

VAIHARAI

(The Dawn)

A Theological Half-Yearly

Vol. 16, No.2

Jul.-Dec. 2001

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Each year on the 8th of December we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Some years when the feast falls on a Sunday we do shift the feast to the following Monday, as Sunday is dedicated to the Lord. In this way we do full justice to the Day of the Lord and at the same time we also give Mary a unique place in the Liturgical Calendar. Jesus is our Lord and Saviour. Mary is his mother and our mother.

The Immaculate Conception of the B.V.M. is one of the Church teachings that arose more from the piety of the faithful than from the insights of brilliant theologians. Even St. Thomas Aquinas could not see theological justification for this teaching. There is no direct Scriptural reference for the same. Some other feasts of Mary, such as the Solemnity of the Assumption of the B.V.M. also fall in this line.

All the same, Mary, the mother of Jesus, has played a key role in the pastoral-liturgical-spiritual life of the Catholic Christians all over the world. Today a rediscovery of Mary is taking place among Church groups, popular devotion is blossoming under the impetus of pilgrimages to Marian Shrines, and both personal and collective consecrations to Mary are being renewed. Yet, it is surprising how little there is about Mary in the Scriptures. The New Testament pictures Mary as a young Jewish woman who is invited to participate in God's plan of salvation. Mary says, "Yes" to this divine plan. The infancy narratives are more concerned about Christological content

than giving information about Mary. Only the apocryphal gospels, such as the *Protoevangelium of James*, tend to give biographical information about Mary. The patristic fathers tended to parallel Eve and Mary. While Eve disobeyed God Mary's obedience became the cause of salvation both for herself and for the whole human race.

The greatest contribution to Mariology and Marian devotion in the early stage was the proclamation of Mary as *Theotokos*, or "God bearer," at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431. This led to the acceptance of Mary not only as Mother of Jesus but also as Mother of God because of the affirmation of the full humanity and divinity of Jesus. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, "Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save" (CCC 501).

Due to the conclusions arrived at the council of Ephesus in 431 Christians were encouraged to pray to Mary as Mother of God. Gradually other Marian devotions developed which made considerable effect on the spiritual and pastoral life of the Church. At the Second Vatican Council which came at the wake of a New Pentecost, a new official title was given to Mary, Mother of the Church, as Mary was with the apostles at the first Pentecost when the Church was officially instituted (Acts 1:14). But even long before that the faithful had been venerating Mary as Mother of the Church. In line with the Vatican II Karl Rahner signaled a change in the theological approach towards Mary. The Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary had been considered as privileges of Mary. But Rahner explained them as radically continuous with human life.

Liberation theologians are impressed by the *Magnificat* of Mary and they see Mary as the spokesperson of the poor and oppressed of society. Mary is seen as one actively involved in God's plan of liberation. However, the feminist theologians are cautious about Marian theology. They view the cult of Mary as a paradigm for patriarchal social control and the oppression of women. They say that the cult of Mary is indicative of Catholic negation and mistrust of sexuality. Although virginity is presented as the superior lifestyle

in the Marian theology, women are reduced to having just two options: marriage or virginity.

The post-Vatican II theology owes much to Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Mariialis Cultus* (1974) which attempts to retrieve the values of popular Mariology within guidelines that reflect the emphases of Vatican II. The post-Vatican II theology is concerned with dialogue between popular piety and sober theological thinking. The encyclical clearly states: "Certain practices of piety that not long ago seemed suitable for expressing the religious sentiment of individuals and religious communities seem today inadequate because they are linked with social and cultural patterns of the past (MC, Introduction). The encyclical also proposes guidelines for Marian devotion.

Today we are in a period of ecumenism. When the Second Vatican Council was invoked there was a certain imbalance with regard to Marian devotions. In the immediate past the Church had proclaimed two dogmatic definitions regarding Mary: The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The reformation people had no difficulty in accepting the declaration of the Council of Ephesus in 431 regarding Mary's motherhood as it is scripture based. But the other definitions which are not so much based on Scripture would not carry value to people who have the principle of *sola scriptura*. But many Christians had valued Marian devotions more than Eucharist. Hence some bishops demanded a separate document on Mary which would highlight the privileges of Mary. But the Council after a heated debate placed the section on Mary within the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*). This was a disappointment for the Marianists who felt that so many familiar and well-loved devotions disappeared. But for those who could move with the spirit of Vatican II this was a welcome gesture as in the chapter on Mary in the constitution on the Church Mary is situated in her theological role within the community of believers. They could realize the ongoing role of Mary in the life of the Church. The feminist theologians too make use of the insights of Vatican II on Mary and they see Mary as the type of the Church.

The ecumenical and inter-faith developments of Vatican II helped the faithful to see Mary above all as a disciple of Jesus Christ. There is an awareness of Mary's Jewish religious roots and that opens up paths for Jewish-Christian cooperation.

In the context of post-Vatican theology on Mary and in the context of ecumenism this issue of *Vaiharai* is dedicated to Mariology. In this issue Rev. Fr. Dr. Aloysius Xavier shows how Mary is more intimately connected with the Word of God as portrayed by the Gospel of Luke. Several people heard the Word of God but it was only Mary who heard it, kept it in her heart, pondered over it and was trying to interpret it. In this way she is the real disciple of Jesus and model for all Christians.

Rev. Fr. Dr. Devaraj explains how Mary is the model of the Church, a point which the fathers of the church did not clearly visualize. "She is its type and outstanding model in faith and charity" as *Lumen Gentium* portrays. This has implications for our life as Mary is a model for our faith, our communion and our commitment to the kingdom of God. Mary was not just a submissive woman. In fact she did not hesitate to proclaim that God will vindicate the poor and the oppressed. The modern women will find strength in Mary.

Rev. Fr. Dr. Santiago Raja examines the various ecumenical dialogues that took place between Catholics and Orthodox Christians and between Catholics and Protestants. He concludes that while some of the Marian dogmas could not be accepted by Pentecostals etc., the Protestants, because of the dialogues, could come to the level of accepting Mary as found in the Scripture. In fact some of the Protestants accept that in the past they have victimized Mary at the wake of attacking the Catholic Church. The Catholics could also realize the excessive Marian devotion done in the past. The dialogues have illumined the Catholic Church to realize that the Marian teaching should be more scriptural and Christological.

Rev. Sr. Dr. Metti Amirtham SCC makes a re-reading of Mary from an Indian perspective. She sees the devotion to Mary from the

perspective of mother-goddess worship of India and from the perspective of feminists abroad and in India. As there is a paradigm shift today in feminist theology itself Mary could be seen through the lens of Indian feminist and identified as a feminist. The author sees women empowerment in the words and deeds of Mary. The Immaculate Conception of Mary and her Assumption into heaven show the goodness of the female human body. Mary is not a victim to the plan of God rather a model of fulfillment and autonomy.

The Marian emphasis of the Second Vatican Council is in harmony with liturgical emphasis too. The strong faith of Mary portrayed by the Gospels is in tune with the liturgical renewal. Advent and the Christmas season have become Mary's special time in the liturgical year. The motherhood of Mary is also celebrated on the octave of Christmas. In this context Rev. Fr. Dr. Arokiaraj writes on the historical and liturgical aspects of Advent. He points out the eschatological, penitential and liturgical dimensions of Advent. He also tells us that Advent, which is a time of preparation for the Lord, never ends till we are admitted into the joy of our Master.

Fr. V. Raphael
Editor