

'HESITATING MARIOLOGY'

BY REV. STEPHEN RIGBY

IN an article in *The Downside Review*, January, 1940, on 'The Beginnings of Devotion to Our Lady,' Dom Ambrose Agius speaks of the Fathers taking up scriptural references to her 'with a growing penetration that goes deeper than much of our hesitating Mariology of to-day.' The expected canonization of Blessed Grignon de Montfort should make popular his great 'Treatise,' and give a tremendous impulse, consequently, to devotion to Our Lady, as an indication of God's beneficent designs upon a world wounded to death.

It is here suggested that, if the following principles were adopted, our Mariology would be less hesitating and more penetrating.

(1) Keep the distinction between Creator and creature and then expunge the word 'exaggeration' from the Mariological dictionary. 'He who deifies thee not, cannot praise thee too much.' The saying is accredited to a Protestant divine, but he spoke to Catholic purpose. 'The limits' (to Mary's endowments as 'our Life, our Sweetness and our Hope'), 'wherever they may be, will never be reached by another creature, exploring, as it were, Mary's spiritual potency.' So wrote Abbot Vonier in a passage that amplifies Pope Pius IX's phrase about 'holiness, than which under God none greater is known, and no one but God can reach even in thought.' Now if such language be taken to its logical conclusion, we shall have to find some word other than 'exaggeration' for false Mariology.

Some, for instance, would say that it is exaggerated to claim that Our Lady's sanctity at her conception outstripped that of all the angels and saints put together. Yet, in the 1933 Cambridge Summer School book, Dr. Rhodes says that 'great teachers have not shrunk from holding it,' and he seems to imply that those teachers will win the day. If it is admitted that she had the use of reason at her conception, and that her holiness at her death was greater than the combined holiness of angels and men, by what logical principle may limits be set to her conceptional holiness?

False Mariology is not exaggeration, but the false application of a true principle. It is a true principle that graces given to lesser saints must have been given to her. It is a false application of that true principle to say that, because St. Francis of Assisi had the stigmata, therefore Mary had. Whatever degree of conformity to the Passion is evinced by the stigmata, it cannot compare with that conformity of which the Church says: 'O blessed faculties of Mary that, without the martyr's death, merited, beneath the Cross of the Lord, the martyr's palm.'

Father Bellanti in the same Cambridge book calls attention to what he considers false Mariology. He speaks of attempts 'to heighten the value of her intercession by some disguised suggestion of severity in Our Saviour.' But surely St. Bernard of Clairvaux¹ was as sensitive as anybody to the honour of Jesus. Yet he emphatically, and without any disguise, uses this device. In so doing he is simply using the argument 'on three planes at once,' analysed by Chesterton in a splendid passage on the parable of the lilies of the field. Mary is Mother of God, but she is a mere creature; Jesus is Man, but He is also God, and God is just as well as loving; Mary is all love and no severity, but Mary herself is a creation of God; therefore the love of Mary is nothing compared with the love of God. By this line of argument the value of Mary's intercession is heightened by a suggestion of severity on Our Lord's part, but, by a further overturn, Our Lord's position is constituted supreme and unapproachable.

(2) The Holy Ghost lives in the Church believing as well as the Church teaching. To be over-anxious lest the laity should not understand, or that Protestants should be scandalized, is being more wise than it behoveth to be wise. 'Our dear people,' writes Abbot Vonier, 'understand much more than we give them credit for, and they are always happy when they are instructed in their faith.' The priest, on his side, is 'pontifex' or bridge-builder, not only in the sacrificial sense, but in the sense of conveying the findings of scientific theologians to the expectant laity. Many of the faithful, for instance, have never realized explicitly that the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are received in Holy Communion. If they are told so, there is danger of them smelling heresy, or jumping to the conclusion that the Father and the Holy Ghost became man as well as the Son. Yet St. Vincent Ferrer, when bringing Holy Communion to the sick, insisted on an act of faith in the presence of the Three Divine Persons. As Father McNabb put it at the Eucharistic Congress in 1908: 'In accepting this doctrine (the Real Presence) we accept the full Catholic Trinity of Three Persons in one Nature, by recognizing that what we adore is the flesh and blood not of the Trinity, but of One Person of the Trinity.' But that One Person showed distinctly that He was disappointed when Philip failed to realize that he who sees Jesus, sees the Father also. Moreover, the faithful are familiar with the invocation, 'Heart of Jesus, wherein abides the fulness of the Godhead corporeally.' They also know that the Holy Trinity is the Holy and Undivided Trinity. 'Our Catechism tells us that the sacrament . . . contains . . . the whole Person of Christ; and, as a consequence, the whole Trinity, as one Person cannot be separated from another.' 'We have said that through the logic of our theology of the Divinity we must admit that the Three Divine Persons are under the Eucharistic veil. *Adoro Te devote latens Deitas* could be applied to the Father and the Holy Ghost when

¹ See opening paragraphs of the 'Sermon for the Sunday within the Octave of the Assumption.'

we kneel before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. Will the Eucharist ever be the centre of some Trinitarian mysticism? It is permissible to say that the possibility is not excluded.¹

It is not for nothing that the priest prays for the coal of Isaias to purify his lips. It is not for nothing that St. Patrick prayed that Christ should be in himself and in the heart, eyes and ears of his hearers. If the preacher can explain such implications of the Eucharistic doctrine, he can penetrate deeply into Marian doctrine. He can, for example, vindicate for Our Lady the title of Co-Redemptrix against those who seem to wish that, where she is concerned, terms must be used only in their strictest connotation: thus she may not be called Co-Redemptrix, because only Our Lord can be the Redeemer in the accurate sense. You might as well say that we may not call our earthly fathers by their title because Our Lord said: 'Call no man on earth your father,' or may not call our mothers good because Our Lord said: 'Call no one good but God.' What but 'Co-Redemptrix' fits the woman of whom Pius X says: 'All that Jesus merited for us *de condigno*, Mary merited for us *de congruo*? Indeed, is not 'by divine courtesy' a fair rendering of *de congruo*, and may we not be courteous to the Queen whom the King hath delighted to honour? May we not trust the Holy Spirit to be in the heart of the preacher telling him what his lips shall utter, and in the hearts of the faithful telling them what their ears shall hear?

As to the fear of shocking Protestants, Faber disposes of it in an inspired phrase. He condemns the 'untheological mistake which some deceive themselves into thinking a theological nicety . . . namely, a sort of jealous ignorant accuracy in keeping Jesus and Mary apart, as if to speak slightly as they dare of the Mother of God would make truth more attractive in the eyes of a misbelieving world, to which the incredible abasement of Jesus in His Sacrament is already a far greater stumbling-block than the incredible exaltation of His Mother.' The matter has also been well put by Father Raymond O'Flynn²:—'If a non-Catholic has not already grasped the difference between the infinite and independent excellence of God, and the finite and dependent excellence of even the greatest of His creatures, you cannot bring it home to him by any verbal distinction; and if he has grasped it—why, I had rather trust him to understand that God exceeded all my praise, than use a term which would lead him to think that I thought less of God's Mother than I do.'

(3) The Saints and Doctors are our best guides. In the Cambridge book before referred to, Dr. Rhodes has an exhilarating chapter on Our Lady's endowments, in which he speaks of Doctors and Saints as those 'who are best qualified to know.' The principle, admitted perhaps in theory, is often belied in practice. There is a tendency to suggest that people like St. Alphonsus Liguori and the Blessed de Montfort forgot the accuracy of the theologian in the raptures

¹ Both quotations from Vonier, *Sketches and Studies in Theology*.
² *Catholic Gazette*, April, 1940.

of the lover. But the suggestion involves many 'inconveniences.' In the case of St. Alphonsus it discounts his eminence as a theologian and his all but unrivalled eminence as a guardian and guide of conscience. In the case of both St. Alphonsus and Blessed de Monfort, it pretends that oneself is more sensitive about the honour of Jesus and about scandal to souls than these men of vast practical missionary experience.

To question the Saints and Doctors in such a spirit is to show oneself out of harmony with the pre-Deformation period. It is a sign of the blight of Luther. 'Vae miseris illis qui Virginis huius gloriosae praecellentiam velילו minuire student, quod tamen a Lutheranis audio factitatum. Propter quod haud dubie manet eos vitio divina, nisi maturius resipiscant.'¹ Calvin differed from, and yet consolidated Luther's work. Jansenism arose out of Lutheranism and so injected its poison into Catholic minds that we still suffer from it. Do we not also suffer from the Lutheran contagion where Our Lady is concerned? The forthcoming canonization is surely an opportunity for dispersing some of the Protestant fog that surrounds her, and for breathing the clear air of the old Irish and Anglo-Saxon litanies, and of Chaucer's 'A. B. C.':—

Doute is ther noon, Thou Queen of misericorde
 That thou n'art cause of grace and mercy here
 God vouches sauf thurgh Thee with us t'accorde.
 For certes, Cristes blisful Moder dere
 Were now the bowe bent in swich manere
 As it was first, of justice and of yre,
 The rightful God nolde of no mercy here;
 But thurgh Thee han we grace, as we desyre.

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¹ St. John Fisher, quoted in the article mentioned, by Father O'Flynn.