

THE BLESSED MOTHER

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SECTION I

OUR LADY IN HOLY SCRIPTURE

A. INTRODUCTION

In the profession of faith which we make at Mass on Sundays and solemnities, we recite these words: “For us men and for our salvation, He came down from heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary and became man.” This brief passage is a summary of all that the scriptures tell us about God’s entry into our human condition. He came to accomplish the redemption of mankind. “When the proper time had come, God sent His Son, born of a human mother, and born under the jurisdiction of the law, that he might redeem those who were under the authority of the law, and make us true children of God.”¹ This work of redemption is made known to us and continued in the Church which Christ established. And all who are members of this Church venerate in a special way Mary, the one who gave birth to the Redeemer and is the spiritual Mother of the Redeemed.

B. THE BIBLE

Now, the Bible is one of the principal channels through which God has made known to us the hidden purpose of His will. Its meaning and purpose are set out beautifully and succinctly in the **Constitution on Divine Revelation**. It stresses that the Bible is God’s revelation of Himself to mankind. For in it He speaks to us as friends, and makes known to us the mystery of our redemption in Christ, who is both our Mediator, and the fullness of revelation.

The principal purpose of the Old Testament was to prepare for the coming of Christ. For the New Testament was hidden in the Old, and the Old was made manifest in the New. The figure and character of the Messiah is foreshadowed all through the pages of the Old Covenant, growing in clarity as the time of fulfillment drew near.

In like manner, though in a more hidden way, the Old Testament presents us with a portrait of the Mother of the Messiah. “These earliest documents, as they are read in the Church, and understood in the light of further and full revelation, bring the figure of the Woman, the Mother of the Redeemer, into gradually sharper focus.”²

NOTES ABOUT THE FOOTNOTES:

Citing of Vatican II Documents:

Lumen Gentium = L.G.
Sacrosanctum Concilium = S.C.
Ad Gentes = A.G.
Perfectae Caritatis = P.C.
Presbyterorum Ordinis = P.O.

Other Documents:

Speculum Carmelitanum; (Daniel of the Virgin Mary) = Spec. Carmelit.
Monumenta Historica Carmelitana (Zimmerman) = Monumenta.
Le plus vieux Textes du Carmel (Francois) = P.V.T.
The writings of Saint Teresa are cited from Peers’ translation (3 vols.) published by Sheed & Ward, London, 1944.

¹Galatians 4:4-5.

²Constitution on Divine Revelation #55.

We can distinguish several titles under which the Blessed Mother is presented in the Bible. Each one has its own significance in prefiguring her role in accomplishing the redemption of mankind. And all converge to give us a more complete picture of the Mother of the Messiah. This outline is not, of course, given in the form of a biography, no matter how stylized. Rather it partakes of the character of a great literary portrait, and may be likened to the classical madonnas of renaissance art, which strive to convey character rather than historical detail.

C. MARY PRE-FIGURED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Here, very briefly, is what we learn of Mary from the Old Testament. We limit our attention to seven titles.

1. **Mary is the Mother of the Messiah.** In the book of Genesis, a passage which is often called the *proto-evangelion*, or the first proclamation of good news, depicts Mary as sharing in the combat and victory of her Son. She is not a feminine messiah but the mother of the Saviour, and her victory consisted in being the mother of Him who “crushed the head of the ancient serpent.” She was inseparable from Him in His fight against evil and in His final victory over death.³

This wonderful motherhood had a two-fold aspect. One was fulfilled in the flesh when she became the mother of Christ on the annunciation day. The other was fulfilled in the Spirit, through faith. As St. Augustine has pointed out, she had become the mother of Christ in the Spirit long before she conceived Him in her body. This was the more important side of her divine motherhood, as our Lord Himself was to stress during His public life. She was more blessed for having listened to the word of God and kept it than for having given birth to Christ.⁴ It was this spiritual motherhood, too, which made her the mother of the redeemed.

2. **Mary was the Daughter of Zion.** All through the poetic books of the Bible, the name Zion is applied to Jerusalem, in its capacity as the Holy City of the One True God. A daughter of Zion then meant the true Israelite. In the opening chapters of St. Luke’s gospel, we are shown how the promises made to Israel and Jerusalem were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. In relation to Mary, St. Luke wanted to bring out that she was the ideal daughter of Zion, renewed through the presence of the Saviour within her. She was the personification of the Holy City and the Temple, which was the dwelling-place of God. Similarly, she is a figure of the New Jerusalem, which is the Church of the New Testament. Saint Luke sees this as a fulfillment of a lovely prophecy uttered by Zephaniah, which proclaims the joy that Yahweh would bring to Zion by His presence in her midst.⁵ This was realized on the first Christmas night when Christ was born, and again, in the first Pentecost, when Mary was present at the birth of the new church, in the upper room in Jerusalem.⁶

3. **Mary was the New Ark of the Covenant.** The Ark of the Covenant was a sacred casket, made of incorruptible wood and richly adorned, which the Jews carried about with them in their wanderings in the desert, and which was later deposited in the Holy of Holies. It contained the

³Genesis 3:15-16.

⁴Luke 8:19-21; 11:27-28; Matthew 12:46-50.

⁵Zephaniah 3:14-18.

⁶Acts 1:12-14.

tables of the law and the rod of Aaron, both of them instruments of the people's religious life. The Ark was thus a sign of God's presence among his people - "Yahweh's footstool." The Ark was lost when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians and after that the presence of God was given a more spiritual and universal meaning. From then on, He was present to all the people, in the souls of the just. The humanity of Christ was the new ark, which became the center of expiation and the final Holy of Holies. In a secondary sense, Mary is also the Ark of the New Covenant, the outward sign of God's presence among His people. This mystery was expressed when, on the day of her purification, Mary brought her Son into the Temple for the first time. It was foreshadowed by what David and Solomon had done, long centuries before, when they brought the Ark into the Holy City.

4. Mary was Full of Grace. In the Old Testament, to give a "new name" signified an important change of role. This was exemplified in the angel's greeting to Mary, on the Annunciation Day, "Hail, full of grace." It signified God's favor to Mary, and His willingness to accept her as the Mother of His Son. In Old Testament times, the prophets had often bestowed names on the daughter of Zion, some of them indicative of her unworthiness and her infidelity to God. Other names pointed to God's delight in her, once she had made atonement for her sins. Isaiah in particular foretold that the Saviour would come into the Holy City, and that His coming would be the occasion of a "new name," which was the final one.⁷ Mary was the fulfillment of that promise. Likewise, the other part of the angel's greeting "The Lord is with thee," replete with Old Testament implications, received its fullest application in Mary.

5. Mary is Blessed among Women. Three women of the Old Testament are regarded as in some sense prototypes of Mary. The first is Jahel, who killed Sisara, the general of the invading army, and thus liberated God's people from oppression. Next came Esther, who placed her life in jeopardy for the sake of her people. Lastly, and probably the best-known, is Judith, the subject of a magnificent piece of historical fiction which depicts the overthrow and humiliation of a powerful enemy. Each of these was proclaimed "blessed among women" for their service to the chosen people. Each one foreshadowed our Lady, who helped "to crush the serpents head."⁸ The eulogies which were poured out on Judith have for long been used in the Marian liturgy. "You are the glory of Jerusalem, you are the joy of Israel; you are the highest honor of our race."⁹

In a far higher and nobler way, Mary is blessed among women. In a unique manner, she participates in her Son's work of bringing about the salvation of the people. The divine motherhood conferred on her a privileged place in the history of salvation. She is the most perfectly redeemed of all the children of men. Far more than Judith, she is "the highest honor of our race," "she is our tainted nature's solitary boast." The *Magnificat*, which itself re-echoes so many voices out of the Old Testament, is a song of victory and thanksgiving on behalf of all the redeemed. And because she did so much for them, "all generations will call her blessed."

6. Mary is the Poor One of Yahweh. Many of the psalms celebrate the "poor ones of the Lord," the *anawim*, who were the humble poor, whose only treasure was God. Their hearts were full of

⁷ Isaiah 62:4, 11-12.

⁸ Genesis 3:15.

⁹ Judith 15:10.

holy fear. They sought shelter in Him; they waited for salvation from Him, and He gave it. They were filled with a true spirit of sorrow and atonement and God crowned them with an abundance of spiritual riches.¹⁰ Mary was the outstanding example of these “poor ones.” Though weak and lowly, she was God’s chosen instrument to overthrow the enemy. She accomplished this by giving her Son the human nature which was the means of our redemption. In doing so, God put down the mighty from their thrones and raised up the lowly. The *Magnificat*, which is a mosaic of texts and thoughts drawn from the Old Testament, is one of the gems of the New Testament. It celebrates the greatness and goodness of God who had granted such singular graces to the least of his handmaids.

7. **Mary is the Mother of Sorrows.** The prophecies of Isaiah present the Messiah as the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. This was manifestly fulfilled in the earthly career of Jesus Christ. In this suffering, His Mother shared. True, the divine motherhood brought her immense joy, the greatest joy that a human being could experience, far exceeding even the ecstatic joys described by St. John of the Cross. But it also brought her deep suffering. The gift of spiritual motherhood was bought at a great price; her soul was pierced with a sword of sorrow; and her son’s mission was a sign of division and judgment for her and for all the people.¹¹ The Mother of the Messiah was destined to share in the career of her Son, in His role as the Suffering Servant.

D. MARY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament does not supply us with a detailed biography of Mary, but it does underline the fact that what was foreshadowed was fulfilled. Furthermore it highlights the events in her life which show her to be in truth the Mother of the Messiah. Our Lady is the most important woman in the entire Bible, and indeed in all history. But her greatness is the inner kind, a greatness of soul. She was eternally predestined to be the Mother of God. Her earthly life was entirely dedicated to her role as mother of the redeemer, an associate of unique nobility, and the Lord’s humble handmaid. In an utterly singular way, she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning love in the Saviour’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls.¹²

The Blessed Mother’s name, Mary, or Miriam in Hebrew, was a common one at the time. In all, seven Marys are mentioned in the New Testament.

Mary lived in the small town of Nazareth among the Galilean hills. The gospels make no mention whatsoever of her home life, but it is a safe conjecture that it was exactly like that of her contemporaries. She spoke Aramaic, a language akin to Hebrew and more remotely to modern Arabic. A variety of Aramaic still survives in parts of Syria. She dressed like other women of her day in long loose-fitting robes, with sandals on her feet and a finely woven scarf over her head.

As part of the normal course of events, in her middle teens she was engaged to Joseph. This man was a distant relative of hers for both were descended from the house of David. Joseph was a

¹⁰cf. Psalms 33:2-19.

¹¹Luke 2:34-35.

¹²L.G. #61.

carpenter by trade. If the recognized social customs were followed, and most probably they were, he would have been nineteen or twenty years old.

Sometime after the betrothal and before the marriage actually took place, an angel of the Lord was sent to Mary to announce to her that she had been chosen to be the mother of the redeemer. Saint Luke reports this event both at length and in depth, using texts of the Old Testament to bring out its significance, to show the continuity of history of salvation and to indicate the fulfillment of the prophecies in Christ's coming. This device, called *midrash*, is used frequently in the Bible

The Annunciation also underscores God's respect for the freedom of His own creatures. He asked Mary to consent to be the mother of the redeemer and she gave the ringing reply: "I am the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to your word."¹³ She embraced God's will with a full heart, and devoted herself totally to the person and work of her Son. But she made her choice in full faith and obedience, thus undoing the infidelity and disobedience of Eve who failed in her duty to be the first mother of the living.

Saint Matthew's Gospel, which reports the infancy narrative principally from St. Joseph's point of view, tells of his anguish and uncertainty. He did not understand, but felt that somehow he was an intruder into a great mystery. He was about to call off the wedding, but an angel from heaven reassures him, and he gladly goes through the formal ceremony, and takes Mary to his home.

From the very first moment, Son and Mother were closely united in the work of salvation. It was shown when Mary went into the hill-country of Judea to visit Elizabeth, and was greeted by her, "because she had believed." Once again, St. Luke echoes a number of Old Testament texts. He identifies Mary with the new spiritual ark of the covenant, and inaugurated a theme that he was to develop considerably in the course of his Gospel, namely Jesus' ascent to Jerusalem.

A census ordered by the Emperor Augustus brings Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem, the city of David, from whom both were descended. All the inns were full, so the homeless couple were lodged in a cave, which in these primitive times was sometimes used as a kind of annex to the public hostels, themselves not too comfortable. It was here that Mary gave birth to her Child and having wrapped Him in linen, placed Him in a manger to sleep. Later in the night, a group of shepherds came to pay their respects. After the Holy Family has left the cave and were living in some kind of simple abode, wise men from the east came and bent their knees before the Infant. Although Mary did not understand the full implication of all this, she was beginning to understand that her Son was no ordinary child. In some sense, He was a King, and with His birth a new era dawned for all the world. But even though she did not understand, she kept everything in her heart, reflecting and pondering and praying.

The shadow of the Cross was already beginning to fall across her path. In St. Luke's Gospel, we read the story of the presentation in the Temple, one of Mary's joys, but also of her deep sorrows. The prophetic words of Simeon told her what lay ahead: contradiction for her Son, and a sword of sorrow for herself.

¹³Luke 1:38.

When we next meet the Holy Family, they are on the road to Egypt to escape the wrath of the wily King, Herod, who was troubled by some talk of a new King of the Jews and was determined to destroy Him. St. Joseph had been warned by an angel to flee for safety. For some length of time, probably about two years, the three lived as refugees in an alien land. Then, on the death of Herod, they returned to their homeland and settled in Nazareth.

Jesus grew up in Nazareth. The Gospels give no detail of the daily life of the Holy Family, but reliable historical research can supply many interesting facts.¹⁴ We know it was very ordinary, and externally differed in no way from that of their neighbors. Joseph presided over the little household. His workshop was probably attached to the house, and undoubtedly, the symphony of hammering and sawing was the background of the growing years of Jesus.

The only significant incident of those hidden years took place when Jesus was twelve. After the Passover in Jerusalem He remained behind in the Temple, and was found only after a three-day search. Mary remonstrated gently, but Jesus replied: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”¹⁵ St. Luke comments that they did not understand the reply. The significance of it was that He was preparing them for a bigger separation, showing them that His destiny involved a much wider circle than the little home at Nazareth. But for some time yet His place was with them in this humble place. This incident also shows that Mary did not have any foreknowledge of her Son’s career. Like the rest of the children of men, she lived by faith, not by vision.

During the public life of Jesus, our Lady generally remained in the background. But she makes a few significant appearances. At the wedding of Cana, her intercession brought about the beginning of miracles by Jesus, proclaiming who He was to all the world. In the course of her Son’s preaching she received His praise when He extolled a Kingdom beyond the calculation of flesh and blood. “Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it;” something that Mary was faithfully doing.¹⁶

As she stands by the cross Mary is a figure of quiet dignity, in spite of her immeasurable anguish. Jesus sees her there and speaks: “Woman, behold your son,” referring to John the Beloved Disciple, who stood close by. To John He said, “Behold your Mother.” This last will and testament of Jesus not only signified His filial love and sense of duty. It also ratified Mary in the role she had assumed on the day of the annunciation; she was the Mother both of the redeemer and the redeemed. God had placed an immense trust in her. And despite her agony of soul, she understands that she was truly blessed among women.

From very early times, Christians have manifested deep love and veneration for the Mother of the Saviour. This was perfectly logical. No one, in fact, had honored her more than God, Who chose her to be the mother of His Son. Hymns were sung in her honor; thousands went on pilgrimages to her shrines. Her picture adorned both the humble dwellings of the faithful and the lovely churches where her Son was worshipped. Some of the world’s greatest cathedrals, unsurpassable

¹⁴See, for example, *Daily Life in the Time of Christ*, by Daniel Rops, or *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, by Edesheim.

¹⁵Luke 2:49.

¹⁶cf. Mark 3:35; Luke 11:27-28; Luke 2:19-51.

achievements in stone, were dedicated to her. But more important than all that, she became, after her Son, the embodiment of everything that was lovely and elevated and pure in creation. She is the symbol of eternal motherhood and noble womanhood. She is the glory of all civilization.

SECTION II

THE MARIAN SPIRIT OF OUR CARMELITE ORDER

E. INTRODUCTION

To produce an adequate study on the Marian spirit of our Order and the significance of the Scapular, it would first of all be necessary to do considerable investigation into the following sources:

1. The Mariological writings of the Order.
2. The biography of the Order and other documents pertaining to its Marian history.
3. The liturgical books of the Order and other records of Marian devotion.
4. Old codes of legislation that contain references to the Blessed Mother or to the Scapular.
5. The Marian iconography of the Order.

Since only a small portion of the preparatory work has been covered, this report will inevitably be incomplete. What I am setting down here is the result of limited research and reflection.

F. THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IN THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

In order to arrive at a proper understanding of the place which the Blessed Virgin Mary must hold in the Carmel of the 20th century, it will be necessary first of all to give a brief outline of her place in the history of salvation in relation to her Divine Son and the Church. The **Constitution of the Church** (*Lumen Gentium*) in chapter VIII sets out the evidence of Sacred Scripture and the Fathers, combined with the pronouncements of the Popes. It tells us in clear and sober terms that Mary was united to her Son by an intimate and indissoluble bond;¹⁷ that she had a singular share in the work of the incarnation; and that consequently the Church honors her with special reverence.¹⁸

In describing the place which Mary holds in the history of salvation, the Vatican Council puts forward some important principles which need to be stressed if we are to bring about a renewal of the Marian spirit within our Order. First of all, it reminds us that the Blessed Mother's exalted place in the divine economy is entirely in relation to her Son. Because she is the mother of God-made-man, and because she had a unique and direct part in the mysteries of Christ, in the supernatural order of faith, hope and charity, therefore, she is exalted to a position that is second only to that of Christ Himself. She is the most perfectly redeemed of all the children of men, but her greatness proceeds from the fullness of Christ; she is part of the *pleroma*. Consequently, her functions and privileges are relative to Christ Who is the source of all truth, holiness and piety.¹⁹ Mary herself sincerely acknowledged this in the words of the *Magnificat*: "He has looked upon

¹⁷L.G. 53; 54.

¹⁸L.G. 66.

¹⁹L.G. 67, 53, etc.

His lowly handmaid. Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me."²⁰

By reason of her dignity as mother of the Redeemer, Mary is rightly called the mother of the redeemed, in an utterly singular charity in the Saviour's work of restoring supernatural life to souls. For this reason, she is mother to us in the order of grace. This maternity will last without interruption until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.²¹ It is, of course, a continuation of her role as mother of the Redeemer, for the Son she brought forth in the flesh is the firstborn among many brethren.²² The other brethren are the faithful, in whose birth and development she cooperates with a motherly love.²³

Although, through the grace of the divine motherhood, Mary is the most perfectly redeemed of all creatures whether in heaven or on earth; nonetheless, she is truly a member of the human race, and very close to all of us. She is also intimately united with the Church. She is in fact a model of the Church in faith, perfect charity and union with Christ. In the most holy Virgin, the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle.²⁴ In her, the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of redemption and the model of all virtues, and joyfully contemplates as in a faultless image that which she herself wholly desires and hopes to be.²⁵

Finally, the Church recognizes the power of Mary's intercession. In all perils and needs, the faithful have fled prayerfully to her protection, and have not been sent empty away. This maternal duty of Mary toward man in no way obscures or diminishes the unique meditation of Christ; but rather shows its power. For all the saving influences of the Blessed Virgin originate not from some inner necessity but from the divine pleasure. They flow from the superabundant merits of Christ, rest on His meditation, depend entirely on it and draw all their power from it. In no way do they impede the immediate union of the faithful with Christ; rather, they foster this union.²⁶

The unique position of our Lady thus outlined by the Vatican Council II determines the place which she must hold in the Order of Mount Carmel. Her relationship to the Order is based on her divine motherhood and her power of intercession. But because in the course of the centuries this relationship to the Order has taken on a special character of intimacy and dependence, it will be necessary to explore somewhat its historical background, if we are to appreciate it fully.²⁷

G. THE BLESSED MOTHER IN THE ORDER OF MOUNT CARMEL

Note: This section focuses attention on certain aspects of the Order's devotion to our Lady in times past. A critical survey of all of them would take us too far afield, but following the example of the Vatican Council, we will endeavor to set out sincerely those facts which are well attested to historically, avoiding as far as possible some historical errors and a lack of Christocentric insight

²⁰Luke 1:47-48.

²¹L.G. 61, 62, 68.

²²Romans 8:29.

²³L.G. 63.

²⁴Ephesians 5:27.

²⁵S.C. 103; L.G. 55, 65.

²⁶L.G. 58, 60, 62; A.G. 42.

²⁷P.C. 2b.

which occasionally disfigured the manner in which our forefathers expressed their devotion. In spite of these incidental blemishes, it can be truthfully said that they arrived at an appreciation of our Lady which was deep, rich and beautiful.

No matter how far back one searches into our Order's history, the influence of the Blessed Mother is always to be found. By the year A.D. 1282, the Prior General of the time could affirm that the Order of Mount Carmel was dedicated to the Mother of God and belonged entirely to her.²⁸ Going back still further almost a hundred years, we find that the hermits on Mount Carmel had built their cells around a small chapel which was dedicated to the Mother of God.²⁹ From this small seed, a great tree was to spring in the ages to come, but even at the beginning, the Carmelites' love for Mary was authentic and sincere. One of the Order's earliest historians could say of his brethren that their only concern was to live continuously in the service of God and His Holy Mother the Virgin Mary.³⁰ This habitual outlook became a powerful force in shaping the spirit of the Order. It also enabled the hermits to understand, according to their capacity, the role which Mary had in relation to their Order; a role that in some way sprung from her relationship to Jesus Christ. These hermits claimed to be bound to the prophet Elijah in spiritual kinship, and through him, they participated in the tradition of the Old Testament. In Mary they were linked up with the spirit of the New Testament, and set themselves to imitate her interior life.

Note: At an early but uncertain date in the Order's history, someone who was an authentic spiritual genius set out to assemble and explain the various strands of tradition which had gone into forming the Order's spirit. His book, called the *Institution of the First Monks*, has been described as one of the finest Christian presentations of the eremitic way of life.³¹ In the course of his treatise, the unknown author discreetly explains the associations which are said to have existed between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Sons of the Prophets. The alleged revelation to Elijah cannot be Accepted as historical, but as presented in this narrative, it shows a truly spiritual insight into the continuity of the history of salvation, even as applied to the Order of Mount Carmel. The preface for the Mass of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is derived from this recital, but owing to the historical errors, it needs to be revised.

It is not surprising that sooner or later, the early Carmelites would unite the Marian traditions flourishing among them with that other stream of Biblical tradition which linked them to Elijah. The cloud which the prophet saw rising from the sea³² was for them a symbol of the Virgin Mary who by her divine motherhood brought new life and fruitfulness to an arid world. Like the cloud, Mary was born from the sea of sinful human nature, but even in her conception, she was free from all sin, even as the cloud was vaporous and clean. She was also thought of as the cloud about which Moses had written: "The glory of Yahweh appeared in a cloud."³³

The substance of this allegorical interpretation is that Elijah stood for the prophetic way of life which the Carmelites strove to perpetuate in the New Testament by their witness of prayer, poverty and penance. Mary on the other hand was the perfect model, the ideal contemplative, the one in whom the Order had already reached its perfection. She was a splendid example of a holiness that was without defect, and yet truly human and ordinary in its external manifestation.

²⁸Spec. Carmelit. I 1047, 1050, 1054, 1060.

²⁹Ibid 303; Monumenta, p. 281; P.V.T. 61, 63, 64, 234.

³⁰Chronicle of William of Sandwich. chapter III and IV; cf. Spec. Carm. I 408, 417.

³¹cf. Alberto de la Virgen del Carmen, in *Revista de Espiritualidad* XIX (1960) pp. 233-265.

³²I Kings 17:24.

³³Exodus 16:10; see also Spec. Carmelit. I, 238, 240; 20-35, 215, 222.

The early Carmelites felt very near to Mary in her life of virginity which symbolized total dedication, and in her life of prayer which meant nearness to God.³⁴

Note: It does not appear that there is any patristic authority for the spiritual interpretation of Elijah's vision which is given in the *Institution of the First Monks*, though St. Ambrose does compare our Lady to a cloud; not however in reference to this particular passage of Holy Scripture.³⁵ The text of the *Institution* would suggest that the author was acquainted with St. Ambrose's commentary. An examination of the Biblical significance of a cloud could yield rich spiritual results when applied to Mary.

Recalling the wonderful story of our Lady's part in the Incarnation, how the human race had received through her the rain of divine grace which it needed so badly, the hermits of Mount Carmel undertook to serve the Holy Virgin in every way that was open to them. They chose her for their particular patroness, and because they resembled her in the practice of voluntary chastity which they undertook for the kingdom of heaven, they loved to call themselves the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁶ This title was recognized and confirmed by several Popes.³⁷

It was from this nucleus that sprung the special love which the Order of Carmel displayed to God's Mother. In the course of the centuries, it acquired greater strength and precision, but essentially, it always remained simple and spontaneous. Two of the images under which it was presented are worth exploring; they contain certain profound spiritual insights.

The first of these concerns the Rule of the Order. It was mystically interpreted as being an imitation of the life of the Blessed Mother.³⁸ The early Carmelites saw their way of life as a replica of the life of Mary and a means of living in conformity with her. This interpretation is entirely valid, though it has to be viewed through the eyes of the spirit rather than in the letter of the law. It has also to be related to the imitation of Christ, as the Rule itself clearly indicates. In the prologue we read that the fundamental norm of all religious life is the following of Christ; to lead a life of dedication to Him and to be unswerving in His service. Christ alone is the way, the truth and the life, and the whole biblical notion of becoming like Him is rich with spiritual implications.³⁹ Our Lady herself conformed to the life of her Son, and we have His word that the deepest bond between them arose not from their natural relationship but rather because she more than anyone heard the word of God and kept it.⁴⁰ That is just why the medieval Carmelites looked to her; to learn how they ought to receive the word of God and make it effective in their lives. St. Ambrose says of our Lady that her life was a rule and example for all to follow.⁴¹ Even more than St. Paul she would be justified in saying, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ."⁴² When our Carmelite forefathers spoke of their Rule as modeled on the life of Mary they were on more solid theological grounds than perhaps they themselves suspected. For just as there can be

³⁴Spec. Carmelit. I, 238.

³⁵**Exhortatio Virginitatis** Chap. V (PL XVI, Col. 345.)

³⁶Spec. Carmelit. ut supra no. 13; **Institutio Primorum Monachorum** chap. XXXVI.

³⁷Bullarium Carmelitanum (ed. Monsignano) I, pp. 4-14.

³⁸John Baconthorpe in Spec. Carmelit. I, 2606, 2613.

³⁹cf. Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 9:57-62; John 14:4-6; Ephesians 5:1-9; etc.

⁴⁰Luke 11:27; Matthew 12:50.

⁴¹cf. P.C. 25.

⁴²I Cor. 4:16; I Thess. 1:6-14.

no theology of the Blessed Mother which is not rooted in the Incarnation, so too there can be no imitation of Mary unless it is related to her Son.

The rule itself, though it does not mention Mary, is impregnated with a true Marian spirit. It is simple, unadorned, lowly and scriptural. The very reading of it brings to our minds the picture of simple hermits striving with the ardor of their hearts to live entirely for Christ and His Blessed Mother.⁴³ Day and night they pondered on the law of the Lord or treasured His word in their hearts. They earned their food by the work of their hands, they restrained their tongues, they curbed their desires, and persevered in solitude and prayer. Above all they tried to increase in themselves supernatural faith and hope and love, for on those all else depends. Thus in its brief span, the Carmelite Rule sought to outline the main aspects of the prayer-life of Christ; a way of life which was exemplified in an outstanding manner in the Blessed Mother.

There is another point of our Marian tradition which is deserving of attention. It concerns the “visits” which the Virgin Mary was said to make to her Carmelite brothers.⁴⁴ It was their childlike, picturesque way of saying that they lived in her presence. This too touches on a deep theological truth, namely the place which the Blessed Mother holds in relation to the work of grace. Although she herself is not a source of grace, she has an important role to fulfill in the grace-life of every soul; a role which basically is a continuation of the tremendous marvel accomplished on Annunciation Day, when Grace Personified came into the world. This was done through the power of the Holy Spirit and the cooperation of Mary. It was He who animated Mary;⁴⁵ it is He also who animates the Church, teaching her all things and reminding her of all that Christ has said.⁴⁶ Because He found in Mary the dispositions that were needed, namely, faith, virginity and obedience,⁴⁷ He was able to establish between God and her that personal bond which on Calvary was extended to the entire human race. For by faith “Mary conceived Christ in her soul before she conceived Him in her body,” and that faith of hers made her truly the mother of all the redeemed. Thus in a very true sense, the soul in grace lives in Mary; he who finds her finds life and wins salvation from the Lord.⁴⁸

The early Carmelites were conscious of Mary’s all-pervading love and of a certain community-life shared with her in the grace of her Son. She visited them and instructed them in all manner of virtuous living by her simple presence.⁴⁹ The most memorable of all these visits was when she intervened to save the Order from extinction and to bring to it a new vitality in the spirit.

H. THE HOLY SCAPULAR OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL

On account of the special importance of the scapular in the Marian life of the Order, it is very worthy of discussion at this point. The historical origin of the scapular has been established, at least in substance, by present-day scholars, working on the circumstantial evidence that is

⁴³Chronicle of William of Sandwich ut supra, note 11.

⁴⁴Spec. Carmelit. 1490, 1006, 867, 865, 1550.

⁴⁵Luke 1:35.

⁴⁶John 14:25-27.

⁴⁷cf. Luke 1:26, 28, 43.

⁴⁸Proverbs 8:35.

⁴⁹Spec. Carmelit. I, 1529-1533.

available. However, it seems more in keeping with the teaching of St. John of the Cross⁵⁰ and the mind of modern theology⁵¹ not to overemphasize the vision of St. Simon Stock nor the promises attached to the scapular, but to concentrate on the theological content of the message, showing that the proper understanding of the Holy Scapular serves the function of calling attention to certain important aspects of God's teaching which tend to be overlooked.⁵²

The solicitude of Mary for the well-being of her Carmelite sons was shown conclusively when the Order seemed threatened with extinction. For all time, Carmelites will recall with joy and gratitude that intervention of hers which saved the Order. In commemoration of this event, the scapular came to be regarded as the principle part of the Carmelite habit. More important, it was seen to be a sign of the Blessed Mother's protection and love. External symbol though it was, it was designed to remind Carmelites that the Order was in a special way associated with the Virgin Mother of God, and had received many favors from her hands. Consequently, they should place themselves under her protection with great simplicity and confidence, and model their lives on her example.

It seems certain that the scapular had been in use in the Carmelite Order for some time as a protection from the stains of toil. It was an easy and appropriate transition to extend this notion of protection into the spiritual domain as well. Moreover, if we keep in mind the biblical significance of garments, great depth can be given to the meaning of the scapular. As one of the basic needs of life, clothing, in the ancient world, came to signify man's social status, his duties, his rights, his attitude of mind and even his personality. During our Lord's earthly life, for instance, He sometimes communicated grace and healing through contact with His clothing.⁵³ Saint Paul uses the symbol of clothing to designate one's interior attitudes. Thus at baptism, we take off the old self and put on Christ.⁵⁴ These various ideas can also be found in the scapular, though in a lesser degree. It is very likely that the Blessed Mother made use of this richly expressive symbol to convey many spiritual truths. And the deepest value of the scapular derives from our Lady's own spiritual motherhood, her heavenly queenship and the power of her mediation. Just as she wrapped the infant Christ in clothing which she herself had prepared, so too she designated the holy scapular to be a sign of her motherly protection both in life and in death.⁵⁵ In so doing, she takes on herself all the consequences of her spiritual motherhood, guards her children and leads them to God. They in turn experience her powerful intercession,⁵⁶ for the scapular is an habitual invocation of her whose prayer is always efficacious.⁵⁷ Moreover, it is the constant belief both of the Church and of the Carmelite Order that the intercession of Mary does not end with this life; those who have need of it experience it even beyond the grave. And here we can discern a valuable link between the scapular and the Blessed Eucharist, for both of them,

⁵⁰ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book II, chapter XIX foll.

⁵¹ cf. K. Rahner: *Visions and Prophecies* Eng. Trans. Herder (New York) 1965.

⁵² Xiberta, B., O'Carmelites: *De Visione S. Simonis Stock*. Rome, 1950. Elisee de la Nativite, OCD: *Le Scapulaire du Carmel*, Tarascon 1958.

⁵³ Matthew 9:21; Mark 6:56.

⁵⁴ Romans 13:12-13; Ephesians 4:22-24.

⁵⁵ Pius XI: *Neminem profecto* AAS (XLII) 1950 p. 390; Paul VI Epistula in Dominicanam Republicam AAS LVII (1965) p. 378; Bullarium Carmel. II 62; Lezana: *Maria Patrona*, Rome 1648; cf. Esteve H.M. O'Carmelites *De Valore spirituali devotionis S. Scapularis*, pp. 72-74.

⁵⁶ L.G. 56, 60-62, 69; A.G. 42.

⁵⁷ cf. John 2:1-11.

though in very different degrees and in a different way, are a pledge of future glory. The **Constitution on the Church** confirms this fact.⁵⁸

In a special way, Mary is queen of Carmel because she owns it all. *Totus Marianus est Carmelus*.⁵⁹ This ownership stems from the age-old profession-form, used in the Order. The vows of a Carmelite are made to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. This formula, especially when viewed against the background of feudalism where it was evolved, meant a total dedication of self so that the Blessed Mother might give one to God. This mark of ownership and the corresponding obligation of service and dedication figures largely in the traditional Marian spirituality of the Carmelite Order. We will find it again, in a notable degree, in the writings of St. Teresa of Jesus.

SECTION III

THE MARIAN SPIRIT OF THE REFORM AND RECENT TIMES

I. THE MARIAN SPIRIT OF ST. TERESA'S REFORM

Note: No complete study has yet been made of the Marian spirit of St. Teresa's renewal.⁶⁰ And yet, if we are to attain to a full understanding of the mind of the Holy Mother, we cannot afford to miss the fact that the influence of Our Lady was one of the dominating factors of her life. Her love was not characterized by many external practices, perhaps, but it was so deep and natural that it showed itself spontaneously at every turn. Indeed it could be said that Mary was her life. She has left no treatise on Marian devotion,⁶¹ but we have a wealth of evidence from her writings that she was truly imbued by the traditional Carmelite love of the Queen of Carmel. We will briefly indicate some of the salient points in her writings, also in those of St. John of the Cross and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. All of them represent a deepening in the understanding of the ancient tradition. It is inspiring to see the old understanding come to life again in a new setting.

The dominant thought in St. Teresa's writings is that the Carmelite Order belonged to Mary. She refers to it lovingly as the "sheepfold of the virgin." The convents of the Order were Mary's houses; "the little dovecotes of the virgin."⁶² The entire Order is hers; she is its patroness and queen. The Rule of the Order, basis of its life, is the Rule of our Lady, and therefore it must be observed with all possible perfection.⁶³ The ideal of every Carmelite is to live as a true child of the Virgin Mary, and her service must be his life's work.⁶⁴ When St. Teresa undertook to restore the vitality of the Order, that work, too, was done for the sake of the Madonna.

Nourished in this Marian tradition, St. Teresa acquired a deep understanding of the bond between Carmel and Mary. The whole Order belonged to her; yet each individual member could feel the consequences of Mary's protection in their personal life. For St. Teresa, Mary brings to the daily life of a Carmelite a touch of gentleness and sweetness. She lessens the weight of the daily burdens and makes the life more attractive as, no doubt, she did in the home at Nazareth. To this

⁵⁸ John XXIII in *L'Osservatore Romano* February 19, 1959; Pius XII *ibid.*, Oct. 13, 1950; cf. the prayer, **Deus, Veniae largitor**; L.G. 68.

⁵⁹ *Spec. Carmelit.* I 1047, 1054, 1060, 1050.

⁶⁰ cf. however, *Archange de la Reine du Carmel, La Mariologie de Ste. Therese* in *Etudes Carmel*, 1924, July - Dec.

⁶¹ cf. **Way of Perfection** in *Peers II*, p. 185.

⁶² *Letters of St. Teresa* (ed. Peers) vol. II, n. 298, p. 670.

⁶³ **Way of Perfection III**; *Works II* p. 12.

⁶⁴ **Foundations XVIII**; *Works III* p. 89; cf. *ibid.* p. 79; *Letters* n. 280, p. 630; *ibid.* n. 320, p. 713.

love, St. Teresa responds, and we find in her writings a devotion that is rich, strong, delicate and childlike. Great teacher of the spiritual life that she was, she thoroughly grasped the gospel message that the following of Mary is also a total dedication to the service of Christ. To appreciate what she says of Mary, we must never forget that she understood the role of Christ in the life of the spirit as few have done since the time of St. Paul.

St. John of the Cross, too, inherited the Order's love for Mary in rich measure. But like so many other aspects of his life and teaching, this one also is not easy to distinguish at first sight; its most striking quality, in fact, is its depth and solidity rather than ostentation. But it soon becomes evident that for St. John of the Cross, as for the hermits on Mount Carmel, Mary was the ideal contemplative. So docile was she to grace that her work and prayer was always done in the closest union with God. She was never moved by any inordinate attachment to creatures, but was always guided by the Holy Spirit.⁶⁵ She knew how to love and petition God with supreme delicacy, "for the discreet lover does not care to ask for what she lacks or desires but only indicates this need to the Beloved that He may do what He pleases."⁶⁶ And whereas the strength, constancy and perfection of virtue was evident in the life of the Blessed Mother, and she never knew weakness in their exercise, yet in order that she might be like to the rest of us and for other good reasons, God allowed her to feel things and suffer from them.⁶⁷ And she accepted this for Christ's sake. In other words, though she was favored by great graces of prayer, she was also very ordinary in her external bearing. She was in fact the model contemplative, and when St. John of the Cross wrote of the totally purified soul, he was thinking of the Blessed Mother.⁶⁸

There is yet one other testimony which deserves to be quoted; it comes from the pen of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus. "One can well imagine that the real life of Mary at Nazareth and later, must have been an ordinary one. She should be portrayed as someone possible to imitate, practicing the hidden virtues; that is to say, living her faith as we live ours."⁶⁹ Plainly, this modern child of Carmel had learnt from the Holy Spirit the selfsame truth about our Lady which long ages before had been made known to the hermits on the Holy Mount.

J. MARIAN SPIRIT FOR THE CARMEL OF MODERN TIMES

Note: This area of the presentation is an attempt at synthesis. Following the guidelines given in the **Decree for the Renewal of Religious Life**⁷⁰ we have briefly surveyed the principal sources of the Order's Marian traditions, bringing into prominence the elements in it which appear to be authentic and perennial. It now remains to consider how these can be integrated into the liturgical and spiritual renewal of the present day, and given a fresh vitality. Thus old things and new would be brought out of the storeroom of Carmel⁷¹ and blended into a harmonious unity, in which ancient jewels would shine with renewed luster, and what is new would be enhanced by association with the treasures of the past.

⁶⁵ **Ascent of Mount Carmel** III chapter 2 n. 10.

⁶⁶ **Spiritual Canticle** (B) II, n. 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, XX, n. 10.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, (B) I, 7, XXXIX 4; **Living Flame** (B) I n. 10.

⁶⁹ **Novissima Verba** for Aug. 23; ed. 1926.

⁷⁰ P.C. 2 b. etc.

⁷¹ Matthew 13:52.

1. Marian Spirit in the Liturgy

The Church invites all her children to be generous in venerating the Mother of God in every approved manner, but more especially in regard to liturgical cult.⁷² This simply worded directive should have far-reaching consequences in the renewal of the Marian life of the Carmelite Order. For the cult addressed to the Blessed Virgin Mary is a part of Christian worship, and the object of that worship is to restore once again the movement of all creation towards its Maker. In this work of reconciliation, Christ has the leading place. After Him, the next place belongs to the Holy Virgin, His mother. And once again, the functions and privileges of the Virgin are always relative to Christ who is the only source of truth, holiness and piety.⁷³ Just as in theology, so also in worship, honors paid to our Lady are not diminished, but increased, by being centered in Christ and gathered into the liturgy of the Church. True worship, our Lord has said, must always be in spirit and in truth.⁷⁴ In this relationship to the worship of Christ, our veneration of the Blessed Mother receives its fullest and deepest meaning. She is and she wishes to be totally relative to God and to Christ, through Whom all things have their being and in Whom all fullness dwells.⁷⁵

Following the example of St. Teresa,⁷⁶ we ought to regard every liturgical feast of our Lady as a special occasion of grace. The Assumption, Annunciation, Purification, Visitation, Nativity, Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Mother, have each its special message for us as Carmelites. They bind the Order more closely to its heavenly patroness; they should incite each one of its members to imitate her virtues and to consider what a good thing it is for us to have her for our mother.⁷⁷

The Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel should be celebrated with due solemnity every year, renewed emphasis being given to its call for a living commitment to God and the Blessed Mother in faith and love.

Even as the Church celebrates the paschal mystery every eighth day, so too in association with this, Carmelites ought to renew their commitment on each Saturday, hearing the word of God, taking part in the Eucharist, and calling to mind the glory of their heavenly Mother and the benefits which she has procured for the Order ever since it came into existence.

It is imperative, too, to recognize that our Lady has a place in the daily celebration of the paschal mystery which is the Mass. To give this presence its authentic meaning is to discover the principal source of true devotion to Mary.

2. Marian Spirit in Interior Commitment

“Let the faithful remember that true devotion to the Blessed Virgin consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion nor in a certain vain credulity. Rather it proceeds from true faith by which

⁷²L.G. 67; S.C. 103.

⁷³L.G. 67.

⁷⁴John 4:24.

⁷⁵L.G. 66, 67.

⁷⁶Letters II, n. 258, p. 595; **Spiritual Relations** in Works I pp. 352, 359, 364; **Life XXXIII, Works I p. 230; ibid XXXIX**, p. 289; **Conceptions** V, Works II, p. 388.

⁷⁷**Interior Castle** III Works II p. 220; **Foundations** Chapter XXVII Works III.

we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God and are moved to a filial love towards her and to the imitation of her virtues.”⁷⁸ So says the Vatican Council.

The Carmelite of the new age must be a symbol of a way of life which is truly a road of love and rejoicing in spirit.⁷⁹ He must strive to show forth Jesus Christ and to live in His mystery through faith and the sacraments, but especially baptism and the Holy Eucharist. He must aim at expressing the paschal mystery in himself by a total living of it. For Christ is the whole meaning of the religious life; Christ who once walked this earth in His lowly humanity; who is now present in mystery with His Church to sustain and console her.

The Carmelite is a follower of Christ, virginal, poor and obedient. In this following, he shows forth radical Christianity and plunges more deeply into the commitment which he made at his baptism.⁸⁰ In spite of human weakness and unworthiness, he can hope to draw in abundance the water of divine life; to become Christ’s leaven for the revitalizing of mankind and salt for the earth, in proclaiming the good news and transmitting divine life to others.⁸¹

Mary is, par excellence, the one who will enable every Carmelite to arrive at this exalted goal. As of old, he can depend on her to guide and assist the entire process of interior renewal and external adjustment. As Mother of Carmel, she gives Christ to us and leads us to Him. Taking into account the teaching of Vatican II, and combining it with our own Marian traditions, it would seem that there are some particularly important lessons to be learnt from the example of Mary.

a. “Near the cross of Jesus there stood His mother.”⁸² It was there that the spiritual motherhood of Mary was confronted by her Son in His dying breath. She gazed on that cross which is the fountainhead of all understanding, “the living and painful synthesis in which all contradictions are taken up.”⁸³ What Mary offered there was not her own body and blood but the body and blood of her Son which meant so much more to her than her own self. This was the supreme occasion of Mary’s self-emptying - *kenosis* - when He who was her very life was taken away. But in that great act of abnegation, the Church began to live and grow. According to one of the central points of the teaching of St. John of the Cross, there is an indispensable need for a similar *kenosis* in the lives of all those who would live in Christ. If we wish to follow Christ in the glory of His resurrection, we must first be conformed to Him in his self-emptying.⁸⁴ Saint John laments that the more necessary this doctrine is, the less it seems to be appreciated even by those who call themselves the friends of Christ.⁸⁵ The self-emptying of a Carmelite is achieved in humility, poverty, chastity and love.⁸⁶ It underlies even the theological virtues; it is the basis of the evangelical way of life, and it is the starting-point of prayer, penance and Christ-like service. More than any other human being, Mary exemplified it perfectly as she stood near the cross of her Son, and on the many other occasions of her life when she did not understand but nonetheless

⁷⁸L.G. 67.

⁷⁹L.G. 43.

⁸⁰P.C. 25; L.G. 43.

⁸¹Instruction for the Implementation of the Liturgy, n. 8.

⁸²John 19:23.

⁸³de Lubac: *Meditation sur l’Eglise* Chapter IX.

⁸⁴Phil. 2:7.

⁸⁵*Ascent of Mount Carmel II* Chapter vii, n. 12.

⁸⁶L.G. 42; P.C. 5; *Poenitemini*, per totum.

obeyed.⁸⁷ For she too, like the Father in heaven, so loved the world as to give up her only Son for its salvation.⁸⁸

b. “I am the handmaid of the Lord; let what you have said be done to me.”⁸⁹ These words of Mary indicate the dispositions of a soul that is perfectly docile to the power of the Holy Spirit. At no time in her life did she offer the least resistance to the call of His grace. So too in the life of everyone dedicated to the “one thing necessary,” there must be a vast amount of docility to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In that way we would be able to grasp the unifying role of the Holy Spirit in the Church; to appreciate the worth of the interior virtues and spiritual freedom. This would enable us to solve some seeming paradoxes in our religious lives; for example the coexistence of unity and variety, or stability and change. It would teach us how to observe laws and still maintain an inward freedom; how to reconcile obedience with initiative, and harmonize the interior suggestions of the Spirit with the commands of authority. It is through this spirit of docility that the theological virtues begin to expand and grow. And since they are the core of our Carmelite life, it is certainly fitting that we should ask the help and look to the example of her whose faith was the strongest, whose hope was the firmest and whose love was the deepest among all the children of men. We can also apply to ourselves the advice from Vatican II: “With the light of a faith nourished by spiritual reading, religious can carefully detect the signs of God’s will and the impulses of His grace in the various happenings of life, and thus can become more docile day by day to the mission they have undertaken in the Holy Spirit. They can always find a wondrous model of such docility in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Led by the Holy Spirit, she devoted herself entirely to the mystery of man’s redemption.”⁹⁰

c. “As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered on them in her heart.”⁹¹ During her Son’s life she closely observed His words and actions; she stored them in her memory and reflected on them in the depths of her soul. After the Ascension of Christ, we find the apostles joined in continuous prayer with Mary, imploring the outpouring of the Spirit.⁹² She helped to mold the spirit of the early Church where all were of one heart and one mind, and all came together both in the sacred assembly and in the privacy of the homes to worship Christ by sacrifice and prayer. The silent mother of the silent Word was in their midst to teach them the mysteries of her Son.

Mary is the model of all Carmelites whose Rule bids them to stay in their cells or nearby, pondering God’s law day and night and attending to their prayers. It was an unerring instinct on the part of the early Carmelites to choose her for their patroness, for more than anyone else in the Old Testament or in the New, she was God’s example in the ways of prayer, all eager to recount to those who love her what she has seen and heard and stored up in her heart.

d. “Mary said to the angel: ‘But how can this come about for I am a virgin?’ ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you,’ the angel answered.”⁹³ Mary is the supreme example of fruitful virginity, which

⁸⁷ cf. Luke 2:34, 50; Matthew 2:13-15; John 2:4; 19:26.

⁸⁸ John 3:16.

⁸⁹ Luke 1:38.

⁹⁰ P.O. 18.

⁹¹ Luke 3:19, 51.

⁹² Acts 1:14.

⁹³ Luke 1:34.

together with poverty and obedience, constitutes one of God's choicest gifts to the religious state. Taken together, they are a special gift of grace in the life of the Church.⁹⁴ They are a gift which the Church has received from her Lord and which by His grace she always safeguards for the sake of those who want to follow Christ with greater freedom and to imitate Him more closely.⁹⁵

Preeminent among these gifts is the precious grace of consecrated virginity or celibacy which is bestowed on some Christians by the Father.⁹⁶ This is chastity embraced for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. It is a theological gift dedicating the religious to God in his whole personality, making his body a temple of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁷ It is essentially a gift of greater and more universal love, love for Christ and all men.⁹⁸ When it is seen in this light, we can perhaps understand why our spiritual forefathers counted it an honor to be called Brothers of the Blessed Virgin, because like her they practiced voluntary virginity.⁹⁹ And when fused with poverty and obedience, it was a direct manifestation in the world of a great love, the love of Him who came not to have service done to Him but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.¹⁰⁰

3. Marian Spirit in Exterior Practices

The Vatican Council II advises us to value highly the practices and exercises of piety in regard to the Blessed Mother which in the course of the centuries have had the recommendation of the magisterium.¹⁰¹ Commenting on this passage, Pope Paul VI writes: "Among those practices, we would mention by name the Marian Rosary and the devout use of the scapular of Carmel. For this scapular is a form of piety which is adapted to all minds by reason of its simplicity, and has become universally widespread among the faithful, producing many and happy fruits."¹⁰²

For us Carmelites, then, the holy Scapular must be the external sign of Mary's motherly protection for our Order and of the fraternal bond that unites us in her great family. It is also the expression of our dedication to her service, and an incentive to theological hope through her intercession.

Although special devotions can never be a substitute for liturgical worship, they can do much to prepare us for it and, as it were, extend it to every part of our lives.¹⁰³ In that way they help the liturgy to fulfill its purpose, which is to make our entire lives a sacrifice of praise.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴L.G. 43.

⁹⁵L.G. 43; P.C. 1.

⁹⁶Matthew 19:11; I Cor. 7:32-34; see also L.G. 42.

⁹⁷I Cor. 6:18-19.

⁹⁸P.C. 12.

⁹⁹**Institutio Primorum Monachorum**, Chapter XXXVI.

¹⁰⁰Matthew 20:28.

¹⁰¹L.G. 67.

¹⁰²Paul VI in AAS LVII ut supra; cf. ibid AAS, 1967, pp. 465-475 for **Signum Magnum**.

¹⁰³cf. S.C. 13, 17.

¹⁰⁴Romans 12:1; 15-16; Phil. 2:7.

In our times then as in ages past, the scapular must be the principal part of our religious habit. However, it would be wrong to over-stress the material element in the wearing of the Scapular, as if God could communicate grace only by actual contact with the cloth. But Carmelites should be faithful in wearing the Scapular habitually, because it is an effective and noble proclamation of the Marian way of life. It is also a sign of the Blessed Mother's protection for all who wear it worthily, and a sign of our dedication to her. Finally, if worn in an intelligent and devout way, it enhances the religious value of our action.

To wear the Scapular and to appreciate it is in fact a testimony to our faith in God's mercy and love. It is a sign of our reliance on His care, as made manifest through Mary. It is a tacit petition that through her, He may carry out the work of salvation in us. The wearing of the Scapular is one way of proclaiming our desire to "put off the old self" and to "put on Christ." It is a renewal of our baptismal commitment, by which we are inserted into the paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. This in turn is the foundation of one's life of renewal, atonement and prayer, and when faithfully lived out, it should bring us to the day when we are clothed in the "vesture of integrity and immortality."

Thus, the wearing of the Scapular should introduce us into the evangelical manner of life as it has been lived by Carmelites for ages untold. It is a life modeled on Mary, who figured profoundly in the history of salvation, and in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith.¹⁰⁵

4. Marian Spirit in the Apostolate

"When the appointed time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman . . . to enable us to be adopted as sons."¹⁰⁶ The very fountainhead and source of all apostolic work, Jesus Christ Himself, was given to us through Mary. And if we want to imbibe the true spirit of the apostolate, we must look to her as the Church does, to learn how Christ may be born again in the hearts of the faithful. The Virgin Mary in her own life was an example of that maternal love by which all should be fittingly animated who cooperate in the apostolic mission if the Church on behalf of the rebirth of men.¹⁰⁷ Mary is the supreme instance of God's coming into this world for its salvation and its acceptance by a child of Adam. She stands at the point in history when her decision in faith made possible God's intervention to save us; in that way, she is the living pattern of the apostolate. In her acceptance of the will of God at the Annunciation, in her self-effacement and silence, in her standing beside the cross, in her real though unpretentious membership in the apostolic Church, she is the perfect model of how God's work must be done. She was so given over to God that she found Him everywhere, and He was able to use her as a docile instrument of grace, to bring new life to the world.¹⁰⁸

What we learn especially from Mary is the interior spirit and how to relate it to the exterior task. Hers is that "solitary" love which is the soul of the apostolate. No one has done more for

¹⁰⁵L.G. 65; see also **Acts of Carmelite Congress at Fatima**, September 1963.

¹⁰⁶Gal. 4:4-5.

¹⁰⁷L.G. 65.

¹⁰⁸L.G. 64.

mankind than she, yet it was done in the tranquillity of the spirit. She was not always active, making great display and attracting the eye superficially, rather was she in contact with the hidden root and source from which the water of life springs and from which comes all the fruit.¹⁰⁹

When Carmelites preach Mary, they must realize that in so doing they are cooperating with her to summon the faithful to her Son and His sacrifice, and to love for the Father. It is thus that the Church becomes more like her exalted model, and the Order continually progresses in faith, hope and charity, searching out and doing the will of God in all things.¹¹⁰ In that way too our brothers are joined with the apostles in spreading throughout the whole world the good news of Christ and the glories of Mary.¹¹¹ Let them tell the faithful that far from being too removed from us to be imitable, the Blessed Mother should be known to her children as one who can be easily followed in the practice of all the virtues. True, she is exalted, but even as the sun excels and makes glorious all the bodies of the world, so the Blessed Virgin excels and makes glorious the members of the whole Church.¹¹²

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10. *Handmaid of the Lord*, by Von Speyer, Ignatius Press.



¹⁰⁹ *Spiritual Canticle* (B) XXVIII annot. 3-4.

¹¹⁰ L.G. 65.

¹¹¹ L.G. 65; P.C. 25.

¹¹² cf. St. Bonaventure in de Lubac, op. cit. chapter IX.