

True enough, beginning with St Paul, the church has had and still has to judge the manifestations of the spirit. She has had to condemn the excesses, sometimes wild and obvious, sometimes subtle and destructive, of those who have leant too heavily on the charismatic or been deceived either by paranormal phenomena whose psychological origins we are beginning to understand better or by the wickedness and snares of the devil. On the other hand, she has occasionally approved the visions and revelations, the extraordinary gifts of certain saints, indicating that they may be believed to be the work of the Spirit himself. But at the centre we are surely still to see the fervour of the community adhering to God in the Spirit and expressing that fervour in the liturgy. We may not break out into ecstatic cries of *Hallelu-Yah* or *Maran-Atha*, but we are to join in the mass, we can say or sing clearly, *Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te*. We are still Yahwists though we know more of Yahweh than the prophets congregated at Gilgal. And we still have a day of judgment to survive.

## Et Mundi Domina

CLARE DAWSON

For a Catholic the main lines of the Christian faith are as certain as, if less demonstrable than, the law of gravity. This attitude of mind is not only part of the concept of faith, which in itself excludes doubt, but a psychological characteristic of 'being a Catholic', considered as a state. However lightly any Catholic may sit to his religious obligations, their existence, and the existence of a determinate authority with the right to loose and bind, is generally acknowledged, even if only with a snarl; and when it is denied there is something in the quality of the denial that tends to stress the fact denied. The idea of the Church has a precedence in individual lives as fundamental as the symbolic rock on which it is founded. It is not just a case of knowing all the answers. Some Catholics would be hard put to it to say exactly why there is and must be an authoritative Church, and perhaps this is one of the

strongest indications of certainty for it is hard to set about reasoning in favour of the obvious.

Where pious customs are concerned there is no such unanimity. Most non-Catholics assume that devotion to our Lady is not optional, but that if you *are* a Catholic then, *ipso facto*, you not only accept, swallow, or wallow in the whole set-up of ardent mariolatry, but could not do otherwise. Without defending the indefensible, I think the non-Catholics are more right than wrong in their assumption.

It is true that devotion to Mary, or at least some of the forms it has taken, may be as distasteful to Catholic as to Protestant minds. It is also true that Catholics are at liberty to voice their objections to any devotion provided they believe that it is Christ who speaks through the Church, and that formal definitions are therefore sacred. There is also, naturally, a family regard for well worn habits of speech and of prayer, so that even if one did not like using a rosary, respect for a family usage several hundred years old would make disparagement of it impossible. At the same time acquaintance with modern Catholic writing shows a quite lively difference of opinion about the purpose and the proper shape of devotion to our Lady.

Occasionally it seems as if objections to what is politely called 'over-emphasis' of such devotion is rather like the embarrassment that may be felt by the more sedate members of a family in the presence of some kind of abnormality, original behaviour, or wild eccentricity on the part of an elderly relative; an emotional rather than intellectual objection one might suppose and it is certainly true that intellectual agreement on the importance of Mary's place in the Christian schema does not necessarily lead to great warmth of feeling towards her.

It may be admitted that what is popularly called 'devotion' leans over from what St Thomas understands to be its proper meaning (a steadfast attitude of will, a readiness in the service of God that springs out of a consideration of his being and goodness) into a comparatively feeble quality that may be compared to a mental urge for sugar: but can it be denied that the desire for a certain feminine curve in religion appears too often to be set aside? It seems to be ingrained in human minds, and what can be proved to be a real need of the human soul is thereby proved to be good, and is sure to be found in a universal religion.

Allowing that superstition concerning our Lady may exist, and that superstition is bad because it is one of the contraries of faith, it is still difficult to judge what constitutes superstition in a particular case.

Are we to say 'the fulsome hymns, or sickly praises', so unlike the soberly dogmatic Ave? Or the (nauseating) plaster statues like something made in icing sugar by a bad cook? Not, I think, unless it can be said that these things always and necessarily lead to and result from superstition. Was there no superstition in the days of Romanesque art? And is it impossible to say the Lord's prayer in a manner and with a motive that reduce it to superstitious practice? Where faith and superstition grow together, contraries though they are, the one can scarcely be uprooted without disturbing the other.

A balanced life, we are told, is not to be lived by simply averting our eyes from anything disturbing, and the tensions caused by the existence of male and female creatures certainly lead to disturbances of many sorts; yet it must be admitted that there is in all of us both male and female characteristics, sometimes described as active and passive qualities. (An excellent term so long as it is not pressed into an argument in favour of total passivity on the part of living women who may be startled to be told that they possess no active qualities that may be exercised.)

The great religions of the world seem to have taken this into account, including the Jewish religion, in spite of its being sometimes upbraided for its harshly male picture of Yahweh. To the Jews Israel was the feminine, the bride and the mother, and female too, perhaps, was the image of the vineyard. If the absorption of the feminine is really necessary then it might be supposed that a religion that makes it of no account is doomed to destruction by a process of withering away, and if I am right in thinking the Mohammedan paradise fairly bristles with houris then *it* cannot be said to discount the existence of women. But Christianity is the boldest of all religions, and because it worships a God made man, born of a woman, it has recognized from the start, in spite of some rather disparaging remarks from the Fathers, that women as well as men have souls, and are able to play a part in the exercise of faith, hope and charity by which the world is laid open to the action of God. (That he does not work against human wills may be surmised from the fact that Christ did no great works at Nazareth because of men's unbelief.)

All this is said to have raised the female status from that of a mere pleasure-giving-cum-utilitarian chattel to the position of personal equality indicated in Genesis. (But did the women *always* give pleasure? Were there no viragos in the ancient world? And what about Jezebel? How often I wonder, did Hebrew women, or Greek, or Asian come to

that, fold their arms, turn their backs on the cooking, and fail to have the dinner on the table for their men because they were so sick of the pots and pans? The Israelite demand for meat in the wilderness may have come from the men but there is a good chance that it burst out partly because the ingenuity of the Hebrew housewives was at low ebb, and they had begun to slam uninteresting food on the table with an air of dark resignation, or a sultry glare that intimated as plainly as words that if the masters wanted something better they could go and get it—that's all; and when a woman says, 'that's all' every sensible man makes for the door, knowing quite well that it is by no means all but probably only a beginning.)

Unquestionably, it is dangerous to discount femininity; it exists, and presumably will exist as a quality until both male and female are transcended in the resolution of opposites in heaven, and perhaps even then they will blossom as each other's complement because they cannot be regarded as merely physical qualities. For the moment they have suffered, like every human quality, the jar of Adam's fall, but both came from God, and both therefore reflect him since creatures so proceed from the creator that they make up, in their totality, a true if pale reflection of himself.

It can hardly be doubted that these facts are at least make-weights on the scale that weighs out the problem of the devotion due to Mary, though they would not turn the scale alone. Feminine, as an idea, is abstract,; down that road, perhaps, came some of the notions of romantic love, occasionally directed, one can but feel, to a lady who was neither flesh nor spirit but rather an emotional phantasm. It can also be construed as too solid flesh, and again the lady vanishes. The perfect feminine is realized (rather than personified) in Mary, as a real person actually existing, having her own characteristic gestures, appearance, ways of doing things. She is not an abstraction even in the sense that the Church, as mother and bride, may be termed an abstraction. She is flesh as well as spirit, though now transcended by the radiance of spirit, and she had for thirty years an intimate knowledge of the Word made flesh. The distance between creature and creator never lessens. It is infinite; but between this mother, and this son, there existed a true relationship of parent and child, made clear in the gospel when St Luke speaks of the boy Jesus being in subjection to his parents, and perhaps in St John's account of the miracle at Cana performed at her request.

Christ never made his divinity an excuse for evading any kind of

human duty, and even if the gospels did not show it so plainly we should expect him to pay to his mother the debt of filial duty that justice demanded—and if that sounds more like Anselm than St Thomas may be the truth is that love does not cut out but forms the pattern of perfect justice. Fr Vincent McNabb suggests, in his *Life of our Lord*, that it was for this reason that Christ performed his first miracle, and reluctantly at that. Reluctant or not he did it, but was he so reluctant? Even her faith had to be tested, and his reply seems a little like the complaint of a rich man who says that his mother will end by making a beggar of him but never fails to get out his cheque book at her request. There is no true comparison, of course, between what the best of sons may do for the best of mothers and what Mary asked of the son she knew to be God.

Some people have seemed to find her reason for asking almost frivolous. After all— should Infinite Power be asked to intervene to save embarrassment at a village wedding? Yet we may need to remind ourselves that neighbourly charity is never a little thing, and that God concerns himself with our material as well as our spiritual needs or Christ would not have taught us to pray for daily bread. Subject to Mary he may have been, but it was she rather than he who learnt from their close relationship, and it was his own teaching that she was putting into practice when she asked him to provide wine. His response has set the standard of behaviour for the Church.

Yet even that is not the rock on which devotion to Mary is founded. First of creatures she may be called, and Queen of creation, without exaggeration of language, let alone the feebleness of superstition. She was the living instrument freely consenting to the power of the Most High through whose overshadowing Christ was conceived and born. She was not a passive instrument of the incarnation, any more than our Lord himself, as man, was a passive instrument of our redemption. God, having created human beings autonomous, treats them accordingly, and ultimately it may be shown that devotion to Mary is based on the concept of supreme Wisdom, Love, and Power as it is revealed in Christ, for if she was not coerced into becoming the Mother of God then our gratitude to her, and for her, is implicit in our gratitude to him.

Her choice, so freely made at the annunciation, led on to Calvary. To love as Mary loved, with the deepest of human affection and the most perfect charity, is to die with the beloved, even to feel in living flesh the cold sweat of his death. But death is a passage. It is a transition

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

AGNES YENDELL

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,'<sup>1</sup> 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

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