

The Woman Clothed With The Sun

It was an essential part of God's design of salvation that it would, as well, lift man to the highest possible point. As a way towards this he wanted man, individually and collectively, to contribute to the utmost extent to his own salvation, so that thereby man would achieve a fuller measure of future glory. But the quality necessary to make an adequate reparation was not to be found in man, and therefore Our Lord Jesus Christ had to become part of mankind in order to make the human acts of sufficient worth.

Having come, even his smallest action would have been sufficient to accomplish redemption. But that minimum sort of Redemption would leave mankind cold. So Our Lord afforded such a startling demonstration of love, perfection and suffering that ever since (as Napoleon said in his profound analysis of Christ's undying role in the world) countless multitudes have striven to return that love and to suffer and to die for him. But at the same time he left room for the inclusion in that price of ransom

of the human contribution. This is the meaning of that scriptural phrase that we can make up what is wanting in the sufferings of Christ.

Actually this is the key-idea of salvation. It is a special point of difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. Historic Protestantism reckoned all the work of salvation to have been done by Christ, the only thing to be furnished by us being an act of faith in him. Calvin went even still further in his teaching of predestination to salvation or damnation. Luther repudiated the Epistle of St James because it spoke of the necessity for good works in addition to Faith.

Catholicism requires that everyone should assume the fullest possible share towards the working out of salvation both for himself and for the world. In this arrangement the Blessed Virgin was made primary. She was found in the eyes of God capable of playing a unique part and that part was assigned to her. The liturgy applies to her co-operation the expression that she merited it. This co-operation reached heights beyond which it would be impossible to imagine anything higher. She was conceived immaculate so as to establish a *likeness* between herself and Jesus Christ which would in turn enable her to conceive him worthily, in a manner fitting to the fact that he was the Son of God. Likewise for the further fulfilling of Redemption a special relation was established between him and her which was equivalent to that which existed between Adam and Eve in the Fall. Redemption was intended to be a precise reversal of the detail of the Fall. Although man is saved in Jesus and not in Mary, still examination of the full role of Eve in the actual Fall and then in the subsequent bringing forth and rearing of children to Adam, points to the magnitude of the part played by Mary as co-operator

throughout. As the popular expression puts it, she was Co-Redemptrix.

It is evident that God's idea in regard to her is to exalt her, not merely in the estimation of man which could be a small matter, but in the full essence of the transaction. In other words he wished to give her the greatest possible part that she could play. We are not able to realise the immensity of Mary and of her contribution, which is such that the scriptures tell us that all generations are to bless her for it. Fr Faber says that her greatness is such that God cannot reveal the fullness of it to us because it would only dazzle and perplex us. Other great writers have said that as time goes on a progressive revelation will be made by God of other items of her magnificence.

In a word, so great was Mary's part in Redemption that her son and she form a single, united principle of Redemption. That being so, we would reflect God's ideas and intention by seeking to appreciate her and to glorify her side by side with Jesus. This puts into a strange position that school of thought which is set on diminishing her – even to the extent of depriving her of function altogether. It is really dismaying to contemplate those Catholics whose only concern seems to be the picking of holes in everything which has traditionally been taught about her. I cannot but feel that such a one is a most dubious Catholic, even a soul in danger. He is departing from the Catholic line and straying into unorthodox fringes, if not into Protestantism itself.

The fact is that the council has taught that she is Advocate, Helper, Co-Operatrix and Mediatrix. It has described her extensive role in the last chapter of the Constitution of the Church which some people have thought to be a paraphrase of the Legion handbook.

A current article by the eminent Mariologist, Laurentin, devotes itself to a rather novel aspect of this whole question of Mary's co-operation. He discusses that new school of Protestant thought which has for some time past been making tentative steps towards Mariology but which still thinks that we go too far in that department. He quotes a number of writers who raise the objection that in the Catholic system the Blessed Virgin has taken over the place of the Holy Spirit; that we ascribe functions to her which scripture assigns to the Holy Spirit; and that in doing so we do not even mention his name.

The foregoing statement is in part true; not that we believe that Mary takes over from the Holy Spirit but very often we do mention her name and do not mention his. Before I proceed to deal with this objection, I point out that it parallels the other Protestant one that we substitute Mary for Jesus.

Those writers produce a number of texts in support of their contention. One of these is where St John tells that the maternity of the Spirit would only commence fully after the departure of Jesus. But Catholics speak of the maternity of Mary as beginning from Calvary. Again, Jesus speaks of the intimacy which exists between himself and the Holy Spirit. But Catholics insist on the intimacy between Mary and Jesus. Again, Jesus declares: 'I will not leave you orphans; I will send you the Paraclete.' Yet Catholic piety insists that it is Mary who has adopted us as children. Again the Holy Spirit, according to St John, is the Comforter and Advocate. Yet Catholics talk of Mary as being that. Again, the Catholic Church says that Mary forms Christ in us, whereas that forming is fundamentally the work of the Holy Spirit.

Those extracts supply a *prima facie* case for the charge against us. But the theological fact is that they are right and we also are right. Undoubtedly those functions in question are proper to the Holy Spirit by appropriation from the Trinity. But they are likewise the function of Mary by reason of her union or spouseship to the Holy Spirit. What one does, the other does. This is the constant traditional teaching in regard to the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin. Then the question arises: Why not speak of the Holy Spirit instead of speaking so much of Mary, because he is the major in the transaction? Therefore for both reasons, i.e. because of his divine dignity and also to avoid the misconception referred to above, those learned Protestant writers would no doubt argue that we should omit references to Mary and make them all to the Holy Spirit instead.

There are difficulties in regard to such a proposal: Firstly, if Mary is thus omitted, then the people will come to think that she has no role, whereas she has been given that vital, even though minor, role of co-operation in every phase of the Redemption, such that it can be described as dependent on her. A chain composed of several links is sundered by the breaking of any one of those links. Therefore it is essential to keep Mary's role prominently before minds to guard against that danger of forgetfulness, omission or suppression.

But does not this bring up the objection that at the moment we are committing the opposite and greater fault by suppressing the Holy Spirit? This is not the case, because any normally instructed Catholic is aware that the Holy Spirit is the operator of all those functions of grace, and that Mary enters in as a co-operator only. Secondly, it would be incorrect to say that the name of the Holy Spirit

is being completely suppressed. The position is that he is constantly spoken of as the operator of all those mysteries. Therefore the position would appear to resolve itself down to this: That the objectors really do not want any inclusion of the name of Mary in those operations of grace.

But as against this, it is obligatory on us to acknowledge her part; this is the law of Christian worship. We Catholics do acknowledge it and therefore we fulfil that duty. We also fulfil it in regard to the Holy Spirit by believing that it is he who operates all these mysteries. I think that we make specific reference to the fact with fair enough frequency. Surely the Legion system cannot be charged with non-reference to the Holy Spirit?

Again the objection proceeds: But you do not mention the fact enough; it is usually Mary who is spoken of. Perhaps that is a fact. For the purposes of our argument let us grant it as a probability and then suggest the reason why it may be allowable.

It is easy and natural to refer to the part played by Mary in all the mysteries of salvation, because she was a visible agent in them. She participated in those events in a manner which to a large extent is comprehensible to us. Therefore it is easy for us to grasp that part and to speak about it.

On the other hand, we cannot either see or appreciate the Holy Spirit. The appropriate offices of the Persons of the Holy Trinity are beyond our understanding, and we have to receive them on pure faith. When we have to talk about the visible and understandable and also about the invisible and incomprehensible, the stress will inevitably fall on the simpler.

As a decisive example of this I give you an analogous position, i.e. as between referring to Our Lord Jesus Christ

and to the Second Divine Person. We would be found referring to Our Lord far more frequently than to the Second Person, and for the same reason as in the former case. Yet it is the Divine Person who is the animating principle of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Seldom or never would we be found speaking of the Second Divine Person as preaching to the multitudes or working the miracles or as being scourged, etc. Yet it was the Second Person who was concerned in all those things and who gave them their value.

The retort which those particular Protestant writers would make to this would be that the omission of reference to the Second Divine Person does not matter because that Person and Jesus Christ are one and the same person. Therefore a reference to one includes the other. They would go on to argue that on the other hand the Third Divine Person and Mary are two Persons, so that if you refer only to one, you are omitting the other!

This seems a valid objection and it must be answered. It is true that if we speak of Jesus, we thereby refer to the Second Person. But even here grave error could occur. We will recall that the great St Teresa once got the notion that the Sacred Humanity of Jesus was only a stepping stone to the Second Divine Person. So she concentrated on the latter to the point of omitting recourse to the humanity. She tells us that Our Lord appeared to her to correct that error and to insist that he must be honoured in his humanity.

In the second place, I point out that modern unbelief has deprived Jesus of divinity, so that those unbelievers would not intend a reference to the Second Divine Person when they would speak of Jesus.

Having said these things in respect of the Second Divine Person, I now go on to the Third Divine Person, and Mary.

It is perfectly true that the Sacred Humanity possesses a higher union with the Second Divine Person than Mary has with the Third Divine Person, because (as said) Jesus *is* the Second Divine Person, whereas Mary is *not* the Holy Spirit.

But this is not at all the point at stake. The principle in question is that a co-operation of an intense and unique character between the Holy Spirit and Mary was contrived by the Holy Trinity; that it was deemed necessary to the Incarnation itself and to all the subsequent outpourings of the Incarnation; and that it is an absolute provision in the plan of God that this part of Mary be acknowledged. Therefore, as a complete consequence, Mary must be thought of and mentioned in that connection. It would not fulfil God's requirements to speak always of the Holy Spirit and never of Mary.

I sum up. Protestants do not think of mentioning Mary in connection with any of the functions of the Holy Spirit because they do not understand her part. But Catholics should understand her part and accordingly must be found acknowledging it in a manner that can be deemed sufficient. Laurentin in one of the Ecclesiastical Reviews makes the interesting suggestion that the Legion of Mary presents the best popular formula of giving practical recognition to Mary's share in the Holy Spirit's office.

I now venture to go on a stage further. I suggest that devotion to Mary has a far deeper root even than the important one of giving honour where honour is due. It is explained by theology that apart even from the purposes of Redemption the Incarnation was necessary because of man's incapacity to conceive God in any real or close or intimate manner. Left to himself, man will either establish a remoteness from God or else will bridge the gap by

the worship of idols. Jesus Christ is the answer to those alternatives. He brings God to man in understandable and attractive form.

Can a somewhat similar idea not be applied to the Holy Spirit and Mary? He has been termed the forgotten Paraclete, and undoubtedly devotion and advertence to him has been weak. It is therefore intriguing to find that in the Legion is to be found a marked devotion to him, a distinguishing of him as a distinct person in the Holy Trinity, the glimpsing of his operation in relation to the whole Christian scheme. Why should this come to pass in the Legion whose members represent no more than average human material? The Legion unhesitatingly ascribes that facility to its devotion to Mary.

Legionaries are taught to do everything, inside and outside the Legion, in union with Mary. It is explained to them that she is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit: that he works in an inseparable union with her; that she derives her graces and her whole function from him. There should be no question of either suffering eclipse in our worship; the thought of one should bring the other to mind.

She is so close to him that we do not touch her without touching him. She is so much his agent that in her he is seen at work. She is so filled with him as to portray him in a human way.

This teaching is readily absorbed by the simplest persons and resolves itself in practice into an adequate devotion to the Third Divine Person.

If Mary did no more than reflect in her own person the splendour of her spouse, it would be much. But that extraordinary Mirror of Justice does more; she projects an image of his perfection and action. She makes him tangible to minds and in a sense visible in the world. He

presents himself to our consciousness as a real person and claims our homage.

Thus Mary does for the Holy Spirit much what Jesus Christ does in regard to God in general. Recall too that Mary was the woman who brought Jesus on Earth and gave him his redemptive mission of crushing the head of the serpent.

So the position is the exact contrary to that proposed by those otherwise sympathetic Protestant writers. That recognition of Mary, of which they complain, instead of supplanting the Holy Spirit and depriving him of honour, brings him out of the darkness of unknowing and the mists of forgetfulness, and renders him as vivid to the minds of men as is possible in regard to the persons and things belonging to the purely spiritual order. She secures for the Holy Spirit a place and glory which otherwise he would not receive from men.

There is something terrific hidden here. Does it not form a new taking-off point for study? Assuredly it imparts a grave aspect to any aloofness from that co-operating woman. The rays of ordinary light only become visible when they touch something material. Much the same may apply to the Light immortal, the Light divine. The Immaculate One, penetrated with it, is an essential mediating way through whom we are enabled to enter into knowledge of the Creator Spirit Blest.