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MARY, THE SERVANT OF GOD,
IN A RENEWED MARIAN THEOLOGY
BASED ON THE NEW CREATION



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**MARY, THE SERVANT OF GOD,
IN A RENEWED MARIAN THEOLOGY
BASED ON THE NEW CREATION**

The title is neither pedantic nor far-fetched. It is at once a return to the oft-forgotten teaching in the New Testament about the New Creation accomplished by Christ the Lord—a central but little noted teaching of faith—and a reflection on the meaning of “servant,” a concept that also receives little attention in theology and spiritual writing.

The pastoral value of a study of Mary from this approach is inestimable. It may not be in line with many past studies of Mary. The question which dominated the past—the primary principle of Mariology—has changed its shape. Theologians discuss questions which relate to the past: what is the approach to Marian Theology consonant with Vatican II? Can there be a renewal of Marian Theology which is a part of each theological consideration or tract? Is the approach from the History of Salvation, used in the documents of Vatican II, to be phrased only in the language of Vatican II, which came out of the recent past? These are questions which often are painstakingly considered today.

To go outside of this containment, and to talk about a theme which can renew all of theology, including Marian theology, is not frequently encountered. And if the attempt is also pastoral and ascetical (that is, beneficial to Christians in a practical way), is the effort to do this pedantic?

I hope to show here that this effort is very much a pastoral one. The return to the New Creation is at once both found in the scriptures and in tradition. It is an attempt to re-appropriate an early Christian belief applicable to our time, and to the spirit of today. In the theology of the New Creation, Jesus is the revelation of the compassion of God as “Servant,” and Mary is a model who shows us how to follow Jesus, our archetype, similar to the way a model airplane demonstrates the characteristics of the specific airplane it models. Mary is the closest person to Jesus, and, as such, a model who shows us what it means to follow Christ (i.e., to be servants of God and of each other). “The way we can be sure we are in union with Him is for the one who claims to abide in Him to conduct himself just as He did” (I Jn 2:6). Mary conducted herself as Jesus did; she too was a servant of God and of others. She is the model of Jesus, for us, in the New Creation. It has been too easy to set aside the statements of Scripture: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new!” (2 Cor 5:17), and, “It means

nothing whether one is circumcised or not. All that matters is that one is created anew" (Gal 6:15).

Christian life, which we try to live daily, is a new creation intended from all eternity. Jesus reveals to us what is true, but beyond imagination. He shows that God wishes so much to be with us in our troubles, that God becomes our servant. In Jesus, God "empties Himself." It is to His Father's loving will that Jesus becomes obedient. Jesus "obeys," that is, He listens to God's will to love us even to the point of death. Jesus' resurrection is proof that this is true, that God's compassion will always conquer. As Zachary sings in the Gospel of Luke, God is "for us."

"God's compassion is a compassion that reveals itself in servanthood . . . God reveals His divine love for us in His coming to us as a servant. The great mystery of God's compassion is that in His compassion, in His entering with us into the condition of a slave, He reveals Himself to us as God."¹

Christians serve God (Rom 9:12) and each other (1 Pet 4:10,11). This is the basis of our Christian life. It is the root of worship, prayer, and of loving our neighbor. We can do this, and do it with joy—as Mary shows in the words of her *Magnificat*. She exemplifies how a human person can serve God and neighbor. She exemplifies the compassion we must all feel as we imitate God's compassion, being conformed by the Spirit into the image of Christ, the true image of God. We follow in Christ's footsteps (1 Pet 2:21).

Mary is an example. She is a model imitating Christ for us. In the New Creation all are called to be images of Christ, the New Adam, the image of God. As image of God, Christ reveals God to us. Jesus reveals the servanthood-love of God. This is what we are called to image also. Mary is *the* model, imitating the servanthood of Christ for us.

The New Creation and the servanthood of Christ unite many strands of Christian revelation. This is the "newness," the "new being" we have in Christ, that makes for "good news." Here lies the basis of all Christian theology. It is not the same as a basis in metaphysics, the being of God and creatures. The New Creation is a gift and is necessary to all that is Christian. It is a surprise, a mystery, beyond the expectations of metaphysics. In this New Creation the servanthood-love of God for all creatures is revealed—another surprising mystery. It tells us that we can be united with God and with each other in Christ as servants of God and of all our brothers and sisters in the mystery of Christ, Who is the fullness of divinity, all-in-all, the one who shows what divine love is. This is the servanthood which Mary shows in her covenantal YES (as human respondent) at the beginning of the life of

¹ D. P. McNeill, D. A. Morrison, and H. J. M. Nouwen, *Compassion, a Reflection on the Christian Life* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 25, 27.

Christ at the Annunciation. It is the motive for her Visitation. It is her joy in being an imitator of Christ, a servant (Lk 1:47-48).

In this New Creation—in which a new people is created, a new family, Mary is given to all servants, loving disciples, as mother (Jn 19:26-27). The beloved disciple, unnamed, is a true servant (Jn 13:14-17). He exemplifies all servants of God and of God's creatures in this new order, the new eschatological family. To him, and to all who will serve as Jesus did, to show the love of God present on earth, the gift of Jesus' own mother is given before the gift of the Spirit. As Cana tells us, Mary intercedes with Christ for us so that we can become people of the Spirit with new wine at a new banquet.

In Gospel life, and in a theology stemming from this New Creation, Mary has a great role to play. She is "with" all of the images of Jesus, formed by the Holy Spirit, in their difficulties as sinners. She shows God's family how to trust God, to be servants doing good to others, saying YES. She always points to the Lord Jesus, the servant who reveals God, while she mothers us in our trials of life, leading us to the compassion of God in the New Creation.

Gospel life is impossible without Mary, as it actually happened. The New Creation and our new being are impossible without Mary, as the good news of Christ tells us what Christ did for us. Theology of the Christian life is impossible without the example and motherhood of Mary. Salvation history is impossible without Mary. That is why we have chosen our title.

I. Salvation History Begins at Creation

Christians have a unique story and theology of creation. Rather than the stories in the Hebrew Scriptures ("Adam and Eve"), Christian belief rests on the revelation by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament that the Word of God is the source and goal of creation. The Hebrew creation stories are necessary background for this New Testament story of creation. That Adam was a figure of Christ, as Paul writes, could only be known after Jesus' resurrection. Slowly, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognized that Jesus the Risen Lord was the source and acme of the creation of all things. That God sent His only Son out of love to save all human beings from evil and death and to reveal the meaning of human life in Christ was the story of the New Creation. This story which presumed the older stories of the Hebrew Scriptures, was a unique creation story that set apart the religion of the followers of Jesus. The Christian creation story is not the story of Adam and Eve (etc.), but the story of Jesus present as source and goal of creation.

This is important, because in the History of Religions each religion is identifiable by its creation story, or lack thereof. The creation story of every religion mirrors the experience of God that a particular people had in their time and place and

culture. This was their most important religious belief. It was ritualized and became the source of other stories in their religion. Even today, when we classify religions as “theistic” or “non-theistic” (e.g., Buddhism), we are speaking of a religion’s creation story or its equivalent. Religions which have no personal creator have the equivalent of this in that they speak of a meaning for life.

The great theological systems which developed in Christianity after a time emphasized the belief in God the Father as Creator. This belief harmonized better with metaphysics, either Platonic or Aristotelian. Our catechetics, based on these theologies rather than on the New Testament, told people a creation story and a theology more metaphysical, and more in consonance with the Hebrew Bible, than the religion and theology of the New Testament. When I was a child, I learned that “God” created the world to know Him, love Him, and serve Him. I heard nothing of God creating the world “through Christ” and “for Him” (just as I never heard that the pronoun “She” might be applicable to God, Who is above all distinctions of gender).

The emergence of the History of Religions in recent times has underlined this problem. The question arose as to whether Christianity, like other religions, had its own creation story, different from that of its Hebrew matrix. Many of the stories of creation in the Hebrew Bible and in the Near East contained symbols, it is true, that re-appeared in Christianity. This did help to explain some metaphors and figures in the New Testament (e.g., the tree of life, the new Adam, the divine redeemer).² But this study also raised a question. If Christianity was a unique religion, different from Judaism although coming from it, did it have a unique creation story as did other distinct religions? How important was the centrality of the resurrection of Jesus for the Christian religion? Scholars such as Mircea Eliade and Raffaele Pettazzoni had shown that creation stories were basic to religions and their beliefs.³ Was the Christian creation story the same as that of the Jewish religion—which I was taught in catechism in the fifties? Or was it distinct from other religions’ stories, because of the central event which distinguishes Christianity—the resurrection of Jesus and His revelation?

There were historical and theological questions underlying this complex question. What about all the theologies which spoke of “God” as the creator—even if this God was identified, personally and in theology consequent to the study of creation, as the Trinity? What happened to the statements and hymns of New Testa-

² See the bibliography in M. Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. R. Sheed (New York: Meridian, 1968), 286-287. Also see E. O. James, *The Tree of Life: An Archaeological Study*, Studies in the History of Religions, 11 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

³ See R. Pettazzoni, *Essays on the History of Religions*, trans. H. Rose (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 21-36. M. Eliade, *Patterns*, 410ff.; G. van der Leeuw, “Primordial Time and Final Time,” in *Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, ed. J. Campbell (New York: Pantheon, 1957), 3:346ff.; C. Long, *Alpha—The Myths of Creation* (New York: Braziller, 1963), 15-31.

ment belief about Christ as creator?⁴ And, by consequence, what happened to the place of the Incarnation in creation theology, and the place of the motherhood of Mary in the plan of the creator?

The catechisms of recent decades, as well as the metaphysical theology which developed in Christianity in later centuries, did retain, in a somewhat "hidden" fashion, the belief that Christ was source of creation. This belief was even less hidden in liturgical texts. But the lack of recognizing its importance as a Christian creation story led to this hiddenness. Christ was spoken of as the source of creation only in Trinitarian theology, which was very intricate. This was reflected in catechisms, insofar as they taught about the Trinity. The liturgy presumed that the covenant of Christ was planned from all eternity, and so the Incarnation was eternally "decreed" by God. Even the divine maternity of Mary was spoken of in the pronouncements of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption as an eternal decree of the Creator, part of the Incarnation.⁵ But the existence of a unique Christian creation story was "hidden" among these statements. The story of creation that people were taught was the story of Adam and Eve. Later, when the genres of the Genesis stories were better known, theologians and exegetes still concentrated on the stories in Genesis as if they were *the* Christian creation stories.⁶

No better renewal could take place in theology than to return to our sources and to apply their meaning to life today. A return to the proper Christian creation story, and seeing its implications for life in the world and in the Church, would bring a revitalization of theology and the life of each member of the Church, as Vatican II requested.⁷ Return to our sources and assessment of their pastoral meaning would mean that we return to the beginning of salvation history as the New Testament tells us about it, and that we see the gifts of God in all of life and theology as gifts in nature and in grace calling us to be images of Christ, servants of God and of others as He was. From all eternity, the gifts of God were planned to be concretized in Christ as the Way to live, to find meaning and happiness. All creation, all life, all theology—even moral theology,⁸ is gift "in Christ" requiring our response. The New Creation requires us to see all life as a gift in Christ. And this

⁴ E.g., Jn 1:1-5; Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:3-13; Heb 1:1-4; et alibi.

⁵ See *Enchiridion Symbolorum, Definitionum, et Declarationum*, H. Denziger and A. Schoenmetzer, eds. (ed. 36; Rome: Herder, 1976), #3902 and footnote 1.

⁶ See J. Dalmau and J. Sagues, vol. 2 of *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* (4 vols.; Madrid: BAC, 1952), #26-41, 2:461-468.

⁷ See I. Calabuig, O.S.M., "L'insegnamento della mariologia nei documenti ecclesiali: dal decreto conciliare *Optatum Totius* alla lettera circolare (25-III-1988) della Congregazione per l'Educazione Cattolica," in *La Mariologia tra le discipline teologiche* (Rome: Ed. Marianum, 1992), 150 and passim.

⁸ E.g., see E. McDonagh, *Gift and Call: Towards a Christian Theology of Morality* (St. Meinrad, Ind.: Abbey Press, 1975).

is what theology studies: this revelation of Christ. The history of salvation by Christ begins with creation through and for Christ.⁹

The theological study of Mary fits into this context. The study of salvation history from its beginning must include the mother from whom Christ is born "in the fullness of time" (Gal 4:4). The approach from salvation history is what the Church expects today of Marian studies in theology.¹⁰ Mary is seen, in this light, as the model of living in the New Creation, a "holy" person who received divine life and was chosen to be the mother of the promised Messiah. As a human being, our sister, she is part of the eternal plan for creation. God foresaw her as a person of covenant, an imitable disciple of the word of Jesus, the Word of God. Her role in the planned incarnation of the Son of God was part of the Christian story of creation, which is the story of the New Testament—the story of the fullness of time, the fulfillment of the plan of the Creator. As a human being, Mary gives testimony¹¹ to this creation plan which is the context of Jesus.

The Christian Creation Story

Before the Gospels were written, St. Paul wrote about "the new creation" and "the new Adam," bringing together Christ and the Church.¹² "New" is a word that presumes "old." The New Creation and the meaning of Christ in creation presume the stories of creation in the Hebrew Scriptures.

There is more than one story of creation in the Hebrew Scriptures. There are two stories in the book of Genesis alone. Scholars have traced the oldest relics of the Hebrew creation story in the Psalms and in Isaiah.¹³ All of these stories depended on the cultural context of the ancient Near East. The Hebrews borrowed mythopoeic elements from neighbors in order to state their beliefs in the One God, the creator of all things.¹⁴

⁹ See the astute remarks of W. P. Loewe on Irenaeus, "the father of salvation history" and creation, in "Myth and Counter Myth: Irenaeus' Story of Salvation," *Interpreting Tradition*, CTS 1983, vol. 29 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1984), 39ff.

¹⁰ See S. DeFiores, S.M.M., "Il discorso mariologico nella storia della teologia," in *La Mariologia tra le discipline teologiche*, 80, 83-88.

¹¹ This "testimony," which explains why Mary is model, is examined profoundly in two chapters of P. Ricoeur's book *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 41 and 119.

¹² 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; 1 Cor 15:45.

¹³ See R. Clifford, S.J., "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," *Theological Studies* 46/3 (Sept. 1985): 507ff.

¹⁴ See B. Anderson, "Mythopoeic and Theological Dimensions of Biblical Creation Faith," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. B. Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 2; H. Gunkel, "The Influence of Babylonian Mythology upon the Biblical Creation Story (1895)," *ibid.*, 25ff.

Creation stories belong to the realm of myth and symbol rather than that of concept. The truth they tell is told concretely (i.e., in stories made up of symbols).¹⁵ This has to be the case, since creation stories are foundational in a religion, and religious truths are told in a symbolic way rather than in a conceptual and abstract theological way (which is a valid reflection upon these stories).¹⁶ Their logical structure belongs to the structure and logic of symbols.

One of the primary elements in the logic of symbolic stories of creation is the structure of *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*. The story of THE beginning is also a story of THE end. Alpha and omega belong together. We today speak of paradise as the beginning and as the end. Understandably, since no one was present at the absolute beginning, this must be symbolic. This structure has a purpose. The intention of what creation and creatures should mean from the beginning is what their end or purpose is. In the Hebrew creation stories, the Will of the Creator is what gives purpose and meaning—an end—to creatures. This is “justice,” and not the Greek notion of *quid pro quo*. The blind goddess with her scales, the symbol of ethical and legal justice, is not the symbol of biblical justice. What the Creator intends is what should happen. This is the end of creation, to be fulfilled from what was planned in the beginning. In a religion in which time is linear rather than cyclic, this “end” is to be accomplished when the Creator plans for it. In a religion of a culture in which time is looked upon as cyclic, this “endtime” is a kind of fate determined more by ritual—to attain the Creator’s intention—than by the ethical actions of individual creatures.

This is important because the Creator in the stories of the Hebrew Bible planned an “end-time” which the New Testament claims to clarify as the “plan of God” for the “fullness of time.” The will of God (the Creator) is accomplished perfectly by Jesus Christ, the source and goal of creation. God’s justice is revealed by Jesus in His words and actions as the Servant Son of God. Jesus Christ is “our justice.”¹⁷ And Mary, who in symbolic terms of justice is “lifted up” in her “lowliness,” is “saved” according to the oldest Hebrew symbols of God’s justification and salvation; she shows what it means to accomplish as a human the “end-time” and “justice” of the Creator. The symbolic structure of the mythopoeic thought in the Hebrew Bible shows that God’s “justice” (or “end” or “plan”) is salvation—by

¹⁵ See P. Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, 32-37; also, P. Tillich, “The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian,” in *The History of Religions: Essays in the Problem of Understanding*, ed. J. Kitagawa, et al., *Essays in Divinity*, 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967), 241ff., and A. Dulles, S.J., *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 17ff.

¹⁶ See A. Dulles, S.J., “The Symbolic Structure of Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 41 (1980): 51ff.; P. Ricoeur, “The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought,” in his *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 347ff.; W. Dupré, “Myth, Truth, and Philosophy,” *Journal of Existential Psychiatry* 6/22 (1967): 161ff.

¹⁷ Rom 10:4; Eph 2:10.

His coming down from the heights and lifting up the people who are good, by taking them out of the raging waters of defeat. This is the symbolic structure behind all later stories of justice and retribution.¹⁸ In this context Mary appears as model “woman of justice.” The words of John’s Gospel—ascend and descent, lowly and lifted up—just as the words of Paul about ascent, descent and kenosis, are the same in meaning as the words Luke puts in Mary’s canticle about God “lifting up the lowly.” Mary is made just, justified, by the Creator. She is a human being, a Jewish woman, who gives testimony to God’s plan, made possible in Christ.

The New Creation and the Renewal of Theology

In recent years, and because of the resurgence of biblical studies in the Church, as well as the aforementioned studies in the History of Religions,¹⁹ more attention was given to the theology of creation. Creation was a salvific act by God; creation was a covenant; creation had more than one way of being told as a story in the Hebrew Scriptures. The theology of original sin, as a part of creation theology, also became a frequent theological topic among theologians. And more attention was given to the Christological hymns in the New Testament.²⁰ All of theology became more biblical, and the old ways of deduction gave way to an historical approach emphasizing salvation history. Works on the history of Christian theology and on the place of the New Testament in that history were published. They were interested in the topic of salvation history and the tradition as a trajectory from the New Testament through the history of the Church.

According to the New Testament, salvation history began with creation. God planned that all would be saved through Christ and become God’s children, like Christ. This was a “call,” a “predestination.” The resurrection of Jesus was the moment of this New Creation, a new covenant. The resurrection was planned at the creation as revealing the way humans were to live to find their true nature and worth, called to be sons and daughters of God. All who would be new people, existing in Christ the Son and Servant of God by being baptized into His death and resurrection, were called to do this from the creation of the world. Others, as images of God although not baptized, were called to this state of being God’s children, too,

¹⁸ See R. Clifford, “The Unity of the Book of Isaiah and Its Cosmogonic Language,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 1-17; J. D. Pleins, *The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope, and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 130-133, 176-177 (e.g., Ps 144:5-9).

¹⁹ See E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 518 ff.

²⁰ See, e.g., R. Karris, *A Symphony of New Testament Hymns* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996); D. Stanley, “The Divinity of Christ in New Testament Hymns,” in *Studies in Salvation History*, ed. L. Salm (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 179ff.

but are so by living a good life or by baptism of desire. Even those who lived before Christ were saved by His death and resurrection.

A New Start

The second Vatican Council called for a renewal of theology. At the same time, the Council and subsequent documents for implementation insisted that the unity of theology be preserved. The presumption behind this is that theology is a continuity, a reflection on tradition, based on salvation history. It is a fact of theological life that different methods are in use in the theological endeavor. Nevertheless, agreement on several things is required by this presumption. First of all there must be an agreement that Sacred Scripture is the soul of theology. All theology, traditionally, has been a reflection on what is revealed in Scripture. Secondly, there must be an agreement that the content of theology must be organized as a reflection on salvation history. That is, the Bible is the soul of theology insofar as the revelation contained therein tells us or reveals the "history" of how God has saved us, especially in and through Jesus Christ. Thirdly, there must be an agreement that this "revelation" is preserved in the Church, especially, granted the hermeneutics of culture and time in the language used, in the teaching of the magisterium of the Church.

The theology in use at the time of Vatican Council II was not a theology which followed a single method. Granted that most theology since the time of the fifteenth or sixteenth century had become a theology of commentaries and tracts, in which Sacred Scripture often seemed subservient to metaphysical and repetitious theses. However, there were differences among the practitioners of this methodology, as well as other different methods used even during this time period. At the time of the council different methods were being used in theological reflection: there were methods which emphasized the "positive" or historical development of theology, methods which emphasized the "practical" or pastoral purposes of theology, and methods which emphasized the use of contemporary thinkers in "systematic" or theoretical analysis of the data of revelation.

While departments of theology and religious studies, at the time of the council and in the years following it, retained courses that were "systematic," as did seminaries, many courses were added to the curriculum at that time which emphasized the practical—especially, but not only, in seminaries. At the same time a pluralism of methods came into usage in these schools. While scholars more used to traditional course offerings, and the neo-scholastic division of theology into tracts and the corresponding methodology, found this novelty too different from the past to be easily accepted, frequently blaming pluralism of methods for this novelty, the curriculum changes were here to stay. The complaint about pluralism of methods was unjustified. It did not affect the unity of "theology" in the traditional sense, but it

did do away with the attempt to have one method only (i.e., the neo-scholastic) in the curriculum. Most of the time, the new courses were not systematic or theoretical, rather they were practical and were required by post-conciliar documents. In general, there was agreement regarding the three principles mentioned above. There was the introduction of many new practical courses related to pastoral practice. Few, if any, new methods were being used, especially in systematic or doctrinal theology. However, there was still not the “renewal” that the council had mandated.

The renewal mandated by the council was a renewal of all theology. Such a renewal was called for, not because of the plethora of methods (as was claimed by some), but because of the lack of method in some courses in an ever-increasing practical curriculum. Scholars who became famous for their methodologies, which were new in comparison to the older method in general usage before the council, were far and few between. It could be that certain more “traditional” teachers looked askance at any method which deviated from the past complacency, or that some few teachers who said they were following a certain new method did so poorly. In the absence of precise information about accusations regarding “deviations,” except for theologians whose works were proscribed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, we will never know what this “pluralism of methods” was.

The council was calling for fresh vigor in all reflection on salvation history. This was especially so since the division of theology into tracts was coming more and more to be seen as not able to support new insights in theology, for example, regarding creation and original sin. The relations between Christ and the Church and eschatology and creation theology and the sacraments and moral theology were becoming more and more understood as organic relations in their origin as well as their history. This criticism of the tract theology—which was rhetorical, insofar as it was more commentary with a few disagreements, rather than analytic—was not new at the time of the council. It had already come to a head. The council was a good place to repeat the need so many saw. As new practical theologies arose—from preaching that was more biblical (“proclamation”), catechetics, liturgical theology, historical theology, and the doctrinal theology which grounded all of them—it was seen that all these branches were connected.²¹ They included organic relations of one topic to another. A new approach to theology, as part of the renewal of all church life, came to be mandated by the council.

The place of Marian theology in curricula and in theology is a case in point. In fact, it is a good test case. The practitioners of Mariology spoke of renewal as the reflection on Mary from the now mandated viewpoint of “salvation history.” Many new “Mariologies” were composed as “contemporary.” However, apart from older

²¹ See D. Lorenzo de Lorenzi, “I Sinnotici, gli Atti e le Epistole Cattoliche nella spiritualità degli ultimi trent’anni,” in *Problemi e orientamenti di spiritualità monastica, biblica e liturgica*, ed. C. Vagaggini et al. (Rome: Edizioni Paoline, 1961), 124-198.

debates about the place of Marian theology within the context of (the older vision of) theology, and the justification that one course on Mary in theology was sufficient, and that course justified as "apart" in the same way that the tract on eschatology was single and "apart," no place was given to the renewal of theology as a whole and the place of Mary within it. The fact that more books were being written about Mary and Mariology did not erase the fact that Mary was not seen as paramount in the life of the Church and in theology in general. The so-called "crisis," the absence of Mary from theology and the life of the Church, continued, despite claims that the crisis was over. At times the increase in devotions, especially devotions related to apparitions or the presence of Marian devotion in popular religion among particular sectors within the Church, was used to justify the statement that the "crisis" was over. While this did account for more writings on Mary related to these topics, there was not any fresh insight into the renewal of theology in a way that the contemporary world would feel the impact. And that was what the council wished, if we regard the council as a whole as pastoral.

There is no doubt that the attempt to renew and invigorate theology, in the traditional sense but not the conservative sense that is opposed to any change, would have an impact on the life of the Church. This essay is an attempt to accomplish this. It is an "ideal" undertaking. Nothing else is worth the attempt. It will not catch on for a long time, if ever. The present confusion in curricula will continue. But not to have tried is to be unfaithful to the call of the council.²²

A New Look at an Old Truth

When Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologiae*, he approached all of theology from the starting point of creation. He repeated what great Christian thinkers had done before him. All existence that was contingent came from God and returned to God, their Beginning and End.²³ While this was a metaphysical reflection on revelation, Aquinas relied on the fact that the Greek philosophers and their followers,²⁴ insofar as they thought (even if they did not write the type of *Summa* which belonged to his day), were religious and believed in creation as a starting point of metaphysical reflection.

The renewal of theology, including Mariology, can start with the New Creation as the beginning of salvation history. This will be a new start, and yet it will be

²² See Calabuig, "L'insegnamento della mariologia," 242.

²³ See A. M. Henry, O.P., "La théologie, science de la foi," in *Initiation théologique* (by a group of theologians; 4 vols.; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1957), 1:281. Also M. D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas*, trans. A. Landry and D. Hughes (Chicago: Regnery, 1964).

²⁴ See A. Pegis, "St. Thomas and the Origin of Creation," in *Philosophy and the Modern Mind*, ed. F. Canfield (Detroit: Sacred Heart Seminary, 1961), 49-65.

traditional—a new way to look at a traditional approach.²⁵ The Christian story of the New Creation can be a renewal of all theology, and so of Mariology, and it will be the beginning of the history of salvation.

What are the details of this Christian story of creation and how does it apply to Mary? This will be the content of this study. We will continue with this first aspect of our study, and we will apply this finally to our theological understanding of Mary the Mother of the Lord.

We have seen a little about the Christian creation story already. We have seen that the New Creation, with Christ as its source and goal, presumes the “old.” We have seen that this story of creation, like all such, must be told in symbols, usually recalling the symbols in the “old” creation accounts, especially the relation between *Urzeit* and *Endzeit* which brings “justice” to the fore. We have seen briefly how this applies to Mary. But there is much more and some of that we will turn to now.

First of all, the Christian creation story developed later in New Testament times. It is related to the theology of the pre-existence of Christ, also a later development, but part of the Christian creed. The realization of what creation meant after the resurrection of Christ must have been a part of the meditation on the Hebrew Scriptures among early Christians. “According to the Scriptures,” Christians gathered for praying with Scripture and discussing how Christ was foreshadowed in the Hebrew Scriptures, when they met for prayer and liturgy in the early post-resurrection times. The proclamation of the *kerygma* and *didache* led to further insights. There was development. This was an understanding under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. We can think of Paul ministering in Antioch for a year before his journeys (Acts 9:30; 11:26), or of the deacon Philip explaining the Suffering Servant to the officer of the Ethiopian court (Acts 8:35). There is much we do not know. Some things are known from the letters of Paul, and we can trace the development of those things in later writings in the New Testament.

Paul links up “new creation” to baptism. The union of the baptized with Christ was spoken of by Paul as a “putting on of new clothes,” as becoming “a new man or new person.” This was a renewal brought by union with Christ. Paul already knew of, and spoke of the plan of God, God’s promises, and the new covenant and new law of Christ. While the rabbis spoke of entrance into Judaism as a “new creation,” probably because of the statements of the later prophets about God’s revivification of the remnant (e.g., Ezechiel), Paul put all the “new” elements of the Good News together. His usage of “new creation” was wider and more complex than that of the rabbis.²⁶

²⁵ See S. De Fiore, “Il discorso mariologico,” 80-81.

²⁶ See Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, 468ff.; 515ff. The “new creation” language is one portrayal of what “grace” means in the Christian revelation.

The Deutero-Pauline literature (Ephesians, Colossians) develops this understanding of Paul's. They also quote hymns about creation which were in use by Christians. By this time, the pre-existence of Jesus as Son Who became Servant, as the New Adam (Phil 2), was clearer. It was taken for granted that the Son was present at creation as cause and goal. The Johannine literature at this late time of New Testament composition, made this clear. The Son was the Word of God, present as cause of creation. Reflection on wisdom literature of the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as acquaintance with creation stories and philosophies that were not Hebrew (e.g., the Stoic), led to the Prologue of John, a Christian wisdom hymn of the New Creation. The hymnic passages in John, in Ephesians, Colossians, Revelation, and Hebrews manifested a uniquely Christian theology of creation that was probably liturgical in usage. The matter-of-fact statements about Christ as source and goal of creation show that this development of a Christian creation story was taken for granted²⁷ (e.g., Rev 3:14; Heb 1:2; Eph 2:10).

The Christian creation story was taken for granted not only in preaching to Gentiles, where creation was often the beginning point, but within the Christian community. Probably the Johannine words come closest to this Christian understanding: "God so loved the world that God sent His only Son" (Jn 3:16). This love of God is for all of God's creation—"the world" here in a total cosmic understanding. This world became "light" and "darkness," and Christ is the instrument, in John, Luke, Paul and the Deutero-Pauline literature of the New Testament, by which Christ's victory over death—a combat—and evil was given as a gift to the whole world. (Of course, this theme is present in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, too.) The story of creation of Christian believers tells of Christ as goal, as reconciler, as giver of gifts, too. Source and end, *Urzeit* and *Endzeit*, come together.

Insofar as the Christian story of the New Creation tells of the end, the purpose of creation, this story provides believers with the Christian anthropology. For those who believe, the "way" to attain the end intended by the creator is to follow Christ, to imitate Him, to allow themselves to be conformed by the Holy Spirit to the image of Christ, Who is the true image of the invisible God. They do this in word and action. They become members of a new covenant. This is to become "holy" and to receive the "life" of God, divinization. Christ, the light of the world, becomes the giver of life to the world, and believers imitate Christ both to receive light and life, and to bring this light and life, this "good news," to others, both within the believing community and outside it. This is "justice" and "reconciliation." It is for this that the creation was made.

To follow Christ is to become like Him and to do what He did. The New Testament portrays Jesus as the Servant and Son of God Who mediated a new cove-

²⁷ See Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, 522-527.

nant, the promised Christ, revealed as Lord in His resurrection. To follow Christ is to be conformed to Him as true image of the invisible God by the Holy Spirit. This conformity, "to have the same mind as Christ" as Paul says, is "holiness" in the new covenant. This imitation of Christ in word and deed is above all imitation of His servanthood (Phil 2:5-11). This is the "end" or purpose of creation. God gives us the gift of His love, the Spirit, to become servants of God and other people motivated by the example of the love of Christ. Thereby we will be people of faith, justified by God, through and in Christ. We will be conformed to His image by the Spirit (Rom 8:6-30; 3:21-26).

The New Creation story is therefore a story of good news. God sent His own Son to show us how much He [God] loves us and helps us to change ourselves and the world, moved by the example of Christ. Christ shows us that God's love for us is the love of a servant. God, the loving servant, is revealed by Christ the servant,²⁸ and this new revelation, that God loves us as a servant, is good news. This is the "gospel of God," as Paul calls it. Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet becomes an image which is revelatory of God and to be imitated by the baptized. In the New Creation a new covenant and a new commandment are offered to people, to act towards each other in faith and love as Jesus showed. That is why there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, male and female—all are to be loved. Even authority becomes service, as the role of Peter shows in John: the keys of the kingdom depend on Peter's "love," asked for three times in view of the threefold denial (Jn 21:15-19; cf. Mt 16:19). The word "new" underlines the "news" of "good news." A new covenant, a new commandment, a new law, by which people are related to each other in a new way and of whom Christ is the firstborn in this new family which possesses a new light—all of these newnesses and metaphors speak of the New Creation, which is a new servanthood revealed as the end of creation by Christ.²⁹

The old truth that theology is a reflection on God as Beginning and End is the story of the unique role of Christ in creation as source and goal. To return to this insight is a return to the old method of theology, but seen in a new way. The origin and the end of creation become unique in Christian faith. We then see that Mary has a special role to play in this unique story.

²⁸ Richard Longenecker, in *The Theology of Early Jewish Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1970), 106-107, shows that the theme of the Messiah as Suffering Servant goes back directly to Jesus' own understanding of Himself.

²⁹ For a summary of the theology of Jesus the Servant in the New Testament see W. Brennan, O.S.M., "Mary, the Servant of God: An Ancient Christian Concrete Principle for Spiritual Growth," *Studies in Formative Spirituality* 10/1 (Feb. 1989): 67-82. For the new creation as a principle in theology, see J.-F. Bonnefoy, *Christ and the Cosmos*, trans. M. Meilach (Paterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1965). While the theme of the Servant remained in the Church in early days, slowly it became subservient to the metaphysical controversies about "sonship." It was less Greek than Jewish. See Longenecker, *Theology of Early Jewish Christianity*, 108.

II. Mary in the New Creation

The first reference to Mary in the New Testament is in Paul (Gal 4:4). While this passage is commonly known as one referring to the humanity of Christ, it is the context which proves interesting. St. Paul is referring to "the fullness of time" and the "new creation." He refers to the time before Christ, the time of the law, before this sentence. He writes of baptism and justification and faith which make us one in Christ so that there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free person, male or female. All the baptized are children of Abraham, heirs according to God's promise. With Jesus, "born of a woman, born under the law," adoption as children of God was made possible by the "ransom" he paid. It is the gift of the Spirit which allows us to call God our Father so that we are children and heirs. All of this refers to the New Creation effected by Christ. Now there is an eschatological family—Abrahamic, promised, ransomed by Christ. The function of the mother of Christ is complex in this passage. Jesus was human and a Jew, but He effected a new unity among those baptized who receive the Spirit. This is the good news, the fullness of time, the plan of the Creator, the promise of God to Abraham. So Mary is part of this creative process, of this new Abrahamic family, just as the humanity and Jewishness of Jesus is. The effect of the Suffering Servant, His "ransom," is to bring about a new unity, elsewhere called a "New Creation."

As a Jewish human person, Mary is a central part of the New Creation, not only in the incarnation but also in the redemption by Christ, His suffering, death, and resurrection. The whole needs all the parts. This role of Mary in the New Creation, the plan of God, the good news effected by Christ, is emphasized in different ways in the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John. Matthew, a very Jewish writer, picks up the theme of "promise." Mary is a "sign" of the way the promise of God to the Hebrews is "fulfilled."³⁰ Jesus' conception and birth were like that of Adam. Mary's function was to be the place of this virginal new creation (like "soil," as Irenaeus would say). Jesus is the New Adam, the New Moses, the New David, but, in light of the passion and resurrection of the suffering Son of Man, He brings a new light to the world—including to the Gentiles (the magi). We see the Hebrew Scriptures being fulfilled: a new creation, a new exodus and new law, a new and universal kingdom, a new suffering Servant. Already Paul had said Adam was a type of Christ. This is the way for Jewish Christians to approach the effect of the resurrection, "according to the Scriptures."

Luke-Acts has much to say about Mary. She is present at the beginning of the redemption and at the beginning of the Church. This is not a coincidence. Luke

³⁰ This was a common Jewish-Christian approach to history. See J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. J. Baker (Chicago: Regnery, 1964), 87.

presents Jesus as the Servant (4:18-22; 9:44-49; 22:27) of God, effecting the New Creation, a new Adam (3:38). Mary is mother and model in this New Creation. She is the mother of Jesus as a woman faithful to God and the covenant. The conception and birth of John the Baptist, who will go before Jesus as a prophet who leads to the new times (1:17; 3:16; 7:28), is paralleled to that of Jesus. At the Annunciation by God to Mary, she responds in a covenantal formula ("Let it be done to me according to your word"; see Josue 24:24). The new covenant has begun with these words of Jesus' mother. In Acts 1:14, Mary is present in prayer with the first members of the Church as they elect Matthias to take Judas' place and then wait for the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. She is present as the new covenant continues. She is present as "the mother of Jesus." Her maternal role extends itself.

How is the mother of Jesus present at the beginning and throughout the work of Jesus? Her song at the Visitation tells us. She repeats again that she, as Jesus will be, is God's servant. This is how salvation, the New Creation, is to be worked out, with the help of God Who gives the Spirit. If the Church is a servant, the Church does what Jesus says, keeps the covenant, and is a "new Israel."³¹ Mary models how life is to be lived in the New Creation.

Jesus is the New David, born in David's city. The New Creation bespeaks of a universal kingdom of justice and peace. The poor who are lowly (1:52), the shepherds, receive the good news of peace and grace, as lowly Mary did (1:48). This is one of the *magnalia Dei*, a new creation, a new help, a new exodus, cause for amazement (2:18). The shepherds become evangelizers, telling the good news to all they encounter. Mary reflects on this (2:19), an aspect of the New Creation.

Righteous and devout keepers of the covenant recognize Jesus as the light of the world, as Simeon, the servant, did. As the story of Jesus builds, Mary and Joseph again are filled with "amazement." Simeon and Anna are evangelizers, as Mary was when she brought Jesus to Elizabeth and John.

As good Jews, Mary and Joseph kept the custom of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the city of peace. When Jesus was twelve, their "amazement" continued as Jesus announced that He must be in God His Father's house. They did not understand Jesus, a more personal way of saying that Jesus astounded even the teachers of Israel. Their anxiety and the sword spoken of by Simeon becomes part of following where God leads, with trust rather than understanding. This is to take up the cross and follow Jesus, to keep the new covenant. This is the way to be a servant in the New Creation, always reflecting on Jesus' words and deeds as Mary did (2:51). Jesus is obedient; He listens to God. As a servant of God, Jesus does God's will, thereby effecting a new justice. God is at work in the stories of Jesus' infancy and in the

³¹ See J. Breck, *Mary in the New Testament* (E.S.B.V.M. in U.S.A., 1998), No. 3, 11.

attitudes of disciples in the New Creation, exemplified by Mary and Joseph. God will call Jesus His beloved son—the servant of Isaiah (42:1)—at His baptism (3:22).

The Gospel of Luke goes on to show how Jesus is God's servant and does God's will. Finally, at the death and resurrection of Jesus, the New Creation is finished. After the resurrection Jesus tells the disciples on the way to Emmaus that it was necessary that the Messiah should suffer, indicating that the Messiah must be the Suffering Servant. (Philip will show this to the official from Ethiopia in Acts 8:30-36.) The role of servanthood, to hear the word of God and keep it (as Mary did: Lk 8:21, 11:28), is the role of disciples in the New Creation, those who receive the Holy Spirit's help. To change the world, by doing what Jesus did, is the goal of the New Creation. It is possible because the human woman Mary did it. She was a servant of God, following her Son. All things are possible with God the Creator (Lk 1:37).

The Gospel of John is explicitly about the New Creation in Christ. The prologue is a creation hymn on the pattern of Wisdom hymns. John rewrites Genesis. The first words of his Gospel—and books were titled by their first words in ancient times—are “in the beginning,” like the first words of Genesis. The Gospel is written at the time Christian belief in the pre-existence of Christ and creation through Him had become explicitly part of the Christian creed. And in this Gospel Mary has a special role.

John repeats much of what Luke tells us, but in different stories. The stories John tells of Cana and the Cross are about servanthood in the New Creation. The story of Cana points to the “hour” in the second part of the Gospel. The passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, His “hour,” will bring the wine of the Holy Spirit in amazing amounts. And people will believe. The story is about this “wedding” of God and human persons, but the mother of Jesus is pointedly a part of this story. She sees when the wine (the Spirit) is needed, and intercedes with Her Son for this wine. He does what she asks. So in the wedding of the New Creation, when the Spirit is given as gift, Mary has an intercessory role. As a result of her request, the wedding guests (human persons) are given this abundant new wine. She has a covenant role with the “servants” at this wedding. She tells them in covenant formula “Do whatever He tells you.”³² The servants do what Christ tells them (see 1 Jn 2:3); they know where the new wine comes from. Here Mary is the guide of those who serve God in the new covenant.

In John 19, this role of Mary with regard to the servants is pictured as a gift. Jesus “reveals” (“Behold”) that Mary is the mother of the beloved disciples, all who serve in the love which Jesus asks in His new commandment. Intercessor, guide,

³² See *Do Whatever He Tells You: Reflections and Proposals for Promoting Marian Devotion* (208th General Chapter of the Order of Servants of Mary; Rome: General Curia O.S.M., 1983); A. Serra, O.S.M., *Maria a Cana e presso la croce* (Rome: Mater Ecclesiae, 1985), esp. 62-63.

and now mother, Mary is pictured at both Cana and the cross as having a role in the eschatological family, the New Creation. She is with all who believe in Jesus, following His words, and she is present when the Spirit is given to the Church, just after she is called the mother of the servants.

The symbolic theology of the New Creation in John, introduced in the prologue, shows both the beginning and end of creation. The Word, present at creation and source of creation, reveals what creation is for: loving service of God Who is Love and all whom God loves (15:12, 16:27, 17:20-26), exemplified in the washing of feet (13:15). Mary is important in this story. She has a special role in the New Creation and new covenant with this new commandment: she is part of it, she is a help and intercessor, she is a model, and she is mother. Because of this she has the special title of "Woman." This is what we learn from the stories of Cana and the cross.

In summation, Mary is presented in the Gospels, in the last third of the first century, as having a role in the mystery of Christ. By this time the mystery of Christ included statements about His pre-existence and His role as source and goal of creation. The tradition about Mary became part of the belief about the meaning of all creation, with Christ as Alpha and Omega. Mary, the Mother of the Lord, has a role to play in the New Creation—as mother of the eschatological family, as guide and model of how to reach our end given us at creation, as our help through her intercession—a concrete part of her maternity to Christ's loving servants. The plan of the Creator included her role in this mystery. And since this mystery of Christ tells us of the whole cosmos and the cosmic Christ, we can logically conclude that Mary has a cosmic role. This is what the early Christians saw when they compared Mary to the virgin soil of the earth, and to Eve.³³

The New Creation, like the theology of Jesus as Servant, was eventually overshadowed by the controversies about Sonship in the great controversies. This was a more-Hebrew theology. Slowly, although it stayed in the documents and the background,³⁴ it emerged in Franciscan theology. It persisted. Today, the theology of the New Creation, beginning from and for Christ, including Mary's role, can be looked upon as a way to renovate all theology, including Mariology. New emphases will occur. Less metaphysics and more salvation history will be the meat of theology. And the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church will be even clearer.

³³ See W. P. Loewe, "Myth and Counter Myth," 50, for the example of Irenaeus.

³⁴ Abbot Marmion gives us a good example of how Mary's role in the New Creation is almost explicit. See his *Christ the Life of the Soul*, trans. by a nun of Tyburn (St. Louis: Herder, 1925), 338ff.