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Bl. Gueric of Igny

**“FORMING HER ONLY-BEGOTTEN IN THE SONS
BY ADOPTION”: THE MARIAN SPIRITUALITY OF
BL. GUERRIC OF IGNY (1157)**

*Deyanira Flores, S.T.D.**

INTRODUCTION

By the power of the Holy Spirit, “when the fullness of time came” (Gal. 4:4), the Blessed Virgin Mary *formed Christ for us*, when “the Word was made flesh” in her virginal womb and from her immaculate flesh “and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). By the power of the Holy Spirit, she continues now *forming Christ in us* every-day, “until we all attain to perfect manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). From all eternity the Blessed Trinity chose Mary for this unique vocation: To be the Mother of the Son of God and the Mother of all the members of His Mystical Body, the Mother of the Whole Christ.

The Son of God was conceived in the heart and the womb of the faithful Virgin of Nazareth in order that we may all conceive Him in our hearts. He has called the Church and each faithful soul within the Church “to be like His Mother Mary,”¹ listening attentively and obediently to the Word of God, receiving Him in the heart with firm faith, vigilantly keeping and constantly meditating

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¹Cf. St. Augustine *Tract. I*, 8: Morin, p.447; *Sermo 25*, 8: Morin, p.163; *Sermo 195*, 21: PL 38, 1012-1013.

upon this Word, trying to be perfect like Mary, so that Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit, may be brought to birth, fully formed in us,² by doing the will of the Father.³

Currently, there are many different definitions which have been given to "spirituality." Briefly stated, Christian Spirituality can be defined as life according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:25), in order to be perfectly conformed by the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29), in order to become fully the children of God and inherit eternal life (Rom. 8:14-17). Or, reversing the order, we can say that we are all called to the sublime vocation of being God's children and partaking of His eternal blessedness in heaven, by conforming ourselves to Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, through humble docility to the action of the Holy Spirit in us.⁴

Marian spirituality is an essential part of Christian spirituality.⁵ As Pope Paul VI expressed so well: "In order to be Christians, we have to be Marian."⁶ The reason for this is threefold.

First of all, because God willed that the Blessed Virgin would contribute concretely and actively to make our spiritual life possible through her consent at the Annunciation and her Divine Maternity. If the Word of God had not been born of her, we would not be able to become children of God, members of Christ's Mystical Body, and temples of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, because, after Christ, she is our best model. In fact, "Marian spirituality" is in the first place the Blessed Virgin's

²Cf. Origen, *In Exodum* 10, 3: PG 12, 371 D - 372 A; 10, 4: 373 B; 373 D; 13, 2: 388 C - 389 C; 13, 3: 389 D - 391 C; *Selecta in Genesim* 41: PG 12, 124 C; St. Ambrose (397), *In Lucam* 2, 26: PL 15, 1642 C; 2, 27: 1642 D - 1643 A; *De Isaac et anima* 8, 74: PL 14, 556 C; St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 14, 4: PL 35, 1504.

³Cf. Origen, *Fragm. in Matth.* 281: GCS, 126; St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 10, 25: PL 15, 1903 A; 10, 32: 1904 B; St. Augustine, *Sermo* 192, 2: PL 38, 1012-1013; *Epistula* 243, 9: PL 33, 1058; *De sancta virginitate* 5, 5: PL 40, 398-399; 7, 7: 399-400.

⁴Cf. St. Basil the Great (379), *De Spiritu Sancto* 26, 61: PG 32, 180 C.

⁵Cf. *The Virgin Mary in the Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, Letter from the Congregation for Catholic Education (March 25, 1988), no. 36.

⁶Pope Paul VI, *Discourse at the Shrine of Our Lady of Bonaria* (April 24, 1970), in AAS 62 (1970): 295-301. (Here and throughout the paper, all the italics are ours.)

spirituality (i.e., the concrete way in which Mary of Nazareth lived her Christian spirituality). But Mary lived her spiritual life so perfectly as to become the model for every single Christian. Therefore, together with her Divine Son, nobody can teach us better than she can how to live our spiritual life.⁷

Thirdly, because in the Communion of Saints she is the person who, as our Mother and Mediatrix, most perfectly and lovingly helps us day by day to progress in our spiritual life and persevere to the end in our call to holiness, with her constant intercession on our behalf, her powerful protection, and all the things which this merciful Mother does for all “the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home.”⁸

We said that one of the essential aspects of Christian spirituality is “to be conformed to Christ,” so that, as St. Paul says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). The Fathers of the Church, inspired by Christ’s own words: “Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother” (Mt. 12:50; Mk. 3:35; Lk. 8:21), and in the Apostle’s description of his pastoral mission: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19), quite often developed the theme of our growth in the spiritual life in terms of “forming Christ in us.”⁹ After the most luminous and perfect example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Church in the first place, and each faithful person within the Church, is called to be “mother of Christ.”¹⁰ The analogy with the conception,

⁷Cf. Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (February 2, 1974), in AAS 66 (1974): 132-133, no. 21; see also no. 16.

⁸II Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), no. 62.

⁹One of the first allusions to Christ being born in us is found in the *Letter to Diognetus* XI, 4.

¹⁰Cf. among many other Fathers and Medieval authors: St. Hippolytus (235), *De Christo et Antichristo* 61: PG 10, 780-781; Origen, *In Exodum* 10, 3-4: PG 12, 373; St. Cyprian (258), *Epistula 8 ad martyres et confessores*: PL 4, 254C; St. Gregory of Nyssa (392), *De Virginitate* 2: PG 46, 324; St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Psalm. 127, 12*: PL 37, 1685; *Sermo* 191, 4: PL 38, 1011; St. Bede (735), *Expositio in Lucam* I, 2: PL 92, 330; Ambrose Autpert (781), *De Adsumptione Sanctae Mariae*, 6; 7: CCCM 27B, p.1031; Berengaud (IX-X), *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 12: PL 17, 960.

growth and birth of a baby is particularly felicitous to illustrate clearly how God's Word has to be received, looked after, and made to grow in us like a child in the womb.

If Mary cooperated to make possible this "formation" of Christ in us through her Divine Maternity; if she was the first "to form" Christ in her heart and her womb, becoming not only His physical Mother, but His spiritual Mother as well¹¹; does she also have some *active role* in this "forming" now of her Son in our souls to which we have been called?

There is a Medieval author who explicitly states that: "*The Blessed Virgin desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption*"; the great Cistercian Abbot, Bl. Gueric of Igny (1157). It is the purpose of this paper to examine in detail some of his ideas on this subject, and to show how important is his contribution to the field of Marian Spirituality.

A. The Main Text

We shall start our study of Bl. Gueric of Igny's teaching on the Virgin Mary's role in that essential part of Christian spirituality which is our "conformation to Christ" by making a philological and thematical analysis of the text where he expresses what we can call the "summit" of his Marian Spirituality. This text is found in his Sermon 52, *Second Sermon for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. We shall follow the critical edition of the original Latin text and the French translation found in *Sources chrétiennes* 202,¹² and the English translation published by Cistercian Publications,¹³ Here is the text, arranged in columns to make the comparison between the three versions clearer:

¹¹Cf. St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evang. Tract.* 10, 3: PL 35, 1468; *De S. Virg.* 5, 5; 6, 6: PL 40, 398-399; *Sermo* 72A, 7: PL 46, 937-938; *Sermo* 215: PL 38, 107

¹²Gueric of Igny, *Sermons*, 2 vols. Introduction, critical text and notes by John Morson and Hilary Costello; French translation under the direction of Placide Deseille (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970 and 1973: *Sources chrétiennes* 166 and 202).

¹³Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, 2 vols. Introduction and translation by Monks of Saint Bernard Abbey (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1971: Cistercian Father Series, 8) and first paperback edition (Kalamazoo, Mich. & Spencer, Mass.: Cistercian Publications, 1971 and 1999 [Cistercian Father Series, 32]). To simplify, in our citations we shall indicate the liturgical feast for which the sermon was written and the page number. Volume I includes the sermons that go from the *First Sermon for Advent* to the *Sermon for the Saturday of the Second Week of Lent*; Volume II goes from the *First Sermon for St. Benedict* to the *Sermon for arousing devotion at Psalmody*.

<i>Latin Original</i>	<i>English Translation</i>	<i>French Translation</i>
1. Insinuare cupiens	Wishing to introduce	1. Désirant faire pénétrer
2. dilectum uteri sui, dilectum votorum suorum	the Beloved of her womb, the Beloved of her desires,	le Bien-Aimé né de son sein, le Bien-Aimé de ses désirs,
3. affectibus omnium,	into the affections of all her children,	dans les coeurs de tous
4. describit eum non secundum carnem sed secundum Spiritum; quasi diceret et ipsa: Et si cognovi Christum secundum carnem sed nunc iam non novi.	she describes him not according to the flesh but according to the spirit as if she too would say: 'Even if I knew Christ according to the flesh, now I know him so no longer' (2 Cor. 5:16).	elle le décrit non selon la chair, mais selon l'esprit; elle semble dire elle aussi: 'Même si j'ai connu le Christ selon la chair, maintenant je ne le connais plus ainsi'.
5. Cupit namque et ipsa formare Unigenitum suum	For she desires to form her Only-begotten	Elle désire en effet, elle aussi former son Fils unique
6. in omnibus filiis adoptionis,	in all her sons by adoption.	dans tous ses fils d'adoption.

7. qui etsi geniti sunt verbo veritatis,	Although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth (Jas. 1:18),	C'est pourquoi, bien qu'ils aient déjà été engendrés par la parole de vérité,
8. nihilominus tamen parturit eos cotidie	nevertheless she brings them forth every day	elle n'en continue pas moins à les enfanter chaque jour
9. desiderio et cura pietatis,	by desire and loyal care	par les désirs et la sollicitude de sa tendresse,
10. donec occurrant in virum perfectum, in mensuram plenitudinis aetatis Filii sui	until they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son (Eph. 4:13)	jusqu' à ce qu'ils atteignent 'l'état d'homme parfait, la mesure de la plénitude de l'âge de son Fils,
11. quem semel parturivit et peperit . . .	whom she bore and brought forth once and for all . . .	qu'elle a une fois pour toutes enfanté et mis au monde . . .
(SC 202, p.492).	(CF 8, p.200-201).	(SC 202, p.493).

1) Mary's Desire

The text expresses two desires which Mary has: "to introduce" her Beloved and "to form" Him. In Latin and French, the same word (gerund and verb, both in the present tense) is repeated twice: *cupiens—cupit; désirant—désire*. In English we have "wishing" and "she desires." It seems to underline Mary's initiative, and her will to act on our behalf by introducing and forming her Son in us.

2) Desire to "Introduce" Christ and to "Make Him Known"

Two translations are possible for "insinuate," the first Latin verb that appears in the text: "to insinuate, introduce, convey," or "to make known, teach." The English translated it with "introduce," and the French with the even stronger "faire pénétrer." The translation "to introduce" is in perfect accord with the theme of Christ's presence in us, which is very important in Bl. Gueric's sermons. The Blessed Virgin wishes "to introduce" her Son in us, because she wants us to have Him in us. Thus Bl. Gueric insinuates here that the "coming," "visiting," and "indwelling" of Christ in us, of which he so often speaks, is desired by Mary, and that she wants to contribute in some way to make it come true in us.

The other possible translation is "to make known." It agrees very well with the immediate context of our text, which is that of "knowing" Christ. Precisely in order to make Him "known" to us, Mary "describes" Him, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. As was the case with Christ's presence in us, knowing Christ is another important theme in Bl. Gueric's sermons. The translation "wishing to introduce Him" goes better with "the affections," where she wants us to receive Him; "wishing to make Him known" fits well with "the description" she makes of Him according to the Spirit. Either translation reflects our author's mind, and Mary's importance in our spiritual life. She wishes "to introduce" Christ into us, and "to make Him known" to us.

Where is it that she "introduces" Him? The Latin *affectus* means "affection, love, devotion, desire, emotion." The English translates it literally from the Latin: "into the affections of all." The French has an interesting nuance: "dans les coeurs de tous." She introduces Him

into our “affections”—into “our heart,” which is “the seat” of our affections. She wants her *Beloved* to be in our affections, to be in our love. She wishes “the Beloved of her desires” to be in our desires. She wants her Beloved *to be loved* by us, to find a place in our hearts, just as He has a place—and such a place!—in her Immaculate Heart

How is it that she makes Him known to us? By describing Him “according to the spirit”—by describing to us His virtues and the example of His life on earth. That is why she calls herself “the mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge and of holy hope” (Sir. 24:24). We shall come back to this later.

3) Mother and Bride

Bl. Gueric describes Jesus as “the Beloved of her womb” (i.e., her Son) and “the Beloved of her desires” (i.e., her Spouse). In other words, and this is common in our author, he presents Mary as both the most loving Mother of Christ, and as His most faithful bride.

4) Spiritual Maternity

From the translations, it would appear that we have two explicit references to Mary’s Spiritual Maternity in this text. The first comes only in the English translation: “Wishing to introduce the Beloved . . . into the affections of all *her children*.” In the Latin original we only have “*affectibus omnium*,” without any explicit reference to “her children.”

The second appears in both the English and French translations, by the addition of the possessive pronoun “her”: “in all *her* sons by adoption,” “dans toutes ses fils d’adoption.” Again the Latin original has only the biblical “in omnibus *filii adoptionis*,” which stated like that can be interpreted to be referring to God the Father: in “all the sons by adoption” of the Father. Of course, thanks to the Incarnation which, as we shall see, our author affirms elsewhere,¹⁴ they have become Mary’s children by adoption as well, but Bl. Gueric does not seem to be *explicitly* affirming it here.

Anyway, the theme of our divine filial adoption is very common in our author. The Son of God became man precisely in order to

¹⁴Cf. I Assumption, p.167-170; IV Nativity, p. 54-55; I Nativity of Mary, p. 192.

make us God the Father's children by adoption. It is thanks to Mary's Only-begotten and in Him that we have become God's children by adoption. Our vocation is to become everyday more like *the Son*, to be thereby more truly "God's sons." And Mary is there to form Him in us.

Bl. Gueric is always very careful to affirm Mary's perpetual virginity. In this same sermon he calls Christ "her *Only-begotten*," "whom she brought forth once and for all . . . without sorrow; nor did she experience the difficulty and trouble of childbirth when she brought forth the fruit of eternal gladness."¹⁵ But in other sermons, inspired for example by Isaiah 62:4-5, he explains how, although Christ is her only Son, she does have other children *by adoption*. Thus we can say that it is in these children—whom she loves, takes care of, and is concerned about—that she wants to introduce her Only-begotten Son, and form Him according to His "spiritual form."

5) The Knowledge of Christ according to the Spirit

The importance of the spirit over the flesh is another common topic in Bl. Gueric's sermons. In this text, the influence of St. John and St. Paul is very strongly felt. "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail" (Jn. 6:63), says the beloved disciple. "Even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him thus no longer" (2 Cor. 5:16), says the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Blessed Virgin knew Jesus according to the flesh better than anybody else, but the important thing is that she knew Him equally well according to the spirit. "She seems to have understood," says Bl. Gueric, that what counts is to know Christ according to the spirit, not according to the flesh, and that is why she describes Him to us according to the spirit. What he means by this we shall see in more detail when we discuss his doctrine of the three forms in Christ.

6) Desire to Form Christ in Us

"*For she desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption.*" This is Bl. Gueric's great text and outstanding contribution to

¹⁵II Nativity of M., p. 200, 201.

the doctrines of Marian Spirituality and Spiritual Maternity. Since "conforming ourselves to Christ" is one of the essential elements and purposes of Christian Spirituality, we can see how important Bl. Gueric's statement is. Mary wants "to form her Only-begotten" in us. In other words, she wants to actively help us in this which might be called the goal of every Christian's life: to become another Christ. Bl. Gueric is speaking of an active role or participation of the Blessed Virgin in our spiritual life to assist us to attain this supreme and sublime end.

The Blessed Virgin wishes "to introduce" her Beloved "into the affections of all," and "she desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption." Both "desires" seem to be interrelated by the method used to attain them, which is mentioned only once: "she describes him not according to the flesh but according to the spirit." "Wishing to introduce the Beloved into the affections of all," "she describes Him according to the spirit," "for she desires to form her Only-begotten in the sons by adoption."

In other words, Mary wishes to introduce Christ in us and to form Him in us. In order to accomplish this, she describes Him to us "according to the spirit" so that, seeing how lovable He is because of His virtues, we are moved to introduce Him into our affections and to love Him; and contemplating His example of life, we are moved to imitate Him, and thus form Him in us. As Bl. Gueric affirms elsewhere in this sermon, we are attracted to Christ by the beauty of His virtues, which conquer our love, and incite us to imitate them. Thus we introduce Him into our heart, and make Him grow there until He reaches His mature age. The formation of Christ in us comes from imitating Him in everything, but in order to do so, we need to know Him. Mary "describes" Him to us according to His "spiritual form" in order to enkindle our hearts with love for Him, and move and help us to imitate Him.

The idea of Mary *describing* Christ to us also appears in the *First Sermon for the Nativity of Mary*. Inspired by Sirach 24:23 ("As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odor"), he says that "Mary is overjoyed because she has brought forth so fragrant a fruit." Christ

is the Fruit, and His renown is the fragrance which must first allure us, because “unless we have believed we will not understand nor will we taste that the Lord is sweet (Ps. 33:9). It is faith that smells, experiential knowledge that tastes and enjoys.” And that is why Mary, “*describing her Jesus* by his powers and influence first of all calls him a pleasant odor, because he has to implant this in us at the beginning if the fragrance of his holy renown is to *draw us to him*.” In fact, He is “first of all a pleasant odor to them whom he calls, then integrity of conduct to them whom he justifies, finally honor to them whom he glorifies.”¹⁶

7) Mary Brings Us Forth Every Day

In the Latin text “*et ipsa*,” and in the French translation “*elle aussi*,” there is an emphasis that is not present in the English translation. Mary “*also*” desires to form her Only-begotten. This seems to imply that there are others who have the same wish. One might be St. Paul, who is Bl. Gueric’s source of inspiration for the idea of “forming Christ”: “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19). Like St. Paul, and still more than him, Mary wishes to form Christ in us. Bl. Gueric affirms this explicitly in another sermon which we shall examine later.¹⁷

The other possibility is obviously the Church, whose vocation *par excellence* is to be “the virgin mother of Christ,” as is clearly taught in the Patristic tradition and mentioned in other sermons of our Cistercian Abbot.¹⁸ What follows seems to confirm it: “Although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth” (perfect passive), “nevertheless she brings them forth everyday” (present active). The idea comes from James 1:18—a text Bl.

¹⁶Cf. I Nativity of M., p.195-196: “*Iesum suum describens per virtutes ipsius et efficientias*”; “*d’après ses pouvoirs et ses opérations*.”

¹⁷I Assumption, p. 169.

¹⁸ Cf. II Nativity, p. 43-44; III Nativity, p. 52; III Epiphany, p. 83-84; III Annunciation, p. 54; II SS. Peter and Paul, p.153ff. S. Delgadillo, “*María y la Iglesia en la historia de la Salvación. Datos en algunos sermones del b. Guericco de Igny*,” *Marianum* 48 (1986): 639-666; M.-C. Bodard, “*Le Christ, Marie et l’Église dans la predication du Bienh. Gueric d’Igny*,” *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Refractorum* 19 (1957): 273-299 (hereafter, *Coll.Ord.Cist.Ref.*).

Gueric also quotes elsewhere¹⁹—where the holy author affirms that “Of his own will he [the Father] brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.”

It is through the Sacrament of Baptism that we are reborn to our new life in Christ and become members of His Mystical Body. But Baptism is the beginning of this new life of grace, “and the spiritual life is an unfolding of the grace which begins at baptism, with the power of the Holy Spirit bringing us gradually more and more into the likeness of Christ.”²⁰ Thus, even though we have already been brought to birth in Baptism, we need to renew everyday our baptismal promises. In a sense, we have to be “reborn” continually into an ever more perfect Christ-like life, and, according to Bl. Gueric, Mary has an active part in this “bringing us forth every day.” Earlier, he had said that she “*desires to form her Only-begotten*”; here, he asserts that she actually “*brings them forth everyday.*”

With the adverb *cotidie* (everyday), Bl. Gueric underlines the continuity both of Mary’s assistance and of our need to progress in the spiritual life. We continually need to grow, and Mary is constantly “bringing us forth.” In other sermons Bl. Gueric describes this spiritual progress, and presents Mary as the highest model of Christian life.

8) How She Brings Forth the Sons by Adoption

Our author affirms that Mary “brings to birth all the sons by adoption by *desire and loyal care.*” The Latin text reads: “*desiderio et cura pietatis.*” “Cura” means solicitude, concern; “*pietas*”—a difficult word to translate into English—means piety, love of devotion, goodness, kindness, mercy. The translation “loyal care” does not seem to do justice to the Latin. The French translation captures more: “*par les désirs et la sollicitude de sa tendresse.*” Mary brings to birth the sons by adoption by her desire and her kind or merciful solicitude.

¹⁹Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 154; I Assumption, p. 169, etc.

²⁰H. Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. by S. Bullough (Chicago, Ill.: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), 69.

Two ways of bringing to birth are mentioned. With “desire,” Bl. Gueric seems to refer to something more passive, that is “felt” in the heart, and that is expressed by prayer or thought. With “kind solicitude,” concrete, loving, solicitous action seems to be implied. Thus, Mary does not bring us forth simply by “desiring” it, but also by cooperating in some way with her merciful concern. As we shall see, Bl. Gueric tends to use terms similar to these in other texts where he also describes the way the maternity of both Mary and the Church is expressed.²¹

9) “Until they reach the stature of the perfect man” (Eph. 4:13)

When does this constant “bringing them forth” end? Inspired by Ephesians 4:13, Bl. Gueric says that it ends only when “they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son,” significantly adding the qualification “of her Son” to the Pauline text. It is *her Son* whom she desires to form in her sons by adoption, and she continues bringing them forth everyday until they finally reach the stature of the perfect man, i.e., *of her Son*. She does not rest until Christ is perfectly formed in us, until the whole course of our spiritual journey is thus fully and happily accomplished. Her goal is our perfect conformation to her Son.

10) Mother of God

Our text ends with a reference to the fundamental principle of Mariology, Mary’s Divine Maternity, which is the foundation for and explains all that he has been saying: “. . . Her Son, *whom she bore and brought forth* once and for all.” It is for everyone that the Virgin Mary bore and brought forth Christ in Bethlehem. This is the Beloved whom she wants to introduce into our affections; the Only-begotten whom she wants to form in us, the Son that she gave birth to “once and for all.”

²¹Cf. III Nativity, p. 52; I Assumption, p. 169.

B. The Context—The Doctrine of the Three Forms

After examining the main text where Bl. Gueric of Igny affirms that the Virgin Mary “desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption,” we would like now to situate it in the larger context of all of Bl. Gueric’s fifty-four sermons in order to see how our author treats in them the principal themes which have emerged from our text.

Indispensable for understanding Bl. Gueric’s idea of Mary “forming Christ” in us is his famous doctrine of the three forms, which even though it is mentioned in other sermons, is developed precisely in his Sermon fifty-two, “The Second Sermon for our Lady’s Birthday.”²² Thus we shall examine first what he teaches in this sermon, and complete it later with what he says in other sermons.

Before starting, let us bear in mind that Bl. Gueric’s idea is rooted in Philippians 2:5-8: “Have this mind [these sentiments] among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was *in the form of God*, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking *the form of a slave*, being born in the likeness of men. And being found *in human form* he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.”

St. Paul explicitly speaks here about “the form of God” (*forma Dei, morphē Theos*)—His divine nature, which He has eternally from the Father—and “the form of the slave”—His human nature, which He assumed in time from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is interesting to note that Bl. Gueric does

²²A. de Wilde, *De Beato Guericco abbate Igniacensi: eiusque doctrina De formatione Christi in nobis* (Westmalle: Typis Abbatiae, 935); id., “La formation du Christ en nous, d’après le Bienheureux Gueric d’Igny,” *Coll.Ord.Cist.Ref.* 1 (1934): 193-198; 2 (1935): 9-18; R. Thomas, “Le Bienheureux Gueric et Notre-Dame,” *Coll.Ord.Cist.Ref.* 16 (1954): 287-295; 17 (1955): 110-118, 245-252; L. Merton, “The Christmas Sermons of Bl. Gueric,” *Coll.Ord.Cist.Ref.* 17 (1955) 229-244; H. Costello, “The Meaning of Redemption in the Sermons of Gueric of Igny,” *Citeaux* 17 (1966): 281-308; Gueric, of Igny, *Sermons*, ed. by J. Morson and H. Costello (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970), 1:34-41 (Eng. trans. in Gueric, of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, 1:XXXI-XXXVIII).

not call it in this sermon “the form of the *slave*” (*formam servi, morphē doulos*), as St. Paul does, but “the form of the *flesh*” (*formam carnis*), maybe because that is the word that the Apostle uses in 2 Corinthians 5:16 (*secundum carnem, katà sarkásō*), which is one of the fundamental biblical texts that inspired this sermon. The “middle form” of which Bl. Gueric would speak, and which is characteristic to his Christology, is found in “the sentiments” of Jesus which St. Paul invites us to have and imitate at the beginning of this text.

1) The Doctrine of the Three Forms in Sermon Fifty-two

Bl. Gueric’s sermons are “liturgical”: They were written for precise liturgical feasts and are wholly based on a liturgical text of the day, taken either from the Mass or the Divine Office. Sermon fifty-two, for example, is inspired by Sirach 24:24: “I am the Mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge and of holy hope,” which was used in the Cistercian liturgy for the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady.²³ This text, together with other biblical passages which Bl. Gueric, as is his wont, intertwines with it (in particular Phil. 2:5-8; Gal. 4:19 and 2 Cor. 5:16), serves him to present his doctrine of the three forms.

a) Mary Knows Christ and Describes Him to Us

Bl. Gueric starts by saying that, although the whole lesson strictly speaking refers to Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, “not unsuitably” it can be attributed to the blessed Mother of God. The reason is that the list of virtues it gives (“fair love, fear, knowledge and holy hope”) describes very well her Son. Placed in her mouth, with this text Mary would be describing to us her Son. She can do it because she knew Him “just as well as he did who said: ‘Even if we used to think of Christ in a human fashion, we do so no longer’ (2 Cor. 5:16).”²⁴

²³Cf. II Nativity of M., p. 198, n. 1, and p.192, n. 1.

²⁴II Nativity of M., p. 198. Sometimes Bl. Gueric gives the impression that he thought that St. Paul had met Christ personally.

It is the same idea which he repeats again in our main text: The Blessed Virgin and St. Paul knew Jesus well. That is why she can describe Him to us. However, there is a negative touch in the biblical text: "no longer," which highly influences Bl. Gueric's development of the idea of "knowing Christ" by opening the way to a threefold distinction in this knowledge.

b) *The Form of the Flesh and the Form of the Word*

Our author offers his first mention of the doctrine of the forms in a text where he places the Virgin Mary in parallel with God the Father, both united by their common Son: "The Mother knew him from the first according to *the form of the flesh* in which she gave him birth."²⁵ This is obvious; Mary, being His true Mother, knew Christ "from the first" in the human form which He assumed from her virginal womb. This "form of the flesh" is the one she gave to Him. But there is another form, "that form in which the Father generated Him," His Divine form. To know "the form of the flesh" is "far from knowing" the Divine form.

Here Bl. Gueric offers to us his first set of "characteristics" of these two forms, all taken from Sacred Scripture. In the form of the flesh, Christ "was seen for a short space of time, there was no beauty in Him" (cf. Is. 53:2), and "its sight increased the sin of disbelievers." In the Divine form, on the other hand, He is all splendor and glory (cf. Heb. 1:3, Wis. 7:26, Jas. 1:17), and its sight "is reserved for the reward of the just."²⁶

c) *The Middle Form*

Bl. Gueric introduces now an idea all his own. Between the form of the flesh and the form of the Word, "like a bridge between

²⁵Cf. II Nativity of M., p. 198. The Latin original has the same verb for both subjects: "In qua ipsa eum genuit"—"in qua Pater eum genuit." The English and French translations use two different verbs: "gave him birth"—"generated him," "mis au monde"—"l'a engendré."

²⁶Ibid. The Latin has "aliquando"; the French translated "à un moment déterminé du temps." The Latin has only "in praeium"; the English and French translations add "of the just," "pour les justes."

the two," he distinguishes a third form. This form is "spiritual in its nature," but "it shows itself clearly in the flesh," that flesh which He assumed from the Virgin Mary. It is "*the form of the life he lived* in his body in order to convey his message to those who were to believe in him" (1 Tim. 1:16).

The importance of this text justifies taking a closer look at it by comparing again the three versions:

Latin Original

Igitur inter formam carnis
et formam Verbi quasi
medius de ista ad illam
gradus est, quaedam *alia*
forma Christi, spiritalis
quidem sed quam in carne
palam exhibuit, *forma*
scilicet *vitae* quam in
corpore gessit *ad*
informationem eorum qui
erant credituri.

(SC 202, p. 486-488)

English Translation

And so we are right in
saying that between the
form of the flesh and the
form of the Word, like a
bridge between the two,
another form can be
distinguished in Christ,
spiritual in its nature yet
showing itself clearly in the
flesh: *the form*, that is to
say, *of the life* He lived in
his body in order *to convey*
his message to those who
were to believe in him.
(CF 8, p. 199)

French Translation

Or, entre la forme de la
chair et la forme du Verbe,
il existe comme un degré
intermédiaire par lequel on
peut s'élever de l'une à
l'autre, comme *une troisième*
forme du Christ: elle est
spirituelle, il est vrai, et
cependant il l'a montrée
ouvertement dans sa chair.
C'est *la forme de la vie* qu'il
a menée dans son corps
pour servir de modèle à ceux
qui devaient croire.
(SC 202, p. 489)

The English translation says that between the form of the flesh and the form of the Word, “like a bridge between the two,” another form “can be distinguished in Christ.” In the Latin original, and in the French version, it is said that between these two forms there is a kind of other form of Christ (*quaedam alia forma Christi*), which the French translation alone calls “a third form”—“comme une troisième forme du Christ”—that is like a middle step or degree from the latter to the former. Thus this “bridge” is literally called “a middle step or degree” (*quasi medius . . . gradus est; il existe comme un degré intermédiaire*), and it is explicitly specified, especially in the French translation, that it leads from one form to the other (*de ista ad illam*). The French adds: “par lequel on peut s’élever de l’une à l’autre.” It is the bridge we have to cross or the step we have to climb if we want to go from the form of the flesh to the form of the Word. In other words, contemplating this “middle form,” the form of the life He lived, will lead us with God’s grace from seeing only the “form of the flesh” (seeing in Christ simply a man, or a great teacher) to acknowledging Him to be *the Son of God made man*.

The clue to understand what is this “middle form” is found in the words: “*the form of the life He lived*.” This third form is the form of life He lived when, thanks to the Incarnation, “He dwelt among us” (Jn. 1:14). The purpose—and this is very important—for living this form of life is precisely “in order to convey his message to those who were to believe in him” (1 Tim.1:16) or, in other words, in order to teach us, not only by His preaching, but with His own example of life as well. Through the very form of life He lived, He is preaching to us. He chose it and lived it precisely in order to give us His example. Thus we are called to pay attention in the Gospels not only to every word that comes from Jesus’ mouth, but also to His every action and gesture. As St. Luke often insists, the Christian faith is based upon what Christ *did* and *said* (cf. Lk. 1:1-2, 2:20; Acts 1:1, etc.).

Moreover, the Latin original has: *ad informationem*, from the verb *informo*, which means “to give form and shape to,” “to form, fashion.” Thus it is more than just “conveying His message” or “serving as a model” (*pour servir de modèle*). It is the form of life He lived in order to *form* us (literally “in-form” us). Elsewhere he expresses the same idea, saying that the Father has adopted us “to shape us to His Son’s pattern” (“*ut sint omnes conformes imaginis eius*”).²⁷ To be *conformed* to Him in everything, according to the pattern He has given us in the life He lived: this is our vocation.

The message, pattern or model that comes from His form of life is “for those who were to believe in Him.” Bl. Gueric uses a text which St. Paul applies to himself, saying that he received mercy in order that in him Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience, “for an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (cf. 1 Tim. 1:12-16). From the mercy and patience He had with Saul, we all learn how merciful and patient He is. His example is for everybody, but only those who have faith will see it and follow it. Those who do not believe will only see the form of the flesh and stay there, as was the case with some of Jesus’ contemporaries. And when this happens, its sight only “increases their sin.”²⁸

It is according to this “middle form” that Christ has to be formed in us. This assertion is of fundamental importance for the understanding of our main text. How do we form Christ in our souls? As a baby is formed and grows in its mother’s womb? The Fathers of the Church had already answered this question, inspired by Christ’s own words: “Doing the will of the Father” (cf. Mt. 12:50); imitating Him in everything; practicing virtue after the example of His perfectly holy life.

Heir to this tradition, our Cistercian Abbot expresses it in his own distinct terminology. Christ has to be formed in us “according to the pattern of virtuous life he manifested in his own person,” “according to the example of His life and

²⁷Cf. II Nativity, p. 43. Cf. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 30, VII, 9-10: PL 38, 191-192.

²⁸Cf. II Nativity of M., p. 198.

conduct.”²⁹ This pattern, which “*has been shown in Him,*” which we can see manifested in His own earthly life, is the pattern we have to follow in order to form Him in us. And if He is *formed in us* according to this example or model, according to this “middle form,” “then we shall be capable of seeing not only the form which has been formed for us but even that which formed us.”

In other words, if we want to attain to the holiness we are all called to by God, and obtain the reward promised to us in heaven, we have to form Christ in us according to the example of His life and conduct. Then we shall be able to see both “the form which has been formed for us,” the form that Mary gave to Him for our sake, and also “the form which formed us”—the form of God, of our Creator, through whom “all things were made” (cf. Jn. 1:3).

In his own beautiful and moving terms, Bl. Gueric is affirming common teaching: If we want to go to heaven and see God, we have to fulfill His commandments. The contemplation of both forms, human and divine, shall be our reward if we have formed Christ in us according to “the middle form.” Even if “knowing Him according to the form of the flesh is far from knowing Him in His divine form,” as he had said before, contemplating Him in the form of the flesh “will not be the least part of our glory” in heaven, as he shall say a little farther on.

d) *St. Augustine’s Teaching on Galatians 4:19*

Bl. Gueric’s idea has a Patristic foundation in St. Augustine’s outstanding explanation of Galatians 4:19, found precisely in his *Commentary on the Letter to the Galatians*.³⁰ The great Bishop of Hippo teaches several things. He starts by explaining that St. Paul said this to the Galatians “in order to be imitated by them like a father” (“ad hoc dicit etiam . . . ut tanquam parentem utique

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 199: “secundum exemplar vitae et morum”; “selon l’exemplaire de vie et de conduite.”

³⁰St. Augustine, *Epistolae ad Galatas expositionis liber unus*, 38, 4, 19: PL 35, 2131-2132; cf. *De S. Virg. 5*, 5: PL 40, 399. St. John Chrysostom (407) also has a very interesting commentary on Gal. 4:19, in his *De Poenitentia I*, 1: PG 49, 277-279; cf. also his *In Epistolam ad Galatas Commentarius 4*, 2, 19: PG 61, 660; Origen, *In Exodum X*, 3: PG 12, 372A.

imitentur”), thus insinuating that they, too, are called like him “to be in travail” until Christ is formed in them or in others. Then he specifies that the Apostle said this “personifying mother Church,” since elsewhere (1 Thes. 2:7) he also says that “he became a child among them, like a nurse taking care of her children.” In other words, that it is to the Church, in the first place, that this maternal mission of forming Christ in souls pertains.

From this he goes on to explain how and where it is that Christ is formed: “Christ is *formed* by faith in the interior man of the believer, called to the freedom of grace with meek and humble heart . . .” (“*formatur* autem Christus in credente per fidem in interiore homine . . .”), that does not presume on the merits of his works, and he can be called one of Christ’s “little ones” (cf. Mt. 25:40). In terms and concepts extremely similar to those of Bl. Gueric, St. Augustine further states that: “Christ is *formed* in him who takes *the form of Christ*” (“*formatur* enim Christus in eo qui *formam* accipit Christi”). And he who takes *the form of Christ* is he who unites himself to Christ with spiritual love (“*formam* autem accipit Christi, qui adhaeret Christo dilectione spirituali”), whence it happens that through the imitation of Christ he becomes what Christ is, as far as his condition permits (“ex hoc enim fit ut huius imitatione sit quod ille, quantum gradu suo sinitur”), for “he who says he abides in Christ”—as St. John says —“ought to walk in the same way in which he walked” (1 Jn. 2:6).

Bl. Gueric says that Mary “brings us forth *everyday*,” even though we have already been born to new life through Baptism. St. Augustine explains very well how this is to be understood in connection with St. Paul. Aware that people might be surprised by the fact that the Apostle says that he is “*again* in travail,” since “mothers conceive men in order to form them, and once they have been formed, they give birth to them so they are born,” St. Augustine indicates that we have to understand this parturition to indicate St. Paul’s *anguish* for the care with which he bore the Galatians in order for them to be formed in Christ, and that he also gives

them birth again with the pangs of childbirth because of the dangers of seduction with which he sees them to be troubled. Moreover, this solicitude for them, which he compares to being in travail, would last until they have attained "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," so that "no wind of doctrine can move them any longer" (Eph. 4:13-14). Therefore, St. Paul's words do not refer to the beginning of their faith, through which they had already been born, but to its strength and perfection.³¹ Bl. Gueric, likewise, refers to that continuous growth in our spiritual life, in our "forming Christ in us," in which Our Lady cooperates in a unique way, truly "being in travail and bringing us forth" until Christ is perfectly formed in us.

e) More Characteristics of the Three Forms

Our Abbot introduces again a series of characteristics, this time concerning all three forms. The Latin text is characteristically synthetic: "Est itaque in Christo alia *forma corporalis*, alia *moralis*, alia *intellectualis*": "There is in Christ a bodily form, a moral form, and an intellectual form."³² All three adjectives describe very well the three forms: "bodily," because of the flesh assumed from the Virgin Mary; "moral," because it concerns His form of life or conduct; "intellectual," because He was eternally generated from the Father by way of knowledge.

In the bodily form He is our brother; in the moral form He is our teacher; in the intellectual form He is our God. He accepted the bodily form in order to accomplish His mystery³³; "he manifests

³¹"Non ergo propter initium fidei, quo iam nati erant, sed propter robur et perfectionem dictum est." He also alludes to 2 Cor. 11:28-29.

³²Cf. II Nativity of M., p. 199. The French translation is similar: "Il y a dans le Christ une *forme corporelle*, une *forme morale*, une *forme intellectuelle*"; the English one is more elaborate: "Christ has taken one form in the flesh; shows another in his conduct; is begotten from eternity in a third by way of knowledge."

³³"Corporalem suscepit ut impleret sacramentum"; "il a assumé la forme corporelle a fin d'accomplir son mystère"; the English adds "of our salvation"; both translations add the possessive pronoun: "his," "son," as well.

himself in his life as our example"³⁴; "he will reveal himself as the eternally begotten as our reward."³⁵

f) *The Beatific Vision*

The theme of seeing Christ in heaven is quite common in our author. He insists that to see the "divine form" will be our reward in heaven, but in some sermons he also speaks about a "foretaste" of this vision here on earth through mystical contemplation. To see the "form of the flesh," "upon which angels long to look" (1 Pet. 1:10-12), will also be part of our reward and our happiness.

But Bl. Gueric insists that this vision has to be prepared by a holy life here on earth: "The man who will be so blessed is he who in this present life *has become a lover of the form* which is proposed as our example."³⁶ He does not say simply: "he who *imitates* this form set forth as our example," but "he who becomes *a lover* of this form." We have to love Christ and love everything He did and the way He did it in order to imitate Him. His example has to elicit in us love for Him, and therefore desire to imitate Him and conform ourselves to Him. In a way, in a certain sense similar to the appeal to move our "affections" found in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (1556), and to what the French School would do centuries later with its insistence on the importance of every aspect of the life of Christ, in many of his sermons Bl. Gueric appeals to what Christ did for us, out of love for us, in order to move us to do something for Him, corresponding to His love by imitating Him.

³⁴All versions are similar: "moralem exhibuit, ut praeberet exemplum"; "il a présenté la forme morale pour donner l'exemple."

³⁵"Intellectualem seu divinam revelabit ad praemium"; "il révélera la forme intellectuelle ou divine pour qu'elle serve de récompense"; the English translation renders "intellectual or divine" with "as the eternally begotten." Cf. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 127, 7, 10: PL 38, 711; 127, 8, 12: 711-712: "the form that was judged will judge"; "they shall look on the form they have pierced"; on judgment day, the "form of the slave" shall be seen by everybody, the "form of God" is reserved only for the just, etc. St. Bernard (1153) also uses several times this "form" terminology in his works.

³⁶"Beatus autem qui nunc *amator* factus est *formae huius* quae in exemplum est proposita"; "Mais bienheureux celui qui présentement a été saisi par l'amour de cette forme qui nous a été offerte en exemple."

Bl. Gueric goes on to say that “the man who seeks to pry into that other form which is stored up for us as our reward will be dazzled by the brightness.”³⁷ In other words, he who tries to obtain the reward of the beatific vision without having become a lover of the form of life Jesus lived, will be overwhelmed, crushed by its glory. Our author insists on the need of corresponding to God’s grace and living a holy life, if we do not want to lose the great reward which awaits us in heaven. How terrible to lose such incomparable and sublime happiness only because of our negligence, he often repeats.

g) *The Appeal of Christ’s Moral Beauty*

The psalmist who said: “Yours is more than mortal beauty” (Ps. 44:2) “was such a lover and admirer of *this form*.”³⁸ Here Bl. Gueric brings in another biblical text where he sees Christ’s virtues described in a way similar to Sirach 24:24. The “mortal beauty” that the psalmist is talking about is not, according to him, “the bodily appearance” of Christ, but His “moral stature” (literally: “not *the form of the body* but *the form of the heart*”). He was speaking “of the beauty of his virtues [conduct], not of his limbs.”³⁹

To prove that this is so, he partially quotes verses three and four (Ps. 44), underlining “on account of truth and meekness and justice” (Ps. 44:4). This is certainly the beauty by which He

³⁷I Nativity of M., p. 199: “qui scrutator est . . . opprimetur a gloria”; “sera accablé par la gloire.”

³⁸Cf. *Ibid.*: “huius formae mirator et amator factus erat . . .”; “de cette forme, il était devenu l’admirateur et l’amant . . .”; the English translation interchanges the order of the nouns “lover” and “admirer,” and changes the tense of the verb “had been made” or “had become” to “was.”

³⁹Ps. 44:3 is translated as: “Yours is more than *mortal* beauty”; the Latin and French have the word “form”: “speciosus forma prae filiis hominum”; “tu es beau par ta forme, plus que les fils des hommes.” In English we have: “Do you want to be certain that he was speaking of *the moral stature* of Christ, not of his *bodily appearance*?” The Latin original and the French translation use the terms “form” and “heart”: “Vis scire quia non *formam corporis* sed *cordis* . . .”; “Veux-tu la preuve qu’il ne louait pas *la forme du corps*, mais celle *du coeur*.” The English reads: “Of the beauty of his *virtues*, not of his *limbs*?”; the Latin has “non pulchritudinem *membrorum* sed *morum* praedicabat?”; the French has “non la beauté des *membres*, mais celle de la *conduite*!”

acquired His kingdom: "truth of speech, meekness of behavior, and rightness of judgment." With this beauty "He easily subjected to Himself even the hearts of His enemies, and He is the fulfillment of every yearning and desire."⁴⁰

Thus we have another biblical text that describes Christ's virtues, the moral beauty with which He attracts even His enemies and fulfills the desires of His friends. These virtues are so "lovable" that "the whole world goes after Him" (Jn.12:19) when they hear about them.

Combining two other texts—"Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth" (Ps. 49:2), and "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Is. 2:3), our Cistercian Abbot offers us a very beautiful assertion: The Gospel is sent to us from Sion and Jerusalem, and in it, "a more beautiful *portrait of Christ* has been revealed" ("in quo quaedam pulchrior *Christi facies* ostensa est"). This "portrait," "face" or "form" of Christ is "the form of life and doctrine which he has passed on by his teaching and shown in his own person by his example."⁴¹ As we shall see, in his sermons Bl. Gueric offers to us many concrete instances where we can appreciate this "form of life and doctrine" of Christ, lovingly and mercifully chosen and lived for our sake and as an example to all of us.

h) Knowing Christ according to the Three Forms

What follows is the text immediately prior to our main text. In it Bl. Gueric returns to the theme of "knowing Christ," which he had touched upon at the beginning of this sermon. There he had mentioned only the form of the flesh and the form of the Word. The form of the flesh was explicitly related to Mary ("the form in which she gave Him birth and knew Him from the first"), and he said that knowing Him according to the form of the flesh

⁴⁰Cf. II Nativity of M., p.200.

⁴¹Ibid.: "*forma* scilicet vitae et doctrinae, quam et tradidit verbo et in se expressit exemplo"; "*la forme* de la vie et de l'enseignement qu'il a livrée par la parole et exprimée en lui-même par l'exemple."

“is far from knowing that form in which the Father generated him.” Here he speaks of all three forms in relation to men and angels.

“To know Christ now in this form is loving service for Christians.”⁴² Christian piety, in the “meanwhile” of this time we are living until Christ comes again, consists in “knowing Christ in this form,” in other words, in imitating the form of life He lived. The imitation of Christ and conformation ever more perfectly to Him is what Christian life is all about.

“To know him in the form of the flesh was scandal to the Jews” (1 Cor. 1:23).⁴³ The biblical text that seems to be in the background is found at the beginning of the Letter to the Corinthians, where St. Paul, speaking about the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the Cross, affirms that “preaching Christ crucified” is “a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” Combining St. John and St. Paul, Bl. Gueric goes on to affirm that “this is the reason why Paul, knowing the flesh profits nothing without ‘the spirit which gives life’ (Jn. 6:63), repudiates any ‘knowledge of Christ according to the flesh’ (2 Cor. 5:16), in order to give all his attention to the life-giving Spirit.”⁴⁴

For Bl. Gueric, St. Paul is speaking about a knowledge that, by restricting itself to the flesh, misses the point of who Christ is: the *Word* made flesh (Jn. 1:14). Jesus was seen by many of His contemporaries; some believed in Him and recognized Him as the Son of God (cf. Mt. 2:11, 16:16, 27:54; Jn. 1:34, 6:69, etc.), while others saw only the flesh, only a man not suited to their likings or expectations, and remained there. When St. Paul was writing his letters, there were still people alive who had known Christ personally, who had seen Him in the flesh, and yet had not believed in Him. He, on the other hand, had not known Christ personally,

⁴²Ibid.: “*in hac forma nosse Christum interim pietas est christianorum.*”

⁴³“*Cum nosse in forma carnis scandalum fuerit iudaeorum.*”

⁴⁴The original Greek text of the NT and the Latin translation of 2 Cor. 5:16 use the terms: “kata; savrka,” “*secundum carnem*” (repeated twice), and “oijvdamen—ejgnwvkamen—ginwvskomen,” “*novimus—cognovimus—novimus.*”

and yet became the great Apostle to the Gentiles.⁴⁵ That is why Bl. Gueric, impressed by this Pauline text which he quotes several times, insists on the importance of the flesh, but not “without the spirit which gives life.”

Finally, “to know the divine form is the complete happiness and joy of the angels.”⁴⁶ And we human beings have been called by God to share in this supreme happiness!

i) *Mary Describes Christ to Us according to the Spirit*

At this point comes our main text. Bl. Gueric starts it by saying that “Mary seems to have understood this, too.” In other words, by the way she describes Christ to us in the text which inspired this sermon: “I am the Mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge and of holy hope” (Sir. 24:24), it would seem that she had understood the importance of describing Christ according to the spirit, and that is why, instead of giving us details about His physical appearance, which she knew so well, she describes to us *His virtues*, which she knew equally well. Mary wants us to become in this life true “lovers of the form which is proposed as our example,” and thus be able to see one day in heaven “that other form which is stored up for us as our reward.”⁴⁷

j) *Mary Brings Forth the Fruit of Eternal Gladness*

Immediately after our main text comes an affirmation of Mary’s virginity at childbirth: “Before she was in labor she brought forth’ (Is. 66:7), because she brought forth without sorrow; nor did she experience the difficulty and trouble of childbirth when she brought forth the fruit of eternal gladness.” It is this fruit of her womb (Lk. 1:42) which Mary praises and commends to us when she says: “I am the mother of fair love, of fear, of knowledge

⁴⁵Cf. III Easter, 93; II Pentecost, 121; II Nativity of M., 198.

⁴⁶“Nam nosse in forma divinitatis felicitas est et gaudium angelorum.”

⁴⁷Cf. II Nativity of M., 200, 199.

and of holy hope" (Sir. 24:24). Inspired by Canticles 5:9 and 5:16, Bl. Gueric addresses Mary directly, asking her: "Is he then your Son, O Virgin of virgins? Is your beloved *such a one as this*, O most beautiful of women?" And Mary answers: "Clearly so, my beloved is such a one and he is my Son."⁴⁸

k) *The Force of Christ's Example and His Operation in Us*

Then comes an extremely important affirmation in order to understand correctly Bl. Gueric's concept of the "middle form." Christ is not only for us a great example that we follow and thus arrive to "form Him" in us, but He Himself is also the one who brings about in us those very things of which He is our supreme example: "For he is not only the one whom we love, fear and acknowledge and in whom we hope, *but it is he who brings about all those things in us.*"⁴⁹

Thus rightly A. De Wilde affirms that Gueric's "spiritual form" is "more than merely exemplary, truly something more, namely a certain active principle by which the soul is informed."⁵⁰ And J. Morson and H. Costello likewise believe that "it is reasonable to think that for Gueric all the actions of Christ are efficacious by virtue of their union with the principal events of his life; that like them they are sacraments or mysteries which are able to effect in us what they signify."⁵¹

And "as these virtues grow in strength like the limbs and members of our body, they bring him to maturity and perfection in us." It is through these virtues, as if through, so to speak, members and parts (understood, of the body) that Christ is perfected, "performed" ("thoroughly formed") in us. When Christ has been thus

⁴⁸Ibid., 201.

⁴⁹Ibid.: "Ipse enim est non solum quem diligimus, timemus, agnoscimus et in quem speramus; *sed haec etiam omnia in nobis operatur.*"

⁵⁰Cf. A. De Wilde, "The Formation of Christ in Us: Bl. Gueric of Igny," *Monastic Studies* 2 (1964): 29-45, 34-35.

⁵¹J. Morson and H. Costello, *Gueric of Igny: Liturgical Sermons*, 1:XXXIV; H. Costello, "The Meaning of Redemption," 296.

formed in us, then we will manifest in ourselves His virtues. If we have acknowledged the truth which is Himself, and glorified it in fear and hope, then His own truth will be made manifest in us.⁵²

Finally, Bl. Gueric is careful to point out that Christ is perfectly formed in us "as far as it is possible in this life." In other words, there is a limit to what can be achieved here on earth; total perfection in this formation of Christ in us can only be attained in heaven, "when we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn. 3:2).

C. The Marian Doctrine

("Forming her Only-begotten in the sons by adoption")

After seeing how Bl. Gueric affirms Mary's fundamental contribution towards making our spiritual life possible through her Divine Maternity and her Cooperation in the Work of Redemption, and after examining briefly how he presents her as the person who has best formed Christ in herself according to the "moral form" (by imitating Him and conforming herself totally to Him), we shall examine now what he teaches about Mary's active role in the spiritual life of each individual Christian. The texts are not very numerous, but they are profound and give more light to our main text, where we find the most significant of Bl. Gueric's affirmations concerning this theme: Mary "*desires to form her Only-begotten in the sons by adoption.*"

1) "Mother of All Christians"

Mary's Spiritual Maternity is a theme very well developed by our author, and one that is extremely important for the correct understanding of our main text. He deals with it particularly in two sermons: his *Fourth Sermon for the Nativity* and his *First Sermon for the Assumption*. We shall examine the latter at some length.

⁵² Cf. II Nativity of M., 201: "Atque his virtutibus veluti quibusdam membris et partibus in nobis *perficitur* atque *formatur* . . . Tunc enim perfecte *pro modulo huius vitae* Christus in te *formatus* est . . ."

a) **“And your children shall dwell in you.” (cf. Is. 62:4-5)**

Inspired by the responsory: “Come my chosen one, and I will set up my throne in you,” this sermon starts affirming how the Lord chose Mary to be His resting-place and His dwelling in a most sublime and unique way.⁵³ Immediately after this, our author introduces another text: Isaiah 62:4-5, and with it the theme of Mary’s Spiritual Maternity.

Paraphrasing the prophet, Bl. Gueric tells Mary that she will no longer be called Desolate for, although a virgin, she will not be unfruitful. She will be called “My Pleasure” (i.e., “my beloved Son is in you”), because the Lord was well pleased with her and her Son shall dwell in her. And not only her Son: “her children shall dwell in her” as well.⁵⁴

Who are these children? Bl. Gueric’s first reaction is to make it very clear that Mary bore only one Son, Jesus Christ, who “in heaven is the Only-begotten of the Father; and on earth, likewise, is the Only-begotten of his Mother” (*Unum quidem genuit, qui sicut unicus est Patri in coelis ita unicus est matri in terris*). She bore no other children “despite the heretic’s blasphemy. But rather the seal of perpetual virginity in the mother, like the mystery of Catholic unity in the offspring, remains inviolate.”⁵⁵ Then, who are these “children that will dwell in her”?

b) **Mother of Those in Whom Christ Has Been Formed or Is Being Formed**

Our author gives a very important answer for us because it contains the idea found in our main text of Christ being formed in us. He says that: “She who is the only Virgin-Mother, she who glories in having borne the Only-begotten of the Father, *embraces that same Only-begotten of hers in all his members* [eumdem unicum suum in omnibus membris eius amplectitur], and so can be truly called

⁵³Cf. I Assumption, 167.

⁵⁴Ibid., 167-168.

⁵⁵Ibid., 168.

Mother of all in whom she recognizes her Christ *to have been formed* [omniumque in quibus Christum suum *formatum* agnoscit], or in whom she knows that *he is being formed* [vel *formari* cognoscit].⁵⁶

The first thing we notice in this text is a certain similarity with Origen's famous passage on Mary's Spiritual Maternity, found at the beginning of his *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*.⁵⁷ Like the great Alexandrian exegete, Bl. Gueric first of all affirms that the Blessed Virgin bore only one Son, the Only-begotten Son of the Father. But that Son united to Himself in her womb many members who form *one Body* with Him. And it is because of this union between the Head and the members that Mary can embrace her same Only-begotten in all His members and become their mother, too. That is why "she can be truly called mother of all."⁵⁸ For the Fathers of the Church and medieval authors, being the Mother of Christ, the Head, is the principal foundation for Mary's Spiritual Maternity.

Bl. Gueric specifies further who are these "all": They are those "in whom she recognizes her Christ *to have been formed* or in whom she knows that *he is being formed*."⁵⁹ The first assertion agrees with Origen. Mary is not ashamed to be called the mother of those in whom she recognizes or knows that Christ has been formed, that is, the perfect ones the Alexandrian exegete speaks about: those who have become Christ, and being "Christ," can be called Mary's children.

The second goes beyond what Origen says in this text, but is similar to what he says in general terms elsewhere, and agrees with what Bl. Gueric has in our main text. She is the mother not only

⁵⁶Ibid.: "Ipsa tamen unica virgo mater, quae se Patris unicum genuisse gloriatur, eundem unicum suum *in omnibus membris eius amplectitur*; omniumque in quibus Christum suum *formatum* agnoscit vel *formari* cognoscit matrem se vocari non confunditur."

⁵⁷Origen, *In Ioh.Com.*, I, 4: PG 14, 32.

⁵⁸The Latin text and the French translation differ a little from the English: "omniumque . . . matrem se vocari *non confunditur*"; "et elle *ne rougit pas* d'être appelée mère de tous ceux . . ."; "she is not *ashamed* to be called the mother of all."

⁵⁹I Assumption, 168: "in quibus Christum suum *formatum* agnoscit vel *formari* cognoscit"; "dans lesquels elle reconait son Christ déjà *formé*, ou en *formation*."

of those in whom Christ is already formed, but also of those in whom “she knows that he is being formed,” those who are in the process of forming Him, of becoming like Him. In the main text he says that Mary “desires to form her Only-begotten in the sons by adoption.” If she desires to form them, it means that they are not yet fully formed. Moreover, he adds that “she brings them forth *everyday*,” thus underlining the progressive aspect of our becoming “Christ.” In this text our author affirms that Mary *embraces* her Son in *all his members*, and that she is truly “the Mother” of all those in whom Christ has been formed or is being formed, the perfect and those walking towards perfection.

c) The True “Mother of the Living” (Gen. 3:20)

Bl. Gueric here refers to another argument taken from St. Epiphanius (403).⁶⁰ Eve is called in the Old Testament “the mother of the living” (Gen. 3:20). But this first Eve “is not so much a mother as a stepmother since she handed on to her children an inheritance of certain death rather than the beginning of light. She is indeed called the mother of all the living, but she turned out to be more precisely the murderer of the living, or mother of the dead, since the only fruit of her child-bearing is death.”

Since Eve “was incapable of fulfilling the vocation of her title, Mary consummated the mystery.” Mary herself, “like the Church of which she is type is a mother of all who are reborn to life.” Thus we have three mothers: Eve, called “mother of all the living,” who in fact was incapable of honoring this title, because, on account of the fall, of which she is responsible together with Adam, all her children are born to die; Mary, who truly fulfills the mystery of this universal maternity by becoming the Mother of all who are reborn to new life in Christ her Son; and the Church, who, after the example of the Virgin Mary, is her “form” or “type,”

⁶⁰St. Epiphanius (403), *Adv.Haer.* 78, 18: PG 42, 727-728C.

for through the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments she conceives and gives birth to all the members of Christ's Body.⁶¹

d) *The Mother of the Life by Which Everyone Lives*

The argument that Bl. Gueric offers now is the fundamental argument that Tradition has given in order to affirm Mary's Spiritual Maternity: the Incarnation. Mary is our Mother because she is the Mother of Christ, our Life, our Head, through Whom and in Whom we are reborn to new life.

"She is in fact the mother of the Life by which everyone lives, and when she brought it forth from herself she in some way *brought to rebirth all those who were to live by that Life*. One was born, but we were all reborn, since in that seed which holds the power of rebirth we were all already then in him" (Heb. 7:10). It is St. Paul who explains this to us very well: "Just as from the beginning we were in Adam by the seed of carnal generation, so even before the beginning we were there present in Christ much more by the seed of spiritual regeneration" (1 Cor. 15:22).⁶²

Mary is our Mother because she gave us our Life, who is Christ her Son. She is our Mother because in Him we were all already present, so that, when she gave birth to Him, she was mystically giving birth to all of us as well. That is why St. Leo the Great affirms that the birthday of Christ is also the birthday of all Christians.⁶³

e) *Showing Herself to Be a Mother*

Thus far Bl. Gueric has only spoken about how Mary became our Mother by giving birth to our Life, how in her Only-begotten she embraces us, His members, and how she can be truly called

⁶¹Cf. I Assumption, 168. The Latin original has the word *forma*, translated into French by "figure" and into English by "type": "quae et ipsa, sicut Ecclesia cuius *forma* est, mater est omnium ad vitam renascentium." St. Ambrose, the first to give her this title, called her "*typus Ecclesiae*": *In Lucam* 2, 7: PL 15, 1635D-1636A.

⁶²I Assumption, 169.

⁶³Cf. St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 26, 2: PL 54, 213B.

the Mother of all in whom she recognizes her Christ to have been formed or is being formed. Now he will speak about the manner in which her maternity in our regard is concretely and individually expressed.

He starts by saying that “the blessed Mother of Christ, *knowing* that she is *the mother of all Christians* by reason of this mystery [the Incarnation]”—“porro beata mater illa Christi, quia se *matrem christianorum* cognoscit ratione mysterii”—“shows herself a mother by her care and loving attention”—“*cura* quoque se matrem eis praestat et *affectu pietatis*.”⁶⁴ The title “Mother of Christians” goes very well with what he had said before: “She is the mother of those in whom she recognizes her Christ to have been formed or is being formed,” that is, she knows herself to be the mother of Christians, whose vocation is precisely to become “other Christs.” Her maternity is expressed by “her solicitude and loving affection or loving kindness,” terms which Bl. Gueric employs to describe Mary’s, the Church’s or St. Paul’s maternal duties.

f) At His Birth, Christ Left Mary “Pregnant with inexhaustible tenderness”

Although her only true Son is Jesus, Mary’s heart “is not hardened against these children as if they were not her own; her womb carried a child once only, yet it remains ever fruitful [*sed numquam effeta*], never ceasing to bring forth the fruits of her motherly compassion [*fructum pietatis*].”⁶⁵ Although her womb gave birth to only one Child, it continues to be fruitful. Bl. Gueric does not say that she never ceases to bring forth “other spiritual *children*,” but refers to “the fruits of her motherly kindness or mercy.” Probably because he believes that in Christ Mary has already given birth to

⁶⁴“Se montre aussi leur mère par sa *sollicitude* et par sa *tendre affection*.”

⁶⁵“Neque enim *duratur* ad filios quasi non sint sui, cuius viscera semel quidem feta, sed numquam effeta, *numquam desinunt fructum parturire pietatis*”; “Elle n’est pas sans cœur pour ses fils, comme s’ils ne lui appartenaient pas; ses entrailles n’ont enfanté qu’une fois, mais elle ne sont jamais épuisées, *elles ne cessent jamais de produire des fruits de tendresse*.”

us, and so what she brings forth now from her virginal entrails is her motherly love and assistance on our behalf.

The reason why she remains ever fruitful is her Son Himself. Our Abbot meditated very deeply on the mystery of the presence of the Son of God in the Virgin Mary's womb for nine months.⁶⁶ A fruit of these meditations is the following beautiful statement: "The blessed Fruit of your womb (Lk. 1:42), O holy Mother, *left you pregnant with inexhaustible tenderness*": "*gravidam te, o pia mater, inexhausta pietate reliquit.*" "He was born of you once and for all, yet he remains in you always, making you ever fruitful."⁶⁷

At the beginning of this sermon Bl. Gueric had said that while Christ lived *in Mary's womb*, "he poured into her graces of a unique kind," and while He lived *with her*, "he nourished her with his salutary words of divine wisdom and with the ineffable sweetness of his example."⁶⁸ Here he says that while He was physically present in her womb, He left her "pregnant with [the French *porteur* translates "bearer of"] inexhaustible tenderness," that infinite tenderness and love which characterizes Him, and which our author describes so well in many sermons. It is with the very tenderness of Jesus, with which He Himself willed to fill her, that Mary loves us.

Now He continues being spiritually present in her, making her "ever fruitful" on our behalf. The Latin has two present participles: *manens* and *affluens* (literally, "remaining" and "being abundant or abounding in"), which the French translated with "il demeure en toi" and "se répand en toi." He remains always in her, making her abound always in tenderness. As he says in another sermon, "being the one-only Mother of Mercy all-High," who "gave

⁶⁶Cf. I Assumption, 167.

⁶⁷Ibid., 169: "Benedictus siquidem fructus ventris tui, *gravidam te, o pia mater, inexhausta pietate reliquit, ex te semel quidem nascens sed in te semper manens et affluens . . .*"; "Car le Fruit béni de tes entrailles, ô tendre Mère, a laissé ton sein *porteur* d'une inépuisable tendresse; il est né de toi une fois seulement, mais toujours il demeure en toi et se *répand* en toi . . ."

⁶⁸Ibid., 167.

birth to Loving-Kindness [*quae misericordiam genuisti*],” in a wonderful way “*she is fruitful with the fruitfulness of the divine mercy.*”⁶⁹

g) A Sealed Wellspring of Charity (Cant. 4:12)

With an image similar to the one used by St. Bernard in his famous sermon *De Aqueductu*,⁷⁰ but used in a different way, his disciple says that “within the locked garden of Mary’s chastity He makes the sealed wellspring of charity always abundant in its supply: that wellspring though sealed is yet channeled to the outer world and its waters are at our disposal in courtyard and street,” for “although this fountain of charity belongs exclusively to the Church and cannot be shared with those outside, yet still it delights to bestow its gifts on her enemies as well.”⁷¹

Although she is “a locked garden,” a Virgin, the wellspring of charity in her is always abundant; and although the wellspring is sealed, its waters are diverted to the outer world and distributed to us, so we can all benefit from them. In St. Bernard, Christ is the Fountain and Mary is the aqueduct through which His graces come to us.⁷² In this text, in a way similar to what he did in the one we just examined, Bl. Gueric speaks of charity coming *from within Mary’s own womb*, which Christ is always making abundant in its supply. In his *First Sermon for St. John the Baptist* we find the same idea: “Rivers indeed of living water flowed *from Mary’s bosom* (Jn. 7:38),” when God’s generous gift of grace flowed from the Full of Grace into the Forerunner.⁷³

⁶⁹I Purification, 102. The Latin original and the French translation are slightly different: “*Illa quippe, sicut singulariter mater est summae misericordiae, sic excellenter habet ubera uberis misericordiae*”; “. . . *sa poitrine se trouve excellemment pourvue de l’opulence de la miséricorde.*”

⁷⁰St. Bernard, “Sermon for the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” in *St. Bernard’s Sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. by a priest of Mount Melleray (Devon: Augustine Publ. Co., 1984), 79-103.

⁷¹I Assumption, 169: “*et in horto concluso castitatis fontem signatum caritatis semper abundare faciens, qui licet signatus sit, foris tamen derivatur, et in plateis aquae eius nobis dividuntur*”; “. . . *et ses eaux nous sont distribuées.*”

⁷²Cf. St. Bernard, “Sermon for . . . the Nativity of . . . Mary,” *op. cit.*, 9.

⁷³Cf. I St. John the Baptist, 124.

In St. Bernard the “aqueduct” was raised to the ineffable vocation of “touching the Living Fountain” and becoming the aqueduct through which “the streams of heavenly grace” began to flow between God and man.⁷⁴ In his disciple, the Word comes down from heaven to dwell within the Virgin’s womb, leaves her pregnant “with His inexhaustible tenderness,” and continues to be present in her, making her fruitful with a charity that is distributed to all, enemies included. From her virginal womb came forth Christ, and from it continue to flow the waters of God’s grace. Both St. Bernard and Bl. Gueric are saying the same thing, but the latter, privileging the image of the womb, gives a more intimate, personal tone to his affirmation of Mary’s Mediation, and links it directly to her Spiritual Maternity on our behalf.

h) *The Parallel with St. Paul*

What follows is a very interesting comparison between St. Paul and the Blessed Virgin based on the fundamental text of Galatians 4:19: “If the Servant of Christ *by his care and heartfelt tenderness [cura et desiderio pietatis]* bears his little children again and again until Christ be formed in them (Gal. 4:19), how much more is this true of the very Mother of Christ?”⁷⁵ If St. Paul, who is the *servant* of Christ, bears “his little children again and again” in a continuous process, until Christ is formed in them, still more can we apply these words to *the Mother* of Christ.

Bl. Gueric explains the reason: “Paul begot his children by preaching the word of truth (Jas. 1:18) through which they were born again; but Mary in a manner far more holy and like to God, by giving birth to the Word himself”: “longe *divinius* atque *sanctius* Verbum ipsum generando.”⁷⁶ Again the argument for Mary’s

⁷⁴Cf. St. Bernard, “Sermon for . . . the Nativity of . . . Mary,” op. cit., 82-83.

⁷⁵I Assumption, 169: “Denique si servus Christi filiolos suos iterum atque iterum parturit *cura et desiderio pietatis*, donec *formetur* in eis Christus, quanto magis ipsa mater Christi”; “. . . par sa *sollicitude* et son *tendre amour*.”

⁷⁶Et Paulus quidem genuit eos, verbum veritatis quo regenerati sunt praedicando; Maria autem longe *divinius* atque *sanctius* Verbum ipsum generando”; “Paul, d’ailleurs, les a

Spiritual Maternity is the Incarnation. While St. Paul becomes our mother now, preaching the Word to us, Mary became our Mother when she gave birth to the Word Himself made flesh in her virginal womb. That is why hers is a far more “divine and holy” maternity.

Bl. Gueric ends by saying that he praises “the *ministry of preaching* in Paul,” but far more does he “admire and venerate that *mystery of generation* in Mary.”⁷⁷ In the table that closes this section may be seen some interesting similarities among this text, our main text, and other texts where he speaks about Mary’s Spiritual Maternity.

i) Her Children Recognize Her as Their Mother

Bl. Gueric says that Mary knows that she is the Mother of all Christians. He also says that, for their part, Christians likewise instinctively recognize her as their mother and seek her help: “Then again, is it not true that her children seem to *recognize her as their Mother* by a kind of instinctive devotion which faith gives them as a second nature, so that first and foremost in all their needs and dangers they run to call upon her name just as children run to their mother’s breast?”⁷⁸

Our Cistercian author, who often speaks about *Christ’s* presence in us, based on Isaiah 62:5 also mentions *Mary’s* presence in us. Seeing how her children have recourse to her, he believes it is “quite reasonable to understand of these children that promise of the Prophet to her: ‘Your children *shall live in you*’ (Is. 62:5); provided that the prophecy is always understood to refer principally to the Church.”

engendrés en leur prechant la parole de vérité, grâce à laquelle il on été régénérés; mais Marie l’a fait bien plus *divinement* et *saintement*, en engendrant la Parole elle-même.” The English translation changes the order of the adverbs “divinius” and “sanctius.” Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, 154: “The Bridegroom himself in the days of his early life had begotten some children by the word of truth.”

⁷⁷Cf. I Assumption, 169: “Laudo quidem in Paulo *praedicationis ministerium*; sed plus miror ac veneror in Maria *generationis mysterium*.”

⁷⁸Ibid., 169-170: “Vide autem si non et filii matrem videntur agnoscere, dictante utique ipsis veluti quadam naturali pietate fidei, ut ad invocationem nominis eius primo vel maxime refugiant in omnibus necessitatibus et periculis tamquam parvuli ad sinum matris.”

For our author we live in Mary both now on earth and later in heaven. Applying to her Psalms 90:1, 4; 16:8, and 86:7, he says that “already we all *dwell in the help* of the Mother of the Most High; we do *live in her protection* (Ps. 90:1, 4), as if under the shadow of her wing (Ps. 16:8). And afterwards in participating in her glory we shall be *cherished as if in her bosom* . Then a single cry of rejoicing and thanksgiving will be heard addressed to this Mother: “*The dwelling place of all of us who rejoice and are glad is in you, holy Mother of God*” (Ps. 86:7). Inspired by the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Bl. Gueric is sure that we will not think it “a greater happiness and glory to dwell in the bosom of Abraham (Lk. 16:23) *than in the bosom of Mary* , when the King of Glory has erected his throne in her.”⁷⁹

Combining again several Scriptural texts, in his *IV Sermon for the Assumption* he addresses to Mary this beautiful prayer, with which we would like to finish:

O Mother of Mercy, be filled with your Son's glory and leave what you have over to your little ones (Ps. 16:4). You are now at the table, we are dogs under the table (Mt. 15:27). Like a maid with her eyes on the hands of her mistress (Ps. 122:2), this hungry family looks to you for the food of life. Through you we have shared in the fruit of life at the table of these present sacraments; through you may we share at the table of everlasting joys in the same fruit of life, Jesus, the blessed Fruit of your womb.⁸⁰

CONCLUSION

Having come to the end of our research, we would like now to draw the following conclusions.

1. Bl. Gueric of Igny offers to us in his *Second Sermon for the Nativity of Our Lady* an extraordinarily important affirmation concerning the *active* role which the Blessed Virgin Mary has in our spiritual life.⁸¹

⁷⁹Ibid., 170.

⁸⁰IV Assumption, 191.

⁸¹II Nativity of M., 200-201.

2. This active role is synthesized by him in four verbs:

Mary:

Wishes to introduce or make known Christ	Insinuare cupiens dilectum
She describes Christ	Describit eum
She desires to form Christ	Cupit formare Unigenitum
She brings us forth everyday	Parturit eos cotidie.

3. Mary desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption. Christ was “formed” in her virginal womb so that He might be “formed” in us. God the Father has adopted us for Him in order to “shape us to his pattern”: “ut sint omnes conformes imaginis eius.”⁸² Bl. Gueric wonders at the “unspeakable condescension of God and at the same time the power of the mystery which passes all understanding,” that “He who created us is created in us, and as if it were too little that we should possess the Father, he wishes also that we should become a mother to himself.” Like the Virgin Mary, we are all called to conceive Christ by opening “to the Word of God an ear that will listen.” In both cases this conception is the work of the Holy Spirit. Listening to God’s word “is the way to the womb of our heart for the Spirit who brings about conception; in such fashion are the bones of Christ, that is the virtues, built up in the pregnant womb.” It is by the Spirit’s gift that “countless faithful souls are pregnant with that noble offspring.”⁸³

But Christ does not come to us, as He did not come to Mary, as an adult fully formed, but as a tender child that needs to grow and has to be looked after with great vigilance and care. He has to be formed in us, just as He was formed in Mary’s womb. He is “the Child who was born for us” in order to save us, and “the Son who was given to us” (Is. 9:6) in order to be formed in the heart of each one of us. We have to “preserve, feed and nourish in us the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6) . . . like the little Jesus until there is formed in us the Child who is born for us.”⁸⁴ We have to

⁸²Cf. II Nativity, 43.

⁸³Cf. II Annunciation, 45.

⁸⁴III Nativity, 53.

“attend to ourselves until Christ is formed in us,” and be very careful “lest any violent blow coming from without should injure the tender foetus,” lest anything we take into our mind “might extinguish the spirit we have conceived,” because “we are still in labor, we have not yet given birth.” But we are very weak and inconstant; we have to ask the Holy Spirit to “preserve *his works*, lest anyone should suffer miscarriage and expel, shapeless [*informem*] and dead, the progeny he has conceived of God.”⁸⁵

4. Sacred Scripture narrates how the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom Christ was obedient for thirty years (Lk. 2:51), actively and concretely contributed to the growth in the spiritual life of two great figures: St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist.⁸⁶

As it was the case with these two, so we can be sure that Mary continues now actively helping us. Bl. Gueric does not specify how it is *exactly* that Mary’s action in our spiritual life takes place. But by saying that she wants to form Christ in us—which is the purpose of every Christian’s life; that she wishes to introduce Him into our affections, so that we may learn to love Him; that therefore she describes Him to us according to His form of life, so that we may imitate it and form Him in us and in others; and, moreover, that she is continually bringing us forth by desire and loyal care, not resting until we have reached the stature of her Son—he has pretty much synthesized some of the basic aspects of our spiritual life, which in his other sermons he expounds more at length, and pointed out that the Blessed Virgin has a specific role in them.

5. These are the great insights which Bl. Gueric left to posterity. In a few other medieval writers we also find the idea of Mary *forming Christ in us*. Space permits to mention here very briefly only three names: St. Anselm of Lucca (1086), who links our growth in the spiritual life to the Eucharist and Mary⁸⁷; Odo of

⁸⁵Cf. II Annunciation, 45-46.

⁸⁶Cf. I St. John the Baptist, 124-125; IV Assumption, 188-189.

⁸⁷St. Anselm of Lucca, *Oratio I*: A. Wilmart, “Cinq textes de prière composés par Anselme de Lucques pour la comtesse Mathilde,” *RevAsc et Myst*, 19 (1938): 23-72, esp. p.51.

Morimond (1161), who says that Mary gives birth to sinners *until Christ is formed in them*,⁸⁸ and William of Newburgh (1198 c.), who, in his outstanding *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, several times speaks in very interesting terms about Mary giving birth to Christ's members until He is fully formed in them.⁸⁹

6. But the great heir of Bl. Gueric's doctrine, who brought it to an unparalleled development, came five centuries later: St. Louis M. Grignon de Montfort. Concerning our theme, what we find in Bl. Gueric in germ, blooms in St. Louis de Montfort. The former had said that "Mary *desires to form* her Only-begotten in *all the sons by adoption*." The latter affirms that "God the Son *wishes to form himself*, and in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in *his members through his dear mother*," willing her to have as her possession *the predestinate*, so that she, "as their loving Mother, will give them birth, feed them and rear them; as their queen she will lead, govern and defend them."⁹⁰

Bl. Gueric affirms that Mary is our Mother because she gave birth to our Life, and that she embraces her Only-begotten in all His members.⁹¹ St. Louis often insists that both Jesus and His members are born of her, that she is the Mother of both the Head and the members, and the solidly Christological reason that he gives is that, "since Mary produced [*a formé*] the head of the elect, Jesus Christ, she must also produce [*c'est à elle aussi de former*"] the members of that head, that is, all true Christians. A mother does not conceive [*forme*] a head without members, nor members without

⁸⁸Odo of Morimond, Homilia in Io.19, 25-27: J. M. Canal, "Dos homilias de Odón de Morimond," *Sacris Erudiri* 13 (1962): 377-460, esp. p.420.

⁸⁹J. C. Gorman, *William of Newburgh's Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii in Matrem Sponsi* (Fribourg: The University Press, 1960). Cf., for example: Cant.1, 7, p. 94; Cant. 7, 8, p. 321; Cant. 7, 11-12, p. 328-329; Cant. 8, 6, p. 342-345.

⁹⁰Cf. St. Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion* 31, p. 298. ("Dieu le Fils veut se former et, pour ainsi dire, s'incarner tous les jours, par sa chère Mère, dans ses membres": *Oeuvres Complètes*, op. cit., p. 503). He often speaks about Mary "giving birth" to us; for example: *The Love of Eternal Wisdom* 213, p. 109; *True Devotion* 33, p. 299.

⁹¹I Assumption, 168-169.

a head. If anyone, then, wishes to become a member of Jesus Christ, and consequently be filled with grace and truth, *he must be formed in Mary through the grace of Jesus Christ*, which she possesses with a fullness enabling her to communicate it abundantly to true members of Jesus Christ, her true children."⁹²

Moreover, the reason is not only Christological but also Trinitarian. It was *God the Father* who willed from all eternity to give us His Son through her at the Incarnation, who continues giving Him to us through Mary, and "raises children for himself only through her." *God the Son* "was prepared [*à été formé*] for mankind in general by her alone." And Mary, "in union with *the Holy Spirit*, still conceives him [*est formé*] and brings him forth daily The Holy Spirit *formed* [*a formé*] Jesus only through her, and *he forms* [*forme*] the members of the Mystical Body and dispenses his gifts . . . only through her"⁹³

Exactly like Bl. Gueric, he uses also the argument of St. Paul's example: "We can attribute more truly to her what St. Paul said of himself, 'I am in labor again with all the children of God until Jesus Christ, *my Son*, is *formed* in them to the fullness of his age' . . . ,"⁹⁴ because, from the truths which he has explained,⁹⁵ we can conclude that "Mary must beget us in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ in us, nurturing us towards the perfection and the fulness of his age"⁹⁶

In this formation of Christ in us, Mary is not alone. She is actually cooperating, because God so willed it, and in a completely subordinate fashion, with the Holy Spirit, as his "*inseparable associate in all these works of grace*."⁹⁷ Few authors are as clear as

⁹²St. Louis de Montfort, *Secret of Mary* 12, p. 266. Where the English translated with the verb "produce" or "conceive," the French original uses the verb "form" (p. 446-447). Cf. *True Devotion* 32, p. 298; 30, p. 298; *Secret of Mary* 11, p. 266; *True Devotion* 17, p. 294.

⁹³Cf. *True Devotion* 140, p. 332-333. The French original uses the verb "to form" (p. 575).

⁹⁴*True Devotion* 33, p. 298-299.

⁹⁵Cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom* 203-214, p. 107-110.

⁹⁶*Love of Eternal Wisdom* 214, p. 109-110. Footnote 287 (p. 122) cites Bl. Gueric's I Sermon for the Assumption, no. 3.

⁹⁷Cf. *True Devotion* 37, p. 300.

St. Louis de Montfort in explaining this great mystery. Bl. Gueric had said that the conception of Christ in our souls is the work of the Holy Spirit. St. Louis specifies further that it is *the joint work* of the Holy Spirit and Mary, as was the case with the Incarnation of the Word: “. . . It was with her, in her and of her that he produced [*a produit*] his masterpiece, God-made-man, and that he produces [*produit*] every day until the end of the world the members of the body of this adorable Head. For this reason the more he finds Mary, his dear and inseparable spouse in a soul, the more powerful and effective he becomes in producing [*pour produire*] Jesus Christ in that soul and that soul in Jesus Christ.”⁹⁸ It is the Holy Spirit who “chose to make use of our Blessed Lady, although he had no absolute need of her, in order to become actively fruitful in producing [*en produisant*] Jesus Christ and his members in her and by her. This is a mystery of grace unknown even to many of the most learned and spiritual of Christians.”⁹⁹ St. Louis ends his *Secret of Mary* with a beautiful prayer, where he asks the Holy Spirit to grant him, among other graces, “a great love and a longing for Mary, his exalted spouse,” “a great trust in her maternal heart and a continuous access to her compassion, so that with her he may truly form Jesus, great and powerful, in him until he attains the fullness of his perfect age.”¹⁰⁰

7. Towards the end of his Apostolic Exhortation *Mariialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI has a significant text that in a way reflects Bl. Gueric’s Marian doctrine: “Christ is the only way to the Father (cf. Jn. 14:4-11), and the ultimate example to whom the disciple must conform his own conduct (cf. Jn. 13:15), to the extent of sharing Christ’s sentiments (cf. Phil. 2:5), living His life and possessing His Spirit (cf. Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:10-11). The Church . . . recognizes that devotion to the Blessed Virgin . . . also has a great pastoral effectiveness and constitutes a force for renewing Christian

⁹⁸*True Devotion* 20, p. 295; cf. *Secret of Mary* 13, p. 266.

⁹⁹*True Devotion* 21, p. 295-296; cf. 269, p. 376; *Prayer for Missionaries* 15, p. 404.

¹⁰⁰*Secret of Mary* 67, p. 280. Cf. Hymn 90,14: *Oeuvres Complètes*, p. 1353.

living Mary's many-sided mission to the People of God is a supernatural reality which operates and bears fruit within the body of the Church. One finds cause for joy in considering the different aspects of this mission, and seeing how *each of these aspects* with its individual effectiveness is *directed towards the same end*, namely, *producing in the children the spiritual characteristics of the first-born Son*"¹⁰¹

8. This is the Blessed Virgin's great mission: To form Christ in us. In this world thirsting for true spirituality, may we "open to the Word of God an ear that will listen,"¹⁰² and humbly and trustingly allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit and our Immaculate Mother, so that they may form in us the Only-begotten of the Father, Jesus Christ our Lord, until we reach the fullness of His age on earth and of His glory in heaven. Amen.

¹⁰¹Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Mariæ Cultus* (February 2, 1974), no.57 (AAS 66 [1974]: 163-164): "ut in filios spiritualia Filii primogenitii lineamenta referantur." (English version taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, English Weekly Edition, published by St. Paul Books & Media, Boston, Mass.).

¹⁰²II Annunciation, p. 45.

Complete Outline**

** Since the article presented here includes only sections from an extensive study made by Dr. Flores, the complete outline is also furnished here, at her request, to provide readers with a broader context. (The entire work may be published in full at a later date.)

INTRODUCTION**A. The Main Text**

- 1) Mary's Desire
- 2) Desire to "Introduce" Christ and to "Make Him Known"
- 3) Mother and Bride
- 4) Spiritual Maternity
- 5) The Knowledge of Christ according to the Spirit
- 6) Desire to Form Christ in Us
- 7) Mary Brings Us Forth Every Day
- 8) How She Brings Forth the Sons by Adoption
- 9) "Until they reach the stature of the perfect man" (Eph. 4:13)
- 10) Mother of God

B. The Context**I. THE DOCTRINE OF THE THREE FORMS**

- 1) The Doctrine of the Three Forms in Sermon Fifty-two
 - a) *Mary Knows Christ and Describes Him to Us*
 - b) *The Form of the Flesh and the Form of the Word*
 - c) *The Middle Form*
 - d) *St. Augustine's Teaching on Galatians 4:19*
 - e) *More Characteristics of the Three Forms*
 - f) *The Beatific Vision*
 - g) *The Appeal of Christ's Moral Beauty*
 - h) *Knowing Christ according to the Three Forms*
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- i) *Mary Describes Christ to Us according to the Spirit*
 - j) *Mary Brings Forth the Fruit of Eternal Gladness*
 - k) *The Force of Christ's Example and His Operation in Us*
 - l) *Synthesis of the "Three Forms" in Sermon Fifty-two*
- 2) *The Doctrine of the Three Forms in the Other Sermons*
 - a) *Taking "the Form of a slave"*
 - b) *Giving Us a Form to Be Our Model*
 - c) *Seeing the Form of God*
 - d) *Synthesis of the "Three Forms" in the Other Sermons*

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRIST'S EXAMPLE: FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON THE "MORAL FORM"

- 1) *History—Mystery—Example*
- 2) *"The Father has adopted us to shape us to the pattern of His Son"*
- 3) *Christ Teaches Us with His Example and His Word*
 - a) *The Incarnation and the Passion*
 - b) *An Example from His Mother's Womb to His Glorious Resurrection*
 - c) *Humility and Silence*
- 4) *God's Grace and Human Response*

III. THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN US

- 1) *"Behold the king is coming, let us hasten to meet our Savior."
(Ant.)*
 - 2) *"A voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of
the Lord.'" (Is. 40:3, Mk. 1:3; cf. Amos 4:12)*
 - 3) *"My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my
breasts." (Cant. 5:6)*
 - 4) *"My soul was liquefied when my Beloved was poured into
me." (Cant. 5:6)*
 - 5) *"Come my chosen one, and I will set up my throne in you."
(Resp.)*
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- 6) Bud, Flower, and Fruit (cf. Jer. 23:5, Is. 4:2, Ps. 107:2)
 - 7) "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev. 3:20; cf. Ez. 44:3)
 - 8) "In all I sought rest." "Upon whom shall I rest if not with the humble and the quiet?" (Sir. 24:11, Is. 66:2; cf. Ps. 131:14)
 - 9) Synthesis of the Doctrine of the Presence of Christ in Us

IV. THE FORMATION OF CHRIST IN US

- 1) "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Mt. 12:50)
- 2) "A Child is born for us, a son is given to us." (Is. 9:6)
- 3) "Give to the Church the living infant, for she is its mother." (cf. 1 Kgs. 3:27)
- 4) "We conceived from the fear of the Lord and gave birth to the spirit of salvation." (cf. Is. 26:17)
- 5) "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." (Gal. 4:19)
- 6) "Behold, there were twins in her womb." (cf. Gen. 25:22-24)
- 7) "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies." (Cant. 4:5)
- 8) Mother Mary, Mother Church, Mother Grace, and Mother Wisdom
- 9) Synthesis of the Doctrine of "Forming Christ in Us"

V. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 1) "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." (Joel 2:28)
 - 2) "Unless I go away, the Paraclete will not come to you." (Jn. 16:7)
 - 3) "The Apostles spoke of God's wonders in various tongues." (Acts 2:4, 11)
 - 4) "O faithful soul, open wide your bosom, expand your affections, admit no constraint in your heart." (cf. 2 Cor. 6:12)
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C. The Marian Doctrine

I. "THE FORM OF THE FLESH IN WHICH SHE GAVE HIM BIRTH

- 1) "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn. 1:14)
- 2) "The angel Gabriel was sent from God . . . to a virgin . . ." (Lk. 1:26-27)
- 3) "Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son." (Is. 7:14)
- 4) "Resting place" and "ivory throne" (cf. Is. 66:2, Ps. 131:14, Sir. 24:11, 1 Kgs. 10:18-20)
- 5) "The blessed earth that brings forth the Savior" (cf. Is. 45:8, Ps. 84:1-13)
- 6) "Kiss me with the kiss of your mouth." (Cant. 1:1)

II. "SPIRITUAL MOTHER OF CHRIST"

- 1) "You shall be called 'My will is in her.'" (Is. 62:4; cf. Mt. 12:50)
- 2) "Virgin most prudent"
- 3) "When the time came for their purification" (Lk. 2:22)
- 4) "If you find my Beloved, tell him that I languish with love." (Cant. 5:8)
- 5) "Mary chose the best part." (Lk. 10:42)
- 6) "He who sows with a blessing will also reap with a blessing." (2 Cor. 9:6)

III. "FORMING HER ONLY-BEGOTTEN IN THE SONS BY ADOPTION"

- 1) "Subject to his mother" (cf. Lk. 2:51)
 - 2) "When the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy." (Lk. 1:44)
 - 3) "Behold your mother!" (Jn. 19:27)
 - 4) The Mediator and the Mediatrix
 - 5) "From one Grain an abundant harvest of faithful souls" (cf. Ps. 84:1, 12, 13; Is. 45:8)
 - 6) "Mother of All Christians"
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- a) *“And your children shall dwell in you.” (cf. Is. 62:4-5)*
- b) *Mother of Those in Whom Christ Has Been Formed or Is Being Formed*
- c) *The True “Mother of the Living” (Gen. 3:20)*
- d) *The Mother of the Life by Which Everyone Lives*
- e) *Showing Herself to Be a Mother*
- f) *At His Birth, Christ Left Mary “Pregnant with inexhaustible tenderness”*
- g) *A Sealed Wellspring of Charity (Cant. 4:12)*
- h) *The Parallel with St. Paul*
- i) *Her Children Recognize Her as Their Mother*
- j) *Synthesis of Mary’s Spiritual Maternity*

CONCLUSION