

LOVING PRESENCE: MARY AND CARMEL

A Study of the Marian Heritage of the Order

The following chapter is an excerpt from the book, which can be viewed in its entirety online at <http://www.ocarm.org/books/sites/default/files/csdeng06.htm>

CHAPTER 8: Our Marian Charism in the Church Today

8.1 The Core of our Charism

In earlier chapters we have seen that five major characteristics stand out in the Carmelite Marian heritage as it developed: Patron, Mother, Model, Sister and Most Pure Virgin. But if we are to see what is the most basic intuition of the Order about Mary it is probably her presence. This presence, symbolized in the dedication of the oratory on Mount Carmel, is the form or pattern of all our Marian sensibility. The sense of her presence was cultivated by a multiplicity of liturgical and devotional exercises. It informed the Carmelites' obedience to the Rule. The notion of Patron gave an awareness that all the service of the Order was offered to her, and she was always present as its protector-patron. The title Sister with its familiar overtones was again indicative of presence. The Carmelite cultivation of purity of heart in imitation of the Virgin Most Pure brought Mary into the situations of daily life. This sense of the presence of Mary reached a high point in the Marian mysticism of Mary Petyt and Michael of Saint Augustine.

Even if all the Marian titles found in the Carmelite Order are also testified elsewhere in the Church, it would seem that in the notion of presence we are very close to the fundamental Marian awareness of the Order. The notion of presence gives a special colouring, a particular flavour to Carmelite texts about Mary which is not so clear in other spiritualities. A consequence is that for many of our writers Mary is presumed to be continually close, even if many Carmelites, even someone like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, do not write extensively about her.

8.2 Charism in the Church

The Marian charism of an Order is not an exclusive possession; it has to be shared with the Church. Indeed, it is only when it is shared that the Order will come into a contemporary and relevant grasp of the charism. We share our Marian charism with the Church in various ways: in writing, in preaching, in prayer groups, in discussions with people in groups, or as individuals. The response of others will help us to clarify our charism. We will know if we have been sharing something that others feel to be valuable; we may have to

search for more appropriate language and symbols in order to make our sharing more effective. What is reflected back to us by others about our Marian insights and devotion will in turn help us further to reflect and deepen our own appropriation.[294]

Our Marian charism must not be something fossilised from the past. Just as we can see its growth and development over the centuries, so too it must be alive and evolving in our time also. If then our sharing of our Marian charism is to be a true service of the Church, we must listen deeply: we must listen to our tradition; we must listen to what people are saying in our Church and our world; we must listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Catholic Church about the Blessed Virgin,[295] as well as to the Orthodox Church,[296] and the ecumenical movement.[297] We need also to be alert to modern scriptural studies on Mary,[298] and to contemporary presentations of the Marian dogmas,[299] and spiritual reflections on them.[300]

A summary of the way ahead is of course to be found in the great exhortation of Paul VI, *Marialis cultus* (1974) in which he notes the Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesial aspects of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. He also gives four guidelines for devotion: biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological.[301] As Carmelites we will best heed the pope by listening to the contemporary Church in the light of our tradition, and by recognising those areas in which our Marian charism can be further deepened in our day.

The first chapters of this book looked at tradition. The previous one on the period 1968–1995 shows something of the listening to the Church and the world as we sought to clarify our identity and charism. The sixth chapter ended with just a hint of critique; it was suggested that as we listened to the Church and the world, we did not fully bring our Marian heritage into our response. These texts of 1968–1995 seem to lack a sufficient sense of Mary's presence which is such a central feature of our history.

NOTES:

[294] See C. O'Donnell, "Religious Community as Apostolic Resource", *Religious Life Review* 24(1985) 307-316.

[295] See S. De Fiores, *Maria nella teologia contemporanea* (Rome: Centro di cultura "Mater Ecclesiae, 21987); id., "Nuovi orientamenti della mariologia oggi" in *Maria icona* 24-34; F.M. Jelly, "Characteristics of Contemporary Mariology", *Chicago Studies* 27(1988) 63-79. See annual bibliographical survey by E.R. Carroll in *Marian Studies*.

[296] E.g. A. Kniazeff, *La Mère de Dieu dans l'Église orthodoxe* (Paris: Cerf, 1990) = *La Madre di Dio nelle Chiesa ortodossa* (Milan: San Paolo, 1993).

[297] R.E. Brown et al eds, *Mary in the New Testament. A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Philadelphia: Fortress - London: Chapman, 1978); H.G. Anderson et al eds, *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary. Lutherans and Roman Catholics in Dialogue VIII* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992); E.R. Carroll, "Ecumenical Roundtable at International Mariological Congresses" in *Mater fidei et fidelium*. FS T. Koehler - Marian Library Studies 17-23. (Dayton: University Press, 1991) 292-305 with texts in *Studi ecumenici* 5(1987) 529-543; H. Grass, *Traktat über Mariologie*. Marburger theologische Studien 30. (Marburg: Elwert, 1991); J. Macquarrie, *Mary for All Christians* (London: Collins, 1990); H. Petri, ed., *Divergenzen in der Mariologie. Zur ökumenischen Diskussion um die Mutter Jesu*. Mariologische Studien 7. (Regensburg: Pustet, 1989).

[298] E.g. R.E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah. A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1979) = *La nascita del Messia secondo Matteo e Luca* (Assisi: Cittadella, 1981); B. Buby, *Mary of Galilee. Vol. 1 - Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Alba, 1994); I. de la Potterie, *Mary in the Mystery of the New Covenant* (New York: Alba, 1992).

[299] E.g. J.M. Carda Pitarch, *El misterio de María* (Madrid: Soc. de Educación Atenas, 1984); J. Galot, *Maria la donna nell'opera della salvezza* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1991); F.M. Jelly, *Madonna. Mary in the Catholic Tradition* (Huntington IND: Our Sunday Visitor, 1986); J. Paredes, *Mary and the Kingdom of God. A Synthesis of Mariology* (Slough UK: Saint Paul, 1991) = *María en la comunidad del Reino. Síntesis de mariología* (Madrid: Pub. Claretianas, 1988); G. Söll, *Storia dei dogmi mariani* (Rome: LAS, 1981) = M. Schmaus et al eds, *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte III/4* (Freiburg - Basel - Vienna, 1978).

[300] E.g. H.U. von Balthasar, *Mary for Today* (Slough UK: Saint Paul, 1987) = *Maria für heute* (Freiburg im. Br.: Herder, 1987); De Fiores, *Maria* (n. 2) 289-314; A. von Speyr, *Handmaid of the Lord* (San Francisco, Ignatius, 1985) = *Magd des Herrn* (Einsiedln: Johannes, 1948).

[301] L. Scheffczyk, *Neue Impulse zur Marienverehrung* (Saint Otilien: EOS, 1974).