

St Paul and Our Blessed Lady

Those outside the Church have tended to concentrate on St Paul as if he were on a higher level than the other apostles. They seize on the texts of scripture which tell of Our Lord's calling St Paul on the road to Damascus and giving him his mission to the Gentiles – about the year AD 45. They overlook the fact that each of the apostles was in his own fashion called individually by Our Lord. The presumption is that St Paul was placed in a position of superior appointment and in a quasi-independence to St Peter and the other apostles: that he took no orders from them. This suggestion is quite unwarranted and scripture itself refutes it. For instance, when he went to Jerusalem for the first time as a Christian, he found the disciples suspicious of him. They did not know what to make of him. Was he a miracle of grace, or was he what he had always been – a relentless persecutor newly clad in a sheep's fleece?

St Barnabas stepped forward to vouch for him. We are not told where St Barnabas got his information from, but he was able to supply convincing details of St Paul's conversion and of his genuineness and ardour. That

settled the matter. St Paul was accepted with open arms, incorporated into the apostolic band, and soon afterwards sent off with St Barnabas for his first missionary journey.

You will note: He was sent by authority. He did not simply march off as he pleased. The two of them were told where to go – just the same as all the apostles were assigned districts. Moreover, it was Barnabas and not Paul who was at first in charge of the team.

Then when later the two of them returned to Jerusalem in connection with the crisis over circumcision, there was no question of their laying down the law to the other apostles. Their special function was to describe to the Elders of the Church their conquests and the manner in which the approval of Heaven had been manifested by torrential grace and by visible favours and miracles. This was to prove that God was not insisting on circumcision as a part of Christianity, but was pouring out the fullness of his grace without that rite.

A long debate followed at the council and terminated in the unanimous decision that circumcision was not necessary. This decision was couched in a form which Rome has ever since adhered to in like cases, that is: 'The Holy Spirit and we have decided.'

Note again: The matter was not settled by St Paul and St Barnabas but by the council.

The next time that pair was sent forth, that is on St Paul's second journey, a subtle difference is to be seen: St Paul had become the senior in the team. Furthermore, it was determined that his special mission was to be to the Gentiles. Here is an exercise of authority over St Paul which complimented and implemented the heavenly mandate to the same effect. So much for that contention as to St Paul's independence!

Another assertion of non-Catholic thought is to the effect that Paul in his Epistles was silent on the subject of the Blessed Virgin. That is true, but the inference which is drawn from it is that he knew little about her and that most certainly he did not recognise her as having any role in the Christian system. My whole purpose here is to demonstrate the precise contrary in respect to St Paul. There were special circumstances which imposed restraint upon him. It was tendency of the time to regard every sublime figure as a god. Paul himself had actually been the subject of that excess. The paganism which surrounded him during his special mission to the Gentiles presented an assembly of many deities. It was necessary to guard Christianity against any such tendency to turn its leading persons into deities apparently on a level with Our Lord himself. So it was imperative to preserve Our Lord in a sort of spotlight of his own, which would entail leaving Mary in the shadow. According as Christianity grew and established its principles, that danger diminished.

Likewise, St Paul's phrase that Jesus was born of a woman is subjected to a violation. He was asserting the necessary truth that Jesus was truly a man, the son of a human mother. But the belittling school wants to put on St Paul's lips the suggestion that Mary was just an ordinary woman and no more than that. I will seek to show that St Paul's phrase could not have had any such derogatory sense, and that St Paul must have been chock-full of discernment and appreciation of her – surely no less than, say, Thomas Aquinas, St Bernard, St Jerome and others.

Improper capital has also been made of St Paul's repeated references to the New Adam. It is contended that his omission of references to the New Eve amounted to the deliberate suggestion that Mary had no partnership role

with Jesus. But this would be impossible. St Paul's references to the New Adam must have had in mind all that St Justin and St Irenaeus subsequently taught of the New Adam and the New Eve. For they were the disciples and immediate successors of the apostles: St Justin was particularly associated with St Paul. Frequently disciples were found surpassing their masters. Because in worldly matters each man learns and adds; he stands on another's shoulders. But that would not apply in the case of that doctrine of the New Adam and New Eve because it is the basis of the Fall and Reparation; the latter was divinely planned in a precise reversal of the Fall. Mary is as necessary a part of Redemption as was Eve of the Fall. To leave out either Eve or Mary would effect a radical change in the very idea. The Fall and the Redemption would assume a different pattern towards which it is not easy orientate oneself.

Let us speculate for a moment on that position: If Eve did not figure as an element in the Fall, that is if the serpent had directly caused the ruin of Adam, then Eve would be guiltless. She would not have contributed to the Fall. In that case there is an anomaly attaching to the position of their children which are thus born of a guilty father and of a mother innocent of actual sin. The resulting position is peculiar, blurred and complicated. It is true that Adam's position as head of the human race dominates and would cause his sin to pass to both Eve and their offspring. But this definitely places Eve in an anomalous position. She is his partner; she is free from culpability, but she is going to be called upon to pay even a greater price than he for the sin which she did not commit. She will bring forth her children in pain and suffering. She will have to pay the penalty in all the other events of life, the struggles, the sickness, all the warfare of a disturbed nature and super-

nature. The more one contemplates that suppositious position, the less one likes it. But one is relieved from all that perplexity by the fact that Eve not only co-operated in the collapse but played an initiating part in it, such that it seems to be made evident that without her the Fall would not have occurred. The Bible narrative makes it plain that Eve was a specific cause of the Fall; then of course enters in that other factor already mentioned, namely, that Adam's participation had overmastering results by reason of his headship of humanity. Man fell in Adam, not in Eve.

At that stage the resulting position becomes simple and comprehensible to our minds. Adam and Eve must be subjected to the consequences of the Fall. True, the race did not fall in Eve but she led to that fall in the fullest possible sense; that is to the extent that it would not have taken place at all without her incitement.

That is what is pictured in the Bible. It follows that the doctrine of the New Adam requires absolutely the presence of the New Eve beside that New Adam. If St Paul is deliberately excluding her, then the divine parallel which makes the Redemption an exact reversal of the Fall is being deformed by him. His doctrine in that case does not reflect the exact reversal of the Fall which God intended the Redemption to be.

But to suggest that St Paul was guilty of a mutilation of the divine idea would be only an absurdity. So it follows conclusively that where St Paul spoke of the New Adam he had present in his mind the absolute fullness of the doctrine. We, poor creatures though we are, are able to see with absolute clarity that the doctrine of the New Adam imperatively requires that the New Eve be placed beside him. It would only be ridiculous to claim that we are clearly seeing what St Paul did not see.

Again, let it be particularly noted that the doctrine of the New Adam is Pauline and not found in the other apostolic books. It would be carrying things to a preposterous limit to suggest that St Paul, who was its source, who claimed to have been divinely taught his doctrine, did not properly understand it and that its fullness only came to his immediate disciples like a dawning.

Therefore, apart from other considerations to which I will proceed, it must be accepted that St Paul's doctrine included the New Eve; that is Mary, the Mother of God and Co-Redemptrix.

This Pauline formula or parable based on reality, compresses as if into a nutshell the scheme of Reconciliation and incidentally the relation of Mary to it. It is a Mariology in itself; nothing could be more-simple. Yet it is so comprehensive that Chapter 8 of the *De Ecclesia* amounts to little more than the expansion of that nutshell into the grown tree.

Would St Paul be a little benighted in regard to Mary, wanting in appreciation and affection for her, grudging in regard to her? Of course not. St Paul was not isolated either personally or doctrinally from the other apostles and elders. He met them, communicated with them, and worked with many of them, including for instance a couple of years with St Peter at Rome. The apostles were a unit. They shared all the Christian doctrine and all their inspirations. A high Protestant authority (Dr Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*) insists that the alleged disagreements between St Paul and St Peter did not denote any cleavage of doctrine.

But very particularly St Paul worked with St Luke. Definitely St Luke was St Paul's most intimate friend and constant companion. He was with St Paul during both his

captivities. Firstly in Caesarea of Judea from AD 58 to AD 60 when St Luke wrote his gospel and secondly, in Rome for two years when he wrote the Acts of the Apostles (AD 63). The latter from the thirteenth chapter to the end confines itself almost entirely to the doings of St Paul. It is quite certain that both of those works of St Luke, and also the Epistles of St Paul, would not only have been communicated to each other at the time of writing, but discussed in every word. What St Paul wrote would have represented the thought of St Luke, and vice-versa. This has a vital bearing, not completely realised, on St Paul's attitude towards Our Lady.

Some critics doubt that St Paul ever saw her, but his contemporary Dionysius the Areopagite knew her personally according to his own statement. St Paul would have the same opportunities and it is unbelievable that he would neglect them. Mary probably died about the year AD 57.

I now touch lightly on the life of St Luke. He was born at Antioch in Syria – it is suggested of Italian descent. He was a physician and taught medicine. It is fixed tradition that he was a painter of no mean skill. He was not born a Jew. It is ordinarily held that St Paul converted him, but according to Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, many believe that he became a Christian at Antioch immediately after the Ascension. The first ray of history falls on St Luke when he joined St Paul at Troas and shared his company into Macedonia. He journeyed with St Paul as far as Philippi. From that time, the dropping of the pronoun 'we' shows that Luke was left behind to work in Philippi. But on St Paul's third journey (Acts 20:5) Luke is again in St Paul's company, having joined him after working in Philippi for seven years. He appears at Paul's side during the

memorable journey to Rome. He was in the ship with him and remained at his side during his first imprisonment in Rome. St Paul wrote his second Epistle to Timothy during his second imprisonment in Rome and this shows Luke with St Paul throughout his afflictions unto his death.

After that, St Epiphanius says that Luke received the commission to preach the gospel in Dalmatia, Gallia, Italy and Macedonia. It seems to be the consensus of opinion that at an advanced age he was crucified on an olive tree. In 357 his bones were transferred by Constantine and placed in the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople along with the bodies of St Andrew and St Timothy.

It was the ancient opinion that St Luke wrote his gospel at Caesarea under the influence of St Paul. This rests on the authority of Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius and Jerome. These mention the opinion that when St Paul uses the words 'according to my gospel,' he is referring to the work of St Luke. But it is insisted that Luke derived his knowledge of divine things not from Paul alone but from the rest of the apostles with whom he had active communication. Though the opinion was ancient that St Paul was somehow connected with the writing of the third gospel, nevertheless the language of the first four verses of that gospel is against the notion of any exclusive influence of St Paul. St Luke made the history of Our Lord's life the subject of research. With the materials so obtained he wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Of course, Luke sought information from every quarter, as he says, and among these he sought it from St Paul. The influence of the one upon the other in all their writings was a mutual one.

St Luke's Gospel is the specially Marian one. So evident is this that the Protestant Adolf Harnack, the chief

exponent of the 'higher criticism' of the Bible, could assert in 1920 that St Luke was the very fountain-head of Mariolatry. From that gospel, as our only accurate source we learn of the Annunciation and of all the details of the Infancy. Without that gospel we would be thrown back to the Apocryphal writings. One of St Luke's sources was of course Our Blessed Lady. From her he got vital knowledge which would not be otherwise available to him, because she was the only living repository of it. We must in imagination see her telling her beloved Luke those sublime and unparalleled things. Of course he would question her most closely, because no one so interested as he could be satisfied with simple statements of fact. Even we long for infinitely more than we are given in the divine text. St Luke as well as the other gospel writers, would have gained from Mary the fullest expansion of all those events in which she had played a primary part. Then later, the apostles and evangelists would have talked over everything among themselves and would have exchanged information and impressions. I repeat that the apostles were a unit and not a set of compartments containing unrelated knowledge.

Perhaps we can be pardoned for thinking that Mary entered in quite a special way into the affections of St Luke. Possibly even he was second to St John. This notion would be supported by the fact that St Luke was her portrait-painter. World-wide tradition holds that when he visited Mary in her elderly days in Jerusalem, he painted her portrait. This original is supposed not now to exist. The other images made by him could not be faithful copies of it but only free renderings from memory. His life of constant movement would not permit him to carry the original with him.

A very ancient inscription in Rome says of a picture of the Blessed Virgin discovered there that it was one of seven painted by St Jude. Theodoret, who was very reliable historian, includes the story that the Empress Eudocia sent to Pulcheria a picture of the Virgin by St Luke. Some at least of these pictures are still in existence, such as Our Lady of the Snows which was placed by Pope Paul V in St Mary Major's; Our Lady of Perpetual Succour which is in San Alfonso, Rome; Our Lady of Vladimir in Russia; Our Lady of Czestokowa in Poland. Out of that series has stemmed the conception of her appearance which we have.

All of those pictures are unquestionably miraculous in the sense that down through the years startling favours have been gained through devotion to them. Surely those miracles would not have issued if the pictures were not in fact the work of St Luke? A miracle is a witness to the truth and not a prop for fiction. If a number of portraits of Our Lady are credited to the one painter; if all are found producing miracles; and if the painter was her own dear evangelist, surely it constitutes a guarantee that St Luke was their author?

Of course this tradition is attacked. But the over-critical school attacks absolutely everything. For instance, as St Jerome says, the Blood of Christ was hardly dry on the ground when it was being asserted that his body was not a real one at all.

In further relation to St Jude's pictures, I turn back to a page of history of the highest value. In AD 60 St Paul and Luke, along with many other prisoners, were being taken by ship to Rome for trial. In a violent storm they were wrecked on the shores of Malta. But not a person was lost. The islanders excelled in their hospitality and in return the saints worked many cures. They were given much

liberty and preached all over the island, winning the bulk of the population to Christianity. Among the converts were the Centurion in charge of the prisoners, the whole Roman garrison and Publius, the chief personage of the island.

During their stay of three months the saints established three churches: the cathedral and one at each end of the island. St Luke – it is said at the bidding of St Paul – painted a picture of Our Lady for the cathedral and another for the church at Mellieha near the palace of the shipwreck. The former disappeared during the Arab occupation after AD 900. The Mellieha picture, though faded and disfigured, survives in honour to this day. Maltese tradition is insistent that St Luke painted those pictures and that those three churches were dedicated to Our Lady under the respective titles of the Assumption, the Nativity of Mary and the Motherhood of Mary. This casts an interesting light on the primitiveness of devotion to Mary.

May we presume to imagine a humorous exchange between the saints when St Luke seeks the opinion of St Paul on the freshly-done picture. St Paul exclaims: 'Whom is this picture supposed to represent?' St Luke: 'Is my painting as bad as that, Saul or Paul or whatever your name is? Or have you lost the Faith?' St Paul: 'Sorry Luke. I was only leg-pulling. But you know as well as I do that no hand could possibly paint the Mother of the Lord. However, it is not all bad and the people here will be ravished over it and revere it forever.'

Now let us return to the theme of the companionship and community of interests of St Paul and St Luke. As they shared thoughts and influenced each other, it is certain that not only would St Luke discuss his own writings with St Paul but likewise those of St Paul. Surely neither

of them would complete any of their writings without reading them over to the other, chatting about them, and perhaps altering them according to suggestions proposed by the other.

This would mean that every word of St Luke's Gospel would be lovingly re-read a multiple of times by them and discussed in finest detail. The language of love is repetition. Imagine the two of them in all the various circumstances of those momentous and thrilling journeys seizing on every leisure moment to return to those overwhelming topics concerning the Lord and his mother. St Bernard says that if we, with our insensitive and stony hearts are found moved by those things after so many years, what would happen to such as St Paul and St Luke so soon after the time. They were the immediate heirs of the Redemption. Neither has seen Jesus in his earthly career, but both had known and talked abundantly to Mary. Of course each of them would respond from the very depths of his utterly sensitive nature with a love for her second only to that which they had for her son. So as we read St Luke, let us realise that we are likewise being permitted to look into the mind of St Paul in all respects. I hold this to be conclusive in its relation to St Paul's outlook on Our Blessed Lady.

Away from us that carefully propagated fable of St Paul as a separate side in the apostolic ranks, producing his own special brand of Christianity, snatching at every chance of differing from the main body, and especially being odd man out where Our Lord is concerned. I contend that the closeness of the association between St Paul and St Luke is utterly inconsistent with any notion of St Paul's separateness, or non-Catholicity, or defect in regard to Mary.