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CHROMATIUS OF AQUILEIA: MARIAN ECCLESIOLOGIST

Cardinal Journet in his monumental work on the Church makes the acute observation, in which Karl Barth concurs, that Mariology and ecclesiology run parallel, so that one's Mariology images his ecclesiology and vice versa. He points out that the fundamental differences between Protestant and Catholic views on these two key phases of theology arise from the divergent conceptions of justification and grace held by the Catholic Church and the Churches of the Reform.¹

Chromatius of Aquileia exemplifies the principle enunciated by Monsieur Journet. When Chromatius evokes Mary he associates her with the Church. His contribution to Mariology and ecclesiology is highlighted by Pope Paul VI in *Marialis Cultus*. The Pope climaxes his own harmonies of Mariology and ecclesiology in Marian devotion, practice and doctrine with a citation from Chromatius (*Sermo XXX*, 1), showing how the love of Christians for the Church develops their love for Mary and their love for Mary blends with their love for the Church.²

Chromatius, the tenth bishop of Aquileia, did not write much. He is overshadowed by his great contemporaries: by St. Ambrose, who consecrated him a bishop and from whom he received a letter on God's veracity and power;³ by Rufinus, who dedicated to him both his translation and enlargement of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and his translations of Origen's *Homilies on Josue*,⁴ by St. Jerome who dedicated to him his Latin translations of the Books of Solomon, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Canticle of Canticles;⁵ by St. John Chrysostom who corresponded with him.⁶

¹ C. JOURNET, *L'Église du Verbe Incarné*, Desclée, 1951, II, 391-393.

² PAULUS VI, Adhort. Apost. *Marialis Cultus*, Typis Polyglott. Vat., 1974, 28, p. 33.

³ Cf. AMBROSIUS, *Ep.* 50, *PL*, 16, 1155-1159. CSEL, 82, 187-194. M. M. BEYENKA, *St. Ambrose Letters*, Fathers of the Church, N. Y., 1954, 70-76.

⁴ RUFINUS, *CC*, XX 267, 217, 10.

⁵ HIERONYMUS, *PL*, 28, c. 1305-1308. Cf. critical ed. of *Préfaces de la Bible Latine*; DE BRYUNE, 30. *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulg. Vers.* VII, Romae, 1948, 3 ff.

⁶ IOANN. CHRYSOSTOMUS, *Ep.* 155, *PG* 51, 702. PALLADIUS, *Dial. de vita S. Joannis Chrys.* *PG*, 47, 8-12.

Nevertheless, in the small corpus of his writings, sermons, and a small commentary on the *Pater* and the Beatitudes, Chromatius emphasizes a remarkable insight into Marian doctrine that many centuries later was to prove particularly appealing to post-Vatican II conciliar Mariology.¹ He gives us no full-blown Mariology, yet in a few passages he marked fourth-century Marian doctrine.

Ubi Ecclesia, ibi Maria

After our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ conquered death and arose and ascended into heaven, the Church gathered together in number about a hundred persons, as you have just heard in the reading that has been made. The Church was assembled in the Upper Room with the Mother of Jesus and his brethren. Wherefore you cannot speak of the Church unless the Mother of the Lord is there. For the Church is there where the Incarnation of Christ of the Virgin is preached.²

Where the apostles, the Lord's brothers, preach, the Gospel is heard.³

Where the synagogue of the Jews is, you cannot speak of the Church, because it does not want to believe in the Incarnation of Christ of the Virgin Mary, nor does it want to hear those who preach a spiritual message.⁴

¹ For life of Chromatius, cf. J. LEMARIÉ, *Chromace d'Aquilée, Sermons I*, SC 154, Ch. III, "Chromace en son temps," 41-54.

² *Sermo XXX*, 1, SC 154. "Postquam Dominus et Salvator noster Christus Iesus devicta morte surrexit et ascendit ad caelum, Ecclesia ipsius in centeno numero hominum congregata est, ut audivit in praesenti lectione dilectio vestra. Congregata autem Ecclesia est in superioribus cum Maria quae fuit mater Iesu et fratribus eius. Non potest ergo Ecclesia nuncupari nisi fuerit ibi Mater Domini cum fratribus eius. Illic enim Ecclesia Christi est ubi incarnatio Christi ex virgine praedicatur. Et ubi apostoli fratres Domini praedicant, evangelium auditur. Ubi synagoga Iudaeorum est, non potest Ecclesia nuncupari, quia nec incarnationem Christi credere ex virgine voluit, nec spiritualiter praedicantes audire."

³ On Apostles' preaching, *Sermo I.5*, "Multae, inquit, portae . . . ad evangelicam praedicationem . . . Evangelica enim praedictio caeli porta est . . ." SC 154, 130, 83-94. *Sermo XII. 6*, "Audit apostolum, manducat avide de apostolo quia apostolica doctrina reficitur." SC 154, 230. *Sermo II.3*, "cum Dominus, per apostolos suos, verbum veritatis ad fidei ubique seminaret." *Sermo XI.3*, SC 154, 136, 38-39. "Quid enim pretiosius apostolicae doctrinae in qua fides Christi et caelestis regni gloria continetur." SC 154, 216, 60-61.

⁴ *Sermo I.2*, SC 154, 126. Cf. *Sermo XXI.3,44*, "Dulcedinem propter fidem Ecclesiae; amaritudinem propter perfidiam synagogae." *Sermo XIII.1*, "Arguuntur . . . non muri . . . vel potius synagoga iudaeorum," SC 154, 234-236, 8-10.

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These passages enter the Mariological thought of Chromatius, introduce his harmonies of ecclesiology and Mariology and emphasize the role of the Apostles while contrasting the Church with the synagogue, a recurring theme. Finally these passages illustrate Chromatius' spiritual reading of Scripture.¹

Born of the Virgin Mary

Chromatius maintains that where the Church is, there is Mary. His *prima facie* reason for this statement is the text from the Acts remarking that, at the origin of the Church, the Apostles were together with Mary. But the theological argument follows quickly upon this evident observation. The basis of the mutual presence of the Church and Mary is the mystery of the Incarnation. The Church preaches the reality of the Incarnation in its plenitude, and the mystery of the Church is that it is itself the continuation of the Incarnation. The Virgin Mother has an essential role to play in both the production of the mystery at the Annunciation and in its prolongation in time and space, for the Church is Christ's mystical body. It is to be noted that Chromatius delights, when he refers to Mary, to evoke the birth of Christ from the virgin: *ex virgine natus*.²

In a surprising text, Chromatius reads a foretelling of the mystery of the Incarnation, *sacramentum futurae veritatis*: "A traveller who comes upon a mother-bird with its young, may take the young but must not harm the mother" (Deut 22,6). The Word undertook his earthly trip by first taking on his human nature from the Virgin Mary. Later, Christ took the little ones, the Apostles, and left the mother-bird; he confided the young to a home, the Church (Ps 83,4). The Jews did not in fact recognize the signs given them to discern Christ, among which must be mentioned the Virgin Mother. Chromatius asks then whether the Virgin birth was an insignificant portent: "*parvum signum fuerat virginem peperisse . . . ?*"³ Behind this line of reasoning, of course, lies the Sign given to Ahaz, but the presence of the apostles in the passage, the insistence on the sign, suggests also that perhaps he had in mind the sign in Cana where the apostles first believed in Jesus. However this may be, the expression *Domus ecclesiae intellegitur* has Marian over- and undertones, as shall be seen.

¹ H. de LUBAC, *Exégèse Médiévale*, II, 108. Cf. CHROMATIUS, SC 154, 135, n. 2.

² Cf. use of expression *ex virgine natus* in Ambrose: C. NEUMANN, *The Virgin Mary in the Work of St. Ambrose*, Fribourg, 1962, 67-68.

³ *Sermo* IV.4 SC 154, 164; *Sermo* I.2, SC 154, 124-126.

Instead of using straightforward language to the effect that the Word became incarnate for the salvation of both Gentiles and Jews, Chromatius chose to stress the virginity of the Blessed Mary, using Mariological terminology where it was not required. The Son of God became incarnate of the Virgin Mary not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. The humiliation of the Word was the beginning of Christ's humble existence on earth. In receiving his body from the Virgin, our Lord and Savior was enabled to give numberless examples of humility. Christ's feet, acquired in all humility in his Incarnation through the Virgin, are telltale of the divinity and make it possible for the Church to come to the knowledge of the Godhead.¹

The body which the Word took from the Virgin served Christ as a tunic with which he covered mankind's nakedness. The tunic of his body became in fact the instrument of salvation, the tunic which clothed the entire world: "*una tunica corporis Christi totum mundum vestivit.*"² This tunic of Christ once again calls our attention to the relationship uniting the Incarnation to the Church.²

The phrase *ex virgine natus* becomes a descriptive designation of Christ, a surname, *onomastikōs*, "*ille qui ex virgine natus est*"³—just as St. John the evangelist is "the disciple whom Jesus loved." More specifically, Chromatius calls him "*ille qui in Bethlehem ex virgine natus est.*"⁴ His Incarnation constitutes him the true Augustus⁵ and the Bread from heaven.

According to the Gospel simile, the Church is the mustard seed which grows into a great tree.⁶ The minuteness of the seed speaks to Chromatius of the Lord, the God of glory and eternal majesty who became the least of all, *minimus*. He became a mustard seed when he deigned to be born an infant of the Virgin Mary. From this humble beginning, Chromatius traces the development of the seed until it is at last sown again in a new way at Christ's burial in the earth, ultimately to be resurrected and to become the

¹ *Sermo IX.5*, SC 154, 202, 119-121; *Sermo XI.4*, SC 154, 218, 90-108.

² *Sermo XV.4*, SC 154, 254, 108. Cf. ATHANASIUS, *Sermo, De cruce*, "... quodque factus homo non habuit corpus ex viro feminaque contextum, sed sola ex virgine sola spiritus gratia."

³ *Sermo XXXII.1*, SC 164, 158, 14.

⁴ *Sermo XXXII.1*, SC 164, 160, 41-42.

⁵ Cf. note 16.

⁶ *Sermo XXX.2*, SC 164, 136, 33-37, "Grano sinapis se ipsum Dominus assimilavit et cum esset Deus gloriae et maiestatis aeternae minimus factus est, quia in corpore parvulus ex virgine nasci dignatus est. Hic ergo seminatus in terra est cum corpus eius traditum sepulturae est."

Church: "*Arbor ista Ecclesia ostendebatur, quae per mortem Christi resurrexit in gloria.*"¹ The consummation of the work of redemption, then, is an eternal seed; the Lord of glory who was sown in Mary's womb, who grew in her and afterwards during his life and death and resurrection, is now the living Body of Christ, the Church. From this point on in the text, Chromatius' interpretation rests within the parameters of ecclesiology. His Mariological principle, as pointed out initially, is developed through the imagery of the mustard seed with regard to the constitution of the Church. The branches of the tree are the Apostles; the birds of the air are believers who enter the Church at the preaching of the Apostles and who there find rest in true doctrine, the apostolic teaching.

Ecclesia, Domus Mariae

Since the role of Mary touches so vitally the origin and the continuation of the Church, Chromatius comes, by the inner logic of his premises, to consider the Church as Mary's very home, *domus Mariae*:

We cannot slip out of prison any other way, that is, from the error of this world, except by the visitation of an Angel of the Lord. The iron gate is opened for us, that is, the gate of death and punishment, which the Son of God smashed in pieces by his passion. Only then we come to the House of Mary, the Church, where Mary the Mother of the Lord dwells. There a girl named Rose meets us. Most aptly the name Rose means the mystery of our salvation. Literally the Greek *rhode* means "rose." When we arrive at Mary's home no one else but Rose meets us, that is, the assembly of the saints which as a precious rose shines with martyr-purple.²

The suggestive title *Domus Mariae* is self-explanatory, and yet something more must be added because of the context in which the appellation occurs. Chromatius is speaking about liberation from sin, a theme proposed by the freeing of Peter from prison. As has been seen, Chromatius considers

¹ *Sermo XXX.2*, SC 164, 136, 40-41.

² *Sermo XXIX.4*, SC 164, 130, "Sed nec aliter de carcere, id est de mundi huius errore evadere possumus, nisi a Domino per angelum visitemur. Aperietur nobis porta ferrea, id est porta mortis et poenae quam Filius Dei passionis suae virtute comminuit. Et tunc venimus ad domum Mariae, ad Ecclesiam Christi, ubi Maria mater Domini habitat; et illic occurrit nobis puella nomine Hrode. Convenienter autem huiusmodi nomen Hrode salutis nostrae mysterium est. Hrode enim secundum litteram graecam rosa nuncupatur. Venientibus ergo nobis ad domum Mariae, non nisi Hrode occurrit, id est congregatio sanctorum quae sanguine martyrum glorioso veluti rosa preciosa refulget . . ."

Mary to be usually in the company of the Church in such a way that she is never far from the Church nor the Church separated from her. She is the mistress of the house, "*Non potest ergo Ecclesia nuncupari nisi fuerit ibi Maria Mater Domini.*"¹ The very phrase, "and Mary the Lord's mother was there," conjures up Cana and the first sign which confirmed the Apostles' faith. When sinners come to the Church and enter therein, they come by faith through the preaching of the Apostles, those faithful heralds of the mystery of the Incarnation: "*ubi incarnatio Christi ex virgine praedicatur. Et ubi apostoli fratres Domini praedicant, evangelium auditur.*"² The presence of Mary, therefore, is not limited to her cooperation in the actualization of the mystery of the Incarnation; she is also present in the continuation of that mystery, the extension of the Mystical Body, which assures the permanence of the Incarnation in all times and climes.

Intacta Ovis: Sancta Maria

To the question raised during Vatican Council II, whether Mary is to be considered a member of the Church or as one above the Church, that is, either with Christ or with the people of God, Chromatius would answer that Mary is one of the flock which boasts Christ as its Shepherd. He would answer thus without denying Mary's active role in the Incarnation of Christ and in the continuation of that mystery in the Church. His view strikes the balance any Catholic view must; at one time he emphasizes her role as Mother and at another her discipleship:

Once again we are your people and the sheep of your flock. Of this flock of saints, there takes precedence that immaculate and inviolate sheep, Saint Mary, who brought forth for us against the laws of nature the purple Lamb, Christ the King. With good reason Christ the Lord is taken as the purple Lamb because he was not made but born King. Not every king is king at birth. But after he is born he becomes king, or he receives the purple robe of rule or the kingly dignity. But our Lord and Savior came forth from the virginal womb with royal authority, because he was a king before he was born of the Virgin. From God his Father he was by nature King and Son of God. Heed what the Lord himself says in the Gospel. When Pilate asked him, "Art thou King?" He answered, "For this I was born and for this I have come into the world."³

¹ *Sermo XXX.1*, SC 164, 134, 7-8.

² *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³ *Sermo XXII*, 3 SC 164, 64-66, "Licet et Salvator noster pastor dicatur, nuncupatur tamen et ovis vel agnus. Denique non sine mysterio dominicae passionis, in praesenti

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The purple which describes the Lamb indicates royal blood and sovereignty. Christ is both Lamb and Shepherd. The movement of the entire passage, however, serves rather to show him Shepherd and King by a twin title, by his divine birth and by his human birth. The Incarnate God is ruler of all in virtue of the hypostatic union, for in his person he was King before his Incarnation. The Christian people share in Christ insofar as he is the Lamb who sacrificed himself, and, therefore, he is rightly qualified as purple Lamb; the faithful in their turn are rightly called lambs. Among Christ's lambs, Mary stands out by her immaculate integrity and purity. Again in this passage, Chromatius insists upon the virgin motherhood of Mary; twice he mentions it. He says that Mary brought Christ forth "*contra naturam*" and that he proceeded "*de ipso utero virginali*."

The presentation of the Church as Christ's tunic has already been considered. Chromatius further elaborates the figure by adding the color of the tunic, purple; in this way he proclaims that the Church shares in the royalty of Christ. The transformation of purple when dissolved represents the transformation of the soul by grace and baptism, wherein the Christian puts on the spiritual purple of the Trinity.¹ This play of images—the royal purple of Christ's Passion, the royal bath and purple of the Christian people—depends on the tunic and the purple of the Incarnation where the Word donned a living human body.

lectione lectum est quod Abel de partu ovium suarum obtulerit munus Dominus Deo. Sancti patriarchae et prophetae, merito innocentiae, oves vel arietes nuncupantur. De ipsis scriptum legimus: Induti sunt arietes ovium et convalles abundabunt frumento. Et iterum: Nos autem populus tuus, et oves gregis tui. De hoc ergo grege sanctorum immaculata illa et intacta ovis processit, id est sancta Maria, quae nobis contra naturam purpureum illum agnum, id est regem Christum generavit. Recte autem purpureus agnus Christus Dominus intellegitur, quia rex non factus sed natus est. Omnis rex non statim nascitur; sed postquam natus fuerit, rex efficitur, aut ipse indumentum suscipit regni purpureum, aut regiam dignitatem. Dominus autem et Salvator noster de ipso utero virginali cum regia auctoritate processit, quia rex erat iam antequam ex virgine nasceretur. De Deo enim pater rex et Dei filius natus extiterat. Audi hoc ipsum Dominum in evangelio declarantem. Cum enim interrogaret eum Pilatus: Tu es rex? Respondens ait: ad hoc natus sum, et ad hoc veni in hunc mundum."

¹ *Sermo XIX.2*, SC 164, 20, 33-47, "Possumus autem in tunica purpurea etiam Ecclesiam significatam cognoscere, quae in Christo rege manens, gloria regali refulget. Unde et 'genus regale' a Iohanne in Apocalypsi nuncupatur. . . . Pretiosa enim et regia res [est] purpura veraciter ostenditur, quia, quamvis de natura terrae sit, mutat tamen naturam cum tingitur, mutat et speciem . . . Ita et caro nostra natura quidem vilis est, sed commutatione gratiae pretiosa efficitur, cum in [purpura] cocco spiritali, veluti purpura, trifarie tingatur mysterio Trinitatis."

Chromatius, too, in this selection advances the unique place of Mary in the Church. At the same time he insists that she remains one of Christ's sheep, a remark illustrating his remarkable sense of parallel theology in its Marian and ecclesial aspects. His way of affirming a truth of the entire Christian people and then, by way of an a fortiori argument, applying the assertion to Mary illustrates how the spouse of the Canticle of Canticles gradually converges in a threefold symbolism: the people of God, the Christian soul, and, ultimately, the personal paragon, Mary. Similarly, the figurative use of purple—as martyrdom, human lineage and royalty—converges in an ecclesial and Marian application.

Mary Model

Since Mary reflects the ideal that the Church should image forth, she is the model both for the entire Church and for the individual members of the Church. She is the *immaculata and intacta ovis* and by the innocence of her life, *merito innocentiae*. Chromatius proposes three examples for the Church's imitation: Joseph for men, Susanna for women and Mary, the Mother of God, for virgins. Joseph is the *palatium Christi* and *templum Dei, habitaculum spiritus*,¹ a model of chastity for men and, indeed, for all called to the perfection of chastity. Yet the Virgin Mary is even more so, and because of a double title. She too is palace, temple and dwelling-place, but beyond all that she is the Mother of God.

Finally, Chromatius interprets the scene of Christ's dying on the Cross and commending his Mother to the safekeeping of John. He does not, however, reach the ecclesiological interpretation this Johannine text was to receive in later centuries. Chromatius does not advance any further than his mentor and friend, St. Ambrose. He stops at discerning in Christ's commendation of Mary to John merely a simple demonstration of filial love for his mother. Chromatius is careful to point out that Christ had no intention of abandoning his Mother—since he watches over all and protects all—but was providing a palpable demonstration of his filial piety towards his Mother:

¹ *Sermo XXIV.2, De S. patriarcha Ioseph*, SC 164, 70-72, 35-47, "Sed vir sanctus carcerem illum palatium computavit, immo ipse in carcere palatium erat, quia ibi fides, castitas et pudicitia, illic palatium Christi est, illic templum Dei, illic habitaculum Spiritus Sancti . . . Tria enim sunt exempla castitatis in Ecclesia, quae imitari singuli debeant: Ioseph, Susanna et Maria; ut viri Ioseph imitentur, mulieres Susannam, virgines Mariam."

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At the time of his Passion, when he was hanging on the Cross for the Salvation of the world, the Lord commended his Mother according to the flesh to John in preference to all others, addressing him, "Behold your mother." And to his Mother he said, "Behold your son." He left his Mother to John, not because he was going to abandon her, for in his divine condescension he protects all. He is the defender and the protector of all. But his intention was to give a proof of his filial affection for his Mother. It was necessary that the Lord prove his piety towards her, because he is the author of filial love. Among all the holy Apostles John was chosen because of his grace and in view of the special affection Christ had for him.¹

As close in thought as he is to St. Ambrose and despite his own insistence on Mary as Virgin, Chromatius does not explicitly draw a parallel between the Church as Virgin and Mary the Virgin, as does St. Ambrose. This omission is all the more striking since he does speak of the spiritual wedding of the Church in the Incarnation. He sees the wedding with the Church prepared by the Father for His Son, and he points out the action of the Holy Spirit. He identifies the nature of the union verified in the Incarnation, and he calls the conception immaculate. He does not forget the role of the Father and of the angels. He makes us hear the sound of wedding instruments, yet he does not single out the obvious Mary as Spouse, Mary as type of the Church, Mother and Virgin.²

¹ *Sermo XXII.3*, SC 164, 54, "Tempore enim passionis, cum pro salute mundi Filius Dei suspensus fuisset in cruce, matrem Mariam secundum carnem nulli magis quam Iohanni commendavit Dominus, dicens ad eum: Ecce mater tua. Et ad matrem: Ecce filius tuus. Suam Iohanni sanctam matrem Mariam derelinquens; non quod esset sanctam Mariam deserturus, qui omnes divina dignatione tuetur—ipse est enim omnium defensor et protector—sed ut pietatis suae affectum circa Mariam demonstraret. Debit enim pium affectum Dominus circa Mariam demonstrare, quia auctor est pietatis. Etiam hic ergo inter sanctos apostolos Iohannes praeeligitur quia per merito gratiae suae peculiari affectu dilectus a Christo est." John 19,25 ff. is frequently presented by the Fathers as an example of Jesus' filial piety towards his Mother. C. A. KNELLER, "John 19,26-27 bei den Kirchenvätern," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 40 (1916) 597-612; for the same interpretation in St. Ambrose, *Exp. Luc.* 6.38, *PL*, 15, 1678C; 10.129, 1836D; *Ep.* 62, 109-110, *PL* 16, 1218BC.

² *Exh. Virg.*, 5.28, *PL* 16, 344AB; *Instit. Virg.* 14, 87-89, *PL*, 16, 326; *Exp. Luc.* 2.7, *PL*, 15, 1555BC CSEL, 32.4, 45; 2.56-57; *PL*, 15, 1572-73 CSEL, 32.4, 72-73. *Sermo X.2*, SC 154, 206, "... cum Christus, sponsam sibi Ecclesiam, per Spiritum Sanctum sociavit? ... Secundum caeleste mysterium, sic Ecclesia nupta monstratur, ut virgo sit. Nupta dicitur, quia per Spiritum Sanctum, Christo coniuncta est; virgo quia innupta et incorrupta manet a peccato."

Conclusion

Chromatius' presentation of Mary and her role in salvation has a modern ring, a post-Vatican II sound. Since the Second Vatican Council, Mariology has been trying to present Mary more and more as one of us, a member of the Church. The Fathers of the Council sought to integrate Mary completely in the Mystical Body, or—to express the same truth with a different accent—to place her in the history of salvation or in the history of the Church.¹ Even if, in response to today's exaltation of womankind, future developments in Mariology veer a little towards the exaltation of Mary as the woman of the Apocalyptic vision, Chromatius will still serve as an ancient witness to the eternal Marian truth that Mary is inseparably associated with the Church in theology and devotion.

¹ Cf. R. LAURENTIN, "Marie (Ste Vierge)," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, 10, 481-482.