Landas 19:1 (2005) 101-118

THE "DIVINIZATION" OF MARY OF NAZARETH IN CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION:
The Iconography of the Virgin Mary

René B. Javellana, S.J.

The term *iconography,* from the Greek *ikon* (image) and *graphein* (to write), has two broad meanings: *first,* as a creative act of producing an image of a sacred figure, whether as painting, sculpture, metal craft or textile, and *second,* as the act of decoding, interpreting, analyzing and understanding such an image.

This essay will concern itself more with the latter meaning. The starting point for analysis shall be some key images, the fruits of creative action.

Philippine Icons of Mary

Two strands in the iconography of Mary are found in the Philippines. These are best exemplified by two principal and early images of the Virgin introduced in the Philippines early in its history: the *Inmaculada* and the *Santo Rosario.* With the establishment of the Manila diocese in 1581 came the decision to adopt Mary under the title of *Inmaculada Concepcion* as the patroness of the diocese. The diocese then encompassed the whole Philippines; therefore, operationally and for all practical purposes, the *Inmaculada* was patroness of the whole

archipelago. The second image is the *Santo Rosario,* the most famous, carved of ivory in 1593. In both instances, Mary is depicted in queenly array, and in the latter, she holds the Christ-child and displays the rosary. The *Inmaculada* and the *Santo Rosario* took on many sobriquets, but the iconography of each remained distinct. The *Inmaculada* was known as *Birhen ng Antipolo, Nuestra Señora de Paz y Buenviaje, Nuestra Señora de la Porteria, Biglang-Awa, Virgen de las Apocalipsis,* while the *Santo Rosario* was *La Japonesa, Birhen ng Manaoag* and *Birhen ng Piat.*

Since the eleventh century depiction of Mary's *Transitus,* there has been a tug and pull between depicting Mary alone or with Jesus. It is instructive to note how the *Divina Pastora* iconography, venerated in Gapan, Nueva Ecija, evolved.

The devotion traces to the efforts of Fray Isidoro de Sevilla, who pioneered and promoted this devotion in 1703. Born in Seville in 1662, Fray Isidoro joined the Franciscan Capuchin convent of the city where, in 1682, he was professed and, five years later, ordained. With his companion, Fray Pablo de Cadiz, he promoted devotion to the rosary, while Fray Pablo founded many *cofradias* in the region. After he had returned from Cadiz, and with his travel companion, Fray Feliciano de Sevilla, he began processions in honor of the Rosary. During these processions much loved by the *Sevillanos,* a cross and a painted standard of the Virgin were brought.

After one such procession, while Fray Isidoro was praying in the choir of the convent, he had a divine inspiration (vision) to have an image of the Virgin painted, showing her as a shepherdess, seated under the shade of a tree with the Christ child on her lap. Lamb and sheep representing Christians or souls are gathered around the pair. Fray Isidoro commissioned the artist Miguel Alonso to Tubar to paint what he had seen, and the work was used as a standard during the rosary procession.

The devotion was spread by the Capuchins throughout Spain and the new world, and the image was declared patroness of the Capuchin missions. A liturgical feast was approved by Pope Pius VI on August 1795.

Fray Isidoro's original iconography gave the Virgin the title *Madre del Divino Pastor.* It is Jesus who is the shepherd and only indirectly are shepherd's attributes attached to Mary. The Mary-with-Christ image harmonizes with the Byzantine *Theotokos* tradition. However, in its transmission, the figure of Jesus and the sheep disappear and Mary is the one who is called shepherd (shepherdess).

Philippine Marian iconography comes after more than a millennium of development in Marian devotion and the imaginative portrayals of her through the arts. The twin iconographic strands are not a local invention but an inheritance. The rest of this paper is about how this inheritance came about and what it says about the dynamics of Christian life and devotion.

Beginnings of the Visual Tradition

Tradition has it that the first Marian image was painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist. Luke (who was also a doctor, according to tradition) created the prototype of what was to become the Byzantine *Theotokos* (God-bearer).

The Lucan origin of Marian iconography is legendary, probably suggested by the Infancy narratives in his Gospel, which seem to point to an intimate knowledge about the birth and childhood of Jesus. The fact is, for almost three centuries, Christian art was not publicly known but circulated within the small community of believers. Because of imperial persecution, early examples of Christian art were in secret places like catacombs. Some early manifestations of Christian art did not employ the human figure, but rather symbols and ciphers like the fish. Early manifestations employed classical motifs like Apollo or the shepherd for Christ.

A motif that appears in catacomb art is the praying figure called *orans* or *orante.* Some art historians have suggested that this figure represents Mary, but that is a minority opinion.

The sarcophagus of Junius Basso, cited both as an illustrative example of the marriage between scriptural themes and classical

antique sculpture and as an example of public art, comes from Rome of AD 360, almost sixty years after Constantine's 313 edict of religious freedom and tolerance.

Textual Sources

Literary sources have inspired artists as they created images. The chief text is, needless to say, the Bible.

The Bible. The references to Mary in the canonical texts are few, but sparse does not mean they are insignificant. Mary is mentioned in the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke, the Passion narratives of the Synoptics and John, and there are brief notices of her in the Synoptics and the Acts of the Apostles. At the expense of sounding like a harmonization of the Gospel witness, here in outline is what Scriptures say of Mary.

The Infancy narratives mention that Mary

- is from Nazareth (Lk. 1:27).
- espoused to Joseph, also of David's line (Lk. 1:27; 3:23ff; Mt.1:1-17).
- to her appeared the angel Gabriel, who announced that she was to be mother of the Messiah, conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:26-37).
- the angel tells Joseph not to denounce Mary but to take her as his wife (Mt. 1:18-25).
- Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth (Lk. 1:29-56).
- Mary sings the Magnificat (Lk 1:47-55).
- Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem of Judah (Lk. 2:1-20; Mt. 2:1-12).
- Mary and Joseph present Jesus in the Temple (Lk. 2:22-40).
- Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-14).
- Mary and Joseph find Jesus in the temple after he is lost (Lk. 2:41-51).
- Jesus returns to Nazareth and is obedient to his parents (Lk. 2:52).

During his public life, there is a brief encounter between Jesus and his mother (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21). The Passion narratives note that she stood at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:26-27). In Acts, she is among the disciples waiting for the spirit (Acts 1:14).

Patristic Exegesis. Following the analogical and metaphorical method of exegesis rooted in the classical tradition, the Fathers of the Church saw an intimate connection between the Old and New Testaments. They perceived in certain Old Testament personages and events foreshadowings of New Testament types. They saw the inchoate revelation in the Old fulfilled in the New. Thus, the Old Testament books were scoured to discover if there were any hidden spiritual meanings in the text. From this metaphorical approach to text, analogies and connections were drawn between Mary and biblical personages, notably Judith; Miriam, sister of Moses; Esther, the Beloved in the Song of Songs; and Eve, the mother of humankind. This metaphorical analogical exegesis became a fertile ground for Christian imagination, a vast landscape where artists could exercise their creativity.

The liturgy reinforced this nexus-building exegetical method through its choice of readings. Some harmony was sought between the Epistle reading and the Gospel, for instance, in the Tridentine Mass for the Annunciation, where the prediction of Isa. 7:10-15 of the Virgin conceiving and bearing a Son to be named Emmanuel is applied to Mary, or in the formulary *Salve Sancte Parens* for the feast of the Visitation, where the passage from Song of Songs 2:8-14 is chosen for the Epistle reading. Other examples are the Mass for the Epiphany, where Isa. 60:1-6 is predicated of the Magi that visit Jesus, or the Mass of the Assumption, which has as first reading the praises sung of Judith in 14:22-25, 15:10: "The Lord hath blessed thee by His power, because by thee He hath brought our enemies to naught. Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth."

The liturgy gave rise to poetry, to poetic tropes written in later centuries, where the same bridge-making exegesis operated and where laudatory praises were heaped upon biblical characters. These poetic

sequences or poetic expansions of the Alleluia before the Gospel were incorporated in the Masses of the Virgin; again, for instance, the *Salve Sancta Parens,* whose *Introit* (entrance verse) quotes lines 63-64 from a hymn (*Carmen*) written by the fifth-century poet Sedulius. Of the numerous sequences, four survived the Tridentine liturgical reform. These included *Stabat mater dolorosa (Hymnus de passione),* written by Jacopone de Todi (1230-1306) for the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, and the *Victimae Paschali* of Easter Sunday. The verses *"Dic nobis Maria, quid vidisti in via? Sepulcrum Christi viventis, et gloriam vidi resurgentis: Angelicos testes, sudarium et vestes. Surrexit Christus spes mea: praecedet suos in Galilaeam"* in the Easter Sequence *Victimae Paschali* (usually attributed to Wipo of Burgundy [1039], chaplain of the German Emperor Conrad II [eleventh century], also to Notker Balbulus [tenth century] and Adam of Saint Victor [thirteenth century]) have usually been interpreted as referring to Mary Magdalene, although there is a minor tradition that equates Mary with the Mother of Jesus, citing as biblical warrant the ambiguous line in Matthew about "the other Mary" (Mt. 28:1) who went to the tomb with Magdalene at dawn on the first day of the week.

Non-canonical sources. The Byzantine Liturgy celebrated as a principal feast the Dormition of Mary, that is, her passing, or as the Latins would call it, *Transitus Mariae.* The principal literary source for the feast is the writing attributed to John the Theologian (i.e. the Evangelist) but which was not part of the canonical gospels. Another important non-canonical source of information on Mary is the *Protoevangelium* of James (c. 150). Enjoying great authority, this apocryphal text was read in some Eastern liturgies. Other literary sources are the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.*

These non-canonical sources and pious legends (some passed on orally) were compiled and synthesized in the West in lives of saints. Although it can be faulted for lack of historical criticism, one of the most popular *vita* was the *Legenda Sanctorum* or *Legenda Aurea* (c. 1260), written by Jacobus de Voragine. Born in 1231 in Viraggio (now Varazze) near Genoa, Jacobus entered the Dominican order in 1244, was made bishop of Genoa c. 1292, and died in 1298. Arranged to follow the

liturgical year, the narratives in *The Golden Legend* served for many centuries as the authoritative reference for artists. Later compilations of saints' lives, dependent on Voragine and the same legends which he consulted, were also popular, like Pedro de Ribadeneira's sixteenth century *Flos Sanctorum.* This work, written by a Jesuit, was brought by missionaries to their assignments in the Americas and Asia, thus spreading hagiographic tradition beyond the confines of Europe.

It is in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire, with Constantinople, or Byzantium, as imperial capital, that Christian art entered its own and developed a unique form of expression. This period in Christian art lasted with vigor for about a millennium but was not without controversy. The Church was facing the Iconoclasts who declared that it was not proper, even idolatrous, to have representations of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints. The controversy was put to rest by the Church in a Council held in Nicaea, Asia Minor in 787 under Empress Irene and attended by 367 bishops. This seventh ecumenical council laid down the basis and justification for the making of icons with this proclamation:

> We define that the holy icons, whether in color, mosaic, or some other material, should be exhibited in the holy churches of God, on the sacred vessels and liturgical vestments, on the walls, furnishings, and in houses and along the roads, namely the icons of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ, that of Our Lady the *Theotokos,* those of the venerable angels and those of all saintly people. Whenever these representations are contemplated, they will cause those who look at them to commemorate and love their prototype. We define also that they should be kissed and that they are an object of veneration and honor *(timitiki proskynisis),* but not of real worship *(latreia),* which is reserved for Him Who is the subject of our faith and is proper for the divine nature. Honor rendered to the type (icon) is in effect transmitted to the prototype; he who venerates the icon, venerated in it the reality for which it stands.

A staunch defender of this teaching was Saint John of Damascus (675-745). Thus, the Council, clarifying the Church's official stand, paved the way for a vigorous artistic tradition that spread throughout the Mediterranean world, where examples of Byzantine type iconography

are found to the west in Spanish Cataluña, in Greece, the Middle East, and even further east in Holy Russia, where the tradition remained vigorous to the second millennium.

Byzantine iconography, because it was the work of monks or of artisans closely supervised by Church people, was conservative. It disdained originality and innovation and looked for faithfulness and adherence to tradition. Icons were judged for their conservatism and faithful transmission of tradition, not for novelty. Typically, the Byzantine *Theotokos* and *Christos Pantokrator* incorporated symbols of the Roman Empire. The typical Byzantine Mary is clothed in a tunic of blue and a mantle that is both veil and cape in reddish purple or crimson. Gold stars, borders and tassels decorate the outer cape. Handbooks of instructions for iconographers explained that the color blue of Mary's tunic represented her humanity and purple her sharing in the divine qualities because of her *Fiat* to God's will. Purple was the empire's royal color because since Republican times, purple dye was the most expensive in the market, such that Roman senators could afford only a purple strip to decorate their tunics and togas. Thus, this expensive dye was considered as most appropriate when referring to divinity.

The *Theotokos* was never separated from the Christ-child, which she bore in her arms or displayed in a roundel in her heart in the *Orans*-type Madonna. The child in Mary's arms has the proportions of an adult, not a baby, and he is dressed in royal robes of white or gold. The child overwhelms Mary, who gingerly holds the child with but one hand. Compositionally, Mary is subordinated to the Christ; she is background and throne to the eternal word made flesh—the Word sometimes symbolized by a scroll or a book.

Many variations of the *Theotokos* are found; some have distinctive names like Mother of Divine Love, or Mary of the Passion (aka Perpetual Help icon, a late-Byzantine icon from Crete). But always, where Mary is, there Christ is. But it is not the other way around. Christ can be all alone, as *Pantokrator* or ruler of all, with his hands

outstretched in blessing or holding the Book of Life; he can also be alone on a throne, with angels as his footstool.

Byzantine icons did not attempt nor care to reproduce human images as they "really are"; they did not care for verisimilitude or realistic renderings of holy persons. In fact, artists composed icons not by observing human models, but by geometry. Egon Sendler has pointed out that the features of an icon's eyes, nose and lips can be inscribed in a circle, the face in an even bigger circle and the head with the halo in a third outer circle. The icon's body is related to these concentric circles by a triangle where the base is the width of the lower part of half or bust portrait. The reason for this disregard of naturalism is the icon's intent of painting a theological and religious statement rather than a semblance or virtual image of the person being signified.

In fact, one method proposed for meditating on icons is to dissolve the image mentally. First, one looks at the icon until all its features are deeply ingrained in one's memory. Then, with eyes closed, one reconstructs the icon mentally from memory. Further on, one erases the icon little by little until one stands face to face with what it represents. Icons almost always have frames, either raised or drawn as a deep reddish brown around it. The frame reminds one that the icon is both mirror and window, mirror that reflects what it represents and window through which one encounters the person being represented.

The Naturalization of Mary. Unlike the East or Byzantium, where Marian iconography remained static, the West, during the Middle Ages, allowed a naturalism to creep into art. Its clearest manifestations surfaced during the twelfth century, the Gothic period, when lithe and wispy sculptures of Mary and the child appear. These images, dressed in the courtly attire of the era, with appurtenances of royalty like crowns, diadems, jewels, and scepters, are sculpted on cathedral facades or as free-standing sculptures in the round. The biblical warrants for the queenly Mary are found in the Song of Solomon and Psalm 44,

where the bride adorned in rich regal array is prepared to meet the groom, interpreted as Jesus or God.

Spiritually, the late twelfth to the fourteenth centuries were dominated by the figures of two saints, contemporaries of each other: Domingo de Guzman (born in Calaruega, Burgos, 1170; died August 4, 1221) and Francesco d'Assisi (born in Assisi in Umbria, 1181 or 1182; died October 3, 1226). Dominic and his eloquent band of preachers (Order of Friars Preachers established by Dominic in 1215) revived the Catholic faith and challenged the Albegensian heretics, while Francesco and his band of simple, nature loving *fratelli minori* easily became grist for romantic minstrels. *Il poverello's* direct, unsophisticated approach to preaching the Gospel caught the fancy of artists. Both Domingo and Francesco broke the time-honored reclusion of the monk, and founded a new mode of Christian presence combining prayer and active work in teaching, preaching and works of charity.

Both Domingo and Francesco valued simple people, the peasants, and in Francisan tradition an accent on the value of nature as a way to God was evident. This is elucidated in Francesco's hymn to *fratello sole e sorella luna* (brother sun and sister moon). This return to nature is evident in Giotto's paintings for the Franciscan church in Assisi and for the Arena chapel. In Giotto's hand, the Passion is no longer a quiet scene where sorrow, following the classical tradition, is expressed with restraint. It is time for the bursting of emotions, of hands pulled back in dismay, of tender touches and embraces. In this era, Mary becomes the Mother of Divine Love, the Madonna of the Smile; she is also the sorrowing, suffering dolorous mother with a pained expression on her face, not just the restrained sorrow of the Byzantine version. Giotto is a transitional figure. On the one hand, his works are still influenced by the Byzantine; on the other hand, he is striving for the realism so loved by the Renaissance. Giotto signifies the end of the Byzantine style in the West and the beginning of a new artistic movement that flowered in the High Renaissance.

Dominic's popular preaching and Francis' unsophisticated approach (which dramatized the story of Christmas by building a

crib) indicate that Western Europe—except for the clergy, monks, lawyers and some nobility and merchants—was largely illiterate. This illiteracy was the ground in which narrative illustrations of biblical and hagiographical stories, transmitted orally or visually, flourished. True enough, during the Byzantine period, biblical scenes were already illustrated in the section of the iconostasis dedicated to the principal feasts, but these scenes were limited. With the invention of stained glass windows during the Gothic period, artists had a wide canvas on which to fill scenes. Stained glass, frescoes and painting were the Bible of the poor. By looking, they learned about the faith. Not only Gospel scenes were depicted, but figures from the Old Testament that related to the Gospels were depicted. Hence, the genealogy of Jesus was illustrated through the Jesse Tree, the sacrifice of Jesus alluded to by the sacrifice of Isaac, and valiant women of the Old Testament pointed to Mary. When decorating the Franciscan church of Our Lady of the Angels in Assisi, Giotto painted a life of Christ and, parallel to this, a life of Mary.

The *Quattrocento*. Italians called it the *Quattrocento;* the French and later historians called it the Renaissance. This was a remarkable period in art, when the legacy of Greece and Rome in various fields was rediscovered. As the Renaissance spread from Italy, where its most important center was Florence, to northern Europe, northern artists sought to learn from the Italians, and a trip to see the ruins of Rome was considered a must for any serious painter or sculptor. Albrect Durer, the sixteenth century German painter and engraver, memorialized his journey to Italy in a text he left behind. Standard history textbooks generally characterize the Renaissance as pagan in inspiration and equate the rediscovery of the classics as the single reason for the Renaissance. More recent studies, like that done on preaching by John O'Malley and Larissa Taylor, or on iconography by Leo Steinberg and Michael Baxandall, question this simplistic causation. Steinberg points out that the Renaissance saw the development of Incarnation theology with a corresponding practice in spirituality. Baxandall relates the gestures and composition of religious subjects to the conventions of Christian preaching rather than the poses crystallized in antiquity.

Typical of Renaissance spiritual practice is Ignatius of Loyola's instructions in his contemplations on the mysteries of the life of Christ on how to bring events within the exercitant's imaginative grasp. In the Incarnation contemplation of the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises,* he firmly places the exercitant within the mystery being contemplated. The exercitant is now a servant girl helping the Holy Family. It is in this stream of spiritual pedagogy that one can make sense of the intrusion into the biblical event of persons like Dominic, Peter the Martyr or Aquinas in the works of Fra Angelico.

During the Renaissance too, Italian artists painted sacred personages with more accurate physical proportions and more realistic features. The baby Jesus assumes the proportions of a child, whose head relative to the rest of the body is bigger than an adult's. Distinct characteristics of children like the chubby face, layers of baby fat, and the innocent look appear in paintings. As the crucified adult, Jesus is perfection of the male form, a true Apollo or Adonis. Mary too becomes an Italian beauty. In fact, it was during this era that artists started using human models for painting.

Here the works of two *Fras* (friars/brothers) are worth comparing. Beato Fra Angelico, a Dominican, painted the San Marco Monastery in Florence under the patronage of Lorenzo de Medici, the richest banker in Europe at that time. The blessed Fra, while he paints biblical figures with generic faces, strives at portraiture when he depicts his Dominican brothers—Dominic, Thomas Aquinas and Peter the Martyr—within or viewing the biblical scenes which he frescoed on San Marco's walls. Fra Filippo Lippi, not as angelic nor as beatific as Angelico, was also a Medici favorite. Joining the Franciscans at an early age, Fra Filippo asked to leave the order and married a most beautiful nun, Lucretia Buti, whom some art historians say he used as model for his painting of the *Madonna and Child with Angels.*

With works by Renaissance artists like Lippi, verisimilitude is attained. It is a matter of mastering realism that occupies artists from the Renaissance to the Baroque. Perfection is achieved with the mastery of the third dimension in the perspectival works of the Baroque.

Art and Religion. It is important to reflect briefly on what has happened to the depiction of Mary. From images of her as a noble being, shrouded in divine grace because of her close connection to Christ, to her as queenly person adorned as a bride for her groom, Mary is now rendered with the beauty of the human figure. The human figure, because of a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Incarnation, is no longer seen as an unfit instrument for the transcendental, but rather becomes the vehicle through which the transcendental shines or glows, with an ethereal light radiating from within or coming from some unseen source.

It is not surprising that, during the Renaissance, artists like Giotto could draw close parallels between the life of Jesus and Mary. Divinity is now within. If Jesus was born miraculously, so was Mary. If Jesus was presented in the temple, so was Mary. If Jesus died and rose from the dead, Mary was assumed into heaven.

Mary Alone. While in the East the close association of Mary and Jesus was safely guarded because of the conservatism of the iconographer, in the West, the image of Mary separated from Christ began to appear in the late Middle Ages. It is in the iconography of the *Transitus,* beginning with the eleventh century illuminated manuscripts of the Reichenau School, Germany, where one notes a separation. In the manuscripts, Jesus is no longer painted beside Mary but rather above her in a mandorla. In Titian's depiction of this scene five hundred years later, Mary rises to heaven by her own power. The composition is divided into three sections: the lower section depicts the apostles in amazement, the middle section paints Mary surrounded by angels, and the top section portrays God the Father welcoming her to heaven. Titian's composition hews closely to the iconographic tradition of Christ's Ascension where a similar tripartite division is employed. The iconography came to be known as the Assumption.

One sees that the tendency to separate Christ from Mary is already evident in the works of Giovanni Bellini, where Mary is presenting Christ while she stands in the background behind a window or ledge, or in Lippi's Madonna, where Jesus is not cradled by the Virgin but worshipped. The final iconographic separation of Mary from the Christ

figure is in the depictions of her as *Inmaculada* or *Immacolata*. Although the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was not proclaimed until 1854, the iconography antedated papal proclamation. The *Inmaculada* was especially popular in Spain, where a Baroque painter, Esteban Murillo, painted the image at least twenty-six times. Major Spanish painters like Velazquez and Zurbarran also painted the theme.

Essentially therefore, *Inmaculada* iconography is the Assumption. The additions are symbols or attributes suggested by the passage in the Book of Revelation about a woman clothed with sun (Rev. 12:1ff). The moon appears as an orb or crescent under Mary's feet, the stars around her as a halo or as a mandorla. Then, there is the introduction of the serpent, symbol of the devil, evil, sin, especially original sin, crushed by Mary's feet. This is an application of metaphorical exegesis which sees Mary and Eve as parallel figures. She is the new Eve that undoes what the old Eve had done through disobedience. Unfortunately, the crushed snake is a misapplication of the passage in Gen. 3, where the referent is not to the woman but to the offspring of the woman, he who will crush the serpent's head. But the iconography had been done, and had spread with great popularity.

Private Revelation. Reports of the appearance of Mary have become common these days: Bayside, Medjugorie, Garabandal, and in previous decades, Fatima, Lourdes, La Sallete. There are Philippine examples, Lipa being the best known and controversial (there are also reports of Marian apparitions in Agoo, La Union). Some of these apparitions have given rise to their own iconography. There is no comparable saint whose iconography has developed from occasional and unpredictable private revelation.

The Medjugorie Virgin is dressed in gray. Lourdes shows Mary as dressed in white with a blue sash, and Fatima has her in a white dress with a golden chain around her neck. In these more recent icons, Mary is almost always *alone*. While the Virgin's message always points to Jesus and how Jesus is asking for repentance and reform of life, the figure of Jesus has completely disappeared from the Marian iconography. Mary now functions as the spokesperson *par excellence* of the Divine Word, without the Word being depicted.

Iconological Reflection. The modern tendency visually presents Mary as apart from Jesus, although there is no denying that Jesus is ineluctably linked with her. This Mary-alone iconographic tendency can make some theologians and pastors uneasy, especially if elements and attributes in Jesus' iconography are predicated of Mary. Two contemporary icons are the Twin Hearts and The Lady (or Mother) of all Nations. The latter, which was the basis for the bleeding, crying Virgin of Akita, presents Mary in white tunic, above a globe and against the background of a cross. The iconography is painfully close to Resurrection icons. Theologians and pastors need to discuss whether such development in iconography is welcome and should be encouraged.

This reflection is more attuned to the discipline of critical art history. Erwin Panofsky, in his work on iconography, speaks of two levels of iconographic analysis. The simplest level is to decode the icon and to render its visual form into meaningful verbal discourse. This is the level of iconographical analysis. The next level involves relating the analysis to a discourse on what such analysis can say about the community or the society from which an artistic expression originates.

Notwithstanding the Romantic notion of an artist as a free agent of self-expression, once that expression has a physical form, it ineluctably has a social dimension. Expression in itself is a dead end. Expression has to become communication, and once it becomes communication, then the relation between expression and society becomes important.

The following are some observations about iconography. First, icons reflect the believing and worshipping Christian community. In the early stages of iconography, artists, wishing to express the elevated, the transcendental, searched through their own societies for expressions elevated from the ordinary. They saw the use of particular colors and pigments, which in themselves were precious, as a means to communicate transcendence visually. It is not surprising that the Byzantines used gold and purple generously when portraying Jesus and Mary. It is not surprising that Mary is portrayed not as a member of the

hoi poloi—she is no longer the simple maiden of Nazareth—but a royal person decked in purple. It is instructive that when artists depicted the Annunciation in the Middle Ages, Gabriel catches Mary in her chamber in the act of reading. Until the twentieth century, women's literacy rates were dismal, much more so during the medieval period. Most women were unlettered and chained to the hard life of farming, house chores and raising a family. Even noble women had their share of physical labor, and while the men went out to war, the women remained at home to tend to the day-to-day business of living. The tendency to present the literate Mary continues to the Renaissance, where Sandro Botticelli presents her as a poet writing the Magnificat, inspired by the Christ Child who lays his hand tenderly on his mother's arm.

It should be noted that, unlike in the East or Byzantium where the production of art was dominated by monks and a celibate clergy, in the West, art production moved from the *scriptoria* of monasteries to the guilds that dominated the Gothic period. Guilds were associations of artisans specializing in an art form or craft: sculpture, stained glass, painting. By the Renaissance, art production was mostly in the hands of lay people and while the guild system of the Gothic had declined, master artists maintained their own following of apprentices who assisted them. It is known for instance that Michaelangelo had fourteen assistants who helped him with the Sistine Chapel and that Leonardo da Vinci had his own following. Often a master would arise after he or she had been taught by a previous master, whom he or she would surpass. Families of lay artists are also known, like the Brueghels and the Gentilleschi. Churchmen, while remaining patrons of the arts and exercising some control over what could and could not be produced, were not themselves engaged in the artistic production. Besides, churchmen had stiff competition from a growing entrepreneurial aristocracy whose money came from trade and banking. Renaissance Florence was dominated by the Medicis as Milan was by the Sforzas and Rome by the Gonzagas. Art became, more and more, a lay concern.

It is in this context that one might understand the growth in the naturalized representation of Mary. One sees lay persons' appreciation, appropriation, and expression of the Christian message. Is it a wonder

then that the macho culture of the Middle Ages would, as counterfoil, develop a chivalric ethos that sung the praises of womankind? This epitome of womanhood is expressed in the Renaissance in the depiction of the earthly beauty above the ordinary. This process of elevation and pedestalization of women develops further when divine qualities are attached to Mary. To draw parallels between Jesus and Mary, to then postulate divine qualities as applying to her, and then to present her floating above sordid earth in the *Hyperion* are logical steps in the process of her elevation. Marian iconography has given a space for depicting women as co-equal with men, a biblically honored belief, which over the centuries was diminished by male dominated religion. "Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh," exclaims Adam in Genesis!

While Christians agree that there is a feminine dimension to God, that God is equally mother as God is father, by and large Christianity is still dominated and controlled by men, the Catholic Church especially so. Is it surprising then that this feminine side of religion would assert itself, and assert itself emphatically? This seems to be the social and cultural import of the "divinization" of Mary. Portrayed with elevated qualities, even qualities akin to those of Jesus, Marian iconography emphasizes that there are aspects of religion one ought not to forget, for they are a vital part of life in the spirit. The caring, compassionate, tender, loving, expressive face of Mary reminds all of the face of God.

A study of Marian iconography would be incomplete without examining how women saints are depicted. Saints like Mary Magdalene, Martha, Catherine of Alexandria, Lucy, Agnes and Cecilia have early on captured the Christian imagination. Like Mary, these saints were given admirable qualities that put men to shame. Magdalene, after her supposed conversion, became a hermit capable of extreme penitence, long hours of prayer and mystical transports. Catherine was noted for her brilliance, shown when she put to shame pagan philosophers and intellectuals in a debate about the true religion. A study of Marian iconography would also be incomplete without examining the feminization of Christ in art. However, developing these themes involves several other papers.

References:

Abbot Suger of St. Denis in Panofsky, Erwin (ed.). *On the Abbey Church of St. Denis and Its Art Treasures.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1946.

Baxandall, Michael. *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972

Ferguson, George. *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (with illustrations from paintings of the Renaissance). New York: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Panofsky, Erwin. *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1953.

_____. *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism.* New York: Meridian Books, 1957.

_____. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance, 2nd ed.* New York: Harper Row, 1962.

_____. *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1969.

_____. *Meaning in the Visual Arts, reprint ed.* Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

Sendler, Egon. *The Icon: Image of the Invisible: Elements of Theology, Aesthetics and Technique.* Redondo Beach, CA: Oakwood Publications, 1988.

Steinberg, Leo. *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion, 2nd revised and expanded ed.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

_____. *Leonardo's Incessant "Last Supper."* New York: Zone Books, 2001.