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ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MARIOLOGICAL THOUGHT
AND MARIAN DEVOTION OF POPE SAINT JOHN PAUL II.
MARIAN DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH?

Abstract. The complexity of Mariology is such that it can only be described by typology or by relationships. Pope Saint John Paul II develops both of these methodologies in dealing with the role of the Virgin Mary as Mother of the Church, a personal Mother to each human being and Mother of the Word Incarnate. This short paper looks at some of the writings and footnotes which are contained therein which show his love of certain Fathers of the Church such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and Saint Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort. In addition to the documents of the Second Vatican Council the Holy Father draws on these two great Saints and devotees of the Blessed Virgin in order to develop a Mariology and devotion suitable for the modern world. Francisco Suarez S.J who developed the systematic approach to Mariology is sidelined by Pope John Paul II in favour of Saint Louis de Montfort and with this approach he is able to bring the study of Mary to a new level where She will be known and loved.

Keywords: John Paul II; Mariological thought; Marian devotion; Fatima; true devotion to Mary.

The theology of Mary is a complex theology given that it can be understood as belonging to Christology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. It is a specialized theology that understands the subject in relation to the Three Divine Persons, the Church in its three dimensions and to each person on earth in particular. From the earliest times the Most Blessed Virgin Mary has been the object of hyper dulia veneration from the apostolic times to the present age. There are currently four Marian dogmas that the Church espouses as the truths and realities about Our Lady. She is the Mother of God, the Perpetual Virgin, the Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Mother, assumed body and soul into heaven where She is exalted by God above all the angels and Saints.

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Mariology properly understood is the theology of Mary which is being unfolded and revealed by the Holy Spirit now and down through the ages, firstly by the Church Fathers, and later by the Marian dogmas, and then later again by the writings of the great Popes and theologians.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyon¹ was one of the first to make reference to Our Lady as the New Eve. Then Saint Ambrose of Milan (374–397)² was another of the influential Fathers of the Church who held the belief in the Virginité of Mary and Her role as the Mother of God: “She was devoid of any defect or imperfection, radiant with exceptional greatness and holiness.”³ The great mind of the early Church, Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430), one of the most important Latin Father’s of the Church, also held the perpetual virginity of Mary in his work *De Sancta Virginitate* explaining in this work how Mary is both Virgin and Mother both physically and spiritually.⁴

1. THE INFLUENCE OF THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH ON THE POPE

The foundational dogma on which all Marian dogmas rest and which is fundamental to the Mariology of Pope Saint John Paul II’s understanding came from the *Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus* in 431 AD which was presided over by Patriarch of Alexandria Saint Cyril (412–444). This Council defined the truth about Mary being the ‘Mother of God’ giving Her the greatest title of all that of *Theotokos*. This first dogma supported the doctrine which was always held of the Incarnation of Christ and Christ’s consubstantiality and equality with the eternal Father.⁵

While other great Marian devotees of the eleventh century onward such as Saints Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), whose writings were also favoured

¹ This was due to the fact that he knew Saint Polycarp (69–150), who knew some of the Apostles and who was a disciple of Saint John the Evangelist who revealed this teaching to him according to Saint Jerome-Peter Kirby on Saint Polycarp of Smyrna ‘Early Christian Writings’ 2021. See also: Irenaeus on Polycarp in *Adv. Haer.*, III.3.4 and the *Letter to Florinus*.

² Ambrose was bishop of Milan by popular acclamation. A great favourite of Pope John Paul II, who quoted Saint Ambrose many times in his writings.

³ Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999).

⁴ *Augustinian Publications* (Genazanno: Augnet, 2010): *De Sancta Virginitate* 3:3.

⁵ This doctrine was absolutely necessary given that Nestorius taught only *Christotokos* – meaning that Christ had two Persons, one fully human and one fully divine. Christ was a Divine Person with a Human nature and fully man.

and understood by the beloved Pontiff, as were the writings and devotions of Saint Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), and Saint Dominic de Guzmán Founder of the Dominican Fathers (1170–1221) who were in their own time promoting the praises of Mary through popular piety and with it the recitation of the Holy Rosary. However it was the writings of Saint John Eudes (1601–1680), and Saint Louis de Montfort (1673–1716) Missionary Apostolic of Pope Clement XI, both of whom belonged to the French School of Holiness that became the major influences on the Mariological formation of Pope Saint John Paul II.

The greatest work of Saint John Eudes, which he completed just a month before he died in 1680, was on the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the inseparability of Her Heart with the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. This work, which was the first major theological exhibition on the theology of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, paved the way for a fuller understanding of the role of the Virgin Mary that Pope John Paul II would use in his writings as the Roman Pontiff. For example, when he addressed the participants of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on Friday, 26 September 1986, he quoted Saint John Eudes' writings on the alliance of the two Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He made this reference on the influence of Eudes to the Church and to himself saying:

There are some references to the Heart of the Mother of God in the commentaries upon the Scriptures by the Fathers of the Church, but for the most part it was not until the seventeenth century that under the influence of Saint John Eudes this devotion became widespread. In our own century we see that the message of Our Lady at Fatima, the consecration of the world in 1942 to the Immaculate Heart of Mary by my predecessor Pope Pius XII, and theological initiatives such as your own have helped us to appreciate the importance of this devotion.⁶

The greatest Mariological influence on Pope John Paul II did not come from Father Francisco Suarez SJ (1548–1617), the author *De Mysteriis vitae Christi*, however, who is considered to be the founder of the Thomist School of Systematic Mariology and who like Saint John Eudes and Suárez was able to collect as many materials on the Virgin Mary as was possible for him in the sixteenth century. He began to put his research together in a systematic way using as he did the great styles of Saint Augustine, and Saint Thomas Aquinas. Suárez then condensed his findings into twenty-three arguments dealing with the mysteries and divine prerogatives of the Virgin Mary.

⁶ *Vatican Archives* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

The greatest of all Mariological influences for the Pope came from Saint Louis Grignion de Montfort. The Pope was more concerned, at least from a teaching and pastoral point of view with de Montfort's devotional approach to the Virgin Mary.

In 1940 the young Karol Józef Wojtyła, the future Pontiff of the Second Millennium worked at the French Solvay quarry in Borek Fałęcki near Krakow. Here he read for the first time the works of Saint Louis de Montfort, in fact he read the book *True Devotion to Mary* many times. Karol Wojtyła grew up with a great devotion to the Virgin Mary from his earliest childhood in Wadowice. But when he entered the seminary, he thought it might be better to take a step back from this devotion. He admitted later that he feared that his devotion to Our Lady would take away from the adoration due to Christ.⁷ But thanks to Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, he wrote in the 2004 Letter to the Religious of the Montfortian Families that:

I understood that authentic devotion to the Mother of God is truly Christocentric.... Reading *True Devotion* marked a turning point in my life. I say a "turning point" although it is a long inner journey that coincided with my clandestine preparation for the priesthood. I realized... something fundamental. It happened that the devotion of my childhood and even my adolescence to the Mother of Christ gave way to a new attitude, a devotion coming from the depths of my faith, as from the very heart of the Trinitarian and Christological reality (no. 1).

Given this profound influence of Saint Louis de Montfort and his understanding of the work *True Devotion to Mary* Pope John Paul II took as his Episcopal motto in Krakow the words of the consecration to Mary: *Totus tuus ego sum, et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in mea omnia. Praebe mihi cor tuum, Maria* ("I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart"). This motto was always used by the Pontiff from the time when he was auxiliary bishop in Krakow until he died in 2005 as the great Pope of our age. This motto used by Saint Louis de Montfort expressed the personal consecration of Pope John Paul II not only as an expression of piety but as a devotion that is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity as espoused in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.

Many of the documents of the Second Vatican Council also had a profound influence on Bishop Karol Józef Wojtyła the future Pontiff who would

⁷ *Dono e Mistero* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), 42.

lead the Church into the twenty-first century. *Lumen gentium* was an important document especially Chapter 8 which is on the Blessed Virgin Mary, the holy Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and the Church. This document is quoted in many encyclicals of the Pontiff especially in *Redemptoris Mater* where Pope John Paul II quotes fifty-seven passages from this document alone, not to mention the Fathers of the Church and in particular by Saint Bernard.

The influence of the Gospels, in particular that of Saint Luke must also be included in the wealth of knowledge that formed the Marian theology of Pope John Paul II. He clearly had a mind that would absorb and assimilate all that was written by the great Marian writers of the past in order that he might write something profoundly of the future. In the 1992 *Catechism* which he promulgated there are over seventy references to the Virgin Mary. Likewise the Pope gave over seventy. Marian catecheses in the course of the Wednesday General Audience addresses from 6 September 1995 to 19 November 1997. These provide a remarkable summary of his own teaching and a further consolidation of that of his predecessors and that of the Second Vatican Council, which constitutes a privileged point of reference for him. It must be readily admitted that these addresses are not infallible declarations, but every word of which must be considered as revealed doctrine and thus settling every conceivable issue which theologians discuss. But on the other hand, these discourses may be justly regarded as an important exercise of the Ordinary Magisterium of the Roman Pontiff and thus should be received by the faithful 'with religious submission of mind and will'.

These Marian catecheses emerge from among thousands of the Pope's homilies, prayers, addresses preceding the recitation of the Angelus or the Regina Coeli, along with many *Acts of Consecration* or other entrustments to Our Lady, and references in Pontifical documents and encyclicals which he has pronounced and published before, during and after these reflections.

Many of the points in these catechetical presentations can be further illustrated and amplified from this greater body of the Pope's teaching and as well as from that of his predecessors and of the Church's whole millennial Marian tradition. What is particularly noteworthy about this series of Marian teachings, however, is that it is unparalleled in the history of the papacy. Never before has any Pope ever undertaken such a systematic exposition on the Mother of God. This alone would be enough to claim the serious attention of Mary's devoted children.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF CARDINAL SCHEFFCZYK ON THE CONSECRATION OF THE WORLD

His Eminence Cardinal Scheffczyk examined the position and importance of the Marian Consecration of 1984 during the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II. He places it between the two dates of Pope John Paul II's first words after his election 16 October 1978 and his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* of 16 October 2003. Pope John Paul II's opening message as the newly elected Pontiff during which he expressed his obedience and total confidence in the Most Holy Virgin Mary overtly with the choice of the Papal Coat of Arms along with the motto "Totus Tuus". Clearly Cardinal Scheffczyk an eminent Mariologist himself was also an influence on Pope Saint John Paul II after all he was the eminent Mariologist who worked at the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during the height of the Pontificate of the beloved Pontiff. The Pope elevated Leo Scheffczyk to the College of Cardinals in 2001 as a reward for his outstanding service to the Church.

The profound Marian devotion of Pope John Paul II overflows not just in the visits to the 129 Marian Sanctuaries overseas which he visited during his twenty-six years as Pontiff, nor of the hundreds of Shrines in Italy but the devotion to Mary overflows in his writings in particular in the encyclicals *Redemptoris Mater* of 1987 and in *Mulieris dignitatem* of 1988.

In the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (whereby he declared a Marian Year—only the 2nd in the history of the Church) Pope John Paul II singles out Saint Louis de Montfort's Marian teaching as that which influenced him more than any other. In addition he shows how the Virgin Mary is venerated not just as *Theotokos* (Mother of God) but also in the Orthodox and Oriental Churches as the *Hodegetria* (She who shows the way) and the *Eleusa* (Mother of Tenderness). He refers to the Holy Virgin and the absolute trust that the Church places in Her as *Mater Ecclesiae* presenting Her role in Christotypical and soteriological dimensions (cfr. RM 32). Noting that God became Incarnate through Her in time and in history the Pope says of the Virgin Mother this: "The Church sees the Blessed Mother of God in the saving mystery of Christ and in Her own mystery. She sees Mary deeply rooted in humanity's history, in man's eternal vocation according to the providential plan which God has made for him from all eternity She sees Mary maternally present and sharing in the many complicated problems which today beset the lives of individuals, families and nations; She sees Her helping the Christian people in the

constant struggle between good and evil, to ensure that it ‘does not fall,’ or, if it has fallen, that it ‘rises again’” (RM 52). The Pope presents the Virgin Mary as the great sign of Hope for the world on par with the promise of the indefectibility by Christ Himself “that not even the gates of hell would prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). On the part of the Virgin Mary the Pontiff presents Her as a light shining on world history in order that we do not despair.

In the second encyclical of the Marian Year of 1988 the Pope wrote *Mulieris dignitatem*. Here he told us that the Virgin Mary is both Virgin and Mother whose vocation is to love. He wrote that: “She is the most complete expression and dignity of womanhood” (MD 1). Chapter II of the encyclical is focused on *Theotokos* whereby the Pope shows that this dignity consists in the “supernatural elevation to union with God in Jesus Christ” (MD 4) and again the Pope shows his brilliant understanding of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the same chapter with this statement: “She is truly the Mother of God, because motherhood concerns the whole person, not just the body, nor even just human ‘nature’. In this way the name ‘*Theotókos*’ – Mother of God – became the name proper to the union with God granted to the Virgin Mary” (MD 4).

In *Redemptor hominis* the Pope describes the relationship of the Virgin Mother with God as a filial relationship akin to the self-entrusting of a child to its mother as this relationship is based on Her mediation. The Virgin’s *fiat* is Her perfect surrender to Christ which Pope John Paul II writing in *Redemptoris Mater* (cfr. no. 46) calls a consecration (cfr. RM 22. 38) and aligns this notion with Saint Louis de Montfort’s consecration through the hands of the Virgin Mary as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments (cfr. RH 48). Cardinal Scheffczyk gives a summary of the Pope’s Marian thoughts quoting him saying: “Our entire perfection consists in being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus Christ. Hence the most perfect of all devotions is undoubtedly that which conforms, unites and consecrates us most perfectly to Jesus Christ. Now, since the Virgin Mary is of all creatures the one most conformed to Jesus Christ, it follows that among all devotions that which most consecrates and conforms a soul to our Lord is devotion to the Virgin Mary, His Holy Mother, and that the more a soul is consecrated to Her the more it will be consecrated to Jesus Christ. Never as in the Rosary do the life of Jesus and that of Mary appear so deeply joined. Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ.”⁸

⁸ *Marian Library* (Dayton: University of Dayton, 2021). Things Saint Louis de Montfort said about the Rosary and Marian devotion by Joseph Pronechen as reported in NCR April 27, 2016.

In the Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* Pope John Paul II uses the two works of Saint Louis de Montfort again, namely *True Devotion to Mary* and the *Secret of the Rosary*, in order to promote a popular piety of the daily recitation of the holy Rosary. He also mentions Blessed Bartolo Longo the Apostle of the Rosary who petitioned Pope Leo XIII to write the first of twelve encyclical letters on the Rosary alone. As a true father of the Second Vatican Council he brings into the document on the Rosary both *Lumen gentium* and *Marialis cultus* at this important moment of history, promulgating it in these words that show his own filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin:

I entrust this Apostolic Letter to the loving hands of the Virgin Mary, prostrating myself in spirit before her image in the splendid Shrine built for her by Blessed Bartolo Longo, the Apostle of the Rosary. I willingly make my own the touching words with which he concluded his well-known Supplication to the Queen of the Holy Rosary: ‘O Blessed Rosary of Mary, sweet chain which unites us to God, bond of love which unites us to the angels, tower of salvation against the assaults of Hell, safe port in our universal shipwreck, we will never abandon you. You will be our comfort in the hour of death: yours our final kiss as life ebbs away. And the last word from our lips will be your sweet name, O Queen of the Rosary of Pompei, O dearest Mother, O Refuge of Sinners, O Sovereign Consoler of the Afflicted. May you be everywhere blessed, today and always, on earth and in heaven. (RVM 43)

Saint Louis de Montfort in his magnificent work *True Devotion to Mary*, Pope Saint John Paul II’s favorite, he wrote that God kept Our Lady hidden for reasons known to Himself. In part one of his works he writes that “Mary is the supreme masterpiece of Almighty God and he has reserved the knowledge and possession of Her for himself. She is the glorious Mother of God the Son, who chose to humble and conceal Her during Her lifetime in order to foster Her humility. He called Her ‘Woman’ as if She were a stranger, although in His heart He esteemed and loved Her above all men and angels.”⁹

In 1917 that fact of Our Lady’s apparent obscurity from the world changed after She appeared in Fatima in Portugal. In the apparition of the June 13, 1917, the Blessed Virgin Mary told the 10-year-old Lucia Dos Santos the following: “Jesus wishes you to make Me known and loved on earth. He wishes also for you to establish devotion in the world to my Immaculate Heart.”¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Fatima in Lucia’s Own Words*, ed. Louis Kondor (19th Edition, Fatima: Fundacao Francisco E Jacinta Marto, 2014), 123.

In the July 13 apparition (the same year) this sentiment of the Virgin Mary to be ‘known and loved’ was repeated to the three children who had just had a vision of the souls of the damned in hell for all eternity with the devil. The Virgin Mary said: ‘you have seen hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. It is to save them that God wants to establish in the world devotion to My Immaculate Heart. If you do what I tell you, many souls will be saved, and there will be peace¹¹. It would seem that from the Creation of Man as recounted in the Book of Genesis right up to modern times and until 1917 as Saint Louis de Montfort has already stated¹² God had kept the Blessed Virgin Mary hidden until now-but now as we approach the end of the age on earth, God wants Her known and loved.

3. JOHN PAUL II AND THE MESSAGE OF FATIMA

Pope Saint John Paul II is known as the Fatima Pope as he was foreseen by the three children of Fatima in 1917 as the “bishop dressed in white, walking with halting step in a city half in ruins”. He was shot on May 13, 1981, in Saint Peter’s Square in Rome but saved by the invisible hand of Our Lady, as he testified by himself. Having read the secret of Fatima he realized immediately that he was the chosen one who would consecrate the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in union with the bishops of the world. 95% of the bishops of the Latin, Oriental and Orthodox Church complied with the request. This was a necessary consecration given that Pope Leo XIII had already consecrated the entire world to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus at the behest of the Lord himself through a nun of the Good Shepherd Congregation in Porto in Portugal, now Blessed Mary of the Divine Heart. Given that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are inseparable and united in mission, it became therefore necessary to consecrate the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The pinnacle of Pope John Paul II’s Marian devotion came into bloom with the solemn consecration of the entire world to the Immaculate Heart on March 25, 1984.

Pope John Paul II lived the message of Fatima in his life and held up the model of the Virgin Mary as the inexpressible sweetness of God and Mother of the Church. He promoted the Holy Rosary by personally giving over thirteen

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Part one, chapter 2, no. 55 (New York: Montfort Publications, 1987).

million Rosary beads to everyone whom he met in person. He recited the Rosary daily and publicly on the first Saturday of each month. He visited the Marian Shrines of each country he visited on every Apostolic voyage he undertook. In this was he was truly a Marian Pope and a great pastor. He has earned the title Marian Doctor of the Church for his heroic words and actions and his love for the Virgin Mary fulfilling the very wish of Almighty God that She be known and loved. Her Immaculate Heart was his refuge and the way that led him to God.

CONCLUSION

However despite the great advances in Mariology made by Pope Saint John Paul II the general understanding of who the Virgin Mary is has remained at the level of popular piety due to the lack of catechesis. That said, the Polish bishops are correct in proposing this great son of Poland, Pope Saint John Paul II, to be known as the Marian Doctorate of the Church, a title which the Catholic world would readily embrace.

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O ROZWOJU MYŚLI MARIOLOGICZNEJ I POBOŻNOŚCI MARYJNEJ
PAPIEŻA JANA PAWŁA II.
MARYJNY DOKTOR KOŚCIOŁA?

Streszczenie

Złożoność mariologii jest tak wielka, że można ją opisać jedynie w kategoriach typologii lub relacji. Papież św. Jan Paweł II stosuje te dwie metodologie, analizując rolę Maryi Dziewicy jako Matki Kościoła, osobowej matki każdego człowieka, a także Matki Słowa Wcielonego. W tym krótkim opracowaniu autor analizuje niektóre pisma tam przywołane oraz przypisy, ukazujące jego podziw dla niektórych ojców Kościoła, np. św. Bernarda z Clairvaux i św. Ludwika Marii Grignonona de Montfort. Poza dokumentami Soboru Watykańskiego II, Papież odwołuje się do tych dwóch wielkich świętych i czcicieli Maryi Dziewicy, by stworzyć mariologię i pobożność odpowiednią dla współczesnego świata. Franciszek Suarez SJ, który wypracował systematyczne podejście do mariologii, ustępuje miejsca u Jana Pawła II św. Ludwikowi Grignonowi de Montfortowi. Dzięki temu Papież jest w stanie przenieść studia mariologiczne na wyższy poziom, gdzie Maryja Dziewica będzie znana i kochana..

Słowa kluczowe: Jan Paweł II; myśl mariologiczna; pobożność maryjna; Fatima; prawdziwe nabożeństwo do Maryi.