

## MARY AND THE VINCENTIAN FAMILY.

We come here looking for “good news.”

Joan Chittister wrote, “The bad news came in the 2013 Save the Children’s “State of the World’s Mothers” report. Of the 30 best countries in the world to be a mother, the survey reports that the United States ranks 30th—behind all the countries in Scandinavia, Australia, Canada, and most of the developed world.

How can this situation exist in the United States—one of the world’s most religious countries—where so many of us believe that religion is a great force for good? Moreover, what exactly are our religious institution... [*like the Vincentian Family*]...doing to advance the development and status of women?”<sup>1</sup>

Mary, for many years exalted as Virgin and Mother — and rightfully so as privileged mother of our Savior — underwent an expansion in our tradition, both before, during and in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. She was called exemplar of what it means to be a follower of Christ; Mother of the Church, and “missionary and disciple.” But subsequently, one can only guess at the reasons, these new images began to fade in the life of the Church. But the Vincentian Family loved them and included them in new constitutions, guidelines and principal documents. Based in the Christian scriptures, she was the spirit-filled teacher of the Vincentian way, second only to Jesus in her place and her importance. Then, in the '90's,

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<sup>1</sup><http://shrivereport.org/are-women-devalued-by-religions-joan-chittister/>

emphasis began to re-shift — to St. Vincent, St. Louise de Marillac, the Bls. Frederic Ozanam and Rosalie Rendu, and our own beloved St. Catherine Laboure. It's time to look at Mary's role once again, as Pope Francis summons the whole Church to return to the poor. Let's look at the reality.

From where have we come? Where are we? Even as far as we've come,

“... women are still one class of people who are often set apart, separated, and given less value and worth. Religion has often defined women only by their maternity and many Cristian churches continue to do so—even though it's just one dimension of a woman's multifaceted humanity. Religion has defined women as “helpmates,” as too irrational to lead, too intellectually limited for the public dimensions of life.”<sup>2</sup>

I've seen it. It is the image of women and girls in the mission where I live and work, and, far too often, the image of women and girls in this society. You can add to that, in our society, “plaything,” “advertising ploy,” and “victim of abuse.” The situation is worse for immigrant women and women of color.

“Though they are endowed with the same degree of sense, reason, and intellect as men, women have been locked out of full humanity and significant participation in religious institutions and society at large. This marginalization of women masquerades as “protecting” them and even “exalting” them. Instead,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://shriverrreport.org/are-women-devalued-by-religions-joan-chittister/>

these attitudes serve to deny the human race the fullness of female gifts and a female perspective on life.”<sup>3</sup>

Chittister continues, pointing out that the “State of the World’s Mothers” report informs us,

“As a result, women make up two-thirds of the hungry of this world. Women are two-thirds of the illiterate of this world. And women are two-thirds of the poorest of the poor, because they lack access to the resources and recognition men take for granted. That’s not an accident.” What religion says about women has long been used to justify what society has done to limit their development.”<sup>4</sup>

And so, — to paraphrase Chittister — *not only does what the Vincentian Family teaches and does about women become the “morality” of our family and our sphere of influence. What we do not say or do on behalf of women condones the situation in which women find themselves.*

“It is time for religions to repent the acceptance of assumptions about the social place and roles of women—assumptions that spring from theological definitions of women as less fully rational, less fully human, and less fully essential to the public arena than men.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <http://shriverreport.org/are-women-devalued-by-religions-joan-chittister/>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://shriverreport.org/are-women-devalued-by-religions-joan-chittister/>

What can Mary do to help us in the struggle against this situation? What do the the Scriptures<sup>6</sup> teach teach about Mary?

Listen to the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 3, beginning at verse 20:

Jesus came home.\*Again [the] crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. 21 When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” 31 His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. 32 A crowd seated around him told him, “Your mother and your brothers [and your sisters] are outside asking for you.” 33 But he said to them in reply, “Who are my mother and [my] brothers?” 34 And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. 35 [For] whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Not an exclusion — a clarification. We go on to find out who she was revealed to be in teh Annunciation — one who “does the will of God”: a disciple.

Luke, in his 24th chapter reveals more. Women from Galilee are at the crucifixion and the tomb, but Mary his mother isn't mentioned in Mark, Matthew or Luke.

9 Then they returned from the tomb and announced all

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<sup>6</sup> this and all bible citations from the NAB online at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>

these things to the eleven and to all the others. 10 The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the apostles 11 but their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them.

The women in this gospel do not flee from the tomb and tell no one, as in Mk 16:8 but return and tell the disciples about their experience. But the initial reaction to the testimony of the women is disbelief. But they did go to the tomb. Why? Someone else, with authority, may have convinced them. John tells us in his Gospel,

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala [John 19:25].

She's with them, teaching them all along. And she continues with them after the resurrection. In the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,

13 When they entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. 15 During those days Peter stood up in the midst of the brothers (there was a group of about one hundred and twenty persons in the one place).

She's there with them again, praying with them. And in the second chapter:

1 When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. 2 And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. 3 Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

She receives the Spirit anew. It's not just the apostles.

So she appears: Spirit-filled, listener to the word; disciple of her Son; witness to his death; witness to his resurrection; leader and formator of the infant Church; communicator of the Good News.

More than helpmate. More than passive recipient of God's grace. And, however exalted, more than just Virgin and Mother.

To paraphrase Chittister again, *it is time for the Vincentian Family to be leaders in repairing this distortion of the will of God*. It is time for both women and men of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity, the Association of the Miraculous Medal, the Vincentian Marian Youth, The Ladies of Charity, Society of St. Vincent de Paul and the Vincentian Lay Missionaries to "contest such untenable conclusions. For all of

our sakes and for the sake of all humanity, it is time.”<sup>7</sup> Or, in the words of Dr. King, whom we commemorate today, the time is always right to do what is right. Mary will lead us to the poor Christ.

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