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Marian Mariology

CHAPTER 37



The veneration of Mary, when properly understood, permeates the entire life of the Church; it is a dimension of dogma and of piety, of Christology and of ecclesiology. This dimension needs to be made explicit today in connection with the problems of humanity. Mariology expresses something fundamental to the Christian life itself, to the Christian experience of the world.

Sound Mariology has always been understood in Christological terms. If the Gospel revealed nothing more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God and man, was born of Mary, this alone would be sufficient for the Church to love her and to draw theological conclusions from pondering this relationship of Mother and Son. We need no other revelations. Mary is a self-evident and essential *datum* and dimension of the Gospel.

Chapter one centers on Catechesis flowing from Byzantine Marian spirituality with commentary by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M. Chapter 2 discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

Chapter 37

The Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of Christ

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

After professing our faith in Christ as the only-begotten Son of God, we declare that He was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary”.

Christ’s Divinity, therefore, means that He has the same uncreated nature as God the Father. Christ’s humanity means that He has the same kind of created nature as Mary His Mother, who conceived Him and gave Him birth.

Focus

There are two mysteries of the faith on which we concentrate in this lesson namely, the true humanity of Jesus Christ, and the privileges of Mary, His Mother, who brought Him into the world.

The first mystery, the true humanity of Jesus, part of world history, at a definite time, in a definite place. The events of His life are real facts and the words that He said are real speech.

The second mystery, His Mother Mary, is also part of the history of the world. Being no less than her Son, the mystery of Mary not only builds on provable historical data and surpasses these data in five marvelous ways.

- Mary is not only the Mother of Jesus of Nazareth; she is also the Mother of God.
- Mary was conceived like other children, of a human father and mother but she was conceived in God's supernatural friendship, that is, without original sin.
- Mary was not only sinless at conception, she was preserved from even actually offending God.
- Mary truly conceived Jesus of Nazareth, but without carnal intercourse. Indeed, she was a perpetual virgin.
- Mary finished her course of life on earth, but then was assumed body and soul into heaven, to join her Divine Son.

Vocabulary

Assumption
 Blessed Virgin Mary
 Fatima, Our Lady of the rosary of
 Guadalupe
 Imitation of Christ
 Immaculate Conception
 Lourdes
 Marian Art
 Marian Literature
 Mariolatry
 Mariology
 Mary, Name of
 Mary's Death
 Mary's sinlessness
 Mary's virginity
 Mary, Blessed Virgin

Catechetics

It is best to treat separately the two mysteries professed in the third article of the Apostles' Creed.

The True Humanity of Jesus Christ

There would never have been any controversy about Christ's human nature except for the towering truth of faith, that Jesus is God.

In teaching others about Christ's humanity it is necessary to avoid two erroneous extremes. The one extreme is to make Him so much like us that He becomes a sinner. The other is to make Him so unlike us that He ceases to be really human.

As far back as the early fifth century, the Nestorians claimed that Christ was really two persons, one human and the other divine. On these grounds, they found no problem in making Christ so human that He had sinful inclinations like us. The general council of Constantinople condemned these ideas as heretical in 553 A.D. But they keep coming up, even in our day.

What the catechist must make clear is that Jesus was truly human. He did not, however, have our sinful inclinations because His human nature was united in one Divine Person, and God is infinitely holy.

We may, therefore, imitate Jesus in the virtues which He practiced while on earth in visible form.

Moreover, Jesus had a free human will with which He voluntarily chose to be patient, and humble, and merciful, and kind. Thus we are to imitate Him on both levels: in the practice of virtue and in the use of our free will to cooperate, as Christ did, with the grace of God.

The Blessed Virgin Mary

In teaching others about the Blessed Virgin, it is well to point out that there has been a remarkable growth, as we call it, in Marian doctrine over the centuries. This does not mean that any new revelations about Mary were given to the world. But it does mean that with the passage of time, the Church under Divine guidance has grown in her ever deeper and clearer understanding of the Marian mysteries that were originally revealed.

MOTHER OF GOD. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of Mary's divine maternity for religious education.

Catholics have so much devotion to the Blessed Virgin; there are so many Marian shrines, so many prayers and hymns to Our Lady; so much stress on the Rosary; so many Hail Mary's are recited - that the faithful must see the basis for it all. They must have clearly explained to them that this is not Mariolatry, giving divine honors to Mary, but authentic Christianity which recognizes the Blessed Virgin as a mere creature, of course, but one who conceived and gave birth to the Creator.

IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. What especially needs to be brought out in teaching the Immaculate Conception is Mary's possession of the supernatural life from the first moment of her existence. She had the virtues of faith, hope and charity. She had the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. She had the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit.

She could grow in the supernatural life by cooperating with the graces that God gave her. She could merit before God. Why? Because she had a free will. Although she

with dignity, and of achieving their own true advancement. In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable: the self-offering totality of love; the strength that is capable of becoming the greatest sorrows; limitless fidelity and tireless devotion to work; the ability to combine penetrating intuition with words of support and encouragement” (Pope John Paul II, *Mother of the Redeemer*, 46).

End

would never choose to sin, yet she would choose among various options that were all good, or between the good and the better, and between the better and the best.

Mary did not have the disorderly passion of body and soul that we experience because she was conceived without original sin and its consequences. One of the results of original sin that we all have is the disorderly desires that, unless controlled with the help of God’s grace, lead us into sin.

ABSOLUTE SINLESSNESS. This says more than merely that Mary never sinned. She had a free will. But confirmed by supernatural grace, her will was never inclined to disobey the will of God. What should be further explained to those you catechize is that, as we grow in holiness, we do not lose our free will. But our freedom is more and more inclined to choose what is *more* pleasing to God. Mary’s sinlessness was not a sterile passivity. It was an ever active tendency to do what was more generous, more loving, and more perfect in the sight of God.

PERPETUAL VIRGINITY. In an age when chastity is considered either “old fashioned” or “humanly impossible” or socially “out of keeping with the times,” Mary’s perpetual virginity needs to be emphasized more than ever. The reason is that chastity is not naturally easy, we may even say, the nature of chastity is naturally impossible. It requires the constant assistance of the grace of God.

Also be sure to bring out to your students that virginity is not impossible, even in the sex-preoccupied modern world. Certainly those who wish to remain virgins before marriage and especially to remain virgins all their lives - they will need extraordinary help from God. But their help is available through prayer and the sacraments.

BODILY ASSUMPTION INTO HEAVEN. Make clear to those you teach just what Mary’s Assumption into heaven means.

It does not simply mean that she is now in heaven. All the saints are in heaven. What makes Our Lady’s Assumption unique is that she is in heaven in soul *and* body. Like her Divine Son, she is with Him in her glorified body even as He is in heaven in His glorified body.

This has some deep implications. It tells us that we, too, are one day meant to be in heaven in our souls *and* our bodies. It tells us that we shall be rewarded in heaven not only in seeing the face of God but in enjoying the heavenly pleasures of our glorious bodies. The bodily mortifications we do on earth; the sacrifices we make in restraining our sinful bodily desires; the effort we expend in using our bodies in the service of God; the pain we

endure in our bodies in patient resignation to the will of God - all these are one day to be rewarded after our bodily assumption into heaven after the last day.

Practice

Putting into practice the third article of the Creed opens up so many doors for the catechist that some basic selection must be made.

The core issue, as we may call it, in this twin mystery of our faith is the humanity of Jesus, the Son of God, and the sublime reality of Mary, the Mother of God. How are those we instruct to be inspired to put this twin mystery of Christianity into practice? I believe the most practical way to do this is to tell those you teach to try to follow the example of Jesus and Mary by imitating their virtues in daily life.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST. Time and again in the Gospels we read how Jesus tells us to follow His example:

- “Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:29).
- “If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in His love” (John 15:10).
- “If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done” (John 13:14-15).
- This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

This is Christ’s formula for sanctity: “Study my conduct and strive to do the same. If you do, and insofar as you do, you will become holy.”

Here I would like to remind the catechists that encouraging their pupils to strive after holiness is not only not romantic; it is part of the stark realism of the modern age.

The Second Vatican Council could not have been more clear in insisting that holiness is not only for those in the priesthood or cloister. It is for all the faithful of Christ. They are to be followers of Christ.

Anyone with eyes to see, sees the widespread denial of God’s rights in today’s world. When, if not in our day, are the believers in Christ to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world?

Children from their earliest days are to be taught and inspired to try to become like Jesus, in His childhood. Adolescents should be encouraged to become like Christ the adolescent. And adults to follow the example of the son of God who lived a human life on earth so that we might follow in His footsteps and learn from Him how we should live in the Palestine of our lives.

The masterpiece of *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis needs to be more widely used by the laity than it already is. As catechists use the *Imitation*, simplified and exemplified, if need be. But use it to show others *how* to become holy. Teach them that there is nothing the Church needs more today than saints. And you become a saint by imitating Jesus Christ.

IMITATION OF MARY. The same may be said about walking in the footsteps of Our Lady.

Unlike her Son, she was not divine. She had to walk by faith, and trust in hope, like the rest of us. She had to believe what she could not understand, and had to suffer without fully understanding why.

Both genders, masculine and feminine, have so much to learn from the virtues of Mary that a lifetime would be too short to do justice to her imitable virtues.

Introduce those you teach early to some of the hundreds - literally hundreds - of books on the Blessed Virgin that are being published in the Catholic world.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a combination of veneration, intercession, and imitation. We venerate Our Lady by borrowing her glories and loving her as our Mother. We invoke her every time we ask her to plead for us sinners with her Divine Son.

But it is mainly by imitating the Mother of Jesus that we make our devotion to her part of our daily lives. Introduce the children early to look upon Mary as their Mother. Teach them to learn from her how they should become like her. And all the while, train them to keep in touch with her by small aspirations, arising spontaneously from their heart, like the whisperings of a child to the one who gave them birth - into the life of God.

Spiritual Thoughts

“How are we to imitate the way of Christ? That which He became for your sake is what you should attend to in Him, that you may imitate Him.”

“To what does He exhort you? To imitate Him in those works which He could not have done had He not been made man. For how could He endure sufferings unless He had become man? How could He otherwise have died, been crucified, humbled? Thus then do you when you suffer the troubles of this world.”

“Women, by looking to Mary find in her the secret of living their femininity