

## OUR LADY'S PLACE IN WORSHIP

Teaching and worship have always been on friendly terms, arm in arm and in step with each other. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, it is said. But it is not always easy to decide which takes the lead, since their action is reciprocal, teaching reacting upon worship and vice-versa. In general most will agree with the Abbé Vacandard, "that in Christianity the feast has always preceded the definition of the doctrine at the same time as the theological discussions contribute to precision in the meaning of the liturgical solemnity."<sup>1</sup> Yet in particular instances consistent teaching must have influenced devotion and directed it into new channels; though only after it has received practical expression in the liturgical worship of the Church is it crowned with precise definition.

The interplay of doctrine and devotion is of special importance in the honour paid to our Lady and the teaching concerning her, for in theology she is distinguished from all other saints by a liturgical distinction. The pre-eminence of our Lady is established by the type of cultus to be offered her, technically called "hyperdulia." Doctrine and cultus are united here where she is distinguished from all other creatures by the type of homage which she should receive. But at the present time there are also many ideas concerning the blessed Virgin which are not so evidently connected with worship. By these she is given a very central position in the scheme of salvation as the "Mediatrice of all graces," as "Co-redemptrice" or the "Mother of the Mystical Body" so that she is distinguished not only by the honour shown her but also by her unique type of co-operation in the redemption of mankind. The position of the Mother of God in religion has only become clear to the eye of the believer through the passage of years and represents a patent example

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(1) *Etudes de Critique* III, p. 215, where he deals with the feast and dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

of development of worship and doctrine. In considering the relation between teaching and worship with regard to our Lady we are confronted with two questions of some interest and importance. Has the liturgy in fact offered her a specifically different type of honour which could be called strictly "hyperdulia": and secondly has the liturgy been responsible for the emergence of the idea of the universal mediatrix or has the time come when that doctrine should be given expression in the liturgy preparatory to some type of definition? The answer to these questions will show the precise position of our Lady now holds in the public worship of the Church and the trend of development in that matter.

In order to grasp the nature of the homage offered to our Lady in the liturgy and to discover its relation to the doctrine of her mediation it is necessary to sketch briefly the gradual unfolding and flowering of Christian devotion to the Mother of God. In the very first ages of the Church no official honour seems to have been paid to the Blessed Virgin and indeed doctrine concerning her was also in an embryonic state; but it was there implicitly and only required development. The gospels which formed so important a section in the instructional part of the liturgy contained the Angelic salutation, "Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women," carried on in the mouth of Elizabeth, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is it to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" The honour due to our Lady comes from her unique association with her Son, Redeemer of the world, and the Archangel and St. Elizabeth both offer the worship due to her on that account. Although the early Christians established no liturgical solemnity in honour of our Lady until the fourth century they were not indifferent to the example set them by such an exalted personage as the Archangel Gabriel. They realized at once, as Justin, Irenaeus and Tertullian testify, that she was the new Eve, even as Christ was the new Adam. They would have realized as they celebrated the two primitive liturgical feasts, the Pasch and Pentecost, that without Mary's co-operation their

salvation would not have been wrought. Indeed every day in the Anaphora at Mass her name was linked at an early date with that of her Son in recalling the mystery of the Incarnation. "We give thee thanks, O God," recited the celebrant in this central act of sacrificial worship, "through thy beloved Servant Jesus Christ . . . Whom thou didst send from heaven into the womb of the Virgin, and who dwelling within her, was made flesh, and was manifested as thy Son, being born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin." Similar terms were used in the rite of baptism, as may be seen in the earliest extant Anaphora and liturgical constitution, that of St. Hippolytus.

With the fourth century came the feast of Christ's birth; the Epiphany in the East and Christmas in the West rose quickly to rival in honour and dignity the two primitive feasts—St. Chrysostom calls it the "metropolis" and source of all feasts. Indeed, with the exception of the Presentation (or Purification) which was celebrated in Jerusalem as a feast of our Lord in the latter half of the fourth century, we may regard the Nativity of our Lord as the source of all the explicit and separate honour paid to our Lady. It is an accidental misfortune that the first celebration recorded in her honour should have been an heretical, feminine superstition<sup>2</sup>, for the true devotion developed gradually but inevitably from the recollection of Bethlehem. Sermons were preached in her honour as a preparation for that feast, and this soon developed into a special solemnity commemorating her on the first or second day after Christmas just as we now commemorate St. Paul after the feast of SS. Peter and Paul. Before this the Council of Ephesus, held in a church already dedicated to her, had shown that the blessed Virgin is to be acknowledged and *venerated* by all as really and in fact the Mother of God; and it had resulted in a vivid expression of popular devotion towards the Theotokos. Thus through the liturgy and then

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(2) The 'Collyridians,' as Epiphanius calls them, appeared in Arabia at the end of the fourth century. The women alone were allowed to perform the rites of offering special cakes to the Virgin.

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by a Council Christians came consciously to recognize Mary's central place in the redemption. Yet there was very little special public worship offered her, although her right to it was acknowledged. It was still perhaps rather incidental in the worship of our Lord.

It was not until the late sixth or early seventh century that the festivals of the blessed Virgin were fully established, by which time the Purification, the Assumption, our Lady's Nativity and the Annunciation formed permanent items in the liturgical calendar. The Assumption or Dormition was first celebrated at Jerusalem towards the end of the fifth century. Soon it was adopted in France and finally, in the seventh century, in Rome. This feast provides an example of the part played by the liturgy in unfolding Christian thought on our Lady, for the Gothic Missal had insisted on the corporal assumption, "translatum corpus est de sepulcro," but at Rome they were at first chary of admitting anything but a *dormitio* not willing to say precisely how our Lady was assumed. It seems however that Rome finally accepted the general tradition of the bodily assumption through celebrating the liturgy it had received from the north. The development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception also illustrates the same interplay between doctrine and worship. The feast appeared as a corollary of that of our Lady's Nativity, but at first in the East rather in honour of Joachim and Anne than of our Lady. It was in England in the tenth century that it was first celebrated precisely as the Immaculate Conception, and though the Normans tried to suppress it as a Saxon superstition the feast and the doctrine persisted because the people felt that if they solemnized with a liturgy the conception and miraculous sanctification of St. John the Baptist they should do as much for the Mother of God who most certainly must have been purified and filled with grace at her conception.

So the liturgy helped to bring forth from the womb of the Church various truths concerning our Lady, but the doctrine of Mary's mediation was not explicitly celebrated nor was she consciously given a public worship which could be said

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to be specifically different from that given to the other saints, for they too had their festivals and liturgical honour. But after the tenth century we enter what we might term the "high" period of liturgical veneration of the Mother of God, when she comes to have a whole liturgy to herself and to be commemorated on nearly every day of the year. The "Ave Maria" had hitherto appeared only as an offertory chant introduced by St. Gregory, but now it was daily on the lips of monks and pious people. It did not form part of the official prayer of the Church, and even the laybrother's Paternoster Office did not include the angelic salutation until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, but it indicates the beginning of a separate veneration of Our Lady, parallel with the Divine Office. For it was at this time that the Little Office appeared as an additional daily Office in monastic institutions. "We know this without a doubt," declares St. Peter Damian, "that faithful assiduity in her praises by these little hours will gain for a man not merely her personal help, but, when he needs it most, her maternal influence with our Judge." The same saint also bears witness to the fact that the Mass and Office of Saturday were in his day generally set aside for the honour of the Mother of God. "Thus a beautiful custom has grown up in many churches of celebrating the office of Mass every Saturday specially in her honour." The liturgical veneration of the blessed Virgin in the West was on the threshold of its fullest and most romantic expression, only rivalled in exuberance by the wonted poetry and splendour of the Eastern rites.

Traces of a "hyperdulia" in the prayers and devotion of the faithful begin to appear, but at this period the honour paid to the Virgin bears the stamp of popular devotion rather than strict liturgical worship; it was distinct from, though parallel with, the official liturgy. The Little Office which had to be recited every day in canonical and monastic choirs was added on to the Divine Office and did not compose with it a single whole. The praises of the blessed Virgin had received a very complete expression for prayer of a liturgical nature, but it seems that this had not been indissolubly

welded to the one central prayer of the Church. In other words, although a unique and special type of honour was now offered her, the full significance of her association in the mediation of her Son had not been realized, because that association was not yet made coherent in the liturgy, in the one official prayer of the Church. Christ is the centre of the original and complete liturgy, His Mother is the centre of another, distinct and smaller quasi-liturgy, and it remains for the later ages of the Church to mould these two into one, to absorb the latter explicitly into the former.

In order that our Lady's rightful position as mediatrix should be recognized consciously by the *lex orandi* and so enter into its own in the prayer and teaching of the Church, and in order that a complete and liturgical "hyperdulia" should be offered her, it was necessary that there should be a fusion, a synthesis in which worship of and through the one Mediator should include consciously a veneration of the mediatrix. This ultimate synthesis even now has not been fully achieved but it may have received the initial impetus when St. Pius V suppressed the Little Office as a daily canonical obligation, and indirectly also from the Protestant attack on the cultus of our Lady. The daily commemoration of the *Sancta Dei Genetrix* in such Offices as Compline had been established, while the *Ave* had become the handmaid of the Paternoster. But the reintegration of the veneration of Mary into the liturgical worship of her Son is not very evident in such examples as these, and to a very great extent that veneration has remained extra-liturgical in such popular devotions as the Rosary. There are however grounds for supposing that this semi- or extra-liturgical worship has been the occasion for the flowering of the doctrine of the mediatrix of graces, which has now come to be regarded as a possible object for *ex cathedra* definition. Popular devotion has therefore, by its own form of "hyperdulia," brought the doctrine before the eyes of the teaching Church as well as of the faithful, but it has not yet entered fully into the liturgy nor become a dogma of the Church. Which should come first, official definition or official cultus? Even apart

from the usual sequence of "lex orandi, lex credendi" it might be expected that cultus should precede.

It is necessary therefore to integrate this new aspect into the Christian liturgy which centres round the one Mediator between God and man, the High-priest Christ Jesus. The time has come when the one official prayer of the Church should expressly include what was already contained implicitly in the earliest Anaphora, a worship of "hyper-dulia" distinct from all other veneration of saints, honour offered with supplications to the mediatrix of graces. "Now of all the blessed in heaven," wrote Leo XIII in the encyclical *Augustissimae Virginis*, "who can compare with the august Mother of God in obtaining grace? . . . We do not pray to the Blessed in the same way as to God; for we ask the Holy Trinity to have mercy on us, but we ask all the Saints to pray for us. Yet our manner of praying to the Blessed Virgin has something in common with our worship of God so that the Church even addresses to her the words with which we pray to God: 'Have mercy on sinners.'" This special attitude of prayer to our Lady, carried on outside the liturgy for a long time, must now have reached that period when it will be embraced in the one official worship.

This is very possible since the liturgy has never been a static unpliant form of prayer, admitting of no change or modification, for that would be bordering on the dead letter of a superstitious rite. It has always been a vital organism, growing and developing as nourishment was offered it either by the praying faithful or by the supreme ecclesiastical authority. In fact from this point of view we might almost describe the liturgy as the rhythmic formation of popular devotion given official sanction by the Church. Its first origins were such and its present vitality is no different. It may therefore be possible to incorporate into the official body of the liturgy the highly developed popular worship of the Mother of God. There are indeed some signs that this natural process has been at work for several years. There is more than a hint of it in the words of Leo XIII: "Just as by the recitation of the Divine Office, priests offer a

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public, constant and most efficacious supplication; so the supplication offered by the members of this (the Rosary) Sodality in the recitation of the Rosary, or 'Psalter of our Lady' as it has been styled by some of the Popes, is also in a way public, constant and universal." (Augustissimae Virginis). Is it not possible that just as the prayers after Mass, addressed in the main to the Queen of heaven, have become by custom almost liturgical, so also Rosaries, Litanies and similar devotions to our Lady during Benediction, when the faithful are adoring the one Mediator, will come to be regarded as liturgical as Vespers or Compline? A similar fusion might take place in other forms of worship of our Lord. If something of this nature does occur we shall be provided with a worship of the "Socia Christi Mediatoris" giving explicit emphasis to the "hyperdulia" which is her due, and thus preparing the way for the definition of the doctrine.

Finally it appears essential that such liturgical worship should precede the definition because only by such a process is it possible to avoid certain exaggerations and misconceptions that are liable to arise from the idea of our Lady as the mediatrix or the co-redemptrix. A misinterpretation of the doctrine may well rob Christ of his unique position as Head of the Mystical Body, the one Mediator and High-priest, making it seem as though we require a mediator to reach the Mediator. Such a mistaken attitude is impossible in a liturgical context; if the devotion to Mary were always intimately connected with the Sacrifice of the Mass, the centre and pivot of the whole of the liturgy, many false conceptions and difficulties would be avoided. In that one act of the day, which should colour all our prayers, we see and co-operate in the work of the unique Redeemer, we stand by the feet of the lonely, suffering Christ as he hangs upon the Cross. Yet at the same time we stand beside his Mother and listen to his words to the Apostle John commending us all to her maternal patronage. The "per Mariam" of devotional writing is modified and seen in true perspective only when placed beside the "per Christum Dominium nostrum"



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which pervades the whole of the liturgy. It is in view of the Christian sacrificial worship that we are forbidden to address Mary as "Priest," but it is in view of the same sacrifice that we can recognize our Lady's part as "the office of tending and nourishing that Victim and at the appointed hour presenting him for the sacrifice." (Pius X.)

Perhaps we are arguing too much on a priori grounds in thus seeing the development of worship and doctrine concerning our Lady's unique position in the scheme of salvation culminating in such a synthesis, but it would seem to be the general trend of the interaction between the two as we have traced it from the germinal state of the first Anaphora up to the bloom of the present day. At least we may say that the liturgy, strictly so called, with its centre in the daily sacrifice seems to have given hitherto no special type of veneration which could be easily recognized as "hyperdulia." While in the liturgy itself the worship of our Lady may perhaps be distinguished from that of the rest of the saints quantitatively rather than qualitatively, outside the liturgy a noticeable veneration of the mediatrix has grown up, which seems to provide the distinctive worship required. It remains then for this devotion formally to enter the ranks of the liturgy and pave the way for a more precise definition.

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