

MARY

WOMAN AND MOTHER

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Mary
Woman and Mother
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For Mary Moloney
(née O'Connor)
Woman and Mother

Preface

The place of Mary within the belief and practice of the Christian Churches has been a matter of debate since the days of the Reformation.¹ In the years since the Second Vatican Council, which closed in 1965, many have noticed an apparent shift of direction in Roman Catholic interest in Mary, paralleled by a renewed attention to her from the Protestant traditions. This is but one of the many fruits of the Council. All the Christian Churches are turning more readily to a reading of the Sacred Scriptures together, as we share what unites us. The person of Mary as she comes to us from the pages of the New Testament is proving to be, despite centuries of division, an instrument for such unity.

In 1974 Paul VI indicated the contemporary orientation of Catholics towards an increased use of the Bible as its 'basic prayer-book', concluding that:

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin cannot be exempt from this general orientation of Christian piety; indeed it should draw inspiration in a special way from this orientation in order to gain new vigour and sure help (*Marialis Cultus* 30).

Continuing the initiative of Paul VI, the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater* of John Paul II is an attempt 'to emphasise the special presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and his Church' (*Redemptoris Mater* 48. Stress in original). Such an emphasis is important for several reasons: the above-mentioned ecumenical dimensions of the question, the seeming decrease in 'popular Marian piety', especially in Europe, and the growing awareness of the importance of woman in the Christian Churches would be some of these.

Whatever the reasons, the Christian Churches have been increasingly urged to reflect upon the role and place of Mary within the context of the Christian mystery and as an important subject for devotion and for the development of a Christian spirituality. Any reflecting Christian cannot ignore this summons. We are at a stage

¹ For a documented study, see G. Söll, *Storia dei Dogmi Mariani* (Accademia Mariana Salesiana XV; Rome: LAS, 1981) pp. 409-416.

in all the Churches where questions are being raised and paths of investigation and reflection are being indicated. The work which follows is an attempt to respond to the challenge through a study of the New Testament portrait of Mary, the woman and the mother of Jesus.

After a more general discussion of the place, the value and the limitations of an explicitly New Testament study of Mary, I have followed what I regard to be the historical development of the documents of the New Testament. I have analysed passages from St Paul's Letter to the Galatians, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospel of John which make explicit reference to Mary, the mother of Jesus. It appears to me that one can trace a developing appreciation and theology of Mary, as a mother and a woman, through these pages. I have then drawn some conclusions and asked some questions which have necessarily arisen from the Mariology which comes to us from the inspired and foundational documents of the early Church.

I am most grateful to the many people who have led me through this study: to my students of Mariology at Catholic Theological College, Clayton and to the Salesian Biblical Association, which demanded that I present a paper on these questions for their Second International Congress in Rome. I am also grateful to Sister Emanuel Saccoman, FSP, who read the first draft of the manuscript, and Sister Margaret Jenkins, CSB, who read the penultimate draft. Both of these women added their intuition and encouragement to my scholarship.

Fr. Michael Goonan of the Society of St Paul made some important suggestions which enabled me to give the final draft its present shape. He also saw the work through the various stages of its production. To him I am particularly grateful.

It is lovingly dedicated to my own mother, another Mary, from whom I have learnt – and thankfully continue to learn – so much about the ways of God. Even in these late years of her journey, she goes on accepting all the surprises, both painful and joyful, which the Lord sends into her life. In this she both teaches and serves us all.

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14th February 1988.*

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