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MARIAN DEVOTION IN THE EARLY UNITED STATES

I

The oldest prayer book in English published in the United States was an American adaptation of Bishop Richard Challoner's famous *Garden of the Soul*. It was edited by Father Robert Molyneux, S.J., pastor of Old St. Joseph's in Philadelphia, and printed by Joseph Crukshank in that city in 1773. Only four copies of this precious bit of Catholic American incunabula are known to survive. Prayer books, like Catechisms and hymn books, were not preserved on library shelves, but were usually worn out by use and thrown away.

On the first pages of the 1773 *Garden* is printed a "Table of the Feasts and Fasts to be Observed." The holydays of obligation, outside of all the Sundays of the year, come in all to the number of 30! The thirteen Apostles are included. There are five holydays of obligation of Our Lady: the Purification, the Annunciation or "Lady Day," the Assumption, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, and the Conception. Thus our Catholic forebears, even before the Revolution, paid ample devotion to Our Lady in their liturgical ceremonies, even, if we consider the number of holydays in Her honor, more than we do today.

It is also interesting to note that 13 of the feasts of obligation listed had vigils on which fast and abstinence was obligatory. Of these, however, only one of Our Lady, significantly enough the Assumption, had such a vigil.

A later early prayer book, published, so far as I know, for the first time in 1819, of which only one copy seems to have survived, had, after the somewhat flamboyant fashion of the time, the following title:

The Christian's Guide to Heaven; or, a Manual of Spiritual

Exercises for Catholics: with the Evening Office of the Church, in Latin and English; and a Selection of Divine Hymns. Published with the approbation of the most reverend archbishop of Baltimore. Philadelphia: Printed for Bernard Dornin, corner of Third and Walnut Sts. 1819.

Bernard Dornin, incidentally, was a young Irishman who, after a brief publishing career in New York and a longer one in Baltimore, where he lost out in competition to Fielding Lucas, Jr., had come to Philadelphia in a rash effort to challenge the supremacy there of his fellow-Irishman, Mathew Carey, who at that time was publishing mostly Protestant Bibles, after having published, in 1790, our first American Douay Bible.¹ Dornin's *Christian Guide* must have had a certain popularity, for it appeared again in 1826, after Dornin had left the city, published by Le Breton (two copies surviving), and in 1829, published, ironically, by Fielding Lucas, Jr., in Baltimore (one copy surviving).

This prayer book marks an important change in the liturgical devotion to Our Lady. It is well known that Pope Urban VIII had issued a decree in 1642, sharply curbing the number of feasts of obligation. Less well known, perhaps, is the fact that Pope Pius VI issued another decree for England in 1777, still further restricting the number of holydays, and this decree was apparently construed by Archbishop Carroll as binding on this country. This would account for the fact that the 1819 *Christian's Guide* prefaced its own Table of Feasts, by the notation that these are the feasts [of obligation] "that are to be observed by all the Catholics of America, according to the last regulations of the Holy See, as well those that continue in their full obligation, as those on which the hearing Mass and resting from servile work is dispensed with. . . ."

¹ Carey returned to the Faith on his deathbed. His grandson, H. C. (Henry Carey) Lea, was, of course, the notorious anti-Catholic writer on Indulgences and the Inquisition. Dornin gave up the unequal fight in 1822, and retired to obscurity in Ohio, where he died in 1836.

The Church in America, before the end of the Revolution, followed the English customs on feasts and fasts according to Urban's decree of 1642, as we have seen, except that St. Patrick's Day took the place of St. George's Day. In Pius VI's list for England of 1777, St. George's Day still appeared (it was abolished in 1850). The American list of 1819 has neither St. George nor St. Patrick—a sort of national compromise, I suppose; but in all other respects it is identical with the English list. This is apparently what the 1819 *Guide* means by "the last regulations of the Holy See."

The new American list, with the exceptions noted, was the following: Easter Monday, Whitsun Monday, Circumcision, Epiphany, Annunciation, Ascension, Corpus Christi, Assumption, All Saints, and Christmas. It was not until the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884 that we reached the present proportion of holydays: one for all the Saints; two for Our Lady—the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception; three for Our Lord—Christmas, Circumcision, and Ascension. Thus, through all our history, colonial and national, we always had the Assumption as a holyday, we once had the Immaculate Conception, then dropped it, and then took it up again.

Fasting days in 1819 were: all days in Lent, Ember Days, Wednesdays and Fridays in Advent, the vigils of Whitsunday, of Sts. Peter and Paul, of the Assumption, All Saints, and Christmas. (It is extraordinary, in view of recent events, how the Assumption keeps recurring as a major feast in all our history. We will see more of this later.) No day of abstinence occurs in 1819 essentially in connection with Our Lady; they still continued to be, as in the past, the Sundays in Lent (!), the Rogation Days, St. Mark's, Fridays and Saturdays out of Lent, Ember Days, and Fridays and Saturdays that happened also to be vigils. Thus, as we grew into Statehood, the Assumption was our outstanding feast of Our Lady, even though the

definition of her privilege was more than 120 years in the future.

It is interesting to note that the *Christian's Guide* reminded the Faithful that even though the Purification, the Nativity, and the Conception of Our Lady had been dropped out of Her five feasts of obligation, nevertheless these were to be considered "as feasts of great devotion." There is ample evidence to show that these and many other feasts of Our Lady were held by early American Catholics in high honor.

II

It has probably not been stressed sufficiently that many, if not most of the "first" happenings in the history of the Church in this country are in some way connected with Our Lady.

The Faith was brought to the New World by Christopher Columbus in his flagship the *Santa María*. The first island he discovered he named San Salvador, after Our Savior, but the second he named after Our Lady, Santa María de la Concepción. It is an interesting testimony to a popular belief in the Immaculate Conception in the fifteenth century (confirmed, of course, by many other witnesses), but a forerunner of the later consecration of this country to Our Lady under this title in 1846.

Spanish missionaries, Franciscan, Augustinian, and later Jesuit, discovered what is now known as the Chesapeake and called it the Bay of St. Mary. Our oldest city, St. Augustine, Florida, was founded by the Franciscans in 1565 on the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady. From Canada came St. Isaac Jogues, the first canonized martyr to die on our territory, and consecrated the State of New York, where he died, to the Immaculate Conception, in 1632. Also, Père Marquette, who with Jolliet discovered the Mississippi, our greatest river, named it the river of the Immaculate Conception, and his

mission among the Illinois bore the same glorious title. As is well known, his diary reveals the most tender devotion to Our Lady under that same title. Our Canadian friends may also well remind us that Montreal was first called Ville-Marie, and that Bishop Laval's first Cathedral in Quebec (1666) was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

Quebec antedates in that title only a few years the little mission station on our Southern borders at La Prairie, Louisiana, founded in 1675. (It was in that same year, by the way, that St. Marguerite Bourgeoys and the Sulpicians dedicated a church in Montreal *Beatae Mariae Virgini et sub titulo Assumptionis*, perhaps a first on our continent for Our Lady's most recently defined privilege.) Louisiana continued its record in this regard. The first church at Opelousas was erected in 1775 by the Capuchin Father Valentin and dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (later changed to St. Leander). The New Galvez settlement, named after the brilliant young Spanish Governor, Bernardo de Galvez, was originally called Post of the Conception of the Virgin Mary. Six years before the definition in 1854, the Jesuits founded a church in New Orleans and called it the Immaculate Conception (Baronne Street). It is also interesting to recall that during the Spanish occupation of New Orleans (1762-1800) appointees to royal offices were required "to swear before God, on the Holy Cross and the Gospels, to maintain and defend the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, the Virgin Mary, and also the royal jurisdiction to which I appertain by virtue of my office. . . ."

English-speaking America was not behind its French and Spanish sections in linking its first steps with devotion to Our Lady. When the Maryland (land of Mary) pilgrims under Baltimore landed in 1634, the first Mass was celebrated on Lady Day, the feast of the Annunciation, and their first city and church was at St. Mary's city, on the St. Mary River, a

tributary of that same Chesapeake which a century before, perhaps unknown to the English colonists, had borne Our Lady's name. When our first Bishop, John Carroll, was consecrated at Lulworth Castle in England, it was, by his choice, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1790. Our first seminary for diocesan priests was the illustrious St. Mary's in Baltimore, founded by Bishop Carroll and the Sulpicians in 1803, and one of our oldest colleges is the no less illustrious Mt. St. Mary's at Emmitsburg, Md., founded in 1808. What seems to be the first parish in the Colonies dedicated to Our Lady was St. Mary's in Philadelphia, Pa., founded in 1763, and later to be the sad scene of the Hogan Schism in the early 1820's.

It is no wonder, then, that in an interesting if somewhat perfervid book,² the Rev. Xavier Donald MacLeod, a converted Protestant minister, professor of rhetoric and Belles Lettres at St. Mary's College, Cincinnati, could say during the Civil War:

We are prepared to believe that there is no old Catholic country in Europe, that there never has been a country, in which reverent love and earnest heartfelt devotion for the Blessed Mother of God was more deeply rooted, more ardently cherished, or more fervently and fruitfully practiced, than this same North America. It is unobtrusive, but it is real. (p. 22.)

Father MacLeod's tribute to his country and the Blessed Mother came from his heart, as is testified by Archbishop Purcell of Cincinnati, his Ordinary, in the biographical memoir prefaced by him to the posthumous work. Its author was killed under a railroad train while on a sick call. In 1862, Father MacLeod had made a census of churches dedicated to Our Lady in this country. It is worth repeating now:

There are (1862) 9 dedications to Mary Help of Christians, 9 to Mary Star of the Sea, 2 to Mary Refuge of Sinners, 7 to the

² *History of the Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary in North America*. New York, 1866. Many details here noticed are borrowed from him.

Sacred Heart of Mary. There are sometimes only 1, sometimes as many as 4, to Our Lady of the Port, of the Isle, of the Cataract, of the Gulf, of the River, of the Rocks, *columba in foraminibus petrae* (*Cant.* 2:14), Our Lady of the Portage, of the Snows, of the Wood, of the Lake, of the Desert.

He follows this picturesque list with the following:

There is Our Lady of La Salette, of Belen, of Levis, and 9 of Guadalupe. Again, we have Our Lady of Light, of Grace, of Good Help, of Refuge, of Good Hope, of Prompt Succor. There are 4 to Our Lady of Victories, 3 to Our Lady of Consolation, 5 to Our Lady of Loretto, 7 to Our Lady of Angels, 9 of the Rosary, 7 of Our Lady of the Good Shepherd, 16 of Our Lady of Mercy, 21 of Sorrows, 22 of Carmel, 31 to "Our Lady" simply.

He ends with this smashing climax:

There were 3 churches of the Mother of God, 5 of the Purification, 11 of the Nativity of Our Lady, 14 of the Annunciation, 16 of the Visitation, 50 of the *Assumption*, 145 of the Immaculate Conception, and 367 which are simply called St. Mary's. (Emphasis added.)

I have made only a cursory examination of the current *Catholic Directory*, and as a result I do not think we can equal in our day either the picturesque variety or the proportionate number of churches dedicated to Our Lady which our forebears had before the Civil War.

III

If we examine the content of our early prayer and hymn books to discover the character of our early devotion to Our Lady, we find an astonishing variety of forms, and also a definite distinction from our modern more formal ways of praying. The material is large, and would require a volume to do it justice. Let me give just some very early examples.

What appears to be our first prayer book composed in this country, as distinguished from Bishop Challoner's *Garden of the Soul*, is a highly original *Manual of Catholic Prayers*, which seems to have been published by Robert Molyneux, S.J., and printed by the non-Catholic Robert Bell in Philadelphia in 1774. In this prayer book, devotion to Our Lady is much more emphasized than in the *Garden*. (Only two copies of it seem to have survived.) Let me give but two examples.

Other early prayerbooks, including the *Garden*, usually include the Litany of Loretto of Our Lady. The *Manual* has its own Litany, which, so far as I know, is unique. It contains many of Loretto's invocations, but here are some of its interesting variations:

Daughter of the eternal Father
Mother of the eternal Son
Spouse of the eternal Spirit
Tabernacle of the glorious Trinity;
Mother of Jesus
Mother of the Messiah
Mother of the Desired of all nations
Mother of the Prince of Peace
Mother of the King of Heaven;
Mother and Virgin;

Root of the Tree of Life
Source of the Fountain of Grace
Dawn of the Sun of Glory;

Blessed amongst women
Blessed above the children of men
Blessed through all generations;

Mirror of humility and obedience
Mirror of patience and resignation
Mirror of silence, modesty and retirement

Mirror of wisdom, devotion and sanctity
Mirror of faith, hope and charity
Mirror of all virtues. . . .

The antiphon which precedes the Prayer is:

Wonderful art thou, O God, in all thy Saints, but incomparably more in the mother of Thy Son; who, remaining a virgin, brought forth the Saviour of the world, and living humbly on this low earth is now exalted above the highest seraphims.

The Prayer is our familiar: "Pour forth, we beseech thee, O Lord. . . ."

This same 1774 *Manual* contains devotions for every day of the week. The Devotions for Saturday, as we might expect, are for Our Lady. I reproduce here part of one of the prayers:

Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, I, a poor wretched sinner, every way most unworthy to be accounted among the number of thy meanest servants, yet trusting in thy great piety and mercy, and desirous to honor and serve thee, do here, in the presence of my angel guardian and of the whole celestial court of saints, choose thee for my peculiar lady, patroness, and mother; and I firmly purpose and promise to follow and serve thee diligently and to endeavor also that others may do the like.

And I also intreat thee, by that great love thou bearest thy said dear son, my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that thou will vouchsafe to obtain me grace of thy beloved son, true repentance of my sins, a perfect keeping of charity, and all those virtues wherewith thou didst so highly please his Divine Majesty, to direct my ways in those paths which may be most agreeable to his blessed Will, and to be mindful of me in the hour of my death, Amen: Blessed Virgin, Amen.

In this prayer we can catch the accent of the authentic English as it was spoken by Americans at the time of the

Revolution. This *Manual*, it seems to me, is our first purely American attempt to express our devotions in our own tongue, without borrowings from European sources, even English. This could be shown from other devotions, outside the scope of this special study.

In 1792, the Jesuits at George Town College (as it was then known) published a prayer book, which went through many editions, under the following title: *The Pious Guide to Prayer and Devotion. Containing various practices of piety calculated to answer the various demands of the different devout members of the Roman Catholic Church. . . .* Georgetown (Potowmack) Printed by James Doyle. 1792.

This book was apparently edited primarily for Georgetown students, but also for the parishioners of Trinity Church, Georgetown, which the printer of the book, and his father, Alexander, had built for Bishop Carroll, in return for scholarships at the College for their sons. It went through five editions through 1827, and no doubt through many others later not yet recorded. With the *Garden of the Soul*, it seems to have been the most popular prayer book of our early Catholics, along with *The Devout Christian's Vade Mecum*, Philadelphia, 1789 (also 1792, 1797, 1814, 1827), and Bishop J. B. David's *True Piety, or the Day Well Spent*, 1809. This latter was enlarged from an original Cork, Ireland, edition, and was reprinted here in 1814, 1824 (twice), 1826, 1830 (?), and maybe later. Unfortunately, it was said to have been infected with the then current Jansenism.

The 1792 *Pious Guide* reflected the interests of its authors. There are devotions, found in no other prayer book, to St. Ignatius, "St. Francis Xavierius," and St. Aloysius Gonzaga. There are devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and there are also pages of devotions, unknown in other prayer books, to the Sacred Heart of Mary. Here is the "Act of Consecration to the Sacred Heart of Mary":

O Holy Mother of God, glorious queen of heaven and earth! I choose thee this day for my mother and queen, and my advocate at the throne of thy divine Son. Accept the offering, may it be irrevocable, I make here of my heart. It can never be out of danger, whilst at my disposal; never secure, but in thy hands.

Ye choirs of angels, witnesses of this my oblation! Bear me up in the day of judgment, and next to Jesus and Mary, be ye propitious to me should the enemy of my salvation have any claim upon me. Obtain for me at present the gift of a true repentance, and those graces I may afterwards stand in need of, for the gaining of life everlasting. Amen.

This prayer has the following footnote, interesting to the historian of Our Lady's devotion:

N. B.—This Feast has no fixed day. It is solemnized in some churches, with the approbation of the Ordinary, on the 8th of Feb. In others on the 1st of June, and in some churches on the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption.

This Act of Consecration is followed by a Litany to the Sacred Heart of Mary, of which I here reproduce the specific invocations:

Heart of Mary, pray for us
 Heart of Mary, according to the Heart of Jesus,
 Heart of Mary, organ of the Holy Ghost,
 Heart of Mary, Sanctuary of the Divinity,
 Heart of Mary, Tabernacle of a God incarnate,
 Heart of Mary, Always exempt from sin,
 Heart of Mary, Always full of grace,
 Heart of Mary, Blessed amongst all hearts,
 Heart of Mary, Illustrious throne of glory,
 Heart of Mary, Abyss and prodigy of humility,
 Heart of Mary, Glorious holocaust of Divine love,
 Heart of Mary, Nailed to the Cross of Jesus,
 Heart of Mary, Comfort of the afflicted,

Heart of Mary, Refuge of sinners,
Heart of Mary, Hope of the agonizing,
Heart of Mary, Seat of mercy.

The prayer which follows is worth recording:

Sweet Jesus! who tenderly lovest the most holy of virgins, and art reciprocally most tenderly loved by her, grant, we beseech thee, through the intercession of thy most holy Mother, and by the resemblance her most holy Heart bore to Thine, that we may ever return due love and affection for her care and tenderness in our regard, who with the Father and Holy Ghost, livest and reigneth, etc. . . . Amen.

The very awkwardness of the phrasing of this litany and prayer would seem to mark them off as indigenous to American piety, and not borrowed from Europe. (I have not been able to find any European provenance, but perhaps others, more experienced in that field, may be able to identify the sources.)

This same section of the *Pious Guide* contains several other pieces of devotion to Our Lady. There is a Novena to the Blessed Virgin Mary, too long to reproduce here. There is "The Reparation of Honour," in imitation of the Act of Reparation to the Sacred Heart, "The Sinner's Address to Our Blessed Lady," which has no counterpart, so far as I know, in our modern times. The section on Our Lady is closed with the formula of admission to the Sodality of Our Lady (1792), the Litany of Loretto (without the invocations of Queen conceived without sin, and Queen of Peace, of course), and a lengthy exposition of the Practice of the Rosary, with a meditation on each of the fifteen mysteries.

In view of the long popularity of the *Pious Guide*, and of its apparently wide circulation, it should be abundantly evident that Our Lady was universally venerated by our fore-

bears. The three competing prayer books, the *Garden*, the *Vade Mecum*, and the *True Piety*, would, if there were space, show in varying degree the same thing. Maybe some day some scholar, more competent or more persevering than I, will be able to show more convincingly that Our Lady was just as widely venerated later on as she was in our earliest days.

In view of all this, it may seem strange that I have not mentioned any hymns in Our Lady's honor. It happens, however, that Catholics have a singular distinction in this regard. In 1787, there appeared in Philadelphia a quarto volume entitled: *A Compilation of the Litanies and Vesper Hymns and Anthems as they are sung in the Catholic Church, adapted to the voice or Organ*. By John Aitken. Philadelphia. 1787.

The title page and text of this precious volume (it was re-issued in 1791) were among the earliest examples of engraved books in this country. It comprises 136 pages of hymns, with the unusual, at that time, reproduction of the music of each hymn. Most of the hymns are traditional, but the music is extremely florid. There is, for instance a *Deo gratias* to an *Ite Missa est* which exceeds our current responses by at least two lines. It must have been really sensational, but it was in the taste of the times.

As far as Our Lady is concerned, this earliest hymn book is strictly liturgical. The only hymns to her which it puts to music are: *Ave Maria, gratia plena*, etc.; the *Angelus*; the *Magnificat*; *Ave Regina Coelorum*; *Alma Redemptoris Mater*; *Regina coeli, laetare*; *Salve Regina*; some of them in Latin, some in English. There are also nine hymns with German titles (showing that the book was also for use at Holy Trinity, Philadelphia) and two of them have titles for Our Lady: "Maria sey gegrüsset" and "Maria jung Fraurin," but only the music is given, not the words. So far as I know, the Philadelphia German hymn books have not survived. One would like to know the second of these two.

So far as we know, the first American-printed book entirely devoted to the Blessed Virgin was *The Imitation of the Blessed Virgin* of Francisco Arias, S.J., which was published by Bernard Dornin in Philadelphia in 1819. Only two copies of it are known to have survived, one of which is at Georgetown and the other at Woodstock College, Md. It cannot fairly be said to reach the mystical heights of Thomas à Kempis, even though the sub-title says it is "composed on the plan of the *Imitation of Christ*." The translator is unknown, but he tells us it is from the French. The original was published by Father Arias at Valencia, Spain, 1588. A second edition was published by Fielding Lucas in Baltimore (1830?) and maybe others later, so it may have been in demand. It is a very devout tribute to Our Lady.

An edition of Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints* was projected and the first volume of it published by Bernard Dornin in Philadelphia in 1811. It was not continued, and even this Volume I ends on an unfinished sentence. But its second "Prefix" is the "Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, chiefly compiled from the Rev. Alban Butler's discourses of her various festivals." It is in his usual sound style.

Another substantial contribution to Our Lady's devotion appeared in a volume published in 1813 under the title of *Man's Only Affair*, by Paul Le Clerc, S.J., in New York, the original of which appeared also in New York in 1814 under the title of *Pensez-y Bien*. It had first appeared in Paris in 1696, and Bishop Challoner's well-known tract, *Think Well On't* is a paraphrase of it. My reason for mentioning it here is that the First American Edition is "enlarged with a Chapter on Devotion to the Blessed Virgin," by an unknown hand.

There is evidence in printed books of the early existence of Sodalties of the Blessed Virgin. The first of which I have a record is *Rules of the Male Confraternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, established in Georgetown, D. C.* 1816. W.

Duffy printed it in 1817. A second *Rules of the Confraternity*, etc., appeared in Baltimore in 1823. A third was *Confraternity of the Rosary, established in Frederick, Md.*, 1824. These three booklets are exceedingly rare: the first is only at Georgetown in one copy; the second only at Notre Dame in one copy; the third only at Woodstock College, Md., in one copy. Since there is no collectors' demand for them, in spite of their rarity, they have no monetary value.

There was, therefore, a great devotion to Our Lady in our early days as shown in our printed records, to which I have restricted myself. Other researchers in archives and unprinted records may be stimulated by these contributions to add immensely to the material which I have here presented.

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