

Mary, the Model of the Church: Implications for the Church Today

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Mary, the Mother of God, is being venerated by millions and millions of Christians as a model and inspiration for their Christian life from the early centuries till today. Obvious as it may be, a number of prayers and hymns have been composed highlighting her maternal love and care for all the people, especially those who are in distress. Popular devotions and feasts have been established in her honour. Churches, Cathedrals, religious orders, confraternities and even holy years have been named after her. Despite the fact that the devotion to Mary is on the decline in many European countries, primarily due to the growing impact of secularization, it has been flourishing greatly year after year in most of the Asian countries, particularly in India. Every year a large number of people visit the various Marian shrines and offer their petitions and thanksgivings to God through the Blessed Virgin Mary. Needless to say, thanking God for her and praying to her for her intercession is an abiding and deeply rooted characteristic of the Catholic community.

Even though the devotion to Mary has become part and parcel of the Christian life, we cannot deny the fact that there are so many exaggerations in these devotions which assign her a disproportionate role in the Church, and create for her, as it were, an isolated glorious world of her own. They create an impression that in Christian life Mary is more important than Jesus

himself. More often than not, the Protestants accuse Catholics of worshipping Mary as mother goddess. At this juncture, what is more important is the correct perception of her role in the economy of salvation and her model for Christian discipleship. The Second Vatican Council has correctly perceived her role and presented her as the pre-eminent member of the Church and the model of its pilgrim life. She is neither parallel to Jesus Christ who is the unique mediator and saviour of humanity, nor above the Church established by him. It is to be noted that the dominant theme of the *Lumen Gentium* Chapter 8 is Mary as the type and model of the Church. In this article let us make a modest attempt to delve deep into this theme and find out its implications for the Church today.

MARY: THE MOTHER OF THE CHURCH OR THE PRE-EMINENT MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

In the pre-Vatican period, the study of Mary was vigorously pursued by the mariologists, whose reflections were often divorced from the rest of the theology and the mainstream of the life of the Church. They seemed to make the Marian mystery more important than that of the central Christian message, namely, the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ. The prominent themes that emerged from their research were: Mary as “co-redemptrix” and as “mediatrix” of all graces. They presented Mary as a co-cause of our salvation, attributing to her an objective merit in the work of redemption (co-redemptrix) and calling her the second head of the Mystical Body (mediatrix). Thus Mariology had drifted towards certain isolation.¹

But this tendency of isolating Mariology from the mainstream of the life of the Church and the traditional way of keeping Mary parallel to Jesus Christ were not conceded by Vatican II. In the Council, a number of bishops favoured a separate document on Mary, taking into account the immense theological research carried out in the preceding centuries and the particular devotion of Catholics to Mary. On the contrary, a vast majority of Council Fathers underlined the paramount importance of linking Marian mystery more

deeply to the core of Christian life so that she would not remain isolated in theology, a trend which was strong in the pre-Vatican period. For instance, Cardinal Franz Koenig of Vienna strongly argued that the Church was the central topic of the Council and that a separate document would create an impression that the Council intended to define a new Marian dogma which might endanger the entire process of ecumenism.² After a long and much heated debate, the Council decided to include one chapter on her in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), instead of issuing a separate document. It is the last chapter of the document which bears the title, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." It is to be noted that the very title itself clearly envisages Mary not in isolation but in an intimate relationship with her Son and his body, the Church. Yves Congar, while commenting on the title, observes that the preposition "in" of the title is of great ecumenical significance as it has brought out a "sharing-oriented" rather than a "privilege-centered" approach to mariology.³ Another noteworthy feature of this chapter is "its ecumenical concern, which leads it to adopt the biblical perspective as the basis for discussion on Mary (LG 55-59), to ignore or relativize the term "mediatrix," which is considered ambiguous or false by Protestants, preferring to translate its more authentic content with "salutary influence" or "function as mother" (LG 60)."⁴

Against this background, let us take up the point for our study whether the Blessed Virgin Mary could be called Mother of the Church. It came up for discussion in the third session of the Council. Already during the second session, when there was a discussion on issuing a separate document on Mary, Pope Paul VI twice expressed his desire that the Council honour Mary with the title Mother of the Church.⁵ Even though the majority of the Fathers felt that this new title was not illegitimate, they honestly thought that it would place Mary too much above the Church and also outside the Church. Therefore, it was rejected by them with a majority of 1559 votes. At the same time, as Luis Antonio Tagle points out, "In spite of the doctrinal,

ecumenical and pastoral reasons advanced by the Doctrinal Commission against giving the title 'Mother of God' a dogmatic value, the devotional reasons dominated in the minds of many fathers and Pope Paul VI."⁶ Finally Pope Paul VI, in the general audience on November, 18, 1964, announced that he would close the third session by conferring the title 'Mother of the Church' on Mary: "To the glory of the Blessed Virgin and for our consolation we declare that the Most Holy Mary is the Mother of the Church."⁷ Commenting on this declaration, Edward Schillebeeckx observes that the Pope "felt called on to satisfy the minority position in the Council in the final gathering of the third session of the Council by making Mary 'Mother of the Church' on his own personal, and thus non-conciliar, authority."⁸ Thus he made a compromise between the two groups which held polarized views on Mary.

It is to be noted that in the first millennium the honorific title 'Mary, the mother of the Church' was completely unknown. Berengaud, in the twelfth century, seems to have been the first person to use the title. He wrote: "In this passage (Rev 12), we can also see the woman as Blessed Mary, since she is the Mother of the Church [*Mater Ecclesia*] because she brought forth him who is Head of the Church"⁹ In the next century, an English Cistercian wrote: "She herself seems to be Mother of the Church, for since she is certainly Mother of the Head, not unfittingly she is understood to be Mother also of the Body. The Church is, therefore, Mother of Mary and Mary is Mother of the Church."¹⁰ Afterwards this honorific title was seldom referred to by the theologians.

Even though Pope Paul VI bestowed the title Mother of the Church on Mary against the mind of the majority of the Council Fathers, it has now become part of the magisterium of the Church. His apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* featured the same title, but did not emphasize it. Mary was called "the Mother of the Church and of the members – the holy Mother of God and therefore the provident Mother of the Church."¹¹ Pope John Paul II, who was known for his personal devotion to Mary, repeatedly called her the Mother of the Church.

At the same time, it is more appropriate to call her the pre-eminent member of the Church in line with the conciliar thinking. The Council, by reflecting on the mystery of Mary within “mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body” unequivocally indicated that she cannot be perceived in isolation, as a kind of super-human person completely divorced from the rest of the humanity, but only as a member - a privileged member - of the Church: “She is hailed as pre-eminent and as a wholly unique member of the Church.”¹² As a pre-eminent and singular member of the Church, she was the one who heard the Word of God and acted upon it (Lk 11:28), and thus became the Mother of the Son of God and of the Redeemer. She enjoyed the unique privilege of becoming “the beloved daughter of the Father and temple of the Holy Spirit.” “Redeemed in an especially sublime manner”, she stands out from the rest of the humankind. However, this exaltation does not diminish her solidarity with them. She remained a daughter of Adam and Eve and as one united with “all human persons in their need for salvation.”¹³ She fulfilled her maternal mission in perfect communion of life and action and passion with her son, the saviour of humankind.¹⁴ Even today she continues her maternal mission towards the Church, whose first member and perfect type she has become.¹⁵ At this juncture, it is worth mentioning that Pope Paul VI, in spite of his proclamation of Mary as the Mother of the Church, did not fail to acknowledge that she was herself redeemed by Christ and was indeed our sister (*sorella nostra*).¹⁶

MARY, THE MODEL OF THE CHURCH: A REDISCOVERY:

The Second Vatican Council, while presenting Mary as the pre-eminent and unique member of the Church, rightly pointed out her intimate and inseparable association with the Church. It presented her as the *typos* or model of the Church, which symbolically expresses the renewed image of the Church: “She is its type and outstanding model in faith and charity.”¹⁷ We should not think that this is the new image discovered by the Council. What is true, in fact, is that it rediscovered the image employed by the Fathers

of the Church who understood Mary only in relation with her son Jesus Christ and his mystical body, namely the Church.

It is a fact that most of the earliest Patristic writings do not mention the Blessed Virgin Mary. The first reference to her is seen in the letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch who showed her in relation to her son.¹⁸ The apologists of the second and third centuries, especially Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian presented her as the model of the Church, primarily in their efforts to bring out the contrast between Eve and Mary. The important contrast was that Eve defied God and disobeyed Him, whereas Mary believed and obeyed Him. The consequence was in one case, sin and death and in the other life and salvation for all. Mary is envisaged as an ideal woman for the Church, for her obedience and response to the Word of God.¹⁹ In the thought of Tertullian, it was Mary and the Church who came forward to offer help to humanity which had been the original mission of Eve.²⁰ Irenaeus, speaking about the Magnificat, says that "Mary cries out in the name of the Church."²¹

In the third and fourth centuries we could see a clear theological comparison of Mary and Church as "Mother" and "Virgin" in the writings of the Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, St. Cyprian and Didymus of Alexandria. In the observation of Didymus, the Church is the mother through the conception of the Holy Spirit, yet the Church remains wholly a virgin.²² In the West, St. Ambrose of Milan presented Mary, at the foot of the cross, as the model of the Church. He writes: "There is a mystery in the fact that Mary is committed to John, the youngest of the apostle; and we do not need this with a strange ear... for this has to do with the mystery of the Church: formerly united with her ancient people in type, but not effectively, and after having given birth to the Word, and having sown him in the bodies and souls of men by faith in the cross and by burial in the Body of the Lord, she has, by God's command, chosen the society of the youngest people."²³ St. Augustine exposed a very intricate mystical relationship between Mary and the Church. For him the physical motherhood of Mary is the type and pattern of the

spiritual motherhood of the Church. Mary, being a member of the Church, played a part in the Church's fecundity, having physically given birth to Christ, the head, whose members are born of the Spirit.: "She is clearly the mother of the members of Christ... since she has by her charity joined in bringing about the birth of believers in the Church, who are members of its head."²⁴

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MARY, THE MODEL OF THE CHURCH

First of all, we have to acknowledge that the patristic teaching on Mary as the model of the Church, which was primarily utilized in the final chapter of *Lumen Gentium*, was not given due consideration in the various treaties on ecclesiology published in the post-Vatican era. In general, mariology suffered a decline in interest after the Council. One important reason for the declining interest in Marian studies was that many theologians were fully involved in the exploration of the new perspectives in major areas of ecclesiology, Christology, liturgy and biblical studies. Nonetheless, among the few works on this theme is the contribution of O. Semmelroth which is noteworthy.²⁵ He worked out a system of mariology which took as its starting point Mary as the type of the Church. In his paper presented at the International Theological Congress which took place in Rome in 1966, he brought out an in-depth comparison between the Church and Mary. He said: "Whoever venerates Mary as the personal type of the Church cannot identify the Church with Christ Himself. Indeed Mary, and thus the Church, is intimately united to Christ, although they can never be identified with him... In all her mysteries the Blessed Virgin Mary prefigures the grace of Christ, through which the Church becomes the Bride of Christ, within whose maternal womb individuals are children of grace."²⁶ Let us continue our reflection on Mary, as the model of the Church in the light of the new ecclesiology which has emerged since Vatican II.

Mary: the Model of Christian Faith

It is evident that Vatican II, shifting from the universalistic, hierarchy-centred and traditional concept of the Church, envisaged the Church as a community of the new people of God called to lead a life of fellowship, charity and truth. The distinguishing mark of the Church, as the new people of God, is that all those who make up the Church consider themselves to be believers. It is basically a communion of believers whom God Himself has summoned through Christ in the Spirit. It is a community which "proclaims the death of the Lord until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). According to Hans Kueng, the Church came into existence only when people gathered together in faith in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and in the hope of the coming consummation of the Kingdom of God and the return of risen Christ in glory.²⁷ It is the confession of faith in Jesus Christ as the crucified and the risen Messiah which unites them all together and makes them into a community of disciples. The love and fellowship are fostered and strengthened among them as all participate in the same proclamation of faith. Despite the fact that they hail from different families with diverse backgrounds and belong to different ethnic, linguistic or cultural groups, they are very intimately and closely united with one another due to the fact that all of them believe in the same Lord and Master.

To describe the Church as a community of faith is to say that what it basically is in its being of communion emanates from the response to the call of God who reveals Himself in human history.²⁸ Faith, strictly speaking, is a God-given invitation to all human persons to share in His divine life and love. The call is not impersonal and distant; rather, it is an intimate call that lovingly urges, but never forces the person to accept God's invitation. The act of faith, on the other hand, is the response to this gift, always made in freedom. Bernard Haring has described the faith response as "the joyous and grateful acceptance of [the One] who is the Truth, the Way, the Life; grateful acceptance of [God's] free gift to us."²⁹ This response is a dynamic and

vibrant encounter with the living God, a total acceptance of the revealing and giving Person by a loving surrender of one's whole being and an unreserved commitment to live for Him. In other words, faith is an act by which the disciples of Jesus Christ are called upon to open themselves to God, who is speaking to them in their context, to accept in their lives His salvific plan for humanity and fulfill it with utmost commitment.³⁰ In the terminology of the gospel it can be described as acceptance of the Kingdom of God and working with Jesus for its coming already in the world.³¹

Mary, the pre-eminent member and the first believer of the Church, can be called a model of Christian faith. In the gospels, faith is described in terms of 'doing the will of God' (Mk 3: 31-35), hearing the Word of God and putting it into practice (Lk 8: 19-21; 11:28). The narrative of the annunciation as found in the Gospel of Luke (1: 26-38) bears witness to this fact. Mary was brought up in a Jewish environment and expected to follow its customs and traditions with meticulous care. Accordingly, she would be expected to marry a man and bring up a family like any other young woman. Therefore, she was betrothed to Joseph. But the voice of God, inviting her to think differently from the ordinary way of life that other women were leading, was not only a great surprise to her, but also posed an immense challenge to her. The annunciation "must have meant a physical, psychological, social and spiritual challenge to the young Mary. She faced this risk bravely and matured through the process of living this exceptional vocation."³²

But Mary was convinced that God had given her a special vocation and mission which she was determined to fulfill, unmindful of the challenges that would be posed to her as a result of her fiat. Her acceptance of the angel's message with an indomitable will and firm determination made her the mother of the eschatological Messiah, conceived virginally by the power of the Holy Spirit. She devotedly listened to the call of God, joyfully responded to it and totally surrendered herself to His salvific plan for humanity. The virginal motherhood of Mary, though usually understood in terms of mere physical facts of her motherhood and virginity, should be seen more as an

outward and visible expression of her inner attitude and commitment. As George Soares Prabhu pertinently observes “The role of Mary in salvation history does not depend primarily on her physical motherhood – the fact she has given birth to Jesus – but on the faith assent which made that motherhood possible.”³³ Mary was called the blessed and favoured one not merely because she brought forth her son Jesus, but primarily because she “believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (Lk 1: 45). Mary joyfully listened to the Word of God, fully believed it, deeply pondered over it in her heart and unconditionally obeyed it (Lk 2: 18; 2: 51; 11: 28). That is the reason why St. Augustine succinctly said: “*Mater prius mente quam ventre*” (mother in spirit before she was physically mother).³⁴ Vatican II articulates Mary’s free, personal response to the divine invitation as follows:

The daughter of Adam, Mary, consenting to the Word of God, became the Mother of Jesus. Committing herself whole-heartedly and impeded by no sin to God’s saving will, she devoted herself totally, as a handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, saving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God. Rightly, therefore, the Fathers see Mary not merely as passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man’s salvation through faith and obedience.³⁵

The Fathers of the Church, keeping in mind the faith and fidelity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, called her the type of the Church and model of Christian life. By her perfect and total docility to the Spirit and her unconditional surrender to God’s will in Jesus Christ, she sets an enduring and supreme model for the Church which is today over-institutionalized and structuralized by its character. Mary’s ‘fiat’ reveals the type of cooperation which the Church is called to render to God for the fulfillment of His saving plan in the world through its life and engagement of various activities such as preaching, pastoral and social care and sacramental ministry. In the observation of St. Augustine, the Christians too, drawing inspiration from the example of Mary, conceive and give birth to Christ by believing in him in

their hearts unto righteousness, and confessing him with their lips unto salvation.³⁶ They are called upon to discern the will of God revealed through day-to-day events of their life, to respond to it in faith and fulfill it with unshakable determination, regardless of the drastic consequences it would bear on them.

Mary: the Model and Mother of Communion

One of the important changes we note as the result of the reforms initiated by Vatican II is that the communitarian model of the Church has gained momentum and made tremendous impact on the life, mission and structure of the Church. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985, marking the close of Vatican II, observed, “the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council’s documents.”³⁷ The Church, accordingly, is not primarily an institution but a people of God united together in “a fellowship of life, charity and truth.”³⁸ Envisaged as communion, the Church has a twofold dimension, namely vertical and horizontal. Communion is basically a participation or sharing in the life of God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit – a divine life that is fostered by the Spirit of God. All the members share in “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14) by virtue of baptism and through the celebration of Eucharist. The participation in the life of communion with the Triune God fosters among them a bond of solidarity and fellowship. It forms them into a Church of God gathered together in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and makes them all brothers and sisters to one another. Since all proclaim the same faith, share the same Word of God, celebrate the same sacraments and participate in the same life of grace gifted by the Holy Spirit, all are called upon to love one another, participate in the joys and sufferings of one another and bear the responsibility of carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ making use of the charisms of the Spirit. This is the reason why the Council explicitly stated: “...the chosen People of God is one: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5). As members they *share a common dignity* from their birth in

Christ. They have the same *filial grace* and the *same vocation to perfection*. They possess in common *one salvation, one hope, and one undivided charity*.”³⁹ “And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, dispensers of mysteries and shepherds on behalf of others, yet *all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and activity common to all the faithful* for the building up of the Body of Christ.”⁴⁰

In the light of the ecclesiology of communion that we have briefly stated above we shall continue our reflections to demonstrate how Mary could be envisaged as the model as well as the mother of communion in the Church. As pointed out earlier, Mary was one of the members of the community of disciples established by Jesus for the Kingdom of God. Certainly we do not see her following Jesus in his movement from place to place with other disciples, especially with women mentioned in the gospels (Lk 8: 1-3; 24: 10; Jn 19:25; Mt 27: 55-56; Mk 15:40-41), but that does not imply that Mary was outside the messianic community. She played her part by remaining within it, if not by a life spent at the side of Jesus all the time. She was present with him in the crucial moments of his life - at his incarnation, his birth, his first visit to the temple, at the beginning of his public life at Cana, at his execution, at his sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to take his place and continue his work. However, Mary’s participation in the paschal and Pentecostal events is very crucial and significant, as both of them unequivocally express her intimate communion not only with God but also with the Church.

According to John, the crucifixion of Jesus was the decisive hour in the messianic mission. It was the hour of the glorification of the Son by the Father (Jn 12:23; 27-28; 17:1). At this decisive hour Mary, as a representative of the messianic community, remained at the foot of the cross with other women and the beloved disciple in order to participate in the last mystery of Jesus’ mission for the Kingdom of God. Mary and the beloved disciple represented the Church, the redeemed community. Commenting on Jn 19:25-27, E. J. Kilmartin writes: “John places her in the midst of the Church as a

member ... Her place is at the foot of the cross with the believers.”⁴¹ Furthermore, Jesus’ address to his mother, “Woman, behold your son,” and to the beloved disciple “Behold your mother,” bear a wide range of symbolic meaning. The relationship between Mary and the beloved disciple represents the unity of true believers, for which Jesus had earlier prayed: “Holy Father, protect them in your name, that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (Jn 17:11). Then in Acts 1:14 we find Mary with the members of the Jerusalem community, gathered together and awaiting the “power from on high,” the gift of the promised Spirit at Pentecost. She was in communion with all those who would form the nascent Church. Thus she stands out as a model for communion of believers in the Church.

At the same time, Mary can also be called the mother of communion of believers. Motherhood is a symbol of life. Mother is the one who not only brings forth children and nurtures them, but also the one who gives them a new life, namely a life of communion. She unifies all her children with maternal care and builds them into a family of love and fellowship. Mary, the pre-eminent member of the Church, brings all the believers of her son together and nurtures in them communion with God and communion with one another by inviting them to follow her example of faith, love and charity. This is why she is being venerated as the mother of all believers starting from the early Christian traditions. In the view of St. Augustine “According to the body, Mary is Mother only of Christ. But in so far as she does the will of God, she is spiritually our sister and mother. And thus this unique woman is mother and virgin, not only in spirit but bodily – mother in spirit, not of the Saviour, our Head, of whom rather she is born spiritually, for all who believe in him – and she is one of them – are rightly called sons of the Spouse, but she is really Mother of the members who we are, because she cooperated by charity so that there might be born in the Church believers, of whom Christ is the head.”⁴² Underscoring the maternal care of Mary, Vatican II observes that “by her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still

journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home.”⁴³

Mary: the Model of Commitment to the Kingdom of God

It is to be noted that Jesus, during his ministry, laid the foundation for the *ekklesia* mainly for the sake of carrying on the mission of the Kingdom of God. The Church exists in and for the Kingdom. It has received from God its vocation to be a sign and an instrument of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a new communion and fellowship with God as Father and human beings as brothers and sisters and with the whole of the nature as God’s wonderful gift. Therefore, the evangelizing mission of the Church consists primarily in becoming the pilgrim people of God with the message of God’s unconditional love for the human person, a visible sign, a sacrament of “communion with God and of unity among all men.”⁴⁴ It implies building up of the Kingdom of God by promoting an authentic human community which respects the dignity of every human person irrespective of caste, creed or ethnicity, shares with fellow persons without being selfish and fosters a sense of solidarity shown in dialogue and collaboration. Further, the Kingdom of God is intrinsically interwoven with the world of the poor: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20) was the good news proclaimed by Jesus. To be at the service of the Kingdom means to participate in what God is bringing about for the poor, the weak and the marginalized (Mt 11:5; Lk 4: 16-21; 6:20). His table fellowship with the poor, sinners and publicans (Lk 5:30-31) and his parables such as that of the Good Samaritan (Lk 5:30-31), the Rich and Lazarus (Lk 16: 19-31) etc., demonstrate his preferential option for them. Therefore, the choice placed before the Church is, “to opt to be on the side of God and the manifestations of the divine power among the poor, or to be on the side of the mighty of the world – the upper caste, classes etc – and enjoy the privileges and influence deriving thereof.”⁴⁵ The Synod of Bishops held in 1971 made it clear the option of the Church: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation

of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."⁴⁶ Thus the proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom of God consists primarily in the involvement of the Church in action on behalf of the poor and the oppressed whom God of the Bible favoured.

Mary's commitment to God's plan for humanity and her identifying herself with Jesus' mission for the Kingdom of God present her as a model for the Church. According to Luke, she was not only the favoured one of God but the courageous woman, fully committed to the advent of the Kingdom of justice, equality and fraternity for which her son dedicated his entire life. She was the first believer as well as servant of the Kingdom of God. Having heard the news that her cousin Elizabeth was pregnant in her old age, Mary left in haste, went to the hill country and remained with her for three months in order to serve her till the birth of John the Baptist. Her haste was "physical and, at the same time, displayed a great quickness of courage."⁴⁷ It was the courage, which sprang up from the joy of her vocation, for announcing the good news of the dawn of the Kingdom of God through her son. Mary was a herald of liberation, singing the song of justice – the Magnificat - of the coming Kingdom of God (Lk 1:46-55). She sang this canticle to demonstrate how God's salvific plan would be realized in the coming of her son Jesus Christ, the liberator of humankind. In accordance with her conviction that God had always opted for the poor and the marginalized, Mary identified her as one of the poor and lowly. She was a member of the *anawim*. The word *anawim* comes from the Hebrew *anaw* with its cognate *ani* which denotes the poor, the afflicted and the humble. It designates both those who are materially poor as well as those who rely completely on the loving mercy of God for everything. The opposite of the *anawim* are those who rely on their own power, strength and resources. In her 'hymn of revolt' Mary revealed God's determined action by which He would liberate the dehumanized and put down the powerful from their thrones, for it was through the emancipation

of the poor and the oppressed that He would realize His liberating project for the entire humanity. Thus she expresses not only her solidarity with the oppressed, but also “blares out a clarion call to the voiceless to become the agent in a revolution in which God Himself marches in the vanguard.”⁴⁸

Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, has described how Mary remains a model for all Christians who are called to join hands with God and bring about a transformation of existing structures of the society. He writes:

The modern woman will note with pleasant surprise that Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions (cf. Lk 1: 51-53). The modern woman will recognize in Mary, who “stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord”, a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile. These are situations that cannot escape the attention of those who wish to support, with the gospel spirit the liberating energies of man and of society.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

Mary remains for ever the unique and unparalleled model of the Church. Her courageous response to the call of God, steadfastness in her vocation in the midst of trials and tribulations, her solidarity with all the members of the redeemed community and, above all, her total commitment to the mission for the Kingdom of God are always inspiring and motivating the Church to follow her path and remain faithful in its vocation and mission in accordance with the plan of God. What makes the Church meaningful

and relevant in the society today are not its huge structures and innumerable institutions, but its display of courageous faith and strength of commitment. It is very fitting to conclude this article with what Pope Paul VI observed in his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus*: "The Virgin Mary is held up as an example to the faithful for the way in which, in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God, because she heard the Word of God and acted on it and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions."⁵⁰

Footnotes

- ¹ V. Piovesan, 'Recent Trends in Mariology,' *Vidyajyoti* XLIII (1979), 295.
- ² Ann Carr, "Mary in the Mystery of the Church: Vatican Council II," in *Mary According to Women* ed. Carol Frances Jegen (Kansas City: Leaven Press, 1985), 11.
- ³ Quoted in Frederick M. Jelly, "Characteristics of Contemporary Mariology," *Chicago Studies* 27 (1988), 35.
- ⁴ Stefano De Fiores, "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," in *Vatican II: Assessments and Perspectives* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 472.
- ⁵ Pope Paul VI's Addresses on October 11, 1963, on the feast of Mary, the Mother of God and on December 4, 1963, during the closing of the second period of the Council.
- ⁶ Luis Antonio Tagle, "Mary as the Mother of the Church," in *History of Vatican II* ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, History of Vatican II (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 446.
- ⁷ *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI* (Vatican City: Tipografia Ployglotta Vaticana, 1965), 2:675.
- ⁸ Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 15.
- ⁹ PL 17, 876 CD.
- ¹⁰ Cf. Michael O' Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1982), 252.
- ¹¹ *Marialis Cultus*, 11.
- ¹² *Lumen Gentium*, 53.
- ¹³ *Lumen Gentium*, 53.
- ¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 56.
- ¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 60-65.

- ¹⁶ *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, 664.
- ¹⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 53.
- ¹⁸ *Letter to Ephesians*, 7:2, 18:2, 19:1; *Letter to Smyrnaens*, 1:1 and *Letter to Tallians*, 9:1.
- ¹⁹ Cf. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 100; Irenaenus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 22, 4; V, 19, 1.
- ²⁰ *De Carne Christi*, 17.5.
- ²¹ *Adversus Haereses*, III, 10.
- ²² *De Trinitate*, 11, 13.
- ²³ *Expositio in Lucam*, X, 134.
- ²⁴ *De Sancta Virginitate*, 6.
- ²⁵ O. Semmelroth, *Mary: Archetype of the Church* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1963).
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- ²⁸ J.M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville: Minnesota, 1992), 106.
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- ³⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis* (London: Collins, 1982), 19.
- ³¹ George Soares Prabhu, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus Vision of A New Society" in *The Indian Church in the Struggle for a New Society*, ed. D. S. Amalorpavadoss (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1981), 584.
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- ³³ George Soares Prabhu, "Rejoice, Favoured One," in *A Biblical Theology for India*, Vol. 2, ed. Scaria Kuthirakkattel (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth Theology Series, 1999), 180.
- ³⁴ Augustine, *Sermo, 215: In redditione Symboli*, 4.
- ³⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 56.
- ³⁶ Augustine, *Sermo, 191: In Natali Domini VIII*, 4.
- ³⁷ *Message of the People of God and the Final Report*, Washington: National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1986, 17.
- ³⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, 44.
- ³⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 32 (emphasis added).
- ⁴⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 32 (emphasis added)

- ⁴¹ E.J. Kilmartin, "The Mother of Jesus was there: The Significance of Mary in Jn 2:3-5 and Jn 19: 25-27," *Sciences Ecclesiastiques* 15 (1963), 224-225.
- ⁴² *De Virgin.*, VI 41.
- ⁴³ *Lumen Gentium*, 62.
- ⁴⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 1.
- ⁴⁵ Felix Wilfred, *Sunset in the East* (Madras: Chair in Christianity, University of Madras, 1991), 113.
- ⁴⁶ Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1972), 34.
- ⁴⁷ Joseph Paredes, *Mary and the Kingdom of God* (Middlegreen: St. Paul Publications, 1990), 86-87.
- ⁴⁸ R.J. Raja, "Mary and the Marginalized," *Vidyajyoti* 51 (1987), 223.
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- ⁵⁰ *Marialis Cultus*, 35.