

EGO SAPIENTIA  
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Foreword

How can all that Wisdom says of itself in the Book of Wisdom really apply to the Virgin Mary; What relationship can be established between this created wisdom and the *Nigra sum sed formosa*—I am black but beautiful of the Song of Songs? These are questions we have proposed to answer.

Of course we do not intend to innovate: you will see this by the constant usage we make of the doctors of the Church and of the commentators. The texts that the liturgy especially dedicates in their mystical sense to the Mother of God will only be used to illustrate conclusions arrived at from looking solely at the literal sense of other passages in the Holy Scriptures.

Considering the misery of our times, isn't it more appropriate than ever to fix unshakably our sights on the most brilliant works of the Wisdom and the Mercy of God?

How can I express my gratitude to all of my friends who, not always realizing it, collaborated on this book? It is Jacques de Monleon who first introduced me to the role of mercy; it is an American Jew who taught me the doctrine of the Blessed de Montfort. I am not forgetting the part played by the Reverend Maurice Dionne; nor that of Alphonse-Marie Parent who imposed upon himself the unpleasant task of correcting my manuscript and the proofs; I am thinking also of all those I cannot mention. If this small tract has any merit at all, think only of the merciful providence who ordains fortuitous meetings and who has entrusted composition to the most unworthy of the slaves of His Mother.

I

Ego Sapientia

*Ego Sapientia*. These are the words the Church puts into the mouth of the Blessed Virgin. *I, wisdom*. Not: "I am wise" nor "I am the wisest of all pure creatures," but: "I am wisdom."

One can say of a person that he is goodness itself, but it must be understood in a metaphorical and parabolic sense. This is not the case with Mary. She is called, in the full sense, wisdom. And since it is only of divine and of transcendental things that such an attribution can be made (2), we will ask ourselves by what supreme and miraculous affinity to God the Virgin Mary, the humble servant of the Lord, can assume such an attribution.

## II

### Ut Orietur Lumen Indeficiens

What is it that characterizes wisdom? As the saying goes, “Sapientis est ordinare”—“It belongs to the wise man to order.” And first of all, what is “order”? Two things constitute the notion of order: distinction and principle. Principle expresses that from which a thing proceeds in any fashion whatever; it expresses procession. Procession is movement starting from a principle, where movement can be understood, in a wide sense, of all action, of the action of thinking as well as a physical movement. Whether a principle is a principle according to place, according to time, or according to nature, order will be divided into order according to place, order according to time and according to nature. Of these three orders, the last is the most profound, for it expresses the notion of origination in so far as nature is “that from which that which is born is born primarily”: *ex qua pullulat pullulans primo*. From another point of view order is divided into universal and particular order, depending upon whether the principle is absolutely first or first within a given genus alone.

Now, what order is in question in the adage: “It belongs to the wise man to order”? “It belongs to the wise man to order,” says St. Thomas, “because wisdom is reason’s highest perfection, and it is proper to it to know order.”(3) Because order entails principle and principle entails relation, the intelligence alone can grasp order under the very notion of order. In effect, “intelligence, because (as opposed to the will) it draws things to itself, and proceeds in passing from one to another, can compare and formally grasp the relation of one thing to another: intelligence thus possesses in itself the primary root and first reason for ordering things, as well as for comparing them amongst themselves and establishing a relation of one to another.” (4)

Now knowledge alone of any order whatever is not as such sapiential. Simple apprehension can already attain an order, and all science bears upon a certain order. Wisdom will not be reason’s highest perfection except inasmuch as it denotes an order according to a principle which is purely and simply first. The verb “to order” expresses this originating primacy. “It is not to be ordered but to order that belongs to the wise man,” (5) says Aristotle. This is why wisdom is radical. It not only makes some things known in others, but it attains all things in their primary source where all the things that come from it are in a certain way precontained; and it attains this source under its proper notion of origin. If this source did not have the notion of origin, the absolutely primary principle would be dependent on the very thing of which it is the first principle; the many would have, as such the notion of first principle.

Wisdom will not be predicable substantially of a thing unless in its being and in its operation, it has the notion of first principle from which all things proceed, in a certain manner, by way of origination. It would not suffice for it to grasp the primary source solely according to knowledge, because then it would only be wise; but it is also necessary that through its very substance it has the notion of the primary source and that it knows itself to be such.

For the Blessed Virgin to be called wisdom, it is necessary that she be a first principle of this genus. It is necessary that she be herself a first principle, not only according to her intelligence and her will, but also according to substance and her proper being. Now, who is first principle according to his own being if not

God? Should Mary not have to be first principle, even in her relationship with God, that she be so close to God that she even participates in the notion of first principle; that she is as the source of the universal order, even that she be the one from whom God Himself proceeds in a certain manner; that she be the origin and generatrix of God?

### III

#### Ecce Virgo Concipiet

Do not fear Mary, because you have found favor before God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and you will give birth to a Son, and you will give him the name of Jesus. He will be great, they will call Him the Son of the Most High; the Lord God will give Him the throne of David his father; He will rule forever over the house of Jacob, and his reign will not end. (Luke, I, 30) *The virgin gives birth most properly to the Man-God; she is truly the Mother of the Lord* (Luke I, 43), generatrix of God.

Now, generation means vital origination and assimilation; it is the coming forth of a living being from inside a living being which is conjoined to it as principle of life and which assimilates it to its own nature in virtue of this very coming forth. Generation therefore consists in expressing a propagative likeness of the nature of the generating principle. That principle draws and forms the engendered from its own substance. Consequently, if the blessed Virgin is truly a generatrix, this definition of generation must suit her in its most proper sense. Let us note that if, in the very act of conception the mother is only a passive principle, which principle, though it is properly nature, does not by itself mean active assimilation and actively expressive of self, nevertheless looked at in its relationship to the begotten, the mother is properly an active principle and assimilates vitally the begotten. In fact, an assimilative action is formally accomplished in the production of the passive principle of conception, production that comes about by the active generative power of the woman with regards to the begotten. For this reason, the mother actively participates in the vital assimilation of the begotten.(6) She is properly a generatrix.

Now, nativity looks first of all and principally at the being of the hypostasis and of the person. Consequently, since the Blessed Virgin is the mother of Christ according to the hypostasis, she is really mother of God and of the man. (7) According to that which, in Him, is born the Blessed Virgin is properly cause and origin of God, “*causa Dei and orig Dei.*” (8)

Cause of the cause of all things, the mother of God is, consequently, mother of all things. “She is the mother of all things,” says St. Albert, “and God the Father is the origin of all things; now, anything that is in itself the origin and cause of the cause is in itself the origin and the cause of what is caused; but she is the mother of the One who is the cause and the origin of all things; therefore, she is, in herself, mother of all things.” (9) Is she not in this way an absolutely universal cause? Is there any work of God that is not brought back to her?

Insofar as she is a substantial principle of the very One who made her—*genuisti qui te fecit*—she fits,

by her divine maternity an essential condition of the name “wisdom.” Being really the mother of the Son, and the Son being begotten Wisdom, she is mother of begotten Wisdom—entitatively begotten by both the eternal Father and the temporal mother. “She is the mother,” says Cornelius a Lapide, “of eternal wisdom become incarnate in her. Insofar as the Son is Wisdom begotten and become incarnate, so also is she the wisdom who begets and makes Him incarnate.” (10)

#### IV

#### Fiat!

Wisdom, however, denotes knowledge, procession according to knowledge. For the Blessed Virgin to be truly wisdom, she must possess, even in relation to God, in addition to her divine maternity according to the flesh, the character of first principle according to intelligence. This is what she declares in her *Fiat*—*Let it be done to me according to thy word* (Luke I, 38). The *Fiat* of Mary, echo of the *Fiat* in Genesis, the word from whence proceeds the new order to which the old was directed. *Ecce enim ego creo caelos novos, et terram novam: et non erunt in memoria priora, et non ascendent super cor*—Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; they will not remember the things of the past, and those things will not come to mind anymore (Is. LXV, 17). “God,” says St. Anselm, “who made all things, made Himself from Mary (ipse se ex Maria fecit), and so, all that he had made he remade.” (10a)

*Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum*—From my heart has sprung an excellent word (Ps. XLIV, 2). “When the angel spoke,” says St. Augustine, “Mary, full of faith, and conceiving Christ first of all in her spirit before conceiving Him in her womb, says: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to thy word.*” “The Blessed Virgin,” adds St. Albert, “would not have engendered Christ corporeally if she had not first of all conceived and preserved the Word in the ear of her heart (aure cordis), carrying him so to speak in the womb of her heart (in cordis utero).” (11)

The *Fiat* of Mary—on this word, principle of the eternal Word by which all things are made, the whole universe is suspended. Judge, Mary, O wisdom, and the universe will be entirely remade! “Hurry, O Virgin,” says St. Bernard, “to give your answer. Oh my sovereign, utter the Word that earth, that hell, that heaven await. . . Say a word, and receive the Word; utter your word and receive the divine Word: express a passing word, and embrace the eternal Word.” (12) *Let it be done unto me according to thy word. May He kiss me with the kiss of his mouth* (Cant. I, 1). Let the Holy Spirit take my flesh and intimately unite it to the Son of God. Let the Word who is light become flesh.

That the Virgin imitates in her *Fiat*, the procession of the Son within God according to knowledge, Mr. Olier tells us most impressively: “. . . As (the eternal Father) begets His Word from all eternity by His knowledge, by a return upon, and a vision of, Himself, He wishes that Mary, the most perfect and most holy image of his virginal fecundity, also engender Him knowingly; and to this very end He desires that she will give to the generation of the Word in the flesh her explicit and solemn consent, which presupposes

knowledge and reason. While all other mothers will not know the one who will be born of them, He wants Mary to know beforehand the manner of Son she will conceive; an angel will make her aware that this son will be the very Son of the Most High, God and man together, the Redeemer of the world, and that his reign will have no end.” (13)

## V

### In Columna Nubis

This God of whom she is the mother, is the Redeemer God who, as Redeemer, is the final cause, and consequently absolutely first cause of the whole universe. In effect, Christ has never been efficaciously willed as the end of all things if it is not as Redeemer.(14) Mother of the Redeemer, she is inseparably united to this final cause as co-principle. *Dominus possedit me in initio viarum suarum, antequam quidquam faceret principio. Ab aeterno ordinata sum, et ex antiquis antequam terra fierit*—The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his undertakings, even before making anything in the beginning. I was established from all eternity and from ancient times, before the earth was created (Prov. VII [VIII], 22—23). Mother of Emmanuel, that is to say principle of “the Powerful within us,” she is the first predestined among all pure creatures. “She came forth from God right from the beginning,” says St. Albert, “because, from all eternity, she was predestined to become the mother of the Son of God.” (15)

The mother is not understandable without the Son, nor is the Son-Redeemer understandable without the mother. She proceeds from the One who made her so that He, Himself, could proceed from her. It is as principle that she proceeds from the Principle: her procession from the Principle is for the sake of the procession of this same Principle, and she contains within herself the Principle in her procession from Him; she is held by Him in His procession from her. *Ego ex ore Altissimi prodivi primogenita omnis creaturae*—I came out of the mouth of the Most-High, first born before all creatures (Eccl. XXIV, 5). And in this procession from the mouth of the Most-High she is herself the mouth which utters the Word. *Osculetur me osculo oris sui*—May He kiss me with the kiss of His mouth (Cant. I, 1). She proceeds from the true light, from the One who is the light, so that in the heavens the indefectable light will rise from her. *Ego feci in caelis ut oriretur lumen indeficiens* (Eccli. XXIV, 6). The Son who as in the bosom of the Father precontains all things, even the Virgin, causes Himself to be contained in the womb of the virgin. *Quem totus non capit orbis, in tua se clausit viscera factus homo*—The One whom all the universe cannot contain enclosed Himself in your womb in becoming man (Mass: Salve santa parens, Grad.). The Son and the mother thus constitute, from the beginning, a circular movement, where the principle is the term and the term is the principle; a movement which is the symbol of the wisdom that reaches from one end to the other—*Attingit a fine usque ad finem* (Wis. VIII, 1). And this circular movement of the Wisdom which is more mobile than all mobile things—*omnibus mobilibus mobilior sapientia* (Wis. XII, 24) is like a game: *Ludens coram Deo omni*—this game is incessantly played in the presence of God (Prov. VIII, 30).

## VI

### A Mari Abundavit Cogitatio Ejus

Being truly the mother of God, the Holy Virgin is tied to the hypostatic order in the most intimate way possible for a pure creature. “Since,” says St. Albert, “the nativity looks first and principally to the being and hypostasis of the person, and secondly to the nature, the Blessed Virgin is called mother of Christ according to the hypostasis, which hypostasis is God and man, and this is why she is mother of God and man; although she is not consubstantial with God if not as to human nature alone, since consubstantiality taken in itself signifies nothing else than the conformity in substance; while nativity belongs first and in itself to the person, and to nature secondly and as a consequence. She alone among all pure creatures occupies, because of this, the summit: *Ego in altissimis habitavi, et thronus meus in columna nubis*—I dwelt in the highest place, and my throne is in a pillar of a cloud—where the glory of God is hidden. She is, in a sense, this pillar of a cloud where the incarnate Wisdom is hidden. Having left the height of heaven, her path is completed in the same height. *A summo caelo egressio ejus: et occursu ejus usque ad summum ejus*. She alone has traversed the circle of heaven: she alone of all creatures is the wisdom which has pierced the depths of the abyss. *Gyrum caeli circuivi sola, et profundum abyssi penetravi*.

It is impossible for a pure creature to be elevated to a higher degree. By her grace of maternity, she exhausts one might say the possibility of a more lofty elevation. “The plenitude of the Holy Virgin,” says St. Albert, “deprives her of all emptiness: in effect, in so far as a vessel can receive something, it retains emptiness. That is why every other creature admits of a certain emptiness, since it can receive a greater grace. Mary alone is full of grace, for she cannot have a greater grace: it would be necessary that she be herself united to the divinity in order to conceive a greater grace than that according to which that which is united to him is drawn from her: that is to say that except being God Himself it is impossible to conceive a greater grace than that of being the mother of God.”

## VII

### Gratia Plena, in Sion Formata

In order to be praised and glorified in Mary, God was not content with the maternity of the Virgin alone—a maternity which would not have been on Mary’s part a total return to the principle according to her whole being: “The maternal parentage,” says St. Augustine, “would have been of no advantage to Mary, if she had not felt joy in carrying Christ in her heart as well as in her flesh.” Now, in fact, she was full of grace even before consenting to her maternity. The angel called her full of grace before she conceived by

the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit descended upon Mary,” says John of St. Thomas, “so that she would be mother of God, and so she would reach the hypostatic order, supposing already that she was full of grace. Because she belongs to the very hypostatic order which, of itself, entails a more elevated form of sanctity, the maternal dignity demands in all propriety and connaturality, holiness. If from an absolute power there would have been a maternity without sanctity, the Holy Spirit would not have descended upon her with a mission in the absolute sense. For he would not have lived in her, but he would have descended upon her in a relative sense.”

The fullness of grace in Mary became then the root of her consenting to maternity, of the most free and liberal act a pure creature could perform, of the most radical human act upon which are suspended all God’s works. *A mari enim abundavit cogitatio ejus, et consilium ejus abyssus magna*—For her thoughts are more vast than the sea, and her counsels more deep than the great ocean. The force and sweetness of the premoving power caused in Mary, who was from the beginning chosen by Divine wisdom and the principle of all His works, a strong determination where she was established and established herself as a first principle. *Non est qui possit tuae resistere voluntati, si decrevis salvare Israel*—There is none that can resist thy will, if thou determine to save Israel. And because she becomes herself a sapiential principle, it is proper that, in so far as she possesses wisdom she takes on (assumes) immutability. *Et sic in Sion firmata sum*—And so I was established in Sion. “Confirmation in the good was proper to the Blessed Virgin,” says St. Thomas, “because she was the mother of Divine wisdom, *in which nothing defiled is found*, as it is said in the book of Wisdom.”

Just as our liberty is all the more ours in so far as it is wholly received as to its end and its mode—*Deus est qui operatur in vobis et velle, et perficere*—so the Holy Virgin’s “being first principle,” wholly received according to this properly divine mode, is also all the more hers.

There is then established, from the grace of maternity to sanctification, a certain circular movement which God saw fit to create in her. It is God, the origin of all things, Who gives it to her to give herself to being the origin of God.

*Ecce imperio Dei omnia subjiciuntur et Virgo; ecce imperio Virginis omnia subjiciuntur et Deus*—Behold that all things are subjected to God’s authority, including the Virgin; behold that all things are subjected to the Virgin’s authority, including God.

In this free consent to maternity, which comes properly from nature, God makes it possible for the Holy Virgin to raise herself over and above this to her proper maternity which demands sanctity appropriately and connaturally.

## VIII

### Mitte Radices

By this superabundance of grace and glory manifested in her, the Holy Virgin brings about the return to the principle understood as principle of all graces and all glory. It is to her, in so far as she is wisdom, that she will be assigned %%%% the role of putting in the chosen the principle of this conversion to God, the divine roots.

*Tunc praecepit, et dixit mihi Creator omnium: et qui creavit me, requirit in tabernaculo meo, et dixit mihi: in Jacob inhabita, et in Israel haereditare, et in electis meis mitte radice*—Then the creator of all things commanded, and said to me: and he that made me, rested in my tabernacle. And he said to me: let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thy inheritance in Israel, and take root in my elect.

In this wisdom resides all the grace of the way and of the truth, in her is all hope of life and virtue.

## IX

### Appropinquavit Ad Mare

Dwelling built by Wisdom—*Sapientia aedificavit sibi donum*—“Mary is the sanctuary of the Holy Trinity, where God exists more magnificently and sublimely than in any place in the universe, without exempting her dwelling about the cherubim and seraphim.” This dwelling within is so complete that in so far as she is wisdom the Holy Virgin is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of his goodness—*Candor lucis aeternae, speculum sine macula Dei majestatis, et imago bonitatis illius*.

This image is so perfect that it has in its turn cause to be considered the root and original for all creatures. She was the sapiential exemplar in virtue of which God compared the universe: *Cum eo eram cuncta componens*—I was with him forming all things. And in virtue of that she is united to the consubstantial image of the Father, to Wisdom engendered, to the Word by which all things were made, and nothing that was made was made without Him.

Image of goodness itself, she imitates the original in the universal diffusion of goodness and she gives to others their primary impulsion and their movement. Spouse of the Holy Spirit who compares Himself to the waters and *who moves over the waters*, spirit of Wisdom, she can say in her turn: *Ego sapientia effudi flumina*—I wisdom have poured out rivers. I, like a brook out of a river of a mighty water; I, like an aqueduct, came out of paradise.



And her diffusion is so universal that she rejoins God, imitating the manner by which God Himself imitates Himself in every diffusion of His goodness: *Et ecce factus est mihi trames abundans, et fluvius meus appropinquavit ad mare*—And behold I became a great river, and my river came near to a sea.

Mirror without blemish of God's majesty, this created wisdom is in its effusion of graces as a formal sign: no limit is placed upon Mary's mediation. This is why she is *subtilis*. She reaches everywhere by reason of her purity. She is a vapor of the power of God, and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty God: and therefore no defiled thing cometh into her. (Wis. VII, 22—25.)

This very tabernacle of the Holy Trinity, this dwelling built by Wisdom, this holy city, this new Jerusalem, this new heaven which renews the earth, becomes the tabernacle of God with men: *Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus*. (Apoc. XXI, 3.)

## X

### Omnia Innovat

Order is of the very notion of wisdom. It is at the same time one and many, stable and mobile. Wisdom can be said of the principle as such, of the sapiential order in so far as this principle stands as root of the precontaining of the order of which it is the principle. Mary is, with her Son, at the very origin of the universe; she is as the root of the universal order: *Ego sum radix*—I am the root. That which God wishes principally in the universe is the good of order. And this order is the more perfect in so far as its interior principle is more profoundly rooted in God. Now, Mary is the purely created principle of this order, purely created principle closest to God and the most perfect conceivable. As principle of the sapiential order, she participates in the unity and the very unicity of this principle: she is at once *emanation* and *immanence*; her power extends to all things, which take from her their incessant innovation. We think, in effect, of vital immanence as a constant renewal from within, and in their relation to the first principle things are in being by an always innovative procession. In effect, the being which things would hold from themselves would be nothingness. *Una est columba mea, perfecta mea; Et cum sit una, omnia potest: et in se permanens omnia innovat*—One is my dove, my perfect one. And being but one, she can do all things: and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things.

Daughter of the eternal Father, mother of the Son, spouse of the Holy Spirit, she is rooted in the Trinity, and she ties up the order of the universe, in a radically new way, which is in God according to the procession. *Collum tuum sicut turris eburnea*—Thy neck is as a tower of ivory. (Wis. VII, 4.)

## XI

### Imago Bonitatis Illius

As principle of the good inherent in the universe as *Regina* and *Domina* of all things, she is a good separated from the universal order, a properly universal common good, a good who in her indivisible and superabundant unity is the good of all things. And this good is better than the good which exists as a form in the order of the parts of the universe; that good is anterior to this one and its principle, as the general is the principle of the order of the army. Note, the good she is for herself does not even connote a material dependence on the things which are ordered to her, nor to the form which is their order. As wisdom, all her glory is from within. *Omnis gloria ejus filiae regis ab intus*. Because Mary has the role of a properly universal common good, because she is for us as principle to all spiritual good, it is not sufficient to love the Holy Virgin as one loves oneself, nor to love her as much as oneself. Just as it is necessary to love Christ more than oneself, one must love the Blessed Virgin more than oneself. “Each one,” says John of St. Thomas, “loves himself, after God, more than his neighbor. In effect, one should love others as one loves himself, in such a way that one is oneself as the first exemplar of those one must love: oneself as participant in the divine glory, and others as our associates in this participation. I make exception nevertheless, of Christ Our Lord, even as man, and of the Blessed Virgin, the mother, because they have, for us, the very property of principle diffusive of grace and beatitude. In effect, Christ is, as man, the head of glory, and the Blessed Virgin is mother of this head, and she is as the neck through which grace descends from this head to us: and for this reason we should love them more than ourselves.” (24)

## XII

### Circumdata Varietate

When, in other respects, we consider her as wholly interior to the universe, we can compare the Holy Virgin to the intrinsic good of the universe, which consists precisely in the form which is the order of its parts. This form is comparable to the look of the face. In this form consists the highest dignity of creation, that is to say that which is most wished by God “for itself” and that which is most perfectly ordered to Him. As separated good of the universe, the Holy Virgin has a dignity greater than the order of the universe of which she is a transcendental principle, as we have seen. On the other hand, when we consider her as wholly interior to the universe where she plays the role of part, the dignity of the universe is greater than that of the Holy Virgin seen, not absolutely, but formally in so far as she plays the role of part, a role which comes to her secondarily.

Nevertheless, it is fitting to remark here that, even under this consideration, she remains the intrinsic root of the dignity which inheres to the universe as form, while at the same time she participates all the more in their dignity. In effect, the dignity of the whole depends materially on the dignity of its parts, and on the relations which ground these parts one to another. Now, the excellence of the inferior parts is contained in the superior parts in a more noble way than in the inferior parts themselves. The superior parts play, in the relation to the inferior parts, the part of form: the splendor which clothes the inferior parts in this subordination to the superior is greater than the splendor they hold of themselves absolutely. Now, envisaged on the part of the parts themselves, the excellence of the principle part of the whole plays the role of form for all the subordinated parts. As a consequence, the Holy Virgin, as part, is the form and the principle cause, wholly created of the dignity which orders most closely and most perfectly all the other parts to the dignity of the whole as principle part, she draws after her all the parts toward the dignity of the whole. *Trahe me: post te currans*—Draw me; we will run after thee.

Among all the purely created parts of the universe, she participates most fully to the order of the universe, and she shows most fully a splendor and variety. Her splendor is most comparable to that of the whole—*deora sicut Jerusalem*; she is surrounded by the variety of all the other parts—*circumdatur varietate*. She is the wholly created part of the universe thanks to which it can show forth such a great dignity. *Fons autem ascendebat de terra, et irrigabat omnem faciem terrae*—But a spring rose out of the earth, watering all the face of the earth.

“Face of the earth,” comments St. Augustine, “that is to say, dignity of the earth, it is most fitting that the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is so named, she which the Holy Spirit, who in the Gospel is called under the name of fountain of water, waters so that from such a clay there would be, that is to say, formed man who was placed in Paradise to cultivate and keep it, that is in God’s will, so that he would accomplish and conserve it.” (25)

### XIII

#### Quasi Rota In Media Rotae

If she is already so beautiful and laudable as part of the universe, besides that which lieth hid within—*absque eo quod intrinsecus late*, how much more so is she as principle and separated good. She is in this second way absolutely anterior to her role as part, for, as separated good, she is a principle in relation to her role as part. Her “being part” is ordained to her “being separated good.” She is born within to be a separated principle, she rises within the universe to be the mother of all things. That which is outside proceeds from within, and that which is within proceeds in order to proceed from outside. As separated principle of the universe, she is more within the universe than she is as a principle part of the universe: from without she is more within than she is from inside. *Intrinsecus ejus per circuitum*. There is set up then a circular movement which encompasses the very order of the parts of the universe. The order and dignity inherent in

the universe are by that very fact all the more united to this separated principle than this principle is itself the principle part interior to the universe. And this circular movement imitates in some way the circular movement between the engendered Wisdom and the mother of this Wisdom which movement imitates in its turn more profoundly the circular movement between the Father and the perfect and consubstantial Image of the Father: *quasi sit rota in medio rotarum*—as it were a wheel in the midst of a wheel. (Ezech. 1, 16.)

#### XIV

##### Defructa Suo Cognoscitur

The very fact that her Son surpasses her infinitely in dignity and privilege manifests the sovereign dignity of the mother. It is in effect her Son, the fruit of her womb, the Word which she has taken out of her heart, who surpasses her infinitely. “We concede,” says St. Albert, “that her Son surpasses her in all privileges, but far from being diminished, the praise of the mother is exalted in so far as she did not beget a Son merely equal to herself, but one infinitely better than she. And even in this way the goodness of the mother becomes in a certain way infinite; in effect, each tree is known by its proper fruit: so that if the goodness of the fruit makes the tree good, the infinite goodness in the fruit manifests yet an infinite goodness in the tree.” (26)

#### XV

##### Mons in Vertice Montium

In his admirable commentary on the Sapiential Books, our Cornelius a Lapide expresses most formally the first reason for this appellation of wisdom in placing himself from the point of view of the end, cause of causes. How can %%% say of the Holy Virgin the things which Wisdom says of herself: I made that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth; and I have poured out rivers? (Eccli. XXIV, 6,40.) To that “I answer first of all, that in the mystical sense we should understand the words in this way: I have made in such a way that in the heavens, that is in the Church, Christ was born, who is the sun of Justice; I have made in such a way that in the Church would rise up the light of faith. More than this, the Virgin, in so far as she is a sea of graces, pours out her river on the Church and the faithful.—Secondly, in the literal sense one must read: I was the cause in virtue of which God created the light, the heavens, the sea, the rivers, and the whole universe. In effect, God’s creation has been ordained, as to its end, to the justification

and glorification of the Saints, accomplished by Christ through the offices of the Blessed Virgin; for the order of nature has been created and instituted for the order of grace. Then, it is because the Holy Virgin has been the mother of Christ that, consequently, she has become the mediatrix of the whole order of grace instituted by Christ; from which it follows, for the same reason, she has been the final cause of the creation of the universe. In effect, the end of the universe is Christ, in such a way that his Mother and the Saints, that is to say that this universe has been created so that the Saints delight in grace and glory through the intermediacy of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. This is why the final cause of the creation of the universe has been the predestination of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints. Although, in effect, Christ and the Blessed Virgin are parts of the universe, and are as a consequence posterior to it in the genus of material cause, nevertheless they are anterior to it in the genus of final cause. As well, there exist a certain reciprocal dependence between the creation of the universe and the birth of Christ and the Blessed Virgin; God, in effect, had not wished that Christ and the Blessed Virgin be born, if not in this world; He did not either wish that this universe exist without Christ and the Blessed Virgin; more than that: it is for them that He created it. He has wished that the whole universe, not excluding the order of grace, be referred and ordered to Christ and the Blessed Virgin as to their complement and their end. Christ and the Blessed Virgin are then the final cause of the creation of the universe, and at the same time they are its formal cause, that is to say the exemplar, understanding the idea. It is such that, in effect, the order of Grace, where Christ and the Blessed Virgin occupy the first place, there is the idea and exemplar in terms of which God has created and dignified the order of nature and of the whole universe.”

## XVI

### Quae es Ista?

Do we marvel at the supereminent *formositas* of this pure creature, of this wholly created wisdom? Has not she been called “Admirable mother,” principle, of which the cause is unfathomable? The most marvelous of all God’s purely created works, Mary causes us to better catch the incomprehensibility of the Wisdom which precedes all things. *Sapientiam Dei Praecedentem omnia quis investigavit?* And to which purely created work could one well compare her? *Non est factum tale opus in universis regnis*—there was no such work in any kingdom. It is not therefore so astonishing that, according to St. Bernard, even the princes of the celestial choir fail in asking:

*Quae es ista*—Who is this that cometh up from the desert, leaning upon her beloved?

*Quae es ista*—Who is this that cometh as the morning rising star, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in battle array? (Cant. VI, 9.)

## II

Nigra Sum, Sed Formosa

## XVII

Universae Viae Domini Misericordia et Veritas

Why does the Blessed Virgin tell us *I am black but beautiful* (*Cant. 1, 4*)? What relationship would there be between the attribute of wisdom and that of blackness which signifies a state of inferiority, as indicated by the preposition *but*? Far from excluding each other, would not those two qualificatives have a bond of dependency? Would there not be a very intimate connection between this blackness the mother of God attributes to herself and her very character as first principle?

To understand the nature of this connection, we will have to go back to the first motive and the universal manner of God's communication *outside of Himself—ad extra*. Now that motive is none other than the divine goodness inasmuch as it is diffusive of itself. The source and first way of this diffusion and of this manifestation outside of Himself is mercy: *Universae viae Domini misericordia et veritas*—All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth (Ps. XXIV, 10). This is why St. Bernard calls the mercy of God “causalissima causarum”—that which is preeminently cause of all the causes. (28) Mercy is the primary source, even of justice: “Now,” says St. Thomas, “the work of divine justice always presupposes the work of mercy, and is founded thereupon. For nothing is due creatures, except on the supposition of something already existing or already known in them. Again, if this is due to a creature, it must be due because of something that precedes. And since we cannot go on to infinity, we must come to something that depends only on the goodness of the divine will—which is the ultimate end. We may say, for instance, that to possess hands is due to man because of his rational soul; and his rational soul is due to him that he may be a man; his being a man is for the sake of the divine goodness. So, in every work of God, viewed in its primary source, there appears mercy. In all that follows, the power of mercy remains, and works indeed with even greater force, as the influence of the first cause is more intense than that of second causes.” (29)

Mercy, insofar as it is an absolutely universal source, spreads itself from one end of the universe to the other. Even the sovereign dignity of the Incarnation is willed only in view of manifesting the divine glory by means of mercy and justice. All dignity other than God's is only a relative absolute. “The end for the sake of which (*cujus gratia*) the Incarnation was accomplished was the manifestation of the glory of God by way of mercy and justice. Consequently, because the Incarnation could accomplish as an effect to manifest mercy and justice in the redemption of men, the motive of willing the Incarnation was, not the dignity itself of the

Incarnation considered absolutely, but the Incarnation itself as being able to produce such an effect” (29a). Because it has the character of a perfectly universal source, “. . . even in the damnation of the reprobate mercy is seen, which, though it does not totally remit, yet somewhat alleviates, in punishing short of what is deserved” (30).

The concept of mercy includes a wholly eminent perfection: it is the virtue of the superior as superior. In itself mercy takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to mercy to be bountiful to others, and what is more to succor others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence mercy is accounted as being proper to God; and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly manifested. On the other hand with regard to its subject mercy is not the greatest virtue, unless that subject be greater than all others, surpassed by none and excelling all: since for him that has anyone above him it is better to be united to that which is above than to supply the defect of that which is beneath. Hence as regards man who has God above him, charity which unites him to God is greater than mercy, whereby he supplies the defect of his neighbor. But of all the virtues which relate to our neighbor, mercy is the greatest even as its act surpasses all others, since it belongs to one who is higher and better to supply to defect of another, insofar as the latter is deficient.” (31)

## XVIII

### Miserationes Ejus Super Omnia Opera Ejus

If mercy is accomplished in the elevation of the inferior, this elevation will be the more merciful and manifestive of the divine goodness and omnipotence insofar as it will further elevate him who is most inferior. In other words, we can judge the extent to which God wanted to manifest Himself by the degree of merciful elevation He chose to realize.

If divine mercy is already manifested in creation<sup>1</sup>, it manifests itself the more insofar as it elevates others above their defects (in quantum defectus aliorum sublevat). *Miserationes ejus super omnia opera ejus*—The mercies of the Lord are above all His works (Ps. CLXIV, 9). Now, among defects, evil, properly speaking, is the greatest. It is evil, insofar as it has the notion of misery, which would be the motive of the plenitude of mercy, of mercy victorious over evil<sup>2</sup>; “the motive for (this) mercy is evil.” (32)

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<sup>1</sup> “Mercy and truth are necessarily found in all God’s works, provided mercy be taken to mean removal of any kind of defect. Not every defect, however, can properly be called a misery, but only defect in a rational nature whose lot it is to be happy; for misery is opposed to happiness.” “. . . Although creation presupposes nothing in the universe, yet it does presuppose something in the knowledge of God. In this way too the idea of justice is preserved in creation, inasmuch as things are brought into being in a manner that accords with the divine wisdom and goodness. And the idea of misery is also preserved in the transition of creatures from non-being to being.” S. Thomas, Ia, Q. 21, a. 4, c. et ad 4.

<sup>2</sup> “It is essential to fault (culpa) that it be voluntary; and in this respect it deserves punishment rather

## XIX

### Angeli Fortitudine, Et Virtute Cum Sit Majores

To catch a glimpse of the height and depth of the manifestation God has chosen to accomplish outside Himself, we must see the lowliness of the nature He has elevated above all creatures. It is precisely in this very elevation that the merciful omnipotence bursts forth most properly. Consider first the hierarchy of created things according to the perfection which is proper to them by nature.

At the peak of creation, seen from the purely natural point of view, one finds the angels, pure spirits, beings very perfect according to substance and operation. Their essence being simple, each one of them constitutes in himself a complete and individual species subsisting outside of every naturally common genus. Each exhausts a degree of being. Radically hierarchised, each angel occupies an absolutely determined place in this hierarchy. Even the most inferior pure spirit constitutes in himself a universe incomparably more perfect than the cosmos and humanity together.

The cosmos and humanity, its most perfect interior limit, are but as distant echis of the spiritual universe: “quaedam resonantia.” (33) We can show this by considering, dialectically, the angelic hierarchy by taking its interior limit. To the extent the angels are removed from Pure Act, the simplicity of their essence is diminished. The limit of this removal, with respect to simplicity, is an essence composed of matter, form and privation. While the pure spirits were immutable in their substance and absolutely necessary, in the sense that they did not contain in themselves any principle of non-being (34), the essences that include privation bring about, so to speak, their own proper negation. At this level, the species, diffused in individuals, can only be maintained by their generation and corruption. It is, again, because of matter insofar as it is deprived of form, that we must attribute the existence here below of chance and of disorder, privation which is expressive of our distance from the first principle which is in itself always uniform (“semper eodem modo se habente”). (35) And this chance only doubles the fortuitous. We are living at the border of the universe in which we are diffused, both as regards substance according to quantity, and duration according to time.

Our days and places are uncertain. All here below is variable and precarious, and it is only by great effort that we sometimes succeed in impressing a momentary direction upon things. It is only by a habituation that blinds us and by a kind of animal resignation that we have become unconscious of the immense confusion in which we live, where violence alone seems capable of awakening us. Our substance is truly at the border of being.

Considered in its natural condition, the intelligence of separated substances is always in act. It judges without composition and division; it knows the reasons for things, some as depending upon others, without than mercy. Since, however, fault may be in a way punishment, through having something connected with it that is against the sinner’s will, it may, in this respect call for mercy. It is in this sense that we pity and commiserate sinners. Thus Gregory says in a homily (Hom. in Ev. XXXIV) that true godliness is not disdainful but compassionate, and again it is written (Matth. IX, 36) that Jesus, seeing the multitude, had compassion on them: because they were distressed, and lying like sheep they had no shepherd.” S. Thomas, IIa—IIae, Q. 30, a. 1, ad 1.



discourse; it grasps intuitively in a quasi circular movement the essence from which it emanates and the light by which it sees. Because the angel is too perfect to submit to other creatures in the exercise of his intelligence, God, from the morning of his existence, infused in him intelligible species representative of the universe that he had chosen to form, species prior to things themselves. Imitating God who knows all things through a unique universal species, the pure spirits, according as they are close to Him, know this universe by way of an always smaller number of species. But when we look at the angelic hierarchy in considering its distance from the first intelligence, the intuition belonging to the essence becomes poorer according to the imperfection of this essence and of the intelligence which emanates from it. To know other things, this intelligence needs more and more numerous ideas, its activity is more and more fragmented; discrete time constituted by a train of always increasing thoughts and acts of will is more and more atomized, the present is diffused, dispersed in a past and future always more distant. The intelligence is always more and more distant from itself and from the other things it knows. At the limit of this degradation rises an intelligence turned outside itself, in pure potency, resembling prime matter, *tabula rasa*, a non-intuitive intelligence which will not be able to awaken itself to its own proper act except by means of the sensible singular, only potentially intelligible. “*Ratio oritur in umbra intelligentiae.*” (36) It can know itself only in dependence on a species representative of something other than itself. To know things in their own nature, it needs a number of intelligible species equal to the number of natures it knows; it puts itself in dependence on the senses for which are needed as many species as there are singular forms which are known. Knowledge requires, at this level, not only a great number of internal and external senses, but also a doubling of the intellectual power in an intellect which anticipates knowledge by penetrating the semi-darkness of the sensible world to enlighten its objects in order to render them assimilable, and another intellect which properly knows things and expresses them for itself. Our intelligence can live only in semi-darkness. The need of shadows of the sensible world originates in the weakness of our intelligence. By nature our rational life is the least perfect intellectual life conceivable.

The union of intellectual nature and sensible nature subjects man to a certain contrariety. Sensible nature takes us towards the sensible and private good, while intellectual nature has as its object the universal and the good under the very notion of good, which is principally found in the common good. Now in us the sensible life is first; we cannot attain to the acts of reason except by passing through sense which, in this respect, has the capacity of principle. As long as man is not rectified by the cardinal virtues, he is drawn mostly towards the sensible good against the good of intelligence. “. . . homo est ex duabus contrariis naturis, quarum una retrahitur ab alia a suo corpore.” (37) Men, for the most part, succumb to this attraction, and for two related reasons. The good, in effect, demands a perfect integrity; evil, on the contrary, is the result of any kind of fault.(38) Now, as long as man has not acquired the virtues, which determine him “*ad unum*”, to the integrity conformed to reason, his action is uncertain and easily deviates from the veritable good. From this comes the adage: “evil takes place most often in the human species.” (38a) Most men follow the inclination towards the sensible good and let themselves be lead by it against the order of reason. (39)

Consequently, seen in our natural condition, and compared to the pure spirits who are always in act, who are immutable and incapable of error or any fault in the natural order, we are already truly black: in substance, because of matter and privation; in knowledge, because of the nocturnal potentiality of the

intelligence and the opacity of the senses; in the order of action because of the contrariety of our composite nature.

This is the order of things seen in their nature and the place we occupy in that order. If we run great risks, we have yet every reason for rejoicing over this existence the divine mercy deigned to confer on us. “Who is the one who did not receive this mercy from God,” says St. Augustine; “first to exist, to be separated from the brute animals, to be a reasonable animal who can know God, and, then, to enjoy this light, this air, the rain, the fruits, the seasons, the charms of the earth, the health of the body, the affection of friends, and the well-being of his home?” (40)

## XX

*Orietur In Tenebris Lux Tua, Et Tenebrae Tuae Erunt Sicut Meridies.*

Nevertheless, in His pure liberality, God chose to manifest Himself in a way incomparably more profound by elevating created intelligence to an end which surpasses infinitely the active nature of this intelligence, to the supernatural life which has as its end the vision of God as He is in Himself. But the ways God can bring about this return to Himself under the very aspect of his deity are still many, some more profound and more manifestive of His mercy than others.

The elevation to the life of God can be effected immediately and without any other intermediary condition than the acceptance of the promised glory, as was the case of the angels. But this elevation can also be accomplished in a much more astonishing way: namely by the visible mission of a divine person by means of a hypostatic union with a created nature. Descending to His creation to elevate it from within to the properly divine order, God would manifest already the mercy of His omnipotence in a measure infinitely more profound than by the creation of intellectual beings alone, however perfect they may be, or in their immediate elevation.

Now, this same hypostatic union can in its turn be accomplished in a variety of ways, one being more merciful than the others, and consequently more profound according as it further elevates the inferior. It could be accomplished in the assumption of an angelic nature. Since this nature is of all created intellectual natures the most perfect and most dignified, is it not the best disposed for this sublime elevation? And is it not this apparent fittingness which deceived the princes of darkness?

The hypostatic union can be accomplished in a yet more admirable way in the assumption of that inferior nature which is human nature, the least dignified of all the intellectual natures. The divine wisdom and power confound the most powerful spirits.

The assumption of human nature can also be accomplished in two ways: Immediately and without any preliminary conditions. Such would be the case if God immediately formed the assumed nature. In assuming human nature by way of nativity, God would thus place Himself in dependence as it were on man and proceeding thereby into the universe by way of origination. And the being itself from which He is born

becomes thereby the origin of God. Let us notice right away that this very radical communication would not in any way have been possible in the assumption of an angelic nature. God could not proceed from an angelic nature, since that *naturae* is, on the one hand, too perfect to engender as do natural beings, and on the other hand, too imperfect to engender as does God. “*Perfecta imperfecte, imperfecta perfecte.*” It is thus thanks to the potentiality of matter, taking matter insofar as it is deprived of form, therefore to the privation which is the weakest reality, that the Son of God can proceed from the very inside of His creation, thus imitating in a very profound manner His generation from the eternal Father. *Infixus sum in limo profundi: et non est substantia*—I am thrust in the depth of slime, where there is no point of support (Ps. LXVIII, 3). Happy imperfection of matter which merits such an informing!

This same Son appears at the two extremes of the universe, uniting our lowliness with His supreme grandeur—*ima summis*. Here is the degree of communication and of merciful elevation it has pleased God to accomplish. *Ecce virgo concipiet, et pariet filium: et vocabitur nomen ejus Emmanuel*—Behold a virgin will conceive, and she will give birth to a son: and they will call him “Emmanuel” (Is. VII, 14). God has himself engendered and given himself birth at the most distant confines of His creation: May the earth open itself, and may it sprout the Savior—*Aperiat terra, et germet Salvatorem* (Is. XLV, 8). Here, in the substantial order, the *nigra sum, sed formosa* can already be applied: Mary is beautiful by the divine maternity; but, on the part of the creature itself, this maternity is only possible due to the darkness of potentiality and privation. It is therefore due to this darkness that God can Himself proceed from a created principle and that a pure creature will be able to call itself wisdom. Mark this intimate proximity to God which the maternity permits in virtue of its very passivity in conception. God cannot proceed here below from an active principle of fecundation. This principle, in effect, would have to assume the nature of passive principle. (40a) It is only in the passive principle of generation, the principle that has the nature of malleable matter, that the fecundity of Pure Act can find its echo according to a mode which is entitative and substantial. “*Imperfecta perfecte.*” Only the woman can have with God the nature of first principle in the origination of God. If a man could be the father of god, not only would the generation be less perfect; the paternity would only be possible in so far as it would imitate maternity; it is the maternity of the woman, and not the paternity of God, which would be the model.

## XXI

### Abyssus Abyssum Invocat

*Nigra sum, sed formosaa.* This statement expresses at the same time the two virtues most removed from one another in the reign of the spirit: humility, the most fundamental virtue for man, the least perfect intellectual creature possible, the weakest of all; mercy, the virtue proper to the Almighty. *Sapientia illius eruperunt abyssi*—His wisdom opened the abysses (Prov. III, 20) one upon the other. The abyss of fullness summons the abyss of emptiness—*Abyssus abyssum invocat* (Ps. XLI, 8). It is by her humility that the

blessed virgin was pleasing to God. *Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae: ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent omnes generationes*—Because he looked on the lowliness of His servant (Luke I, 48).

The humility of the Most Blessed Virgin can in no way be compared to the act of humility the most perfect angel makes before God. His natural condition being so superior, he does not have as much reason to humiliate himself, even though he too possesses all that he is from God.

Let us note that there is a divergence among the commentators on the Cantic of Mary concerning the significance of the term “humilitas”. Some see, expressed in it the condition of nature; others understand it as the virtue of humility. The Greek text of the Magnificat seems to agree with the first group of commentators, because %%% means a “lowering”, while humility properly so called is signified by the term %%% (41) However, these opinions do not exclude one another; on the contrary, they compliment each other. Mary recognizes the lowliness of her condition before God, and it is in this that her act of the virtue of humility consists. She does not see the abasement in which she find herself as a state contrary to her dignity, a humiliation with which she is afflicted and from which she praised the Lord for having liberated her. This is why the act of humility of the Servant of the Lord attains the highest sublimity: attains the two extremes of the universe. The angel does not have within him the substance that would permit an act so profound, which *reaches from one end to the other* (Wis. VIII, 1).

## XXII

### Quia Respexit Humilitatem Ancillae Suae

Among all the virtues, humility alone is not aware of itself; one who would boast of his humility would be proud. Complete self-effacement—in this consists its character at the same time radical and universal. Now, can we not see in the Cantic of Mary a teaching on humility, and on its exaltation as well? But we must carefully note that the Blessed Virgin does not glorify humility absolutely, as if its exaltation were owing to itself, founded upon itself. The Blessed Virgin refers it completely to the omnipotence and mercy of the Lord: *her soul magnifies the Lord, and her spirit exults in God her Savior, in the one who is powerful, and whose name is holy, and whose mercy reaches from age to age* (Luke I, 46—50).

It is not in herself that she exalts humility, but in God, for it has now been given to the one who is the *immaculate way* (Ps. XVII, 33), *the way God dug in the desert* (Is. XIII, 19), *the holy way which is for us the straight way* (Is. XXXV, 8), to understand the hidden and truly divine ways of mercy. God has given her to know that she is *at the origin of all his ways* (Prov. VIII, 22): *Viam sapientiae monstrabo tibi*—I will show you the way of Wisdom (Prov. IV, 11). She who understood so perfectly that *all the ways of the Lord are mercy* (Ps. XXIV, 10), how could she have exalted humility in herself? It is for the Almighty to *exalt the humble* (Luke I, 52), and for the humble to exalt humility only in the Almighty.

Even if it not the greatest of the virtues, humility is in us the condition for all the virtues: it renders us malleable for superior perfections. It has the nature of maternity with respect to the other virtues. The

person in whom this mother-virtue was the most profound was chosen to be the mother of God. “The Blessed Virgin”, says Cajetan, “reminds us that the Lord regarded her humility as a universal virtue that was the most fully and profoundly open (patula) to the reception of the celestial influence of the divine bounty.” (42) “He regarded the *lowliness of His servant*,” says John of St. Thomas, “that is to say that to pour out a fullness of grace as vast as the Blessed Virgin received, God did not look at anything other than the depth of her humility by which she was rendered capable of receiving, as in a very deep concavity, the immense grandeur of grace.” (43) It is humility which is the truly liberating virtue, and which is at the very foundation of the dignity to which God has deigned to call us. “Humility is like a certain disposition for man’s free access to spiritual and divine goods” (44). By her act of humility, Mary completely divested herself, she liberated herself from herself in a total conversion to God.

### XXIII

#### Humiliavit Semetipsum

*Behold, you will conceive in your womb.*

In her perfect humility, founded on the right understanding of her human condition, Mary understood the humiliation to which God wanted to submit Himself in her. “However,” says St. Bernard, “of all the infirmities or of all the human injuries that divine Goodness suffered for us, the first in the order of time and almost the greatest with respect to his abasement, is the fact that His infinite majesty suffered to be conceived in the womb of a woman and was enclosed therein for nine months. In fact, at what moment has God ever divested Himself in this manner, or when have we seen Him so completely turn away from Himself. All this time, this wisdom utters no word, this power does nothing which becomes visible: this enclosed and hidden majesty does not manifest itself by any visible sign. God did not appear as weak on the cross where that which was weak within Him suddenly appeared stronger than that which is the strongest among men: when dying, He glorifies the thief, and, expiring, He inspires the centurion; His confidence of an hour aroused the passion of creatures, and what is more, submitted His enemies to eternal grief. In the womb of his mother, (The One-Who-Is) is as if he were not: thus sleeps the almighty as if he was impotent, and the eternal Word holds itself in silence.” (45) Yet, in this silence is hidden the most powerful manifestation of the Word: by this silence in the womb of the mother, the Word imitates at the same time in a striking manner His silent procession in the bosom of the Father.

## XXIV

### Ubi Humilitas, Ibi Sapientia

Ubi humilitas, ibi Sapientia—Where there is humility, there is wisdom (Prov. XI, 2) “This proposition, “ says St. Albert, “is a self-evident proposition in theology: Therefore, the greater the humility, the greater the wisdom, and where there is perfect humility, there is perfect wisdom. Now, in the blessed virgin, humility was incommensurable; therefore, her wisdom is incommensurable. The minor is rendered evident by this passage in the Gospel: *The one who humbles himself will be exalted* (Mat. XXIII, 12 and Luke XIV, 11). This proposition is equally self-evident: therefore, the one who is exalted above other creatures in an incommensurable manner is shown to be incommensurably more humble than they. Now, according to St. Jerome, the Blessed Virgin, who is exalted above all the choirs of Angels even to the fourth hierarchy, is elevated incommensurably above other creatures; therefore, she was the most humble among men and angels; therefore she surpasses all in wisdom.” (46)

Humility touches the very cause of mercy, Mercy, in effect, looks at the inferior as such. Now, God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble—*Deus superbis resistit, humilibus autem dat gratiam* (James IV, 6; Prov. III, 34). Mercy only lavishes its bounty over the inferior who recognizes himself as such, and the more inferior he will be, the more he will have reason to humble himself. But, this humility will only be productive if it is rooted in a knowledge wherein we see at the same time how we are not, and how powerful is the one who is Lord over us. The very great humility of the Blessed Virgin must rest on faith in the omnipotence of God. *Et beata, quae crededisti, quoniam perficienter ea, quae dicta sunt tibi a Domino*—Happy is she who believed! cries St. Elizabeth, “for the promises made her by the Lord will be fulfilled” (Luke I, 45).

## XXV

### Dominus Tecum

*The Lord is with you* (Luke I, 28), that is to say, the Almighty, the One who is purely and simply Lord, the One before whom Mary humbles herself is at the same time the One who can do the most astonishing things. “. . . because it is faith that best disposes to consent to marvelous things, and especially faith in the almighty, and because the one who believed and is convinced that God can do all things, admits that He can also change natures and command them. So that, since what was announced to the Blessed Virgin was a most unexpected thing of all unexpected things (*omnium novorum novissimum*), it is most fitting (*congruentissime*) that there is employed here the name of the *Lord*, which denotes in an absolute manner the

omnipotence of God (47). The faith of the Servant in the almighty had to be greater in the same proportion as there was question of elevating a nature the more humble in its condition of nature. St. Bernard cries out: “O Virgin, sublime palm, you elevate yourself to the highest peak of holiness, to the One who is seated on the throne, to the majesty of the Lord Himself! And why would this astonish us when you bury so high (in altum) the roots of humility.” (48) “O humility, by which the woman became the mother of God, by which God descended from heaven to earth, by which souls were transported from the places of torment to heaven. There is the ladder (Gen. XXVIII, 12) God proposes to you and by which one climbs from the earth to heaven. It is by this ladder that our fathers ascended to heaven, and it is also by it that we must ascend, for otherwise we will not ascend to heaven.” (49)

Only the abyss of humility can envelop the infinite without confining Him, and can, in the world, be an unshakable foundation for the Immutable. “If (Wisdom) was conceived from all eternity,” St. Bonaventure asks himself, “how can it, after many centuries, take birth in the Virgin Mary? If in effect it was eternal, it was therefore immutable, and could not therefore be encompassed (incomprehensibilis), and could not therefore be circumscribed (interminabilis). How, therefore, not being able to be circumscribed, could it be enclosed in the womb of a young girl? How, being without possible limits, was it conceived of a little girl? Now, being immutable, was it conceived of a fragile and delicate child? And yet, it is indeed such a Wisdom, such a great Wisdom which the virgin conceived according to the angelic salutation. At the beginning of St. Luke, the Angel tells the Virgin: *Behold! You will conceive in your womb, and you will give birth to a Son*, etc.; and he then describes that Son: *He will be great*, namely by His infinity; and *He will be called the son of the Most-High* because of the immutability of His essence; and *His reign will have no end* because He cannot be limited. Also, the divine Majesty is, in this conception, humbled in an astonishing manner and the virginal humility exalted in an admirable way.” This is why St. Bernard cries out: “Admire these two things, and tell me which should most astonish us, the most benevolent favor of the Son or the most excellent dignity of the Mother! On the one side as well as on the other we are stupefied, on one side or the other we touch upon a miracle; and that God be subordinated to a woman, that is humility without example; and that a woman command God, that is sublime without equal.” (50)

## XXVI

### Felix Culpa!

*Nigra sum, sed formosa*. In fact, mercy manifested itself even beyond the assumption of human nature by means of birth. Man, whom God had established in a state of original justice infinitely superior to all that could belong to him by nature, had succumbed to the temptation of being himself the origin of the dignity to which God deigned to elevate him. *Et homo cum in honore esset, non intellixit: comparatus est jumentis insipientibus, et similis factus est illis*—And man, while he was in his splendor, did not understand: he became comparable to the stupid beasts, and he became like them (Ps. XLVIII, 13,21). By original

sin, human nature became vulnerable. We are born in a state of misery properly speaking. *Ecce enim in iniquitatibus conceptus sum: et in peccatis concepit me mater mea*—Behold I was born in iniquity and my mother conceived me in sin (Ps. L, 7).

Now sin is not just any kind of fault: it is that fault which is furthest from God. Evil properly speaking is not simple privation, it is opposed to good as a contrary. Consequently, the mercy which will come face to face with evil, which will be victorious over evil, will also be, in a sense, the greatest possible. The manifestation of the divine omnipotence will make here, within the universe itself, a sort of return to itself: it will be like the plentitude of mercy. Evil (*malus poenae*) was ordered to the greatest manifestation of mercy conceivable. *O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem*—O happy fault which merited for us such and so great a Redeemer (Office of Holy Saturday).

If, according to the ordinary power of God, man alone could be redeemed, is this not due to the very imperfection of our intelligence, which is also the root of the contrariety of the two natures? The fallen angel, on the contrary, was immediately obstinate and confirmed in evil. This is because angelic intelligence is so perfect that it grasps without composition and division and without discourse all that we know by simple apprehension, by the understanding of principles and by a science very difficult to acquire: it grasps its object in an immutable manner, and the adhesion of the will is also fixed and immutable. Man is as a consequence more open to mercy by his very imperfection. The free will of man remains as flexible after choice as it was before this choice; on the contrary, the free will of the angel, flexible before the choice, becomes, after this choice, immutably fixed. (51)

## XXVII

### Quid Mihi et Tibi Est, Mulier?

The one who is merciful takes upon himself the misery of others as if it were his own. Now this can be done in two ways. One can take to himself the misery of others by way of a union of affection. It is thus that we suffer from the evil that afflicts a friend, as if it afflicted us. But one can also take upon himself the misery of others according to a real union, in suffering the misery in the way it affects the object of compassion. It is thus that man can expose himself to sickness in order to console or to cure the sickness of his neighbor. But this supposes a proximity, a similitude of nature such as allows the taking upon oneself, in a physical manner, the misery of others. (52)

In this way there is accomplished a real union in misery. Now, God assumed a human nature with its liability, taking upon Himself our misery in the way it affects us, that is to say, physically; assuming in this way evil (*malum poenae*)—a darkness infinitely more profound than the one which was owing to us by nature: the most profound God could have assumed. *Although He was in the form of God, He did not eagerly retain His equality with God; but He emptied Himself (semetipsum exinanivit)*<sup>1</sup>, by taking the form

<sup>1</sup> “It is fitting (pulchre) that the apostle says: He emptied himself. In effect the empty is opposed to the



*of a slave, by making Himself like man, and recognized as a man by all that was apparent about Him; He lowered Himself, making Himself obedient unto death, a death on the cross (Phil. II, 6).*

The origin from which Christ received this liability in which was accomplished the redemptive passion, and thanks to which God became our brother in misery, this origin is again the Blessed Virgin. As our Lord seemed to insinuate at the wedding feast of Cana, the mother of mercy would be manifested in the very passion of Christ. “*What have you to do with me, woman? My hour has not yet come. . . (Jo. II, 4)* as if he were saying: That which in me accomplishes the miracle, you did not engender, you did not engender my divinity: but because you engendered my infirmity, I will know you when this infirmity will be hanging on the cross” (St. Augustine). (54) In that, God placed the Blessed Virgin at the very foundation of his work of mercy, thus all at once bursting the darkness, communicative of the liability, and making shine forth the *formositas*, instrument of redemptive grace.

## XXVIII

### Et Macula Non Est In Te

Why, St. Albert asks himself, does the genealogy of Our Lady contain not only good, but wicked ancestors as well? Surely because the comparison exalts one of the extremes—*like a lily in the midst of thorns* (Cant. II, 11,12). This genealogy mentions wicked ancestors “so that the wisdom of God appeared more merciful. In effect, there is the origination (exitus) by which good comes out of good, and the origination by which evil comes out of evil. Following the first, *God saw all the things he had made, and they were good* (Gen. I, 31). Following the second, the principle of all sin is pride (Eccli. X, 15). There is a third origination, according to which evil proceeds from good, like the woman from whom comes the beginning of sin (Gen. III,6). There exist a fourth origination by which good comes out of evil, and this one is the property of God alone whose wisdom conquers all malice, because it attains all things in their principle and their term—*attings a fine usque ad finem* (Wis. VIII, 1).” (55) Now, is it not by a sovereignly merciful privilege that Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin? *Et macula non est in te* (Cant. IV, 7). This very fact must “increase the sinners’ confidence because their mediatrix unites the two extremes in one and the same relationship, namely in the same way that she is mother and daughter of God she is likewise our mother and our sister, and she is thereby, by nature, inclined to have pity on the sinner.” (56) The condition to which she would have herself been submitted if she had not been preserved brings her all full. Mow the divine nature is completely full, because there is found in it the full perfection of good. *I will show you all good*. But human nature, and the soul, is not full, it is only in potency to fullness; for it was created as a blank tablet. Human nature is thus empty. This is why the Apostle says: He emptied himself because he assumed human nature. He speaks thus first of the assumption of human nature when he says: *Taking the form of a slave*. In effect, man, by his creation, is a slave of God, and human nature is the form of a slave” (St. Thomas) (53)

the closer to us, and that intimacy is that much deeper and more efficacious insofar as Mary herself assumes the grandeur of this mercy which preserved her. In this respect, “the Blessed Virgin was not in herself black, but in her father Adam who sinned, and by his sin contaminated all his posterity—with the exception of the Blessed Virgin. Again, she is said to be black by extrinsic denomination, because she is the daughter of a sinner; but in herself she is beautiful by the fullness of grace which is in her.” (57)

## XXIX

### Discite A Me, Quia Mitis Sum, Et Humilis Corde

Communicating human nature with its liability to her Son, Mary is at the very foundation of Christ’s humble condition. But her gracious humility is at the same time at the foundation of the humility of that Son, of that Wisdom who henceforth says: *Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart* (Mat. XI, 29). Cornelius a Lapide says that “She knew that her Son had to restore the world at the price of the greatest humility, and that He had to lower His deity even unto taking mortal flesh, even more, to submitting to the torment of the whip, of the cross and of death. She therefore had to adapt herself to her son’s future condition and even to anticipate it in some way, and to prepare the way for Him: above all because, just as proud mothers impress pride and a haughty spirit upon their sons, so likewise humble mothers impress upon their sons a meek and submissive spirit. . . This is why our Canasius says, in the fourth book of his Mariology, C. VIII: ‘The mother has, in no way, degenerated from her Son; on the contrary, the Son has instead reproduced the character and nature of his mother’. In fact, children are in the habit of taking more after their mother than after their father. On the subject, St. Ambrose remarks: ‘Having to give birth to the meek and humble Christ, Mary had to prefer humility’. She knew that the head of the devil, his pride, would be crushed by her humility, according to the passage in Genesis: *She will crush your head* (Gen. III, 15). St. Alphonsus as well declares, in his second sermon on the Assumption: ‘This is why the humble Christ came to the humble virgin, so that from the depths of such a humility He could raise up the victory of salvation’.” (58)

## Et Tuam Animam Pertransibit Gladius

*A sword will pierce through your own soul, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed* (Luke II, 35) In this participation in the redemptive passion, where she is established

as first principle with her Son to ‘suppress the misery of others as if this misery were her own’, Mary is again, and in the profoundest sense, *black, but beautiful*: black in compassion and in sorrow, beautiful in the ineffable merit of this compassion.<sup>1</sup> Let us note that, in effect, all our grace is essentially redemptive. Now, as Christ is our head in that He communicates to us the grace merited by His by His passion—so in relationship to the substantial grace and glory of the angels He is head only by His own authority, as John

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<sup>1</sup> *“I am black but beautiful.* In effect, O most sweet Virgin, you have been, in the night of your compassion, very dolorous, from your sadness and your affliction, in the whole redemptive passion of your dearly beloved Son, you have, I say, been hidden, filled and penetrated, even more, pierced with a sword of sorrow: you experienced the sorrow of a double begetting. And unless the omnipotence of your Son had maintained you, your heart would have been broken, and you would have at once expired; but your Son was keeping you for His Church for the spiritual advancement of believers. And nevertheless, in the midst of so many sorrows and tribulations, of so much discomfort and so many burdens, you are beautiful because such a compassion and affection were the cause of ineffable merits, and by them you have attained the power and the efficacy to assist us all. So, if the Apostle Paul was able to say: *I accomplish in my flesh that which is missing in the passion of Christ, for His body, which is the church*, for how much better a reason is the same not permitted to thee most holy Mother of Christ? O most happy Queen, your beauty, the charm of your sadness, the brightness of your patience, your most profound humility and the sanctity of your charity became resplendent in that in all the very dolorous and ignominious passion of your unique and dearly beloved Son, you were not moved by the least beginnings of indignation, of aversion and of impatience towards the persecutors and most cruel and criminal executioners of your most precious Son, whom you regarded as vile, iniquitous, deformed *as the tabernacle of Cedar*, that is, as the unhappy mother of the most impious seducer, while your son was as beautiful as Solomon’s tent, that it was bedecked with a celestial beauty similar to the brightness of the true Peaceful One, who unfolds the firmament like a tent.” (59) Denis The Carthusian

“Just as the dying Son, not wretchedly but by mercy, had only scorn for the shameful and unbecoming mourning which they displayed toward him, so also had his most blessed Mother, sharing by love the death of her Son, and in a certain way dying in Him, because He was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh: ‘Why, she says to us, do you cry over me as over a miserable woman, and mother of a miserable man? In this hour, I am black, because it is necessary that I be held in contempt with my Son, and that I be reputed leprous with him who is so considered. It is, according to the Prophet, my sun, now having become as a sack of hair to your eyes, and in whom there is found no appearance of beauty; it is suitable that I be also conformed to him, and that I am like him in the tragic and somber aspect of the accused: as the tabernacle of Cedar, as a sinner among the sinners, says Honorius’.” (60) Cornelius a Lapide

of St. Thomas says: (61) likewise the Very Blessed Virgin is not only our queen by her dignity, as she is queen of the angels, but, even more is she our mother with regards to the generation of redemptive grace. *Mater divinae gratiae.*

### XXXI

#### Mater Misericordiae

When we call the Blessed Virgin *mother of mercy*, we do not understand only the mercy that is in her by an accidental mode and by inherence, but we understand also her maternity as an essential origin of mercy: “According to the universal usage of the Church,” says St. Albert, “the Blessed virgin is called, and is, effect, mother of mercy, which does not fit any other creature. Some men are sometimes called men of mercy, that is to say men who are humble by mercy, and thus all other men maintain a certain relationship with mercy, either by principle mode or by accidental mode; but, the relationship that she has with mercy is by mode of essential origin because it is by mode of generation (per modum matris). Now, essential conformity surpasses without any possible proportion the mode of inherence and the accidental mode; therefore the Blessed Virgin surpasses all created persons in mercy, and this surpassing is beyond all proportion.” (62)

### XXXII

#### Regina Misericordiae

*Queen of mercy*, she is so profoundly rooted in the ‘causalissima causarum’, that she takes from it the very notion of ‘first principle’, and, consequently, her dominion over God’s work is absolutely universal. In the same way that God is merciful, even in relationship to those who are confirmed in evil, Mary is likewise queen not only of the blessed angels but also of all those that are in eternal gehenna. Again St. Albert says: “All those who are under the reign of God are under His mercy; but all those who are under the reign of God do not share in His glory, His grace or His justice; therefore mercy alone encompasses His whole reign; therefore, the one who reigns over the whole kingdom of God will be called before all else queen of mercy.” (63)

Mary is not only queen of mercy in that she is the cause of all the mercy God deigned to manifest, but, as we have seen, we can attribute mercy to her as a substantial predicate. “If we construct this proposition in an intransitive manner,” says St. Albert, “the meaning will be as follows: she is queen of mercy, that is to

say mercy itself; but then she is truly called queen of mercy, whence Esther, who is the figure of the Blessed Virgin, is also called Edissa, which means mercy. So Isaiah: And a throne will be prepared in mercy; now the proper place of the throne is the proper place of the kingdom; therefore mercy is the proper place of the kingdom. Now, in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, a womb prepared by the Holy spirit, all the divinity and all the humanity rested and were established. She was therefore the proper place of the kingdom; therefore, she was mercy itself, and at the same time she was, not without reason, queen of mercy because, possessing herself perfectly, she always governed well, for nothing that ever came out of her was without direction.” (64) This is why, according to her dignity, Queen of Mercy is the most proper name of the Blessed Virgin. (65)

### XXXIII

#### Nigra Sum, Sed Formosa

Seeing the immensity of the mercy that the Almighty chose to manifest, it was eminently suitable that the universal royalty of Christ and of His mother be manifested in his passion. *Pilate said to Him: You are then a king? Jesus answered: It is you who say it. I am a king* (Jo. XVIII, 37). It is the same Christ who says: *I am a worm and not a man, the shame of men and the outcast of the people* (Ps. XXI, 7), and: *I am a king, King of kings, and Lord of lords* (Apoc. XIX, 16). It is in the passion that the *nigra sum, sed formosa* shows forth in all its profundity and to its fullest extent.

Queen of mercy, the Blessed Virgin is so profoundly rooted in the divine omnipotence that in her issue, in her procession from that power, she participates, so to speak, in the incomprehensibility of that same power. *Sol in aspectu annuncians in exitu, vas admirabile opus excelsi* (Eccli. XIII, 2)—Coming out of God she announces the sun in its glory: what an admirable vase is this work of the Most-High. Was she not herself troubled at first before the proximity to God, which Gabriel announced to her? *She was troubled by his words* (Luke I, 29). If the most powerful blessed angels tremble and humiliate themselves before the power which elevates them so high above the dignity that is appropriate to them by nature<sup>1</sup>, how much more profound will be the astonishment and the humility of the Blessed Virgin called to the sovereign dignity. *Totam habet potestatem*—She possessed all power. This astonishment, this imperfect knowledge of the

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<sup>1</sup> “A considerable curb is imposed on our appetite when it tends toward an object which surpasses our dignity, and which cannot be attained and conserved except by an extraneous and gratuitous assistance. Hence the reason for which we chant on the subject of the blessed angels: *Tremunt Potestates*—The Powers tremble. For insofar as the gift they have received from God, and which they are certain of conserving eternally, is seen in relation to what they have of themselves, inasmuch as they were made from nothingness, etc., then one can say that a trembling is aroused in them, because one sees nothing in them which renders them worthy of this gift; one sees on the contrary that they could be deprived of it, and that this gift is given them in complete gratuity and without merit on their part.”—Cajetan. (66)

cause, will remain for us to the end. *Admirabilis ero*—I will be astounding (Wis. VIII, 11). *In plentitudine sancta admirabitur*—She will astound the assembly of saints (Eccli. XXIV, 3).

#### XXXIV

##### Nonne Stultam Fecit Deus Sapientiam Hujus Mundi?

Since she proceeds so admirably from the incomprehensible abyss of divine wisdom and omnipotence, is it surprising the world finds so difficult the language which magnifies the greatness and the glory of Mary? *Did not God render stupid the wisdom of this world? . . . In effect, the wisdom of this world is stupidity compared with God (I Cor. I, 30; I Cor. III, 19).* How can this pure creature, so weak in her nature, be invested with all of the power that God deigned to manifest? *That which is God's folly is wiser than the wisdom of man, and that which is God's weakness is stronger than the strength of man (I Cor. I, 25).* *Is not the Blessed Virgin in her darkness and in her beauty the touchstone for us of divine Wisdom?—By yourself, you have annihilated all heresies.*<sup>1</sup> (Trait(?) of the Mass: Salve Sancta Parens)

#### XXXV

##### Terribilis Ut Castrorum Acies Ordinata

This purely created wisdom called *Mater timoris, et agnitionis*—Mother of filial fear and initiation into knowledge (Eccli. XXIV, 24) is for us the beginning of wisdom. *Initium sapientiae timor Domini* (Ps. CX,

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<sup>1</sup> “All the true children of God and the predestined have God for their father and Mary for their mother; and who does not have Mary for his mother does not have God for his father. That is why the damned as well as the heretics, the schismatics, etc., who detest or regard with scorn or indifference the Most Blessed Virgin, do not have God for their father, even though they glorify themselves, because they do not have Mary for their mother; for if they had her for their mother, they would love her and honor her as a true and good child naturally loves his mother who has given him life.

The most infallible and indubitable sign to distinguish a heretic, a man of bad doctrine, a damned, from one predestined, it is that the heretic and the damned have nothing but scorn or indifference for the Most Blessed Virgin, attempting, by their words and example, to diminish her cult and the love of her, openly and in secret, sometimes under fine-looking pretexts. Alas! God the Father has not told Mary to make her home in them because they are Esaus.”—De Montfort (67)

10). But she herself, who had received everything in humility also becomes, by her wisdom, by her practical wisdom, her prudence, and by her power, the terrible enemy of the creature whom God had created the most sublime and powerful in his nature and who was, by his pride, the principle of all evil. For the one who is at the very head of all evil, the one who received the fullness of power is *terrible like an army arrayed for battle* (Cant. VI, 3). “Never had God made and formed but one enmity,” says Blessed Gringnon de Montfort, “but irreconcilable, which will last and grow even until the end.” (68) And in this enmity, it is the very humble Virgin, the gentlest of all mothers, who will conquer. *She will crush your head* (Gen. III, 5).

### XXXVI

#### Non Serviam!

In order to better see the splendor and the power of the Woman, let us consider for a moment the stature of the one who is *head and king of all the sons of pride* (Job. XLI, 25). The Lord Himself called him Principle of the ways of God—*Ipse est principium viarum Dei* (Job. XL, 14). In effect, he was established in the beginning as the first and most sublime of all creatures, not only as to nature, but also with regard to grace, because the separated intelligences receive a grace proportional to the perfection of their nature. *You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and beauty. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created.* (Ezech. XXVIII, 12,15). It is he who carried the light—Lucifer (Is. XIV, 12). In all of creation *there was no power comparable to his, he was created to fear nothing* (Job XLI, 24). *He was like a cedar of Lebanon, with beautiful boughs, with thick shade, tall, with his crown in the clouds. He who was already so sublime in his nature, the waters made him sprout, the abyss made him grow by making the rivers flow around the area where he was planted and by sending the streams to all the trees in the fields* (Ezech. XXXI, 3—8). The principle who carried the light, he could enlighten all the intelligences of his kingdom, and these saw in him the most perfect image of their God. *This is why his stature was above all the other trees of the fields.* He could reach from one end of the universe to the other. *He was handsome because of his size, because of the length of his branches, because his roots were immersed in the abundant waters. None of the trees in God’s garden equaled him in beauty.*

But, behold how the most sublime of the intelligences was astonished by God’s new plan: a new plan that was also the most ancient plan. *Ecce ego facio nova—Behold! I will make a new marvel; it is close to blooming; will you not recognize it? I will put a road not in heaven, but in the desert, and the rivers in the arid soil . . . to refresh my people, my elect, the people I formed for myself* (Is. XIII, 19—21).

Grace, those abundant waters that made the cedar of Lebanon sprout, does not have as its ultimate end the increase of the excellence of angelic nature. Principle only of merit, it ordains a new life, a supernatural life where nothing is possible solely by the strength given by nature. A purely gratuitous favor, it must be recognized as such. Without this practical recognition, grace, principle of merit, cannot lead to the grace of glory. Compared to the order of nature, the order of grace is radically new. In the first, every intellectual

creature moves itself, by itself, towards its singular good and towards its natural common good, in a way appropriate to its own nature. In the new order of grace, this same creature must place itself in dependence upon a power completely exterior to its nature: nature does not suffice; it must let itself be pulled from above. In the order of nature, the angel has a right to natural beatitude by the fact of his creation; grace is not owed to him. Even more, grace ordains so perfectly to the most universal good that the creature least deserving in his nature can participate in it in a much more abundant manner than the most perfect creature; grace is not tied to the order of natures. (69)

Because he was already elevated to the supernatural order by grace, principle of merit, the angel could establish a comparison between the two orders. He thus saw his condition of nature in a light he could never have known if he had not been exalted. And he cast a new look upon his great dignity and upon the singularity which was his in view of his natural good. All that was proper to him in this order was proper to him by right. Under this new day, he made the discovery himself. The first of the angels, has he not the nature of first principle, *of the principle of the ways of God*, and is it not in this very way that he is the most similar to God? In the new order I would be dethroned and I would have to communicate with those inferior to myself as with equals and even as superiors. I would lose my singularity and my dignity would be distorted; (70) love would no longer be my right. In this deliberate turning toward self, there arose in him the disordered desire of his own excellence. And he tells himself: *I am a god, I sit on a godly throne in the middle of the seas* (Ezech. XXVIII, 2). *And his heart was exalted because of his beauty* (Ezech. XXVIII, 17). *I will climb into the heavens above the stars of God, I will elevate my throne, I will sit on the mountain of the assembly, in the depths of the Lesser Bear, I will climb to the top of the clouds, I will be as the Most-High* (Is. XIV, 13—14). I am the principle of the ways of God and in that order I will always be the principle of all His ways, and it would be contrary to the dignity wherein God Himself established me to serve whoever is below me. In the new order, the One by whom all things were made does not unite himself to the most splendid and most worthy nature, but to the one which is the most distant from me. And his neck stiffened in his power, and he decreed: *Non serviam*—I will not serve! (71) (Jerem. II, 30)

## XXXVII

Michael?!

Now an intelligence very inferior to the first of the angels revolted against this decree *of the principle of the ways of God*, from the head of the celestial hierarchies, and he cried a cry that is also his name: *Michael—Who is like God?* In this cry there shines forth the absolute transcendence of the One who is above all ways. That cry, the echo of humility, began to sing the new canticle (Ps. XXXII, 3: Apoc. V, 9), and Michael deserved to be the head of the celestial militia. It is, in the order of time, the first glimmer of the *new city* where *the mercies are above all the works* (Ps. CXLIV, 9. And the one who was the principle of the ways of God *perverted his wisdom by the effect of his splendor* (Ezech. XXVIII, 17), *he fell from*



heaven like a thunderbolt (Luke X, 18). *This is why the Lord Yahweh speaks thus: Because he elevated himself in arrogance, because he carried his crown up in the clouds, and because his heart became proud of his exaltation, I delivered him to the one who is the most powerful over all of the people, who will treat him in his own manner* (Ezech. XXXI, 10—11). He who did not want to serve the creature will be conquered by the slavery of God *who humbled Himself, making Himself obedient unto death, a death upon a cross. And this is also why God raised Him high, gave Him the name which is above all names* (Phil. II, 8—9). He who caused to reverberate the *Non serviam!* and who denied, not directly the negation which is his before God, but the negation where he would have to place himself in the face of grace and in the face of a nature in itself much inferior to his own, will be conquered by the negation of things which are, by the ‘via negationis’ which Jesus Himself lived: He chose the things that are not in order to destroy the things that are—*et ignobilia mundi, et contemptibilia elegit Deus, et ea quae non sunt, ut ea quae sunt destrueret* (I Cor, I, 28). All that will really be, is from now on bound to that which is not.

Behemoth *was the principle of the ways of God, but the One who made him, the One by which all was made, will turn his sword against him* (Job. XL, 14). That which was from the beginning the instrument of a revolt against God, will be at the same time *the sword that will pierce* the soul of the most humble of all pure creatures. Mary was also the purely created original which God had conceived *before making anything whatever*, and she will conquer in her sorrow the one who *sinned since the beginning of time* (I John III, 8) and who is the *original which all imitate who rally to him* (Wis. II, 25).

## XXXVIII

### Novissimi Primi, Et Primi Novissimi

In the new order, the order of the fullness of mercy, *behold the last will be first, and the first will be last* (Luke XIII, 30). “It is also with reason,” says St. Bernard, “that Mary who had made herself last of all when she was the first, was elevated from the last rank to the first; it is with reason that she becomes the mistress of all, as she had made herself the servant of all; with good reason she was elevated above the angels, after having placed herself, with ineffable gentleness, below the widows and the penitent sinners, below even the one from whom seven demons were expelled.” (72) In the new hierarchy, the most humble creature in the condition of nature is carried to the summit of the universal order. *Quoniam excelsus Dominus, humilia respicit: et alta a longe cognoscit*—The Lord being so exalted, considers the humble and He know the proud from afar (Ps. CXXXVII, 6). The very imperfection of human nature has rendered it open to a greater elevation. In its dignity as image of the Most Holy Trinity, it is capable of being elevated to the order of grace. It is true that the angels are more deserving by nature, and ‘the image of creation’, the one which is in all intellectual creatures before any elevation and which is in us the reason for the possibility of being elevated, is more perfect in them. But, it remains that man is more malleable to supernatural dignity, to the image of grace and glory, not because of a natural dignity hidden under his infirmity, but because of

the incommensurable mercy of God. That which the world holds as nonsense, that is what God chose to confound the wise; and that which the world holds as weak is what God chose to confound the strong (I Cor, I, 27). The excess of power rejoins itself most perfectly in the excess of impotence. But, if it is true that the very lacking of human nature establishes it in a most singular affinity to its creator, there is but the excess of the divine power overflowing with mercy that can show forth that affinity. *Wisdom reaches from one extreme to the other*. It is in the world of mercy that the abyss of fullness calls the abyss of emptiness, that is, of misery.

### XXXIX

#### Attendite A Falsis Prophetis.

Now this affinity will be, for man, the object of a temptation which will grow with the passing of time. Is it not quite fitting that the devil who sinned, notwithstanding the perfection and infallibility of his speculative knowledge, *who perverted his wisdom as a consequence of his splendor*, attacks the new order by awakening in man, so weak in his speculative intelligence, a very ignoble pride that would have as object the very darkness of his nature, under pretext that this darkness was assumed by the Son of God? He will push man to take possession of himself, to retire within himself, to identify the strength of the weak with its weakness and to see in his nature a right to supreme love and a claim upon it, while in truth, the strength of the weak is nothing other than the omnipresent mercy of God. In this consciousness of his singularity and in his very weakness, man will search for a good in himself and for himself in virtue of which he would have been judged deserving of a love even unto the debasement of God. Man would thus turn the nature in which God incarnated Himself, against God attacked in His condition of humiliation. The devil will this accomplish the promise he made to himself in the evil of his heart: *Sedebo in monte testamenti*—I will sit on the mountain (Is. XIV, 13) that is Christ. For *the son of perdition will go so far as to sit in the sanctuary of God, and will present himself as if he were God* (II Thess. II, 4). The head of this simulation of a new order will be announced by men who will clothe themselves with the Incarnation: *For there will arise false Christs and false prophets, and they will perform great deeds and extraordinary things, even to the point of seducing, if possible, the elect themselves* (Matt. XXIV, 24). They will be so much the more insidious because they *will have the appearance of piety* (II Tim. III, 5). Those who will rebel openly against God will not be the most dangerous, but rather those who will come in the name of Christ: *take care not to be seduced, because many will come in my name* (Luke XXI, 8). They will not want to believe that, in becoming man, God's majesty was reduced to nothing (exinanivit) and that it is the things that are not (ea quae non sunt) that were chosen. "It is an intolerable impudence," says St. Bernard, "for a miserable worm of the earth (vermiculus), to puff himself up and magnify himself when the very majesty of God becomes nothing." (73) *Existimasti inique quod ero tui similis: arguam te, et statuam contra faciem tuam*—You believed, evil doers, that I would be like you: I will punish you and will make you see your won ugliness

(Ps. XLIX, 21).

We will be able to recognize those false prophets by this sign: they will preach *the great prostitute who is sitting on the great waters* (Apoc. XVII, 1—18), the woman who is also called a great city—*the great city which has the kingship over all the kings*.

## XL

### Cantate Canticum Novum

Let us contrast “those old canticles of Lucifer, canticle of pride, canticle of detraction, canticle of doubt, canticle of the lie and canticle of excuse” with the *new canticle* the mother of Christ will sing. “Exalted,” says an author, “more than it is possible to say or to think, set above the whole world and all the heavens, she does not elevate herself, but she sings the canticle of humility, which is also the canticle of charity, because charity does not puff itself up. She took from her heart blessedly elated, a word good and sweet, the new canticle that virgins must repeat after her. And what does she say? *My soul magnifies the Lord*. See how much this canticle is opposed to the one the angel sang at the brink of the abyss. The one began from a very high place. He did not come down but fell into a deep pit. Mary begins by what is low to elevate herself to what is high. She magnifies the Lord, she does not magnify herself, even though she is incomparably exalted, observing what is written: *The more you are great, the more humble you are in all things*. Also, she deserves to be placed above the choirs of all the angels. Satan exalted himself above the Lord; he was, therefore, justly hurled below all that exists. The spirit of the humble Virgin Mary trembled in Jesus her Lord, thereby receiving more abundantly than her companions the unction of the oil of joy. The foolish angel exalted himself in himself; thus was he justly condemned to perpetual mourning. Mary glorified herself because her humility was regarded; thus she will have a reward at the judgment that will be made of the blessed souls. The angel glorified himself in the brilliance of his strength, thus has he secured the chastisement of an eternal contempt.” (74)

## XLI

### Infirma Elegit, Et Ea Quae Non Sunt

God chose to realize the limit of mercy. *He chose the things that are not: He has exalted the humble*. We see by this how all those who would wish man to be by nature at least the equal of angels and woman to

be in everything equal to man, diminish the true stature that God deigned to give to his work of predilection, where the Woman is Queen of angels. It is an insult to the sublime humility of the Servant of God. *Quae cum audisset, turbata est in sermone ejus, cogitabat qualis esset ista salutatio*—Having heard these things, she was troubled by the words (of the angel Gabriel)—, and she asked herself what could this greeting mean (Luke I, 29). “She meditated within herself,” comments Cornelius: “I see myself unworthy of all grace; how then can the angel call me *full of grace*? A poor thing (paupercula), I spend my life with poor virgins; from whence comes it that the angel tells me: *the Lord is with thee*? I consider myself to be the least and the most vile (minimum et vilissimam)<sup>1</sup> of all women: How then can it be that the angel makes resound in my ear: *You are blessed among all women?*” (75)

## XLII

### Civitas Dei

Seeing the growing misery of this world and the pains to which our mother the Holy Church is submitted, it happens that it is very opportune to repeat these truths. The intellectual and moral misery of the contemporary world more than ever reveals the baseness of man, a baseness that we will more and more ignore. *Et nescis quia tu es miser, et miserabilis, et pauper, et caecus, et nudus*—And you do not know that you are an unhappy one, one miserable, poor, blind and nude (Apo. III, 17). Never has humanity been so deprived of its purely human virtues of wisdom and prudence. Never has it so despised this nature it exalts. Men retain only the name of science; research becomes more and more an end in itself; we become similar to the men of the last times, *who always learn but cannot attain to knowledge of truth* (II Tim. III, 7).

Never more nor more profoundly than in our time, as the encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* states, has the work of Redemption been attacked. And this attack is radical. It touches the work of Redemption in its root: mercy. This very insidious attack takes on the appearance of charity. It converges on the multitude which brings down the mercy of the Savior. *I have compassion on this multitude* (Mark, VIII, 2). *Beware of him, Israel's posterity: because he has not despised nor rejected the supplication of the poor!* (Ps. XXI, 25). Some attack this mercy by pushing the masses into an extreme necessity wherein they themselves lose all sense of mercy. “Those who have already reached the limit of misery, are not afraid any longer of suffering more; this is why they are without pity.” (76) Others, instead of preaching and establishing justice, try to raise up pride in the wretched, this false power of the weak. Now, nobody is more unworthy of mercy than

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<sup>1</sup> How could the Blessed Virgin humiliate herself to this extent? Was it not contrary to truth? We will find in St. Thomas (IIa IIae, q. 161, a. 6, ad1) an answer to this difficulty. “. . .Someone can without error, think and affirm that he is the most vile of men, because of the hidden faults he recognizes in himself, and the gifts of God which exist in a secret way in others. This is why Augustine says, in his book *On Virginity*: Be convinced that some, who are externally your inferiors, are your superiors internally.” See also, in the same place, the commentary of Cajetan.

the wretched proud.

But the Church teaches us that parallel to this growing baseness, divine mercy will manifest itself more and more through the ages, and particularly in the more and more explicit revelation of the mysteries of Mary, Mother of Mercy.

*“The Lord,”* says Ps. LVIII, *“will reign in Jacob and in all the world; they will convert in the evening, and they will suffer hunger like dogs, and they will go through the city to find something to eat.”* “This city,” adds Grignon De Montfort, “that men will find at the end of times, to convert themselves and to recover the hunger they will have for justice, is the very Blessed Virgin, who is called by the Holy Spirit: town and city of God.” (77)

The End

*In Laudem Deipare Virginis  
Quae Non Tantum Opportune,  
Sed Etiam Importune  
Interpellat Pro Nobis. (78)*