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# Ecumenical Problems in Mariology

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## MARIOLOGY AS AN ECUMENICAL PROBLEM

As recently as 1952 a text written by a reputable New Testament scholar was distributed free to each divinity student in a Scottish university. "The cult of the Mother of Jesus," it stated in the chapter on Mary, "is not only a perversion of the gospel, but the subversion of Christianity."<sup>1</sup> Such cries as "perversion of the gospel," or "blasphemous falsehood," have constantly been heard in the course of Protestant polemic against Rome. And even for the present speaker, a teacher in a Reformed seminary, to consider Mary's part in love and reverent inquiry is still to arouse for some a nervousness that a new idolatry may be in formation.

It may help to try to say in simplest terms what the Reformation consciousness was. "One of the first facts to come to notice," says John T. McNeill in his study of the ecumenical spirit of Protestantism, "is the insistence with which the claim of catholicity was made by the leaders of the Reformation."<sup>2</sup> The Protestant Reformation was not a protest against catholicity, but for it, for a reformed catholicity that did not simply identify (as John Eck had done in his dispute with Martin Luther) the words "catholic" and "Roman obedience." Calvin himself was insistent. To remain in communion with one another is a solemn obligation: "Since it is the purpose of the gospel that we might be reconciled to God through Christ," he wrote in his commentary on I Corinthians, "it is necessary that we should all be bound together in him . . . For we ought

<sup>1</sup> C. Anderson Scott, *Romanism and the Gospel* (Edinburg, 1973) 90.

<sup>2</sup> John T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism* (Richmond, Virginia, 1964) 63.

to be one body, if we want to be kept together under him.”<sup>3</sup>

Mariology, as Luther and the other Reformers saw it, had been a tapestry woven of glorious color and intricate design. But in what Calvin malevolently called “the ruins of a church” at Rome the threads of that tapestry had been torn apart and the colors had run together. So the Reformers sought a new pattern, faithful to the original gospel. “All we have attempted,” Calvin wrote to Cardinal Sadoletto, “has been to renew that ancient form . . . which was mangled and almost destroyed by the Roman Pontiff and his faction.”<sup>4</sup> Our more irenic temper is embarrassed by the acerbity of these dialectical shafts. Calvin, however, was sure there were dangers in an uncontrolled Mariology. In his explanation of the words of Jesus to Mary at Cana, “Woman, what have I to do with thee?”, he says: “Christ addresses his mother like this so as to transmit a perpetual and general lesson to all ages, lest an extravagant honor paid to his mother should obscure his divine glory . . . As if it were honoring her to adorn her with sacrilegious titles.”<sup>5</sup> But neither he nor any of the other Reformers were content to reject the excesses of the Marian cult. In faith and order alike, and therefore by definition in their understanding of Mary, they sought to renew the ancient form.

The Reformers continued to declare their faith in the words of the ancient creeds: Jesus Christ was “conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary.” Uniformly they testified to her perpetual virginity. They willingly, though with some reticence, applied to her the title *Theotokos*. At the height of the Reformation in Zürich Zwingli still taught his people to use the *Ave Maria*: “The more honor and love for Christ,” he told them, “the more also the esteem and honor for Mary.”

<sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 1:13.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, Reply to Cardinal Sadoletto's Letter.

<sup>5</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on St. John's Gospel*, 2:4.

On one point of critical interpretation the Reformers did break with a tradition of centuries. The angelic salutation in St. Luke's Gospel was not a witness to what she is in herself, nor to her virtues, nor to her virginity. The Vulgate translation *gratia plena* had led, they said, to an indiscriminating application to her of a plenitude of grace. They were without doubt familiar with the *Mariale Super Missus Est*, attributed in their day to the Dominican, Albertus Magnus, and with its teaching that Mary possessed all graces—"all individual and universal blessings of individuals individually and universal ones universally." The angelic salutation, the Reformers said, is to be understood in its Greek form. Mary is the *kecharitomenē*, who confessed, as Luther put it, that the foremost work God did for her was to regard her in her lowliness.

The Reformation insight here is of fundamental importance. The holy is revealed not in the heights but in the stable; not on the thrones of the powerful, but in the flight and the fears of wanderers and refugees from the weaponry of totalitarianism. As Luther put it, "Mary seeks not her own glory, but goes about her usual household duties, milking the cows, cooking the meals, washing pots and kettles, sweeping out rooms."<sup>6</sup>

To exalt Mary, to make her a queen, to adorn her with honors she never sought, is to remove her from us. As René Laurentin has said, it is "to snatch her away from solidarity with the human race," and to create a privilege-oriented Mariology.<sup>7</sup>

So the Reformers made their plea for a return to the Gospel witness concerning Mary. "Let us learn to praise the holy Virgin," Calvin wrote in one of his sermons. "When we confess with her that we are nothing, that we are worth nothing,

<sup>6</sup> Text in *Luther Deutsch* 5 (Göttingen, 1963) 309.

<sup>7</sup> Abbé R. Laurentin, *Mary in the Communion of Saints* (London, 1973) 1.

and that we owe all to the pure goodness of God, see how we will be disciples of the Virgin Mary and will show that we have retained her doctrine. And what honor are we able to do her greater than that?"<sup>8</sup> Yet it is not too much to say that the Protestants never learned, even in Calvin's sense, to praise the holy Virgin. Mary, whose place in the faith and life of the church Luther and Calvin had sought to define, was gradually at first, then rapidly extruded from both the doctrines and the worship and spirituality of the Protestant churches. As late as the seventeenth century the Socinians, the rationalistic group whose unorthodox views on the Trinity had so rattled Calvin, held to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Amongst the Lutheran Pietists, Mary has hardly a place, except briefly in the theosophical speculations of Jacob Boehme (d. 1624). In the century following the Pietist origins, both English deism and German rationalism submitted the Christian revelation to a thoroughgoing criticism and the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was rejected either icily or sadly. In contemporary Protestantism there is still a hard core of Fundamentalist thought that regards the doctrine as part of the bulwark against the doctrinal aberrations of modernism. The older Protestant polemic against the cult of Mary is still to be found, though phrases criticizing "the tide of Mariolatry" have an oddly dated ring to them.

A second movement within Protestantism since the nineteenth century has been the theological movement which has aimed at bringing traditional Protestant doctrines into closer relationship with modern ideas. The movement was wholehearted in its adoption of a critical view of the Bible, and may be said to have its own liberal and conservative wings. Emil Brunner (1889-1962) may be regarded as typical of the liberal rejection of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. In *The Mediator*

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Soixante cinq Sermons de Jean Calvin sur l'harmonie des trois Evangelistes, S. Matthieu, S. Marc, et S. Luc* (Geneva, 1562) XXXIX.

(1927) he argued that the Son of God assumed the whole of humanity, and that this implies unequivocally procreation through the two sexes. Any other view of the Incarnation is docetic. Karl Barth (1886-1968), as is known, defended the doctrine of the Virgin Birth on the ground of what he called a countersign: "If it is only the *virgo* who can be the mother of the Lord, if God's grace considers her alone and is prepared to use her for his work upon man, that means that as such willing, achieving, creative, sovereign man is not considered, and is not to be used for this work. Of course, man is involved, but not as God's fellow-worker, not in his independence, not with control over what is to happen, but only in his readiness for God."<sup>9</sup>

The separation of Mary from Protestant theology and spirituality which began in the sixteenth century has become almost total in the twentieth century. Even the singing of the *Magnificat* caused the Puritans to show scruples, and their ceasing to recite the Apostles' Creed is as much to be explained by its mention of the Virgin as by its use of the offensive adjective "Catholic." Protestant art tended to avoid representations of the Virgin. This would not have been Luther's desire, since he wanted the Virgin to be portrayed to show "how the exceeding riches of God joined in her with her utter poverty." The only major artist who felt the influence of the Reformation is Rembrandt, whose later paintings, notably *The Virgin and the Child with Cat* (1654) and *Christ Between His Parents* of the same year intensify the mystery of her nature. In Protestant music hymnody the Virgin is little celebrated. One can think of Bach's *Great Magnificat*, of which his noted biographer, Spitta, wrote: "Scarcely ever has the idea of virgin purity, simplicity, and humble happiness found more perfect expression." But other than this there is little. Indeed, such little as there has been in Protestant hymns

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2 (Edinburgh, 1956) 192.

has all too often been edited out. For instance, the popular hymn, "Fairest Lord Jesus," usually sung to a Silesian folk tune, addresses Jesus thus: "O Thou of God and man the Son." But the German words are, "Gottes und Marien Sohn," "Jesus of God and Mary's Son." The struggle against any vestige of Mary could hardly go much further!

There are many explanations for this diminishing awareness of Mary's participation with us in the communion of saints, each worthy of lengthier discussion. A telegraphic survey must pass for now. Why has Mary been lost from Protestant consciousness?

First, because Mary belongs to the "Catholic heritage." The designation "catholic" was precious to the Reformers, who sought to maintain fellowship with the whole Christian past, not least in maintaining catholic doctrine. But by the nineteenth century (and ever earlier) "Catholic" had become for much of Protestantism a term of abuse. If a doctrine or practice were "Catholic," that meant it was part of Romish popery" and, therefore, that it was a denial of the Gospel faith and contrary to Scripture truth. Since Mary was only too obviously part of the Catholic heritage, Protestants had to limit their definition of catholicity to exclude her.

Second, the characteristic hermeneutical principle of Protestantism by which Scripture was to be interpreted by Scripture alone led, in the end, to a sterile biblicism, increasingly isolated from life and from the world.<sup>10</sup> In the scholastic theology of later Protestantism there is a marked preference for logical modes of thought. Intuitive, poetic and mystical ways of thinking tend to be discounted. Karl Barth, for instance, was notoriously unsympathetic towards someone like Rudolf Otto's idea of the holy. In the intellectual world of Protestant thought asceticism, mysticism and intuitive habits

<sup>10</sup> John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster* (Richmond, Virginia, 1973) 75-84.

of thought that hint at the mystery of the Spirit have often been forgotten.

Related to this was the emergence in Protestant scholarship of the spirit of critical inquiry—higher criticism, form criticism and historical criticism. Each gave to the churches results now generally accepted. But it became clear to many Protestant exegetes that Mary does not figure largely in the New Testament writings. Therefore the developments in Marian doctrines which took place in patristic theology are to be attributed to something like the chronic catholicizing of the primitive faith against which Harnack wrote.

Fourth, for historical reasons Protestantism has always tended to stress human, personal and indeed individual answerability before God. It has often tended to lack a sense that life in Christ is *koinonia*, a communion in which we participate in God and in one another. The early Reformers spoke of Mary only in her relation to Christ; but their Christocentric view of Mary often gave place to a Christomonism and a strongly individualistic conception of salvation.

Fifth, for a large part of its history Protestantism has inculcated an androcentric and even aggressively masculine society. The patriarchal households of the Old Testament provided the model for the home life of the devout Protestant.<sup>11</sup> This model was not without its effects, especially in the continued subordination of women.

Closely related to this was Protestantism's repudiation of virginity or celibacy. The witness of Protestantism in this regard has exalted the ideal of marriage and family life, and has borne fruit in a profound theological understanding of sex and marriage. Married clergy tend to know more about the inner meaning of marriage than celibates! But in the process Protestant theologians lost a different kind of vision.

<sup>11</sup> Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought* (London, 1959) 181.



The Virgin has had no place at all in the development of Protestant spirituality. If contemporary Catholic theologians like Mary Daly reject the symbolism of Mary kneeling at the cross as the source of later subordination of women in the Catholic Church, Protestant believers have never accepted Mary, kneeling or in any other position, or even by and large any woman as a symbol of faith or devotion. In Evelyn Underhill's chapter on Protestant Mystics in her study, *The Mystics of the Church*, only one woman, Elizabeth Fry, is discussed; and even she is better known for her work of prison reform.

All this is somehow connected in Protestant and more particularly Reformed history with a movement in spirituality or personal devotion from the Spirit to the Word and especially to the sermon. A mystical and quietist tradition in Protestantism, from Boehme to Hammarskjöld does exist in Protestantism, and it is rich and diverse. But Protestant spirituality has tended to be rationalistic and verbal. For the Presbyterian and for the Puritan the proclamation of the Gospel through preaching brings the hearer to the existential cross-roads, which leads either to life or to destruction. Good and proper that is! But there are few Protestants who feel that is enough—or ever has been enough. So we must begin to ask other questions about the future.

According to Dominique Dubarle,<sup>12</sup> when dialogue is resumed between parties, each with its own system of convictions, the discussion may set itself three kinds of objectives. We can follow his guidance in dealing with the question of Mary.

The first objective is to remove more or less grave matters in dispute. If Protestants have been opposed to Mary, Catholics have an obligation to ask why; to purge devotional bad habits which disfigure Mary; to remind some of the debased

<sup>12</sup> Dominique Dubarle, *Dialogue and Its Philosophy*, in *Concurrence*, no. 1 (1969) 8.

theological coinage for use in the emerging ecumenical conversation. And Protestants need to be pushed to see if in their rejection of Mary they are not in fact rejecting what is central in the meaning of salvation.

The second kind of dialogue, according to Dubarle, involves defining in common those domains in which interests are found to coincide. There is no escaping the secular context in which all theological discourse today has to take place. It is a world of hunger, of the fear of death, of nuclear peril, of war, totalitarian control, shortage of food and fuel, or rising expectations, conscientization, human awareness and revolution. Catholic and Protestant alike have to learn to think theologically in this world, not another one. And if we talk together about Mary, this is our inevitable context.

The third kind of dialogue, says Dubarle, is that in which each brings to the other new resources of vitality and progress, even on the plane of the convictions on which they differ.

What, then, may it mean for Protestants (as Calvin expressed it) to learn to praise the holy Virgin? Four areas of concern can be named: liberation, faith, communion and eschatology.

We can learn first, that Mary is the sign of our liberation. She is for us both memory and hope. She was the first in the new age to find, as Luther put it, that God "is the kind of Lord who does nothing but exalt those of low degree, put down the mighty from their thrones, in short, break what is whole and make whole what is broken." She is the sign to us that liberation is never an empty promise, that God's word is never without its effect. She is "re-called," present again in *anamnesis*, and so here and now she is amongst the people of God, the sign for us all that God calls us to a fullness of which Christ is the disclosure, the means, and the goal. It is a fullness of technical, economic, and political realities. And she or he who re-presents Mary's free choice in action shows us again that God is the kind of Lord who breaks what is

whole and makes whole what is broken.

Within both Protestantism and Catholicism there is increasing alertness on the part of women to the vanguard ideas of our time, the ideas of freedom and liberation—we could say, to the Gospel idea of salvation. Can Mary become again bearer of the inexpressible revelation of a human God? The challenge of our not yet liberated world is to recover a doctrine of human nature free through Christ; uniting spirit and flesh in Christ. Mary is one of the *anawim*, one of those subject to oppression and with no power to defend themselves. She is the remnant of Israel and the survivor of the house of Jacob (Isa. 10:20), who has none to trust but God. And it is she who hears the Gospel that announces joy—*chaire kecharitomene*—for Yahweh is in her midst, renewing her by his love and dancing with shouts of joy for her (Zeph. 3:17).

Mary is also the one who says, *Yes*. "I am the handmaid of the Lord," she said at the annunciation, "let what you have said be done to me, *genoito moi kata to rema sou*" (Lk. 1:38). She is not the gainsayer, the contradicting one: she is the one who responds in faith, "Amen," *genoito*, accepting what has been offered, appropriating the Word of God, giving it body within her own body and delivering it for the life of the world. To be sure, she is so enabled by God's grace. But it is her response, wrought out in her own gonads, her own matrix, her own blood, and her own labor. Mary's *Amen* is her human response in the crisis of her choice. She is absolutely on her own, and there are two ways open to her: she can shrink back or she can go forward. And that, according to the writer of Hebrews, is the crisis of faith.

The religion of Israel is essentially a religion of obedience: to obey is to hear and to do. Yahweh said to Abram, "Leave your country." So he left. And Yahweh said, "Take your son . . . offer him." So he chopped the wood and started on his journey. (Gen. 12:4, 22:1ff.) To be of Israel is to belong to the people who say, "Amen," who are faithful to the

Word of God; who hear the bidding, "Blessed be Yahweh," and say, "Amen" (Ps. 41:14); who hear the words, "May the whole world be filled with his glory," and respond, "Amen" (Ps. 72:19). Infinitely greater than the journey of Abraham was the journey of Mary; she, too, set out and traveled, to Bethlehem (Lk. 2:4). Infinitely greater than the sacrifice of Isaac was the sacrifice of God. In the temple Simeon said to Mary, "A sword will pierce your own soul" (Lk. 2:35), and Mary said, "Let it be done."

A nurse who works in the bustees of Calcutta wrote this:

Today, after I left the bustee, I went and sat at the edge of the Hooghly river, when I was disturbed by a hoarse barking of dogs, and crows cawing, and the noise of the day... vulture's wings flapping... and they were all at the edge of the river, a little way off from where I was sitting, tearing away at what I thought to be another of the hundreds of dead bodies which are thrown in the river each day. A woman sat not far from this scene, and something about the way she was sitting drew me to her. I went up to the woman and noticed that she was weeping. I then looked at the "thing" that was being eaten by the animals and birds and found it was a newly born child. I asked her why she had done it, and in Hindustani she replied that she had no food, no clothes, no husband... He had died four weeks ago of cholera... and she didn't know how to bring up a child with nothing, so she decided it was better for the child not to know hunger, and so she left it at the edge of the river.

Something cold went through me, I don't know if I can quite explain the feeling. I took up the torn infant's body, wrapped it in my scarf, which I now wear across the back of my neck because of the extreme heat, and took it to the Bowhanipur Cemetery and buried it, in a corner of the cemetery compound, and prayed like I have never prayed before. What is it coming to, when mothers must leave their children to die because there is no food, no future for them... only hunger, sickness, and poverty. O God, if there is one, why don't you do something?

The critical question today is the question of faith: "What is it coming to? O God, why?" We are asking with our own urgency the questions asked by the Reformers: What does it mean to live by faith? And here the witness and response of Mary is of primary importance. In Karl Rahner's phrase, "What Mary has, must in the ultimate resort be ours too."<sup>13</sup> Mary shows us what it means, in the phrase of Hebrews, to keep a grasp on our first confidence right to the end (Heb. 3:14); and she shows us what it means to live by faith both at the personal level and under the shadow of global annihilation for every human being.

It is of no consequence who or what plays Gabriel to our Mary. But when the moment of crisis comes, will we go forward or shrink back, assent or shrivel? To her then and to us now comes constantly what Pamela Ravensdale called "the fiercely personal, unyielding impertinent question, 'Why me?'" To quote Luther's Commentary on the *Magnificat*: "Out of that which is nothing, worthless, despised, wretched, and dead, he makes that which is something, precious, honorable, blessed, and living." A much-loved friend learned two years ago that she had cancer. Appalled at first by the discovery, she and her husband, two writers of skill and sensitivity, decided to write a book about living "with cancer and with confidence." They wanted, even in their own pain, to console and strengthen others; to show that out of what is wretched God makes something. But they discovered that the decision to write meant through every trying chapter a recapitulation of the pain of their first decision to live with ambiguity and uncertainty. "Saying yes to an idea," they now reflect, "commits you to the pain of its becoming real." Yet they go on. They are not the sort of people who draw back (Heb. 10:39). And time would fail to tell of others, of Gideon, Barak, and

<sup>13</sup> Karl Rahner, *Mary Mother of the Lord* (Edinburgh and London, 1962) 40.

Samson; or of Pamela and Jack Ravensdale; or of all of whom have what Mary had—a belief in that love which the God of mercies bears towards us. Mary by faith received the world's salvation. By that same faith so do we.

Liberation, faith, and thirdly, communion—here, too, we must ask what it can mean for Protestants to learn to praise the Virgin.

"The history of theology," John McIntyre wrote in 1953, "is the story of the church's attempt to strike the balance between 'the faith delivered to the saints' and the many contemporary forms in which that faith has been stated and appropriated by the church."<sup>14</sup> We know how Luther rediscovered the Gospel in the monastery. The righteousness of God, he realized, is a forgiving righteousness, not a retributive and punishing righteousness. Protestant interpreters today see not only how valuable but also how circumscribed and historically relative this doctrine was.

The shift in theological emphasis since the time of Luther reminds us that the Christian understanding of salvation is always integrally related to the social, cultural and political situation in which the church has found itself. Though we may not quite have found the operative concept for our generation, the idea of communion or community may well be what we are looking for. Our world, like that of the ancient Gnostics, is one of incommunicability and alienation. The impoverished poor of Bangladesh have no access to the fortified graneries of western farmers. People wearing sheets shot at the Columbia Point housing project in Boston, and buses in which black elementary school children rode were stoned in South Boston. Israeli cannot enter Cario, and Arafat cannot enter Jerusalem. It is a world in which we are incapable of sharing in existence together, of coming to a common lan-

<sup>14</sup> John McIntyre, *The Theology of Community*, in *Coracle*, no 24 (December, 1953) 1.

guage. But God calls us to submit ourselves to a common Word. And that Word is Christ, in whom God summons us, who makes God known, who is the realization of communion and of community.

In Acts 1:14 the Apostles join in continuous prayer "together with several women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." Together they await the fulfilment of God's promise, and pray for the coming of the Lord. All alike are witnesses of the resurrection, all now live in the dimension of the new age. And Mary is one of them, numbered among the crowd of witnesses, even the greatest of them. For she has heard the Word calling to her, and she has opened herself to the Word. Mary's presence among the people of God is her true glory: to remind us of the Gospel that Christ was raised on the third day. In this, her presence is identical with the Apostles, the women, and the brothers.

A Protestantism that may have begun to find what it is looking for in the idea of salvation as communion must begin to ask what it means to live in communion with the witnesses who have lived before us.<sup>15</sup> "Think of the dead," St. Columba said on Iona, "as though they were your particular friends." Such an idea of the communion of saints has never been wholly lost within Protestantism. It can still be heard in the Heidelberg Catechism (1563): "Q. 55: What do you mean by 'the communion of saints?' That all Christians, as members, have their part in Christ the Lord." So Mary is a particular friend (though we need to be reintroduced) for she too has her part in Christ.

Here Protestants and Catholics must approach one another with sensitivity and trust. Protestants will insist on the scriptural foundation and the need for exegesis of uncontrolled popular piety. Catholics will agree, and both must ask what Mary means *now* as "partaker of Christ in common with all

<sup>15</sup> See Laurentin, *Mary in the Communion of Saints* 36.

who believe." Protestants will argue that Mary made a true moral response to God's initiative, a response which bore not only on her own salvation but on that of every human being. Catholics will agree, and both must question whether that free response has redemptive significance now. Does it have meaning for our growth towards fullness in Christ now? If we cannot bring out the whole significance of the Incarnation without Mary, can we bring out the whole significance of the church—and therefore of its mission, its sacraments and its life—without Mary? Here are questions which bear directly on all contemporary ecumenical discussion.

Finally, it is not so much backward to Mary that we must go, as forward to Mary, to the issue of human history, to the meaning of Jesus in the cosmic struggle, and to the ultimate reign of God. With part of the world drowning in its own affluents and a larger part dwindling in poverty, there is a sense about that events are no longer in our control. In our poverty we need to turn to the Revelation of St. John. There in the twelfth chapter is the vision of the pregnant woman (symbolizing, for the early church, Mary the mother of our Lord). She is in the pangs of childbirth. The dragon waits in front of her, ready to devour the child as soon as he is born. The child is born, and taken up to God. The woman escapes to the desert.

Then there is the war in heaven. But Michael and his angels attack the dragon and hurl him down to the earth, though his days are numbered.

Somewhere in all of this I find a dim vision of hope. The same fight takes new shape, in our own day, as we seek to come level with the cosmic dimensions of salvation.

God's whole design is that we are made to be dominant over the whole material universe, to use, rule and direct the matter of creation to fulfill the divine purpose. It is given to our age to see the human race tremble on the brink of its fullness, in the light/energy of nuclear power. But how frail we



are! How oppressed by great events beyond our control. There *is* a war in heaven in our inner being and in our outward environment, good and evil forces are in eternal conflict. The evil powers must be defeated and driven out.

And events will always seem too big for us unless we see again that the child Jesus is enthroned. He is, to use George Maloney's phrase, "this Body-Person who has become the working agent to effect the fulfillment of God's plan of creation."<sup>16</sup> There are no merely material things, there are no neutral forces, and Christ is not to be separated from the world of material reality. All is personal. And what in our stammering ways we call abstract forces (love and justice, hate and violence) are but expressions of a personal universe where victory and power belong to God and his Christ, toward whom the whole cosmos is moving and in whom it finds its completion.

Of this end, John wrote in his apocalyptic drama, Mary is a momentary sign, glimpsed for the twinkling of an eye. She is, in Willa Cather's phrase, the Kind Woman in heaven though there are such cruel ones on earth. So at the end, as at the beginning, we have a sign, that in Jesus the whole created universe is being brought to its fulfillment.

In the cloister of Iona Abbey there is a statue by Jacob Lipschitz entitled, 'The Descent of the Spirit.' It is a statue of the Virgin, overarched by the Dove. Only her hands are fully human. She has a gift to offer. The Dove comes down upon her. Only God the Spirit can give Life to the world through her. As a youth Lipschitz was driven out of Lithuania, for he was a Jew and the Orthodox Church harassed him. Painfully he set up his workshop in Poland, but because of a pogrom there and the uncharitableness of the Roman Catholic Church he had to flee to Paris. There, when Germany invaded, he was hounded out by the Protestants. So he escaped to New

<sup>16</sup> George A. Maloney, *The Cosmic Christ* (New York, 1968) 15.

York, to begin life over again. He rented a tiny house, and at the moment of entry was informed by an embarrassed landlord that a clause in the title deed prevented his taking possession, because he was a Jew. His response to the malice and venom of a lifetime? It was to make this statue. The inscription on the back reads: "I, Jacob Lipschitz, a Jew faithful to the faith of my fathers, have made this Virgin for a good understanding of all the people of the earth. That the Spirit may reign."

Salvation, Jesus said, is of the Jews. It took a Jew to remind us of that.

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