



Opening to God

Mary and Life in the Spirit

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*After Tempi Madonna
Martha Hayden 1985*

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Introduction

In the past several years Mary has received renewed attention and interest, both from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. In 1991 the December issue of *Time* had a cover story on "The Search for Mary: Was the most revered woman in history God's handmaid -- or the first feminist?" At that time there was a growing number of pilgrims to Marian shrines like Lourdes, Knock, Ireland, Fatima, Portugal, Czestochowa, Poland and Emmitsburg, Maryland. Some 10 million pilgrims had gone to Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, where six young peasants claimed to have received messages from Mary every evening since June 24, 1981, The Feast of the Birth of John the Baptist. Mary, like John, seemed to be preparing the way of the Lord. The Medjugorje apparitions have been controversial in the Catholic Church and are still under investigation, but Pope John Paul II, devoted to Mary since his youth in Poland, is convinced Mary's intercession brought about the downfall of atheistic communism. According to Sister Lucia, the visionary at Fatima, Mary predicted the rise of Soviet totalitarianism before it happened, and she directed the Pope and his bishops to consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart in order to bring communism to an end. Papal attempts to carry out that consecration failed in 1942, 1952 and '82. John Paul II carried out Mary's directive in 1984 and the very next year, Mikhail Gorbachev's rise to power inaugurated the communist collapse. In his 1987 encyclical on Mary, *Mother of the Redeemer*, John Paul portrayed Mary's present influence as inaugurating God's Jubilee 2000, even as she preceded the coming of the Messiah in the incarnation. She goes before the Church in its journey toward holiness.

This worldwide revival of interest in Mary has come in the wake of an eclipse of Mary following Vatican Council II. Instead of issuing a separate document on Mary, the Council voted by a narrow margin to incorporate Mary in the constitution on the Church. The Council placed her clearly among the community of believers and away from any suspicion of co-equality with Christ. This theologically sound decision had an immediate practical effect of lessening interest in Mary. Seminary courses on Mary were reduced or dropped altogether. Marian statues were removed from some sanctuaries, traditional novena devotions were reduced or dropped. The step of demythologizing Mary, akin to the desire to find the historical Christ, seemed to be taking hold in the Catholic Church.

In the early 80's, with the resurgence of Marian apparitions, the tide began to turn. This resurgence of interest has not been without its conflicts. The strong advocates of recent apparitions point to the conversion of life of millions of believers. Those who doubt that Mary has spoken at all stand in opposition. Supernatural revelations have been controversial from the time of Christ's resurrection (see Mt 28:17) and continue to be today. Mary is used to support such seemingly divergent positions as Church Orthodoxy, with Mary as Mother of God assuring the divinity of her Son, and feminine liberation, with her *Magnificat* as heralding the victory of the oppressed. While many Protestant and some Catholic theologians question the biblical warrant for what seems to them an extravagant attention to Mary, others, both Catholic and Protestant, find an incipient theology of Mary already in the

New Testament and continue developing different views of her relevance today. At the same time, those of a more secular bent, like C. G. Jung and many feminist writers today, see Mary as a kind of mother goddess figure that is presently needed to offset what they see as an excessively male view of the deity.

In addition to these more theoretical positions regarding Mary, we also encounter pastoral concerns. Many have a personal experience of being helped or hurt by the image of Mary they were taught as a child. Not a few women experienced the idealization of Mary and her virginal purity as a devaluation of their womanhood and sexuality. Mary and virginity were lauded, whereas marriage was often portrayed as second best, a kind of divine consolation prize for those not able to achieve perfection. Although that view of marriage has changed in recent years, the early impression left its mark on many. For others, Mary recalls images of May devotions and strong support of the institutional church. For some this is a positive experience of continuity with tradition. For others, who feel oppressed by the church, it is more a reminder of constricting training that blocked their freedom and the celebration of their bodies and sexuality. There are those who were wounded by their own mothers, and may also have been wounded by the Church. These reject and mother figure that reminds them of their painful experience.

In short, consideration of Mary touches sensitive issues for many different individuals and groups, and may raise caution flags before even opening a book such as this. Is this book going to be another attempt at urging orthodoxy or an attack on orthodoxy -- red flags for differing groups? Is it another attack on Protestants' supposed neglect of Mary, or on Catholics' supposed exaggerated devotion to Mary? Will it be urging women to return to traditional roles of wife and mother, or using Mary to advance the cause of women's liberation? Would it not be better to leave such sensitive issues to each one's personal convictions?

The Need for Clarification

These are certainly important concerns, but conflicting views are not resolved by silence. Nor on the other hand, are they resolved by adamantly taking one side or another. What can help is clarification and bringing to light the issues that are at stake. One such help to clarification, which I present in this book, is that people see through different faith perspectives as through different lenses. Some have a strong institutional allegiance and see Mary from that perspective as ideal mother who gives directives and guides and protects her children. Others are moving more into what I call *individuating faith*, with its critical attitude toward what they judge as harmful training from their past. These tend at first to see Mary as part of the institution from which they are distancing themselves. They tend to remove the idealized aspects of Mary and see her in her humanity, as one who suffered much in her motherhood and with her son. She becomes for them a woman who struggled with institutional views at odds with her extraordinary life. These very different perspectives are actually bordering stages of development – familial and individuating – so each tends to see the other as a threat and so puts the other down. Traditional believers see those moving into critical individuation as “liberals” and “unorthodox,” whereas those touched by individuation see traditional believers as stuck in outdated perspectives.

On the other hand, from a developmental point of view, each stage is necessary. From a more all-encompassing view of faith development, each stage can be seen as complementary to every other stage. If one loses touch with tradition, our thinking has no grounding and will yield to every fad that emerges. We then become fragmented, with every individual holding to his or her own point of view. On the other hand, if doubt and critical judgment do not touch one, one will simply perpetuate forms of belief that no longer speak to today's world. I am convinced that neither traditional faith nor individuating faith is adequate alone. Each needs to open to a more encompassing *communitarian faith*, a kind of individuated community, to be fully integrated. Each needs to be rooted in personal experience but also to stay in continuity with the living tradition of God's revelation in Christ and with present day perspectives. It is from this communitarian form of faith, to be explained more fully in chapter two, that Mary's role is most clearly seen. Aspects of Mary's story are supportive of divergent faith perspectives. They only become integrated from a more interpersonal and communitarian perspective.

A communitarian perspective helps differentiate and unite the various tensions in reflection on Mary's role. Mary can be seen to support the Protestant focus on the absolute singularity of Jesus, but she also supports the need for a grace-empowered community to bring Jesus authentically to birth in each age of the church. Mary can be seen in light of our deep human need for a feminine mediation of the divine, but also our need to see God as totally transcendent and calling us to a humble attentiveness to God's call. Analogous to how Jesus embodies the paradox of being fully human and fully divine, Mary reveals what it is to be fully human and yet to respond fully to the action of God's Spirit. This is the mystery we all share, and until we find some way of seeing these polarities as complementary and mutually enriching, we will continue to stay in our separate camps and fail to integrate the gifts our differences could bring.

The Perspective of This Book

This book is an effort at integration and healing. I have been gifted by each of the perspectives that find themselves in conflict with one another. My initial interest in Mary stemmed from my study of C. G. Jung. As a member of a theological faculty, I taught Trinitarian theology and grace and courses on the integration of psychotherapy and theology. I became intrigued by Jung's comment that the definition of the Assumption in 1950 was the most important religious event since the Reformation since it brought femininity into our view of God. Jung spoke as a therapist. He saw the need to balance our male-dominated culture and religious view with the neglected aspects of the feminine and God's "shadow" side. Not having had a course on Mary for some eight years in the seminary, I decided to offer one to investigate how Marian thought related to the rising importance of the feminine. What I found was that she related more to differing views of spirituality in general (for men and women). I also was delighted to find that her role in salvation enlightened every area of theology. I was enriched by the biblical insights of Protestants like Max Thurian and John de Satge, and by the entrance into world mythology that needed to be considered. I was led more deeply into the concerns of women theologians as well as the piety of the faithful. But most of all, I was led to a deeper insight into what we are all called to and empowered by grace to become.

Later study led me to see the teachings about Mary in light of stages of faith revealed in salvation history. I became convinced that the main issue was not that we had thought too highly of Mary, but that we had failed to assimilate the glory all believers are called to reach. Mary goes before us in the way we all need to travel. She is model of life in the Spirit. Seen in this way, Mary is not an endorsement for any particular vocation or form of life, but a vision of growth in the Spirit that embraces every call.

To develop this perspective, the first chapter brings out some of the many issues that thinking about Mary's role has raised and gives a short history of Marian thought as the background of these issues. Chapter 2, as a first step in clarification, presents a view of faith development that has been gleaned from the biblical history of salvation and considerations of human spiritual growth. Chapter 3 looks at Mary in Scripture in light of faith development. The five following chapters consider five basic teachings about Mary in light of insights derived from faith development. We will find that the teaching about Mary helps us understand the healing of the different stages of faith. If Mary is model believer in Scripture, which is Luke's view as well as that of the Fourth Gospel, then what is said about her reveals a real possibility for all of us through God's Spirit. The final chapters give a summary view of the healing implications of Mary role, and then return to the various issues brought up in chapter 1. There they are responded to in light of what has been said about Mary. I hope to show that Mary embodies the work of the Holy Spirit to the fullest possible extent, and continues to be personally involved in opening us all most fully to the Spirit's work.