

# PLURALISM ABOUT MARY: BIBLICAL AND CONTEMPORARY

By RENÉ LAURENTIN

**H**OW DO WE picture Mary in our mind's eye? Portraits of her differ considerably according to period, place and culture. The variety of marian iconography is in clear contrast with that of Christ, for which a model was set by as early as the fourth century — no doubt influenced by the Turin Shroud.<sup>1</sup> Not so with Mary, of whom St Augustine said at the beginning of the fifth century: 'Her face is unknown to us'.<sup>2</sup> And the picture of her attributed to Luke is by no means as influential a norm as is the Shroud — which nowadays inspires not only a film-director like Bunuel but also numberless hippies.

Whereas byzantine art often depicts Mary as a typical queen or empress, the roman Virgins of the western Church are more often images of poor, humble, peasant women. And, whereas some artists have so spiritualized and etherealized Mary as to render her unreal, others have shown her as a dominant matriarch embodying the cosmic forces of nature — as overpowering as any pagan goddess. Botticelli used the same woman as his model for both the Virgin Mary and the goddess Venus. Painters and sculptors have found their inspiration in widely differing models. The same can be said of theologians. Among them also we find very different visions of Mary — and sometimes no vision at all.

Ought we to proclaim 'pluralism exists' and forthwith rejoice in the scope thus afforded to ecumenical dialogue? That would be easy but deceptive. Pluralism is a fact. It is not necessarily an ideal. We need to be wary of it, to make sure we assess it correctly. Pluralism would be nothing but a detestable slogan if it were used as the pretext for abandoning every criterion and norm, for relativizing dogma, truth and its unity, and turning the christian revelation into a jumping-off point for subjective improvisation — in short, if we were to break loose and head towards a philosophy that glorifies subjectivity, as has been the case all too often in the last two centuries with theology.

On the other hand, any monolithic system would be illusory since it would fail to recognize a diversity which in large measure is quite legitimate. Both East and West can enlist the support of differing theologies, teachings, poetics, iconographies — differing indeed, but nonetheless faithful to one and the same revelation. ‘The spirit bloweth where it listeth’, and ‘there are many mansions’ we might say, applying to this context two sayings of Jesus according to St John. In short, pluralism itself is subject to norms and criteria; it has to be assessed.

This being so, I would like to put one fundamental question. Is the teaching of scripture concerning Mary pluralist — objectively speaking? If the answer is ‘Yes’, that could give a great fillip to ecumenical dialogue. It would enable our differences and our legitimate freedoms of interpretation to be clearly set out — like a series of marker-buoys, landing-lights along the way, capable of transforming our confessional differences into differences of spirituality. This biblical pluralism (together with these confessional affinities which I first explored during a course I gave at Dayton University) has been accepted by my protestant colleague Professor Kretschmar; and the two of us collaborated fully in preparing the text on this subject which appeared in an ecumenical volume published in Germany to mark the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say there is not more than one Mother of Jesus; her name, Mary, is beyond doubt — even though Paul and John do not seem to know it, or at least do not disclose it to us.

### *The Silence*

Although according to Luke (Acts 1,14) Mary was present in the primitive Church of Pentecost, she did not feature in the preaching of those early days. The *Acts of the Apostles* shows that the subject-matter of the witness and *kerygma* was confined to the public life of Jesus ‘from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us’ (Acts 1,22).

The primitive preaching was to remain faithful to this pattern, as can be seen from what *Acts* tells us of Peter’s speeches (Acts 2,17-36; 10,36-43), and even from Paul’s speeches too. The same is true of Mark’s gospel. Questions about Christ’s origin — his birth and childhood, the Incarnation — lie outside the primitive *kerygma*; yet they are by no means ‘late’ (as some over-zealous extrapolators unjustly assert) because the kernel of the infancy narratives, which is very old, seems to have taken shape very early, as a matter of

personal conviction, among the primitive judaeo-christian communities.

In every one of the epistles (which constitute almost half of the New Testament) there is complete silence concerning Mary — apart from one single verse which we shall examine shortly.

I note this silence as a fact, without seeking either to exaggerate its importance, which may be fortuitous, or to dispute it like J. Massingberd Ford, Professor at Notre Dame, Indiana, who considers that Mary, together with John and Luke, provided the inspiration for the epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>4</sup>

The main part of the synoptic gospels contains little of note concerning Mary. In Mark, the most primitive of the gospels, Mary is mentioned only in passing, and apparently dismissively. In Mark 6,1-6, Christ's fellow-countrymen refuse to believe in him precisely because he is only 'the carpenter son of Mary'. Their acquaintance with Jesus according to the flesh, clouds their vision of him according to the spirit. This scornful remark by the Nazarenes may be an allusion to the irregular birth of Jesus (that he was not the son of Joseph was well known to the village gossips) and it could be read in the same light as the stinging reply of Jesus's adversaries in John 8,41: 'We were not born of fornication'. Perhaps we have here the first witnesses to those jewish traditions which interpreted the unusual origin of Jesus as adulterous. Celsus declared him to be the son of a roman soldier called Panthera — this proper name being a curious anagram of the word *parthenos*, virgin.<sup>5</sup>

The other marcan text (3,31-33, common to the other two synoptics) makes it quite clear that Jesus's true family is made up of his disciples:

And his mother and his brethren came; and standing *outside* they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him [in the house, cf 3,20] and they said to him 'Your mother and your brethren are *outside*, asking for you'. And he replied 'Who are my mother and my brethren?' And looking around on those who sat about him, he said 'Here are my mother and my brethren! Whosoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother'.

This text, setting flesh and spirit in opposition, gives spiritual family ties ascendancy over blood relationships. The opposition between the two groups is underlined by the contrast between those who are '*outside*' (the word occurs twice) and those who are '*about*' Jesus, in the house with him, and on whom he looks *around* to make

the point that this is his orbit or his family circle. Luke softens the contrast by omitting to mention the looking around.

A third passage, proper to Luke (11,27-28), begins with praise of Mary from an enthusiastic listener: 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked!' But he said 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!' Here the intervention does not come from outside the circle of listeners. But the meaning is the same, so much so that some exegetes have tried to make this passage a doublet of the other.

If there were nothing beyond these texts, there would be nothing on which to found a theology of the Mother of Christ — or an Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It is because they have no specific meaning that I have dealt with these texts under this initial heading of 'The Silence'. Although they attest the existence within history of a mother of Jesus, called Mary, living in Nazareth, they have no additional significance; all they do is warn us against erroneous assessments of Mary from a carnal standpoint.

What does merit our attention is the place assigned to Mary by Paul, Luke and John. Do the differences between these three lay the foundations for a legitimate pluralism in theology and spirituality?

### *Paul*

Although the epistles attributed to Paul occupy more than a quarter of the New Testament, in none of them is Mary mentioned by name; and only one verse, Galatians 4,4, remotely concerns her: 'But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his *Son*, come of a woman, come under the *law*, to set free those who were under the *law*, to make us *sons* by adoption'. We have not come here to explore the chiasmus 'Son-law-law-sons'. Or to examine the implications of the text. Some people consider that it tells us nothing about Mary. Others find in it an oblique reference to spiritual motherhood; for whereas the law, in St Paul's view, conjures up the negative image of a yoke from which mankind is to be freed, to relate a woman to the Son of God made man and to sons by adoption conjures up the positive perspective of what the Fathers were to call the 'admirable exchange' (*admirabile commercium*).<sup>6</sup> V. Cernuda,<sup>7</sup> who has explored the text more thoroughly than certain of his predecessors, detects in it an oblique reference to the virginal conception.

Paul does not say that Christ was born of a woman (the verb *gennāō*) but that he was come (*genomenos* from *gignomai*) of a woman.

That is one way of expressing what the Fathers were to convey, more explicitly, by 'he became what he was not, without ceasing to be what he was from all eternity'.<sup>8</sup> And what Thomas Aquinas was to establish in metaphysical terms: 'When we say *God became man*, we do not understand any change on the part of God, but only on the part of human nature' (*Summa* q 16, a 6, ad 2). According to V. Cernuda, this avoidance of the verb 'to be born' shows clearly how difficult it was for the concept of the Incarnation to fit into the thought-patterns of those days.

Analogous stylistic precautions are to be found in the main passages in Paul which touch on the Incarnation. If Paul does no more than attribute to Christ the *likeness* (Phil 2,7 and Rom 8,3) or *form* (Phil 2,7) of men, and if he says not that Christ *was born a man* but *came to humanity*, this does not imply that, for him, the humanness of Christ was no more than apparent (as the Docetists claimed); it is a precaution intended to convey that the *becoming man* in the Incarnation in no way detracted from the *divine state* of the Son of God. The same preoccupation is discernible in Galatians 4,4, where the reference to Christ's human origin is exclusively maternal.

Two important points characterize the position occupied by Mary in Paul's theology. First, the Incarnation is only rarely mentioned in Paul (Rom 1,3; cf 8,3; Phil 2,7; 2 Cor 8,9). Secondly, where it is mentioned by him it means, for him, the *kenōsis* of the Son of God (Phil 2,7: *Hekenōsen* means that Christ not only humbled himself but stripped himself, emptied himself in some way of his glory). This negative function of the Incarnation, according to St Paul, has prompted one protestant theologian, S. Benko, to consider that the first principle of any authentic mariology should be, following Paul, that the function of the Incarnation was to effect the *kenōsis* (the humbling, the form of a slave) of the Son of God.<sup>9</sup>

Paul, whose conversion sprang from his vision and experience of the risen Christ, centres all his teaching on the Resurrection — a fulfilment of Christ far beyond the humiliations of the flesh. This perspective does not lack affinities with the perspectives of Platonism. The Incarnation now appears as a stage characterized by an impoverishment. When Jesus assumed 'the condition of our sinful flesh' (Rom 8,3), he 'became poor so that by his poverty we might become rich' (2 Cor 8,9). This path entailed experiencing death, in order to be highly exalted by contrast (Phil 2,9). In this perspective the part played by Mary emerges as a sort of prologue, comparable, in its deprivatory effect, to the law to which Jesus became subject.

That is why Mary is no more than a shadowy figure in St Paul's writing. This 'woman' makes her appearance only as the means of the Incarnation; she is not of course without significance in the context of our adoption (Gal 4,4), but our full adoption is a consequence of the Resurrection.

Following the lead of the apostle Paul the Reformation laid major stress on the risen Christ, who has to be known according to the spirit and not according to the flesh. Such a perspective sets a low value on the Incarnation. In recent decades a few Protestants have shown concern about this, treating it as a deficiency. Pastor J. L. Lebas wrote the following self-criticism in 1954: 'If, as is undoubtedly the case, Protestantism is going through a crisis, isn't this because our affirmation of the Incarnation is itself disembodied?' Hans Küng levels the same reproach at Karl Barth in his thesis on that great theologian: 'Man, and hence the Incarnation — Jesus Christ as man — are perhaps not taken entirely seriously'. Since then Protestants, especially Lutherans, have to a great extent revalued the Incarnation — while certain *avant-garde* catholic theologians have been losing sight of its meaning. Such a trend is apparent when Christ is declared the sole mediator, on the basis of the Pauline saying *unus mediator* (to which Vatican II did justice in response to a concern already felt by Pius XII in his last years).

Hence the saying of Paul Tillich: 'Mary means nothing to a Protestant'.<sup>10</sup> Although nowadays such a statement would seem to call for a nuance or two, it does at least correspond with the minimal treatment accorded by Paul to Mary and the Incarnation, for which she figures in his writings as no more than the instrument.

### *Luke*

The catholic perspective is first and foremost a prolongation of that of Luke 1-2. Luke, the author of Acts, is the only hagiographer in the New Testament (if we disregard the sketchy beginnings in Hebrews).<sup>11</sup> He shines the spotlights on Peter and Paul, on Stephen the first martyr and on a number of exemplary Christians, both men and women. He does not forget to recall the presence of Mary in Acts 1,14.

Unlike Matthew, for whom Mary is a passive character, a woman-object, Luke presents her as loved by God, endowed with grace (1,28 and 30), freely engaging in a dialogue (1,29 and 34) which she brings to a close with an exemplary act of faith — in strong contrast with the speechlessness of Zacharias the priest, punished for his dis-

belief. Luke certainly lends no weight at all to those feminist slogans which accuse the Church of exalting Mary, only in order to denigrate all other women. In Luke, women are the first beneficiaries of the coming of the Spirit, in the proto-Pentecost of the infancy of Christ (Mary, Elizabeth and then Anna the prophetess). Similarly they are the first witnesses of the Resurrection, and have to contend with the disbelief of the apostles. Moreover, Luke is the first gospel-writer to stress this, unlike Matthew and Mark. In Luke it is the man who is humiliated for having raised an objection: Zacharias is punished for having asked a question analogous to that of Mary. If Paul opines that women should remain silent in Church (1 Cor 14,34), he would seem to be contradicted by the sanction imposed on Zacharias: let the priest remain silent in Church.

Luke speaks openly of Mary's holiness. She is given a new name by God, a name of grace: *Kecharitōmene*, object *par excellence* of God's favour, full of *grace* in a way that is unchanging, everlasting, definitive (shown by the verb *charitōō* used in the perfect tense). She has 'found favour with God', remarks Gabriel (1,30). The *Holy Spirit* comes upon her. Her selfless response to God's gifts is not confined to her whole-hearted acceptance of her destiny: she at once embarks on a preparatory errand, like the promptly diligent servant she is (1,39-55). That is why she is 'blessed among women' (1,42), 'blessed for having believed' (1,45), so that 'all generations will call her blessed' (the same root *makaria* in 1,48). We may perhaps be surprised to find Luke placing Mary in the foreground — a position more befitting the Messiah. Nowadays we would be more careful to praise Jesus in the first place and Mary next, dependent on him. But Luke is hindered by no such precautions while Jesus is still hidden from sight. The same applies to his account of the visit of the shepherds: 'they found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger' (2,16). But the praise of her is not overdone. Although Mary is praised for her exemplary faith (1,45), she does not understand Jesus's first utterance (2,50) and accepts the trial of her faith by pondering things in her heart (2,19 and 51).

### *John*

John the evangelist stands in clear contrast with Paul the apostle. For Paul, the Incarnation was essentially *kenosis*; for John it is glory: 'The Word became flesh . . . we have beheld his glory' (Jn 1,14). The evangelist who lay close to Jesus's breast at the last supper (Jn 13,25) is even more insistent in his first epistle: 'That which we have

heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands *concerning the Word of life. . .*'. What is more, whereas for Paul the cross marks the lowest depth of Christ's humiliation: 'he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross' (Phil 2,8), John sees the cross as the high point of glory and the tree of life. He feels no need to give an account of the Ascension, which he perceives in the cross itself. Hence his insistent repetition of Jesus's reference to being lifted up: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me' (Jn 12,32-33; cf 3,14; 8,28-30; 18,32). The *glory* of Christ is the Incarnation, and in the cross itself, is all-pervasive in eastern spirituality. This glory has an affinity with the mystery of the Transfiguration, which glows brightly in orthodox liturgy — and in some orthodox believers too. The deep impression made on me by the Patriarch Athenagoras was one of an icon in some way transfigured. Nor is his case by any means unique. A similar impression was made on me by the Eastern Catholic Patriarch, Maximos IV, one of the great figures of Vatican II.

#### *Word-made-flesh and Theotokos*

John's bold short-cut *The Word became flesh* is exactly paralleled in the formula which sums up, for the eastern Church, all devotion to Mary and which has to a large extent enabled the East to dispense with speculations and special devotions — *Theotokos*.

This word is far bolder than the latin expression 'Mother of God', predominant in the West, which links the word *God* to the word *Mother* as a determinative. *Theotokos* is the greek equivalent of the coptic term *manou-ti*, first used in Egypt to designate Isis and applied to Mary (in a totally different and quite new sense), from the third century onwards.<sup>12</sup>

This formula effects a short-circuit, analogous with *the Word became flesh* (Jn 1,14). But John's formula is incomplete. To express the mystery in its entirety a different formula would be needed: *the Word became man* (and the East did have some difficulty over defining that Christ was by no means only flesh and blood, but that he had taken on a human soul and a human intelligence and will).

In the same way *Theotokos* brings together the two poles of the Incarnation: *God* and the *flesh*, immutable immortality and moral corruptibility.

This short circuit is not without one risk — a monophysite interpretation against which the East did react, though with some diffi-



culty. Thus the ecumenical Council of Constantinople adopted the formula of Cyril of Alexandria: *one nature* of God, the incarnate Word.<sup>13</sup> Given that the word *monophysite* means *one single nature* of Christ, Cyril's formula is, etymologically, monophysite, whereas Chalcedon clearly defined his two natures: the human nature and the divine nature.

*Theotokos* has become central and all-embracing in orthodox theology of the blessed Virgin. It is the *leit-motif* as well as the inspiration behind an infinitely varied ensemble of symbols. It is a title of glory centred on the Incarnation of Christ.

The title is johannine — not only because of its structural analogy with the formula 'the Word became flesh' but also because the following passage in John's prologue (Jn 1,13-14) refers to Mary:

... to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God. To all who believe in the name of him who was born not of blood nor will of the flesh nor will of man but of God himself. The Word became flesh and he lived among us and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of his Father, full of grace and truth.

In this text we see a kind of succession of births — three births or sonships. First — that of believers who become children of God. Next comes the mention of a birth characterized by three abrupt negatives: not of blood, nor will of the flesh, nor will of man, but of God. Such terms accord well with the virginal conception spoken of in Luke (1,2), with which John's prologue is connected by both terms and ideas.<sup>14</sup> If we adopt the singular reading 'him who was born' (the earlier of the two to be attested), the virginal conception is referred to in the most obvious way possible. If we were to adopt the plural reading (which is retained in most manuscripts) the reference would again be to the birth of faith of believers, although in terms modelled on the virginal conception. Finally, John's attention turns to Jesus as only-begotten Son of the Father; here the birth is the eternal one — the birth which existed 'in the beginning' (Jn 1,1).

Is it right however, to say that John deals with *three* births — baptismal, temporal, eternal? An analytical turn of mind could certainly tempt one along that path. But John's concern is with one birth only — that of the only-begotten Son (1,14) — which makes further progress within time: first made manifest at the Nativity and then, by an extension of the mystery of divine sonship, in those who believe. In this perspective the fact that Jn 1,13 wavers between the

singular and the plural — between the birth of Christ and the birth of believers — is explained by the meaning's own profound duality. But whichever reading we accept, the triple negative (not of blood, nor will of the flesh, nor will of man) would be incomprehensible if it were not in some way connected with the visible and tangible birth of the incarnate Word.

The same attitude determines the eastern Church's esteem for Mary's intercession when the wine failed at Cana (Jn 1,1-11). There, notwithstanding Christ's negative response: 'What have you to do with me? My hour is not yet come' (Jn 1,4), Mary considers her plea to have been heeded and invites the servants to co-operate in the 'first of the signs' by which Jesus 'manifests his glory' in advance and lays a foundation for the faith of the disciples who 'believed in him' (2,12). Within the same perspective — which allows of no separation between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, or between the cross and the glory — Mary, *Theotokos* is symbolized in the Byzantine Mass by the first of the portions prepared at the offertory.

### *Conclusion*

In their treatment of the Incarnation and its links with the Holy Spirit and the communion of saints, Paul, John and Luke bear witness to three different perspectives differently rooted in their respective theologies. These three perspectives have in their turn inspired the dominant intuitions of protestant, orthodox and catholic theologies and spiritualities. It would of course be quite wrong to make any hard and fast distinctions. Clearly no one confession restricts itself to one part only of the inheritance while refusing the rest. It is more a question of one part predominating. To avoid any exaggeration let us underline what each of the three confessions has preserved from the two complementary poles of its privileged axis.

The Orthodox found in Luke the source of their prayer to Mary. Since the fourth century they have adopted, in the form of an invocation, the annunciation and visitation formulas (Lk 1,): 'Rejoice, full of grace, the Lord is with you, Blessed are you among women' (Lk 1,28 and 42). Invocation of Mary is common to both Orthodox and Catholics (since the fourth and fifth centuries respectively). This practice raises a problem for Protestants. Their reserve is not unfounded. The fundamental norm of the *lex orandi*, strictly observed in all eucharistic anaphora and (with a few rare modern exceptions) in the prayers at Mass, is for *the Father to be addressed*

*through the Son.*<sup>15</sup> The very few Mass prayers addressed to Christ are recent ones. And not a single prayer is addressed to the Holy Spirit. In this basic form of prayer, Mary is not the recipient; she is only the motive. St Augustine invokes her only once, in *prosōpopoeia* (rhetorical apostrophe),<sup>16</sup> without a thought of that turning into a prayer. Direct invocation of Mary is still, even today, no more than a minor, secondary, complementary form of prayer, related not to worship of the one and only God but to communication within the communion of saints. Luther's enthusiasm for the gospel account of the Visitation, which he often preached about and commented on,<sup>17</sup> is all the more surprising in view of the fact that the eastern Church's calendar contains no feast of the Visitation; this was a fifteenth-century creation of the western Church.<sup>18</sup>

Although none of the three confessional groups has confined itself within an enclave restricted to Paul, Luke or John, it must also be said that none of the confessions has by any means exhausted the possibilities of its preferred perspective. Protestants, for example, have perhaps been unable to discern in Paul all the implications of the Incarnation, their vision being to some extent clouded by cultural difficulties in the expression of this mystery, as Cernuda's work has shown.

I now have another question which I would like the Reformed Churches to answer: have they not tended to under-estimate the implications of the communion of saints in Paul by limiting them so strictly to the Church Militant — in reaction against sixteenth-century abuses of devotion to the saints? According to St Paul, the integrity of Christ's body is not betrayed or diminished but revealed, enhanced, fulfilled in glory; this opens up possibilities for accepting the communion of saints not only on the earthly plane but also on the plane of glory where Mary is to be found.

Catholics were for a long time polarized by a mariology confined to Mary's privileges; they thus failed to appreciate Luke's admirable idea of Mary as 'Daughter of Zion', prophet of the revolution in her *Magnificat*. These ideas have now been brought to the fore again, not without decisive protestant collaboration (Sahlin, Herbert, Thurian on 'Mary, Daughter of Zion'). Luke also prompts the thought that Catholics (and perhaps Orthodox too) should not confine their esteem for Mary to her motherhood alone but should recognize her own individual existence — in which freedom, initiative and dynamism (Lk 1,39-56) both precede and go beyond the function of motherhood.

Turning now to the eastern Churches, have they perhaps become too polarized on the single title of *Theotokos* — bound up with johannine incarnation theology and thence attributed to the one whom John himself calls 'the mother of Jesus'? The East seems to have been reluctant to respond to other johannine ideas. I am thinking first of the important place John accords in his gospel to women, making clear the new light in which Jesus saw them. Women have a structural place in John's gospel: they have an inaugural role at the beginning of each of the three books of the gospel — the Book of Signs, the Book of the Passion, the Book of the Resurrection — each of which begins with two episodes involving women.

*The Book of Signs* (Jn 2-10) begins with Mary's initiative which causes Christ to effect, sooner than intended, his 'first sign' on which the disciples' faith was to be founded (Jn 2,4-11). And it is the samaritan woman who takes the good news of Jesus to her people (Jn 4,39-42). *The Book of the Passion* (Jn 11-19) opens with the twin approaches by the sisters of Lazarus, who cause Christ to recall their brother to life — a sign foreshadowing his own Resurrection (Jn 11,30-32). Then Mary's anointing of him symbolizes the anointing at his death and burial (12,7). Finally, *the Book of the Resurrection* (Jn 20-21), begins with the two episodes involving Mary Magdalene: she is the first to arrive at the empty tomb to which she leads the disciples (20,1-10), and the first to see the risen Jesus whom she proclaims to the disciples (20,11-18). 'Evangelist to the evangelists', commented St Peter Chrysologus. Also we should not forget the episode on Calvary (Jn 19,25-27) which has a different function in the structure of the gospel.

Greek culture, misogynous in some respects, played down St John's innovatory treatment of women: one has only to remember what some of the greek Fathers (such as Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria and plenty of others) had to say about the weakness or inconstancy of the fair sex, Mary included. That is why we find in some greek Fathers the idea that Mary sinned, through doubt or vainglory. John, no less than Luke, calls on us to leave such depreciation behind us.

There is a second point. Only rarely did the greek Fathers echo what John said about 'Mary, mother of the disciples' (Jn 19,25-27 and Apoc 12,17). In the gospel (Jn 19, 25-27) Jesus makes Mary aware that her motherhood is being transferred — from him to the disciple, type of every disciple. John does this with a most

remarkable interplay of pronouns: 'Standing by the cross of Jesus were *his* mother (and the other two Marys). When Jesus saw *the* mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near her, he said to *the* mother: "here is *your* son". Then he said to the disciple: "Here is *your* mother"'.

The possessive '*his* mother', in reference to Christ, is dropped from the second sentence where John merely says '*the* mother' (twice), in reference to nobody, as if this motherhood were unoccupied, vacant. Then a possessive re-appears, this time in reference to the disciple: '*your* mother'. Obviously Mary's maternal role as indicated by John must not be hypostasized. For him, it is above all the wounded side of Christ that gives birth to the Church and the sacraments; and this essential prerequisite must condition any assessment of Mary's maternal function in relation to the beloved disciple, and thus to every other disciple. But the idea does seem to find confirmation in Revelations (12,17 — a chapter in many ways related to Jn 2,1-12 and 19,25-27). 'The woman', mother of the Messiah 'who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron' (12,5), is shown as mother of the disciples in the last verse of the chapter where the dragon, furious at being unable to engulf her, 'went off to make war on *the rest of her offspring*; on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus' (that is, the disciples. Revelations 12,17).

J. Jouassard, and then A. Wenger, who made a study of the spiritual motherhood in the greek Fathers from the beginning to the fifteenth century, were surprised by the rarity of texts dealing with this spiritual motherhood. Wenger went so far as to express his disappointment in a wryly humorous sally: 'Having gone through all these glorious titles they bestow on Mary, one might end up with the impression that for them Mary is everything *except* their mother'. We can no doubt take into account the humorous intention of that remark, just as we shall no doubt take into account the much greater awareness of Mary's spiritual motherhood apparent in present-day eastern writing.

It seems to me that Revelations 12, which is an echo of Genesis 3,15 and Isaiah 66,7 and has considerable affinity of ideas and teaching with John 19,25-27, could with advantage be given greater prominence within the perspective of the eastern Church — and of the latin Church too. The link established by John and the Book of Revelation between Israel (the Daughter of Zion) and the mother of the Messiah, enables us now to find the key to the typological association of Mary with the Church which is proper to these texts.

Revelations 12 shows both the glory and the cross within one and the same perspective: the Lamb is at the same time both triumphant and slain. The woman is a sign in the heavens but is persecuted on earth. In this contrast we find once again not only the gospel perspective of the cross of glory but also the link between Mary and Jesus's hour.

Our ecumenical dialogue can therefore be stimulated and enriched by the pluralism of our inspirations drawn from Paul, Luke and John. This biblical pluralism concerning Mary can broaden our field of vision. It must not bring about scepticism nor any negative relativism. Instead it can lead to an open-minded re-appraisal of a fulness of light transcending the bounds of our individual horizons. The light may come to us through different intermediaries: Paul, Luke, John, but it has only one original source shining through our differing cultures and denominations: the one Holy Spirit.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The holy Shroud's influence on christian iconography from the end of the fourth century has been studied by P. Vignon, E. A. Wunschel, J. Wilson (*The Shroud*, ch. 12). Cf R. Laurentin, 'Il volto del uomo della sindone e suo influsso sulla iconografia del Christo' in *Gesù, figlio di Dio* (Rome, 1980), pp 59-86.

<sup>2</sup> St Augustine, *De Trinitate* 8, PL 42 962.

<sup>3</sup> *Confessio Augustana* (Paderborn, 1980), pp 279-80.

<sup>4</sup> 'The Mother of Jesus and the authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews', in *The University of Dayton Review* II (1975), pp 49-56.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, R. E.: *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York, 1977), Appendix 5, pp 534-42.

<sup>6</sup> Among the most recently published studies are: Vanhoye, A.: 'La Mère du Fils de Dieu selon Galates 4,4', in *Marianum* 40 (1978), pp 237-47; S. Soll, *Storia dei dogmi Mariani* (Rome, 1981), pp 29-31. These important studies are perhaps too restrictive, given V. Cernuda's analyses cited below, note 7.

<sup>7</sup> Cernuda, V.: 'La genesis humana de Jesu Cristo según S. Paolo', in *Estudios Bíblicos* 36 (1978), pp 57-77, 267-89. This article is one in an important series (three on Lk 1-2 and Mt 1-2, one on Jn 1,13-14 and one on Heb 1,6) which shows how the Incarnation made headway despite being alien to first-century culture. V. Cernuda concludes that 'St Paul knew of the virginal conception and handed it on . . . as an integrating element in the Incarnation, although this mystery does not in itself constitute a turning-point characteristic of pauline theology. . . . A fundamental christology and mariology emerge as from an encipherment or a delicate piece of filigree. It is neither illusory nor erroneous to discern the virginal conception belonging within the earliest christian faith. . . . The archaic character of the pauline formulae bears this out'.

<sup>8</sup> Texts on this subject can be found in Laurentin, R.: 'Sens et historicité de la Conception virginale', in *Mélanges Balic: Studia Mediaevalia et Mariologica* (Rome, 1971), pp 515-42.

<sup>9</sup> Benko, S.: 'A new principle of mariology: the kenotic motif', in *Oikonomia Heils geschichte als Thema der Theologie*, Oscar Cullmann zum 65. Geburtstag, Hrsg. von F. Christ. Hamburg-Bergstedt, II. Reich, Evang. Verlag, 1967; pp 259-72. The author has just produced (same publisher) *Mariologie in protestantischer Sicht* (english edition: *Protestants, Catholics and Mary*), the best informed protestant study known to me. The section on the kenotic principle, pp 129-44, which concludes it, is full of promise.

<sup>10</sup> Pastor H. Roux, with whom I have several times discussed the Blessed Virgin in public, sometimes echoed Tillich's formula without actually quoting it: after admitting the legitimacy of differing biblical interpretations, he would sometimes add, so as to put a firm stop to any misunderstandings: 'That being said, the Virgin Mary is of no theological interest to me'.

<sup>11</sup> Laurentin, R.: *Structure et théologie de Luc 1-2* (Paris, 1956), pp 64-70.

<sup>12</sup> Giamberardini, G.: *Il culto mariano in Egitto*, Franciscan Printing Press, 1 (1975), pp 115-21.

<sup>13</sup> The 2nd Council of Constantinople (563), canon 8, Denzinger 220.

<sup>14</sup> Laurentin, R.: *op. cit.*, pp 135-37.

<sup>15</sup> Brou, L.: in *Hispania Sacra* 3 (1950), pp 371-72 recalls that 'the Roman liturgy seems to have observed strictly the recommendation of the Council of Hippo (393), renewed by the Council of Carthage (397), to the effect that *all prayers said at the altar are to be addressed to the Father*. And Rome seems to have extended this to all types of liturgical prayers, even those not said during Mass or at the altar'. This norm explains St Augustine's cautious approach to prayer to Mary. Roman gossip had it that Leo XIII, greatly attached to the prayer to St Michael which he recommended to be said at the end of Mass, absent-mindedly added *Per Christum Dominum Nostrum* to this prayer to the archangel. The competent authorities effected the necessary correction.

<sup>16</sup> St Augustine's *prosōpopoeia* (Sermo 291,6 for the Birthday of St John the Baptist, 5 PL 38 1319): cf. a very good commentary by Barre, H.: *Prières anciennes de L'occident à la Mère du Sauveur* (Paris, 1962), pp 21-22.

<sup>17</sup> Besides his numerous sermons on the Visitation, Luther has left us a commentary on the *Magnificat*, recently republished in France, Germany, Italy, etc.

<sup>18</sup> Polc, Jaroslav V.: *De origine festi visitationis BMV* (Rome, 1967).