

THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL REFLECTION PROJECT  
FOR THE DISCALCED CARMELITE NUNS

**- VII -**

**“MAY WE LIVE OUR LIVES AS TRUE DAUGHTERS  
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN ”**

*(Foundations, 16:7)*

**Mary in the Contemplative life of  
Teresian Carmelite Nuns**

**On-going formation Project from the Generalate**

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## INTRODUCTION

After our reflections on *Lectio Divina*, and *Following In The Footsteps of Christ*, then *Poverty, Chastity and Obedience* and *Fraternal Life in Community*, we now turn our attention to the third chapter in our Constitutions: *The Marian Life of Carmel*.

“As Discalced Carmelite Nuns we belong to a family that is called in a special way to love and reverence her. Mary’s presence pervades our entire Carmelite vocation and brings a particular Marian tone to our contemplation, sisterhood, our evangelical self-denial, and our apostolic spirit”<sup>1</sup>.

When the Second Vatican Council spoke about veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary it denounced, on the one hand, a false exaggeration which could someone into error about the true doctrine of the Church, and on the other, a attitude that is too summary which can obscure the figure and mission of Mary<sup>2</sup>. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* focused on four areas in the cult of the Blessed Virgin which must guide us in our own reflection: biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological.

The *biblical* aspect leads us to place Mary within the mystery of Christ and the Church, from her state as a simple mother from a small village, Nazareth, in which she lived at a specific period in history. Knowledge of the Blessed Virgin comes from Scripture, which must always be our starting point. The few texts which speak of Mary trace the principal characteristics of her personality and life.

From a *liturgical* perspective Mary appears as an example of a spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries: an attitude of listening, praying and offering. Mary is the *Blessed Virgin who listens*, who accepts in faith the Word of God. She is also the *Virgin who prays*, who in the Magnificat opens her spirit with expressions that glorify God, showing her humility, her faith and her hope. Mary also appears as the *Virgin who prays* in Cana, where she discreetly asks her Son to help in a moment of temporal need; and she obtains a response of grace when Jesus, in performing the first of his “signs”, confirms his disciples’ faith in Him (cf Jn 2:1-12). Again, the last biographical note about Mary describes her as being in prayer: the Apostles “joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14). Finally, Mary is seen as a *Virgin who offers*. At the episode of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (cf Lk 2:22-35), Mary offers Him and proclaims the universality of salvation which Christ fulfils, as Light to enlighten the Gentiles.

On the other hand, the biblical presentation of the figure of Mary, helps to bring about ecumenical dialogue in the light of biblical revelation and the Church’s tradition. From an *anthropological* perspective Paul VI invites us to keep in mind the insights of psychology and sociology so as to situate the Blessed Virgin within the context of our contemporary world and in

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Constitutions*, N° 53.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. LG. N° 67

particular within the context of women today. “In the home, woman's equality and co-responsibility with man in the running of the family are being justly recognized by law and the evolution of customs. In the sphere of politics women have in many countries gained a position in public life equal to that of men. In the social field women are at work in a whole range of different employments, getting further away every day from the restricted surroundings of the home. In the cultural field new possibilities are opening up for women in scientific research and intellectual activities”<sup>3</sup>.

For us who are consecrated to God, Mary appears as a *model of consecration and discipleship*. She is a *model of consecration* since she belonged completely to God and was totally devoted to Him, thus reminding us of the primacy of God’s initiative. “At the same time, having given her assent to the divine Word, made flesh in her, Mary is the *model of the acceptance of grace* by human creatures. Having lived with Jesus and Joseph in the hidden years of Nazareth, and been present at her Son's side at crucial moments of His public life, the Blessed Virgin teaches unconditional discipleship and diligent service.... Consecrated life looks to her as the sublime model of consecration to the Father, union with the Son and openness to the Spirit”<sup>4</sup>.

In our personal and community reflection we shall be looking from five perspectives as we have been doing since the beginning of this project: *biblical, theological, historical, Carmelite and practical*.

## I

### A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### MARY IN SCRIPTURE

A reading of the Bible that looks at the history of salvation from the context of community discovers in Mary of Nazareth a woman who reflects the faithful people in whom God makes himself present. With Jesus there begins a new era in the history of humanity, and Mary is seen to be united with him. God enters history and is incarnated into human nature.

“Even though Mary was born into a patriarchal society where a wife was the property of her husband in every respect, she is a figure who lives between the two Testaments. She participates in and enjoys the new liberating experience of her Son’s movement, which inaugurates a discipleship that is equal for both men and women. Legitimate representative of the people of Israel, a figure-symbol of the faithful Zion, Mary is, at the same time and no less, a begetter of the new Israel, of the new people, of the new Covenant which God made with humanity, where a woman is no longer seen as someone passive and submissive to a man, as an inferior being, but rather as an active and

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<sup>3</sup> *Marialis Cultus* 34

<sup>4</sup> *Vita Consecrata* 28

responsible subject, man's partner, and with him assuming, shoulder to shoulder, many of the works inherent in announcing the Good News"<sup>5</sup>.

We must situate the biblical teaching on Mary within the society and culture of her time<sup>6</sup>. It is within this context that she fulfils her mission as Mother of Jesus.

## **1. Life in Nazareth**

Nazareth, where the angel appeared to Mary, was a small place, a village in the interior of the Holy Land. It was hidden away, almost lost in the high Galilean hills, not so very far from the sea of Galilee. It was a place others looked down upon, hence the expression: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). The houses were poor, some were in part caves on the side of a mountain. There were few houses and few people. Everyone knew each other; everyone knew what everyone else was doing. So much so that when Jesus returned there, announcing the Gospel after his baptism in the river Jordan, he astonished people and they asked: "Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary..?" (Mk 6:2-3).

Nazareth had but one source of water for the entire population. The spring was a meeting place for the women who came to fetch water. It was from this place that information spread to the village, mixed with gossip from the people, as happens today in many small towns and villages in Palestine.

There was a house of prayer there, called a synagogue (cf. Lk 4:16), where people assembled every Saturday to recite and listen to a reading from the Scriptures, which was then explained and commented on by the coordinator of the community or by one of those present, invited to do so by the coordinator. In this way, Jesus, who was not the coordinator of the Nazareth community, was once invited to read and give an explanation to the people (Lk 4:16-22). Next to the synagogue the community had a school, where the children learned to read the Scriptures in Hebrew. The people spoke Aramaic.

The people of Nazareth made a living for the most part by working in the fields: they tilled the land. A few however, like Jesus, lent their services to the community as carpenters or blacksmiths. For this reason Jesus often used words connected with fields, or sowing, or trees and flowers. He knew all about these things.

## **2. Mary of Nazareth**

The Bible does not tell us anything about Mary's parents. She received her faith in God from them, her love of life and her hope for the future of her people. Like all young people of her generation, the hope of her people grew in her, fed by the prophecies. Their hope was that one day the one who would set his people free, the Messiah, would be born. Like all the youth of her village, she must have had the desire to see the fulfilment of this hope, to be able to contribute in some way.

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<sup>5</sup> MARIA CLARA BINGEMER, *Maria*, en J.J. TAMAYO, director, *Nuevo diccionario de Teología*, Trotta, Madrid, 2005, pg. 563.

<sup>6</sup> C. MESTERS, O.Carm., clearly and simply outlines these circumstances in a small book: *Maria, la Madre de Jesús*, Cesca, Caudete, 1981. We shall transcribe some paragraphs from his book in this section and in the following.

In what way? Surely by being a mother, by having children, and then sometime in the near or distant future the liberator of the people would be born. Moreover, according to calculations made by the experts at that time, all appeared to indicate that this birth was very close.

In Nazareth there lived a young man called Joseph. His family was not from there. They were from the south, from Bethlehem (Mt 1:19). At that time many people from the south immigrated north to Galilee, in search of a better life. Joseph was one of those. He was either an immigrant or the son of immigrants. A poor and honest man. The Bible tells us that he was just, i.e., he belonged to the group of people whom God loved (Mt 1:19).

Mary and Joseph were already betrothed (cf Mt 1:18). They were going to be married soon, the fulfilment of their dreams, just like so many other young men and women of their time. Nothing extraordinary in this. But, as they say, man proposes and God disposes. God had other plans for them. The Angel Gabriel came, and everything completely changed for both of them. It was not to be an easy change! It meant a lot of suffering. The Angel Gabriel did not ask Joseph's permission to allow Mary, his future wife, to become the mother of Jesus. He spoke directly with Mary. Mary accepted the invitation and became pregnant by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, without Joseph's knowledge (Mt 1:18-19). Moreover, no one knew, only she and her kinswoman Elizabeth (Lk 1:43-45).

Joseph was left perplexed by Mary's pregnancy. He did not know what to do and considered leaving her (Mt 1:19). In the end, enlightened by God, he discovered his mission alongside the Virgin Mary, and accepted being known as the father of the Child about to be born (Mt 1:20-24; Lk 3:23).

But it was not only St Joseph who was aware of the fact that Mary was going to be a mother. The village folk also knew! There could be no doubt that the many groups of women, gathered around the well, made comments. And what about her parents? Everyone, the local people and her parents, must have been suspicious and thought that Mary was to be a single mother. "And that three month journey to the south! Was it only so that she could visit her kinswoman Elizabeth?"

The rumours must have been such that Joseph, obliged to go to Bethlehem for the census, preferred to take Mary with him instead of leaving her in Nazareth (Lk 2:4-5). Mary did not need to be with him in Bethlehem, as only Joseph was from there. She could have remained in Nazareth with her parents. They would have helped her when the moment arrived for her to give birth. This would have been the normal thing to do. But Mary preferred the company of Joseph, who accepted her as his wife and who knew her secret, rather than remain in the company of all the women, who probably would have been suspicious and would have gossiped. She preferred the trials of a long journey and to give birth far from home, to the relative comfort of Nazareth, but without the support of Joseph.

In order to be the Mother of Jesus, the one who would set His people free, Mary ran a double risk: to lose her honour in the eyes of the people and then have to live the rest of her life as a single mother, should Joseph not accept her into his home. But Joseph faced up to the situation and received Mary into his house as his wife (Mt 1:24), and in this way prevented Mary's honour from being dragged through the streets. Joseph was a great man. For love of his wife and of God he bore the misunderstanding of his own people, who saw as of little importance whether people already legally married would have had relations before the time came for them to live together in the same house (it was not something bad; after all they were already man and wife). There was an accepted period of time between the marriage proper and living together.

God does not ask permission to fulfil His plan. God is free, and works freely, and where He manifests his freedom men and women must change their ideas and plans. This is what it was like for Joseph and Mary who had to change their plans, so that their lives could fit into God's plan. Mary becomes the Mother of Jesus by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, and Joseph assumes the paternity of Jesus, according to the Jewish law.

### 3. Different Biblical Perspectives

The New Testament portrays the figure of Mary from different but complementary theological perspectives. The Gospels of *Matthew* and *Luke*, together with a brief mariological text from Paul in his letter to the *Galatians* (4:4), give us a perspective on Mary which is Christological. John, on the other hand, together with the *Acts of the Apostles* presents Mary from an ecclesial perspective: more than being the Mother of Jesus, Mary is the companion of the Messiah in serving a new humanity. In the Apocalypse, even though "the woman clothed with the sun" is to be understood firstly as a symbol of the People of God who gives birth to its Messiah, we can see in Mary a symbol of the faith of the People of God which suffers and believes in the Saviour.

#### a. Mary in Mark's Gospel

Mary appears in two passages in Mark: 3:31-35 and 6:1-3. In the first, the Blessed Virgin is praised for her faith in accepting the will of God. We also see affirmed her maternity in relationship to Jesus. The second passage highlights the greatness of Christ and Mary set within the context of a normal ordinary life.

#### b. Mary in Matthew's Gospel

Matthew's Gospel is concerned with the infancy of Jesus in the first two chapters. In them, starting from historically substantiated events, the evangelist wants to present Christ as the Messiah, the son of David and, by a genealogy, as the son of Abraham, as well as the new Jacob, the new Moses and the true and definitive Israel (the episodes of the three Kings, the massacre of the Innocents and the flight into Egypt).

In these narratives the central figure is Joseph rather than Mary. She is spoken of only indirectly in fact, in the genealogy. Women do not usually appear in Jewish genealogies. In this one, apart from the name of Mary, we also see the names of Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. The reason why these are mentioned seems to relate to the abnormal way in which they enter the genealogy to form part of Jesus' ancestry. Christ's virginal birth is, therefore, humanly speaking, to be understood as the greatest abnormality. In it, divine intervention reaches its culmination.

Matthew's Gospel speaks about the *virginal conception* of Jesus (1:18-25). The narrative confirms that Mary was betrothed to Joseph. According to Jewish custom she was already his wife, even though she must still remain in her parents' house for a year. It is during this time that she conceives by the Holy Spirit. In this way the Evangelist emphasizes the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: "Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel", which translated means, "God is with us". Just as in the account of creation (Gn 1:2), the Spirit of God hovers over Mary, a woman from Nazareth, a symbol of the faithful people of Israel. In the episode of the Magi, in the flight into Egypt and in the return to the land of Israel, Mary appears *in company with Jesus*: "On entering the house, they saw *the child with Mary his mother*" (2:11)... "...Get up, take *the child and his mother*, and flee to Egypt" (2:13). "...Then Joseph got up, took *the child and his mother* by night and went to Egypt (2:14)." "...Get up, take *the child and his mother*, and go to the land of Israel...Then Joseph got up, took *the child and his*

mother...” (2:20-21). “Mary in Mathew’s Gospel is a symbol of virginal hope: a mother untouched but at the same time pregnant with life, the face of a people full of Light, the face of God which gives always new life to those destroyed by sin and death”<sup>7</sup>.

### c. Mary in Luke’s Gospel

We see the greatest number of references to Mary in St Luke’s Gospel, especially in chapters 1-2. While Matthew presents the Infancy of Jesus from Joseph’s point of view, head of the holy family and witness to the virginal birth, Luke writes from Mary’s perspective. She is the centre of the narration.

The *Annunciation* (Lk 1:26-38), is told in the stereotypical pattern of annunciations: angelic apparition, disturbance, announcement, objection, confirmation with a sign. These five moments appear, among other annunciations, in the birth of Isaac (Gen 17-18), in the mission of Moses (Ex 3-4), in the birth of Gideon (Judges 6:12-21), in the birth of Samson (Judges 13:3-22), and in the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:5-25). Mary, greeted by the angel, responds by searching for the will of the Lord which, once she knows what it is, she accepts fully.

Mary’s *Visitation* (Lk 1:39-45) to her kinswoman Elizabeth is written with the words of 2 *Samuel* 6:1-23 in the background, with regard to the Ark of the Covenant. In this way, besides presenting the Blessed Virgin as anxious to help Elizabeth, her kinswoman, Luke describes her as the new Ark, the place of the presence of God. The Visitation “is the meeting of the old and the new and the recognition, by some of the Jewish people, of the new. Now Mary is ‘blessed among women’. It is Elizabeth who recognizes and proclaims this. She is of the old Jewish tradition from whom the last of the prophets of the old law is born, John the Baptist”<sup>8</sup>. Mary appears as a model of faith.

When Elizabeth greets her young relative as she arrives from Nazareth, Mary replies with the *Magnificat*. The *Magnificat* (Lk 1:46-55) reproduces Mary’s feelings, appearing as she does as the “poor of Yahweh” whose spirituality is synthesized in Psalm 131. She is a woman who discovers what God has done in history and proclaims it boldly. The *Magnificat* is the song that represents what is to be Jesus’ programme in the synagogue in Nazareth (Lk 4:16-21). John Paul II commented in this way: “*The Church’s love of preference for the poor* is wonderfully inscribed in Mary’s *Magnificat*. The God of the Covenant, celebrated in the exultation of her spirit by the Virgin of Nazareth, is also he who ‘has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly, ...filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, ...scattered the proud-hearted...and his mercy is from age to age on those who fear him.’ Mary is deeply imbued with the spirit of the ‘poor of Yahweh,’ who in the prayer of the Psalms awaited from God their salvation, placing all their trust in him (cf. Pss. 25; 31; 35; 55). Mary truly proclaims the coming of the ‘Messiah of the poor’ (cf. Is. 11:4; 61:1). Drawing from Mary’s heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the *Magnificat*, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that *the truth about God who saves, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his preferential love for the poor and humble*, that love which, celebrated in the *Magnificat*, is later expressed in the words and works of Jesus”.

“The Church is thus aware - and at the present time this awareness is particularly vivid - not only that these two elements of the message contained in the *Magnificat* cannot be separated, but

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<sup>7</sup> M.C. BINGEMER, ditto., pg. 564.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

also that there is a duty to safeguard carefully the importance of ‘the poor’ and of ‘the option in favour of the poor’ in the word of the living God. These are matters and questions intimately connected with *the Christian meaning of freedom and liberation*. Mary is totally dependent upon God and completely directed towards him, and at the side of her Son, she is *the most perfect image of freedom and of the liberation* of humanity and of the universe. It is to her as Mother and Model that the Church must look in order to understand in its completeness the meaning of her own mission”<sup>9</sup>.

The *Presentation* of Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:22-24) highlights the consecration of Jesus and Mary to God. Simeon’s prophecy gives Mary an importance for all time. “Those who struggle for the Kingdom of God are marked out by contradiction with this world. A sword continues to pierce the hearts of those who, like Mary, struggle to uphold God’s justice, those who are concerned above all with the things of God, who are possessed with passion for the freedom of their brothers and sisters”<sup>10</sup>.

#### *d. Mary in John’s Gospel*

There are two explicit passages that refer to Mary in John’s Gospel: 2:1-11 and 19:25-27. There is a connection between the two passages: Mary appears in both with a role in regard to the “hour” of Jesus. In the two passages she is called “Woman”. With this title she is presented as the new Eve, united with the new Adam, as the mother of all the living (cf. Gn 3:15, 20). The episode in Cana is situated at the beginning of Christ’s public ministry and establishes the faith of the disciples. The scene on Calvary is at the end, at the “hour” when all is consummated.

The *Wedding Feast of Cana* (Jn 2:1-11). This passage is both Christological and at the same time mariological. Mary’s presence is recorded from the very first verse. It underlines her redemptive role: she is the one who reports that the wine has run out; she is the one who speaks with Jesus and the servants. We see here Mary’s availability. From being called “woman” she accepts becoming the spiritual mother of all the faithful. On Calvary she once again appears as the “woman” with a new relationship to Christ. Mary’s intercession is made in the context of a wedding feast, a symbol of the eschatological wedding (cf. Apoc 19:7-8; 21: 2-9). The changing of water into wine in large earthenware jars that are used for washing by the Jews signals the end of the old Jewish religion. “Mary’s faith prepares and gives birth to the faith of the new messianic age and inaugurates the time of the new people of God, the community of all in the Kingdom, where the poor and despised Cana in Galilee becomes the place where God manifests His glory”<sup>11</sup>.

*Mary at the foot of the Cross* (Jn 19:25-27). At the moment of his death Jesus gives to the Virgin Mary the disciple to love as a son. Mary appears as the Mother of the new community, all those who follow Christ. Her role is similar to that of the “Daughter of Zion” in the Old Testament (Is 26:17-19). She has both an individual role (she is Jesus’ mother) and a communitarian one, in so far as she is a figure of the Church.

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<sup>9</sup> *Redemptoris Mater*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> M.C. BINGEMER, o.c. pg. 564.

<sup>11</sup> *Ib.* Pg. 565.

#### *e. Mary in the Acts of the Apostles*

In *Acts* 1:14 Mary is present at the beginning of the Christian community in Jerusalem, persevering in prayer with the disciples of her Son. There she appears as a mother, sister and teacher, showing the followers of Christ the need to prepare themselves for the coming of the Spirit and to be able to proclaim the Good News.

#### *f. Mary in the Apocalypse*

In the vision of *the woman and the serpent* (Apoc 12:1-18) we come across a text which applies directly to the Church. The second part of the Apocalypse speaks of the history of the kingdom of Christ and of his Church, Chapter 12 being the introduction to this part. The starting point for the struggle between the new People of God and Satan is Calvary. We see in the birth an image portraying the painful passion of Christ and his resurrection. This part of the passion was, at the same time, the beginning of new life. The snatching away of her son to God and to his throne (12:5) is an allusion to the Ascension of Christ. With him is born the new People of God. He is the founder and head of this people.

The “Woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (v.1) is the personification of Israel, but after the victory over the dragon and the resurrection of Christ, she becomes the representation of the new People of God. The ongoing struggles with the dragon are the persecutions endured by the Church from the Jewish community and from the pagan nations. The Messiah ascends to heaven but the woman must remain on earth to represent him and continue his work. All this, which applies *in a direct way to the Church*, can also be applied to Mary, the fulfilment *par excellence* of the “Daughter of Zion” who gave birth to the Saviour. The Church and Mary are truths which complement each other. As Mary was united to the origins of the Church, so she is still united to it, as the Church grows and develops throughout history.

### **4. Conclusion**

In the biblical approach to the figure of Mary we come across a succession of *specific facts* that have also an aura of hidden meanings. Among the former we must indicate that:

- Mary is a saint, Virgin and Mother of the Saviour.
- Mary is *present at all the fundamental moments in the history of salvation* since the beginning of the New Testament (Lk 1-2) until the end (Jn 19:27); at the inauguration of Christ’s ministry (Jn 2:1-11); at the birth of the Church (Acts 1:14). Her presence is silent and discreet, driven by a pure faith and a love that grasps and accepts God’s plan and the aspirations of men and women whom she serves (Lk 1:38-39, 46-56, 2:22; Jn 2:3). Mary is one of the “Poor of Yahweh”.
- She is the woman through whom the Son of God enters into history (Gal 4:4). She is the woman who accompanies Jesus on his messianic and salvific mission (Jn 19:25-27). She is the Mother of the Church (Acts 1:14).
- She is to be seen as a model of faith and openness to the will of God (Lk 1:26-38; 11:27-28; Jn 2:5). Her life is one of generous obedience (Lk 1:38), of simple humility (Lk 1:48), of practical charity (Lk 1:39-45); she was someone who reflected wisely (Lk 1:29-34); 2:19, 33,51).

In the aura of hidden meanings we should record the following, coming from the relationship between the Old and the New Testament, and viewed from the perspective of the principle themes of biblical theology: Mary is the new Eve; the “Daughter of Zion”, God’s collaborator; the Ark of the Covenant where God is present.

“A brilliant portrait, but not entirely clear. The Holy Spirit does not make all the features clear, but it is the prerogative of an artist not to paint every single feature of a face. The Church will come to understand in time the full meaning of those elliptical sketches”<sup>12</sup>.

## **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION**

1. *What conclusions have you drawn from the biblical approach to the figure of Mary?*
2. *What aspects of Mary’s personality do you consider more important for your contemplative life in Carmel?*
3. *In your community, do you try to live the biblical perspective in your Marian devotions? How?*

## **II**

### **MARY IN THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

#### **1. An independent Mariology**

The figure of Mary that appears in the New Testament is of a simple but, at the same time, great woman, who lives within a specific period of our human history, perfectly integrated into the social and cultural context of her country and of her time. Later on, the literature on Mary within the Church abandoned the biblical paths and took the rough paths of the privileges and the greatness of the Mother of God. Mariology left the integrating aspects of theology and, more concretely, of Christology. It became an independent treatise within a deductive theology based on certain principles which drew out conclusions and truths on the Blessed Virgin. The method used is scholastic: it begins with a thesis, the terms are explained, the “status of the question” is pointed out, objections to this thesis are raised, scriptural proofs are produced - almost always texts outside of any context, then arguments are made from tradition and objections against the thesis are resolved.

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<sup>12</sup> R. LAURENTIN, *Court Traité sur la Vierge Marie*, Paris, 1967. pgs. 39-40.

There are two important principles upon which this deductive mariology is based: “You cannot say too much about Mary” and “God can do it; it is fitting that He does it; therefore He did it”. In practice others derive from these:

- The *principle of singularity or transcendence*: Mary, being superior to all other creatures had privileges which were not fitting for others.
- The *principle that it was fitting*: God granted to the Blessed Virgin all the gifts which could show that it was fitting for her to be so blessed.
- The *principle of pre-eminence*: all the privileges which God granted to the saints he gave to Mary in another manner.
- The *principle of association*: Mary was associated with Christ in His work of redemption.
- The *principle of restoration*: what Eve damaged, Mary repaired.

This kind of Mariology encouraged the proclamation of new Marian dogmas but made ecumenical dialogue difficult.

## **2. A salutary reaction**

From 1950 a theological movement started which went back to biblical and patristic roots, reaching a point when Vatican II formulated mariological doctrine that was well founded and balanced. Obviously the Council did not attempt to elaborate a complete treatise, but it did offer directives for this.

The first important directive was to place Mary within the mystery of Christ and the Church. Everything she received was because she was going to be the Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. Before arriving at this conciliar directive there was much discussion between a group that wanted to integrate the mariological draft-formula within the document on the Church and a group that wanted a special document just on Mary. The first group argued that Mary is a figure of the Church and like the Church, has been redeemed; both are the fruit of the redemption and a means of salvation. This made ecumenism easier and made Mary closer to believers. The group wanting a special document on the Blessed Virgin emphasized Mary’s privileges. A special document on Mary, they said, would correspond better to her pre-eminent position and dignity. On October 24, 1963, there was a discussion in the council chambers; the voting was on October 29th. 2193 Fathers voted, 1114 in favour of placing the draft-formula on Mary within the document on the Church, with 1074 opposed to this, and five nullified votes.

## **3. The Conciliar Teaching**

The Council did not want to write a mariological treatise but integrated the principal mariological affirmations from the perspective salvation-history, as well as christological, ecclesial and eschatological. In the history of salvation Mary is the first of those who have been redeemed and at the same time, the one who shares most with the humanity of Christ. For this reason she possesses the fullness of grace which makes her holy. The glorification of her body and her sharing in Jesus’ redemptive work find here their foundation. At the same time, Mary is the prototype and image of the Church and its perfect fulfilment.

Chapter VIII of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* “seeks to situate Mary within the story of salvation, as it did not want her to be treated apart from this. By placing Mary in the centre of the mystery of salvation we see in her certain unique relationships with the Trinity, with the Church and with the entire human family.

It is the *Father* who, on devising his plan of salvation, chose as a way for its realization the Incarnation of his Son in Mary's virginal womb<sup>13</sup>. Even so, the Father of mercies wanted Mary's free assent to precede the Incarnation, so that she would constitute the new Eve<sup>14</sup>.

In relation to Christ, she is the sublime fruit of the Redemption; Mother of Christ without recourse to man, she consecrates herself to serve his Person and work, as a generous collaborator. She is also Jesus' first disciple.

Her relationship to the Holy Spirit is also recalled in the draft-formula: Mary is the summit of the Spirit's salvific action, as she is totally moulded by the Spirit. She is the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation is the manifestation of the extraordinary and unique work of the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is Jesus Christ. Through Mary the Holy Spirit is made manifest at the Visitation with a special outpouring on Elizabeth, John the Baptist and Mary. At the beginning of the Church Mary prays with the first community of believers while waiting for the Spirit.

With regard to the Church, Mary is a member, but an exceptional member. She is a figure of the Church because she is perfectly redeemed; from the beginning the essence of the Church is already fulfilled in her. This same truth allows us to see in Mary the perfect model of the Church. In her the holiness of the Church attains its highest point; she is the perfect image of the eschatological Church. Mary is the model of all Christian virtues and in her the Gospel is already fulfilled. Mary is also considered as Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Helper and Mediatrix. The Council did not give her the title Mother of the Church, but it was said in other ways, and there are many allusions to Mary's maternity of all men and women.

These relationships explain the motivation of the Council: "Wherefore this sacred synod, while expounding the doctrine on the Church, in which the divine Redeemer brings about our salvation, intends to set forth painstakingly both the role of the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body, and the duties of the redeemed towards the Mother of God, who is mother of Christ and mother of humanity, and most of all those who believe"<sup>15</sup>.

In her relationship with us she is proposed as someone who unites in herself all the requirements of faith and who takes people to Christ. In this proposal the new mariology and the new devotion to Mary confirm an important principle: "Devoutly meditating on her and contemplating her in the light of the Word made man, the Church reverently penetrates more deeply into the great mystery of the Incarnation and becomes more and more like her spouse"<sup>16</sup>. According to this principle, the contemplation of Mary does not terminate in her, but must terminate in the mystery of the Incarnation; without this the mystery of Mary lacks any meaning. Moreover the Council confirms that this Marian meditation brings us to resemble not so much Mary but Christ. It is a direct response to those who, in the years before the Council, insisted on defending the position

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<sup>13</sup> Cf LG 52.

<sup>14</sup> Cf ib. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Cf ib. 54

<sup>16</sup> Cf ib. 65

that Mary was an obstacle for anyone wanting to know Christ and, at the same time, it was a reminder to those who separate Mary from the mystery of Christ”<sup>17</sup>.

“We can speak of a qualitative leap, inasmuch as mariology has been directed along new paths. We have discarded what was called the mariology of privileges, and accentuated more Mary’s human aspects, inserting her into the mystery of the Church which has enlightened her, and in its turn the Church is enlightened by Mary, as the first among those who have been redeemed.

Other positive notes have been...to discover in Mary’s gifts and privileges her christological dimension, which makes the mystery of Mary more comprehensible as well as helping us to understand better the mystery of Christ. Also here with Christ and Mary, though with a different intensity, they enlighten each other. There is an insistence on the christological, pneumatological and ecclesial aspects of the Marian truths. In this way they have taken on board once more the patristic directives on Mary and advanced along the path of theological reflection, which must not remain on the basis of dogmas, but must also be comprehensible to modern men and women.

A concern for ecumenism played a very important part in the draft-formula, as much for the bishops as for those drafting it. Both strove to increase the ecumenical perspective. Using scripture as a starting point created a strong bridge for dialogue. All the christian confessions have scripture as a valid source of revelation. With ecumenism in mind it was also necessary to use language which theologically speaking can be called free from infection, with frequent quotations from the Fathers of the Church, whose authority grows from day to day in the different christian confessions”<sup>18</sup>.

#### **4. Postconciliar Mariology**

The changes made by the Second Vatican Council in Marian doctrine disconcerted many people, especially those who were formed on a mariology that made little reference to the bible, and was based on the privileges of the Blessed Virgin, and tended to exaggerate them, thereby removing her from the ordinary life in Nazareth. These changes brought with them *a crisis in theological reflection and in popular Marian piety*. There was a notable diminishment in Marian publications, doctrinal as much as devotional. “To many pastors and scholars the marked change by the Council took from them the mariology which they had studied and left them unprepared when it came to preaching, because as yet they had not understood the conciliar directives. This ignorance reverberated in the preaching of novenas, triduums and feasts of the Blessed Virgin, and in sermons that touched upon other themes that had nothing to do with what was being celebrated. Perhaps for the Christian faithful the crisis was not so difficult, because they were not so put out by these earthly disputes, but remained cultivating their Marian devotions as always, but with a very deficient catechesis, which gave way to superstitions and extravagant forms of devotion”<sup>19</sup>.

In 1974 Paul VI published a great Marian document: the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*. The Pope indicated in this document new ways to renew mariology and marian devotion. In a special way there emerged a new anthropological focus on the figure of Mary which surpassed the traditional image of a quiet, silent, discreet and subservient woman, which imposed on Christian

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<sup>17</sup> A. MARTÍNEZ SIERRA, Cien fichas sobre María de Nazaret, Ed. Monte Carmelo, Burgos, 2005, pgs. 168-169.

<sup>18</sup> Ib.

<sup>19</sup> Ib. Pg.170.

women the unique example and way to live their feminine identity. Two numbers of the Exhortation illuminate these new paths of Marian reflection and the way to present the Blessed Virgin in a special way. We will transcribe the full text:

“Secondly, we would like to point out that the difficulties alluded to above are closely related to certain aspects of the image of Mary found in popular writings. They are not connected with the Gospel image of Mary nor with the doctrinal data which have been made explicit through a slow and conscientious process drawn from Revelation. It should be considered quite normal for succeeding generations of Christians in differing socio-cultural contexts to have expressed their sentiments about the Mother of Jesus in a way and manner which reflected their own age. In contemplating Mary and her mission these different generations of Christians, looking on her as the new woman and perfect Christian, found in her as a virgin, wife and mother the outstanding type of womanhood and the pre-eminent exemplar of life lived in accordance with the Gospels and summing up the most characteristic situations in the life of a woman. When the Church considers the long history of Marian devotion she rejoices at the continuity of the element of cult which it shows, but she does not bind herself to any particular expression of an individual cultural epoch or to the particular anthropological ideas underlying such expressions. The Church understands that certain outward religious expressions, while perfectly valid in themselves, may be less suitable to men and women of different ages and cultures”.

“Finally, we wish to point out that our own time, no less than former times, is called upon to verify its knowledge of reality with the word of God, and, keeping to the matter at present under consideration, to compare its *anthropological ideas and the problems springing there from with the figure of the Virgin Mary as presented by the Gospel*. The reading of the divine Scriptures, carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with the discoveries of the human sciences, and taking into account the different situations in the world today, will help us to see how Mary can be considered a mirror of the expectations of the men and women of our time. Thus, the modern woman, anxious to participate with decision-making power in the affairs of the community, will contemplate with intimate joy Mary who, taken into dialogue with God, gives her *active and responsible consent*, not to the solution of a contingent problem, but to that ‘event of world importance,’ as the Incarnation of the Word has been rightly called. The modern woman will appreciate that Mary's choice of the state of virginity, which in God's plan prepared her for the mystery of the Incarnation, was not a rejection of any of the values of the married state but a *courageous choice* which she made in order to consecrate herself totally to the love of God. The modern woman will note with pleasant surprise that Mary of Nazareth, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive woman or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions (cf Lk. 1:51-53). The modern woman will recognize in Mary, who “stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord,”(104) *a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile* (cf. Mt. 2:13-23). These are situations that cannot escape the attention of those who wish to support, in the spirit of the Gospel, our’s and society’s liberating energies. And Mary will appear not as a mother exclusively concerned with her own divine Son, but rather as a woman whose action helped to strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ (cf. Jn. 2:1-12), and whose maternal role was extended and became universal on Calvary.(105) These are but examples, but examples which show clearly that *the figure of the Blessed Virgin does not disillusion any of the profound expectations of the men and women of our time, but offers them the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord*: the disciple who builds up the earthly and temporal city while being a diligent pilgrim towards the heavenly and eternal city; the disciple who works for that justice which sets free

the oppressed and for that charity which assists the needy; but above all, the disciple who is the active witness of that love which builds up Christ in people's hearts" <sup>20</sup>.

Thirteen years later, in 1987, John Paul II published an encyclical: *Redemptoris Mater* and convoked a Marian year which offered an opportunity for a doctrinal and cultural renewal in the field of mariology. In this encyclical he spoke successively of Mary in the mystery of Christ and in the centre of the pilgrim Church and of Mary's maternal mediation. It is in line with *Lumen gentium* and the post-conciliar documents of the Church's magisterium and confirms the christological and ecclesial reflection on Mary, which is necessary in order for mariology to reveal the entirety of its contents. After more in-depth reflection, with a lengthy meditation on Elizabeth's exclamation: "Blessed is she who believed" (*Lk* 1:45), the many aspects of the Blessed Virgin's "heroic faith", which John Paul II considers to be "like a key" allowing us to discover Mary's intimate reality, the Pope explains the Blessed Virgin's "maternal presence" in the way of faith, which conforms to two lines of thinking, one theological the other pastoral-spiritual. Taken as a whole, *Redemptoris Mater* can be considered the encyclical of Mary's "maternal and active presence" in the life of the Church, in her journey in faith, in the worship she renders to her Lord, in her work of evangelization, her progressive configuration to Christ, and in the commitment to ecumenism. Another important point in the encyclical, in line with *Marialis cultus*, is to present Mary as a model of freedom and liberation for humanity and the cosmos, and as a prophetic woman who in the Magnificat proclaims what God has done in salvation history for the poor and oppressed<sup>21</sup>.

The encyclical concludes with these words: "As [the Church] goes forward with the whole of humanity towards the frontier between the two Millennia, the Church, for her part, with the whole community of believers and in union with all men and women of good will, takes up the great challenge contained in these words of the marian antiphon: 'The people who have fallen, yet strive to rise again,' and she addresses both the Redeemer and his Mother with the plea: 'Assist us.' For, as this prayer attests, the Church sees the Blessed Mother of God in the saving mystery of Christ and in its own mystery. The Church sees her deeply rooted in humanity's history, in our eternal vocation according to the providential plan which God has made for us from eternity. The Church sees Mary maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which today beset the lives of individuals, families and nations; and it sees her helping the Christian people in the constant struggle between good and evil, to ensure that they 'do not fall,' or, if they have fallen, that they will 'rise again'<sup>22</sup>.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION

1. *What truths can be learnt based on this panorama of the evolution of mariology in the life of the Church?*

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<sup>20</sup> *Marialis cultus*, 36-37.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris mater*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> *Ib.* 52.

2. *What kind of mariology predominates in your community?*
3. *What theological means could be used to renew our Marian devotion?*

### III

#### MARY IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

In the history of the Church veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been constant even during periods of crisis. In every era it has been expressed in different ways, conditioned by the same changes that have taken place in the Church, or by theological reflection or by the social, cultural and ecclesial contexts of a particular era.

##### 1. The Patristic era

The Patristic era, that of the Fathers of the Church, began with the first theological commentaries on Christ's teaching, after the generation of the Twelve Apostles, i.e., at the beginning of the 2nd century. This period ended in 1054 with the great Western Schism, which separated the Byzantine (Orthodox) Church from the Latin (Catholic) Church. "In the Patristic period the cult of the Mother of God was expressed by attitudes of veneration, admiration, praise, prayer, trust and imitation"<sup>23</sup>.

##### a. *Mary in the 2nd century*

In the 2nd century there are three authors whose doctrinal ideas influenced later mariology. First of all, there is *St Ignatius of Antioch* (+ 107). "Defending Mary's true maternity, he opposed the Docetists who taught that Christ did not have a real body, only an apparent one, or a body that came from Mary but without taking anything from her... For Ignatius the mystery of Mary remains within the framework of the mystery of salvation. She receives from Christ the light that enlightens her but at the same time there are parts of the mystery of Christ which cannot be understood without Mary's presence. We have only to look at Ignatius' great theological and scholarly texts. There are short letters in which the author testifies to the faith he has received from the Apostles"<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> S. DE FIORES, *Maria, en Nuevo Diccionario de Espiritualidad*, Ed. San Pablo, Madrid, 5th ed. 1991 pg. 1162.

<sup>24</sup> A. MARTINEZ SIERRA, *o.c.*, pg. 50

Another author is *St Justin* (+ c. 165). Justin “is not a mariologist as such but rather someone who defended the belief that Christ is both God and man. In his apologetics there are texts which we can call mariological, because in these he defended vigorously Mary’s virginal maternity as a fundamental factor of our faith in Christ. In his works we meet for the first time the Eve-Mary parallelism...which is based on a comparison between the two women. Eve on the side of Adam, Mary on the side of Christ. The first caused death by her disobedience, Mary caused life by her obedience”<sup>25</sup>.

*St Irenaeus of Lyons* (+202) is one of the Church’s greatest theologians. In his book *Against the Heresies* he tells us that humanity acquires divine life once again because of Christ. The role played by Mary already appears in Christ’s work [of Redemption], fulfilled in the Incarnation,. “If sin came in through Adam with Eve at his side, recapitulation came through Christ with Mary at His side... Mary’s maternity is, once again, for Irenaeus, an argument against the heretical theories of the Docetists. At the same time he defended energetically as revealed truth the virginal conception of Christ”<sup>26</sup>.

### *b. 3rd – 4th Centuries*

In this period we need to distinguish between the situation of the Greek and the Latin Churches.

#### ***1) Mary in the Greek Church***

The Fathers and ecclesiastical writers of this period concentrated much more on the themes of the Trinity and Christology. Questions referring to Mary arise indirectly.

A. In the third and fourth centuries, before the Council of Ephesus (431), magisterial ideas appear in ecclesiastical writers which will later influence mariology:

“a) Mary’s maternity is the guarantee of the Word’s true humanity. Christ’s virginal conception, seen from a Christological perspective, is changed into an obvious sign of Christ’s divinity.

b) The association of Mary with Christ is seen from considering Mary as the new Eve. Christ, the second Adam, has Mary at his side as the new Eve; Mary unties the knot of the first Eve.

c) The identification of the Church with Eve leads the Fathers to compare the two new Eves: Mary and the Church...

The Fathers often used symbolic language to express intuitions that came to them in contemplation rather than from theological discourse. In this era, perhaps until the end of the fourth century, a feast of Mary was instituted during the Christmas cycle”<sup>27</sup>.

#### ***B. From Ephesus to the death of Justinian (565)***

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<sup>25</sup> Ib.

<sup>26</sup> Ib. Pg. 51.

<sup>27</sup> Ib.

It was at the Council of Ephesus (431) that Mary's divine maternity was solemnly defined. The problem discussed at this Council was not mariological but christological. The definition at Ephesus was to have profound repercussions on the development of mariology and also promoted an increase in Marian devotion. Churches and shrines dedicated to Mary began to appear. Mariological homilies abounded.

#### *C. From 565 to the Council of Nicea II (787)*

The mystery of Mary continued to deepen in this period. Mary's virginity of body, mind and spirit, was shown to be the source of all the evangelical virtues which adorned her. Her holiness was greatly stressed. She is superior in holiness to all other creatures. Mary is totally moulded by the Holy Spirit. Mention is made of Mary's Assumption. Her divine maternity, through which she became a dwelling place for God, was seen as the basis of proof for this. There was also stress on her participation in Christ's mystery of salvation, her suffering on Calvary and her glorification in Heaven, from where she exerts an intercessory role for the people of God.

#### *D. The first Byzantine period (787-1054)*

In the first century of this period the outstanding author is *Theodore the Studite* (+826). He exalted Mary's holiness and enriched the liturgy with his poetical compositions and homilies. He praised the Virgin's holiness, which was free from sin. He presented her as an instrument of salvation. She does not forget us in Heaven and puts demons to flight, protecting men and women from sin. Another author, *Focius* (+897), emphasized Mary's role as intercessor and mediator in favour of all. We must call on her because she is our only refuge and hope.

"The ninth and tenth centuries were characterized by an interest in historical facts as opposed to apocrypha or legends. Lives of Mary appeared...The authors united in a common scheme: Mary's infancy, which closely followed the so-called Proto-Gospel of James; the infancy of Jesus...Christ's Paschal Mystery: the perfect union of the Son with his Mother throughout her life on earth, especially during his Passion; Mary's Dormition and mediation"<sup>28</sup>.

### **2) Mary in the Latin Church**

#### *A. Before the Council of Nicea (325)*

The christological heresies led to discussions about Mary. They mentioned the important place she had in the mystery of the Incarnation and in that of salvation. The frescoes in the catacombs of Priscilla, where Mary appears beside Jesus, are an eloquent sign of Mary's presence .

#### *B. From the Council of Nicea (325) to Constantinople (451)*

This is the golden age of the Patristic period. *St Ambrose* (+397) stands out. He is considered the founder of western mariology. We attribute to him the development of the relationship between Mary and the Church. *St Jerome* (+420) presents Mary as a model for all christians, especially those who consecrate themselves in chastity. Many biblical texts are applied to Mary and Jerome argues against the apocryphal fantasies. *St Augustine* (+430) considered Mary in her relationship to Christ and the Church. This is how he sees her role in the history of salvation. "He is the one who initiates the western tradition ... that Mary, before the Annunciation,

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<sup>28</sup> Ib. Pg. 55.

had made a vow of virginity. He exalts Mary's holiness, although he upholds that she was born with original sin...In the Eve–Mary parallelism, he insists on Mary's maternity and virginity. The *Council of Ephesus* (431) also influenced liturgy, art, and preaching in the Latin Church. Mary's name was probably included in the Eucharistic Canon during this period, as in a Mass of the Annunciation during Advent in the Ambrosian rite<sup>29</sup>. St Peter Chrisologus (+450) admitted Mary's divine maternity but opposed the use of the title 'Mater Dei' or 'Dei Genitrix' in order to avoid pagan misunderstandings. Mary was so united to God that we cannot think about Him without thinking about the mystery of Mary.

### C. From the Council of Chalcedon (451) to the Western Schism (1054)

In this period we can distinguish two eras: one up to the beginning of the Carolingian era (800) with the reign of the Emperor Charles the Great (Charlemagne 747-814) and the other from 814 to the Western Schism (1054).

In these centuries the teaching on Mary on the one hand preserved the traditional teaching, while on the other it grew and developed. *St Leo the Great* (+461) is the greatest exponent of mariology in this period: Mary is the Mother ever Virgin of the Son of God. She gives Christ His human nature. *St Isidore of Seville* (+636) is characterized by his praise of Mary. He calls her the Star of the Sea (*Stella Maris*), Our Lady and Shrine of the Holy Spirit. He mentions the relationship of Mary to the Church, saying that the Virgin means the Church, which being married to Christ, conceived us as a Virgin by the work of the Holy Spirit, and, as a Virgin, also brought us to birth.

Another author of this era is *St Ildefonse of Toledo* (+667) who wrote a book on Mary's perpetual virginity against those who denied it. He extolled Mary's intercession in our favour. He spoke of Christians as slaves to Mary because of her sublime dignity as the Mother of God.

The *Venerable Bede* (+735) wrote of Mary as the perfect creation of the Holy Spirit who prepared her for motherhood. For Bede, devotion to Mary should lead to an attitude of fidelity to the demands of the Christian life.

The spiritual reform at Cluny with *St Odo* and *St Odilo* (+1048) had an influence on Marian devotion. St. Odilo "consecrated his life to Mary in the form of slavery. His teaching was traditional but presented a practical aspect: Mary is a model for Christians to live a life of faith, humility, poverty and purity. She is the ideal of the contemplative life for monks"<sup>30</sup>. *St Peter Damian* (+1052) deepened new aspects in mariology: the relationship between Mary and the Eucharist; the matter of Mary's free choice. He invites people to go to Jesus through Mary because by her we come to Jesus.

In this period Mary occupies an important place in Western liturgy especially in the Advent and Nativity seasons. Many liturgical texts are full of allusions to the Blessed Virgin.

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<sup>29</sup> Ib. Pgs. 56-57.

<sup>30</sup> Ib. Pg. 59.

## 2. The Middle Ages

In the middle ages many liturgical hymns in praise of Mary, which are still sung today, appear: *Ave Maris Stella*, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, *Salve Regina*. The Rosary also finds its origin in this period, “which was created as a way of uniting the divine praises in Cistercian monasteries to the laity, who sat apart and were unfamiliar with Latin, accompanying the recitation of the psalms with 150 Hail Marys from the Rosary... This spread of the cult of the Blessed Virgin encouraged the creation of marian feasts in which the scenes from Mary’s life were commemorated... In this era there was a proliferation of places dedicated to Mary both in the East as well as in the West, a clear indication of the strong presence which the spirituality and devotion to the Blessed Virgin had acquired, also in social life”<sup>31</sup>.

Among the writers *St Bernard* (+1153) stands out, as one greatly devoted to Mary. His marian homilies are famous, singing as they did of her greatness. Other types of literature proper to this era are the collection of miracle stories that greatly influenced popular marian piety.

Other signs of Mary’s presence could be found in the great cathedrals with her statues, paintings, murals and stained-glass windows. Living monuments of marian devotion were the different Religious Orders which appeared at this time: Carmelites, Mercedarians, Servants of Mary, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, who gave Mary a special place in their lives and spirituality.

From a doctrinal viewpoint this period greatly advanced the consideration of the dogma on Mary’s Assumption. Much is also owed to the 13th century for the dogma on the Immaculate Conception, as yet undefined. In order to safeguard the truth of Christ’s universal redemption, St Augustine did not accept it. Mary had been at least in original sin in order for her to be redeemed. The Scottish Franciscan, *Duns Scotus* (+1308) resolved the problem by distinguishing between two types of redemption: preservative and liberative. Christ has preserved the Blessed Virgin from original sin. The rest of us have been freed. A title that was also created at this time for the Blessed Virgin was that of Queen.

## 3. The Modern Era (16th – 19th centuries)

Marian theological reflection continued to evolve during this period. A Spanish Jesuit, *Francis Suarez* (+1617) wrote the first systematic treatise on Mary. His starting point was the questions relating to Mary in the Commentaries of St Thomas Aquinas. He did not call it mariology: this title only began to be used in the 19th century.

The cult and devotion to the Blessed Virgin represented her “as a great and elegant lady, adorned with the conventions and colours of the ladies of that age. Each painter adapted the figure of Mary to the lifestyle and environment in which he lived... The outstanding authors who wrote popular spiritual and devotional tracts are *St Louis Grignon de Montfort* (+1716) and *St Alphonsus Liguori* (+1787). The first wrote his treatise on *True Devotion to Mary* in which he spoke about slavery to Mary. The second wrote *The Glories of Mary*... It was particularly interesting as it pointed out that Jesus had put all graces in Mary’s hands, inspiring the faithful to cast their eyes on her, and to call on her always with unbounded trust... The works of this period were outstanding for

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<sup>31</sup> Ib. Pg. 60.

having a certain apologetic tendency, as they faced criticisms which rose up from inside and outside the church against the catholic marian doctrine and piety of the faithful”<sup>32</sup>.

We should mention *Philip Neri* (+1596) who suggested that young people offer presents to Mary in the month of May as a form of Marian devotion. At this time, especially after the French Revolution (1789), there appeared numerous religious congregations with a marian spirituality, about 150 in all. Marian ecclesial groups were created: marian congregations, arch-confraternities and confraternities. Also typical of this period was the phenomenon of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin which had great importance in Marian piety: Guadalupe (Mexico, 1531); in France: the Miraculous Medal (1830), la Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858). Her influence extended to the entire christian world. The church did not undertake to confirm the historical authenticity of these events, but it acknowledged the cult and veneration attributed to God in these places.

All this marian fervour created many forms of devotion that were criticized within as well as outside the Church. Already in the 16th century *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (+1535), used his exegetical skills to become very critical of those who made certain scriptural texts applicable to the Blessed Virgin Mary. He tried to create a devotion that was scripturally and theologically sound and dignified.

“In this period there was a notable growth in theological reflection on Mary, which distanced itself from popular devotion. Theologians constructed serious theological treatises, which were studied in the universities, but which the ordinary people were not interested in, because they were far removed from the kind of worries and fervour they had for the Blessed Virgin... There was a risk of having a treatise about Mary which would have had little connection to the other treatises... The theme of the Immaculate Conception occupied a central position in 18th century theology. But the discussion had already begun in the Middle Ages and lasted until the definition of Pius XII in the year 1854”<sup>33</sup>.

#### **4. The Contemporary Era (1854-1962)**

From the point of view of the church’s magisterium we have at this time two dogmatic definitions: that of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and that of the Assumption (1950). Moreover, many papal documents approached the theme of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

There were not many publications on Mary in the first years of the 19th century. Some time later there was the outstanding German theologian, M.J. Scheeben (+1888) who studied in a special way the well-established tradition of the relationship between Mary and the Church. A controversial theme studied at this time was Mary’s mediation. There was a call for it to be dogmatically defined but this petition was rejected by Rome.

Popular devotion to Mary continued to spread with papal interventions recommending the recitation of the rosary. The apparitions at Lourdes (1858) and Fatima (1917) also influenced the devotion of the faithful. The month of May became dedicated to the Blessed Virgin.

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<sup>32</sup> Ib. Pgs. 62-63.

<sup>33</sup> Ib. Pgs. 64-65.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION

1. *What conclusions do you draw when you observe the evolution of the understanding of Mary's role in the story of salvation and the same evolution in our devotion to her?*
2. *Indicate the aspect of Marian doctrine that impressed you most in the Patristic era, in the Middle Ages, in the modern era and in the contemporary era.*
3. *In the life of your community, does any element of this historical evolution exist that is especially present in your Marian devotion?*

## IV

### THE ROLE OF MARY IN CARMEL<sup>34</sup>

When the Constitutions of the discalced carmelite nuns address the marian life of Carmel they state: "The history of the Order overflows with the presence of the Virgin Mary. It began on Mount Carmel where the first hermits dedicated to her a little chapel. Later, with the approval of the Church, they undertook the obligation of living the evangelical counsels in allegiance to Christ and his Virgin Mother. St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross confirmed and renewed Carmel's devotion to Mary. In fact, they acknowledged Mary as Mother and Patron of the Order. They present her as a model of prayer and self-denial in our pilgrimage of faith. She humbly and wisely welcomed the Lord's Word and pondered it in her heart. She was wholly responsive to the impulses of the Holy Spirit. She is the valiant woman who follows Christ faithfully and shares in the joys and sorrows of his paschal mystery"<sup>35</sup>.

From the 13th century Carmel was recognized in the Church as a marian Order propagating devotion to the Mother of God. Although we cannot say that this is exclusive or unique to Carmel, we can affirm that marian devotion is special to Carmelite spirituality. We carmelites meditate on her and live our lives devoted to her with our own particular nuances. These special characteristics of our relationship with Mary have developed throughout the history of the Order.

#### 1. The origins

In the formula of life that St Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, gave to the carmelites, there was no reference to Mary. However, some twenty years after the promulgation of the Rule (1207), the chapel built in the centre of the hermits' cells on Mount Carmel was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. In the Middle Ages this detail had a special significance: it established a relationship of patronage between Mary and the Carmelites. They would serve her and she would protect them.

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<sup>34</sup> There is an excellent article by Christopher O'Donnell, on the role of Mary in Carmel, in E. BOAGA- L. BORRIELLO (dir.) *Dizionario Carmelitano*, Città Nuova, Rome, 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns, N° 54.

When the Carmelites passed into Europe, Mary's role was emphasized. From the middle of 13th century pontifical documents refer to them as "Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel". From 1280, these documents confirm that they were founded in honour of the Blessed Virgin. If we look at the first documents of the Order, especially the constitutional texts, there is an obvious awareness of Elijah and Mary in our identity as Carmelites. The figure of Mary is stamped into our Carmelite consciousness as Mother, Patroness and Sister.

## 2. The End of the Middle Ages

In the 14th and 15th centuries the theme of Elijah-Mary was developed even more. The marian title of Brothers of the Blessed Virgin was not viewed well by other religious orders. This led to arguments being put forth, often legendary, but which expressed the love and devotion of the Carmelites for the Blessed Virgin. At the beginning of the 14th century *John of Cheminot* confirmed that the Blessed Virgin had visited Mount Carmel in her adolescent years. In his commentary on the Rule, *John Baconthorpe* (+1348) stressed that the Carmelites imitated Mary when they observed the Rule. On the other hand, he affirmed that Elijah had been the first Carmelite. It was Baconthorpe who developed the marian symbolism of the "little cloud" in 1 Kings 18:44, the cloud that led to relief in the time of drought.

These insights and symbols were developed in the famous book *De Institutione Primorum Monachorum*, written by *Philip Robot* (+1391). The book can be seen as the summit of marian devotion in Carmel. From the 15th century devotion to the scapular spread and there began an extraordinary development of marian devotion by the Carmelites through stories of miracles, titles, prayers, liturgical hymns, music, poetry and painting. At the end of the 15th century *Arnold Bostius* (+1499) wrote a book on the patronage of the Virgin and its attributes to the Order consecrated to her: *De Patronato et patrocinio B. Virginis Mariae in dicatum sibi Carmeli Ordinem*. In it he gathered together all the previous Carmelite traditions and interpreted them in his own way with biblical texts and symbols. In so doing he wanted to respond in the affirmative to the question: had Mary specially favoured the Order? He showed that both Elijah and Mary were privileged through the same Holy Spirit who animated them: the shining light, the splendour of virginity, to be inspirational for religious life, to be examples on many levels on how to relate to God, also with angelic spirits, how to have great love and zeal for the glory of God, to have a prophetic charism, to be obedient, compassionate and merciful; they were workers of miracles and ascended into Heaven. For Bostius, Mary can be called a Carmelite: "She showed that she was a true Carmelite, in body and spirit".

## 3. The Modern Era

Just before the Teresian re-founding, the marian-Carmelite synthesis was already well established, being expressed above all in the scapular and the sabbatine privilege.

*Saint Teresa* is placed within this marian tradition and develops it<sup>36</sup>. For Teresa, Mary is like the maternal presence in the Spirit; at the same time she is the way to understand Christ, the Church and the foundations which she would make. St Teresa expresses her thoughts on Mary in different ways and with different titles as she comes to understand Mary in her daily life. The marian titles she uses most are: Our Lady, Virgin, Mother, Patroness. In the *Interior Castle* 3, 1:3 she writes:

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<sup>36</sup> We present here in síntesis the article by MAURICE MARTIN DEL BLANCO, O.C.D. in the article *Maria Santísima*, in the *Diccionario de Santa Teresa de Jesus*, Monte Carmelo, Burgos, 2001, pgs. 942-954.

“Praise Him, my daughters, for you truly belong to our Lady. Thus you have no reason to be ashamed of my misery since you have such a good Mother. Imitate her and reflect that the grandeur of our Lady and the good of having her for your patroness must be indeed great”.

“The deeply Marian soul of St Teresa of Jesus was forged gradually ever since she first began to cry as a baby in the family home... She herself tells us how at the age of six her mother specially wanted her to have a devotion to the Virgin (*Life* 1:1)... Since she was a small child she sought solitude so as to practice her favourite devotions: ‘I sought out solitude to pray my devotions, and they were many, especially the rosary, to which my mother was very devoted, and she made us devoted to it too’ (*Life* 1:6)... Later St Teresa tells us how when her mother died ... she went before an image of the Virgin ... to ask her to be her mother (*Life* 1:7)... At twenty Teresa entered the convent of the Incarnation in Avila. There, as in all carmels, Mary’s presence was everywhere: in the liturgy, paintings, titles, devotions, feasts. The carmelite habit left a special mark on Teresa... The presence of Mary was accentuated by her mystical experiences; later this presence became an integral part of her mystical graces, including extraordinary ones...”<sup>37</sup>.

“We cannot say anything about St Teresa’s doctrine as all came from her own experience...The sources of her marian doctrine were undoubtedly, preaching, reading, confession and above all, prayer; which was the source of her experience, as well as the liturgy, which she celebrated with devotion and joy, particularly the feasts of the Blessed Virgin; during some she received many mystical graces relating to the life and mysteries of Mary”<sup>38</sup>.

“Because of Mary’s presence and her total love for the carmelite family, Teresa of Jesus proposed certain attitudes of filial respect: to serve Our Lady, Mother, Queen and Patroness of the Order; to love the Blessed Virgin and her Order; to keep the Rule of our Lady and Empress as perfectly as possible; praise and gratitude to Our Lady and Patroness whose habit we wear and whose daughters we are, for the new houses (dovecotes of the Blessed Virgin) established for her glory and honour; gladness and jubilation for being so dear to and loved by her who is the Mother of the Lord and our intercessor. Teresa of Jesus takes refuge in the goodness of Mary as she takes refuge in the mercy of God: ‘May the mercy of God help me. In Him I have always trusted through His most sacred Son and the Virgin, our Lady, whose habit I wear through the goodness of the Lord’ (*Foundations* 28:35)”<sup>39</sup>.

Mary is present throughout the life of St John of the Cross<sup>40</sup>. John de Yepes was taught by his mother to observe the contemporary traditional practices of Christian piety. Among them the cult of and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary stand out. A witness at the canonical process for John of the Cross’ beatification declared: “He was so devoted to Our Lady that every day he recited the Office of Our Lady on his knees...and when he went on a journey all his talk and conversation were about the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin, and he sang hymns dedicated to Our Lady”. This devotion to Mary made him choose the Carmelite Order.

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<sup>37</sup> Ib. Pgs. 944-945.

<sup>38</sup> Ib. Pgs. 947-948.

<sup>39</sup> Ib. Pgs. 952-953.

<sup>40</sup> For Mary in St John of the Cross we have made a resumé of the article by ISMAEL BENGOCHEA, O.C.D., *Maria Virgen, Santa*, in *Diccionario de San Juan de la Cruz*, Monte Carmelo, Burgos, 2000 pgs. 915-920.

“John of the Cross wrote little about the Blessed Virgin, but what he did write spoke volumes. There are no more than 22 references which expressly speak of the Mother of God... From such a small treasury it is not possible to create a true mariology...but it offers material and clues with which we can deepen some particular aspects that relate to Our Lady...”<sup>41</sup>. There is a fundamental text in St John of the Cross’ approach to the Virgin when, speaking of how a person must empty the memory to allow union with God, he states that Mary “raised from the beginning to this high state, never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any, for she was always moved by the Holy Spirit” (*Ascent of Mt Carmel* Bk 3, 2:10). Also in the marian language of the Incarnation St John of the Cross highlights Mary’s free consent which was needed if the Word was to be incarnated in human nature: “Then He called the Archangel Gabriel and sent him to the Virgin Mary, at whose consent the mystery was wrought, in whom the Trinity clothed the Word with flesh; and though Three work this, it is wrought in the One: and the Word lived incarnate in the womb of Mary”<sup>42</sup>.

#### 4. Contemporary Era

Towards the end of the 19th century *Thérèse of Lisieux* (+1897) was proclaimed a doctor of the Church. Her teaching on Mary is profound. She restored the idea of relating to Mary as a simple mother from Nazareth, who is ‘more mother than queen’. She has great faith in her intercession. In this she is followed by *Elizabeth of the Trinity* (+1906). “The vision that Elizabeth has of the Mother of God is focussed on three principle factors: the Annunciation, Bethlehem and Calvary. Contemplating these mysteries she entered into the heart of the Blessed Virgin whom she saw as the perfect contemplative and for herself as the gate of paradise” (*Last Retreat* 2 & 40)... *Edith Stein* (+1942) was influenced by her Jewish background in her approach to the Blessed Virgin and also by her profound anthropological and feminist reflections as well as by the carmelite tradition. She was particularly attached to the scapular and later on developed a profound intuition for and empathy with Mary on Calvary. Carmelite mariology shines out in these great figures but also in many simple devotees of our Lady of Mt Carmel”<sup>43</sup>.

#### 5. The evolution from 1950

The second half of the 20th century witnessed a renewal in carmelite mariology. After the Second World War Carmelites offered an important contribution to mariology through books, conferences and devotional literature. After the Second Vatican Council there was a re-appropriation of the marian legacy by the Order. The renewed Constitutions of the carmelite friars and nuns dedicated a chapter to Mary: in the nun’s it is called: ‘The Marian Life of Carmel’, and in the friar’s, “The Blessed Virgin Mary in Our Life”.

“A later impulse for renewal came with the year 2001 which was proclaimed a Marian Carmelite Year. In this year two important documents were produced. The Holy Father, John Paul II, sent a letter to the two Superior Generals, J. Chalmers, O.Carm and C. Maccise, OCD, on March 25, 2001: entitled “A Providential Event”<sup>44</sup>. The Papal message praised the Order’s decision ‘in

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<sup>41</sup> Ib. Pg. 918.

<sup>42</sup> John of the Cross, *The Poetry*, in K. Kavanagh & O. Rodriguez, *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, ICS, Washington, pg 67.

<sup>43</sup> CH. O’DONNELL, *o.c.*, pg. 544.

<sup>44</sup> Ib. Pgs. 544-545.

both its branches, ancient and reformed', to dedicate to Mary the year 2001 to coincide with the 750th anniversary of the giving of the scapular, defined as 'a venerable tradition of the Order itself'. Carmel's marian patrimony has become over time, "a treasure for the whole Church, through the spread of the devotion of the brown scapular. By means of its simplicity, its relatedness to ordinary human life and its connection with the role of Mary in the Church and the whole of humanity, this devotion has been profoundly and wholeheartedly received by the people of God, so much so as to be remembered in the memorial of 16th July, which is in the liturgical calendar of the universal Church" (n° 4). In what refers specifically to the scapular, John Paul II stressed that not only did he wear it himself but so do many of the laity, as a sign of devotion to Mary, and in this way associating themselves with the great carmelite family.

On the occasion of the same Carmelite Marian Year, the two above mentioned Superior Generals sent a joint circular letter with the title: *With Mary the Mother of Jesus*. In it they underlined the need to be faithful to our Marian inheritance but in dialogue with the Church and the new situation in the world: " 'Generations of Carmelites, from the beginnings until today... have sought to model their lives after the example of Mary'<sup>45</sup>. Each generation has a responsibility not only to live out Carmel's heritage, but also to enrich it and pass it on. A heritage is something living which must be open to the real world and presented in the actual experience of the Church. Carmelite life must be in constant dialogue with the present and the past. The riches of our tradition must indeed be preserved but in such a way that they are found to be relevant and meaningful for the present. We invite all Carmelites to take the opportunity of revisiting our past but with questions that come from our reading of the current signs of time and place"<sup>46</sup>. In the letter both Superior Generals reflect on themes that are central to Mary's role in Carmel. A slow and reflective reading of this letter should help us deepen our understanding of the figure of Mary in the Order.

"The manifold richness of the Marian Carmelite charism leads naturally to its spirituality, since, historically the relationship with our Patroness, already existing in mediaeval times, had been presupposed. It was neither a legal or formal relationship but was always a communion of love with her whom Carmelites have come to see as their Mother and Sister. The unique characteristic of the relationship between Mary and the Order is her continuous presence"<sup>47</sup>.

## QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION

1. *What are the principal lessons you have learned about your relationship with Mary from the above view of Mary's role in Carmel?*
2. *Which new factors appear in this overview and to which of them are you committed in your consecrated life?*
3. *How can we in this era, in the social, cultural and ecclesial contexts of our time, live and pass on this Marian element of our charism and spirituality in a way that is intelligible for men and women today?*

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<sup>45</sup> Letter of Pope John Paul II, March 25 2002, n° 2.

<sup>46</sup> J. CHALMERS – C. MACCISE, *With Mary the Mother of Jesus*, Circular Setter, 2001, n° 4.

<sup>47</sup> CH. O'DONNELL, *o.c.*, pg. 546.

## V

### THE PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE OF MARIAN LIFE IN THE TERESIAN CARMEL

The practical perspective of our marian life should take into account tradition, and at the same time, face up to the challenges that a renewed ecclesiology and mariology present, as well as the present day signs of the time and place.

Vatican II made a distinction between devotion and devotions, placing the accent on the first which is the base and foundation of the way people express their devotions: "...true devotion consists neither in sterile or transitory affection, nor in a certain vain credulity, but proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to recognize the excellence of the Mother of God, and are moved to a filial love towards our Mother and to the imitation of her virtues"<sup>48</sup>

"Authentic love brings in its train a need to externalize this love by deeds. For this reason, even though true devotion does not consist in external acts of devotion, it needs to express itself in them. It is the language of love. If there is true devotion then devotions will arise as an expression of this. To have devotion is not the same as practising devotions, but they are intimately linked. The Council indicated to the sons and daughters of the Church that 'the practices and exercises of devotion towards her [Mary], recommended by the teaching authority of the Church in the course of centuries, be highly esteemed'<sup>49</sup>. It does not name them, but the reference to the Angelus and the Rosary seems clear. Paul VI appeared to have understood it this way, when he spoke of them at the end of *Marialis Cultus*'<sup>50</sup>.

#### 1. Directives from our legislation

Our Constitutions offer rich material to guide us in our Marian devotions. Above all, they take their origin from the contemplation of Mary, which is the foundation for our filial devotion to her: "In Our Lady we contemplate the ideal of the Order lived to perfection. Her example inspires us to follow in her footsteps. She takes the lead among the Lord's poor and little ones. She best exemplifies contemplative life in the Church. Every sister will find in Mary a mother and teacher in the ways of the Spirit who will conform her to Christ and lead her to the heights of holiness.

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<sup>48</sup> LG 67.

<sup>49</sup> Ib.

<sup>50</sup> A. MARTINZE SIERRA, *o.c.*, pg. 178.

Because of their profession, the sisters belong to the Virgin Mary in a special way. They wear her scapular to show that they are members of her Order and are determined to clothe themselves with her virtues”<sup>51</sup>.

Starting from this fundamental and sound guidance, the *Constitutions* move on to give practical suggestions as to how we Carmelites express this life of intimacy and love of Mary. They ask, in the first place, that our marian devotion be fed by “Sacred Scripture, the Church fathers, the Church’s liturgy and magisterium”. They exhort us to honour Mary “with the veneration that is due her, in the light of Christ’s paschal mystery, and in compliance with the directives of the Church. In fact, when the Church venerates the Virgin Mary in the liturgy, it regards her as inseparably joined to her Son in his saving work, and it sees in her a model of the spiritual attitude with which all should celebrate and live the divine mysteries”<sup>52</sup>.

The *Constitutions* ask the communities when organizing their liturgical life to give prominence to the marian character of the Order. For this, they ask that the solemn commemoration of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mt Carmel be celebrated as the principle feast among the proper feasts of the Order, and special emphasis be given to other marian solemnities, feasts and memorials. “On Saturdays during the year, as the liturgical rubrics permit, the memorial of Our Lady will be celebrated in the Mass and the Divine Office. On Saturdays, on the solemnities and feasts of the Virgin Mary, or on their Vigils, the *Salve Regina* will be solemnly sung, as required by the tradition of the Order”<sup>53</sup>.

Descending into more detail regarding devotions in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the *Constitutions* give to each convent the freedom to establish devotions in accordance with their circumstances. They *suggest*, not impose, the recitation in common of the *Angelus* and the *Litanies* and exhort the personal recitation of the Rosary<sup>54</sup>.

## 2. Three traditional practices

The Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultis* encourages us to be creative in the way we show our devotion to Mary but, at the same time, explains and recommends, without imposing, the two most traditional Western devotions: the *Angelus* and the *Rosary*: “We have indicated a number of principles which can help to give fresh vigour to devotion to the Mother of the Lord. It is now up to episcopal conferences, to those in charge of local communities and to the various religious congregations, prudently to revise practices and exercises of piety in honour of the Blessed Virgin, and to encourage the creative impulse of those who through genuine religious inspiration or pastoral sensitivity wish to establish new forms of piety. For different reasons we nevertheless feel it is opportune to consider here two practices which are widespread in the West, and with which this Apostolic See has concerned itself on various occasions: the *Angelus* and the *Rosary*”<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> *Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns*, n° 55

<sup>52</sup> *Ib.* N° 56.

<sup>53</sup> *Ib.* N° 57.

<sup>54</sup> *Cf. Ib.* N° 58.

<sup>55</sup> *Marialis Cultis* N° 40.

### a. *The Angelus*

Paul VI said the following about the Angelus: “What we have to say about the Angelus is meant to be only a simple but earnest exhortation to continue its traditional recitation wherever and whenever possible. The Angelus does not need to be revised, because of its simple structure, its biblical character, its historical origin which links it to the prayer for peace and safety, and its quasi-liturgical rhythm which sanctifies different moments during the day, and because it reminds us of the Paschal Mystery, in which recalling the Incarnation of the Son of God we pray that we may be led ‘through his passion and cross to the glory of his resurrection.’ These factors ensure that the Angelus, despite the passing of centuries, retains an unaltered value and an intact freshness. It is true that certain customs traditionally linked with the recitation of the Angelus have disappeared or can continue only with difficulty in modern life. But these are marginal elements. The value of contemplation on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, of the greeting to the Virgin, and of recourse to her merciful intercession remains unchanged. And despite the changed conditions of the times, for the majority of people there remain unaltered the characteristic periods of the day - morning, noon and evening - which mark the periods of their activity and constitute an invitation to pause in prayer”<sup>56</sup>.

### b. *The Rosary*

Paul VI expanded his reflections when he spoke about the Rosary<sup>57</sup>. John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, in the year 2002, re-echoed everything from Paul VI and his predecessors while stressing the Rosary’s *contemplative* and *Christological* character.

In the first place the Rosary has a contemplative character: “The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary’s own experience, is *an exquisitely contemplative prayer*. Without this contemplative dimension, it would lose its meaning, as Pope Paul VI clearly pointed out: ‘Without contemplation, the Rosary is a body without a soul, and its recitation runs the risk of becoming a mechanical repetition of formulas, in violation of the admonition of Christ: *In praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think they will be heard for their many words (Mt 6:7)*. By its nature the recitation of the Rosary calls for a quiet rhythm and a lingering pace, helping the individual to meditate on the mysteries of the Lord’s life as seen through the eyes of her who was closest to the Lord. In this way the unfathomable riches of these mysteries are disclosed’. It is worth pausing to consider this profound insight of Paul VI, in order to bring out certain aspects of the Rosary which show that it is really a form of christocentric contemplation”<sup>58</sup>.

John Paul II made some proposals which can help us to understand better the christological and contemplative character of the Rosary. He lists the following: the Rosary ...as a “meditation” with Mary on Christ, is *a salutary contemplation*<sup>59</sup>; learning about Christ from Mary: “Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to ‘read’ Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message”<sup>60</sup>; being conformed to Christ

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<sup>56</sup> Ib. N° 41.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Ib. Nos. 42-55.

<sup>58</sup> *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, n° 12.

<sup>59</sup> Ib. N° 13.

<sup>60</sup> Ib. N° 14.

with Mary: “Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined”<sup>61</sup>; praying to Christ with Mary: “The prayer of the Church is sustained by the prayer of Mary”<sup>62</sup>; proclaiming Christ with Mary: “The Rosary retains all its power and continues to be a valuable pastoral resource for every good evangelizer”<sup>63</sup>.

“The relationship between the liturgy and the Rosary is clear. The Rosary is not liturgical prayer and in this sense liturgy surpasses it. In fact, the liturgy makes present, by the use of symbolic signs, the mysteries that are being celebrated and with a greater efficacy. The Rosary is a contemplative invocation of the past, which stimulates whoever contemplates it to be a faithful follower of Christ”<sup>64</sup>.

### *c. The Scapular*

In the circular letter that the O.Carm and O.C.D. Superior Generals wrote on the occasion of the Carmelite Marian year, in 2001, they looked to deepen the significance of this Marian devotion and at the same time, to encourage traditional approaches, insisting on the need to reinterpret the values of the scapular. “Any revitalization of the Carmelite Scapular demands that we consider it within the wider context of Carmel’s relationship with Mary. According to our saints what is important is a personal intimacy with the Mother of God and a commitment to take her as the model of Christian discipleship. The main themes of Mother, Patroness, Sister and Exemplar, can bring us to a deeper knowledge of Mary and to a more profound relationship with her. Only from this perspective can the Scapular be assumed as a sign that favours spiritual growth in Christian life”<sup>65</sup>.

“Our tradition shows the firmest conviction that the habit and the Scapular have no salvific effect unless we see their meaning as Mary’s habit, which affiliates us to the Carmelite Family, and unless we live according to her example. The central truths to be pondered include Mary’s protection, her intercession at the time of our death and beyond it. On our part there is need for a filial relationship, or one that expresses our being her brothers and sisters and devoted to her service for the glory of her son. The Scapular is a sign that draws us into such relationships... If we are to be clothed in Mary’s habit, we should strive to be clothed also in her virtues. The Scapular is one of our means of directing people to Mary and thus to her Son”<sup>66</sup>.

## **QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY REFLECTION**

1. *How does your community express its traditional Marian devotions? Has there been a new approach?*
2. *Does your community have other practices of Marian devotion? If so what do they bring to its spiritual life?*

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<sup>61</sup> Ib. N° 15.

<sup>62</sup> Ib. N° 16.

<sup>63</sup> Ib. N° 17.

<sup>64</sup> A. MARTINEZ SIERRA, *o.c.*, pg 179.

<sup>65</sup> J. CHALMERS – C. MACCISE, *With Mary the Mother of Jesus, circular letter*, 2001, pg. 14.

<sup>66</sup> Ib. Nos. 30, 34.

3. *In what way does the practice of Marian devotion help us to live lives of contemplative prayer that is proper to the Teresian Carmel?*

## **CONCLUSION**

It has rightly been said that “Carmel is all Mary’s”. This agrees with the actual reality of Carmel’s history and spirituality. Faithful creativity to this essential feature of our charism brings us to see Mary, our Mother and Sister, as she who teaches us “how to listen to the Word of God in Scripture and in life itself, how to be open to God and close to the needs of our brothers and sisters in a world where poverty in its many forms takes their dignity away. Mary further shows us the woman’s path to God and stands with us as a woman who is the icon of the tenderness of God, a woman who had to face many trials in order to fulfil the vocation given to her by God. She remains as a sign of freedom and liberation for all those who in their oppression cry to God. On our part, the wearing of the scapular is an expression of our confidence in Mary’s care. It shows our willingness to witness to our baptismal adoption and to being her daughters and sons, sisters and brothers, as well as our desire to be clothed with her virtues, with her contemplative spirit and with her purity of heart. Thus clothed by her, we, like her, ponder the Word and show ourselves to be disciples of her Son in our dedication to the works of God’s Kingdom: truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love and peace”<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>67</sup> Ib. N° 31.