

# The Marian Church

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Cardinal Ratzinger says that “the woman who gives birth amidst pain, in chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation, is the indivisible unity of the entire divine community of salvation: Israel-Mary-Church.”<sup>1</sup> Further on, he states: “At the moment of her Yes, Mary is Israel in person, the Church in person and as person.”<sup>2</sup>

Since Mary is at once both Israel and the Church, let us consider her, contemplate her, so as to discover the characteristics of a Marian Church. Mary is associated in all the mysteries of the life of Christ, from birth to death-resurrection-Pentecost. Chaminade asks: “Is there a single mystery of the life of our Lord to which Mary is a stranger? But if the Mother is to be found wherever the Son is, how could I be so foolish and so senseless as to separate from the Son a Mother who was never separated from him?”<sup>3</sup>

An overview of scripture, a Marian reading of scripture, leads us to discover in Mary the Woman, the Spouse, the Mother-Virgin, the educator, and, therefore, the missionary. Consequently, a Marian Church contemplating Mary will be a Church promoting the values of femininity, of spousal relations, of maternity-virginity, and those of educator, formator, and missionary.

## *Mary, Woman; Church, feminine*

This is not a matter of “feminizing” its members by some kind of claim to the ministerial priesthood for women. Much greater things are involved. “The femininity of the Church affects everything, whereas the ministry carried out by the apostles and their male successors is a simple function within that all-embracing femininity,” as von Balthasar says.<sup>4</sup>

A feminine Church is a Church which claims as its own the history of the people of Israel, the history of all the women who, in the midst of that people, fore-shadow Mary in some way: Miryam Deborah, Ruth, Judith, Esther. These were women of faith, whose unshakeable confidence in Yahweh foretold the intrepid and vigorous faith of Mary (Lk 2:19.51), which led her to say: “*Do whatever he tells you*” (Jn 2:5). These women were liberators of their people at critical moments of its history, standing up to the powers of evil. They prefigured Mary. She is the Woman of Genesis (3:15) whose offspring would crush every kind of evil (the sign of the Woman becomes a sign of hope in life). She is also the Woman of Revelation (ch. 12) who gives birth in pain but who is borne aloft on eagle’s wings, symbols of immanence and transcendence. She is a Woman who becomes a sign of the universality of salvation.

A feminine Church is conscious of being answerable for what it has received and of what it wishes to transmit in turn. It is a Church which, like all these women, sings the praises of God the victor, and of the marvels he has done for them and their people. These are the themes of the *Magnificat* of Mary as she recalls the history of Israel.

<sup>1</sup> Ratzinger and von Balthasar, *Marie, Première Eglise*. Paris: Médiaspaul, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Marie, Première Eglise*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Marian Writings*. Dayton: MRC, 1980, vol. 2, par. 737.

<sup>4</sup> *Marie, Première Eglise*, p. 114.

A feminine Church is one which, despite all danger, takes risks because it believes in its Lord. It “*knows in whom it has placed its faith*” (2Tim 1:12).

A feminine Church is one which, like all these women, gives evidence of listening, welcoming, sensitivity, vulnerability, creativity, courage, intuition, interiority, and the humble and heart-rending good fortune of loving and being loved; a good fortune which becomes capable of giving woman her proper place.

A feminine Church is one which generates, carries, and brings forth a life which saves the world from death, like these women who saved their people from extermination, like Mary who gives LIFE, the Christ.

### ***Mary Spouse, Church betrothed***

The prophets of Israel, especially Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, often portray the people of Israel as a rebellious spouse, a prostitute, ransomed and saved by Yahweh. The Song of Songs is Israel’s song in which the well-beloved is unceasingly seeking her well-beloved. She finds him, then seeks anew because he has disappeared. These books portray the comings and goings of a people often looking covertly for the Other. Mary, chosen from all eternity, is this unique and immaculate spouse, preserved by God so that she might become mother of his Son: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the most high will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35). This recalls the espousals found in Ruth (chap. 4) and Ezekiel (16:8ff).

At Cana she is truly the New Eve, spouse of the New Adam. She shares in the joy and banquet of the Parousia and distributes the wine of the wedding to all those who desire it (Jn 2:1-11). She enters fully into the new creation.

A spousal Church is both the immaculate spouse and the sinful one, as Saint Paul says (Eph 5:25-27). In it are found both Israel and Mary.

A spousal Church is one that turns to the well-beloved to receive from him all the riches of knowledge (in the biblical sense), wisdom, and fear of the Lord. It gives itself totally to him, without restrictions.

A spousal Church is audacious, because it loves. It finds new ways to proclaim the good news. It is inventive and creative, like a spouse who desires to make known the one whom she loves.

### ***Mary, Mother-Virgin; a maternal Church***

The Daughter of Sion is, first of all, Israel. She engenders the people. Within this people are the women of the patriarchs, the “Mothers of Israel.” They are all sterile, but become miraculously mothers of the promise foretelling the one who, while virgin, will give birth to the Son of the promise (Lk 1:31,35). The Daughter of Sion gives birth to the first-born son in joy, and all his brothers in the pains of childbirth (Is 66:7-8). This title applies to Mary. After having brought forth the Son, Mary, at the foot of the cross, brings forth the brothers of the Lord, the disciples, in the pains and suffering of an innocent victim (Jn 19:26-27). Mary is “Mother of Believers” and “Mother of the Church.”

A Marian Church remains standing by the cross. It is exposed, and vulnerable to the ridicule of the executioners. But it remains upright beside the cross.

The virginal Church, because it is spouse of Christ, will bring forth the brothers of Christ in pain, for such is the Daughter of Sion: “You for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you” (Gal 4:19).

The maternal Church will give proof of tenderness, tenacity, and self-effacement, as does a loving mother for her children. It will not care about its own fatigue or suffering, but will be completely given over to the people of this time because it knows itself to be the object of a gratuitous love from a God who has a mother’s heart (Is 49:15). It will be on the lookout for what is being born, for what is possible, for the life which stirs in the human heart.

The maternal Church does not despair of humans, for in the most disfigured of them a wick still smolders. It tends with compassion to the most isolated, the most abandoned, the most wounded, for it is the Mother of Mercy who remains close to the least of them.

### ***Mary, Educator; Church, educator, formator, missionary***

Israel’s only concern is to inculcate in her children a love of God’s Word so that they might listen to it, study it, interpret it, and live it (Dt 6:4-9); all this, in order to make holy the name of the Lord and to hasten the coming of his reign.

Like every Jewish woman, Mary was the educator of the humanity and faith of the Son in the home of Nazareth, in simplicity, humility, and silence. When two beings love one another, there is little need for words. They understand a single syllable, a gesture, a smile, prolonged gazes. Von Balthasar says that “Jesus owed his human self-awareness above all to his mother.”<sup>5</sup>

In her Jewish home with its family liturgies, Mary educated and formed her son to the history, traditions, and religion of his people. At the same time, she initiated him to the psalms, to the art of listening to the word, and to the Jewish prayers which supported the life of the people. Without knowing it for certain, she was preparing him for his mission as Son. “This first foundational contact, this symbiosis of mother and child, were not, in the light of contemporary reflection on relationships, something merely biological. Rather, the essential was taking place on a spiritual level. That is why the unique spiritual life of this child allows us to conclude that there was a correspondingly unique spiritual life of the mother.”<sup>6</sup> She shared fully in the life of her people, rejoicing and weeping with her neighbors. She headed for the mountains of Ein Karim to help her cousin. By her mere presence, she proclaimed the mystery which was burgeoning in her. “*Blessed are you who have believed...*” (Lk 1:45; 11:27). She is the first missionary of the Son.

At Pentecost, Mary was present within the small Church which was being born; her presence discreet, but reassuring and comforting. In union and prayer they awaited the Spirit which would transfigure them and send them to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:14; ch. 1-4).

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<sup>5</sup> *Marie, Première Eglise*, p. 105

<sup>6</sup> *Marie, Première Eglise*, p. 106.

Mary is educator of her Son, and educator of each of her children who are to be similarly conceived in her virginal womb by the operation of the Holy Spirit. They are to be formed to the image of Jesus by her maternal care,<sup>7</sup> to become, in turn, educators and missionaries of the faith of the people.

A Church, educator, formator, and missionary, lives at Nazareth and proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ, in simplicity and especially by being what it is. It invites us to allow ourselves to be formed by the Spirit in a missionary dynamism. It visits men and women of our day. It does not wait for them to come, but goes out to them. It lives at the cutting edge of dehumanization, for it is audacious in discerning the Spirit.

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<sup>7</sup> *Spirit of Our Foundation*, vol. 1, par. 111.