

May all men ever more and more acknowledge his power, may they be built up as living temples from the corner-stone of his love.

O *Emmanuel*. 'O God-with-us, our King and our Law-giver, the Expectation and Salvation of all peoples:<sup>16</sup> Come, save us, our Lord and our God'. The cycle is complete. He, the eternal Wisdom, the consummation of prophecy, the hope of all peoples, is coming to  *dwell*  amongst us. Not remotely, but intimately, in our own nature; for the Word is to become flesh, and henceforth 'we are limbs of his body; flesh and bone we belong to him'.<sup>17</sup>

So it is that we can echo the words of Moses and Aaron, 'In the evening you shall know that the Lord has brought you forth out of the land of Egypt',<sup>18</sup> for here is the new deliverance. No longer from afar, in fear and trembling under the whip of the Law: near now, in our human nature, for 'he has been through every trial, fashioned as we are, only sinless. Let us come boldly, then, before the throne of grace, to meet with mercy, and win that grace which will help us in our needs'.<sup>19</sup>

The naming of Christ begins with Wisdom and ends with *Emmanuel*, his dwelling with and in us. He is the one Christ, eternal, the Messiah, the Lord. But at Bethlehem, in the crib, we see him bereft of power, helpless in the arms of his Mother. But here indeed is his majesty most plainly seen, his wisdom revealed, for

*Beatus Auctor saeculi  
Servile corpus induit;  
Ut carne carnem liberans,  
Ne perderet quos condidit.*<sup>20</sup>

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## DEVOTION TO THE HOLY NAME

BY

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CHRISTIAN worship began with the bestowal of a Name. It ends with the adoration of that Name. When the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mother what her little son should be called he started a devotion that has run like a red thread through all the worship of the Church and seems destined to last while time shall last and till time shall be no more. One surmises if among the things the wondering shepherds and the adoring magi asked was the name by which he should be called, and if the Virgin Mother in her graciousness entrusted to them that high secret which they carried so joyously back with them as they returned to their own fields or their own country by another way. Anyway, eight days after he was

<sup>16</sup> Gen. xlix. 10. <sup>17</sup> Ephes. v. 30. <sup>18</sup> Exod. xvi. 6. <sup>19</sup> Hebr. iv. 15, 16.

<sup>20</sup> 'The blessed Creator of the world assumed the body of a servant, so that, redeeming flesh through his own flesh, he might not lose those whom he created'. (From Lauds hymn for Christmastide.)

born, he was publicly given that Name which is above every name and before which every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and of things on earth and things under the earth.

It was not of course in itself a new name, or one that had not been borne by other members of his race, though to it now was attached a peculiar significance that was forever to distinguish it from that of all others, for the angel added, 'for he shall save his people from their sins'. Four others at least had borne it. The great Leader into the Promised Land was Joshua—Jesus—the son of Nun, called so by St Stephen in his sermon to his murderers. Another great Jesus was High Priest at the time Zerubbabel rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem. Yet another was the author of the book Ecclesiasticus, while yet another was a forefather of our blessed Lord according to the genealogy of St Luke: 'Er who was of Jesus who was of Eliezer' (Luke iii. 28.)

The most cursory reading of the New Testament will make manifest that a particular power and significance was attached to the revelation of the Holy Name, for its particular significance lay in the fact of its being a *revealed* Name. St Paul speaks of no man being able to call Jesus Lord but by the Holy Ghost, and by that he meant not some esoteric mystery reserved for a few initiated but none the less a divine gift, as our blessed Lord spoke of it to St Peter as being revealed to him by 'my Father which is in heaven'. Indeed, our blessed Lord himself seems to have laid emphasis upon the prevailing power of his Name, as he told his disciples that in his Name they should cast out devils and gave to them that assurance of the fulness of answered prayer when they had learnt to ask for things in his Name. 'If ye shall ask anything in my Name I will do it'. So too was the reward unailing to them if they gave a cup of cold water to a little child or received a child in his Name; so too was the reward of his Presence sure to the two or three who gathered together in his Name; so too was it to be full and complete for all who left house and kindred and land for his Name's sake.

And so it would seem that in the first use of the new power that came to them at Pentecost, the Apostles made literal use of the Holy Name in all they did. To the lame man at the Gate Beautiful of the Temple St Peter answered, 'In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk'. His witness of what happened to the enquiring Jews was that 'His Name, through faith in his Name, has given him perfect soundness in the presence of you all', and it was that very fear that roused the chief priests to forbid them any longer to preach in the Name. So did the early Christians rejoice to suffer for the Name. To Cornelius Peter preached, 'To him give all the prophets witness that through his Name whosoever believeth shall receive remission of their sins' (*Acts*, X 43). Indeed the whole battle of the acts and the work

of the disciples seems to have been carried on over the Name, and it must needs have been so while the dogmatic side of the Church's life was being formulated. St Paul, too, makes great use of it, and one would expect it above all to be dear to St John, as he declared the power to become the sons of God should be given to them that believe in his Name and to say that the final reward of perseverance should not only be that of the beatific vision that they should see his face but that 'his Name' should be written on their foreheads.

And when Christianity was driven underground and the first persecuted Christians began to meet in the holes and caves of the catacombs, it was still the sacred name, mysteriously written or engraved in letters and symbols, or whispered among themselves, that sustained their faith and gave them that gladness of mutual recognition that became the victory sign of the early martyrs of the Church; and one most dear inscription of the catacombs still inspires our prayers, 'Jesus esto mihi Jesu'.

It will be natural therefore, too, to look in the records of the Fathers, of all the mystics down the centuries, of the monastic life of the Church, to find there once again that peculiar tenderness and reverence which the mention of the holy Name seems always to evoke. Long before the devotion became a recognised fact of the Church's official liturgy, St Bernard wrote, in his still strangely moving way, of all that it had come to mean to him. Scholar, student, man of affairs that he was, he comes down at once to the simplicity of a little child as he lingers over the music of the Name. 'Whence think you that great light of faith, and no less sudden than great, which in the dawn of Christianity illumined the whole world except for the preaching of the Name of Jesus. But the Name of Jesus is not only a light. Dry is the food which this oil does not moisten, insipid whatever this salt does not season. If you write, your composition has no charm unless I read therein the Name of Jesus. Jesus is honey to the mouth, melody in the ear, jubilation in the heart. There is nothing so efficacious as the Name of Jesus for restraining the motions of anger, dispersing the swellings of pride, curbing the passions of the flesh, banishing every unlawful desire. What hardness of heart, what slothful torpidity, what rancour of spirit, what weariness and disgust have ever been able to resist the potent influence of that all saving Name. Whoever agitated or rebuffed by the billows of doubt has not found his mind suddenly illuminated with the clear light of certitude the moment he invoked the illustrious Name'. And out of that devotion came those incomparable hymns of devotion—'Jesu, the very thought of thee', 'O Jesu, King most wonderful', 'O Jesu thou the beauty art'.

But it was the Dominicans who first raised the devotion to an official place in the Church's worship and amongst whom it still holds high place in their regular offices and liturgy. In 1274 the

Council of Lyons urged a greater devotion to the holy Name as a means of more reverent participation in worship among Christians and prescribed bowing at the name of Jesus especially when it was mentioned at Mass. In September of the same year Pope Gregory X issued a bull to the Master General of the Dominicans committing to that Order the spread of the devotion. Better to fulfil this mandate the Dominicans founded the Society of the Holy Name of Jesus, which has ever remained attached to, and under the government of, the Order. By the end of the sixteenth century it had become an official feast of the Church, celebrated naturally at the Feast of the Circumcision, though the date of its observance seems to have varied in the different Orders of the Church and indeed in different countries: for some reason in England it was celebrated on 7th August. In the Dominican Order today there is a procession in honour of the holy Name each month on the second Sunday, during which the hymns *Jesu dulcis memoria*, *Jesu Rex admirabilis* and *Jesu nostra Redemptio* are sung.

It was a Franciscan who was later to be responsible for the greater spread of the devotion. In the early years of the fifteenth century St Bernardino of Siena took it up with great enthusiasm and with the persuasive eloquence and humour of the Franciscan preacher spread it far and wide till Siena became indeed the City of the Holy Name. He carried a tablet round his neck with the sacred monogram inscribed in it surrounded by the rays of the sun in memory of Isaiah's words: 'Unto you that fear my name will the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings'. Together with his friend St John Capistran he preached to great crowds in the Piazza, turned the occupation of the makers of playing cards into the much more lucrative one of making little tablets of the holy Name, with it 'he blessed the sick, wrought great miracles', exhibited the tablet to the faithful and invited them to prostrate themselves before the holy Name. No visitor to Siena will fail to notice the large monogram cut in stone above the Porta Camollia of the city, or overlook it in the art and workmanship of Siena's treasures. To him, too, is ascribed the authorship of that most beautiful of medieval devotions, the Litany of the Holy Name, which is still the prayer most used by those to whom the devotion has become most dear. It consists of a number of petitions addressed to the Name of Jesus, describing and enlarging upon it both in its human and divine significance, expressed in the language of scripture or the words of the faith of the Church. It collects up into itself all the burning devotion, all the tender affection of that of which St Bernard had already spoken. It may have been from his early membership of the confraternity of the holy Name that St Ignatius Loyola gave to his new Order the name of the Society of Jesus.

In the sixteenth century there appeared that charming book of

devotion called 'The Jesus Psalter' or the poor man's psalter. The author was a certain Richard Whitford, Brigettine monk, the friend of Erasmus and St Thomas More, chaplain to Fox, Bishop of Winchester. He loved to call himself 'The poor wretch of Syon'. The original MS was in the library of the Marquis of Abergavenny and was edited by a Sir Henry Gough of the Middle Temple for the Marquis of Bute. It is divided into fifteen sections of petition, rather after the form of the Rosary, with ten repetitions of the holy Name in threefold form, followed by the prayer—with prayers for mercy, help, strength, comfort, for constancy and stability, for a holy death, for purgation here, for the avoidance of evil company, for grace to ask for help, for perseverance, for the grace of attention, for the grace of conformity. The 150 petitions are based obviously on the Psalter and the prayers themselves contain many strangely winsome and beautiful petitions. It became a very popular lay devotion, and its use was widespread, especially among Catholics in penal times, and it was attractively reprinted by St Dominic's Press some years ago.

It would be an interesting study to follow the devotion as it is expressed in the wide and long field of hymnology. But hymnology is obviously the most prolific field for the devotion, from the hymns of St Bernard no less than to those of Charles Wesley. Indeed no little of the power of the Wesley revival was due to Wesley's own affection for the hymns that belong to the devotion. *Jesu Lover of my soul* is a not unworthy successor of *Jesu the very thought of thee*. But what is interesting to discover, too, is that there is a like devotion to be found in the worship of the Orthodox Church. It is true that in the Orthodox Church there is no official feast of the holy Name, and the *Prayer of Jesus* is not liturgical. But it may be used and is used, especially in monasteries, as sometimes a substitute for the official office. Thus a certain number of recitations of 'Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me' may be used instead, and the monks make several hundred prostrations in its use every day. It is also very largely used as a method of prayer by the laity, though without the prostrations. The method is perhaps best illustrated in that attractive little book, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, translated from the Russian by R. M. French, with a foreword by Bishop Frere (Philip Alan). It tells the story of a typical Russian pilgrim who set out from place to place in search of the secret of praying without ceasing. After a long search he found it at last in a method suggested by a 'starets', which consisted largely in the continued repetition of a 'Lord Jesus have mercy on me'. And this by long and frequent repetition he found the high road to that state of continued recollection that he had so long sought for and hitherto in vain.

And so it would seem that here is a form of devotion wherein lies a common denominator for many varying types of person and devotion. It belongs of course to the affective side of prayer,

though it would be a grievous mistake to dub it as just sentimental or mechanical. The early Jews shrank from pronouncing the name of God, shrank from destroying a bit of paper for fear that the Sacred Name might be inscribed thereon. So that the origin of this devotion arose largely from a desire effectively to safeguard the Holy Name from blasphemies and the light way it was too often used in medieval times. Those who come to know something of its meaning will not want easily or lightly to speak of or use it now. But if used faithfully according to each man's *attrait*, may it not still be a way towards that unity to which all our prayers are directed? It has the inestimable advantage of an approach to unity, apart from the immediate dogmatic side and is therefore most likely to affect the lay mind, and if it was more faithfully used and followed perhaps we should find ourselves in the end nearer to one another than we dreamed. Nor does the devotion belong to that rather sickly, sentimental, individualistic type of devotion we have come to know and dislike in a certain type of religious manual. Those who have learnt to use it and love it most have always been the saints and mystics, and there is very little that is sentimental about them, but it has brought to them all that virility and single-eyed outlook that has been the hallmark of their holiness. It is striking in the long pages of their biographies how many of them have died, from St Stephen to St Joan of Arc, from her to Charles de Foucauld, with only the word 'Jesus' on their lips—and there is nothing very sentimental about dying. Nor need such a devotion any more than that of the Rosary be in any way mechanical or wooden. It is mechanical to go up a ladder, but it leads at last to a view from the house-top. It is mechanical to play over and over again the scales of the piano, but it produces at last the pianist who plays so smoothly that we say he does it without effort. It seems mechanical to repeat some loved name, but it is sometimes all we can or want to say, and neither time nor repetition will stale the sound of the 'sweetest carol ever sung, sweetest word of mortal tongue, Jesus, Precious Jesus'.

And finally, perhaps here too is a field for psychological exploration not yet fully investigated, as we learn the most effective way of gathering up the twisted threads of our divided personalities when they are woven together at long last by the magic of the Name of him in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden, and with a new adoring gladness we in our turn learn to sing:

'Tis the Name that whoso preacheth  
Speaks like music to the ear,  
Who in prayer this Name beseecheth  
Sweetest comfort findeth near,  
Who its perfect wisdom reacheth  
Heavenly joy possesseth here.