

it not for her tender heart, he repeats, 'we weren spilt (=destroyed)'; and he concludes on a quiet but trusting note, begging Mary the 'mercycable' to bring us all safe and sound to our heavenly home.

Any attempt to convey the sincere and childlike devotion of the poem must be inadequate; when we read the whole in its original, it will make its own quiet appeal. 'The fervour of praise and devotion' cannot be more evident. And, out of many points, there is one that is worth meditating. Twice, the poet begs Mary to 'chastise him well' before the day of judgment; for he feels unable to abide his Father's 'rightful reckoning'. Surely this trustful turning to Mary, this confiding to her, as to a loving and wise mother, the charge of our correction, can become an integral part of our own devotion to the Mother of God.



## OUR LADY IN THE SCRIPTURES

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**F**ROM early childhood the Catholic is taught to realize something of our Lady's place in God's designs, and in course of time comes to learn that he who 'suffered under Pontius Pilate' was 'born of the Virgin Mary'. So much for traditional Catholic teaching.

Now let us turn to the Church's Sacred Book and consider the doctrine of our Lady as it can be found there. Having looked more carefully, we shall be rewarded by knowing more about *her*, and also by knowing and understanding the Scriptures better.

The last hundred years (1854-1954) have been a high-point in the Church's conscious expression of the doctrine of our Lady, from the definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 to this Marian year of 1954. We can contrast the years 1754-1854. There have been very long periods of quiet, when doctrines are humbly taught, tacitly assumed, and the reality lives on, for the Church's teaching never fails.

Let us start by considering the first generations of believers in the Church's infancy. A first catechism seems to have taken the

early Christian from the baptism of John to the Ascension (Acts 1, 22), and St Peter stood by this method later (Acts 10, 36-43).

For a time, it would seem, our Lady lived in the Church, sinless—but unmentioned; a living member of the Body of Christ, but not the object of catechetical teaching. Thus St Mark has only two allusions to our Lady, and these are incidental: 'Behold thy Mother and thy brethren are outside, seeking thee. . . . Who is my Mother and who are my brethren? . . .' (Mark 3, 31-35), and when he was rejected at Nazareth . . . 'is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?' (Mark 6, 1-6).

Incidental too, and seemingly impersonal and remote, is St Paul's wondrous text: 'when the fullness of the time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law . . .' (Gal. 4, 5). Only impersonal as regards our Lady, for St Paul was passionately preoccupied with the 'fullness of the time', that centre of all history on which had converged the prophecies and all sacred happenings.

Still, in the infancy of the Church, it was not all silence and distant allusion to our Lady. There were other currents in tradition. St Matthew, St Luke and finally St John have enshrined some of the old traditions and old memories in their writings. We say 'old memories', for there must have been some such, especially from our Lady who had, we are told by St Luke (Luke 2, 19 and 51), treasured these things in her heart.

St Matthew (1, 18-25) tells his story: 'Now the origin of Christ was in this wise . . .' and adds significantly: 'all this came to pass that what the Lord had spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,

'Behold a virgin shall conceive,  
and shall bring forth a son,  
and they shall call him Emmanuel'.

He thus gives the key to the classic prophecy of Isaias 7, 14, and recognizes in Isaias's '*almah* the Blessed Virgin Mary. Already the Greek translators had seemingly held that a Virgin (*parthenos*) was to give birth, and this was to be the extraordinary sign. Christian tradition unanimously holds that Isaias 7, 14 is a messianic prophecy. We must distinguish, however, the meaning of the prophetic utterance and sign (a) for Achaz and his contemporaries, and (b) for believers at all times, and especially in the Church. Achaz and his followers were presented with a twofold 'sign': a good sign in the birth of a little prince who would continue

David's line; but also a sign of woe, because Achaz had been obdurate; evil would loom up before Emmanuel had grown to distinguish good and evil. But the prophet's message goes far beyond Achaz and immediate local preoccupations of the menaced dynasty of David, and it only terminates in the greatest of David's line, our Lord Jesus Christ. The message of Isaias 7, 14 registers on two scales. This is more comprehensible if we bear in mind that prophecy in general is timeless; Isaias 7, 14 is a message for Achaz and for the Church. Emmanuel is the Messias, and the Maiden ('*almah*') is our Lady, Mother of the Messias.

Text and context show that no ordinary birth was meant. Certainly later Rabbinic writings and Philo give evidence that the Jews were expecting a very mysterious birth for their Messias. Something of this expectation appears in a passage of St John's gospel: 'Some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, can it be that the rulers have really come to know that this is the Christ? Yet we know where this man is from; *but when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from.*' (John 7, 27).

Anyway, whatever the antecedent traditions of the Jews, it seems clear that Christian tradition on the matter originated with the use made of Isaias 7, 14 by St Matthew.

Closely echoing Isaias 7, 14 is the text of Micheas 5, 1-2: 'And thou Bethlehem Ephrata art small to be among the clans of Judah: from thee one shall come forth to me, to become a ruler in Israel; and his goings forth are from old, from the days of eternity. Therefore he shall give them up *until the time when she who is with child hath brought forth*, then the rest of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.' (West. version). There is undoubtedly a veiled reference to the '*almah*' of Isaias 7, 14 and so to the miraculous birth of the Messias. Jewish tradition took the passage to be messianic and Christian tradition has done so unanimously.

There remains the text of Genesis 3, 15, long a *locus classicus* of Mariology.<sup>1</sup> The serpent or Devil is condemned by God:

'I will put enmity between thee and this woman,  
between thy seed and her seed.

This last will crush thy head,

and thou shalt thrust at (bruise) his heel.'

The prophetic force shows two collectivities in opposition: the

1. cf. the thorough investigation of Tiburtius Gallus, s.J. *Interpretatio Mariologica Proto-evangelii Post-tridentina* (Rome, 1953).

descendants (metaphorically) of the Serpent; and the descendants of the woman.

The Devil still 'in' the descendants will be 'crushed'. On the other hand an individual emerges from the collectivity to effect total victory. Greek (LXX) and Old Latin versions stress the individual by reading '*autos teresei* or *ipse conteret*. An imposing (but not unanimous) Patristic tradition sees in the Woman of Genesis 3, 15 the Blessed Virgin Mary. The reading 'Ipsa', 'she shall crush thy head', of the Vulgate, reflects this belief. And Pius IX in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* declares that Genesis 3, 15 tells of the Redeemer of the human race and that the Blessed Virgin Mary is also signified (*designatam*), and his and her enmity to the Devil's seed strikingly recorded (*inimicitias insignite expressas*).

However, we can hold that this is not the meaning of the text in the literal sense. Text and context require the woman to be Eve. It remains true that Eve is a type or figure of our Lady. Genesis 3, 15, taken in the typical sense, refers to our Lady. The parallel, Eve = our Lady, can be matched with that of 'Adam, who was a figure of him who was to come' (Rom. 5, 14).

Our Lady is the New Eve; and just as Eve was 'Mother of all the living' (Gen. 3, 19), so our Lady is the Mother of all who love her divine Son, a Mother who brings thousands to spiritual birth.

This typological interpretation of Genesis 3, 15 can serve as an introduction to a whole world of types and figures of our Lady which centuries of Catholic prayer, reading and thought have seen in the sacred text. We can do no more than suggest a few of the main classes of these figures of our Lady. Thus she has been compared to 'the moon and the stars which thou hast established' (Ps. 8, 4); or the *Stella Matutina* . . . 'the morning star in the midst of a cloud, and as the moon at the full' (Ecclus. 50, 6). This last passage is in the literal sense part of a section in praise of Simon the High-Priest. In the typical sense, with something of an accommodation, the words are applied to our Lady. Perhaps the best known of these 'physical universe' figures of our Lady is the passage of the Canticles 6, 10:

Who is she that cometh forth as the dawn of morning light,  
fair as the moon, bright as the sun,  
terrible as an army set in array? . . .

Events in Old Testament history provide many figures. The burning bush (Exodus 3, 2) which was not consumed is taken as

a type of the perpetual virginity of our Lady. This appears in the Liturgy on the Feast of the Circumcision, Lauds' antiphon

*Rubum incombustum conservatam agnovimus tuam laudabilem virginitatem.*

Our Lady has also been compared to Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28, 12) linking earth and heaven; or to Noah's Ark, bearing within itself the father of a new humanity (Gen. 6, 18 and 19).

Liturgical usages and institutions of the Old Testament also stand for our Lady. We still call her the Ark of the Covenant, and the striking parallelism of St Luke and 2 Samuel goes far towards explaining her title thus:—

<p>Luke 1, 43. How comes it that the Mother of my Lord comes to me?</p>	<p>2 Sam. 6, 9. How comes it that the Ark of my Lord comes to me?</p>
<p>Luke 1, 56. Mary remained about three months with Elizabeth.</p>	<p>2 Sam, 6, 11. And the Ark remained about three months in the house of Abinadab</p>

A favourite title among the Fathers was '*Porta Clausa*', from the text of Ezechiel 44, 1-2: 'This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it, for the Lord God of Israel has passed through there.' The general interpretation was that Temple=Church, the Closed Door=Mary's virginal womb, the Prince=Jesus Christ.

Further, it is not surprising that the great women characters of the Old Testament were taken as figures of our Lady. Thus Miriam (whose very name means Mary), the sister of Moses, and her canticle of thanksgiving (Exodus 15) admirably prefigure our Lady and her *Magnificat*. Debora and Esther have been taken as types, and the words used of Judith (15, 10-12) have often been applied to our Lady:

'Thou art the glory of Jerusalem,  
Thou art the joy of Israel,  
Thou art the honour of our people,  
For thou hast done manfully . . .'

Finally, we must remember the great passages in the Wisdom books, where divine Wisdom is described and praised in splendid terms (e.g. Proverbs 8, Eccclus. 24). All this lofty doctrine and

exalted wording came very easily to be applied to our Lady, as is often evidenced in our liturgy, cf., e.g.:

I am the Mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all the grace of the way of truth, in me is all hope of life; and of virtue. (Ecclus. 24, 24.)

After this brief summary of the use of some Old Testament texts, let us return to the New, especially to St Luke. St Luke teaches (like St Matthew) that our Lord was conceived by the Holy Ghost (Luke 1, 34-35), and Catholic tradition has always understood our Lady's word, 'how shall this happen, since I do not know man?', of a vow of virginity which she had decided upon at the prompting of the Holy Ghost. The birth narrative of St Luke suggests something of the mystery of the miraculous preservation of her virginity in giving birth to the Man-God. Thus after four days journey from Nazareth, and fruitless search for a lodging, she herself wraps the new-born Child in swaddling clothes (Luke 2, 7). St Luke's narrative also brings out something of the interior life of our Lady. She was truly one of the lowly, 'poor ones' of God, come at the term of a long tradition of the *anawim*, who for centuries had prayed and loved God in silence and subjection. Our Lady was the true link between Israel and the New Israel of God. In contrast with the Sinai scene, the Word was made Flesh in silence:<sup>1</sup>

Trumpets, lightnings, earth trembling

But when Thou didst come into a Virgin's womb,

Thy coming was all silence. (Anth. Palat. I, 37.)

Hail! full of grace . . . We should understand 'Hail and rejoice'.<sup>2</sup> Mary was utterly disposed, open to acceptance. She was of that small band of those who 'awaited the Kingdom', and her answer was for all mankind. Yet she could (at first) hardly believe<sup>3</sup> that God had such purposes for her; and she sings in her lowliness, 'He that is mighty has done great things. . . .'

The two major texts of St John tell of her presence at Cana (2, 1-5) and at the foot of the Cross (19, 25-27). Both refer to an 'hour'—at Cana 'the hour' had not yet come, at Calvary the hour was *that* hour when in the person of St John, the whole human

1. cf. *Dum medium silentium tenerent omnia Omnipotens sermo tuus . . . a regalibus sedibus venit.*

2. *Gaude et laetare Virgo Maria* gives the exact force.

3. *Non tam alta de se sapiebat* III, 30, 1 ad 2.

race was entrusted to our Lady. In both passages she is called 'Woman', perhaps rather starkly, not entirely explicable as a semitic phrase, but certainly a recall of the 'Woman of Genesis', 3, 15. This 'beginning of miracles' at Cana was a foundation of our faith. The Sacrifice of Calvary is the basis of our redemption.

Our Lady was present at Cana, and at the *consummation est*, a rounding off and perfecting of all God's purposes. And so too, to the end of time, she is present and effectively interceding for our spiritual regeneration, and for our ultimate salvation. 'Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.'



## OUR LADY AS PATRONESS OF THE DYING According to the Liturgists of Eighteenth-Century France\*

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THE ancient cry that there is nothing new under the sun seems often justified in the mind of the student pondering on the history of the devotional spirit. Perhaps nowhere, however, is the truth which underlies the apparently hyperbolic character of this dictum less understood than in the minds of those zealous for this or that movement or cause which powerfully appeals to them.

In our own day we have seen many Catholics become increasingly interested in the movement called the 'Liturgical Revival'. This movement, praiseworthy in its aims and aspirations, has won the approval and the aid of the highest authority in the Church. Sometimes, nevertheless, one senses in those who are striving to make better known the work of the revival, exaggerated and erroneous expressions and opinions. It was because of this spirit of exaggeration that an English observer mordantly remarked that some of the 'antics' of the revival's less judicious spokesmen justify

\* A documented study of this theme, in which will be found reproduced the Latin text of the *Missa de Beata Maria Virgine pro defunctis* (presented here in an English version), has been attempted by the present writer in his essay, 'Our Lady as intercessor for the departed; a glance at liturgical life in France under the *ancien régime*', published in *Theological Studies* (September, 1954).