

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is Incomparably the Best Devotion to the Holy Spirit

Once again I discuss with you the difficult subject of the Holy Spirit and Mary. I approach it in the hope of exhibiting some additional facets – in the way that the gleaner goes over the harvest field collecting the grains which the reapers have left.

No legionary feature is more distinctive than its realisation of the union between the Holy Spirit and Mary. Addressing the Holy Spirit, the Legion Promise declares:

But I know that Thou, who hast come to
regenerate the world in Jesus Christ,
Hast not willed to do so except through Mary;
That without her we cannot know or love
Thee;
That is by her, and to whom she pleases,
when she pleases and in the quantity and
manner she pleases,

That all gifts and virtues and graces are
administered;
And I realise that the secret of a perfect
legionary service
Consists in a complete union with her who is
so completely united to Thee.

As our membership and everyday existence depend on our understanding of this divine arrangement, we must seek for lights on the subject.

Previously I have referred to the objection launched against Catholicism by a sort of chorus of Protestant thinkers, to the effect that the function in grace which we are ascribing to Mary is precisely that which in the divine order is attributed to the Holy Spirit; they saw we have transferred it all to her.

Protestant Objections Find Echo in Some Catholics

Formerly the pet accusation was that we put Mary in the place of Jesus. Now that there is a vogue in favour of the Holy Spirit, this charge is ingeniously modernised by alleging a similar trespass on his rights; Mary has taken over from him! On the surface there is a plausibility about this. It is true that those bestowings of grace which we credit to the Blessed Virgin belong essentially to the Holy Spirit. The reason why we associate her with them is because we believe he has united her to all his dealings with men, and that it is his will that men should recognise this fact and turn to her and honour her.

But it is possible that those critics are committing themselves to the assertion that God gives no field of action to the Blessed Virgin or the saints or the angels; that he employs no agencies save inanimate ones like the

natural elements? Surely they recognise that God confers an agency in grace on many men? If to them, why not to those who have passed from this lower state to Heaven and are now reigning there? There is no inconsistency here.

However that may be, those persons can see nothing else in our attitude towards Mary but a usurpation of the divine rights. They regard us as pushing the Divinity out of a large portion of his domain and handing it over to a creature whom we petition and thank exactly as if it were she alone who is in charge of the whole transaction. Those critics are disturbed at the enormity of this. But they are not alone. They find many today in the Catholic camp who agree with them that the popular attitude to Mary goes too far and must be cut down. The result of this is being shown in the serious diminution of Marian devotion.

In particular it is sought to throw the Legion onto the defensive. Its picture of Mary and her role in grace is viewed by some as a species of fanaticism. This causes one to ask: Have those persons read Chapter 8 of the *De Ecclesia* decree of the Vatican Council? For in no way does the Legion doctrine go beyond that decree! If they have not read the decree, that puts them in a peculiar light. If they have read it and rejected it, any words of theirs on the subject of Mary are of no consequence.

Going Direct

Now as a practical matter where would the process of pruning begin or end in regard to Mary? At what point in that descending scale can it be logically said: 'Just here!' If, as alleged, the Holy Spirit is waiting to receive us without intervention by Mary, and to load us with his gifts directly, why bring her in at all?

This has an air of propriety about it. Why should we go by a roundabout route when we can take a straight road? But even in the natural order, that simplification can be misleading. How many direct roads are in practice not negotiable, so that one has to proceed by circuitous ways? One has to go around a lake. One has to zigzag through hilly territory.

To this it will be retorted that in the supernatural order there is no need for indirect routes or expedients such as the Blessed Virgin; we can and should go straight to the Holy Spirit!

I dwell on this type of argument because its effect on thoughtless persons ignorant of Christian doctrine is damaging. If doubt is caused to enter in, even to the smallest extent, fatal injury has been done to Our Lady's maternal status. If there is any misgiving in us as to the addressing of her, then she has been artfully manoeuvred out of her true position as described to us by the Catholic Church.

What God Wanted for Mary

But there is a vicious defect in all that reasoning. It disregards the main fact in the situation which is the divine intention. Instead of ruling out Mary, the divine purpose was to build on her. God willed to give her responsibility and real authority, and to abide by her use of it. This was by way of a divine prime policy. He wished to make her the very pivot of his plan of Redemption. Everything in it was to depend on the free cooperation of the virgin. The Messiah would not come except with her consent. Moreover that consent was given in the name of the whole human race and would be instrumental in their salvation.

What a mighty figure all this depicts! But that personage had already been sketched out in prophecy. Thousands of years previously God had promised her. She is none other than the long awaited Woman of Genesis. The New Eve who with the New Adam will reverse the Fall. The immensity of the office committed to her is breathtaking. What resemblance is there between that greatness and what the minimisers grant her? The answer is that there is no resemblance. The Catholic concept of Mary and the common Protestant one are as far apart as the North and South Poles. To fulfil the Protestant one any Jewish maiden would be adequate, because it asks for no more than ordinary motherhood. But to rise to the destiny delineated in the Genesis prophesy only one person would serve.

No other person in all human history but that one would meet those divine specifications. She was chosen before the ages. Recall the phrase of St Augustine that she was the fruit of an eternal deliberation by the Most Holy Spirit. Then we see the exactness with which she was prepared for her unique mission, the Immaculate Conception providing the basis for sublime adornment. To apply to her some grandiloquent expressions of scripture, she is the magnificence of God. Yet he continues to add on further splendour.

Remember also what Fr Faber says to the effect that God is only revealing progressively to us the wonders he has done to Mary. As the minds of men become accustomed to each new one, another dawns on our horizon.

But if she has had virtually nothing to do, why that eternal preparation and accumulation of gifts? Certainly it would be meaningless. But so colossal, so nearly touching on infinity was the part she had to play that each and

every one of those embellishments was not alone fitting but necessary. She was being, so to speak, ordained not only to be the deliberate agent of the Incarnation, but also to be the channel to men of all its outpourings.

The Un-cooperating Statue of the Protestants

If the Protestant and Catholic visions of Mary are poles apart, likewise are their programmes of the application of Redemption to man. Primitive Protestantism requires from man virtually nothing more than an act of faith in Jesus Christ. This entitles him to the merits of Christ and he is saved. No contribution of his own is demanded. His category is that of a block of wood or stone out of which the sculptor, who is Christ, carves an un-cooperating statue.

On the other hand Catholicism opens up to man the responsible part of helping towards his own redemption. God says to man: 'In fear and trembling work out your own salvation (Phil 2:12). So man must add to faith the acts of a Christian life, comprising – let it be said – apostleship. Then the life of man becomes a process of sanctification which can aim at supreme heights. As St Paul says: 'I live no longer by myself; it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The Vatican Council declares Mary, supremely elevated though she is in Heaven, is nonetheless the model which God has in mind for all men.

That is the Christian scheme. In its working out Mary's part continues on as primary. She was the representative of mankind; she has become its queen. She was the one and only possible bride; she continues on as the essential mother. She affords to her children every grace and they are dependent on her. The Legion system is built upon her.

The objectors would say that this importance of hers takes from the primacy of God. But if God enacted this dispensation, how can he be at any loss thereby?

A Union Stopping Short Only at Identity

What the Holy Spirit has been pleased to do has been to establish between himself and Mary a union so profound as to stop short only at identity. There is no Incarnation but neither is there any separation of aims or conflicts or interests. Therefore in going to Mary one necessarily goes to the Holy Spirit; and in going to the Holy Spirit one necessarily includes Mary. This does not mean that we have to view this whole operation consciously. The mind may have to be content to concentrate on one thing at a time. Our approach takes in both provided the opposite intention does not exist.

The simpler person, whose prayer might largely be the Rosary without specific adherence to the Holy Spirit, would nonetheless be pouring himself out to the Holy Spirit all the time. Here may I interject that when I link the Rosary with the simpler person, it is far from being in a derogatory sense. Most of the methods which we have proposed for substituting the Rosary have unquestionably less of the spirit of prayer in them.

You will recall the handbook suggestion that the best devotion to the Holy Spirit is the Rosary. This we could expand into the larger saying that we supremely touch the heart of the Holy Spirit by loving his masterpiece Mary, and by recognising the great things he has done to her and through her.

If Mary is the choicest work of his hands and we do not see things so but in reverse, we are only caricaturing the divine idea. If he has brought her to such a pitch of

immensity, and yet we see her only as an excrescence, then we are certainly not in line with God's will; in that case there has to be loss whether there is culpability or not. The person outside the Church or the non-Marian Catholic may be acting out of ignorance. But that does not turn wrong into right.

Any loss of grace is a catastrophe. But a special gravity would attach to the putting aside of the very keystone of the plan of God, and Mary is nothing less than this. Newman has asserted as a historical fact that wherever Mary was left out, belief in the divinity of Our Lord became fatally obscured. An analogous process would operate in regard to the Third Divine Person when Mary is put aside. The old description of him as the Forgotten Paraclete might become true again. Or a wrong inclination towards him could show itself, a tone almost of dictation, of knowing for certain that we are perfectly interpreting him, of demanding his spectacular gifts to use as we think fit. If we are looking at him *with* Mary it is psychological that her humility will be our atmosphere. We will not be found laying down the law to him.

An Improper Attitude Gives Entry to Evil Spirits

Improper attitude could be dangerous. It could invite interference of malign spirits. The scripture cautions that these are always prowling around seeking for those whom they may ensnare. If our behaviour offers them an opening towards us, they will be only too willing to oblige by supplying us with the sort of thing we want. They can give us emotions, glowing ideas and their own type of gifts, all of which would be in tune with our desires but which would certainly not work out well for us in the end.

In this connection let us not forget that one of Our Lady's special spheres of power is that of restraining her evil spirits. Your legionary symbolism places this before your eyes. Her hands are outspread in the attitude of distributing grace. Her feet are set upon the serpent's head to illustrate her domination over him. This is something which God does not deign to exercise himself. He said at the beginning: 'I will set enmities between you and the woman' (Gn 3:15).

Have I been overplaying the influence of those evil beings? I do not think so. The saints and the spiritual writers have spoken strongly on this subject and it would be rash to regard them as exaggerating. Moreover we see it around us in all the sects and freak religions: people assuming that the Holy Spirit is at their beck and call, and that they are authorised to speak on his behalf. Every sort of folly has been formulated in his name and devastation has been the product.

I do not say that deficiencies in devotion to Mary are the only cause of such aberrations, because heresies have been built around Mary herself. Her doctrine can be perverted just like any other doctrine. Therefore the over-riding consideration must be the keeping in strict line with the Church. For the Church is the pillar and the ground for the truth. It is the authentic voice of the Holy Spirit on earth and there is no other.

All that said, I revert to my theme that devotion to the Holy Spirit must be Marian to be orthodox and safe. Wherever Mary has on any pretext been edged out, things will always proceed to go astray. The Holy Spirit departs with her; just as of old she took the Divine Infant with her. 'There was no room for them in the Inn at Bethlehem' (Lk 2:4-7).

To separate Mary from the Holy Spirit would be analogous to the separating of Jesus and Mary. No less in the one dispensation than in the other is her presence divinely insisted on. Mary with the babe in her arms is as perfect a representation of the Church as Mary in the Cenacle in the midst of the disciples after the descent of the Holy Spirit. Remove her from either and the picture is mutilated.

It is easy to understand the degree of dependence in which the Divine Babe was placed towards its mother. The closeness and the necessity of her relation to the Holy Spirit does not lend itself to such a simple comprehension, but their union was no less intimate and remains as necessary. Her agency was to characterise the whole plan, from the first prophesy to the consummation of the world and no doubt even beyond that.

Mary is Not an Optional

It was first to last God's abiding principle to exalt her to the maximum extent but would still leave her a creature. The latter she had to remain so as to be totally representative of mankind, but she was brought to the borders of the divine. This was strictly necessary for the purpose of the Incarnation. As she conceived by the Holy Spirit, so the same Holy Spirit makes all the outpourings of the Incarnation issue through her. This is essential in order that her mothering of men would be an authentic motherhood. She genuinely administers to her children their nourishment which is the Holy Spirit.

To be vested with power so vast she had to possess an affinity with the Holy Spirit so as to be utterly responsive to him in their partnership of grace. She is meant to be the responsible administrator of their joint treasure. 'She manages it as by a mother's right' (St Pius X).

Such is the woman who realises the prophecy of Genesis, and such is the office to which she has been divinely appointed. This carries with it the obligation of honouring her whom God has made so much of. We need not fear to attribute too much to her or to let our love take wings. Imperatively she must not be relegated to a corner, still less excluded, as the minimising brigade would have it. In the divine system devotion to Mary is not an optional.

We can apportion our prayers according to our individual likings. Should it be our special attraction to address them all directly to the Holy Spirit, there would of course be nothing against. But the idea seems artificial as excluding the other Divine Persons and the sacred humanity of Jesus. However, it must be stipulated that there is no slighting of Mary involved. Furthermore it should all the time be borne in mind that it is her maternal recommendation of those prayers which carries them to their objective.

Mary's role towards her child prominently embraces the aspect of protection. But when we analyse her relation to the Holy Spirit, it is found that the same element enters in. At first sight this appears almost disrespectful to him, yet it recommends itself as a positively necessary idea. Although the circumstances look to be different, the same economy is at work. In the one case it was the Body of Jesus which required guardianship. In the case of the Holy Spirit that protection takes the different form of safeguarding doctrine and proper approach. To an extent which we cannot realise, it is Mary's presence which assures due order and sanity in our dealings with the Third Divine Person. Without her he recedes into the shadows. It is she who as a practical proposition makes him familiar to us as a person. The mind in visualising them together

has necessarily to form some image of him equivalent to hers. This renders him vivid to us. Likewise her relations with the other Divine Persons aid towards clarifying his individual distinctiveness and mission. All this has the effect of eliminating incorrectness of doctrine.

Towards Advance in Theology of the Holy Spirit

The Theology of the Holy Spirit is literally of infinite delicacy. It is understood that there was a widespread desire at the Vatican Council that a statement, somewhat of the character of Chapter VIII of the *De Ecclesia* decree, should be legislated on the Holy Spirit. But this was considered to be premature: the theology on the subject being still under intense study.

Chapter VIII is a progression in that direction and we must be most grateful for it. In summarising so effectively the role of Our Lady, it is likewise casting light on the Holy Spirit who manifests himself most clearly through her. 'The Holy Spirit is revealed through the Mother of God,' says Bulgakov.

On those higher levels of Our Lady's power to form us in the Holy Spirit and pour into us his influences, our thoughts must dwell. Because every new day brings evidence of the importance of the mission which has been allotted to the Legion. St Louis Marie de Montfort's formula for conquest is a brief one: 'We must begin by blessing Mary. Then at once the Holy Spirit, seeing in us the proper dispositions, will come in to us in abundance and fill us to overflowing.'

The world has been going through a lean time. It is not a little frightening to find that the Legion seems to represent in a unique way the pastoral principle of the Church; that is the seeking out of every soul with intent to bring it

to Christ as he commanded. We are definitely trying to fulfil that commission which is seemingly impossible, and we are making strange, unexpected headway in every direction. Even at this stage it can be said that the Legion is converting multitudes.

The legionaries seem to be provided with all that they need in their work. It must not be taken as a matter of course that they are able to go to persons of every religion and of none and to present the Faith in convincing form. In view of their simplicity and ordinariness it has to be granted that they are the output point of divine forces, conquering graces. Quite plainly these are being lavished on them by reason of their wholehearted offering of themselves to Mary who apparently is affording them easy access to the Most Blessed Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.