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REDEMPTIONAL VIRGINITY IN MARY AND THE CHURCH

The virginity of Mary and the Church in their mutual relationship may be studied under a variety of aspects. The present essay is limited in its objective.¹ It is an effort, more speculative than positive, more synthetic than analytic, to compare these verifications of Christian virginity precisely insofar as they belong to a redemptional economy, that is, an economy which is not only supernatural, and therefore significantly different from a purely natural order, but which finds man, because of original sin, its consequences, and the divinely chosen mode of its reparation, in a situation profoundly different from his situation in the state of innocence. More particularly, our intention is to ask whether the virginity of Mary, the Church, and the consecrated virgin have their significance, at least in notable part, from their occurrence in the present economy in its redemptional aspect. When this

¹ Hence we must leave aside any formal consideration of: First, the doctrine of the sources studied according to the method of positive theology; subsequent notes will refer to some leading studies. Secondly, the important notion of *type* (and related notions of sign, symbol, sacrament, etc.) and the way in which it is verified in Our Lady's virginity with respect to the virginity of the Church. On this notion see O. Semmelroth, S.J., *Urbild der Kirche. Organischer Aufbau des Mariengeheimnisses* (2nd ed., Würzburg, 1954) 21-25; W. J. Burghardt, S.J., *Theotokos: The Mother of God*, in *The Mystery of the Woman* (ed. E. D. O'Connor, C.S.C.; Notre Dame, 1956) 14-16. Thirdly, questions concerning the superiority of Mary's virginity relative to that of the Church, the causality of Mary in her virginity, the mutual inclusion of Mary and the Church, etc.

Furthermore, we are directly concerned with virginity insofar as it formally says, on the human and natural level, privation and abnegation of the natural and human drive for integral marital fulfillment. This is not to deny, of course, that Christian virginity has religious value only as a disposition, condition and even exigency (divinely induced) for supernatural spousal union with God and for the resulting maternal fruitfulness.

is done, we hope to be able to state, without attempting to solve, what would appear to be the principal question regarding the meaning of Our Lady's virginity. This contribution is, therefore, exploratory; it is, in a sense, a search for a *status quaestionis*.

Our basic procedure, at least in the first two parts, will be to describe the actuality of Christian virginity, using the state of original justice as a term of comparison. We shall be forced to ask: If Adam had not sinned, would virginity have meaning? Is such an enquiry legitimate? Is it worthwhile? For some theologians today, the very placing of a contrary-to-fact hypothesis is a useless endeavor.² Theology, they maintain, must deal with what is, not with what might have been. To this a double answer is possible.

First, by her authoritative endorsement of the possibility of a state of pure nature, the Church has presented us with a parallel and normative instance of the theological utility of an unreal hypothesis.³ Secondly, we have the example of both St. Augustine and St. Thomas, not to speak of St. Paul (*Rom.* 5:12-21; *1 Cor.* 15:21-22, 45-49), for seeking insight into Christian mystery in a comparison of the Adamic and Christic economies. Where modern theologians are especially fond of using the concept of pure nature as a term of comparison with the entitative supernatural, St. Augustine's theology hinged on a powerful contrast between the economies of the first and the second Adam, of the *adjutorium sine quo non* and the *adju-*

² Cf. L. Bouyer, *Le trône de la sagesse. Essai sur la signification du culte marial* (Paris, 1957) 92-93. The English translation, *Woman and Man with God: An Essay on the Place of the Virgin Mary in Christian Theology and its Significance for Humanity* (London, 1961) was not available. Supporting the viewpoint of the present paragraph are the remarks of G. de Broglie, S.J., *Le "principe fondamental" de la théologie mariale*, in *Maria. Etudes sur la Sainte Vierge* 6 (ed. H. du Manoir, S.J.; Paris, 1961) 309. This essay, to which the present effort is heavily indebted, will be referred to hereafter as *Le "principe fondamental."*

³ Cf. *DB* 2318.

torium quo.⁴ For St. Thomas, too, vast differences separated innocent man from man fallen and redeemed. The fact of sin has profoundly changed the structure of the divinely established economy.⁵

And so despite the limitations of our knowledge regarding the original state of man, both internal and external grounds would appear to justify our using this knowledge in order to delineate what is distinctive of Christian virginity in its triple verification, in Mary, virgin of virgins, in the Church, virginal spouse of Christ, and in the consecrated virgin, called to imitate the Virgin Mary and the virgin Church.

I

The Consecrated Virgin

The virginity which is most familiar to us in the Church today (*magis nota quoad nos*) is the virginity of those who have consecrated their lives to God in the religious state.⁶ We

⁴ For an interpretation of this celebrated distinction cf. G. de Broglie, S.J., *Pour une meilleure intelligence du "De Correctione et Gratia,"* in *Augustinus Magister* 3 (Paris, 1954) 317-337. The contrast of the two economies emerges in some other key Augustinian ideas, such as *delectatio victrix*, *gratia liberans*, *Christus medicus*, *Christus humilis*, etc. The last two mentioned have been the subject of recent studies. On the latter cf. O. Schaffner, *Christliche Demut. Des Hl. Augustinus Lehre von der Humilitas* (Würzburg, 1959). On *Christus medicus*, cf. the review by T. van Bavel, O.E.S.A., in *RHE* 66 (1961) 488-491, of P. Eijkenboom, *Het Christus-Medicusmotif in de preken van Sint Augustinus* (Assen, 1960). The two themes are intimately related. Cf. R. Arbesmann, O.S.A., *Christ the Medicus humilis in St. Augustine, in Augustinus Magister* 2 (Paris, 1954) 623-629, more fully developed in *The Concept of 'Christus medicus' in St. Augustine*, in *Traditio* 10 (1954) 1-28.

⁵ Cf. below, the discussion of St. Thomas' position on virginity in paradise; also notes 35 and 36.

⁶ From the abundant literature dealing with consecrated virginity we have made use especially of: Pope Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, in *AAS* 46 (1954) 161-191 (cf. English translation in *CMd* 52 [1954] 491-512); F. Bourassa, S.J., *La virginité chrétienne* (Montreal, 1952); L. Bouyer, *op. cit.*; A. Brunner, S.J., *A New Creation. Towards a Theology of the Christian Life* (New York, 1956); T. Camelot, O.P., *Virgines Christi. La virginité aux premiers siècles de*

can best begin our consideration of this virginity in its redemptional aspects by speaking of St. Thomas' statements on the absence of virginity in the state of original justice: ⁷

Continentia in statu innocentiae non fuisset laudabilis, quae in tempore isto laudatur non propter defectum fecunditatis, sed

l'église (Paris, 1944); idem, *Les traités "De virginitate" au IV^e siècle, in Mystique et Contenance* (Les Etudes Carmelitaines; Bruges, 1952) 273-292; J. Fuchs, S.J., *De castitate et ordine sexuali* (Rome, 1959); G. Gilleman, S.J.; *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster, 1959) 317-330; D. von Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity* (New York, 1931); E. Mersch, S.J., *Love, Marriage and Chastity* (New York, 1939); Sister M. Rosamond Nugent, *Portrait of the Consecrated Woman in Greek Christian Literature of the First Four Centuries* (Washington, 1941); J. Perrin, O.P., *Virginity* (Westminster, 1956); P. de la Trinité, O.C.D., *Amour mystique, chasteté parfaite, in Mystique et Contenance* (Les Etudes Carmelitaines; Bruges, 1952) 17-26; P. Schoonenberg, S.J., *Le sens de la virginité, in Christus* 5 (1958) 32-44; C. Truhlar, S.J., *Problemata theologica de vita spirituali laicorum et religiosorum* (Rome, 1960) 61-79; M. Viller, S.J., and K. Rahner, S.J., *Azese und Mystik in der Väterzeit* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1930) 41-59; F. de B. Vizmanos, S.J., *Las virgenes cristianas de la Iglesia primitiva* (Madrid, 1949); L. Weber, *Jungfräulichkeit, in LTK*² 5, 1213-1219.

We have not taken into account the recent explanation of virginity given by Karl Rahner, S.J., which departs from the commonly held views in its establishment of the superiority of virginity to marriage. On this cf. several of the essays of his *Schriften zur Theologie* 3 (2nd ed.; Einsiedeln, 1957) 47-104 and 329-348. Substantial agreement, with important qualifications, is expressed by J. D. Gerken, S.J., *Towards a Theology of the Layman* (John Carroll University, Cleveland, 1961). This is the first chapter of an unpublished doctoral dissertation.

⁷ The virginity which we are here considering is that of the religious state (and of secular institutes). We do not include the virginity or celibacy of the priestly state. Pertinent here is the distinction between the symbolism of male and female virginity, and the distinction between the Church as the community of faith responding to God and the Church as the hierarchical dispenser of God's gifts to man. The virginity of Mary and of the consecrated religious belongs to the response of humanity to God. The celibacy of the priest belongs to the communication of divine gifts to man, and is more directly related to the virginity of Christ the supreme priest. On this cf. Burghardt, *op. cit.* 20-24; A. M. Henry, O.P., *Le mystère de l'homme et de la femme, in VS* 80 (1949) 463-490; idem, *Virginité de l'Eglise, virginité de Marie, in BSFEM* 11 (1953) 43-49; R. Laurentin, *Rôle de Marie et de l'Eglise dans l'oeuvre salvifique du Christ, in BSFEM* 10 (1952) 46-47.

propter remotionem inordinatae libidinis. Tunc autem fuisset fecunditas absque libidine.⁸

Virginitas tunc servata non fuisset: nec ei tunc aureola deberetur. Sed mutata humanae naturae conditione, virginitas specialem decorem habet.⁹

St. Thomas' argument for denying virginity to the economy of paradise is the same as for the superiority of virginity to marriage in man's present condition, the fact of concupiscence, because of which the exercise of married life brings a necessary division in man and hinders perfect dedication to contemplation and divine things:

Ad hoc autem pia virginitas ab omni delectatione venerea abstinet, ut liberius divinae contemplationi vacet.¹⁰

Ad perfectionem humanae multitudinis est necessarium aliquos contemplativae vitae inservire, quae maxime per matrimonium impeditur.¹¹

This optimism of St. Thomas regarding the original excellence of marriage was, it would seem, part of his inheritance from St. Augustine.¹² We cannot, however, speak of it as a common heritage either as regards the patristic era or as regards current opinion.¹³ But for the purposes of this paper

⁸ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* I, 98, 2, ad 3.

⁹ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Supplementum*, 96, 5, ad 3.

¹⁰ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 152, 2.

¹¹ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica, Supplementum*, 41, 2.

¹² On the doctrine of St. Augustine and the Middle Ages regarding virginity in paradise cf. M. Müller, *Die Lehre des Hl. Augustinus von der Paradiesesehe und ihre Auswirkung in der Sexualethik des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts bis Thomas von Aquin* (Regensburg, 1954); L. Brandl, *Die Sexualethik des heiligen Albertus Magnus* (Regensburg, 1955), especially 17-25; J. Fuchs, S.J. *Die Sexualethik des heiligen Thomas von Aquin* (Cologne, 1949); M. Meslin, *Sainteté et mariage au cours de la seconde querelle pélagienne: saint Augustin et Julien d'Eclane*, in *Mystique et Contenance* (Bruges, 1952) 293-307.

¹³ The conflicting opinions are presented, not always in the same way, by Müller, *op. cit.*, 9-32; L. Brandl, *op. cit.*, 17-22 (summarizing Müller); L.

we accept it as a working hypothesis. Adding to it what a more universal tradition has to say about the status and role of the consecrated virgin in the Church, we will attempt to describe this first verification of Christian virginity in the present redemptive economy.

Consecrated virginity is, first of all, a condition of privation, renunciation, abnegation.¹⁴ In its formal notion it says non-fulfillment of human potencies and aspirations which are at the very center of the human person. It would be a mis-

Bouyer, *op. cit.*, 83-93; Camelot, *Virgines Christi*, 9-10. We may speak, it would appear, of a double tradition regarding the superiority of virginity to marriage. The first has its roots in certain of the Greek Fathers, and establishes the excellence of virginity independently of the consideration of man's sin. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *De creatione hominis* 16-17 (PG 44, 177-192), and the comments of J. Laplace, S.J., in *Grégoire de Nysse. La création de l'homme* (Sources Chrétiennes 6; Paris-Lyons, n.d.) 54-59; also Chrysostom, *De virginitate* 14 (PG 48, 543), and Müller, *op. cit.*, 17. The other tradition appeals to the later doctrine of Augustine (for texts and discussion cf. Müller, *op. cit.*, 21-32) and to St. Thomas, and sees in original sin the necessary condition for the superiority of virginity. Both of these views are alive today, in various forms. Thomists in general echo what would seem to be the clear and explicit teaching of Aquinas. Cf. Fuchs, *Die Sexualethik*, 93-105; *De castitate*, 26-27; Camelot, *Virgines Christi*, 9-10; P. de la Trinité, *op. cit.*, 21; Mersch, *op. cit.*, 57-61. There are some, however, who contest this interpretation of St. Thomas. Cf. W. Bertrams, S.J., *Il celibato sacerdotale* (Rome, 1960), 103-104. The tradition stemming from Gregory of Nyssa has its best known modern exponent in Albert Mitterer, who, however, is not alone in his contention that virginity was part of the state of innocence. Cf. A. Mitterer, *Dogma und Biologie der heiligen Familie nach dem Weltbild des hl. Thomas von Aquin und dem der Gegenwart* (Vienna, 1952), 165-170; Bertrams, *loc. cit.* Mitterer, as is well known, has suggested that the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph is an image of what normal marriage would have been if Adam had not sinned. Cf. *op. cit.*, 180-194. Cf. also the remarks of P. Donnelly, S.J., *The Perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God*, in *Mariology* 2 (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.; Milwaukee, 1957) 294-295; R. Laurentin, *Le mystère de la naissance virginale*, in *EphM* 10 (1960) 362-373. Both of these authors refer to other critiques.

¹⁴ For this stress cf. Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, in *AAS* 46 (1954) 180; English translation 502-503; Camelot, *Les traités*, 291; E. Malone, O.S.B., *The Monk and the Martyr. The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, 1950) 59-60, 81-83; Nugent, *op. cit.*, 33-61; Viller-Rahner, *op. cit.*, 45, 57; Perrin, *op. cit.*

take to conceive of this non-fulfillment as being concerned exclusively or even primarily with the sexual in the restricted sense of the venereal. One of the advances of modern times over the patristic and medieval periods is the realization of the degree to which marriage and parenthood enrich not merely the race but the person of man and wife. We no longer say, for example, as St. Thomas did, following a tradition inherited from the Greeks, that woman is a help to man only through marital intercourse, and that for any other purpose another man will do better.¹⁵

It follows that the natural human values voluntarily renounced by the consecrated virgin are values of the highest order and nobility. When one reflects on the excellence of these values, and on the powerful attraction to their pursuit present in human nature, it seems clear that their voluntary renunciation will be humanly justified only when the imperious call of a yet higher value asserts itself in the life of an individual Christian. The Church has consistently refused to canonize the life of the bachelor or the spinster, that is, the person whose turning from the fulfillment found in marriage and parenthood is characterized by timidity and lack of generosity rather than by a dedication to a higher and more demanding vocation incompatible with the vocation of marriage. It is not our purpose here to discuss in detail the positive side of this higher vocation, the consecration to God, to divine things, to contemplation, to the service of the Church, and, in short, to the bridal union of charity with Christ in which the consecrated virgin finds, in a transcendent mode, the most perfect human fulfillment. Its mere mention must suffice to suggest that, more than any other vocation save the ministerial priesthood, the vocation to be the bride of Christ more than com-

¹⁵ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* I, 98, 2, *Sed contra*. Cf. Fuchs, *Die Sexualethik*, 42-43.

pensates, in its dignity and nobility, for the loss of the dignity and nobility of the married state.¹⁶

But why should the choice of one of these noble states involve the renunciation of the other? Why may the married woman not be true and faithful spouse to her husband on the human level, and true and faithful spouse to Christ on the divine level? Why may she not find precisely in her intimate union with another human person the means to and the symbol of a perfect bridal union with the divine person of Christ? Is not the bridal union with Christ verified, after all, in supernatural charity, which has both God and man for its object? If creation is good, if marriage is divinely instituted, and in fact a sacrament of the new law, why should its renunciation be *par excellence* the way of Christian perfection?

In the hypothesis which we have assumed, the answer is to be found in the doctrine of original sin, its effects on human nature, and the divinely chosen mode of its reparation. The wife is anxious, says St. Paul (1 *Cor.* 7:34), about the things of the world. Her solicitude to please her husband works, concretely and to some extent, to the detriment of a perfect solicitude to please Christ, the divine spouse. This does not deny the goodness and holiness of Christian marriage, nor the fact that individual spouses may find in and through the married state a greater degree of charity than other individuals who are in the religious state, nor the fact that, while there is a universal call to perfection and a universal obligation to tend to it, there is no universal call or obligation to the state of perfection. Nevertheless, in the present condition of man and the present dispensation of providence and grace, the *state* of Christian virginity is more perfect than the *state*

¹⁶ On the fulfillment found in consecrated virginity cf. Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, in *AAS* 46 (1954) 175-178; English translation, 499-501; Bourassa, *op. cit.*, *passim*; Fuchs, *De castitate*, 28-29.

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of Christian marriage.¹⁷ And it is a state calling for a mysterious renunciation.

This perfection and this renunciation would not have existed in paradise. This does not mean that the blissful original state of man precluded all abnegation. If it did, it would be difficult to see how Adam and Eve could possibly sin, save through some inexplicable whim. Actually, they were asked for a spiritual renunciation of a high order. In the conception of St. Thomas, the call to the supernatural, while crowning the deepest aspirations of human nature, required at the same time a certain basic renunciation of natural autonomy. Adam, like the rebellious angels, sinned by balking at this renunciation.¹⁸ But it is hard to see how the call to the supernatural could involve, even for its more perfect pursuit, the renunciation of the human fulfillment given in marriage and parenthood. Prior to the division and disorder wrought in mankind and the universe by sin, virginity would, it seems, be neither an apt instrument for growth in divine charity, nor an appropriate symbol of the transcendence of man's vocation to the beatific vision. Rather, it would seem, marriage itself, both as instrument and as symbol, would have perfectly fostered and expressed man's divine vocation.

Let us return to our evaluation of virginity in the present redemptional order. Its finality, we have said, is to liberate from that excessive concern for the goods of marriage and family which constitutes an obstacle to the unhampered pursuit of Christian perfection. At this point it is important to note that perfect chastity in the Christian view is not its

¹⁷ Cf. DB 980. Also Pius XII, *Sacra Virginitas*, in AAS 46 (1954) 174; English translation, 499; Bourassa, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

¹⁸ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, 163; 2: "quantum ad aliquid uterque [primus homo et diabolus] Deo aequiparari appetit: inquantum scilicet uterque sibi inniti voluit, contempto divinae regulae ordine." Cf. also I, 63, 3. On the abnegation involved in the call to the supernatural, cf. G. de Broglie, S.J., *Charité*, in DS 2, 676.

own justification, nor is it embraced in a purely pragmatic way as if it were merely an appropriate means to the realization of a purely human moral life. Its excellence is from above. It is subordinate to the virtue of religion. The virgin in the Church belongs to the realm of the sacred; she is set apart from the profane, consecrated to God in a rite which, in the solemn consecration of virgins, is a liturgical act of the greatest majesty, conducted according to the prescriptions of the *Pontificale Romanum*.¹⁹ But the virtue of religion itself is not supreme. It is from the influence of the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity that the virtue of virginity receives its crowning dignity.²⁰

It is especially with faith that we wish to connect the life of virginity, for this coupling of faith and virginity is central also to an understanding of the virginity of the Church and of Our Lady. It is true that charity is supreme even among the theological virtues, that it is charity which gives to all the virtues, including faith, their perfect form, and that charity is the ultimate justification of the life of consecrated virginity. But we are here speaking of virginity precisely insofar as it is a renunciation. Hence it is more appropriate to speak of its relation to faith, which essentially connotes the acceptance of privation, whereas charity is accompanied by privation only as long as it is associated with faith and hope. The charity of heaven knows no privation.

The faith which gives significance to Christian virginity is, of course, the living virtue of faith informed by charity. It is, moreover, faith functioning not merely speculatively but practically, not merely enabling the consecrated virgin to

¹⁹ Cf. R. Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'Eglise Romaine. Etude d'histoire de la liturgie* (Paris, 1954).

²⁰ Cf. Bouyer, *op. cit.*, 226; Camelot, *Virgines Christi*, 15; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Love of God and the Cross of Jesus 1* (St. Louis, 1947) 350-351; Henry, *Virginité*, 36; P. de la Trinité, *op. cit.*, 23; Perrin, *op. cit.*, 94-106.

assent to the truths of revelation, but enabling her to make every practical decision, to face every moral situation, in the light of Christ. This is a point of some importance, for if, succumbing to the post-Tridentine tendency to focus too exclusively on faith in its speculative role, we neglect its relationship to all the virtues and its function of guiding the entire Christian life, then we are unable to account adequately for the traditional nexus between virginity and faith. By the faith of which there is question here the Christian virgin does not merely assent speculatively to revealed truths; she clings with her whole being to Him who is divine truth, and delivers herself totally to Him in fidelity, confidence, and love.

As Christian virginity is proper to our redemptive order, so the faith which gives it meaning is Christian and not Adamic faith. Faith was asked of man in the state of innocence as it is today; but today it possesses modalities which make it profoundly different from the faith of paradise. And it is the redemptional character of Christian faith which transfuses the virginity to which it gives meaning, and makes it, too, redemptional. We must therefore examine the redemptional character of this life of faith-virginity, which is the Christian life perfectly lived.

First of all, there is the immense paradox that in the Christian soul, sanctifying grace and the infused virtues and gifts coexist with the effects of original sin. This is one of the key factors in the divinely chosen mode of redemption, the mystery of the cross as it is verified within the soul of the Christian. The Christian retains his ignorance and proneness to error, the disorder of concupiscence, his bodily weakness and mortality, even after baptism. He remains to a degree a man divided. By grace he is divinized, somewhat more than human; by fallen nature he is diminished, somewhat less than human. The result is a condition of weakness, tension, and the necessity of combat, which distinguishes the

Christian life from the Adamic life. Hence, for the Christian, to live a life of faith means a constant struggle with his own weakness and instability. For the consecrated virgin to live a life of faith means a constant struggle in which there is both greater strength and greater weakness—greater strength because of the removal of the obstacles found in the married state, greater weakness in the sense that the purely human supports for a virtuous life have been greatly reduced, so that the virgin is the one who most of all looks to God alone for deliverance from her weakness and for victory in the combat.

But this weakness, tension, and necessity of combat arising from the inner paradox is not the only redemptional element in the life of faith of the consecrated virgin. She must now live, as must every Christian, in a universe marked by grave disorders and alienations, not only of man from God, but of man from man, and of mankind as a whole from both the purely material and the purely spiritual components of creation.²¹ The universe in which Adam was created was one connatural to his supernatural dignity, one which fostered his supernatural fulfillment. The universe in which Christian man and the consecrated virgin must fulfill their vocation is not the universe of pure nature or of original justice. It is a universe marked with the sign of the first and the second Adam. This means concretely and principally two things:

First, it is a universe in which Satan and the powers of darkness, though conquered in principle by Christ, continue to exist and to act against Christ in His Church. Hence our universe is one characterized by a violent struggle, discernible to the eyes of faith, between Christ and Satan. Now it is the testimony of tradition that the consecrated virgin is at the center of this struggle. It is no accident that at the historical

²¹ Cf. C. Journet, *L'Eglise du Verbe Incarné* 2 (Bruges, 1951) 770-773; M. Flick, S.J., *Lo stato di peccato originale*, in *Gr* 38 (1957) 299-309.

origins of the religious life in the monks of the desert this theme of combat with Satan was so prominent.²²

Secondly, it is a universe in which the achievement of victory over Satan by Christ in His members is carried out according to the law of the cross, that is, by way of expiatory suffering by which the members of Christ share in the sacrifice of the cross. It is quite correct to depict the Christian life and especially the virginal life as a return to paradise. The Fathers abound in expression of this and related themes.²³ But we must immediately add that this return is not immediately had in its perfection. If it is true to say that the consecrated virgin has already returned to paradise, is already leading the angelic life, is anticipating the kingdom of heaven, this is true only to a degree. Another traditional and complementary image must be included to balance the picture, the image of the Christian pilgrim returning from exile, still on the painful road.

A number of other themes could be developed to indicate the specifically redemptional character of the life of consecrated virginity. The theme of humility, so important in the Augustinian conception of the Christian life, is given special emphasis by him when he speaks of virginity.²⁴ The regime of fasting and other practices of mortification; the stress on the dress and deportment proper to virgins; the ceremonial of consecration where the theme of death to the world is secondary only to the theme of bridal union with Christ—all these make it clear that the renunciation involved

²² Cf. Malone, *op. cit.*, 64-111; L. Bouyer, *La vie de S. Antoine: essai sur la spiritualité de monachisme primitif* (Paris, 1950) 69-98; idem, *La spiritualité du Nouveau Testament et des Pères* (Paris, 1960) 378-380.

²³ Cf. J. Daniélou, S.J., *From Shadows to Reality. Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers* (London, 1960) 11-65; A. Stolz, O.S.B., *The Doctrine of Spiritual Perfection* (St. Louis, 1946) 17-36, 87-106; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., *The Three Ages of the Interior Life* (St. Louis, 1947) 210-213.

²⁴ St. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 31-56 (PL 40, 412-428). Cf. Schaffner, *op. cit.*, 74-79; P. de la Trinité, *op. cit.*, 20.

in the life of perfect chastity extends beyond the limits of the sexual and embraces the whole of life.²⁵

One final and very important theme may serve to summarize what we have been saying: The Christian virgin is in a condition of perpetual martyrdom. The first great flowering of virginity in the Church took place at the end of the age of the martyrs.²⁶ The monks and the virgins replaced the martyrs as the special class of Christians whose role was to give spectacular witness to Christ, and to the power and wisdom of the cross of Christ. Like the martyr, the consecrated virgin is baptized again; like him she represents the victory of divine folly and weakness over human wisdom and power; like him she engages in combat with Satan; like him her achievement of perfect union with Christ is not merely a growth but a victory in combat.

From what has been said it should be evident why physical virginity and the consecration to it is a most appropriate expression of redemptional faith. The attitude of the dedicated Christian soul toward Christ is analogous to that of the pure maiden toward him to whom she has been espoused. Her treasure is preserved intact only for him; the approaches of all rivals are repelled with vigor and constancy; there is a willingness, in the absence of the beloved one, to do without the consolations of intimate human communion; and there is an overall attitude of fidelity to one alone. Faith under this aspect is fidelity to the divine spouse; infidelity is adultery.²⁷ The Judaeo-Christian tradition and modern psychology are in basic agreement on the importance of the sexual as

²⁵ Cf. Malone, *op. cit.*, 64-111; Nugent, *op. cit.*, 38-61. St. Cyprian devoted his *De habitu virginum* to the dress proper to the consecrated virgin.

²⁶ Cf. Malone, *op. cit.*, vii; Camelot, *Virgines Christi*, 39; Journet, *op. cit.*, 316-320; Viller-Rahner, *op. cit.*, 40, 296-297.

²⁷ For the connection between virginity, faith and fidelity cf. E. Carroll, O.Carm., *Our Lady's Virginity "post partum,"* in *MS* 7 (1956) 97-98; G. Philips, *Perspectives mariologiques: Marie et l'Eglise*, in *Mm* 15 (1953) 454-456.

symbol of the religious. And Christian virginity, because it is so excellent a symbol of redemptional faith, is also a powerful instrument for its nurture and growth. Because of the intimate union of soul and body, the faithful fulfillment of the commitment of Christian virginity cannot but strengthen the redemptive faith which gives it meaning.

We may conclude this examination of the first verification of Christian virginity. The state of consecrated virginity would appear to be excluded from the state of innocence, and to derive its significance and justification from the drama of sin and redemption. It is essentially a life of faith, and of faith exercised in circumstances peculiar to our redemptive order. Virginity is combat for Christ against Satan, conducted according to the law of the cross, by which the experience of privation and weakness is prelude to the triumph of divine grace. Virginity is a martyrdom, the perfect fulfillment of the baptismal vows, by which Satan is renounced and the virgin turns to Christ alone for hope of salvation.

II

The Virgin Church

The virginity of the consecrated individual does not exist for itself alone. Its function is essentially ecclesial. It is to give striking symbolic expression to and nourish the growth of the whole Church. And the virginity of the whole Church is her faith. This is the witness, rich and powerful, of tradition: the Church, the bride of Christ, the mother of us all in Christ, is a virgin-mother, and her virginity is her faith. "*Ecclesia in fide virgo est*," says St. Augustine.²⁸ Let us examine this

²⁸ St. Augustine, *Sermo 213*, 7 (*PL* 38, 1063). Cf. M. Agterberg, O.E.S.A., *Etude sur la virginité de l'Eglise et des fidèles chez saint Augustin* (Héverlé-Louvain, 1960) 25-28, 81-90. This work, a doctoral dissertation presented at the Angelicum in Rome, also appeared in the periodical *Augustiniana*, volumes 8 to 10 (1958-1960). It has been extremely helpful for the thought of Augustine

faith-virginity, once more from the limited perspective of this essay, that is to say, in its precisely redemptional aspects.²⁹

First of all, and by way of preliminary, we must predicate here of the Church's virginal faith two general characteristics which we previously attributed to the faith of the consecrated individual. The virginal faith of the Church is faith in its practical as well as in its speculative exercise; and it is faith informed by charity. It is faith in both practical and speculative exercise. For if the Church is, as we shall see, the faithful bride of Christ, resisting all temptation to adultery, if this fidelity to Him is her faith, it is not exercised merely when she renounces doctrinal errors on faith and morals, and keeps intact the deposit entrusted to her keeping. It is in her whole life, doctrinal, liturgical, pastoral, disciplinary, apostolic, that her virginal fidelity to her Spouse is exercised. Her entire life is permeated with the influence of her virginity which is her faith. The virginal faith of the Church is moreover not the intellectual habit alone to the exclusion of or in isolation from hope and charity and the other virtues, especially that of religion. This is why St. Augustine will sometimes identify the virginity of the Church with faith, and sometimes with faith, hope, and charity.³⁰ Her virginal faith is not merely

on the present subject. The author notes, p. 123, that he has not considered the relation of the virginity of the Church with that of Mary in the doctrine of Augustine. For other patristic texts on the identification of the Church's virginity with her faith, see H. Rahner, S.J., *Maria und die Kirche* (Innsbruck, 1951) 31-40.

²⁹ Besides the works mentioned in the preceding note, and those to be mentioned below, note 47, the following works on the Church as virgin, spouse and mother have been useful in preparing this section: G. de Broglie, S.J., *L'Eglise, nouvelle Eve, née du Sacré-Coeur*, in *NRT* 68 (1946) 3-25; S. Grabowski, *The Church. An Introduction to the Theology of St. Augustine* (St. Louis, 1957); C. Journet, *op. cit.*, 112-118 and *passim*; H. de Lubac, S.J., *The Splendour of the Church* (New York, 1956); J. Plümpe, *Mater Ecclesia. An Inquiry into the Concept of the Church as Mother in Early Christianity* (Washington, 1943); S. Tromp, S.J., *Corpus Christi quod est Ecclesia* (Rome, 1937) 24-46; idem, *Ecclesia Sponsa Virgo Mater*, in *Gr* 18 (1937) 3-29.

³⁰ Cf. Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 25-27.

assent to divine truth but reliance on Christ, confidence in Christ, fidelity to Christ, total abandonment of her whole life and destiny to Him. And like the virginity of the consecrated individual, the Church's virginity is sacred and cultic of its nature. She herself is *persona sacra*, and never more so than when, in an infinite variety of ways, she exercises her virginal faith.

One further preliminary remark: it is that the virginity of the Church which is her faith is shared by all her members. This is the teaching of St. Ambrose:

Sive Ecclesia in populis, sive anima in singulis, Dei Verbo . . . quasi sponso connubit aeterno.³¹

It is likewise the doctrine of St. Augustine:

Ecclesia ipsa . . . quae fidei, spei, charitatis integritate, non in solis virginibus sanctis, sed etiam in viduis et conjugatis fidelibus, tota virgo est.³²

It follows that the Christian life, wherever and by whom-ever it is lived, is a verification of the virginal faith of the Church. Every Christian is called to be a virgin in soul, while it is the privilege of those few who are chosen to be virgins in soul and body.³³

³¹ St. Ambrose, *De virginibus* 1, 6, 31 (PL 16, 208). The works of Ambrose on virginity have been published in a single volume, with Latin text and Italian translation: *Scritti sulla Verginità* (ed. M. Salvati; Corona Patrum Salesiana, Series Latina, Volumen VI; Turin, 1955). Ambrose is, of course, one of the key figures in the patristic doctrine of the virginity of Mary, the Church, and the consecrated virgin. It has been well said that his interest in the last enriched his Marian teaching, and vice versa. Cf. J. Huhn, *Maria ut typus Ecclesiae secundum Patres, imprimis secundum S. Ambrosium et S. Augustinum*, in *MEcl* 3 (Rome, 1959) 166-168.

³² St. Augustine, *De bono viduitatis* 10, 13 (PL 40, 438). Cf. Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 91-94.

³³ Agterberg says: "Ici sur la terre, la virginité de l'Eglise n'implique pas nécessairement la virginité stricte des *sanctimoniales*." *Op. cit.*, 93 (and cf. 120).

To proceed now to our central point: the virginity of the Church which is her faith is a reality peculiar to the redemptive order. Hence we may expect to encounter, with certain differences, of course, the same properties which we met in the virginity of the consecrated individual.

The Church herself is a reality of the redemptive order. It is quite true that tradition permits us to speak of the Church in a broad sense, and to trace her origins not merely to the Israel of the desert, to the patriarchs and to Abel—*Ecclesia ab Abel*—but to see in Adam and Eve in the state of innocence the prototypes and effective beginning of God's fashioning of the union of Christ and His Church, the second Adam and the second Eve.³⁴ Nevertheless, in her most characteristic institutions, and in the mode of their exercise, the Church is a structure designed specifically for a sinful world in process of redemption. If a common faith, sacraments and hierarchy designate the Church as an institution, it appears that she is essentially redemptional in each of these elements. Christian faith, unlike Adamic faith, is a *fides ex auditu exteriori* mediated to the individual by the redemptive community.³⁵ The sacraments are essentially *remedia peccati*, and though they are naturally fitted to the body-soul structure of man, they had no place, according to St. Thomas, in the economy of innocence.³⁶

³⁴ On this theme of the pre-existence of the Church cf. Y. Congar, O.P., *Ecclesia ab Abel*, in *Abhandlungen über Theologie und Kirche. Festschrift für Karl Adam* (ed. M. Reding; Düsseldorf, 1952) 79-109, with references to other literature.

³⁵ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, 5, 1, ad 3, and de Broglie, *Le "principe fondamental"* 314, note 7, with other texts and a reference to J. Huby, S.J., *Foi et contemplation d'après saint Thomas*, in *RSR* 9 (1919) 137-161. On the redemptional aspects of Christian faith cf. also G. de Broglie, S.J., *Pour une théorie rationnelle de l'acte de foi. Ad usum auditorum* 2 (Paris, n.d.) 25-32.

³⁶ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* III, 61, 2, and, for a commentary, A.-M. Roguet, O.P., *Saint Thomas d'Aquin. Somme Théologique. Les Sacrements*. 3^a, Questions 60-65 (Editions de la Revue des Jeunes; 2nd ed., Paris-Tournai-Rome, 1951) 214-217.

The Church's infallible magisterium is made necessary by, and accommodated to, minds still darkened by sin, and it seems likely that her monarchical government, so scandalous for the modern world, was divinely decreed primarily with a view to counteracting the disunity of mankind consequent upon the fall.⁸⁷

There are in addition several related themes present in tradition—and we draw here especially on St. Augustine—which emphasize that the Church is the virginal bride of Christ in a universe where sin and redemption are crucial realities.

The redemptional character of the Church's virginity is seen in the fact that her faith-virginity is a condition proper to the state of pilgrimage, the state in which she must wait patiently for her bridegroom while resisting the temptation to adultery with the powers of this world. For Augustine the Church's virginity is a state of yearning and of privation. It implies that attitude of waiting for Christ in which Newman was later to see an indispensable element of the Christian spirit.⁸⁸ In Augustine's terminology the Church is the *virgo* who is not yet *uxor*; she has been espoused to Christ but the union is not yet consummated, and will not be until faith gives way to vision. It is not that the reality of the Church's virginity will cease after the final resurrection; it will in fact be perfected. But the concept of the Church's virginity possesses for Augustine such a connotation of combat, privation, yearning for deliverance, that he appears never to speak of it as a property of the heavenly city in its definitive state.⁸⁹

Why is the virginal fidelity of the pilgrim city of God to Christ her spouse necessarily a state of privation, weakness, and combat? For two reasons: without there is Satan, and

⁸⁷ Cf. note 35, above.

⁸⁸ Cf. J. H. Newman, *Waiting for Christ*, in *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* 1 (London, 1892) 31-46; reproduced in *Famous Newman Sermons* (ed. D. O'Connell, S.J.; New York, 1940) 56-68.

⁸⁹ Cf. Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 111-112.

within there are sinners. Both of these, in combination, constitute a perpetual challenge to her loyalty to Christ, and demand from her an attitude of purity, vigilance and courage which is most aptly compared with the attitude of a pure virgin faced with an ominous threat to her integrity.

The serpent who deceived the virgin Eve is still at work, attempting to seduce the members of the new Eve, to destroy the *virginitas mentis* which is their faith. Both Paul and Augustine see principally in heresy the infidelity to Christ to which Satan tempts the virgin Church, and to which some of her children succumb.⁴⁰ Heresy here is not a purely intellectual deviation. It is a breach of the unity of the *ecclesia catholica*.⁴¹ It is rooted in pride, especially the pride which, dissatisfied with the obscurity of faith, seeks an unwarranted gnosis. It is a thirst for autonomy through understanding. And since this autonomy is not the prerogative of man, least of all fallen man, its pursuit in an act of infidelity to Christ.

The Church herself, as a totality, is beyond the power of Satan to seduce. Her fidelity to her spouse is total and un-deviating. Why then do the assaults of Satan cause her distress? Because while herself the spotless bride, she is made up of members who can and do lose their *virginitas mentis*, by succumbing to heresy, schism, and sin.⁴²

This is the second reason, then, why the Church's virginity is a state of weakness, privation, and combat. She is *sponsa sine macula*, but only to a degree. She is a sinless Church, but a Church of sinners.⁴³ We can do no more here

⁴⁰ Cf. 1 Cor. 11:1-4 (and v. 14). On St. Augustine, cf. Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 40-47.

⁴¹ This emerges especially in Augustine's anti-Donatist writings. Cf. Grabowski, *op. cit.*, 388-392.

⁴² Cf. Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 35-90 *passim*.

⁴³ Cf. Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 100-121; Grabowski, *op. cit.*, 465-649; idem, *Sinners and the Mystical Body of Christ according to St. Augustine*, in *TS* 9 (1948) 47-84; Journef, *op. cit.*, 393-398, 573-577, 1103-1107, 1115-1129. See also the following note.

than briefly refer to the discussions of recent years regarding this theme.⁴⁴ Just as we saw in the consecrated virgin the paradox of the coexistence of grace and concupiscence, strength and weakness, so in the virgin Church there is the paradox of the coexistence of spotless virginity, total fidelity to Christ, with the infidelity and sinfulness of the members of the Church.⁴⁵

The figure of the *Ecclesia-Virgo* that emerges from these considerations is one in which redemptional features are quite pronounced. In her essential structure of faith, sacraments and hierarchy she is designed for a humanity ravaged by sin. She is *virgo* only after being rescued and purified from her former prostitution. She is in a state of separation from her Spouse, and while she waits for Him, journeys toward Him, she must do combat with Satan and bear with the sinfulness of her children. It is perfectly logical, then, that her virginity which is her faith should have its perfect verification and special symbol in the life of the consecrated virgin as we have described it.

If we would wish to sum up in a Biblical image what is most characteristic of the Church, virgin spouse and mother, two appropriate images are at hand, one from each of the testaments. The virgin Church is the *mulier fortis* of *Proverbs*

⁴⁴ The principal participants have been Charles Journet (cf. preceding note) and Yves Congar, the latter especially in *Vraie et fausse réforme dans l'Eglise* (Paris, 1950) 63-132. For a good brief discussion cf. R. Laurentin, *Sainteté de Marie et de l'Eglise*, in *BSFEM* 11 (1953) 12-17.

⁴⁵ Mention may also be made of the theme of the Church, now a pure virgin, but once a prostitute. The nations, given over to the worship of idols and demons, merited the harsh language which the prophets had used of faithless Israel. But now Christ has come and has purified in the waters of regeneration a bride for Himself and made her virginal. The virginity of the Church is, therefore, an effect of God's merciful and redemptive act in Christ. The Church is that miraculous thing, a virgin who has not always been a virgin. Cf. St. Augustine, *Sermo* 213, 7 (*PL* 38, 1063), and Agterberg, *op. cit.*, 115.

(31:10-31), and still more is she the mysterious Woman of the *Apocalypse* (c. 12), who gives birth in anguish, and flees from the dragon.⁴⁶

III

The Virgin Mary

Thus far we have been examining the virginity of the consecrated virgin in the Church and of the Church herself, who is virgin by her faith. We have focused on the redemptional elements present in each case, that is, on those modalities which are present only because of sin and redemption. In either case, it has been suggested, virginity would not be present in a state of innocence.

We come now to the third great verification of Christian virginity in Mary, Virgin Mother of God. We shall proceed in two steps:

First, we shall examine the redemptional aspects of Mary's virginity, especially by comparison with what we have already seen, but without attempting to engage the many problems concerning superiority, typology, causality, inclusion, etc., which the general discussion of the Mary-Church relationship has treated at great length in recent years.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ On the former image as applied to the Church and Mary, cf. H. Rahner, *op. cit.*, 85-94. On the much discussed twelfth chapter of the *Apocalypse*, cf. B. Le Frois, S.V.D., *The Woman Clothed with the Sun* (Rome, 1954); idem, *The Mary-Church Relationship in the Apocalypse*, in *MS* 9 (1958) 79-116, with references to other literature. On both images cf. Tromp in *Gr* 18 (1937) 22-23.

⁴⁷ From the abundant literature dealing with the virginity of Mary, the following have been especially helpful: The entire volume 7 of *MS* (1956); Donnelly, *op. cit.*; J. Galot, S.J., *Vierge entre les Vierges*, in *NRT* 89 (1957) 463-477; idem, *Marie dans l'Evangile* (Paris-Louvain, 1958) especially 30-75; D. Ryan, *Perpetual Virginity*, in *Mother of the Redeemer* (ed. K. McNamara; New York, 1960) 104-134; M. Scheeben, *Mariology* 1 (St. Louis, 1946) 61-130; F. Suárez, S.J., *The Dignity and Virginity of the Mother of God* (West Baden Springs, 1954) 29-116. See also below, note 65.

Secondly, we shall finally be in a position to formulate the problem of the meaning of Our Lady's virginity in relation to that of the Church and the consecrated virgin. We shall propose no solution of our own to this problem, but after outlining the solution recently suggested by Père Guy de Broglie, S.J., we shall finish with some general observations.

At first glance, the virginity of Mary presents itself in striking contrast with the redemptional virginity of the consecrated virgin. It is certain that it did not represent a triumph over the flesh in the sense of carnal concupiscence, which was, of course, completely absent from the second Eve as from the first. Hence St. Thomas acknowledges that the special aureole due to the virgin for this victory over the flesh could not be gained by Mary.⁴⁸ The choice of virginity was not for her a means to more perfect union with God than could otherwise be had.

Nor do we find in the experience of the virginal life in Mary that quality of privation, weakness, and struggle which arises in the consecrated virgin because the faith of which virginity is the instrument and sign has to coexist with the ravages of original sin in the form of ignorance, proneness to

On the relationship between Mary and the Church, the literature is even more abundant. Cf. the entire volume 9 (1958) of *MS*; C. Vollert, S.J., *Mary and the Church*, in *Mariology* 2 (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.; Milwaukee, 1957) 550-595; *BSFEM*, volumes 9-11 (1951-3) devoted entirely to the Mary-Church theme, with bibliographies by R. Laurentin, 9 (1951) 145-152, and 11 (1953) 170-171; Burghardt, *op. cit.*, 13-30; Y. Congar, O.P., *Marie et l'Eglise dans la pensée patristique*, in *RSPT* 38 (1954) 3-38; C. Dillenschneider, *Marie dans l'économie de la création renouvelée* (Paris, 1957) 193-321; H. Rahner, *op. cit.*; de Lubac, *op. cit.*, 238-289; Journet, *op. cit.*, 382-453; J. Galot, S.J., *Marie et l'Eglise*, in *NRT* 81 (1959) 113-131; A. Müller, *Ecclesia-Maria. Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche* (2nd ed.; Freiburg, 1955); H. Coathalem, S.J., *Le parallélisme entre la sainte Vierge et l'Eglise dans la tradition latine jusqu'à la fin du XII^e siècle* (Rome, 1954); N. O'Donoghue, O.C.D., *Our Lady and the Church*, in *Mother of the Redeemer* (ed. K. McNamara; New York, 1960) 228-250; Semmelroth, *op. cit.*; G. Philips, *op. cit.*, 436-511.

⁴⁸ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, *Supplementum* 96, 5, ad 2.

error, and concupiscence in the broader sense of disorder and egotism, both carnal and spiritual. Hence the absence of the inner paradox, the inner division, would seem to place the virginity of Mary in a category apart from the redemptional virginity of the consecrated virgin and of the Church.

Then, too, by a wonderful dispensation of Providence, the embracing of a life of virginity for Mary did not mean, at least after the Annunciation, the renouncing of a true human motherhood and wifehood. Unlike every other consecrated virgin, Mary was in the proper sense mother, and of such a Son! Furthermore, while her marriage to St. Joseph was virginal, it was a true marriage, and even though her wifely affection for him had nothing incongruous with her virginal consecration (and his), it remained the affection of a wife for her husband, for that is what he was. So by her true human motherhood and wifehood Mary's life, despite its virginal consecration, was characterized by human fulfillment, not by privation, as in the case of other consecrated virgins.

For these three reasons, and for others perhaps, we might be tempted to look elsewhere for the meaning of Our Lady's virginity than to the redemptional character of the economy in which it was experienced. This would be a grave mistake. It would deprive her of a major source of glory as virgin of virgins, and would deprive us of a solidarity with her which is a major source of our own glory and hope. For, in a manner that was unique but no less real, the virginity of Our Lady retained the characteristics of privation, weakness, and combat which we have seen in the Church and her consecrated virgins. It was redemptional in nature. Let us examine briefly several reasons why this is so.

(1) Though Our Lady's marriage was a true marriage, it did not achieve that natural, human fulfillment of the person which is had from the actuation of marital union with the partner. This element of natural privation, present in all

consecrated virginity, was not absent from Mary's. Nor was it negated by the fact that a spiritual and supernatural bridal union for which it was disposition, condition and exigency was had instead. For the latter union was experienced in the obscurity of faith, and was of another order of reality than the union which she freely renounced.

(2) The virginal consecration of Mary, in its situation in sacred history, placed her squarely in the company of the *anawim*, those who, out of faith and hope and love for the God whom they did not see, willingly chose or at least accepted a condition of sterility, non-fulfillment, humiliation, while they looked to God alone to give them, somehow, fulfillment and glory. There is no necessity for developing this theme here, for it represents one of the principal achievements of recent Biblical Mariology, and will be found discussed elsewhere in this volume.⁴⁹

(3) The virginal life of Mary has a further redemptional significance from the fact that it was the expression of a virginal, redemptional faith. There is no need to discuss here in detail the relation of Mary's virginity with her faith.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Among the many recent treatments of this theme, the following may be mentioned: A. Feuillet, P.S.S., *La Vierge Marie dans le Nouveau Testament*, in *Maria. Etudes sur la sainte Vierge* 6 (ed. H. du Manoir, S.J.; Paris, 1961) 38-39; J. Forestell, C.S.B., *Old Testament Background of the Magnificat*, in *MS* 12 (1961) 205-244; L. Bouyer, *Le trône de la sagesse* (Paris, 1957) 93-101; Galot, *Marie dans l'Evangile* 45-50; idem, *Vierge entre les Vierges*, in *NRT* 89 (1957) 470-473; A. Gélén, *Les pauvres de Yahvé* (Paris, 1953) 121-132; A.-M. Henry, O.P., *Virginité de l'Eglise, virginité de Marie*, in *BSFEM* 11 (1953) 35-36; R. Laurentin, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II* (Paris, 1957) 83, 152-153, 176-188.

⁵⁰ On the relationship between faith and virginity in Mary cf. especially Galot, *NRT* 89 (1957) 476-477; idem, *Marie dans l'Evangile* 51-53. Also, Bouyer, *Le trône de la sagesse* 100-101, 215-216, 226. This relationship is expressed in tradition especially in the Mary-Eve comparison: we are saved through the faith of the virgin Mary just as we fell through the lack of faith of the virgin Eve. On this theme in the Fathers cf. W. J. Burghardt, S.J., *Mary in Western Patristic Thought*, in *Mariology* 1 (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.;

Tradition is just as strong in affirming an intimate nexus between the two in her case as in the case of the Church, where the consecrated virgin is the perfect symbol of the Church's virginal fidelity to her spouse. Mary is blessed among women because she has believed (*Luke* 1:45), because she has heard the word of God and kept it (*Luke* 11:28). Various suggestions and themes both in the Gospels and in tradition would seem to justify the statement that her faith was predominantly sacrificial, marked by privation and obscurity. It is associated in a special way in tradition with the faith of Abraham, in which the element of obscurity and privation is so pronounced.⁵¹ Saints and theologians caution us against heaping extraordinary gifts of supernatural knowledge upon her while she is still *viator*.⁵² There are a few scenes in Our Lord's public life where, at least with some probability, He insists on her remaining, naturally speaking, at a certain distance.⁵³ And finally, tradition gives a unique prominence to her faith on Calvary, where she alone, according to some medieval doctors, maintained faith.⁵⁴ All of this gives some grounds for stressing the obscurity, rather than the light, of the virginal faith of Mary.

Milwaukee, 1955) 110-117, and *Mary in Eastern Patristic Thought*, *ibid.*, 2 (1957) 88-100.

⁵¹ Cf. E. D. O'Connor, C.S.C., *The Faith of Abraham and the Faith of the Virgin Mary*, in *AER* 132 (1955) 232-238.

⁵² Cf. the remarks of St. Thérèse of Lisieux quoted by E. Mersch, S.J., *The Theology of the Mystical Body* (St. Louis, 1951) 169-170. For the theologians a representative statement is that of M.-J. Nicolas, O.P., *Le concept intégral de maternité divine*, in *RT* 42 (1937) 68-69.

⁵³ Cf. *Mark* 3:31-35; *Luke* 11:27-28; *John* 2:4. For this interpretation cf. Galot, *Marie dans l'Evangile* 120-132; Feuillet, *op. cit.*, 120, who cites also Braun and Schnackenburg in its support.

⁵⁴ Cf. the exhaustive study of C. Binder, *Thesis, in Passione Domini fidem Ecclesiae in Beatissima Virgine sola remansisse, juxta doctrinam medi aevi et recentioris aetatis*, in *MEcl* 3 (Rome, 1959) 389-488; also Y. Congar, O.P., *Incidence ecclésiologique d'un thème de dévotion mariale*, in *MSR* 7 (1950) 277-292.

(4) The final, and perhaps the principal, redemptional aspect of the virginity of Mary came from her association with her Son in the essential task of His life, the overthrow of the kingdom of Satan. "Now is the judgment of the world; now will the prince of the world be cast out" (*John* 12:31). The victory won by Satan in the garden over a richly endowed Adam and Eve is now turned into the defeat of Satan by a new Adam and Eve who conquer him by weakness and privation. The law of redemption is the law of the cross, of voluntary kenosis as prelude to exaltation by God, of the *anawim* made rich, of losing one's life in order to find it, of weakness triumphing over power, the "foolishness" of God over the "wisdom" of men. The first and the last books of the Bible speak of Mary, and in both cases she is not only associated with her Son, but also pitted in combat against His adversary. Mary's role in redemption specifically with reference to Satan has always been recognized by tradition.⁵⁵ This is true especially of the tradition which attributes to her the destruction of heresy.⁵⁶ It is by her virginal faith that she defeats Satan's empire of unbelief. And her virginity has also a key role, just as does that of her Son. St. Thomas has a profound remark in this regard. After making the statement which we have seen about Mary not having the virgin's aureole for victory over the flesh because she did not have to battle with the flesh, he adds

... aureolam proprie habet [Beata Virgo], ut in hoc membris aliis Ecclesiae conformetur in quibus virginitas invenitur. Et

⁵⁵ Works dealing with *Gen.* 3:15 and *Apoc.* 12 in their Mariological implications may here be referred to for the Mary-Satan enmity.

⁵⁶ Cf. J. C. Fenton, *Our Lady and the Extirpation of Heresy*, in *AER* 114 (1946) 442-454; L. Brou, *Marie "destructrice de toutes les hérésies," et la belle légende du répons Gaude Maria Virgo*, in *EL* 62 (1948) 321-353; J. de Tonquedec, S.J., "*Cunctas haereses sola interemisti . . .*," in *NRT* 76 (1954) 858-862.

quamvis non habuit pugnam per tentationem quae est a carne, habuit tamen pugnam per tentationem ab hoste: qui nec etiam ipsum Christum reveritus fuit, ut patet Matth. 4, [1-11].⁵⁷

We have nothing explicit in the Gospels which tells us how Mary shared that terrible combat, that *tentatio ab hoste* which her Son experienced in the desert and in the garden. But we do know that she did share it to the full, and the tradition which has seen in Mary, whether in the literal or in some other sense, the woman who is persecuted by the dragon in the Apocalypse (c. 12), testifies to the Church's almost instinctive realization that this valiant, embattled, finally triumphant Woman is verified in the virgin Mother of Christ.⁵⁸

We may conclude, then, even from this summary treatment, that the virginal consecration of Mary, as disclosed to us through Scripture and tradition, is notably redemptional in its meaning, that is, is notably related to the fact of original sin and to the peculiar mode of redemption from sin chosen by God for our present order. We are thereby justified in saying that, in this regard, the virginity of Mary resembles the virginity of the Church and of the consecrated virgins in the Church. This is the first point which we wished to establish in this essay.⁵⁹

IV

The Significance of Mary's Virginité

In discussing the first two verifications of Christian virginity, we suggested that the redemptional element is so essen-

⁵⁷ St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, *Supplementum* 96, 5, ad 2.

⁵⁸ Cf. note 46, and the references given by R. Laurentin, *Court traité de théologie mariale* (4th ed.; Paris, 1959) 33 and 151.

⁵⁹ On the question whether and in what sense Mary belonged to the state of original justice, cf. A. Carr and G. Williams, O.F.M.Conv., *Mary's Immaculate Conception*, in *Mariology* 1 (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.; Milwaukee, 1954) 391-394; J. B. Carol, O.F.M., *Fundamentals of Mariology* (New York, 1956) 130-131.

tial as probably to render virginity inappropriate for the state of innocence. The logical pursuit of our theme would seem to require us to ask the same question regarding the virginity of Mary. But may we do so? Certainly not the identical question. For the state of innocence as generally discussed by theologians and as understood in this essay up to now is a non-Incarnational dispensation, a situation in which there is no God-man on the scene, and therefore no Mother of God, virginal or otherwise. (This may be said without prejudice to the view that the Incarnation would have taken place even if Adam had not sinned; for even if we accept this view, it remains legitimate to prescind, for purposes of discussion, from the Incarnational aspect of such an original dispensation, and to focus, as we have done, on that dispensation as a supernatural but non-redemptive one.) Hence the question of the virginity of the Mother of God independently of sin makes no sense if the term of comparison is a non-Incarnational order.

But we may place the question in a different fashion, taking as term of comparison an order which all would acknowledge to be possible and congruous, an order in which, even without sin, the Son of God would have become man and been born of a human mother. In such an order, would the Mother of God still be a virgin?

To ask such a question is not, it would seem, an impossible search for what God would freely decree in an order different from our own. It is to ask rather for the meaning of Mary's virginity in the present order of redemptive Incarnation, even though the question is being formulated in a hypothetical way (which may not be the best way of formulating it). Is the significance of Mary's virginity Incarnational, Trinitarian, or is it redemptional, or is it both? And if both, which essentially and primarily? Is Mary a virgin because she is the Mother of God or because she is the Mother of the Redeemer,

or for both reasons? And if both, which essentially and primarily? Such, we believe, is the principal question to be asked regarding the significance of Mary's virginity in the present order of redemptive Incarnation.

The question is rarely placed in these explicit terms. It has, however, been placed in these or very similar terms in a recent essay of Père Guy de Broglie, S.J. on the fundamental principle of Mariology. The essay is remarkable in several respects, and will not fail, as have previous works of the author, to receive serious attention.⁶⁰

Père de Broglie's basic contention is that the doctrine of the divine maternity, while a necessary part of the fundamental principle of Mariology, is not its adequate principle. Just as the fundamental principle of Christology is not the mere fact of the hypostatic union, but something more, so the fundamental principle of Mariology is not the mere fact of the divine maternity but something more. And in each case the "something more" is what we have called the redemptional element.⁶¹

All this would, at first glance, appear to be nothing new, as others have previously sought a solution to the problem of the fundamental principle of Mariology by combining the Incarnational (or "theotokal") and redemptional elements. But de Broglie's position is distinctive in two respects:

First, in his peculiar formulation of the fundamental principle itself, especially as regards the redemptional element:

Mary is the Mother of the Son of God made man—and *born into the sinful race of Adam—to save it by a life of expiatory renunciation—and by the voluntary participation of redeemed souls in this life of renunciation.*⁶²

⁶⁰ Cf. de Broglie, *Le "principe fondamental,"* 297-365.

⁶¹ Cf. de Broglie, *Le "principe fondamental,"* 307-324.

⁶² Cf. de Broglie, *Le "principe fondamental,"* 323-324. For his dissatisfaction with previous formulations of the Marian principle in terms of divine maternity and redemption, cf. 316-317. Some of these other formulations are

Of this formulation we will only say that it summarizes and presupposes a unified understanding of the present economy of redemptive Incarnation which de Broglie, with great force and consistency, has expounded elsewhere.⁶³

Secondly, in the particular implications which he sees in this formulation for the several truths of Marian theology. What concerns us here is not his conception of the basic Mariological principle, but his position on the virginity of the *Theotokos*.

The choice of a virginal life for Himself and for His Mother on the part of the Redeemer, says de Broglie,

finds its true explanation only in the finalities of the redemptive Incarnation. . . . The Christian sense does indeed consider it normal and necessary that, *in the economy of Redemption which is ours*, the Word Incarnate should have made for Himself a law of living in virginity and also of inspiring in advance in His Mother a like will; but to the same degree theological reasoning fails to discover a firm and solid reason which could or ought to have dictated this predilection for virginity in a "God-Man" who (by hypothesis) would have come down *to humanity before the fall*, to associate with and participate in its life. Only an economy of Redemption, then, explains to us truly why the Word Incarnate decided to be born of a virgin, to lead a virginal existence Himself, and thus to establish, between Himself and His Mother, bonds of carnal solidarity that were *strictly exclusive*.⁶⁴

described by C. Vollert, S.J., *The Fundamental Principle of Mariology*, in *Mariology* 2 (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.; Milwaukee, 1957) 38-41.

⁶³ Cf. his works mentioned in notes 4, 29, 35. There exist also notes on his courses at the Institut Catholique in Paris; it is much to be hoped that these courses, unique in many respects, will one day be published. The course *De gratia*, while not yet published, exists in the form of *Notes prises au cours par les élèves* (Paris, n.d.).

⁶⁴ De Broglie, *Le "principe fondamental"* 326-327.

It is not our purpose here either to defend or object to this position. We wish merely to make several observations which may serve both to ward off misunderstanding and to provide some light for a profitable pursuit of the question.

First, let us try briefly to justify the previous statement that the question which we have posed must be asked. The virginity of Our Lady is the object of adequate theological understanding when not only individual *rationes convenientiae*, varying in cogency and character, have been proposed, but when they have been distinguished from one another and grouped according to their nature and relative importance. Theology is never satisfied short of a unified view. Now from patristic times to the present theologians have proposed a great number of reasons for the virgin birth of the God-Man in time, and for the virginity of His Mother *ante partum, in partu, post partum*.⁶⁵ It would appear that none of these reasons constitute a certain demonstration of the virginity of

⁶⁵ Most presentations of the *rationes convenientiae* for the virginity of Mary echo or modify St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* III, 28, 1-3. Cf. also Suárez, *op. cit.*, 38-40, 50-53, 62-63, who cites a good number of Fathers; and Scheeben, *op. cit.*, 61-131 *passim*, especially 69-72. Some other presentations and comments: G. van Ackeren, S.J., *Mary's Divine Motherhood*, in *Mariology* 2 (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.; Milwaukee, 1957) 227; J. Alfaro, S.J., *Marie sauvée par le Christ*, in *Maria. Etudes sur la sainte Vierge* 6 (ed. H. du Manoir, S.J.; Paris, 1961) 465; Bouyer, *Le trône de la sagesse* 79-108, 139-140, 146-149, 214, 220 and *passim*; Carroll, *op. cit.*, 93-102; Donnelly, *op. cit.*, 240-241; C. Feckes, *The Mystery of the Divine Motherhood* (London, 1939) 43-48; K. Healy, O.Carm., *The Harmony of the Immaculate Conception with Our Lady's Other Privileges*, in *Carm* 1 (1954) 245-249; Laurentin, *EphM* 10 (1960) 362-373; B. Leeming, S.J., *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, in *Mth* 179 (1943) 127-137; T. Mullaney, O.P., *Mary Ever Virgin*, in *AER* 131 (1954) 166-167, 257, 261; E. Neubert, S.M., *Mary in Doctrine* (Milwaukee, 1954) 169-171, 178-179, 188-189; M.-J. Nicolas, O.P., *La Vierge Marie*, in *La Sainte Vierge figure de l'Eglise* (Cahiers de la Vie Spirituelle; Paris, 1946) *passim*, especially 56-62; idem, *RT* 42 (1937) 255; M.-D. Philippe, O.P., *Le mystère de la maternité divine de Marie*, in *Maria* 6 (ed. H. du Manoir, S.J.; Paris, 1961) 383-385; Semmelroth, *op. cit.*, 88-94; J.-B. Terrien, S.J., *La Mère de Dieu et la Mère des hommes d'après les Pères et la théologie. Première partie: La Mère de Dieu* 2 (6th ed.; Paris, n.d.) 153-173.

Mary from any other revealed truth. Considered in the abstract, neither the hypostatic union nor the divine maternity nor the redemption of mankind nor its divinization absolutely demanded virginity either in the Saviour Himself or in His Mother.⁶⁶ And so the reasons alleged for Mary's virginity fall into the class of *rationes convenientiae*, which is to say, God's free choice is responsible for the mystery, but once the mystery is revealed, human reason, enlightened by faith, is able to see a fittingness or even a kind of necessity in the association of two revealed truths.⁶⁷

Now the *rationes convenientiae* traditionally given for the virginity of Mary fall into two general groups: those which in themselves prescind from any consideration of sin and redemption, and those which do not. For the most part those which do so prescind appeal either to the Trinitarian life of God in Himself or in us, or to the divinity of the Son of Mary (that is to say, to the divine maternity). This is why we have labeled such reasons Trinitarian and Incarnational. An example of this first class: the birth of the Son of God in time was virginal in order that the true and natural Son of God might have God alone as Father.⁶⁸ An example of the second class: the conception of Christ was virginal because

⁶⁶ There is a strong tendency today to reduce the role of demonstrative deduction in Mariology. Cf. Vollert, *The Scientific Structure of Mariology*, in *Mariology 2* (ed. J. B. Carol, O.F.M.; Milwaukee, 1957) 13-14; idem, *The Fundamental Principle of Mariology*, *ibid.*, 35-36; Journet, *op. cit.*, 388, who goes so far as to say that there is no abstract impossibility of God having been born from a sinner.

⁶⁷ For the general notion of *rationes convenientiae* cf. M. Flick, S.J., *Il valore dell'argomento di convenienza*, in *Problemi scelti di teologia contemporanea* (AG 68; Rome 1954) 57-61; and M. Flick, S.J. and Z. Alszeghy, S.J., *Il Creatore: Finizio della salvezza* (Florence, 1959) 81-87; also Y. Congar, O.P., *Théologie*, in *DTC* 15 455-456.

⁶⁸ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* III, 28, 1. The argument is presented in various forms. Cf. the authors mentioned above, note 65.

non-virginal conception is the means of the transmission of original sin, from which the Son of God was immune.⁶⁹

In view of what we have said about an adequate understanding of Mary's virginity in the present economy, theology must seek further light regarding the relative importance of these two principal aspects, Incarnational and redemptional.

Secondly, the similarity of the question here under discussion to the classic question of the finality of the Incarnation will not fail to have been noticed. It may be, in fact, that the question we wish to place is one particular Mariological application of the basic Christological question. In any case, the similarity is a great advantage, for it permits us not only to relate Mariology to Christology, but also, if we are willing to learn from history, to profit by the shortcomings as well as by the genuine insights of several centuries of Christological discussion. One of the principal shortcomings, it would appear, has been an inadequate or distorted *status quaestionis* regarding the finality of the Incarnation. The question "If Adam had not sinned, would Christ have come?", may be so understood as to be legitimate and fruitful. But its contrary-to-fact character opens the way to misunderstanding.⁷⁰ From the outset of any discussion of the significance of Mary's virginity, it should be made clear that the purely hypothetical is introduced for the sake of the actual, and that what is being sought is the relative importance of the two principal aspects of her virginity in the present economy. Are we to judge that it was freely chosen by God essentially because of its congruity with the eternal birth of the Son of God from the Father, with the spiritual birth of the same Son of God in men's souls, with the divine nature of Mary's Son, and for

⁶⁹ Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica* III, 28, 1; Donnelly, *op. cit.*, 253-254. It is well known that Mitterer rejects the validity of this argument. Cf. *op. cit.*, 31-51.

⁷⁰ For a good recent attempt to place the question cf. F. Malmberg, S.J., *Über den Gottmenschen* (Quaestiones disputatae 9; Freiburg, 1960) 9-26.

similar non-redemptional reasons, and that this aspect is so exclusively essential that the role of Mary's virginity in symbolizing and inviting to a life of redemptional expiation must be conceived as accidental? If so, then our view will find expression in the statement: Even in a non-redemptional Incarnational economy, the Mother of God would be a virgin. Or are we, on the contrary, to require for the *essential* significance of Mary's virginity *both* of these aspects? Then our view will find expression in the statement: In a non-redemptional Incarnational economy, the Mother of God would not be a virgin.

Thirdly, what has just been said should make it clear that one who chooses the second alternative is not by that fact rejecting the validity of the Incarnational or Trinitarian *rationes* offered for the virginity of Mary. He is merely maintaining that such *rationes*, to be valid, presuppose at least implicitly that our present order is redemptional.⁷¹ Hence he is insisting that both Incarnational and redemptional aspects are essential. His position can be clarified, perhaps, by two formulas, one a classic one which he rejects if understood absolutely, the other a modified formula. The classic formula, "Only a virgin could be mother of God, and only God could have a virgin mother," he will not accept as universally valid.⁷² He says instead, "Only a virgin could be mother of a redeeming God, and only a redeeming God could have a virgin mother."

Fourthly, though we have already briefly alluded to the special sense given by Père de Broglie to what we have called the redemptional element, it will be helpful at this point to

⁷¹ Cf. de Broglie, *Le "principe fondamental"* 326, note 15 *bis*.

⁷² Cf. J. M. Bover, S.J., *Cómo conciben los Santos Padres el misterio de la divina maternidad. La virginidad, clave de la maternidad divina*, in *EM* 8 (1949) 185-256. This work was consulted only when the present essay was substantially completed; it would seem to be one of the more important contributions to be considered in formulating the theological significance of Our Lady's virginity. Cf. also van Ackeren, *op. cit.*, 215.

speak of it again. Redemptional in the present context designates not only an order in which man is redeemed from sin, but one in which he is redeemed from sin through a life of privation and expiatory sacrifice on the part of the Saviour, in which privation and sacrifice man himself must participate, both on behalf of his own salvation and on behalf of others for whom he has a co-redemptive role. God could have effected man's redemption in a number of ways which would have put no premium on the privation and sacrifice involved in a virginal life. The return to paradise could have been perfected in an instant. It is only because the present redemptional economy is marked by the sign of the cross not only in the Redeemer but in the redeemed that virginity has redemptional value.⁷³

Fifthly, and finally, whatever conclusions may be reached regarding the relative importance of the Incarnational and redemptional aspects of Mary's virginity will have to be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the virginity of the Church and of the consecrated individual. For even if we accept, as we have, that ecclesial and consecrated virginity would have had no place in the state of innocence considered as a non-Incarnational state, it does not follow that it would have no place in a non-redemptional Incarnational economy. Our conception of these two derivative types of virginity will depend on the answer we give to the question regarding Mary's virginity.

Conclusion

It may be asked, by way of conclusion, why we have placed so much emphasis throughout on the redemptional rather than on the Incarnational aspect of virginity. There are two reasons.

First, contemporary theology is fascinated, and justly so,

⁷³ On the role of expiation in the present economy, cf. de Broglie, *Charité*, in *DS* 2, 682; also his *NRT* article (cf. note 29, above).

with the entitative supernatural and with the Incarnational character of the Christian economy; but it thereby runs the risk of neglecting somewhat the properly redemptional features of Christianity.

Secondly, we who look upon the virginity of Our Lady, of the Church, and of the consecrated individual in the Church with a faith which is not Adamic but Christic and therefore redemptional, who have therefore a certain affective con-naturality with virginity, may be tempted to so take its excellence and beauty for granted as to suppose that it would form an essential part of any supernatural, or at least of any Incarnational order. We are so accustomed by our redemptional faith to the pattern and rhythm of God's salvific action in the present dispensation, that we find it difficult to envisage even the possibility of His acting otherwise. This is why perhaps the very notion of a non-virginal Incarnation may cause us an initial shock.

Such an attitude, if acquiesced in, would be a misfortune. It would be an undue limitation of the divine freedom. It would deprive us as theologians of a legitimate and fruitful question. And, most of all, it would close us off, without sufficient reflection, from the possibility of a new and wonderful application of the Church's great and ecstatic cry uttered during the Easter vigil: *O felix culpa!* Should not the theologian of Mary give serious consideration to the arguments which would make it possible for us to sing, on the basis of sober theological reflection: *O felix culpa, quae tantam et talem meruit habere Matrem Redemptoris virginalem! O certe necessarium Evae peccatum, quod Mariae virginitate deletum est!*

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