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**THE HEART OF MARY, MODEL OF LOVE:
MARIAN DIMENSION OF THE
MILLENNIUM PREPARATION**

*Ronald M. Bagley, C.J.M.**

I. Roots of the Marian Devotion of John Eudes

When St. John Eudes was canonized by Pope Pius X, he was proclaimed “father, doctor, and apostle of the liturgical cult of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.” He was the first to write a Mass and Office in honor of the Heart of Mary (and later for the Heart of Jesus). He saw the hearts of Jesus and Mary being so closely united that only one feast was needed. He believed that to honor the heart of Mary is to honor her Son.

John Eudes was born November 14, 1601, in the little village of Ri in Normandy (about 50 km from Caen). He records in his *Memorialis Beneficiorum Dei* (a spiritual autobiography or journal) how his parents, Isaac and Mary Eudes, were hoping for a child early in their marriage. After years passed, they made a vow to Our Lady that if she granted their request, they would go on a pilgrimage to a chapel called Notre Dame de Ré-couvrage at Les Tourailles (about 25 km from their home in Ri). John Eudes attributed his conception to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and referred to it as a miracle.

In 1618, he joined the Sodality of Our Lady at the college at Caen. At age 18, he placed a ring on the finger of a statue of Our Lady and wrote “A Contract of Holy Alliance with the Most Holy Virgin Mary.” Each major step in his life was marked by some act of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, usually occurring on one of her feast days. He entered the Oratory in Paris on March 25, 1623, and began his spiritually fruitful relationship

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with Pierre de Bérulle. In 1643, when he began the Congregation of Jesus and Mary with five confreres, they did so by making a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Notre Dame de la Délivrande. It was on the Feast of the Annunciation that they placed the fragile beginnings of their congregation in the hands of Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

His devotion to Our Lady is reflected in his preaching and writing. There is a touching letter written to him, in 1660, by a Jesuit who had heard tell of him “even in Québec in Canada.” It begins this way: “I have been consoled to hear from M. Torcapel of the holy ambition you have of surpassing everybody, no matter who they may be, in love of Our Lady. Would to God that you could communicate this spirit to all ambitious men in this world.”¹ In commenting on this letter, Paul Milcent notes about John Eudes that “there are not many authors who have consecrated so many and such enthusiastic pages to Mary.”² John Eudes summarized his many years of preaching and teaching about devotion to Mary in his great work *The Admirable Heart of the Blessed Mother of God*. It comprises three complete volumes of his *Complete Works* in French. He finished this monumental project in 1681, just weeks before his death.

Much more could be said about the devotion to Mary that we find in the life and work of John Eudes. Similar scenarios could be written for Pierre de Bérulle, Charles de Condren, Jean-Jacques Olier, and the other key figures of the French School of Spirituality. Suffice to say, personal devotion to Mary went hand-in-hand with their preaching, teaching and writing.

II. Liturgical Devotion to the Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Pope Paul VI names Mary as “a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries.”³ He notes that “Mary is above all an example of that worship that consists in making one’s life an offering to God.”⁴ In a flourish of exuberance he recalls for words of Vatican II:

¹Quoted in *St. John Eudes* by Paul Milcent (Glasgow, Scotland: John S. Burns & Sons, 1964), 36.

²Milcent, *St. John Eudes*, 37.

³Paul VI, *Marialis cultus (MC)*, no. 16.

⁴Paul VI, *MC*, no. 21.

. . . as we consider the piety that [our] liturgical Tradition . . . expresses toward the Mother of God, and as we remember that the liturgy through its pre-eminent value as worship constitutes the golden norm for Christian piety, and finally as we observe how the Church when she celebrates the sacred mysteries assumes an attitude of faith and love similar to that of the Virgin, we realize the rightness of the exhortation that the Second Vatican Council addresses to all the children of the Church, namely "that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin be generously fostered."⁵

John Eudes' devotion to the Blessed Virgin found expression in the liturgical texts of the Mass and Office he composed for the feast of the Heart of Mary. It was celebrated publicly as a liturgical feast for the first time in the cathedral of the diocese of Autun on February 8, 1648. His love and devotion to Mary reaches its apex in the prayers, hymns and other liturgical texts he composed. Throughout these prayers three prominent qualities of Marian devotion are prominent:

- It is always Christ-centered.
- It focuses on the Incarnation as God's invitation.
- It emphasizes Mary's response.

This devotion and these three themes can be found in the Mass and Office which John Eudes composed in honor of the Heart of Mary. Five themes can be identified in St. John Eudes' devotion to the Heart of Mary.

A. The Heart of Mary, Full of Love for God and for Us

In the antiphon for Morning Prayer we pray:

Happy are you, Mary, who loved God with your whole heart, and fulfilled all his wishes with a generous heart and resolute will.⁶

John Eudes amplifies this theme in his classic work *The Admirable Heart of Mary*, which is currently found in the Office of Readings for this feast.

⁵Paul VI, *MC*, no. 23.

⁶Quotations from the Mass and Liturgy of the Hours for the feast of the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary are taken from the *Proper of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, Order of Our Lady of Charity, Congregation of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd* (Rome: Congregation of Jesus and Mary, 1978). [Further quotations will be referred to as *Proper*.]

Although the heart represents the whole interior of a person, it is principally the symbol of love. So, in venerating the Heart of Mary, we wish to honor, not her very worthy person, but the source and origin of what makes all that worthy and holy, that is to say, her love and charity.⁷

He is saying that to honor the Heart of Mary is to honor her love and charity, the love of Mary for God and for us.

[The heart of Mary] is full of love for God. It never loved anyone but God and what God wanted it to love in him and for him. It is full of love because the Blessed Virgin always loved God with all her heart and soul, with all her strength. It is full of love not only because she always wanted what God did and never wanted anything he did not want, but also because she always found satisfaction in doing God's most lovable will.⁸

That same text contains the other aspect of this theme in that the Heart of Mary is full of love *for us*.

She loves us with the same love with which she loves God since it is God she sees and loves in us. Her love for us is the same as her love for the God-man, her Son Jesus because she knows he is our Head and we are his members, that we are one with him as members are one with the Head. That is why she sees and loves us somewhat like her Son and her own children.⁹

The liturgical texts in honor of the Heart of Mary composed by John Eudes emphasize her love for God and us.

B. Presence of Jesus in the Heart of Mary

The next theme evident in these liturgical texts is that Jesus is present and living and reigning in the Heart of his Mother. John Eudes adapts the words of St. Augustine for an antiphon for Sext on the feast of the Heart of Mary:

⁷Translation found in *Lectionary Proper to the Congregation of Jesus and Mary* (Charlesbourg, QC, 1989), 172. [Further quotation taken from this translation will be referred to as *Lectionary*.]

⁸*Lectionary*, 174.

⁹*Lectionary*, 174.

Happy are you, Mary who bore the Creator of the world; but happier still because, before you carried him in your body, you bore him in your Heart.¹⁰

This idea appears in several ways in the Mass and Office texts. It is a favorite insight that he incorporates often. He also comments on this quotation in his book:

A testimony of St. Augustine's ardent devotion to the Admirable Heart of Mary is found in his book on her Virginitly: *The divine maternity would not have profited Mary if she had not first borne Jesus Christ in her Heart more happily and advantageously than in her womb.* She bore him in her womb for nine months whereas, she bore him in her Heart from the very first moment of her life and will carry him there eternally. She bore him in a more noble and holier manner in her Heart than in her womb, since her Heart is a living heaven in which the King of heaven and earth is loved more passionately and glorified more perfectly than in heaven.¹¹

Jesus living and reigning in the Heart of Mary was the object of adoration and contemplation. And we find this in the Opening Prayer of the feast.

Oh God, you willed that your only begotten Son should live and reign in the Heart of the Virgin Mother. Grant us, we pray, that, following the example of Jesus and Mary, we may constantly accomplish your will in all things, and so merit to have but one heart with them and among ourselves.¹²

The Prayer after Communion contains the same message:

Oh God, you willed that the marvelous mystery of your Son be preserved and pondered in the Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹³

The prayers are related to the gospel passage which John Eudes chose for this feast.

¹⁰*Lectionary*, 177.

¹¹*Lectionary*, 177.

¹²*Proper*, 8.

¹³*Proper*, 11.

Now when the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this event which the Lord has made known to us." . . . All who heard of it were astonished at the report given by the shepherds. Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart. (Luke 2:15-19)

This Gospel text had great significance for John Eudes. Mary considered not only the exterior happenings but contemplated the divine, the interior meaning of this event. He developed a commentary on the last sentence of this passage of the gospel.

C. Jesus Is the Heart of Mary

In John Eudes' way of speaking, Jesus lives and reigns so really in the Heart of Mary that it is possible to say that he *is* the Heart of Mary. He speaks this way, for example, at the beginning of some of his letters when he says:

May Jesus (who is) the most Holy Heart of Mary, be our light and our joy forever.

In the text cited earlier (in Part I), we read:

All you who thirst, come and drink of this spring (which is the Heart of Mary). Why delay any longer? Because you are afraid to offend the goodness of your Redeemer if you go to the Heart of his Mother? Do you not know that Mary is nothing, has nothing and can do nothing except from Jesus, through him and in him? Do you not know that it is Jesus who is everything in her, can and does everything in her? Not only does Jesus live and remain continually in the Heart of Mary, he is himself the heart of her Heart. So, to have recourse to the Heart of Mary is to come to Jesus; to honor her Heart is to honor Jesus; praying to the Heart of Mary is praying to Jesus.

This admirable Heart is the prototype and model of our own hearts. Perfection consists in transforming them into living productions of the most holy Heart of Mary. Moreover, the eternal Father gave Mary the power to conceive his Son, first in her Heart, before conceiving him in her virginal womb. So too, he has given her the power to do the same in the hearts of the children of Adam.¹⁴

¹⁴*Lectionary*, 172.

D. The Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary Are One and the Same Heart

Jesus and Mary are so closely united in love that they have but one heart. It is possible to say that they have one heart, even that they *are* only one Heart. And very frequently, John Eudes speaks of the Heart of Jesus and Mary, the one Heart of Jesus and Mary. This expression may sound a little strange, but it contains a profound spiritual message. He wrote prayers which are addressed to the Heart of Jesus and Mary. First of all, the *Ave Cor Sanctissimum* ("Hail, Holy Heart of Jesus and Mary"). We find the same expression in his *Magnificat*: "My soul magnifies the adorable Heart of Jesus and Mary."

Why did John Eudes speak this way? Because in the Heart of Jesus and Mary he was contemplating the close communion, the perfect unity between Jesus and the foremost member of the Mystical Body, that is to say, Mary. The Heart of Jesus and Mary is the first and most perfect realization of the words of Jesus: "Remain in me and I will remain in you . . . May they be one as we are one. May they be one with me" (cf. John 15:4 and 17:21-23). The Heart of Jesus and Mary is the origin, the initial cell, the core of the Church, because the Church cannot be other than the extension of this unity, this community, this fellowship, this love which already exists between the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary.

E. Our Vocation: To Become One with the Heart of Jesus and Mary

Our vocation is to become one with the Heart of Jesus and Mary. We are invited to share in this unity and the love which exists between Jesus and Mary. Look again at the Opening Prayer of the Mass for the feast of the Heart of Mary:

Oh God, you willed that your only-begotten Son should live and reign in the Heart of the Virgin Mother. Grant us, we pray, that, following the example of Jesus and Mary, we may constantly accomplish your will in all things, and so merit to have but one heart with them and among ourselves.

John Eudes extols the blessed communion between the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary. Our vocation is to share

in this community of the Heart of Jesus and the Heart of Mary. In this way, we constitute a community with the other Christians, that is to say, the Heart of Jesus and Mary will be the source of the unity among ourselves. Our reason for uniting is found in this union of hearts. The human community is more than than human friendship. It stems from our incorporation into Christ and our union with him, with the Heart of Jesus and Mary as well as with our brothers and sisters. This is a very great motivation to make efforts for us to live in unity among ourselves. We are called in the Church to become one with the Heart of Jesus and Mary.

It is clear that the devotion of St. John Eudes to the Heart of Mary is something profound—more than reciting a prayer, or receiving communion on the first Friday of the month. It calls for a commitment. This devotion is clearly Christocentric, that is to say, oriented to Christ. Such a devotion cannot remove us from Jesus; on the contrary, it leads us to Jesus. It is quite typical of the Marian devotion of this time and offers us key themes for a healthy Marian devotion today.

III. Heart of Mary as a Reflection of the Marian Themes Suggested as Preparation for the New Millennium

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Pope John Paul II outlines a program of spiritual preparation for the dawning of the new millennium. It is ambitious and comprehensive. The four-year program has a Trinitarian basis and incorporates the sacraments and theological virtues. Each year also has an emphasis on ecumenism and a Marian dimension.

The year 1997 was to focus on “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.” The virtue of faith was prominent, and the sacrament of Baptism was highlighted. There was an ecumenical exhortation that all look together to Christ, our common Lord. The ecumenical theme encouraged all to look together at Christ, our common Lord. Mary in her divine motherhood, the virginal mother of the Son, completed the year’s thematic accents.

In 1998 the focus was on the Holy Spirit whose sanctifying presence renews the community of Christ’s disciples. The theological virtue was hope and the sacrament was Confirmation.

Christians were encouraged to work toward unity within the Church. Here Mary was seen as the woman who was docile to the voice of the Spirit, a woman of silence and attentiveness.

The year 1999 is focused on the Father who is in heaven. The theological virtue is charity and the sacrament is Penance. In the ecumenical sphere, an emphasis is placed on the need for inter-religious dialogue, in particular, with Jews and Muslims. The Marian theme sees Mary as the highly favored daughter of the Father.

The year 2000 will focus on the Trinity from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns. The sacrament to be highlighted is the Eucharist. The ecumenical theme widens the circle to include other world religions in joint meetings. The Marian theme relates Mary to the Trinity as Mother of the Redeemer, Mother of fairest love.

These Marian themes are found in the devotion to the Heart of Mary fostered by St. John Eudes.

A. The Virginal Mother of the Son (1997)

Along with the other members of the French School of Spirituality, John Eudes places special emphasis in all his preaching and writing on the Incarnate Word. He always sees Mary as the mother of the Incarnate Word. She is the woman of faith, who conceived Jesus in her heart even before his bodily conception.

All Christians are to conceive Jesus in their hearts by reflecting on the states and mysteries of the life of Jesus. They are called to continue and fulfill mysteries of Christ by reproducing the states of Jesus in themselves.

We must strive to follow and fulfill in ourselves Jesus' various states as well as his mysteries, and frequently beg him in prayer to bring them to completion in us and in the whole Church. For the mysteries of Jesus are not yet completely perfected and fulfilled. In the person of Jesus they are complete, but not in us, who are his members, nor in the Church, which is his mystical body. The Son of God wills to give us a share in his mysteries and somehow to extend them to us. He wills to continue them in us and in all his Church. This is brought about first through the graces he has resolved to impart to us, and then through the works he wishes to accomplish in us by way of these mysteries.

For this reason, St. Paul says that *Christ is being brought to fulfillment in his Church, and that all of us contribute to this fulfillment* (Eph. 1,22-23; 4,13). Thus he achieves the fullness of life, that is to say, the mystical stature that he has in his mystical body, which will reach completion only on judgment day. And in another place St. Paul says: I complete in my own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1,24).

This is the plan by which the Son of God wants to complete and fulfill in us all his various states and mysteries. He wishes to perfect the mystery of his Incarnation, of his birth and his hidden life, by forming himself in us and being reborn to our souls through the holy sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, making us live a spiritual and interior life hidden with him in God.

He intends to perfect in us the mystery of his passion, death and resurrection, by making us suffer, die and rise again with him and in him. Finally, he wishes to fulfill in us the state of glorious and immortal heavenly life, when he will cause us to live a glorious, eternal life with him and in him in heaven.

In the same way, he wants to complete and fulfill in us and in his Church all his other states and mysteries. He wants to give us a share in them and to accomplish and continue them in us. So it is that Christ's mysteries, will not be completed until the end of the time he has ordained for their completion in us and in his Church, that is to say, not until the end of time.¹⁵

Mary showed herself to be the first and best disciple of Jesus by reflecting on the mysteries of Christ from the first moment of his conception. John Eudes sees great significance in the observation of St. Luke in the infancy narrative when he notes that after the Shepherds left, Mary reflected on all these things and treasured them in her heart. In fact, he uses this passage as the Gospel reading for the Mass of the Heart of Mary which he composed.

B. The Woman Attentive to the Spirit (1998)

While John Eudes does not dwell extensively on Mary's relation to the Holy Spirit, he uses the title "Spouse of the Spirit" in

¹⁵*The Kingdom of Jesus* as cited in *Lectionary*, 65-66.

several of his prayers. His devotion to her heart certainly emphasizes a heart open to the Spirit. It is her openness to the Spirit that enables God to use Mary to become the Mother of God.

Pope Paul VI noted that "some Fathers and writers saw in the Spirit's intervention an action that consecrated and made fruitful Mary's virginity."¹⁶ For John Eudes, the Holy Spirit's action at the Annunciation is similar to that work effected in the sacrament of Baptism. There is clear evidence in his teaching on Baptism in the Kingdom of Jesus that the Holy Spirit is there forming Jesus in each soul just as he formed him in Mary's womb.

C. Highly Favored Daughter of the Father and Perfect Model of Love (1999)

In the year 1999, Mary is honored as the highly favored daughter of the Father who appears before the eyes of believers as the perfect model of love toward both God and neighbor. For John Eudes, Mary's Heart is a symbol of that love. It symbolizes God's love for her and God's love for us. It is that same love that we are called to have for others. It is the manifestation of God's love for us in Christ. The theology and spirituality of John Eudes is not complicated. He does not make excessive distinctions. All love is one, insofar as it is unconditional and selfless.

D. The Trinity (2000)

For the year 2000, Pope John Paul II directs the Church's attention to the Trinity from whom everything in the world and in history comes and to whom everything returns. Mary's unique role to each person of the Trinity relates her first and foremost to her Son. She is the Mother of the Redeemer, the long-awaited Messiah who fulfills the expectations of God's people. The Church awaits his return in glory when the fullness of God's Kingdom will be revealed.

Within the spiritual tradition of St. John Eudes, Mary's role is very clear. She is always to lead people to her Son. The clear emphasis on Mary's role in the plan of salvation and the

¹⁶MC, no. 26.

Trinitarian relationship can be seen in the “Salutation to the Blessed Virgin Mary” composed by St. John Eudes. It extols Mary for her role in God’s plan and serves as a fitting conclusion to these reflections:

Hail Mary, Daughter of God the Father.
Hail Mary, Mother of God the Son.
Hail Mary, Spouse of the Holy Ghost.
Hail Mary, Temple of the Divinity.
Hail Mary, Immaculate lily of the resplendent and ever-peaceful Trinity.
Hail Mary, Radiant rose of heavenly fragrance.
Hail Mary, Virgin of virgins, virgin most faithful, of whom the King of Heaven did will to be born.
Hail Mary, Queen of martyrs, whose soul was pierced with a sword of sorrow.
Hail Mary, Queen of the universe, to whom all power has been given in heaven and on earth.
Hail Mary, Queen of my heart, my mother, my life, my consolation, and my dearest hope.
Hail Mary, Mother most amiable.
Hail Mary, Mother most admirable.
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women.
And blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
And blessed be your spouse, St. Joseph.
And blessed be your father, St. Joachim.
And blessed be your mother, St. Anne.
And blessed be your adopted son, St. John.
And blessed be your angel, St. Gabriel.
And blessed be the Eternal Father who chose thee.
And blessed be the Divine Son who loved thee.
And blessed be the Holy Ghost who espoused thee.
And blessed be forever all those who bless and who love thee, Amen.¹⁷

¹⁷English translation (by Charles di Targiani) from *The Admirable Heart of Mary* by St. John Eudes (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1948), 359–360.