

Mary and the Mission of the Holy Spirit

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In order to examine Mary's place in the mission of the Holy Spirit, we should first look at Mary's relationship to the Holy Spirit. It is essential that this be understood if evangelization and the conversion of the world are to become realities for us, for these require extraordinary powers: the working of the Holy Spirit and Our Lady. I will draw especially from two 20th century writers, St. Maximilian Kolbe and Frank Duff.

A look at the apostles before and after Pentecost reveals ordinary weak fishermen transformed during nine days of prayer with Our Lady in the Cenacle into dynamic disciples -- for the Holy Spirit came down upon them and they went out to preach; 3,000, we recall, were converted that very day.

It is the same Mary and the same Holy Spirit who were in the upper room that are with us today. If we are living in the presence of Mary, and asking the Holy Spirit for His power, should not those mass conversions which took place in the early Church take place again today? We do hear of great numbers of conversions taking place now in South Korea, the Philippines and Africa through the Legion of Mary -- an organization which operates under the auspices of Mary and the Holy Spirit. When the Legion began in South Korea in the 1940's there were only 300,000 Catholics. In the 1980s there were 2,500,000 Catholics. By the year 2000, there will be 3,000,000. The Bishops of that country have said that the Legion of Mary is responsible for 80% of those conversions through their door-to-door visitations. Should we not also hope and expect similar results in our own country?

To do this we need to come to know better the Holy Spirit and Our Lady and to see the

intimate union which exists between those two persons -- one Divine, the other human. It is a matter of great importance because every grace, virtue and supernatural gift, which Christ merited, is given to us by Mary and the Holy Spirit.¹

Frank Duff, the founder of the Legion of Mary, said that each day we should try to come into contact with each person of the Blessed Trinity through prayer.² It means that each day in our prayer life we should converse individually with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are One God, yet three Divine Persons. We should come to know each of those Persons intimately, for God willing, we'll be living in eternity with Them. Obviously, the more we come to know Them now the greater our love and appreciation for Them will be in Heaven.

It is probably the easiest to pray to Our Lord since we know more about Him through scripture and tradition, and of the Three Persons perhaps we pray to Him best, especially in Holy Communion and in visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Regarding the Father, the four Eucharistic prayers in the Mass are addressed to Him by the Church which is Christ's presence on earth. And we say the Our Father in every Mass, in every recitation of the Rosary and other devotions. But does the Holy Spirit receive as much attention as He could be given? We do have novenas, hymns, and prayers to the Holy Spirit and entire prayer groups devoted to Him, but in many ways He is still "the forgotten paraclete." He seems to be in the shadows, and perhaps that is because of the type of image we have of Him in our mind. Frank Duff said that we cannot pray in a vacuum - - we need to understand to Whom we are praying and address that Person by name.³ To individualize the Persons of the Blessed Trinity in our prayer, it is helpful to have in our minds as suitable an image of the Divine Persons as possible. It is not good enough to picture the Trinity

as a luminous triangle with rays of light coming from it or as a big “eye” looking down over the world.⁴ Neither of these images evoke much love on our part for our Creator.

Perhaps the epitome of our image of God the Father comes from Michaelangelo's masterpiece which graces the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. But even this falls infinitely short of that exquisitely beautiful Being of goodness and power Who loves us beyond all imaginings yet Who calls Himself our Father.⁵ With the Second Divine Person things come a bit easier since He took flesh and dwelled among us. Christian art down through the centuries has shown us what Christ may have looked like. Since He was the Second person of the Trinity, we are privileged to get some glimpse of how God the Son appeared in human form.

But when we consider the Person of the Holy Spirit a difficulty arises. The images of the dove, tongues of fire and a great wind are all scripture has provided. These are true symbols of the Holy Spirit, but do they evoke in us a personal response in prayer and the love which we should have for the Third Divine Person?

It is here, we find Mary's place. Mary was brought into an intimate relationship with the Blessed Trinity. As you know, her relationship with the Three Divine Persons is entirely unique and eternally different from that of any other human being. She was the daughter of God the Father, Mother of Jesus Christ, and true spouse of the Holy Spirit. Next to Christ, she supplies the most accurate image of the Holy Spirit.⁶

To see Mary in her relationship to the Trinity we must first turn to the dogma of her Immaculate Conception, which states that from the first moment of her existence Mary was preserved from the taint of original sin due to the foreseen merits of Christ. Maximilian Kolbe said that it was at the moment of her Immaculate Conception that the Holy Spirit united Himself

to Our Lady in a close and intimate union.⁷

The union of Mary and the Holy Spirit begins at Mary's conception but continues to intensify throughout her life. Almost every time in the infancy narratives that she is mentioned the Holy Spirit is there to be found. At the Annunciation, the Holy Spirit comes down upon Mary. When she visits her cousin, the Holy Spirit inspires Elizabeth to proclaim to Mary "Blessed are you among women." In the Presentation in the Temple, it is the Holy Spirit who inspires Simeon to come to the temple to see the Christ-child. At Pentecost also, Mary is gathered with the Apostles as the Holy Spirit descends upon each of them.

So this Divine-human relationship grew throughout her life, intensifying with the passing of Mary's earthly years. Maximilian Kolbe says that her Immaculate Conception was Mary's preparation for her becoming the Mother of Jesus Christ.⁸ It would certainly be against right reason to think that the All-Pure God, the Second Person of the Trinity could take flesh in a woman who was tainted by sin. God prepared Mary in her conception that He might one day be born of her in time. Bishop Sheen said "if any man would pre-exist his own mother he would certainly make her the most beautiful and grace-filled mother possible." In God's case, He did pre-exist His mother and made her the most beautiful and immaculate creature ever to live -- His greatest masterpiece.

The story is told of a sculptor who had just finished a beautiful work of art and invited a friend of his into his workshop to see it. But the friend ignored the work of art and instead just talked to the artist. Because he had spent so much time and effort putting his inspiration into stone, the artist was insulted. And in a sense this is applicable to God who created Our Lady as his greatest masterpiece. When people ignore her or don't honor her it is like not telling an artist

“You created a thing of beauty .”

The Immaculate Conception was Mary's spiritual birth and baptism. Being conceived without sin meant for her not only the absence of original sin, but also the infusion of supernatural grace in its fullness in her soul. At Lourdes, she didn't say to Bernadette “I am the woman who was immaculately conceived” but “I am the Immaculate Conception” as if to say the Immaculate Conception is not a quality of mine like the color of my eyes or hair, but this belongs to me as part of my very essence, part of my very nature.⁹ This was the nature given her when she was created out of nothing by God.

St. Maximilian Kolbe says that Mary is the human Immaculate Conception and uses an interesting phrase when he says that “the Holy Spirit is the uncreated and eternal Immaculate Conception.”¹⁰ In order to understand this we have to take a look at the Blessed Trinity and delve a little more deeply into this realm of theology.

We can look at God's actions as they are in Himself, the ad intra operations, namely the relation of the Father to the Son, the Son to the Father, etc., or God's actions outside the Trinity (i.e., the ad extra operations) -- for example God's dealings with us in the Incarnation and Redemption.

As you are aware, there are two processions in God. The first is God the Father eternally begetting the Son. The second is the love between the Father and Son eternally bringing forth the Holy Spirit. The word that the Church uses for this second procession is “spirate”. The infinite love between the Father and the Son eternally spirates the Third Divine Person -- the Holy Spirit. It is important to understand this because Maximilian Kolbe calls this spiration “the eternal Immaculate Conception.” This terminology has not been used before in the tradition of the

Church as far as we know, so it is a great contribution to theology. If we see the Holy Spirit as the uncreated Immaculate Conception (the love between the Father and the Son) then it gives us an insight into why Mary at Lourdes would call herself “the Immaculate Conception”: she was calling herself by the name of her Spouse.¹¹

We are forced, whenever speaking of God to use human terminology which makes it difficult. Even when we say that the Father generates the Son from all eternity, we are attributing the human idea of generation to the Father. What Maximilian Kolbe does is to apply the human idea of conception to the spiration of the Holy Spirit from the Father and Son. Kolbe does not want to fall into error, and so he stresses that this “conception” is eternal and uncreated.¹²

Now let us look at the union which exists between Mary and the Holy Spirit. The Church says that everyone in the state of grace has the Holy Spirit dwelling within him. We are temples of the Holy Spirit if we have sanctifying grace in our souls. The saints grew in holiness in proportion to the sanctifying grace in their soul. Thus they became progressively beautiful temples of the Holy Spirit. Now Mary, because of her Immaculate Conception must have the Holy Spirit dwelling in her to the most intense degree possible for a creature.

Frank Duff says that the Holy Spirit established a union with Mary so profound that it stopped short only at identity.¹³ He also states that this does not remove Mary from the human condition. Because of Mary's Immaculate Conception and her Divine Motherhood, the Holy Spirit has united Himself to her and is, as the Legion of Mary Handbook states “as her very soul”¹⁴ Frank Duff also says that the Holy Spirit has made Mary the next thing in dignity to Himself. However, Frank Duff and Maximilian Kolbe are always careful never to say that the Holy Spirit became incarnate in Mary. Only the Second Person became incarnate and that was

Our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary is not the incarnation of the Holy Spirit.

In Jesus Christ, there is one Divine Person with a human and divine nature. In Mary's relationship with the Holy Spirit there remain two persons, one who is God, the other who is a creature. And yet there is a unique, intimate union between them. The union of two natures in the person of Christ we know as the hypostatic union.¹⁵ Mary's union with the Holy Spirit is not a hypostatic union, yet we might call it a charismatic union. "Charismatic" here means that this union is brought about for the sake of others, i.e., the good of the Church, just as charisms are given for the sake of others. Mary's spiritual motherhood is the greatest charism ever given to a creature. Mary is the Mother of God and souls primarily for our sake and not her own. The same can be said for her mediation of grace. The privilege of the Assumption, however, was given her for her sake.

Christ of course, because He was true God and true man was our Redeemer, who atoned for sin. Our redemption came through Jesus Christ -- God made man. Mary's role in redemption was to be a purely human one, acting on behalf of mankind.¹⁵ Her role was indispensable.

Some may suggest that this union of Mary with the Holy Spirit is a new teaching in the Church, but we know this is not the case. Many writers down through the centuries have written about it. But in this century a deeper penetration has been made into the mystery. Maximilian Kolbe, Frank Duff and others have not contradicted Church teaching but have "fleshed it out" for us. It is what Cardinal Newman called the "Development of Doctrine." Teachings which have been in the Church since the beginning are more clearly understood with the passing of time. The Church, guided infallibly by the Holy Spirit, always judges carefully new insights into the mysteries of God and redemption. Truth never changes. The seed of defined truth in the early

Church is still true today. I, the man, am the same person as the boy I once was.

So, Mary's unique relationship to the Holy Spirit has always been in the Church's tradition. It is the logical consequence of the many privileges given her by God.

An important aspect of the mission of the Holy Spirit and Mary can be seen by a comparison between the prophetic statements of the Old Testament prophets and the substance of Our Lady's private apparitions which have taken place since the Divine founding of the Church. The Nicene Creed says that the "Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets." The Holy Spirit used the prophets -- Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel -- to get the Chosen People to repent, to turn from their ways of sin and to lead holy lives. Since the time of the Assumption, however, it seems that the Holy Spirit has given this "job" to His Spouse, for it is Mary who has continued the mission of telling the world to "pray and do penance," and to obey the commandments of God. Many the centuries and varied the peoples that have experienced her remonstrations. Guadalupe, Lourdes, Fatima -- prophetic revelations which have immensely helped the new 'People of God' stay on the narrow road to Heaven. The saints can be considered New Testament prophets. Prophecy is a charism which Mary, too, must possess to the highest possible degree. As the just God of the Old Testament seems to reveal Himself more as the merciful Father of the New, so the Holy Spirit, who had spoken through the stern, accusing prophets of Judea, now speaks through the gentle, exhorting Virgin of today. Part of the mission of the Holy Spirit is to show forth Holiness in the Church. In fact, He is that Holiness. But His action, His Person, is unseen. So next to Christ, Mary gives us the clearest picture of what the Holy Spirit -- what Holiness -- looks like. She is called the mirror of the Holy Spirit -- His human portrait.¹⁶ Jesus Christ in His humanity (because He is the Eternal Son of God made incarnate) is the perfect image of His own Divinity as the

Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. In an analogous way Mary shows us the Holy Spirit, not only by her outer appearance but also by her inner virtues: her profound humility, her angelic sweetness, her spotless purity and her heavenly wisdom.¹⁷ To see Mary is to see the Holy Spirit -- to see the Holy Spirit is to see Holiness. As Christ said to His disciples, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." so Mary, in an analogous way, could say 'He who has seen me has seen the Holy Spirit.'

It is the Holy Spirit Himself who has formed Mary into His image, who has made her like Himself. Some people have said that husbands and wives who have lived together a long time in married life begin to look like each other. Perhaps the same can be said for the Holy Spirit and His spouse who actually resemble each other.

The Holy Spirit makes a showing in all his saints. Many people have remarked that while they were in the presence of Mother Teresa or John Paul II they could almost feel the Holy Spirit in them. So it is not an exaggeration to say that Mary would manifest the Holy Spirit to an even greater degree. The images of the peaceful dove and the purifying tongues of fire are good and helpful to us, but the spiritual writers believe that we need a more personal image of the Holy Spirit in order to develop a deeper relationship with Him. His mission is to attract us to the God Head, to sanctify, and Mary's mission is not only to attract us to Him, but in fact to attract Him to us, as St. Louis de Montfort says. All of this is so that Christ may be born and grow to His fullness in us. It is Mary who can bring us into that deeper and more personal relationship with the Holy Spirit wherein we feel His effect in our lives. In one of his books, Frank Duff says that in Heaven we are going to have to "look twice", as it were, to distinguish Mary from the Holy Spirit.¹⁸

Any virtue that Mary has is from the Holy Spirit. And just as the Second Divine Person did not disdain to use the womb of Mary to come to us as man, neither does the Holy Spirit disdain to use Mary to show forth Himself in an intelligible and attractive manner.¹⁹

We should pause for a moment to observe a few precautions. St. Thomas Aquinas says that studying the Blessed Trinity is the most dangerous area in theology because it is so easy to fall into error, and yet he also considers it the most fruitful. So, is this relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit too exaggerated? Is what has been said about Mary too exalted? Frank Duff and Maximilian Kolbe state time and time again that Mary is a creature and that compared to God she is as nothing.²⁰ God existed from all eternity. He created Mary out of nothing. Mary is redeemed by Christ, and we might say, redeemed more perfectly than any other creature. During the past century, many German Protestant theologians criticized the Church for “putting Mary in the place of the Holy Spirit.”²¹ This was even picked up by some Catholic theologians. Yet, this claim is unfounded. For it is God's will, God's Divine plan, that has brought the Holy Spirit and Our Lady into such a close relationship. And if it is the Divine plan, how dare we contradict it?

The incarnation depended on Mary's consent. If she had said no, we don't know what would have happened to redemption. Vatican II puts down in writing the tremendous role that Mary played in redemption. Lumen Gentium calls her the “temple of the Holy Spirit” in chapter eight. It also says “Mary is fashioned by the Holy Spirit,” that she is “prophesied in Genesis' and that the traditional devotional practices that the Church has known should be fostered.

Duff and Kolbe both use the interesting expression that Mary was taken to the very borders of the infinite, that she is the epitome of creation, the highest creature on the human scale. Yet this does not mean that she is far from us. It is just the opposite. Even though she is above

all the angels and saints, she is very truly one of us. Because she was so filled with love of God, Mary's personality, too, must have been exquisite. We see a reflection of this in the attractive personalities of some of the saints like St. Terese the Little Flower, St Francis, and St. John Bosco.

The Holy Spirit's mission to dispense the graces of the New Covenant after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus is also seen in Mary's mediation of grace which flows from her relationship with the Holy Spirit. Though this teaching of the Church has not yet been solemnly defined (like the Assumption or her Immaculate Conception) it is part of the ordinary teaching of the Magisterium. Leo XIII in 1891 in his encyclical Octobri Mense wrote “Nothing of the vast treasure of all grace which the Lord has brought is given to us except through Mary. Pius X in an encyclical called Mary “the Dispenser of all the gifts which Jesus acquired for us.” Benedict the XV said “all gifts are dispensed by the hands of the most holy virgin.” Pius XI wrote “It is God's will that we should have everything through Mary.” We have here, once more, an example of that development of Doctrine.

Just as Mary will be forever the Mother of Christ, so forever will she be the co-operator with the Holy Spirit in God's plan of grace. Any grace that comes to us is through the power and operation of the Holy Spirit but always in concert with Mary. They are distinct persons (one human, one Divine) and yet always acting in perfect accord. Mary's will never deviates from the will of her Spouse. Kolbe and Duff believe that Mary is not a mere channel of graces but rather a conscious co-operator, an intelligent agent, in the distribution of God's grace.²² Thus, every grace that we receive is due to a positive intervention on her part and this is found in many of the writings of the saints. St. Bernardine says that “all gifts and virtues and graces of the Holy Spirit

are given by Mary to whom she pleases, when she pleases, and in the quantity and manner she pleases.”²³ Surely this infers the union, the identity of mission between these two persons. (This quotation is found word for word in the Legion of Mary promise which the Church has approved and granted a plenary indulgence -- under the usual conditions -- for the making and renewing of it.)

Lumen Gentium says that this mediation of Mary is subordinate to and dependent on the one mediatorship of Christ. There is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Mary has been incorporated into that one mediatorship of Christ by Christ. Because Mary gives the world Christ, who is the source of all grace, she also gives to the world all the “lesser graces.” Kolbe believed that one day the Church would solemnly define Mary's mediation of grace and make it a dogma of the Church. This would solidify our awareness of Mary's connection with the multi-faceted mission of the Holy Spirit.

Kolbe and Duff refer to Mary as the spouse of the Holy Spirit, and yet both hold that the term “spouse” is not adequate to describe this unique union. It is much closer than the husband/wife analogy. It is more interior, more essential. Together the Holy Spirit and Mary brought Christ into the world and today it remains the Holy Spirit and Mary who together form Christ in us. Holiness is nothing other than likeness with Christ. And it is Mary and the Holy Spirit who thus mould us. The Holy Spirit carries out this mission -- our sanctification -- in union with Mary, not merely as His spouse but as His “other self”, so to speak. The Church teaches that there are two wills in Christ, a human and a Divine will, which always act in perfect accord. In Mary and the Holy Spirit there are two distinct, yet united wills. That is why we can speak of Mary as the Holy Spirit's “other self.” Mary, for her part, treats us as her children. Everything she

did for Christ at Nazareth she does for us today in the supernatural order: nourishes us with the Sacraments, protects us from evil and enlightens us with her wisdom.

To sum up, Mary has a sway over our souls that is more intense and more real than the relationship which a mother has with the babe in her womb. We are more dependent on Mary for supernatural life and for grace than an unborn child is dependent on his mother for life and nourishment.²⁴ And is not this the very claim made for the Holy Spirit in the Mystical, Sacramental life of the Church? In other words, Mary provides God with an expression of human motherhood, gives the Third Person of the Trinity a certain maternity to care for the growing, yet wounded, Mystical Body of Christ on earth.

ENDNOTES

¹ Frank Duff, The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary (Dublin: Concilium Legionis Mariae, 1985), p. 43; hereafter cited as Handbook.

² Frank Duff, The Woman of Genesis (Dublin: Praedicanda Press, 1976), p. 278; hereafter cited as Woman.

³ Woman, p. 278.

⁴ Woman, p. 278

⁵ Woman, p. 287.

⁶ Woman, p. 274.

⁷ Fr. H.M. Manteau-Bonamy, The Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit: The Marian Teaching of Father Kolbe (Kenosha: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1977), p. 47.

⁸ Manteau-Bonamy, p. 53. [In this Fr. Kolbe is echoing the teaching of Pope St. Pius X in the encyclical Ad Diem Illum.]

⁹ Ernesto Piacentini, O.F.M. Conv. S.T.D. Panorama of the Marian Doctrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe (Kenosha: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1975), pp. 25-26.

¹⁰ Piacentini, pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Piacentini, p. 23.

¹² Piacentini, pp. 19-20.

¹³ Woman, p. 279.

¹⁴ Handbook, p. 134.

¹⁵ Woman, p. 279.

¹⁶ Woman, p. 274.

¹⁷ Handbook, p. 4.

¹⁸ Woman, p. 277.

¹⁹ Woman, p. 275.

²⁰ Handbook, p. 9.

²¹ Frank Duff, Victory Through Mary (Dublin: Praedicanda Publications, 1981), p. 266.

²² Handbook, p. 134.

²³ Handbook, p. 179.

²⁴ Handbook, p. 105.