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THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY AND MISSION

SOME EXEGETICAL ASPECTS

Our **Spiritans Rule of Life** (art. 1-2) describes our vocation as follows:

“we Spiritans are called by the Father. . .
to follow Jesus
and to announce the Good News of the Kingdom”.
“We respond to this call
in a religious missionary institute, the Congregation of
the Holy Spirit
under the protection
of the Immaculate Heart of Mary”.

So our life revolves around three poles: the Holy Spirit, the Immaculate Heart of Mary and mission.

In the Book of Wisdom, the godless say to themselves “By chance we came to birth.” (2 : 2). We might wonder if people don’t think of us Spiritans as “children of chance”, born as we are of the union of two religious families: that of Claude Poullart des Places and that of Francis Libermann. Certainly we, looking upon ourselves with the eyes of love, see a remarkable connivance of the Holy Spirit, the Heart of Mary and mission. If we look with the eyes of intelligence, however, can we affirm that there is an existential relation at work in this triad of the Holy Spirit, the Heart of Mary and mission? In other words, the “fusion” of the religious family of Claude Poullart des Places with the religious family of Francis Libermann – surely not the fruit of chance but of Providence – can it find a basis in Scripture? From the scriptural point of view, is there a link between the Holy Spirit, Mary and the apostolate? Or again: Can I find my Spiritan vocation reflected in the mirror of Holy Scripture?

It is a fundamental question, since it touches the very heart of my vocation. With no pretense of giving a biblical

theology of the Holy Spirit, of the Heart of Mary, or of mission, allow me to offer some food for thought. Let us first look at the link between the Holy Spirit and Mary by analyzing the relationship between the Annunciation and Pentecost (Part I), and then consider the relationship between Mary and mission (Part II).

PART I

THE ANNUNCIATION AND PENTECOST

One might say that Saint Luke wrote a history of the origins of Christianity in two volumes. The first (the Gospel) concerns the history of Jesus and the second volume (the Acts of the Apostles) concerns the history of the Church.

As a preface to these two books, as a prelude to the joyful symphony of the mission of Jesus and of the Church, Luke assures us of the presence of the Holy Spirit and of Mary both at the Annunciation and at Pentecost¹. Through the Holy Spirit dwelling within her, Mary is "the Woman" present at both these beginnings. She is at the origin of Jesus' body when the Word becomes incarnate in our humanity on the day of the Annunciation. She is also at the origin of the Church, the Mystical Body of Jesus, when it becomes incarnate among men and women on the day of Pentecost. In the decree *Ad Gentes*, no. 4, the Second Vatican Council is happy to state:

"The "acts of the apostles" began with Pentecost, just as it was when the Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary that Christ was conceived. . . ."²

¹ On the Holy Spirit, we recommend the excellent work of our confrere F. GILS, *Désaltérés par l'unique Esprit*, Ed. Saint-Paul, Paris-Fribourg, 1982. It contains all the biblical references. We recommend also the article by J. LECUYER, "Docilité au Saint Esprit", in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, T. III, Col. 1471-1497. It is a mine of information.

On the relation between Mary and the Holy Spirit, the best studies have appeared in the *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Etudes Mariales*, *Le Saint Esprit et Marie*, T. I (1968), T. II (1969) and T. III (1970), Ed. Lethielleux, Paris.

² This relationship Annunciation - Pentecost is found mentioned in *Lumen Gentium*, 59.

and John Paul II, in his encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 26, states: "The moment of Pentecost in Jerusalem was prepared for. . . by the moment of the Annunciation".

According to the Church's Magisterium, therefore, there is a relation between the Annunciation and Pentecost.

THE ANNUNCIATION

Mary, Daughter of Sion

At the root of the message of the Annunciation there is the prophecy of Zephaniah to the Daughter of Sion³. Here are the parallel passages:

Zephaniah 3 : 14-18

" Shout for joy,
daughter of Sion. . .
Yahweh, the king of Israel,
is in your midst. . .
Sion, have no fear. . .
Yahweh your God
is in your midst,
a victorious warrior".

Luke 1 : 28-33

" Rejoice,
so highly favored!
The Lord
is with you.
Mary, do not be afraid.
You are to conceive
and bear a son. . .
He will rule. . .
Jesus (= Saviour).

Clement of Alexandria spoke of the ecclesial symphony played by the two choirs of the Old and New Testaments. Here this symphony reaches one of its climaxes.

In Old Testament symbolism the Daughter of Sion represents the Covenant community, betrothed to Yahweh. In the New Testament the mystery of the Daughter of Sion continues in the Church, the chaste virgin betrothed to Christ (II Cor. : 11, 12). What was said, in a general way, to the Daughter of Sion is now said, in a personal way, to Mary. At that instant

³ The best contemporary study on Mary is R. LAURENTIN's *Les Evangiles de l'Enfance du Christ*, Desclée et Desclée de Brouwer. On *Mary, Daughter of Sion*, cf. my work published by Desclée de Brouwer. For English-speaking readers, *Mary, Daughter of Sion*. The Liturgical Press.

of the Annunciation she is the purest and most intense realization of the mystery of the Church.

It also follows that what was once said to the Daughter of Sion, according to Zephaniah, and then was said to Mary, according to Luke, is said today in a certain manner to the whole Church, heir to the promises given to the Daughter of Sion and fulfilled in Mary. Mary is the Daughter of Sion par excellence, *praecelsa Filia Sion*, as the Second Vatican Council states⁴, but every member of the faithful participates in the mystery of the Daughter of Sion, according to his or her vocation. In a certain sense, the whole Church is a marial community.

This has an extremely important consequence for every one of us: when we read the story of the Annunciation we are reading the story of our own vocation. Every morning which wakens us is one of God's words: "Rejoice! May your life be filled with the joy and grace which I give you in my Son Jesus!" Every event, every joy, every suffering is a message: "Don't be afraid! I am with you as I was with Mary. I am with you all days, even unto the end of the world!" (Luke 28 : 20). Each day is an "annunciation", an invitation to welcome Christ within us as Mary did.

The Holy Spirit and the Power of the Most High

When Mary asked how the conception would come about, Gabriel answered:

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you
and the power of the Most High will cover you with its
shadow".

Luke likes to associate the words spirit and power. He says, for instance, that John the Baptist will go before Jesus with *the spirit and power* of the prophet Elijah (Luke 1 : 17). He also says that Jesus had been anointed with *the Holy Spirit* and with *power* (Acts 10 : 38). In the Annunciation text the words spirit and power mean, first of all, the breath and the force of God coming to act in Mary. After the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Christian

⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

community was able to recognize in the Annunciation story the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Mary.

It was said that the power of the Most High would cover Mary with its shadow. Here Luke is recalling the coming of the glory of the Lord upon the Ark of the Covenant:

Exodus 40 : 35

Luke 1 : 35

*" The cloud
covered the Tent of Meeting*

(epeskiazzen)
*The glory of the Lord
filled the tabernacle".*

*" The power of the Most
High
will cover you with its shadow.*

(episkiasei)
*The child will be holy and
will
be called Son of God".*

Here Mary appears as the Ark of the Covenant of the New Testament. Just as the Ark was filled with God's glory, Mary is filled with the power of the Most High and gives birth to the Holy One, the Son of God.

According to Scripture, therefore, the mystery of the Annunciation has an ecclesial dimension. On the one hand, of course, it remains personal to Mary: what could be more personal for the young Galilean girl from Nazareth than to become the mother of a little child? On the other hand, however, it places Mary at the heart of the Church, there where God has united Himself with humanity and involved Himself with our flesh and our blood. The child who was given to her is at the same time our Lord and our Brother.

The Annunciation Today

We are the messianic community upon which the Holy Spirit rests today so that the Christ Jesus may be born again within it. Just as Mary, the Daughter of Sion, welcomed the Word of God into the cradle of her obedience, had the Holy Spirit dwelling within her, clothed the Christ with the clothing of His humanity and presented Him to the world, - just so must every one of the faithful welcome the Word of God, let himself be invaded by the Spirit, clothe the Christ Jesus with the clothing of his word and the example of his life, and present Him to his brethren. This is the vocation of every one of

the faithful. All the more is this the vocation of every Spiritan consecrated to the Holy Spirit and to Mary.

PENTECOST

"We have a special celebration on the feast of Pentecost," is the recommendation of the *Spiritan Rule of Life* (art. 99.1). The Feast of the Holy Spirit is our "patronal feast". Is it also a feast of the Virgin? What is Mary's part in this feast? To put it more precisely, what is the relation between Pentecost and the Annunciation, between the day the Church was founded in Jerusalem and the day Jesus became incarnate at Nazareth?

"With several women and Mary, the Mother of Jesus"

After the Ascension the primitive community gathered together in the "upper room". Luke narrates (and I translate literally):

"All these (i.e. the eleven whom Luke has just named) joined in continuous prayer, together with several women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers." (Acts 1 : 14).

By singling out Mary from the other women, Luke discreetly draws our attention to her presence there. This discretion was appropriate, given the male-dominated Jewish society of the first century. We cannot imagine a woman – especially the humble Virgin Mary – ostentatiously imposing her presence in the midst of the men, the "Eleven".

The Holy Spirit and the Power of the Most High

However, to underscore the importance of Mary's presence at the first Pentecost, Luke has other devices, more refined and, in his opinion, wonderfully more effective. The Angel had said to Mary that the *Holy Spirit* would come upon her and that the *Power* of the Most High would overshadow her. We recall that Luke liked to associate the concepts of spirit and of power. Now it is precisely this mystery of the Holy Spirit and the Power of God that is renewed at Pentecost. When Jesus wanted to announce to His followers the grace of Pentecost, He said to them:

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." (Acts 1 : 8).

The Holy Spirit who came upon the primitive community is the same Holy Spirit who came upon Mary at the Annunciation. The Power about which Jesus said that it is a "*Power from on High*" (ex hypsous dynamis, Luke 24 : 29) is the same "*Power of the Most High*" (dynamis hypsistou, Luke 1:35) which rested upon Mary.

Thus it was that at the Annunciation Mary, the Daughter of Sion, received the Spirit and the Power of the Most High and had the body of Jesus take form within her. In the same way at Pentecost the primitive community, gathered together with Mary, received the Holy Spirit, the Power from on High and that community was transfigured into the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.

The new creation with the Spirit dwelling in it

The verb *eparchesthai*, *come upon*, holds another pleasant surprise for us. It forms a part of Luke's vocabulary. He uses it seven times (three times in the Gospel and four times in Acts), whereas it is used only twice in the rest of the New Testament⁵. Now Luke is quite aware of his vocabulary and uses it very judiciously. When he speaks of the Holy Spirit *coming upon* Mary, he recalls a prophecy in the Book of Isaiah announcing the messianic era.

*"Once more there will be poured on you (LXX)
the spirit from above:
then shall the wilderness be fertile land
and fertile land become forest.
In the wilderness justice will come to live
and integrity in the fertile land;
integrity will bring peace,
justice give lasting security."*

A day is coming, therefore, when the *Spirit* who is *from on High* will *come upon* the Covenant community. It will fill it with right, with justice and with peace. Then the earth, which

⁵ In Ephesians 2 : 7 and James 5 : 1, texts which have no importance for our purpose here.

became a desert after the Fall, will blossom again like the garden in the first Paradise.

Jesus fulfils the promise when He brings to the Christian community the peace of His resurrection and confers upon it the Holy Spirit, the *Promise of the Father* and the *Power from on High* (Luke 24 : 49).

*" Jesus said to His disciples: Peace be with you! . . .
And saying this, He breathed on them
and said: Receive the Holy Spirit.
For those whose sins you forgive,
they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain,
they are retained." (John 20 : 21-23).*

The verb John uses: *He breathed on them, enephyseisen*, is a "hapax" in the New Testament (i. e. it only used once). It is rare in the Old Testament and has direct reference to the creation of Adam according to the Yahwist section of Genesis:

*" Yahweh God fashioned man of dust from the soil.
Then He breathed (enephyseisen) into his nostrils a
breath of life,
and thus man became a living being" (Genesis 2 : 7)*

Mary is at the head of that community sanctified by the Spirit. The Second Vatican Council, summarizing tradition, affirms that she was "as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit (quasi a Spiritu Sancto plasmata) and formed as a new creature"⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons liked to explain that Mary was the holy and virginal soil from which Christ, the new Adam, was formed⁷.

MARY AND THE TWELVE

The Pentecost story is the only passage in which Mary appears in the company of the Twelve. It is also the last time that Mary is referred to by name in the New Testament.

⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 56.

⁷ *Adv. Haer.*, III, 18,7; 21,10; V, 21,1.

She will, however, be mentioned once more in a mysterious way in the vision of the heavenly Woman clad with the sun, standing upon the moon and crowned with twelve stars, according to Apocalypse 12. That Woman gives birth to a royal Child who "will rule the nations with a rod of iron". We have here a quotation from Psalm 9:2. This psalm belongs to the "Testimonia"; that is, the group of biblical quotations which served as a base from which the primitive community announced the mystery of Jesus. That royal Child is, on the one hand, Christ Himself (according to Apocalypse 19 : 15); on the other hand (according to Apocalypse 2 : 26-27) He is the faithful one who conquers with Christ and receives from Jesus the Morning Star. The Woman represents, on the one hand, the entire People of God, the descendance of Eve, against whom "the Devil, Satan, the Deceiver of the whole world" went out to do battle (Apocalypse 12 : 9,17); on the other hand the Woman represents the Virgin Mary, she who alone is the mother of the royal Child according to the flesh. The twelve stars, finally, are the twelve tribes of Israel, and these twelve in turn represent the twelve Apostles (Apocalypse 21 : 12,14).

Present at the first Pentecost, clothed with the Power from heaven, Mary, at the heart of the Church, is present at all the battles. She truly is the "Woman blessed among all women".

At first sight it might seem that this image is full of feminine tenderness and evokes the picture of a beautiful Madonna with a blue robe sewn with stars. In reality, she brings to mind the combat which, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, has raged between the People of God and the forces of evil. Blessed among women is Jael, the ferocious antagonist of Sisera who, during the time of the Canaanite oppression, gave a victory to the People of God. "So perish all your enemies, Jahweh! And let those who love you be like the sun. . ." was the song that arose from the tents of Israel (Judges 5 : 24,31). Blessed among women is Judith, the intrepid victor over Holofernes (Judith 13 : 18), Judith whose name means "The Jewess" and whose victory was also the victory of the whole people. Blessed among women, finally, is the Virgin Mary whose cousin Elisabeth, inspired by the Spirit, called "the Mother of my Lord" (Luke 2 : 42,44), as if the Christ Jesus had already triumphed.

So it is quite normal that the twelve Apostles, who fought

with her in the name of the entire People of God and who share in her triumph, should make a crown of glory for her out of twelve stars.

The "familiarity" which the Holy Spirit entered into with the Virgin Mary at the Annunciation continues naturally until Pentecost. It is a familiarity which extends from the Daughter of Sion to the whole Church. It is carried forward into all the combats for the Kingdom.

The least one can say is that the Spiritan home in which we live, a house consecrated to the Holy Spirit and to Mary, has a solid foundation set upon the rock of the Word. As far as exegesis is concerned, we can live at peace.

PART II

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MARY IN OUR APOSTOLIC LIFE

This second part concentrates upon mission and the apostolate. It has two sections: 1. The Holy Spirit 2. Mary.

There is a snag we must be aware of. Protestants sometimes accuse us of placing Mary on the same level as the Holy Spirit. They say that we attribute to Mary what belongs to the Holy Spirit. We go so far as to have her occupy the place of the Paraclete. We give her the titles and roles of Consoler, Advocate, Defender of the faithful before Christ the formidable Judge. Hers is a motherhood such that, thanks to her, we are not orphans. She reveals Jesus to us and Jesus reveals the Father. She forms Jesus within us – a role belonging to the Holy Spirit⁸. In the same line, one might imagine that Mary has the same right as the Holy Spirit to be called the soul of our apostolate.

Father Congar speaks words of wisdom on this subject: "We must take into account the criticism lodged against us and recognize its possible justification. However, we must also be aware of the profundity of the bond which exists between the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit and that, conse-

⁸ Y. CONGAR, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, Ed. du Cerf, T. I (1979), p. 224.

quently, they have a certain common role to be exercised in entirely different conditions"⁹. As Spiritans, we lovingly venerate the "common role" of Mary and the Holy Spirit, while respecting with the same love the "entirely different conditions".

A. THE HOLY SPIRIT, SOUL OF THE APOSTOLIC LIFE

What we mean is this: the Holy Spirit is the origin and the life of our apostolic vocation. He is also the strength which supports it day after day. It is He Who brings it to its conclusion: to bring human beings to Christ Jesus, and, through Jesus, to the Father.

All this is so evident that there is no need to prove it. It suffices to quote. . . the entire New Testament. We shall limit ourselves to a few essential texts on the Holy Spirit in the apostolic life of Jesus and on the apostolic life of the primitive community. The conclusion will be clear for everybody: such was the mission of Jesus, such was the mission of the first apostles, such must be our mission.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE APOSTOLIC LIFE OF JESUS

The apostolic life of Jesus was lived entirely under the motive force of the Spirit. Summarizing Jesus' ministry, Peter tells us:

"God had anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power. . . Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil. . . because God was with Him." (Acts 10 : 38)

As Jesus stated in His homily in the synagogue at Nazareth, it was also the Holy Spirit Who sent Him to proclaim the Good News to the poor (Luke 4 : 18-19 = Isaiah 61 : 1-2). The Holy Spirit was the soul of His prayer (it is principally Luke

⁹ *Ibid.*

who insists upon the presence of the Spirit in Jesus' dialogue with His Father). When He was praying after His baptism, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Then Jesus received His mission as Servant of Jahweh according to the Book of Isaiah: "Here is my servant (= son), my chosen one, in him I am well pleased. I give him my Spirit" (Isaiah 42 : 1, acc. to LXX).

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE APOSTOLIC LIFE OF THE PRIMITIVE COMMUNITY

This active presence of the Holy Spirit continues in the life of the primitive community. The Acts of the Apostles are the "Acts of the Holy Spirit".

After the apostles had been fortified by the Holy Spirit, the Power from on High, they became witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus before "all nations" (Luke 24 : 47-48).

It was the Holy Spirit who chose Barnabas and Paul for the first departure on mission from the Antioch community (Acts 13 : 2). Luke writes as assuredly as if it were a commonplace matter: They were sent on mission by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13 : 4).

When the Apostles transmitted to Antioch the decisions of The Council of Jerusalem concerning the admission of pagans into the Church without imposing upon them the yoke of the Mosaic Law, they used the astounding expression: "It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves. . ." (Acts 15 : 28). It was as if there could be some sort of equality between the Holy Spirit and them! It does state powerfully that every decision concerning the mission must be the fruit of a dialogue with the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes the Spirit guides the route of His missionaries with such precision that He clearly points out to them where they are to go and that He blocks the way where they are not to go. Luke must have had a smile on his face when he wrote:

"They (Paul and Timothy) travelled through Phrygia and the Galatian country, having been told by the Holy Spirit not to preach the word in Asia.

When they reached the frontier of Mysia they thought to cross it into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them. " (Acts 16 : 6-7)

It is clear: the apostle does not go where he wants to go, – he goes where the Spirit wants him to go.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR APOSTOLIC LIFE

I imagine that these texts are known well enough by all Spiritans that there is no need to insist upon them. The Spiritan-missionary imitates Jesus-missionary, imitates the Apostles-missionaries. He continues the mission of Jesus and of His Apostles. The Holy Spirit is the soul of his apostolate.

It is necessary, therefore, that the Spirit come upon him as He came upon Jesus, that it be the Spirit Who sends him on mission just as He sent the first missionaries. It is necessary that he spend his life doing good as Jesus did, that he fight against the power of the devil, beginning by fighting against the evil which is in his own heart. Every mission begins with the conversion of the missionary. It is necessary that God be always with him – i. e. that the missionary be always with God in the nearness of prayer. Finally, it is necessary that each one of his decisions be the fruit of a dialogue with the Holy Spirit (“It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves. . .”). To put it briefly, he must be constantly taken over by the Holy Spirit. Paul gives us the following principle: “Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God.” (Romans 8 : 14). We might translate it to read: Those who are moved by the Spirit are missionaries.

B. “THE MOST APOSTOLIC HEART OF MARY”

Can we speak, as Libermann does, of the “Most Apostolic Heart of Mary”? (Glose 18). More simply: in what sense is Mary an apostle?

Our *Spiritan Rule of Life* (art. 89) tells us:

“In every facet of our lives, but particularly in our prayer, Mary is our model of willing obedience and of faithfulness. We offer her veneration and prayer so that we may, as she did, welcome within us the Holy Spirit who dwelt in her Immaculate Heart, and that he

may be for us also the abundant source of our apostolic spirit."

The encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 26, notes that "Mary did not directly receive this apostolic mission (which the Apostles received). She was not among those whom Jesus sent out to make disciples of all the nations at the time when He sent them out." The encyclical is taking up a strictly juridical position here: Mary, being a woman, was not appointed an apostle, no more than she was ordained a priest. However, this says nothing at all about Mary's real place in mission.

The Second Vatican Council calls Mary the "Queen of the Apostles"¹⁰ and, during the Council, Paul VI proclaimed her the "Mother of the Church"¹¹. Commenting on the title "Queen of the Apostles", the Council states: " (Mary is the perfect model of this apostolic spiritual life. . .

She remained intimately united to her Son and cooperated in an entirely unique way in the Saviour's work¹²".

All this is very good and poses no problems. But now, placing myself on the strict level of exegesis, I would like to show the relationship which exists between the "religion" of Mary and that of Jesus, between what Mary, as mother, taught the Child Jesus and what Jesus, as Messiah, taught later during His messianic ministry. Libermann is happy to write "When you want to find the heart of Jesus, you must begin the search with Mary"¹³. We can understand that it was the apostolic heart of Mary that formed the apostolic heart of Jesus. It is her heart which, at least in part, gives us an understanding of her Son. True enough – Mary was not an apostle "directly". She is more than that: she is the mother of Christ the Apostle. She formed the apostolic heart of Him Whom Scripture proudly calls "the one mediator. . . , himself a man, Christ Jesus". (I Tim. 2 : 5)

¹⁰ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

¹¹ Title taken up again in *Redemptoris Mater*, 46.

¹² *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

¹³ Quoted in A. GILBERT's *Le feu sur la terre*, Fayard, 1985, p. 41.

THE LAW OF GROWTH

Luke makes bold to write, as if it were so evident as to raise no problem:

*"Jesus increased in wisdom,
in stature and in favor
with God and men."* (Luke 2 : 52)

And here we find ourselves plunged into a mystery.

It is easy enough to understand that Jesus grew in stature, that the new-born baby of Bethlehem became a child, an adolescent and then a man. The old Latins used to say: *Filii matrisant*, boys resemble their mothers. As He grew up, Jesus resembled His mother more and more.

We understand also that He grew in wisdom in the eyes of men. He learned to pronounce his first words: Abba, Papa, ; Imma, Mamma. He learned to speak with that Galilean accent which would be so easily recognized in Jerusalem and with the the voice-intonations of Joseph and Mary.

Jesus also learned to read at a very early age. The rule was: at the age of five, they were to begin to study Sacred Scripture; at the age of ten, they studied the Mishna (the oral tradition)¹⁴. We can trust Joseph and Mary: the education of their son would be worthy of their piety.

However, what is most marvellous in Jesus' formation is that He increased in favor with God. The intimacy of family life with Joseph and Mary was the place where Jesus learned that there was a God of love who ruled over the world, and that that God was His Father – the "Abba!" – of tenderness and mercy, and that the first duty of every child of the Covenant was to love Him with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his spirit and with all his might. Here, once again, we find the staggering law of the Incarnation: Joseph and Mary taught Him how to love God, Him who was the image of the Love of God upon the earth!

Certainly the mystery of Jesus remains impenetrable. It is the mystery of the heart formed not only in the school of

¹⁴ STRACK-BILLERBECK, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, T. II, p. 146.

Joseph and Mary, but also in His personal prayer in a very special way. We know that Jesus liked to pray alone up on the mountain until late at night or again in the early morning¹⁵. Nobody can say what this intimate dialogue with His Father was like. We can, however, trace something of the influence of His family upon the "religion of Jesus". And there we are in a world of marvels.

From among these marvels, let us consider three.

A SOUL OF PRAISE AND BLESSING

The Heart of Mary is best revealed in the Magnificat. Of course, we don't have to think that the text Luke gives us is a word-by-word reproduction of the song which Mary sang when she visited Elizabeth. One can also justifiably suppose that other factors, probably based upon tradition, had an influence upon its final form. Nevertheless, all this does not alter the fact that the text Luke has transmitted to us must correspond to the image of Mary which was held by the primitive community in which the Mother of Jesus was known.

The very first words of Mary's song are words of praise of God. Literally, we read:

*"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exults in God my Saviour." (Luke 1 : 46-47)*

Mary's soul is a soul of praise and of joy: she exults with joy in God her Saviour, – that is, in Jesus Whom she is carrying in her womb.

Similarly, the soul of Jesus is a soul of praise. To Mary's Magnificat there corresponds Jesus' hymn of jubilation. Just as Mary trembles with joy (egalliasen) in God her Saviour, so too Jesus trembles with joy (egalliasato), with joy in the Holy Spirit and says:

*"I bless you, Father,
Lord of heaven and earth,
for hiding these things from the learned and the clever
and revealing them to mere children!*

¹⁵ Mark 1 : 35 ; 6 : 46 ; 14 : 32-39.

Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do.
(Luke 10 : 21)

Here we have the essence of the religion of Jesus. That religion is, first of all, praise and blessing of God. That praise which is revealed to us in His prayer during His public life is a direct echo of the prayer of the hidden life at Nazareth. As a matter of fact, the beginning of His hymn of jubilation repeats the beginning of the Jewish prayer of the Eighteen Blessings, a prayer which the Holy Family recited three times a day:

*"Blessed are You, Yahweh,
God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
Lord of the heavens and the earth,
our shield and the shield of our fathers.
Blessed are you, shield of Abraham."*¹⁶

Thus the home in Nazareth was the school where Jesus learned how to praise God.

It was also His school of obedience to the Father's will. That "Yes, Father" pronounced here in the jubilation of the Holy Spirit is a forerunner of the humble prayer in Gethsemani in which Jesus Makes supplication:

*"Abba, Father!
Everything is possible for You. . .
But let it be as You
not I, would have it."* (Mark 14 : 36)

This submission to the Father's will had already been taught to the disciples by Jesus in the "Our Father"

*"Your will be done on earth
as it is in heaven!"* (Matthew 6 : 10)

The "Everything is possible for You" from the prayer in Gethsemani recalls the "Nothing is impossible to God" from the Annunciation at Nazareth. Jesus' God, like Mary's God, is the Master of the impossible, He is the One Who is blessed when the words are uttered:

¹⁶ J. JEREMIAS, *Théologie du Nouveau Testament*, Coll. "Lectio Divina", 76 (1973), p. 82. The text of the Eighteen Blessings can be found in L. DEISS: *Printemps de la Liturgie*, Ed. du Levain, Paris, 1979, pp. 18-23.

*"Behold the handmaid (literally, slave) of the Lord.
Be it done to me according to your word!"* (Luke
1 : 38)

Would that every Spiritan community could be that mes-
sianic people of which it is said:

*"The people I have formed for myself
will sing my praises"!* (Isaiah 43 : 21)

Would that every Spiritan could be for his followers like
the leader of a choir in which each singer, both in joy and in
suffering, would say with Christ: "Blessed are You, Father,
Lord of the heavens and the earth!", or with Mary: "Be it
done to me according to your word!" Would that the whole
Church could be that marial community whose first words of
praise would be: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the
Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour". Our destiny is
to be in the presence of the Father in the eternity of love, living
"praises of His glory". (Ephesians 1:6) Our life on earth is an
apprenticeship for the life in heaven. Would that the Church
on earth could echo the praise of the Church in heaven!

THE GOD OF LOVE AND MERCY

To bless the Omnipotent One Who has done wonders for
her, Mary speaks of His mercy:

*"His mercy is from age to age (eleos)
on those who fear Him.
He protects Israel, His servant,
remembering His mercy" (eleos)* (Luke 1 : 50, 54).

The word mercy (eleos) is the only word repeated twice in
the Magnificat (if we except the common expression "from
age to age").

The story of Mary is the story of divine mercy which
flooded her soul, it is the story of her love for Jesus the mys-
terious fruit growing in her womb, it is the story of her nuptial
love for Joseph whom God had given her as spouse. Mercy
was the spring from which her life came forth and which
slaked the thirst of her love for God.

That mercy was often the topic of conversation in the car-
penter's house.

Every day their morning prayer, Birkat Yotser, began with the blessing: "Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, . . . You who, by Your mercy, give light to the earth and those who live on it.¹⁷ That mercy had placed its mark upon the soul of Mary. It also marked the soul of Jesus. The apostolic heart of Mary transmitted it to the apostolic heart of Jesus. He will announce it as the supreme rule for imitating the Father:

*"Be merciful
as your Father is merciful."* (Luke 6 : 36)

He will also give it as a rule of life for the Christian community: we have to be merciful to our brothers and sisters, our companions in service, just as God Himself is merciful towards us¹⁸.

The very ministry of Jesus appears as the face of God's mercy upon earth. The Scribes and Pharisees, those official interpreters of God's Law, thought that Jesus' kindness went beyond the limits they in their wisdom had fixed for God's mercy. In their judgment, His ministry to sinners was not only open to criticism, but sometimes even scandalous. He went so far as to lead the good life with publicans like Zacchaeus of Jericho who had climbed a sycamore tree to see Him – how ridiculous! – and had invited Him into his house, to sit at table with a whole gang of sinners. Jesus had even recruited a publican, a certain Matthew, to be one of His closest companions, and had dared to say on the subject:

*"What I want is mercy
not sacrifice.
I did not come to call the virtuous,
but sinners."* (Matthew 9 : 13)

Any honorable rabbi who cared at all about his reputation would not even talk with his wife in public, but Jesus – Great God, what have we come to? – carried on a familiar conversation with a Samaritan woman who had been divorced five

¹⁷ Text in *Printemps de la Liturgie, op. cit.*, pp. 25-26. We have repeated here some elements which appeared in *Célébrer la Parole*, T. IV, Ed. du Levain 1987, p. 75-80. For English-speaking readers: *God's Word is Our Joy*, Advent, Christmas, Cycle B, Ed. N.A.L.R., Phoenix, U.S.A.

¹⁸ Matthew 18 : 32.

times and was then living in concubinage. When another woman was caught in the act of adultery, He declared that He would not condemn her; instead of inflicting upon her a medicinal and salutary penance, he opened the way of freedom for her and did not even require that she say a word of regret. Still another woman, who was known in the town as a common sinner, He allowed to weep over His feet, to kiss them and to dry them with her hair. As to the prodigal son who had wasted his inheritance upon prostitutes, He said that it was not enough just to await his return: He showed the father running to meet him and embracing him.

On Sinai, God had revealed Himself as the "God of tenderness and compassion" (Ex. 34 : 6). Never did that tenderness and compassion seem so close to the poor and the sinners as it did when Jesus was present. In Him mercy had come "to seek out and save what was lost". (Luke 19 : 10).

As missionaries, we are messengers of God's love on the earth. It is by what we teach, and principally by how we live that we continue Jesus' ministry of mercy. In the same way the apostolic heart of Mary, who formed the heart of Jesus, continues to sing of the Father's mercy for every human being.

And every Spiritan community can be a community of love and mercy! Would that every Spiritan might be the messenger of Mary and of Jesus to announce at each instant: Our God is a God of love and tenderness!

THE GOD OF THE POOR

The Magnificat is also the song of the poor of Yahweh. Mary's God is the Lord Who looks upon the humility of His maid-servant and scatters the proud-hearted. He lifts up the humble and puts down the mighty from their thrones. He has filled the hungry with good things and has sent the rich away empty-handed. At Nazareth they knew that God loved the poor. They had experience of a certain material scarcity, since the Holy Family was on the level of the poor¹⁹.

¹⁹ Cf. Luke 2 : 23-24 and Leviticus 2 : 8.

This cult of poverty left its mark upon the consciousness of Jesus. Mary's song of poverty became the spiritual milieu in which the grand themes of the Gospel symphony were developed. The first homily given by Jesus at Nazareth, according to the tradition of Luke, began with the affirmation that He had come to bring the Good News to the poor, to the captives, to the blind, to the oppressed. According to Matthew, His first major discourse began with the proclamation of the beatitude of the poor²⁰.

At Nazareth it was said:

*"God sends the rich away
empty-handed."* (Luke 1 : 53)

Jesus remembered His mother's song of poverty when He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*"Blessed are the poor,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation."* (Luke
6 : 20,25)

It is true that Matthew, with his concern as teacher, clarifies that it is (also) a question of poverty "in spirit", a spiritual disposition, for material poverty is only blessed if it opens the heart to God. But the Virgin of Nazareth and the Christ of the beatitudes speak of a universal poverty which naturally includes material poverty such as they had experienced it in daily life at Nazareth.

Mary also said:

*"He has filled the hungry (peinontas)
with good things."* (Luke 1 : 3)

Jesus remembered what His mother said about the poor when He said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*"Blessed are you who are hungry now (peinontes) for
you shall be filled.
Woe to you who have your fill now, you shall go hun-
gry."* (Luke 6 : 21,25)

²⁰ Matthew 5 : 3.

It is true that Matthew, with his concern as teacher, clarifies that it is (also) a question of hunger for justice. The Virgin of the Magnificat and the Christ of the beatitudes were thinking of true bodily hunger, of the type we ask God to relieve us of when we pray: "Give us this day our daily bread."

It has been said that the text of Deutero-Isaiah was the "favorite book of Jesus and His disciples"²¹. It was also the favorite book of Jesus' mother. We can suppose that it was Mary, along with Joseph, who, during the long years at Nazareth, gave her Son this love of preference for the message of Deutero-Isaiah. There is a text in the Book of Isaiah which is directly related to the Magnificat. It is a sublime text in which God speaks about the reconstruction of the Temple:

*"With heaven my throne
and earth my footstool,
what house can you build me,
what place could you make for my rest? . . .
But my eyes are drawn (epiblepso) to the man
of humbled (tapeinon) and contrite spirit,
who trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66 : 1-2)*

At the moment of the Annunciation, Mary appeared as the new Temple where the glory of God would reside. The marvel of that Temple was Mary's humility. She it was that had drawn God to look upon the new Temple:

*"He has looked upon (epeblepsen)
his lowly (tapeinosin) handmaid." (Luke 1 : 48)*

Pride, on the other hand, found no favor in the household of Nazareth. It was said:

"(The Lord) has scattered the proud." (Luke 1 : 51)
(literally: "those who exalt themselves in the thoughts of their hearts")

It is within the heart that is found the altar where the liturgy of the humble is celebrated. If the heart is eaten up by pride, God deserts the altar and scatters the stones. If the heart is humble, God takes up His abode there.

²¹ P. E. Bonnard, *Le Second Isaie*, Coll. "Etudes Bibliques", p. 81.

Jesus remembered the gentle and humble heart of His mother. He imitated it. He said to His disciples:

*"Learn of me
for I am gentle and humble (tapeinos) of heart."* (Matthew 11 : 29)

Would that every Spiritan community might imitate the Holy Family in becoming a school of gentleness and humility! Would that every Spiritan might have a gentle and humble heart like the heart of Jesus, formed by the gentle and humble heart of Mary! Would that the whole Church might be gentle enough and humble enough to draw down upon itself and upon the world that look of love of which the Book of Isaiah speaks!

Just as in the days of Jesus, mission is a matter of humility, gentleness and kindness. Only in gentleness and humility can a missionary hope to build the Kingdom of God upon the earth.

MARY AND JOSEPH

We have spoken at length about Mary and her influence upon Jesus. Little has been said about Joseph. This is not surprising, since, in the Gospel, Joseph says nothing. We cannot quote even one word of his. But Joseph is much better than words: He is, for Mary, silent Love. For God, he is obedient Love.

But, how can we speak about the Immaculate Heart of Mary without mentioning Joseph whose presence filled that Immaculate Heart?

Jewish tradition maintained that God chooses each man's wife for him²². So it was also God Who chose Joseph as the spouse for Mary and her love for Joseph enriched her womanly heart with infinite tenderness.

It can be said of two people who love one another in tenderness and in truth that they receive their hearts from one another. Each one can say to the beloved: you have given me my heart. The heart of Joseph must have been very

²² E. FLEG, *Anthologie juive*, Ed. Flammarion-Sulliver, p. 164.

beautiful indeed for it to be able to cause such spendors to blossom in the heart of Mary. Without Joseph, without the long intimacy of the silent years at Nazareth, Mary would not have been later on, at the foot of the cross, such a loving presence to the agony of Jesus. Without Joseph she would not have been that praying presence at the heart of the Church on the eve of Pentecost. Without Joseph, Jesus Himself would not have been such a well-balanced man on both the human and the religious level. For all that Jesus received from Mary, Mary had received, at least in part, from Joseph and shared with Him.

CONCLUSION

Mary and Sacred Scripture

Some Christians – I have some of our Protestant brethren – principally in mind – keep their eyes fixed upon Scripture but sometimes ignore the mystery of Mary. Without any bad will, they practice what is sometimes called the “concealment of Mary”.

On the other hand, some Christians live with their eyes glued upon Mary and, without any bad will, practice the “concealment of Scripture”.

A healthy faith contemplates Mary, the Daughter of Sion – *praeclsa Filia Sion*, according to the Second Vatican Council – in the light of the Word of God. It is true that the quoted texts don’t “prove” anything; but they clarify everything. Speaking about the prophecies, Pascal said: “In those promises each person finds what he has in the bottom of his heart”²³. Similarly we might say that in these texts every Spiritan finds what he has in the depths of his heart.

Mary and the Holy Spirit

All the marvels we find in the Immaculate Heart of Mary come from the Holy Spirit. It is He, the Holy Spirit, Who has

²³ J. STEINMANN, *Pensées de M. Pascal*, 1961, p. 332.

formed that “eminently apostolic” heart. It is He Who gave her the grace to form the heart of Jesus her Child according to God’s Will.

It is also He Who is at the origin of all the good that can exist within our hearts for the service of the mission.

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