

MARIAN SOCIETIES IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS AN ENLIGHTENED DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

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Abstract

This article discusses Marian Societies in Nigeria with the aim of highlighting their various spiritualities and therefore, engender more devotion to our Blessed Mother. The Church has, in her various Mariological teachings, emphasized the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation, as well as her maternal intercessory role in the lives of Christians. This has given rise to various Marian devotions with varying spiritualities. This study begins with an introduction and clarification of relevant terms. It presents the origin of Marian devotions and discusses five popular Marian devotions: Our Lady Queen of All Hearts, The Legion of Mary, The Blue Army of our Lady of Fatima, The Block Rosary Crusade and The Mary League Association. It emphasizes the importance of devotion to Mary and addresses some misconceptions about the Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, explaining the nature of true devotion. The article exposes the extremism of Marianism, which is a danger to Marian spirituality, and concludes.

Keywords: Mary, devotion, Marian devotion, Marianism.

Introduction

The place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the history of salvation has remained very controversial. This is because some people have decided not to accept and acknowledge her as the mother of God, that is, mother of God the Son made incarnate in our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary plays a prominent role in these significant events of Christ's incarnation at Christmas and His resurrection at Easter. For some, Mary should not be given any special place in the Church's worship and devotion because she is mere mortal like any human. They often ask: Can anything good come from devotion to Mary? Mary is distinguished by the fact that she, through her life, was totally dedicated to God.⁴ She deserves special place in our lives as Christians. This is made manifest in the various forms of devotions accorded her in the Church. This work aims at bringing to limelight the nature of various genuine devotions to Mary in the Church which will help Christians, most especially, Catholics, to

⁴George Muller, "Mary: Model of Evangelization" in the Bulletin *Dei Verbum* No. 22 (Germany: Catholic Biblical Federation, Eng. Ed., January-March 1992), 20.

better understand, appreciate, and cultivate a proper devotion to her who is the Mother of God and the Church. It would achieve this by first clarifying some terms. Then, it would proceed to discuss the historical foundation of Marian devotions in the Church, the various forms of devotions to Mary, necessity of devotion to Mary, true devotion to Mary, misconception about Marian devotions and many others.

Clarification Of Terms

For a proper understanding of the said topic, the following terms would be clarified: devotion and Marian devotion.

Devotion

Devotion is from the Latin word '*devotio*', which means 'vow' or 'total dedication'. This refers to piety in general or deep reverence for the holy in prayer. Thus by devotions, we refer to prayers, rituals, spoken formulas, or physical gestures, used in private or with others to worship God, to honour Mary and the saints, to request for divine help.⁵

Marian Devotion

Devotion is also seen as the joyous dedication of oneself to God and to others for the sake of God and for the promotion of His kingdom here on earth. It is in this sense that one talks about devotion to Mary, that is, the joyous dedication of the whole self to her and to her service through imitating her virtues and footsteps in our service to God and humanity.⁶ It can also be intercessory, whereby she is called upon for assistance. It can also be reverential, which emphasizes and praises the irreplaceable position Mary occupies as the mother of the Saviour.

Origin And Historical Development Of Marian Devotions

In order to talk about devotion to Mary in the Church, one must fall back to the words of Evangelist Luke who made it known that the Blessed Mary said: "From now onward, all generations will call me blessed, for the Almighty has done great things for me." (Luke 1:48-49). This laid the foundation for Marian devotions in the Church. The first historical indication of devotion to the mother of Jesus was found in the Roman catacombs as early as the first century. It was clear from the number of locations of representations of Mary that she was seen not only as an historical person, but also as assign of protection, of defence

⁵Reynolds R. Ekstrom, *The Concise Catholic Dictionary*, (Bandra, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1995), 95.

⁶Anthony O. Nwachukwu, *What a Model is Mary the Mother of Jesus*, (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 1995), 33.

and of intercession.⁷ The Eastern Church may be rightly regarded as having originated the teaching about Mary and devotion to her. It was the Eastern Church that gave rise to the Apocrypha, specifically the *protoevangelium* of James. The traditions concerning Mary were contained in these books and prompted devotions to her.

There was also a practice of devotion in the East as early as the beginning of the 3rd century. A Greek papyrus found in Egypt and dating from the early 3rd century has the Marian *Sub Praesidium* (under your patronage). This, thus, proof that the mother of God, was venerated even before the council of Ephesus in the 5th century.⁸ However, it was at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D that the title, 'Mother of God' was officially ascribed to Mary by the Church following some serious debate. After which large churches were dedicated to her in central ecclesial locations of Rome, Jerusalem and Constantinople. After the Council of Ephesus, there was a tremendous flourishing of devotion to Mary both in the East and the West in the form of prayers, hymns, liturgical feast and artwork.⁹

The Council of Ephesus served to foster Marian devotions and this is acknowledged in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 21 November: "Accordingly, following the Council of Ephesus, there was a remarkable growth in the cult of the people of God towards Mary, in veneration and love, in generations and imitation, according to her own prophetic words: all generations shall call me blessed...".¹⁰ From the 5th century, liturgical feasts of Mary were celebrated. The first was a remembrance of Mary as part of the Christmas season. Later came the feasts of the Annunciation, Assumption and others. In the 7th century, the Marian antiphon "*Ave Maris Stella*" was written, followed by a stream of hymns and antiphons through the centuries. During the 10th century, the little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared, Saturdays were devoted to Mary and the title Mother of Mercy spread throughout the West. The 11th century witnessed the beginning of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres, the composition of the Hail, Holy Queen and the "*Alma Redemptoris Mater*". Just before the time of Saints Francis and Dominic, the Litany of

⁷T. Barga, *Behold Your Mother*, (Jos: Fab Aneih, 2009), 124.

⁸ A. Buono, "*Eastern Church and Mary*" in *Dictionary of Mary*, (Bandra, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2006), 123.

⁹T. Barga, *Behold Your Mother*, 125.

¹⁰Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 1964, no 66.

the Blessed Virgin was shaped and the first half of the Hail Mary was used in prayer.¹¹

In the 13th century, the scapular was presented to Saint Simon Stock; Duns Scotus defended the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the month of Mary was dedicated to Mary. The 15th century saw the writing of the *Memorare*; Thomas Kempis urged recourse to Mary in the spiritual life; a feast of the Sorrows of Mary was established; the rosary was approved by Pope Alexander VI; Michelangelo carved the Pieta, and the *Salve Regina* was the first prayer recited in the New World by Columbus and his crew. The Blessed Virgin appeared to Juan Diego at Guadalupe in 1531 and in 1543 Martin Luther affirmed the Immaculate Conception. More feasts and writings evolved in the subsequent centuries. In 1830, the Miraculous Medal was struck in response to a vision given to Saint Catherine Labour. In 1854 the dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception was proclaimed. In 1858 Our Lady appeared to Saint Bernadette and in 1917, to the children at Fatima. In 1921 the Legion of Mary was founded. The dogma of Mary's assumption was proclaimed and a Marian Year observed in 1950. We could, therefore, conclude that devotion to Mary began with the first followers of Jesus, and those who came after them, reflecting on her role in the life of Jesus and the Scriptures, they probably, at least intuitively, saw Mary as an intercessor with her Son and the Father. They also saw her as the first disciples and the model for all who could follow Christ in truth and in Spirit.

Popular Marian Devotions In The Catholic Church

Throughout history, lay people who wish to devote themselves more closely to a spiritual life and apostolic work devoid of religious vows or the ministerial priestly commitment formed Marian Associations or Confraternities.

They include:

- Our Lady Queen of All Hearts
- The Legion of Mary,
- The Blue Army of our Lady of Fatima,
- The Block Rosary Crusade
- The Mary League Association

Our Lady Queen Of All Hearts

This devotion is composed of those faithful who wish to live their baptismal vows by means of a total consecration to Christ through the

¹¹Yohanna Jacob, "Devotion to Mary", (Kaduna: Abbey Digit-All Print, 2015), 48.

hands of Mary. They practice true devotion to Mary as taught by St. Louis de Montfort. This devotion consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. It requires us to give:

- i. Our body, with its senses and members;
- ii. Our soul with its faculties;
- iii. Our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future;
- iv. Our interior and spiritual possessions, which include our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future.

The nature of this association is such that it gathers together the faithful, clerics or lay, who, desiring to be witnesses to the truth of the Gospel, intend to live the commitments of their baptism with the help of a total consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary. They commit themselves to the practice of true devotion to the Blessed Virgin taught by St. Louis-Marie de Montfort, whom they choose as spiritual guide and Master. Members of this association are commonly identified with the Brown Scapular with which the image of the miraculous medal is attached. They call themselves “slaves of love” in every spiritual and theological sense of the word love. This is because after undertaking the total consecration members engage in humble sacrificial service to all and sundry wherever they find themselves. St. Pope John Paul II, was a true follower of this spirituality. He further enriched the devotion with a plenary indulgence, granted in perpetuity, to be gained by members of the association, under the usual condition, on the day of their enrolment, first Saturday of every month, Holy Thursday, and the Liturgical Celebration of the following feasts and Solemnities: Annunciation of the Lady - Dec. 8, Christmas - Dec.25 and the feast of St. Louis de Montfort - April 28.

The Legion Of Mary

The word ‘Legion’, according to Harper’s Bible Dictionary, is a large unit of soldiers in the Roman army. “Legion” (for we are many) appears as the name of a demon exorcised by Jesus in Mark 5:9 (Cf. also Luke 8:30). The name “Legion of Mary” is derived from the Roman Legion. As the name suggest, legionaries of Mary are soldiers called to a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness and evil through prayers and works of charity. Its apostolate is centered on the promotion of “the glory of God through the sanctification of its members by prayers and active cooperation, under ecclesiastical guidance, in Mary’s and the

Church's work of crushing the head of the serpent and advancing the reign of Christ."¹²

Frank Duff an Irish lay man is the founder of the Legion of Mary. At the moment, Legionaries worldwide are praying for his beatification. The legion of Mary is open to all Catholics who faithfully practice their religion, are animated by the desire to fulfil their role in the church's apostolate through membership of the legion; and are prepared to fulfil each and every duty which active membership of the legion involves."¹³ The legion promise presents four vital points which includes: it is a prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit, it emphasizes humility, it encourages union with Mary; and it demands strict observance of the Legionaries discipline. The Legionaries see themselves too as "handmaids" ready to work according to the Word of God.

Legionaries' devotion and spirituality could be summarized in the Latin maxim: "*laborare et orare*", that is, "to work and to pray" this should be distinguished from "*laborare est orare*" (to work is to pray). For the legionaries, one cannot and does not substitute the other. The two go hand in hand. They therefore, go for their weekly meeting to pray first, after which they share themselves in pairs to go out for the work they do on weekly basis. Devotion to Mary as we mentioned earlier, can be imitatory or exemplary, whereby Mary is honoured in view of the life she led, a life of faith, humility and love.¹⁴The legionaries' devotion is embedded in their two-fold work of sanctifying themselves and serving their neighbours with whom they intend to share the love of God. The spirituality of the Legion it said to be that of Mary because legionaries' aspire after her profound humility, her perfect obedience, angelic sweetness, her altogether spotless purity, her heroic patience, her heavenly wisdom, her self-scarifying courageous love of God, and her faith.¹⁵

The Blue Army Of Our Lady Of Fatima

The Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima is a public international association of the Christian faithful that has as its general purpose "the promotion of the authentic teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and the strict adherence to the tenets of the Gospel; the personal sanctification of adherents through faithful adherence to the Message of Fatima and the promotion of the common good by spreading the

¹²The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary, (Dublin: Concilium Legionis Mariae, 1993), 11.

¹³The Official Hand Book of the Legion of Mary, 80.

¹⁴A.O. Nwachukwu, *What A Model is Mary the Mother of Jesus*, 33.

¹⁵"Spirit of the Legion", in The Official Legion Hand Book, 12.

Fatima's Message." This pious group is gradually dying because many people are not aware of its activities especially in some dioceses and parishes in Nigeria. It was founded by an American Priest, Herold Colgan, in the year 1947, under the guidance of Fatima's Virgin. He made a vow to make her known; if our Lady could cure him of a severe heart disease. Eventually, he was cured by our Lady. He preached the message of Fatima in his Parish. "On a quest to know how any people who are fulfilling Our Lady's request in the Parish, they will be Our Lady's Blue Army against the red tides of atheism."¹⁶

The Blue Army has its world headquarters in the *Domus Pacis* ("House of Peace"), a pilgrim guest house in Fatima, Portugal. Due to its fast spread, there necessitated the erection of a new society. The Decree of Erection of the World Apostolate of Fatima was signed on 7 October (the Feast of the Holy Rosary), 2005. Then, on 3 February 2006, the World Apostolate of Fatima held an official ceremony for the consignment of the decree and the approval of its statutes at the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Rome.

Devotion in the Blue Arm involves the following: to offer up every day the sacrifices demanded by one's daily duty to the faithful observance of God's law; to say five decades of the Rosary daily while meditating on the mysteries; to wear the Brown scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel as a sign and reminder of personal consecration to our lady.

The membership of the Blue Army are of three categories namely;

- i. Ordinary members: are those who make and keep the pledge, wear their scapulars, pray the daily morning offering and recite the Rosary. This is good for those who are at present members of other Church societies.
- ii. Militant Crusade: are those who make the pledge and keep it with additional obligation of recruiting at least three members within a year. They meet once a month (first Saturday of the month).
- iii. Eucharistic Crusaders: they are those who live the message in depth as did the children of Fatima and spend one hour each week known as the "Cell Hour of Holiness". They are also known as the Blue Army Parish Cells and like living cells, they grow and divide and they may be the militant crusaders who meet monthly.

Block Rosary Crusade

¹⁶Anselm Uba, *Manual of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima*, (Bodija: Claverium Press, 1990), 1.

Since the Rosary is composed, principally and in substance, of the prayer of Christ and the Angelic salutation, that is, the Our Father (*Pater noster*) and the Hail Mary (*Ave Maria*), it was without doubt the first prayer and the principal devotion of the faithful and has been in use all through the centuries, from the time of the apostles and disciples down to the present. It was only in the year 1214, however, that the Church received the Rosary in its present form and according to the method we use today. It was given to the Church by St. Dominic, who had received it from the Blessed Virgin as a means of converting the Albigenses and other sinners¹⁷. The Albigenses denied the mystery of incarnation, rejected Church sacraments and condoned many secular activities considered evil by the catholic faith. Among the efforts by the Church to combat this heresy was the organization of the mendicant orders, including one led by St Dominic. The Dominicans as they became known, tried to reverse the vile teachings of the Albigenses by roaming the countryside preaching against the heresy, trying to influence the fallen away back into the church. Tradition has it that St Dominic's efforts were most effective following a visit from the Blessed Virgin Mary in the year 1214. In his dream Mary gave Dominic the Rosary and instructed the saint to preach the rosary as part of his effort to thwart heresy¹⁸ Block Rosary is a Marian devotion which is connected with the visit of Icons of Mary, or Statues of Mary from house to house, and from one family to another, where special veneration is given to Mary and the holy family. Block Rosary Crusade is an indigenous pious society whose aim is to propagate the Fatima message in 1917¹⁹.

The Block Rosary is a powerful means to deepen Christian life in the family and in groups of families through community building and concern. It also intensifies the devotion to Jesus and Virgin Mary. In addition to mean an effective means of stimulating parish devotion, group, and is highly recommended by St. Louis Marie de Montfort. In his book, "The Secret of the Rosary." He lists these benefits:

- i. Normally, our hearts are far more alert during public prayers, than when we pray alone.
- ii. When we pray in common, the prayer of each one belongs to all. We make one great prayer together, so that if one person is not praying well, someone else in that same gathering who prays better make up for his deficiencies. In this way, those who are

¹⁷<https://m.theholynosary.org>. Retrieved on 20th June, 2022.

¹⁸Timothy Barga, *Behold Your Mother*, 2nd Ed, Nigeria: Jos, Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2019, 174.

¹⁹ <https://www.brcblog.org>, *History Of The Block Rosary Crusade*

strong uphold the weak. Those who are fervent inspire the lukewarm.

- iii. Pope Urban VIII who was very blessed to see how devotion to the holy Rosary had spread in the city of Rome, and how it was being said in two groups or choirs, attached 100 days extra indulgence whenever the Rosary was said in two groups. This was set out in his brief "*Ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam*" written in the year 1626.
- iv. Public prayer is far more powerful than private prayer, to appease the anger of God, and to call down his mercy. Holy mother Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has always advocated public prayers in times of public tragedy and suffering²⁰.

Mary League Girls Association

This association of devotees to Mary is also known as Catholic Girls Organization (C.G.O).

This Marian Movement is a popular devotion in Igboland and has been attributed to Blessed Cyprian Iwene Tansi of Aguleri. He initiated this Marian Movement in order to protect and prevent the adolescent Christian girls from moral mutilations. It also helps to secure the traditional principle of the sacredness of virginity of young girls before marriage as well as to preserve the girls from being tainted with non-Christian fetish customs and practices. This League helps to keep the young girls at the close watch and under the protective eyes of the Church, availing them at the same time with a set of stringent rules to observe and follow to ensure that the Catholic faith is ever alive and active in them. Through this way, the young girls are challenged to live out the principal message of the Gospel. Through this association, young girls are urged to contribute to the success and order in the indigenous apostolate and community life through their manual labours, cleaning of the rectory, Church and environments as well as support the clergy by the supply of the needs at will.

The Mary League Girls Association helps to make liturgical celebrations in the parishes very lively and active. Dancing, clapping of hands as well as beating of instruments are now introduced by the Mary League Association. The members also help in teaching Catechisms to the children, youths and adults. They also visit the sick and fallen Catholics in their homes to pray for them, offer them some gifts, share their problems with them, offer them hope and sustain them in the Catholic faith. In this way, they make great contributions in the spread of the

²⁰Louis Marie de Montfort, *The Secret of the Rosary*, USA: Montfort Publication, 1954,65-73.

Catholic faith in Igboland and beyond. The first Friday or first Saturday of every month is their special day of Masses, Prayers and Meetings. They maintain yearly feasts along the feast of Mary like 25 March and 8 December, the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception respectively²¹.

Importance Of The Devotion To Mary

God did not have to use Mary either in terms of the Incarnation or in terms of Redemption, but the fact of divine revelation is that it was God's will that Mary has a central role. True devotions to Mary lead one to the Eucharistic Jesus. Therefore, devotion to Mary is not arbitrary like a preferred devotion to an individual or patron saint, nor is it extraordinary. Rather, it is an ordinary and natural part of living out the mystery of Christ's mystical Body and the communion of Saints. However, an explicit veneration of Mary is a necessary condition for the full flowering and normal adult maturity of Christian life. For this reason, therefore, Schillebeeckx admonished that the Christian who is explicitly aware of the part allocated to the Mary in the divine pastoral plan of God cannot afford to neglect the Blessed Virgin in his or her explicit life of faith. If for any reason one does that, such a person will inevitably do a grave injustice to his divine vocation, misinterpret the objective and basic features of the Christian way of life and indeed remain deaf to God's loving care and project. Such a Christian will moreover, fail to be fervently committed to faith, and will not throw himself or herself into the great ocean of God's love which would carry him/her along towards the full maturity of personal holiness and witness.

It is for same reason therefore, that one cannot call Mary mother without genuine devotion and veneration of her. A mother always has a special place in the family not based on power of authority but of care and dedication to the welfare of the members of the family. Pius XII in his encyclical letter, *Mystici Corporis* as quoted in Schillebeeckx expresses that it is only when one is in full communion with the church as a community that one can speak of mature Christianity. This is because full Christian life can only be in church life. In the same manner, we may concluded that the full Christian life must necessarily be essentially Marian life, as an irreplaceable function has been assigned to Mary with the Christian order of salvation by God. Therefore it is important to note that all justified and genuine veneration to Mary are based and founded on the development of Marian dogmas. This

²¹ <https://repozytorium.kul.pl>, *The Identity of the Catholic Church in Igboland, Nigeria*.

explains clearly that devotion to Mary to a greater extent is an expression of Christian life and faith in the God made man. Mary's presence in the divine plan of salvation explicates God's maternal love for humanity and so adds something greatly to the redemption brought by Christ her Lord.

St. John Damascene teaches that to be devoted to Mary is a great weapon that God gives to those he wishes to be saved. St. Louis De Montfort equally preaches that one can have an intimate union with God or perfect fidelity with the Holy Spirit without being closely united with and dependent on the Blessed Mary ever Virgin. Whosoever finds Mary, finds life because the true life and true way is Jesus Christ-fruit of her womb. But we cannot find Mary if we do not search for her and neither can we search for her if we don't know her; we don't look or desire for something unless we know what it is. Therefore, any devotion whether it be to Mary or any other saint that does not have Jesus as its Centre is false and misleading. We should therefore venerate and honour the blessed virgin Mary as much as possible, thus imitating God who has honoured her to the point of calling her by the dear name of Mother; imitating the angel Gabriel, repeating often his angelical salutation, imitating St. Elizabeth, by proclaiming her blessedness among women, uniting our If we try to praise her here on earth as she is praised by the angels and weak voice with the grandiose choir of all generations of Christians. If we try to praise her here on earth as she is praised by the angels and saint in heaven, we shall have done what is most pleasing to God her true God and only son²².

Misconception: Veneration Or Adoration Of Mary

There are some misconceptions about devotion to Mary not only from outside the Church, but even among members of the Church. Many people do not see the point of going to Mary, when the whole idea of the Christian religion is that, Jesus is the sole intermediary between humanity and God. the problem actually is that some people see all forms of devotion to Mary as worship, which for them is against the second commandment: "You shall have no other Gods to rival me" (Ex 20:3). They find it difficult to understand why the Church venerates Mary to such extend, let alone participate in such devotion to her. They consciously or unconsciously assimilate the notions of veneration and adoration and there lies the entire problem. Catholics do not worship Mary. What is done is veneration which is different from adoration in the context of devotion. To clarify this misconception therefore, a basic

²²Timothy Barga, *Behold Your Mother*, 2nd Ed, Nigeria: Jos, Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2019, 161.

theological distinction between devotion as adoration and devotion as veneration is necessary. In classical theology, there are three categories of degrees of devotion namely: Latria, Dulia and Hyperdulia.

Latria: This means adoration. It is the worship and homage that is rightly offered to God alone who has the supreme Lordship over all beings. It is the acknowledgement of excellence and perfection of an uncreated, divine person. It is the worship of the creator that God alone deserves.

Dulia: It is otherwise known as veneration. It is the honour due to the excellence of a created person such as the saints. We venerate the saints because they have won the crown of victory in the kingdom of God after their earthly pilgrimage. They are now members of the triumphant church interceding for us.

Hyperdulia: This is a higher level of veneration superior to dulia. It is an exalted level of honour for a created person whose excellence rises above that of every other created person. It is at this special level of veneration, that we find the proper devotion ascribed to Mary. This is because of her unique privilege of being so intimately involved in God's plan of salvation as the Mother of the Saviour, through her perfect obedience to the will of God. It is therefore clear that Marian devotions are not in any way placing the Blessed Virgin Mary on equal level with Jesus Christ.²³

Characteristics Of True Devotion To Mary

Firstly, true devotion to our lady is interior; that is to say, it comes from the spirit and the heart. It flows from the esteem we have of her, the high idea we have formed of her greatness, and the love which we have for her. Secondly, it is tender; that is to say, full of confidence in her, like a child's confidence in his loving mother. This confidence makes the soul have recourse to her in all its bodily or mental necessities, with much simplicity, trust and tenderness. It implores the aid of its good mother, at all times, in all places, and about all things; in its doubts, that it may be enlightened in its wanderings that it may be brought in to the right path; in its temptations that it may be supported; in its weaknesses, that may be strengthened; in its falls that it may be lifted up; in its discouragement that it may be cheered; in its scruples, that they may be taken away; in its crosses, trials, and disappointments of life, that it may be consoled under them. In a word, in all its evils of

²³Yohanna Jacob, "Devotion to Mary", (Kaduna: Abbey Digit-All Print, 2015), 118.

body and mind, the soul's ordinary refuge is in Mary, without fearing to be importunate to her or to displease Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, true devotion to our Lady is Holy, that is to say it leads the soul to avoid sin, and to imitate in the Blessed virgin particularly her profound humility, her lively Faith, her continual prayer, her universal mortification, her divine purity, her ardent charity, her heroic patience, her Angelic sweetness, and her divine wisdom. These are the ten principles virtues of the most holy virgin. Fourthly, true devotion to our Lady is constant. It confirms the soul in good, and it does not let it easily abandon its spiritual exercises. It makes it courageous in opposing the world in its fashions and maxims, the flesh in its weariness and passions, and the devil in his temptations. So that a person truly devoted to our blessed Lady is neither changeable, irritable, scrupulous, nor timid. It is not that such person does not fall, or change sometimes in the sensible feeling of devotion, or in the amount of devotion itself. But when he falls he rises again by stretching out his hand to his Mother. If he loses the taste and relish of devotion, he does not disturb himself because of that; for the just and faithful client of Mary lives on the faith of Jesus and Mary, and not on sentiments and sensibilities.

Fifthly, true devotion to our blessed Lady is detached; that is to say, it inspires the soul not to seek itself but God only and God in his holy Mother. A true devotee of Mary does not serve the August Queen from a spirit of lucre and interest, not for its own good, whether temporal, corporal, or spiritual; but exclusively because she merits to be served, and God alone in her. He does not remember Mary precisely because she does him good, or because he hopes in her; but because she is so worthy of love. It is on this account that he loves and serves her as faithfully in his disgusts and dryness, as well as in his sweetness and sensible fervours. He loves her as much on Calvary, as at the marriage of Cana²⁴.

Marianism: A Danger To Marian Spirituality

The proliferation of Marian devotions and spiritual practices are on the increase especially in our time. Good as that may be, however, therein are dangers to place her above and against the Church's understanding of her place in our salvation in Christ. Schillebeeckx, in charity, cautions that in as much as our plea for an explicit veneration of Mary is a

²⁴ Frederick William, *True Devotion to Mary*, United Kingdom: London, Catholic Way Publishing, 2013, 53-54.

necessary condition for the mature Christian life, we must be conscious of the danger inherent in popular devotion to her. It could happen unconsciously that emphasis is unduly shifted in such popular manifestations of Marian worship. The shift of emphasis is often quite spontaneous; occasionally it can be traced to the activity of certain Marian movements which have placed themselves under the protection of Mary. It is, most important to remember that Mary can only be understood when seen in the perspective of Christ and that it is an error to view Christ from the perspective of Mary. This is itself an exaggeration of undue emphasis that constitutes Marianism²⁵. Mary herself cannot take that from us her children. Indeed, our way to Christ is through Mary. This fact is, however, often falsely presented or interpreted.

One of the commonest errors is to think that the man Jesus is rather remote from man and that the gulf is, as it were, bridged by Mary. To consider Mary in this way as the link between ourselves and a distant Jesus Christ is totally to misconstrue the deepest meaning of the incarnation. Schillebeeckx stresses this fact "this in turn inevitably leads to a fundamental falsification of the central Christian vision of life – the significance for us of Christ's sacred humanity as the divine organ instituted by God for our salvation. Christ was born of Mary. Because of this, he is emphatically one of us. He was brought to us by Mary"²⁶. Therefore, our relationship with him could be direct. However, Jesus offers his great gift of redemption to us in a special form through Mary. This gift is realized in a sublime and universal manner for our benefit in Mary who was the first to accept Christ's gift in the most sublime character. Consequently together with Mary, and under her influence, we have direct access to Christ. In this case it is better to think of Christ as giving Mary to us as our Mother, rather than of Mary as giving us Christ, "Behold thy Mother, behold thy son (Jn. 19:26). It is in this context that the phrase "through Mary to Christ", emphasized in various papal documents might be correctly understood in at its deepest level. As our mother, Mary can teach us how to be Christian in our lives. To live in unity with her is essentially and in the purest sense a Christocentric life, and for this reason it is impossible for her children to go astray²⁷.

Conclusion

²⁵Schillebeeckx Edward, *Mary Mother of the Redemption*, London: Sheed and Ward, 1978, 140.

²⁶Ibid

²⁷Timothy Barga, *Behold Your Mother*, 2nd Ed, Nigeria: Jos, Fab Anieh Nigeria Limited, 2019, 168-167.

Marian Devotion is something very common nowadays. Mary is seen as a helper and great intercessor. But that does not negate the fact that when it comes to Marian devotions there are two sides, bothering on two extremes: those who overindulge and those who out rightly condemn any display of affection to Mary. Whichever way it is considered, it is difficult to witness a balanced attitude towards Mary. Those who are opposed to Marian devotion continue to castigate those involved on false premises, while those who engage in it continue to give their opponents reasons to criticize them. Since devotion to Mary falls within the fringes of popular devotion, it is largely left at the discretion of the lay faithful, without sufficient theological parameters to guide them. That is what we attempt to do through this work by clarifying the forms of veneration due to Mary and by given an insight on the various devotions to Mary. Mary is *Theothokos* as admitted by the Council of Ephesus (431 AD) and as such it is not out of line that Christians render her particular respects through acts of devotedness. She is not competing in any way with her son, being saved herself, but she is a sure way to the heart of her son.

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