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VIRGINITY IN THE LITURGY

An invitation to prepare a paper on the subject of virginity in the liturgy, with a request for emphasis on its spiritual meaning, on its theological significance, as I take it, is most encouraging evidence of the growing recognition in our time of liturgy as a *locus theologicus* in the full sense of that term. Until quite recently no one would have dreamed of making such demands on the liturgy. Theologians have, indeed, since the time of the Reformation, made use of the liturgy, but for the most part very sparingly, and almost exclusively for the purpose of documenting the existence of dogmas in Tradition.¹ It is only in the past few decades, and more precisely since Pius XI, in a celebrated audience, characterized it as "the most important organ of the ordinary magisterium of the Church,"² that there has been any general attempt to utilize liturgy for the purpose of elaborating the positive content of dogmas.

Virginity in the liturgy is, however, a vast subject for a paper such as this. We propose to limit it in two ways. First, we shall restrict ourselves to a study of virginity in the Roman liturgy. This restriction is not so drastic, nor so regrettable, as it might seem, since in employing the methods of comparative liturgy we shall necessarily take into account the Eastern liturgies, particularly the Byzantine liturgy, from which the Roman liturgy has borrowed so many of its Marian themes and texts, and also the other Latin liturgies, which in

¹ For a discussion of the use of liturgy as a *locus theologicus* by theologians since the time of the Reformation, cf. C. Vagaggini, *Il senso teologico della liturgia* (Rome, 1957) 428-438.

² Audience granted to the late Abbot Bernard Capelle of Mont-César (Louvain), Dec. 12, 1935. For the full text, cf. A. Bugnini, *Documenta pontificia ad instaurationem liturgiae spectantia*, 1903-1953 (Rome, 1953) 70-71.

some cases provide the best commentary of pertinent Roman texts. Second, we shall restrict ourselves to a study of the major themes concerning virginity. We find ample justification for this second restriction of the topic in the very nature of the liturgy as an organ of the magisterium of the Church.

Not all liturgical texts are proposed to the faith of the worshipper with the same degree of authority, nor with the same degree of insistence. There are texts which are common to the entire Church, and others which form the propers of local feasts. There are texts which have been in constant use for centuries, and others which date from the recent past. There are texts which are employed repeatedly throughout the year, and others which are to be found only in one context. For theological purposes it is surely legitimate, and even necessary, to distinguish between these texts. Local texts can be valuable for the study of theology, especially for the history of dogma, but as a theological source they can perhaps be best compared with the witness of ecclesiastical authors. Recently composed texts are often more interesting as evidence of the influence of theologians on liturgy than as a source for their work. Isolated texts are usually quite restricted in their tenor and are useful for our purposes chiefly to the extent that they provide necessary clarification of general themes. For the identification of these major themes, and for their study, we must concentrate on the texts which are common to the entire Church, which bear the sanction of centuries of constant use and the emphasis of insistent repetition. These texts can be taken as an imperious expression of the faith of the Church at worship.

Once identified, these texts must be critically interpreted. Here it is necessary first of all to determine their literary genre. Liturgy, in general, is praise, not theology. As often as not, a doctrine is presupposed rather than expressed, and when it is expressed, the form of expression is more commonly that of

poetry or drama than that of scientific theological exposition. Terms are often chosen for their lyrical or rhetorical impact, or for the purpose of achieving some stylistic effect, such as the *cursus*. And even when apparently technical terms are employed, they are in most cases technical terms of some terminology other than our own.

For the criticism of liturgical texts, for the determination of their literary genre and for the correct interpretation of their terminology, we cannot confine ourselves to a study of these texts such as we find them in our present liturgical books. We must trace them back in history, reconstitute them, in so far as possible, in their original form, identify their sources, and, what is extremely important, determine their original use. The Church can, of course, give an authentic interpretation of a given liturgical text. But she very rarely does so, and in the absence of very clear indications to the contrary, we must assume that a text has maintained the tenor with which it was admitted to the liturgy.

Since most of the texts with which we are concerned in this paper are Marian texts, it is of the utmost importance, in view of the considerations of methodology just noted, to bear in mind that the Blessed Virgin Mary was not the first virgin, at Rome or elsewhere, to be honored with a feast of her own. Marian liturgy, such as we know it, represents, in its origins, a fusion of elements from the liturgy of the Christmas season with elements from the liturgy of virgins, and it does not date back, at Rome at least, much beyond the middle of the seventh century. For our purposes it is necessary to recall here at least the general circumstances of its origins and the broad lines of its early development.

For the Roman Office the earliest extant liturgical book, a *Liber Responsalis* destined for the use of some Frankish secular church, dates only from the latter part of the ninth cen-

tury.³ It contains antiphons, with indication of the accompanying psalms, and responsories. For the feasts it contains, including those of the Purification, the Assumption, and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, it presupposes offices roughly identical to ours as regards both their structure and their formulae. We may assume from what we know generally of the circumstances of the adoption of the Roman rite in the Carolingian kingdom that we have here substantially the form in which these offices were celebrated at Rome in the second half of the eighth century. It is not possible to go back further with any degree of assurance, except for the study of certain isolated texts.

As regards the liturgy of the Mass, and that of certain sacramental and consecratory rites as well, we are much more fortunate. We dispose of a considerable number of manuscripts of the seventh century and especially of the eighth century containing various forms of the Roman sacramentary, lectionary and antiphonary which, thanks to the patient research of scholars, permit us to trace in detail the development of the Mass liturgy from the latter part of the sixth century to the end of the eighth century, that is to say, throughout the decisive period of its formation.⁴

The Leonine Sacramentary, a sixth-century compilation of Mass formularies otherwise known as the *Sacramentarium Veronense*, provides evidence, as we should expect, for an al-

³ Manuscript Paris Bibl. Nat. lat. 17436, formerly of Compiègne; for the Maurist edition, cf. *PL* 78, 725-850.

⁴ The results of modern research on these documents have been critically reviewed and admirably synthesized in the monumental work of A. Chavasse, *Le Sacramentaire Gélisien* (Vat. Reg. 316): *Sacramentaire presbytéral en usage dans les titres romains au VIIe siècle* (Tournai, 1958). For the development of the Roman lectionary and antiphonary during this period, as revealed by a critical study of the related documents, consult the same author's article: *Les plus anciennes types du lectionnaire et de l'antiphonaire romains de la messe*, in *RBn* 62 (1952) 3-94.

ready well developed liturgy of Christmas.⁵ It also contains, in addition to a certain number of Masses for virgin martyrs, the necessary formulae for a rite of consecration of virgins which we know by other evidence to have existed throughout the West from at least the middle of the fourth century.⁶ The consecratory preface for this rite, the formula *Deus castorum corporum*, which, with a somewhat expanded finale, still figures in the greatly developed rite of the Roman Pontifical, and which was quite possibly composed by St. Leo the Great, deserves our attention here as one of the earliest liturgical texts concerning virginity.⁷

In accordance with the standard "eucharistic" structure of Roman consecratory prefaces, this formula seeks to motivate the desired intervention of God in favor of the virgins binding themselves with a *continentiae propositum* by rehearsing the main facts of salvation history and in particular by situating virginity in the context of the divine Mystery. In addition to pouring forth His grace on all those who have been born of the

⁵ It gives nine separate Mass formularies for Christmas. Cf. *Sacramentarium Veronense* (Cod. Bibl. Capit. Veron. 80), ed. C. Mohlberg (Rome, 1956) nn. 1239-1272.

⁶ *Sacramentarium Veronense*, formulae *Ad virgines sacras*, nn. 1103-1104, and a proper *Hanc igitur oblationem* formula, n. 283. For a discussion of the sources for a study of the early existence and form of this rite, cf. R. Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'Eglise romaine* (Paris, 1954) 95-162.

⁷ *Sacramentarium Veronense*, n. 1104. The formula is also given, with slight variants and with the expanded finale found in the Roman Pontifical, apparently of Gallican composition, in the Gelasian Sacramentary and in the closely related *Missale Francorum*; cf. *Liber Sacramentorum . . . Circuli* (Cod. Vat. Reg. 316): *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, ed. C. Mohlberg (Rome, 1960) nn. 788-790, and *Missale Francorum* (Cod. Vat. Reg. 257). ed. C. Mohlberg (Rome, 1957) n. 47. A critical edition of the text, on the basis of these three documents and derivatives of the latter two, has been attempted by J. Magne, *La prière de consécration des vierges: "Deus castorum corporum,"* in *EL* 72 (1958) 245-267. The attribution of this text to St. Leo is based on its really remarkable similarities of doctrine, vocabulary and style with his authentic works; cf. Metz, *op. cit.*, 144-147; Magne, *op. cit.*, 266-267; and C. Coebergh, *Saint Léon auteur de la grande formule Ad virgines sacras du Sacramentaire léonien*, in *SE* 6 (1954) 282-326.

Holy Spirit, God is reminded, He has granted to some more lofty souls the great gift of spurning marriage, even though it continues to be blessed, in such wise that *concupiscerent sacramentum, nec imitarentur quod nuptiis agitur, sed diligerent quod nuptiis praenotatur*.⁸ We have here, it would seem, an unmistakable reference to *Eph.* 5:32, to the great sacrament of Christ and the Church. That is to say that the Church, in one of the most ancient and solemn of her prayers concerning virginity, defines the vocation of virgins in terms of her own relation to Christ.

It is the great privilege of virgins to serve as icons, as it were, of the Church, to express visibly by a life characterized by continence, by physical chastity and integrity, the total fidelity and consecration to Christ that is spiritual reality for the Church and of all Christians who are true to their calling. We have here, no doubt, at least a partial explanation for the preoccupation with the physical aspects of chastity and integrity which marks some liturgical texts, particularly ancient ones, and for the use in this regard of expressions which sometimes impress us as indiscreet or even crude. The function of an icon is to provide visible expression, and therefore the physical element is indispensable. Obviously the expression of the spiritual reality should be as perfect as possible, and in this preface the Church is not content with asking for virgins the grace of perseverance in perfect continence; she also implores for them, very solemnly, the grace of faithfully mirroring in their lives the fullness of evangelical perfection. This plea is based, quite ingenuously, on an appeal to the honor of Christ: His brides should not be lacking in virtues to be found in the wives of men.

⁸ According to Magne, *op. cit.*, 258, the original version of this passage is represented by the more concise version of the *Missale Francorum* and its derivatives: *non hoc concupiscerent quod habet mortale connubium, sed hoc eligerent quod promisit divinum sacramentum*. In either case the sense is the same.

The bridal theme is therefore absolutely fundamental to virginity as envisaged in this preface. This is true of the rite of consecration generally, very strikingly so in its later development, but also in its early form, in so far as we know it.⁹ The basic antiphons of the rite, which recur in the Office of St. Agnes with slight variants, and which are so rich in bridal imagery of biblical inspiration, do not, it is true, appear in manuscripts before the tenth century; however, their source, the early fifth-century pseudo-Ambrosian *Gesta* of St. Agnes, may very well reflect the contemporary liturgy of virgins.¹⁰ In any case, the ultimate source for the antiphon *Induit me Dominus*, Is. 61:10, is given as a lesson *In velacione virginum* in the seventh-century Gallican Lectionary of Luxeuil.¹¹

The lesson *In velanda* of the Evangeliary of Naples, which in some ways reflects the Roman lectionary system of the sixth-century, is even more remarkable: *Jn.* 2:1, the marriage feast of Cana.¹² The choice of this lesson might be due to the fact that Epiphany, together with Easter and the feasts of the Apostles, had been fixed by Pope Gelasius I as the normal times for the consecration of virgins.¹³ Epiphany is given priority in

⁹ This is likewise true of the Gallican and Mozarabic formulae for the consecration of virgins in the late-seventh to early eighth-century form in which they have been preserved and in which Roman influence is very evident; cf. *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, nn. 791-792; *Missale Gallicanum Vetus* (Cod. Vat. Palat. 493), ed. C. Mohlberg (Rome, 1958) nn. 13-14; *The Bobbio Missal* (Paris Lat. 13246), ed. E. A. Lowe (London, 1920) 546-547; and the Mozarabic *Liber Ordinum*, ed. M. Férotin (Paris, 1904) 63-66. In these texts, however, there is a marked emphasis on the eschatological note, with *Mt.* 25:1-15 (see also the Gelasian Masses for the anniversary of the consecration: *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, nn. 793-796, 800-803) and *Apoc.* 14:3-4 (see also "Gallican" finale of Roman consecratory preface) as biblical sources.

¹⁰ For more details on these antiphons and their sources, cf. Metz, *op. cit.*, 202-212.

¹¹ P. Salmon, *Le Lectionnaire de Luxeuil* (Rome, 1934) 210-211.

¹² Cf. H. Leclercq, *Le Comes de Naples*, in *DACL* 12 (1935) 759, 766.

¹³ *Epistola . . . ad universos episcopos per Lucaniam, Brutios et Siciliam constitutos*, c. 12; *Epist. rom. pontific.*, ed. A. Thiel, 1, 369.

the listing of these feasts. Does the practice of holding consecrations on that date represent the more ancient tradition? In any case, it seems clear that Epiphany was associated with the consecration of virgins at Rome almost, if not, from the time of its institution, and that it was preceded in this regard by Christmas, for St. Ambrose speaks of a consecration of virgins at Christmas by Pope Liberius, at a time, that is to say, when Epiphany was probably not yet celebrated at Rome.¹⁴ Surely the choice of these two feasts of Christmas and Epiphany, with their fundamental theme of the espousals of Christ with humanity, with the Church, that is, is eloquent testimony that the Church at worship contemplates in her virgins the image of herself.

As regards the Mass liturgy for the feasts of virgins, the basic repertory of collects, lessons and chants, such as we find them in the Common of Virgins of the Roman Missal, it is necessary to bear in mind for their correct interpretation that these texts had already been largely fixed by the early seventh century, at a time, therefore, when only virgin martyrs were honored with feasts.¹⁵ As a result, the theme of

¹⁴ St. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 3, 1; ed. O. Faller, *Florilegium Patristicum* 31 (Bonn, 1933) 63. On the interpretation of this text, with an indication of the literature on the subject, cf. Metz, *op. cit.*, 126-128. Note, however, that St. Ambrose also speaks of the consecration of virgins at Easter as customary: *Exhortatio virginitatis*, c. 7; *PL* 16, 364. The consecration of virgins on the feasts of the Apostles is attested by the Leonine Sacramentary, for the proper *Hanc igitur oblationem* follows the first Mass formulary for the feast of SS. Peter and Paul; *Sacramentarium Veronense*, n. 283.

¹⁵ All of the collects are to be found either in the Leonine Sacramentary or in the Gregorian Sacramentary, in its earliest form. All of the epistle lessons, with the addition of *Sir.* 24:7-15, are indicated in the Comes of Würzburg, which in many respects represents the pre-Gregorian system of lessons, and which, following the feast of SS. Agnes and Agatha (lesson: 2 *Cor.* 10:17-11:2), provides a sort of "common" of virgins under the rubric *in nat scarum superscriptarum*; cf. G. Morin, *Le plus ancienne Comes ou lectionnaire de l'Eglise romaine*, in *RBN* 27 (1910) 49. The two basic gospel lessons, *Mt.* 13:44-52 and *Mt.* 25:1-13, are to be found in the common source of the various forms of the Roman evangeliary edited by Th. Klauser, *Das römische Capitulare*

virginity is rivaled throughout by the theme of martyrdom. Thus in the chants we find *Ps.* 118, so expressive of the trials and victories of martyrdom, used almost as extensively as *Ps.* 44, the virginal psalm *par excellence*, and even in the case of this latter psalm the choice of verses seems to be influenced to some extent by the theme of martyrdom.¹⁶ The same is true of the lessons. The epistle lessons from *Sir.* 51 are clearly chosen with martyrdom in mind, while the lesson 2 *Cor.* 10:17-11:2 expresses the bridal theme, and that in a characteristically ecclesial perspective. Of the two basic gospel lessons, the first, *Mt.* 13:44-52, is susceptible of interpretation in terms of either theme or of both, while the tenor of the second, *Mt.* 25:1-13, is emphatically bridal. As for the collects, they refer almost exclusively to the theme of martyrdom. However, the references they contain to the confession of martyrs and to the victories of feminine frailty are not, we shall see, entirely foreign to the theme of virginity, particularly when evaluated in terms of their more explicit formulation in the prefaces of the Leonine Sacramentary.

We must now note briefly the development of that second source of Marian liturgy, the liturgy of the Christmas season.¹⁷ As has been mentioned, the Leonine Sacramentary provides

Evangeliorum, 1, *Typen* (Münster in Westf., 1935) and which represents substantially the Gregorian system of lessons. The same can be said for the chants; they belong to the oldest attainable form of the Mass antiphonary, the common source of the sixth, eighth, and ninth-century manuscripts containing the antiphonary edited by R.-J. Hesbert, *Antiphonale Septuplex* (Brussels, 1935).

¹⁶ This factor has perhaps not been sufficiently taken into account by J. Pascher, *Der Psalm 44 im Jungfrauenoffizium der römischen Liturgie*, in *LJ* 1 (1954) 152-156. His contention is that in these chants, verses of *Ps.* 44 which in their original context apply to the royal bridegroom, and particularly the verse *Dilexisti*, apply to Christ, not to the virgin; that a dramatic inter-play between Christ and the virgin is intended. This is plausible, but we doubt that his demonstration can be considered conclusive.

¹⁷ For a detailed analysis of the texts of the old Roman sacramentaries for evidence of the cult of Mary in the early Christmas liturgy, cf. P. Bruylants, *Les origines du culte de la Vierge à Rome*, in *QLP* 23 (1938) 200-210, 270-281.

a fully developed liturgy for Christmas; it gives nine Mass formularies, all of them with proper prefaces. A good number of these formulae make explicit reference to the role of the *virgo mater* in the Incarnation.¹⁸ The Gelasian Sacramentary, in the seventh century, incorporates many of the Leonine formulae into its four Christmas Masses, along with other formulae from different sources, one of which likewise refers expressly to the role of Mary.¹⁹ On the other hand, in the composition of the Christmas Masses of the Gregorian Sacramentary, which were destined to become those of the Roman Missal, the redactor, most probably St. Gregory himself, eliminated all formulae referring expressly to Mary, except for the *Communicantes* and two others, and these last two he relegated to an appendix of *Aliae Orationes*.²⁰

The best explanation for the systematic elimination of these "Marian" collects from the Christmas Masses is, it would seem, that it was felt at the time that the role of Mary in the Incarnation was otherwise and better emphasized thanks to the institution of Advent at Rome some time during the second half of the sixth century. In time, Advent would acquire a rather distinctive eschatological dimension in the Roman liturgy. In its origins, however, it represents a somewhat tardy imitation by Rome of a movement to provide Christmas with a liturgical prelude, a movement which seems to have originated in the East some time during the first half of the fifth century, in the general context of the Nestorian controversy, and which was occasioned by the desire to exploit more fully

¹⁸ *Sacramentarium Veronense*, n. 1270: *VD . . . quia et mater virgo non posset nisi subolem proferre divinam et deus homo nasci dignatus congruentius non debere nisi virgine matre generari*; cf. also nn. 1247, 1244, 1245, 1252.

¹⁹ *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, n. 17: *qui hunc diem . . . per partum beatae virginis Mariae consecrasti*; note also n. 27, given as a collect *ad vespereos sive matutinos*: *. . . humanae . . . naturae quam unigenitus tuus in utero perpetuae virginis adsumpsit*.

²⁰ H. Lietzmann, *Das Sacramentarium Gregorianum nach dem Aachener Ur exemplar* (Münster in Westf., 1921) n. 9.

in worship the scriptural texts supporting the orthodox doctrine concerning the Incarnation. Among these texts the first chapter of *Luke* was regarded as capital, and it was, in fact, the *lectio continua* of this chapter which would provide the basis for the organization of this developing pre-Christmas liturgy. The various events preceding the birth of Christ as related there, assorted with appropriate Old Testament messianic texts, came to be commemorated as a series of "Annunciations" on the Sundays preceding Christmas.²¹

Rome was to adopt this program, but with this difference, that the events commemorated were limited to two, the Annunciation properly so called and the Visitation, and that their commemoration was attached, not to the Sundays preceding Christmas, but to Wednesday and Friday of Ember week, an institution peculiar to the Roman liturgy. This arrangement, featuring our present lessons *Is.* 2:2-5, 7:10-15 and *Lk.* 1:26-38 for Ember Wednesday, and *Is.* 11:1-5 and *Lk.* 1:39-47 for Ember Friday, is attested by the Comes of Würzburg.²² It can be said that it dates back to the second half of the sixth century and that it preceded the organization of the Roman Advent such as we know it.

The development of this pre-Christmas liturgy, at Rome and elsewhere, would provide the role of Mary in the Incarnation, as the *virgo mater*, with considerable relief, and it would be followed rather closely in time by the institution of feasts in her honor. Here again the initiative came from the East, where the vindication of the title *Theotokos* by the Council of Ephesus (431) was followed by a triumphant surge of Marian piety. The definitive history of the institution of these feasts will require vastly more critical and minute research

²¹ For a discussion of the evidence for the origins of this pre-Christmas liturgy in the fifth century, and for an indication of its basic content, together with bibliographical references, cf. W. Croce, *Die Adventsliturgie im Licht ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, in *Zf&T* 76 (1954) 257-278.

²² Cf. Morin, *op. cit.*, 63-64.

than has been done to date; nevertheless, it is possible to chart their development in general.²³

For the earliest period, embracing the fifth and sixth centuries, we can distinguish two basic types of Marian feasts. First, there is a form of Commemoration of the Blessed Virgin which owes its origin, it would seem, to the custom of congratulating mothers on the day following their delivery. This feast, which is still observed in the Byzantine rite as the Synaxis of the Mother of God, and in the Syrian rites with what was probably the original title of Congratulations of the Mother of God, may quite possibly date back to the fifth century. Its theme is, of course, the maternity of Mary, in so far as it can be said to have a proper theme, for as a matter of fact its liturgy is very largely taken from that of Christmas.

The second type of Marian feasts is related to the celebration of events, or mysteries, in the life of Mary. These feasts probably originated for the most part in the Church of Jerusalem, in geographical proximity with most of the sites associated with events in the life of Mary by biblical and apocryphal literature.

Two of these feasts have as their object mysteries which

²³ For a summary account of the origins and early development of these feasts, in the light of research to the present time, and an indication of at least the major bibliography on the subject, cf. Th. Maertens, *Le développement liturgique et biblique du culte de la Vierge*, in *PLr* 36 (1954) 225-250. For further details on the history and present content of Marian feasts in the various rites, consult the series of articles devoted to this in H. du Manoir, ed., *Maria*, 1 (Paris, 1949) 215-413. The full texts of the propers for the Byzantine Marian feasts are to be found in the *Menaia* (Roman edition in 6 volumes, 1888-1901); for a French translation of the texts for the major feasts, cf. E. Mercenier, *La prière des églises de rite byzantin*, 2, 1: *Fêtes fixes* (Chevetogne, Belgium, 1953). For an indication of the scriptural lessons in use for Marian feasts (Mass and Office) in the different rites using the Syriac language (for the first half of the year, from November to the feast of the Annunciation), cf. G. Khouri-Sarkis, *Pericopes bibliques des églises de langue syriaque*, in *OS* 3 (1958) 359-386; unfortunately, the tables for the second half of the year have still not been published.

are also, and primarily, mysteries of Christ. One of them, the Purification, was, according to the pilgrim Egeria, celebrated with great solemnity at Jerusalem already at the end of the fourth century;²⁴ the primary object of the feast was the Meeting of Christ with humanity in the person of Simeon, and it was only later, and in the West, that its Marian aspects became sufficiently accentuated for it to be considered a Marian feast.²⁵ The other, the Annunciation, first entered the liturgy, as we have seen, as a pre-Christmas commemoration; however, beginning in the sixth century it would also be celebrated on March 25, its "historical" date, and would quite properly come to be regarded as one of the greatest Marian feasts, and that without any shift in its Christological accent.

Meanwhile, specifically Marian feasts were being instituted, mainly, it would seem, as anniversaries of the dedication of sanctuaries erected on sites associated in pious legend and in apocryphal literature with events in the life of Mary. This is almost certainly true of the earliest attested Marian feast, a feast of the *Theotokos*, which dates back beyond the middle of the fifth century, and which was celebrated on August 15 at the sanctuary of the Kathisma, south of Jerusalem.^{25a} This was also, very probably, true of the origins of the great Marian feasts of the Dormition, the Nativity and the Presentation, the first two of which certainly date back to the sixth century and had already acquired a certain universality in the East in the early seventh century.

In the present state of research it is not possible to chart

²⁴ *Itinerarium Egeriae*, 26; ed. Franceschini-Weber, *CCChr* 175, 72.

²⁵ We might note that the feast was introduced at Rome with its Greek title of *Hypapanti*; cf., for instance, *Sacramentarium Gregorianum*, ed. Lietzmann, n. 27. Another title was *Sci Symeonis*. The title of Purification dates from the eighth century; the change in title, a gradual adoption of the new name, is documented, so to speak, by the oldest manuscripts of the antiphonary. Cf. Hesbert, *op. cit.*, n. 29a.

^{25a} Cf. B. Capelle, *La fête de la Vierge à Jérusalem au V^{me} siècle*, in *Msn* 56 (1943) 1-33.

with precision the early development of the liturgy of these feasts. The attributions of various compositions to known historical authors, such as we find them in the Byzantine *Menaia* and in other Eastern liturgical books, are subject to caution. However, it does seem that a basic repertory of these poetic compositions, a good number of which are to be found in identical or closely related versions, and many of which are inspired by themes exploited by panegyrists from as early as the fifth century, existed already in the seventh century. And the same can be said with regard to the basic choice of scriptural lessons.

It was not until towards the middle of the seventh century that Rome followed the Eastern initiative by instituting a special feast for Mary. It is possible, not only to identify this first Roman feast, but to reconstitute its Mass liturgy, thanks to the traces it has left in early liturgical books.²⁶ It was a generic feast, celebrated on January 1, only later to be observed as the octave of Christmas, with the title *Natale sanctae Mariae*. The theme of the orations, which, in the papal liturgy at least, were those still in use for the octave day of Christmas, is that of the maternity. In this respect, and in its rapprochement with the feast of Christmas as well, this feast resembles the Byzantine and Syrian feast of December 26. However, the similarity ends there. For while the Eastern feast derived its liturgy very largely from that of Christmas, the Roman feast borrowed the texts for its chants and lessons, purely and simply, from the already fully developed liturgy of virgins. The chants, all of them taken from Ps. 44 except for the Communion verse, and all of them standard in the early liturgy of virgins, are identical with those given in the Gregorian Antiphony for the ancient feasts of St. Agnes and of St. Euphemia: *Vultum tuum*, as Introit; *Diffusa est gratia*, as Gradual; *Specie tua*,

²⁶ Cf. B. Botte, *La première fête mariale de la liturgie romaine*, in *EL* 47 (1933) 425-430; cf. also A. Chavasse, *La Sacramentaire Gélisien*, 383-384.

as Alleluia verse; *Offerentur regi*, as Offertory; and *Simile est regnum coelorum thesauro*, as Communion verse.²⁷ The gospel lesson, as the Communion verse would suggest, was *Mt.* 13:44-52, while the epistle lesson, part of which still serves for the Mass and Office of the Common of the Blessed Virgin, was *Sir.* 24:11-20, which is already attested by the Comes of Würzburg as belonging to the liturgy of virgins.²⁸

This first feast of Mary at Rome was to prove ephemeral. With the introduction of the new Eastern feasts during the second half of the seventh century, and particularly the feast of the Dormition with its Eastern date, the celebration of a generic feast on January 1, with the title of *Natale*, became pointless, and it was replaced with a newly instituted octave of Christmas.²⁹ However, while new lessons were adopted for these new feasts, in general conformity with Eastern usage, except for the provisional retention of *Sir.* 24:11-20 for the feast of the Dormition, the same chants, taken from the liturgy of virgins, continued to be used as basic Marian chants, integrally for the feast of the Assumption, and partially for the feast of the Annunciation, here in concurrence with chants taken from the December Ember days, which had, of course, provided the lessons for this feast.³⁰

It is of the greatest importance to note this fact that the Mass liturgy of Marian feasts, for the earliest period, was very largely borrowed from the liturgy of virgins. This was to entail an initial accent on the virginity of Mary which would be normative for the subsequent development of Marian liturgy.

²⁷ Cf. Hesbert, *op. cit.*, nn. 16bis, 23bis, 28, 153.

²⁸ See note 15. B. Capelle, *Les épîtres sapientielles des fêtes de la Vierge*, in *QLP* 27 (1946) 42-49, suggests that this lesson was chosen with a view to providing a description of the contemplative ideal of virgins. We would be inclined to consider that the ecclesial perspective prompted the choice.

²⁹ For a brilliant sketch of the very complex history of the introduction of these feasts into the Roman liturgy, cf. Chavasse, *op. cit.*, 375-402.

³⁰ Cf. Hesbert, *op. cit.*, nn. 33a, 140.

More specifically, it helps to account for the prominence accorded to the bridal theme in Marian feasts of the Roman liturgy; those of the Byzantine liturgy, in contrast, seem to have maintained a much more direct relation to the liturgy of Christmas, where Mary is envisaged more readily as the bridal chamber than as a bride, with the result that they are very definitely centered around the theme of the maternity, which is lavishly illustrated with a host of Old Testament figures, notably those of the Ark and the Temple.³¹

For the interpretation of this bridal theme, so characteristic of the Marian feasts of the Roman liturgy, it is essential to bear in mind the origin of the earliest texts in which it finds expression. These texts, as we have seen, were originally adopted by the Church for the liturgy of virgins, with the evident purpose of celebrating in their vocation her own spiritual reality. Now what can be applied to virgins, can be applied also, and pre-eminently so, to the Blessed Virgin. The fact that the Church does so in the case of these particular texts is dramatic evidence that she recognizes in the Blessed Virgin her own prototype, just as she recognizes her image in her virgins. But it also means that the reference to the Church made in these texts is fundamental for their interpretation. We have no warrant, at least not on the basis of their liturgical use, to draw from these texts anything that is not directly applicable to the Church herself, with regard to virginity and bridal character, that is. And the same norm would seem to apply to texts related to the bridal theme which have been incorporated into Marian liturgy.

In the case of the Office it is not possible, due to the already noted lack of sufficiently early documents, to identify

³¹ The title of bride, usually as *nymphe theou* or, as in the Akathistos Hymn, *nymphe anympheute*, occurs with relative frequency, but there is no considerable development of the bridal theme as such. Nothing could be more significant in this regard than the really negligible role of the *Canticle of Canticles* in the Byzantine Marian liturgy.

with certainty the original source of Marian liturgy. It has been argued that its source is to be found in the Christmas liturgy.³² Now it is evident, and hardly surprising, that elements of the Marian liturgy were borrowed from the Christmas liturgy and from that of Advent as well. But to maintain that the Christmas liturgy is the source, for the Office, of the Marian liturgy might well be begging the question, for it could be the ultimate source of the liturgy of virgins as well.

With regard to the distribution of psalms, one of the more stable elements of the Office, we should note that in the oldest extant document, the *Liber Responsalis* of Compiègne, the Matins psalms for the office *unius virginis* are identical with those given for feasts of the Blessed Virgin, then as now, with this one exception, that *Ps.* 98, then as now the final psalm for the Octave of Christmas, is given instead of *Ps.* 97, at present the final psalm for offices of both the Blessed Virgin and virgins.³³ The distribution of psalms for the two offices is therefore virtually identical in our oldest source. It differs from the distribution of Christmas psalms in the substitution of *Pss.* 8, 23, 45, 86, and 96 for *Pss.* 2, 47 (now used for the Common of Virgins!), 71, 84 and 88. The distribution of psalms for the Octave of Christmas, which we must not forget was preceded on January 1 by the *Natale sanctae Mariae*, appears to be a combination of the Christmas distribution of psalms with another series of psalms, some of which lend themselves very readily to the Christmas theme, but which, as a group, seem to have this in common that they apply primarily to the Church.

It so happens that for the period prior to that for which there are extant Office books we are not entirely limited to the indications of the Mass antiphonary for our knowledge

³² Cf. G. Frénaud, *Le culte liturgique de Notre-Dame*, in *RG* 31 (1952) 104-111.

³³ Cf. *PL* 78, 829.

of the liturgical use of psalms. As is known, it was customary in the early Middle Ages to provide the psalms, in copies of the psalter, with *tituli*, or Christian titles; these titles, intended to facilitate the use of the psalms in prayer, often reflect the association of a given psalm with the object of certain feasts and, indeed, in some cases actually incorporate liturgical notes. Six separate Latin series of these *tituli*, dating back to the sixth century in their present form, or at least in their sources, have recently been edited from the mass of psalter manuscripts.³⁴ As we would expect, they provide abundant evidence of the early association of the psalms of the Christmas office with the mystery of the Incarnation and, specifically, with the theme of the espousals of Christ. But they also provide ample evidence of the application to the mystery of the Church of all the psalms used for the office of virgins and not for Christmas. On the basis of this evidence, and from what we have seen of the ecclesial perspective of the early liturgy of virgins, it seems likely that these psalms were used for the office of virgins from the time of its organization.

It is remarkable that in many of the *tituli* for the psalms which the Church applies to herself and to her virgins there is reference to the faith of the Church or of her members, usually in terms of praise or confession.³⁵ Now, as we have

³⁴ P. Salmon, *Les "Tituli Psalmorum" des manuscrits latins* (Paris, 1959). Three series of psalter collects, collects that is, which were intended for recitation after the individual psalms recited at Office and which were inspired from their content, have been edited by L. Brou, from the papers of A. Wilmart: *The Psalter Collects, From V-VIth Century Sources* (London, 1949); however, these collects, unlike the *tituli*, are quite exclusively tropological in tenor, and consequently do not in most cases provide very clear clues to the liturgical use of the psalms.

³⁵ The reference to faith is much more explicit in some of the pertinent psalter collects. Particularly notable: *custodi quaesumus ecclesiam tuam ex varietate gentium congregatam, ut dum te ex ipsa credulitatis iustitia corde puro diligimus principatum aeterni saeculi cum patribus mereamur*. Brou, *op. cit.*, *Romana series* n. 44. Cf. also *ibid*, *Hispana series* n. 86; *Romana series* n. 86.

already noted, the theme of confession, in the sense of constancy in faith, and implicitly in praise, occurs in the Masses of virgin martyrs. In these orations, it is true, we find a bare reference to the theme, but these orations, we must not forget, were originally composed as part of Mass formularies complete with prefaces. It is to these prefaces, such as we find them in the older sacramentaries, that we should look for the explicit formulation of the theme.

These prefaces, notably those of the Leonine Sacramentary, situate the confession of the virgin martyrs in the context of the protoevangelium. To the virgin, faithful *inter saeculi blandimenta*,³⁶ it is given to revenge the *deceptio* of Eve,³⁷ *male in sua paradisi felicitate fidens*,³⁸ in such wise, *ut diabolus, qui virum per imbecillitatem mulieris impulerat . . . per muliebrem quoque fragilitatem mutuo ediceretur obtritus*.³⁹

Texts such as these, and it would be easy to multiply them, anticipate in virtually all of its details the portrait of the Blessed Virgin as the new Eve by whose obedience and faithful acceptance of the Word of God the damage wrought through the *perfidia* of Eve is repaired, such as we find it developed in numerous ancient prefaces of the Latin liturgies.⁴⁰ Obviously, the analogy between the virgin martyrs and the Blessed Virgin is very imperfect. The explanation for these texts, for their existence, that is, can only be that the Church sees in the confession of her virgin martyrs, in their fidelity, the image of her own integrity of faith, thanks to which she destroys the hold of the devil on her children, and with which she faithfully continues the role of Mary, her prototype: *Gaude Maria*

³⁶ *Sacramentarium Veronense*, n. 1178.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 826.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 1180.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, n. 839.

⁴⁰ For an indication of these prefaces, and an analysis of their content, cf. G. Frénaud, *La "Nouvelle Eve" dans les liturgies latines du VI^e au XIII^e siècle*, in *BSFEM* 13 (1955) 90-119.

*Virgo, cunctas haereses sola interemisti, quae Gabrielis arch-angeli dictis credidisti.*⁴¹

Here we have faith as the second major theme of virginity as it is envisaged in the liturgy, and we find it related to the first major theme, the bridal theme, for it is in union with her Spouse, the second Adam, that the Church, prefigured by Mary, achieves her victory over Satan.

For the Church in her liturgy these two themes are necessarily related. She does not separate maternity from virginity, neither in herself nor in Mary. The virginity which she celebrates at worship is, in the words of the collect of the Octave of Christmas (which, as we have seen, is the oldest Marian collect of the Roman liturgy) a *virginitas fecunda*. It is spiritual maternity, maternity through faith. It would be very easy to document this theme copiously with liturgical texts, but a few examples will suffice.

For most of the Marian feasts the gospel lesson is chosen with reference to the event in the life of Mary which is the object of the feast. However, for the feast of the Assumption there was no such "indicated" gospel lesson, and there was consequently a freedom of choice. The lesson in universal use from the beginning was *Lk.* 10:38-42, with the addition of *Lk.* 11:27-28. In the Byzantine liturgy these lessons would in time come to be used as the lessons at Mass for most Marian feasts, while in the Roman liturgy the second would be adopted as the gospel lesson for the Common of the Blessed Virgin, where we find distilled, as it were, the basic Marian texts. There is no need to insist on the reference of

⁴¹ From a study of the sources of this responsory, now restricted in slightly varying forms to the feasts of the Annunciation and of St. Gabriel, but formerly much more extensively employed, it is evident that it is directly related to the protoevangelium and not, as has sometimes been imagined, intended as a reference to miraculous interventions of Mary against heresies and their champions. Cf. L. Brou, *Marie, "Destructrice de toutes les hérésies" et la belle légende du répons Gaude Maria Virgo*, in *EL* 62 (1948) 321-353, with *Addendum*: *EL* 65 (1951) 28-33.

these lessons to faith as the essential modality of the divine maternity. If further proof of the primary importance the Church attaches to the faith of Mary in the liturgy were needed, we could recall the Matins response: *Beata es Virgo Maria Dei Genetrix quae credidisti*, which in its various forms (also as an antiphon) serves to orchestrate the theme throughout the Church year.

As regards the virginal maternity of the Church, the theme of faith is largely implicit in the Roman liturgy, at least in our present texts, where we are ordinarily invited to contemplate the Church in Mary as in a mirror. However, some of the older Latin liturgical texts are less discreet, particularly those of the non-Roman Latin liturgies, and contain numerous very clear references to the theme; we find what is perhaps the most explicit formulation of the theme in the *Post pridie* formula of the Mozarabic feast in *diem sanctae Mariae: qui Genetrici praestitisti ut mater esset et virgo, tribuas Ecclesiae tuae ut sit fide incorrupta et castitate fecunda*.⁴²

The theme of faith is also basic in the use of Old Testament figures with reference to the virginal maternity of Mary, such as we find them notably in the antiphons for Vespers and Lauds of the feast of the Circumcision. The texts exploiting these figures have, for the most part at least, been translated or adapted from the Byzantine liturgy,⁴³ and represent only a very limited selection from the vast repertory of such texts in that source. The function of these figures, or types, is not primarily apologetic. They were chosen because of their community of spiritual structure with the virginal maternity, for the purpose of situating it in the context of the Mystery.⁴⁴

⁴² *Liber Mozarabicus Sacramentorum*, ed. M. Férotin (Paris, 1912) n. 107. Cf. A. Baumstark, *Byzantinisches in den Weihnachtstexten des römischen Antiphonarius Officii*, in *OC*, 3rd series, 11 (1936) 162-187.

⁴³ This is true, notably, of the antiphons of the feast of the Circumcision.

⁴⁴ With regard to the exegetical interpretation of these figures as exploited in the liturgy, cf. B. Capelle, *Typologie mariale chez les Pères et dans la*

Their purpose is, essentially, to illustrate that God's ways, in His work for our salvation, are entirely different from the ways of men, and that in the order of grace virginity, far from being incompatible with maternity, is its essential condition. In the economy of salvation, as announced and prepared in the Old Testament, it is a fundamental principle that only the faithful are fruitful.

To treat adequately the theme of virginity as we find it developed in the liturgy would require volumes, for the texts which would have to be taken into account, many of which merit a special monograph, are legion, even when restricted to those directly concerned with the major themes which we have considered.⁴⁵ The great majority of these texts refer to the virginity of Mary. If we seem to have neglected unduly these Marian texts, it is because we felt that within the narrow confines of this paper it would be perhaps more useful to illustrate how the basic themes concerning virginity found expression in the liturgy even prior to the constitution of a specifically Marian liturgy. These themes, such as

liturgie, in *QLP* 35 (1954) 109-121. See also the excellent article of A. Kniazeff, *Mariologie biblique et liturgie byzantine*, in *Ikn* 28 (1955) 269-289.

⁴⁵ There is, however, one minor theme to which we should like to refer briefly. One cannot help but be struck by the number of texts which reveal a preoccupation with the physical integrity of Mary, with the repeated use of such terms as *incontaminata*, *sine contagio*, etc. In the present texts these passages amount to nothing more or less than a clear affirmation of her physical virginity. But judging by the tenor of some of the earlier texts, it would seem that this emphasis was at least partially due to the influence of the Augustinian doctrine of the physical transmission of original sin through the act of marriage. Among the many texts we could cite, let the following formula from the Leonine Sacramentary suffice: *Deus, qui per beatæ sacræ virginis partum sine humana concupiscentiâ procreatum, in filiū tui membra venientis paternis fecisti præiudiciis non teneri* (*Sacramentarium Veronense*, n. 1244). This can be compared with a passage from a Christmas sermon of St. Leo, the probable author of many of the Leonine formulae: *Solus itaque inter filios hominū Dominus Jesus innocens natus est, quia solus sine carnalis concupiscentiæ pollutione conceptus*. (*Sermo* 26, 5; *PL* 54, 211). Needless to say, texts such as these have been eliminated from the liturgy as aberrant.

we find them in the earliest liturgical books, are pre-Marian only in the sense that they antedate the institution of special feasts in her honor. It will be evident that Mary, as the prototype of the Church, was fully present in the liturgy from the beginning, and that the themes of virginity elaborated in the early documents not only greatly concern her, but have her as their source. Surely the fact that the Church at worship has always contemplated herself as a *virgo mater* in the likeness of Mary is the most forceful kind of evidence that, according to her faith, virginity, and specifically the virginity of Mary, is regarded, not as a spiritual luxury, not as some sort of ornamental decoration, but as something intrinsic to the very structure of the divine Mystery.

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