

things quiet in us, so that then, our 'house being now at rest', we may allow unimpeded entry to the quickening Spirit. We pray to and think of our Lady, but it is essentially in order that she may lead us to her Son; we think of the human events in the life of that Son, but it is essentially that we may be led *per humanitatem ad divinitatem*, through those human things to the divine reality they express and reveal. We pray, 'Mother of God, pray for us, sinners'; but it is essentially in order that through growing in love and understanding of the motherhood of Mary we may be led to know and love and adore, to accept and so be renewed by, the creative Motherhood of God.



OUR LADY IN TRADITION

REGINALD GINNS, O.P.

THE centenary year of Lourdes has drawn the attention of the world as it was drawn in that wonderful year 1858. Some approach with an attitude of reverence, others with a faint but somewhat sceptical admiration, and there will no doubt be others who greet the celebrations with a scoffing smile of contempt. So far, however, there has been little sign of scoffing or contempt. Indeed the most striking thing that has appeared since the opening of the centenary year was, not the enthusiastic crowds of pilgrims who assisted at the ceremonies of February 11, but the dignified and respectful way in which the great journals of the secular press reported the event. They showed no fumbling or hesitation in the use of Catholic terminology; they spoke of 'the Blessed Virgin' and 'Saint Bernadette' without the use of inverted commas, nor was there any hint of scepticism about the visions or the miracles of Lourdes.

In tone and spirit it was worlds away from the old cheap insult of the late Dean Inge about 'the lucrative imposture of Lourdes'; or from the less impolite but equally contemptuous observation of the learned Cambridge don who, when writing of the theophanies and miracles of the old pagan shrines, proceeded to say: 'Aristides believes in the healings of Asclepius at Epidaurus as

surely as the most ignorant French peasant believes in those of Lourdes, and with as little idea of the real explanation of them'.¹ He had no excuse for being ignorant of the fact that belief in the miracles of Lourdes is not confined to ignorant French peasants; there were plenty of Catholics in the university at Cambridge, some of them among his fellow dons. Moreover he prudently abstained from providing us with what *is* the real explanation of the miracles at Lourdes. Earlier in the book containing the above extract, he prides himself on the fact that at Cambridge 'we are a little more matter-of-fact than Oxford, a little more content to confine ourselves to verifying our references and to recording what we find'; in a word more scientific, as he says. But it is not scientific to close one's eyes and mind to evidence like that accumulated by the medical bureau at Lourdes, or to dismiss all the medical men concerned as ignorant French peasants.

The journalists, on the other hand, who are not so bad in spite of the rough handling they have received lately in the correspondence columns of the daily press, show a much more scientific and honest attitude of mind. At any rate, they go and look at the facts, and the facts have certainly impressed them. It is true that the commercialism of Lourdes stuck in their throats a little, but knowing the world as they do, they did not make a great song about that. One of them even twisted it round in a good sense; for, as he wittily remarked, perhaps the greatest miracle of the centenary year is the fact that the sellers of the *objets de piété* closed their shops on February 11 without being asked to do so.

But while we welcome this mood, we are not so confident as to count upon its persevering in all the ranks of our non-Catholic friends during this coming year. When they begin to notice the continuance of the crowds of pilgrims flocking to Lourdes by every known means of transport, ship, plane, train, motor-coach, car, bicycle and on foot, it is likely that we shall hear once more the old threadbare complaints about mariolatry, putting Mary in the place of Christ, offering a worship to Mary which has no basis in Scripture or apostolic tradition, and that the Catholic attitude to our Lady is no more than a continuation of the old pagan worship of the Mother Goddess. Was it not, the learned men will say, at Ephesus, the seat of the licentious worship of

¹ *Progress in Religion*, by T. R. Glover, p. 325.

Cybele and Diana, that Mary received the title Theotokos, the God-bearer or Mother of God?

We must be prepared to deal patiently but effectively with these difficulties, some of them no doubt real enough for those nurtured in a tradition that for centuries was hostile to every sign of special reverence paid to our Lady. The root of this hostility seemed at first sight sincere enough: every honour shown to Mary was so much honour stolen from what was owing to God and Christ, her Son. In view, therefore, of those sincere Christians who have honest difficulties on this subject—and all those who have had experience in the instruction of converts know that there are such people—we ought to take care that, in our enthusiasm for the praise of our Lady, we do not give occasion for such difficulties. And this we should certainly do if we used exaggerated terminology about her. The sober truth of the Gospel and the Church's official doctrine is surely quite strong enough, and it needs no reinforcement at our hands. Mary is the Mother of God; when we have weighed the meaning of those six simple words and drawn the conclusions from them which should force themselves on our mind, it would be impertinent to add our improvements after the example of the writers of the apocryphal gospels, who tried to improve on the sober narrative of the canonical Gospels.²

In view of non-Catholic misconceptions about our devotion to the Blessed Virgin, it seems regrettable to use such expressions as that of a recent writer in the Catholic press, who said that the present age might well be called the Marian Age. Certainly it is true enough that in the past century there has been a notable development in what is called Marian theology; but even that expression will be misunderstood by people like the Anglican clergyman who objected to the present writer that our doctrine of the Immaculate Conception turned Mary into a sort of god. Of course it will be said that such an objection only served to show how great was his ignorance of this very doctrine; but if we are concerned about the salvation of our neighbour we have to take into account the lamentable fact of such ignorance. And if the doctrinal development of our Lady's position in the scheme of Catholic theology has received great advance in our own time,

² Cf. St Bernard's warning: *Virgo regia falso non eget honore, veris cumulata honorum titulis*: 'Richly endowed with real honour, the royal Virgin needs no false honours.'

it does not follow that popular devotion to her is by that much greater than it was in the past. That is a question only settled by studying the Church's life and history; and those who are familiar with the old hymnologies in praise of Mary, and much more those who have read the writings of the early theologians, will be slow to maintain that the past ages of the Church fell short of us in that respect.

In 1855, three years before the apparitions at Lourdes, Bishop Ullathorne, that fine theologian and patristic scholar, wrote his book on the Immaculate Conception. In his second chapter he writes of the way in which the Fathers of the Church speak of the dignity of Mary, and begins by saying that those who read the Fathers only in the brief extracts generally quoted can form no idea of 'the amplitude and magnificence with which they extol the praises of the Mother of God'. He proceeds to give some extracts himself, beginning with a sermon preached by St Proclus, a disciple of the great Chrysostom and much admired by St Cyril. It was a sermon preached at Constantinople on a festival of the Blessed Virgin in 429 and received with great applause by the people present. So well was it considered to express the orthodox attitude towards her that it was afterwards placed at the head of the acts of the Council of Ephesus held in 431. It is a long chain of epithets and instances drawn from the Scriptures and from theology and applied to our Lady. The following will serve as examples.

'Where sin abounded, there grace has superabounded. . . . That workshop wherein was wrought the union of natures (i.e. the divine and human nature in Christ). . . . That market of the commerce of salvation. . . . Truly the bright cloud which bore him bodily who sitteth between the cherubim. . . . Handmaid and mother, virgin and heaven. . . . The only bridge of God to men. . . . By his birth he made woman the gate of salvation, who previously had been the gate of sin. . . . By no means was the architect dishonoured, for he dwelt in the house which he himself had built. . . . As he formed her without any stain of her own, so he proceeded from her contracting no stain.'

Ullathorne follows with a moving discourse on the Blessed Virgin preached by Basil Bishop of Seleucia about the same date; and the force of this is all the greater from the fact that Basil was for a time regarded as an adherent of the monophysite heresy,

and for that reason temporarily deprived of his see. The reading of his sermon recalls to me the occasion when I copied it years ago, and I can do no better than copy it again here.

‘He who would exalt the holy Virgin and Mother of God will find a most ample subject for his praises. But in sight of my own weakness I am stricken to the soul and have long delayed. Oppressed with the weight of my sins, I have hesitated and delayed upon the matter demanded by such a discourse as this. It seemed to me to be a work for those whose vision is very clear and who are eminently purified both in body and soul; that only those who have been illuminated in mind by divine grace can fittingly speak the praises that are due to the Mother of God. But there is nothing in me that can inspire me with such confidence and freedom of speech; for my lips have not been cleansed like those of Isaias, who awaited the seraph with the live coal. Nor like the godly Moses have I loosened the shoes from the feet of my soul. With what fear, then, ought I to be encompassed when I take it upon me to offer praise to the Mother of God lest, through some indiscretion of mine, I might utter words unsuited to her dignity. It is not my aim to climb one of the mountains of this world, whence I might be able to pass through the overspreading atmosphere and be caught up into the midst of the stars shining in all their brilliance, even if such a thing could be accomplished. . . . But lifting my head even higher than these, it is my purpose, so far as it is in my power with the help of the Spirit who guides us to divine things, to pass by the choirs of angels, to rise above the brightness of the thrones, the honoured dignity of the dominations, the principalities in their place of command, the clear lustre of the powers, the clear-sighted purity of the many-eyed cherubim, and the six-winged seraphim with their movements unrestrained in every direction; and if there be any created being above these, I will not there stay my course or my longing desire, but will dare to fix intently my curious gaze and, as far as is permitted for man in these chains of flesh, will contemplate the co-eternal brightness of the Father’s glory; then, surrounded and enlightened with that True Light, there will I begin the hymn of praise to the Mother of God from whence she became the Mother of God, and obtained that name and title. . . . The great mystery of the Mother of God transcends

both speech and reason. . . . What praises can we offer her as she deserves, when everything of this world is beneath her merits? . . . Who then will not admire the vast power of the Mother of God? Who does not see how far she is raised above the saints? For if God gave to his servants a grace so great that by their very touch they healed the sick . . . how much more power, think you, has he given to his Mother? With what gifts has he adorned her? If Peter is called blessed and entrusted with the keys of heaven because he called Christ the Son of the living God, how much more blessed than everyone else must she be who deserved to bear him whom Peter confessed?

After such an encomium, Basil of Seleucia ends his sermon in the following really delightful fashion:

‘But I am afraid lest, though I could say a lot more about her, I should say little that is worthy of her dignity and so bring all the more shame upon myself. So I will draw in the sail of my discourse and retire into the harbour of silence.’

In the thirteenth chapter of the same book Ullathorne returns again to the witness of the early Fathers concerning the mind and the devotion of the Church towards our Lady, and a mere perusal of the few short extracts he gives leads emphatically to the conclusion that, only out of ignorance or blind prejudice could anyone today maintain that Catholic doctrine about and devotion to the Mother of Christ is a growth of later ages. What later age has given expression to anything that can be compared with what Augustine said at the end of the fourth or beginning of the fifth century? ‘No heart can conceive, no tongue can express, the effect of her dignity and grace.’ Or with that other famous remark of his in the thirty-sixth chapter of his treatise *On Nature and Grace*, where he admits that all have sinned, even the just, ‘except the Blessed Virgin Mary of whom, for the honour of the Lord, I will have no question whatsoever where sin is concerned. For whence can we know the measure of grace conferred on her to vanquish sin on every side, on her who deserved to conceive and bring forth him who manifestly had no sin?’

Now those who are familiar with the genuine stream of authentic theological teaching in the Catholic Church will be well aware that later theologians of repute never depart from the patristic tradition so clearly shown above. The principle on which

that patristic tradition is based is that summed up so concisely by St Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons in the first half of the fifth century, the friend of Cassian and St Hilary of Arles: 'If you would know how great is the Mother, think you how great is the Son'. We cannot take a better example to demonstrate the fidelity of later theologians to patristic tradition than the example of the Church's official theologian,³ St Thomas Aquinas. Though often considered an innovator, he was certainly no innovator in the field of dogmatic theology but a strict traditionalist who adhered even to the words of his predecessors. Try to count his references to and quotations from Augustine, for example. His teaching about our Lady is summed up in QQ. xxvii-xxxvii of the Third Part of the *Summa* under the treatise on the Incarnation. Consider the two following extracts from the fifth article of Q. xxvii.

'The nearer anything approaches to the source of its being the more it partakes of the effect issuing from that source. Hence Dionysius says in his *De Caelesti Hierarchia* that the angels, who are nearer to God than men, partake more than men in divine goodness. Now Christ is the source of grace: the authoritative source in so far as he is God, the instrumental cause in so far as he is man. Hence John writes in i, 17: *Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ*. But the Blessed Virgin Mary was nearer to Christ than anyone else in his humanity, for his human nature he took from her. Consequently much more than anyone else was she bound to receive from Christ the fullness of grace.'

'To each one God gives grace in proportion to the work for which he chooses them. And seeing that Christ in so far as he is man was predestined and chosen, as we read in Romans i, 4, so that he might be *predestinated Son of God in the power of sanctification*, to him alone was it granted to have such a fullness of grace as might overflow on to everyone else. Hence John writes in i, 16: *Of his fullness we have all received*. But the Blessed Virgin Mary was granted such a fullness of grace as was fitting for one who was brought into close proximity to him who is the author of grace; that she might receive into herself him who is full of every grace; that further, by becoming his Mother, she might in some degree be the means by which grace is derived by all others.'

3 Cf. *Cod. Jur. Can. Canon* 589.

We may add one more quotation which might easily escape the notice of those who study the place occupied by our Lady in Thomistic theology; it occurs in the First Part of the *Summa*, Q. xxv, where St Thomas treats of the Power of God. In the last article he raises the interesting problem: whether God could have done better things than he has in fact done. His reply is that, absolutely speaking, it cannot be said that the works of creation have exhausted the divine power for good; therefore God could have made better things than he has made. This seems to put him at variance with the traditional teaching that we have seen above about the perfection of the Mother of God, which implies that she could not be better than she is. But he makes an exception for her, and on the same principle that serves as the foundation of the whole of traditional Marian theology:

‘We must say that the humanity of Christ, for the reason that it is in union with God; and the final happiness of mankind, for the reason that it consists in the enjoyment of God; and the Blessed Virgin also, for the reason that she is the Mother of God; all these three possess an infinite dignity which they receive from the infinite goodness of God. And on that account there could not be anything better than they are, just as there could not be anything better than God.’

This was evidently a subject on which there existed speculation and discussion in the theological schools at the time, for we find in the treatises on our Lady (*De Laudibus B. Virginis* and *Biblia Mariana*) long attributed to the authorship of St Thomas’ Dominican master, St Albert the Great, but now claimed to be by another writer, such phrases as these: ‘We can think of no grace given to a creature greater than the grace of being the Mother of God’; and again: ‘The Son gives an infinite goodness to his Mother, for every tree is known by its fruit’. While St Bonaventure, the contemporary and friend of Aquinas, writes in his *Speculum* what the latter wrote in his *Summa*: ‘God could make a better world than this, but he could not make a greater mother than the Mother of God’.

But as this article began with a reference to the centenary year of Lourdes and the apparitions there are so closely connected with the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception—the dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception dates from 8 December, 1858, four years before the apparitions—it may be thought that

I ought here to show how the attitude of St Thomas to that doctrine is reconcilable with the claim that he is so strict a traditionalist. For it is commonly said that Aquinas was a determined opponent of the doctrine; and, moreover, a dogma is not defined as part of the revealed truth of the faith unless it can be shown that there has been a constant tradition in the teaching Church in favour of that doctrine. It was the purpose of Ullathorne's book to prove that this was so, that there was justification for the words in the encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus*: 'The illustrious monuments of venerable antiquity of both the Eastern and Western Church most strongly bear witness that [the doctrine] has always existed in the Church as received by tradition, and that it is stamped with the character of a revealed doctrine'. Not that it was held clearly and explicitly by all, or even admitted by all; otherwise there would be no reason for defining it, that is to say, clearly stating it in explicit and precise terms as had been done during the early centuries of the Church with regard to the development of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

How St Thomas stands in regard to this question may be well illustrated by the excellent treatment of it in Fr Bridgett's *Our Lady's Dowry*, where he gives an account of a correspondence that took place between Nicholas, a monk of St Alban's, and Peter of Celles, Abbot of Saint Remi, during the century that preceded St Thomas. Nicholas wrote defending the English custom of celebrating the feast of Our Lady's Conception, finding fault with St Bernard's opposition to the celebration of the feast at Lyons—St Bernard who was so strong a traditionalist and such a devout servant of Mary. It is worthy of note that the custom of celebrating the feast in this country dated from early times, and Bridgett maintains that it spread through Europe from England. Peter's reply is a model of reason and tolerance.

I yield to none, he says, in devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and I am ready to take part in her feasts, whether it be her conception, her nativity or her assumption that is being celebrated. But he objects that in the ecclesiastical circles with which he is familiar the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin is a novelty. So far as he is aware Rome has given no authority for the observance of the feast, and it is for the See of Peter to decide on matters like this. If Rome decides in its favour, nothing would please him better. And as for St Bernard's opposition, has not Rome just

recently canonized him (1174)? Therefore he concludes: 'But if you wish to strike a new coin different from what is in common circulation and without the approval of St Peter, to whom it belongs to approve or to disapprove the order of the universal Church, then I hold back, nor will I pass the bounds marked out'.

No one will feel inclined to criticize unfavourably such a reasonable reply; the treatment of the question by St Thomas is an echo of it a hundred years later, though his language is more moderate and quite impersonal. Peter ends on a somewhat harsh note: 'I believe in the Gospel, not in dreams'. There is nothing like that in the *Summa*. Thomas admits⁴ that although the churches in Rome do not celebrate the feast of our Lady's conception, nevertheless Rome raises no opposition to its celebration in other parts of the Church; consequently it is not for him to condemn it. But while few were so steeped in the theological writings of the past as he, there is an implicit admission on his part that the teaching and tradition were not sufficiently clear and well defined to enable him to assert as true the doctrine as it was defined in the nineteenth century, after so many centuries of study and discussion. And it must be borne in mind that St Thomas was writing in opposition to those who were certainly in error about the doctrine of our Lady's sinlessness. Some, for example, sought to exclude her from the universal need of the redemptive grace of Christ, and so 'derogated from the dignity due to Christ'. Others held that she was cleansed from original sin before her soul came into union with her body; and that, he said, was impossible. For cleansing from original sin is by sanctification, and sanctification is by grace, and the subject of grace is only the rational creature, and the rational creature does not come into being until the union of soul and body. Moreover, he adds, how could the soul be in need of cleansing before it was joined to the body? It cannot be thought that God created the soul of our Lady, or anyone else's soul, in a state of sin. Original sin comes from man, not from God, and consequently must arise in the soul through contact with the body.

Here, as in all his writings, he is concerned with the work of reconciling reason and faith; hence he will not admit anything that runs counter to either. Therefore going only so far as the guidance of the authentic voice of Scripture and Tradition will

⁴ *Summa* III, xxvii, 2.

lead him on the one hand, and only so far as fidelity to human reason will permit him on the other, he draws the following prudent conclusions: first, that Mary being the Mother of God was higher and more privileged than any human creature; secondly, since he believed that others were sanctified and cleansed from original sin before birth, then he ought to say as much at least of her; lastly, that she was therefore set free from original sin before she came from her mother's womb, but at what point of time he was unable to declare. The Church has informed him and us, in words provided by St Thomas, on the point of time: not *before* her body was animated by her soul; not *after* her body was animated by her soul; but, in the *very instant* when soul and body were united, the redemptive grace of her Son saved her soul from contracting the stain of original sin with which her body, descended from Adam and Eve, was waiting to infect it.



MOTHER OF OUR CREATOR

SISTER MARY ROBERT, O.P.

HAIL, then from us, O holy mystical Trinity, who has gathered us all together in this church of Mary, the Mother of God. Hail, from us Mary, Mother of God, majestic treasure of the whole world, the lamp unquenchable, the crown of virginity, the sceptre of orthodoxy, the indestructible temple, the dwelling of the Illimitable, Mother and Virgin, through whom he is called in the holy Gospels "Blessed who cometh in the name of the Lord". Hail, thou who didst contain him in thy holy virginal womb, who cannot be contained, thou through whom the Holy Trinity is glorified and adored throughout the world; through whom heaven rejoices, through whom the angels and archangels are glad; through whom devils are put to flight; through whom the tempter-devil fell from heaven; through whom the fallen creature is taken up into heaven; through whom all creation, held fast by the madness of idolatry has come to the