

Christianity depends on the acceptance of what Christ proclaimed, as the supreme unalterable standard of truth. It cannot be added to nor detracted from. "These are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name."¹ "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."² "Let that abide in you which ye heard from the beginning. If that which ye heard from the beginning abide in you, ye also shall abide in the Son and in the Father."³ The norm and standard of truth is enshrined in the revealed Word. The Catholic creeds have safeguarded it. We abhor the impious daring of manufacturing new articles of faith and presuming to discover further revelations. In less than a century three of these spurious or dubious doctrines have been promulgated and there is no reason to think the process has reached its limit.

In opposing Roman errors there has been for many years a tendency to refrain from former plainness of language, and to prefer polite inoffensive expostulations. The controversy was often frowned on altogether. Theories of appeasement were as popular, and as futile, in theology as in politics. Such decorous half-hearted methods are trifling with the realities of the situation. The struggle is "that the truth of the gospel might continue with you". Loyalty to that truth, as it is in Jesus, compels us to withstand, without hesitation or ambiguity, all that corrupts or obscures His teaching. We should be ready to take our stand with the Reformers and Caroline divines in their outspoken denunciations. We have even more reason than they to condemn the "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits" and whatever, old or new, is "a fond thing vainly invented and grounded upon no warranty of scripture but rather repugnant to the word of God". Is there not still a valid sense in which we should witness against the "detestable enormities" of the Bishop of Rome?

¹ John xx. 31.

² 1 John i. 3.

³ 1 John ii. 24.

The Growth and Significance of Mariolatry

BY THE REV. R. J. COATES

THE reports of the Rome correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*, describing the scenes of religious fervour about the time of the definition of the Assumption dogma, confirmed the extent to which the cult of Mary dominates the Roman Church, and also indicated the source of its strength. In a huge procession consisting of members of the various religious orders and secular priests only one emblem of the founder of Christianity was carried. Each group, apart from the Benedictines who carried a cross, had some representation of the Virgin. The correspondent, giving his impressions, remarks on the fact that the most enthusiastic element in the concourse consisted of

the bodies of peasant priests : men, who, in contrast with many of the other monks and priests, had the appearance of neither intellectuality nor spirituality. Some of this group carried a banner proclaiming the occasion as the first mariological congress. In his definition of the dogma the Pope admits that he has yielded to the clamour of a great movement of popular devotion.

This admission, which accords with the attendant circumstances, gives us a significant clue to the understanding of the whole growth and development of Mariolatry and the manner of its acceptance within the Church. The doctrines peculiar to Rome are, in the main, crystallisations of permitted movements of perverted devotion. Such devotion would find all its needs answered in a truly scriptural and spiritual church, but as Rome has long since ceased to be such, her people seek satisfaction in grievous distortions of the truth. Mariolatry has its roots in paganism and in the natural tendency of the unenlightened human heart to worship Femininity.

I

Holy Scripture affords no basis for the cult of Mary worship. Its almost complete silence about the personal history of the mother of our Lord has probably been an inducement to religious romancers and fiction writers to supply the lack. The Fathers of the early centuries have likewise very little if anything to say of the Virgin. The attempt to find some support for later developments in the innocent comparison between Mary and Eve by Irenaeus is symptomatic of the paucity of evidence in authoritative sources. Fr. Thurston, S.J., in his article on the Virgin Mary in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* reveals the weakness of the appeal to antiquity when he writes, "Evidence regarding the popular practice of the early centuries is almost entirely lacking, and while on the one hand the faith of Christians no doubt took shape from above downwards (i.e. the apostles and teachers of the Church delivered a message which the laity accepted from them with all docility), still indications are not lacking that in matters of *sentiment and devotion* the reverse process sometimes obtained. Hence, it is not impossible that the practice of invoking the aid of the Mother of Christ had become more familiar to the more simple faithful some time before we discover any plain expression of it in the writings of the Fathers. Some such *hypothesis* would help to explain the fact that the evidence afforded by the catacombs and by the apocryphal literature of the early centuries seems chronologically in advance of that which is preserved in the contemporaneous writings of those who were the authoritative mouthpieces of Christian tradition". (Italics mine.) And yet while Fr. Thurston seems to suggest the existence of the practice of invocation of the Virgin from early times, he has to admit in the same article that we have no definite evidence of direct invocation even for purposes of private devotion before Nicaea. On the other hand there is direct evidence to the contrary, to show that any worship of Mary was definitely considered heretical. The Collyridians were a sect of female devotees who appear to have existed in Arabia in the latter part of the fourth century. Their name is derived from the Greek word *κολλυρις*, 'a cake', owing to their practice of offering

cakes to the Virgin Mary in their acts of worship. Epiphanius condemns them with just severity and attributes their false worship to demons. "Let Mary be honoured," he says, "but let Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be worshipped. Let no man worship Mary". We cannot conceive any orthodox writer using such language if any form of Mary worship had been accepted in Catholic circles. The Collyridian worship has an obvious kinship with the similar pagan worship of Artemis.

The unmistakable source of most of the later extravagant teaching about the Blessed Virgin is to be found in the Apocryphal literature. While no sensible student will look to such writings for accurate history, this literature is of great value in that it records the imaginations, hopes and fears of the unlearned Christians of the first ages. "To the lover and student of medieval literature and art they reveal the source of no inconsiderable part of his material and the solution of many a puzzle. They have, indeed, exercised an influence (wholly disproportionate to their intrinsic merits) so great and so widespread that no one who cares about the history of Christian thought and Christian art can possibly afford to neglect them."¹ The Apocryphal "Protevangelium of James" and "Transitus Mariae" purport to supply us with accounts of the birth and childhood of Mary and the story of her death and assumption. They fill, with the usual fantastic stories of the miraculous, the gaps in the former case about the birth and childhood and in the latter about the death, which the silence of orthodox writers leaves.

It is possible to trace the existence of the Gospel of James in part, at least, to the second century, and some part of the assumption story goes back perhaps as far as the third century. They had their origin in Gnostic circles and were not accepted by the orthodox. Both are mentioned in the list of apocryphal writings condemned as heretical in the decree attributed to Pope Gelasius at the end of the fifth century. The Protevangelium, the name given to the Book of James by Postel, who introduced it into Europe in the sixteenth century, was the source from which the writer of Pseudo-Matthew or *Liber De Infantia* gathered his material. This latter work, a Latin compilation as old as the eighth or ninth century, was the vehicle by which the legends became popularized in the medieval period. To give the stories greater authority pretended letters to and from St. Jerome were prefixed as credentials. Poets and artists from the tenth century onwards drew their inspiration from them. A similar use was made of the *Transitus Mariae* and kindred writings from the time of Gregory of Tours onwards. These latter stories were given credence by being accredited with names such as Melito, Eusebius, Augustine, and Athanasius. We can see therefore that a very influential force in the furtherance of Mariolatry during its period of greatest advance came from the uncritical use of fanciful and highly imaginative writings from unorthodox sources in the early church. In the primitive ages, when the worship of Mary was entirely rejected, the apocryphal books were recognised as spurious. During and following the dark ages when Mariolatry had established some hold in Christendom they were used widely to spread the cult

¹ M. R. James, *Apocryphal New Testament*.

under the patronage of great names.

II

We must, however, look in other directions for the origin of devotion to Mary. Fr. Thurston says, "Devotion to our Blessed Lady in its ultimate analysis must be regarded as a practical application of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints". Admittedly if one believes that the doctrine of the Communion of Saints includes belief in the communication of living saints with the departed saints, the real basis of devotion to Mary is justified. While we are not here concerned with that question, the reference to the practice of praying to the departed gives us another clue to the origin of Mariolatry. Praying to the saints arose out of the custom of keeping annual commemorations of the martyrs' deaths, often at their tombs on their 'birthdays'. Thankful mention of them and their virtues gradually led to the idea that because of the 'satisfaction' of their sufferings they could obtain graces for others, and this led in time to direct invocation of them. The ready acceptance of these intercessions was no doubt due to the influence of pre-Christian ideas of the cult of angels in sub-apostolic times. "It seems to have been only as a sequel of some such development that men turned to implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin," writes Fr. Thurston. The direct mention of the Blessed Virgin in our earliest liturgical formulae is, he admits, of rare occurrence. None is found in the Prayer Book of Serapion or the liturgy of the Apostolic Constitutions, or in the fragments of the Canon of the Mass preserved in the Ambrosian treatise *De Sacramentis*. In other words, the practice owes all to the revivals of pagan conceptions in perverted devotion and nothing to scriptural Christianity.

Two other factors we believe helped forward the cult until it attained its flood tide in the medieval period. One was the way in which writers such as SS. Ambrose and Jerome in their enthusiasm for the life of virginity wrote of Mary as the model of all virtue and the ideal of sinlessness. Ambrose draws a very beautiful picture of what a girl ought to be and attaches it to Mary. It is of course drawn wholly from his imagination. Even Augustine, while believing Mary to be under original sin, suggests that it is possible that God may have given her grace to keep from actual sin. It is easy to see how in time such ideal pictures led men into rapturous devotion to the pure and perpetual virgin mother. Another factor which considerably helped into prominence the devotion to Mary was the Nestorian controversy. The watchword of orthodoxy concerning the person of our Lord was the use of the title Θεοτοκος (God-bearer) applied to the Virgin. "It ought to be added that Θεοτοκος is not designed to honour Mary, but rather to explain the position of her child. It is perhaps unfortunate that it frequently gave place to the expression 'Mother of God' (μητηρ Θεου — *Dei genetrix*)."² Modern Roman Catholic writers, however, ignoring the real force of the use of the term Θεοτοκος, speak of the church's recognition of Mary as "the Mother of God". While the term had been used prior to the controversy and its significance

² Art. "Nestorianism," *Encyc. Rel. and Ethics*.

was well understood, it would seem that in time the reaction from Nestorianism definitely led to an undue exaltation of Mary. The fear of Nestorius that Mary would be made a goddess was unfortunately justified. It would appear that these three influences, the practice of prayer to the Virgin, the painting of her as the ideal of human perfection, and the representation of her as the mother with the child, the Θεοτοκος, paved the way through the succeeding dark ages for the great flood tide of devotion to her which characterizes the medieval period.

When we come to the middle ages we find the Festivals of Mary, the Assumption, Annunciation, Nativity and Purification established and devotion to her as an authoritative part of the Church's life. The *Ave Maria*, *Salve Regina* and later the "Rosary" came into wide use. Mary stories multiplied exceedingly in the 12th to 14th centuries. They were composed and copied mostly in the monasteries. The great orders such as the Cistercians, Dominicans, Carmelites and Servites adopted some special devotion to her. Shrines in her honour were multiplied and 'miracles' through her power were legion. The recurrent motif in all was the *Mater Misericordia*. "The purity, pity, and motherliness of Mary were always the dominant motive," says Fr. Thurston. The late Dr. G. Coulton in his first volume of *Five Centuries of Religion* has two very interesting and important chapters on "The Mother of God" and "The Gospel of Mary". In his usual manner he well substantiates from contemporary sources his statements. He sees the cult of the Virgin as the acceptance of feudal ideas of privilege and personal favour in the realm of religion. The root-ideas of the Church were feudalized. He quotes the Franciscan author of the *Fasciculus Morum* (about 1320) as follows :

"We ought to imitate the man who has incurred the King's anger. What does he do? He goes secretly to the queen and promises a present, then to the earls and barons and does the same; then to the free men of the household, and lastly to the footmen. So when we have offended Christ, we should first go to the Queen of Heaven to offer her, instead of a present, prayers, fasting, vigils and alms, then she, like a mother, will come between thee and Christ the father who wishes to beat us, and she will throw the cloak of mercy between the rod of punishment and us, and soften the king's anger against us. Afterwards we should go to the earls and barons, i.e. the apostles, and ask them to intercede for us; then to the knights and esquires, i.e. martyrs and confessors; then to the ladies of the Queen's chamber, i.e. the women saints; and lastly to the footmen, i.e. to the poor, for the poor should be persuaded by gifts of alms to intercede for us to Christ."

III

The common man whose Bible was the images and paintings which he saw in churches, was most familiar with the representation of the child Jesus in His mother's arms, and consequently readily believed in her power as virtually supreme. The plea of the Romanist apologist, then as now, that all that Mary had she had through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, did not prevent the people and priests from going

into the extremes of deification of Mary and degrading Jesus. Is it not enough to say that the worship of Mary was the acknowledgment of the ideals of gentleness, purity and pity. Such an admission reveals that there must have been a dreadful perversion of the gracious nature of God in Christ in the popular mind for such qualities to be sought in any superlative measure outside the Deity. In fact, the basis of Mariolatry is found theologically in the conception that the mother heart of Mary is more accessible than the Father heart of God. Mariolatry has probably reached its most blatant and blasphemous expression in the *Glories of Mary* by Alphonsus Liguori, Saint and Doctor of the church (18th century). He quotes with approval the sentiments of St. Bonaventure: "If my Redeemer rejects me on account of my sins, and drives me from His sacred feet, I will cast myself at those of His beloved Mother Mary, and there I will remain prostrate until she has obtained my forgiveness; for this Mother of Mercy knows not, and has never known, how to do otherwise than compassionate the miserable, and comply with the desires of the most destitute who fly to her for succour; and therefore if not by duty, at least by compassion, she will engage her Son to pardon me".³ There is much more in a similarly revolting strain in this infamous book which shows that the crudest views of God have survived the shock of the Reformation in the Church of Rome.

The real appeal of the cult of Mary and the reason for its persistence and continued growth is to be found in this, that it answers a real need of the human heart. It is the survival of the Female Principle. Goddesses symbolize the gentler and more heartfelt qualities of pre-Christian religions. "Female deities have often, thanks to their spiritual qualities, acted as intermediaries between gods and men."⁴ Since the days of Gregory's advice to Augustine of Canterbury to tolerate the continuance of some things in the religion of those he sought to convert, it has been the policy of Rome to absorb into her system, sometimes unwittingly, pagan practices. The practical identity of her Mariolatry with much in paganism cannot be denied; it has enabled her on occasions to make some doubtful conquests. "The goddess Tonantzin, our Dear Mother, was the most widely loved of Nahuatl divinities, and it is because her mantle fell upon Our Lady Guadalupe that the latter now can boast of the most popular shrine in Mexico."⁵ The popularity of Our Lady of Lourdes and Fatima shows the tremendous appeal which the perverted Gospel of Mary makes even in modern Europe. The Fatima apparition is reported to have occurred as late as 1917. Among other wonders the sun is supposed to have spun like a Catherine wheel in the heavens before the gaze of 60,000 people. The whole thing appears too fantastic to us to require more than ridicule, but we must think more deeply about it than that. Two quotations from an article in the *Protestant News*, Zurich, of 3/11/50 seem particularly apt.

"A young Frenchman once confessed to me: 'I wouldn't go to

³ *Glories of Mary*, English Edition, 1868, p. 90.

⁴ See Art. "The Female Principle," *Encyc. Rel. and Ethics*.

⁵ Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 179 (Philadelphia, 1896), quoted in *Encyc. Rel. and Ethics*.

church for the sake of Jesus, but what draws me thither irresistibly is Mary'. This fact cannot be overcome : thousands of Roman Catholics have a similar feeling. There must therefore be 'something in it'. In actual fact Mary is a power ; indeed, she is not an imaginary but a real one. She was a power long before there were any Roman Catholics, and long before Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived. The 'Eternal Feminine' has attracted not only Goethe, but men of all ages."

"The image of a sublime and pure, infinitely kind and loving woman exists in the depths of every man's soul, and is the goal of a powerful if unconscious longing. What could be more affecting to a worshipper of Jesus than to rediscover and to worship this image in the mother of one's beloved Master?"

We cannot conclude this article better than by quoting the beautiful comments of George Adam Smith on the nature of God as revealed in Old and New Testaments in his commentary on Isaiah xxxi. "With such fountains in Scripture, we need not, as some have done, exalt the Virgin, or virtually make a fourth person in the Godhead, and that a woman, in order to satisfy those natural longings of the heart which the widespread worship of the mother of Jesus tells us are so peremptory. For all fulness dwelleth in God Himself. Not only may we rejoice in that pity and wise provision for our wants, in that pardon and generosity, which we associate with the name of father, but also in the wakefulness, the patience, the love, lovelier with fear, which makes a mother's heart so dear and indispensable. We cannot tell along what wakened nerve the Grace of God may reach our hearts ; but Scripture has a medicine for every pain. And if they feel their weakness as little children feel it, let them know that the Spirit of God broods over them, as a mother over her babe ; and if they are in pain or anxiety, and there is no human heart to suffer with them, let them know as closely as a mother may come to suffer with her child, and as sensitive as she is to its danger, so sensitive is God Almighty to theirs, and that He gives them proof of their preciousness to Him by suffering with them."

Conversion

BY THE REV. D. A. BROWN, A.L.C.D., M.Th.

I

IN general, Christian conversion may be defined as "the re-orientation of life from self to God, through Jesus Christ", as is done in the report *Towards the Conversion of England*. Such a definition includes the conversion of societies and institutions, but in this article we are concerned more particularly with the conversion of the individual, i.e. with such a reorientation appropriated by an individual to apply to his or her own personal life.

In thus limiting the term to 'individual conversion' we must not forget the wider background of the eternal love and life of God. God is for ever acting towards all men in perfect love, even when He brings judgment upon them. The response of the individual to this love of