



From A Bishop's Journal (617)

Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ (2)

The report of the the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) on the Virgin Mary is stamped with awe at God's gifts. By giving you a few excerpts from the report I ask God for the grace to welcome into the depths of my heart the rich teaching of Tradition, and like Mary, to meditate in my heart the wonders of God.

Scriptural Reflection

The scriptural witness summons all believers in every generation to call Mary 'blessed'; this Jewish woman of humble status, this daughter of Israel living in hope of justice for the poor, whom God has graced and chosen to become the virgin mother of his Son through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. We are to bless her as the 'handmaid of the Lord' who gave her unqualified assent to the fulfilment of God's saving plan, as the mother who pondered all things in her heart, as the refugee seeking asylum in a foreign land, as the mother pierced by the innocent suffering of her own child, and as the woman to whom Jesus entrusted his friends. We are at one with her and the apostles, as they pray for the outpouring of the Spirit upon the nascent Church, the eschatological family of Christ. And we may even glimpse in her the final destiny of God's people to share in her son's victory over the powers of evil and death.

Role of Mary

The [Second Vatican] Council intended "to explain carefully both the role of the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Word Incarnate and of the Mystical Body, as well as the duties of the redeemed human race towards the God-bearer, mother of Christ and mother of humanity, especially of the faithful". The Constitution on the Church concludes by calling Mary a sign of hope and comfort for God's pilgrim people. The Fathers of the Council consciously sought to resist exaggerations by returning to patristic emphases and placing Marian doctrine and devotion in its proper Christological and ecclesial context. Soon after the Council, faced by an unanticipated decline in devotion to Mary, Pope Paul VI published an Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus* (1974), to remove doubts about the Council's intentions and to foster appropriate Marian devotion. His review of the place of Mary in the revised Roman rite showed that she has not been 'demoted' by the liturgical renewal, but that devotion to her is properly located within the Christological focus of the Church's public prayer. He reflected on Mary as a model of the spiritual attitudes with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries. She is the model for the whole Church, but also a teacher of the spiritual life for individual Christians.

Authentic Devotion

According to Paul VI, the authentic renewal of Marian devotion must be integrated with the doctrines of God, Christ, and the Church. Devotion to Mary must be in accordance with the Scriptures and the liturgy of the Church; it must be sensitive to the concerns of other Christians and it must affirm the full dignity of women in public and private life. The Pope also issued cautions to those who err either by exaggeration or neglect. Finally, he commended the recitation of the *Angelus* and the Rosary as traditional devotions which are compatible with these norms. In 2002, Pope John Paul II reinforced the Christological focus of the Rosary by proposing five 'mysteries of Light' from the Gospels' account of Christ's public ministry between his Baptism and Passion.

In the Anglican Communion

Mary has a new prominence in Anglican worship through the liturgical renewals of the twentieth century. In most Anglican prayer books, Mary is again mentioned by name in the Eucharistic prayers. Further, August 15th has come to be widely celebrated as a principal feast in honour of Mary with Scripture readings, collect and proper preface. Other feasts associated with Mary have also been renewed, and liturgical resources offered for use on these festivals. Given the definitive role of authorized liturgical texts and practices in Anglican formularies, such developments are highly significant. At the same time, the Roman Catholic Church has attempted to set devotion to Mary within the context of the teaching of Scripture and the ancient common tradition. This constitutes, for the Roman Catholic Church, a re-reception of teaching about Mary. Revision of the calendars and lectionaries used in our Communion, especially the liturgical provision associated with feasts of Mary, gives evidence of a shared process of re-receiving the scriptural testimony to her place in the faith and life of the Church.

Common Praise

The Scriptures lead us together to praise and bless Mary as the handmaid of the Lord, who was providentially prepared by divine grace to be the mother of our Redeemer. Her unqualified assent to the fulfilment of God's saving plan can be seen as the supreme instance of a believer's 'Amen' in response to the 'Yes' of God. She stands as a model of holiness, obedience and faith for all Christians. As one who received the Word in her heart and in her body, and brought it forth into the world, Mary belongs in the prophetic tradition. We are agreed in our belief in the Blessed Virgin Mary as *Theotókos*. Our two communions are both heirs to a rich tradition which recognizes Mary as ever virgin, and sees her as the new Eve and as a type of the Church. We join in praying and praising with Mary whom all generations have called blessed, in observing her festivals and according her honour in the communion of the saints, and are agreed that Mary and the saints pray for the whole Church. In all of this, we see Mary as inseparably linked with Christ and the Church. Within this broad consideration of the role of Mary, we now focus on the theology of hope and grace.

+ François Thibodeau *ym*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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