

## INTRODUCTION TO MARIOLOGY

### **Place of Mary in Theology**

Christian theology reflects on God's salvific revelation and self-communication through Jesus Christ. God revealed himself to us not through doctrinal formulae but through his works. The first medium of his communication is the created world. God also revealed himself in the events of the lives of individuals and nations.

Theology is centered on this final speaking of God in Jesus Christ. He speaks in the person of Jesus: in the human life and work of Jesus, we encounter the Father who sent him. In him we also find the authentic meaning of human existence.

However, revelation needs an addressee; self-communication seeks a partner. God's revelations is addressed to us. The addressee of God's word, the partner in the divine life, is our human world. Theology is concerned not only with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, but also with our human world, our condition, our needs. It includes our openness to God's work, our freedom to respond to it and our involvement in the coming of the new creation. Hence, though centered in Jesus Christ, theology also includes anthropology, the understanding of our human existence before God.

This presence before God, this openness to his word, this response to his invitation in freedom, this total involvement with body, mind and heart in God's work of salvation has most beautifully been revealed in Mary. She was chosen to be the mother of Jesus not merely to give him human life, but **through her motherhood she was drawn into the mystery of salvation**. Vatican II states: "The Father of mercies willed that the incarnation should be preceded by assent of the predestined mother. This is preeminently true in the mother of Jesus."

In preparation for her response to God's call and her involvement in the divine plan of salvation, **Mary was sanctified from the beginning**.

Thus from **ancient times** she is seen "not merely passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of man's salvation through faith and obedience."

This then is Mary's place in theology: as we encounter God's revealing and saving word in the person of Jesus Christ, so **we contemplate in the person of Mary the human response to God's word**. Already in the Gospels, Mary is seen not merely as an individual who is touched by God's grace—many have been touched by God's overwhelming power at all times—but as **the one in whom the encounter of God with our human world has taken place for the sake of the whole human family**.

### **Ecclesial Dimension of Mariology**

The core of mariology is obviously the person of Mary, the woman of Nazareth who, according to the Gospel, gave birth to Jesus. God's entry into our world is described by the Gospel by Luke, not as an act of divine omnipotence, but as a personal encounter: the divine invitation addressed to Mary and the free response to the handmaid of the Lord. In faith and surrender she is the first to respond to the message of salvation.

Just as the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb is the Son's first step in an ever-deepening and widening communion with our human family, likewise Mary's "fiat", her response to God's word and her involvement in the divine work of salvation, is the first voice of an ever growing chorus of responses coming from all believers. **Mary gave birth to Jesus' earthly body, the Church is to give birth to the body of his faithful**. Mary, the virginal mother, becomes the model of the Church.

Mariology is the attempt at a comprehensive understanding of Mary's place in God's plan of salvation. Mariology becomes Christian anthropology, an epitome of human existence before God.

### **Problems of Mariology**

**-Exaggerations of popular devotions** which assign her a disproportionate role in Christian life, and create for her, as it were, an isolated glorious world of her own. Historians of religion consider Mary the Christian heiress of the great mother goddesses of the ancient mediterranean world.

Apparitions of Mary, true or alleged, draw millions to the spot where she has been seen and has given her messages.

The tendency to supernaturalize Mary's earthly life continued through the centuries. Legends were added to the biblical accounts and filled up the sober silence of the gospels. These legends tended to remove Mary from the earthly sphere of our human life, totally opposite to the Bible where Mary appears first as the guarantee of Jesus' true humanity: "born of a woman". (Gal 4:4)

**-Mary's Privileges:** Critical questions were asked not only about their biblical basis but also about their theological soundness. During the decades before the second Vatican Council the mariologists were divided into two camps, summarily called "Maximalists", those who claimed many prerogatives for Mary, and "Minimalists" those who were critical and tended to underrate Mary's unique place in the Church.

It is one of the important tasks of modern Mariology not only to strike a sober balance between extreme forms of devotion and neglect of Mary in Christian life, but also, based on the Bible, to free the image of Mary from Gnostic spiritualization and to see to it that her life and mission are integrated into the mystery of salvation, into the life and mission of Jesus and the Church.

### **Significance of Mariology**

-Mariology holds an important place in Theology itself.

Theology is part of the life of the Church. It articulates the faith that is expressed in the Church's teaching and worship in relation to the social and cultural conditions of the faithful. Mariology has to interpret the actual place held by Mary in the life of the Church and of the people.

-Mariology and Ecclesiology.

Vatican II has inserted Mariology into the life stream of the Church, and so freed it from isolation. At the same time, the presentation of Mary as the "typos" of the Church symbolically expresses the renewed image of the Church itself. Mariology is a substantial contribution to ecclesiology.

She is first "mystery", sacrament of salvation, not primarily an institution. She is community. **Mary is its symbol.**

Mary stands for the entire community of believers. Hers is the strong silent faith of one whose trust is the Lord. It is the faith of a woman with no trace of a guarantee in her hands, often puzzled and suffering, pondering, growing, never shaken. It seems very much the symbol of the Church today.

Today the image of the Church is undergoing a crisis: The Church, in so far as she is a worldwide organization of dogmatic orthodoxy and rigid liturgical rituals, has become cold and empty; she has lost credibility; people today do not feel at home in it.

A new vision is emerging, the stirrings of a deep desire are beginning to rouse the Church from her lethargy. Many keenly feel the need for community rather than institution, faith and contemplation rather than orthodoxy.

A new image of the Church has been born, based on the Bible in communion with all people who are in search of truth, a Church which is truly human without any discrimination based on gender, as God wanted it, in togetherness and complementarity, serving God's kingdom. The symbol of this Church is Mary.