

from one state to another, and the Lord's voluntary death remakes the whole condition of mankind which his resurrection brings to new birth, and it is not a matter of pious opinion but an article of faith that this mother, sharing in the death of her son twice over, by his dying and her own, was caught at once into the new life of his resurrection.

If the Catholic doctrine of the incarnation is true, and no human invention, then devotion to Mary is not a luxury, far less a superstition, but something really needed for a complete grasp of Christian dogma; something for which human minds were initially prepared at the time of their creation, and without which they are always in danger of falling away from humbling and saving Truth.

The Throne of Wisdom

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Fr Bouyer is never superficial, but it is a pity that his profound thought should not be expressed with more clarity and economy. This is particularly true of 'an essay on the place of the Virgin Mary in Christian theology and its significance for humanity,'¹ since a subject of such mystery and delicacy suffers in its impact on the reader from a very analytical and somewhat heavy and repetitive treatment. Nevertheless the basic thought of this book is of great value, particularly at this time when much attention is necessarily given to the subject of sexuality. Fr Bouyer faces questions which arise in many minds and, in the light of the scriptural exegesis of the early church and of the gospel account of the place of our Lady in the work of redemption, he strives to provide answers on the subjects of sex, virginity, marriage and the family as seen in the light of revelation.

'The idea that Mary stands in relation to Christ as a second Eve to the second Adam is found expressly stated in St Irenaeus'. Fr Bouyer begins with a study of Adam and Eve and their fall, examines the wisdom books in the Old Testament, and follows with the life of Mary

¹WOMAN AND MAN WITH GOD, by Louis Bouyer; Darton Longman & Todd, 25s.

in the gospels, and the dogmas of the Virgin Birth, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The later chapters of the book are a development in theological terms of principles discovered earlier in the appropriate scriptural themes. These are chiefly: the nature of original sin, in which Fr Bouyer finds a large element of sexuality; God's relation to his chosen people, which was revealed by the prophets as the relation of bridegroom to bride (however sinful); and the divine Wisdom, which was to find its fullest expression in Mary.

In contrast to modern theologians Fr Bouyer reverts to the view taken by the early fathers of the Church that the original disobedience was sexual in nature, and maintains that this was the Jewish and rabbinical belief. It would be a great mistake, however, to assume that this is a reversion to the puritanical and manichean belief that sex is in itself evil, a misunderstanding which has already appeared in at least one review of this book. It is rather to be understood that sex was the field in which the act of pride and disobedience took place. 'The relation of man with God seems to have been disturbed, because man introduced into his relations with woman a sensual self-seeking, rejecting the divine law, and ruling out a love which would be an image of God's love for his creatures'. The sin was so serious and far-reaching precisely because it was committed in relation to the most sacred act of man, the act in which he most fully resembles God in sharing in the work of creation. Necessarily the harmony of his relation to God was thereby disturbed to a fatal degree.

There seems also to be a clue to the nature of the sin in the application of the Hebrew word *aroum* both to Adam and Eve before the Fall and to the serpent. According to Fr Bouyer this word, which is usually translated as 'cunning' or 'subtle' when applied to the serpent, should be translated as 'naked', as indeed it is when applied to Adam and Eve. However different these translations may appear to be they tend to support, along with the symbolism of the serpent, an interpretation of original sin which is closely connected both with the act of sex, and with the wisdom which was in the creation before the Fall, was perverted as demonic cunning, and was to be regained for mankind in its fulness through the Virgin Mary.

There is a section of the book which makes clear the ambivalent view of sexuality taken by the spiritual teachers of the Old Testament, that it was both a blessing and a curse. There is no doubt of the blessing attached to marriage and the family, but it was fully recognized that, since the Fall, parents passed on in the act of generation the tendency

to sin along with the great blessing of created life. The temple rites and purifications were regarded as necessary safeguards of an act which is in itself holy, but which sinful man cannot expect to perform without a special blessing by God through the priest. This is the principle behind the purification of women after childbirth, which to the modern mother might otherwise seem puzzling. Fr Bouyer also points out that after the exile, and following the line of the prophets, there was 'a new spirituality alongside the primitive one with its simple trust not only in the Creator but in the creation. This new spirituality is one of even firmer trust in the Creator, but, paradoxically, has an intimation that it must renounce the creation'. This prophetic tradition recognized that the true 'justice' is in poverty, and they awaited the 'servant' of God with renunciation and simplicity. 'At a time when the greatest of blessings seemed to consist in abundance of offspring, these poor, in communities like those of Qumran or the Essenes, renounced even marriage'. This spiritual tradition of Judaism was to find its greatest exemplar in St John the Baptist.

From this background Fr Bouyer proceeds to discuss the particular significance of the Virgin Birth; he disposes of some important misunderstandings with regard to it which might lead to false views on natural birth; but explains that it was necessarily of a supernatural order since its fruit was the author of supernatural life. This chapter is the key to the two which follow it, on marriage and virginity, and on the virgin motherhood ('fruitfulness of *agape* through the crucifying of *eros*').

It cannot be said that the ordinary reader, approaching these chapters with hopeful anticipation, will find a clear and easy answer to their far-reaching questions. Perhaps this is a good thing, for most of us are only too ready to evade the greatest mysteries of life by easy answers. Fr Bouyer does no evading, and the answers he gives are worth some study. He extols the state of marriage and explains its fullest possible significance as a living sacrament of Christ and his Church. He points out too that the states of marriage and virginity complement one another in the full economy of the body of Christ. He is also concerned to understand and explain the complete nature of the sacrifice involved in virginity, and the high place which has always been given to it by the Church, not forgetting its fruitfulness in the supernatural life. His study of the teachings of the Fathers is instructive and interesting, and so is the point he makes with much perception—that the very happiness and self sufficiency of the contented family can constitute the greatest obstacle to the full participation of its members in the supernatural

life of God. 'Sacrifice, supported by the grace of God, is the only way of healing a vitiated use' (of the creative act) 'and restoring it to God'.

Fr Bouyer's view is that the sacrifice made by the consecrated virgin needs to be made by those who are married, by degrees, or in the end, if they are to share in the final consummation of the marriage of the Lamb. It is doubtful whether Fr Bouyer's diagnosis of the type of sacrifice demanded of married people, which he describes as a sense of loss in the separate existence of each other and of their children, resulting in non-possession, is quite adequate. Rather much seems to be made of this point; though married people may be able to apply it in a more far-reaching sense than is here described, and prove its truth. We wonder also whether the sense of Christian vocation in marriage is given sufficient emphasis. The superiority of the state of virginity over the state of marriage seems to consist, for Fr Bouyer as for St Paul, in the practical difficulty of making the sacrifice of one's life to God complete in the state of marriage owing to the burdens of the world, and the natural demands of family life. It appears that these arguments may be given too much weight where they are seen apart from the supernatural possibilities of obedience to the will of God in either state; and also from the mutual help that can be given by Christians living in either state through their common participation in the body of Christ. It is a little dispiriting to be told by Fr Bouyer that though a life of holiness achieved through marriage would be 'the most perfect conceivable Christian life . . . its very perfection makes it unattainable'. We wonder how far either part of this sentence is really true, particularly as a little earlier he says that the partners are called to 'a mutual relationship made possible for them by the resurrection'. The call to lead a life made possible by the resurrection is surely made to all Christians, whether in families or in monastic communities; it would seem also that many of the disciplines, and even the dangers, are common to both states of life. Did not many monasteries before the Reformation suffer from exactly the complacency and self-sufficiency against which he warns the family?

There remains however in consecrated virginity a hidden supernatural power which derives from the Virgin Mother of God, and brings forth the life of God. Fr Bouyer's chapters on this subject go deep, and reveal possibilities of Christian living which should be understood by us all, and may be applied by all who wish to follow Christ wherever he goes.

Throughout the biblical exegesis in this book runs the theme of the

divine Wisdom exemplified by many passages from scripture. It was the early Church which, without intellectual definition, but as if by a commonly realized intuition, applied many of these passages to our Lady, and incorporated them in the liturgy. The final chapter on the Assumption gathers these threads together, and shows the universal and essential power of our Lady in the economy of salvation and for human need.

NOTE

I am afraid that some remarks I made, in passing, about Catholic schools in my article *Bringing up the Family—Today*, have been taken as a wholesale condemnation of those who teach in our schools. Unfortunately remarks made in a lecture, and discussed afterwards, look different when printed. What I wanted to say was that the system of segregating Catholic schools is often a waste of the talents and zeal of our teachers—religious and lay. Thousands of teachers do the best they can inside the system, but as long as their efforts are confined to the children, and do not touch families, a great part of their work is wasted. Our schools are designed to serve a small, self-contained and semi-persecuted community of Catholics. What we have is a huge, exposed, disconnected mass of Catholics. They need help—all the help trained and enthusiastic teachers can give. But the present system doesn't help them, it only gives them a false sense of security. All honour to the good teachers who work wonders in such unpromising conditions. We as a community are to blame for wasting them.

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