

THEOTOKOS: MINIMALISTIC CONCEPTIONS

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Introduction

The doctrine of Mary as Mother of God was the first to be declared in (431 A.D. at the Council of Ephesus) as the key-Marian dogma so far officially defined by the Church. The other Marian dogmas that have been solemnly defined are: the Perpetual Virginity of Mary in 649 A.D., Immaculate Conception of Mary in 1854 A.D. and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1950 A.D. The magisterial declaration of the divine motherhood of Mary providentially took place in the Council of Ephesus in that same city where Mary was said to have lived the latter part of her life under the watchful care of St. John the Evangelist to whom the Lord at the last moment of his earthly life entrusted her (cf. Jn. 19:26-27). The beloved disciple of the Lord stood faithfully to the very end just like the Virgin Mary herself and before the Lord breathed his last, he bequeathed his precious Mother to the members of his Church through John the son of Zebedee in that symbolic and real gesture: “behold your Mother”.... “behold your son”. In this simultaneously dual filial and maternal entrustment which manifests the last testament of the Lord, Mary assumes her holistic role as Mother, not only of

her incarnate Son, Jesus Christ the head of the Church but also of the mystical body of Christ the Church. The liturgical post-Communion prayer on the feast of Mary, Mother of God, celebrated on the first day of the year in the Universal Church declares affirmatively: “Father, as we proclaim the Virgin Mary to be the mother of Christ and the mother of the Church, may our communion with her Son bring us to salvation”.¹

Biblical Foundations

The doctrine of the divine motherhood of Mary is explicitly rooted in the scriptures and derives from the sound dogmatic truth that Jesus Christ whom she gave birth to is always God and never ceases to be God even at the moment of his incarnation in the virginal womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The nature of God is such that he is eternally the same and never ceases to be who he is. This is notwithstanding the Pauline exhortation on the *kenosis* of Christ Jesus that he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:7). The foregoing does not presuppose that he was no longer God at the moment of incarnation but, when accurately understood simply refers to the mentality of Christ in his profound humility. Christ assumed the nature and form of man while remaining ever-God, the one who never stops being I AM WHO AM which is the meaning of Yahweh in Hebrew (Ex 3:14).

At the annunciation of the divine message leading to the incarnation of the Word of God, the Archangel Gabriel declares to Mary: “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God” (Lk 1:31,35). From this passage emerges sound scriptural and logical truth that since Mary is the Mother of Jesus; Jesus is God; therefore, Mary is the Mother of God. The New Testament writers often referred to Mary as the Mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1; Acts 1:14) and the same Jesus who was in the beginning the Word that was with God and was God (Jn 1:1). Adhering also to the scriptural truth as Paul affirmed that Jesus Christ is Lord [God]

(Phil 2:11) and that Mary is his Mother, should invariably lead one to hold to the fact that Mary is the Mother of God. Mary the Mother of Jesus, the Word made flesh in her womb, is therefore the Mother of God. Any attempt to deny this fact may invariably derive from some Christological misunderstandings of the fact that Jesus is God and is ever God even when he was in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Ecclesial Tradition

The unchanging tradition of the Church has ever adhered to the fact that Mary is the Mother of Jesus who is God. The Apostles and other early Christians did regard Mary as the Mother of Jesus whom Thomas recognized in his famous exclamation after a period of great doubt as: “My Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28). In the first cenacle practice of prayer before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the Apostles and other Christians gathered with Mary the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14) thus testifying eloquently to their high regard for her as the Mother of their Lord and God. The First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. which gave birth to the Nicene Creed reveals the great formula with which the early Christians professed the Divine Motherhood of Mary thus: “for us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and was made man”.²

The Church firmly teaches perennially that “belief in the incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith”.³ Indeed, St John undoubtedly affirms that “by this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (1Jn 4:2). St Paul similarly attests to the fact that Jesus the Son of God who is ever God was revealed in the flesh (1Tim 3:16). The particular manner in which Jesus Christ revealed himself in the flesh through his incarnation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary has led to so many doctrinal misunderstandings all through the centuries thereby bringing about a lot of heretical positions. It is pertinent here to first of all highlight the dogmatic definition of the Divine

Motherhood of Mary before delving into such heresies regarding how the Son of God became Man or how he is God-man.

Dogmatic Definition

The Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431AD adopted the sound theological position of St Cyril of Alexandria against the errors of Nestorius regarding how Mary is the Mother of God. As it were, the first Marian dogma was arrived at in the process of theological clarifications of the Christological controversies of the divine and human natures of Christ. St Cyril of Alexandria argued against Nestorius the bishop of Constantinople thus:

for we do not say that the nature of the Word became flesh by undergoing a change, nor that it was transformed into a complete man, made up of soul and body. Rather, we affirm that the Word, having united to himself according to the hypostasis (*kath' hupostasin*) the flesh animated by a rational soul, became man in an ineffable and incomprehensible manner and was called Son of man. This union is not merely according to will or good pleasure; nor does it consist in the assumption of a *prosôpon* (“personality”) only. And though the natures which are brought together into a true unity are distinct, from both there results one Christ and one Son; not as though the distinction of natures were suppressed by their union, but rather because the divinity and the humanity by their mysterious and ineffable coming together into unity have constituted for us the one Lord, Christ and Son.... It was not that an ordinary man was born first of the holy Virgin, on whom afterwards the Word descended; what we say is that, being united with the flesh from the womb, [the Word] has undergone birth in the flesh, making the birth in the flesh his own.... Thus [the holy Fathers] have unhesitatingly called the holy Virgin “Mother of God” (*theotokos*). This does not mean that the nature of the Word of his divinity received the beginning of

its existence from the holy Virgin, but that, since the holy body, animated by a rational soul, which the Word united to himself, according to the hypostasis (*kath' hupostasin*), was born from her, the Word was born according to the flesh.⁴

From the foregoing citation, it's quite obvious that the dogmatic definition of the divine motherhood of Mary is intrinsically embedded in the Christological clarification of the incarnation of the two natures of the one person of the God-man, Jesus Christ. Essentially the dogma is explicitly stated in the first anathema of the Chapter of Cyril against the heresy of Nestorius: "If anyone does not confess that the Emmanuel [Christ] in truth is God and that on this the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God [*Theotokos*] in as much as she gave birth to the Word of God made flesh...let him be anathema."⁵

Contrary Positions

The Jehovah Witnesses deny the divine motherhood of Mary in line with their monotheistic creed which believes that there is only one person, the Father, who is for them the Jehovah God. This sect is a resurgence of Judaistic dispositions in contemporary Christian religion and this is understandably plausible from the Jewish background of their initial founder, Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916), an American Jew, who was later succeeded by Joseph 'Judge' Franklin Rutherford (1869-1942). The Jehovah Witnesses clearly reject the fundamental Christian doctrine of the Trinity since for them Jesus is a created person. Drawing principally from the Pauline text in Colossians 1:15 which states that "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation", they erroneously infer that Jesus Christ is a creature of God. In actual sound biblical hermeneutics, to be the 'firstborn of all creation' explains Jesus as being 'begotten of the Creator God the Father before time begun'. However, since the Jehovah Witnesses like the Jews reject the belief in Jesus as God they invariably affirm that Mary could not have been the Mother of God.

Similarly, Islam in its strict monotheism and rejection of the Trinity does not believe in the divinity of Jesus and so deny the divine motherhood of Mary. Some other Christian sects of our separated brethren though professing faith in the divinity of Christ and retaining that Mary is his mother, still do not subscribe to the doctrine that Mary is the Mother of God. For them it seems unimaginable to conclude that a human being can become God's mother. They invariably end up re-enacting the Christological heresies of the past in their misunderstanding of Jesus' personality and incarnation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

All through the centuries, even to the present day, great oppositions are raised against the possibility of the Divine Maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A brief recap of the arguments or of the reasons given for such impossibility will reveal a kind of naturalistic fallacy or anthropomorphism. Considerations are that such feat is humanly impossible. However, since this matter concerns God and his unfathomable actions, none should be oblivious of the fact that with God all things are possible (Mk 9:23). The fact that it is humanly unimaginable how, for instance, God can create the entire universe from nothingness (*ex nihilo*) does not necessarily add up to the fact that it cannot be true.

Certain things are just imbibed and accepted as mysteries. This is where faith takes over in the form of, or 'faith helping or coming to the aid of reason' where the latter cannot go further in human comprehension. St Anselm is renowned to have given the formula: 'I believe that I may understand' (*credo utintellegam*). On the other hand too, faith is also made lucid by the application of sound theological reasoning through the action of the Holy Spirit guiding the Magisterium, that is, the official interpreter of divine revelation which thereby helps to eliminate the influx of Subjectivism and Relativism of doctrines. The Jesus' guarantee of the guidance of the Church by the divine Paraclete is the basis of the infallibility of the Sacred Magisterium (Mt 16:18-19; Jn 16:13).

The Divine Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary is actually a dogma that reason alone cannot grapple with or render intelligible. So many contrary argumentations have arisen therefore in contestation of this dogma. An examination of the contrary positions will reveal various classifications of philosophical trends, theological heresies and religious contrapositions. Some of these arguments do somehow overlap into all three contrary positions just mentioned but shall be considered under their principal influence in a class. An attempt will be made here to highlight the historical doubts on the divine maternity of Mary since they continue to manifest in varying dimensions even in our contemporary time.

(a) Philosophical Trends

Some persons dispute the possibility of the divine maternity of Mary purely from their philosophical reasoning and bias. These thinkers doubt the possibility of knowing God's existence or the realities of God; and where such is possible, one cannot really say or describe exactly how they are. Such schools of thought like Deism, Gnosticism, Manicheanism and Atheism do fall under this consideration.

(i) Deism

Deism is a rationalistic trend of belief in the existence of God which affirms his creation of the world and the intelligible order therein while at the same time denying his continuous guidance and intervention in the world.⁶ The God of the deists is a rationalistic Being that cannot be said to be triune, becoming human or begotten by a woman. This current of thought was popular during the period of Enlightenment as a rationalistic alternative to the traditional Christian belief in God. Deism therefore propounds the doctrine of “the withdrawn God” (*Deus asconditus*), that is the transcendental Being who no longer has anything to do with the created and intelligible world. So this God has nothing to do with the Christian ideology or theology of revelation whether in the past or in the present moment. Deism absolutely denies the possibility of God becoming human in

Jesus Christ. Deists therefore totally deny the divine motherhood of Mary.

(ii) Agnosticism

The agnostic philosophical trend generally doubts the possibility of asserting any metaphysical and religious realities since they are unknown or unknowable. According to William L. Rowe, “in the popular sense of the term, an agnostic is someone who neither believes nor disbelieves the existence of God, whereas an atheist disbelieves the existence of God. In the strict sense, however, agnosticism is of the view that human reason is incapable of providing sufficient rational grounds to justify either the belief that God exists or the belief that God does not exist”.⁷ The agnostics equally deny the possibility of knowing the truth of the claim of divine motherhood of Mary. Agnosticism as a philosophical trend of thought became the precursor of Empiricism and its scientific method of verification. Agnostics retain it unknowable if the child given birth to by Mary is God or not. Agnosticism should not be confused with Gnosticism, the latter which is a religious movement that believes in the possibility of arriving at certain knowledge of the spiritual world through some form of philanthropy or sexual abstinence.

(iii) Atheism

Atheistic philosophical thoughts totally repudiate the idea of the existence of God or deities. Tilley defines atheism as the refusal to acknowledge any god but the particular manifestations of this disbelief vary greatly.⁸ In the ecclesiastical-juridical order, one who is guilty of atheism is regarded as an apostate (canons 751 and 1364) and *ipso facto* excommunicated. Atheists deny the idea of the divine maternity of Mary since for them God does not exist.

(b) Religious Movements

There have also been notable movements with some religious or affiliated inclinations that directly debunk the Incarnation of God in human history and thus invariably deny the divine motherhood of Mary. Gnosticism, Marcionism, **Manichaeism**, and Albigensianism are renowned to have vehemently countered

Divine Incarnation in the person of Christ the God-man. The earlier of these groupings have varying influence on the latter ones; or conversely, the latter propositions are actually mere nominal modifications of the earlier postulations. Even to the present day, denials of divine motherhood of Mary can be viewed as a resurfacing of the classical heresies. It would be seen consequently that there are great semblances or just mere alterations of the positions of the earlier ones by the latter ones.

(i) Gnosticism

Gnosticism which flourished between and 2nd and 4th centuries A.D. had great influence on many latter ancient religious movements and it derives from the Greek word “gnosis” meaning knowledge. In the extreme application of the terminology, Gnosticism holds that salvation can be attained through secret knowledge known only to the Gnostics who will be incorporated into the heavenly Church of those saved and not to those who base their faith on the Jewish scriptures or the Christian gospels. Christian types of Gnosticism attribute to Christ as the heavenly redeemer and combine also some religious dimensions of platonic philosophy to buttress to the soul the need to embrace contemplation and asceticism in order to arrive at the divine. The Gnostics hold that Christ descended from above as a heavenly revealer, assuming merely bodily form in order to communicate with his 'chosen ones', thus they merely affirm the virginity of Mary in order to prove the non-incarnation of Christ. It is irrational to think that the real spiritual or heavenly Christ actually died since he only vanished from the body he merely assumed. So, Gnostics invariably deny that Mary is the mother of the real, spiritual or heavenly Jesus and for them, Mary could not have been the mother of God.

(ii) Marcionism

Marcionism derives from the name of the founder of the group Marcion (d. 160 A.D.) whose origin is traditionally traced to Sinope in Asia Minor on the southern shores of the Black Sea. Marcion's ideas were akin to that of Gnosticism along with his complete rejection of the Old Testament. He attributed the

created world to a creator God worshipped by the Jews as a god of law, vendetta and violence and so was actually a lesser god who was responsible for the creation of the cosmos, matter and evil. The actual God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God of love; incarnation was a kind of simulation and so was never real. In essence, Mary cannot have been the mother of God. Marcionism's Christological viewpoint follows the heretical position of Docetism and he also taught strict asceticism in order to liberate the spirit from the matter-imprisonment.

(iii) Manichaeism

Manichaeism is a derivative of the name of the founder called 'Mani' (216-276 A.D.) from Persia or modern day Iran. The main religious thought of the group centres on the reality of absolute dualism in our world, of the ongoing struggle between two opposing forces: good and evil, light and darkness. The cosmological viewpoint of Manichaeism regarding the origin of essences including human beings is the occurrence in history of the imprisonment of some particles of light in matter and therefore occasioning the necessity to liberate the light by the individual. Strict asceticism as also taught by Gnosticism is the principal means of carrying out this liberation but only by a selected-few of the 'elect' whereas the rest majority the 'hearers' are not bound. The dichotomy or opposition between good and evil, spirit and matter, highlights the non-possibility of divine incarnation which means invariably that Mary cannot be mother of God. Mani, the founder of the religious movement was initially banished to India and was subsequently executed by the Persian government on his return. Saint Augustine was earlier fascinated by the heresy and practiced Manichaeism before his religious conversion. However, aspects of possible influence from the sect pervade Augustinian latter thought on the practice of celibacy and detachment from the flesh and carnal pleasures which influenced ecclesiastical legislation on celibate priesthood. Manichaeism is the ideological foundation and heretical precursor of the latter medieval Albigensianism.

(iv) Albigensianism

Albigensianism is a Medieval religious movement, an offshoot of earlier ancient Manichaeism and Gnosticism. It re-echoes classical dualism of opposing forces of good and evil operational in our world. As a neo-Manichean Christian dualist of the Catharist-Puritan movement which flourished in Southern France in 12th and 13th centuries, Albigensianism upheld the reality of a good spirit (God) who created the spiritual order including the angels and the human soul; and an evil spirit (the Devil) who created the material world including the demons and the human body which is therefore under his control. Problem started, however, when the evil one imprisoned the soul in the body and in order to deliver the soul from the body, God sent Jesus Christ who according to them is also a creature. During incarnation, Jesus could only assume a celestial body since the earthly human body is evil. Albigensianism therefore encouraged suicide especially by starvation or punishment of the body in order to liberate the soul. They also taught abstention from marriage. The implication of the foregoing teaching debunks the possibility of incarnation of Jesus in human body since the good has nothing to do with evil. Jesus only assumed a similar celestial body. The doctrine of the divine maternity of Mary is invariably debunked by Albigensianism.

Pope Innocent III during the Fourth Ecumenical Lateran Council in 1215AD condemned the tenets of Albigensianism and declared thus:

we firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal, infinite (*immensus*) and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit...[they] are the one principle of the universe, the creator of all things, visible and invisible, spiritual and corporeal... that is, the angelic and earthly, and then (*deinde*) the human creature, who as it were shares in both orders, being composed of spirit and body. For the devil and the other demons were indeed created by God

naturally good, but they became evil by their own doing...⁹

Traditionally, St Dominic Guzman (d.1221), the founder of the Order of Preachers was said to have received by a revelation the Rosary from Our Lady. The Rosary became a veritable tool in combating the Albigensian heresy that was ravaging the faith especially in southern France. The emphasis of the mysteries of the Rosary bother on the incarnation, life, ministry, passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ which effectively countered the erroneous doctrines of the Albigensians.

(c) Trinitarian Heresies

Trinitarian heretics are those groups or sects of persons who have a wrong notion of the doctrine of the three persons in One God formally defined by the Ecumenical Council of Nicea I (325)AD which is the foremost of the ecumenical councils in the Catholic Church. Due to the errors they have regarding the Trinitarian doctrine as laid out accurately in the Nicene Creed, by denying three persons in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are consubstantial, coequal and coeternal, they invariably negate the divine motherhood of Mary.

Arius and the adherents of Arianism which conceive of Jesus Christ as a superhuman being and a creature of God deny invariably the divine motherhood of Mary. This subordination of the Son to God the Father would mean that Mary did not give birth to God. This belief originates from the Alexandrian (in Egypt) priest Arius (d. 336). Arius holds that the Son was created by the Father implying that he was not coeternal with him and that there was a time he did not exist, he was not of the same substance or consubstantial (*homo-ousios*) but rather of similar nature (*homoi-ousios*), and so could not be coequal but inferior to the Father. The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea I officially defines in a creed, the accurate Trinitarian doctrine and states categorically that: “we believe in one God the Father Almighty... and in one Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God, the only begotten,

born of the Father... born, not made, of one substance with the Father and the Holy Spirit... ”.¹⁰

Strict Monotheism as practiced in Judaism and Islam uphold the view of God as one Lord and none other inclusive persons (Deut 6:4). So the question of Divine Motherhood by Mary does not arise since there is nothing like God having a Son or the Holy Spirit. Adherents of Jehovah Witness, a Christian sect, and other heretical Christian sects do either theoretically or even practically negate the possibility of a Trinitarian God as authentically upheld in Orthodox Christianity. Denying that Jesus is truly God, negates the divine motherhood of Mary. Arianism, though essentially a Trinitarian heresy, also ends in a Christological controversy since it denies Christ of His divinity. Thus, it constitutes a reverse position of contrary Monophysitism which negates the humanity of Christ.

Modalism expounds a Trinitarian controversy that maintains that the one God is three only in regards to His modes of operation in the world. This theology contradicts the Trinitarian doctrine of the one God with three distinct persons. Sabellianism is also a kind of Modalism that tries to reconcile belief in the one God with the divinity of Christ by asserting the varying mode of historical operations of God. Another off-shoot therein is Monarchianism which denies the Trinity while asserting the reality of one single principle in God. Subordinationism is a kind of Monarchianism which upholds the erroneous doctrine that only the Father is fully divine, while Christ has lesser degree of divinity. Modalism teaches that the three names of the persons of the Blessed Trinity are mere attributes or titles that people anthropologically give to the manifestations of the same one God and that they have no objective reality in God. The implication of the foregoing for the divine motherhood of Mary is that it was not real but mere human attribution. All these Trinitarian heresies go a long way to denying in varying ways the Divine Motherhood of Mary.

(d) Christological Heresies

Nestorius, the Patriarch-Bishop of Constantinople (d. ca. 451 A.D.) denies the hypostatic union of two natures: the divine and human in Christ but upholds rather a moral union of two persons though without strict dichotomy. However, his adherents as found in Nestorianism extend his argument further to create dichotomy of persons and claims that Mary was only the mother of the human person Jesus Christ and not of the divine Second Person of the Blessed Trinity since she could not have given birth to the divine person. The defective notion of the hypostatic union of two natures in one person leads to the separation of the two natures into two persons thereby failing to comprehend the theology of *communicatio idiomatum* which upholds that the properties of the two natures can be predicated on the one person of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the hypostatic union of the two natures in Jesus Christ is a mystery defined by the Church. Nestorianism essentially ends in a single nature or monophysitism, namely, the one human nature of Christ and so negates that Jesus is the same person as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, no, they are different.

Docetism, on the other hand, upholds that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was never really incarnated in human nature but only apparently appear in Christ's life and suffering. The foregoing claims of Docetists end in a common conclusion of distinction of two persons of Christ leading to the claim that Mary was the mother of the earthly Jesus (*Christotokos*) and not of the spiritual Jesus the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity thereby denying that she is the mother of God (*Theotokos*). Regarding the accurate doctrine on how the Incarnation of Second Person of the Blessed Trinity or the Word becoming man occurred, Pope Saint Leo I (the Great) expatiates thus:

the uniqueness of each nature being preserved and combined in one person, humility was assumed by majesty, weakness by strength, mortality by eternity, and for the sake of paying the debt of our creation, an inviolable nature was joined to a passible nature;

so that, because it was adapted to our relief, *one* and the same *mediator of God and men, the man Jesus Christ* [I Tim 2:5] both could die by reason of the one, and could not die on account of the other. Accordingly, in the whole and perfect nature of true man, true God was born, complete in His own, complete in ours....¹¹

Adoptionism espouses further that Jesus was simply a human being given birth to by Mary but was subsequently favoured and anointed (adopted) as Son of God at some point around the time of his baptism or resurrection. This viewpoint is popular among medieval Judeo-Christians, Elipando of Toledo (Spain) in the eight century and Abelard in the twelfth century. Pope Saint Gregory I (the Great) clarifies regarding the foregoing error that “the flesh was not first conceived in the womb in the Virgin and afterwards the divinity came into the flesh; but as soon as the Word came into the womb, directly, the power of His own nature being preserved, the Word was made flesh.... Nor was he conceived and afterwards anointed; but He was conceived of the Holy Spirit from the flesh of the Virgin, was anointed by the Holy Spirit, this was”.¹²

Monophysitism in general contradicts dualism and only points to the divinity of Christ. It tends to present the fact that after the incarnation, Christ has only one will, the divine. Eutyches holds the doctrine of *hypostasis* or being of Christ as being only divine having totally subsumed or swallowed up the humanity in its divinity. The Eutychians affirm a Christological heresy of only one nature of Christ after the incarnation, that is the divine. Monophysitism is akin to the Christological problem of Monothelism, the latter which holds there is only one will and activity in Christ. This position was denounced by the Third Ecumenical Council of Constantinople (680-681 A.D.) which clarifies that there are two natural wills and two natural operations in the one person of Christ according to his two natures, divine and human. It states thus: “we proclaim two natural wills in Him, and two natural operations indivisibly,

incontrovertibly, inseparably, unfusedly... not contrary... but the human will following and not resisting or hesitating, but rather even submitting to His divine and omnipotent will.... two natural operations... the divine operation and the human operation...".¹³

Universal and Spiritual Motherhood of Mary

Mary indeed is the spiritual mother of all humanity. Pope Sixtus IV, on February 27, 1477, in his Apostolic Constitution *Cum Praeclsa*, alludes to the spiritual motherhood of Mary. Pope Pius IV (1559-1565 A.D.) talks about three possible significations of the spiritual motherhood of Mary: metaphorical Mary acts in regard to human beings as a mother to her children and prays always to obtain graces for them; adoptive Christ wills that Mary adopts all human beings as her children and anticipates their needs; real Mary in some ways transmits spiritual life by a kind of generation to human beings as a true mother. Pope Leo III (795-816 A.D.) emphasizes Christ's donation of his mother as a spiritual mother of all humankind, but for Pope Pius X (1903-1914 A.D.) the foundation of the spiritual motherhood of Mary rests basically on the incorporation of people into Christ as his faithful and more so on Mary's role at the incarnation.¹⁴

Highlighting the great theme of the spiritual motherhood of Mary, the Fathers of the Church especially Justin the Martyr, Irenaeus and Tertullian draw analogy between the first Eve who fell and brought death to all her children through the sin of disobedience and Mary, the new Eve who by her *fiat* obedience welcomed the saviour of humanity, Jesus Christ, the fruit of her sinless womb, the saviour of the world. Mary's cooperation in the incarnation of the Son of God by her assent, so that just as a woman had a share in bringing about death, so also a woman should contribute to life as pre-eminently true of the mother of Jesus, who gave to the world the life that renews all things, and she was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.¹⁵

Mary as Mother of the Church

Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ, to whom she gave her human nature, in order for Christ to be truly human, is also a mother for

all those redeemed by Christ's grace. Ecclesiologically, the full Church is Christ as the Head and constitutive Members; having given birth as a mother to Christ the Head of the Church, Mary is also the mother of the entire body of Christ in a spiritual sense of the term. Jesus categorically gave his mother to the Church and all humanity redeemed in his precious blood when he said to his mother referring to the beloved disciple: "here is your son" and to the disciple: "here is your mother" (cf. Jn 19:26-27). John stands here in representation of all humanity and the Church. Mary's motherhood in this sense is essentially in the spiritual as one who aided our spiritual regeneration in Christ by her cooperation from incarnation to redemption at the foot of the Cross.

Pope Paul VI, (21 November 1964), affirms Mary as mother of the Church thus:

We declare the most holy Mary Mother of the Church, that is, of the entire Christian people, faithful and pastors alike, who call her most loving mother, and we decree that henceforth the whole Christian people give to the divine mother ever greater honour by invoking her and having recourse to her with that sublime name.... This name belongs indeed to genuine Marian piety, since it is firmly rooted in the dignity with which Mary is endowed as Mother of God's Incarnate Word.¹⁶

Furthermore, the same Pope Paul VI, (13 May 1967), adds that

Mary is mother of the Church, not only because she is mother of Jesus Christ and his closest associate in the new plan of salvation 'when the Son of God took human nature from her, that he might in the mysteries of his flesh free human beings from sin [LG 55], but also because she 'shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues' [65]. Just as no human mother may limit her role strictly to the procreation of a new human

person but must continue it by nourishing and educating her offspring, so does also the Virgin Mary. After sharing in the Sacrifice of her Son, cause of our redemption, so closely as to deserve to be called by him mother not only of John the disciple but also it may be said of the whole human race represented by the disciple, she continues now in heaven to fulfil her motherly role by contributing to bring forth and increase the divine life in the souls of the all the redeemed.¹⁷

Concluding Remarks

Marian defective line of arguments as popular among some ignorant Catholics, Pentecostals and some of our separated brethren is basically due to lack of knowledge of the sound Christological doctrine of how the Incarnation of the Word or the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity occurred. There is an error in the knowledge of the interplay of the two natures which make them to assert, for instance, of lack of an intrinsic role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the whole process of incarnation of Divinity in humanity in the one person of Jesus Christ thereby leading them to attribute an extrinsic role to her of being merely a medium of occurrence in the popular phrase of her being just like “an envelope”. This minimalism in the conception of the role of Mary in the whole process of incarnation may not altogether end in just the denial of incarnation (in the pattern of nestorianism, adoptionism or docetism) or in denying that the one person of Christ have two natures (as opined by monophysitism) but more so in reductionism of the importance of the God-given role to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This equates her to having carried out a pseudo-maternal role of surrogacy which invariably not only denies her of being of God-bearer (Theotokos) but also of being a true Christ-bearer (Christotokos).

The divine motherhood of Mary, albeit miraculous or extraordinary according to the divine intervention in her conception of Word-made-flesh, is nevertheless in the medium

of her nature. Pope Saint Leo the Great lucidly explains that human flesh or nature of Christ is from his mother:

From the mother of the Lord, nature, not guilt, was assumed; and in the Lord Jesus Christ born from the womb of the Virgin, because His birth was miraculous, nature was not for that reason different from ours. For He who is true God, is likewise true man, and there is no falsehood in this unity, as long as there alternately the lowliness of man and the exaltedness of the Divinity... And just as the Word does not withdraw from the equality of the paternal glory, so His body does not abandon the nature of our race.¹⁸

The divine motherhood of Mary is in the true sense of giving birth to Christ in the human nature identical to her own. It can be said therefore that in Mary, the eternal Word of God (Jn1:1) became the flesh of her flesh in the human nature of Christ. Thus, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity while retaining his divine nature, assumed flesh through incarnation in Mary and thereon, also had a human nature thereby leading to Christ having two natures in His one and inseparable person. Saint Paul puts this marvellous event thus: “when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (Gal 4:4).

ENDNOTES

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3. CCC, n. 463.
4. St Cyril of Alexandria (380-444), “Second Letter of Cyril of Alexandria to Nestorius” in *The Christian Faith*, nn. 604-605, Seventh Revised and Enlarged Edition edited by J. Neuner and

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 12. Pope Saint Gregory I (590-604), "The Time of the Hypostatic Union" in Denzinger, n. 250, p. 98.
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 17. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation "*Signum Magnum*", (13 May 1967), in J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*, p. 293.
 18. Pope Saint Leo I (440-460), "The Incarnation" in Denzinger, nn. 144, p. 58-59.