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# MARIAN LIBRARY STUDIES



## Mary and the Church

RENE LAURENTIN

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor of Theology at the Catholic University of Angers, France, and recently-appointed Consulor of the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council, Father René Laurentin is one of the most renowned and prolific Mariologists of the present time. His monumental work *Marie, l'Eglise, et Le Sacerdoce*, published in two volumes in 1953, earned him universal acclaim. During the last ten years he has been one of the leading lights of the French Mariological Society and has contributed numerous articles to professional Marian publications. Perhaps the best index of his popularity and scholarship is a list of the works which have appeared under his name (in French and other modern languages) during the past decade:

*L'Action du Saint Siège par Rapport au Problème de l'Immaculée Conception. In Virgo Immaculata, vol. II, p. 1-98.*

*Bernadette Raconte les Apparitions.* Lethielleux, Paris, 1958.

*Compendio di Mariologia.* Edizioni Paoline, Rome, 1957.

*Court Traité de Théologie Mariale.* Lethielleux, 1954.

(Fourth edition published in 1959.)

*Kurzer Traktat der Marianischen Théologie.* Pustet, Regen, 1959.

*Lourdes: Documents Authentiques.* Lethielleux, 5 vols., 1958.

*Maria, Ecclesia, Sacerdotium.* Nouvelles Editions, Paris, 1953.

*Meaning of Lourdes.* Clonmore, Dublin, 1959.

*Message de Lourdes.* Bonne Presse, Paris, 1958.

*Notre Dame et la Messe au Service de la Paix du Christ.* Desclee, Bruges, 1954.

*Our Lady and the Mass.* Macmillan, New York, 1959.

*Procès de Lourdes.* Lethielleux, 1959.

*Queen of Heaven. A Short Treatise on Marian Theology.* Conmore, 1956.

*Realta di Lourdes.* Coletti, Turin, 1957.

*Sens de Lourdes.* Lethielleux, 1956.

*Structure et Théologie de Luc I-II.* Gabalda, 1957.

*Le Titre de Corédemptrice.* Marianum, Rome, 1951.

*Traces d'allusion Etymologiques en Luc I-II.* Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, Rome, 1957.

With the kind permission of the author and publisher (P. Lethielleux, Paris), the selection for this month has been translated from an article in the 1953 Proceedings of the French Mariological Society entitled "Sainteté de Marie et de l'Eglise," *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Etudes Mariales* XI (1953), *Marie et l'Eglise* III, 2-27. Only the third and final section "Etude Comparative" (17-24) has been translated for this study.

We are grateful for the work of the translator Mr. Jerome Wening of Dayton, Ohio.



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# Mary and the Church

Rene Laurentin

There are many ways of considering the comparison between Mary and the Church, depending on the meaning which one gives to the word "Church"; among the different acceptations, there are three principal significations.

1. One can consider the Church in its totality: Christ and members. In this case the Virgin appears as the foremost member, the closest to the Head, and the greatest saint surpassing the rest of the Church in sanctity. Her great sanctity exceeds that of all the other members because the holiness of the Mother of God and associate of Christ is of a superior order.

2. One can consider the Church as the Spouse of Christ, as distinguished from its Head. Here again, the Virgin is the first member. She appears, moreover, as the personal realization of the collective sanctity of those redeemed in the Church. Mary is on a superior plane, in which the communion of the Church with Christ attains its very highest perfection. In Mary the Church realizes the personal character which without her would be lacking to her spousal dignity. The Church is, as it were, holy in her collectivity and from this point of view, she is not a person. One can consider the persons who make up the Church and one finds sin; on the other hand one may regard the collective being, but here we find simply a moral person, not an existential person. This dualism is resolved in the most holy Virgin.

3. In the third way, by using synecdoche, one can *distinguish the Virgin from the rest of the Church*.<sup>1</sup> This very strict point of view, permits us to pursue most precisely a comparative study. *We will treat the parallel from three following viewpoints: action, being and time.*

Before drawing the final perspective, we will compare Mary and the Church from the viewpoint of their life which is most comparable during their earthly and militant existence. This parallel is most readily seen in the Virgin of the Annunciation and the Church of Pentecost with the great infusion of grace from the Holy Spirit.

## 1. ACTION

Sanctity in action is the pure and steady orientation of all one's acts towards God. To the purity of this orientation towards the supreme Love is opposed all love which is outside of God, i.e., which is opposed or not referred to Him — *every turning to creatures*. To the steadiness of this orientation are opposed all failings, weariness, interruptions, and tepidity.

In this respect, the fundamental principle is that Mary is more inte-

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grally holy than the holy Church: there is no sin in her, even materially. One can go into detail as follows:

1. Mary's flight towards God was never retarded; concupiscence never burdened the flight of her soul. In the Church, on the contrary, the life of grace is diverse in degrees according to the times, places and persons; it is hindered or opposed by the weakness and sins of men, the subjects of sanctifying grace. If this weakness and this misery do not come from the Church, they still affect the Church enough to always place obstacles along her path and make the sanctity actually attained definitely below the possibilities of grace.

2. The Church is composed of members who are sinners. She is *immaculata ex maculatis*. Perfect sanctity in every member and under all circumstances would be nothing else than the perfect Panagia who is holy in all her members even materially. Her flesh has not experienced anything which even resembles corruption.

Likewise, it can be added that in the governance of the Church some errors or accidental failings are committed.<sup>2</sup> It does not seem that anything of this kind can be attributed to the Virgin Mary!

3. Due to these failings which are definitely in the Church, and which really affect her, the Church, according to the learned Monsignor Journet,<sup>3</sup> is called upon to purify herself. "O God, Who dost purify Thy Church with the annual observance of Lent" is found in the Collect for the First Sunday of Lent. In Mary there is no place for any purification other than the legal purification to which she submitted externally because of her genuine humility. (cf. *Luke* 2:22)

4. Finally, as Msgr. Journet grants, "The Church repents . . . is converted"<sup>4</sup> and "does penance"<sup>5</sup>; "she does penance," he adds, "for sins which she did not commit."<sup>6</sup> In other words, according to the principles of the theologian of Fribourg, the offenses of sinners do not arise from the Church, because they do not originate in her; but their repentance, which originates in her, pertains to her very strictly: it is this living element of the members through which they are really joined, although imperfectly, to the Church. On the contrary, the sanctity of Mary, as that of Christ, has no need of the virtue of personal penance: this virtue is not in them. The offenses of sinners cannot be imputed to Christ or Mary; they cannot repent for these offenses as the Church does. Likewise, conversion and reformation are not matters for them.

The relation of sanctity to sin, which we have touched upon here, deserves further investigation. Sanctity implies *separation* — separation from that which is profane, from that which is sinful. It is that which God wishes to signify when He leads His people to the desert. It is important to understand the special character of this separation. It is not an isolation, an emigration, or an ignorance of the realities of the world and of sin. Sanctity then would exclude the apostolate and the Incarnation. To reconcile all that, one must approach God, the model of all

sanctity and specially of that separation which sanctity implies. In what does this separation consist? In the fact that the Creator does not have a real relation towards His creation. As has been established in metaphysics, the relation between God and the world is *real* on the part of creatures but simply a relation of *reason* on the part of God.

It is clear that this separation from the creature implies at one and the same time a universal knowledge and an efficacious sovereignty: knowledge without error, sovereignty without peer. Sanctity, truly a divinization through grace, is a participation of this divine quality. Christ knows and carries the sins of the world without being led into temptation. He exercises the most powerful action in the world without the sins of the world reflecting on Him. It is this which is realized also in the Virgin Mary and in a more complex way in the Church. In Mary and in the Church there is perfect compassion in regard to their erring children without defilement through sin. The difference is that Mary is absolutely separated from the sin according to her whole being, whereas the Church is materially bound to the sin which dwells in the body and the soul of her children and can, under this aspect, perform penance and purify herself.

At the source of the saintly activity of Mary and of the Church, there is the same Spirit and the same grace of Christ. It is formally, then, the same sanctity. The difference is in the receptivity of the subjects. That of Mary is more perfect. She places no obstacle, no reservation; in a word, she does nothing which would limit the dynamism of the Spirit and of grace. She is, as one would say in the Berullian School "pure capacity of God" and most positively receptive: she dedicates all the resources of her intelligence and of her heart to the service of divine initiative. All the other members of the Church offer grace only a diminished receptivity because of sin and the effects of sin.

Because of her dignity, Mary's fullness of grace is more perfect than that of the Church. This plenitude is measured both by the most profound capacity for grace with which God endowed Mary and also by her sublime vocation — the unique vocation from which she received the title "Mother of God." This calling by which she attained in a certain way to the hypostatic order<sup>7</sup> necessarily calls for a plenitude of grace of a most exalted order. This observation now leads us to the ontological aspect of Mary's sanctity.

## 2. BEING (Ontological Sanctity)

On the plane of being, one can distinguish two aspects: grace (the ontological principle of moral sanctity) and consecration (the ontological principle of dedicated sanctity).

### Grace

We will not pause to compare the respective grace of Mary and of the Church since we have just touched upon this. The essential points can

be outlined in two principles: 1) The grace of the Church attains its greatest plenitude in Mary, who by her dignity, excels and surpasses the entire Church. 2) Her great fullness of grace is due not only to her perfect receptivity but also to her high calling which requires this great grace. We will elaborate on this point, since everything else depends upon it.

### Consecration

The basic principle is that the vocation of Mary (and also the consecration which realizes this vocation) is of a higher order than that of the Church.

Mary was called to be the Mother of the God-Man in the proper sense; metaphorically, the Church was called to be His Spouse. To these two vocations are bound the following differences. Mary was called to participate in the mysteries of the life of Christ; the Church begins her mission after the death of Christ. Mary was destined to cooperate in the realization of the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Redemption; the Church cooperates only in the diffusion of these mysteries. To this sublime vocation of Mary corresponds a sublime consecration.

It is necessary here to state precisely the nature of these two consecrations — by no means an easy task.

1. In Mary's case, the difficulty is that there are two successive consecrations, ordered one to the other and joined to each other. (It is something like the chrismal or sacerdotal character which presupposes the baptismal character and is joined on to it.) Mary received a kind of first consecration through her Immaculate Conception, a privilege which prepared and disposed her for the divine maternity; then at the second consecration, at the Incarnation, she found herself engaged to become the associate of the Redeemer. Certain writers are tempted to see a third consecration, completing the first two, on Calvary in the words of Christ establishing Mary as the Mother of Men. The essential consecration of Mary, however, is found at the Incarnation; the first is completely ordered to the second, and, if we admit a third consecration, it is intimately united with the divine maternity. This point is essential.

2. In the case of the Church a difficulty arises: in what does this consecration consist?

Since this domain is new and difficult we are permitted to offer two series of considerations as hypotheses. As our starting point we use the viewpoint of symbolic theology, insisting upon *the sign* accompanying the consecration of Mary and the Church. Then passing from the external sign to the internal sign, i.e., from the *sacramentum* which introduces this consecration to the *res et sacramentum* constituting it, we will attempt a more formal exposition.

On the level of the sign, the Bible furnishes us with an interesting fact: the bond between blood and consecration.<sup>8</sup> In the Old Testament as well

as in the New the consecration of God's people is made through blood. Moses concluded the ceremony of the first covenant by sprinkling the assembly with the blood of the sacrifice.<sup>9</sup> And Christ established the new covenant in His own blood.<sup>10</sup> The important difference between these two rites is measured by three characteristics: 1) on the one hand there is the blood of an animal; on the other, the blood of God. 2) aspersion and absorption: this exteriority and this interiority explain symbolically the difference between the two economies 3) finally, on the one hand, there is corruptible blood and a passing action; on the other, the blood of Christ which lives always in the Church. The Fathers are not wrong when they unite the consecration of the Church to the blood which flowed from the open side of Christ.<sup>11</sup> This view is based on many other scriptural passages. The Church is the Spouse which Christ acquired through His blood.<sup>12</sup> And the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, referring to the sacrifice of the New Covenant, explicitly compares the consecration of the Hebrew people through Moses to that of the Christian people through Christ, High Priest of the New Covenant.<sup>13</sup> St. Thomas, supporting Scholasticism with Scripture and the writings of the Fathers, preserved this meaning, and he insisted very strongly on the relation between blood and consecration: "*consecratum quasi sanguine tinctum.*" This can be found several times in his writings.<sup>14</sup>

The union of the consecration of the Church and the blood of the Savior is rich in meaning. The blood springing forth from the open side of the Savior *signifies* His death and the divine life which He communicates to us. The blood also signifies the love which inspires both this gift and this sacrifice. One thinks also of the family line which blood establishes among the members.

The consecration of Mary at the Incarnation implies also a contact with the blood of Christ, a contact much more intimate, more interior, than that which is given to the Church through the Eucharist. Mary formed Christ from her own blood, and this divinized blood (this blood of the future victim) flowed back into her. This is a communion without parallel.

But blood is only a sign and a symbol. It is not the material reality which is important, but rather the spiritual realities which it symbolizes and efficaciously introduces. St. John marks with force and sobriety the fact that a spiritual reality was bound up with the effusion of Christ's blood. In his epistle he hints at the bond between the *Holy Spirit's* mission and the blood which flowed forth from the transfixed heart.<sup>15</sup> He manifests it more explicitly in his First Epistle where the trilogy appears: "the Spirit, water and blood" (I *John* 5:7). The sign of the consecration of the Church is the blood of Christ: the spiritual principle is the effusion of the Holy Spirit which was accomplished on Pentecost. As blood and water flowing from the side of the Savior represent the Sacraments, we claim that the consecration of the Church is bound to the presence of the sacraments. The Church is established in Christ



through the sacraments and principally through the sacrament *par excellence* where both the Blood and the Person of Christ are present: the Eucharist. It is, as we have attempted to establish elsewhere,<sup>16</sup> the *res et sacramentum* of the Church. Corresponding to this consecration in the Church is the (sacramental) character in Christians and the divine maternity in Mary. This consecration at the Incarnation is likewise from the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon you," the angel said to Mary. (*Luke 1:35*)

In what does the internal and permanent reality of this consecration consist? It is the establishment of a permanent and definitive relation in Christ, the establishment of a family line (which blood signifies), an incorporation into Christ. Just as the baptismal character incorporates one into Christ, so the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Mystical Body, is the means by which the Church is incorporated into the Savior. At the time of the Incarnation, Christ was physically incorporated with the human race through Mary, while spiritually He incorporated her into His Mystical Body, making her the first member. The result was the *ordination* of Mary and of the Church to Christ, and through Him, to God: the ordination in the case of Mary attained the hypostatic *order*.

The resemblance between the maternal consecration of Mary and the spousal consecration of the Church are as follows: both have bonds of blood with Christ; they are realized through the Holy Spirit; they consist in a relation, union, definitive incorporation, and reciprocal appurtenance; both realize at the same time a material inclusion – the Savior in His holy Mother and in the holy Church as in a tabernacle – and a [spiritual] inclusion of grace in Christ. The difference is that the mystery of the consecration of Mary is related to the realities of the natural and biological order (she becomes Mother of God through generation) whereas the mystery of the consecration of the Church is related to the realities of the intentional and sacramental order. The divine maternity directly binds Mary to the Incarnate Word: the spousal relation of the Church to Christ is realized through the means of the sacraments.

It is through the mystery of the Incarnation that Christ comes into relation with Mary and lives within her; it is through the mystery of the sacraments – particularly the Eucharist – that He enters into relation with the Church. Just as the physical reality of the Incarnation is the work of Mary, so the physical reality of the sacramental signs is the work of the Church; just as the divine maternity dedicates Mary to the work of the Redemption, so the spousal consecration of the Church involves it in the same work of Redemption.

There is question in the two cases of an indefectible consecration; consequently the effect of grace and of glory must surely follow. The Church has the promises of eternal life, but Mary, even before the Church, was chosen by God for an infallible, though free, vocation. Although the radical holiness, the sanctity of the order of the sign, con-

ferred on a person through the character of Baptism, is not always realized in action, yet the sanctity conferred on Mary through the divine maternity (and perhaps already through the Immaculate Conception) and the sanctity conferred on the Church through Christ's continual existence in the Sacrament of the Eucharist cannot fail to produce their effects. They infallibly involve Mary and the Church in the way of perfect sanctity.

This last observation leads us to a comparison of Mary and the Church from the viewpoint of time.

### 3. TIME

We will limit ourselves to three essential points: the source, the progress, and the consummation of the sanctity of Mary and of the Church.

1. *Source* – At the very beginning of the existence of Mary there is the Immaculate Conception. The Church also begins with a spotless spiritual conception. In both cases the paradox is the same and can be explained in the words of St. Ambrose; *Immaculata ex maculatis*, as long as we translate it as “immaculately conceived, but taken from sinners.” The Church is formed of members who have all (except Mary) contracted original sin. The most holy Virgin is the daughter of saintly parents, but who should have, according to the ordinary course of events, transmitted the original sin which soiled their souls. The mystery of this divine action – from a sinful race there comes a saintly people – has been written about by the prophets in striking terms. The prophet Osee is the initiator of this theme. He describes Israel as an adulterous spouse severely reproached by Yahweh for her prostitutions. But at the end of these reproaches the tone changes. The reproach gives way to a promise:

“I will espouse thee to me forever.

I will espouse thee to me in justice and in love.

I will espouse thee to me in faith and thou shalt know that I am Yahweh.” (*Osee 2:19-20*)

This promise will astound us if we bear in mind the fact that Israel is already his spouse, and an adulterous spouse, as Osee, in his rustic, straightforward manner, had already described her.<sup>17</sup> This allegory with many others is not in accord with the realities of the human order. Nevertheless it leads us to a divine mystery – the very mystery of the Immaculate origin of Mary and of the Church. Mary was redeemed by a preservation in view of the sacrifice of Christ: the Church was born mysteriously from the pierced side of the Savior as a new Eve; the Church was really born at Pentecost through the coming of the Holy Spirit.

We must point out, however, that the Immaculate Conception preserved Mary from all concupiscence whereas the members of the Church, even though perfectly cleansed from all sin in the Sacrament of Baptism, nevertheless are not freed from concupiscence. Thus the Church's growth in grace is slow and encounters many obstacles.

2. *Progress* – Mary's progress on the path of sanctity is incomparably more regular, more certain than that of the Church, because the latter is an assembly of penitents and sinners. The Church must ceaselessly reprove, reform, repent and convert in the person of her members. The growth of the Church is a growth through trials, a growth which is menaced. And it seems that at the approach of the second coming of Christ, she will experience a final combat rather than a supreme efflorescence.

The sanctity of Mary follows a very steady path. Most assuredly her life was not without strife and interior sorrows, because God tried her according to the measure of her sanctity. By no means let us minimize the anguish to which she was subjected at the foot of the cross nor the terrible trials which she had to endure. But these trials were borne without the slightest weakness and they left intact in her the most profound peace – which is peace with God – in such a way that the time of her greatest trials was also the time of her greatest growth. . . . This growth of Mary in the order of sanctity followed without respite the law of progressive acceleration evoked by St. Thomas and so dear to Father Garrigou-Lagrange.<sup>18</sup> She was destined to attain unparalleled heights in sanctity.

3. *Consummation* – Mary's sanctity leads to glory and the Resurrection because glory is the radiance of sanctity and the Resurrection is its ultimate achievement. In a way heavenly glory is sanctity unveiled and expanded throughout creation. Terrestrial sanctity is in a humble condition (in the image of the *kenosis* of Christ): celestial sanctity is its triumphant state.<sup>19</sup>

Glorification is the definitive passage into the domain of God. All material and spiritual contact with the defilements of this world ceases because the elect soul now belongs completely to God. Thus will it be for eternity. His love is unalloyed and will never cease. The soul is established unreservedly in the divine life. One sees how magnificently are consummated the divinization and the love and also the *puritas* and *firmitas* which are for St. Thomas the characteristic marks of sanctity.

The Church which bears on this earth the sorrows of childbirth (*Apoc.* 12:2) awaits this final celestial consummation. She is, in her militant portion, in the humble order of terrestrial sanctity; even in her triumphant portion, she has not yet attained her glory and resurrection. She must yet wait for this incorruptibility and this transparency of the body which is the ultimate radiance of sanctity, this repose in God which seems to be the ultimate essence of sanctity.

Therefore, Mary not only exceeds the holiness of the Church in her Immaculate Conception, and excels the Church in the intensity of her growth in sanctity, but also surpasses the Church in the visible triumph of her sanctity.

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 "For simple convenience of vocabulary and in using synecdoche here, we have come to speak of the Church not as the whole being composed of the Virgin and all Christians but only as that part formed by the latter group. Consequently, separating the two parts of the same whole, we speak of Mary and the Church, the study of Mary and the study of the Church." C. Journet, *L'Eglise du Verbe Incarné*, (Paris, 1951) II, p. 393.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 927-932.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 910. We purposely cite Msgr. Journet who conceives the sanctity of the Church in the strictest sense. The demonstration of the superiority of Mary's sanctity will thus be even more firmly established.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 906.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 907.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 907.
- 7 J. Nicolas, *L'appartenance de la Mère de Dieu à l'ordre hypostatique*, taken from *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Etudes mariales* 3 (1937), pp. 147-194. One must be very careful not to abuse this expression. Nicolas defines the sense of the expression very precisely.
- 8 *Lev.* 8:12 and 30; 2 *Chron.* 30: 16-17.
- 9 *Exodus* 24:8
- 10 *Mt.* 26:28 and parallel passages.
- 11 S. Tromp, "De Nativitate Ecclesiae ex corde Jesu in cruce," *Gregorianum*, 13 (1932), pp. 489-427. G. De Broglie, "L'Eglise, nouvelle Eve, née du Sacré-Coeur," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 68 (1946) pp. 3-27.
- 12 *Acts* 20:28.
- 13 *Heb.* 9:18-21; cf. 9:12-15; *I Pet.* 1:2, as compared to *Eph.* 5:26
- 14 *Summa Theol.* II-II, 81, a.8.c. *In orationem dominicam*, *Opuscula*, ed. Mandonet, t.4, p. 396; cf. *In I ad Corinthios*, VI, 2: "The elect are saved by the power of Christ's blood through grace.", ed Vives, t. 20, 662a.
- 15 "He gave up his spirit" *Jn.* 19:30. "The Greek expression is singular (literally: "He delivered (gave over) the Spirit"). This is not a coincidence. For the Evangelist, the last breath of Jesus is a prelude to the effusion of the Holy Spirit." (1:33; 3:34; 4:14; 7:37-39; 20:22). D. Mollat, S.J., *L'Evangile de saint Jean*, Paris, Cerf, 1953 (Bible de Jerusalem), p. 188, note f.
- 16 R. Laurentin, *Marie, l'Eglise et le Sacerdoce*, Paris, Lethielleux, 1953, pp. 158-61.
- 17 It is known what degree of delicacy this theme so rudely begun by Osee afterwards attains. In the allegory of the *Canticle*, there is no longer a question of the adultery of Israel, but rather of her engagement with the King Yahweh.
- 18 *Mariologie*, Paris, Cerf, 1948, p. 85.
- 19 Several biblical texts show the relationship between sanctity and glory: *Lev.* 10:3; *Dan.* 3:52-43; *Ex.* 28:22, where glory and sanctity are paralleled as synonyms. Cf. *Apoc.* 20:6: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection."

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