

ARCIC II (MARY)  
425/88

Tim  
Galligan.

The marian issues

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When ARCIC-I started, we had during one of the so-called Poringland meetings, a brief discussion about the marian issue. At that time the feminist issue and even the prospect of an ordination of women in one of the two churches were not considered as serious theological problems which needed to be debated. The marian question was limited to the two marian dogmas of Pius IX and Pius XII. But the main issue concerning these two dogmas was not their content. It was the way they were declared to be authentic elements of the revealed apostolic faith. The statement on Authority and its Elucidation dealt with this ecclesiological difficulty. But the Commission said "Mary is not a major problem for us"

I

1. It is evident that the situation is no longer the same. Especially in the anglo-saxon context, the name and signification of Mary have been proposed either as the best sign of the essential role played by women in God's plan of salvation or as a distortion of the vocation of real, concrete, women because of all the privileges which transform her into a person "not really belonging to our human race". These two contradictory views are found in our two churches. I have heard an anglican lay-woman saying "the blessed Mary is my model", and a catholic nun asserting "Mary is the kind of woman I refuse to be".

2. This is why I believe that we have to tackle the issue in a quite different way. For us, anglicans and Catholics, it cannot be an easy solution to by-pass the deadlocked problem of "woman and the Church". It needs to be treated not at the level of "christian anthropology", but at the dogmatic range of the realities belonging to the nature of grace. It really pertains to the *ethos* of our statement on *Salvation and the Church*. Our perspective is also different from that of *Le groupe des Dombes*. The context is not the same. Anglicans and Catholics rarely disagreed about the way Mary is an instrument (a servant) of God at the starting-point of Christ's salvific work. Anglican hymnology and

Catholic hymnology are, on this point very similar. This is true for marian feasts. In the *Prayer Book for Australia*, 1995, the prayer of the day for the fourth Sunday in Advent says "Gracious God whose eternal Word took flesh among us when Mary place her life at the service of your will" (p 472) The prayer for the visitation is the following

Father in heaven,  
 by whose grace Mary was blessed among women  
 in bearing your incarnate Son,  
 and still more blessed in believing your promises  
 and in keeping your word.  
 help us, who honour the exaltation of her lowliness,  
 to follow her in obeying your will;  
 through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, for ever and ever Amen. (p 630)

In the *New Zealand Prayer Book* (1997), one finds this collect for the Annunciation

God of grace,  
 grant that Mary's obedience may inspire us  
 to obey your will  
 and receive Jesus Christ in our hearts as Lord,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one God for ever (p 647)

Usually, the collects for the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary are exactly the same in the Prayer-book and in the Missal

3 Moreover none of our two traditions is surprised by the fact that all the old confessions of faith proclaim that Jesus is born of Mary, or born from the Virgin, and make no reference to Joseph. Let us mention: Ignatius, *Epist. ad Trallianos* 9, Irenaeus AH I, 10, 1, III, 4, 1, 2; Tertullian, *De Virg. vel. 1. Adv. prax. 2; De praescrip. haer. 13*, Origen, *De princ. I, praef 4-6*; Epiphanius, *Anc. 119-120*, etc Yet, it is Joseph who is a descendant of David, the ancestor of the Messiah. Why this omission of his name? The two churches explain it by the unique and distinct role of the Mother of the Saviour *eis oikonomian tou plerōmatos tōn kairōn* (according to the divine plan of the fulfillment of the times) (*Ep 1 10*) The motherhood of Mary cannot be really understood outside this specific nature of the *kairōs* in which she is called to be a specific instrument of God,

endowed with all the gifts such a vocation requires. Exactly as it is impossible to really understand the identity of what the New Testament calls "the Twelve", "the Apostles", outside this *kairos*. Mary's vocation is radically unintelligible without a constant reference to "the Spirit" at work in "the fullness of time" (Ga 4.4)

4

A. I believe that another point is evident for both of us. It concerns the way the New Testament expresses what belongs to the *kairos* (as it understands them) that we have to "receive" in our faith, especially what is said of persons or events related to them. Yet one cannot forget that we find in the biblical tradition two complementary ways of transmitting the same revealed truth, like the fruit of two manners of looking at it.

One of these two ways is descriptive, based on historical evidence and relates the words said (or supposed to have been said), the events happening (or supposed to have happened), the facts, the tangible reality clear enough to be easily noticed by any person. For instance, it is said that Jesus was born of Mary.

The other way of relating the same reality is not descriptive (in the habitual meaning of this adjective). It is interpretative, trying to make clear the inner signification of the events, the transcendental element at work in them, to give an insight into their divine dimension and their belonging to the realm of the *oikonomia* of Salvation entirely dependent on God. But since it is dealing with the transcendental, beyond the practical evidence of ordinary reasoning and experience, this manner of expressing reality makes use of the language of poetry, symbolism, epics, mythology. Is there an other possibility? To show that the baby of Mary belongs to the divine *oikonomia*, Luke and Matthew use the beautiful poetical or symbolic images of angels singing, stars leading pilgrims to the child, light illuminating the night and the epic remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. All these features express really the *inner* truth of the event of Jesus' birth. When the churches use them in their liturgy they are really "remembering" the truth of the Incarnation. But this way of expressing the truth is not, indeed, the way historians use to describe reality. It is an effort to answer questions concerning especially the source, the "reason why", the signification, the link with the whole of God's action. It does not describe. Strictly speaking, it "reveals". And what is "revealed" is precisely what makes

of this event a *kairos*, that is an act essentially rooted in the salvific will of God, not only an event belonging to a neutral succession of events (to the chronology of the *chronos*) but a decisive moment appointed by God himself. It is clear however that in this process truth is authentically disclosed. Evangelical truth is not only the empirical evidence of what can be verified or checked. It is also what, enlightened by the Spirit, human intelligence comes to perceive of the divine intention and transcendental elements involved in the events. It is this perception that what I called the interpretative or supra-rational language conveys. To grasp authentically the revealed truth, one needs to take into account these two realms of scriptural language, acknowledging the specificity of each of them, resisting the temptation to reduce everything to the descriptive, the chronological, the obvious, the empirical.

B It is at this second realm of expressing "the truth which is beyond reason" that the marian doctrines and dogmas belong. They have to be "received" and understood according to this nature. This is why in our churches the marian devotion, as soon as it forgets that what the Scripture says of Mary is a "commentary" or an "inspired interpretation" of the *kairos* of the Incarnation, becomes problematic, giving birth to wrong visions of the role of Christ in Salvation. This explains also why as soon as the symbolic poetic, "mythological" *ethos* of the marian language is put aside, the so-called "marian doctrine" and "marian piety" become too moralistic to be compatible with the core of the *kairos*. This core is what Paul declares in *Ga* 4 4-7

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

Its content is essentially the mighty intervention of God in which Mary is implicated as its instrument, only because such is the will of the Father. Its gist is the *agape* of God for the whole of humanity, it is not the way humanity has to behave. So, Mary is not there as

the one getting a role she deserved. She is there as the one the Father gratuitously chose and "prepared" to be the mother of the incarnate Son.

5 Consequently, Mary is not called by God chiefly to be the divinely appointed model of human obedience to God's will. Besides, in the New Testament there is a "yes" of Joseph to the will of God (*Mt* 1.20-25) parallel to the "yes" of Mary (*Lk* 1.38). In other words, the figure of Mary does not belong to the moralistic realm of *the euaggelion tou Theou*. It is inserted at the heart of what the Latin tradition calls the *mirabilia Dei*. This explains why for patristic, medieval (especially Thomistic) theology, there is no specific "mariology" (a word to avoid!) but only a particular chapter of Christology dealing with the *Theotokos*. And this in spite of the important place of Mary in liturgy, sculpture, architecture, icons, hymns, and even profane poetry. Yet for the first centuries, she is some one the church contemplates with joy, some one in whom the faithful have a glimpse of what the grace of the Spirit can do with the creatures God made as "his own image and likeness". Eastern and Western liturgical celebrations of Mary are made of a tissue of poetry, biblical images and symbols praising the splendours of the work of the Spirit in this young girl of Nazareth. Rare are, in these beautiful pieces of official Marian cult, affirmations belonging to what I called the descriptive, factual, argumentative language. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, the rule of prayer establishes the rule of faith. Both must be in conformity. This does not apply only to the content (*PI* 51, 664, *DH* 246). It concerns also the way faith is explained and received: "dis-moi comment tu pries je te dirai ce que tu crois".

## II

It is now possible to look at the two dogmas declared after the separation of our two churches, and which are two explications of the ecumenical dogma we all "receive", Mary the *theotokos* (*Ephesus*, 431).

1 Immaculate Conception is not the same as virginity. It is essentially linked to the absence of any sin in the Mother of God, a point on which Fathers (in East and West)

were not unanimous, especially before Ephesus (431) Augustine, who believes in the victory of Mary over sin (but not necessarily in her immaculate conception), says beautifully, having quoted Pelagius.

Piety demands, he says, that we admit that she was without sin. Let us then leave aside the holy Virgin Mary, on account of the honor due to the Lord, I do not want to raise here any question about her when we are dealing with sins. (*De natura et gratia* 36, 42)

I am convinced that Augustine did not accept – for reasons explained by S. Bernard and Thomas Aquinas – the Immaculate Conception (see *De Genesi ad litt.*, X, 18, 32, CSEL 28, 2, 319). Nevertheless he says rightly that we are in the field of *pietas* (the patristic *eusebeia*, cf. *1 Cl* 12, 11 1; 15 1, 32 4, that is the right explication of our relation to God). He also explains that what is affirmed of Mary is on account of the *honor* due to the Lord. It is, indeed, this *honor* which is involved in the main sentence of the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (Pius IX, 1854, *DH* 2803, *DS* 1641).

We declare, pronounce, and define that the doctrine, which holds that the most Blessed Virgin Mary at the first instant of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in virtue of the merits of Christ Jesus, the Savior of the human race, was preserved immaculate from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and on this account must be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.

Well understood, this “definition” is affirming that Mary was in need of the Redemption procured by Christ Jesus, the Saviour. Moreover, a careful re-reading of the whole document shows that in the mind of Pius IX the ultimate foundation of the definition – not clearly evident in the Scriptures – is not the parallel between Eva and Mary but really the *theotokos*. The commentary of cardinal Newman is here misleading. Regrettably it is still used in many catholic circles (*Certain difficulties felt by Anglicans*, vol II).

In this perspective, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is – in the *eusebeia* of the Church – the solemn “manifestation” or “disclosure”, through the unique privilege of the *theotokos*, that the grace of God at work “*jam ab Abel justo*”, was already coming

from the Cross and saving Death of Christ. Moreover, everything, in communion with God, men and women were doing as "servants" of the Spirit, before the historical incarnation of the Son, was already seized within the power of the saving Cross. In her rationally and empirically unjustifiable role of mother of the Saviour, Mary is thus the corporate personality of the people of God – starting with Abraham and even Abel (cf. Augustin) – that the merit of Christ empowers, in order to make possible the Incarnation "when the time will fully come" (cf. *Ga* 4:4). For it is the fruit of this merit of the "Cross of the Lord to come" which enabled men and women to cooperate with the Spirit, *already in the preparation* of Christ's Event, still expected. Yet, as Aquinas will explain, because it is the merit of a humanity hypostatically united to the Son of God, "*praesentialiter attingit omnia loca et tempora*" ("it is efficiently present to all places and all times" *Summa Theol.* III<sup>e</sup>, 56, 1, ad 3).

I am convinced that our two churches can agree that this is perfectly in tune with some important lines of ARCIC II's statement on Salvation and the Church. It is said (n<sup>o</sup> 19).

Salvation involves participating in that humanity, (of Christ), so as to live the human life now as God has refashioned it in Christ (cf. *Col* 3.10). This understanding of our humanity as made new in Christ by God's transforming power throws light on the New Testament affirmation that, while we are not saved because of works, we are created in Christ for good works (*Eph* 2.8 ff) "Not because of works": nothing even of our best achievement or good will can give us any claim to God's gift of renewed humanity. God's recreating deed originates in himself and nowhere else. "For good works" good works are the fruit of the freedom God has given us in his Son. In restoring us to his likeness, God confers freedom on fallen humanity. This is not the natural freedom to choose between alternatives, but the freedom to do his will. "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" (*Rom* 8.2, 4). We are freed and enabled to keep the commandments of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, to live faithfully as God's people and to grow in love within the discipline of the community, bringing forth the fruit of the Spirit. Inasmuch as we are recreated in his "own image and likeness", God involves us in what he freely does to realise

our salvation (Phil 2 12 ff) in the words of Augustine. "The God who made you without you, without you does not make you just" (*Sermons* 169 13) thus from the divine work follows the human work. it is we who live and act in a fully human way, yet never on our own or in a self-sufficient independence.

In Mary, playing an important role in the *karos* of the Son becoming flesh from her flesh, it is the wonderful and impressive esteem of God for his "own image and likeness" which is involved, the "admire how you are loved" which is actualized God, to whom everything is possible, does not want to save humanity without involving it in its salvation, especially when the person of the Saviour is concerned. This Saviour has to be a man, the "gift" of a real mother (cf. Irenaeus). But because humanity is by itself radically unable to do that, God – eminently in Mary that he gratuitously and marvelously "adjust" to her role of *theotokos* – gives humanity *already* a share in the grace the cross and Resurrection will provide. Without Mary God does not make Christ but, most radically without the saving Cross and Death of Christ God does not make Mary.

In this perspective, the Immaculate Conception appears as the epitome of the transcendence of God's grace and of the power of the Cross-Resurrection event. In the language of the *karos* (and giving to the word symbol its rich philosophical meaning) it is the symbolic emergence of the fullness of the gift of God to humanity. It conveys, in its own way, an essential dimension of the truth of divine Redemption the reason alone cannot grasp. This is why it is celebrated with images taken from the "poetic" style of the first chapters of Genesis.

2 The way Pius XII, in *Munificentissimus Deus* (1950), proclaims the definition of the Assumption helps us to understand the other dimension of the privileges of the *theotokos*. He says (DH 3903, DS 2333):

the Immaculate Mother of God, ever Virgin Mary, after completing her course of life upon earth, was assumed to the glory of heaven both body and soul. (DH 3903)

The context is explicitly apocalyptic, eschatological. The Apostolic Constitution mentions *Gn* 3 15, *1 Co* 15.21-26, 51-57.



Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn. Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet" ( )

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery. We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true. Death has been swallowed up in victory.

"Where, O death, is your victory?"

Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

*Rm 5 and 6 (DH 3901).* We need to remember how, in the same context (*1 Co 15:35-44*) Paul shows clearly that we do not know what is the nature of the "Resurrection Body" except that it comes from the natural body and is raised as pneumatical. This is why one is obliged to use images (the seed and the plant, the earthly bodies and the heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon, the star and the other star).

Even if the Victory of the Risen Lord over death is to be fully manifested only "at the end," when Christ will hand over the kingdom to the Father (*1Co 15:24*), nevertheless the seeds of Resurrection are already at work in the ecclesial Body of Christ. Christians are baptized in the Death and Resurrection of Christ (*Rm 6:1-11, 8:11; Col 2:12-13*), they receive at the Synaxis the body and blood of the Risen Lord (cf *1Co 5:6-8*), they have

"the spirit who raised Jesus from the dead living in them" (*Rm* 8:11), they are "a new creation... the new has come" (2 *Co* 5:17) and the author of the letter to the Ephesians may declare "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms *en Christo Jesu*" (*Eph* 2:6, *Col* 2:12; 3:3-4, cf. *Rm* 8:17-18). The *eschatia* are already at work. The Church of God is not only the result of a juridical and ethical link with Christ the Head. It is fundamentally a *koinonia* with the eschatological reality and totality of the Risen Lord. The letter to the Ephesians will affirm that it is his Body (*Eph* 1:23), not that it is "like his Body", the Body of the Risen Lord.

The Assumption is the *apotheosis* or epitome of this reality of the Resurrection already at work and of the efficacy of "the seeds of Resurrection" in the Church of God. Because of the Resurrection of Christ, Resurrection is now, for all the members of his Body, not only a vague possibility but a real gift. Through Mary it is the gift in its fullness which is blossoming, in the member of the Church the most intimately associated with the Head, his mother. She already enjoys what the whole Body will enjoy after the Coming in glory of her Son, when the last enemy, Death, will be destroyed. She becomes, because of that, the archetype of the Risen Body of Christ. But this can be expressed only with apocalyptic images and symbols. The depth of christian "myth" – in the positive meaning of the word "myth" – is there manifested not in a concept but in a poetical vision which is not to be understood literally (as in the paintings of Murillo!). It is a way to give access to the impenetrable reality of the *eschatia* the Church itself cannot fully grasp, even if she knows that what she tries to express is the truth the Spirit of God "reveals" as an essential element of the *kairos* of Salvation in Christ.

Again, what ARCIC II said of the link between Church and Salvation (especially n° 26) is coherent with this view.

The Church is itself a sign of the Gospel, for its vocation is to embody and reveal the redemptive power contained within the Gospel. What Christ achieved through his cross and resurrection is communicated by the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. In its life the Church signifies God's gracious purpose for sinful humanity. It is thus a sign and foretaste of God's Kingdom. In fulfilling this vocation the Church is called to follow the way of Jesus Christ, who

being the image of the Father took the form of a servant  
and was made perfect by suffering.

But the Assumption shows the depth of this communication of the "achievement" of Cross and Resurrection, in the *koinônia* with God the Church is *en Christo*. Something not alien to our statement on *koinônia*

This is the right way to integrate this issue in our program of studies. Mary needs to be seen in relation inseparably both to God and to us, but always according to the way the Church looks at the *kairos* of Salvation and at the *eschatia*.

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