

MARY AND INCULTURATION

With the moderator's 1,400 word submission some eight issues, resulting from Cardinal Baum's letter, *Marialis Cultus*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Redemptoris Mater*, John Henry Newman's *A Letter to Pusey* and *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Edith Stein's *Woman*, and Father Koester's inculturation paper provided a beginning to a most spirited interchange.

Agnes Cunningham took up the New Eve theme from Irenaeus and Newman, which Fred Jelly broadened. The result of their offering was a revelation of the fact that feminists have ignored the positive thrust of the renewal of Irenaeus' teaching to their own detriment. Then the *lex orandi, lex credendi* theme was highlighted with the reference to a recent presentation at the Mariological Society of America's October 1989 conference. Following upon this intervention reference was made to the 1989 *Marian Studies* issue containing a comprehensive paper on liturgical options, "The Virgin Mary in the Liturgy: 1963-1988." Next the importance of the sacramental view of the Blessed Virgin's role in Newman's teaching was added to the *lex orandi, lex credendi* emphasis. This fitted in with the ecumenical issue *A Letter to Pusey* had earlier raised.

At this point in the dialogue, Petro Bilanuik began his series of exciting contrasts of the Eastern Fathers' view with that of the Western Fathers' by showing the Blessed Virgin's relations with the Trinity. By downplaying the Incarnation, upon which the interventions on Irenaeus and Newman had centered, he freed the feminist issues and the biblical issues from their controversial nature.

Both sides found it difficult to be aware of the deep influence of the change in starting points, yet they pushed their perspectives in an amicable manner. Mary Christine Athans, coming from both an Eastern and Irish background, confirmed and confuted both sides. Yet her major contribution was on the North American concerns and this came from her article, "Mary in the American Catholic Church," which included an overview of devotion to Mary and the possible uniqueness of our understanding of her in the U.S., vis-à-vis Mary and freedom, Mary and the frontier, and the Jewishness of Mary. In the course of her offerings the fact came out that the participants had not had occasion to come upon the classic on the Virgin and feminism, *Monte-Saint-Michel and Chartres* by Henry Adams, nor *The Education of Henry Adams*, which expressed concern that Mary had no influence on our culture. Though issue was taken with this claim, once the position of Adams within the entire American culture had been noted, the fact was recognized. Equally upsetting to some was Adams' statement on page 285 of *Chartres*: "If the Church had cared half as truly for the Virgin as it has for Thomas Aquinas, every miracle might have been collected and published a score of times." To quell the disturbance this caused, the moderator noted that the call Adams had made early in this century had finally found its fulfillment in *Les Collections de Miracles de la Vierge*

en Gallo et Ibero-Roman au 13^e Siecle, recently published as volumes 15–16 of *Marian Library Studies*.

It became evident at this juncture that the time had come to carry out a theological critique of Adams. One participant suggested that Mary Magdalene would be a preferable model for today's woman rather than the Blessed Virgin. Responding ironically to this suggestion another asked, "Which Mary Magdalene should we choose?" From this question, a discussion of the different stands on model began. While only some continued to see value in such a model approach, others enlarged the Blessed Virgin's role as model to embrace men as well as women. This brought out the difficulties facing those teaching in women's colleges.

Finally, in light of the agreement upon the criticism of St. Paul's interpretation of roles by Edith Stein and Newman's position on the Blessed Virgin in his *Development*, the various feminists' objections to *Lumen Gentium* and *Redemptoris Mater* were partially explained on the basis of inadequate translations. The point was that only a return to the original Greek and Polish would help explain the meaning of irritating statements found in the documents of Vatican II and John Paul II on the Blessed Virgin and feminism. This careful concern with causes of misinterpretation turned the final part of the session into an example of harmony and humility where the significance of questions of inculturation became clear to most.

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