

Mary's Position in the History of Salvation and the Early Days of Schoenstatt

1954

(A translation of an article from "Regnum," October 1971 issue)

The fact that the order of salvation has a Marian character is, according to God's design and decree, based upon Mary's unique and universal role of mediation. This is a special gift to our present time in which humanity is threatened with ruin. It is not only the basis of the Holy Father's consecration of the world (to the Immaculate Heart of Mary), but is also the basis of the Schoenstatt consecration. This clear and definite conviction was present with compelling force even at the dawn of our family history; it constantly enveloped the family with a growing fullness of light and happy warmth, and determined its life and activity, essentially, in all respects. As a great power, it contributed, towards the formulation of the Founding Document and was responsible for its planned and continuous realisation.

A fleeting glance back into the past forty years confirms this quite unmistakably. From time to time, expressions, arid formulations changed according to the demands of the law of the open door, but the conviction in faith of our Lady's unique, objective position in the plan of salvation remained unflinchingly the same. It grew constantly, hand in hand with the many religious experiences and observations made over the years amongst ourselves and in our dealings with others. It was wonderfully confirmed and gained a deeper foundation with the mariological research in the time that followed as well as in the far-reaching utterances of the popes of the last century. It was this faith that later inspired the Founding Document. Otherwise, how could the figure of Mary appear there as covenant partner? How could she make the most austere covenant demands and large-scale covenant promises?

"I shall then take my dwelling amongst you with delight. I shall bestow gifts and graces abundantly. Then, in future, I shall draw youthful hearts to myself from here and educate them to become useful instruments in my hands..." (As instruments in my hand) "You shall free your country from overpowering enemies and (in the religious and moral sphere) place it at the head of the Western world."

This faith also inspired the parallel we drew between Schoenstatt and Ingolstadt. It permanently determined the leading idea of the family, quite irrespective as to which particular form it took at any specific time. Being the "chosen work of our Lady as Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, and an instrument in her hand for the moral and religious renewal of the world (or, the marian renewal of the world in Christ) from Schoenstatt" -- was the essential message which always remained the same, even if we later spoke of the "Schoenstatt Secret" or, Schoenstatt's vision of the future.

This faith ran like a red thread through all the talks given on our Lady through the decades.

A faithful reflection of this, can be found in the personal notes of deceased Schoenstatt children--think for example of Joseph Engling--and also in innumerable published and unpublished documents. As a test case, take the book, "*Unter dem Schutze Mariens*" (Under the Protection of Mary), which contains authentic documents from the founding period of Schoenstatt: e.g. refer Edition I, pp 336-338.

"In view of her position in the kingdom of God, our patroness will and must have a big share in the moral and religious renewal of the world. Theological deliberations convince me of this, but also historical perceptions. Anyone who knows the present situation as regards the economy of salvation will undoubtedly realise that our Lady — like God himself and according to the way he has arranged things — depends upon our cooperation. Certainly our Lady is not dependent on specific instruments. It is a great grace to be chosen by her, to be used by her and I think we sodalists have a special privilege in this regard... The cause that we serve will and must win. The authority of God guarantees this. We are indeed only experiencing a small phase in the gigantic struggle between God and the devil, between the Spirit, the flesh, and the world. Even though the spirit of the world storms ahead so victoriously, God will win. As apostles of devotion to Mary, we want to help to spread his triumph so that poor humanity will not have to experience his mighty power and justice too severely in eternity. We have to take a radical stand."

The text is informative because it provides us with the talks of that time in condensed form. Refer further p 343:

"We want to offer all our big and small efforts at self-mastery, all our good works and apostolic endeavours to our heavenly Mother in the shrine for her Capital of Grace, so that she can use them from there for the moral and religious renewal of the world."

Or, if you wish, think of our favourite saying which became a custom in our family early on and has won a place amongst us for all times. We said: Our Lady has a seat and vote in the council of the Triune God. He does not make decisions without her.

A presentation which is true to history does not only contain chapters dealing with this general theme however, but also and always speaks warmly of certain striking individual features. There are mainly three characteristics which come strongly to the fore in this regard: The person and role of Mary in regard to Christ, to the Father and in regard to her task of forming and guiding modern humanity which is so acutely threatened.

As early as the founding time the image of Mary which was unveiled on countless occasions as our authentic image, was that of the Christ-formed and Christ-forming

apocalyptic woman. In her official role she was constantly presented as the one who gives birth to Christ and who bears Christ. For the founding generation the dearly-loved image of the Mother with the Child on her arm or her lap was not just a reminder of a unique and significant historical event, but the symbolic expression of Mary's indispensable and permanent role in the history of salvation.

Following the development of religious trends in both East and West they constantly saw how the image and mission of Mary protected and enlivened the idea and image of Christ and of God. In this connection the "*soli Deo*" (God alone) trend, was modified into the most varied shapes and forms. God alone! Mary is not God, therefore — according to many heretical teachings — away with her! Elsewhere one hears there is also a human element in the person of Christ, hence, away with him too! And so God is left in his transcendental distance and aloneness. Now at last — people say — the "*soli Deo*" is fully justified. It does not take long however, before this spiritual God is also swept away, and what remains is the divinisation of nature, then the "*soli Deo*" is explained as "Hail to the Sun God" and this, because the protecting shield of the image of God and Christ — Mary — was not given its rightful place in the long run. In diverse talks during the founding period these vast dimensions were deepened by the unveiling of the meaning and history of these words which are a song of praise of Mary: "*Omnes haereses (Christologicas, antitrinitarias, ecclesiologicas, anthropologicas) tu sola interimisti in universo mundo*". (You alone have overcome all heresies in the whole world).

They studied the age of enlightenment and saw how at that time all expressions of devotion to Mary were mercilessly eliminated until only a lifeless stump remained (Josefinismus, Wessenbergianismus). On the other hand, they noted how in the East love for our Lady had saved the image of Christ, and how in the West marian trends had paved the way for Christ-centred movements. A classic example of this was seen in the life and activity of Pius X. Think of those oft-quoted words of his which acclaim the way via Mary as the easiest, surest and most perfect way to Christ and the heavenly Father. Recall how the person and role of our Lady were progressively revealed before our spiritual eye in a most outstanding way. We saw her as the Woman with the Child on her arms, the tongues of fire over her head, the Ave in her ear, the Magnificat on her lips, the sevenfold sword in her heart, the serpent beneath her feet. She radiated a warmth into the family which we can observe today as a consequence of the basic marian element which progressively gained ground in so many ways. This again proves how strong, autonomous and independent our family has always been, how it has persevered and proved itself in this and anticipated the development of the time by far. For decades we have been carried and inspired by the marian ideas and warmth which can be observed in the Church today. We constantly endeavoured to bring our Lady onto the battlefield of our time and to place the destiny of the Church and world trustingly into her kind and mighty motherly hands. In doing so we knew that we were in very good company — that of God and the Church.

Did God not plan and act in the same way when he made our salvation dependent on Mary? He made and chose her — the masterpiece of his Spirit, his heart, his hands — not only to be Mother of his Son, but also and in the true sense of the word, our Mother, the Mother of all people. He gave her both the rights and duties of a mother in the sense of her collaborating in the conception, education and guidance of the children of God in his kingdom. What else could it mean to be the official bearer of God other than that God has commissioned her to collaborate in the birth, education and guidance of Christians?

This was what Pius X meant when he declared: “It is part of the glory of Mary that she did not only offer the only-begotten Son part of her flesh in order thereby to prepare a sacrifice for the salvation of the world, but also that she took over the official task of protecting and nourishing this sacrificial lamb and at the right time, brought him to the altar of sacrifice. So it was that there was an unbroken communion of life and suffering between Son and Mother. Beneath the cross she participated so intensely in his suffering that, if it had been possible, she would gladly have borne all her Son’s agony for us. Through this participation in the suffering and love of Christ, Mary rightly earned her position as the Woman called to restore a lost humanity and thus also to dispense all the treasures of grace which Christ purchased through his death and his blood.

Pius XI said the same in his encyclical, “*Miserentissimus Deus*”:

“Mary gave birth to Jesus the Redeemer for us. She formed him and offered him up beneath the cross. Through this, and through her mysterious union with Christ and his most unique grace, she was also the Woman who would reinstate mankind, and is also referred to as such amongst the faithful.”

Pius XII spoke in similar vein:

“Mary was always most deeply united with her Son. As the New Eve she offered him to the Father on Golgatha for all the children of Adam who suffer under the consequences of the Fall. Through this, she who was already the physical Mother of the Head, by virtue of her glorious suffering, now also became the spiritual Mother of his members.”

Has the Church, the Bride of Christ on earth, not always orientated itself on this divine plan and ruling? Has she not, in imitation of God himself, expressly placed her destiny into Mary’s motherly hands and at least consciously so when she has been particularly threatened? By way of proof we only need look at the events of the past few centuries. It would however be unnecessary to go into details here.

Our family history also records a series of articles amongst the bulletins for presidents of marian sodalities on the position of our Lady in the kingdom of God, They were written by a Father P Heitger S.J., a writer of that time. If these publications ever come your way, take the trouble to read them. If I am not mistaken they are the issues of 1915 or 1916.

They are written in an ordinary style rather than in a speculative manner, and are therefore understandable for all. I myself would very much like to read and look into them again, so as to be able to reconstruct the spiritual situation of the family at that time. The title itself points to the fact that we gained a great deal from them for the coining of our image of our Lady at that time. And that was so too. In any case, they provided most effective help for us to understand the marian way to Christ and God clearly, and to follow it courageously and consistently. In this manner we were able to find the surest, shortest, and most perfect path to Christ, and in and with him to the Father, and to exercise creative responsibility for the kingdom of God on earth.

It was on this foundation that the entire structure and membership of the sodality of that time were based. So too were all the activities pursued within it. Special reference was given in the talks on the Church to the image of Mary. Apart from the influence of the spiritual director in personal guidance, the prefect had the main responsibility for the growth, deepening, and securing of an intense and deep love for Mary. The Eucharistic section had the task to see to it that, the way to Christ from, with, through, and in our Lady would also always be pursued effectively and successfully..

Just think how warm, deeply religious and transforming the atmosphere in the house was despite the exceptionally difficult circumstances caused by the war — such as shortage of food, accommodation. Recall how intently the boys turned to the Eucharist, to the Heart of Christ and to spirituality. Those of us, who lived through the situation, do not take these things for granted. It was the ‘prayer group’ and the ‘Heart of Christ group’ which were responsible for these things. Each in their own way supported the workings of the great Christ-bearer most effectively. At the same time the good conduct group successfully saw the link up of love for Christ and Mary with daily life. The mission section enkindled the apostolic spirit and nurtured it richly through study and activities.

So it was that both sections made their own contribution towards the realisation of one of the stipulations of our constitutions which read: “The members of the sodality frequently receive Holy Communion together and arrange common devotions — as the possibilities permit. In order to facilitate the attainment of the aim of the sodality, the spirit of the respective sections should be fostered. In the meetings which are arranged for this purpose, special care should be taken to promote devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the Eucharistic Lord, love for apostolic activity, and particularly the vocation to the missions and the Pallottine Society as well as all-round conscientiousness at study.”

It was good that, in this way, we got to know devotion to Mary, both in theory and in practice, as a singular and unique power in education, which, like an underwater current spreads warmth and fruitfulness everywhere. So it was that we were prepared, fundamentally and in all respects, for the unremitting hard battles — which are known to you — which subsequently followed, with spiritual trends in the Church, particularly with the youth and liturgical movements. Indeed, you know that all these spiritual trends

which are breaking through and forcefully pressing ahead have not been able to penetrate Schoenstatt's walls.

Over the course of the years, experiences and observations in the religious sphere went hand in hand with our gaining a deepened and more comprehensive understanding of Mary's role in the plan of salvation. These experiences can be seen as rings of growth which developed almost effortlessly around the original core — the notion of our Lady as the official Christ-bearer. Therefore it was not difficult for us — long before wider circles in the Church got so far — to expound the characteristics of Mary's person, i.e. we formulated the basic and central thought which determined the image and role of Mary in the divine plan, and which thus easily explains how God equipped her in regard to the characteristics and tasks he gave her — just as one can trace a river back to its source.

We only had to follow up the idea of Mary being the Christ-bearer to its ultimate conclusion. So it came about that from then on we spoke of our Lady as the official and permanent Helpmate of the Saviour in the entire work of redemption, or, to put it briefly, as the "*Sponsa et consors Christi*", or likewise, as Christ's official collaborator and the official opponent of Satan.

This sheds bright light on Mary's co-operation at the hour of the Annunciation, on Golgotha and from heaven. With great love the family immersed itself again and again in these great mariological truths. All the issues which came up for discussion during the marian year had been alive in the family for a long time beforehand; we kept them alive and they were solved within the family. Once again, as we have so often ascertained, we anticipated the development of the Church. Obviously a definite proof that the Spirit of God is at work amongst us, and at the same time however, an effective protest against the reproach that we lack the "*Sentire cum ecclesia*", In his official letter for the feast of the Queenship of our Lady, Pius XII spoke of her just as we have done for years, as the Helpmate of Christ in the work of redemption in the battle against the enemies of God's kingdom, and his companion in the final victory,

All that the popes — beginning with Leo XIII — have said about the way in which our Lady saw and carried out her task, is identifiable, down to the last detail, with the basic attitude of the family from the start, i.e. from the time of the Founding Document which as has already been seen, was actually inspired by it.

Leo stresses that under the cross, our Lady took over a "unique and difficult task the task of being a true Mother to the whole human race, and has, since that time, been devoted to us with glowing and untiring love," Let me remind you of the fact that Mary's official position is one of the most central ideas in Leo's mariology. He does not tire of stressing that God has given our Lady a unique and timeless office, i.e. he has given her a timeless vocation, the on-going capacity to fulfill it, and the on-going duty to fulfill it in the sense of it being a definite task, as we have said.

At times the pope uses the word “*munus*”, at times, “*ministerium*” and at times, “*officium*”, as translations for “official position”. He, as it were, exhausts himself in expressions which, though, different, nonetheless say the same thing. So important is the subject matter to him, he proceeds from the thought that Mary has the on-going task, the on-going capacity, and the on-going duty to play the role of man before God in the most, perfect possible way (*Personam agebat generis humani*) in the sacred drama of salvation history. To describe it in detail, her task, on behalf of all mankind as it ‘were, is to be the physical Mother of Christ and then spiritual Mother to all God’s children, mediating divine life to them.

She has thus been officially appointed as Christ-bearer for all times. And she fulfils this task with her whole soul, with glowing love and with all her strength. The whole Founding Document is based upon this twofold conviction, Please check it yourselves. It is above all the words, “*Ego diligentes me diligo*” that point in this direction.

Furthermore, Leo draws our attention to the fact that “Mary is so concerned about us that, when it comes to matters pertaining to the attainment of eternal life, she constantly hastens to our aid in needs of every kind — immediately and of her own accord, also when we have not called upon her. Since her Assumption she has begun, “according to divine decree, to watch over the Church. She gives us her motherly help and grace in such a way that, possessing almost immeasurable power, she became the disperser of the graces which flow from the mystery of redemption into all times, just as she was once the Helpmate in bringing the work of redemption to its full completion.”

It is her special concern “to see to it that the Catholic faith continues to exist unshaken amongst the nations, that it remains untainted, preserves its strength, and bears fruits. In those times and places where there has been the most serious slackening in the faith due to indifference or the regrettably greater threat of contagion through worthless false teachings, there the great Virgin proved her aid, through grace. The efforts of many powerful heroes who, in radiant splendour and great apostolic fervour, thwarted the undertakings of the godless and inspired people to return to a good Christian life, can be attributed to her encouragement and inspiration.”

The Founding Document says the same when it lets Our Lady speak: “Do not worry about the fulfilment of your wishes.” The wish, the request which permeates the entire document is from beginning to end, that of the sanctification of souls and the glorification of the Mother of the Lord, and hence, of the Triune God. Hence the constant references to “miracles of grace”, “cradle of sanctity”, birthplace of the apostolic spirit, the educational activity of Our Lady and the instrumental endeavours of her faithful ones. The family lives with awareness and conviction that our Lady wants above all to act as

Mother of Grace from her shrines. Does not all this go in the same direction as that taken by Pope Leo XIII?

In 1926 Pius XI called Our Lady “the Woman with big eyes”, who in the light of her vision of God, constantly pursues us with “singular vigilance”. We are thus not indifferent to her. She looks at us, she looks at each individual and us all with a warm motherly heart and deeply personal concern.

Pius XII sees the “birth pangs of the Apocalyptic Woman” as a symbol of Our Lady’s motherly vigilance, especially in apocalyptic times such as we experience today. He stresses that “Mary’s heart beats with inexpressible tenderness and motherly love for us all and the entire world. This is obviously the same singular vigilance, the same birth pangs, the same inexpressibly tender motherly care with which, according to the Founding Document, Our Lady descends to the shrine and sets up her throne there. She does so — indeed at the cost of our earnest cooperation — in order to render effective help to our disturbed world and to renew it from therein Christ.