

CHAPTER THREE

MARIAN AND RELIGIOUS CONSECRATION

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1. Pope John Paul II: Zealous Promoter of the Consecration (Entrustment) to Mary

Along the history of the Church, Mary's role in consecration has been ever more recognized and emphasized. Consecrated life has played a pivotal role in propagating the Marian Consecration that has been frequently associated with the religious consecration itself. For the lay faithful the consecration to God through Mary (Marian Consecration) has been seen as a way to live a sort of consecrated life in the midst of the world.

The official Church was at first hesitant to embrace fully the "consecration movement" because of its ambiguities in terminology and lack of theological elaboration. Nevertheless, more recently the Popes Pius XII, Paul VI and particularly John Paul II made the consecration to Mary their very own, because they saw the importance of this consecration in fostering the Church's growth in holiness.

It is no secret that Pope John Paul II is an eminently Marian Pope who always has confident recourse to Mary. In his inaugural address right after his election as Pope, he stated:

In this grave hour which gives us trepidation, we can do no other than to turn our mind with filial devotion to the Virgin Mary, who always lives and acts as a Mother in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, and repeat the sweet words *totus tuus* - totally yours - that we inscribed in our heart and in our "coat of arms" twenty years ago as the logo of our episcopal ordination.

Faithful to his motto, the present Pope has made the

consecration to Mary a salient feature of his Marian pastoral so as to be called the "Pope of the Marian Consecration." John Paul II attributes to the Marian Consecration a great significance also for the consecrated life. He concludes his Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum* with the words: "I address myself to you with this present message, to invite you to *renew your religious consecration according to the model of the consecration of the very Mother of God.*"

Moreover, during the Marian year in his letter *Ad Omnes Personas Consecratas*, the Holy Father asked religious communities to seek through Mary spiritual vitality so as to be rejuvenated with her. And he concluded that

Mary, the Mystical Spouse of the Holy Spirit and our Mother, desires this [filial entrustment to her] *from you and for you*. Indeed, I exhort you to respond to this desire of Mary's with a *community act of dedication* which is precisely "the response to the love of a Mother (RM 45).

One might wonder what has influenced the Pope so deeply that he gives such primordial significance to the Marian Consecration? It was - as he himself reveals - the reading of Saint Louis de Montfort's spiritual classic, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*. In his interview with André Frossard, the Holy Father explained the debt of gratitude he owes to this Saint for his doctrine and spirituality of Marian Consecration:

The reading of this book was a decisive turning point in my life... As a result, my devotion to the Mother of Christ in my childhood and adolescence yielded to a new attitude springing from the depths of my faith, as though from the very heart of the Trinity and Jesus Christ... My devotion to Mary, modeled on this pattern, has lasted since then. It is an integral part of my inner life and spiritual

theology.

Before we consider, in the following sections, the history and the principal modes of the Marian consecration, it is fitting to first clarify some fundamental theological principals one has to bear in mind so as to place the consecration to Mary in its proper theological context:

1. Consecration in the proper sense is *by* God and *to* God, because he alone can sanctify us by means of his divine grace.
2. The basic Christian consecrations are the *sacraments*, above all Baptism and Confirmation; religious consecration is the deepening and fuller expression of these fundamental consecrations.
3. Since God does nothing in or to us without our cooperation, it is therefore necessary that we give ourselves to God bringing thus the seed of holiness to fruition that was planted in us by the sacramental consecrations.
4. God himself confided the work of our consecration (sanctification, christification) to Mary in union with the Holy Spirit. It was for this purpose that he gave her to us as our Mother. Confident recourse to her will therefore be the best way to become gradually more and more configured to her Son, the Consecrated One.

2. Models and Spirituality of Marian Consecration (Historical Survey)

Though deeply influenced by St. Louis M. de Montfort, John Paul II developed his own spirituality of Marian Consecration. The same holds true with regard to the various founders and foundresses of Institutes of Consecrated life who impressed on their communities their

very own form of Marian Consecration with its corresponding spirituality.

Fr. Stefano de Fiores distinguishes in his historical survey on the development of the Marian Consecration fifteen different modes that, according to other opinion, could be reduced to thirteen:

1.) *Mary the One Perfectly Consecrated to God, Model of Virgins*

The apocryph proto-gospel of James (second half of II century) narrates that as a child Mary was presented in the Temple in order to be consecrated to God. With the rise of monasticism and the different forms of virginal life that besides martyrdom were considered a sign of total love and consecration to God, the reference to Mary as *the one who is perfectly consecrated* became common among the Fathers of the first Christian centuries who propose *Mary as the sublime model of consecrated virginity*. St.Ambrose states: "Behold the *image of perfect virginity: Mary whose life is the norm for all virgins.*" St.Jerome says that for him consecrated "*virginity is a consecration in Mary and in Christ... May Mary, therefore, be the teacher of our way of life.*"

2.) *Confident recourse to Mary*

The "*Sub tuum praesidium*" of the 3rd century, although is not yet an act of consecration to Mary in the proper sense, served as a basis for the collective consecrations of communities, cities or countries to Mary. For instance, after Constantinople was consecrated to Mary in 626, that great city experienced her special maternal protection against the assault of the barbarians.

3.) *Being a servant of the handmaid of the Lord*

In his work *De virginitate sanctae Mariae*, St.Ildefonso

(+ 667) explains this expression stating: "To be a devout servant of the Son, I want to serve faithfully the Mother."

4.) *We consecrate ourselves to you*

St. John Damascene composed the first *act of consecration to Mary* by: "Tibi nos quoque hodie assidemus, o Domina, Domina, inquam, atque iterum Domina... *mentem, animam, corpus, nos ipsos denique totos Tibi consecramus* (We too, today, present ourselves to you, O sovereign Lady; yes, I repeat, o sovereign Virgin Mother of God, ... *We consecrate ourselves, spirit, soul and body, completely to you*)."

5.) *The offering of oneself - tradition, commendatio - to Mary*

This mode of "consecration" corresponds to the idea of the feudal society of the Middle Ages to give oneself into the service of a king or lord. With regard to Mary, it expressed one's humble submission and filial trust in her: "*Ecce tibi me commendo, me ut servum tibi trado* (Behold I entrust myself to you, I give myself to you as your servant)." This tradition was particularly promoted by the Benedictine reform movement of Cluny under its Abbot Odilón (+1049). It also entered the Dominican Order, and is reflected in the early Dominican formula of profession that was subsequently imitated by the other Mendicant Orders:

We promise obedience to Mary. It is by the hands of Mary that we hand over to God the radical ownership of our being and of our possessions. It is by her heart that we consecrate ourselves to divine worship and to the service of souls.

6.) *The deditio of the Servites (XIII century)*

This is a sort of contract between the servant who gives himself to and accepts voluntarily Mary as his Mistress. This

idea of consecration as a complete offering of oneself appears from the very beginning in the formula of religious profession of the Servants of Mary (OSM): "*Wishing to serve God and Holy Mary..., I offer myself and all that I have to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mary.*"

7.) *The consecration according to the ideal of knights*

The formula of religious vows of the military orders expresses this ideal as for example the one of the Teutonic Order: "I promise to be pure in body, without own goods and obedient to God, to holy Mary, and to you, Master of the Order."

8.) *The "oblatio" of Marian congregations*

Both in newly found religious congregations as well as in confraternities in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the consecration to Mary as a complete and irrevocable offering of oneself plays an important role in their spirituality and often becomes the rite of admission. For example St. Louise de Marillac (on December 8, 1658) was the first one to consecrate her Daughters of Charity to the Virgin: "We implore you to accept most humbly the irrevocable *oblatoion of our souls and our persons, which we dedicate and consecrate*, on this feast day, to your service and to your love... We adopt you as our Lady and mistress, and as our patron and advocate."

Saint Anthony Maria Claret (1807-1870) proposed the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as the first formula for joining the religious Institute he founded and bequeathed the following act of consecration to his congregation: "I entrust and consecrate myself to the special service of God and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the object for which this Congregation has been was founded."

9.) *Accepting Mary as Patroness and living like Mary (a "Maryform" way of life)*

This mode of Marian consecration pervades the Carmelite Tradition and is understood as "*traditio personae*" in which the consecrated person puts himself unconditionally at the service of Mary, the Patroness of the Carmelite Order. This Marian consecration which has various names as: "expropriation," "dedication," "belonging wholly," "delivering oneself over," etc. was *added* to the religious profession being sanctioned with a solemn oath. For the Carmelites their Marian Consecration is not only an act of consecration, but entails a Marian life-style that is manifested in an experience of continual conversion, identification with and loving adherence to Mary in order to live more intensely the Divine life of grace.

10.) *Holy servanthood or slavery towards the Mother of God*

This idea originated within the ambience of *Franciscan* spirituality first in Spain where in 1484 a community of Franciscan nuns was founded whose rule required them "*to offer themselves to our Redeemer and his glorious Mother, becoming like living sacrifices, dedicated body and soul.*" In 1595, Sister Ines Bautista, of the same congregation, founded the first Confraternity of the Slaves (Servants) of the Most Holy Virgin that was propagated by the Franciscan friars Juan de Angeles (1608) and Melchior de Cetina (1618). Soon religious of other Orders like the Trinitarian, Augustinian, and Benedictine assumed and promoted this mode of Marian Consecration. De Bérulle (1615) even proposed to the Oratorians and the Carmelites a *fourth vow in which they promised perpetual servanthood to Jesus and Mary*. Some congregations up to the present profess a fourth Marian vow like the Marianists whose founder,

Blessed Chaminade, joined to the three vows a fourth vow of stability, which has the special Marian sense of perseverance in Mary's service.

The other three modes:

- **11) Consecration to Jesus through Mary** (St.Louis Mary de Montfort),
- **12) Consecration to the Immaculate** (St.Maximilian M.Kolbe) and
- **13) Consecration as intimate union with Christ's redemptive Consecration** (John Paul II)

that characterize the Marian spirituality of recent times, particularly the Marian renewal after Vatican II, deserve special attention. Hence, they will be considered more in detail regarding their underlying theology and spirituality. Before focusing on the contemporary paradigms of Marian Consecration, some conclusions can be drawn from the historical survey:

- a) Consecrated life has had an important role in the rise, spread and development of the Marian Consecration.
- b) The Marian Consecration has always been seen in harmony with the Religious consecration to the extent that in numerous institutes, both consecrations were joined together either by adding the Marian consecration to the religious profession or integrating it within the very act of profession.
- c) The Marian Consecration has been always considered as a means to live one's religious consecration more fully according to the model and with the help of Mary, the *living paradigm of perfect consecration* to God in Christ.
- d) The great variety of Consecrations and the wide range of Marian spirituality found among religious

Institutes testify to the manifold aspects of Mary's role and presence in the Church which reflect the richness of the mystery of Christ.

To grasp better the common features of the various forms of Marian Consecrations present in the post-conciliar consecrated life, they can be classified according to three models corresponding to the three principal aspects of consecration complemented by a fourth model that emphasizes the communitarian dimension of consecration. This classification will present a clearer view of the varied aspects of Marian Spirituality found in different Institutes of Consecrated life. At the same time, it highlights some features of John Paul II's own Marian spirituality and devotion.

Before investigating the relationship that exists between the consecration to Mary and the religious consecration, let us recall the three dimensions of consecration that are reflected in the various models of Marian consecration:

❖ ***Ontological-incarnational dimension (Ascetic consecration - Montfort): Consecration as a particular charism and call to holiness***

Here consecration is seen as God's gracious gift to us. It is only God who can sanctify us by communicating his divine life to us in the measure in which we correspond to his grace.

❖ ***Dynamic-redemptive dimension (Expiatory consecration - John Paul II): Consecration as a sharing in Christ's sacrifice***

The emphasis in this type of consecration is clearly on our cooperation with God's redeeming and sanctifying action. We are invited to unite ourselves to the redemptive consecration of Christ by making of ourselves a gift to the Father for the salvation of the world.

❖ ***Missionary and communitarian dimension (Missionary and Family consecration - Kolbe, Chamanide, Claret; Families of Consecrated Life): Consecration as a mission that builds up the Church as a community***

Consecration is always for mission and communion. In the measure we are joint to Christ's gift (consecration) to the Father our life will become a gift for the life (sanctification) of the world.

- While in the ***incarnational model***, consecration is above all considered as ***God's gift to us (virgin)***,
- in the ***redemptive model*** the emphasis is on consecration as ***our gift to God (spouse)*** as beautifully expressed in the saying of Mother Teresa: *What you are is God's gift to you. What you become is your gift to God.*
- In the ***missionary and communitarian model***, however, consecration is ***God's and man's joint gift to humanity (mother)***.

3. The Incarnational Model (St.Luis Marie de Montfort)

Formulas of consecration to Mary abounded in the seventeenth century. However, the theological basis of this Marian devotion was not so clear at that time. It is the merit of St.Louis Marie de Montfort (1673-1716) to develop a *theology of consecration* that made him the "doctor of the consecration to Christ through Mary." Rene Laurentin states that "his bringing about the elimination of various Mariological exaggerations and deviations is one of the reasons why he should be declared a Doctor of the Church." John Paul II recommends in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater* the Marian spirituality and devotion of St.Louis Marie de Montfort in these words: "I would like to

recall among the many witnesses and teachers of this [Marian] spirituality, the figure of Saint Luis Marie Grignon

de Montfort, who proposes consecration to Christ through the hands of Mary, as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments."

Indeed, the consecration envisioned by Montfort is clearly Trinitarian and Christo-centric. How does he explain the "consecration to God and to Christ through Mary"? Why is there a need to involve Mary in one's consecration? How is this consecration related to the particular consecration of religious?

3.1. Marian Consecration and Religious Consecration: Two Consecrations that Deepen One's Baptismal Consecration

The consecration to Mary proposed by St. Luis Marie de Montfort is defined by him as "the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of baptism." The baptismal vows involve an act of renunciation to Satan and sin and an act of faith in the Triune God. In other words, through the grace of God, every Christian has to strive to be completely separated from all what is evil and totally united to God in Jesus.

However, usually the effects of the baptismal consecration - complete separation from sin and total union with God - are not fully realized, because the inclination to commit sin remains in man. Faced with many temptations, he easily is drawn away from God back into the influence of Satan. Instead of radical separation from sin and perfect union with God he finds himself not yet perfectly united to God, while at the same time strongly linked to sin. How can this sad situation be overcome?

Mary was from the first moment of her existence completely separated from Satan and sin and perfectly united to God and thus became the model and Mother of perfect consecration. For this reason she is the only way to the perfect fulfillment of one's baptismal consecration. John Paul II explains:

I would like to highlight the fact that, in Saint Louis-Marie's mind, the *whole spiritual life flows directly from the sacrament of holy Baptism* as is known by a significant passage of the Act of Consecration to Jesus through Mary, written precisely by Montfort... The sacramental grace of Baptism wipes out original sin, but the one who receives it must also personally renounce sin, in order to respond to the grace of justification, offered to him in the faith in Jesus Christ. In the sacrament of Baptism there is a certain return to the beginning, to our origins when the choice was for good, not for evil, for salvation, not rejection. If Grignion de Montfort puts this in his true devotion to the Mother of God, he does so because *Mary, by the will of God, from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, was destined in God's plan to overcome sin* by the justification she received through the grace of Christ... It is good for us to consider the essential meaning of the sacrament of Baptism from a Marian point of view.

In fact, St. Louis Marie de Montfort affirms that the only perfect way to live our baptismal consecration consists "in giving ourselves entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Christ through her." Thus he identifies the perfect consecration to Jesus with a complete consecration to Mary:

As all perfection consists in our being conformed, united, and consecrated to Jesus Christ it naturally follows that the most perfect of all devotions is that which conforms, unites, and consecrates us most completely to Jesus. Now of all God's creatures, Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus. That is why

perfect consecration to Jesus is but a perfect and complete consecration to the Blessed Virgin...; or in other words, it is the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of the holy baptism.

In what does this total gift (consecration) of self to Christ through the hands of Mary consist? Montfort states that consecrating oneself entirely to Christ by giving oneself totally to Mary requires us to give:

- 1.) our body with its senses and members;
- 2.) our soul with its faculties;
- 3.) our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future;
- 4.) our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future.

In other words, we give her all that we possess both in our natural life and in our spiritual life, as well as everything that we shall acquire in the future in the order of nature, of grace, and of the glory of heaven. This we do without any reservation, not even of a penny, a hair or the smallest good deed. And we give for all eternity without claiming or expecting, in return for our offering and our service, any other reward than the honor of belonging to our Lord through Mary.

By itemizing of what we freely give to Jesus through Mary, St. Luis Marie de Montfort tries to get across the *absolute totality of Consecration*. There is nothing whatsoever not included in this "perfect consecration." Everything is surrendered to God in order to become subject to the overriding will of Jesus by being united to Mary's "fiat." Therefore

a person who is thus voluntarily consecrated and sacrificed to Jesus Christ through Mary can no

longer dispose of the value of any of his good actions. All he suffers, all he thinks, all the good he says or does, belongs to Mary in order that she may dispose of it according to the will of her Son and his greatest glory without interfering in any way with the obligations of our state [of life].

Montfort thus proposes a program for living the essence of religious consecration in the world. As in religious consecration, in the Montfortian consecration the person makes a gift of himself to Jesus by living the spirit of the evangelical counsels.

a.) Evangelical Chastity

One gives one's body according to the obligations of one's state of life, thereby committing oneself to die to sin in the flesh and to offer his body "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). Thus, one lives the spiritual content of the vow of chastity.

b.) Evangelical Poverty

One gives all one's material and spiritual possessions to Jesus through Mary. Fr. Frederick L. Miller clarifies that

it means, at least, that the person who makes the consecration should opt for a simple lifestyle. It also highlights the Christian's responsibility of caring for the poor and sharing one's goods generously with them.... [Regarding the "spiritual possessions"] the person who consecrates himself to Jesus through Mary places everything in the Blessed Virgin's hands and asks her to use the trifling value of his good works for the salvation of the "poorest of the poor" in the world.

Who makes the perfect consecration is indeed called "to be poor in fact and in spirit, having one's treasures in

heaven (cf. Mt 6:20)" and "to share in Christ's poverty who for our sake became poor, though he was rich, so that we might become rich through his poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9; Mt 8:20)."

c.) Evangelical Obedience

In the consecration to Jesus through Mary, one is also called to live the spiritual content of evangelical counsel of obedience for one commits oneself explicitly and willingly to making the will of the Father ("Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven") the guiding principle of all that one is and does. By means of the Marian consecration one enters into the "fiat" of Mary, into her perfect obedience, so that through the power of the Spirit that overshadowed Mary. One lives a new and deeper intensity of "belonging to" and union with Christ. It is then that the interior practice of the perfect consecration consists in "doing everything through Mary, with Mary, in Mary and for Mary, in order to do it more perfectly through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus and for Jesus."

At this point it can be deduced that from what we have seen, there is a profound harmony between Montfort's Consecration to Jesus through Mary and the Religious consecration in that both are

- rooted in the baptismal consecration of which they are a fuller expression
- means to be more perfectly conformed to Christ - chaste, poor and obedient - through the living of the spirit of the evangelical counsels
- Marian in the sense that Mary is not only the perfect model of consecration, but also the Mother that leads us with supernatural efficacy in the power of the Spirit to be more perfectly conformed to Christ.

Given the profound harmony that exists between the consecration to Mary and the particular consecration of religious, one may ask in what consists precisely the difference between these two ways of consecrating oneself to Christ through Mary?

The fundamental consecration of each Christian consists in the baptismal consecration which establishes an "ontological" bond of the person with God. Every other consecration of self is essentially an act of devotion (*consecratio votiva*) inspired by love, by which an individual personally ratifies his baptismal consecration committing himself to live out more radically the potentials and consequences of one's baptismal consecration. Among the consecrations of devotion founded upon the baptismal consecration, the most perfect is the religious consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels because it constitutes in the Church a special and stable form of living: the state of religious life. As a consequence, religious consecration is also called a "constitutive consecration" (*consecratio constitutiva*).

Other consecrations of devotion as the consecration to Mary, even though they are made according to formulas approved by the authority of the Church, do not constitute by themselves (*per se*) a particular state of life, because they do not change the state of life (lay, religious, clerical) of the person who makes the consecration. Nevertheless, they have the significance and implications inherent to each and every consecration of a person to God, namely, to be a self-donation to God committing oneself to strive explicitly and continuously for holiness (*perfectae caritatis*).

Consequently, when in an Institute of consecrated life the rule prescribes that, in addition to the profession of the evangelical counsels, the members are to make the consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary, as it is the case in many Institutes, the Marian consecration is not on the same footing with the religious consecration, but it imparts to the religious consecration the Marian Spirituality proper to the Institute which is expressed in the respective formula of the

Marian Consecration. For every paradigm of consecration - the incarnational, redemptive, missionary and communitarian - one sample of a consecratory formula that has been approved by the authority of the Church and is at present being used in an Institute of Consecrated life was selected. The nucleus of the Monfortian consecration which represents the incarnational model is as follows:

I, N.N., a faithless sinner, renew and ratify today in Thy hands, [o Immaculate Mary], the vows of my Baptism; I renounce forever Satan, his pomps and works; I give myself entirely to Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom, to carry my cross after Him all the days of my life, and to be more faithful to Him than I have been before.

In the presence of all the heavenly court I choose thee this day for my Mother and mistress, I deliver and consecrate to thee, as thy slave, my body and soul, my goods, both interior and exterior, and even the value of all my good actions, past, present, future; leaving to thee the entire and full right of disposing of me, and all that belongs to me, without exception, according to thy good pleasure, for the greater glory of God, in time and eternity.

Regarding this Marian Consecration the Constitutions of the Montfort Missionary state:

no. 40: *The "perfect consecration" to Jesus through Mary is the most outstanding mark of the Marian character of our inspiration. From this flows the necessity of remaining continually open to a profound theological reflection on the words and formulas that express its content, so as to clarify the full meaning of this act taking into account the mentality of those whom we are offering.*

no.130: *Our dedication to Christ and the mission finds its full expression in the Montfortian*

consecration. We renew it privately each day, and as a community on the feasts of the Immaculate Conception and the Annunciation, which is the principal feast of the Congregation.

no.136: *The Montfortian consecration*, which the aspirant solemnly pronounces on the occasion of his first profession and his perpetual profession, *must be lived out as a commitment of his entire life to the service of Christ through Mary*.

The Constitutions of the Montfort Missionaries state clearly that the Marian Consecration is not something "added" to the religious consecration, but fuses with it into a profound unity. The consecration to Jesus through Mary *makes explicit, emphasizes, and opens up in a new way the Marian dimension of the baptismal consecration* of which the religious consecration is a deeper expression. Consecration to Christ and consecration to Mary are not two, but only one consecration as St.Louis Marie de Montfort stresses:

We consecrate ourselves at one and the same time to Mary and to Jesus. We consecrate ourselves to Mary because Jesus chose her as the perfect means to unite himself to us and unite us to him. We consecrate ourselves to Jesus because he is our last end. Since He is the Redeemer and our God we are indebted to him for all that we are.

3.3. Theological Foundation of the Consecration to Jesus through Mary

St.Louis Marie sees the theological basis for the unity of the Marian and Christological dimension of consecration in the Incarnation event. Consecration in this world takes place in Jesus Christ through Mary. The incarnational consecration of the Son of God in the Annunciation became a reality by Mary's consent. Mary's cooperation with the

Holy Spirit was essential in bringing God's very holiness (consecration) in Christ into the world. If Mary, through her consent to the Incarnation, became the Mother of the One who is in his person the Consecrated One, the very source

of all consecration, then she is also the Mother of all those who are spiritually embraced in Christ's consecration, his brothers and sisters. *Lumen Gentium* states that "the Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the firstborn among many brethren (cf. Rom 8:29), that is, the faithful, in whose generation and formation she cooperates with a Mother's love." The objective "generative and formative activity" of the Virgin in the Incarnation becomes present and fruitful in the life of each one of Christ's brethren from the moment of baptism onwards. Therefore, each son and daughter of God is "bonded" to Mary in the Holy Spirit through the grace of Divine childhood. John Paul II affirms this when he says that incorporation in Christ involves "a filial relationship not only with the heavenly Father, but also with Mary, the earthly Mother of the Son of God:"

In our process of being conformed to Christ..., we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her "preeminent and altogether singular member" (LG 53), is at the same time the "Mother of the Church." As such, she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son. *She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the exhaustible outpouring of the Spirit.*

St. Louis Marie insists that a pattern is established in the Incarnation: From the moment the Word became flesh through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and Mary's assent of faith, the Virgin and the Spirit formed an indissoluble alliance in the formation of the total Christ, Christ the Head and we his body. Mysteriously, the Holy

Spirit draws Mary as the Handmaid of the Lord into his work of regenerating souls and forming them into the likeness of Christ. This union issues from the "work" of the Holy Spirit in the maternal consent of Mary to the Incarnation. Hence, the biblical paradigm of the Montfortian consecration is the Annunciation event. Its immediate theological foundation is the spiritual motherhood of Mary. No wonder that the Pope maintains that "Mary is the *perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church*." While Montfort emphasizes the Annunciation event to explain Mary's formative activity in our configuration to Christ, the Holy Father includes also Mary's role in the human growth of Jesus during his formative years at Nazareth. He explains that, as Mary was "busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth, so she trains us and molds us with the same care, until Christ is "fully formed" in us (cf. Gal 4:19)."

Indeed, as the Holy Spirit formed through the cooperation of Mary the humanity of Christ first in her womb at the Incarnation and then in its gradual growth "in age, wisdom and grace" (cf. Lk 2:52) in the home of Nazareth, so Mary forms us into Christ and Christ in us through the power of the same Spirit in the womb of the Church. Thus, every consecration in the life of the Church is in a way an extension of the mystery of the Annunciation-Incarnation.

It follows that the baptismal consecration is necessarily Marian. We cannot be conformed into Christ without Mary's maternal cooperation. Consequently, Mary likewise has an important role in conforming consecrated persons - by the profession of the evangelical counsels - more radically to Christ chaste, poor and obedient. Every consecration is, therefore, always a consecration to God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, through Mary, our Mother. Hence, the consecration to Mary always has to be seen in its Trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesial dimension in order to realize its profound harmony with the baptismal and religious consecration.

3.4. The Effect of the Marian Consecration on One's Religious Consecration

Having seen the profound harmony, but also distinction

between the religious and Marian consecration, one may now ask what will be the specific effect of the Marian Consecration in relation to the religious consecration?

According to St. Louis Marie de Montfort, the most important effect of the consecration to Mary is

that it establishes, even here below, *Mary's life in the soul*, so that it is no longer the soul that lives, but Mary living in it; for Mary's life becomes its life... As Mary is the fruitful Virgin everywhere, she produces in the soul wherein she dwells, purity of heart and body, purity of intention and of purpose, and fruitfulness in good works... *She will cause Jesus Christ to live in that soul, and the soul to live in constant union with Jesus Christ.*

Truly the Marian consecration effects an intense mutual sharing of life with Mary and deepens thus the Marian dimension of the religious consecration. As religious entrust to her maternal care their consecrated life in Christ, so she shares with them her intimate union with Christ. As Mary's presence becomes ever more alive in their spiritual life, so she communicates to them gradually her spirit so that by "doing everything *through* Mary, *with* Mary, *in* Mary and *for* Mary" they will be enabled "to do it more perfectly *through* Jesus, *with* Jesus, *in* Jesus and *for* Jesus."

Fr. Calvo Moralejo, OFM states that the consecration to the Virgin Mary assumes particular importance in the lives of those who, by the profession of the evangelical counsels, make of their human existence a particular and more intimate consecration to the Lord. For them the consecration to Mary is not only a means that aids the religious life, but more so a stimulus that, impelling them to follow Christ as Mary did, impels them to attain the perfection of charity.

The mystic, Madre María Angeles Sorazu, a Franciscan nun of the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, considered the consecration to Mary "the foundation of her spiritual life, the first and most

fundamental cornerstone of the mystical temple that the Lord built in her soul." By means of this consecration to Mary, she was able to live more perfectly the demands inherent to the religious profession. "Under the maternal gaze of my heavenly Mother and Lady," she wrote, "the religious always will find the secure way that will lead him/her to fully realize the consecrated life. And this way is the authentic Marian life, the consecration to her who is the Mother and Model of consecrated souls."

4. *The Redemptive Model (John Paul II): Consecration to Mary, Who was Most Intimately United to Her Son's Redemptive Consecration*

Though Pope John Paul II is, in a way, a disciple of Saint Luis Marie de Montfort, he shifts the emphasis in the understanding of the consecration to Mary from the incarnational to the redemptive aspect or, in other words, from Nazareth (Annunciation) to Calvary (Redemption). Accordingly, the principal objective of the Marian consecration is not first and foremost our personal sanctification (*ascetic consecration*) by being more perfectly transformed into the likeness of the Son of God, the Incarnate Word, but to be more intimately united to the redemptive consecration of Christ (*expiatory consecration*) so that the power of this consecration can renew the Church and the whole world. John Paul II notes:

Every vocation of a baptized person *reflects some aspect of that "consecration in the truth" which Christ accomplished by his death and resurrection and made part of his Paschal Mystery: "For their sake I consecrate myself, that they may be consecrated in truth" (Jn 17:19). A person's vocation to consecrate his or her whole life has a special relationship to Christ's own consecration for the sake of mankind"*

4.1. *Spiritual and Theological Content of the Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

Repeatedly, the Holy Father outlined the spiritual and theological content of the consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary with particular reference to the message of Fatima. In fact, he has developed his own theology of consecration as can be examined from his homily at Fatima on May 13, 1982:

- a.) ***Mary is solicitous for the eternal salvation of mankind, because on Calvary her maternal heart being one with the pierced Heart of Jesus was opened with the same love for man:***

When Jesus said on the Cross, "Woman, there is your son," he opened his Mother's heart in a new way, he showed her the Immaculate Heart and revealed the new dimension and the new significance of love, to which she was called in the Holy Spirit with the power of the sacrifice of the Cross...

The Immaculate Heart of Mary was open to the word, "Woman, there is your son." It went to meet spiritually the heart of the Son opened by the soldier's lance. *The Heart of Mary was opened by the same love for man and for the world with which Christ loved man and the world, offering himself even on the cross, even to that stroke from the soldier...*

The solicitude of the Mother of the Savior is solicitude for the work of salvation, the work of her Son. It is concern for salvation, for the eternal salvation of mankind...

- b.) ***Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means to bring back mankind to the pierced Heart of Jesus, the very source of the Redemption***

➤ By allowing Mary to help us to enter more deeply into

the redemptive
consecration of Christ and

- helping Mary to offer ourselves and mankind to Him who is infinitely holy by joining wholeheartedly in the redemptive consecration of Christ who said: "I consecrate myself for their sakes" (Jn 17:9).

Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means approaching the same Source of Life, through the Mother's intercession, that life which flowed forth from Golgotha, the source which gushes out ceaselessly with redemption and grace. Reparation for the sins of the world is continually being accomplished in it. It is ceaselessly the fount of new life and holiness.

Consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother means returning under the *Cross of the Son*. More: it means consecration of this world to the pierced Heart of the Savior, by bringing the world back to the very source of its Redemption. Redemption is always greater than man's sin and "the sin of the world." The power of the Redemption infinitely surpasses the whole range of evil in man and in the world.

The Heart of the Mother is aware of it, more than anyone else in the whole cosmos, visible and invisible. This is why she calls. She does not call only to conversion; *she also calls upon us to let ourselves be helped by her, the Mother, to return to the source of the Redemption....*

Consecrating oneself to Mary means helping her to offer ourselves and mankind to Him Who is Holy, infinitely holy... God's holiness was manifested in the redemption of man, of the world,...: a redemption which occurred through the sacrifice of the Cross. "I consecrate myself for their sakes," Jesus said (Jn 17:19).

The world and man *were consecrated through the power of the redemption*. They were consecrated to him who is infinitely holy. They were offered and confided to Love himself, to the merciful Love ...[They] are offered to the Eternal Father through the power of the Redemption of Christ. They are offered up in the Heart of the Redeemer pierced on the Cross.

The Mother of the Redeemer calls us, asks us and aids us to join in this consecration, in entrustment of the world. Then, indeed, do we find ourselves as near as possible to the Heart of Christ pierced on the Cross.

c.) Brief Analysis of the Act of Consecration (Panoramic View of John Paul II's Theology of Consecration)

The very act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary which the Pope himself composed and recited on March 25, 1984 gives a *panoramic view of redemptive consecration itself as well as Mary's and our role in it*:

- Mankind and each individual is in utter need of Christ's redeeming consecration to be liberated from evil and brought back into God's holiness:

How deeply we feel the need for the consecration of humanity and the world - our modern world - in union with Christ himself! For the redeeming work of Christ *must be shared in by the world through the Church*.

- The power of Christ's redemptive consecration overcomes all evil and consecrates the whole universe:

The power of this consecration lasts for all time

and embraces all individuals, peoples and nations. It overcomes every evil that the spirit of darkness is able to awaken, and has in fact awakened in our times, in the heart of man and in history...Let there be revealed, once more, in the history of the world the infinite saving power of Redemption: the power of *merciful love*! May it put a stop to evil! May it transform consciences!

- Redemption has a Marian dimension because Mary is wholly united to the redeeming consecration of her Son:

*O Mother of all men and women, and of all peoples...*you who have a mother's awareness of all the struggles between good and evil, between light and darkness, which afflict the modern world, accept the cry which we, moved by the Holy Spirit, address directly to your Heart.

Embrace with the *love* of the Mother and Handmaid of the Lord, this human world of ours, which we entrust and consecrate to you, for we are full of concern for the earthly and eternal destiny of individuals and peoples...

Above all creatures, may you be blessed, you, the Handmaid of the Lord, who in the fullest way obeyed the divine call! Hail to you, who are *wholly united* to the redeeming consecration of your Son! Mother of the Church! Enlighten the People of God along the path of faith, hope and love! ...Help us to live in the truth of the consecration of Christ for the entire human family of the modern world... Help us with the power of the Holy Spirit to conquer all sin: individual sin and the 'sin of the world,' sin in all its manifestations...

In entrusting to you, O Mother, the world, all individuals and peoples, we also entrust to you *this very consecration of the world*, placing it in your motherly Heart.

- The gift of Redemption has to be accepted and shared in by man with the help of Mary in order to become fully effective in the history of individuals and peoples

Behold, as we stand before you, Mother of Christ, before your Immaculate Heart, *we desire*, together with the whole Church, *to unite ourselves with the consecration which, for love of us, your Son made of himself to the Father:* For their sake,' he said, 'I consecrate myself that they also may be consecrated in the truth' (Jn 17:19). *We wish to unite ourselves with our Redeemer in this consecration for the world* and for the human race, which, in his divine Heart, has the power to obtain pardon and to secure reparation.

4.2. The Redemptive (Expiatory) Consecration to Mary in Religious Institutes (Missionaries of Charity)

Having briefly outlined John Paul II's theology of consecration to Mary, his insights on consecration can now be applied on the redemptive model of Marian Consecration used in various Institutes of consecrated life. The act of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Patroness of the Society of the Missionaries of Charity Sisters, represents a model of an "expiatory" (redemptive) Marian consecration:

O Heart of Mary, Heart of the tenderest Mother, Cause of our Joy, we consecrate ourselves unreservedly to you, our hearts, our bodies, our souls; we desire to belong to you, in life and in death. You know, o Immaculate Mother, that your Divine Son has chosen us in His infinite Mercy in spite of our misery and sinfulness, not only as His children and His spouses, but also as *His victims, to console His Divine Heart in the Sacrament of*

His love, to atone for sacrileges, and to obtain pardon for poor sinners. We come today, to offer Him through your most Pure Heart, the entire sacrifice of ourselves.

Of our free choice we renounce all the desires and inclinations of our corrupt nature; and *we accept willingly and lovingly whatever sufferings He may be pleased to send us.* But conscious of our weakness, we implore you, o Holy Mother, to shield us with your maternal protection and to obtain from your Divine Son all the graces we need to persevere.

Bless our society, and the houses we visit, and each soul confided to our care, our relatives, friends, benefactors that all may preserve in grace or recover it if lost, and when the hour of death comes, may our hearts, modeled on your Immaculate Heart, breathe forth their last sigh into the Heart of your Divine Son. Amen.

As it is evident from the formula, this consecration to Mary aims at the most perfect union with the redeeming consecration of Christ *through the help of Mary*, thus *strengthening the redemptive dimension of the religious consecration.* In the following, we will consider the nucleus of this consecratory formula:

a.) ***Mary is "the Immaculate One, the First Marvel of the Redemption"*** (*We come today, Immaculate Mother, to offer to your Son through your most Pure Heart, the entire sacrifice of ourselves*):

The Holy Father maintains that Mary was preservatively redeemed and

created immaculate *to be better able to act on our behalf.* The fullness of grace allowed her to fulfil perfectly her mission of collaboration with the work of salvation: It gave the maximum value to her

cooperation in the sacrifice. When Mary presented to the Father her Son nailed to the cross, her painful offering was entirely pure... It is for us sinners, that is, for all of us, that she received an exceptional grace."

Consecrated persons have also received an "exceptional" grace, a "*particular*" consecration, that enables them to *cooperate more perfectly in Christ's saving mission* on behalf of humanity by the example and with the help of Mary. The Pope states in his letter to Sis. M. Nirmala Joshi M.C.:

From the very first, Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity were driven by the desire "to quench the infinite thirst of Jesus Christ on the Cross for love of souls... by laboring at the salvation and sanctification of the poorest of the poor" (*Letter of the Foundress*). These are words which go to the heart of *both your consecration*, your "clinging to Jesus" in love, your thirsting for him who thirsts for you, and *your mission* of joyful and wholehearted service to Jesus in the poorest of the poor... may you enter still more fully into the mystery of the saving Cross of Jesus Christ, which your Foundress placed at the heart of your spirituality.

b.) ***Mary Cooperated in the most Perfect Way in Christ's Redeeming Consecration*** (*We accept willingly and lovingly whatever sufferings He may be pleased to send us*):

Christ has redeemed us and the infinite power of his redeeming consecration embraces all individuals and peoples. However, it becomes effective only in the measure it is accepted and shared in. Mary is the person who most perfectly accepted and shared in her Son's redeeming consecration for she is "wholly united to the redeeming

consecration of [her] Son."

The Pope states that "the world's salvation is linked to her [Mary's] faith... Just as in Christ Jesus, the Word of the Father, all of God's saving acts are summed up, so in Mary's response the adherence of faith of God's people and all its members is summed up and reaches completion." Mary therefore cooperates with her faith to the penetration of the Redemption into our fragmented world. Since the

Redeemer called for a unique cooperation in faith of his Mother, Redemption has a Marian imprint. There can be no perfect acceptance and sharing in his redeeming consecration which ignores this Marian dimension.

By consecrating oneself to Mary, one acknowledges this ever-present role of Mary. Not only is she our model of cooperation in the work of Redemption, but she also truly influences us by her "yes" willed by God for the redemption of the world, because of her total loving surrender to God. To be consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary means to embrace Mary's attitude of heart, to have a *heart modeled upon her Immaculate Heart*, a heart that, with God's grace, has come to that perfect surrender to God, a heart which makes the *fiat* - "your will be done" - the defining center of one's whole life.

c.) ***Mary helps us to be more perfectly one with the redeeming consecration of her Son (Conscious of our weakness, we implore you, o Holy Mother, ... to obtain from your Divine Son all the graces we need to persevere):***

As our Mother, she asks us to accept her motherly help to share more effectively in the redeeming consecration of her Son. Hence, by consecrating themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, consecrated persons turn to Mary so that, through her maternal influence and with her as model, they may be more perfectly and immediately one with the Redeemer in his consecration to the Father for the salvation of humanity. Fr. P.Gaffney, S.M.M., aptly explains this in these words:

Through her [Mary], our consecration to the Lord becomes more intense, more effective, more immediate. Through her, the power of the Redemption is poured forth upon the anguish and cares of this world.

John Paul II expresses the same idea in his encyclical on Christ the Redeemer of man (*Redemptor Hominis*):

We believe that *nobody else can bring us as Mary can into the divine and human dimension of this mystery [of the Redemption]*. Nobody has been brought into it by God himself as Mary has... We can say that *the mystery of the Redemption took shape beneath the heart of the Virgin of Nazareth* when she pronounced her "fiat." From then on, under the special influence of the Holy Spirit, this heart, the heart of both a virgin and mother, has always followed the work of her Son and has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love. For this reason, her heart must also have the inexhaustibility of a mother. *The special characteristic of the motherly love that the Mother of God inserts in the mystery of the Redemption and the life of the Church finds expression in its exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him*. It is in this that the mystery of the Mother consists... *Through her maternal presence, the Church acquires certainty that she is truly living the life of her Master and Lord and that she is living the mystery of the Redemption in its life-giving profundity and fullness*.

One might be surprised at the daring thought and hopes of Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe to bring the whole universe back to Christ through the Immaculata. Our attitude as Christians - according to him - ought to be a *missionary* one. In other words, we should not be overly preoccupied with our own personal sanctification, even though it is of great importance, but instead, let the devouring fire of Pentecost consume us totally, as it did the Apostles and the Christians who have gone before us. Kolbe states:

Those who give themselves entirely to the Immaculata wish to burn with a love so powerful that it will set fire to everything in their milieu, and cause as many other souls as possible to burn with the same flame... They would wish to conquer the whole world and every soul in particular for the Immaculata, and do this as soon as possible.

Saint Maximilian M.Kolbe sees the mission of the Church as immense, limitless. Realizing that this mission is identical with the mission of Mary, the Mother of the Church, and inseparable from the Spirit of Christ, all her children and particularly consecrated persons, her "special" sons and daughters, will necessarily desire with all their heart to be one with their immaculate Mother in her mission of "multiplying Christians" in order to complete the whole Christ (*Christus totus*).

5.1. Theological Basis of the Missionary Consecration to Mary

For Kolbe the focal point of the consecration to Mary is Pentecost: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Mary who is at the center of the "missionary" Church. Thus, his model of Marian consecration is a "consecration for mission" or, in other words, an "apostolic consecration." Furthermore, Kolbe emphasizes that it is only *in and through the Immaculate Virgin Mary* that we become perfect instruments of the Spirit in order to conquer the world for Christ. Indeed,

he stresses the importance to consecrate ourselves to her and her maternal mission of salvation in the power of the Spirit as he writes:

We must hand ourselves over to the Immaculata: she is totally God's. We must divest ourselves of ourselves, and do it as soon as possible, so as to keep nothing for ourselves, absolutely nothing. She must be the one who acts; let us be her

instruments... The main thing is not to act a great deal according to our own ideas, but to place ourselves firmly into her hands. She knows far better than we how to procure the glory of God; by ourselves we could only spoil everything. Everything depends on our perfect docility towards her. There is no greater perfection than the union of our will with hers.

John Paul II underscores that for St. Maximilian Mary Kolbe the Immaculata was "in addition to a "sweet Mother," an example and criteria to absolute fidelity to the saving plan of God."

He [Kolbe] strongly believed that the person who is close to Mary is docile to the breath of the Paraclete, knows how to receive his inspiration and can adhere fully to Christ. He seems to suggest that whoever wants to know and preach the Gospel should draw close to the Immaculata with confidence, because she intimately knew the mysteries of the Son of God.

St. Maximilian Mary did not establish a new missionary Institute within the Church like the following great Marian devotees; St. Anthony Mary Claret, the founder of the Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Claretians); Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, the founder of the Marianists; and the Servant of God Fr. Jean Claude Colin, the founder of

the Marists an. Instead, Saint Maximilian Mary founded an international association of the faithful, the *Militia Immaculatae*, that "has made this [missionary] consecration to Mary its own in a special way, so that the Gospel may continue to be preached generously to all and be a light for all humanity." This act of consecration to the Immaculata composed by St. Maximilian Mary succinctly expresses the missionary role of Mary in consecrated life:

O Immaculata, Queen of heaven and earth, refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother. *God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to you. I, N., a repentant sinner, cast myself at your feet, humbly imploring you to take me, with all that I am and have, wholly to yourself as your property and possession. Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body, of my whole life, death and eternity whatever most pleases you.*

If it pleases you, even use all that I am and have without reserve to accomplish what was written of you; "she will crush the serpent's head" (Gen 3:15), and also: "You alone have destroyed all heresies in the whole world" (Little office of the B.V. Mary), so that I may become a *useful instrument in Your Immaculate and most merciful hands for promoting and increasing your glory to the maximum in so many strayed and indifferent souls, and thus extend as much as possible the blessed Reign of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.*

For wherever you enter, you obtain the grace of conversion and sanctification, since it is through your hands that all grace comes to us from the Most Sweet Heart of Jesus.

5.2. Consecration to Mary in Missionary Institutes of Consecrated Life (Marianists, Claretians)

Various missionary Institutes of Marian inspiration have made the consecration to Mary an integral part of their missionary orientation. Fr. Emil Neubert, S.M. asserts the

Blessed William Joseph Chaminade did not begin with thinking about founding a new apostolic society; rather, the very idea of Mary's apostolic mission gave birth in him to the idea of a new religious congregation, totally consecrated to her as her ministers for the accomplishment of this mission.

At the feet of Our Lady of the Pillar (Saragossa, Spain) he meditated long hours on Mary's mission. There he understood that since Mary had received from God the command to crush the head of the serpent, to destroy all heresies, her mission is a pre-eminently apostolic one... But to accomplish her mission Mary needed assistants, soldiers, just as Jesus wished to depend upon priests for the continuation of His work. Father Chaminade felt himself called to raise up to the Blessed Virgin Mary those soldiers who would enter the religious life because of her, to be completely and during their whole life at her service and thus to aid her in conquering the world for Christ.

The Marianists express this missionary spirituality in their formula of consecration to Mary:

Behold, I give and consecrate myself to you as your child, just as Jesus gave Himself to you to be your Son... I give myself to you that you may use me as you wish... I particularly wish to assist you *in your providential mission*. I wish to be *your apostle and soldier in the warfare against Satan*. I wish to combat in your name and to save your children from his grasp. I wish to fight for the glory of your name, to make you known, loved and served. *I am convinced that revealing you to men is the most effective way of revealing Jesus to them...*

Like Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe and Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, St. Antony Mary Claret also conceived

the apostolic orientation of the Institute he founded as a collaboration in the Virgin's struggle against Satan; thus, his notion of "Sons of Mary's Heart" was synonymous of being an instrument of the Virgin in assisting her in her mission of salvation. For this reason, he defines a Son of the Heart of Mary exclusively in terms of the apostolate: "A Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a man on fire with love, who spreads its flames wherever he goes. He desires mightily, and strives by all means to set the whole world on fire with God's love." Fr. Juan M. Lozano writes that

The Saint regarded himself as an instrument of Our Lady in extending the Kingdom of God. In the first of his prayers he wrote during the novitiate he says: "What is lacking then, my Mother? Would you perhaps avail yourself of *some instrument* with which remedy so great an evil? Here is one..." In his prayer before missions he says, "I am like *an arrow poised in your mighty hand*. Release me, my Mother, with the full force of your arm..." "The Lord told me both for myself and for all these missionary companions of mine, 'You yourselves will not be the speakers; the Spirit of your Father (and your Mother) will be speaking in you.'" Finally shortly before he died, he saw his Missionaries as the arms of the Virgin: "The arms of Mary are the Missionaries of her Congregation, who will work zealously, hold everyone in their embrace, and pray to Jesus and Mary. *The Blessed Virgin Mary will use them as her arms and her maternal breasts, to feed her little ones.*"

Considering his apostolic Marian spirituality, it is not a surprise that St. Antony Mary Claret made the consecration to the Heart of Mary part of the ceremony to join the missionary Congregation he founded. Evidently, the Saint attributed great importance to this consecration for himself and his foundation. He and his Sons consecrated themselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the

apostolate. It was not a personal, ascetical motive that impelled them, but a missionary goal. All this allows us to understand the eminently apostolic meaning of the act of consecration to the Heart of Mary the Saint passed on to his Congregation: "I entrust and consecrate myself to the special service of God and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, for the object for which this congregation has been founded." Addressing their General Chapter, Pope John Paul II reminds the Claretians of the Marian character of their apostolic spirituality:

Like your founder, let the Virgin Mary kindle in the forge of her charity the flame of your zeal. Let the spirit of your Mother speak in you, in order that proclaiming the Gospel in a worthy and fruitful way, you may call yourselves - and really be - her sons.

Concluding this inquiry on the missionary model of Marian consecration in relation to the religious consecration, the following comes to the fore:

By means of an apostolic consecration to Mary, the "missionary" dimension of religious consecration is not only strengthened but also given a particular Marian note. Consecrating themselves to Mary for the specific mission of their Institute, religious become more aware that, being her instruments in promoting the kingdom of God, they are not only extending Mary's mission in the world, but with the help of Mary and in union with her they are also enabled to fulfill their mission more effectively and more faithfully.

6. The Communitarian Model of Marian Consecration (Augustinian Tradition, Families of Consecrated Life)

Consecrated life is concretely realized in community. *Consecration is for communion*; it is always directed towards unity: union with God and union with one's brothers and sisters. In fraternal community, one's brothers and

sisters are sacraments of Christ, that is, signs and instruments of God's presence and sanctifying action. The principal purpose of community life is to grow in the love of God and neighbor. The religious community is therefore a privileged place to grow in holiness. Amadeo Cencini writes:

It is nice to meet a saint, but it is even nicer and more uplifting to meet a community of saints, or brothers/sisters who, living together, try to become saints together, proposing thus, to everybody a common and imitable form of holiness, much more visible and efficient, eloquent and coherent, because in this form the contents of the announcement, that is evangelical love, identifies itself with the style of life it announces.

In numerous religious communities, a communitarian act of consecration to Mary is occasionally recited. By way of this collective consecration, Mary's maternal protection is implored and the community dimension of their common journey on the way of perfection is strengthened. Among the various formulas of collective consecration used in Institutes of Consecrated Life only a few express explicitly the theological and spiritual content of building community. Before we reflect on the content of an exemplary "family consecration," let us first consider the theological foundation for Mary's role of bringing her sons and daughters into harmony and communion.

6.1. Theological Foundation: Mary Brings Her Children into Unity through Consecration

Origen said: *Ubi peccata, ibi multitudo*. (Where there is sin, there is division.) Sin divides, and can only be overcome by holiness (consecration). The Holy Father explains this further:

In the Old Testament, the "dispersed children of God" are the exiles in foreign land, especially in

Babylonia. The Lord permitted their dispersion among the peoples because of their sins (Dt 4:25-27; 28: 62-66), but once they were converted by the preaching of the prophets (Dt 4:29-31; 30:1-6), God gathers them together from the diaspora and makes them return to their own country.

The Temple of Jerusalem, reconstructed from the ruins, is the privileged place of this reunification (Ez 37:21, 26-28; 2 Mac 1:27-29; 2;18). Beneath its vaults the converts who had become members of a new Covenant, adore the same Lord; and Jerusalem becomes "the universal mother" of

these numberless sons whom Yahweh, her Spouse, brought together within her walls (Is 49:21; 60:1-9; Ps 87; Tob 13:11-13). That surrounding wall, in effect, resembles a womb which contains the Temple and all those who assemble there to adore the One God.

In the New Testament, Jesus, by his redeeming consecration, is the one who gathers together in unity the dispersed children of God (cf. Jn 11:51-52). And Mary, his Mother, to whom he entrusts in John all of humanity, becomes at the foot of the Cross "the mother of the dispersed children of God." He gathers together dispersed humanity in another Temple, that is his own humanity consecrated by his Divinity, making them share in his redemptive consecration to the Father: "For their sake I consecrate myself" (cf. Jn 17:19). And thus the "true Jerusalem" is formed: the Church as a community consecrated to the Father through Christ in the love of the Spirit, with Mary as the Mother of the unity of the Church. The Pope notes:

On Calvary she [Mary] was indeed united with the sacrifice of her Son who was looking to the formation of the Church; her motherly heart shared completely Christ's will 'to gather into one all the

dispersed children of God' (Jn 11:52). Having suffered for the Church, Mary deserved to become the mother of all her Son's disciples, the mother of their unity... Mary seeks to promote the greatest possible unity of Christians, because a mother strives to ensure accord among her children.

The Holy Spirit heals the divisions Babel has brought among humanity, through the power of Christ's redeeming love which he has been pouring out upon the Church since Pentecost. Among the disciples Mary is "the center of unity which held the young Church together in its expectation of the Holy Spirit."

By cooperating with the Spirit in the work of making the redeemed share in God's holy life, she is also instrumental in bringing about unity among God's children through their gradual configuration to Christ. The more her sons and daughters are consecrated to the Consecrated One, the more they are conformed to Christ and the more they will have the one Spirit of Christ becoming "one heart and one soul."

Throughout the history of consecrated life, many founders of religious communities consecrated their foundations to the Blessed Virgin Mary because "they are all convinced that Mary's presence is of fundamental importance both for the spiritual life of each consecrated person, and for *the solidity, unity and progress of the whole community.*" Mary who "was present in the early community (Acts 1:14), is pleased to remain in the heart of all communities gathered in the name of her Son. In particular she watches over the preservation and growth of their love." Hence, whenever a religious community consecrates itself to Mary by means of a communitarian act, it opens itself in a new way to Mary's maternal presence so that Mary can form it more and more into a holy family, a truly consecrated community. She "will help configure religious communities to the model of "her" family, the Family of Nazareth, a place where religious communities should ought often visit spiritually, because there the Gospel of communion and

fraternity was lived in a wonderful way." Indeed, the biblical icon for the communitarian model of consecration to Mary is the "Family of Nazareth," Jesus, Mary, and Joseph living a hidden life of fraternal communion. The immediate theological foundation is Mary's maternal role in fostering the unity among the children of God and bringing them in the power of the Spirit ever more into the unity of the Holy Trinity.

6.2. Marian Spirituality of Communion as Expressed in the "Family Consecration" to Mary (Community of Saint John)

The following act of a communitarian consecration to Mary is daily recited by the Community of Saint John (SJM):

As the Father has chosen you, O Mary, to be His Immaculate Child, Joseph's spouse, and the Mother of His beloved Son and of the whole Church in full communion with the Holy Spirit, so we choose you this day as Mother and Queen of our whole family; and we consecrate to you our souls and our bodies, all that we do and that we have, without exception.

Exercise upon each one of us your most maternal mercy, teach us to love Jesus and the Father always more, and in and through the Holy Spirit, discovering one another evermore profoundly in the light of Jesus, respecting each other, and choosing one another each day in a more divine and simpler love.

O Mary, grant that each of us fulfill the Father's will each day by a personal gift of ourselves, so that our whole family may bear witness, in the midst of the world, to the love of Jesus victorious over evil. Amen.

Evidently, by means of this act of consecration to Mary the communitarian aspect of religious consecration is being strengthened and assumes a distinctively Marian

physiognomy. It imparts on the religious community a particular mode of Marian spirituality of communion. What are the main features of this spirituality?

a.) ***Imparting on the community its true identity as God's family, Mary gives solidity, unity, and progress to the community*** (*As the Father has chosen you, O Mary, to be ... the Mother of His beloved Son and of the whole Church in full communion with the Holy Spirit, so we choose you this day as Mother and Queen of our whole family*)

The Father chose a Mother (the woman) for his Son so that he would be "born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Gal 4:5). By giving him a human Mother, he wanted to give him a true human identity so that he could be called at one and the same time the Son of God and the Son of Mary. It was, therefore, through his Mother that the only begotten Son of the Father became a part of the human family. Extending Mary's Motherhood to all of his adoptive sons and daughters, God gives them a new identity as his children and as members of his Divine Family.

In an address to Polish priests and religious on the feast of Mary, Queen of Poland, the Holy Father says that

For this reason we live with *the knowledge of our having been entrusted to the Mother of God*, as the whole nation, not only each one individually, but as *a great community*. We feel embraced by these words: "Behold your son;" *we feel that we are her children and we consider her our mother. And we extend this motherhood of hers to all generations, to all distant and recent events*. In the evolution of these events, which even in difficulty have not stopped being for us ever full of hope, we read the signs of her motherhood. They are ours! They are ours because we have a Mother. *Motherhood is the source of identity of each one of us*. The first of

man's rights is that of descending directly from motherhood.

And thus *this unique motherhood of Mary*, passed on one time to John the Evangelist and Apostle, and extended to so many men and to entire nations, and above all to our nation, *gives us a particular sense of identity*. It allows us to live in hope and to carry on towards the future, being grateful for all that has been good and creative in the past.

If the Pope speaks here of his own nation as a community marked by a special Marian identity, we can see this Marian identity realized even more in religious communities. Founders have been aware of the fact that it is through Mary, the Mother of God and of the Church, that their religious communities receive their particular identity as a family of God. It is through her that they become within the Church a particular realization of the mystery of communion with God and with one another.

Through the community act of consecration, Mary, in a new and more profound way, is chosen as the "Mother and Queen of the whole family" so that through the maternal assistance of Mary the religious community will grow in its identity as a "Holy Family," a consecrated community sharing with particular intensity in the communion of the three Divine Persons.

b.) Having the inexhaustible heart of a Mother, Mary leads the members of the community to grow in the spirituality of communion. (Teach us ... to love one another in the Holy Spirit discovering one another evermore profoundly in the light of Jesus, respecting each other, and choosing one another each day in a more divine and simpler love)

Like the maternal heart of Mary that "has gone out to all those whom Christ has embraced and continues to embrace with inexhaustible love," consecrated persons are called to

embrace with the same love of Christ and Mary all those whom the Lord has placed close to them, particularly their fellow community members. The mystery of Mary's maternal love consists precisely in her "exceptional closeness to man and all that happens to him."

Mary is the type, the model member of the Church, for in her all graces of union with God and with her human brothers and sisters were brought to fruition and none was lost. She is in some way the synthesis of the Church as a consecrated community. "Mary is not an isolated individual closed in on herself, but a person who carries within her the whole mystery of the Church." She is an "ecclesial soul" (*anima ecclesiastica*), a human person whose Christ-filled

Spirit transcends private consciousness in order to expand and widen into Church consciousness. Her maternal Heart contains all men and women, loving them as her children and cherishing them as brothers and sisters. At all times, she leads consecrated persons to grow in the authentic spirituality of communion that is, in the words of the Pope, above all "the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling in us." In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, spirituality of communion is defined in these terms:

A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body, and therefore as "those who are part of me." This makes us able to share their joys and sufferings, to sense their desires and attend to their needs, to offer them deep and genuine friendship.

A spirituality of communion implies also the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me."

A spirituality of communion means, finally, to know how to "make room" for our brothers and sisters, bearing "each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2) and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly

beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust, and jealousy.

Through Mary's maternal presence the religious community becomes the home and school of communion, a place where the spirit of solidarity and sharing are acquired and lived. Pope John Paul II has repeatedly called for a "Marian model of the Church," that is a Church that lives the Gospel in Mary's style. In a recent address to the Institutes of the Marist family he said:

Today yours is the call to *make the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary visible in the life of the Church and in the life of men and women* in an original and specific way and, for this, to *develop a Marian attitude...*

Mary gave herself totally to the Lord, placing all her trust in the word of God. How she would like to teach you to dwell in the power of this Word and to choose, like the other Mary, the better part (cf. Lk 10:42). In today's world the disciples of Christ can easily be dispersed, because the abundance of material goods can tear them away from what is essential and because pastoral needs are many. As I recently wrote to the whole Church, we need to contemplate the face of Christ (cf. NMI, II), to pursue ever more deeply the mystery of his person since he is the true font from which we draw the love we would like to give. Do not let this essential bond of consecration be undone! *Choose rather to follow the Lord humbly, in Mary's discreet ways!*

In being a true family formed and nourished by Mary's maternal love, religious communities make the presence of the Blessed Virgin Mary visible in the life of the Church. They are in a particular way called to develop a Marian attitude and exemplify a Marian style of being Church. A beautiful prayer written by Fr. José María Arnaiz for a meeting of Marianist Lay Communities summarizes key

aspects of this Marian ecclesial style:

Our Father, we pray for our *Marianist Family* with all its weaknesses and all its wealth. Look upon us with kindness; it is our mother and our family. Give it your grace so that it may become what it longs to be:

A *family* which fosters life and enthusiasm, in which all can express what they think and feel, what they believe and desire; a community of freedom.

A *family* where people listen long and hard before speaking, welcome others before judging them, forgive much more quickly than condemn, focus more on announcing the Good News than denouncing the bad; a community of mercy.

A *family* in which the simplest brother and sister understand what others are saying; in which the leaders are highly educated and experienced, but still know that there is much they do not know; in which everyone is allowed to be himself or herself: a family in which we learn wisdom.

A *family* in which the Holy Spirit will feel at home, since everything will not be pre-planned, regulated, determined: a community that fosters creativity and growth.

A *family* in which the courage to risk the new is more powerful than tried and true routines: a community that looks to the future.

A *family* in which all can pray in their own language, develop and cherish their own culture, appreciate the heritage and history in which they feel at home: an incarnational community, one that knows the paschal mystery and experiences a new Pentecost.

A *family* of which people will say: 'See how they love one another,' rather than, 'See how well organized they are:' a living and growing community.

Marianist Family, you are small but growing,

fragile but full of hope, hesitant but believing. Lift up your eyes and see: Jesus and Mary are always with you. Amen.

c.) Mary leads religious to take on her role in generating and sharing Christ's spiritual presence to others by their reciprocal love. (O Mary, grant that each of us fulfill the Father's will each day by a personal gift of ourselves, so that the whole family may bear witness, in the midst of the world, to the love of Jesus victorious over evil.)

Jesus said to his disciples: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"

(Jn 13:35). It is only when two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, that is, in his spirit of love, that he will become present and radiate his Divine love through the witness of a community united in mutual love. By helping religious communities to be united in doing the will of the Father in the love of Christ, Mary makes them experience her Son's spiritual presence in their midst. By helping religious communities to be united in doing the will of the Father in the love of Christ, Mary makes them experience her Son's spiritual presence in their midst. As Chiara Lubich shares:

It is our mother who makes us meet one another along the way of God's love... Our mother wants us united on our journey! She knows that "where two or more" unite in the holy name of her Son, He is in their midst... It is Mary, who taking us by the hand, unites us; she fuses us always more in unity to the point that we consume ourselves in unity!

Moreover, as it was her primary role to generate Christ by the power of the Spirit and give Him to the world, so Mary desires religious communities to take on her very role of "generating" the spiritual presence of Christ in their midst through their mutual love: "Love each other as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34). This love is poured out into their hearts

through the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5) in order to give him to the world.

In being identified with the intimate Marian heart of the Church-community, that is directed towards Christ "in their midst" (that is, to its own members), a community will likewise be oriented towards Christ "outside" in their brothers and sisters in the world. In the measure a religious community bears the loving, caring, and merciful face of Mary, it will be able to witness to Christ's love operative among its members and become thus a very convincing missionary sign in the Church and in the world. It has been a continuous missionary experience in the history of consecrated life that people feel more attracted to a community that radiates the warmth of the Mother than to the functionality of a perfectly organized Institution. As a community of disciples, Fr. Bredan Leahy believes that "we can be an icon for Mary, a Marian people. *It is as a Marian people that we are a sign and instrument of humankind's unity with the Triune God and of humankind's own unity.*"

At the close of this division in which different contemporary models of consecration to Mary have been analyzed, we can conclude:

1. The incarnational, redemptive, missionary and communitarian models of Marian consecration express and deepen the various dimensions of consecration.
2. Institutes of Consecrated Life of Marian orientation would assume the model that most clearly expresses their specific charism and spirituality. While contemplative communities would rather opt for the expiatory consecration, missionary congregations would prefer an apostolic consecration.
3. It is by entrusting themselves to Mary that consecrated persons will experience Mary's particular maternal assistance and thus be inspired and

"empowered" to live more fully and, in a Marian, way what is already contained in their religious consecration.

Let us conclude this chapter with a prayer of consecration to Mary written by Bl. Mother Teresa that combines the incarnational and redemptive model of consecration. This prayer is at the same time a wonderful example how the particular spirituality of a community is embodied in its Marian consecration:

Covenant of Consecration to Mary to satiate the Thirst of Jesus

Mary, Mother of Jesus and my Mother, moved by a burning desire to live in the closest union with you possible in this life, so as to more surely and fully come to union with your Son, and with you to discover the mystery of His Thirst, I resolve to keep this covenant as faithfully and generously as I am able to with your help. Since Jesus from the Cross gave you to me, I take you as my own. And since Jesus gave me to you, take me as your own. I entrust myself and all I do entirely to you, that you may share your life and heart with me. I give you complete power over me and all that belongs to me, both material and spiritual, that as a Mother you may nourish Jesus' Thirst within me.

Mary, I depend on you totally as a child on its mother, that in return you may possess me, protect me and transform me into Jesus. May the light of your faith dispel the darkness of my mind; may your profound humility take the place of my pride; may your contemplation replace the distractions of my wandering imaginations; and may your virtues take the place of my sins. Lead me deeper into the mystery of the Cross that you may share your experience of Jesus' Thirst with me.

O most pure heart of Mary, allow me to enter your heart, to share your interior life. You see and know my needs; help me to do "whatever Jesus tells me"... that my human needs may be changed into thirst for God alone. I desire to discover, satiate and proclaim Jesus' Thirst, but I know all too well my weakness, nothingness and sin. Mother, may this covenant of consecration be the hidden strength in my life that you may use me to satiate your Son to the full. Let this be my only joy... and you will be the Cause of that joy.

Sweet Lord, Thy Thirst for souls I satiate with my burning love, all for Thee. My chalice will be filled with love, sacrifices made all for Thee. Evermore, I will quench Thy Thirst, Lord. Evermore, I will quench Thy Thirst, Lord, for souls, in union with Mary, our Queen, I will quench Thy Thirst.