>3</sup> This contact gives rise to Mary's unique place in the Church as the first and most prominent member, and also is the foundation of the four Marian dogmas defined by the Church: her Divine Motherhood as *Theotokos* and New Eve; her Perpetual Virginity; her Immaculate Conception; and her Assumption.

### DIVINE MOTHERHOOD AND THE NEW EVE

The primary mystery of Mary is her divine motherhood. It is from this that all the other mysteries flow. "Likewise she is mother, namely according to the flesh of Christ himself, but also mother of his brethren by her spiritual cooperation."<sup>4</sup> In treating the mystery of Mary as a chapter in the document on the Church, the Council Fathers in no way wanted to denigrate her participation in the redemption.

Quite the contrary, they wanted to underscore her *munus* or office in the Church more. "Wherefore she is hailed as a pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and outstanding model in faith and charity."<sup>5</sup> This is because she is endowed "with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>6</sup>

Mary is the new Eve, because like the first virgin mother of the human race, she received a message from an angel. In her Annunciation, that message was an invitation to loving obedient cooperation in the divine plan. The angel is like the priest who witnesses the heavenly nuptials between the Virgin and God. God has already given his consent to the marriage and therefore the conception. Now, Mary in our name is asked to give hers. She exemplifies the human cooperation of the whole Church in receiving faith and grace in her catechesis and her loving obedience. She conceives the Word, in faith, in her mind and then in her body. She is therefore the Mother of God because in her the Person of the Word took a human nature. Even though the word is not used in Scripture, certainly if the Word was made flesh the question is whose flesh formed the origin of that new relation with God.

### HERESIES AGAINST DIVINE MOTHERHOOD

This mystery was rejected by Nestorius who maintained that Mary could be called the Mother of Christ, but not really the Mother of God. His idea has been characterized as leading to the idea that there are two persons in Christ, one divine and one human. God dwelt in man in Christ, as a man dwells in a house, without any substantial connection between the two. In other words, the two natures of Christ were so distinct that they led to two different persons that enjoy a union in Christ like our union with God by grace. Instead, the Church maintains that there is a distinction between person (the radical individual) and nature (the principles enjoyed by the radical individual). In Christ, the person of the Word who enjoys a divine nature took other principles to himself to also act as a person, a human nature. This is not an accidental union like grace in us, but a personal union which is unique.

The heresy of Nestorius denied this personal union. His heresy looked on Jesus as an adopted son of God and not the wholly unique natural Son of God. This position was rejected at the Council of Ephesus which used the word "God-bearer" (*Theotokos, Dei Genitrix*) of Mary.

Many today would like to reduce Christ to merely a good man who was somehow identified with God, who only pre-existed his conception in the womb of Mary in the Father's intention. Others would see some distinction between the Jesus of faith and the Jesus of history, or Christology from above (the dogmas of faith) and a Christology from

below (the Jesus sensibly experienced by the Apostles). This distinction is based on an old problem which has its origin in the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant. Kant sought to reform thinking by teaching that nothing metaphysical could be derived from the senses; the metaphysical could only be derived from the subject's need. The Jesus of history is the one described by the senses. The Jesus of faith is the one described by the subject's need.

Catholicism knows no such distinction. Metaphysical knowledge can be arrived at through the senses and so the Jesus of faith and history are the same. Mary, then, is a maternal type because she gave birth to the Person of the Word, but in his human nature. The cooperation of her faith was necessary for the experience of motherhood because the inner union of spousal love (her faith, charity and obedience) were so strong that they brought forth Jesus in the flesh. So no "discrepancy should appear [It. orig.] between the woman, the Mother of Christ in the Gospels, and the figure of the Blessed Virgin just as it is treated in the theological tract and cherished by the Christian people."<sup>7</sup>

## MOTHERHOOD REFLECTED IN THE MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

Mary is the Mother of the Word and so, by her believing, is the prime analogate for faith and the obedience which cooperates with grace in the faith. As the Mother, she is intimately associated with all the mysteries of the life of her Son. One can see this unique Mother and Virgin in her participation in the Christian mysteries which comprise the life, death and resurrection of Our Lord.

In her Annunciation, Mary as the new Eve, consents in the name of the human race to be the vessel of grace and brings forth the one who fulfills the first prophecy of the Redemption, in Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head and you will strike his heel."

In her Visitation, she as the New Ark of the Covenant, brings the Covenant, Jesus to perform an act of ordinary charity to Elizabeth. Thus, she is the image of the active life. John the Baptist dances in the womb as he is cleansed from Original Sin in recognizing Christ, and Mary, with her *Magnificat*, evangelizes us in the mercy God has shown his people. Radical feminists have changed the *Magnificat* into a prayer of Mary addressed to God by altering pronouns to avoid saying "He" of God. Instead in the Gospel text, Mary evangelizes Elizabeth and is the first catechist in the true faith.

In the Nativity, Joseph plays the midwife. The shepherds brought by angels believe in Christ, representing the Jews and the uneducated. The Magi represent the Gentiles and the educated, brought by nature, in the star, to believe. In both cases, they find the child "with his mother".

In the Presentation in the Temple, Mary brings the Lord of the Temple to *meet* the Temple. The New Law comes to meet and fulfill the Old Law. Simeon addresses his words concerning his own death and faith in Christ the Redeemer, the "glory of Israel and the light of the Gentiles" to Mary as well. He then pronounces a prophecy concerning both Christ and his mother Mary.

In the Finding in the Temple, Christ demonstrates His position as the prime teacher of Israel. He does not remonstrate with Mary and Joseph, but asks them why they sought Him *for three days*. Where else would He be but in His Father's house? Mary, as the image of contemplation, keeps all these things and treasures them in her heart as a model to us of the necessity of constant meditation on the life of her Son.

During Jesus' public life at Cana, Mary is the image of the intercessory prayer of the Church. His disciples believe in Him as a result of an action done at her behest. Christ says that His Mother and brothers are those who hear the Word of God and keep it. This is not a denigration of Mary, but an exaltation of her because she is the one who hears the Word within and keeps it *par excellence*.

In the Passion and on the Cross, Mary offers her life with Christ's so she is completely associated with His redemptive obedience and love. She lovingly consents to His offering and so is given to us, the ones won for His Church by this offering, to be our Mother. She shows this Motherhood because after his Ascension, she participates with the Church praying in the Upper Room, in the first novena, for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

## MARY'S PERPETUAL VIRGINITY

Mary is a type of the Church in her virginity, which is not only a virginity of body, but also of mind. "The deepening faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man."<sup>8</sup> The perpetual virginity of Mary has been seriously questioned today by those who miss the point of her spiritual connection with the Church. Her virginity of heart is seen "in faith, and obedience, fidelity and charity."<sup>9</sup> Her purity within is shown in her faith because she believes in the fullness of the mystery of her Son. The church imitates that purity in teaching the complete faith and all the articles of the Creed. Her faith is the prototype for that faith and so she is the "hammer of heretics". She shows this purity in the obedience of her will, an obedience which is never wanting because she is always "full of grace".

Since Mary is the Mother of Christ, and a Virgin in heart as well as body, God gave her special privileges which fittingly correspond to these mysteries. In her inception as a person, she is Immaculately Conceived. In her passing from the world, she does not experience the corruption of death, but by a unique privilege is assumed into heaven with her body.

The Immaculate Conception is central to the mystery of Mary as Mother and Virgin. As Mother of God, she should be untouched by sin. So, God chose to keep

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### **Mary as Virgin and Mother...** (Continued from page 3)

Original Sin from touching her body and soul, so that she might be a fit Mother for the Word. However, this privilege was not given her apart from her relationship with Christ the redeemer. Rather, since she occupies first place among the redeemed, this gift is given to her precisely because of her connection to the cross of Christ. She is also preserved from all actual sins and from temptation so that the virginity of her soul may correspond to the virginity of her body.

Her obedience is therefore completely spontaneous. She has no concupiscence to compromise her inner union with God. All virtues and gifts are given to her, and she is the example of all these to the members of the rest of the Church.

In the end of her life, she is also presented to the Church as a sign of the perfection of the life of the Church in heaven, so she is an eschatological icon of the Church.<sup>10</sup> She is assumed into heaven because it is not fitting that the corruption of death should touch her body.

In Mary's assumed body, the Church can experience the final consummation of the earthly pilgrimage and see a personal expression of the communion of the society of the Church at war with the dragon in the woman of the Apocalypse. She is "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. 12:1) because all nature finds its completion in man, and man finds his completion in God. The woman with her child struggle with the dragon as the woman and her child in Genesis 3:15 struggle with the serpent. These two experiences enclose the realization of salvation history in the rest of the Scripture like bookends. The pilgrim Church, struggling here on earth in faith, could not have a more powerful sign and advocate encouraging her members than Mary.

### **IMPORTANTCE OF Latria AND Dulia**

The veneration of Mary is founded on these mysteries and reflects the text of Scripture itself, "All generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48) The Church wants to be clear, again from an ecumenical intention, that the cultic veneration of Mary "for all its uniqueness, differs essentially from the cult of adoration, which is offered equally to the Incarnate Word and to the Father and the Holy Spirit and it is most favorable to it."<sup>11</sup> Marian piety must shun extremes which do not conform to the doctrine explained in Church teaching and be firmly rooted in the faith handed on through the Church. The veneration of Mary, called *hyperdulia* in Greek, and distinguished from the *latria* offered to God and the *dulia* offered to the rest of the saints, is based solidly on the Fathers and the Scholastic theologians. The Second Vatican Council points out, "[T]rue devotion consists neither in sterile nor transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are to recognize the excellence of the Mother of God [...] and to the imitation of her virtues."<sup>12</sup>

The Church most fittingly ends her reflection on herself as the mysterious society on earth which has an earthly

aspect but is in essence a communion with the Trinity, with a prayer for unity through the intercession of the Mother of God. Catholics and Orthodox likewise venerate her and see in her the sign of hope of the fullness of humanity which the divine light can bring. The faithful on earth experience in her one who lived faith, hope and charity to the fullness and now is enjoying the highest place in heaven. In the experience of the revelation of the "light of the nations" in the Church, she is truly "our life, our sweetness and our hope." ■

1. "Ac tandem in capite VIII [...] specialis consideratio tribuitur B. Mariae Virgini, tum in mysterio Christi, cuius ipsa est mater, tum in mysterio Ecclesiae, cuius ipsa est maternalis et virginalis typus. In quo finali capite, coronidis instar, tota expositione de mysterio Ecclesiae velut recapitulatur." Synopsis, 484.

2. "In mysterio enim Ecclesiae, quae et ipsa iure mater vocatur et virgo, Beata Virgo Maria praecessit, eminenter et singulariter tum virginis tum matris exemplar praebens.", LG, n. 63.

3. "Evidens est autem singularis dignitas Deiparae ex contactu suo cum ipsa Personis divinis." Synopsis, 490.

4. "Est simul mater, scilicet Christi ipsius secundum carnem, at etiam mater fratrum Eius cooperatione sua spirituali." Synopsis, 492.

5. "Quapropter etiam ut supereminens prorsusque singulare membrum Ecclesiae necnon eius in fide et caritate typus et exemplar [...].", LG, n. 53.

6. "[...] hoc summo munere ac dignitate ditatur ut sit Genetrix Dei Filii, ideoque praedilecta filia Patris necnon sacrarium Spiritus Sancti [...].", Ibid.

7. "[...] ne discrepantia appareat inter mulierem, matrem Christi in Evangeliiis, et figuram B. Virginis qualiter in tractatione theologica exhibetur vel a populo christiano colitur." Synopsis, 491.

8. CCC, n. 499.

9. "[...] scilicet fide et obediencia, fidelitate et caritate.", Synopsis, 492

10. CCC, n. 972.

11. "Qui cultus, [...] singularis omnino quamquam est, essentialiter differt a cultu adorationis, qui Verbo incarnato aequae ac Patri et Spiritui Sancto exhibetur, eidemque potissimum favet.", LG, n. 66.

12. "[...] veram devotionem neque in sterili et transitorio affectu, neque in vana quadam credulitate consistere, sed a vera fide procedere [...] eiusque virtutum imitationem excitamur." LG, n. 67

13. "[...] vita, dulcedo, et spes nostra [...].", *Salve Regina*.

### **Mary Our Mother** (Continued from page 1)

she conceived her divine Son. At that moment the divine Word became a member of the human race in the womb of Mary. Yet, it was not until nine months later at Bethlehem, that she brought Him forth.

As we shall see, at the same moment that Mary became the Mother of Jesus, she became the Mother of all mankind. Yet, the fullness of her universal motherhood, the bringing forth of her spiritual children, was not accomplished until many years later on Calvary. ■

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