

# the CORD

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## MONTHLY CONFERENCE TRANSFORMATION IN CHRIST

In these monthly conferences we have been seeking to explore some of the implications of that line from Saint John: *God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him* (1 Jn. 4:16). Our first consideration was the creative aspect of divine love, how a Trinity of Persons whose name is God fashioned man in its image so that he is destined as a social being even on a purely natural plane to give and share his life with his fellows. We learned further how God uses this natural altruism to prepare man for his supernatural destiny, reeducating his mind and heart so that he may be fit someday to enter a heavenly home as the adopted son or daughter of a divine family. By her religious vows a woman marries into that family in promising ever to love, adore, and obey as her husband the Firstborn of the Eternal Father, whereas, a man, by forswearing every human tie that might keep him from following *the Lamb wherever he goes* (Apoc. 4:14), is admitted into that chosen circle of Christ's closest friends whom He loves with an affection surpassing that of David for *my brother, Jonathan* (2 Kings, 1:26). And because the Son is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the religious who abides in Christ's love, *abides in God and God in him*.

But we also saw how God's creative love is scorned by sin or selfishness and what such abuse of love entails. It brings death and misery to the sinner in this life and creates hell and purgatory in the next. And because all sin is anti-social, it crucifies both God and man, creating at the same time the challenge of sin.

In our last conference, we told how Christ's redemptive love met that challenge and gave to us the power as it were to redeem our world by restoring as far as possible the ravages wrought by sin. This is a personal, an individual task each one of us has to perform. But as we continue this work begun by Christ filling up *what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ for his body which is the Church* (Col. 1:24), a marvellous transformation comes about, so that we might say in truth, if sin killed Christ, then love can make Him live again.

Humanly speaking, Christ died too young. His work had hardly

begun. Only one little province of the vast Roman Empire knew Him. Just a handful of the world's population ever met Him face to face. True, hundreds, even thousands, may have heard Him speak, but what were thousands, even hundreds of thousands, when the whole world hungered for His message? What might He have done had He lived! He knew men's weaknesses as well as their strength. He could have emptied our hospitals, our prisons, our asylums. He had the answer to all mankind's problems, political, social, economic. And yet He died in the prime of manhood, died that you and I might live. Or should we rather say, He died that He might live again in you and me. For did He not say as He went to His death: *The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it die, it brings forth much fruit* (Jn. 12: 23-24).

How will Christ live again? I think we find the answer in an event that occurred during the first Christian persecution. It was about noon. A little group of men had just climbed the long steep road from Galilee up through the Lebanon hills. They did not pause at the top to look back at the magnificent view of the Jordan valley, for they were pressed for time. Their leader must reach Damascus as soon as possible. Already its sun-blazed domes and minarets gleamed white against the sand-colored upland. This Pharisee was still young, but already his name was a terror to Christians. When Saint Stephen was stoned, he looked on with approval. In the persecution that followed, he canvassed Jerusalem from door to door dragging forth men and women until the prisons were cluttered. Even now he carried credentials to the rulers of Damascus commissioning him to bring back any Christians he should find there.

He was almost at the city gates when a blinding light shone about him. He fell to the earth. A voice chided him: "*Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?*" Trembling, he looked up to see the glorified Christ before him. *And he said, "Who art thou, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom thou art persecuting"* (Acts 9:4-5).

That was the beginning of a great saint's conversion. Saul, the persecutor, became Paul, the apostle. The vision left him temporarily blind so that he had to be led to Damascus. There he fasted three

days and nights awaiting baptism by Ananias. During those hours of darkness the words of Jesus kept ringing in his ears. Even after his baptism when he went into retreat in the solitude of the Arabian desert, they kept coming back. Christ had not said: "Why do you persecute my disciples, my followers, my friends?" but "Why do you persecute Me?" Somehow this Catholic Church was different from the synagogue, different from the Roman state, different from any other organization the world had yet seen. In some mysterious way it had become a part of Christ, even as food or drink become a part of the body, but with this important difference. Paul was still Paul; Peter was still Peter. They still retained their own personality. Their individuality had not been swallowed up. Still for all that, Christ had taken up a new existence in them and through them. He had so identified Himself with them that it made little difference whether it was the soldier of Annas who struck Him in the mouth or Paul who struck Him in the Church. To the first He said: "*Why dost thou strike me?*" (Jn. 18:23), to Paul, "*Why dost thou persecute me?*"

This idea intrigued Paul. More and more he realized why Christ could say: "*Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me*" (Mt. 25, 40). Paul prayed over this truth, he dreamt about it, he preached it, he lived it. "*You are the body of Christ*" (1 Cor. 12:27), he told his converts. "*Christ is head of the Church,*" he explained, "*we are members of his body, made from his flesh and from his bones*" (Ep. 5: 23, 29). To live the life of grace, to practice Christian virtue, meant to *live on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 13:14). When he talked of the sacraments, once again it was in terms of the Mystical Body. Baptism is our incorporation, for *in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body* (1 Cor. 12:13). And because our head has been crucified, we share in His redemptive death as well as in His resurrection. *Do you not know that all we who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? For we were buried with Him by means of baptism into death in order that, just as Christ has arisen from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in the likeness of his death, we shall be so in the likeness of His resurrection also* (Rom. 6:3-6). The Eucharist for

Paul was both a symbol and a cause of Christian solidarity. It knits us closer to Christ and to one another. *And the bread that we break, is it not the partaking of the body of the Lord? Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). Marriage was a great sacrament (Eph. 5:32) because it symbolizes the union of Christ with His body the Church. The Mystical Body was Paul's answer to racism. *For all you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor freeman; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:27). When he pleaded for purity it was the same motive he used. *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?* (1 Cor. 6, 15). When dissension arose in the parish at Corinth, he reminded them that *if one member of the body suffers anything, all the members suffer with it* (1 Cor. 12:26). And just as the sound and healthy tissues bring back life and health to those diseased, so too the weak members are strengthened by the virtues of the Church as a whole. And when some of the Colossians became sympathetic towards heretical doctrines, Paul told them sharply: *Such a one is not united to the head, from whom the whole body . . . attains a growth that is of God* (Col. 2:19).

From the declarations of His Holiness Pius XII we know that "the Mystical Body of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church are one and the same" (*Humani Generis*). And we know too its members are linked together by many bonds, such as profession of the same faith, acknowledgment of the authority of the Vicar whom Christ left as the Church's visible head, acceptance of its sacramental system. But if a Catholic is to be a living, active cell and not a dead or weak member sapping the strength of Christ's Mystical Body rather than contributing to its vigor, he must be enlivened by sanctifying grace which is nothing else than the Christ-life in us.

An analogy may help us to understand in what sense grace can be called the Christ-life. A living being, we know, is more than a mere machine. No matter how carefully we handle it, the longer the machinery is operated the more it wears down. Bearings become loose, parts weaken and wear and finally something breaks. But take the miracle of living bone and muscle. The more they are exer-

cised the stronger they become. Unlike the lawnmower which can only improve the lawn but not itself, the man pushing it not only trims the grass but discovers that the exercise stimulates the circulation of the blood, tones the muscles, gives him a glow of health. This is but another way of saying that life grows by living. The very functioning of the life processes causes the organism to grow and expand, to increase and multiply. Human life begins with a speck of protoplasm that weighs but one fifty-thousandth of an ounce. But even before the babe is born that bit of life has increased not a million or even a billion, but twenty-six million, million times. Supernatural life is much the same. It too tends to grow, to expand, to produce new life, for sanctifying grace is a kind of supernatural physique transforming the substance of our soul so that it becomes a supernature, a principle of supernatural life. Identical with the infused habit of charity, as Franciscan theologians tell us, it vitalizes our will enabling us to love in a supernatural manner.

To clarify this point somewhat we might recall that there are various degrees or levels of life. A flower is one of the most beautiful of living things, yet no flower ever saw its own beauty, or smelled its own fragrance, or heard its own rustling in the wind. To this degree, its life is imperfect. It lacks that form of living associated with feeling and sensation such as an animal possesses. Yet sense life too is limited. A dog can see, hear, taste and feel. It can even howl at the moon, yet no dog ever wrote a moonlight sonata. Why? Because it lacks the higher intellectual and affective life which makes man a creator of culture. But there is a still higher form of life, that which elevates man's soul to a supernatural level or plane. Indeed the difference between a soul in the state of grace and one living on a purely natural plane is greater than the difference between a man and the grass on which he treads or the cat he may pass on the street. For under the influence of this grace-life even the most insignificant actions take on a quasi-infinite value, in the sense that nothing short of eternity itself will be long enough to reward even so small a favor as a glass of cold water given in charity.

Incidentally the fact that grace is a principle of superlife explains, for instance, why there are certain things we cannot give away to others even by the so-called "heroic act." A man may dig

ditches to make money to pay off his debts, or in the olden days of the bond servant, to buy his own or another's freedom. But there is one thing he could not give away, the increased bodily vitality that came through the exercise of digging. So too with sanctifying grace and the actions it supernaturalizes. They have a triple value, meritorious, satisfactory, and impetratory. While we may ask for something either for ourselves or others, and make satisfaction for our own sins or those of the souls in purgatory, we cannot give away the increase in the grace life itself that such supernatural good works merit any more than the laborer can sell the health that is the fruit of his working. For every good act performed in the state of grace augments the grace itself. That addition is not something clinging to the soul like another garment. It penetrates its being, becoming a part of our supernature like food becomes a part of the body tissue. Grace works like compound interest, each increase accruing to the original capital, each new addition making its earning power the greater. Thus by repeated good actions we build up our supernature, we develop our supernatural physique in much the same way as muscles are developed by exercise.

This growth can be slowed down by venial sin, just as the metabolism of the body is altered by toxic poisons. It can be killed entirely by mortal sin. Yet theologians commonly teach that when the sinner sincerely repents, God in His mercy restores the degree of life and grace possessed before his fall. And so the grace-life continues to grow until a man reaches spiritual maturity. Yet because we are always children in the spiritual life, the fulness of the grace-life is never completely attained. Only in one human soul was such maturity achieved, that of Christ.

Christ, we must remember, was not only God. He was also man. He had a body that could grow weary, a heart that could be broken, a mind that could know, a will that could love. He was like us, the Apostle tells us, *in all things except sin* (Hebr. 4:16). Because His created nature was human, it could be supernaturalized by grace. But because it was created it was also finite, and like a chalice, could be filled up. And it was filled to the brim at the very first moment of the Incarnation. Practically, this meant that no matter how perfectly He prayed with His human mind and heart, no matter how

much He suffered in His human body, no matter how much He surrendered His human will in love to His heavenly Father, the grace-life or supernature could not grow or expand as it does in us. Did this mean that only in the most perfect of men, sanctifying grace could merit no increase of grace or that only in Christ this divine life could not produce new life? No, it only meant that God had to fashion for His divine Son a new, a mystical body, in whose members this grace-life might flow, and in each and every part of which He might be undivided. That body we know is the Catholic Church. As a living member, you have His life in your soul. That is why Saint John could write: *Of his fullness we have all received, grace for grace* (Jn. 1:16). That is why He Himself could say: *"I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly"* (Jn. 10:10). Truly He could claim: *"As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing"* (Jn. 15:4-5). Where the Christlife of grace is, there too is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Mystical Body.

If we understand this, we can also comprehend why we are necessary if Christ is to increase, if His grace-life is to grow and expand. Baptism implants the seed of grace, but we must nourish and tend it if it is to grow.

Each seed, we know, is determined in root or germ. A grain of wheat never sprouts into barley, nor does the kernel of corn develop into an oak. A hen may be set on duck eggs, but they never hatch out baby chicks. So too the grace-life in your soul may die or fail to sprout, but if it grows at all it must flower into a personality that is Christ-like.

In all growth, however, two factors exercise a determining role, heredity and environment. Hydrangeas, for instance, can be made to bear blue flowers instead of their usual white ones by treating the soil with iron compounds. But they never become bluebells or violets. The characteristic form or shape remains. So too with the Christ-life in the human soul. It will not simply result in a rubber-stamp likeness of Christ, but will be influenced by the environmental factors. This is another way of saying, it will develop in a particular and individual way, influenced by a person's

character, talent, the milieu in which he is born, works, and dies. Nevertheless, for all that, it will still bear the distinctive Christ-like form. *For those whom he has foreknown he has also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son that he should be the firstborn among many brethren* (Rom. 8:29). In this sense every one of us in accord with our personality traits, sex, talents, strength, must bring Christ into our concrete environment. Or better, we must make Him live again in every sphere of human activity.

And so we begin to understand dimly why paradoxically He needed to die that like the grain of wheat buried in the earth He might be multiplied in those whom Paul declares are *begotten in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (1 Cor. 4:15). What He could not do nineteen hundred years ago as a Galilean carpenter He achieves through His Mystical Body, visiting every corner of the world and continuing His redemptive work down through the centuries to our own day.

*Christ. . . dies now no more, death shall no longer have dominion over him* (Rom. 6:9). Indeed, the Eternal Highpriest still lives on in the sacerdotal powers of His priests. Christ the Divine Teacher still speaks through the infallible Magisterium of His Church. Christ the King still rules in the person of the Holy Father, Pius XII. But what of Christ the Man? What of the carpenter who spent fifteen years at a workman's bench to teach us that labor was not a form of slavery but of service? What of the very human Christ who wept with Martha and Mary over the death of their brother? What of the compassionate Christ who dried the tears of the Widow of Naim, who defended the poor, who fed the hungry, who cheered the sick? What of the Christ who loved to have the youngsters crowd around His carpenter's bench to see what He was doing? What of all the simple, everyday virtues He came to teach by His example? What of Christ the Man?

He too must live again. And because millions of generous souls are determined that He shall live, they have made their own that prayer of Cardinal Newman: "Dear Jesus, help me to spread thy fragrance everywhere. Flood my soul with thy spirit and life. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may be only a radiance of thine. Shine through me that every soul

I come in contact with may feel thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus."

And so it is in nuns' chapels of perpetual adoration or in homes where families have pledged themselves to the practice of nocturnal adoration you may still see the Christ who stole away into the hills to spend whole nights in prayer. Sisters who staff your local hospitals, who care for the homes of the aged or poor, are reliving Christ's charity to the sick and the needy. In the thousands of teaching brotherhoods and sisterhoods we find Christ the educator present once more. Every Christian father and mother who considers marriage a career, not a sideline, perpetuates Christ's love for little children. Every young man and woman who still prizes Christ's purity, preaches from His sermon on the Mount: *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God* (Mt. 5:8). In each of them Christ is forging a personality like His own.

Every religious, then, who is a bride of Christ or, like His apostles, an "alter ego", should be living the right kind of a double love-life, doubling for Christ in everyday life. Or perhaps we should not refer to it as a double life, for as Paul realized the spiritual union to which we are committed is not perfect until we can say with him: *It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live in the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me* (Gal. 2: 20). Only then is the cycle of redemption complete.

Fr. Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M.

## THE ASSUMPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY ACCORDING TO SAINT BONAVENTURE

There is no point in searching through the early Fathers of the Church for testimony saying that the Virgin Mother of God was taken into heaven body and soul. The oldest documents on the Assumption belong to the sixth century.

Although from then on the Fathers rarely spoke of this privilege of Mary, there is nevertheless no doubt that a strong conviction was taking firm root in the minds of the faithful that the body of the Mother of God, inasmuch as it was the virginal and the immaculate home of the Incarnate Word, was preserved from the corruption of the grave and was assumed into heaven immediately after death. This privilege was far from having the number of brilliant adversaries that the Immaculate Conception had. Already in the Middle Ages it was quite universally held, as we learn from the writings of Saint Thomas, Saint Albert the Great, Conrad of Saxony, Bartholomew of Bologna, and others. Among these writers, the Seraphic Doctor is surely not to be ranked as the least. In his sermons he flatly states that the Assumption is a fact and elegantly describes the triumphal entry of the Virgin into Paradise. For this reason, we shall divide our discussion into two articles. First, we shall treat the fact of the Assumption; then, briefly, the glory of the Virgin after the Assumption.

### I. The Fact Itself

The term "Assumption" will be used here to denote that outstanding privilege by which the Virgin, undefiled and immune from the corruption of the grave, was bodily transported to heaven immediately after death.

Strictly speaking, the Assumption is concerned only with the transference of the body of the Mother of God into heaven. It does not include the notion of death because it does not necessarily postulate death. However, Mary did actually die. Although there were once some who denied this or called it into question, it is positive that the Seraphic Doctor cannot be included in their ranks. He affirmed the death of the Mother of God, and alleged as proof either original sin, which he thought she contracted, or the fact that otherwise the mother would seem to be elevated above her Son: "It was not proper that the Son of God should have an immortal mother, since he himself was mortal" (III 78b; IV 904b).

Since it was the common lot of men, Mary too underwent death; however, her body was left intact and incorrupt. For how could that body be turned to dust which had not experienced the disorder of concupiscence? "Just as the Glorious Virgin in her life and conception suffered no corruption through actual concupiscence, so in her death and expiration she did not suffer the corruption of dissolution and the worm; which was most appropriate to the unbroken and incorrupt flesh of her virginal womb" (IX 715b). For this very reason the Mother of God is compared to the Ark of the Covenant which symbolizes integrity. "This (integrity) made her light by freeing her from the weight of carnal impulses. It also made her incapable of decaying by separating her from contact with rotteness which resides in a work of flesh. After all, what is virginity but a kind of incorruptibility? . . . On the other hand, what is sensuality but rotteness? Because of concupiscence, therefore, we are born to rot. Consequently (Job 17:14) (If) I must call corruption, my father, we will deservedly disintegrate bodily since we are corrupt and bear in us the cause of corruption" (IX 715b). Although such an incorruptibility of the body, strictly speaking, should be distinguished from the assumption, it is so closely connected with this that the two themes are usually treated together.

But it was not only incorruptibility of body that the Seraphic Doctor claimed for the Mother of God. He claimed her assumption into heaven also. He expressly teaches that Mary is now in heaven *secundum conjunctum*, that is, body and soul. Further, her coronation was "not just in spirit but also in the festive robe of her body" (IX 700a). In another place, he says that "the body of the Mother of God was glorified in the assumption of her soul" (IX 692a). And again: Mary, "is there bodily" and "the excellence of the Virgin's glorification is had in both soul and body" (IX 82b).

From the above, the Seraphic Doctor's position becomes obvious: after dying, the Blessed Virgin was raised from the dead and given the privilege of being assumed into heaven in a glorified body.

He also looked for arguments to demonstrate the privilege. The first one considered by the Seraphic Doctor is based on the supreme happiness of the Blessed Virgin reigning in heaven. We know that the Blessed Virgin is enjoying supreme happiness in heaven. But her joy would not be perfect unless she were there as a person; in other words, unless she were there *secundum conjunctum*, body and soul.

If the objection is brought up: Why would Mary not fully and perfectly enjoy heaven without her body? the Seraphic Doctor answers

with the teaching of Augustine: "Because, according to Augustine, 'the minds of the saints in some manner are not able to be totally absorbed with God. This is because they retain a natural longing for their bodies' " (IX 690a).

The second reason, no less striking, is the one which the Seraphic Doctor tries to draw from the divine maternity. He teaches that the perfection of the heavenly Jerusalem consists in a kind of "conversion" by which the blessed are carried back to God the Creator. This type of conversion would be proper to Christ and the Blessed Virgin and other creatures, each in its own way. In Christ, the conversion was "as that of a supposit into its subject, by identity of person." In the glorious Virgin, "as that of an originator into the one originated, as a mother to her son. The rest of the saints, on the other hand, are turned back as the ones who received origin to the One who gives origin. A special conversion is demanded for the Virgin Mother, who thus places a special kind of perfection in the heavenly city." This would be out of the question unless she were bodily in heaven "since according to her body she was the originator. Christ's soul did not come from her soul, since the soul is not passed on, but His body was from her body" (IX 690a).

When he interprets these words of the Psalm, he also alludes to the divine maternity: "*Thou has set on her head a crown of precious stones.* (Ps. 20:4). The Seraphic Doctor declared that by these precious stones Christ is symbolized, "by whom the Virgin Mary was crowned, a crown excelling all creatures in value since the gem had to be mined from her own being. Hence, it can be concluded that she is worthy to be crowned not only in spirit but also in the robe of the body" (IX 690a). He also applied the Scripture text: *I dwell in the heights, and my throne is on a pillar of cloud* (Eccli. 24:4), to the excellence of the glorification of the Virgin in body and soul.

We cannot overlook the fact that the Seraphic Doctor uses no argument from tradition to prove the corporal assumption of the Mother of God. This is not strange, however, because even Saint Bernard, in whose steps the Seraphic Doctor closely followed, nowhere makes a clear-cut use of such an argument. This is common to the writers of the Middle Ages. Although they hold this truth they rarely mention it. To support this statement, it is sufficient to cite Richard of Saint Lawrence who says: "Mary was assumed into heaven both body and soul by her Son, as it is indeed believed, although not preached" (*De laudilius B.M.V.*).

Whatever may be said about that, it is evident that Bonaventure not only asserted but also tried to prove the corporal assumption of Mary: "The body of Mary. . . is piously believed and proven to have been glorified in the assumption of her soul" (IX 692a).

Some one may ask what sort of theological weight the Seraphic Doctor gave to this doctrine. In answer we may say that, although it is not easy to determine accurately the meaning of the phrase "piously believed," it can not be doubted that the Seraphic Doctor held for certain the truth of the bodily assumption as a doctrine based on reasons of fitness and resting on the authority of Scripture. We cannot ignore what he so brilliantly wrote about the Gospel story of Martha and Mary: "This Gospel is applied to the Assumption of the Virgin, not by some human inventiveness, but by divine inspiration, because in this text the Holy Spirit has hidden a commendation of the Virgin as regards the number of her prerogatives, for the preservation of which he adds at the end: *Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken from her.* Yes, Mary has chosen the better part in both grace and glory" (VII 277b).

It is worthy of note that Bonaventure defended the Assumption as a unique privilege of Mary.

It is certain that at one time there was a popular opinion which held that Saint John the Apostle had been assumed. Indeed, even Saint Thomas held this opinion: "The resurrection of others is put off until the end of the world except those to whom it is granted by privilege beforehand, i.e., to the Blessed Virgin and, as is piously believed, to John the blessed evangelist" (*Expositio super symbolum apostolorum, ed Venetiis, 1593, XVII 68b*).

This is all contrary to the mind of the Seraphic Doctor who openly opposes this view by saying: "There is an opinion that the Lord assumed him (John the Apostle) in body and soul, and that in this assumption he died and lived again. . . This opinion. . . because it has no authority, can be as easily dismissed as it is brought forward" (VI 529a).

## II. The Glory of the Assumed Blessed Virgin Mary

Since the Seraphic Doctor tends to be diffuse when speaking of the sublimity and excellent dignity of the Mother of God above all angels and saints, it will be easier to explain his teaching in summary form.

When the body of the Mother of God was lifted into heaven it was "the day of the fulfillment of her glory." It caused Saint Bernard and the Seraphic Doctor to be carried away with emotion when reflecting on it. Bernard wrote: "Who can do it justice? The glorious queen

of the earth on this day bids us adieu and passes out of sight while heaven's army of legions march out to her! The Son wraps her in a joyous embrace and lifts her above every creature" (Bernardus, PL 183, 416). The Straphic Doctor goes further by saying: "Whatever honor creatures may confer on her, it is nothing in comparison to the all-surpassing honor which the Creator confers on her. The whole Trinity goes out to meet her, not by actually moving, but by imparting their favor, by princely joy, and by giving glory which makes her like God. Of Christ her Son, however, we understand literally what is said: *The King rose to meet his mother*. Rising from his throne, he moves the entire mechanism of his empire to honor his mother. Behold, this is the Solomon who commands the princes, tribunes, leaders, and magistrates of all Israel to advance and escort this Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies, that is, into the empyrean" (IX 694a).

Someone may ask: Can any convincing arguments of fitness be produced to attest such a glory of the Virgin? Indeed, quite a few.

First of all there is the divine maternity by which the Mother of God reached such a peak of glory that in heaven she is revered by Christ himself. "Jesus reveres His mother" (IX 694b). This should not seem strange because, although "the person of the mother is infinitely lower than the person of the Son" (III 206b), nevertheless, it is consonant with reason that Christ should manifest reverence for Mary. "Is it breaking any law if the Son reverences His mother? No, because the eternal law commands that the natural order be observed, not perverted" (Augustinus, PL 183, 416). This applies all the more to the Mother of God because her maternity was so much the more perfect. "Jesus reveres. . . not just any mother but a mother. . . of unique sufficiency because without union with male seed, she was sufficient for the task so that she had the power to conceive by the Holy Spirit who granted this to her. Moreover, she was of unique magnificence because until then no mother had generated God, and yet after the birth she remained a virgin. She was also a mother of unique watchfulness and solicitude because no mother loved as she did, and no mother was so full of anxiety" (IX, 694b).

To these reasons another should be added. Mary was exalted in heaven because she was intimately associated with Christ in the work of salvation. The patriarchy, which Adam had in relation to men and Eve in relation to women, so that they would sit at the right hand of God (that is, they were to have the better things) was transferred to Christ and Mary, his mother, because, just as Adam and Eve were the

destroyers of the human race, so Christ and Mary were the rebuilders of it. Hence, it is written, . . . *Let another that is better than she be made queen in her place*. . . (Esth. 1:19). For this reason also "all saints by crediting their crowns to her, crown her through whom, after God, they admit they were crowned" (IX 701b).

Since the amount of glory depends on merit, the third reason for this marvelous exaltation of the Mother of God is that "from perfect merit she passed. . . into glorious reward" (IX 699b). The abundance of the merits of the Mother of God was wonderfully increased by the constant daily practice of virtues while she was still on earth with us, but especially from the conception of the Word till His death on the Cross, where with a motherly affection that words cannot describe she suffered together with Christ. "O my soul, who is able even to think how much joy arises from contemplating that Mother of mercy, the Queen of love and mercy, lying with her Infant in the manger, with whom all choirs of angels are associated as with their Queen! She no longer goes about seeking her Son with tears. Although she lost her dearest child for three days, she now looks upon him with an eternal joy. She no longer flees in terror from the eyes of Herod into Egypt. No, her Son ascends into heaven and Herod plummets into hell. She is not now in anguish over the many things which the Jews did to her Son, *to whom all things are subject*, while she stood close to her only-begotten Son dying on the pillory of the cross. Certainly, she must have then cried out in anguish: *Oh, who will let me die for you, my Son!* (II Kings 18:33). She does not now weep the bitter tears which she did when a disciple was given for the Master, a slave for the Lord, a near stranger for her only-begotten and well-loved Son. Yet, this pitiable person who once seemed to us so filled with sorrow is now immeasurably above every creature, reigning in the palace of the Trinity with Christ her Son" (VIII 65b-66a). Moreover, her perfect chastity, poverty, and humility gave the Mother of God a very special crown of glory: "Who is more chaste than Mary? Who poorer? Who more humble? To these three virtues which came to full flower in her corresponds a triple and wonderful throne" (IX 694b).

Perhaps we would be able to comprehend more clearly the marvelous exaltation of Mary in heaven if we would reflect on her immense charity by which she attained such beauty of soul that, shining like the sun, she is found most like the eternal Sun of Justice. "The luminous Virgin in her assumption was actually brighter than the sun. . . because she was then more like the Source of all brightness than the sun. . . just



as a certain star is brighter than others, if it is known to be more than our earthly sun, so among rational creatures, that one is brighter than the others, approaches more closely the Eternal Sun, the Fountain and Origin of all beauty. Such a creature is the Virgin queen. If, according to the words of Saint Victor, 'the force of love transforms the lover into an image of the beloved', then Mary, since more than any other creature has been transformed into his likeness, can be called 'the splendour of the eternal light and the flawless reflection of the God of majesty, the image of his goodness.' Hence she is more beautiful than the angels and all the other creatures" (IX 691ab).

Finally, this was to be expected because even on earth the Mother of God excelled all the saints and angels in grace. Naturally in heaven through a great excess of glory, she would also be exalted above every creature. ". . . Whatever dignity or glory was granted to (the saints) was partially, was completely granted to the holy Virgin" (IX 696a).

Then the Seraphic Doctor argues in reverse order thus, "(Mary) was exalted above choirs of angels in glory, therefore, she was more in the summit of grace" (I 174b).

From this we can see that the doctrine which the Seraphic Doctor maintained about the Assumption was clearly Catholic. He did not merely describe, with Saint Bernard, the celestial glory of the Mother of God as she is now reigning in heaven. He did more. He said quite openly that she was carried there body and soul. Nor did he merely assert the privilege of the Assumption, but found arguments to support it. Moreover, he defended this privilege for the Virgin alone, contrary to the opinion of many others.

Anyone who would want to study this question and would remember the brevity with which medieval authors spoke of the Assumption, could easily see how important is the contribution of the Seraphic Doctor.

Fr. Emmanuel Chietini, O.F.M.  
Fr. Jorges Eppe, O.F.M. (Transl.)



## SAINT FRANCIS AND MARY

An Order traditionally devoted to the Blessed Mother of God could not but have got its inspiration from its founder. The Franciscan Order certainly received its love for Mary from Saint Francis. As scholars uncover or establish with more certainty texts relating to Saint Francis, they confirm the fact that the Poor Man of Assisi was not only the Herald of the Great King but was also the faithful Knight of the Great Queen, "Mistress of the World."

In this paper I shall attempt merely to set down the undoubtedly historical texts that evidence the solid devotion of Francis for Our Blessed Mother. For the historicity of the texts I shall rely on the work of Raphael Brown, Franciscan Tertiary who is on the staff of the Library of Congress. His work is entitled *Our Lady and Saint Francis: All the Earliest Texts Compiled and Translated.*

### 1. The Portiuncula

We might say that the Portiuncula chapel is the symbol of Saint Francis' love for Mary. There his love for her blossomed and bore fruit. And one might add that the restoration of Saint Mary of the Angels betokened the revival of devotion to Mary and the return to Christ.

While we do not know that the twenty-five by fifteen-foot chapel of "Saint Mary of the Little Portion," also called "Saint Mary of the Angels," was given to Saint Francis by the abbot of Monte Subasio (above Assisi), we do know that during the second or third year after his conversion (c. 1210), Francis, after repairing two churches near Assisi, next

went to another place not far from that town, called the Portiuncula, where there was a church built in former times to honor the most glorious Virgin Mary, Mother of God. But it was then deserted and no one took care of it.

When Francis saw it thus ruined and abandoned, he was moved with pity, because his heart burned with especially fervent devotion toward the Mother of all goodness and the sovereign lady of the world. And he began to stay there all the time in order to repair it.

For he perceived that, in accordance with the name of that church, which had in former times been called Saint Mary of the Angels, a number of angelic visitations took place there. And he remained there on account of his reverence for the angels and his special love for the Mother of Christ.

And while he stayed in the church of the Virgin Mother of God, with continuous longing he prayed to her who had con-

ceived the Word, full of grace and truth, that she should deign to become his advocate. And by the merits of the Mother of Mercy he himself conceived and gave birth to the spirit of gospel truth.

The blessed Father used to say that it had been revealed to him by God that among the other churches in the world built in her honor, the Blessed Virgin loved this church with a special love. Therefore the Saint loved it more than the others.

Francis, the shepherd of a little flock, led his band of twelve brothers to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula—and the graces of heaven went before them—so that where the Order of the Minors by the merits of the Mother of God had its beginning, it might develop with her help.

The Saint loved this place more than all the others in the world, for here he began in humility, here he advanced in virtue, here he came to his end in joy, and when he was dying, he recommended it to the brothers as most dear to the Virgin.

Although he knew that the kingdom of heaven had been established in every place on earth, and he believed that divine grace can be given to the elect of God everywhere, yet he knew by experience that the "place" of the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula was filled with more abundant grace and frequented by the visitation of heavenly spirits.

Therefore he often used to say to the brothers:

"My sons, see that you never leave this place. . . For this place is truly holy and the home of Christ and of His Virgin Mother. Here when we were few, the Most High increased us. Here He enlightened the souls of His poor by the light of His wisdom. Here He inflamed our wills with the fire of His love. Here whoever prays with a devout heart will obtain what he asks for, and if he offends, he will be more heavily punished. Therefore, my sons, hold this place worthy of all reverence and honor as truly a dwelling of God which is uniquely cherished by Him and His Mother."

And yet despite his great love for the little place, Francis would rather sacrifice its ornaments than abandon poverty and would rather give away its *New Testament* which the brothers needed for their lessons at Matins than leave unaided the poverty of others.

Once the Saint's vicar, Brother Peter Catani, saw that Saint Mary of the Angels was crowded with brothers who had come from a distance, and there was not enough alms to provide them with what they needed. So he went to Saint Francis and said to him,

"Brother, I don't know what to do, because I haven't enough to provide for these troops of brothers arriving from

everywhere. Please let some of the property of the novices expenses in time of need."

entering the Order be set aside, so that we can turn it for our Saint Francis, whose counsel was inspired by heaven, replied: "My very dear brother, put away that kind of piety which acts against the rule for the sake of any man at all."

And Peter asked: "Then what shall I do?"

He said, "Strip the altar of the Virgin and take away its various ornaments, since you cannot provide for the needy in any other way. I would rather have you strip the altar of the glorious Virgin, when necessity requires it, than to make even the slightest move against our vow of poverty and the observance of the gospel. Believe me, the Blessed Virgin would prefer the gospel of her Son to be perfectly kept and her altar to be stripped than that the altar be adorned and her Son scorned. The Lord will send someone who will restore to His Mother what He has lent to us."

At another time, at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, a lamb was brought to Saint Francis, and he gratefully accepted it because of his love for the innocence and simplicity which are natural to lambs.

He told the little lamb both to pay attention to the divine praises and to avoid bothering the brothers in any way. And the lamb, as though it sensed his saintliness, carefully obeyed his instructions.

also went into the church and, without being told what to do, would kneel down. And it would bleat before the altar of the Virgin Mother of the Lamb of God as though it wanted to greet her.

For when it heard the brothers chanting in the choir, it Saint Bonaventure narrates also the cure of Brother Morico, who before he entered the Order, was cured when dying by some crumbs of bread which Saint Francis sent to him mixed with "the oil taken from the lamp that burned before the altar of the Virgin."

## 2. Why Saint Francis Loved Mary

"He [Francis] loved the Mother of the Lord Jesus," says Celano, "with a love that cannot be described, because she had made the Lord of Majesty our brother, and through her we have obtained mercy."

Unquestionably Saint Francis loved Mary in the first place because she is the Mother of God. And he must have honored her other privileges and titles, as one must infer from his statement that "through her we have obtained mercy," and from Celano's assertion that "Francis' devotion was to the mother of all goodness and the sovereign lady of the world." Thomas of Celano was perhaps poetic, but he did un-

questionably reflect the reasons for and the spirit of Saint Francis' love of Mary.

Was Saint Francis the first to call the Portiuncula by the name of Saint Mary of the Angels? We do not know. But the name does suggest two more reasons why Francis must have honored the Blessed Mother: her Queenship of the universe and presumably of heaven.

### 3. Saint Francis Sings to Mary

In the last chapter of the First Rule Francis incorporated the following "Prayer, Praise and Thanksgiving."

Almighty, / Most High, / Most holy and sovereign God, / Holy and just Father. . . / We give thanks because, / Just as through Your Son / You created us, / So by that true and holy love of Yours, / With which You have loved us, / You caused Him to be born / True God and true man, / From the glorious ever Virgin / Most blessed holy Mary, / And You wished / Us prisoners to be redeemed, / By His cross and Blood and death.

Francis, besides frequently mentioning Mary's part in our redemption, also composed two, and possibly three, prayers to her. Celano says that Saint Francis "rendered special praises and poured forth prayers and offered his devotion to the Mother of Jesus—in how many and in what ways, it is not humanly possible to tell"; and Saint Bonaventure says that "after Christ, he placed his trust especially in her." His first companion, Bernard, before joining the Order, "often had him as his guest in his home. And he used to see him praying all night, very rarely sleeping, praising God and His Mother, the glorious Virgin."

In the last chapter of the First Rule, Saint Francis besought the "glorious Mother, the most blessed Mary ever Virgin. . . to give thanks" to the Lord for all that the Savior has done for us.

In the Office of the Passion, which he had composed and which he recited daily, Saint Francis began and ended each of the seven parts with the following antiphon:

Holy Virgin Mary / There is none like you / Born in the world among women. / Daughter and handmaid / Of the most high King / And heavenly Father, / Mother of our most holy Lord / Jesus Christ, / Spouse of the Holy Spirit / Pray for us with Saint Michael the Archangel and all the Virtues of Heaven and all the Saints / To your most holy beloved Son, / Our Lord and Master.

The "Salutation to the Blessed Virgin" is certainly the most beautiful hymn to Mary from the lips of Saint Francis:

Hail, holy Lady, / Most holy Queen, / Mary, / Mother of God! / You are forever Virgin, / Chosen by the most holy Father in

heaven, / Whom He consecrated, / With His most holy beloved Son / And the Paraclete Spirit, / You in whom was and is / All plenitude of grace / And all good! / Hail, His Palace, / Hail, His Tabernacle! / Hail, His Dwelling! / Hail, His Vesture! / Hail, His Handmaid / Hail His Mother / And all you Holy Virtues / That by the grace and light / Of the Holy Spirit / Are infused into / The hearts of the faithful, / That from faithless Souls / You may make them faithful to God!

An organic sequel to the previous "Salutation to the Blessed Virgin" is the "Salutation to the Virtues" and its probably historical subtitle, "with which the Blessed Virgin Mary Was Adorned and with Which a Holy Soul Must Be Adorned."

Hail, Queen WISDOM! / The Lord save you / with your Sister, / Holy pure SIMPLICITY!

Holy Lady POVERTY! / The Lord save you / with your Sister / Holy HUMILITY!

Holy Lady CHARITY! / The Lord save you / with your Sister, / Holy OBEDIENCE!

All you very holy VIRTUES / The Lord save you, / who proceed and come from Him.

There is not a single man / in the whole world / Who can have one of you, / Unless first he dies.

Whoever has one, / and does not offend the others, / Has all. / And whoever offends one / Has none and offends all.

\* \* \*

And each one confounds vices and sins.

Holy WISDOM / Confounds Satan / and all his malice.

Pure holy SIMPLICITY / Confounds all the wisdom / of this world and of the flesh.

Holy POVERTY / Confounds all greed and avarice / and anxiety about earthly things.

Holy HUMILITY / Confounds pride / and all the men of this world / and everything that is in the world.

/ Holy CHARITY / Confounds all diabolical and sensual temptations / and all sensual fears.

Holy OBEDIENCE / Confounds all self-will / and all sensual will, / And keeps its body / obedient to the spirit / and obedient to the neighbor, / and makes man subject / to all the men of this world / And not only to the men / but also to all animals and wild beasts, / So that they can do with him / whatever they wish, / As far as God from above allows them.

Saint Francis not only frequently prayed to the Blessed Mother, but also "in her honor he used to fast with great devotion from the feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul until the feast of the Assumption."

#### 4. *Saint Francis Especially Loved the Poor Virgin*

In stressing the grand concept of all-embracing and all-pervading poverty—a poverty that is well reflected in the spurious “Prayer for Peace,” Francis termed poverty “the companion of the Son of God,” and Pius XI was inspired to add: “Francis loved poverty so much because he regarded her as the companion of the Mother of God.”

“Saint Francis often recalled with tears the poverty of Jesus Christ and His mother. And he declared that this virtue was the queen because it shone with such superior brilliance in the King of Kings and in the Queen, His Mother.”

#### 5. *Saint Francis Preached to All the Poverty of Mary*

Because Francis considered poverty the queen of virtues, he naturally tried to communicate his ideal to all men. In his *Letter to All the Faithful* he pointed out to them that Jesus, “though He was rich above all things, nevertheless wished with His most Blessed Mother to take poverty as His choice.”

To the Poor Clares, Saint Francis wrote shortly before his death: “I, little Brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother, and to persevere in it to the end.”

To a brother who had expressed the suspicion that a certain poor man was “rich in will,” Saint Francis said, after making the brother apologize to the man and ask him to pray for him, “Brother, when you see a poor person, a mirror of the Lord and his poor Mother is set before you.”

And in Chapter IX of his First Rule, Francis urged all the brothers in their begging

to strive to follow the humility and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . And if it is necessary, let them go begging. And they should not be ashamed, but let them rather remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living almighty God. . . was not ashamed and was poor and homeless and lived from alms—He and the Blessed Virgin and His disciples.”

One day when he was sitting at a meal, a certain brother recalled the poverty of the Blessed Virgin and told about the destitution of Christ her Son, saying to him that the Blessed Virgin Mary was such a poor little woman that she had nothing to give her little Son to eat.

When Saint Francis heard this, he immediately rose from the table, sighing with intense grief and groaning and sobbing with pain. He left the table and ate the rest of his bread on the bare ground, weeping very much.

When Francis exhorted everyone to feed the birds on Christmas, in honor of the birth of the Christ Child, he recalled

not without tears how on that day the poor little Virgin was surrounded with poverty and need—how on that night the most Blessed Virgin Mary laid the Son of God down in the manger between an ox and a donkey.

In all the poor he saw the Son of the poor lady. He bore naked in his heart the One whom she bore naked in her hands.

#### 6. *Relics of Saint Francis' Devotion to Mary*

It is not certain with just how many Blessed Virgin churches and chapels Saint Francis was associated in his work. In Wadding's *Annales* Father Bierbaum found evidence of at least twelve which the Saint either acquired or built.

There are tiny chapels usually named Santa Maria in several of Saint Francis' favorite hill-side hermitages, such as Monte Alverna, Mont Luco (above Spoleto), the Carceri (above Assisi), and the Eremita di Cesi between Todi and Terni. In the Eremita chapel Saint Francis had fifteen brief inscriptions painted on the walls, including one which read: *Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.*

Among the relics of Saint Francis himself which are preserved in his basilica in Assisi is a small crucifix five and a half by three and a half inches, made of walnut and probably dating from the twelfth century, which the Saint is believed to have used. The Blessed Virgin figures in five of the scenes sculptured in relief on its broad sides, representing the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Crucifixion and the Entombment.

Mr. Raphael Brown intends to study and write on *The Hermitages of Saint Francis* and from him we shall expect to have authoritative decisions on the history of the Madonna which disappeared from Santa Maria degli Angeli centuries ago, of the Byzantine Madonna which the Capuchin Fathers residing in Celle, near Cortona, say Saint Francis venerated, and of the Madonna in San Francesco trans Tevere.

#### 7. *The Portiuncula Indulgence*

Whether Saint Francis obtained the Portiuncula Indulgence from our Lord through the intercession of our Lady we do not know. The vision and the request of Saint Francis are not mentioned in the earliest documents. However the concession by the newly elected Pope Honorius III to Saint Francis at Perugia, in late July 1216, is supported

by documentary evidence. The following dialogue brings out the main points of the Pope's concession:

And at once, taking Brother Masseo with him as companion, he [Francis] went to Perugia, where the Lord Pope Honorius was staying at that time.

And when he was in the presence of the Lord Pope Honorius, after bowing reverently to him, he said to him very humbly: "Very holy and blessed Holy Father, may Your Holiness know that I recently repaired for you in honor of the Virgin Mother of God a church for which I would like to have, if it pleases Your Holiness, an indulgence without any donation to be offered.

The Lord Pope replied: "Francis, that cannot properly be done, since whoever seeks an indulgence should earn it, and in order to earn it should make a sacrifice."

And the Pope added: "How much of an indulgence do you want? Do you want one year or several?"

And then Saint Francis did not answer him.

Then the Lord Pope, perceiving that Saint Francis was not satisfied, said to him: "Do you want three years?"

And Saint Francis did not give him any answer.

And the Lord Pope repeated again: "Do you want seven years?"

And then Saint Francis answered and said: "Very blessed Father, I am not asking for years but for souls."

And then the Lord Pope said to him: "And in what way do you want souls?"

Saint Francis said to him: "Very holy Father, may it please you and Your Holiness, through the merciful heart of Jesus, to grant **THERE** a plenary indulgence of all sins—to be confirmed by you in heaven and on earth—from the day of baptism until the day assigned by us and the hour of entering the church—and this for every penitent who is well confessed and contrite and has made full satisfaction. For great are the marvels that God continuously performs there."

And then the Lord Pope replied and said: "Francis, you are asking for a great thing, nor is it the custom of the Roman Church to give such an indulgence."

Then Saint Francis answered: "Very holy Father and Lord, what I am asking is not on my own behalf, but on behalf of Him who sent me here, that is, my Lord Jesus Christ! And of this I have many witnesses, that is, the glorious Virgin Mary and the heavenly angels who were present then!"

And after the Lord Pope heard this, he could not raise an objection against him. But marveling at those words he repeated three times with intense emotion, "It pleases me that you have a plenary indulgence. And so be it as you request—in the name of Jesus Christ—and as you wish!"

And then the Cardinals, hearing this, said to the Lord Pope: "Take care, very holy Father, not to grant such an indulgence to Brother Francis, for if you do so, you will dissolve the one far beyond the sea, and also you will completely annul the Indulgence of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Therefore we beseech you to revoke it or otherwise to modify it, so that the fore-mentioned ones may not be destroyed."

And then the Lord Pope replied: "We have given and conceded it, so it is not right to destroy it but rather to confirm it. For you do not know the intimacy and friendship which this poor little Brother Francis has with the Lord Jesus Christ."

And he added: "And who is he who would dare to set himself between those two, that is, Christ and Francis? And who could separate them?"—as if he were saying: "no one."

Therefore the Cardinals then said to the Supreme Pontiff: "Very Blessed Father, if this Indulgence cannot in any way be revoked, let it at least be modified."

And then the Lord Pope said: "That is agreeable to me and is right."

And when Saint Francis had been called into the presence of the Cardinals, the Lord Pope said to him: "Francis, we concede to you the Indulgence which you requested, so that whoever truly penitent and confessed shall come and enter the Church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula—it is our wish that he have a plenary indulgence of all his sins. And we grant it to you only for a single natural day for all the years of the world, beginning at the First Vespers and lasting through the whole day, until the Second Vespers of the following day."

And then Saint Francis merrily and joyfully gave thanks to God, and bidding the Supreme Pontiff farewell at one, he began to leave.

Seeing this, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Lord Pope Honorius, called him and said to him: "O you simple fellow, why are you thus going away, and what did you come for? Tell me, are you taking away with you anything about the Indulgence which you requested? Don't you see that, although the Indulgence has been granted to you, nevertheless it has not been confirmed for you by the testimonial of a bull?"

Saint Francis replied and said: "Holy Father, for me your word is sufficient, and I want nothing else. If this is the work of God, He Himself will manifest His work and preserve it in the hearts of faithful persons. Therefore I do not want any other document or charter except the Blessed Virgin Mary; and Jesus Christ will be the notary and the angels will be the witnesses!"

And after saying this, Saint Francis left and went to Assisi.

8. *Mary Picks Francis to Aid Dominic*

The Bollandists considered the following vision probably historical because it is found in the two thirteenth century sources.

Once when Saint Dominic was in Rome seeking to obtain the confirmation of his Order from God and the Lord Pope, during a certain night while he was watching and praying in a church, as was his custom, he saw in a vision the Lord Jesus, sitting at the right of the Father, rise up in anger to slay all the sinners on earth and destroy all who were committing iniquity.

He stood in the air with a terrifying expression, brandishing three arrows against the world sunk into evil: one with which He would transfix the haughty necks of the proud; another with which He would cast out the entrails of the greedy, and a third with which He would pierce the flesh of those who yielded to concupiscence.

While no one could withstand His anger, the gracious Virgin Mary appeared. And falling to her knees she embraced His feet and begged Him to be merciful to those whom He had redeemed and to temper justice with mercy.

The Son said to her: "Do you not see how many outrages they inflict on Me? My justice does not permit so many evils to be unpunished."

Then the Mother said to Him: "As you know—who know all—here is the way by which You will bring them back to You. I have a faithful servant whom You shall send into the world to announce Your words. And they will be converted and seek You, the Saviour of all. And I shall give him another servant as an assistant who will do similar work."

Then the Son said to His Mother: "I am appeased and I accept your plan. Nevertheless, show Me these whom you wish to assign to so great a task."

Then the Lady Mother showed Saint Dominic to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the Lord said to her: "He will perform well and zealously what you said."

Likewise she showed Him Saint Francis also, and the Lord similarly praised him.

Saint Dominic therefore carefully studied his companion in that vision, for he did not know him.

The next day he met him in church and recognized him from among those whom he had seen during the night. Running up to him, he embraced and kissed him saying: "You are my companion. You are to run along beside me. Let us stand together, and no opponent shall prevail against us!"

He also told him about the vision.

And henceforth they were like one heart and one soul in God.

9. *The Blessed Mother Confirms the Stigmata*

One hundred and fifty years after the death of Francis, Bartholomew of Pisa imagines the scene that must have taken place at the moment of Saint Francis' death.

It is to be believed that the Mother of the highest King Christ, herself, whose custom it is to go to her dying devotees, undoubtedly came to meet her devotee Saint Francis, who was marked with the stigmata of her Son. For she showed during his life that she loved him with special affection, by manifesting herself to him many times; so it is all the more plausible that she gave him the grace of meeting him when his soul left his body and of conducting him into heaven.

Fifty years after the death of Francis, the Blessed Virgin intervened to reconfirm the fact of the stigmatization. Although a private revelation, it was fully attested by several Franciscan superiors. Brown, quoting the *Acta Sanctorum*, tells the story:

Saint Francis is reported to have appeared to a certain friar on Mount Alverna and to have described to him in some detail the stigmatization, bidding him to make this revelation known. But as the friar delayed in making it known, an angel commanded him to disclose it. Still he hesitated and prayed to Mary for guidance. Then the Mother of God appeared to him, accompanied by angels, and said:

"Consider certain the words about the stigmata of Saint Francis which you asked me to obtain for you from my Son. And do not fear or delay to reveal them, because it is the will of my Son that they be disclosed."

10. *The Blessed Virgin Honors Saint Francis*

Several interventions of Our Lady and Saint Francis also occurred after his death.

A certain woman in the district of Arezzo in Tuscany had endured the pains of labor for seven days and was already turning black. Everyone had given up hope for her.

She made a vow to Saint Francis. And as she was dying, she began to call upon him for help.

After making the vow, she quickly fell asleep. And Saint Francis appeared to her in her sleep, and called her by her name, Adelasia. He spoke to her in a kind way and asked her whether she recognized his face.

She answered: "Indeed I recognize you, Father!"

The Saint added: "Do you know how to say the 'Salve Regina, Mater Misericordiae?'"

She replied: "I know it, Father."

The Saint said: "Begin it—and before you finish it, you will safely bear your child."

In saying this, the Saint cried out in a loud voice and disappeared.

At this call, the woman awoke and fearfully began to pray. And when she was praying the words, "Thine eyes of mercy" and mentioned the Virgin's womb, all of a sudden, before she finished the prayer, she gave birth to a handsome baby safely and with joy, uttering thanks to the Queen of Mercy, who had deigned to have pity on her through the merits of Saint Francis.

The Lord Transmundo Anibaldi, a Roman Consul, at the time when he was exercising that function in the city of Siena in Tuscany, had a certain blind servant Nicolo whom he liked very much and who was very efficient in serving him. The latter suddenly developed a serious infection in his jaw, and the doctors predicted that he would soon die.

While he was taking a little sleep, the Virgin Mother of Christ appeared to him and urged him to make a vow to Saint Francis and to visit his tomb without delay. When he arose in the morning, he told his master about the vision. The master marveled, but followed after him in order to see what happened.

When the master reached Assisi, he found his friend before the tomb of Saint Francis, where he had been suddenly cured.

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A certain woman in Apulia had for a long time lost her voice and the faculty of breathing freely. When she was sleeping one night, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her and said: "If you want to get well, go to the Church of Saint Francis in Venusia, and there you will receive the good health which you desire."

The woman arose, and as she could not breathe or speak, she indicated to her parents by gestures that she wanted to hasten to Venusia. Her parents consented and traveled there with her.

When the woman entered the Church of Saint Francis, while she was praying fervently, she vomited a mass of flesh and was freed from her affliction, before the sight of everyone.

*Joachim Daleiden, O.F.M.*

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## THE ANGELUS

The name of this prayer may sound strange to those not initiated in the Latin language. Angelus commemorates the story of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to the Mother of Jesus. In Latin, which was the language first used for the prayer, the opening word of the prayer is *Angelus*, "the Angel." Hence the name.

When "the fullness of time had come" (Gal. 4:4), as determined in the Providence of God, in the days that King Herod was ruler of Judea (Luke 1:5), God sent Gabriel, one of his Angels who assist at his throne in Heaven (Luke 1:9), to a little town of Galilee, called Nazareth. Here there lived a humble young lady, who was a virgin, but who was espoused to the very holy man, Joseph. He, as the Virgin herself, was a descendant of the royal family of the great King David. The Virgin's name was Mary, a name that well befitted her, since in her day it probably was popularly taken to mean "Lady," and its scientific meaning may be "Highness," or "Exalted One."

Entering her home unannounced, the Angel must have found Mary at prayer—the perfect occupation for receiving this message. He greeted her: "Hail, Full of grace." "Hail," represents the Greek of Saint Luke, which really means "Rejoice." It has commonly been asserted that St. Luke merely interpreted the usual Hebrew greeting, "Peace be to you," since the Angel no doubt spoke in the Aramaic language, Mary's language. Today, however, scholars incline to think that the Angel used a term that actually invited Mary to rejoice, a term that is found in some Messianic prophecies. And so the Angel's first word would indicate that he came to announce the fulfillment of the prophecies about the Messiah who would bring joy to the world.

The grace that Mary possessed so fully and by which she is in turn possessed so fully is sanctifying grace. This she had received already at the first moment of her existence, when she was immaculately conceived in her own mother's womb. Mary was so full of grace that she possessed more than all Angels and men taken together. Besides sanctifying grace, the fullness of grace meant here includes also the very exceptional, entirely unique and fundamental favor that God bestowed on Mary and about which the Angel came to tell her, her divine, virgin Motherhood.

After that greeting the Angel assured Mary: "The Lord is with you." This phrase, found rather frequently in the Sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament, expresses the fact that God is with Mary in a very special manner, because he is conferring on her a most exceptional and difficult office. In it she will certainly be successful, since God himself, the Lord Omnipotent, will give all the help needed.

Whether at this point the Angel pronounced the special praise of Mary, "Blessed are you among women," is not certain, since it is missing here in a few of the more important manuscripts. No matter. It is certain that, not many days later, Saint Elizabeth, under divine inspiration, uttered the praise of her cousin Mary. The clause is couched in Hebrew idiom for the superlative degree, and means that Mary is more blessed than all other women.

All in all the divine messenger's praise was surely exceptional for a young Jewish lady of lowly station. Small wonder that in her humility, Mary feared at hearing such praise bestowed on her. Still she remained entirely self-possessed and kept pondering what manner of greeting this really was. The Angel quickly informed her: "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found grace with God." The Angel, in other words, said, "Mary, you are most pleasing to God; He is granting you a very great favor." Continuing, the divine herald unburdened himself of his message:

"And behold, you shall conceive in your womb and shall bring forth a son; and you shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and he shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be King over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

What a wonderful child the Angel promised Mary! What? A child to Mary? But how? "How shall this happen?" asked Mary, looking for an explanation, since "I do not know man." She wished to say that she had made a firm and sacred resolve never to make use of a wife's rights with her spouse. She had decided, undoubtedly under divine guidance, to remain a virgin always, even though for protection she espoused Joseph, who had also determined to remain a virgin.

The Angel did not leave Mary in doubt for long. He assured her:

"The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you: and therefore the Holy One to be born shall be called the Son of God."

How delicately and simply stated! Mary will remain a virgin while at the same time she will be the greatest mother ever to exist, the Mother of the Son of God. This will elevate her to the highest dignity a mere creature can receive even from God. All this by the miraculous creative power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love Divine.

Then, by way of re-assurance, though Mary had not doubted the Angel's message, he gave her a sign of the truth of the message: Elizabeth, her cousin, is with child. She who had been sterile and who was now beyond the child bearing age conceived a child by God's omnipotence. "For nothing shall be impossible with God." Neither, therefore, shall the virginal conception of Mary's divine Child be impossible.

Now the Angel is waiting. Her message has been delivered. God in his infinite goodness did not wish to force motherhood on Mary, even Divine Motherhood. God, too, is waiting . . . waiting for Mary's answer. In a sense, God made the Incarnation of his Son and the consequent redemption of mankind depend on the consent of the Redeemer's Mother. He wanted her to share in the closest way in her Son's work of Redemption, not only in the distribution of the grace acquired, but already in the very first act bringing Redemption. And the first step would be Mary's consent, free and generous, to be the Mother of the Redeemer, to make it possible for the Son of God to be born of our race and to offer himself for man's Redemption. What will Mary's answer be? Without delay, most humbly but resolutely she replied:

"Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word."

Mary meant to say, "I am the lowly servant of the Lord Almighty. Let him achieve in me, and with me, what he has expressed in the message that you have brought. God's holy will be done."

The Angel's mission is ended. He left as quietly as he had come. Saint John states the mystery simply:

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:41).

Immediately upon Mary's consent to be the Mother of the Messiah the Holy Spirit wrought the marvel of the Incarnation of the Son of God in the immaculate sanctuary of the Virgin Mary's womb. Pope Pius XII, quoting Saint Thomas, writes in his encyclical on the Mystical Body, "In the name of the whole human race, She gave consent for 'spiritual nuptials between the Son of God and human nature.' " Thereby she became the Mediatrix and Spiritual Mother of all men as well as the Mother of God's Son and our Redeemer.

By Dominic J. Unger, O.F.M. Cap., "The Meaning of the Angelus"  
Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, Illinois

**FRANCISCAN PERFECTION.** Cesaire de Tours, O.F.M. Cap., translated by Paul Barrett, O.F.M. Cap. Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1956. Pp. X-193. \$3.25

This book, the author says in his Introduction, was written "for the benefit of our younger brothers in Religion and out of filial love for our Holy Father St. Francis." These two aims establish both the level and the keynote of the treatise: it is directed toward the needs of beginners in the spiritual life, and is therefore couched in simple language and in the form of appeal, exhortation, and guidance; and it is permeated with love for the Franciscan ideal.

Although the book contains nothing new, either by way of matter or presentation, to anyone familiar with the Franciscan literature produced in the thirty-odd years since the author first wrote it, it is still a useful and readable volume based on reliable sources.

The translation is good, but one could wish that the translator had done a little more revising in the matter of certain slightly out-of-date expressions and points of view. MFL

**COME, HOLY SPIRIT.** Leonce de Grandmanson, S.J., translated by Joseph O'Connell, S.J. Chicago: Fides Publishers Association, 1956. Pp. 117. \$2.95

To those who like their spiritual books brief, practical, and to the point, this little volume will seem written to order. Originally, the chapters that make up the book were little meditations used in conducting triduumms for lay apostles. The meditations, naturally geared to the requirements of lay apostles, are psychological rather than theological; but anyone who takes his Christian life seriously will find much food for thought in them—and much reason for offering to

the Holy Spirit a humble and contrite heart.

Unfortunately the translation is not up to standard. The reader is quite likely to be annoyed by the frequent lapses into loose—if not erroneous—grammatical constructions. In general, however, it reads smoothly, and probably follows the style of the original French. SMF

**LAUDA SION.** Compiled by Thomas Rust, O.F.M. New edition revised by Leopold Kitt, O.F.M. Chicago: The Franciscan Herald Press, 1955. Pp. 168.

Franciscan choirmasters will be happy to see this new edition of the old and long out of print first edition of *Lauda Sion*. It contains texts and melodies, old and new, for litanies, antiphons, and *ritualia* proper to or especially popular in the Franciscan Order. The present reviewer has not checked how far the new Seraphic Ritual will affect some of the material in *Lauda Sion*, but in any case it should still be a welcome book to any Franciscan choir-loft. SMF

**GOD AND HIS CREATION.** Edited by A. M. Henry, O.P. Translated by Charles Miltner, C.S.C. The Theology Library Volume Two. Chicago: Fides Publishers Association, 1955. Pp. xi-511. \$6.50

This second volume of theology for laymen continues the high level of excellence we admired in the first volume. The treatment of the various problems relative to God and His creation are handled briefly but adequately, clearly, and competently. For the reader who wishes to study these problems more extensively, bibliographies follow each chapter. A short section entitled: "Reflection and



Perspective" is appended to each discussion for the purpose of helping the reader understand more fully the implications of what he has read, and of guiding him toward further independent study.

Since the Theology Library is edited by the Dominicans, it is natural that the Thomistic view of things should predominate. There are, nevertheless, occasional bows to the Franciscan school, and since the general tone of the Library is modern and eclectic, the reader is not conscious of any objectionable one-sidedness. There is at least one question posed by the editor that should stir some kind of response in the Franciscan reader—the question of beauty. "How does it happen," asks Fr. Henry, "that the beauty of the world holds relatively such a small place in Christian thought and such a large place on the contrary in pagan thought, and even in the religious thought of all times outside of Christianity? Still does not *Le Chant du monde* of Giono sound pagan? Does not a film like *Farré-bique*, in which the whole creation of land which exhales its splendors and its noises, shock many Christian eyes and ears? And we do not speak of the beauty of woman whom the Church alone praises, in the words of the *Canticle of Canticles*, to the glory of the Blessed Virgin.

It would nevertheless be necessary here to take note of certain exceptions, and of one at least of which everyone thinks: St. Francis of Assisi, the singer

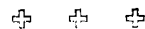
of nature, in his *Canticle of the Sun*.

"Is there not in that, aside from the exceptions, and especially these last centuries, a gap? Might not our theology have something to recover? Is it sufficiently schooled in certain inspired authors: the author of the Book of Genesis, of Job, of Ecclesiasticus, etc. A distinction is certainly to be made between pagan thought and Christian thought on the beauty of things and of beings. Do the fears of Christians (as expressed, e.g., in the *Imitation of Christ*.) bear on the nature of things or on the subject who contemplates them and who is afraid of himself? Is it possible, is it desirable, that theology and the life of Christians moderate those fears?" (p. 307).

The answer to these vitally important questions can be found precisely in the almost totally buried (for the average Catholic) treasure of Franciscan philosophy and theology, which has traditionally upheld the aesthetic view of life. It remains only for us to formulate the answers and to present them in a manner understandable and acceptable to the modern mind.

A word of warning: Any thoughtful Catholic who exposes himself to the Theology Library will be brought face to face with a realization of how little he knows and how much he is obliged to acquire if he is to qualify in any way as an informed Catholic.

The Theology Library belongs on the bookshelf of every Catholic home and every religious community. SMF



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