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**“FORMING HER ONLY-BEGOTTEN IN THE SONS BY ADOPTION”:
THE CONTRIBUTION OF BL. GUERRIC OF ICNY († 1157)
TO THE DOCTRINE OF MARY’S SPIRITUAL MATERNITY**

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 became man in order that man may become God. He became flesh and was born in time by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, so that we may all be spiritually reborn to eternal life by the power of the Holy Spirit of the virgin mother Church. Jesus Christ 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. That is why the Fathers of the Church insist that we confess in vain that Christ was born in the flesh if He is not also born in each one of us.¹ He has called the Church and each faithful soul within the Church “*to be like His Mother Mary*,”² listening attentively and obediently to the Word of God, receiving Him in the heart with firm faith the way Mary received Him in her heart and her womb, vigilantly keeping and constantly meditating upon this Word, trying to be perfect like her, so that Christ, conceived by the Holy Spirit, may be brought to birth, fully formed in us,³ by doing the will of the Father.⁴

¹ Cf. Origen (†253), *Homiliae in Lucam* 22, 1: PG 13, 1857 B-C; *In Genesim Homilia* 3, 7: PG 12, 182 C -183 C; St. Augustine (†431), *Sermo* 189, 3: PL 38, 1006; *Sermo* 215, 4: PL 38, 1074.

² Cf. St Augustine *Tract.* I, 8: Morin, p. 447; *Sermo* 25, 8: Morin, p. 163; *Sermo* 195, 21: PL 38, 1012-1013.

³ Cf. 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:

God has called us to a sublime vocation: to live 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). In other words: to be God's children and partake 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 and the Blessed Virgin, His immaculate Spouse, in us.⁵

One of the essential aspects of Christian spirituality, therefore, 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 in 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 ministry: "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*."⁶ 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."⁷ The analogy with the conception, growth and birth of a baby is particularly felicitous to illustrate how God's Word has to be received, looked after, and made to grow in us like a child in the womb.

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.

⁴ Cf. Origen, *Fragm. in Matth.* 281: *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller*, 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.

⁵ Cf. St. Basil the Great (†379), *De Spiritu Sancto* 26, 61: PG 32, 180 C.

⁶ One of the first allusions to Christ being born in us is found in the *Letter to Diognetus* XI,4: D. Ruiz Bueno, *Padres Apostólicos* (Madrid: BAC 65, 1974), 858-859: οὗτος ὁ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, ὁ καινὸς φανεῖς καὶ παλαιὸς εὐρεθεὶς καὶ πάντοτε νέος ἐν ἁγίῳ καρδίᾳς γεννώμενος. ("He, who is from the beginning, who appeared new and was found old, and is always being born new in the hearts of the saints.")

⁷ Cf. 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, 254 C; 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: ed. R. Weber, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 27 B, Turnhout 1979, p. 1031: "Quaecumque tamen anima sancta Dei Verbum concipere potest credendo, parere praedicando, magnificare amando;" "Sic namque optandum est in singulis Mariae anima ut magnificet Dominum, concipiat Dei Verbum, pariat et nutriat...;" Berengaud (IX-X), *Expositio in Apocalypsin* 12: PL 17, 960.

Mary's Maternity of the Whole Christ can be expressed in terms of "*formation*." She cooperated with the Holy Spirit in the "*formation*" of Christ as Man; she most perfectly "*formed*" Christ in her heart and her womb, becoming not only His physical Mother, but His spiritual Mother as well;⁸ she now has an active role in the "*formation*" of her Son in all the redeemed, who have become her children. In fact, among her many maternal duties on our behalf, cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the "*formation*" of Christ in us is the most important one.

The great Cistercian Abbot Bl. Gueric of Igny (†1157) explicitly states that: "*The Blessed Virgin desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption*." 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 doctrine of Mary's Spiritual Maternity.

I. The Main Text⁹

We shall start our study of Bl. Gueric of Igny's teaching on the Virgin Mary's Spiritual Maternity and her role in 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 teachings on Mary's Spiritual Maternity. 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* 202,¹⁰ and the English translation published by *Cistercian Publications*.¹¹ Here is the text, arranged in columns to make the comparison between the three versions clearer:

⁸ Cf. St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evang. Tract* 10,3: *PL* 35, 1468; *De S. Virg.* 5,5; 6,6: *PL* 40, 398-399; *Sermo* 72 A, 7: *PL* 46, 937-938; *Sermo* 215: *PL* 38, 1074.

⁹ A substantial part of "I. The Main Text" was published in: D. Flores, "'Forming her Only-Begotten in the Sons by Adoption': The Marian Spirituality of Bl. Gueric of Igny (1157)," *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 105-114.

¹⁰ Gueric d'Igny, *Sermons*, 2 Vols. Introduction, critical text and notes by John Morson and Hilary Costello; French translation under the direction of Placide Deceille, (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1970 and 1973: *Sources chrétiennes* 166 and 202). *Sources chrétiennes* will henceforth be abbreviated as SC.

¹¹ Gueric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, 2 Vols., intro. and trans. 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]). Henceforth, these editions of *Liturgical Sermons* will be abbreviated as CF. 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*. When quoting a long text in Latin or French, we shall indicate in parenthesis the SC volume and the page number.

TABLE 1: THE MAIN TEXT

<i>Latin Original</i>	<i>English Translation</i>	<i>French Translation</i>
1. Insinuare cupiens	1. Wishing to introduce	1. Désirant faire pénétrer
2. dilectum uteri sui, dilectum votorum suorum	2. the Beloved of her womb, the Beloved of her desires,	2. le Bien-Aimé né de son sein, le Bien-Aimé de ses désirs,
3. affectibus omnium,	3. into the affections of all her children,	3. dans les cœurs 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.	4. 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).	4. elle le décrit non selon la chair, mais selon l'esprit; elle semble dire elle aussi: ' <i>Même</i> si j'ai connu le Christ selon la chair, maintenant je ne le connais plus ainsi.'
5. Cupit namque et ipsa formare Unigenitum suum	5. For she desires to form her Only-begotten	5. Elle désire en effet, elle aussi former son Fils unique
6. in omnibus filiis adoptionis,	6. in all her sons by adoption.	6. dans tous ses fils d'adoption.
7. qui etsi geniti sunt verbo veritatis,	7. Although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth (Jas. 1:18),	7. C'est pourquoi, bien qu'ils aient déjà été engendrés par la parole de vérité,
8. nihilominus tamen parturit eos cotidie	8. nevertheless she brings them forth every day	8. elle n'en continue pas moins à les enfanter chaque jour
9. desiderio et cura pietatis,	9. by desire and loyal care	9. par les désirs et la sollicitude de sa tendresse,
10. donec occurrant in virum perfectum, in mensuram plenitudinis aetatis Filii sui	10. until they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son (Eph. 4:13)	10. 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... (SC 202, p. 492).	11. whom she bore and brought forth once and for all... (CF 8, pp. 200-201).	11. qu'elle a une fois pour toutes enfanté et mis au monde... (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" - "desire;" 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 "insinuare," 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 it 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 well 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 word “*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 cœurs* 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,” i.e., 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 filiis 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, as we shall see that our author affirms elsewhere,¹² they have become Mary's children by adoption as well, but Bl. Guericc 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 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 every day more like *the Son*, to be thereby more truly "God's *sons*." And Mary is there to form Him in us.

Bl. Guericc 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."¹³ But in other sermons, inspired for example in 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, and 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. Guericc'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.

¹² Cf. I Assumption, pp. 167-170; IV Nativity, p. 54-55; I Nativity of Mary, p. 192.

¹³ II Nativity of Mary, pp. 200-201.

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. We shall see in more detail what he means by this when we discuss his doctrine of the three forms in Christ.

Other Medieval authors also underline the importance of knowing Christ "according to the spirit." In a totally different context, we find it, for example, in William of Newburgh's (†1198 c.) *Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles*. Inspired in Canticle 8:14: "Flee from me, my Beloved," he describes the progress in the spiritual life in terms of growing from knowing Christ according to the flesh to knowing Him according to the spirit. When this progress takes place - thanks to Mary's constant intercession on our behalf, asking her Son for so much grace, "weary of milk and hungry for solid food, they dismiss Him saying: 'Flee from me, my beloved,' no longer wishing to know Him according to the flesh as they formerly had."¹⁴ William of Newburgh also develops the theme of Mary "forming" Christ in us.

6. *The 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 the doctrines of Spiritual Maternity and Marian Spirituality. 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 for the fulfillment of 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."

¹⁴ Cf. William of Newburgh, *In Cant.* 8,13-14, in John C. Gorman, *William of Newburgh's Explanatio Sacri Epithalamii in Matrem Sponsi: A Commentary on the Canticle of Canticles (12th C.)*, Spicilegium Friburgense, 6 (Fribourg: The University Press, 1960), pp. 358-364.

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. Guericc 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 us 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 in Sirach 4:23: “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 allure us first, 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.”¹⁵

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. Guericc’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. Guericc affirms this explicitly in another sermon which we shall examine later.¹⁶

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 tra-

¹⁵ Cf. I Nativity of Mary, pp. 195-196: “Iesum suum describens per *virtutes ipsius et efficientias*,” “d’après ses *pouvoirs* et ses *opérations*.” (SC 202, p. 480; 481).

¹⁶ I Assumption, p. 169

dition, and mentioned in other sermons of our Cistercian Abbot.¹⁷ What follows seems to confirm it: "Although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth" (perfect passive tense), "nevertheless she brings them forth every day" (present active tense). The idea comes from James 1:18 - a text Bl. Guericc also quotes elsewhere¹⁸ - 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."¹⁹ Thus, even though we have already been brought to birth in Baptism, we need to renew every day our baptismal promises, in a sense we have to be "reborn" continually into an ever more perfect Christ-like life, and according to Bl. Guericc, Mary, as our Mother, has an active part in this "bringing us forth every day." Before he had said that she "*desires to form* her Only-begotten in all the sons;" here he asserts that she actually "*brings them forth every day.*"

With the adverb "cotidie," "every day," Bl. Guericc underlines the continuity both of Mary's maternal assistance and of our need to progress in the spiritual life. We continually need to grow, and Mary is constantly "bringing us forth." Bl. Guericc describes this spiritual progress in other sermons, 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 make 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.

¹⁷ 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. 153f. Cf. S. Delgadillo, "Maria y la Iglesia en la historia de la salvación. Datos de algunos sermones del Venerable Guericco de Igny," *Marianum* 48 (1986): 636-666; M.-C. Bodard, "Le Christ, Marie et l'Eglise dans la prédication du Bienh. Guericc d'Igny," in *Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatum* 19 (1957): 273-299 (hereafter, *Coll. Ord.Cist.Ref.*).

¹⁸ Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 154; I Assumption, p. 169, etc.

¹⁹ H. Rahner, *Our Lady and the Church*, trans. by S. Bullough (Chicago, Ill.: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), p. 69.

Two ways of bringing to birth are mentioned. With “desire,” Bl. Guericc seems to refer to something more passive, that is “felt” in the heart, and that is expressed by prayer, thought, etc. 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. Guericc 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.²⁰

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. Guericc says that it is not until “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 every day 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”!

II. The Context

After examining the main text where Bl. Guericc 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. Guericc’s fifty-four sermons in order to see how our author treats in them the principal themes which have emerged from our text.

²⁰ Cf. III Nativity, p. 52; I Assumption, p. 169.

A. THE DOCTRINE OF THE THREE FORMS²¹

Indispensable in order to understand 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, it is developed precisely in his Sermon LII, *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," "μορφῇ θεοῦ"), i.e., His divine nature, which He has eternally from the Father, and "the form of the slave," i.e., 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 not call it in this sermon "the form of the *slave*" ("formam servi," "μορφῇ δούλου"), 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," "κατὰ σάρκα"), 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 LII*

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

²¹ A substantial part of "A. The Doctrine of the Three Forms," with the exception of the final Table, was published in *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 115-131.

²² Cf. A. de Wilde, *De Beato Guericco abbate Igniacensi: eiusque doctrina de formatione Christi in nobis* (Westmalle: Typis Abbatiae, 1935); 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," *Cîteaux* 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*, vol. 1, p. xxxi-xxxviii).

the Mass or the Divine Office. Sermon LII, for example, is inspired in 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 as the short reading at both vespers on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady and part of the first reading of the Mass.²³ This text, together with other biblical passages which Bl. Gueric, as is his wont, intertwines with it, in particular Philippians 2:5-8; Galatians 4:19 and 2 Corinthians 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

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 in the words: "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*

The first reference to the doctrine of the forms is found 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*; but this is far from knowing *that form in which the Father generated Him*.²⁵

Mary, being Christ's true Mother, obviously knew Him "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

²³ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 198, note 1, and p. 192, note 1.

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

²⁵ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, 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," "l'a mis au monde" - "l'a engendré" (SC 202, pp. 486-487).

which the Father generated Him,” His Divine form. To know “the form of the flesh” is “far from knowing” the Divine form.

Here Bl. Guericc offers to us his first set of “characteristics” of these two forms, all taken from Sacred Scripture: In the form of the flesh, “He 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. Guericc introduces now an idea all his own. Between the form of the flesh and the form of the Word, “like a bridge between 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:

TABLE 2: THE THREE FORMS IN SERMON LII

<i>Latin Original</i>	<i>English Translation</i>	<i>French Translation</i>
Igitur inter formam carnis et formam Verbi quasi medius de ista ad illam gradus est, quaedam <i>alia forma</i> Christi, spiritalis quidem sed quam in carne palam exhibuit, <i>forma</i> scilicet <i>vitalis</i> quam in corpore gessit <i>ad informationem</i> eorum qui erant credituri.	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: <i>the form</i> , that is to say, <i>of the life</i> He lived in his body in order to convey his message to those who were to believe in him.	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 <i>la forme de la vie</i> qu'il a menée dans son corps pour servir de modèle à ceux qui devaient croire.
(SC 202, pp. 486-488).	(CF 8, p. 199).	(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 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” (“com-

²⁶ Cf. Ibid.

me 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, specially 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 this “middle form” is can be 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). He desires to teach us not only with His preaching, but with His own example of life as well. He chose the form of life He lived 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 to every action, every gesture of His. 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; 4:20; 1 Jn. 1:1-3).

Moreover, the Latin original has: “ad informationem,” from the verb “in-formo,” 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”). He lived that form of life in order *to form us* (literally “in-form” us). Elsewhere he expresses the same idea by 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 applied to himself, when he said that he had 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” (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,

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

as it 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 in Christ's own words: by "doing the will of the Father" (cf. Mt. 12:50); by imitating Him in everything; by 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 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*³⁰ according to this example or model, according to this "middle form," "then we shall be capable ("idonei") 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 "the form which formed us," i.e., 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 further 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*

²⁸ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 198.

²⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 199: "secundum exemplar vitae et morum;" "selon l'exemplaire de vie et de conduite." (SC 202, p. 489).

³⁰ "Si... formatus fuerit... erimus," conditional mood.

the Galatians.³¹ 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 *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 (cf. 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 is it 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 of the merits of his works, and can be called one of Christ’s “little ones” (cf. Mt. 25:40). In terms and concepts extremely similar to those of Bl. Gueric, he further states that: “Christ *is formed* in he 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 sinatur*”), 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 *every day*,” 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 cares 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.

³¹ St. 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 Galatians 4:19 in: *De Poenitentia* I, 1: PG 49, 277-279; cf. Id., *In Epistolam ad Galatas Commentarius* 4, 2, 19: PG 61, 660; Origen, *In Exodum* X, 3: PG 12, 372 A.

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.³² Bl. Gueric, likewise, refers to this 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."³³

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 mystery;³⁴ "he manifests himself in his life as our example;"³⁵ "he will reveal himself as the eternally begotten as our reward."³⁶

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

³² "Non ergo propter initium fidei, quo iam nati erant, sed propter robur et perfectionem dictum est." He also alludes to 2 Corinthians 11:28-29.

³³ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 199. The French translation is similar to the Latin: "Il y a donc dans le Christ une *forme corporelle*, une *forme morale*, une *forme intellectuelle*" (SC 202, p. 489); 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."

³⁴ "Corporalem suscepit ut impleret sacramentum;" "il a assumé la forme corporelle à fin d'accomplir son mystère;" the English adds "of our salvation;" both translations add the possessive pronoun: "his," "son," as well. (SC 202, p. 489).

³⁵ All versions are similar: "moralem exhibuit, ut praeberet exemplum;" "il a présenté la forme morale pour donner l'exemple" (Ibid.).

³⁶ "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" (Ibid.). 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. St. Bernard (†1153) also uses several times this "form" terminology in his works. Cf. for example: *In Cant. Sermo* 22, in *Obras Completas de San Bernardo*, Vol.V. *Sermones sobre el Cantar de los Cantares* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos 491, 1983), p. 306-308; *Sermo* 25, p. 362; *Sermo* 27, p. 396; *Sermo* 42, p. 574; *Sermo* 62, p. 784; *Sermo* 73, p. 918; *Sermo* 83, p. 1028; *Sermo* 85, p. 1056-1058.

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.”³⁷ 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.

His teaching is similar to the appeal “to move our affections” found in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola (†1556), and to the insistence of the French School on the importance of “making ours” every aspect of Christ’s life. Bl. Gueric appeals in many of his sermons 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.

The Cistercian Abbot 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.”³⁸ 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. In many sermons 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*.”³⁹ 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:

³⁷ “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” (Ibid.).

³⁸ II Nativity of Mary, p. 199: “qui scrutator est... opprimetur a gloria,” “sera accablé par la gloire” (Ibid.).

³⁹ Cf. 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.”

“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.”⁴⁰

To prove that this is so, he partially quotes verses 3 and 4 of the same Psalm 44, underlining from verse 4: “on account of truth and meekness and justice.” This is certainly the beauty by which He acquired His kingdom: “truth of speech, meekness of behavior, and lightness 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.”⁴¹

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 Abbot offers us a beautiful assertion: The Gospel is sent to us from Zion and Jerusalem, and in it, “a more beautiful *portrait of Christ* has been revealed” (“in quo quaedam pulchrior *Christi facies* ostensa est;” “dans lequel nous a été montré comme un *visage* plus beau du Christ”). 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.”⁴²

We know about Christ’s beauty because the Gospel has revealed it to us, by narrating what Jesus did and taught. We are not dealing with a physical portrait, but a moral one, i.e., the form of life and doctrine which he both handed down to us by His word and expressed in Himself by His example. As we shall see, Bl. Guericc offers in his sermons many concrete instances where we can appreciate this “form of life and doctrine” of Christ, lovingly and mercifully chosen and lived for our sake.

⁴⁰ Psalm 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 term “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*.” “Of the beauty of his *virtues*, not of his *limbs*;” “non pulchritudinem *membrorum* sed *morum* praedicabat?;” “non la beauté des *membres*, mais celle de la *conduite*?” (Ibid.).

⁴¹ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 200.

⁴² Cf. Ibid.: “*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.”

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 former one explicitly related to Mary (“*the form in which she gave Him birth and knew Him from the first*”), and had said that knowing Him according to the form of the flesh “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:

1. “To know Christ now *in this form* is loving service for Christians.”⁴³ 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.

2. “To know him *in the form of the flesh* was scandal to the Jews” (1 Cor. 1:23).⁴⁴ 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.”⁴⁵

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 Him according to the flesh, and yet he became the great Apostle to the Gentiles.⁴⁶ That is why Bl. Gueric, impressed by this Pauline text which he

⁴³ Cf. Ibid.: “*in hac forma nosse Christum interim pietas est christianorum.*”

⁴⁴ “*Cum nosse in forma carnis scandalum fuerit iudaeorum.*”

⁴⁵ The original Greek text of the NT and the Latin translation of 2 Cor. 5:16 use the terms: “κατὰ σάρκα,” “secundum carnem” (repeated twice), and “οἶδαμεν - ἐγνώκαμεν - γινώσκομεν,” “novimus - cognovimus - novimus.”

⁴⁶ Cf. III Easter, p. 93; II Pentecost, p. 121; II Nativity of M, p. 198

quotes several times, insists on the importance of the flesh, but not “without the spirit which gives life.”

3. Finally, “to know *the divine form* is the complete happiness and joy of the angels.”⁴⁷ 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, we come to 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.

The Virgin Mary wishes to introduce her Beloved into the affections of all. As another great Medieval author, Ambrose Autpert (†781), had said, “she offers the Only One to an individual, or rather, she offers Him to all in the person of just one man.” Indeed,

She never ceases to offer the Son she has generated, and through her holy interventions, she obtains that the Redeemer be united to the elect; and, to tell the truth, she carries on this duty with maternal affection... she who is not jealous of her children.⁴⁸

In order to introduce Him into our affections, she describes to us His virtues, so that, in the words our author had used before, “we are converted to love by beauty,” and we go after Him, desiring the fairness of his moral beauty, which is so lovable, and fulfills every yearning and desire. Mary describes him “not according to the flesh but according to the spirit,” because she 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.”⁴⁹

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

Immediately after our main text, Bl. Gueric mentions Mary’s virginity at childbirth:

⁴⁷ “Nam nosse *in forma divinitatis* felicitas est et gaudium angelorum” (SC 202, p. 490).

⁴⁸ Cf. Ambrose Autpert, *In Purificatione Sanctae Mariae*, 7: ed. R. Weber, CCCM 27 B, Turnhout 1979, p. 992.

⁴⁹ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 200; 199.

"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 and of holy hope" (Sir. 24:24). Inspired in Canticle 5:9 and 16, Bl. Guericc 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."⁵⁰

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

Then comes an extremely important affirmation in order to understand correctly Bl. Guericc'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. *He Himself is 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.*"⁵¹

A. De Wilde is right when he affirms that Guericc's "spiritual form" is "more than merely exemplary, truly something more, namely a certain active principle by which the soul is informed."⁵² And J. Morson and H. Costello likewise believe that:

It is reasonable to think that for Guericc 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.⁵³

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 they were members of the body, that Christ is perfected, "performed" ("*thoroughly formed*") in us. When Christ has been thus formed in us, 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.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 201

⁵¹ Cf. Ibid.: "Ipse enim est non solum quem diligimus, timemus, agnoscimus et in quem speramus; *sed haec etiam omnia in nobis operator*" (SC 202, p. 492).

⁵² Cf. A. de Wilde, "The Formation of Christ in Us: Bl. Guericc of Igny," *Monastic Studies* 2 (1964): 34-35.

⁵³ J. Morson and H. Costello, *Guericc of Igny. Liturgical Sermons*, vol 1, p. xxxiv; H. Costello, "The Meaning of Redemption," p. 296.

⁵⁴ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 201: "Atque his virtutibus veluti quibusdam membris et partibus in nobis *perficitur* atque *formatur*... Tunc enim perfecte *pro modulo huius vitae* Christus

Finally, Bl. Guericc 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).

Bl. Guericc ends his sermon with a justification of his interpretation of Sirach 24:24, and a disquisition on the virtue of love and the extension of “the reign of Jesus’ fair love.”⁵⁵

TABLE 3: SYNTHESIS OF THE “THREE FORMS” IN SERMON 52C C

The Form of the Word	The Form of the Flesh	The Form of the Life He lived
1. The <i>Form of the Word</i> . - The <i>Divine Form</i> .	1. The <i>Form of the Flesh</i> (four times). - The <i>fleshy form</i> . - The <i>bodily form</i> .	1. Another <i>form</i> distinguishable in Christ. - Like a bridge between the <i>form of the flesh</i> and the <i>Form of the Word</i> . - Spiritual in its nature. - Yet showing itself clearly in the flesh. - The form of the life He lived in His body. - In order to convey his message (ad <i>informationem</i>) to those who were to believe in him.
2. That <i>form</i> in which the Father generated Him.	2. The <i>form of the flesh</i> in which Mary gave Him birth.	2. [The form in which Christ is formed in us].
3. [He is] begotten from eternity by way of knowledge.	3. One <i>form</i> [that] Christ has taken in the flesh.	3. Christ shows another [form] in His conduct.
4. [In it He is] the splendor of glory (Heb. 1:3) - the glow that radiates from eternal light (Wis. 7:26) - with whom there is no change nor swerving from his course (Jas. 1:17).	4. There was no beauty or comeliness in Him.	4. The moral stature of Christ (formam cordis) [of which the Psalmist was speaking (Ps. 44:3)] (“speciosus forma prae filiis hominum”). - The beauty of His virtues [truth, meekness, and justice]. - The <i>form of life and doctrine</i> which He has passed on by His teaching and shown in His own Person by His example. - [It is] a beautiful portrait of Christ [which] has been revealed in the Gospel.

in *te formatus est*... Tunc veritas ipsius in te expressa est, si veritatem quae ipse est agnovisti et agnitam glorificasti, timore videlicet et spe, et ne spes confundant caritas diffusa sit in corde.” (SC 202, pp. 492-494).

⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. 203.

The Form of the Word	The Form of the Flesh	The Form of the Life He lived
5. [He is] our God by His generation as the Word.	5. [He is] our Brother according to the flesh.	5. [He is] our teacher by His conduct.
6. [To know the form of the flesh] is far from knowing <i>that form</i> in which the Father generated Him. - To know the <i>Divine Form</i> is the complete happiness and joy of the angels.	6. The Mother knew Him from the first according to the <i>form of the flesh</i> . - To know Him in the <i>form of the flesh</i> was scandal to the Jews. - St. Paul repudiates any knowledge of Christ according to the flesh. - Mary seems to have known this too. - Wishing to introduce the Beloved of her womb... into the affections of all her children, she describes Him not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.	6. - To know Christ now in <i>this form</i> is loving service for Christians.
7. [It is] <i>that form</i> which <i>formed us</i> .	7. The form which has been <i>formed for us</i> .	7. According to <i>this form</i> Christ is <i>formed in us</i> . - According to the pattern of virtuous life He manifested in His own person. - Mary desires <i>to form</i> her Only-begotten in all her sons by adoption. -...bringing them forth every day by desire and loyal care until they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son... - He is and He brings about in us love, fear, knowledge and hope; and as these virtues grow in strength like the limbs and members of our body they bring Him to maturity and perfection in us. - Then Christ will have been perfectly <i>formed</i> in [us], as far as is possible in this life...
8.	8. [In it] He was seen for a short space of time.	8. When Christ has been formed in us according to this form, then we shall be capable of seeing [the two other forms].

The Form of the Word	The Form of the Flesh	The Form of the Life He lived
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [Its sight] is reserved for the reward of the just. - [It is] stored up for us as our reward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [Its sight] increased the sin of disbelievers. - To look upon His <i>bodily form</i> will not be the least part of our glory. - The angels desire to gaze upon it. 	
9. The man who seeks to pry into it will be dazzled by the brightness.	9.	9. The man who will be so blessed [with glory] is he who in this present life has become a lover of the <i>form</i> which is proposed for our example. - The Psalmist was such a lover and admirer of <i>this form</i> (Ps. 44:3).
10. [He will reveal Himself] as the eternally begotten as our reward.	10. He accepted His <i>fleshy form</i> to accomplish the Mystery of our Salvation.	10. He manifests Himself in His life as our example.

2. The Doctrine of the Three Forms in the Other Sermons

After seeing how Bl. Gueric of Igny develops his doctrine of the three forms in his *Second Sermon for the Nativity of Our Lady*, we thought it important to see if this idea appeared in any of his other sermons. We found it in fifteen of them. Let us examine briefly his teachings.

a) Taking “the Form of a Slave”

As we mentioned before, Bl. Gueric usually built his sermons around one of the scriptural texts of the liturgy of the day. We also said that the biblical foundation for his doctrine of the three forms is Philippians 2:5-8. There is one sermon that has precisely Philippians 2:5-8 as its inspiring text: his *First Sermon for Palm Sunday*.⁵⁶ It would be interesting to see how he develops the Pauline text here, and so we shall start with this sermon, where our author offers to us an extraordinarily moving synthesis of Christ’s Work of Redemption.

“ ‘Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who, although He was by nature God...’ (Phil. 2:5)” (Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Iesu qui cum *in forma Dei* esset...). Bl. Gueric starts (and ends) his sermon quoting this verse, and explaining how these words are addressed to “the wicked and runaway slave,” man, “who although he was by nature and rank a slave and bound to serve, refused to serve and tried to appropriate freedom and equality

⁵⁶ Cf. I Palm, note 1, p. 55: On Palm Sunday, this text was read at vespers, lauds, tierce, and as the first reading of the Mass.

with his Lord.” On the other hand, and paraphrasing the Apostle’s text, Bl. Guericc says that Christ, who “was by nature God (*“cum in forma Dei esset”*), equal to God not through robbery but by birth because he shared omnipotence, eternity and divinity,” nevertheless “dispossessed himself (*“exinaniens semetipsum”*) and not only took the nature of a slave (*“non solum formam servi accepit”*), fashioned in the likeness of men, but also carried out the ministry of a slave, lowering his own dignity (*“humilians semetipsum”*) and accepting an obedience to the Father which brought him death, death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8).⁵⁷

But even serving the Father as a slave, although He was His Son and co-equal, was not enough for Christ, who also willed to serve “His own slave as more than a slave.” Nothing could be more just and blessed than to serve the Creator; but man refused. Our Cistercian Abbot explains the fall and God’s reaction to it with a superb text:

“I will not serve,” man says to his Creator. “Then I will serve you,” his Creator says to man. You sit down, I will minister, I will wash your feet (Jn. 13:4f.). You rest, I will bear your weariness, your infirmities (Is. 53:4). Use me as you like in all your needs, not only as your slave but also as your beast of burden and as your property. If you are tired or burdened I will carry both you and your burden... If you are hungry or thirsty... behold I am ready to be slaughtered that you may eat my flesh and drink my blood. Neither need you fear that through the death of your slave you will suffer the loss of his service; even eaten and drunk you will still have me whole and alive and I shall serve you as before. If you are led into captivity or sold, here I am, sell me and redeem yourself at my cost, or with myself as the price... If you are ill and afraid to die I will die for you so that from my blood you may make yourself medicine that will restore life.⁵⁸

How truly did the Son of God “take *the form of a slave*,” and serve humankind like a “good and faithful servant,” not lukewarmly, not fictitiously and without complaint! “What is there that he ought to have done and has not done?”⁵⁹ And yet, as a reward, because of the “detestable pride of man who scorns to serve” - pride that only by the example of servitude of its own Lord could be reduced to humility -, he was treated like the worst criminal. Even now “we do not feel and show gratitude for such great humility and goodness”! Therefore Bl. Guericc exhorts us to serve the Lord, who toiled so hard in serving us, who bought back our useless service at such a price, and with so much love recovered and subjected to Himself “his stubborn servant, overcoming evil with good.”⁶⁰

Finally, our Abbot assures us of the happiness we would obtain if we listened to St. Paul’s advice of having in us the same mind which was first in

⁵⁷ Cf. I Palm, p. 55.

⁵⁸ Cf. Ibid., p. 55-56.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 56.

⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 57-58.

Christ (Phil. 2:5). He synthesizes all that he had previously described that Christ did for us in four things that ought to be imitated:

Let no one be lifted up above himself, but brought down below himself; let him who is greater serve others; let the one who has been injured be the first to make satisfaction; let everyone obey even to death.

He ends his sermon with a text where he explicitly mentions two of the forms, and implicitly the third:

These are *the footsteps* ("his *vestigii*")... in which we may follow Christ *in the form of a slave* ("*in forma servi*"), and come in the end to see him *in the form of God* ("*in forma Dei*"), in which he lives and reigns for ever and ever.⁶¹

Thus we see how, whereas in this *First Sermon for Palm Sunday*, without speaking about a "moral form," he does quote Philippians 2:5, and gives it as the foundation of such a "moral form," in his *Second Sermon for Our Lady's Birthday* he develops his doctrine of the "moral form" without explicitly linking it to Philippians 2:5.

Philippians 2:5-8 also appears in other sermons where it is not the leading text. We mention two examples:

1. In his *Third Sermon for Christmas*, Bl. Guericc develops at some length the concept of Christ "emptying Himself" (Phil. 2:7). After affirming categorically that Christ was born "*for us human beings*," and describing the sublime consequences of His Incarnation, thanks to which we have become children of God, he says that His name is rightly called "oil poured out" (Cant. 1:2) ("*oleum effusum*"), "or rather ointment wholly emptied out" (cf. Mt. 26:6f.) ("*unguentum exinanitum*"), since God has been so thoroughly poured out into man, that the Apostle in his faith declares that "he emptied himself out" (Phil. 2:7) ("*semetipsum exinanisse*"). This "emptying out," however, was done in such a way "so as not to diminish or change anything in Himself," but rather He emptied Himself "in order to fill us," for "He transfused all the fullness of His divinity into man."⁶² In spite of the splendor He had as Son of God (cf. Heb. 1:3), Christ "chose rather only *the form of a slave*" ("*formam praeferat servilem*") in order to redeem us, and even in it "he had no comeliness or beauty" (Is. 53:2). As if becoming man was not enough "emptying out," "he so thoroughly brought to nothing in himself the glory of human flesh... as to show himself in his birth the least of men and in his passion the last of men..."⁶³

⁶¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 58.

⁶² Cf. III Nativity, p. 49; 48.

⁶³ Cf. Ibid., p.49: "ut in nativitate minimum et in passione se exhiberet novissimum virorum, unde nec reputaverunt eum". Cf. a similar text in I Nativity, p. 41, where he wonders at the "incomparable sweetness and loving kindness" that "the God of all majesty (Ps.28, 3) and glory

But the fact that "God's strength has been hidden in the weakness of the flesh (Hab. 3:4); that the strength of the God-man has been hidden in the weakness of the Cross; that his appearance among men was without glory *and his form* ("*forma eius*") *inglorious* among the sons of men," instead of making us love Him more, it is a scandal for us. We make little of Him (Is. 52:14), thinking Him to be "struck by God and brought low, while God placed on him the iniquities of us all" (Is. 53:3f.). We prefer to place the yoke of our iniquities on ourselves, to bear "the heavy burdens" (cf. Is. 58:6), rather than to bear Christ's yoke (Mt. 11:29f.). Not so Bl. Gueric, who prefers to bear "the bundle of myrrh" (Cant.1:12) "*which Mary has tied together for us and, wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in the manger*" (Lk. 2:12).⁶⁴

2. In the *Third Sermon for Palm Sunday* we have another interesting description of the Divine and Human forms, this time inspired in the two moments that comprise the Palm Sunday liturgy: The glorious procession with the palms that recalls the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the sorrowful proclamation of the Gospel of the Passion of Our Lord.

Bl. Gueric starts this sermon mentioning the two forms: " 'The desire of our soul' (Ps. 41:1; Is. 26:8f.), 'the most comely among the sons of men'" (Ps. 44:3) ("*speciosum forma prae filiis hominum*"), is presented to us in this celebration "now in one form, now in another."

In both forms he is remarkable, in both desirable and lovable, because in both the Savior of men.⁶⁵

In fact, Christ saves us as the *God made man*, and He is desirable and lovable in both His Divine and Human Natures, which are united without confusion in His One Divine Person, even though both are so different. Bl. Gueric describes them thus:

In the one he is sublime; in the other lowly, in the one glorious, and in the other suffering; in the one an object of veneration, in the other an object of compassion, who compassionately took misery upon himself so that from his misery he might show compassion to the miserable...⁶⁶

should become not only like us in true bodily form ("*corporis veritate*"), but show himself even wretched and... devoid of all strength in the weakness of his infancy".

⁶⁴ Cf. III Nativity, p. 51.

⁶⁵ The Latin does not have the word "forma," but "specie": "*hodierna dies alia et alia specie repraesentat filiis hominum;*" "in utraque quidem *specie* spectabilem." The French translation uses the term: "aspect." (SC 202, p. 188).

⁶⁶ Cf. III Palm, p. 66. Further on in this sermon he makes a striking parallel between the entry into Jerusalem and the crucifixion in similar terms: cf. p. 67-68. Cf. also III Assumption, p. 183, where, inspired in Isaiah 66:2, he says that God found rest in Mary, and because "no one was found like her in the grace of humility, therefore all the fullness of the godhead (Col. 2:9) rested *even in bodily form* in this fullness of humility." The Latin, instead of "bodily form,"

b) *Giving Us a Form to Be Our Model*

The references to the “*moral form*” are fewer than those to “the form of God” or “the form of a slave.”

We already saw how in his *First Sermon for Palm Sunday* Bl. Guericc pronounces most happy the man who follows St. Paul’s advice of imitating Christ in His sublime example of humility and love, serving like a true servant those who should be *His servants*, and being obedient unto death for their sake (Phil. 2:5-8). “These are the footsteps,” the example, the “moral form” of his sermon *On the Nativity of Our Lady*, “in which we may follow Christ *in the form of a slave*, and come in the end to see him *in the form of God*.”⁶⁷ If we imitate those actions which He “showed clearly in the flesh”⁶⁸, in the form of a slave which He assumed from the Virgin Mary, we will come to see Him in heaven in the Divine Form in which He exists from all eternity.

Another similar text is found in the *Second Sermon for the Annunciation*. Bl. Guericc is convinced that there cannot be a more efficacious and pleasing moral edification than the faithful and devout consideration of the Mystery of the Incarnation. “For what can so stir up man to the love of God as the love which God first bestows on man, a love for man so ardent that he wills to become man for the sake of man?” And likewise, “what so nourishes love of one’s neighbor as the likeness and nature of one’s neighbor in the humanity of God?” Thus the Incarnation is a most powerful force to move us and a most sublime example to teach us to love God and neighbor.

As for an example of humility, surely none greater can be imagined than God humbling himself and taking on *the form of a servant* (Phil. 2:7) (“*exinanitionem Dei in formam servi*”) and a servitude below that of a servant.⁶⁹

The most important text is found in his *Third Sermon for Christmas*, where he says that Christ chose “*the form of a slave*,” and that “*His form was inglorious* among the sons of men.”⁷⁰ At the very end of this sermon, whose main biblical text has been: “A child is born for us” (Is. 9:6), our author exhorts us to preserve, feed, and nourish “the faith that works through love” (Gal. 5:6), and has been born in us of the Holy Spirit, “like the little Jesus *until there is formed in us* the Child who is born for us” (“*donec formetur in nobis Puer...*”). It is interesting to note how he speaks of “the faith that works through love,” im-

has “corporaliter”: “in plenitudine humilitatis requievit etiam *corporaliter* omnis plenitudo divinitatis.” (SC 202, p. 452).

⁶⁷ Cf. I Palm, p. 58.

⁶⁸ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 199.

⁶⁹ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 44.

⁷⁰ Cf. III Nativity, p. 49; 51.

plying the need of both faith and good works in order for Christ to be conceived and grow in us. The reference to the Holy Spirit is extremely important: It is thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit in us that Christ is “born in us,” just as it was of the Holy Spirit that Mary likewise conceived and gave birth to Christ.

Then comes one of his most significant statements:

Who not only by being born but also by living and dying gave us *a form to be the model of our formation* (“cui non solum nascendo, sed vivendo et moriendo, *formam cui informemur tradidit nobis*”).⁷¹

The Son of God was born for us. In His birth, life, death and Resurrection He has given us “the form” in which we have to be “formed” or “fashioned” in order for Him to grow in us. Every moment of His life on earth, from His virginal conception and birth to His death and resurrection, has been given to us as a “form” or model to imitate perfectly, to conform ourselves to wholly.

Moreover, we have to be always mindful of the fact that “he was born only for us and he willed to live only for us, to die only for us: for himself he had no need.”⁷² If it were not for us, He would not have been born. He willed to live and to die only for our sake, out of love for us, “*in order that we might be reborn through him, live according to him, die in him.*”⁷³

Thus we see that Bl. Gueric is not speaking simply of “an example” that we are to follow. It is something much more profound and powerful. We are *reborn* to a new life only “*through Christ*” in Baptism; we have to live “*according to Him,*” and we have to die “*in Him.*”

This veritable conformation to Christ in His birth and death is mentioned by our author in other sermons as well. In his *Second Sermon for Palm Sunday*, for example, he says that:

Our Redeemer chose this way of suffering to work out our salvation and give it *its form* (“*ad operandam et informandam salutem nostram*”), to the end that the mystery of redemption should provide a *pattern* (“*exemplum*”) of justification.⁷⁴

In his *Second Sermon for Easter*, Bl. Gueric is still clearer on the fact that His death and Resurrection are both *example and cause* of our own death to sin and resurrection to eternal life:

⁷¹ Cf. Ibid., p. 53: “qui non solum nascendo, sed vivendo et moriendo, *formam cui informemur tradidit nobis*,” the French translation does not use the words “form” or “informemur,” but “*modèle*” and “*être modèles*.” (SC 166, pp. 200; 201).

⁷² Cf. Ibid. The English translation has “He remembered;” the Latin original and the French translation have: “*memor*,” and “*rappelons-nous*”: “*memor quippe semper quod nonnisi nobis natus fuit nec nisi nobis vivere voluit, nec mori nisi pro nobis, qui pro se non habuit.*” (Ibid.).

⁷³ Cf. Ibid: “*Ut et nos per ipsum renasceremur, secundum ipsum viveremus, in ipso moreremur.*” (Ibid., p. 200-202).

⁷⁴ II Palm, p. 64.

Thanks be to God who has given us the victory both over sin and over death, through our Lord Jesus Christ... By dying he underwent the punishment due to our sins, and by rising he established for us *the form and the cause* ("*formam et causam*") of everlasting justification.⁷⁵

There are some instances where the terms "form" or "moral form" are not used, but the meaning that Bl. Guericc intends with these expressions is present. For example, in his *First Sermon for Christmas*, he says that "a Child is born unto us" (Is. 9:6), and "emptying out" (Phil. 2:7) his majesty "God has taken on himself not merely the earthly body of mortal men but even the weakness and insignificance of children."⁷⁶ But the weakness and foolishness of this blessed childhood is stronger and wiser than any man, it triumphs over the prince of this world, and sets us free. Thanks to this "sweet and sacred childhood," man's true innocence has been recovered, and men of every age can return to blessed childhood (1 Pet. 2:2),

and be conformed to Him ("*tibique conformis fiat*"), not in physical weakness *but in humility of heart and holiness of life*.

Although He was the greatest of all, He made himself "the humblest of all" and "adopted the state of helpless infancy" in order to be an example to us.⁷⁷ We shall examine other similar texts when dealing with the importance of Christ's example.

c) *Seeing the Form of God*

As we mentioned before, the beatific vision is an important theme in Bl. Guericc's work. It appeared in our main text and, using the "form" terminology, we find it in three other texts. One of them we have already seen twice. It is his *First Sermon for Palm Sunday* where he says that, if we follow Christ *in the form of a slave*, we shall come in the end to see Him *in the form of God*.⁷⁸

Another one is found in his *Third Sermon for the Purification*. Inspired in the text: "The old man carried the child," taken from the second antiphon sung at Vespers on the Feast of the Purification,⁷⁹ Bl. Guericc says that:

⁷⁵ II Easter, p. 88.

⁷⁶ I Nativity, p. 38.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 38-39.

⁷⁸ Cf. I Palm, p. 58. As we said before, St. Augustine is a possible source for this doctrine. Cf. the similarities in terminology and content for example in *Sermo* 127, 7,10 and 8,12: *PL* 38, 711-712.

⁷⁹ Cf. III Purification, p. 113, note 1

God had filled this old man [Simeon] with length of days, so as to show him his salvation (Ps. 90:16) *in human form*; but he was to fill him with the length of still other days, so as to show him his salvation *in his own form* [the Divine form].⁸⁰

The third one is found in his *First Sermon for the Assumption*, where, in a most beautiful passage inspired in the responsory: "Come my chosen one, and I will set up my throne in you," he describes how Jesus lived in Mary and with Mary: "He lived *in her* for nine months; he lived *with her* and was subject to her for so many more years." But this dwelling in and with His Mother does not mean that He was just present there without any effect upon her.

While living *in her*, he poured into her graces of a unique kind; while living *with her*, he nourished her *with his salutary words of divine wisdom and with the ineffable sweetness of his example*.⁸¹

This text is very significant because our author insists on the importance of Christ's "words" and "example" for the Virgin Mary, too. With them He nourished His Mother, as He continues to nourish us now. And it is precisely in these words and example that consists or is contained the "moral form" according to which we have to form Him and make Him grow in us.

A direct consequence of this unique indwelling of Christ in Mary and with Mary is her glorious Assumption. In heaven, she enjoys again "in a manner incomprehensible" both His dwelling *in her* and *with her*, and this for all eternity. That is why Bl. Guericc says that "her cup of joy overflows with the glory of the beatific vision" ("satiat eam beatificantium gloria visionum"). He describes this beatific vision in a manner similar to what he does in our main text, where he speaks about "the form that *was formed* for us," and "the form that *formed* us:"⁸²

Outwardly he shows her *the form of his glorified flesh* ("foris quidem *glorificatae carnis formam* exhibens"), while within he imprints *the form of the glorifying Word* ("intus autem *formam Verbi glorificantis* imprimens").⁸³

Two distinct verbs are used: He *shows* her the flesh He assumed from her, now glorified at the right hand of the Father; and He *imprints* in her His Divine form, in order to glorify her.

⁸⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 113: "ut ostenderet ei salutare suum *in vultu nostro*... ut ostenderet ei salutare suum *in vultu suo*;" "pour lui montrer son salut devant *notre face*... pour lui montrer son salut devant *sa propre face*." Neither the Latin original nor the French translation have the word "form;" however, its use may help to convey better the meaning of the text. (SC 166, p. 340; 341).

⁸¹ I Assumption, p. 167.

⁸² Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 199.

⁸³ I Assumption, p. 167.

TABLE 4: SYNTHESIS OF THE “THREE FORMS” IN THE OTHER SERMONS

<i>The Form of the Word</i>	<i>The Form of the Flesh</i>	<i>The Form of the Life He lived</i>
<p>13. But he was to fill him [Simeon] with the length of still other days, so as to show him his salvation in <i>his own form</i> (in <i>vultu suo</i>).</p> <p>(III Purification, p. 113).</p>	<p>2. “Unto us a child is born” (Is. 9:6). A Child who is the ancient of days (Dn. 7:9). Child <i>in bodily form</i> (<i>forma corporis</i>) and age...</p> <p>(I Nativity, p. 37).</p>	<p>1. [This] coming of the Lord to the individual is frequent in this middle time between his first coming and his final coming, <i>conforming</i> (<i>conformans</i>) us to the first, preparing us for the last.</p> <p>- [He comes now] so that his first coming will not have been in vain nor his last in anger...</p> <p>- In this coming he is intent to reform (<i>reformare</i>) our spirit of pride, making it conform (<i>configuratum</i>) to his humility which he manifested in his first coming, so that he might also refashion (<i>reformet</i>) our lowly body, making it like (<i>configuratum</i>) to his glorious body which he will manifest when he comes again the second time.</p> <p>(II Advent, p. 11).</p>
<p>14. You will progress from the vision which is through faith to that which is in a mirror and an image, and finally from that which is in the image <i>of the form</i> (in <i>imagine speciei</i>), to that which will be in the very truth of the face...</p> <p>(V Purification, p. 132).</p>	<p>4. What incomparable sweetness and loving kindness, that the God of all majesty (Ps. 28:3) and glory should become not only like me <i>in true bodily form</i> (<i>corporis veritate</i>) but show himself even wretched...</p> <p>(I Nativity, p. 41).</p>	<p>3. Thanks to this sweet and sacred childhood man’s true innocence has been recovered and men of every age can be conformed (<i>conformis fiat</i>) to him... in humility of heart and holiness of life.</p> <p>(I Nativity, p. 38).</p>
<p>18. Every word coming forth from the mouth of God is the one and only-begotten Word of the Father, which although it is simple contains in itself the reason and <i>the form</i> of every divine word.</p> <p>(III Annunciation, p. 53).</p>	<p>6. Be very grateful that he has been given to you... Once he was given to the world shaped in flesh (in <i>forma carnis</i>)...</p> <p>(II Nativity, p. 46).</p>	<p>5. For He is the Son of God Most High (Lk. 1:32) and his Father has adopted them for him, to shape them to his pattern (<i>ut sint omnes conformes imaginis eius</i>).</p> <p>(II Nativity, p. 43).</p>

<i>The Form of the Word</i>	<i>The Form of the Flesh</i>	<i>The Form of the Life He lived</i>
<p>19. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus, who, although he was by nature God (cum in <i>forma Dei</i> esset) ...</p> <p>- Christ was by nature God (in <i>forma Dei</i> esset), equal to God... by birth because he shared omnipotence, eternity and divinity.</p> <p>(I Palm, p. 55).</p>	<p>7. Great is this emptying out... the radiance of his Father's splendor and full expression of his being (<i>figura paternae substantiae</i>) (Heb. 1:3) chose rather only <i>the form of a slave...</i> (<i>formam servilem</i>).</p> <p>(III Nativity, p. 49).</p>	<p>9. [Preserve, feed, nourish in us the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6) and has been born in us of the Holy Spirit] like the little Jesus until there is <i>formed in us</i> (<i>formeretur</i>) the Child who is born for us (Is. 9:6).</p> <p>- Who not only by being born but also by living and dying gave us a form to be the model of our formation (<i>formam cui informemur tradidit nobis</i>).</p> <p>- [He was born, lived, and died only for us]. And that in order that we might be reborn through him, <i>live according to him</i> (<i>secundum ipsum viveremus</i>), die in him.</p> <p>(III Nativity, p. 53).</p>
<p>20. These are the footsteps in which we may follow Christ... and come in the end to see him <i>in the form of God</i> (in <i>forma Dei</i>) in which he lives and reigns.</p> <p>(I Palm, p. 58).</p>	<p>8. A scandal... that his appearance (<i>aspectus</i>) among men was without glory and <i>his form</i> (<i>forma eius</i>) inglorious among the sons of men.</p> <p>(III Nativity, p. 51).</p>	<p>11. The whole pattern of a religious life (<i>totius religionis forma</i>) seems already to have been born at his birth.</p> <p>(V Nativity, p. 66).</p>
<p>23. "The most comely (<i>speciosum forma</i>) among the sons of men" (Ps. 44:3) is presented to the sons of men... now in one <i>form</i>, now in another (<i>alia et alia specie</i>).</p> <p>- In both <i>forms</i> (in <i>utraque... specie</i>) he is remarkable, in both (in <i>utraque</i>) desirable and lovable, because in both (in <i>utraque</i>) the Savior of men.</p> <p>- Nevertheless in one (<i>form</i>) (in <i>una</i>) he is sublime, in the other (in <i>altera</i>) lowly;</p> <p>- in the one (in <i>ista</i>) [<i>form</i> he is] glorious, and in the other (in <i>illa</i>) suffering;</p> <p>- in the one (in <i>ista</i>) [<i>form</i> he is] an object of veneration, in the other (in <i>illa</i>) an object of compassion...</p> <p>(III Palm, p. 66).</p>	<p>10. Christ the Lord is the fullness of all good things, he who is full of all the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:3) and of all grace, he indeed in whom all the fullness of the godhead dwells <i>in bodily form</i> (<i>corporaliter</i>) (Col. 2:9).</p> <p>(IV Nativity, p. 54).</p>	<p>12. There is no place for a second baptism, since all we who are baptized are baptized in the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3). As he died once (1 Pet. 3:18) so too he was baptized once, so as to lay down for us too the measure and <i>form</i> (<i>modum et formam</i>) of a sole baptism.</p> <p>- Let us give him thanks, whose humility both consecrated the <i>form</i> (<i>formam</i>) of baptism today for those who believe and reserved an equivalent grace for those who repent.</p> <p>(IV Epiphany, p. 94; 98).</p>

<i>The Form of the Word</i>	<i>The Form of the Flesh</i>	<i>The Form of the Life He lived</i>
28. ...while within he imprints [in Mary] <i>the form of the glorifying Word (formam Verbi)</i> . (I Assumption, p. 167).	13. God has filled this old man [Simeon] with length of days, so as to show him his salvation (Ps. 90:16) in <i>human form (in vultu nostro)</i> ... (III Purification, p. 113).	15. For Jesus, leaving his impression in the heart, his expression in her [Mary's] work, is a seal and a bulwark of his Bride's inviolate chastity, and by the very fact that he leaves the impression of a pattern for imitation (<i>imprimit imitationis formam</i>) he sets also a guard which preserves from corruption. (II Annunciation, p. 42).
	16. As for an example of humility, surely none greater can be imagined than God humbling himself and taking on <i>the form of a servant (formam servi)</i> . (II Annunciation, p. 44).	17. Preserve your works [Holy Spirit], lest anyone should suffer miscarriage and expel, shapeless (<i>informem</i>) and dead, the progeny he has conceived of God. (II Annunciation, p. 45).
	19. [Although God] he nevertheless dispossessed himself and not only took the nature of a slave (<i>formam servi</i>)... but also carried out the ministry of a slave. (I Palm, p. 55).	20. These are <i>the footsteps</i> in which we may follow Christ... (I Palm, p. 58).
	20. These are the footsteps in which we may follow Christ <i>in the form of a slave (forma servi)</i> ... (I Palm, p. 58).	21. "Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh together with its vices and evil desires" (Gal. 5:24). A guarded definition indeed and carefully phrased; it derives a model... from the pattern marked out by Truth himself (<i>ac velut formam referens de ipsius veritatis exemplari impresso</i>). - He then who was nailed with Christ to the cross drew forth this model from the pattern of his own conscience (<i>de propriae conscientiae exemplari formam istam protulit</i>). (II Palm, p. 63).

<i>The Form of the Word</i>	<i>The Form of the Flesh</i>	<i>The Form of the Life He lived</i>
	<p>23. "The most comely (speciosum <i>forma</i>) among the sons of men" (Ps. 44:3) is presented to the sons of men... now in one <i>form</i>, now in another (<i>alia et alia specie</i>).</p> <p>- In both forms (in <i>utroque specie</i>) he is remarkable, in both desirable and lovable, because in both the Savior of men.</p> <p>-...in the other [form he is] lowly;</p> <p>-...and in the other [form he is] suffering;</p> <p>-...in the other [form he is] an object of compassion ...</p> <p>(III Palm, p. 66).</p>	<p>22. Our Redeemer chose this way of suffering to work out our salvation and give it its form (<i>ad informandam</i>), to the end that the mystery of Redemption would provide a pattern (<i>exemplum</i>) of justification.</p> <p>(II Palm, p. 64).</p>
	<p>28. Outwardly he shows her [Mary] <i>the form of his glorified flesh (carnis formam)</i>...</p> <p>(I Assumption, p. 167).</p>	<p>24. He allowed himself to be honored for a passing moment, preserving... his habitual and inborn meekness, and thus he gave a model (<i>formam</i>) to those who have been entrusted with power.</p> <p>(III Palm, p. 70).</p>
	<p>29. And as Eve was incapable of fulfilling the vocation of her title, Mary consummated the mystery. She herself, like the Church of which she is type (<i>cuius forma est</i>), is a mother of all who are reborn to life.</p> <p>(I Assumption, p. 168).</p>	<p>25. Thanks be to God... By dying he underwent the punishment due to our sins, and by rising he established for us <i>the form (formam)</i> and the cause of everlasting justification.</p> <p>(II Easter, p. 88).</p>
	<p>30. [No one was found like Mary in humility] therefore all the fullness of the godhead (Col. 2:9) rested even <i>in bodily form (corporaliter)</i> in this fullness of humility.</p> <p>(III Assumption, p. 183).</p>	<p>26. [John the Baptist]... although wholly innocent yet exhibiting a pattern (<i>formam</i>) of penance more by his example than by his word.</p> <p>(III John the Baptist, p. 137).</p>
		<p>27. You ought especially to glory in them [SS. Peter and Paul] since like olive branches you have imbibed from their root not only the sap of faith but also a pattern of life (<i>formam vitae</i>) and the model (<i>exemplum</i>) of your Order.</p> <p>(I SS. Peter and Paul, p. 149).</p>

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

In his *Second Sermon for the Nativity of Mary*, Bl. Guericc says that the "middle or moral form" is "*the form of the life Christ lived in his body in order to convey his message to those who were to believe in him,*" and that Christ has to be formed in us "according to this form, according to *the pattern of virtuous life* he manifested in his own person."⁸⁴

As we have seen, more or less explicit references to this "moral form" are not numerous in his other sermons. However, numerous indeed are the instances where Bl. Guericc speaks about "the form of the life Christ lived," about the example He has given us, from the cradle to the Cross, and about the *importance and power* of this example. It is precisely *this example* which we have to imitate in order to have Christ formed in us. It is precisely this "pattern of virtuous life" that the Virgin Mary describes to us in order to form her Only-begotten in us.⁸⁵ That is why we considered it important to take a closer look at some of the teachings our author has on this subject.

1. History - Mystery - Example

Blessed Guericc of Igny reminds us today of something very important: 1. Every action, word, gesture, and even silence of Jesus in the Gospels is *a historical event*, faithfully narrated to us by the evangelist.

The mysteries of our Redemption are based on concrete, historical facts lived by the Word of God, Who truly entered our history and became Man, our Brother, Redeemer and Teacher. *With every single act of His earthly life* - the Incarnation and the death and Resurrection being the two fundamental ones - *Jesus Christ saved us*.⁸⁶ And, at the same time, *every single act and word of His is for us to imitate and to follow*, in order to be perfectly conformed to Him by the action of the Holy Spirit in us and our docile cooperation with His Divine motions.⁸⁷ Bl. Guericc affirms this several times.

⁸⁴ II Nativity of Mary, p. 199. Cf. St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* VII 3,5: PL 42, 938; *Sermo* 117, 2, 3: PL 38, 662-663: "Verbum Dei forma quaedam non formata... Est enim forma quaedam, forma non formata, *sed forma omnium formatorum*..."

⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 514-521.

⁸⁷ Cf. St. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. 93:19*: PL 37, 1208: "Quidquid ergo de illo scriptum est, fratres, *factum est, verum est*;" *Sermo* 77, 7: PL 38, 486: "Res de illis narrata licet *vere gesta*, tamen figura est. *Factum* quidem est, et ita *ut narratur, impletum*: sed tamen etiam ipsa, quae a Domino *facta sunt*, aliquid significantia erant, quasi verba, si dici potest, visibilia et aliquid significantia;" *De vera religione* 16, 32: PL 34, 135: "Tota itaque *vita eius* in terris per hominem quem suscipere dignatus est, *discipline, morum fuit*;" *Sermo* 134, 1: PL 38, 742f.

Concerning history and example, the great Cistercian author teaches that in the Gospel,

a beautiful *portrait of Christ* has been revealed; *the form*, that is, *of life and doctrine* which he has passed on by his teaching and shown in his own person by his example.⁸⁸

Moreover,

when Scripture relates *the mysteries of our redemption* it describes *the historical events* which were enacted for us in such a way as to indicate *what moral line of action* we have to take.⁸⁹

Throughout his sermons, which are full of Scriptural quotations wonderfully fitted together, Bl. Gueric is careful to point out to his monks this sublime example of the Incarnate Word, encouraging them unceasingly to follow it with God's grace.

Several times he insists on the relationship between Mystery and example. Dealing with the Mystery of the Incarnation, he underlines in a very important text that:

The Virgin's conception has not only a mystical but also a moral sense, *what is a mystery for our redemption is also an example for our imitation*, so that we clearly *frustrate* the grace of the mystery in us if we do not *imitate* the virtue of the example.⁹⁰

Dealing with Christ's death, which brought us the victory over sin and death (1 Cor.15:57), our author tells us that those who wisely glory, glory in the Lord's Cross, because "its triumph has set us free, its *mystery* has brought us life, its *example* has justified us, its sign fortifies us."⁹¹ It was our Redeemer Himself who chose to suffer on the Cross in order to "work out our salvation, and give it its form, to the end that *the mystery of redemption should provide a pattern of justification*."⁹²

⁸⁸ II Nativity of Mary p. 200.

⁸⁹ IV Purification, p. 120: "Scriptura *redemptionis* nostrae narrans *mysteria* sic refert quae pro nobis *historialiter* sunt gesta, ut significet quae *moraliter* a nobis sunt gerenda." (SC 166, p. 356).

⁹⁰ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 44: "Et ut plenius noveris conceptum virginis non solum esse *mysticum* sed et *moralem*, quod *sacramentum* est *ad redemptionem*, *exemplum* quoque tibi est *ad imitationem*, ut manifesto *evacues* in te *gratiam sacramenti* si non *imiteris virtutem exempli*." (SC 202, p. 138).

⁹¹ Cf. II Palm, p. 62: "cuius liberatus es triumpho, vivificatus *mysterio*, iustificatus *exemplo*, munitus signo." (SC 202, pp. 178-180). Cf. a similar text in II Easter, p. 88: "By dying he underwent the punishment due to our sins, and by rising he established for us *the form and the cause* of everlasting justification;" also II Palm, p. 60.

⁹² II Palm, p. 64: "Ideo namque Redemptor ad operandam et *informandam* salutem nostram hunc passionis elegit modum, ut redemptionis *sacramentum* iustificationis fieret *exemplum*...." (SC 202, p. 184).

What is a sign *for redemption* serves at the same time *to teach and edify*...⁹³

Thus, if Christ “crucified the likeness of sinful flesh, condemning sin with sin” (Rom. 8:3), “in the same way and indeed to a greater extent, we should mortify sinful flesh, crucifying sin in it.”⁹⁴

In two of his sermons for Easter, Bl. Guericc offers an interesting explanation of Revelation 20: 6: “Blessed and holy is he who has a share in the first resurrection.” There are two resurrections: The first one is the resurrection of the soul, which comes to life again from the death of sin to the life of grace. The second is the resurrection of the body, which will be freed from the corruption of death. Christ, who said that He was “the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25), is the first and the second resurrection, because,

rising from the dead as the first-fruits of those who sleep (1 Cor. 15:20) he both brings about for us the first resurrection *by the mystery of his own resurrection* and *by the example of that same resurrection* will bring about for us the second.⁹⁵

and:

In his own body which he raised from the dead he inaugurated for our souls *the mystery of rising* and gave our bodies *a first example* of it.⁹⁶

Thus we ought “to be molded into the pattern of his death, so that we may arrive at resurrection from the dead.”⁹⁷

2. “The Father has adopted us to shape us to the pattern of His Son”

We are God the Father’s adopted children. “When the fullness of time came, God sent us His Son, born of a woman, *so that we might receive adoption as sons*” (cf. Gal. 4:4-5) and, in Bl. Guericc’s words, “*be shaped to the pattern of His Son.*”

This important assertion is found in his *Second Sermon for the Nativity*. Inspired in Isaiah 9:6: “A child is born for us, a son is given to us,” Bl. Guericc comments on the joy the Church feels “at the Son who has been born for her, given to her, and whom she enfolds in her embrace.”⁹⁸ Through this Son who

⁹³ III Palm, p. 70: “quia quod *sacramentum* est redemptionis, simul est etiam *documentum aedificationis*.” (SC 202, p. 196).

⁹⁴ II Palm, p. 64.

⁹⁵ II Easter, p. 86: “Christus et *sacramento* suae resurrectionis operatus est nobis resurrectionem primam, et *exemplo* eiusdem suae resurrectionis operabitur nobis secundam.” (SC 202, p. 230).

⁹⁶ III Easter, p. 92: “dum in suo corpore, quod suscitavit a mortuis, et animabus *sacramentum* et corporibus *exemplum* resurgendi initiavit.” (SC 202, p. 246).

⁹⁷ III Easter, p. 92: “dum in suo corpore, quod suscitavit a mortuis, et animabus *sacramentum* et corporibus *exemplum* resurgendi initiavit.” (SC 202, p. 246).

⁹⁸ II Nativity, p. 43.

has been given to her, the Church, once barren and childless, shall with great wonder find herself with many children (cf. Is. 49:21), who are the gift from the Son who was given to her, and who will have “every nation for their heritage” (Is. 54:2f.), “for Mary’s only son is the first to be born of all creation” (Col. 1:15).⁹⁹

This Son given to Mary and to the Church is the Son of God Most High, *and his Father has adopted these children for him, to shape them to his pattern* (“cui Pater istos adoptavit; ut sint omnes *conformes imaginis eius*”), so as to make him the eldest of many brothers (Rom. 8:29).¹⁰⁰

God does not only want us to be His children, but to be *like His Only-begotten Son* in everything. For this purpose, He did something very concrete: He sent us His Son, born of the Virgin Mary, to be both our Head and our Teacher. Through Him, in Him, with Him and like Him, we become truly God’s children by adoption.

God knew that men’s minds were incapable of perceiving invisible things, unwilling to be taught about the things of heaven, slow to yield their faith unless the object itself in which they were asked to believe was visibly borne in on the senses to convince them. For although faith comes from hearing (Rom. 10:17) it comes much more readily and promptly from sight (cf. Jn. 20:29)...¹⁰¹

And so God, “wishing to satisfy our slowness in everything,” made visible to us, and even tangible, the Word which previously was only heard. The Word of God “sought an entrance for himself to the soul *through all the ways of the senses*.” He was made flesh for us, “who are wholly flesh, so that as we had previously only been able to hear the Word of God, we might now be able to see him and taste him made flesh, summoning all the senses to witness to hearing.”¹⁰²

Thus Bl. Guericc invites us earnestly to “make our way to Bethlehem and see this Word which the Lord has made and shown to us” (Lk. 2:15).¹⁰³ If we:

listen devoutly and diligently to this word... how much and how easily we can be taught by it. It is an abbreviated word, yet in such a way that in it every word which makes for salvation is summed up¹⁰⁴ ... By an unspeakable condescen-

⁹⁹ Cf. II Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 43.

¹⁰¹ V Nativity, p. 61.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 62; cf. p. 64: “Because God could not speak to us as spiritual men but only as carnal (1 Cor. 3:1) his Word was made flesh so that all flesh might be able not only to hear but also to see that the mouth of the Lord has spoken” (Is. 40:5).

¹⁰³ Cf. V Nativity, p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. III Annunciation, p. 53: “the Only-begotten Word of the Father... although it is simple contains in itself *the reason and form* of every divine word.”

sion the same Wisdom of God made itself foolishness (1 Cor. 1:21-23). It offered itself *to be learned* by men however uneducated or stupid, and through the folly of preaching saved those who believed.¹⁰⁵

God the Father wants "to shape us to the pattern of His Son," and has set forth to us this pattern clearly visible, audible, and even edible! Forming Christ in us "according to the form of life He lived," then, is nothing else but fulfilling the eternal Will of the Father. And Our Lady actively cooperated and cooperates now in this Divine Economy.

3. *Christ Teaches us with His Example and His Word*

Jesus Christ teaches us first of all with the example of His own life - the life He chose to live on earth for our sake - as well as with His word. Bl. Gueric insists several times on this.¹⁰⁶

In his *Third Sermon for Palm Sunday*, for example, he explains why it was necessary for us that Christ should "trace out a path for his followers through prosperity as through adversity," so that we would learn how to preserve moderation in honor and adhere to patience in ignominy or pain; how to be neither puffed up when honored, nor cast down by despondency or embittered by anger when despised. He willed to experience all these things in order to "*teach by example what he had prescribed by word of mouth.*"¹⁰⁷

Explaining Jesus' answer to Mary at Cana (cf. Jn. 2:4), he affirms that Jesus was by no means spurning his Mother or showing disgust for her, rather "he was setting charity in order in us (Cant. 2:4) *both by his words and by his example,*" teaching us to put the love of God and of those who do God's will before our human affections.¹⁰⁸ In his *Fourth Sermon for Palm Sunday* he succinctly says that,

in order to vanquish the pride which reigns in the world Christ will proclaim poverty and humility *both by word and by example.*¹⁰⁹

a) *The Incarnation and the Passion*

Nowhere is the power of Christ's example more patently shown as in the Incarnation and the death on the Cross. What better teaching could we have on

¹⁰⁵ V Nativity, p. 64.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. II Pentecost, p. 116-117.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. III Palm, p. 70; cf. also III St. John the Baptist, p. 137.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. IV Assumption, p. 187-188; St. Augustine, *De Fide et Symbolo* 4, 9: PL 40, 186; *In Ioh.* 8, 6: PL 35, 1453-1454; 8, 9: 1455; 119, 1: 1950; *Sermo* 218, 10: PL 38, 1086; Rupert of Deutz (†1130), *Commentaria in Canticum Canticorum* 1,2,4: ed. R. Haacke, CCCM 26, Turnhout 1974, p. 39-40.

¹⁰⁹ IV Palm, p. 76.

love, humility, mercy, and poverty than seeing God become a little child and die on a cross like a criminal?

Concerning the Incarnation, Bl. Guericc is certain that “there can be no more efficacious and pleasing moral edification than the faithful and devout consideration of the mystery of the Word Incarnate;” nothing that can stir up love of God and neighbor so much.¹¹⁰ If someone suffers from spiritual lassitude, our author counsels him to go to Bethlehem and look upon the Word which the Lord has shown to us (Lk. 2:15), and “picture in his mind what the living and creative (Heb. 4:12) Word of God is like as he lies there in the manger.” If the eye is enlightened by piety, “what can there be so delightful to see, so wholesome to think about? What so edifies behavior, strengthens hope, inflames charity?”¹¹¹

The same is true of Christ’s Passion. Bl. Guericc considers that

nothing is more suitable for preaching than Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). For... what can ever be preached that is more conducive to faith, what can be heard that is more wholesome, what can be thought that is more fruitful? What so enkindles the affections of the faithful, what medicine is so good for their morals, what is there that so does sins to death, crucifies vices, nourishes and strengthens virtues as the remembrance of the Crucified?

For him it is “the loftiest and most noble philosophy,” which enables him “to laugh at the stultified wisdom of both the world and the flesh.” He who is fastened to the Cross together with Christ (Gal. 2:19), is “wise, just, holy, and free.”¹¹²

b) *An Example from His Mother’s Womb to His glorious Resurrection*

Christ’s example is not restricted to His three years of public ministry. Bl. Guericc affirms that it goes from His very conception in the Virgin’s womb to His glorious Resurrection and Ascension. His childhood and His Passion are particularly emphasized.

1. Mary’s virginal conception of Christ was given to us as “*an example for our imitation*,”¹¹³ because we are all called to conceive Christ in our hearts and make Him grow until He reaches mature age.

[Jesus] was born in a traveler’s inn so that we might confess ourselves to be strangers and travelers upon earth (Heb. 11:13). He chose to be put in a manger that we might learn to choose “to be of no account in the house of God rather than to dwell in the tents of sinners” (Ps. 83:11). He was wrapped in swaddling clothes (Lk. 2:12) that we might be content to have just enough to cover us (1

¹¹⁰ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 44.

¹¹¹ Cf. V Nativity, p. 63.

¹¹² Cf. II Palm, p. 59-60.

¹¹³ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 44; III Annunciation, p. 54.

Tim. 6:8). In everything he was content with his mother's poverty and in everything he was subject to his mother.

Our Cistercian Abbot points out to his monks how "the whole pattern of a religious life seems already to have been born at his birth" ("ut totius religionis *forma iam in eius nativitate nata videretur*").¹¹⁴ It is particularly significant for us that, among the facts of Jesus' childhood that he mentions as worthy of imitation, is that of being subject to Mary. This subjection to the Mother of God will be very important in the Marian Spirituality of St. Louis de Montfort (†1716), who greatly developed centuries later Bl. Gueric's insights on Mary's cooperation in the formation of Christ in us.¹¹⁵

In his *Fourth Sermon for the Epiphany*, Bl. Gueric explains how Christ was baptized not for Himself, but for us, and how that soul must be proclaimed happy "which has taken the bath of salvation and has immediately *followed in the Savior's footsteps*," keeping close to Him. What happens if we sin after receiving Baptism? On the one hand,

just as there is one faith, so there is one baptism (Eph. 4:5). There is no place for a second baptism, since all we who are baptized are baptized in the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3). As he died once (1 Pet. 3:18), so too he was baptized once, so as to lay down for us too the measure and form of a sole baptism ("ut et nobis unicum modum et formam baptismatis praescriberet").

But, on the other, consoled by the fact that Naaman was asked to "wash seven times in the Jordan" (2 Kgs. 5:10), Bl. Gueric affirms that we can be purified from these sins through "the humility of repentance,"

which flowing at once from Christ's *gift* and from *his example* of humility, is now preached throughout the world...¹¹⁶

2. With His Passion, death and Resurrection, "Jesus is also constantly pointing us the way to follow. Although *He was God*, He chose to *serve us*, His servants, toiling for us "even to exhaustion, hunger and thirst... even to sweat, a sweat of blood which ran down on to the earth" (Lk. 22:44)... "even to death, death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8)... He was struck in the face, covered with spittle, crowned with thorns, pierced with nails, transfixed by the lance, given vinegar and gall to drink... Is there any toil like His?" (Lam. 1:12).¹¹⁷ He traversed the

¹¹⁴ Cf. V Nativity, p. 66.

¹¹⁵ On the theme of subjection to Mary in St. Louis de Montfort, cf. *True Devotion to Mary*, 18; 27; 139-140; 156, in *God alone: The Collected Writings of St. Louis Marie de Montfort*, (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1987) 295; 297; 332-333; 337-338. (Hereafter referred to as *God alone*).

¹¹⁶ Cf. IV Epiphany, p. 94-95

¹¹⁷ Cf. I Palm, p. 57.

paths of prosperity and adversity, of honor and ignominy, of joy and pain *in order to be an example to us*.¹¹⁸

[Our Savior] took care *to give us an example* in himself of perseverance on the cross. He wished to reach his consummation only on the cross and would not be taken down from the cross before evening, both of that day and of his life.¹¹⁹

Finally, Christ proclaims Himself “the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11:25) because,

it is through him and into him that we rise *in order to live according to him* and with him; *now according to him in holiness and justice*, afterwards with him in happiness and glory.¹²⁰

c) *Humility and Silence*

Bl. Guericc mentions some *specific virtues* found in Christ which he exhorts his monks to imitate. In his *Fourth Sermon for the Epiphany* he enumerates seven – including *subjection to His Mother* –, which spring from His humility:

Being rich He became poor; He carried poverty to its extreme limit; *He was subject to his mother* (Lk. 2:51); He bent His head beneath a servant’s hands (Lk. 3:21); He so bore with a disciple who was a thief and a traitor; He was so meek before an unjust judge, and He was so forgiving in interceding with His Father for those who crucified Him.¹²¹

We shall examine in more detail only two virtues, upon which he insists very much: humility and silence.

1. *Humility*, which he considers “the greatest of all virtues”¹²², is the one he mentions more often, and the Incarnation is its most glaring proof. In fact, God,

although the greatest of all, made himself the humblest and least of all, *to be an example to us*. It was not enough for him that he should become less than the angels (Ps. 8:6) by assuming mortal nature; he would become less even than grown men by adopting the state of helpless infancy.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Cf. III Palm, p. 70-71.

¹¹⁹ II Palm, p. 64.

¹²⁰ II Easter, p. 86.

¹²¹ Cf. IV Epiphany, p. 97.

¹²² Cf. Saturday of the Second Week of Lent, p. 144; III St. John the Baptist, p. 139: “If humility does not attract by virtue of its own worth and justice, let it attract at least by its usefulness for *there is no straighter or easier way* to the glory which is of God.” St. Augustine speaks very often about Christ’s example of humility. Cf. just one example: *Sermo* 117, 10, 17: *PL* 38, 671.

¹²³ I Nativity, p. 39; cf. II Annunciation, p. 44: “*As for an example of humility*, surely none greater can be imagined than God humbling himself and taking on the form of a servant” (Phil. 2:7).

Bl. Guericc is convinced that, “of all the human weaknesses God deigned to bear for us,” the greatest in humility is His conception in Mary’s virginal womb and His presence there, “confined for the space of nine months.” For such a long time “Wisdom says nothing; Power works nothing that can be discerned.” Even on the Cross Christ was not so weak!¹²⁴

It is in this “visible and abbreviated Word” that we are all called to learn the Wisdom of God, “which in its entirety *has been made humility*.” In this virtue,

that all-embracing Virtue has for the time being found expression: that supreme Wisdom has willed for the time being to know nothing else but that humility of which he willed afterwards to declare himself *a teacher*.¹²⁵

Paraphrasing Hebrews 5:8, our author says that Jesus was “worthily and justly made *a teacher of humility*.”

Although he knew it well, by origin from his mother and naturally from his Father, nonetheless from the very womb of his mother he learned it from the things he suffered.¹²⁶

Seeing how God has humbled Himself, Bl. Guericc wonders how can we, “earth and ashes,” still be proud; still be great in our own eyes, “even after God has made himself a little Child under those very eyes of ours”! Grown by pride into giants (Gen. 6:4), he warns us that, “unless we are converted and become like this little Child, we shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 18:3f.).

I am the Gate of the Kingdom” (Jn. 10:9), this little Child says, and unless man’s proud head is bowed the doorway of humility will not let him in.¹²⁷

2. *Silence* is another virtue in Christ which he extols. First of all, it is an *eloquent silence*: The almighty Word,

which in such deep silence made its way down from the Father’s royal throne (Wis. 18:14f.) into the mangers of animals... speaks to us better by its silence. Let him who has ears to hear, hear (Mt. 11:15) what this loving and mysterious silence of the eternal Word speaks to us...¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Cf. V Nativity, p. 65; I Nativity, p. 38: “This Child’s seeming dumbness... makes the tongues of children eloquent (Wis. 10:21)... It is he, who seems to know nothing, who teaches knowledge to men (Ps. 93:10) and angels.”

¹²⁶ V Nativity, p. 65-66.

¹²⁷ Cf. I Nativity, p. 38-39.

¹²⁸ V Nativity, p. 63.

Secondly, it is a silence *to be imitated*, for what can recommend “the discipline of silence with such weight and such authority... as the Word of God silent in the midst of men?”¹²⁹ And why is silence so important? Because:

“as that Child in the womb advanced towards birth in a long, deep silence, so does the discipline of silence nourish, form and strengthen a man’s spirit, and produce growth which is the safer and more wholesome for being more hidden.”¹³⁰

Bl. Guericc himself wants to learn from this silence:

If I were allowed I would gladly be dumb... and be silent even from good things (Ps. 38:3), that I might be able the more attentively and diligently to apply my ear to the secret utterances and sacred meaning of this divine silence, learning in silence in the school of the Word if only for as long as the Word himself was silent *under the instruction of his mother*.¹³¹

4. God’s Grace and Human Response

Although Bl. Guericc does not phrase it like this, we could say that “forming Christ in us according to the moral form” is synonymous of having God’s grace and human response meet. In His infinite mercy, God willed to become man in order to redeem us and become our supreme Model and Teacher. He has given us “the form of life” we ought to live, exemplified in His own Person. In response to so much love, we are called to make our own this “form of life” which He has given us, and live it, always with His grace. We are called to “form in us” Him Who willed to be formed by Mary. Both of these - God’s grace and the concrete part we are all called to play in response to His love and grace - are often stressed by Bl. Guericc. A few examples would suffice.

Concerning our part, the Abbot is very strong. He exhorts us “to win heaven by force” (cf. Mt. 11:12), “wrestling perseveringly and without remission (cf. Gen. 32:24f.), remembering nevertheless that success comes only “by the touch of God’s strength and through his bounty.”¹³² Christ’s words: “This is my desire, that where I am they also shall be” (Jn. 17:24) are a great assurance for those who are faithful, and a pledge for those who believe, only making sure we do not “throw away the grace we have received.” Moreover, this grace that has been granted to us,

¹²⁹ Ibid.; cf. III Annunciation, p. 52: “To you that silence of the Word speaks, to you it cries out, to you... it recommends *the discipline of silence*.” Cf. St. Ambrose, *In Ps.* 118, 4, 17: *PL* 15, 1313 A-B.

¹³⁰ III Annunciation, p. 52.

¹³¹ V Nativity, p. 63-64.

¹³² Cf. II St. John Baptist, p. 130; II Palm, p. 60: “this is not due to his own perfection but is God’s free gift of redemption - not, that is, because he committed no sin... but because he... freed him from his sins.”

is that of *suffering for Christ's sake*, not merely believing in him (Phil. 1:29). Faith in the promise of Christ should not lull us into false security but spur us to eager enthusiasm. It should reward our efforts in the daily struggle against sin with the crown of continual martyrdom...¹³³

We have to be very careful to be authentic Christians, for "very few are truly Christians." In fact,

the whole world almost confesses verbally that it knows God; but by its deeds it denies him (Tit. 1:16)... They are Christians only in name, they take to themselves in vain the holy name (Ex. 20:7) of Christ while they freely devote themselves to the pursuit of the things which are contrary to this name. All their behavior, their whole way of life, marks them out as enemies of Christ's cross (Phil. 3:18)...¹³⁴

Speaking about making the sign of the cross, he says that:

Consistency and right reason seem to demand that those who mark their foreheads with the sign of the cross to fortify themselves should mark their behavior *with the example of the Crucified* to justify themselves, *living by the law of the cross as they are armed by faith in it*. Otherwise it is mockery for the soldier to wear the badge of a king whose command he does not follow, it is wrong for him to protect himself with the sign of him whose bidding he does not obey...

It is perversity and abuse that "the enemies of Christ's cross should wish to protect themselves with the sign of Christ's cross. As long as they are free from fear, they live wantonly, in total disloyalty to the cross; when they are threatened by danger they are eager to be defended by the power of the cross..."¹³⁵

St. Paul has given us the sign to distinguish true soldiers from false ones: "Those who belong to Christ have crucified their flesh together with its vices and evil desires" (Gal. 5:24).

A guarded definition indeed and carefully phrased; it derives a model... *from the pattern marked out by Truth himself*.¹³⁶

Without crucifying our vices there is no salvation, "just as apart from Christ's cross there is no redemption," for our Redeemer "chose this way of suffering to work out our salvation and give it its form," so that the mystery that redeemed us is also what we are called to imitate. Christ died on the Cross for us, and we have to die daily in Him and with Him to all that is not He. This is Bl. Gueric's wish:

¹³³ Ascension, p. 106.

¹³⁴ IV Epiphany, p. 92.

¹³⁵ II Palm, p. 62.

¹³⁶ II Palm, p. 63: "cauta prorsus et circumspecta definitio, ac velut *formam* referens de ipsius veritatis exemplari impresso." (SC 202, p. 180).

May my soul die the death of my Lord Jesus Christ and may my end be like his (Num. 23:10), that is, may I hang on the voluntary cross of penitence until the end of my life...¹³⁷

In the *Sermon for the Feast of all Saints* he presents the Beatitudes as the “eight steps” we have to climb to progress from virtue to virtue (Ps. 83:8), “from the lowest states of evangelical perfection to the very highest.”¹³⁸

Bl. Guericc underlines often that this implies a permanent struggle; it is not something achieved in a day. That is why he likes the image of the baby growing in the womb. We have been transformed “into a new creation by Easter’s healing action;” we have to walk always in newness of life (Rom. 6:4); we have to strive “not only to keep the principle by which we are grounded in him unshaken to the end (Heb. 3:14) but also constantly *to increase it*...”¹³⁹ Christ’s single resurrection prepared for our souls “a twofold grace of resurrection: *day by day* they come to life again from the dead of sin through the working of this mystery...”¹⁴⁰ When the day comes for us to go to heaven, shall a man “straight away find himself able to fly heavenward who has not here and now learnt to fly by daily exercises and practice?”¹⁴¹

Thus the way is long and the effort constant. But we are not alone. Christ is with us today to teach us.¹⁴² God does not rest; His grace always goes before and follows us:

It goes before us by first *showing examples* of humility and patience; it follows us by *helping us to imitate* what is shown to us.¹⁴³

Nothing is “excessive or difficult to learn of Jesus... since in him there is to be found both repose for the soul and healing for our spiritual leprosy, together with the pledge of eternal salvation.”¹⁴⁴

5. *Final Comments on Christ’s Example*

At the end of this summary view of Bl. Guericc’s teachings on the importance and power of Christ’s example, we can see how clearly he explains throughout his sermons what is this “form of life” according to which we have to form Christ in us, and how God’s grace is always granted to us to make this formation possible. All the examples of virtue in Christ which Holy Scripture

¹³⁷ Cf. II Palm, p. 64.

¹³⁸ Cf. Feast of all Saints, p. 204; 205-206.

¹³⁹ Cf. II Easter, p. 91.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. II Easter, p. 91.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Ascension, p. 106-107.

¹⁴² Cf. Ibid., p. 107.

¹⁴³ Cf. I Palm, p. 58.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. IV Epiphany, p. 96; cf. II Pentecost, p. 117.

offers us are “the footsteps,” the “moral form” in which “we may follow Him in the form of a slave,”¹⁴⁵ in order to *form Him in us*, and see Him in heaven “*in the form of God*.” By the action of the Holy Spirit, as all these virtues of Christ grow in strength in us through our constant meditation and imitation of them,

they bring him to maturity and perfection in us. *Then Christ will have been perfectly formed in us* as far as it is possible in this life.¹⁴⁶

C. THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN US

One of the most sublime mysteries of our Christian faith is the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in us. Based on Sacred Scripture, in particular St. John and St. Paul, Tradition has often spoken about this. Bl. Guericc unites his voice to that of other important authors, offering us his distinct contribution to this theme. He uses several Scriptural images to speak about the indwelling of the Word in us. One very powerful way of expressing the reality of Christ's presence in us and its purpose is the image of the pregnant woman, which we already mentioned: We “conceive Christ” and “form Him in us,” like a baby in its mother's womb. It would be interesting to see briefly other images which he also presents.

1. “Behold the king is coming, let us hasten to meet our Savior” (*Ant.*)¹⁴⁷

Advent has traditionally been a good time to speak about the coming of Christ to dwell in our souls, framed within the theme of His “different comings”: in humility at the Incarnation, sacramentally in the Eucharist, spiritually into our souls, in glory at the end of time.

Bl. Guericc follows this idea. He explains how, “in this middle time between his first coming and his final coming,” the Lord frequently comes to the individual. Faithful to His promise of coming to us before His actual coming at the end of time (cf. Jn. 14:18), when He will arrive for the world in general, “he may pay us a friendly visit” (“antequam mundo generaliter adveniat *familiariter* invisat vos”).¹⁴⁸

Just as in the resurrection “we shall be caught up in the clouds to meet Christ in the air” (1 Thes. 4:17) and be forever with Him, so now also we have “clouds” that “raise up our spirits to higher things provided our hearts are not too lazy and tied to earth,” so that we may be with the Lord “if only for half

¹⁴⁵ Cf. I Palm, p. 58.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 201

¹⁴⁷ Antiphon of the invitatory used at vigils or matins of the First Sunday of Advent: cf. II Advent, p. 7, note 1.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. II Advent, pp. 10-11.

an hour,” as we may know by experience. These “clouds” are the voices of prophets or apostles in the Church, that bear our minds and hearts aloft to sublime things and even beyond these to the mystical contemplation of the glory of God (2 Cor. 3:18) “as on a cloud.”¹⁴⁹

The purpose of this coming of the Lord to us, fruit of “merit or ardent striving,” is to “*conform us to His first coming, and prepare us for the last.*” He comes to us now “so that his first coming will not have been in vain nor his last in anger.” In this coming He is “intent to reform our spirit of pride,” *making it conform to the humility* He manifested in His first coming, so that He may also refashion our body making it like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21), which He will manifest in His second coming. Bl. Guericc insists that this “intimate visitation,” which imparts to us “the grace of the first coming and pledges the glory of the second is to be desired with all longing and sought after with every care.”¹⁵⁰

Being “midway between the two corporeal comings, like a mediator,” this spiritual coming participates in both: It is *hidden* because He comes secretly to each person; it is *glorious* because it is so wonderful. It is a mysterious coming because “invisible he is seen and inconceivable he is understood,” plunging and keeping the soul that contemplates Him into “a sweet and happy state of absorbed admiration,” that is known by those who have experienced it, and should be humbly and lovingly desired by those who have not. It brings both *grace and glory*, because “through the consolation of grace we are given a foretaste of future glory.” In it God is both *wonderful* and *lovable*, allowing Himself to be grasped even in the senses,

the Bridegroom embracing the Bride and the two becoming one in Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18), as she is *transformed* into the same image in which as in a mirror she sees the glory of the Lord (“in eandem imaginem *transformatur*”).¹⁵¹

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)

A very important aspect concerning Christ’s coming is our *preparedness*. It is St. John the Baptist’s great cry: “Prepare the way of the Lord”! We have to be prepared, because we do not know when He is coming (Lk. 12:40). We have to be ready to meet the Lord, ready to do good and to suffer ill, so that

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁵¹ Cf. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

we may not only “open to him when he comes and knocks (Lk. 12:36), but may run to meet him, eager and joyful, while he is still far off.”¹⁵²

Even before we reach heaven, if we have prepared for the Lord “a spotless way He will quite often deign to tread the way with us (Ps. 84:14), making smooth the path before us (Ps. 17:37), so that our heart may be enlarged and we may run in the way of His commandments” (Ps. 118:28).¹⁵³ Moreover, “He is to be not merely invited but drawn into the guest chamber of our heart by the violence of our prayers and the vehemence of our fervor,” like the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:28-29), the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15:22f.), and the spouse in the Canticum (Cant. 5:5).¹⁵⁴

Sometimes He comes before He is called, at others He waits for us to invite Him, or dissimulates for a long time, to increase our merits and to make us compel Him “with gentle violence” to enter. Our heart is ready (Ps. 107:2) for Him when it is empty of evil and full of holy desires.¹⁵⁵

An interesting point he makes is that Jesus deigns “to meet and manifest himself not only to those who devote themselves to contemplation but also to those who justly and devoutly walk the ways of action.” We know by experience how, after seeking and not finding Him “at the memorials of the altars,” like the women who searched Him at the tomb, He “unexpectedly comes to meet us in the way while we are working.”¹⁵⁶

When we invite Jesus, we have to take care lest we invite Him “into an unclean and unworthy dwelling.” On the other hand, we cannot plead that preparing “a lavish dwelling for so great and so powerful a guest” is beyond our means. We have the means at hand. They are “a perfect confession of our past life, and a good will in respect to all else.” With this we prepare a throne for the Most High.¹⁵⁷

Bl. Guericc also mentions other things we have to do in order to prepare our hearts to receive the Lord. A very important one is silence:

If the depths of our soul were to keep a quiet silence, the all-powerful Word would flow secretly into us from the Father’s throne (Wis. 18:14f.).¹⁵⁸

Other things include: amending our life; directing our footsteps along the narrow way; rectifying and correcting our will if it is crooked and twisted according to *the pattern of the Divine Will* (“ad regulam divinae voluntatis”);

¹⁵² Cf. III Advent, p. 16.

¹⁵³ Cf. Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. III Easter, p. 95.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. III Advent, p. 19; also III Purification, p. 116: “it is in vain to allege poverty...”

¹⁵⁸ IV Advent, p. 24.

reforming even the harshness of character “lest that meek and humble traveler be shocked at the roughness of the road and draw back.” The pure and pleasing way along which the Lord advances is chastity. Mary is the supreme example:

*Perfect was the chastity of the Virgin, by which he entered her womb, perfect must be the chastity of man by which he may enter his soul.*¹⁵⁹

But we do not take the first step. He who is the Life, the Truth and the Way (Jn. 14:6) “anticipates his own advent to us,” so that our way can be corrected “according to the model of truth (*“secundum regulam veritatis”*), observing his words, and following in the footsteps (*“vestigia”*) of him who made himself the Way by which we might come to him.”¹⁶⁰ Moreover, His grace never fails us.

We are dealing with a continuous process. What our author expresses elsewhere with the image of the baby that grows in the womb, and has to be carefully protected lest we suffer a miscarriage, he describes here with the image of the journey:

[We prepare the way of the Lord] by walking along it; and we can walk along it only by preparing it. However far we journey along it, *the way is always waiting to be prepared*, so that we must start afresh from the place we have reached and advance along what lies ahead. We are led to do so because at every stage we meet the Lord for whose coming we are preparing the way, and each time we see him in a completely new way... There is no limit to the way along which we travel... so when the wise and indefatigable traveler has reached his goal *he will begin again*.¹⁶¹

Among the effects of His presence in us, Bl. Guericc mentions the “curing and sweetening of our rancor of soul, bitterness of speech and harshness of manners” for, “where there is awareness and remembrance of his divine sweetness,” there is no room for “anger or sadness, but every trace of anger and bitterness and every other source of evil shall be taken away from us” (Eph. 4:31).¹⁶²

3. “*My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts*” (Cant. 1:13)

Linking the Canticle text about the Beloved that lies close to the Bride’s breast: “My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts” (Cant. 1:13) with “A child is born for us, a son *is given to us*” (Is. 9:6), Bl. Guericc exhorts us to run to this Jesus that is offered to us “open-handed, throwing out our arms and enfolding him in our embrace.”

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid., pp. 24; 26; 27; St. Gregory of Nyssa (†392), *De Virg.* 2: PG 46, 324 A-B.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Ibid., pp. 24-25; 27.

¹⁶¹ V Advent, p. 30.

¹⁶² I Nativity, p. 41; cf. III Purification, p. 115.

[We have to] prove our devotion in love and deed: take him to ourselves without a qualm... embrace him lovingly and linger with him always pressed to our heart (Cant. 1:12).¹⁶³

He distinguishes three ways in which Christ is given to us, all three being a Divine gift to us: *The Incarnation*, when He was given to the world shaped in flesh in order to save us; *the Eucharist*, whereby “on certain days, at set times, he is offered to the faithful in the likeness of bread to furnish us with the means of holiness,” and *His spiritual advent to our souls*:

To his devoted friends he is quite often granted at unexpected moments *by the delicious breath of his Spirit* to bring us comfort.

Each advent elicits from us a concrete response:

For the first he demands a sure faith, for the second a pure conscience, for the third a ready love that bestirs the mind, melts the heart, throws wide the gates of love to make way for grace to enter in abundance.¹⁶⁴

4. “*My soul was liquefied when my Beloved was poured into me*” (Cant. 5:6)

In his *Second Sermon for the Purification* our author has a very moving text where, inspired in the antiphon for the Feast of the Presentation in the Temple: “The old man carried the child,” and in Canticle 1:2 and 5:6, he describes what Simeon must have felt when he took the baby Jesus in his arms. If Christ is the Anointed, “who anoints even those whom he does not touch,” how did he anoint all over “the pure and holy breast of the old man who took him into his arms and pressed him to his breast, eager to enclose him, if only he could, in the inmost depths of his heart?” Moreover,

How did he, so lovable and so meek, introduce himself into the chaste bosom of the devout old man? How did he slip into his inmost parts, how delightful and health-giving he was, rather how utterly ineffable, when he entwined himself in his bones, breathed himself into his senses?

And so it happened that, on the one hand, “the Anointed became wholly liquid, dissolved into ointment to fire the love of him who embraced him;” and, on the other, “the old man’s soul was liquefied at the embrace of the Anointment or Ointment, so that he would say: ‘My soul was liquefied when my Beloved was poured into me’” (Cant. 5:6).¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Cf. II Nativity, p. 43.

¹⁶⁴ II Nativity, p. 46; cf. Ascension, p. 105.

¹⁶⁵ II Purification, p. 108; cf. a similar text concerning the prodigal son and his father in Saturday of the Second Week of Lent, pp. 141-142: “ ‘He fell upon his neck and kissed him’ (Lk. 15:20). When he thus showed his affection for him, what did he do by his embrace and kiss but take him to his bosom and cast himself into his son’s bosom, breathe himself into him, in

In order to receive Christ the King, both Simeon and Anna had prepared themselves, adorning their bridal chamber, i.e., the inmost recesses of their hearts, where God dwells, “with the varied beauty of virtues,” in particular faith, chastity, and devotion.¹⁶⁶ Like them, we should also prepare a fitting place for Him in the interior of our heart, “in order to receive Him more worthily and more often,” considering “the majesty that is to be received, the care and diligence it behooves us prepare him a place.”¹⁶⁷

Concerning the virtues with which we should adorn ourselves, Bl. Guericc reminds us that Christ Himself is its “source and perfection, *by him they are distributed, through him they are preserved, with him they find their reward.*”¹⁶⁸

5. “*Come my chosen one, and I will set up my throne in you*” (Latin liturgy)

Inspired in a responsory used in the liturgy for the feast of a virgin or holy woman, in Psalm 9:7: “But the Lord sits enthroned for ever, he has established his throne for judgment,” and in 1 Peter 3:15, Bl. Guericc also speaks of Christ’s presence in us in terms of “setting up His throne in us.” In fact, the great desire which he entertains in his sermons is to give Christ to us, “so that according to the words of the apostle Peter *we may enthrone him as Lord in our hearts*” (1 Pet. 3:15).¹⁶⁹

He often explains how this “setting up of His throne in us” was perfectly fulfilled in Mary, both at the Incarnation and the Assumption.

When the Word came “from a royal throne (Wisd.1 8:15) into the Virgin’s womb,” He made for Himself there “a royal throne” in which He is “the comforter of those who grieve on earth.”

In her and from her he prepared a throne for himself (Ps. 9:8) when in her and from her he fitted a body to himself (Heb. 10:5).¹⁷⁰

When she was gloriously assumed into heaven, a throne was not placed for her: *She herself became her Son’s throne.* In her He set up a seat over His kingdom, from her He makes judgments, through her He listens to prayers.¹⁷¹

Like the Virgin Mary, “the ivory bodies of the saints” are also “the house of Christ, Christ’s garment, Christ’s members (Eph. 5:30), and temples of the

order that by clinging to his father he might become one spirit with him... He could not bind us to himself more closely, could not make us more intimate to himself than by incorporating us into himself...”

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Ibid., pp. 111, 110.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. III Purification, pp. 115-116.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. II Purification, p. 112.

¹⁶⁹ V Nativity, p. 67.

¹⁷⁰ I Annunciation, p. 34. We shall come back to this text later.

¹⁷¹ Cf. II Assumption, p. 178.

Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19)," from which the fragrance of all the virtues should be wafted.¹⁷² If we consider "the confines of the womb, the place is indeed confined;" but if we consider "the breadth of the heart, the throne is great," because God in His infinite love and mercy makes both Mary's womb and heart and our own hearts "adequate to receive such majesty."¹⁷³

Bl. Gueric privileges the "throne image" to describe our situation in heaven. Those whom the Lord has chosen are blessed, because they shall dwell in His courts. "More than that, *He will live in them*, He will reign in them, *He will set up the throne of His kingdom in them*," with the Virgin Mary being "the most blessed" of all.¹⁷⁴ The soul of the just is called "a seat of wisdom," and "what is a seat of wisdom now will one day be a seat of glory," so that heaven "will be full of seats and thrones and on each of them *God will take his rest*, giving himself to all as and how their merits deserve."¹⁷⁵

6. *Bud, Flower and Fruit* (cf. Jer. 23:5; Is. 4:2; Ps. 107:2)

Our Abbot speaks about the different "stages" of Christ's presence in us using the image of the bud, the flower and the fruit (cf. Jer. 23:5; Is. 4:2; Ps. 107:2).

[Christ is] at first *a bud*, when faith breaks forth into confession or manifest activity; afterwards *a flower* when God's sanctifying action blooms upon the man who is making progress by making visible the beauty of virtues; finally, *a fruit*, when beatitude satiates the man who has reached his consummation.¹⁷⁶

7. "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one 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).

Explaining to his monks how they should occupy their minds while they are silent - silence being something upon which Bl. Gueric insists very much - he says that they should imitate the Lord and "eat their bread." Two texts inspire this answer: Ezekiel 44:3: "The prince himself shall sit in it, to eat bread before the Lord," and Revelation 3:20: "If anyone will open to me, I will come into him and sup with him and he with me." The prince is Christ, who sits and rests (cf. Ps. 131:14) in Mary's virginal womb eating the Bread which is

¹⁷² Cf. I Annunciation, p. 37.

¹⁷³ Cf. III Annunciation, p. 53.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. I Assumption, p. 167.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Ibid., p. 172.

¹⁷⁶ II Annunciation, p. 43.

Himself, feeding on Himself, "for Christ does not feed on any bread other than himself."¹⁷⁷

If we are wise, such should be our occupation,

which will keep us busy in our silence: to eat the bread of God's Word before the Lord, *preserving like Mary* what is said about Christ and pondering it in our heart (Lk. 2:19).

Then Christ "will take pleasure in eating this bread with us, and he who feeds us will himself be fed in us." Moreover, "the more the bread itself is eaten the more it will abound for eating, since grace is not lessened by use but increased."¹⁷⁸

8. "*In all I sought rest*" (Sir. 24:11). "*Upon whom shall I rest, if not with the humble and the quiet?*" (Is. 66:2; cf. Ps. 131:14)

Our merciful God does not only want us to find our eternal rest in Him, but He also desires both *to give us some rest* while we are still toiling here on earth (cf. Mt. 11:29), *and to find His rest in us* (cf. Sir. 24:11). Many saints have felt strongly the vocation of offering in their hearts some "rest" to Jesus, who finds so much indifference and even hatred in the world. Bl. Gueric proclaims blessed the person "with whom God has found rest if but once, in whose tent he has rested if only for one hour," and he strongly affirms that, "unless he finds with us the rest he is seeking, we shall not find in him the rest we desire."¹⁷⁹

Where does Wisdom find the rest He is seeking in all? "In the humble alone."¹⁸⁰

It is only with little ones that this little one agrees, only in the humble and quiet that he rests (cf. Is. 66:2).¹⁸¹

Our author explains why: Nothing can rest upon the restless; a column cannot stand upon a base that shifts and totters. And only the humble man can be quiet because he possesses a quiet and modest spirit. The godless man, on the other hand, "is like a stormy sea that cannot rest," because "he seethes with anger, is inflamed with avarice, swells with pride, is continually harassing himself with interior conflict and cast down by sedition in his own house."¹⁸²

Therefore, if we wish that "he who loves quiet and bestows it" may rest in us, we have to make it a point to be quiet (1 Thes. 4:11) and to attend to

¹⁷⁷ Cf. III Annunciation, p. 52-53.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. III Assumption, p. 182.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁸¹ V Nativity, p. 65.

¹⁸² Cf. III Assumption, pp. 183-184.

the needy and the poor (cf. Is. 28:12).¹⁸³ In order to find peace, like Simeon, we have to “drive out all other cares and meditate in our heart on Jesus alone, and there lay him to rest when we receive him...”¹⁸⁴ In our quiet we have to be occupied with meditation on eternal quiet, “and for desire of it be found ready for every work.”¹⁸⁵

God found perfect rest only in the humble Mary:

How pleasantly he rested in the tent of her body, how with greater delight he dwelt *in the inner chamber of her heart!*¹⁸⁶

“May the blessed Mother of God... obtain this for us by her prayers from him who rested in the tabernacle (Sir. 24:12) of her body and her heart.”¹⁸⁷

TABLE 5: SYNTHESIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST IN US

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>We</i>
1. The Lord is <i>coming</i> .	1. “We are <i>waiting</i> for the Savior.” (Phil. 3:20) (I Advent).
2. “ <i>The King is coming</i> .”	2. “Let us <i>hasten to meet</i> our Savior.” - <i>With joy in our hearts</i> . (Ant.) (II Advent).
3. “ <i>I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you</i> .” - He <i>pays us</i> a friendly <i>visit</i> . - He <i>comes to conform us</i> to His first coming, and prepare us for His last coming. - The Bridegroom, wonderful and lovable, embraces the Bride and they become one Spirit (2 Cor.3:18), as she is transformed into His image.	3. The voices of the apostles in the Church are “clouds” that raise us up to higher things so we can be with the Lord, provided we are not too lazy and tied up to earth. - This intimate visitation imparts to us the grace of the first coming, and pledges the glory of the second. - It is to be desired with all longing and sought after with every care. (Jn. 14:18) (II Advent).
4. “He is <i>coming</i> .”	4. “ <i>Be prepared</i> now Israel to meet the Lord.” (Amos 4:12) (III Advent).
5. “The Lord <i>comes and knocks</i> .”	5. Be ready <i>to meet</i> the Lord. - <i>So we may not only “open to him,”</i> but may <i>run to meet</i> him, eager and joyful, while he is still far off. (Lk. 12:36) (III Advent).
6. God <i>stands</i> at the gate and <i>knocks</i> . - He <i>shares</i> the delights of the heavenly banquet.	6. If a man <i>opens</i> to Him. (cf. Rev. 3:20) (III Advent).
7. “A <i>knock</i> on the door, and then my true love’s voice: ‘ <i>Let me in, my sister, my spouse</i> ’.”	7. “I rose up <i>to open</i> to my beloved...” (Cant. 5:2-5) (III Advent).

¹⁸³ Cf. III Assumption, pp. 183-184.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. III Purification, pp. 116-117.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. III Assumption, p. 185.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. III Assumption, p. 185.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 184-185.

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>We</i>
8. "I will nourish it." - "I will fill it."	8. "Open your heart to me." - "Open your mouth." (Ps. 80:11) (III Advent).
9. "Loving violence, by which the heavenly kingdom is borne away." - Sometimes He comes before He is called; at others He waits for us <i>to invite</i> Him, or He dissimulates for a long time.	9. He is to be not merely <i>invited</i> but <i>drawn</i> into the guest chamber of our heart by the violence of our prayers and the vehemence of our fervor. - Matchless importunity that <i>wins</i> as guest Christ. - Gentle violence to compel him <i>to enter</i> . - Take care not to <i>invite</i> Him into an unclean and unworthy dwelling. - We have the means to <i>prepare</i> for such a great and powerful guest a throne: a perfect confession of our past life and good will. (Mt. 11:12) (III Advent).
10. The all-powerful Word would <i>flow</i> secretly from the Father's throne .	10. Into you, if the depths of your soul were to keep a quiet silence. (Wis. 18:14f.) (IV Advent).
11. "A voice of one crying in the wilderness." - He anticipates His own <i>advent</i> to us.	11. "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." - By amending our life, directing our footsteps along the narrow way, rectifying our crooked will to the pattern of the Divine Will, reforming even harshness of character. - So that our way can be corrected according to the model of truth, observing his words, following in the footsteps of him who made himself the Way by which we might come to him. (Is. 40:3; Mk. 1:3) (IV Advent).
12. "This is my God, his way is perfect." - By which God may enter his soul. - By which God entered her womb.	12. The pure and pleasing way is chastity. - Perfect must be the chastity of man. - Perfect was the chastity of the Virgin. (Ps. 17:31) (IV Advent).
13. "Unto us a Child is born."	13. Christ <i>in us</i> is a most effective remedy for curing and sweetening our rancor of soul, bitterness of speech, harshness of manners and sadness. (Is. 9:6) (I Nativity).
14. "My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh, that lies between my breasts."	14. Jesus is offered to us, run to him <i>open-handed</i> , throw out your arms and enfold him in your embrace. - Prove your devotion in love and deed. - Take him to yourself without a qualm. - Embrace him lovingly and <i>linger</i> with him always pressed to your heart. (cf. Cant. 1:13).(II Nativity).

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>We</i>
<p>15. He is quite often <i>granted at unexpected moments by the delicious breath of his Spirit.</i> <i>- He demands for it...</i></p>	<p>15. <i>To his devoted friends.</i> <i>- To bring us comfort.</i> <i>- A ready love that bestirs the mind, melts the heart, throws wide the gates of love to make way for grace to enter in abundance.</i> (II Nativity).</p>
<p>16. "<i>In your hearts enthrone Christ as Lord.</i>"</p>	<p>16. <i>[For this purpose] Christ it is whom I desire to give you in my sermons.</i> (1 Pet. 3:15) (V Nativity).</p>
<p>17. "<i>Your name is ointment poured out.</i>"</p> <p>He anointed all over...</p> <p>- So lovable and meek, He <i>introduced</i> himself... - He slipped... - How delightful and health-giving he was. - How utterly ineffable when he entwined himself... - He breathed himself ... - The Anointed became wholly liquid, dissolved into ointment to fire the love... - At the embrace of the Anointment.</p>	<p>17. "My soul was liquefied when my Beloved was poured into me." - The pure and holy breast of the old man who took him into his arms and pressed him to his breast, eager to enclose him in the inmost depths of his heart. - Into the chaste bosom of the devout old man. - Into his inmost parts. - In his bones. - Into his senses. - Of him who embraced him. - The old man's soul was liquefied. (Cant. 1:2; 5:6) (II Purification).</p>
<p>18. This Word...</p>	<p>18. Laid <i>in his bosom</i>, will increase <i>his understanding, sweeten his behavior and temper his whole frame of mind and way of life with a pleasing and wholesome gentleness.</i> (III Purification).</p>
<p>19. <i>In order to receive Him more worthily and more often.</i></p> <p>- Worthy to receive Christ with much grace</p>	<p>19. <i>Happy he who prepares a fitting place for him in the interior of his heart.</i> - <i>Considering the Majesty to be received</i>, thinking with what care and diligence it behooves you <i>prepare</i> him a place. - It is in vain to allege poverty. - (If) thus adorned. (III Purification, p. 115-116).</p>
<p>20. "I will set up my throne in you." - He has made for himself a royal throne. - He is the comforter. - He prepared a throne for himself. - When he fitted a body to himself.</p>	<p>20. "Come my chosen one." - In the Virgin's womb. - In it, of those who grieve. - In her and from her. - In her and from her.</p>

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>We</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It was so made and adapted that it might be for him... - After serving him. - The house of Christ. - He has especially chosen to reside... - Nothing is compared with becoming my throne. - The Child... - The Infinite... - For the Pilgrim ... - Of the Warrior as he prepared for battle in the world... - Of the Victor in heaven... - Of the Bridegroom in the flesh... - Of the King in all his majesty... - Both to receive you, Christ, her King, as Guest, and to <i>hold</i> you as Bridegroom. - Then you made a shrine of grace for yourself... - Now you have set up as a throne of glory... - A seat of wisdom. - God will take his rest. - Giving himself. - There is a special throne of the King. - My throne... - I will place my throne... - I will set up for myself a seat over my kingdom - I will make judgments and listen to prayers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both a house in which to rest and a throne for judgment. - As a tent for fighting and a chair for teaching. - Are the ivory bodies of the saints. - They are Christ's garment and members. - They are a temple of the Holy Spirit. - On her before all others. - [You, Mother of God] whose merits are so much greater [than those of the rest]. - You have sheltered in your womb. - You will embrace in the depths of your soul - You were the resting place. - You were the tent. - You will be a throne. - You were the bridal chamber. - You will be the throne. - The virgin must prudent <i>had adorned</i> her bridal chamber... with virtue. - In her. - Her. - Is called the soul of the just man. And what is a seat of wisdom now will one day be a seat of glory. - On each of [these seats and thrones]. - To all as and how their merits deserve. - Exalted and elevated above the glory of all the rest: Mary. - She will be. - In you. - In you. - From you and through you. <p style="text-align: right;">(Resp. ; Ps. 9:8) (I Annunciation, I Assumption, II Assumption).</p>
21. "Wisdom built himself a house."	21. In Mary and from her. (Prov. 9:1) (I Annunciation).
22. He is at first a bud. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Afterwards a flower. - Finally, a fruit. 	22. In us, when faith breaks forth into confession or manifest activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When God's sanctifying action blooms upon he who is making progress by making visible the beauty of virtues. - When beatitude satiates the man who has reached his consummation. <p style="text-align: right;">(Jer. 23:5; Is. 4:2; Ps.107:2) (II Annunciation).</p>

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>We</i>
23. "The prince himself shall sit..." "To eat bread before the Lord." - Christ will take pleasure in eating this bread. - And he who feeds you will himself be fed.	23. "In it." - With you. - In you. (Ez. 44:3) (III Annunciation).
24. "Behold, I stand at the door and <i>knock</i> . I will <i>come in</i> to him and eat with him, and he with me."	24. "If any one <i>hears</i> my voice and <i>opens</i> the door." (Rev. 3:20) (III Annunciation).
25. "Many are called." - Whom you have chosen... - In your courts. - You will live... - You will reign... - You will set up the throne of your kingdom...	25. "But few are chosen." - Blessed are those. - They shall dwell. - In them. - In them. - In them. - Of them all, Mary is the most blessed. (Mt. 22:14) (I Assumption).
26. "My rest for ever and ever." "Here will I dwell, for I have chosen..." - The Lord has chosen her. - He lived for nine months. - While living... - He poured graces of a unique kind... - Now through his indwelling for all eternity	26. "She shall be." "Her." - To be his dwelling. - In her. - In her. - Into her - In her and with her, her cup of joy overflows with the glory of the beatific vision. (Ps. 131:13-14) (I Assumption).
27. "My beloved Son is"... "My Pleasure..." - Because the Lord has been well pleased. - For the young man shall dwell... - And your son shall dwell...	27. "In her." - You will be called.' - You will no longer be called Forsaken, and your land will no longer be called Desolate.' - With you. - With the virgin. - In you. - And your children shall dwell in you. - "The dwelling place of all of us who rejoice and are glad is in you, holy Mother of God." (Is. 62:4-5; Ps. 86:7) (I Assumption).
28. "I sought rest." - Wisdom sought rest. - But found it - He who created me. - How pleasantly he rested. - How with greater delight he dwelt. - With whom God has found rest if but once.	28. "In all." - In all. - In the humble alone. - Was created from me and found rest in the tent of my body. - In the tent of your body. - In the inner chamber of your heart. - Blessed is he.

<i>Jesus Christ</i>	<i>We</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He has rested if only for one hour... - Unless he finds the rest he is seeking... - In him... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In whose tent. - With us. - We shall not find the rest we desire (Sir. 24:11-12) (III Assumption).
<p>29. "Upon whom shall I rest."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In all I sought rest. - Therefore all the fullness of the godhead - In order that he who loves quiet and bestows it may rest... - From him who rested 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "If not with the humble and the quiet." - But I found it with a humble handmaid. - No one was found like her in the grace of humility. - Rested even in bodily form in this fullness of humility. - In us, make a point of being quiet. - In the tabernacle of her body and her heart, may the Mother of God obtain it for us. (Is. 66:2) (III Assumption).

D. THE FORMATION OF CHRIST IN US

When confronted with the idea that we are all called to be Christ's "mothers," we might have the same reaction that Nicodemus had when Jesus told him that it was necessary to be born anew in order to see the kingdom of God: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" (Jn. 3:3-4). How can we become Jesus' mother? How can we conceive Him like the Blessed Virgin? How can we make Him grow in us?

Bl. Gueric, a faithful son of the Church Fathers, who had brilliantly developed this theme,¹⁸⁸ answers this question very well: *It is Christ's moral form that we conceive*. We conceive Him *by listening* with faith, humility, and obedience to His words and *contemplating* the example of His life on earth. And that which we conceive are *His virtues*, which have to grow in us like limbs; *His form of life*, which we have to imitate more and more, thereby making Christ grow in us. This is "the form" which is important for us now. To see both His bodily form and His Divine form will be our reward in heaven if He has been formed in us now according to His moral form.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Origen, *In Exodum Homilia* 10: PG 12, 369 B – 374 C (entire homily on this theme; cf. for example: 10, 3: PG 12, 371 D – 372 A; 10, 4: 373 B; 373 D); *In Exodum Homilia* 11, 3: PG 12, 372 A – B; *In Exodum* 13, 2: 388 C – 389 C; 13, 3: 389 D – 391 C; *Selecta in Genesim* 41: PG 12, 124 C; St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 2, 26: PL 15, 1561 D – 1562 A; *In Lucam* 10, 24-28; 32: PL 15, 1810 B – 1811 B; 1904 B; *De Isaac et anima* 8, 74: PL 14, 556 C; St. Jerome (†419), *In Galatas* 4, 19: PL 26, 385 B – C; *In Ps. 86, Anecdota Mared.* 3, 2, 104, 23 – 105, 25; St. Augustine, *In Iohannis Evang. Tract.* 14, 4: PL 35, 1504; *Sermo* 192, 2: PL 38, 1012-1013; *De s. virginitate* 5,5: PL 40, 398-399.

We have already inquired into the meaning of the “*middle or moral form*” by going over some of the numerous texts where our author speaks about the power and importance of Christ’s example. We have also gone over some of the texts where he speaks about *Christ’s presence in us*. Now we shall examine the passages where he speaks explicitly about *the formation of Christ in us* and the maternal role which the Church and each of the faithful have in this regard. All this will help us to understand better the importance of our main text: The Blessed Virgin “*desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption.*”

Bl. Guericc uses several biblical texts to establish his doctrine of the formation of Christ in us. In order to call the attention to each text and examine it more closely, we have divided them into several points, even though this division is somewhat artificial, because he usually quotes more than one text in the same sermon, and he even tends to link them together, making clear the meaning of the one with the help of the other.

1. “*Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother*” (Mt. 12:50)

The main text upon which both the Fathers of the Church and Medieval writers like Bl. Guericc based their ideas concerning the spiritual maternity of Christ is Matthew 12:46-50, where Christ Himself, when He was told that His Mother and brethren were outside, asking to speak to Him, explained to His disciples that whoever does the will of His Father in heaven is his brother, and sister, *and mother* (cf. Mt. 12:46-50).

This passage is actually narrated by the three synoptic Gospels (Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21), with slight differences between St. Matthew and St. Mark,¹⁸⁹ and more marked ones in St. Luke’s version. The differences found in the third Gospel are in agreement with what St. Luke alone narrates elsewhere concerning the woman who praised Mary for her maternity of Jesus (Lk. 11:27-28), Mary’s obedience to the word of God (Lk. 1:38), and the fact, repeated twice, that Mary “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19, 51). They serve to make it clear that Mary is precisely the first one to do the will of the Father and deserve Jesus’ words of praise.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ In Matthew 12:49-50 Jesus addresses His “disciples” saying: “ὅστις γὰρ ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς αὐτός μου ἀδελφός καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν;” in Mark 3:34-35 He addresses “those who sat about Him” saying: “ὅς γὰρ ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, οὗτος ἀδελφός μου καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ μήτηρ ἐστίν.”

¹⁹⁰ Luke 8:21 has: “Μήτηρ μου καὶ ἀδελφοί μου οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούοντες καὶ ποιῶντες;” the Greek text is very similar to what we have in Luke 11:28: “Μενοῦν μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσοντες” (the same verb ἀκούω in participle form, and the same expression τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ); and also to what St. Luke affirms about Mary in 2:19 and 51: “ἡ δὲ Μαριάμ πάντα συνετήρει τὰ ῥήματα ταῦτα συμβάλλουσα ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτῆς” (the

Bl. Guericc develops this theme best in his *Second Sermon for the Annunciation*. He starts speaking at some length about the Mystery of the Incarnation, and the Virgin's Mary unique vocation to be "the blessed earth" (Ps. 84:1) that yielded the blessed Fruit (Ps. 84:13; Lk. 1:42) and brought forth a Savior (Is. 45:8);¹⁹¹ the holy and inviolate rock out of which was hewn a holy and inviolable Rock;¹⁹² the door forever closed (Ez. 44:2): *the door of her ear and her heart*, through which the Word entered to become incarnate; and *the closed door of her body*, through which He came forth incarnate.¹⁹³ Then he urges the Blessed Virgin to open with her faith to the Lord God who is calling to her (Cant. 5:2), receive Him in her heart, and conceive Him in her womb.¹⁹⁴ He explains the symbolic meaning of "Nazareth,"¹⁹⁵ and the power of the example of humility and love given to humankind by Christ with the Incarnation.¹⁹⁶ Then comes the text that concerns us.

A few lines before, Bl. Guericc had apologized to his audience because, instead of "providing instruction to guide their behavior," he had perhaps lingered longer than necessary "in wonderment at and praise of" the unspeakable mystery of the Incarnation. But he wants to show that both things go together, and so he offers us an outstanding text that we have already encountered before:

The Virgin's conception has not only a mystical but also a moral sense, what is a mystery for our redemption is also an example for our imitation, so that *we clearly frustrate the grace of the mystery in us if we do not imitate the virtue of the example*.¹⁹⁷

meaning of the two compound verbs used: συντηρέω and διατηρέω is similar to that of φυλάσσω; this last verb probably inspired the Fathers of the Church with the idea of the need to take care of the child within us "lest there is a miscarriage," as we shall see. It is also interesting to note that St. John has a similar idea, although expressed differently. In terms of being His "friends," it is found in Jn. 15:14: "ὅμοις φίλοι μου ἔστε ἐὰν ποιῇτε ἃ ἐγὼ ἐντέλλομαι ὑμῖν." In terms of Christ and the Father dwelling in us as a reward for demonstrating our love for Him by "keeping" His word (the same verb St. Luke used but in simple form: τηρέω), it is found in John 14:23: "Εάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτὸν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλευσόμεθα καὶ μονήν παρ' αὐτῷ ποιησόμεθα."

¹⁹¹ Cf. II Annunciation, pp. 39-40.

¹⁹² Cf. Ibid., pp. 40-41.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Ibid., p. 42. Cf. St. Bernard, "IV Sermon on the Glories of the Virgin Mary," in *St. Bernard's Sermons on the BVM*, trans. by a priest of Mount Melleray (Devon: Augustine Publ. Co., 2nd. ed., 1987), pp. 70-72.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. II Annunciation, pp. 42-43.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 44.

Christ redeemed us by being born of the Virgin Mary, dying on the Cross, and rising on the third day. But He also, as Bl. Guericc repeats very often, left us in every moment of His life on earth an example for us to follow. Thus, it is indispensable both to believe in Him and to follow - with His grace - His example; to meditate on the Divine Mystery and to live it.

Applying this text to what occupies us now, we have to remember that this imitation of the Lord starts with the virginal conception itself in a twofold manner: Just like Christ was born by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, we are all reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit of the virgin Church. Just like *Mary conceived Christ of the Holy Spirit and brought Him to maturity within herself*, thus *we are all called to conceive Christ of the Holy Spirit and bring Him to maturity within us*.

According to Bl. Guericc, it is *Mary herself*, "who conceived God by faith," "*who promises us the same if we have faith*" ("quae enim Deum fide concepit, si fidem habeas idem tibi promittit"), and who affirms that we can conceive Him not only in our hearts, but even in our bodies:

If you will faithfully receive the Word from the mouth of the heavenly messenger you too may conceive the God whom the whole world cannot contain, conceive him however in your heart, not in your body. And yet even in your body, although not by any bodily action or outward form, nonetheless truly in your body, since the Apostles bids us glorify and bear God in our body (1Cor.6:20).¹⁹⁸

The faith we need in order to conceive comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the word of God (Rom. 10:17), which is proclaimed to us by faithful preachers, who take the place of the angel Gabriel when they "treat with us of the fear or the love of God."

Bl. Guericc rests in awe at "the unspeakable condescension of God and at the same time the power of the mystery which passes all understanding." The God 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*." In order to prove this, he quotes Matthew 12:50: "Whoever does the will of my Father is my brother and sister *and mother*."

Thus our Cistercian Abbot exhorts the faithful soul "to open wide its bosom, expand its affections ("expande sinus, dilata affectum"), admit no constraint in its heart (2 Cor.6:12), *conceive him* whom creation cannot contain." He wants us to "open to the Word of God an ear that will listen," just like the Virgin Mary did.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 44-45: "Si Verbum ex ore nuntii coelestis fideliter velis suscipere, Deum quem totus orbis non potest capere possis et ipse concipere, concipere autem corde non corpore; immo et corpore, licet non corporali opere aut specie, tamen plane corpore tuo." (SC 202, p. 138).

As it was in Mary's case, likewise in ours also it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we can conceive Christ. Bl. Gueric has in mind here yet another biblical text: "As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything" (Eccles. 11:5). The Incarnation of the Word in the Virgin Mary and His coming to our soul "to be formed in us" is a profound mystery. However, we know for sure that "opening to the Word of God an ear that will listen" is "*the way to the womb of our heart for the Spirit who brings about conception*" ("*haec est ad uterum cordis via spiritus concipiendi*"). And it is "in such fashion that the bones of Christ, that is the virtues, are built up in the pregnant womb (Eccles. 11:5)," until Christ is fully formed in us (cf. Gal. 4:19), and we attain "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).¹⁹⁹

2. "A Child is born for us, a son is given to us" (Is.9:6)

Although Matthew 12:50 is the main text, Bl. Gueric uses other biblical texts as well in order to reinforce the idea that the Church and the faithful are called to become Christ's "mothers" like the Virgin Mary. One of these is Isaiah 9:6: "A Child is born for us, a son is given to us," which inspired three of his Christmas sermons and is quoted elsewhere too.

It is clear how this text, so important in the Christmas liturgy to this day, agrees with Matthew 12:50. The Child has not only been born of the Virgin Mary *for us*, for *our* sake, for our salvation,²⁰⁰ but *He has also been given to us as a son*, in order that we may become His "mothers" as well. Bl. Gueric speaks at some length about both of these important truths.

The Child, "who as God is born eternally to beatify the angels," is born in time "to renew us," and lavish His mercy upon us,²⁰¹ by blending "God's beatitude and man's misery in making them one in the Mediator, that by dint of the mystery of this unity, in virtue of his resurrection, beatitude may absorb misery, life swallow up death and the whole man pass glorified into fellowship with the divine nature." Being born of the Holy Spirit, "immaculate from her who was immaculate, he washed away our origin's sin and granted us the mystery of a second birth."²⁰² He Who is the Son of God, became the Son of man in order to give to all those who receive Him the power of becoming children of God (cf. Jn. 1:12). Bl. Gueric exclaims:

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 45.

²⁰⁰ Cf. III Nativity, p. 47.

²⁰¹ Cf. I Nativity, p. 37.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 38.

Thank you for the free gift of your gracious birth, God, Son of Man, through which we have access to that grace in which we stand and in which we are confident of attaining glory as the sons of God (Rom. 5:2).²⁰³

This “compassionate Child” was born for us, and He has also been given to us, to be conceived by us and grow in us; for us to take care of Him, and to conform ourselves to Him after the sublime example of the Blessed Virgin. Moreover,

He would have been made the Son of Man in vain had he not also been accepted by the sons of men to whom he was giving the power to become the sons of God (Jn. 1:12).²⁰⁴

Receiving Him, like Mary did, in order for Him to be born *in each one of us*, is indispensable if we do not want His birth to have been in vain for us.

“Everyone has been offered the graces of this birth, but not all have accepted them; for not everyone has faith (2 Thess. 3:2). ‘He came to his own people and they did not accept him’” (Jn. 1:11).²⁰⁵ Bl. Guericc grieves at the fact that this “Son” which is given to us is not accepted by everyone, and he exhorts us ardently saying:

See, Jesus is offered to you: run to him open-handed, throw out your arms and enfold him in your embrace... Take him to yourself without a qualm, *this Son who is given you...*²⁰⁶

It is the Church in the first place for whom this Child has been born of the Virgin Mary, to whom He has been given, and who has joyfully received Him (Is. 35:2), enfolding Him in her embrace. But when she becomes the Mother of this Child given to her, the Church becomes at the same time the mother of a great multitude. It is the Mystery of the Mystical Body of Christ, which makes both the Virgin Mary and the virgin Church the mothers of One and of many at the same time: mothers of the Head and of all the members as well. By becoming the mother of Christ, they become also the mother of all His members.²⁰⁷

To illustrate this important truth, which was so well developed by the Fathers of the Church,²⁰⁸ Bl. Guericc introduces three other well-known texts from the prophet Isaiah: “Give praise then, you who could not bear a child: give full vent to your praise and jubilation, you who could not bring a son to birth, *for through this Son who has been given to you, you who were all alone shall have*

²⁰³ III Nativity, p. 48.

²⁰⁴ II Nativity, p. 42.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.; cf. II Purification, pp. 107-108.

²⁰⁶ II Nativity, p. 43.

²⁰⁷ Cf. Isaac of Stella (†1169), *Sermo 51 In Assumptione Beatae Mariae*: PL 194, 1862 A – 1866 C.

²⁰⁸ Cf. D. Flores, “Virgin Mother of Christ: Mary, the Church, and the Faithful Soul. Patristic and Medieval Testimonies on This Inseparable Trio,” *Marian Studies* 57 (2006): 97-172.

many children" (Is. 54:1)... "Then your heart will throb with wonder" (Is. 60:5), puzzled at the thought: "By whom were these borne and bred for me? For I was barren and childless... who has brought these up for me? I was abandoned and all alone; where were these then?" (Is. 49:21). "O virgin and mother, in utter purity conceiving, *they are your gift from the Son who was given you*," answers our Cistercian Abbot.²⁰⁹

This Son given to the Church is "the Son of God Most High," and his Father has adopted all these new children "for him, to shape them to his pattern, so as to make him the eldest of many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). Although "she was formerly unable even to conceive, the Church has, *in her reception of God's Son*, given birth to many children," and is grateful "for this gift of her Son."²¹⁰ Moreover, "together with this son who is given to us," everything has been granted to us, for "every choicest gift, every perfect present, has come down to us from him (Jas. 1:17) and with him, at one and the same time."²¹¹

Finally, Bl. Gueric specifies that Christ is actually "given to us" in a threefold way: Shaped in flesh at the Incarnation; in the likeness of bread in the Eucharist, and "to his devoted friends at unexpected moments by the delicious breath of his Spirit to bring them comfort."²¹²

3. "Give to the Church the living infant, for she is its mother" (*cf.* 1 Kg.3:27)

Another passage from the Old Testament which Bl. Gueric uses in order to illustrate how the Church has been called to be the mother of Christ is 1 Kings 3:16-28, the story of the judgment which Solomon rendered concerning the rivalry of the two harlots who affirmed to be the mother of the same child. For him, the two women represent the Synagogue and the Church, and Solomon is figure of Christ, who makes the right judgment by giving the Child to the Church:

Give to the Church the living infant, for she is its mother. "Whoever does his will, he is his mother and brother and sister" (Mt. 12:50).²¹³

When she receives the Child, the Church becomes like Mary. That is why our author puts Mary's words in the Church's lips:

Lord Solomon, you call me mother. I profess myself to be a handmaid. "*I am Christ's handmaid; be it done to me according to your word*" (Lk. 1:38).

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

²¹¹ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 44-45.

²¹³ III Nativity, p. 52. Cf. this interpretation in St. Jerome, *Epistula 74 ad Rufinum*: PL 22, 682-685; St. Bernard, *Vig. Nativ. Dom.* 6, 11: PL 183, 115-116.

Then he describes the Church's maternity in terms common to him: "I will show myself a mother by love and anxious care to the best of my ability," and adds: "but I will always be mindful of my condition."²¹⁴

It is only by God's infinite grace that Mary, the Church, and each one of us have been called to become the mother of this Child "who was born for us and was given to us" (Is. 9:6). We must always bear in mind that we were created and redeemed by the same One Who graciously grants us to be called "His mothers." Mary, who always calls herself His "handmaid" (Lk. 1:38-48), is our sublime example in this, too.

4. "*We conceived from the fear of the Lord and gave birth to the spirit of salvation*" (Is.26:17)

Another text which Bl. Guericc presents is Isaiah 26:17: "We conceived from the fear of the Lord and gave birth to the spirit of salvation." It was already used by Origen (†253) and St. Ambrose (†397) to describe the "perfect ones" in the spiritual life, "who conceive and give birth on the same day." According to Origen, these "strong and perfect men" are those who immediately "translate into works the word of faith which they have conceived."²¹⁵ St. Ambrose affirms:

Not all are perfect, not all can say that "they have conceived and given birth to the spirit of salvation," because *not all are like Mary*, so that they can conceive Christ of the Holy Spirit and bring forth the Word.²¹⁶

For us, this passage is important because of the light it gives in order to understand better what our author means by conceiving "the spirit" of Christ. In fact, in his *Second Sermon for the Annunciation*, he proclaims blessed those who can say: "For fear of you, Lord, we have conceived and given birth to the Spirit of Salvation" (Is. 26:17), and he specifies: "*which indeed is no other than the Spirit of the Savior, the Truth of Jesus Christ.*"²¹⁷

In his *Third Sermon for Christmas*, where he presents Solomon's judgment concerning the harlot's child (cf. 1 Kgs. 3:27), our Abbot puts together Isaiah 26:17 and Matthew 12:50 affirming that the name of "mother of Christ" is not restricted to prelates, "although they are charged in a special way with maternal solicitude and devotion," but "is shared by all who do the Lord's will." We

²¹⁴ III Nativity, p. 52.

²¹⁵ Cf. Origen, *In Exodum* 10, 3: PG 12, 371 D - 372 A; *In Cant.* III, 13, 33: PG 13, 176 A -177 B; *In Cant. Prologus* 2,4: PG 13, 66 A-B.

²¹⁶ Cf. St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 10, 24: PL 15, 1810.

²¹⁷ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 45.

are mothers of the Child who has been born for us *and in us*, since “we conceived from fear of the Lord and gave birth to the spirit of salvation.”²¹⁸

5. “*My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you*” (Gal. 4:19)

Together with Matthew 12:50, Galatians 4:19 is certainly the most important text upon which the doctrine of the formation of Christ in us is based, and Bl. Guericc quotes it several times.

The Fathers of the Church had already noticed two things: That the adverb that St. Paul uses: “until” (“μέχρις;” “donec”) shows very well how this formation is an on-going process, and that the verbs used in Luke 11:28, Luke 2:19,51, and John 14:23 (φυλάσσω, συβτηρέω, διατηρέω and τηρέω), which mean: “to watch, guard, protect, keep, defend, preserve, treasure up, hold, or keep watch,” describe very strongly the care that we must take with the Word of God in us so as not to lose it.²¹⁹

Using the analogy of the pregnant woman, they describe the solicitude that we, as mothers of Christ, ought to have to protect the Child within us, and how the Child is in the process of being formed in us.²²⁰

Following Tradition, in his *Third Sermon for Christmas*, for example, Bl. Guericc urges us saying:

Keep watch, then, holy mother, keep watch in your care for the new-born *until Christ is formed in you* (Gal. 4:19) who was born for you (Is. 9:6); for the more tender he is, the more easily he can perish for you, he who never perishes for himself.

And bringing in Isaiah 26:17 together with Ecclesiastes 12:7, he affirms that “if the spirit which is in you is extinguished for you, it returns to God who gave it.”²²¹

Inspired in the story of the two women of 1 Kings 3:16f., Bl. Guericc insists that we should “keep watch” in our care for the baby, remembering how one of

²¹⁸ III Nativity, p. 52. “Fear of God” is an important theme in his sermons; cf. for example: II St. Benedict, pp. 12-13.

²¹⁹ Cf. a few verses before Lk. 11:28, in Lk. 11:21 the use of the same verb φυλάσσω to describe how, when “the strong man, fully armed, *guards* his own palace, his goods are in peace.”

²²⁰ Cf. Origen, who has two interesting and quite long texts on this subject. Explaining Exodus 21:22-25: the image of the two men fighting together who hit a pregnant woman: *In Exodum* 10, 2-4: PG 12, 370 B - 374 C; and explaining Canticle 2:9 and Job 39:1: the image of the Lord assisting at the calving of the stags: *In Cant.* 2: 9, III, 9: PG 13, 172 C; 176 A-C; 177 A-B; also *In Exodum* 13, 3: PG 12, 389 D - 391 C; St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 10, 24: PL 15, 1902 C -1903 A; 10, 27: 1903 B-C; 10, 28: 1903 C - D; 10, 30: 1903 D - 1904 A; St. John Chrysostom, *De Poenitentia* 1,1: PG 49, 279.

²²¹ III Nativity, p. 52.

the women smothered the son that had been given to her while she slept (1 Kg. 3:19). It is the carnal soul that extinguishes the spirit by negligence and sluggishness, and yet continues affirming that her son is alive, and that of the spiritual soul is dead. Applying this text to his experience in "Chapter meetings," he affirms in very strong terms that these carnal souls "strive to make their own the authority of religion, the true substance of which is possessed by the spiritual, so that by depriving them of authority they may introduce customs to suit their own wanton desires... They desire to keep for themselves the honor of holiness and leave to others the toil." Thus, while the rival, out of envy, would rather have the child killed than give it to the true mother, so that neither of them would have it, the true mother is willing to give the child to her to keep him alive, "not begrudging glory to her as long as she possesses virtue."²²²

In *his Second Sermon for the Annunciation* this topic is also developed at some length. As we saw already, Bl. Gueric is clear that it is by the Holy Spirit that we are able to conceive Christ, and that we open the way to Him by opening our ears to God's Word. He also addresses the Spirit, "'who breathe where He will'" (Jn. 3:8), in thanksgiving, because "by his gift he sees not one but countless faithful souls pregnant with that noble offspring." Then he asks Him "to preserve His works, lest anyone should suffer miscarriage and expel, shapeless and dead, the progeny he has conceived of God."

Turning to us, our author asks us also, "blessed mothers of so glorious an issue, to attend to ourselves *until Christ is formed in us.*" He warns us:

to be careful lest any violent blow coming from without should injure the tender fetus, lest we should take into our stomach, that is our mind, anything which might extinguish the spirit we have conceived.

He urges us to spare, "if not ourselves, at least the Son of God in us;" to spare him "not only from evil deeds and utterances but also from harmful thoughts and deadly pleasures which obviously stifle the seed of God" (Mt.13:22). Finally, he asks us:

to guard our heart with all vigilance, for from it life will come forth (Prov.4:23), that is, when the offspring is ready for birth and the life of Christ which is now hidden in our hearts (Col. 3:3) will be made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:11).²²³

Quoting again Isaiah 26:17, he reminds us that "we have conceived the spirit of salvation (Is. 26:18), but we are still in labor, we have not given birth." It is a constant and continuous process. However, "if there is labor in giving birth, great consolation comes from the hope of offspring." Inspired this time in

²²² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

²²³ Cf. *II Annunciation*, p. 45.

John 16:21-22, he says that “a woman in childbirth feels the distress of labor; but when she has borne her child she will not remember the distress any longer, so glad will she be that a man, Christ, has been born into the world.”

For he who is now conceived as God in our spirits, *conforming them to the Spirit of his charity*, will then be born as man in our bodies, conforming them to his glorified body.²²⁴

Bl. Guericc also speaks about the care we should give to the Child within us in other terms, like gift or deposit. For example, in his *Second Sermon for Christmas* he invites us to be “very grateful (Col. 3:15) that he has been given to us, and make every effort that *the gift within us may be brought to full perfection*.”²²⁵ In his *Fifth Sermon for Christmas* he exhorts us “to be patient and *cherish that word implanted in us* which can bring salvation to our souls” (Jas. 1:21).²²⁶ Finally, in his *Third Sermon for the Purification* he prays to Christ with the merits of the Virgin Mary and of Simeon and Anna to intercede for us,

that he may grant us the virtue we lack and watch over what he has granted, so that through his watchful care *we may keep this deposit intact* and when we return it to him may obtain the reward which he gives.²²⁷

6. “Behold, there were twins in her womb” (cf. Gen. 25:22-24)

Our author links the story of the true mother who was ready to give her child to her rival in order to have him live (1 Kgs. 3:26) with the story of Rebecca (Gen. 25:22-24), introducing a parallel between her and the Church.

He starts by saying that there is another way in which Jesus, “conceived and carried in the womb,” should be an example to us. When the Blessed Virgin was pregnant with Him, He was for her a “light and pleasant burden, without being a heavy weight.” Likewise the womb of the Church should not feel us “heavy or troublesome.”²²⁸

But there is a difference between the Church and Mary. Mary was pregnant with Jesus alone, while the Church, like Rebecca, is pregnant with Jacob and Esau (Gen. 25:22-26). In other words, she is pregnant “not only with those who are good and well-behaved but also with those who are ill-tempered and undisciplined” (1 Pet. 2:18). However, these, too, “for the sake of Jesus or perhaps

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 46; cf. Rupert of Deutz, *Commentaria in Evangelium Sancti Iohannis*, XIII, 19, 25-27: CCCM 9, pp. 743-745.

²²⁵ Cf. II Nativity, p. 46.

²²⁶ Cf. V Nativity, p. 67.

²²⁷ II Purification, p. 112; cf. III Purification, p. 119.

²²⁸ Cf. St. John Chrysostom, *Epist. ad Galat. Comment.* IV, 2,19: PG 61, 660; *De Poenitentia* I,1: PG 49, 278-279.

because they possess the principle by which they are grounded in him (Heb. 3:14), the womb of the Church receives and enfolds."

The book of Genesis tells us that when the two infants "struggled and fought in Rebecca's womb she, who previously had prayed to conceive, was grieved that her womb ached with pain, trouble and sorrow (Ps. 106:39), and was almost sorry that she had conceived" (Gen. 25:22). With very strong words Bl. Guericc affirms that,

if it should happen that the bowels of our mother should complain thus of any one of us, I am afraid that it would have been better if that man had not been conceived (Mt. 26:24).

However, "*even for such we are not allowed to despair*. He who even from stones raises up sons to Abraham will not allow it" (Mt. 3:9). Thus, if there are people like that, our author asks Christ "to soften the stony heart in them so that their mother's womb will not ache" and, at the same time,

to comfort their mother's womb, so that she will not grow weary of carrying them, however ill-behaved they may be, *until Christ is formed in them...*²²⁹

Thus the lesson is twofold. On the one hand, all the faithful have to strive to be good and loving children, who are obedient to their mother, the Church, like Jesus was obedient to His Mother Mary (cf. Lk. 2:51). On the other hand, the Church, following the example of the Blessed Virgin, who desires "to form her Only-begotten in *all* the sons by adoption," is called to be a good and patient mother, who does not despair of anyone, but tries to the end to form Christ in *every single person*.

7. "*Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies*" (Cant. 4:5)

The last biblical text we shall examine is found in the *Second Sermon for Saints Peter and Paul*, where Bl. Guericc develops the image of the mother nursing the child, applying to these two great saints a text taken from the Canticle of canticles: "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle..." (Cant. 4:5).

According to our Cistercian Abbot, the "gazelle" represents the Church, and her "two breasts" are St. Peter and St. Paul, both because of "the manifest witness of their work and the records of their teaching," and because to this day we continue drinking "with all pleasure and abundance from the breasts of their consolation," i.e., from the great richness of their doctrine. All the sons of

²²⁹ Cf. III Annunciation, p. 54.

the Church, Gentiles or Jews, have been fostered and continue to be fostered at their breasts.²³⁰

God Himself had promised to the Church that “kings would be her nurses” (Is. 49:23), and that “she would suck the breasts of kings” (Is. 60:16). And these two Apostles themselves used the “nursing” imagery in their letters:

It was to his breasts Peter invited those whom he told: “Like newborn babes desire milk” (1 Pet. 2:2). It was his breasts Paul had offered to those whom he told: “I gave you milk to drink” (1 Cor. 3:2). And again: “I became in your midst like a nursing mother who sits and feeds her children” (1 Thes. 2:7).²³¹

However great Fathers and Doctors of the Church may be, none can be compared to St. Peter and St. Paul, and to the importance of their witness, their mission, and their writings, *which form part of the New Testament*. Bl. Gueric expresses this by saying that, “unless the Church had been nourished with such noble milk it would never have reached this summit of virtue and glory.”²³²

Praising St. Paul, our author extols “the plenitude of spiritual milk he overflowed,” giving his life “for those to whom he had given his breast.” All was milk in him because his thoughts were not concerned with anything carnal, anything of his own, “but only what was useful to others.” It was not simply “that he possessed breasts as that he was all of him a breast,” because:

he abounded with such a wealth of loving kindness that he yearned not only to impart the milk of his spirit in its totality to his children but also to give them his body.²³³

Inspired in another text from the Canticle: “Our sister is small and has no breasts” (Cant. 8:8), Bl. Gueric meditates on the situation of the Church after Christ had founded it before the coming of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost. Before these two breasts, Saints Peter and Paul, were given to the primitive Church, “the Church of the holy and blessed spirits,” “anxious over the Bridegroom’s children, *whether already born or still to be born*, and who would be entrusted with their feeding, complained in heaven saying that the Church ‘was small and had no breasts’ (Cant. 8:8),” that it was “small in numbers, virtue and authority and without the breasts of doctrine.” Christ had gone back to heaven,

leaving the little flock of his disciples, and had not yet sent his Spirit *with which the wombs and the breasts of the saints were to be impregnated*.²³⁴

²³⁰ Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 153.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 154.

²³² Ibid., p. 153.

²³³ Cf. Ibid., p. 154.

²³⁴ Ibid.

Bl. Guericc offers here an extremely interesting text, where he speaks about *Christ's own maternal activity on our behalf* while He was on earth:

The Bridegroom himself in the days of his earthly life *had begotten some children* by the word of truth (Heb. 5:7; Jas. 1:18) and as long as he was with them *he had suckled them* at the breasts of edification and consolation (Is. 66:11).²³⁵

The first Christians were begotten by the word of truth preached by Truth Himself, and were nourished by Christ Himself, whose breasts are better than wine (Cant. 1:1), i.e., better than "the teaching of the Law or than worldly joy."

The Bridegroom also has breasts because he should not be lacking in "any of the duties and titles of loving kindness." Christ is our father because He is our Creator and our Redeemer, bringing us to new life through grace, and He is our authoritative Teacher.

He is *a mother*, too, in the mildness of his affections, and *a nurse* because he is so attentive to the care such a duty imposes.

So He did feed little ones, the first-fruits of His creation (Jas. 1:18), but "there remained a great deal of careful work to be done before they would be brought to perfection (Heb. 7:19) *and Christ be formed in them*" (Gal. 4:19). He "suckled the newly adopted offspring with milk," but when He ascended into heaven, He "weaned them prematurely."²³⁶ He did not make them grow to their full maturity, but left to His Church the mission of fostering them.

Before the coming of the Holy Spirit, the picture was indeed dim. Not even Peter, who had been told by Jesus to "feed his lambs" (Jn. 21:15), "had enough milk in his breasts yet," fear for his life still being greater than his loving care for the souls of his little ones. But when the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven, "*like milk poured out from Christ's own breasts*, Peter was filled with an abundance of milk," and Saul became Paul,

the persecutor became the preacher, the torturer became the mother, the executioner became the nurse, so that... the whole of his blood was changed into the sweetness of milk, his cruelty into loving kindness.

Now, "with these two breasts attached to her body, the Church glories in being not only a fertile mother but also a fortified city" to nourish and protect her children.²³⁷

²³⁵ Ibid., pp. 154-155; cf. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 117,10,16: PL 38, 670-671.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 155; cf. Ascension, p. 104: Christ lovingly "weaned his little ones from the love of the world to place all their hope in him...."

²³⁷ Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 155.

Bl. Guericc desires to give us milk from these breasts. He draws milk for us from the Apostle's breasts "as often as he uses their words to treat of our *spiritual growth*." He exhorts us to love these breasts and desire always their milk (1 Pet. 2:2),

in order that through it we may grow unto salvation *until we show our Savior formed in us, Jesus Christ.*²³⁸

Thus these two pillars of the Church *show us* in a concrete way how the mission of being "mother of Christ" is to be fulfilled, and they themselves *are* at the same time *the incomparable "milk"* with which we should feed ourselves and feed others, in order to have Christ grow in us until He is fully formed in us. Bl. Guericc points out here that in order for Christ to be conceived and grow in us, it is necessary not only to listen to His word and imitate the example of His life on earth, *but also to nourish ourselves with the milk of the great Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, with the milk the Church offers to us in the person of her great saints and doctors*, who throughout the centuries continue feeding us.

8. *Mother Mary, Mother Church, Mother Wisdom, and Mother Grace*

Bl. Guericc calls "mothers" not only the Virgin Mary, the Church or the faithful soul; "wisdom," and in particular "grace" are also considered by him to be "mothers of Christ." We shall examine briefly two texts.

In the first one, taken from his *Fifth Sermon for Christmas*, he affirms that today, also, we may see the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger of the altar. He warns our faith not to be disturbed by the poverty of the covering, "as it beholds the reality of that august body beneath the appearance of other things." In fact, this has always been the case with the Word Incarnate. *His Mother Mary* "wrapped the infant in swaddling clothes." *Our mother grace* "hides from us the reality of the same sacred body by conveying it with certain outward appearances which are in keeping with the economy of salvation." Finally, *mother wisdom* "covers the hiding majesty of the divine Word with riddles and figures, in order that in the one case the simplicity of faith and in the other the exercise of study may accumulate merit for itself unto salvation."²³⁹

In the second one, found in his *Third Sermon for the Purification*, he explains how each of these "mothers" gives us Christ. First of all, recognizing our own weaknesses, we have to come into the temple with Simeon "and receive in

²³⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 159

²³⁹ Cf. V Nativity, p. 66

our hands the child which *His Mother Mary* brings." We do this by "embracing with our affections the Word of God which *mother Church* offers." We have to lay it in our bosom, where "this Word will increase our understanding, sweeten our behavior and temper our whole frame of mind and way of life with a pleasing and wholesome gentleness."²⁴⁰

Comparing the maternal offices of the Church and of grace, our author says that the Church is "*a mother to all those who hear*," but "much more is *grace a mother to those who pray*." In fact,

prayer will give us the Child to embrace provided we come to the temple often and devoutly to pray... For Him whom the Church offers to our ears by its preaching, grace brings into our hearts by its enlightening; and it makes him the more present and the more delightful inasmuch as it conveys naked truth to the understanding.

Comparing again the three "mothers," he states that:

The Truth which is Christ *Mary* gives us to embrace clothed with *flesh*; the *Church*, clothed with *words*, *Grace*, naked in the impouring of the *Spirit*; however, this comes about in various ways, according to the capacity of the soul which receives it or according to the judgment of the mercy which distributes it.²⁴¹

But He is not given to us just to be "there" somehow. He is given to us so that we, too, may become His mothers, actively taking care of Him, making Him grow in us, and giving Him to others as well.

TABLE 6: SYNTHESIS OF THE DOCTRINE OF "FORMING CHRIST IN US"

<i>The faithful Soul</i>	<i>The Church</i>	<i>Christ</i>	<i>Sts. Peter and Paul</i>	<i>The Virgin Mary</i>
1. This name of mother is not restricted to prelates... it is shared by you too who do the Lord's will. Yes, you too are <i>mothers of the Child who has been born for you and in you...</i>	5. May He [Christ] comfort their mother's [the Church's] <i>womb</i> , so that she will not grow weary of carrying them, however ill-behaved they may be, <i>until Christ is formed in them</i> .	6. So those whom he [Christ] fed were little ones, some beginning of his creation (Jas. 1:18), but only a beginning, and there remained a great deal of careful work to be done before they	7. For we draw milk for you from the Apostle's breasts... As you love these breasts so always may you desire their milk (1 Pet. 2:2), in order that through it you may grow unto salvation un-	8. She [Mary] embraces that same Only-begotten of hers in all his members and so can be truly called Mother of all in whom she recognizes her <i>Christ to have been formed</i> , or in whom she

²⁴⁰ Cf. III Purification, p. 114-115.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<i>The faithful Soul</i>	<i>The Church</i>	<i>Christ</i>	<i>Sts. Peter and Paul</i>	<i>The Virgin Mary</i>
Keep watch then, holy mother, keep watch in your care for the new-born child <i>until Christ is formed</i> in you (Gal. 4:19) who was born for you (Is. 9:6). (III Nativity, p. 52).	(III Annunciation, p. 54).	would be brought to perfection <i>and Christ formed in them</i> (Gal. 4:19). (II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 155).	<i>til you show your Savior formed in you, Jesus Christ.</i> (II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 159).	knows <i>he is being formed.</i> (I Assumption, p. 168).
2. So you... in whom the faith that works through love (Gal. 5:6) has been born of the Holy Spirit, preserve it, feed it, nourish it like the little Jesus <i>until there is formed in you the Child who is born for us...</i> (III Nativity, p. 53).			9. <i>If the Servant of Christ</i> by his care and heartfelt tenderness bears his little children again and again <i>until Christ be formed</i> in them (Gal. 4:19), how much more is this true of the very Mother of Christ? (I Assumption, p. 169).	9. If the Servant of Christ by his care and heartfelt tenderness bears his little children again and again <i>until Christ be formed</i> in them (Gal. 4:19), how much more is this true of the very Mother of Christ? (I Assumption, p. 169).
3. You also, <i>blessed mothers</i> of so glorious an issue, attend to yourselves <i>until Christ is formed in you</i> (Gal. 4:19). (II Annunciation, p. 45).				11. For she desires <i>to form her Only-begotten in all her sons by adoption.</i> Although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth (Jas. 1:18) nevertheless she brings them forth every day by desire and loyal care <i>until they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son.</i> (II Nativity of M., p. 200-201).

<i>The faithful Soul</i>	The Church	Christ	Sts. Peter and Paul	The Virgin Mary
<p>4. As that Child in the womb advanced towards birth in a long, deep silence, so does the discipline of silence nourish, <i>form</i> and strengthen a man's spirit, and produce growth...</p> <p>(III Annunciation, p. 52).</p>				
<p>10. And when Christ has been formed in us according to this form, according to the pattern of virtuous life he manifested in his own person, then we will be capable of seeing not only the form which <i>has been formed</i> for us but even that which <i>formed</i> us.</p> <p>(II Nativity of M., p. 199).</p>				
<p>12. ...And as these virtues grow in strength like the limbs and members of our body they bring him to maturity and perfection in us. Then <i>Christ will have been perfectly formed</i> in you (Gal. 4:19) as far as is possible in this life.</p> <p>(II Nativity of M., p. 201).</p>				

V. THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

One of the fundamental truths of our Christian faith is that Christ was conceived of the Blessed Virgin Mary *by the power of the Holy Spirit*. If we are all called to conceive Christ like Mary, does the Holy Spirit also have a role in this conception? Yes! Bl. Gueric is very clear in this regard as well.

1. "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (Joel 2:28)

When talking about the Holy Spirit, the first thing that our Abbot underlines, in very moving terms, is the inexpressible love that God demonstrates to us in giving us His Spirit. In an outstanding Trinitarian text he affirms:

It was not enough for *the Father* to have given *his Son* to redeem his slave, *unless he were to give the Holy Spirit also*, through whom he adopts the slave as his son. *He gave his Son* as the price of redemption; *he gave the Spirit* as the bill of adoption. Finally *he reserves himself* in all his totality as the inheritance of those he has adopted.

God indeed "lavishes Himself on man far beyond his dreams," giving us not only all His resources but even His own person in order to save us.

Just as he did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (Rom. 8:32), so also *he has*, so to speak, *not spared the Holy Spirit*, but has poured him out on all flesh (Joel 2:28) with a liberality of a new and astonishing depth.²⁴²

2. "Unless I go away the Paraclete will not come to you" (Jn. 16:7)

Bl. Gueric mentions several functions of the Holy Spirit on our behalf: "We are created by the Father, redeemed by the Son, *sanctified in the Holy Spirit*."²⁴³ Through the Holy Spirit the Father *adopts us* as His children. We have received "*the Spirit of Sonship*" (Rom. 8:15); we have the Spirit "*as a mark of our adoption and guarantee of our inheritance*" (Eph. 1:14). *The Spirit*, "as a kind of singular imprint *marks off* the vessels of mercy from the vessels of wrath" (Rom. 9:22f.).²⁴⁴

The Holy Spirit is the Giver of grace:

With what liberality the grace of the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the whole world, not only to strengthen the just but even to justify sinners; how everywhere, among all peoples, the Spirit creates a new race of men and thereby renews the face of the earth (Ps. 103:30)!

But the more wondrously the grace of God is made manifest, the more our obstinacy is to be condemned, "whether it be in refusing the grace that is of-

²⁴² Cf. I Pentecost, p. 109.

²⁴³ Rogation Days, p. 101

²⁴⁴ Cf. I Pentecost, pp. 110-111.

ferred or not preserving it after it has been accepted. For to whom is grace not offered?.. Woe to those... who resist the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:51)!²⁴⁵

Our Abbot insists often on the fact that we have to correspond to God's grace.

Industry helps grace and grace helps industry, both co-operating in mutual support, so that man is a docile disciple *and the Spirit is present as a diligent teacher*, distributing his spiritual gifts to each individual according to his will.²⁴⁶

He exhorts his monks, sometimes in quite strong terms, to be very careful not to mock the Spirit that brings grace, or turn grace into wrath against themselves.²⁴⁷ He dwells on different sins or attitudes that "extinguish" the presence of the Spirit in us so that we begin with the Spirit and end up with the flesh: Disdain - a destructive plague and deadly disease, languor, forgetfulness, idleness, lust, anger, impatience...

They come to the divine office and doze, they give themselves to idle and pernicious thoughts, they sit down to read but yawn at the book, they listen to the sermon but find it difficult to pay attention, they change from one pasture to another and they loathe the new as much as they did the old... They were well on the right track; who has beguiled them into changing their course?²⁴⁸

Such examples should make us very cautious, "that the grace of the Holy Spirit which others lose through their negligence we may take good care to preserve with all due diligence to the praise and glory of the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁴⁹

The Holy Spirit is also our Teacher:

For it is the Spirit who bears witness that Christ is truth (1 Jn. 5:6). He is the power which proceeds from him, *the Anointing which teaches everything*, which flows in manifold richness from the Anointed.²⁵⁰

Bl. Gueric has an interesting text where he speaks about the teaching role of both Christ and the Holy Spirit. As long as Christ was with His disciples, "it was for Him to keep them true to the Father's name" (cf. Jn. 17:11). But He explained to them that it was convenient that He should go away, so that the Paraclete could come to them (cf. Jn. 16:7). "Unless you are abandoned by my bodily presence my spiritual visitation will not console you."²⁵¹ And thus:

²⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

²⁴⁶ Cf. III Epiphany, p. 89.

²⁴⁷ Cf. II Easter, pp. 90-91.

²⁴⁸ Cf. I Pentecost, pp. 113-115.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

²⁵⁰ Cf. II Purification, p. 108; I Easter, p. 83.

²⁵¹ II Pentecost, p. 121.

They were to be taught by his presence in the flesh until their understanding had increased sufficiently for them to be capable of receiving *the direction of the Holy Spirit*.²⁵²

*The Holy Spirit exercises "a healing operation in the weak souls whose care he takes upon himself," and the first effect He produces is knowledge of self.*²⁵³ *He comes into the world for judgment* (Jn. 9:39), "so that those who grieve should not grieve and those who laugh should deliver themselves over to eternal and inconsolable mourning." To the man "who accuses and judges himself, the Spirit of consolation comes often." He even "anticipates his own coming," because he comes to accord consolation to those whom *he has taught to mourn*, devout and religious mourning occupying "the first place and being outstanding in usefulness in the Spirit's teaching."²⁵⁴

The Holy Spirit is both "a spiritual anointing and an invisible brilliance," because "he produces both these effects in us by the gift of himself."

Because he is charity, he anoints the affections when *he gives devotion and teaches goodness*. Because he is truth, he enlightens the understanding when *he reveals mysteries and teaches knowledge*.²⁵⁵

*The flesh of Christ is our food for the journey, his Spirit our means of conveyance ...*²⁵⁶

3. *'The Apostles spoke of God's wonders in various tongues' (Acts 2:4, 11)*

Bl. Guericc explains very well the importance of the Holy Spirit by describing what the situation was before and after Pentecost. When Christ rose from the dead, "the Apostles doubted even after seeing his living body;" but "after tasting his life-giving Spirit, with great power they gave testimony of his resurrection" (Acts 4:33). Jesus convinced them:

not so much by showing them his body as by breathing on them his Gift... When he breathed on them saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn. 20:26; Lk. 24:36f.), and when later he sent from heaven the same Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit "who bears witness in the hearts and on the lips of the saints that Christ is the truth (Jn. 14:6), the true resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25).²⁵⁷ Before Pentecost, St. Peter "feared more for his own skin than for the souls of his little ones," and St Paul was a "persecutor, a torturer and an executioner."²⁵⁸ But when Christ sent forth His Holy Spirit, those who received "the outpouring of such a torrent" were filled with riches.

²⁵² Ascension, p. 104.

²⁵³ Cf. II Pentecost, p. 120

²⁵⁴ Cf. Ibid., p. 122; II Advent, p. 24: Christ "anticipates his own advent to us."

²⁵⁵ Cf. SS. Peter and Paul, p. 150.

²⁵⁶ I Easter, p. 85.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Ibid., p. 83.

²⁵⁸ Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 155.

Not only did the goodness of charity overflow from their hearts, but from their lips poured forth a rushing torrent of eloquence, which their enemies could neither resist nor contradict...²⁵⁹

Bl. Guericc extols again "the abounding generosity of God, the unfailing bounty of the divine goodness," because He offers the Holy Spirit to all human-kind, the Apostles on Pentecost receiving the first-fruits of this Spirit.

He opens his treasure, the fount of living water, to men as well as to beasts (Nm. 20:6f.), as if he himself were under an obligation to all, both to the wise and to the foolish (cf. Rom. 1:14). "Everyone who thirsts," he says, "come to the waters" (Is. 55:1).

He continues to invite us now to the joy experienced by His disciples on that day; "it is from this torrent of pleasure (Ps. 35:9) that he desires the souls of his lovers thirsting for his delights to drink."²⁶⁰

4. "O faithful soul, open wide your bosom, expand your affections, admit no constraint in your heart" (cf. 2 Cor. 6:12)

Together with the entire Tradition of the Church, Bl. Guericc teaches that the Virgin Mary conceived Christ *of the Holy Spirit*.²⁶¹ He also teaches that, especially after the Ascension, Mary was more fully enlightened by the Holy Spirit than any other. Moreover, "besides the special first graces she received at the incarnation, she received him again in common with the Apostles."²⁶²

In three of his sermons he also teaches that it is of the Holy Spirit, like Mary, that we conceive Christ.²⁶³

1. One of these is his *Second Sermon for the Annunciation*. In it we find a very important text which we have already seen. Inspired in Isaiah 26:17: "For fear of you, Lord, we have conceived and given birth to the Spirit of Salvation," he wonders at "the unspeakable condescension of God" and the power of the mystery of the Incarnation, whereby "He who created us is created in us" ("qui creavit te creatur in te"). Jesus does not only want to share His Father with us; He also wants us to become His "mothers" like the Virgin Mary ("et quasi parvum esset teipsum habere Patrem, vult etiam te sibi fieri matrem"). In order for this to take place, our Abbot ex-

²⁵⁹ Cf. I Pentecost, pp. 112-113; also I SS. Peter and Paul, p. 150.

²⁶⁰ Cf. I Pentecost, p. 113.

²⁶¹ Cf. IV Purification, pp. 120; 122; I Nativity of Mary, pp. 192-194; 196.

²⁶² Cf. IV Assumption, p. 189.

²⁶³ Cf. this idea in the Fathers also: Origen, *Fragm. in Matth.* 281: GCS, 126: "Every virginal, incorrupt soul, having conceived of the Holy Spirit to engender the will of the Father, is the mother of Christ;" St. Ildefonsus of Toledo (+667), *De virginitate perpetua sanctae Mariae* 12: PL 96, 106.

horts us, in words similar to those of St Paul, to “open wide our bosom, expand our affections, and admit no constraint in our heart” (cf. 2 Cor. 6:12).

Applying to us an idea which the Fathers of the Church very often referred to Mary, he invites us to “conceive him whom *creation cannot contain*.”²⁶⁴ The Fathers of the Church also insisted that Mary conceived “through her ear,” i.e., by listening to the word of God spoken to her by the angel Gabriel.²⁶⁵ In order to conceive Jesus, we have likewise “to open to the Word of God an ear that will listen.”

This is the way to the womb of our heart for the Spirit who brings about conception (“haec est ad uterum cordis via spiritus concipiendi”).²⁶⁶

It is the Holy Spirit who brings about the conception. He can make His way “to the womb of our heart” to effect it if we open our ears and listen to the Word of God. That is how He enters our womb. That is also how “the bones of Christ, that is the virtues, build up in the pregnant womb” (Eccles. 11:5). The Holy Spirit does not form in us the flesh and bones of Christ, as He had done in the Virgin Mary’s womb and with her cooperation. What He forms with our cooperation are Christ’s virtues, that have to grow in us every day more as the bones of a baby grow and become stronger in its mother’s womb.

Bl. Guericc thanks the Holy Spirit, “who breathes where he wills” (Jn. 3:8), because it is “*by his gift*” (“munere tuo,” “par l’effet de ta grâce”) that countless faithful souls *are pregnant with such a noble offspring* (“non unam sed innumeras fidelium animas illo generoso germine gravidas”). It is indeed a gift. It was a gift to the Immaculate Mary that she should become the Mother of the Son of God. And still more it is a gift to us, sinful as we are, that we should also become “mothers” of such a Son. Precisely because it is His gift, and we are so weak and inconstant, Bl. Guericc beseeches the same Holy Spirit

to preserve his works (“custodi opera tua”), lest anyone should suffer miscarriage and expel, shapeless and dead, the progeny he has conceived of God (“ne aliqua illarum abortiat conceptumque divinae sobolis *informem* aut mortuum excutiat”).²⁶⁷

It is significant to note that the Latin word used for “shapeless” is “*informis*,” literally: “formless.” The baby is expelled “formless,” without Christ’s “form” having been “formed” in that person.

²⁶⁴ Cf. for example: St. Proclus of Constantinople (†446), *Oratio de laudibus S. Mariae* I, 1: PG 65, 680 C – 692 A; *Oratio 2 De incarnatione Domini*, 2; 5 : PG 65, 693 B – 704 A; *Oratio 3 De incarnatione Domini* : PG 65, 705 C – 708 B; Basil of Seleucia (†a.468) *Oratio 39 In SS. Deiparae Annuntiationem*, 4-5: PG 85, 425 C – 452 B.

²⁶⁵ Cf. for example St. Ephraem (†373), *Diatessaron* 20, 32: SC121, 366-367; St. Proclus of Constantinople (†446), *Oratio de laudibus S. Mariae* I,1: PG 65, 680 C – 692 A; *Oratio 3 De incarnatione Domini* : PG 65, 705 C – 708 B;

²⁶⁶ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 45.

²⁶⁷ Cf. Ibid; cf. also Origen, *In Exodum Homilia* 10: PG 12, 369 B – 374 C; St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 10, 24: PL 15, 1810 B – C.

How is it that Christ can be conceived and grow in us? In other words, how do we achieve the greatness of the spiritual life to which we have all been called, and which consists in being wholly conformed to Christ? Very few know it.

Mere man with his natural gifts, who does not take in the thoughts of God's Spirit (1 Cor. 2:14), does not know the way of the Spirit and how bones are built up in the womb of a woman with child (Eccles. 11:5).²⁶⁸

Few know "the way of the Spirit," the wonders of Grace, the importance of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit and of the infused virtues and how they work in man, either because they have not been taught or they do not persevere in the spiritual life. This mystery, however, has not been hidden from us, says Bl. Gueric; we can experience it. And one of the things he recommends to achieve this knowledge and experience is to cultivate the discipline of silence.

2. The text in his *Second Sermon for Saints Peter and Paul* is not new to us. We shall only underline a few points. The first is that "becoming mother of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit" is for us another of the great gifts of *Pentecost*. Mary alone, and in a unique way, received this gift at the *Annunciation*. That is why Bl. Gueric says that "the Church of the holy and blessed spirits" was anxious over "the Bridegroom's children, *whether already born or still to be born*" ("sive iam natis sive nascituris"), because Christ, when He ascended into heaven, He had not yet sent His Spirit. And it is with this Spirit that "*the wombs and the breasts of the saints were to be impregnated ...*" ("quo erant fetanda viscera et implenda ubera sanctorum").²⁶⁹ Without the Holy Spirit, no conception and no subsequent nourishing of the child can take place. It is the Spirit who fecundates the womb and who fills the breasts with the milk needed for the growth of the child.

Bl. Gueric describes Pentecost in a very original way:

Behold all at once the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven, *like milk poured out from Christ's own breasts* ("ecce autem repente Spiritu sancto misso de coelo, tamquam lacte de propriis Christi uberibus effuso"), and Peter was filled with an abundance of milk ("impletus est lacte plurimo")... Saul became Paul... the torturer became the mother, the executioner became the nurse... the whole of his blood was changed into the sweetness of milk...²⁷⁰

In a way, we can say that the Holy Spirit is "the milk" with which Christ, now that He has gone back to heaven, continues to feed us and nourish us in order to form Himself in us. *It is the joint action of the "mother," Christ, and the "milk," the Holy Spirit, that brings about our spiritual growth or conformation with*

²⁶⁸ Cf. III Annunciation, p. 52.

²⁶⁹ II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 154: "qui devait féconder les entrailles et remplir de lait les mamelles des saints." (SC 202, p. 383).

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 155.

Christ. The Church, with her breasts filled with this milk, i.e., with her saints filled with the Holy Spirit, advances through the centuries fulfilling her maternal duty of forming Christ in souls. And each faithful soul within the Church is called to this sublime vocation, too. Not without the Holy Spirit, but neither without our cooperation, however imperfect it may be.

III. The Marian Doctrine

After having examined our main text and the development of some important themes that emerged from it in the other sermons of Bl. Gueric of Igny, we shall try now to deepen certain aspects of his Marian doctrine that will help us to understand better how is it that the Blessed Virgin cooperates in the formation of Christ in us.

A. The Form of the Flesh in Which She Gave Him Birth

In his *Second Sermon for the Nativity of Our Lady*, where our main text is found, Bl. Gueric speaks about “*the form of the flesh in which Mary gave him birth*,” and “*the form which has been formed for us*.”²⁷¹ The fact that it was Mary who gave Christ this “*form of the flesh*” by the power of the Holy Spirit and bore Him as the Word made flesh (Jn. 1:14) is also the principal reason why our author says that “*she desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption*.”²⁷² Precisely because she was called by God to cooperate in the formation of the Head, she now cooperates also in the formation of the members of that Head. God asked her to become the Mother of both, Head and members. If Mary now has such an important role in our spiritual life as our Mother, it is because, in the first place, she had a fundamental role in *making possible* this spiritual life by giving birth to the Word Incarnate.

Bl. Gueric is clear in his sermons that it was Mary who gave Christ “*the form of the flesh*” - whether or not he uses the term “*form*” - and he does not fail to underline the importance of her Divine Maternity in God’s Economy of Salvation. We have many examples of this.

1. “*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us*” (Jn. 1:14)

The Son of God was born in time not for Himself, He who “*existed from all eternity and was his own perfect beatitude*,” and not for the angels, but for us human beings in order to redeem us.²⁷³ With His birth “*he has repaired every-*

²⁷¹ II Nativity of Mary, pp. 198-199.

²⁷² II Nativity of Mary, pp. 198-199.

²⁷³ Cf. III Nativity, p. 47.

one's birth." In an "admirable commerce of charity," He has taken our flesh in order to bestow to us His Divinity.²⁷⁴

Seeing our plight, Wisdom "came down into the arena of this world" to fight, "refusing to be overcome by evil but wishing to overcome evil by good" (Rom. 12:21). Although "iniquity abounded, and although men's charity was frozen solid that of God did not grow cold" (Mt. 24:12). Great was the ardor of His charity, which could not be extinguished by many waters (cf. Cant. 8:7). "Although the multitude of sins called for the last judgment already, God sent his Son not to judge the world but that it might be saved through him" (Jn. 3:17).²⁷⁵ Christ's is a "wonderful triumph of grace, a new and perfect type of victory," whereby "the enemy is not hounded to death by strength but converted to love by beauty."²⁷⁶ He saved us "not only by greeting us with the kiss of peace at His Incarnation... but by effecting our salvation through His death on the Cross."²⁷⁷

2. *The angel Gabriel was sent from God... to a virgin* (Lk. 1:26-27)

It was the angel Gabriel who "brought to the Virgin the joyful word concerning the incarnation of the Word," and promised "to the Virgin a Son, to the guilty forgiveness, to prisoners redemption, to captives liberty and to the buried life..."²⁷⁸ Mary, "the Virgin of virgins, full of all graces," had *attracted Him* with her humility and all her virtues. The Bridegroom came "to that highest mount of mountains, mount not only of myrrh and incense but also of all perfumes," taking special pleasure "in the myrrh of chastity and the incense of devotion... This odor attracted the Lord of majesty from on high and invited him to incline the heavens and come down (Cant. 4:10; Ps. 143:5)," so that, "after sending an angel from heaven," He Himself, remaining in the Father's bosom, "*came down into his Mother's womb.*"²⁷⁹ The pure and pleasing way along which the Lord of grace advances is chastity. "Perfect was the chastity of the Virgin *by which he entered her womb.*"²⁸⁰

It was *from Mary* that "the Life of all things took his birth." She is the Virgin "*from whom* the Savior of all men willed to be born in order that he might give to all who were born to death *the power to be reborn to life.*" Based on the Eve-Mary parallel, our author affirms that Mary is

²⁷⁴ Cf. Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷⁵ Cf. IV Nativity, p. 58.

²⁷⁶ II Nativity of Mary, p. 200.

²⁷⁷ Cf. II Advent, p. 8.

²⁷⁸ Cf. I Annunciation, p. 32.

²⁷⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 38.

²⁸⁰ Cf. IV Advent, p. 26.

that *new Mother* who has destroyed the curse brought by the first mother, so that all those who through the fault of the first had been born under the yoke of eternal condemnation might instead, *through her*, inherit a blessing.²⁸¹

3. "Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son" (Is. 7:14)

The entire Tradition of the Church, from St. Justin Martyr (†165) and St. Irenaeus (†202) onwards, based on Matthew 1:22-23, has always affirmed that Isaiah 7:14 is a Messianic prophecy that refers in a literal and immediate sense to *Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary*.²⁸² Bl. Gueric teaches the same truth, insisting, like those two great Fathers of the Church had done, that it is a concrete sign of *God's power, of Jesus' Divinity*, and of our sublime vocation to be "*divinized*" thanks to the Emmanuel, "God with us."

In his *Third Sermon for the Annunciation* he says:

The first sign which the Father and the Son worked... *in witness of their own power and to effect our salvation* was the Virgin's conception.²⁸³

This sign was given by the Lord himself through the prophet Isaiah (7:14) and it was fulfilled at the Annunciation.²⁸⁴ Those who do not believe, are not moved either by this sign of power of the virginal conception, nor by the sign of weakness of His death and burial for three days. But we receive the sign given in Isaiah 7:14 "with full faith and devout veneration,"

recognizing the Son *whom the Virgin conceives* to be for us in the depths of Sheol a sign of liberation and pardon, in the heights above a sign and a hope of exultation and glory. For he who first went down into the lower regions of earth (Eph. 4:9) so that in the blood of his covenant he might set the captives free... is no other than he who has gone up high above all the heavens to fill creation with his presence (Eph. 4:10).²⁸⁵

The Virgin Mother,

conceiving and giving birth *is a sign for us that he who is conceived and brought forth is God and man*. The Son doing the things of God and suffering the things

²⁸¹ Cf. I Nativity of Mary, p. 192.

²⁸² Cf. St. Justin, *Apologia I pro christianos* 33: PG 6, 380 C – 381 C; *Dialogus cum Tryphone Iudaeo* 43; 66; 67; 68; 84: PG 6, 565 C – 569 A; 628 B – 629 A; 629 A – 632 C, spec. 629 A – B; 633 C – 635 A; 673 A – 676 A; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* III, 20, 3; III, 21, 1; III, 21, 3-4: PG 7, 944 B; 946 A; 949 A – 951 A; Tertullian (†220/230), *Aversus Marcionem* 3, 13, 3: PL 2, 338 A – B; St. Basil the Great (†379), *Comm. in Isaiam* 201: PG 30, 464 A – 465 B; *Homilia In Psalmum* 45, 6: PG 29, 425 C; St. Gregory of Nyssa (†392), *Contra Eunomium* 3, 3, 8-9: PG 45, 684 A; St. Ambrose, *Epistula 42 ad Siricium Papam*, 4-5: PL 16, 1125 A – C; St. Jerome (†419), *In Isaiam* 3,7,14: PL 24, 109 C – 112 B; St. John Damascene (†749), *In nativitate B.V.M.*, 4: PG 96, 668; *De fide orthodoxa* IV, 14: PG 94, 1161 A – B.

²⁸³ Cf. III Annunciation, pp. 49-50.

²⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

of man is a sign for us that he raises up to God man for whom he is conceived and brought forth and for whom also he suffers.²⁸⁶

4. "Resting place" and "ivory throne" (cf. Is. 66:2; Ps. 131:14; Sir. 24:11; 1 Kgs. 10:18-20)

As we already saw, Bl. Gueric uses several Scriptural images to describe the ineffable mystery of Christ's presence in us. All of them are fulfilled in the Virgin Mary in a unique way, because in her alone the Word was present both in her heart and her womb. Among the blessed ones whom the Lord has chosen, and in whom "he will live, and reign, and set up the throne of his kingdom," the most blessed is Mary, because she, "of all the elect was in a unique way chosen and singled out, for the Lord had chosen her... *to be his dwelling*" (Ps. 131:13).²⁸⁷ God, who rests with the humble (cf. Is. 66:2), in all sought rest (Sir. 24:11), and found it "with a humble handmaid."

No one was found like her (Sir. 44:20) in the grace of humility, therefore all the fullness of the godhead (Col. 2:9) *rested even in bodily form in this fullness of humility*.²⁸⁸

It was in Mary and from Mary "that Wisdom built himself a house (Prov. 9:1),"²⁸⁹ and "without the intervention of man *he fashioned for himself from a virginal body the flesh of our redemption*."²⁹⁰

God's almighty Word came "from a royal throne (Wis. 18:15) into the Virgin's womb," and in it He made for Himself a royal throne in which He is "the comforter of those who grieve on earth." Coming from his Father's royal throne, He was welcomed "by a royal throne in the virginal court of his queenly mother."

In her and from her he prepared a throne for himself (Ps. 9:8) when *in her and from her he fitted a body to himself* (Heb. 10:5).

[This body] was so made and adapted to all things that it might be for him both a house in which to rest and a throne for judgment, after serving him as a tent for fighting and a chair for teaching...²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 51; cf. I Nativity of Mary, pp. 192-193: "No one who admits that the Child was God, finds any difficulty in believing his Mother remained a Virgin."

²⁸⁷ Cf. I Assumption, p. 167.

²⁸⁸ III Assumption, p. 183: "Non est inventa similis illi in gratia humilitatis, ideo *in plenitudine humilitatis requievit* etiam corporaliter omnis plenitudo divinitatis" (Col. 2:9). (SC 202, p. 452).

²⁸⁹ I Annunciation, p. 34.

²⁹⁰ II Annunciation, p. 39: "Hodie itaque sapientia aedificare sibi coepit domum corporis nostri in utero virginis, et ad aedificandam unitatem Ecclesiae angularem lapidem de monte sine manibus abscondit, dum sine opere humano de corpore virginali carnem sibi nostrae redemptionis reparavit." (SC 202, p. 126).

²⁹¹ Cf. I Annunciation, p. 34.

Making a parallel between the great ivory throne which king Solomon made for Himself (1 Kg. 10:18,20) and Christ's body, our author pronounces blessed indeed "*the womb of ivory from which the Redeemer's flesh of ivory was taken* (Lk. 11:2; Cant. 5:14)," and which is "the price of souls, the wonder of angels, the seat of supreme majesty and the throne of power, the food of immortal life, the medicine of sin, and the restoration of health." How happy is "the chastity of the virginal womb *which provided the material for this work of art*" ("quae huic operi materiam ministravit"), a chastity that is "commended by humility, for the Lord has looked upon the humility of his Handmaid (Lk. 1:48)..." Just as king Solomon:

had nothing among all his treasures and vast wealth so precious that he judged preferable to ivory for that magnificent work of art, the throne of his glory; so did Mary find before the Lord a grace all her own, above that of all of the elect, angels and men, the grace to conceive and bear God's Son and to have a throne of glory *carved from the ivory of her body* by the power of the Most High without the labor of hands.²⁹²

5. *The blessed earth that brings forth the Savior* (cf. Is. 45:8; Ps. 84:1,13)

Another image which Bl. Guericc develops very well, putting together several Scriptural texts (cf. Is. 45:8; Ps. 84:1,13; Lk. 1:28,42; Ps. 77:25), is that of the "blessed earth" which, when the fullness of time has come, "wholly untouched, not dug nor sown, from heaven's dew alone *brings forth a Savior* and provides mortal men with the Bread of angels (Ps. 77:25) and the Food of eternal life."²⁹³ We shall come back to this text shortly.

In his *First Sermon for the Purification* we find yet another image. The Abbot congratulates and praises the "Full of Grace" (Lk. 1:28), who "gave birth to the Loving-Kindness we received," and "gave shape to the candle we accepted." In fact, it was "the Virgin of Virgins" who:

prepared the wax for the touch of the light, when *as the unblemished mother she clothed the unblemishable Word in unblemished flesh*.²⁹⁴

6. *"Kiss me with the kiss of your mouth"* (Cant. 1:1)

As the Fathers of the Church had done, BL Guericc links several times Mary's Divine Maternity with her glorious Assumption, affirming how right it is that She who received the Word of God here on earth, in her heart and her virginal womb, should in turn be received in the glory of heaven by her Son.²⁹⁵ We shall mention just two texts.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 36.

²⁹³ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 40; IV Nativity, pp. 54-55.

²⁹⁴ I Purification, p. 102; cf. p. 101: "Jesus, God's Word, clothed in flesh like a candle-flame clothed in wax..."

²⁹⁵ Cf. I Assumption, p. 171: "Then [at the Incarnation] you made in her a shrine of grace for yourself; but now you have set her up as a throne of glory;" III Assumption, p. 181: "He who

In his *First Sermon for the Assumption*, using the image of the throne, he affirms that, if Christ promised to his disciples that they would sit on thrones in the new world (cf. Mt. 19:28; Rev. 3:21), to His Mother, "whose merits are so much greater than theirs he promised a reward so much the greater": She herself would become His throne. Mary "sheltered the Child in her womb;" now she "will embrace the Infinite in the depths of her soul."

[She was] *the resting place* for the Pilgrim; she will be *the palace* of the Sovereign. She was *the tent* of the Warrior as he prepared for battle in the world; she will be *the throne* of the Victor in heaven. She was *the bridal chamber* of the Bridegroom in the flesh, she will be *the throne* of the King in all his majesty.²⁹⁶

In his *Second Sermon for the Assumption*, inspired in one of St. Bernard's sermons *On the Song of Songs*,²⁹⁷ he interprets Cant. 1:1: "Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth" as the Virgin Mary imploring Christ to grant her, not to kiss His feet like Mary Magdalene (cf. Lk. 7:38,45), "where forgiveness of sin is obtained," because her heart "had nothing to reproach her with in the whole of her life," but to grant her "the joyful grace of the kiss of the mouth." The reason why she feels that it is not overweening to ask "for that mouth again," which as a little child in her arms she was able to kiss as often as she wished, while "he never turned his face away, never repelled his Mother," is that *that mouth* "he, *the Created and the Creator, formed for himself from her.*" Now "he has grown in glory and majesty; but he has not changed at all as far as his natural mildness and goodness are concerned... He will not disdain the Mother whom he chose; he will not reverse her eternal election by a new judgment."²⁹⁸ And so He says to Mary:

You imparted to me, besides other things, what makes me a man; I will impart to you what makes me God. You implored the kiss of my mouth; rather the whole of you will be kissed by the whole of me. I will not press my lips to your lips, but my spirit to your spirit in an everlasting and indissoluble kiss...²⁹⁹

B. "SPIRITUAL MOTHER OF CHRIST"

In his *Second Sermon for the Nativity Our Lady*, Bl. Guericc says that we have to form Christ in us according to "the form of the life he lived in his body," "according to the pattern of virtuous life he manifested in his own person."³⁰⁰

created me, was created from me and found rest in the tent of my body; he will not be able to refuse me the rest of his heaven;" III Assumption, p. 182.

²⁹⁶ Cf. I Annunciation, pp. 170-171.

²⁹⁷ Cf. St. Bernard, *In Cant. Sermo* III: BAC 491, pp. 98-104.

²⁹⁸ II Assumption, p. 177.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³⁰⁰ II Nativity of Mary, p. 199.

And in fact we saw how important Christ's example is for him, and how often he speaks about it and exhorts us to follow it.

The Blessed Virgin Mary, the only one who conceived Him "*in the form of the flesh*," was also called, like all of us, to conceive Him "*in the moral form*," to be His disciple and imitator. In other words, as the Fathers of the Church had already taught so well, in particular St. Augustine (†430), *Mary is not only the physical mother of Christ, but His spiritual mother as well*. Moreover, this "spiritual maternity" is so fundamental that "it was more important for her to carry Christ in her mind than in her womb."³⁰¹ Precisely because she believed in Him and humbly obeyed the Father's will, "conceiving Him first in her mind and then in her womb,"³⁰² she became His physical mother as well as His spiritual mother. Christ's words in Matthew 12:50 were fulfilled by Mary in the first place and to the most perfect degree. She will always be "His first and most perfect disciple,"³⁰³ the one who formed Him most perfectly in herself.

1. "*You shall be called My will is in her*" (Is. 62:4; cf. Mt. 12:50)

Bl. Guericc affirms Mary's spiritual maternity of Christ in terms similar to those of St. Augustine (†430). Mentioning the occasions where Jesus seemed to ignore His Mother: At Cana, when she asked Him for a miracle; and when in the middle of His preaching He was told that His Mother was looking for Him, he explains that on no account are we to take this in the sense that Jesus, who laid down the Fourth Commandment (cf. Ex. 20:12; Mt. 15:4), was spurning His Mother. At Cana, He gave her such an answer to show "that miracles did not come to Him from His Mother;"³⁰⁴ and to the man who interrupted Him, "to demonstrate that spiritual things must come before those of the flesh." He Who desired her beauty from heaven, did not show disgust for His Mother on earth. "Rather he was setting charity in order in us (Cant. 2:4) both by his words and by his example."³⁰⁵ As God the Father's adopted children (Rom. 8:15), it is our duty to do His will always.³⁰⁶

Our author is convinced that with His words: "Whoever does the will of my Father who is in heaven, is my brother, and sister, and mother'" (Mt. 12:50),

Jesus demonstrates that Mary, who was his mother according to the flesh, *is his mother in another way also*, since she too so valued the Father's will that the Father could foretell of her: You shall be called "*My will is in her*" (Is. 62:4).

³⁰¹ Cf. St. Augustine, *In Ioh. Evang. Tract* 10,3: PL 35, 1468; *De s. virginitate* 3,3: PL 40, 397-398; 5,5: 398-399; *Sermo* 65 A, 6: *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976) 44; *Sermo* 72 A, 7: PL 46, 937-938.

³⁰² St. Augustine, *Sermo* 215, 4: PL 38, 1074; cf. *Sermo* 196, 1: PL 38, 1019.

³⁰³ Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus* (2 February 1974) # 35.

³⁰⁴ Cf. St. Augustine, *In Ioh. Evang. Tract.* 8, 9: PL 35, 1455-1456; *Sermo* 218, 10: PL 38, 1086, etc.

³⁰⁵ Cf. IV Assumption, p. 187.

³⁰⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Mary had made her own God's will so perfectly, that in her will He found nothing but His own Will! Therefore, where her Son seemed to ignore her, He was actually honoring her all the more, because the honor of the name of mother is doubled for her: *Mary is both Christ's physical and spiritual mother*:

She now bears in spirit also through inspiration the same Son whom she bore in her womb through incarnation.³⁰⁷

Bl. Guericc proves in many texts how perfectly Jesus' words are fulfilled in Mary. Moreover, *he offers us a very complete picture of Mary's "spirituality," i.e., of the concrete way in which she lived her Christian vocation*, so that she became, in an absolutely unique and perfect way, Christ's Virgin, Mother, Spouse, Collaborator in the Work of Redemption and Disciple, thereby becoming also our greatest model after her Divine Son.³⁰⁸ It would not be possible to bring in and examine in this article all the texts where he speaks about this. A few examples would suffice.

2. "Virgin most prudent"

Mary found before the Lord "a grace all her own, above that of all the elect, angels and men."³⁰⁹

The Divine Majesty has never been seen to lavish his abundance on any soul so completely and so intimately as on her in whom he has especially chosen to reside before all others.³¹⁰

She "conceived God by faith," satisfied with the angel's argument that "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk. 1:37), and "by faith deserved to have all that God had promised her fulfilled."³¹¹ She was ready to do His will and help Him with her prayers if she could.³¹² She opened to Him who was calling on her,³¹³ and if her womb was confined, not so was the breadth of her heart.³¹⁴

The Blessed Virgin is a sublime example of the silence we should maintain if we want to grow in our spiritual life, and of the occupation which should keep us busy in our silence:

To eat the bread of God's Word before the Lord, preserving like Mary what is said about Christ and pondering it in our heart (Lk. 2:19).³¹⁵

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Cf. St. Ambrose, *De virginitate* 2,15: PL 16, 210; St. Augustine, *Sermo* 51, 18: PL 38, 343.

³⁰⁹ I Annunciation, p. 36; cf. IV Assumption, p. 189: "besides the special first graces she received at the incarnation, she received the Holy Spirit in common with the Apostles."

³¹⁰ I Annunciation, p. 170.

³¹¹ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 44; III Annunciation, p. 51.

³¹² III Annunciation, p. 53.

³¹³ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 42.

³¹⁴ Cf. III Annunciation, p. 53.

³¹⁵ Cf. Ibid., pp. 53-54.

Bl. Guericc extols her virginal purity, comparing her with a rock, who for love of integrity was firm in her resolve, solid in her affections, in her feelings wholly without feeling and like a stone against the enticements of sin.³¹⁶

Comparing her to the ivory of Solomon's throne, he admires:

how brilliant is that ivory which pleased the eyes of so great and so rich a king... how cool - it did not know the heat of passion even in conception; how solid -even childbirth did not violate it; how white and at the same time how ruddy -it was filled by the whiteness of eternal light (Wis. 7:26) and the fire of the Holy Spirit with all their plenitude.³¹⁷

Insisting on her holiness, he exclaims:

Nothing, O Son of God, *nothing at all gave you displeasure* in that guest-chamber which your loving kindness so gladly accepted as your own and so lavishly decked out in recompense. *No stain* did you find in it, because no lust was there, but only the purest chastity. *No hint of downfall* did you perceive, because no pride was there, only the deep foundation of humility; *no dark corners there*, because faithlessness had been shut out; *nothing cramped*, because the breadth of charity was there.³¹⁸

The "virgin must prudent" had adorned her bridal chamber "to receive Him as Guest and hold Him as Bridegroom with the manifold beauty and glory of virtue."³¹⁹

3. "When the time came for their purification" (Lk. 2:22)

Our author speaks at some length about the example that Mary gave us when she went to the temple to comply with the Law that prescribed the purification of the mother after childbirth (cf. Lev. 12).³²⁰ He insists that "when Scripture relates the mysteries of our redemption it describes the historical events which were enacted for us in such a way as to indicate *what moral line of action we have to take*."³²¹

Thus, Mary, who had no need to be purified, because she had conceived and given birth as a Virgin, "*rather put before us the inner meaning of purification.*"

³¹⁶ Cf. II Annunciation, pp. 40-41. He also compares her virginal integrity with a rock which gives birth to nothing by its own natural power, and when it does give birth by the power of God's dew is able to remain unopened both when it admits conception and when it brings forth a child.

³¹⁷ I Annunciation, p. 35.

³¹⁸ I Assumption, p. 171.

³¹⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 171

³²⁰ Cf. I Purification, p. 99.

³²¹ IV Purification, p. 120; cf. II Purification, p. 112.

The mother of all purity has seemed to be purified by the law so as to show forth, at one and the same time, *the strength of all-obedient humility* and the truth of the Gospel's purifying power.³²²

When we recall the purification of Blessed Mary, "we are clearly admonished as to our purification, moved by the authority of *such an example*," when we see her, "the most holy of holy women, although she had nothing to purify, consenting none the less to fulfill the commandment of legal purification." She who was chosen to be "the mother of supreme Justice," "fulfilled all justice" (cf. Mt. 3:15), being also like her Son "*a mirror and a pattern of all justice*" ("*speculum quoque sim totius exemplar iustitiae*").³²³

Bringing in the famous parallel with Eve, he says that:

The pride of Eve's daughters is more ready to excuse their failings than to purify them... The mother of prevarication sinned and stubbornly defended herself; *the mother of redemption will not sin and will make humble satisfaction*, so that the sons of men who derive the impulse to sin from the mother of all that is old *may obtain humility at least from the mother of all that is new*.³²⁴

Bl. Guericc exhorts us to follow the example of Mary's purification and be "pure of body and clean of heart, burning with love and radiant with good deeds."³²⁵ Who can be so stubborn as to deny his need for purification? Surely "he cannot be as holy as she, the most holy of all the holy, Mary, who gave birth to the Holy of Holies?"³²⁶

O sons of men, the time for purification has come when *the mother of supreme purity...* has both *brought forth the fountain* and *set the example* by which we must be purified" ("*pariter et fontem edidit et exemplum dedit nobis*").³²⁷

4. "If you find my Beloved, tell him that I languish with love" (Cant. 5:8)

Doing the Will of the Father and following Christ is often synonymous with "taking up the cross," suffering, and dying. Mary also, true disciple of her Divine Son, experienced in her life many hardships and sorrows, indeed sufferings so great that she can rightly be called a "martyr," the greatest after Christ. These sufferings united her indissolubly to Christ and conformed her perfectly to Him.

If her Son, out of His own free will and compassion, had been willing to suffer, she also wanted to suffer with Him.³²⁸

³²² I Purification, p. 100: "Maria tamen non tam purificata fuit, quam mysterium purificationis commendavit, implendo legalem, significando spiritalem." (SC 166, p. 306).

³²³ IV Purification, p. 120.

³²⁴ Ibid., pp. 120-121.

³²⁵ I Purification, p. 99; cf. p. 100; II Purification, p. 112; IV Purification, pp. 125-126

³²⁶ I Purification, p. 100.

³²⁷ IV Purification, p. 121.

³²⁸ Cf. II Assumption, p. 175.

Chastity conferred on her... an incomparable whiteness; and *charity*, or indeed martyrdom, a ruddiness brighter than that of all the elect of old. For her own soul was pierced by a sword (Lk. 2:35), so that the Mother of the supreme Virgin and Martyr might be herself too a virgin and a martyr, white and ruddy just as her Beloved is white and ruddy (Cant. 5:10).³²⁹

Bl. Gueric describes her sufferings in a text where, inspired in Canticle 5:8, he is explaining why we can say that Mary “languished with love.” It is true that she was the Mother of the Son of God, whom she “held for so long in her womb, in her bosom, and on her lap,” that we could wonder “how she could be liable after that to any weakness or languor.” But we must not forget that her Son became true man precisely in her virginal womb, and that “He bore our ills and carried our pains” (Is. 53:4). If He, the Son of God, saw fit to suffer so much, Mary could not wish otherwise for herself than to suffer like Him as much as she could.³³⁰ And indeed, frequent and continual were the causes of her languor. She was practically always languishing after she gave birth to Jesus. *She languished with fear* from His birth until His passion, “since she saw that the life of her Son was always the object of scheming and attempts at murder;” *she languished with sorrow* “throughout the time of the passion until she recovered Him restored to life;” after His Ascension into heaven, *she was tormented* more happily but more pitifully “*with love and desire*,” because she did not possess Him yet in heaven. Bl. Gueric asks Jesus, who is so good, indeed “the fruit of supreme joy,” how He could become for His Mother “the cause of so long a martyrdom, that so many and so sharp swords pierce unceasingly the soul dearest of all to Him?”³³¹ Mary herself, “like any faithful soul, sought rest in all her actions,” but she found it only with her Assumption, after suffering so much on account of her Son throughout her life.³³²

5. “*Mary chose the best part*” (Lk. 10:42)

It is interesting to note that, in Bl. Gueric’s time, the Gospel reading at Holy Mass for the Solemnity of the Assumption was Luke 10:38-42. Thus it was common for Medieval authors to make a parallel between the Blessed Virgin and Jesus’ friends, Martha and Mary, symbols of the active and contemplative lives. That is why our Abbot tells his monks that Jesus’ words to Martha’s sister, Mary: “She has chosen the best part” (Lk. 10:42), “are realized today with greater fullness and holiness in Mary, Mother of the Lord.”

³²⁹ I Annunciation, p. 35; cf. Paschasius Radbert (†865), *De Assumptione Sanctae Mariae Virginis* XIV, 89-90: CCCM 56 C, pp. 149-151; *Sermo* 2: PL 96, 252 A-B.

³³⁰ Cf. II Assumption, pp. 174-175.

³³¹ Ibid., pp. 175-176.

³³² Cf. III Assumption, p. 181.

For today the blessed Virgin Mary chose the best part; or rather she entered to-day into unending possession of what she had chosen long before: to keep close to the Lord, to be inseparable from him, and to enjoy God's Word for all eternity.³³³

According to him, it is not inappropriate to transfer what was said of either sister to the Mother of the Lord, because the similarity is found not only in name but also in deed.³³⁴ Martha welcomed the Lord to the shelter of her roof; the Virgin Mary to the bridal chamber of her womb. Mary sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his word (Lk. 10:39), the Virgin Mary,

carefully tending his humanity, kept all the words which concerned him, pondering them in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51). *She showed herself to be a Martha* in her care for the Child's rearing, in such a way that nonetheless *she fulfilled the part of Mary* in her application to knowledge of the Word... Since she was not careless or remiss in Martha's work, she has not been left without Mary's fruit.³³⁵

When Jesus went around preaching the Gospel, "Mary was his inseparable companion, clinging to his footsteps and hanging upon his words as he taught," so much so that nothing "could deter her from following her Son and Master." That is why:

by the Lord's cross there stood Mary, his Mother (Jn. 19:25). Truly a Mother, who did not abandon her Son even in the face of death. How could she be frightened of death, when her love was as strong as death (cf. Cant. 8:6), or rather stronger than death? Truly she stood by Jesus' cross, when at the same time the pain of the cross crucified her mind and as manifold a sword pierced her own soul as she beheld the body of her Son pierced with wounds...³³⁶

6. "He who sows with a blessing will also reap with a blessing" (2 Cor. 9:6)

The Cross is not the last word, but the glory of heaven. To see Jesus in heaven will be "a vision of wholly ineffable joy and supreme delight for all who love Him (1 Cor. 2:9)," but above all others for His Mother. All her own and without comparison is the glory of the Virgin Mother when she contemplates "God, the King of all, in the diadem of the flesh with which she crowned him (Cant. 3:11);" as she recognizes God "*and adores him in her own body and sees her own body glorified in God.*"³³⁷

St Paul teaches that "he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; and he who sows with a blessing will also reap with a blessing" (2 Cor. 9:6). "No

³³³ IV Assumption, p. 186; cf. pp. 189-190.

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 186.

³³⁵ Cf. Ibid., pp. 189; 190.

³³⁶ Cf. Ibid., pp. 186-187.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

one to be sure *sowed with so generous a blessing* as she who was blessed among women (Lk. 1:42) and *brought forth blessed seed* from her womb.³³⁸

So let Mary reap her blessings; let her who sowed the blessing of all nations (Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Sir.44:25) receive in a way all her own the blessing of all nations.

It is at her Assumption that Mary reaps her blessings,

because that all-embracing blessing which she brought forth from herself has been given back to her spiritually. *Give her*, says the Holy Spirit, *of the Fruit of her womb and let her be filled with him to whom she gave birth.*³³⁹

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

We can speak of a threefold Maternity in Mary: her *physical Maternity of Christ*, whereby she cooperated with the Holy Spirit in the formation of the Son of God as Man; her *spiritual Maternity of Christ*, whereby she was exemplarily docile to the action of the Holy Spirit in her, perfectly conforming her to Christ; and her *spiritual Maternity of all the redeemed*, whereby she cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the formation of Christ the Head in all His members.

After seeing how Bl. Gueric of Igny presented the Virgin Mary's role in God's Economy of Salvation as the one called to *form Christ as Man*, and the one who best *formed Christ in herself*, we shall examine now what he teaches about Mary's active maternal role on behalf of each individual Christian, in other words, how Mary *forms Christ in each one of us*. 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. "*Subject to His Mother*" (cf. Lk. 2:51)

The first one to give us an example of dependence on Mary and obedience to her was Jesus Christ Himself. St Luke implicitly refers to this unspeakable dependence, which the Son of God willed to have on the woman He asked to be His mother on earth, when he relates to us the Annunciation of the angel Gabriel (Lk. 1:26-38), and the words of praise of the unknown woman (Lk. 11:27-28). He explicitly mentions it after narrating the scene of the Child lost and found in the temple: "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, *and was obedient to them*" (Lk. 2:51).

³³⁸ Ibid., pp. 190-191.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 191.

Following Tradition,³⁴⁰ Bl. Guerric also deals with God's ineffable example of humility and His voluntary subjection to His Mother several times. In his *Third Sermon for the Annunciation*, for example, he speaks in very moving terms about Christ's "emptying out" at the Incarnation, comparing it with His death on the Cross. According to him,

of all the human weaknesses or injuries which God deigned to bear for us, the first in time and... [and] the greatest in humility was... that the majesty which knows no bounds allowed itself to *be conceived in the womb* and to *be confined in the womb* for the space of nine months. Where else did he so empty himself out, or when was he seen so completely eclipsed? For so long a time Wisdom says nothing, Power works nothing that can be discerned. The majesty which lies hidden and enclosed is not betrayed by any visible sign. He was not seen so weak on the Cross...

In fact, on the Cross we can see His weakness but at the same time His power, when "he glorified the thief as he died" (Lk. 23:40f.), "with his last breath breathed faith into the centurion" (Lk. 23:47), and "the elements of creation suffered with him" (Mt. 27:45,51).³⁴¹

At the Incarnation "the immense God was made a little one,"³⁴² and no one like Mary contributed to and witnessed to such an extent this "abbreviation of the Word." That is why the Abbot puts in Mary's lips the following words:

I know how weak His body was and subject to how many needs, *although of his own free will*. I know who fed him in the womb, suckled him at my breasts, cherished him in my bosom, and saw the needs not only of his infancy but also of subsequent periods in his life, tending them as far as I could.³⁴³

Wisdom's silence in Mary's womb deeply impresses our author as a proof of His subjection to her and as an example to us.

There is no word on my tongue (Ps. 138:4), the almighty Word seems to confess *while he is subject to his mother* (Lk. 2:51).

Bl. Guerric wants to apply his ear:

to the secret utterances and sacred meaning of this divine silence, learning in the school of the Word if only *for as long as the Word himself was silent under the instruction of his mother*.³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Cf. Origen, *In Lucam* 20, 4-6: PG 13, 1852 C - 1853 A; St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 2, 65: PL 15, 1657 C - 1658 A.

³⁴¹ III Annunciation, p. 51.

³⁴² Cf. V Nativity, p. 65.

³⁴³ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 175.

³⁴⁴ V Nativity, p. 64: "et vel tanto tempore sub silentio discere in schola Verbi, quanto Verbum ipsum sub disciplina, siluit matris;" cf. pp. 65-66. (SC 166, pp. 226-228).

He reminds us that, if we are called to imitate Christ in everything, and if silence is such an important part of our spiritual life, we must not forget that Christ's was, and ours should be, *a silence where we are also "subject to His Mother, and under her instruction."*

Moreover, when the Son of God came down from heaven, He did not only will to "live in Mary for nine months," but "he lived with her *and was subject to her* for so many more years."³⁴⁵

In everything he was content with his mother's poverty *and in everything he was subject to his mother.*³⁴⁶

Thus likewise our subjection to Mary should not be something occasional or just for a specific period of time, but continuous throughout our life and in everything which concerns it.

2. "*When the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy*" (Lk. 1:44)

The Gospels narrate two direct interventions of the Blessed Virgin in the lives of others that produced an effect in the order of grace: Her visit to her kinswoman St. Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39-56), and her intercession before Jesus at Cana (Jn. 2:1-12). St. John's Gospel also relates how Jesus entrusted the beloved disciple to her, and how he, in turn, was likewise entrusted with her care, and received her in his home (Jn. 19:25-27).

Bl. Guericc mentions Cana three times, underlining how Jesus manifested His glory before His disciples by changing the water into wine, and how the Eucharist was prefigured.³⁴⁷ He develops more at length the other two biblical passages.

Concerning the Visitation, he offers a very important text about Mary's maternal action on our behalf - exemplified in St. John the Baptist - affirming that *her voice served as an instrument to transmit to the Forerunner God's grace*. The idea is not his; we find it already in Origen (†253), who underlines the effect of Mary's greeting on St. John and St Elizabeth, and mentions also the spiritual progress that both of them and Zechariah also must have made during those three months that Mary stayed at their home, and they were so close to her and to Christ.³⁴⁸

Bl. Guericc speaks first about Mary's part in *the prophetic vocation of St John*, who "began to prophesy before he could speak, to be conscious of God

³⁴⁵ I Assumption, p. 167.

³⁴⁶ V Nativity, p. 66.

³⁴⁷ Cf. II Epiphany, p. 76; IV Assumption, p. 187.

³⁴⁸ Cf. Origen, *In Iohannem* 6, 49: PG 14, 285 B; *In Lucam* 9, 1: PG 13, 1822 A-C; St. Ambrose, *In Lucam* 2, 29: PL 15, 1643 B-C; 2, 30: 1643 D -1644 A.

before he was conscious of himself." Admiring "the truly incomparable grace and inestimable power of God's might," he affirms that:

As Mary's voice sounds in Elizabeth's ears (Lk. 1:44) it penetrates to John's heart ("*vox Mariae dum auribus Elizabeth insonat ad cor Ioannis penetrat*") where he lies hidden within his mother's womb, *gives life to his spirit and feeds him with salutary joy.*

Although he is still only a baby inside his mother's womb, "*the power of Mary's voice imparts the gift of prophesy in all its fullness*" (*virtus vocis Mariae pleniorum infundit prophetiam*"), so that it seems to be communicated abundantly to the mother from the son's fullness.³⁴⁹

Then our author speaks about Mary's role *in the dispensation of grace*. The angel had greeted her calling her "full of grace" (Lk. 1:28). We can see how truly Mary was full of grace and how:

the God of all grace was clearly in her, when from his liberality grace's generous gift flowed both abundantly and magnificently into his mother in the first place ("*principaliter in matrem*"), *from his mother into John* ("*de matre in Ioannem*"), from John into his parents. Rivers indeed of living water *flowed from Mary's bosom* (cf. Jn. 7:38) ("*flumina prorsus de ventre Mariae fluebant aquae vivae*"). A fountain of life and grace rose from the midst of Paradise to water the trees of Paradise (Gen. 2:6-10).³⁵⁰

Echoing again Origen (†253), he says that:

Near to the fountain was this noble cedar, John, the Bridegroom's cousin and friend (Jn. 3:29), the Lord's Forerunner, baptist and martyr; *and thus watered more copiously he grew to such a height* that no one among those born of woman could be found more lofty than he (Mt. 11:11)... It was fitting, to be sure, that the Grace of God, *brought forth by a woman who was full of grace*, should be proclaimed by the man full of grace ("*dignum... ut gratiam Dei, quam gratia plena profudit, plenus gratiae praedicaret*"); that he should be distinguished by outstanding grace who marked off like a boundary the time of grace from the time of the Law.³⁵¹

3. "*Behold your mother!*" (Jn.19:27)

Since Origen (†253) and St. Ambrose (†397), Tradition has always called attention to the fact that it was precisely St. John, the virgin and beloved disciple, the author of "the first fruits of the Gospels," who received in his home the Virgin Mother of the Lord, given to him by Jesus as His last will and testament, as a proof of His love and concern for His faithful Mother.³⁵² Bl. Gueric

³⁴⁹ I St. John Baptist, p. 124.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 124-125.

³⁵¹ Ibid., p. 125.

³⁵² Cf. Origen, *In Iohannem* 1,4: PG 14, 32; St. Augustine, *In Ioh. Evang. Tract.* 119,1-2: PL 35, 1950-1951.

also echoes these themes, *underlining Mary's part in St. John's spiritual growth and in particular her teaching role concerning the divine mysteries.*

In his *Fourth Sermon for the Assumption*, he speaks first about Jesus' love for her, who "loving her as he did, loved her to the end" (Jn. 13:1), and showed it by dying for her and speaking for her benefit almost his last words, committing to the care of "his beloved heir His mother, whose debtor he knew himself to be too."³⁵³ Then he turns to the effect this had on St John:

The young man's virginity received that much recompense in the meantime: *to make progress by living with such great holiness.*³⁵⁴

Because "he was proved faithful in his service of the inviolate Mother," St John also merited "to have confided to him the mysteries of the Godhead and hidden truths concerning the inviolate Word." The disciple who complained "that his Master had been taken away from him too soon, might rejoice in having found *the Mistress of all truth*" ("magistram totius veritatis"). There is an important reason for this:

Providence also arranged very conveniently that *he who was to write a Gospel should have intimate conferences on each matter with her who knew about them all*, for she had taken note from the beginning of everything that happened to her Son and treasured up all the words that concerned him, pondering them in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51).³⁵⁵

Thus we see how, based on Sacred Scripture, Bl. Gueric affirms that Christ Himself was the first to give us an example of filial dependence on and obedience to Mary, and that she made a concrete contribution to the spiritual lives and the mission of two of the most important figures of the New Testament: the Forerunner of the Messiah and the author of the fourth Gospel.

4. *The Mediator and the Mediatrix*

Besides mentioning Gospel passages where the Virgin Mary's intervention on behalf of men can already be seen in the New Testament, Bl. Gueric also speaks about her intervention *now* in the lives of Christians.

One of the aspects of this intervention is Mary's intercession. This is not a theme which he developed at great length. He usually mentions it at the end of his sermons, when he asks for Mary's intercession.³⁵⁶

³⁵³ IV Assumption, p. 188.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 189: "Idque satis commode provisum, ut scripturus evangelium *familiarius de singulis conferret cum ea quae conscia erat omnium*, quippe quae ab initio omnia Filii sui diligentius observaverat, conservans 'omnia verba' quae de illo erant, 'conferens in corde suo' ." (SC 202, p. 464).

³⁵⁶ Cf. II Purification, p. 112: "Let us pray to him then, *with the merits alike of the Virgin Mary and of Simeon and Anna to intercede for us...*;" III Assumption, p. 185: "May the blessed

One interesting point is that he likes to talk about *the Mediator and the Mediatrix* together. For example, in his *Second Sermon for the Purification*, he describes the "procession" that takes place saying that, on the one hand, there come to the temple "the Child and his mother... the Lord and the Lady... *the Mediator and the Mediatrix...*," and, on the other hand, "the old man and the widow... the servant and the handmaid..."³⁵⁷ In his *First Sermon for the Assumption* he says that:

[the Mother in heaven] can contemplate nothing above herself but her Son alone; the Queen can gaze in wonder at nothing above herself but the King; *the Mediatrix* can venerate nothing above herself *but the Mediator*.

And therefore he asks her, "by her prayers," to "represent, reconcile and commend us to her Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ."³⁵⁸

Inspired in the image of the "throne," which we have already examined, he says that Christ promised to Mary a reward in heaven much greater than that which He promised to his followers: Not only to sit on thrones *but to be His throne*,³⁵⁹ "the special throne of the King, exalted and elevated (Is. 6:1) above the glory of all the rest."³⁶⁰ But Mary is not intended to be an inert throne. In her,

[Christ] will set up for himself a seat over his kingdom, *from her he will make judgments, through her he will listen to prayers*. No one ministered to him more in his lowliness: there is no one he wants to minister to more plentifully in his glory...³⁶¹

5. "From one Grain an abundant harvest of faithful souls"

In Bl. Gueric's *Fourth Sermon for the Nativity* we find a very important text on Mary's Spiritual Maternity.³⁶² His source of inspiration this time is agricultural imagery found in Sacred Scripture (cf. Ps. 84:1,12,13; Is. 45:8; Gen. 3:17, etc.). He is following the Fathers of the Church, who interpret the "fruit," the "righteousness," "truth," and "salvation" that "*the earth*" yields as referring to Christ, the Fruit, Justice, Truth and Salvation that springs forth from Mary, "the virgin earth" from whom He assumes our human nature. St. Irenae-

Mother of God, whose rest we are celebrating, *obtain this for us by her prayers* from him who rested in the tabernacle of her body and heart."

³⁵⁷ II Purification, p. 111.

³⁵⁸ I Assumption, p. 172.

³⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid., pp. 170-171

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 172.

³⁶¹ II Assumption, p. 178.

³⁶² Cf. B.-J. Samain, "Gueric d'Igny: Court Traité sur la Maternité Spirituelle de Marie," *Études Mariales* 55 (1999): 109-120; J. Morson, *Christ the Way. The Christology of Gueric of Igny* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1978 [Cistercian Studies Series, 25]).

us (†202) was one of the first Fathers to compare Mary with the earth, when he said that, just as the first Adam “was moulded from *virgin soil*,” so the new Adam was born of the *Virgin Mary*.³⁶³

Our Cistercian Abbot, combining several texts, affirms in these poetic terms *first of all the Mystery of the Incarnation*. Speaking on the feast of the Annunciation, for example, he exclaims:

Indeed today, Lord, you did bless that earth of yours (Ps. 84:1), blessed among women (Lk. 1:28). Today you did bestow the kindness of the Holy Spirit, so that *our earth might yield the blessed fruit of its womb* (Ps. 84:13; Lk. 1:42) and as the heavens dropped down dew from above *a virginal womb might bring forth a Savior* (Is. 45:8).

Echoing St. Irenaeus and underlining her virginity, he pronounces this earth blessed which,

wholly untouched, not dug nor sown, from heaven's dew alone *brings forth a Savior* and provides mortal men with the Bread of angels (Ps. 77:25) and the Food of eternal life.³⁶⁴

He calls Jesus “the Flower of the flower, the virgin born Son of the Virgin,” and “the fruit of Mary's flowers” (i.e. her virginity) (Sir. 24:23). A Virgin, she gave birth to the Savior “in the same way as the flower of the vine produces its fragrance.”³⁶⁵

But Bl. Guericc does not use the Scriptural image of the earth only to affirm that *Christ is the blessed Fruit of this virgin earth, but also that so are we, His members*. The theological foundation is always the Incarnation. And the two texts that probably inspired him are John 12:24, the grain that must fall on the ground and die in order to give fruit, and Luke 10:2, the plentiful harvest in need of labourers. He says:

*From one grain of corn which a virgin's womb brought forth an abundant harvest of faithful souls has grown all over the world.*³⁶⁶

This assertion is similar from several points of view to our main text and to another one which we shall examine shortly.

1. First of all, we see its strong Christological character: *Mary is our Mother because she is the Mother of Christ*. Mary, the virgin earth, received in her womb only one Grain, but from this one Grain, Christ, an abundant harvest

³⁶³ Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III, 18,7; 21,9-10; 22,1-2: PG 7, 938; 954-958.

³⁶⁴ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 40.

³⁶⁵ Cf. I Nativity M., pp. 197; 196; 194.

³⁶⁶ IV Nativity, pp. 54-55. “De uno grano frumenti, quod germinavit alvus virginis, ubique terrarum pullulante copiosa messe fidelium;” “d'un seul grain de froment éclos dans le sein de la Vierge: c'est la moisson abondante de fidèles proliférant par toute la terre.” The Latin text has “frumenti” and the French translation “wheat;” the English rendered it with “corn.” (SC 166, pp. 204-205).

will spring, so that, by becoming the Mother of the Grain, she becomes the Mother of the harvest as well.

2. The second point is that our author speaks of a harvest of "faithful souls," just as in the main text he speaks of "the sons by adoption," and in the other text of "those in whom Christ has been formed or is being formed." In other words, he seems to be thinking not of everybody in general, but particularly of those who believe in Christ and are trying to follow Him.

3. Finally, the "universal" and "continuous" tone he sets. It is "*all over the world*" ("ubique terrarum") that this abundant harvest of faithful souls has sprung. Moreover, the English translation uses the perfect tense of the verb "to grow" ("has grown"), but the Latin original has the present participle of the verb "pullulo," "to shoot up," "sprout out," indicating a continuous "sprouting" or "proliferating" of this harvest. (The French rendered it "proliférant").

The image of the grain to express Mary's Spiritual Maternity was already used by St. Ambrose (†397), who combines John 12:24 with Canticle 7:2: "Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies," to say that from Mary's virginal womb spring forth both the Grain and the heap of wheat, because that one Grain bears much fruit.³⁶⁷ Other Fathers of the Church and Medieval authors like St Andrew of Crete (†740) and St. Amadeus of Lausanne (†1159) - to mention only two - also use Canticle 7:2 as their inspiring text to affirm Mary's Spiritual Maternity.³⁶⁸

6. "*Mother of All Christians*"³⁶⁹

One of the sermons where Bl. Gueric explains better Mary's Spiritual Maternity is his *First Sermon for the Assumption*. We shall examine it at some length.

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

Inspired in 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, in a most sublime and unique way, His rest and His dwelling.³⁷⁰ 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

³⁶⁷ Cf. St. Ambrose, *De Inst. Virg.* 89,91: PL 16, 327.

³⁶⁸ Cf. St. Andrew of Crete, *In Annuntiationem B. Mariae*: PG 97, 897 A; St. Amadeus of Lausanne, *Homilia VI*: SC 72, p. 164.

³⁶⁹ Part of "6. *Mother of all Christians*" (excluding also the final Table), was published in *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 131-141.

³⁷⁰ Cf. I Assumption, p. 167.

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.³⁷¹

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 off-spring, remains inviolate.”³⁷² 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, because it contains the idea found in our main text of Christ being formed in us:

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 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”).³⁷³

The first thing we notice in this text is a certain similarity with Origen’s (†253) famous passage on Mary’s Spiritual Maternity, found at the beginning of his *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*. The immediate context is Origen’s affirmation that the first fruits of Sacred Scripture are the Gospels, and the first fruits of the Gospels is St John’s Gospel, concerning which he is going to write his commentary. Then he affirms that no one can grasp the meaning of this Gospel unless he has reclined upon Jesus’ breast (like St. John did during the Last Supper), and unless he has received from Jesus Mary, who has become his mother also (like St John received her at the foot of the Cross). In other words, unless he has attained a profound union and great intimacy with Jesus, and has received in his home Jesus’ mother, who has become his mother at the Master’s bidding.³⁷⁴

Why is it necessary to receive Mary as mother in order to understand St John’s Gospel? As we mentioned before, Tradition suggests that it is not a co-

³⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 167-168.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 168.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 168: “Ipsa tamen unica virgo mater, quae se Patris unicum genuisse gloriatur, eumdem unicum suum *in omnibus membris eius amplectitur*; omniumque in quibus Christum suum *formatum agnoscit* vel *formari cognoscit* matrem se vocari non confunditur.” (SC 202, p. 416).

³⁷⁴ Origen, *In Ioh. Com.* I, 4: PG 14, 32: “μηδὲ λαβόνων ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ τὴν Μαρίαν γινομένην καὶ αὐτοῦ μητέρα.”

incidence that such a Gospel as St John's was written by the disciple who received Mary in his home, and had before his eyes "the royal hall of the divine mysteries."³⁷⁵ If, as Bl. Guericc says, St. John had "intimate conferences on each matter with her who knew about them all,"³⁷⁶ if Mary instructed him, then it is clear why we need her now, and how she can help us to understand the Mysteries of her Son, so well described in this Gospel.

The great Alexandrian exegete continues saying that:

Such must become he who wants to be another John. So that, as was the case with John, Jesus can say of him that he is Jesus.

In other words, he who wants to be another John must become Jesus like St. John did, so that Jesus can say of him what he said of St John: that he was Jesus. Origen further explains his thought thus:

If, in the judgment of those who think sanely about her, no one is Son of Mary but Jesus, and Jesus said to his Mother, "Behold your son" and not "Behold, *this too* is your son,"³⁷⁷ it is as if he had said: "Behold, this is Jesus whom you brought forth."³⁷⁸

Since Mary bore only one Son, Jesus, and the text literally says: "Behold *your Son*" (Jn. 19:26), it means that John was able to be called her son and received her in his home³⁷⁹ because he had become another Jesus, and as such Mary could be called his mother. Origen reinforces this by quoting St Paul (Gal. 2:20), and saying:

It can be said of everyone who is perfect that he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him, and since Christ lives in him, it is said of him to Mary: "Behold your son, Christ."³⁸⁰

Returning now to Bl. Guericc's text, we can see how, like Origen, first of all he 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, that form *one Body with Him*. Due to this union between Head and members, 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*."³⁸¹ According to

³⁷⁵ Cf. St. Ambrose, *De Inst. Virg.*

³⁷⁶ IV Assumption, p. 189.

³⁷⁷ Origen, *Ibid.*: "φησὶ δὲ Ἰησοῦς τῇ μητρὶ: Ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου, καὶ οὐχὶ Ἴδε καὶ οὗτος υἱός σου."

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: "Ἴδε οὗτος ἐστὶν Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγέννησας."

³⁷⁹ Literally: "among his own things," "εἰς τὰ ἴδια."

³⁸⁰ Origen, *Ibid.*: "Καὶ γὰρ πᾶς ὁ τετελειωμένος ζῇ οὐκέτι, ἀλλ' ἐν αὐτῷ ζῇ Χριστός καὶ ἐπεὶ ζῇ ἐν αὐτῷ Χριστός, λέγεται περὶ αὐτοῦ τῇ Μαριᾷ Ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου ὁ Χριστός."

³⁸¹ The Latin original 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...." (SC 202, pp. 416-417).

the Fathers of the Church and Medieval authors, being the Mother of Christ, the Head, is the main foundation for Mary's Spiritual Maternity.

Bl. Guericc further specifies 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*." ³⁸²

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, i.e., the perfect ones that 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,³⁸³ and agrees with what Bl. Guericc has in our main text: She is the mother not only of those in whom Christ is already formed, but also of those in whom "*she knows that he is being formed*," of 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 *every day*," 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. Guericc brings in here another argument taken from St. Epiphanius (†403).³⁸⁴ 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."³⁸⁵ 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, be-

³⁸² I Assumption, p. 168: "in quibus Christum suum *formatum* agnoscit vel *formari* cognoscit;" "dans lesquels elle reconnaît son Christ déjà *formé*, ou en *formation*." (Ibid.).

³⁸³ Cf. St. Augustine, *De s. virginitate* 6,6: PL 40,399.

³⁸⁴ St. Epiphanius, *Adv.Haer.* 78,18: PG 42, 727-728 C.

³⁸⁵ "Et quia illa non potuit fideliter interpretari nomen suum, ista implevit mysterium." (SC 202, p. 416).

cause, on account of the fall - of which she was 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, who is her "form" or "type," through the preaching of the Word and the Sacraments, conceives and gives birth to all the members of Christ's Body.³⁸⁶

Our Abbot also develops this theme in his *First Sermon for the Nativity of Mary*, where he gives her three times the title of "*new Mother*" ("*mater nova*") for two reasons: the Eve-Mary parallel and her perpetual Virginity.

1. *Concerning the Eve-Mary parallel*, and in order to justify the celebration of the birthday of the blessed Virgin, he starts by saying that from Mary "the life of all things took his birth," and "the Savior of all men willed to be born in order that he might give to all who were born to death the power to be reborn to life" ("ut natis ad mortem daret ad vitam posse renasci"). Then he calls her "*new Mother*" twice:

Today is the birthday of that *new Mother* ("*mater nova*") who has destroyed the curse brought by the first mother ("*primae matris maledictionem dissolvit*") so that all those who, through the fault of the first woman, had been born under the yoke of eternal condemnation, might instead, *through her*, inherit a blessing ("*ut per istam benedictionem hereditate possideant*"). She is indeed the *new mother* ("*prorsus nova mater*"), *for she has brought new life* to her children already hardening with age ("*quae novitatem attulit filiis inveteratis*"), [and] has healed the defect of both inborn and acquired senility.³⁸⁷

2. *Concerning the perpetual Virginity*, and calling her "*new Mother*" for the third time, he affirms:

Yes indeed. She is *the new Mother*, who by an unheard of miracle has given birth in such a way that, becoming a mother, she has not ceased to be a Virgin. And she has given birth to the Child who created all things, even the Mother herself ("*prorsus nova mater, quae tam novo miraculo parit, ut pariat et virgo sit...*").³⁸⁸

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

Bl. Guericc offers now the fundamental argument that Tradition has always 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.

³⁸⁶ Cf. I Assumption, p. 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 resurgentium." (SC 202, p. 418). St. Ambrose, the first to give her this title, called her "*typus Ecclesiae*": *In Lucam* 2, 7: PL 15, 1635 D -1636 A.

³⁸⁷ Cf. I Nativity of Mary, p. 192.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

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).

St Paul explains very well the reason for this:

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).³⁸⁹

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 conceived and gave birth to Him, she was mystically conceiving and giving birth to all of us as well. That is why St. Leo the Great (†460) affirms that the birthday of Christ is also the birthday of all Christians.³⁹⁰

e) *Showing Herself to Be a Mother*

Thus far Bl. Guericc has explained how Mary became our Mother by giving birth to our Life, Christ; how in her Only-begotten she embraces us, His members, and how she can be truly called the Mother of all in whom she recognizes her Christ to have been formed or be in the process of 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 mystery of 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*”).³⁹¹

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 speaking of “her solicitude and loving affection or loving kindness,” terms which he employs to describe Mary’s, the Church’s and St Paul’s maternal duties.

f) *Christ Left Her Pregnant with Inexhaustible Tenderness*

Mary’s only Son is Jesus. However,

³⁸⁹ I Assumption, p. 169.

³⁹⁰ Cf. St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 26, 2: *PL* 54, 213 B.

³⁹¹ “Se montre aussi leur mère par sa *sollicitude* et par sa *tendre affection*.” (*SC* 202, p. 419).

[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").³⁹²

Although her womb gave birth to only one Child, it continues to be fruitful. Bl. Guericc does not explicitly say that she never ceases to bring forth "other spiritual children," but "*the fruits of her motherly kindness or mercy.*" This is probably so because he believes that *in Christ* Mary has already given birth to us, and so what she brings forth now from her virginal entrails is her motherly love and her 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.³⁹³ 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.³⁹⁴

At the beginning of this sermon, Bl. Guericc 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."³⁹⁵ Here he says that while He was physically present in her womb, He left her "pregnant with" (the French translates: "porteur," "bearer of") "inexhaustible tenderness," that infinite tenderness and love which characterizes Him, and which our author describes so well in many sermons. Thus it is *with the very tenderness of Jesus* - with which He Himself willed to fill her - that Mary loves us.

After being born of her, Christ continues being spiritually present in her, making her "ever fruitful" on our behalf. The Latin original has two present partici-

³⁹² "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 coeur* 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.*" (SC 202, pp. 418-419).

³⁹³ Cf. I Assumption, p. 167.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 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...;" (SC 202, pp. 418-420; 419-421); cf. St. Bernard, *In Assumptione beatae Mariae* I, 2: *Obras Completas de San Bernardo*, Vol. IV. *Sermones litúrgicos* (2º) (Madrid: BAC 473, 1983), p. 339.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

ples: “manens et 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 the Abbot says in another sermon, “being the one-only Mother of Mercy all-High” (“Mater est summae misericordiae”), who “gave birth to Loving-Kindness” (“quae misericordiam genuisti”), in a wonderful way “*she is fruitful with the fruitfulness of the divine mercy*” (“sic excellenter habet ubera uberis misericordiae”).³⁹⁶

g) “A Sealed Well-Spring of Charity” (*Cant. 4:12*)

With an image similar to the one used by St. Bernard in his famous sermon *De Aqueductu*,³⁹⁷ but used in a different way, his disciple Guerric says that,

within the locked garden of Mary’s chastity, He makes the sealed well-spring of charity always abundant in its supply: that well-spring 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.³⁹⁸

Although she is “a locked garden,” i.e. *a Virgin*, the well-spring of charity in her is always abundant; and although this well-spring is sealed, its waters are diverted to the outer world and distributed to us, so that 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.³⁹⁹ In this text, in a way similar to what he did in the sermon we just examined, Bl. Guerric 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.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁶ I Purification, p. 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*.” (SC 166, pp. 312; 313).

³⁹⁷ St Bernard, *In Nativitate beatae Mariae. De aquaeductu*, in J. Leclercq, H.M. Rochais and C.H. Talbot, *Sancti Bernardi Opera, Sermones per annum*, Vol. V (Roma: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968) pp. 275-288; we shall follow the English translation already mentioned: *St. Bernard’s Sermons on the BVM*; the sermon *On the Nativity of Mary* is found on pp. 79-103.

³⁹⁸ I Assumption, p. 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*.” (SC 202, pp. 420; 421).

³⁹⁹ Cf. St Bernard, *On the Nativity of Mary*, p. 89.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. I St. John the Baptist, p. 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.⁴⁰¹ 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?⁴⁰²

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").⁴⁰³

The Incarnation is again the argument for Mary's Spiritual Maternity. While St. Paul becomes our mother by preaching the Word to us now, 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.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. St. Bernard, *On the Nativity of Mary*, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁰² I Assumption, p. 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." (Ibid.).

⁴⁰³ "Et Paulus quidem genuit eos, verbum veritatis quo regenerati sunt praedicando; Maria autem longe *divinius* atque *sanctius* Verbum ipsum generando;" "Paul, d'ailleurs, les a engendrés en leur prêchant la parole de vérité, grâce à laquelle ils ont été régénérés; mais Marie l'a fait bien plus *divinement* et *sainement*, en engendrant la Parole elle-même." (Ibid.). The English translation changes the order of the adverbs "divinius" and "sanctius." Cf. II SS. Peter and Paul, p. 154: "The Bridegroom himself in the days of his early life *had begotten* some children by the word of truth."

Bl. Guericc 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.”⁴⁰⁴

In the table that closes this section, we shall show some interesting similarities between 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. Guericc 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?⁴⁰⁵

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.

According to our author, we live in Mary both now, here on earth, and later in heaven. Applying to her Psalm 90:1,4, Psalm 16:8, and Psalm 86:7, he says:

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 in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31), Bl. Guericc 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.”⁴⁰⁶

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:

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. I Assumption, p. 169: “Laudo quidem in Paulo *praedicationis ministerium*; sed plus miror ac veneror in Maria *generationis mysterium*.”

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 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.”

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 170.

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.⁴⁰⁷

TABLE 7: SYNTHESIS OF MARY'S SPIRITUAL MATERNITY: MARY'S MATERNITY COMPARED WITH THAT OF ST. PAUL:

<i>St. Paul (I Assumption)</i>	Mary (I Assumption)	Mary (II Nativity of M.)	Mary (I Assumption)	Mary (I Assumption)
1. If the servant of Christ	1. How much more this is true of the very Mother of Christ	1. Her Son, whom she bore and brought forth once and for all	1. She who is the only Virgin-Mother, she who glories in having borne the Only-begotten of the Father.	1. The blessed Mother of Christ, by reason of this mystery
2. by his care and heartfelt tenderness (<i>cura et desiderio pietatis</i>)	2.	2. by desire and loyal care (<i>desiderio et cura pietatis</i>)	2.	2. by her care and loving attention (<i>cura et affectu pietatis</i>)
3. bears his little children	3.	3. although they have been brought to birth by the word of truth nevertheless she brings them forth	3. embraces that same Only-begotten of hers in all his members	3. knowing that she is the mother of all Christians, shows herself a mother. - For her heart is not hardened against these children as if they were not her own.
4. again and again	4.	4. every day	4.	4.
5. until Christ <i>be formed</i> in them.	5.	5. for she desires <i>to form</i> her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption, until they reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son.	5. and so can be truly called Mother of all in whom she recognizes her Christ <i>to have been formed</i> , or in whom she knows that <i>he is being formed</i> .	5.
6. Paul	6. But Mary - in a manner far more holy and like to God	6.	6.	6.

⁴⁰⁷ IV Assumption, p. 191.

<i>Eve (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Nativity of M.)</i>
			- She is the new Mother who by an unheard of miracle has given birth in such a way that, becoming a mother, she has not ceased to be a Virgin. And she has given birth to the Child who created all things, even the mother herself.
2.	2.	2.	2.
3. The first Eve is not so much a mother as a step-mother 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 was death. - And as Eve was incapable of fulfilling the vocation of her title... (p. 168).	3. Mary consummated the mystery. - She herself, like the Church of which she is type, is a mother of all who are reborn to life. (p. 168).	3. She in some way brought to rebirth all those who were to live by that Life. - But we were all reborn, since in that seed which holds the power of rebirth we were all already then in him. (1 Cor. 15:22) (p. 169).	3. Today is the birthday of that new mother who has destroyed the curse brought by the first mother so that all those who through the fault of the first have been born under the yoke of eternal condemnation might instead, through her, inherit a blessing. - She is indeed the new Mother for she has brought new life to her children already hardening with age and has healed the defect of both inborn and acquired senility. (p. 192).

TABLE 9: MARY'S MATERNITY COMPARED WITH THAT OF THE CHURCH

<i>Mary (IV Nativity)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>The Church (III Nativity)</i>
1. From one grain of corn which a virgin's womb brought forth	1. Her womb carried a child once only	1. The blessed Fruit of your womb	1. He was born of you once and for all,	1. The judgment of our Solomon, whose word is more penetrating than any two-edged sword... (Ps. 7:10), made no mistake in finding the mother

<i>Mary (IV Nativity)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>Mary (I Assumption)</i>	<i>The Church (III Nativity)</i>
2.	2.	2.	2.	2. And indeed I will show myself a mother by love and anxious care to the best of my ability (amore et sollicitudine). - But I will always be mindful of my condition.
3. An abundant harvest of faithful souls has grown over all the world.	3. Yet it remains ever fruitful, never ceasing to bring forth the fruits of her motherly compassion (fructum pietatis).	3. O holy Mother, he left you pregnant with inexhaustible tenderness.	3. Yet he remains in you always, making you ever fruitful. - Within the locked garden of your chastity he makes the sealed well-spring of charity always abundant in its supply. - That well-spring 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. (p. 169).	3. Give to the Church, he says, the living infant, for she is its mother (1 Kg. 3:16). - Whoever does his will, he is his mother and brother and sister. - You call me mother, I profess myself to be a handmaid. I am Christ's handmaid; be it done to me according to your word (Lk. 1:38). (p. 52).
(p. 54-55).	(p. 169).	(p. 169).		

<i>The Church</i> (II Nativity)	The Church (II Nativity)	The Church (II Nativity)	The Church (II Nativity)	The Church (III Annunciation)
1. The Child is born for us, the Son is given to us (Is. 9:6). - Without doubt it is the Church [praising and] filling the whole wide world with joy and praise at the Son who has been born for her, given to her and whom she enfolds in her embrace. - Give praise, you who would not bear a child... through this Son who has been given to you...	1. From the Son who was given you...	1. For Mary's only Son is the first to be born of all creation and the Father has told him: Ask me for anything; I am ready to give you every nation for your heritage...	1. In her reception of God's Son	1. ...Jesus, conceived and carried in the womb, would be an example to you. As that light and pleasant burden made Mary's womb pregnant without being a heavy weight.
2.	2.	2.	2.	2.
3. You who were all alone shall have many children... - Then your heart will throb with wonder... "By whom were these borne and bred for me?.." (Is. 49:21).	3. O Virgin and mother, in utter purity conceiving, they are your gift...	3. Every nation will become a heritage for your [the Church's] children.	3. although she was formerly unable to conceive, the Church has given birth to many children and grown the stronger thereby.	3. So the womb of the Church should not feel you heavy or troublesome. - The Church is pregnant, not as Mary was, with Jesus alone, but as Rebecca was with Jacob and Esau... - These too, for the sake of Jesus, the womb of the Church receives and enfolds.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.
5.	5. For He is the Son of God Most High, and his Father has adopted them to shape them to his pattern (<i>ut sint conformes imaginis eius</i>), so as to make	5.	5.	5. If it should happen that the bowels of our mother should complain of any one of us... it would have been better if he had not been conceived...

<i>The Church</i> (II Nativity)	The Church (II Nativity)	The Church (II Nativity)	The Church (II Nativity)	The Church (III Annunciation)
	him the eldest of many brothers.			[but] even for such we are not allowed to despair... - May he [Christ] comfort their mother's womb, so that she will not grow weary of carrying them, however ill-behaved they may be, until <i>Christ is formed</i> in them.
(p. 43).	(p. 43).	(p. 44).	(p. 44).	(p. 54).

TABLE 10: MARY'S MATERNITY COMPARED WITH THAT OF CHRIST AND SAINTS PETER AND PAUL

<i>Christ</i> (II SS. Peter and Paul)	<i>SS. Peter and Paul</i> (II SS. Peter and Paul)	<i>SS. Peter and Paul</i> (II SS. Peter and Paul)	<i>SS. Peter and Paul</i> (II SS. Peter and Paul)	<i>SS. Peter and Paul</i> (II SS. Peter and Paul)
1. The Bridegroom himself in the days of his earthly life...	1. Take care not to be unworthy of your parentage. To say nothing of your Father's nobility...	1.	1. But when he had left them the celestial spirits, although glad at the return of the Only-begotten, were anxious over the newly adopted offspring.	1. Behold all at once the Holy Spirit was sent from heaven, like milk poured out from Christ's own breasts...
2. In the mildness of his affections (affectu clementiae)	2.	2. (Paul) abounded with such a wealth of loving kindness (misericordia)	[Peter's] loving care (pietas) will soon dry-up.	2.
3. He is a mother, too... - And a nurse because he is so attentive to the care such a duty imposes.	3. the mother who bore you is high-born... - Your mother is the Bride to whom these words (Cant. 4:5) are spoken...	3. that he yearned not only to impart the milk of his spirit in its totality to his children but also to give them his body.	3. since he still fears more for his own skin than for the souls of his little ones.	3. Saul became Paul... the torturer became the mother, the executioner became the nurse.
4.	4.	4.	4.	4.

<i>Christ (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>
5. So those whom he fed were little ones, some beginning of his creation, but only a beginning, and there remained a great deal of careful work to be done before they would be brought to perfection and <i>Christ be formed in them.</i>	5.	5.	5.	5.
6.	6.	6. These two breasts of the Church are Peter and Paul.	6.	6.
7. had begotten some children	7.	7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.	8.	8.
9. by the word of truth.	9.	9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.	10.	10.
11.	11.	11.	11.	11.
12. ...and as long as he was with them he had suckled them at the breasts of edification and consolation. - The Bridegroom himself has breasts better than wine (Cant. 1:1), i.e., than the teaching of the Law or than worldly joy. -The Bridegroom has breasts lest he should be lacking any one of all the duties and titles of	12. noble are the breasts at which you suckled. - whose breasts are praised by the Bridegroom's voice.	12. We are given to drink with all pleasure and abundance from the breasts of their consolation. - At what other breasts have the sons of the Church, whether Gentiles or Jews, been fostered? - [God had promised this: Is. 49:23; 60:16]. - Unless [the Church] had been nourished with such noble milk it would never have reached	12. Not even [Peter] has enough milk in his breasts yet.	12. Peter was filled with an abundance of milk. - The whole of [Paul's] blood was changed into the sweetness of milk, his cruelty into loving kindness.

<i>Christ (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>SS. Peter and Paul (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>
loving kindness. He suckled them with milk, but he weaned them pre- maturely. (p. 154-155).		this summit of vir- tue and glory. - [To them Peter and Paul invited us: 1 Pet. 2:2; 1 Cor. 3:2; 1 Thes. 2:7]. - It was not so much that [Paul] possessed breasts as that he was all of him a breast. (p. 153-154).		
	(p. 153).		(p. 155).	(p. 155).

TABLE 11: MARY'S MATERNITY COMPARED WITH THAT OF THE CHURCH, THE SAINTS, PRELATES AND US

<i>The Church (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>The Saints (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>Prelates and Us (III Nativity)</i>
1.	1. For when Christ went back to heaven, leaving the little flock of his disciples, and had not yet sent his Spirit...	1.
2.	2.	2. Although they are charged in a special way with maternal solicitude and devotion (<i>cura maternae sollicitudinis et pietatis</i>).
3. The Church glories in being not only a fertile mother but also a fortified city (Jer. 1:18).	3. With which the wombs and the breasts of the saints were to be impregnated	3. The name of mother is not restricted to prelates. - It is shared by you, too, who do the Lord's will. - You too are mother of the Child who has been born for you and in you... since you conceived from the fear of the Lord and gave birth to the spirit of salvation.
4.	4. That Church in heaven was... anxious over the Bridegroom's children, whether <i>already born or still to be born</i> .	4.

<i>The Church (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>The Saints (II SS. Peter and Paul)</i>	<i>Prelates and Us (III Nativity)</i>
5. We draw milk for you from the Apostles' breasts as often as we use their words to treat of your <i>spiritual growth</i> . - Through [their milk] may you grow unto salvation until you show <i>your Savior formed in you</i> .	5.	5. Keep watch, then, holy mother... in your care for the newborn Child <i>until Christ is formed in you</i> who was born for you.
6. With these two breasts [Peter and Paul] attached to her body...	6. Before the primitive Church received these two breasts, Peter and Paul, on earth	6.
7.	7.	7.
8.	8.	8.
9.	9.	9.
10.	10.	10.
11.	11.	11.
12. As you love these breasts so always may you desire their milk. (p. 155; 159).	12. The Church of the holy and blessed spirits complained in heaven: "Our sister is small and has no breasts" (Cant. 8:8). - Who would be entrusted with the feeding of them? - They saw that this Church was small in numbers, virtue and authority and without the breasts of doctrine. (p. 154).	12. (p. 52).

TABLE 12: MOTHER MARY, MOTHER GRACE, MOTHER WISDOM AND MOTHER CHURCH

<i>Mother Mary</i>	<i>Mother Grace</i>	<i>Mother Wisdom</i>	<i>Mother Church</i>
1. As his mother Mary wrapped the infant in swaddling clothes . (Lk. 2:7) (V Nativity, p. 66).	1. So our <i>mother Grace</i> hides from us the reality of the same sacred body by conveying it with certain outward appearances which are in keeping with the economy of salvation. (V Nativity, p. 66).	1. So too mother Wisdom covers the hiding majesty of the divine Word with riddles and figures, in order that in the one case the simplicity of faith and in the other the exercise of study may accumulate merit for itself unto salvation. (V Nativity, p. 66).	1.
2. If anyone knows himself to be imperfect in understanding or unseasoned in his behavior let	2.	2.	2. That is, let him embrace with his affections the Word of God which <i>mother Church</i> offers.

<i>Mother Mary</i>	<i>Mother Grace</i>	<i>Mother Wisdom</i>	<i>Mother Church</i>
him come into the temple with Simeon and receive in his hands the Child which his <i>mother Mary</i> brings.			
3.	3. But much more <i>is grace a mother</i> to those who pray. Prayer will give you the Child to embrace provided you come to the temple often and devoutly to pray.	3.	3. However, not only <i>is the Church a mother</i> to those who hear...
4.	4. Grace brings into our hearts by its enlightening and it makes him the more present and the more delightfull inasmuch as it conveys naked truth to the understanding.	4.	4. For him whom the Church offers to our ears by its preaching...
5. The Truth which is Christ <i>Mary</i> gives us to embrace clothed with flesh.	5. <i>Grace</i> , naked in the impouring of the Spirit.	5.	5. <i>The Church</i> , clothed with words.
6. (III Purification, pp. 114-115).	6. However, this comes about in various ways, according to the capacity of the soul which receives it or the judgment of mercy which distributes it. (III Purification, p. 115).	6.	6. (III Purification, p. 115).

Conclusion

Having come to the end of our research, we would like to draw the following conclusions.⁴⁰⁸

1. *The Way Mary Exercises her Spiritual Maternity*

1. Bl. Gueric of Igny offers to us in his *Second Sermon for the Nativity of Our Lady* an extraordinarily important affirmation concerning Mary's Spiritual Maternity and her consequent *active role* in our spiritual life.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁸ Some of these conclusions were published in *Marian Studies* 52 (2001): 141-147.

⁴⁰⁹ II Nativity of Mary, pp. 200-201.

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

Mary:

Wishes to introduce or make known the Beloved	<i>Insinuare cupiens dilectum</i>
She describes Him	<i>Describit eum</i>
She desires to form the Only-begotten	<i>Cupit formare Unigenitum</i>
She brings them forth every day	<i>Parturit eos cotidie</i>

3. Mary wishes to introduce the Beloved of her womb, the Beloved of her desires into the affections of all. She desires that her Son and Spouse may be in us and dwell within us. Bl. Guericc speaks quite often about the presence of Christ in us. Thus it is significant that in this text he affirms that *Mary wants to contribute in some way for this to take place by "describing" Him to us.*

4. Mary wishes to make her Beloved known to us, and so she describes him according to the spirit, according to His "moral form," which is "the form of the life he lived in his body in order to convey his message (*"ad informationem eorum qui erant credituri"*); "according to the pattern of virtuous life he manifested in his own person,"⁴¹⁰ so that, attracted by the beauty of His virtues, in particular His "truth of speech, meekness of behavior, and lightness of judgment," we are "converted to love by beauty," and go after Him. He lived this form of life precisely in order to "inform" us, i.e., in order to form us after His own example, in order for us to conform ourselves completely to Him under the action of the Holy Spirit in us.

That is why Mary wants to introduce Him or make Him known to our affections. It is not simply a matter of acquiring the knowledge of what He did and taught, of knowing "the more beautiful portrait of Christ" which the Gospels offer to us, "the form of the life and doctrine which he has passed on by his teaching and shown in his own person by his example." This knowledge has to reach our "affections," our heart. We have to become in this present life *"lovers of the form which is proposed as our example."* The knowledge of Christ has to move us to love Him, and love has to make us imitate Him. By imitating *His form of life, He is formed in us* precisely according to that *"moral form."*⁴¹¹

2. Knowledge and Love of Christ's Example in order to Be Conformed to Him

1. The work of forming Christ in us comprises God's grace and our "affectionate" - so to speak - knowledge of Christ's words and deeds, with our effort to imitate Him every day, conforming ourselves ever more to Him under the constant action of the Holy Spirit in us.

⁴¹⁰ II Nativity of Mary, p. 199.

⁴¹¹ Cf. II Nativity of Mary, pp. 199; 200.

2. Bl. Guericc's sermons are full of concrete examples taken from Christ's life on earth with which he wants to elicit our love for Him and our desire to conform ourselves totally to Him. He insists on the historicity of the Gospel narratives, and on the intimate relationship between "mystery" and "example," so that:

*what is a mystery for our Redemption is also an example for our imitation, and we clearly frustrate the grace of the mystery in us if we do not imitate the virtue of the example.*⁴¹²

3. His words remind us of the teachings of Bl. Pope John Paul II (†2005) in his wonderful Apostolic Letter on the Holy Rosary *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (October 16, 2002):

The contemplation of Christ has an *incomparable model* in Mary. In a unique way the face of the Son belongs to Mary. *It was in her womb that Christ was formed*, receiving from her a human resemblance which points to an even greater spiritual closeness. No one has ever devoted himself to the contemplation of the face of Christ as faithfully as Mary...⁴¹³

...If the Liturgy, as the activity of Christ and the Church, *is a saving action par excellence*, the Rosary too, as a "meditation" with Mary on Christ, *is a salutary contemplation. By immersing us in the mysteries of the Redeemer's life*, it ensures that what He has done and what the liturgy makes present *is profoundly assimilated and shapes our existence.*⁴¹⁴

Christian spirituality is precisely distinguished "*by the disciple's commitment to become conformed ever more fully to his Master*" (cf. Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:10,12).

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Baptism grafts the believer like a branch onto the vine which is Christ (cf. Jn. 15:5) and makes him a member of Christ's mystical Body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12; Rom. 12:5). This initial unity, however, calls for *a growing assimilation which will increasingly shape the conduct of the disciple in accordance with the 'mind' of Christ*: 'Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 2:5)...

In the spiritual journey of the Rosary, based on the constant contemplation – in Mary's company – of the face of Christ, this demanding ideal of *being conformed to him* is pursued through an association which could be described in terms of friendship. We are thereby enabled to enter naturally into Christ's life and as it were to share his deepest feelings...⁴¹⁵

⁴¹² II Annunciation, p. 44; cf. Bl. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (October 16, 2002) # 13.

⁴¹³ Bl. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* # 10; cf. # 12: "The Rosary, precisely because it starts with Mary's own experience, *is an exquisitely contemplative prayer....*"

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., # 13.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., # 15.

4. Bl. Gueric's teachings also brings to mind two of the great masters of the spiritual life: St Ignatius of Loyola (†1541) and St Louis M. Grignon de Montfort (†1716).

5. *St. Ignatius*, in the "Second Week" of his *Spiritual Exercises*, invites us to ask God

for *interior knowledge* of the Lord, who for our sake became man, so that we may *love Him and follow Him more*.⁴¹⁶

His words might serve as an excellent synthesis of Bl. Gueric's doctrine, and demonstrate how, even if the language used is different or the emphasis varies from one author to the other, all the Saints and masters of Christian spirituality always coincide in the same fundamental principles.

6. St. Louis de Montfort greatly exalts the Rosary as an excellent means of *meditating* upon the mysteries of our faith, *following* Christ's example, and *obtaining* the graces contained therein. In his famous book, *The Secret of the Rosary*, he teaches:

The saints made our Lord's life the principal object of their study; they meditated on his virtues and his sufferings, and in this way arrived at Christian perfection.⁴¹⁷

Our Lady taught us the Rosary in order "to teach the faithful *to meditate* upon the sacred mysteries of the life of Jesus Christ... not only that we might adore and glorify him, but chiefly that we might *pattern our lives and actions on his virtues*."⁴¹⁸ The fifteen mysteries of the Rosary stand for Jesus' and Mary's "virtues and most important actions." They are:

fifteen pictures whose every detail must *rule and inspire* our lives... fifteen flaming torches *to guide* our steps throughout this earthly life; fifteen shining mirrors to help us *to know* Jesus and Mary, *to know* ourselves and *to light the fire of their love* in our hearts; fifteen fiery furnaces *to consume* us completely in their heavenly flames.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Ignacio de Loyola, *Ejercicios Espirituales*. Introducción, texto, notas y vocabulario by C. de Dalmases (Santander: Editorial Sal Terrae, 1990), # 104, p. 90; cf. # 139, p. 99, where we ask for "*knowledge* of the true life that the most high and true captain shows, and the grace *to imitate* it."

⁴¹⁷ St. Louis de Montfort, *Secret of the Rosary* # 71, *God alone*, p. 188.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Idem., *Secret of Mary* # 66, *God alone*, p. 186 ("... non seulement afin qu'ils l'adorent et le glorifient, mais principalement afin qu'ils *règlent leur vie et leurs actions sur ses vertus*." For the quotations in French, we are following: St. Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1966), 322; hereafter referred to as *Oeuvres*); cf. # 60-76, pp. 184-190.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., # 61, *God alone*, p. 184.

In his first three “*Methods of saying the Rosary*,” St Louis specifies that when we pray we must ask for *the grace of each mystery to come into our souls and make us conform to the virtue of Christ we are meditating.*⁴²⁰

7. St. Louis de Montfort’s teachings coincide perfectly with what Bl. Pope John Paul II (†2005) teaches in his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (October 16, 2003):

*Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of “learning him.” In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother... Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning from her to “read” Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message. This school of Mary is all the more effective if we consider that she teaches by obtaining for us in abundance the gifts of the Holy Spirit, even as she offers us the incomparable example of her own “pilgrimage of faith.”*⁴²¹

8. We are not alone in our universal vocation to imitate Christ’s virtues and conform ourselves to Him. Actually, *it is Christ Himself “who brings about all those things in us.”*⁴²² In this middle time between His first and last coming, the Lord *comes* to each one of us, “*conforming* us to His first coming, preparing us for the last.” Coming to us, “he is intent to *reform* our spirit of pride, making it *conform* to his humility, which he manifested in his first coming.”⁴²³ Thanks to His sacred childhood “men of every age can *be conformed* to him in humility of heart and holiness of life.”⁴²⁴ He precedes us with His example and at the same time helps us with His unfailing grace, which we must take good care not to receive in vain.

9. We also have the Virgin Mary, whom we recognize as our mother “by a kind of instinctive devotion” which faith gives to us, so that “first and foremost in all our needs and dangers we run to call upon her name just as children run to their mother’s breasts.” Her virginal womb is the “sealed well-spring of charity” which Jesus makes “always abundant in its supply,” and whose waters are “at our disposal” all the time.⁴²⁵

As Bl. John Paul II (†2005) expressed so well:

⁴²⁰ Cf. Idem., *Methods for saying the Rosary, God alone*, pp. 233-243.

⁴²¹ Bl. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, # 14.

⁴²² Cf. II Nativity of Mary, p. 201.

⁴²³ Cf. II Advent, p. 11.

⁴²⁴ Cf. I Nativity, p. 38.

⁴²⁵ Cf. I Assumption, pp. 170; 169.

...In this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary, we entrust ourselves in a special way to the maternal care of the Blessed Virgin. She who is both the Mother of Christ and a member of the Church, indeed her "pre-eminent and altogether singular member," is at the same time the "Mother of the Church." As such, *she continually brings to birth children for the mystical Body of her Son*. She does so through her intercession, imploring upon them the inexhaustible outpouring of the Spirit. Mary is *the perfect icon of the motherhood of the Church*. The Rosary mystically transports us to Mary's side as she is busy watching over the human growth of Christ in the home of Nazareth. This enables her *to train us and to mold us* with the same care, *until Christ is "fully formed" in us* (cf. Gal. 4:19).⁴²⁶

3. The Formation of Christ in Us

1. 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. He became man so that we may become God. God the Father has adopted us for Him in order to "shape us to his pattern" ("ut sint omnes conformes imaginis eius").⁴²⁷

Bl. Guericc 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*.

2. 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."⁴²⁸

3. 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.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Bl. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, # 15.

⁴²⁷ Cf. II Nativity, p. 43.

⁴²⁸ Cf. II Annunciation, p. 45.

⁴²⁹ III Nativity, p. 53.

We have to “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.” 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.⁴³⁰

It is Christ Himself who works His own “formation” in us through the working of the Holy Spirit, if we open our hearts to His grace, and are not negligent or sluggish in our care of this Child which is given to us.

4. In his *Second Sermon for the Annunciation* our Abbot says that Mary promises us that, just as she “conceived God by faith,” we may also conceive Him “if we have faith.” If we will “faithfully receive the Word,” we may also conceive “the God whom the whole world cannot contain” both in our heart and our body (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20).⁴³¹

5. In his *Second Sermon for the Nativity of Mary* he goes further by saying that *Mary desires to form her Only-begotten in us*. She desires to *actively cooperate in His formation in us*, the sons by adoption, just as she cooperated in the formation of His “form of the flesh,” and was the first one to form Him perfectly in herself according to His “moral form,” thus being both His physical and His spiritual mother, “valuing the Father’s will so much that He could foretell of her: ‘You shall be called My will is in her.’”⁴³²

That is why *she describes Him to us according to the spirit*; she describes to us His virtues, so that we may love and imitate them, thus making Christ, whom we have conceived, grow in us like a baby grows in its mother’s womb.

[His virtues] grow in strength like the limbs and members of our body and they bring him to maturity and perfection in us. Then Christ *will have been perfectly formed in us*, as far as is possible in this life.⁴³³

And when He has been thus formed in us, we shall receive as our reward the vision in heaven of both His human and His divine forms.

4. *Mary’s Spiritual Maternity*

1. *Mary brings us forth every day*. Although we are born to new life in Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism, the Blessed Virgin continues:

⁴³⁰ Cf. II Annunciation, pp. 45-46.

⁴³¹ Cf. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁴³² IV Assumption, p. 188.

⁴³³ II Nativity of Mary, p. 201.

bringing us forth every day by desire and merciful solicitude until we reach the stature of the perfect man, the maturity of her Son (Eph. 4:13), whom she bore and brought forth once and for all.⁴³⁴

This is Bl. Gueric's most explicit affirmation of the active role that Mary has in our spiritual life as our Mother. *She desires to form her Only-begotten in all the sons by adoption and she brings us forth every day until we reach the maturity of her Son.*

Baptism is the beginning of a long journey that is not fulfilled until Christ has been fully formed in us. This forming of Christ in us is a continuous process that requires constant effort and attention. It is the fruit of God's grace and our human free, responsible, generous response. And the Blessed Virgin has a very important part in it: first, by having given birth to Christ in the form of the flesh; and now, by wishing to introduce Him into our affections, describing Him to us according to His moral form, desiring to form Him in all of us, and bringing us forth every day until He is perfectly formed in us.

2. *Our author affirms very clearly Mary's Spiritual Maternity based on the Incarnation.* She is "the *Mother of all* who are reborn to life;" "the *new Mother* who has brought new life to her children already hardening with age;" "the *Mother of all Christians*."⁴³⁵ She is our Mother because she has given birth to our life, who is Christ. She cares for us, and intercedes for us. On earth "we dwell in her help and live in her protection, as if under the shadow of her wing," and in heaven "we shall be cherished as if in her bosom."⁴³⁶

3. In his *First Sermon for the Assumption* Bl. Gueric has a text that bears some similarity to our main one. He says that, because of the indissoluble union between the Head and His members,

Mary *embraces* that same Only-begotten of hers in all his members... and so can be truly called *Mother of all* in whom she recognizes her Christ *to have been formed*, or in whom she knows that he *is being formed*.⁴³⁷

In our text, he goes beyond that by asserting that she does not only "embrace" or "recognize as her children" those in whom Christ has been or is being formed, but that *she desires to form Christ in them*. This was the wish of St. Paul, too. But if St. Paul:

bears his little children again and again until Christ be formed in them, *how much more is this true of the very Mother of Christ*!⁴³⁸

⁴³⁴ Ibid., pp. 200-201

⁴³⁵ Cf. I Assumption, p. 168; I Nativity of Mary, p. 192; I Assumption, p. 169.

⁴³⁶ I Assumption, p. 170; cf. IV Assumption, p. 191.

⁴³⁷ I Assumption, p. 168.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., p. 169.

If the Apostle could speak about him forming Christ in others, with what greater reason can we say this of Mary!

5. *Mary Exercised Her Spiritual Maternity in the New Testament*

1. Sacred Scripture narrates to us 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, thus initiating with them her maternal role on our behalf.

2. When she visited St Elizabeth, "*the power of Mary's voice imparted the gift of prophesy in all its fullness*" to St John the Baptist, and from God's liberality: grace's generous gift flowed both abundantly and magnificently *into his mother* in the first place, *from his mother into John*, from John into his parents. Rivers indeed of living water *flowed from Mary's bosom*" (Jn. 7:38), and "the woman who was full of grace brought forth the Grace of God."⁴³⁹

3. Likewise, when Mary was received by the Apostle St. John at his Master's bidding, "the young man's virginity" made progress "*by living with such great holiness,*" and he had "confided to him the mysteries of the Godhead and hidden truths concerning the inviolate Word" by the "*Mistress of all truth.*"

Providence also arranged very conveniently that *he who was to write a Gospel* should have intimate conferences on each matter *with her who knew about them all*, for she had taken note from the beginning of everything that happened to her Son and treasured up all the words that concerned him, pondering them in her heart (Lk. 2:19,51)...⁴⁴⁰

6. *Mary Exercises Her Spiritual Maternity Now*

4. As it was the case with these two persons, so we can be sure that Mary continues actively helping us now. Bl. Guericc does not specify how is it *exactly* that Mary's maternal action in our spiritual life takes place. But he describes her action in various ways 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

⁴³⁹ Cf. I St. John the Baptist, pp. 124-125.

⁴⁴⁰ IV Assumption, pp. 188-189.

life - which in his other sermons he expounds more at length, and pointed out that the Blessed Virgin has a specific role in them as our spiritual Mother.

7. The Doctrine of the Formation of Christ in Us in Other Medieval Authors

1. These are the great insights which Bl. Gueric left to posterity. In some other Medieval writers we also find the idea of *Mary forming Christ in us*. Space permits to mention very briefly only three names: St. Anselm of Lucca (†1086), Odo of Morimond (†1161), and William of Newburgh (†1198 c).

2. *St. Anselm of Lucca* does not speak explicitly about “forming Christ,” but, quoting Ephesians 4:13 - a text which Bl. Gueric uses often, in his *I Prayer to Countess Matilda of Tuscany* (†1115), he links our growth in the spiritual life to the Eucharist and Mary. Appealing to the power of Mary’s maternal mediation, he implores Our Lady “to offer to our infirmity the singular remedy of the vivifying flesh assumed from her unblemished womb,” and “to pour out unceasingly the same blood which was once poured out on the scaffold of the cross for our salvation (Lk. 22:20; Heb. 9:28), until we [all] attain to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), her most beloved Son....”⁴⁴¹

3. *Odo of Morimond*, in his great *Homily on John 19:25-27*, where he often speaks about Mary’s Spiritual Maternity, says that Mary gives birth to sinners until Christ is formed in them.⁴⁴²

4. Finally, *William of Newburgh* is very important, because in his outstanding *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, which could be considered a Mariological treatise in its own right, he speaks several times in very interesting terms about Mary giving birth to Christ’s members until He is fully formed in them.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴¹ St. Anselm of Lucca, *Oratio I*: A. Wilmart, “Cinq textes de prière composés par Anselme de Lucques pour la comtesse Mathilde,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique* 19 (1938): 23-72, esp. p. 51: “...suppliciter imploro clementiam tuam, gloriosissima domina, ut singulare remedium, ex tuo illibato utero assumpte, vivificatricis carnis nostre infirmitatis offeras, et ad reconciliationis nostre mi <ni> sterium eundem sanguinem qui pro nostra salute in crucis patibulo semel fusus est, beatissima mater et domina, sine intermissione refundas, donec occurramus [omnes] in virum perfectum, in mensuram etatis plenitudinis Christi filii tui dilectissimi in unitate fidei et veritatis agnitione;” cf. *Oratio II*, p. 59: “Hec est enim illa hostia immaculata agni, que nos Christo configurat” (Phil. 3:10.21).

⁴⁴² Odo 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: “Ubi et peccatores forte portare didicit, quorum quamplurimos usque ad decrepitam etatem sustinuit, et paritavit, donec formaretur Christus in eis.”

⁴⁴³ J.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: “pascere a me et pascere mecum, et cuba mecum in hac meridie... ut et ad te clametur ab infirmioribus membris meis in terra peregrinantibus, et parturias ea visceribus pietatis, donec plenius formetur Christus

8. *The Doctrine of the Formation of Christ in Us in St. Louis M. Grignion de Montfort (†1716)*

1. The great heir of Bl. Gueric's doctrine, who brought it to an unparalleled development, came five centuries later: St. Louis M. Grignion de Montfort. This great Marian Doctor actually quotes Bl. Gueric twice in his works,⁴⁴⁴ and shows many interesting similarities with him, although there is probably no direct dependence, at least for most themes. For example: In both the Incarnation is a central theme; both underline the importance of Mary in God's Economy of Salvation; both develop well the theme of Mary's Spiritual Motherhood based on the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Mystical Body of Christ; both insist on the importance of Christ's example; both call the attention to Christ's humility and His subjection to His Mother; both ponder the mystery of Christ's presence in Mary's womb; both refer to Mary's intervention in the life of St. John the Baptist; both speak about Mary's presence in us; both of them like to call Christ "the Wisdom of God;" both teach the primacy of grace; both are inspired by Galatians 4:19 and Ephesians 4:13; both of them speak about *the formation of Christ in us*, and about *the role of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin in this formation*:

2. Concerning our theme, what we find in Bl. Gueric in germ, blooms in St. Louis de Montfort.

3. The former had said: "Mary *desires to form* her Only-begotten in *all the sons by adoption*." De Montfort affirms:

God the Son wishes *to form himself*, and, in a manner of speaking, *become incarnate* every day in his members *through his dear Mother*... You, my dear Mother... as their loving mother... [you] *will give them birth, feed them and rear them*. As their queen, you will lead, govern and defend them.⁴⁴⁵

in eis;" Cant. 1:8, p. 321: "Plane illa cotidie materna sollicitudine *parturiens* infirmiora membra hinnuli sui, *donec plenius Christus informetur in eis*, neminem a sue pietatis sinu repellit, sed potius invitat et attrahit universos;" Cant. 7:11-12, pp. 328-329: "Denique pro eo, quod tibi sum mater corporalis, tuus ero mater spiritualis, materna scilicet caritate *quasi proprios parturiens filios, donec plenius formeris in eis*, materna itidem cura nutriens eos, *donec usque in virum perfectum grandescas in eis*, totum autem hoc eos tibi assidue commendando et augmenta eis gratiarum piis a te precibus impetrando;" Canticle 8:6, pp. 342-345 has much on the doctrine of Christ's "form," "forming" Him in us, "conforming to" and "transforming" ourselves into Him.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. St. Louis de Montfort, *Secret of Mary*, # 54: *God Alone*, p. 276; *True Devotion to Mary*, # 199, p. 352. He apparently borrowed it from Poiré (cf. *True Devotion*, note 313, p. 390). In both instances he refers to Bl. Gueric's idea that there cannot be more joy in dwelling in Abraham's bosom than in Mary's (cf. I Assumption, p. 170).

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. St. Louis de Montfort, *Secret of Mary*, # 54: *God Alone*, p. 276; *True Devotion to Mary*, # 199, p. 352. He apparently borrowed it from Poiré (cf. *True Devotion*, note 313, p. 390). In both instances he refers to Bl. Gueric's idea that there cannot be more joy in dwelling in Abraham's bosom than in Mary's (cf. I Assumption, p. 170).

4. Bl. Guericc affirms that Mary is our Mother because she gave birth to our Life, and that she embraces her Only-begotten in all His members.⁴⁴⁶ 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. The solidly Christological reason that he gives is the following:

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 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 ("*doit être formé en Marie*") *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.⁴⁴⁷

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 Mary* at the Incarnation, Who continues giving Him to us *through her*, and Who "*raises children for himself only through her*." *God the Son* "was prepared ("*a 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*..."⁴⁴⁸

5. Mary forms Jesus in us and forms us in Jesus. Based on Luke 1:42, another important argument which St. Louis offers to explain this truth is the fact that Jesus is always *the fruit of the Virgin Mary*:

Jesus is still as much as ever the fruit of Mary... It is therefore certain that Jesus is the fruit and gift of Mary for every single man who possesses him, just as truly as he is for all mankind. Consequently, if any of the faithful *have Jesus formed*

⁴⁴⁶ I Assumption, pp. 168-169.

⁴⁴⁷ St. Louis de Montfort, *Secret of Mary* # 12, *God Alone*, p. 266. Where the English translated with the verb "produce" or "conceive," the French original uses the verb "form": "Puisque Marie a formé le Chef des prédestinés, qui est Jésus-Christ, c'est à elle aussi de former les membres de ce Chef, qui sont les vrais chrétiens: car une mère ne forme pas le chef sans les membres, ni les membres sans le chef. Quiconque donc veut être membre de Jésus-Christ, plein de grâce et de vérité, doit être formé en Marie par le moyen de la grâce de Jésus-Christ, qui réside en elle en plénitude, pour être communiquée en plénitude aux vrais membres de Jésus-Christ et à ses vrais enfants" (*Oeuvres*, pp. 446-447). Cf. *True Devotion* # 32, *God Alone*, p. 298; # 30, p. 298; *Secret of Mary* # 11, p. 266; *True Devotion* # 17, p. 294: "God the Father imparted to Mary his fruitfulness as far as a mere creature was capable of receiving it, to enable her to bring forth ("produire") his Son and all the members of his mystical body."

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. *True Devotion* # 140, *God Alone*, pp. 332-333. The French original uses the verb "to form": "Dieu le Fils n'a été formé pour tout le monde en général que par elle, n'est formé tous les jours et engendré que par elle dans l'union au Saint-Esprit..." (*Oeuvres*, p. 575).

("formé") in their heart they can boldly say, "It is thanks to Mary that what I possess is Jesus her fruit, and without her I would not have him."⁴⁴⁹

Exactly like Bl. Guericc had done, he uses 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..."⁴⁵⁰

St. Louis de Montfort synthesizes his teachings⁴⁵¹ with these words:

Mary must beget us in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ in us nurturing us towards the perfection and the fullness of his age...⁴⁵²

6. A very striking analogy found in St. Louis de Montfort is that of "the mold of God" ("*forma Dei*"). He draws his idea from a text which he ascribed to St. Augustine (†430), but actually belongs to the great Medieval author Ambrose Autpert (†781).⁴⁵³

According to him, Mary is "the living mold of God" because "in her alone the God-man *was formed* ("*a été formé*") in his human nature without losing any feature of the Godhead," and "in her alone, *by the grace of Jesus Christ*, man is made godlike ("*peut être formé en Dieu*") as far as human nature is capable of it..."⁴⁵⁴ The Blessed Virgin is:

the great mold of God, fashioned ("*fait*") by the Holy Spirit to give ("*pour former*") human nature to a Man who is God ("*un Homme Dieu*") by the hypostatic union, and to fashion ("*pour former*") through grace men who are like to God ("*un homme Dieu*")...⁴⁵⁵

St. Louis de Montfort considers it "a secret in the order of grace" the fact that "Mary is a mold capable of *forming* ("*a former*") people into the image of the God-man."

⁴⁴⁹ *True Devotion* # 33, *God Alone*, pp. 298-299; cf. *Secret of Mary* # 56, p. 277.

⁴⁵⁰ *True Devotion* # 33, *God Alone*, pp. 298-299.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. *Love of Eternal Wisdom* # 203-214, *God Alone*, pp. 107-110.

⁴⁵² *Love of Eternal Wisdom* #214, *God Alone*, pp. 109-110. Footnote 287, on page 122, cites Bl. Guericc's I Sermon for the Assumption, n.3.

⁴⁵³ Cf. Ambrose Autpert, *De Adsumptione Sanctae Mariae*, 5: CCCM 27 B, p. 1030: "Sed quid dicam pauper ingenio, cum de te quidquid dixero, minor laus est quam dignitas tua meretur? Si caelum vocem, altior es; si matrem gentium, praecedis; si *formam Dei* appellem, digna existis..."

⁴⁵⁴ St. Louis de Montfort, *Secret of Mary* # 16, *God Alone*, p. 267 ("c'est en elle seule que Dieu [fait] homme *a été formé* en Dieu au naturel... et c'est aussi en elle seule que *l'homme peut être formé* en Dieu au naturel, autant que la nature humaine en est capable, *par la grâce de Jésus-Christ*": *Oeuvres*, p. 448).

⁴⁵⁵ *Secret of Mary* #17, *God Alone*, p. 267.

Anyone who is cast into this divine mold is quickly shaped and molded ("*formé et moulé*") into Jesus and Jesus into him. At little cost and in a short time he will become Christ-like ("*il deviendra dieu*") since he is cast into the very same mold that fashioned a God-man ("*a formé un Dieu*").⁴⁵⁶

7. If Mary "makes her dwelling-place in us as God the Father ordered her to do," and she conceives, nourishes, and brings us forth to eternal life as our mother; if we are her inheritance and possession, and she *forms* us in Jesus and Jesus in us, being "*the inseparable associate of the Holy Spirit in all these works of grace*," it means that she has received from God "a far-reaching dominion over the souls of the elect."⁴⁵⁷ Consequently,

just as an infant draws all its nourishment from its mother, who gives according to its needs, so the elect draw all their spiritual nourishment and all their strength from Mary.⁴⁵⁸

8. In this formation of Christ in us, Mary is not alone. She is actually *co-operating with the Holy Spirit*, in a completely subordinate fashion, because God so willed it. Few authors are as clear as St Louis de Montfort in explaining this great mystery.

Bl. Guericc affirms that the conception of Christ in our souls *is the work of the Holy Spirit*. St. Louis further specifies, more explicitly, that it is *the joint work of the Holy Spirit and Mary*, as it was in the case of the Incarnation of the Word.

... It was with her, in her and of her that he [the Holy Spirit] 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.⁴⁵⁹

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.

⁴⁵⁶ *True Devotion* # 219, *God Alone*, p. 361 ("Les saints sont moulés en Marie... [Elle est] le moule propre à former et mouler les dieux. Celui qui est jeté dans ce moule divin est bientôt formé et moulé en Jésus-Christ, et Jésus-Christ en lui: à peu de frais et en peu de temps, il deviendra dieu, puisqu'il est jeté dans le même moule qui a formé un Dieu": *Oeuvres*, p. 636); cf. *True Devotion* 220, p. 361; *Secret of Mary* 16-18, pp. 267-268.

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. *True Devotion* # 37, *God Alone*, p. 300.

⁴⁵⁸ *Secret of Mary* # 14, *God Alone*, pp. 266-267.

⁴⁵⁹ *True Devotion* # 20, *God Alone*, p. 295; cf. *Secret of Mary* # 13, p. 266: "The Holy Spirit espoused Mary and produced his greatest work, the incarnate Word, in her, by her and through her. He has never disowned her and so he continues to produce every day, in a mysterious but very real manner, the souls of the elect in her and through her."

This is a mystery of grace unknown even to many of the most learned and spiritual of Christians."⁴⁶⁰

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.*⁴⁶¹

9. The Doctrine of the Formation of Christ in Us in Other Authors

1. It would be impossible, within the scope of this research, to mention all the other authors who, through the centuries, have spoken about the formation of Christ in us.⁴⁶² Besides those already mentioned, we shall call the attention to only one more name: Pope Paul VI.

Towards the end of his Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (February 2, 1974), the Pontiff has a significant text that reflects well 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 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.

⁴⁶⁰ *True Devotion* # 21, *God Alone*, pp. 295-296; cf. # 269, p. 376; *Prayer for Missionaries* # 15, p. 404.

⁴⁶¹ *Secret of Mary* # 67, *God Alone*, p. 280. Cf. *Hymn* 90,14: *Oeuvres*, p. 1353: "Je vous salue, Marie, / Dans la naissance du Sauveur! / Que tout chante et publie / Votre bonheur. / O Vierge et Mère, / Je vous révere, / Produisez Jésus en mon cœur." St. Louis also speaks of the formation of *Mary* in us (cf. *True Devotion* # 164, p. 341; # 264, pp. 373-374; *Secret of Mary* # 15, p. 267), and of our conformation with Christ (cf. *True Devotion* # 120, p. 327).

⁴⁶² Among these other authors, we would like to mention *John David* (†1613), a Belgian Jesuit and famous preacher who wrote a spiritual work called "*Pancarpium marianum*" (*Paradisus sponsi et sponsae [...] et Pancarpium marianum septemPLICIT titulorum serie distinctum, ut in B. Virginis odorem curramus et Christus formetur in nobis*, Antverpiae 1607). Even though almost nobody followed him, and he has been ignored by most Mariologists, he is worthy to be mentioned because he set forth a form of Marian Spirituality which consists in imitating the Virgin Mary in order to become "mothers of Christ" like her. His originality lies in the fact that he organized *the entire spiritual life* with the purpose of *conceiving and forming Christ in us*. Cf. S. De Fiore and L. Gambero, *Testi Mariani del Secondo Millennio*, Vol.5 *Autori moderni dell'Occidente secoli XVI-XVII* (Rome: Città Nuova, 2003), p. 452-459; S. De Fiore, "Il culto mariano nel contesto culturale dell'Europa nei secoli XVII-XVIII," *De cultu mariano saeculis XVII-XVIII* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1987) 2,19.

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...*"⁴⁶³

2. This is the Blessed Virgin's great maternal 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,"⁴⁶⁴ 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.

⁴⁶³ Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (February 2, 1974) # 57 (AAS 66 [1974]: 163-164): "Ac iuvat singulas huius muneris partes considerare, quae omnes, pro sua cuiusque efficacia, in idem contendunt, *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.).

⁴⁶⁴ II Annunciation, p. 45.