

# MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

## \* Patroness of Australia

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### PREFACE

In an editorial in 1976 a local Catholic paper suggested that our patronal title was largely irrelevant for Australians today. Too closely tied to European History and to "far-off unhappy wars of long ago" it had judged our patronage, and consequently called for a more updated title than that of Help of Christians.

To this we could admit in brief, "the fault, dear Brutus . . .". We have done little to show Mary as the most contemporary of women. She is what the church should and, one day, will be; and in that sense we can never keep pace or quite catch up with her : The New Woman, the Perfect Christian.

If we have over-stressed before Mary's victories in remote church history, we may have lost sight of her dynamic help for the church, nations and people of today. We may have missed her making her Son's Paschal Mystery leap from doctrine to experience in our daily lives.

In new Marian studies, Mary figures prominently with her social help for the church. In this she personifies the Australian identity and character, stepping in to assist the underdog or those on the brink.

"A sign of sure hope and consolation for the pilgrim church until the Lord's Day comes," Vatican II has called her.

In rediscovering Mary, Help of Christians may we find the church, in particular the Australian church, "writ large".

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### Help at Hand

When the contemporary world asks the church for a sign, it is asking for proof of love in action. It seems to be challenging St. Francis De Sales' bold assertion: "Everything in the church belongs to love, happens in love, for love, and from love". But such pastoral love has to be experienced to be believed.

Even non-believers are moved by seeing the compassionate help of a Mother Teresa, a Sheila Cassidy, or a Dorothy Day at one with forgotten or oppressed people whose very condition is a plea for help. In these concerned, caring women the world can see the Beatitudes come to life, can perhaps glimpse the better world of Christ's new creation.

Many today are keen to test St. James' definition of religion: "This is religion, pure and undefiled before God the Father: to give help to orphans and widows in their tribulation, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." In the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, ministering to urgent need, they find a most convincing witness.

Such help has always been the index of bona-fide religion.

In Israel the mark of God's fidelity was his timely help for his people in crisis; his saving-action in their history was a dominant biblical theme. It was in God's saving-presence, dramatically intervening at the Red Sea, during siege, etc. that Israel saw proof of his Covenant-love. It was this help-at-hand "that made Yahweh what He was, gave him personal identity, and set him apart, as Israel's own" (McKenzie). Without seeing such saving-help as the mark of God's love, little of the bible story will make sense for us.

In the same way, at the apex of all teaching Jesus answers the question, "What is help? Who is my neighbour?" In his simple Good Samaritan parable He gives short shift to that selfish devotion which crosses over to the other side deliberately to bypass a wounded traveller. Instead, He canonizes the Samaritan who administers urgent, practical help to his needy brother on the road. His conclusion is a practical one: "Go, now, and do the same." Such visible help was the Messianic Sign: "Go, tell John the blind see . . . the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

No wonder Thomas Aquinas could define devotion not in terms of spiritual enjoyment, but as generous service. "Devotion", he writes, "is simply the determination to give oneself readily to those matters that concern the service of the Lord and of the faithful".

### **All God's Helpers**

In a poor Roman parish recently, Pope John Paul II told his people, "By her motherly help, Mary liberates us so that as a community we can experience freedom, dignity, love and joy." The Pope quoted from *Marialis Cultus*, "Mary is the beginning of a better world."

It is just this timely help, Mary's saving-presence among the believing community, that our patronal title implies. Mary is the constant help of the church in all its crises, great or small. She is so by her nature, grace and assigned function. Our title stands apart, as it focuses on Mary's social mediation when by her ecclesial aid she ensures the continuity, the freedom, the purity and growth of the Faith in her Son's Church, despite all oppression from outside or all defects within.

Basically it is a humble rather than triumphant title. It reveals Mary as the servant-helper, Christ's associate and ours. It stresses her auxiliary role, humbly subordinate to Christ and to His Church in saving men. But with it goes a powerful, militant dimension that will let nothing stand in the way of Christ's redeeming mission.

This solidarity of Mary's help extends in general to the whole human family. "Mary's unceasing intercession" Paul VI reminds us, "draws her close to those who ask her help, including those who do not realize that they are her children." So all religions and non-believers belong to the Mother of Humanity. Unasked, she anticipates their needs.

But in particular Mary is the Mother of the Church. As Christians, we experience her help every day when she intervenes to assist the Church or each individual believer when things are at their darkest.

Hers is a many-sided help. It can be gentle or militant; ordinary or extraordinary; personal or social; pastoral or theological; universal or domestic. There is only one common criterion each time: an urgent need that will adversely affect the church in some way unless Mary intercedes and intervenes with her helping-hand.

This patronal-protection of hers presents us with a life-situation catechesis; a Marian catechesis. It reveals Mary active in our daily lives. She not only brings help; she is help-in-person, who time and again restores

holiness and unity to the church, justice and liberation to society, and peace and happiness to dioceses, parishes and families. "She is the beginning of a better world."

"In Mary's countenance", Semmelroth writes, "the Church is rediscovering her own features." As the Church's identikit or alter ego, the humble maid-servant is helping the Church stay aware of its own nature and mission as Servant of the Servants of God.

Through Mary's eyes of faith, the church can better see Christ in "the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the prisoner"; and translate that faith into apostolic action. If the church grows too lordly, rich or privileged, it is Mary who promptly calls it back to its Servant-image.

This attitude of lowly service is the very origin of Mary's glory. "The driving-force of all Mary's action", *Marialis Cultus* insists, "is a spirit of loving-service." Earlier Pope Paul had asked the rhetorical question, "Was not Mary's whole life a ministry of loving-service" (1967).

Our Marian title is a powerful reminder that as Christians, above all, "We are God's coadjutors", Christ's helpers in the Church (St. Paul). As Australians, could we ask for a more topical, dynamic patronage than that of Mary, Help of Christians?

### **Active in History**

In Mexico (1979) Pope John Paul stressed that "God is active in our history today . . . Emmanuel . . . His loving providence lived out through Jesus Christ in His church."

He was refuting Nietzsche's agnostic claim that "God is dead." With it falls Freud's assertion in modern psychology that "the Father is dead". An existentialist demand was heard in the "*Cool Hand Luke*" film for a practice-based religion, "Are you really there, Lord? Are you honestly awake and listening?" Experience before theology; not ideology, but help of immediate concern to us, is the modern demand.

And here lies the strength of our Help of Christians title. It is a practice-based devotion, linking the church to daily life so that Mary, active in epic or domestic history, gives the lie to any suggestion that "the mother is dead". She does care, does intercede, does intervene. "She is", as Therese Martin shrewdly noted, "more mother than queen".

In her constant help we experience the glow of realizing that we are not a herd of extras, bit-players on the world's stage; but important associates of Jesus in the ongoing drama of salvation. Mary's eleventh-hour assistance is the great light in the darkness of our contemporary tunnel.

Nothing human is outside the concern of Mary's help. The runaway teenager, the tearful old pensioner, the shattered university student, the frightened boat-people, the terminally-ill cancer patient, the deserted wife and children can all immediately identify with one who herself experienced fear, exile, pain, loneliness and confusion. Real-life history is Mary's natural ambient. She is our sister in the church.

Mary is equally present and moves at ease in the grand themes of current history: third-world development and liberation, social justice and peace, church unity and holiness, for she has been commissioned to bring about a "better world till the Lord's Day comes". She is the mother of the church.

For this reason only, and not for any motives of triumphalism does the church refer us back to history when she speaks of Mary, Help of Christians. >From the mirror of the past, we are asked to see Mary's ongoing help newly reflected in contemporary experience; to catch an initial glimpse of the future from one who has gone ahead like a pioneer pilgrim of faith not merely "to prepare a place for us", but to facilitate the way as we go.

### **Helpmate in Australia**

At Guadalupe (January 1979), Pope John Paul spoke of coming from "a great nation whose heart beats in

the great Marian sanctuaries of Poland." He quoted, as he had done on his Inauguration Day, from a well known Polish poet: "Holy Virgin, who defends bright Czestochowa and shines forth at Jasna Gora gate."

His Mexican audience would have understood intuitively how a nation's whole spirit could be enshrined in a single Marian Patronage. They could readily identify with Juan Diego's colourful peasant Lady of Guadalupe, embodying all the simplicity and vitality of their national church; just as the strong ikon of Czestochowa darkly enshrines the heroism and depth of Polish faith.

By comparison Australia's patronal bonds may seem, at first sight, slack indeed.

Yes *Marialis Cultus* insists that "local churches make a careful revision of Marian devotion, and see that it answers "to the socio-cultural conditions and psychological needs" of each nation.

Later in this pamphlet the origin of Australia's Marian connection will be studied in more detail.

Our task here and now is to trace how our Help of Christians patronage dovetails in with the Australian ethos and identity. Mary, as the Second Eve, is essentially "a helpmate like ourselves" (See Genesis 2,18).

Like a recurring theme the motif of "mateship by giving a helping-hand" runs through our nation's history. It has defied the academic charge of myth, and still survives in a more affluent, multi-cultural society.

Born in hard times, the mateship ethos has gradually evolved through outback settlement, gold rushes, inner-city depressions, two world wars, natural disasters, and mass migration.

Social historians in Russel Ward and Manning Clark have identified the better features of this "helping-hand", steering clear of the more phoney "ocker" elements, for the underdog.

We could single out, loyalty to one's mates . . . passing round the hat in disaster time . . . sharing a last cigarette in the trenches . . . staying with the injured workmate in a mine cave-in . . . the open-doored bush hospitality . . . tucker for the track for one down-on-his-luck or in-the-horrors . . . the gentle reassurance of the frontierswomen of the west . . . the Drover's Wife, the Little Irish Mother . . . the awkward sympathy, the wordless handshake after personal loss . . . the anonymous parcel at the door, something for the kids . . . the corner storekeeper docking it up for later on . . . a fair-go and a fresh start for the battler who has just done time . . . the tireless community search for the lost bush-child . . . the weekend working-bee to paint the Retirement Home or to mend the convent fence . . . the hilarious sign-language barbecue, as a welcome for a new migrant neighbour . . . sorefoot schoolgirls on a twenty-mile "walk against want" . . . the million-dollar telethon for the Children's Hospital, or the quadriplegic ex-Rugby player . . . the sharing of house-and-home in flood and bushfire . . . and the one unpardonable sin (the ultimate in scabbing) letting down one's mate in trouble and slamming the door on need.

In the secular field this ethos of "mateship-through-help" was to find expression in W.G. Spence's close-knit unionism; through the *Bulletin's* pages as the bushman's bible; or through Henry Lawson's sensitive, sometimes maudlin short stories.

This remarkable Christ-like compassion in a masculine frontier society was to create a community conscience and a biblical heart in a new nation. A strange and dangerous isolation, the so-called tyranny of distance, was to make solidarity here a sheer necessity to survive. The Beatitudes and the practical religion of St. James' Epistle were to gain entrance through a secular door, marked by the twin posts of critical need and urgent help.

In the religious field, a sympathetic Irish-Australian Catholicism readily made its own this "mateship-through-a-helping-hand". Eventually it was to find its way, as the major factor, in shaping the whole Australian ethos and identity.

In the domestic church, it was to gravitate, almost inevitably, towards the patronage of Mary, Help of Christians, "a helpmate like ourselves".

## The Liberated Woman

The Women's Liberation extremist is often seen as some kind of twentieth century witch. A strident voiced revolutionary, she seems to threaten the most sacred institutions of family, church and state.

Yet in its better moments, such a feminist movement can help us rediscover the co-responsibility of women, which the Scriptures and Jesus have recognized from the beginning. It can, unwittingly perhaps, redirect us to the ever-modern woman in Mary.

In *Marialis Cultus* Pope Paul stresses Mary's initiative, strength and decisive action. He dismisses as caricature any presentation of Mary as "a timidly submissive woman of repellent piety", and points to a more vigorous, authentic portrait of the Gospel woman who intervened freely and intelligently at every crisis in Christ's life; as she has done since in Church history. She was "the humble housewife", but a lot more.

The letter shows her as the valiant Daughter of Israel, the strong Woman of the Gospel. It points to "her dialogue with the Lord, her decision-making power, her courage in choice-of-life, and that unhesitating spirit of service as the driving-force of all her actions".

In a fresh approach, the Pope is breaking with a long-misunderstood tradition: the "Imitation of Mary".

Today's women, he insists, cannot put back the hands of the clock to Mary's culture and life-style in Palestine. Rather it is her attitude of heart, mind and soul that needs recapturing: her inner relationship to Christ and his Church. Only then, can contemporary women identify with her, as she opens up new vistas and experiences that move history. They can relate to a Spirit-filled Woman whose faith moves mountains.

Such an understanding alone gives meaning to St. Ambrose's "following of Mary" (rather than a static "imitation"): "Let the soul of Mary be in each of us to glorify God. May the spirit of Mary be in everyone to rejoice in the Lord."

In Christ's presence the Gospel women experience an extraordinary sense of freedom. With the woman at the well, the Syro-Phoenician woman, Mary Magdalen, Peter's mother-in-law, the Boanerges' mother, Chuza's wife, Martha, and Mary, etc. Christ deals in an adult give-and-take relationship. It puts them at their ease, so that they speak with absolute freedom. This can be traced back to Mary's own relationship with her Son: an intelligent, liberating relationship that respects the autonomy of every female.

Not once in the Gospel do women lose faith in or prove unfaithful to Jesus. Even when He seems to reject their plea for help, they quietly insist until He comes to their aid. This confident heart-speaks-to-heart rapport is unique in the Gospel. It is women who offer Him food, water and hospitality, as the need arises. Not a single woman rejects His invitation to believe in Him and His work. It is always men, in the evangelists' accounts, who prove unfaithful, turn their backs or abandon Him in need. Women are the first witnesses to His Resurrection.

The feminine character in the Gospels calls to mind Leon Bloy's famous expression: "The holier a woman is, the more she is a woman".

And Mary with her steadfast faith and spirit of initiative and help is the classic example of this character. Her "Answer of Yes" to the Lord, is the turning-point of all authentic liberation.

As a free and intelligent co-operator, Mary is the first of all liberated women.

## Help in Liturgy

Lady-chapels, as dear to Anglicans as they are to Catholics, seem to set Mary apart as an adjunct to the liturgy. They date from the Middle Ages.

Yet Pope Paul follows an older, richer theme when he opens his letter by exploring Mary's role in the heart of the liturgy. He is keeping to the older church-tradition: *Lex orandi, lex credendi*. The norm of prayer makes clear the norm of faith.

Why does the church preface many Marian feasts, Dr. Pius Parsch asks, by announcing that "today we rejoice in celebrating the feast of The Blessed Virgin Mary"? Because in doing so, he answers, it is keeping its own feast, joined with her in a mysterious Paschal bond. The church-role, like Mary's, is that of Christ's associate; its function of helping save all men, identical with hers.

Parsch could have turned to Albert The Great here: "Every day the church gives birth to Christ, through faith in the hearts of those who hear His word." Here it is Mary who joyfully reminds the church that its mission can be done because it has been done, already, by her, as the point of reference for the church.

There is no question of taking-away from the unique mediator, Jesus Christ. Her auxiliary role in prayer is totally subordinate to His. Her function as helper can never be viewed in isolation from her Son's intercession to the Father. Neither can the auxiliary-church.

Even so, Mary does have a distinct function in church worship and practice. She is the Woman-closest-to-Christ and closest to us.

And so in the church Mary is always one of the community and at one with the community. "Through Mary we are all related to Christ", writes Robert Faring, S.J., (And, notice, not to Mary through Him!). "Because it is through Mary that Christ has related all men to Himself at His birth; and through her continues to relate all men to Himself in the Church".

The very earliest Marian prayers, feasts and inscriptions confirm this community tradition: They are a plea from the assembled faithful for Mary's help.

The 'Sub Tuum Praesidium' ("We fly to your protection, Holy Mother of God; do not despise our petitions or needs, but graciously hear and answer them") of the 3rd century is an ideal example of such a community approach. It is the oldest Marian prayer known.

The 'Orante' of the Catacombs, a woman at prayer with uplifted hands, combines in one figure Mary and the Church. Two of Rome's oldest frescoes portray Mary as a liturgical figure, seated between the apostles Peter and Paul; as do the eastern icons, with Mary depicted in the Basilicas as a powerful auxiliary - sometimes empress, sometimes shepherdess. Her 'Salus Populi Romani' - Help of the Roman People - image enshrines this Marian-Papal theme.

As early as the 16th Century the Greeks kept a solemn feast of Mary's Church Patronage (October 1st). Its opening prayer praised her "who intervenes to save the church in every need, because God has given her the special function of Helper of The Faithful."

The same experience of faith in Mary's church intercession can be read from the original Byzantine inscriptions. They call on Mary "to help the rulers, to help the church at Ephesus, to help the Bishop keep purity of faith, to help Kosmos and his family, to help her sick servant Michael", etc.

Archaeologist John Gnolfo, who worked at Istanbul with the support of Archbishop Roncalli (later John XXIII), collected over 1000 such Marian inscriptions. "More than half of them", he has noted, "invoke Mary's help in an ecclesial, social or personal form."

An Ethiopian hymn of 470 A.D., brought to light by an Anglican researcher, illumines Mary's special place in church prayer at the time. "We look to you, Virgin Mary, to whom prayer and petition are offered in all times and places. You are the hope of the church, the living petitioner of the faithful. Pray for us to Our Lord Jesus Christ to keep us in the true faith, and to help bring salvation to all believers."

## Wisdom in Icons

Covering the liturgy, Pope Paul referred to the Marian iconostasis in eastern churches. This is a set of icons that catch the eye on first entering. At the central door we see Mary as humble maid-servant answering "Yes" to the angel's message. Then in stages the series sets out Mary's life-episodes, climaxed by the whole sweep of the apse, revealing Mary assumed and crowned in glory. It is more than a spectacular picture-gallery. It unfolds the entire Mary-Church mystery, and our own part in it: from servant-helper to spouse of Christ.

In Russia this Marian synopsis takes the form of the Sancta Sophia, the Holy Wisdom, shrine. Here an eagle-winged woman dominates the entire Sanctuary wall. In one person, it enshrines the Virgin, the Church and each Christian believer, rising from a humble auxiliary role to attain Divine Wisdom with Christ, in heaven's liturgy.

Such representations indicate the basis of all liturgical prayer, and all Christian life: we are Christ's lowly coadjutors.

### **Marian Pastoral Contact**

Father Joseph Perrin, the French Dominican writer on Mary, blind since the age of eleven, laments "the lack of Marian voltage" in the modern church. "There is no point of contact", he writes, "between Mary and real life. And so no effective current flows."

This pastoral gap between Mary and experience is illustrated by an incident related by Father Platt, an English priest writing in the *Clergy Review*.

"As I watched the Mexican pilgrims come and go in their new Guadalupe Basilica recently, - a building so Mexican, so modern, my attention was caught by a young family approaching the altar. The father, hardly more than a boy, carried a sheaf of lilies and a piece of clothing. The mother carried the baby almost smother-wrapped in local fashion; a friend carried two votive lights. With a disarming candour and dignity the father explained how the baby had been at the point of death, and how they had prayed to Our Lady of Guadalupe for his recovery. This was their thank-offering.

" 'May I bless the baby,' I asked. 'Si, padre', he nodded.

"I walked out into the crowd on the darkening streets, thinking the blessing had really been on me more than on the child. I had seen the Presentation in the Temple, and mingled with people familiar with God."

This same blend of reverence and fondness towards Mary - simplicity and mystery, transcendence and imminence, - the eastern liturgy has been able to keep in its worship and pastoral practice.

In the western church we have not been so fortunate. With our mania for logic-chopping and vivisection, we often tend to reduce Mary to an abstraction, a theology. "And abstractions", Karl Rahner drily observes, "have no need of a mother." As a result we have been left with private Marian devotions stranded on one extreme, and bone-dry Marian studies out of touch on the other. Changing social conditions of today plead for an integrated approach in pastoral life.

Among others, three praiseworthy attempts have been made to bridge the Marian gap with pastoral practice. The authors are Hugo Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx and Cardinal Suenens.

Father Hugo Rahner focuses on Mary's presence at our baptism. In a splendid chapter "Mary at the Font", he recalls how the very title "Mother Church" has come about. The early church constantly saw the womb of Mary as the womb of the Church. So Pope Leo the Great could write, "God has given to the water what He gave to his Mother". His inscription on St. John Lateran's baptistery still reads today, "The Church,

Virgin Mother, brings forth from the water the children she has conceived by the breath of God."

From this stems Mary's intimate link with Easter, the Church, the Sacraments, and all believers in the great Paschal Mystery; as she mothers and initiates each Christian into the life of faith. "Our piety today", Rahner laments, "is often dull and joyless, because we have forgotten the origin of it all in baptism: at the font stands Mary, symbol of our Mother Church."

But birth is only the beginning. Like any mother worthy of the name, Mary stays with us as the years go on, to help bring us to maturity and adulthood in the Christian life. Our prayer life, our sacramental and Eucharistic life, our apostolic life all come under her ongoing care.

And yet in practice (till a few years back, at least) we have been strangely reluctant to allot Mary an effective role in the church life, especially in the Sacraments. Surely what any good catechist can do in state schools, preparing children for the Sacraments by instruction but still more by bringing them close to God by faith and kindly presence, is not beyond Mary. "Faith is communicated by believing people", and at all beginnings this is Mary's strong-point, as the Scriptures indicate. It is her specific function to foster the inner attitudes of faith, lowliness and self-giving, without which the Sacraments can never reach their full grace-effect.

If we are reluctant to involve Mary's pastoral help due to the institutional or priestly barrier, Schillebeeckx may help reassure us. "Mary received the Primordial Sacrament, Jesus Christ in person. Her help and saving mediation include the church both as a community of grace, and the church as a hierarchical institution. She is mother of both bishops and simple faithful."

It is a cue taken from Albert the Great, "All the members of the church are members in view of a ministry. But the Blessed Virgin was not chosen by God for a ministry, but to be an associate and a helper. As Scripture says, "Let us make a helpmate like unto him - 'in consortium et adiutorium'. The Blessed Mary is not a substitute; she is 'a helpmate and associate'."

There is great scope in pursuing this theme of Mary's pastoral help through all the other sacraments, besides Baptism. It is sound church tradition, not rhetoric.

Not only does Mary stand at the font, but she calls her children whom she has well-prepared in faith and inner-life to her Son's Eucharistic meal-table; she brings him when spiritually ill to the Divine Physician in Penance, praying for us sinners now; she proudly presents him for his adult patrimony and spirit-heritage in Confirmation; she takes the initiative in helping young couples start their public life as Christians in each Cana wedding; she perseveres in prayer with each deacon to help him absorb Christ's priestly spirit at Holy Orders; and she helps each sick Christian face up to the great rendez-vous with Christ at the hour of death in the Sacrament of Anointing.

To every Mass, at one with the oblation, the celebrant and the faithful, Mary brings that interior "Yes-surrender" that is the essence of all sacrifice. It is Mary who gathers us round the parish altar drawing us together in community prayer, as to the power-plant of our apostolic mission. And so at the heart of each Eucharistic Prayer, we pray to her "on whose constant intercession we rely for help".

### **Help of the Half-Defeated**

Cardinal Suenens has situated Mary's helpful presence in the very centre of our pastoral apostolate. He suggests a prayer for every worker in the apostolate, "Make my soul one with Mary's love and Mary's will to save the world".

He reminds us that missionaries to a new territory find that she has already preceded them there. "She has already filled the water-pots with water, and is only waiting for the priests who will follow her to bring about the miracle of Cana in Christ's name." With her the Christian apostle "goes with haste to help in the hill-country", prompt to take up the most difficult parish assignment.

To the sick, the young, the old, the needy, the careless and the sinful of every parish Mary comes, vicariously through her auxiliaries, as "help of the half-defeated". Georges Bernanos sees her "as younger than sin", - and so the most hardened sinner experiences new hope and fresh life with her help.

Mary's pastoral role was preached on the very day of Ephesus, by Cyril of Alexandria in his homily. "Through you, Mother of God, all people come to know the truth. Through you, the faithful are drawn to holy baptism and the oil of gladness. Through you, churches are founded everywhere among the nations".

A vital current flows through church life, once pastoral contact is made with Mary.

### **The Biblical Woman**

A half-truth was published recently in a study on Mary "In these last few years", it stated, "Protestants have begun to discover Mary THROUGH the Scriptures; Catholics to rediscover her IN the Scriptures."

Half true, because both approaches are of a piece. Christ's Gospel tells us very little of Mary or of her life, as biography. But it does evoke rich, mysterious depths in her relationship with Christ and His Church.

Mary's scriptural features will remain a vague etching, unless they are fleshed out and made come alive by the whole living tradition, liturgy, practice and teaching of the Christian church. Only then will Mary emerge as "a helper like unto him", Christ's associate; only then will we see her at one with us, our ideal helper.

Mary is the ideal biblical woman. As the Daughter of Sion, she never acts purely as an individual or in isolation from the community. She is aware that she represents the whole nation of Israel, bound by religious ties to the Temple and its liturgy; so that its official psalms and prophecies become part of her own prayer and mentality.

As a Virgin of Israel, her own race, she is ready to lose herself in the multitude, as Ruth had done: "Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live; your people shall be my people and your God my God." (Ruth 1,16).

At other times, Mary is prepared to emerge, as Esther and Judith before her, to bring saving help to her own people under threat. "Come to my help, lend me your hand, for I am alone and have no help but you (Esther, 4.18). At such moments she clearly sees her mission as "help of the oppressed, the support of the weak, the refuge of the poor" (Judith 9.11).

At such crisis-points she "will not mind her own life when the nation is brought to its knees" (Judith 13,19).

By prayerful osmosis and her own experience, Mary has become steeped in biblical thought and spirituality. Such Old Testament spirituality was marked by 'Doulia', a 'service of practical help' for the needy.

For Mary, then, to be God's "maidservant" means to give herself completely to such service. Above all, it means to identify with the 'Anawim', the Lord's 'Poor Servants'. In their low estate and gentleness, they had been set aside by the Spirit as Israel's surviving remnant, the saints of God in a lowly domestic church.

In a way such faithful ones were quiet revolutionaries, overturning at the base all the existing values in church and state. Unlike the ambitious pharisees, they measured wealth not in terms of large estates, fatness of flocks, barrels of wine and oil, and first place in the synagogues, but by self-capitulation to God, and by practical expression to needy people.

Their logic seemed hard to follow. They were happy and confident in a way out of all proportion to their natural talents; but they had put all their trust in God's fidelity and power. They would experience God's help, they had no doubt, because they had tried to help the poor and needy. No matter, then, how insignificant their daily life or how slight their own virtues, God was their sole hope. Nothing could shake

their faith in Him.

These little people, graced by God's Spirit, are at their best in the Infancy narrative. Here the forgotten people, Anna and Simeon past their prime, Elizabeth and muddled Zachary, lowly shepherds, and the quiet Joseph are all destined to see the Word revealed before their eyes. At last their childlike simplicity of heart is to penetrate the deepest Faith-mystery.

But it is at Nazareth, with Mary's firm "Yes", that we read the apex of this movement. She is the Poor Servant, graced to the full. Now overshadowed by the mysterious cloud of God's presence, she becomes a flesh-and-blood Ark of the Covenant.

From birth, Jesus is the Suffering Servant, par excellence. In His teaching, however, his walking blueprint for the Sermon on the Mount is to be the Mother whom He has known from childhood. In his eyes, she is the living Beatitude, happy and blessed through that gentle, peaceful spirit He has enjoyed as a child. In her, Jesus sees the meeting-place of the old and new church, the Synagogue and Pentecost.

If Abraham had been "Father in faith", Mary will be from now on our "Mother in faith". At times an heroic faith, but more often the faith of everyday situations, the simple pains and joys of every man and woman. It would direct all she had and all she did to Christ and to His Church.

For this reason, there are no passing, private episodes of Mary in the Gospel. What may seem a spur-of-the-moment helping-hand at the Visitation or Cana will be just as significant for the church as the more solemn moments of Calvary and Pentecost. They will all have a lasting, cosmic importance that will affect history for all time.

Her help is, without exception, ecclesial help, and will continue until . . . "all eyes have seen the salvation of the Lord".

### **Mary's Gospel Image**

"There is no Gospel of Mary", Father Bojorge neatly reminds us, "but without Mary neither is there any Gospel".

To examine Mary's role in the New Testament in closer detail seems to diminish her stature, in terms of prominence.

Out of the twenty-seven books, only seven give her a mention, and brief mention at that. Only three direct conversations between Mary and her Son are recorded, and in two of them Jesus seems very formal and aloof.

However, it is the epic-setting of such moments, and the whole context in perspective, that reveal the major importance of Mary's role in the Gospel. Let us look at Mary's image as seen separately by each of the synoptic writers.

Mark's Gospel has been called the Great Marian Silence. Only two short passages focus on Mary, and each of them could be interpreted as downgrading her.

In the first (Mk. 3,31) when a hostile crowd reminds Jesus of the presence of his mother and relatives, He answers the unbelievers sharply: "Those who do the will of God, those are my mother and brothers". In the second (Mk. 6,1) while teaching in his hometown synagogue, Jesus is taunted by the sceptic crowd, "Where did He get all this wisdom? Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary?"

Here Mary's lowly condition and Galilean background are used as bait to humiliate her Son before his hearers. She is held up to public ridicule with Him: the implied "behold the Mother" set beside a later "behold the Man". Mark's Marian silence is at last broken by Jesus himself (in Luke) "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it". With this Beatitude-type tribute to his first Great Believer, He is

repaying the help she has given Him by her steadfast faith in public.

This whole first half of Mark's Gospel must be seen as a prelude to the half-way climax, Peter's public profession of faith in Christ. For this, Mary's faith-profession is the helpful forerunner, so that again we have the Mary-Church connection.

Matthew's account focuses on Christ as Son of David, born of a woman. In it, there are strong echoes of St. Paul's single Marian reference, "God sent Him, born of a Woman".

To persuade his Hebrew listeners that the Kingdom is not won by pure bloodlines or Temple inheritance, but only by faith, Matthew's genealogy shows the Messiah is both Son of David and Son of God; that Jesus has a human-divine origin, as promised by the scriptures. In doing so he reveals, almost incidentally, that belief in Jesus as Son of God includes (and so precedes) belief in Mary as Virgin-Mother.

Mary's motherhood of faith, he intimates, is more important than her physical motherhood: she was first to give birth to Christ in her heart.

The fulcrum of all Matthew's account is Mary's twofold help through co-operation. First, she helps the Incarnation mystery begin by her assent to the Lord's request, in faith. And, secondly, she helps give social acceptability to the mystery by her consent to the marriage with Joseph. It is Mary's faith that initiates and helps the revelation of the 'Son of David - Son of God' to unfold in Matthew.

Luke's Gospel has been called the Marian Gospel. It is also the ecclesial one. From eye-witness accounts and domestic-church traditions, Luke is able to convey the immediate faith-experience of the first believers. In particular, he makes Mary come alive as the nursing-mother giving birth to and fostering the growth of Christ and his Church. Here Mary is no longer an idea, but the warm human mother.

It is Luke who makes his gospel vibrate with a thrill of joy, as God's Spirit swirls in to fill his maidservant with charismatic grace. But Simeon's sword of prophecy hangs there, as well.

Luke's is the Gospel of women, the social gospel, one of contemplative prayer, of compassion and help, of discipleship, of the 'Poor Ones of the Lord': of all those elements that go to make Mary what she is, as church-model. It sings with harmony, as it shows no tension between Mary's official function and her personal, spontaneous help for the church. She is the contemplative in action. By intuition at Pentecost, she knows her auxiliary role (See Acts), now prominent, now content to retire once again into the church assembly, as the need of the moment arises.

For all its moon-softness, there is nothing bland about Luke's study of Mary. There is, as well, a vigorous and red-blooded note, unexpected enough to be disturbing in such a setting, that is struck in the Magnificat; that Gospel Protest-Song, like the Hebrew Psalms or Negro Spirituals, demanding positive help for the poor.

In this biblical prayer, Luke has left us a compendium of the whole Mary-Church mystery with its Beatitude-motif of strength in weakness, joy in sorrow, help for the lowly. It is a theme revolutionary enough to have overthrown, over the centuries, current religious and social orders that had fallen short of the Gospel ideal.

"My Spirit rejoices in God my Saviour . . . because He has looked on his humble maidservant and his help is from generation-to-generation."

From the cumulative effect of the Gospel accounts, Mary emerges as Christ's associate and ours. In the church, it indicates, **Mary will be Help of Christians.**

## Mary in John's Gospel

It is in the fourth gospel that we find the deepest underpinnings for Mary's title, Help of Christians.

Here as Braum, Bouyer, Bojorge and other Johannine writers suggest, we have the 'Rosetta Stone' to help us decipher the Marian-Church enigma. Written much later, when the young church had had further time for reflection, John's account gives us a fuller, deeper insight into Mary's role than the earlier evangelists.

This Johannine theology has been called the theology of wisdom. Immediately the eagle-winged female figure of the eastern liturgy flashes to mind. This dazzling Sancta Sophia personifies the Mary-Church figure.

This winged-gospel adds a new dimension to Mary: Mary's help - that of militancy on a grand, cosmic scale. John labours to show Jesus setting out to establish His Father's reign of Justice and Love through a Kingdom. The collective forces of light, he intimates, will triumph in cosmic battle over the collective forces of darkness. Mary will figure as the strong Sancta Sophia, radiating light and power and help in this titanic struggle through history.

John's soaring theology has such tight unity that it demands a total approach. Any partial interpretation will present a hazard. But two Marian features do mark the fourth gospel. First, John never once calls Mary by name, simply "The Mother of Jesus . . . His Mother" (although he does name less important women); secondly, he concentrates on two inter-related Marian episodes as feature-points of his whole gospel: The Cana Marriage and Mary at Calvary.

Of the significance of John not using Mary's name, Bojorge writes: "There are many Marys in the gospel, but John is looking for a unique name, a title that will indicate her destiny never to be repeated. He has chosen well: the Mother of Jesus. That is what she and she alone was, and is, for all time".

Besides, John's primary aim is to manifest Jesus Christ as the living revelation of his Father's love, "His Father . . . The Father of Jesus". And so he juxtaposes, "The Mother of Jesus . . . His Mother", to keep this single theme and to make clear Mary's associate-help. When he records Mary's Cana intervention, "Do whatever He tells you", John is letting us hear her echo the Father's voice at the transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son: listen to Him". He is calling to mind the very Hebrew expression for the word "echo", which is "Daughter of the Voice".

The Cana Wedding in John is mysteriously related to Calvary in a way that defies full insight. As if by twin signals, at the start John alerts us to Mary's significant presence on both occasions. "And after three days, there was a wedding feast at Cana, . . . and the Mother of Jesus was there". And again at Calvary, ". . . there stood by the crucified Jesus, His Mother".

Yet in these rare (only three - Luke records the other when Jesus was but 12) face-to-face conversations between Mary and her Son, Jesus seems strangely distant in his tone. "Woman, what is this to me and to you?", when the wine fails at Cana; and "Woman, here is your son", at Calvary.

Mary and Jesus, however, as Braum notes, communicate by a language of veiled allusions, an initiate's secret-speech that they alone of the wedding guests, can understand. Only Mary can read him like a book, a mother's diary or a book of revelation.

His hour is not yet come. For the present, taken up with the duties of public life, Jesus is asking her to see Him as belonging to all, and to accept a temporary separation. "If", Newman comments, "Jesus seems to rebuff his mother because his hour has not yet come. He implies that when the hour does come, such separation will be at an end".

Jesus' mission of help is now officially beginning; Mary's will be later. She has anticipated the hour for both of them.

Mary's matter-of-fact remark, "They have no wine", John hints here, is rich in old allusions. It conjures up the Jewish proverb, "There is no feast, if there is no wine"; and triggers off a chain of biblical concepts:

The Old and New Covenant . . . old and new wine . . . burst wine-skins . . . the best wine till the end. With later hindsight we might add the parable of the wedding feast . . . Jesus not drinking of the vine till the kingdom . . . His Father as Vine-dresser . . . the apostles after Pentecost accused of being drunk on new wine . . . the water of mysterious origin at Jacob's well.

From it all, Mary shines out as the First Believer, the New Christian. Yet Cana will make sense only on Calvary.

John's Calvary scene takes in at one sweep - from Genesis to Apocalypse - the whole panorama of salvation. He uses the semitic device of "inclusion", letting the scriptural wheel finally come full circle from where he had set out: to Cana, and back even further to his own Prologue.

Jesus' last testament, then, bequeathing his mother "to the disciple whom He loved" is far more than a filial provision for her future welfare. It has a profound church bearing. This one disciple personifies all believers, whom Jesus loves in the 'agape' community, when he receives Mary "for his own" (into his home). Echoes of John's prologue drift in here. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (Jn. 1, 11): an echo deliberately evoked.

From this hour, Mary is officially the Mother of the faithful; till the end of history, The Help of Christians.

"Like any mother," Bouyer reminds us here, "at Cana Mary had to renounce possession of her child's life, to accept as all mothers must that He had to live his own life, going about His Father's business". Now at Calvary, she is asked to ratify this surrender by accepting Jesus' shameful death as his Father's final business. As the true 'Daughter of the Voice', she echoes the Father's will. As a true servant-helper, once more she gives her "yes" of consent. At Jesus' death, Simeon's prophetic sword transfixes her heart in a living Pieta.

Added to this, Mary is now asked to take on a heavier, larger function. As the Woman of the Proto-evangelium (Genesis 3,15) and Woman of the Apocalypse, John shows her constantly to be in pain giving birth to the new faithful, while the church issues with the water from the side of Christ, as Eve did from the side of Adam. She consents to nourish, protect, and bring that new community to maturity right through the dark desert of history, till the Covenant has been made perfect.

Mary will help, John intimates, now, always: her consent to be renewed by a "yes" after "yes" for each new believer till history's end.

What a strange "hour of glory" John gives us for Jesus and his Mother! Lifted up, He draws all men and all history to himself, as the Poor Servant of His Father with his mission accomplished. Beside him, his lowly servant-helper, with her mission in the new church just beginning.

The aloofness, the separation of Cana now melts into the loving intimacy of Calvary. This, suggests John in awe, is His hour, and hers.

So once again in "after three days" there would be another Wedding Feast with new Paschal Wine. "And the Mother of Jesus would be there."

### **Second Eve as Helper**

When the little peasant girl from Marsabielle returned from Lourdes there was great mirth in her village.

"The Lady said 'vous' (the polite form of address in French) to me", related Bernadette simply, "and asked would I do her the favour of coming back each day for a fortnight". That the Blessed Virgin should treat the obscure flour-miller's daughter as a refined young lady for the first time in her life was too much for Bernadette's peers. As if the Blessed Virgin, if you please, were herself a poor country girl! And so the general merriment.

This incident typifies Mary's place in the early Church-Fathers. They invariably saw her as a lowly help-servant, auxiliary of Christ and the Church: a Second Eve, not blinding us mortals by her glory, but "a helpmate like ourselves".

"Until recently", notes Jean Galot, "it was generally believed that Mary's intercession was a late development in the church. New discoveries have now shown that we can trace such intercession back to apostolic times".

It was this apparently late development that troubled a young Newman (see his Letter to Dr. Pusey); but he, too, came to revise his original estimate.

In the Church-Fathers, the four chief Marian dogmas are all there folded in embryo: Theotokos, Virgo, Immaculata, Assumpta. Mary is God's Mother, Ever Virgin, Immaculate One, and Assumed with Christ. But only after liturgical prayer and theological reflection over years would each definition come to light in due time in the Church. Always they were seen as part of the whole faith, inseparable from Christ's Incarnation.

All Mary's glories, the Fathers stress, are not for herself, but for her Son and his Church. She is a sign, and remains a servant.

Much older than any of these concepts, however, is the focus on Mary as The Second Eve. Even in the second century, Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian were already teasing out this line of thought that traces Mary as the New Eve in Christ's New Creation - the Church.

Their Eve-Mary analogy seems based on like and contrast: - virgin -and mother of the living; obedience - and disobedience; faith - opposed to experience; message from angel - and serpent respectively; a wish to be godlike - and being actually Godlike; death - and life, etc. But none of these seems compelling enough to convince us just why Mary should be considered as Second Eve.

Again Cardinal Newman comes to our rescue. He has salvaged up from the deep past the long-lost pearl of Mariology. In Genesis (2,18) he sees the Marian gem: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a helpmate like himself!" In the overall scriptural plan, this "adjutorium sibi simili" (helper like him) is at the core of Mary's relationship to Christ and to his Church.

Newman calls on Tertullian here to confirm Mary as Christ's key associate-helper, and ours. "God's love provided a helpmate so that his plan would be complete; for God said it is not good for man to be alone. In doing this God knew that man would be in need of Mary's help, and later in need of the Church".

This is also seen by Albert The Great as the Marian key: "The New Eve is ever associated with the New Adam in the capacity of a 'helper like unto himself", reads his celebrated passage. "The Blessed Virgin was chosen by the Lord", Albert continues "not to be his slave but his partner and associate . . . As his helper and assistant, she shares in the kingdom as she shared in the sufferings for mankind." The Dominican Master of Theology, M. M. Philipon, regards this "Colleague" passage as the key to the Marian mystery; and directs today's researchers to all of Albert's lucid works on Mary.

In this fundamental Mariology, Mary is regarded "as a help not a hindrance to Christ and the human family. So she is destined to help make and not mar his new creation". While Eve aspires to be god-like, answers "no", and claims total self-sufficiency as an experienced mistress, Mary in her faith gladly depends on God's help, answers "yes", and achieves God-like wisdom as a lowly servant.

This very admission of weak-dependence, in fact, makes Mary at one with the human family forever. Here, in her littleness, is Mary's secret of help and power; for the whole human race in its frailness, stands or falls by the bonds of mutual help. In this, the Fathers see in Mary what the Church is meant to be for all men; "a helpmate like ourselves", a feeble reflection, in turn, of God's help to humanity.

The same classic theme runs through Livius' huge volume, *"Mary in the Fathers of the First Six*

*Centuries*". It was a theme dear to two great Mariologists in Newman and Scheeben, and the inspiration of the Mediaeval Schoolmen, especially Albert The Great.

In the single statement, "Just as Jesus Christ is the Second Adam, Mary is the Second Eve", we have the early church-key. And the hinge of all is "Mary as a helpmate of like-kind to Christ and the Christian church".

It should be encouraging for us as Australians to realize that our pastoral concept dates from the very start of Mariology. And such a low profile theme should ideally suit the Australian temperament, as it did the working-girl from Marsabielle.

### **Basic Marian Principle**

"The world is spinning off its axis; the centre cannot hold. Things fall apart"!

Every science needs a principle of unity and cohesion, unless it is to fall apart like W.B. Yeats' war-torn Ireland.

Since the 1950's there has been a constant search for a central principle to give cohesion to Mariology. There has been a proliferation of new concepts, each opening up new vistas on the mystery of Mary: The New Christian, The Perfect Believer, First of the Redeemed, Mother of the Faithful, Archetype of the Church, etc. Some even posit a dual-principle, fusing into one double concepts such as Bridal-Mother of Christ.

Not just a spree of devout titles, they are all attempts to give stability to Mary's place in a rapidly whirling church that, in some eyes, appears "to be spinning off its axis".

In exploring such new fields, these efforts have gone away slightly from the traditional focal points, namely Mary as Mother of God, and Mary as Second Eve.

Treating of the Divine Motherhood, Laurentin poses a stumbling-block: "Every privilege and grace of Mary can be linked to it, but hardly a single one can be deduced from it"

Just as the Hypostatic Union is the very height of Jesus' glory, so without question the Divine Motherhood must be seen as the very summit of all Marian privileges: a summit to which everything leads.

*Marialis Cultus* reaffirms this unchallenged eminence of her Divine Motherhood as the most glorious role of all Mary's functions. But it does not close the door on further studies to find the underpinnings of this crowning grace. Ultimately, of course, it will be found in the pure-grace and choice of God Himself; but it is also of vital importance to the church to find what it is that predisposes Mary as a free, intelligent person, for that grace.

At the outset we can make a distinction that may help clear up earlier confusion. Throughout scripture's overall salvation plan, we find without fail a basic principle and a crowning principle, low point and high point, in the long pilgrimage of grace from faith to vision for every community and individual. First a test of lowly abjection and, after the successful servanthship, the crown of exaltation. This theme stares at us from the Exodus and Covenant accounts: a Red Sea, a Desert to be crossed and only after that, the cool green of the Promised Land. Scripture hammers this inexorable law for every spiritual wayfarer.

It is not a question, then, of a dual Marian principle; simply a point of departure, and a point of arrival.

Oddly enough, this fundamental distinction has not been kept in mind in making "the basic principle of Mariology" as one distinct from "the most eminent principle of Mariology".

When we do apply it, we cannot separate Mary in the total mystery of the Incarnation from Christ and His Church. What holds true for the basis of Christology and Ecclesiology (the doctrine of Christ and of His

Church), will be equally true for the basis of Mariology. Let us look at such bases.

For Christ, St. Paul clearly spells out this foundation: "Though He was in the form of God, Jesus did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. For which reason, God has highly exalted Him, "giving Him a Name above all others". (Philippians 2, 6-10).

Here St. Paul clearly spells out three steps on Christ's way to glory: KENOSIS (= self-emptying), DEATH, and EXALTATION. He also makes crystal-clear that the basis of all Christ's redeeming work is the lowly-servantship through KENOSIS.

In this Pauline passage, we have a remarkable parity with the Mary-Church-Eve theme of Genesis and the Magnificat: The servant-helper, the equal-to-God concept, the likeness to us men, the obedience-to-death test, the lowliness as the precise reason for exaltation. It is a rich mine, still hardly touched.

For the church, as the extension of Christ's saving work in time, we find the very same basis. It is, without dispute, its Servantship of the Servants of God. "The church is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim humility and self-sacrifice, especially by her own example" (*Lumen Gentium*). As an auxiliary-helper, and only in this lowly stance, as Christ's associate, will the church find its real basis. And the very same humble basis, paradoxically, is the grounds of hope for its own future glory.

As it is with Christ and His Church, as it has been throughout all salvation-history, so must it be with Mary. The basis of all her glories is her willing kenosis, when the maidservant by her "yes" makes herself at one with Christ and the servant church.

This is precisely Mary's self-portrait in Luke: "Here I am, the maidservant of the Lord . . . My spirit exults in God my Saviour BECAUSE He has looked on his lowly servant . . . and God has come to the HELP of his Servant Israel".

And so the basic principle of all Mariology is a lowly one, indeed: as lowly as the Kenosis of the Suffering Servant, and of the Servant-Church. Basically, she is the servant-helper of Christ, as Help of Christians. For this very reason, for no other, she "will be blessed by all generations". She is the binding-link that ties the human family together as a community of mutual help, as it in turn is linked to the help of God.

One wonders whether Mary could ever be regarded as "an obstacle to reunion and ecumenism", if this lowly auxiliary-basis were always kept in mind.

### **Lepanto not the Origin**

An old Flemish hymn to Our Lady sings that "love has given her a thousand names". However it is the depth of revealed truth that underlies it, rather than fond devotion, which gives lasting, objective meaning to a Marian title.

On this score, Mary, Help of Christians is on solid ground. From the start, its Mary-Church theme has been an integral part of the faith life of the Christian community.

Like most Marian truths, the title only gradually emerged into full light in later history.

Three events in the church-story were to bring it dramatically into prominence: two sea and land battles against Islam forces at Lepanto (1571) and Vienna, and the return of Pope Pius VII from exile. In all three, Mary's help, (with the Rosary) was to hold centre-stage. But if history has been its spectacular ambient, its origin still lies in scripture.

As a community title it first appears in the Marian litanies somewhere between the 12th and 16th centuries. It is found among the so-called Marian-ecclesial titles that can be used with equal truth of the church or the

Blessed Virgin ("Tower of David", etc.).

The first known litany that includes this title was published at Dillingen, Germany, by St. Peter Canisius in 1558, and discovered by the Jesuit Paulus at Monaco. As early as 1524 another copy carried the titles Advocate of Christians and Help of Sinners, which slipped by an easy transition into the Litany title as we now know it. By 1570 (again before Lepanto), these litanies were in wide use in Rome and beyond. The old Roman decree, then, for May 24th that claimed "this title was inserted into the Loreto Litany by Pope Pius V after Lepanto", can no longer be sustained; as historian Von Pastor has demonstrated in detail. [Though Pius V obviously made prior custom and practice 'official'.]

Over the years in the popular mind the title has been associated almost exclusively with the Lepanto Battle and Pius V (1571). While the victorious Christian fleet did pay public tribute with Don John of Austria and Rome's MarcAntonio Colonna to "Mary, Help of Christians, Our Lady of Victory" on their triumphant return, any official link of the title with Lepanto is hard to find. Von Pastor even questions (but against weighty evidence from Roman ambassadors of the time) the well known Lepanto vision of the Dominican Pope:

"Kneel down, gentlemen, this is no time for business. Mary has given us a marvellous victory".

In any case, there is no doubt how people in the street regarded the victory over the Islamic threat to the church. Lepanto was to spawn thousands of tapestries, paintings, banners, and literary tributes to Mary that can still be seen in the sacristies, galleries and museums of most European cities. Two motifs catch the eye: the Rosary, and the inscription "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us".

As a catalyst, it was to give instant impetus to the devotion throughout all the alpine countries, Churches, shrines and confraternities (over 700 in less that a century) of this title spread with incredible speed and enthusiasm. Rome, Loreto, Monaco and Innsbruck (Bavaria) were the chief centres of the devotion; and German-speaking migrants were to take it with them all over the world (including the U.S.A.). Many Germans kept the shorter title used by early church fathers: "Mary-Helper".

When John Sobieski's Polish troops held out at Vienna against two million Ottoman soldiers in 1683, using this same Marian invocation as their rallying cry, this devotion (with the Rosary) became firmly established in Catholic folk-tradition.

With the hindsight of later history, we may feel some embarrassment in a calmer, less triumphant age at this militant Lepanto connection. We cannot rewrite or, still less, unwrite history tailoring it to suit later ecumenical or pacifist trends. But we can try to see it in better perspective.

At a time when church and state were so closely intertwined, it was not always easy to distinguish between religious and national aspirations. There was heroism and religious idealism on both sides. There were also, in this "collision of strong creeds", excesses and fanaticism. Crusades are seldom clean. And so it has not been easy to shake off the charge of a counter-reformation siege-mentality from the Help of Christians title.

But from it all Mary emerged as Champion of the Church, the help of Pope, Bishops and faithful when survival was a question-mark. It was seen as a Marian epiphany.

The original plan of the Christian League had been for an invasion of the Dardanelles; and the actual battle of Lepanto took place not far from the shores of Gallipoli.

In 1971 Pope Paul VI restored the purple-silk Islamic banners, captured from the Ali Pasha at Lepanto, to Istanbul. Earlier all reference to Lepanto had been omitted from the revised Breviary lessons for May 24th. A new approach in a new age had begun.

**Late as a Feast**

As a feast the title found its way into the liturgical year through Pope Pius VII in 1815.

Napoleon had responded to his excommunication in 1809 by abducting the pontiff and pressuring him to sign a treaty that would give the emperor Gallican powers over church and state in France and all conquered territories. Anti-clerical newspapers at the time predicted, "Not Pius VII, but Pius The Last". But at the height of his victories, while Rosary petitions went up for Mary's help, on behalf of the frail exile at Fontainebleau, Napoleon met both his Waterloo and the winters of Moscow.

On May 24th, 1814, Napoleon signed his abdication from power, the very day when Pius VII returned from his five-year exile to a tumultuous reception in Rome. A year later, a decree proclaimed the feast "to commemorate the un hoped-for help of Mary most holy towards the Pope and the Christian People".

Many papal encyclicals have stressed the impact of Mary's social mediation for the church. Most important of them was Leo XIII's complete letter on this topic in 1896. It is entitled *Adjutorium Populi*, "*The Mighty Help of the Christian People*". Its general theme is the constant help of Mary, particularly for church unity, through the Rosary.

The Pope singles out Mary's help to the Church, to the apostles, to the early Fathers, to Popes, rulers, and cities; to believers of both east and west, towards brotherhood with our separated brethren, for world peace and unity. Pope Leo quotes, as a common heritage, a present-day Greek prayer for unity: "Virgin Mother, beseech your Son to give peace to the world, and to breathe one mind and heart into the Christian churches. And so we shall all magnify you." It is a precursor of the ecumenical voice of Pope John XXIII.

From all this, a long-standing misconception needs to be cleared up regarding the origin of our patronal title. Its historical links, as they stand, are transitory not essential ones. In fact, Mary is Help of Christians not because she intervened dramatically as church-auxiliary at Lepanto, Vienna and Fontainebleau. The reverse is true: Mary's aid saved the church at such decisive moments precisely because she has always been and continues to be the Help of Christians, in God's constant plan.

Had such victories never taken place, Mary's ecclesial help would still be experienced and held in veneration by the faithful. These victories are simply the epic manifestations of her function, an ongoing one, that stems from her relationship with Christ and the apostolic church. They are visible reminders but not the origin of the devotion (or title), any more than Margaret Mary and Paray-le-Monial could be considered the origin of the Sacred Heart devotion.

At the present time the title "Mother of The Church" says much the same as our patronal title does. Still, ours has not been duplicated. Besides her spiritual motherhood of the faithful, it also denotes Mary's timely presence and aid for the church in crisis; and in this it remains unique.

At his closing address at the end of Vatican II, Pope Paul's last words clarified this theme: "You, Virgin Mary, Auxilium Episcoporum, 'Help of Bishops', protect and assist the Bishops in their apostolic mission; and all those priests, religious and laypeople who help them in their difficult work. To you Mother of the Church, we recommend the entire church and the fruits of this Ecumenical Council. Remember the Christian people."

## **Mary in Australia**

The excellent T.V. series "*Against the Wind*" reminded us of the dignity and strength of many early penal-settlers in the face of inhuman treatment. This was particularly true of many Irish Catholics.

The Marian quality stamped on the early Australian church by such lowly servants seems very appropriate. Mary is the lowly servant par excellence.

The broad outline of our Marian story has often been told; but it merits a brief retelling here, before passing on to its less well-known connection with Mary specifically as Help of Christians.

In cameo, we can recall De Quiros and the Spanish Conquistadores' vow "to erect first in the South Land a chapel to Our Lady"; the earliest known Catholic-grave, Bridget Egan's at Parramatta in 1800, with its engraved Rosary Beads entwined on the headstone cross; the transport ships with the Catholic-convicts (as a Royal Navy surgeon testified) "huddled together counting their beads in prayer"; the two convicts taking the lash or the stocks "rather than have their beads laughed at."

Among free or emancipated settlers the identical theme continued: the layman's ex-tempore Marian chapel in Sydney Town "as crowds spilt over onto the footpath from the Davis home, Sunday after Sunday, reciting Mary's Rosary and Litany, praying her to send a priest"; Father Therry, on arrival, dedicating "the first church in the colony to Our Lady Help of Christians"; the patriarchal Dr. Polding intervening dramatically in Rome "to have Mary's Immaculate Conception defined without further debate"; and "the hundred ounces of gold from Ballarat diggers" used by Pius IX to strike Mary's commemorative medals at the Definition celebrations.

From the above memory-snippets, the episode of the two convicts deserves fuller treatment. The first convict, John McCernan, refused to attend Protestant services at Castlereagh. "He protested to the overseer," Eris O'Brien records, "at being compelled against his conscience to attend a service where (in his own words) 'they would make a laughing-stock of him and his beads.' He was then put in the stocks for some hours."

The second convict, simply designated as "Old Carey", was a carpenter in the road gang on the Cowpastures near Liverpool. In 1824 he refused to attend Anglican service, and received one hundred lashes. "Later he had Father Therry present his case to the Governor", an eye-witness recalled in the *Australian Chronicle* of 1841; "after which Catholics were excused attendance, and were marched instead to the barracks where Mr. Dwyer led the Rosary for us." We often reflected, "Well, we are indebted for this favour to poor Carey - the man who was flogged".

This same epic-quality in our early Marian story can be discerned in the settlement of the separate colonies. A repeated pattern can be traced. While waiting for priest and hierarchy to come, a group of lay people would gather for readings, hymns and Mary's rosary; pleading for help, as the Macedonians once appealed to Paul, "Come over to us and save us."

And so the Dempsey, Bodecin, Mooney and Phillip households in Sydney Town, Port Phillip, Swan River and Wakefield Settlements became, respectively, isolated centres of Marian devotion; in what are now our capital cities.

In "*Around The Boree Log*", John O'Brien depicts the later Marian tradition among pioneer families of the outback. "I can see that little mother still and hear her as she pleads 'Now it's getting on to bed time; all you children, get your beads.' There were no steel-bound conventions in that old slab dwelling free, only this - each night she lined us up to say the Rosary."

There is a biblical echo of the remnant here, the Poor Ones of the Lord, in their intuitive Catholic sense. At their humble beginnings they turned instinctively to Mary's help as the early church had done: the Marian-ecclesial thread that runs through all history, discerned by our country's simple pioneers.

Later there would be the three impressive Marian Congresses in Melbourne (1904), Adelaide (1937) and Sydney (1976), and a wide range of Marian confraternities and movements.

Still one wonders whether we have ever quite recaptured the charism of Australia's pioneer lay-community, so close to the very heart of the Mary-Church mystery.

### **Mary as our Patroness**

Over the years we have come to call Australia's mother church in Sydney "St. Mary's Cathedral". The foundation stone, instead, reminds us that the original title was "Mary, The Immaculate Help of

Christians".

Just how this title came to be chosen is a puzzle to be pieced together from fragmentary records and conjectures.

It seems likely that it was the choice of lay Catholics themselves, as they leant heavily, as the first church did, on Mary's help for the establishment of the institutional church. It was precisely during this priestless period (1802-1819) that Pius VII returned to Rome from exile and instituted the feast of May 24th.

That this dramatic episode had deeply impressed and struck a sympathetic chord in the hearts of Irish Catholics is proved by the Pope's subsequent letter of gratitude to the Irish Bishops and faithful, thanking them for their loyalty to him in exile, and for their joy on his return to Rome (*Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 1865 pp. 441-443). Similarly in 1816 we find Edmund Rice asking his Christian Brothers "to offer special prayers to Mary, Help of Christians", when their young Institute was under threat.

To confirm this, Archbishop Kelly's pastoral letter of 1904 lends strong weight: "From Rome the first Catholics here had brought devotion to Mary, Help of Christians. Who was the patroness selected by the people and Father Therry for their new mother-church? Mary Immaculate, under the special invocation of Help of Christians."

Indications are that Father Therry simply watered a Marian seed already planted by the church-minded lay people. He had been ordained priest the very year of Pius VII's return to Rome (1814). At Carlow seminary, he had studied under Father James Doyle and Father Andrew Fitzgerald, O.P. (later President of Carlow), both devotees of Mary's role in church history. The Dominican had been stationed at Rome's Minerva Church, where many trophies brought there by the victorious Lepanto League can still be seen.

In 1841 Father Therry wrote to Archbishop Polding requesting that Australia be dedicated to Mary's name. This suggestion was taken up by the first Provincial Synod in 1844 which, by a decree subject to Rome's approval, declared that "the Most Blessed Virgin Mary should be invoked under the title Help of Christians as Patroness of Australasia on May 24th." (New Zealand, then, seems to have been included in the original.)

Thus at the first assembly of bishops ever held in the British dominions since the Reformation, Mary was re-accorded her place of honour. It was a long way and a long time from Sydney Town to Walsingham; but the Southland was to become her "Second Dowry".

Strangely enough the Synod's official acts and decrees make no mention of this patronal petition, but such a decree did exist, as Monsignor McGovern was to show. He brought to light a long list petition to the Holy See, written by Dr. Polding in 1847, in which our Marian decree is expressly quoted.

Although not officially approved by Rome till 1852 (due to the decree going astray in Bishop Pompallier's mislaid suit-case!), our patronal feast was already being celebrated in Sydney as early as 1844. So the *Morning Chronicle* of that year reads: "Votive Mass of Mary, Help of Christians, the title under which She is Patroness of our Ecclesiastical Province". In 1847 a plenary indulgence is granted "to those who receive Holy Communion, under the usual conditions, on May 24th each year." By 1862 an *Ordo*, still in St. Mary's archives, gives May 24th as "a double of the first class" (Solemnity, today).

While Dr. Polding was away in Rome, Archdeacon McEncroe took it on himself to publish a melodramatic letter on Australia's "real peril of a Russian invasion" during the Crimean War! The whole letter reminds the diocese of Mary's powerful assistance throughout all history as Help of Christians."

In the pioneering Adelaide diocese the first permanent church built there at Morphett Vale was dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians; and Bishop Murphy of that diocese was to mention this devotion frequently in his homilies.

The Lady Altar at St. Mary's, Sydney, with its statue of Mary, Help of Christians, was erected as a

memorial to Father Therry's name.

In this remarkable way, Australia became the first nation in the world to have as Patroness, Mary, Help of Christians; the first church to celebrate May 24th on a national scale (elsewhere the feast was restricted to Rome and specified places); and the first country to have a Mother-Cathedral under this same title.

### **Australia's later Patronage**

Begun so well, Australia's patronal feast was to fall on more apathetic times. In 1854 the ardent Dr. Polding was to boast that "nowhere in the world is the Dogma of Mary Immaculate celebrated with greater favour than in this country and church dedicated to her, as the Immaculate Help of Christians."

But by the 1890's we find Cardinal Moran trying to revive falling enthusiasm by bringing all Sydney's schoolchildren together at St. Mary's each May 24th for a patronal Mass. He made repeated efforts to link our patronage with Australia Day celebrations on that same day (until the National Day was later transferred to January 26th). In this, he hoped to evoke an Australian church identity. Prophetically, he also wanted the Australian church to be a centre of Christian help to its Asian neighbours.

Local seminaries made similar efforts to arouse flagging popular interest in May 24th. Thus the Corpus Christi students (Victoria) were instrumental in the 1930's in having The Prayer for the Conversion of Australia (to our patroness) inserted as a regular petition at Benediction. The Manly seminarians of the 1920's, through their College Annuals, were to foster the same revival of this Australian-Marian church theme, with some measure of success.

In 1942 a Sydney Synod decreed that "all churches in the archdiocese should keep May 24th in a solemn manner, preparing for it by a novena in each parish"; while Dr. Mannix ordered "special prayers to Mary, Help of Christians for the welfare of Australia as a Christian nation".

Over the years, individual diocesan priests and religious orders have made their contribution towards our national devotion. In Sydney, Monsignor McGovern did valuable work researching the origins of the local devotion; a work carried on at even greater depth and length by Father Ambrose Ryan, O.F.M.

In Melbourne, Father Joseph King set up a centre of this devotion as his parish church of Our Lady, Help of Christians at East Brunswick. He had an artist from his parish, John Hennessey, travel especially to Turin to make a copy of Don Bosco's ecclesial portrait of Mary among the Apostles. Later pastors in the same parish were to print and distribute popular books of devotion to our patroness. Father Norris of Coburg spent years and thousands of dollars having pictures of our patroness, set within the Southern Cross constellation, printed and spread throughout the country. "Our patroness in every Australian home" was his express wish.

As an annual event in the Townsville diocese, week-long celebrations for May 24th have been climaxed by a Eucharistic procession through the city streets. And in Tasmania, as this is written, Father Terry Southerwood is building an outdoor shrine to Mary, Help of Christians, attached to his new memorial church at Kingston. [1979]

Shortly before his death in Canberra-Goulburn diocese last year [1978], Archbishop Cahill announced plans for a national shrine to Australia's Patroness to be built in our capital city; while the number of new parish churches under this title is on the increase.

The Salesian congregation has also tried to popularize this devotion, publishing, among other material, two A.C.T.S. pamphlets on this patronage. [Numbers 1291 and 1526]

A stirring hymn to Australia's Patroness can be found in the *Living Parish Hymn Book* (No. 103), composed by Richard Connolly, the Sydney musician.

"Help of Christians, guard this land,  
From assault and inward stain;  
Let it be what Christ has planned,  
His new Eden where you reign."

That there are some indications of a comeback for our Marian patronage is revealed by a letter to the *Advocate* (22nd February, 1979):

"While holidaying at Torquay, I was privileged to attend the special Australia Day celebrations at the parish church. Arranged appropriately for January 26th, Rosary and Benediction were followed by a procession in honour of Our Lady, Help of Christians, Patroness of Australia. I am told the idea came from the Legion of Mary, supported by Father Linane. Many people expressed their appreciation. I commend this effort to link our National Day to Our Patroness."

In a letter to the Armidale Diocese (1961), Pope John XXIII rejoiced that "through Mary's help the Faith in Australia had grown vigorously despite initial difficulties."

We have a precious heritage in our patronage of Mary, Help of Christians. It is at the very heart of the Mary-Church mystery, so old and so new, so universal and so Australian. It has close rapport with our national history, ethos and identity.

It stood us in good stead in early years "against the wind", and it is needed today when society pleads urgently for a life-style and legislation that reflect Christian values of a christian people. In the social field, especially, we are being challenged to pass on Mary's help to the poor and underprivileged, in a world that is guilty for the plight of refugees, boat people and so many unwanted.

### **Don Bosco's Marian Mission**

Don Bosco's name calls to mind two memories of Popes of our time.

The first, "When I was a boy of twelve," writes John XXIII, "I tore out a picture of Mary, Help of Christians from an old *Salesian Bulletin* and pasted it over my bed. What simple confidences and prayers that picture has looked on! Never once has her help failed me . . . Now I dedicate this coming Vatican Council to Mary, Help of Christians, Help of Bishops."

And the second, "I learnt my devotion to Christ the Lord from my good parents. But my devotion to Mary" recalls Pope John Paul II, "I got from the Salesians in my boyhood parish of Cracow". ("We often saw the young Wojtyła", writes a boyhood companion, "kneeling at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians, with the rosary in his hands.")

Don Bosco, the Salesian founder, saw in the title Help of Christians, a synthesis of Church History. For him it had a strong Roman, ecclesial appeal, showing Mary's relationship to Christ and the beginnings of the church. And so he was to become the modern apostle of the devotion, popularizing it through his works and the printed word first in Northern Italy and then throughout the world.

"All my work", he later admitted, "began with a simple Hail Mary for Our Lady's help".

In his initial work for poor apprentices, Don Bosco took up the local Marian devotions of the time, especially to Our Lady of Consolation; gradually turning to the Mary Immaculate title at the Definition period of the 1850's.

But in his full maturity, from 1858 onwards, when he saw the ecclesial impact of the title Help of Christians, so apt for the anti-clerical times of the Risorgimento, he was to become a champion of this Marian-Church devotion.

"We live in troubled times", he told an assistant, "and I see that the only hope for the church, now and in the near future, will be to turn to the strong help of Mary."

With this Marian mission in mind he wrote six pamphlets on the title, composed a blessing in her name for the sick (now recognized in the *Roman Raccolta*), founded the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and made Turin a world centre of this devotion. With fond exaggeration, locals called Mary "Don Bosco's Madonna".

To crown it all, he erected in Turin a magnificent Basilica to the Help of Christians, still the power-house of world devotion to the title. Its central feature is the Sanctuary picture he had painted, portraying Mary in her church-role, surrounded by the twelve apostles. It is a perfect compendium of all that the title implies.

It was to be a church built on faith, or better by Mary herself. On the first pay day, Don Bosco emptied his purse into the foreman's hand. "You see," he said, "the first instalment . . . the princely sum of five cents!"

From the Basilica he wanted the Salesians to go out to the world translating Marian devotion into a practical, concrete expression of Mary's help for the poor and needy as social, ecclesial action. One of his successors as Superior General was to write enigmatically: "Mary Help of Christians IS the Salesian Society". The same strength in weakness, help in crisis, and kindly presence among the poor: these, in Don Bosco's eyes, were the new reality of Mary's help in the modern world. It was no more than pastoral love in action.

As he lay dying of overwork in 1888, Don Bosco's thoughts were still of Mary. "All that I have done, everything done after me, is Mary's doing . . . If you have devotion to Mary, Help of Christians, you will see what miracles are."

Perhaps John XXIII and John Paul II could say "Amen" to that.

## Help of Ecumenism

I recall giving the Eucharist one May 24th some years ago at the Beagle Bay Mission in the Kimberleys. To receive the Host, an old aboriginal extended his hands on which there were no fingers, merely stumps. He was the victim of Leprosy. The prayer of St. Augustine came to mind, "Mary, Mother of the Whole Church, make us whole again."

The episode symbolizes Mary's role in bringing about church unity. The whole subject of Mariology seems a touchy one, where ecumenism is concerned. Some Protestant commentators such as Karl Barth have flatly called Mary's function in the Church "the greatest single obstacle to brotherhood and reunion between the churches." And the Help of Christians title, with its former militant connotations, may seem at first especially divisive.

This pamphlet has already quoted Leo XIII's *Adjutorium Populi* encyclical, where he lays stress on Mary's peaceful role to keep Christ's seamless garment as one, or to restore its unity. He puts into the mouth of Mary, as a Church figure, the tenderness of St. Paul, "My little children with whom I am in labour, until Christ be formed in you . . . And is Christ divided?"

Behind the apparently simple accusation of Catholics letting the Virgin Mary take away from Christ's unique mediation lies a deeper split; **the initial "ALONE" syndrome of the Reformers. The Christ alone, Grace alone, Scripture alone, Faith alone, etc. approach**, had it been kept in perspective as part of the total faith and not in prominent isolation, could have been of real worth in church reform.

Again, Orthodox theology in particular insists on the transcendent element in Marian prayer, and regards as suspect the child-like fondness of some catholic devotions to her.

Here Karl Rahner insists that "we must not be nervous or niggardly towards the Blessed Virgin for the sake of a supposed ecumenism; but give her her full scriptural and ecclesial place while avoiding excesses

based on pure sentiment."

This is the position taken by many non-Catholics, especially Anglicans, since Vatican II. The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded at Birmingham in 1975, has done much to restore Mary's rightful place in the Christian Church.

In particular, Professor John Macquarrie sees a new opening: "I believe the title Mother of The Church provides an interpretation of Mary's place on which Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants could agree."

This Marian-Ecclesial theme of our patronal title has everything in its favour, ecumenically. It is based on Mary's lowly servant-image, rather than on honours; it stresses her position as one of us in the believing-community; it invokes her not as Help of Catholics but as Help of all Christians; it fits in with the Eastern tradition of Mary as Protector of the Domestic Church; it shows Mary meeting non-believers (as potential Christians) more than half-way; it revives memories of Mariam (Miriam) venerated as Help of the Arab-Islamic world.

The prayer "Our Lady, Help of Christians, pray for us" was the official prayer (indulged) of the English Church Unity movement under the convert Father Ignatius C.P. (formerly The Honourable George Spencer) [of the same family that was to give the world Princess Diana]. (*Clergy Review* August 1977).

There are sound hopes of St. Augustine's prayer being fulfilled when, Mary as Mother of the Whole Church, "makes us whole again".

### **'Devotion' and 'Devotions'**

"To come across some Marian devotions in today's critical world", Newman drily observes, "is like stumbling upon love-letters in a police report".

Both Thomas Aquinas and Francis De Sales clearly distinguish between Devotion and devotions: the first an interior dedication to God's service, and the second an external display of that piety. They are complementary by nature.

In recent years we have been asked to "interiorize" our Marian Devotion, a tautology if ever there was one; since Devotion by its very essence is already interior. What is meant is that our external devotions of Marian piety should avoid any excesses of bad taste that let emotions get out of hand, in a form that could alienate non-Catholics.

In practice, the complaint concerns "culture" generally more than "religion" alone; and could be harmonized by new studies in acculturation. In a multi-cultural Australian church, we must, while keeping to the new restrained approach ourselves, show tolerance to other manifold expressions of Marian piety.

It is in this key area of prayer and contemplation that we find the real secret of Mary's help, as Servant of the Holy Spirit.

*Marialis Cultus* firmly encourages traditional practices outside the liturgy, but minus the excesses mentioned above. It singles out for special praise the Angelus and the Rosary.

The Angelus is seen as a rhythmic meditation on the deepest Mystery of Faith, integrated into its daily life. "If someone were to ask me how to become a saint quickly", writes Frank Duff, "I would tell him to say the Angelus with faith and meaning three times every day. It is the gate to the inner-sanctum of our Faith, The Incarnation Mystery and all its holiness."

Our patronal title, closely bound to the Rosary, gives us special interest in what the letter says of that devotion.

It stresses the Rosary's community nature as a prayer. Here Pope Paul lets a flood of light pour on to the concept of Mary's domestic help. "From the family rosary, the members can go out to promote justice together, to practise works of mercy, to dedicate themselves to helping their brethren, to share in local community apostolate, and play their part in liturgical worship." A wonderful insight into the social significance of Mary, Help of Christians!

It admits the Rosary can become "a body without a soul", if reduced to a mechanical, parrot-like repetition, without its soul of contemplation.

Like all "devotions", the Rosary, says the Pope, can be taken or left at personal choice. But "Devotion" to Mary cannot. It is an integral part of every Christian life; at the heart of the Faith-Mystery".

"Those countries", wrote the Anglican Dean of York, "that have lost faith in Christ, have usually begun by losing faith in Mary".

### **Changes and Mary**

As the old Guadalupe Cathedral in Mexico City slowly sinks on its foundations, a new Basilica has risen up beside it.

The many changes in Marian Devotion since the Council may leave us thinking that Mary is going down with the old Cathedral. If so, we can look with optimism at the clear-cut, imposing lines of the new Marian Shrine; as it represents all that is best in the revised approach to Mariology.

Such a fresh attitude is found in summary in four related sources: the Marian Chapter (Ch. VIII) of *Lumen Gentium*; the *Marialis Cultus* letter; the U.S. Bishops' *Marian Letter* (reprinted in Australia with a local appendix); and the Papers given at Sydney's Marian Congress. (1976)

They all indicate a Mariology based on liturgy, scripture, church practice, human experience, and, changing social patterns. They warn of extravagant displays, and emotional excesses, they suggest that by joining Mary with the work of Christ and the Church, we are advancing church unity. They ask us to see both Mary's glory and her humility, our church-model as lowly pilgrim of faith and servant of the Spirit. They hope to see her personal presence and help made meaningful for ordinary men and women in everyday life.

As a result, the study of Mary can no longer be seen in isolation, but at one with the study of Christ and His Church in the total Mystery of Faith.

In particular, the changes relate Mary to Christ in the Eucharist and to the social realities (the poor) of today. Such a fresh outlook may be illustrated by the following episode:

"A Dutch theologian," writes Edward Farrell, "whose devotion to Mary had faded told me of a visit he had made to the shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico".

"In that experience he recognized that all the contemporary apparitions of Our Lady had been to the poor, the illiterate, the unsophisticated - Guadalupe, La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima; as if to call the Christian community back to its primary identity with the poor, the 'anawim'. And the sign of authentic devotion at those shrines is seen in the depths of devotion to the Eucharist."

For all the changes, Mary is still Mary as she was in Christ's gospel: with all her glory, and with all her humility.

### **After Puebla**

Since Pope John Paul's Mexico visit, the eyes of the world have been on Puebla. From it, one great strength and one great weakness of the Spanish-speaking churches have emerged. Their strength is the vigour infused into catholic life by their Marian (Guadalupe) devotion; their weakness the inability to

translate Christian social teaching into daily, practical terms.

In the Australian church, the reverse is possibly true. We are a lot stronger on social action than we are on our patronal Marian devotion. By comparison, we take her patronage very much for granted.

After Puebla, we must try with the Spanish-speaking churches to integrate the two; seeing Mary, Help of Christians as the inspiration and effective supporter of our apostolic and social work in the Australian Church.

Mary's national patronage is more than just a token one. Her thoughtful intervention "They have no wine" can be translated into contemporary, local terms. "They have no home, no food, no job; they have no family, friends, or visitors; they have no parents, teachers, no ideals, no joy; they have no belief, no hope, no loving-kindness." Here we are led to that "mysticism of action" of Francis De Sales: the Church's love expressed by help.

We can hope that Mary is "keeping the best wine till now"; so that, through her help, and ours, Australia "may begin to believe in Him" as a Christian nation.

It is in her patronal role, that we can see in Mary "the calm vision and reassuring word for modern man", (*Marialis Cultus*).

### **Prayer for Patroness Approved**

The Australian bishops have announced that the Holy See has approved for use in Australia the following opening prayer for Mass on the solemnity of Mary Help of Christians, Patroness of Australia (First available Sunday on or after May 24th) [now to be celebrated ON May 24th]:

Lord,  
 You place deep in our hearts  
 the love of Mary, Help of Christians.  
 Through her prayers  
 grant wisdom to our leaders  
 and integrity to our citizens.  
 Under her protection  
 may Australia be granted harmony,  
 justice and peace.  
 We ask this through Our Lord  
 Jesus Christ, your Son,  
 who lives and reigns with you  
 and the Holy Spirit,  
 one God, for ever and ever.

The Australian Episcopal Conference, in May 1977, recommended readings for the solemnity as proposed by the National Liturgical Commission. These may be used if the Celebrant wishes.

#### **YEAR 1.**

Ecclesiasticus 4, 11-18. *Lectionary* p. 338.  
 Psalm 112 & Antiphon. *Lectionary* p. 801, No. 4.  
 1 Corinthians 1, 18-25. *Lectionary* p. 830, No. I.  
 Alleluia and Verse. *Lectionary* p. 774 (Sept. 15).  
 John 19, 25-27 *Lectionary* p. 806, No. 11.

#### **YEAR 2.**

Proverbs 31, 10-13, 19-20, 30-31 *Lectionary* p. 688.

Psalm: Judith 14, 18-20 and Antiphon. *Lectionary* p. 800, No. 2.

James 3, 13-18. *Lectionary* p. 1002.

Alleluia and Verse. *Lectionary* p. 752 (May 31).

Luke 1, 39-56. *Lectionary* p. 769.

### YEAR 3.

Genesis 3, 1-15. *Lectionary* p. 314 (verses. 1-8) and p. 372 (verses 9-15).

Psalm 102 and Antiphon. *Lectionary* p. 1040, No. 2.

Ephesians 3, 14-19. *Lectionary* p. 1071, No. 4.

Alleluia and Verse. *Lectionary* p. 802, No. 3.

Luke 8, 19-21. *Lectionary* p. 592.

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