

## SERMON 5

### **On the most holy day of the Annunciation In the morning On the consent of the virgin**

*Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word*, as in Luke 1:38 and in today's Gospel. We are always bound to bless God with the Prophet [Ps 33:2 (34:1)], but in this feast particularly we should be more careful to set aside time for praise, offering something special in view of the special grace by which the Word of God wished to become man and the invisible God deigned to live in a visible form with us. All the feasts we venerate on earth in honour of our Saviour have but one author, one Lord Jesus Christ who is blessed forever. While, in view of the majesty of the Creator, they are all equal and are to be celebrated with equal devotion and zeal, however, each has a privilege of honour and grace as it is seen to contain a mystery of singular grace. It is the one Son of God who was conceived in the womb, born from the womb, circumcised and offered in the temple, crucified and buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven; but he works in one way in the person who conceived and differently in others. Therefore, the faithful, with one faith and one devotion in the various feasts in which they venerate and celebrate at different times the solemnities of Christ, honour each single one with the praises proper to the various deeds and signs.

Among the solemnities, as much as we are able, we recall and confidently extol the day of the Incarnation, not because of its dignity, but because we think of it as worthy of all and special honours and to be put first because it was the cause and content for us of the others. Rise up then, *young men and women, the old with the younger* [Ps 148:12], in praise of this sacred solemnity. Let all faithful souls and all Christians open their mouths in honour of our Redeemer and his glorious Virgin Mother, and let us proclaim with as much joy as possible the joys that we receive through them in our redemption.

Today, we turn the eyes of our mind more especially to that admirable sign and deep mystery in which the Virgin Mother in one word of consent drew God from heaven to earth, gave us that man and brought forth for us our Saviour. She had such great merit and virtue that she surpassed all the merits of angels and humans when she spoke the text quoted to the angel Gabriel: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word*.

A triple mystery of the glorious Virgin is stated in these most sacred words: firstly, an abyss of extraordinary humility, for she says: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*; secondly, the excess of desirable love when she adds: *Be it done to me*; thirdly, a sense of shining fidelity when she says: *according to your word*.

## ARTICLE 1

### **On the abyss of the humility of the glorious Virgin when she consented to conceive the Son of God**

In the first mystery, the abyss of the wonderful humility of the glorious Virgin becomes evident when she said to the Angel: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord*. 'She does not say: Behold the Lady, behold the queen, behold the bride, behold the mother, but: *Behold the handmaid*'<sup>1</sup>. This humility shines out from the consent of the Virgin in three ways: firstly, in a mental confusion; secondly, in an anxious waiting; thirdly, in her prompt dedication.

## CHAPTER 1

### **That the abyss of the Virgin's humility was evident in her confusion at the message of the Angel**

Firstly, 'the humility of the Virgin in this consent shone forth in her mental confusion'<sup>2</sup>. For, as said above from Luke 1:29: *She was troubled at his saying*.

This trouble arose from her complete horror of being praised. If the angel had said to her: Woe to you, most vile of all creatures, she would have rejoiced in a wonderful way because such was how she felt about herself, as being most unworthy and indescribable. On the contrary, when she heard herself called full of *grace* and blessed in a singular way among women, she could not tolerate the statement of such praise.

Therefore, after she conceived, she rightly rejoiced and said:

*Because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed* [Lk 1:48]. She says: *He regarded the humility*. She does not say nobility or dignity, because the Lord *looks on the lowly and the high he knows from afar* [Ps 137:6 (138:6)]. Nor does she say: He has regarded power because the Lord *has put down the mighty from their seat and has exalted the lowly* [Lk 1:52]. Nor does she say: *He has regarded the wisdom, because God has made foolish the wisdom of this world* [1 Cor 1:20]. Nor, finally, does she say: *Because he has regarded the virginity, but the humility*, because there are foolish virgins; Matthew 25:2: *And five of them were foolish*. Therefore Bernard<sup>3</sup> says: ‘Even if she pleased because of her virginity, she conceived because of her humility’. But even though all these were in the glorious Virgin, she gloried only in her humility because they pertain to secular glory; worldly people usually look for this humility in women. Rightly, therefore, does she add: *behold from henceforth*, that is, from the humility by which I pleased the Most High, *all generations shall call me blessed*, namely, heavenly, earthly and those in limbo, because Mary’s humility benefited all of these: a restoration for angels, reconciliation for humans, freedom for the captives in limbo; because she gave birth to the Restorer of angels, the Reconciler of humans and the Liberator of captives in limbo. This is what was said to her in the person of Judith 15:10: *You are the glory of Jerusalem*, namely, of the heavenly city because you repaired the damage in the angels; *you are the joy of Israel*, for the captives you freed, you are the honour of our people, that is, of the people for whom you gave birth to Christ Jesus, a brother and reconciler<sup>4</sup>.

## CHAPTER 2

### **That the humility of the glorious Virgin shone forth in the admirable coming of the Son of God**

Secondly, her humility

shone forth in a trembling apprehension at the wonderful overshadowing of the divine majesty; she felt that this was about to come upon her like an immense mountain of infinite weight which would bury her under or within it and would hold her nothingness pressed down forever by the weight of its eternity and total immensity. If blessed Job 31:23 could say: *I always feared the Lord as waves swelling over me, and his weight I was not able to bear*, how much more would she fear, she in whom a *stone was cut* from the mountain of the divine majesty living in her, the stone which broke the statue of vanity and, as stated in a mystical sense in Daniel 2:34-35: *became a great mountain and filled the whole earth*. If we can hardly hear a syllable of the divine words without a feeling of reverence and fear, how much more did she tremble when she felt coming down directly upon her the thunder of the divine majesty with lightning of wonderful efficacy and power?<sup>5</sup>

## CHAPTER 3

### **With how great humility the blessed Virgin dedicated herself to serve the Son of God**

Thirdly, the humility of the Virgin shone forth

in her prompt dedication to all the needs and demands of God the Father and the Son. She expressed this dedication in the words: *Behold, the handmaid of the Lord*. It must be understood that the more a mind feels itself to be called to higher and deeper aspects of God, the more it feels itself bound to a greater service of God for which one must have more humility, reverence, fear, caution and solicitous diligence. Hence, I ask you: if we handle the sacrament of the Eucharist, that is, the Body of Christ, with such humility and reverence, with what humility and reverence did the Mother of Christ handle and carry her infant whether in her womb, in the cradle or in her arms?

Further, she knew that the Redeemer and intercessor for the expiation of all sins was to be conceived and nourished by her for the salvation of herself and of all, and that he was to be born from her and nourished by her for the salvation of all. For this reason, she felt herself to be inwardly and with a mother’s affection joined to these humble prayers that had to be offered to the eternal Father by the Son of God who carried all the sins of the world upon himself, as if he were made sin by God [2 Cor 5:21]. Therefore, when she consented she felt herself to be dedicated by her consent and joined to the humiliations and humble duties of the Redeemer. For this reason in praising God, as is clear in Luke 1:48, her humility is paramount because she remembers that God looked on her when, as stated above, she said: *He has regarded the humility of his handmaid etc.*<sup>6</sup>

Bernard<sup>7</sup> says correctly: Eve wanted to make herself equal to God in pride not thinking of herself as a handmaid of God; Mary, however, humbly called herself a handmaid as she looked down on herself before

her Creator. So Eve was cast aside while Mary was chosen. The Virgin observed what is said in Judith 8:16: *Let us humble our souls before him*. Otherwise, she could not have been filled with grace had she not been humble of heart. For, as stated in 1 Peter 5:5: *God resists the proud, but to the humble he gives grace*. Also, Petrus Ravennas says on *Super Missus est*<sup>8</sup>: ‘Behold, the one whom the Angel called Lady knew and named herself a handmaid; because a devout soul from infused gifts increases in service, grows in grace, and is not puffed up from pride nor rise up in arrogance’.

## ARTICLE 2

### **On the abyss of the humility of the glorious Virgin when she consented to conceive the Son of God**

In the second mystery is indicated the excess of loving desire of the glorious Virgin because she says: *Be it done to me*.

I ask anyone how much love of God she expected to experience by her consent. If you can explain this to me I will tell you from how much love she consented to such great love. I have no doubt that this consent came from a flaming furnace of love in the abyss of infinite love. So it is not surprising if that consent was a fire of love<sup>9</sup>.

The extent of the loving desire of the blessed Virgin is evident in three things: firstly, in the great promise; secondly, in the firm faith mentioned; thirdly, in her prompt consent.

## CHAPTER 1

### **That the great desire of the glorious Virgin for the incarnation of the Son of God is evident in three things**

Firstly, the great desire of the Virgin was evident in her great promise, for she heard what was desirable, understood what was desirable and asked for what was desirable.

Firstly, her desire was great because she heard what was desirable. When the Angel said to her in today’s Gospel: *Behold you shall conceive and shall bring forth a son* [Lk 1:31], she heard that she was to be the future Mother of God. She heard that the *son* to whom she would give birth would be the Saviour of the world because the Angel added: *and you shall call his name Jesus*, that is, Saviour; she understood that this is the meaning of Jesus. But more explicitly the same Angel in Matthew 1:21, as to one less intelligent, said to Joseph in a vision: *You shall call his name Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins*. She heard also that she was to conceive the Son of God in an overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Gabriel added [Lk 1:35]: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you*. Is it surprising then if her desire was so keen when she had heard such desirable things and knew that they were to be realized in her? So she could recite the text of Isaiah 26:9: *My soul has desired you in the night, yes and with my spirit within me in the morning early I will watch for you*. She says *in the night* that is, in that dark time. Of this *night*, Wisdom 18:14-15 says: *While the night was in the midst of her course, your omnipotent word, O Lord, leaping down from heaven, came from your royal throne*. For the Virgin conceived the Word of God between the time of law and the time of grace. Or understand in *the night* as in a shining bright darkness of contemplation; in this night the Virgin arose, took herself from the peak of affection to the eternal, seized the Word from the bosom of the Father, and restored him as the author and beginning for every creature, according to what is written of her under the image of the valiant woman in Proverbs 31:15: *She has risen in the night and given a prey to her household*.

Secondly, she desired much because she understood what was desirable. For if the memory of the Son of God, because he is most desirable, was an extreme desire of the soul in the holy prophets, according to Isaiah 26:8: *Your remembrance is the desire of the soul*; how much more excellent was his presence, not any kind of presence but a presence from assuming flesh? But since he was present in the strong desire of all the saints to the extent that Isaiah 64:1 could say: *O that you would rend the heavens and come down*, and his remembrance was present in them only by grace, how much more did she desire him for she felt his presence not only in her mind but also felt it in her flesh? So she could say in the words of Philippians 1:23: *I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ. To be dissolved*, that is, to be separated from all that is worldly, *and to be with Christ*; not only, like Paul, from a gift of grace, but one flesh, one life by giving of my flesh.

Thirdly, she also desired greatly because she sought for things that are desirable. We desire greatly the things for which we search diligently; so Luke 15:8 says: *A woman lights a candle, sweeps the house and finds the coin she had lost*. In a mystical sense the coin is the wisdom of God lost by human nature; but the

woman, that is, Mary, *lit a candle* when she gave an example of virginity to an unstable world. *She sweeps the house*, when by the effort of her mind she sought for rest in all things and never found it other than in the lost coin, that is, in the wisdom of God. Hence Sirach 24:11 says: *In all these I sought rest, and I shall abide in the inheritance of the Lord. Then God commanded the Angel who spoke to me, announcing the will of God concerning the incarnation of the Son, and I said: Be it done to me according to your word.*

## CHAPTER 2

### **That the blessed Virgin showed a great desire for the incarnation of the Son of God because she promptly believed the message of the Angel**

Secondly, the strong desire of the glorious Virgin was evident in her believing as mentioned above; in fact, we believe readily in what we greatly desire. Just how strongly she wanted to believe is clear: firstly, because she believed what was incredible; secondly, because she believed what was wonderful; thirdly, because she believed what was lovable.

Firstly, she strongly desired because she believed what was incredible; for something that is extremely astonishing is also extremely incredible. This event was extremely astonishing. For if astonishment is an amazement of the mind arising from ignorance, the manner of the incarnation was unknown even to the highest order of angels, according to Dionysius who, in his book *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 26<sup>10</sup>, says: ‘The divine forming of Jesus was secret and unknown to every mind and understanding, even to the most distinguished order of the most honourable angels’. It was then more astonishing and so more incredible than anything else. Accordingly, the desire of the Virgin was strong since she believed in such wonders so readily. In a mystical sense, she was prefigured in this by Anna, Tobit 11:5-6, who, while sitting *on the top of a hill*, that is, in the highest point of her mind or at the extremity of all that is created, she rests in contemplation where she waits in desire for *her son*.

Secondly, she desired strongly because she believed what was astonishing. We find it difficult to believe in what is new and what is newer seems to be more astonishing. But this event was extremely new, as predicted by Jeremiah 31:22: *The Lord has created a new thing upon the earth*. Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus*, ch. 10<sup>11</sup>, says this, namely: ‘this is the newest of all that is new’. Truly, this event was most incredible; the Virgin believed readily without making excuses; she did not indicate impossibility or weakness, but she hoped it could happen through her. All she asked was how it was to happen: *How shall this be done?* Did she not then believe strongly?

Thirdly, she desired strongly because she believed what was lovable. According to Bernard, *Super Cantica*, hom. 9<sup>12</sup>: ‘Love is the highest point; it does not wait for judgment, is not influenced by advice, curbed by shame nor subject to reason’. True love does not think of energy, does not reflect on what is possible, makes no excuses over knowledge; but even hopes for what seems incredible, does not delay but hurries and hastens to the impossible to which it reaches out.

Mary heard that the Son of God was to become incarnate, she loved what she heard, desired what she loved, and hoped to realize her desire by faith. So she said: *Be it done to me*.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Because the blessed Virgin quickly consented she showed that she had a strong desire for the incarnation of the Son of God**

Thirdly, a strong desire was evident in the glorious Virgin in her prompt consent or by the wording of her consent. For indeed she did not remain silent, hide nor deny what she believed; but when she, as one co-operating, heard, she broke forth in a cry of joy and gave the consent daily desired by all the elect, saying: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me*. Bernard<sup>13</sup> says of this: O word worthy of full acceptance, for which she expressed so ardent a desire that she took the Son of God from the embrace of the Father! O fleeting word that takes hold of eternity! O pleasing response by which she takes the Son of God as her bridegroom! O virginal but valid word that draws the Lord to her! Indeed, she expressed a strong desire when she gave a ready consent to so great a work! According to John Damascene<sup>14</sup>: ‘What is greater than for God to become man?’

### ARTICLE 3

#### **The greatness of the faith of the blessed Virgin was most evident in three lights of faith**

In the third mystery the meaning of the shining faithfulness of the blessed Virgin is shown, because at the end she says: *according to your word*. Indeed:

The highest and most basic foundations of our faith were put before the blessed Virgin so that she would not consent to things in which she did not strongly believe. Her faith had to be not only a total belief in general but also in particular, namely, as to how this affected her as she made or gave her consent, and so that at the very hour of her consent being given, this consent would lead in fact to the conception of the Son of God. It was not without reason then that her act of faith was commended in a singular way by holy Elizabeth who said: *Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord* [Lk 1:45]<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, the greatness of her faith is clear in the three lights in this consent: the first light was that she believed something of which the world had not heard; the second, because she believed what she knew to be beyond nature; the third light was because she understood she was to co-operate in so great a thing.

### CHAPTER 1

#### **That the faith of the Virgin was great because she believed readily things never previously heard**

Firstly, the great faith of the blessed Virgin was evident by the first light because she believed something not heard by the world; for *faith comes by hearing*, as stated in Romans 10:17. Hence, something heard frequently is more easily believed, and vice versa; but this had not been heard by the world, namely, that a virgin could give birth without pain and also still remain a virgin in giving birth. So Isaiah 66:7-8 says: *Before she was in labour*, that is, experienced the pain of birth, *she brought forth*, and *before her time came to be delivered*, that is, before she felt the pain of birth, *she brought forth a man child*. *Who has ever heard such a thing?* Nevertheless she believed this unheard of thing from a single word of the Angel. Therefore, she had strength of faith so that the Son of God could truly apply to her the text of Matthew 8:10: *I have not found so great faith in Israel*. Nor had the blessed Virgin seen an example of this. We believe more easily things of which we frequently see examples; what can be illustrated by an example is not incredible. There is no visible example of God becoming man; so there is written in Isaiah 66:8: *Who has seen the like to this?* As if to say: No one. Therefore, among all that has to be believed this is the most incredible. So Isaiah 53:1 says: *Who has believed our report?* Nothing, however, when believed, is more salutary. So, when she believed this most incredible thing with no visible example did she not have the strongest faith? Hence, the Church sings of her<sup>16</sup>: Alone, the Virgin pleased Christ without an example. In Luke 1:45 Elizabeth said to her: *Blessed are you who has believed*. For, although she said to the Angel: *How shall this be done, because I know not man*, she did not doubt but believed and questioned to find out how.

### CHAPTER 2

#### **The great faith of the Virgin was evident because she believed what she knew was beyond nature**

Secondly, the faith of the blessed Virgin was great by the second light because she believed what she knew to be beyond nature. Something is wonderful when it is rarely found. But the rarest thing to find is something of this kind, namely, the incarnation of the Son of God; in fact from the beginning of the world it was not found until the coming of this glorious woman who *found grace with God* [Lk 1:30]. So Song 8:10 says: *I am become in his presence as one finding peace*, that is, him who *is our peace* [Eph 2:14]. Therefore, if she believed this rare and wonderful event, she had the strongest faith. Augustine, *De bono virginitatis*<sup>17</sup> says: 'Mary was more blessed in conceiving the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ. Maternal closeness would have been of no benefit to Mary, unless she had been happier to carry Christ in her heart rather than in her flesh'.

In truth she believed strongly because she knew that what was utterly incredible was to happen in her. For, as Augustine says, *De utilitate credendi*<sup>18</sup>: 'A wonder is something difficult and unusual that appears beyond the hope and ability of the one admiring'. But this event was difficult, in fact most difficult, since it

could be done only by God. So the Angel said to her: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you* [Lk 1:35]. It was beyond the hope and ability of the one admiring. Who could have dreamt that the Lord of heaven would be enclosed in a mother's womb, the Lord as the lowest servant, reigning in heaven and ministering on earth, containing all things but contained by the Virgin, the one who refreshes everything being nourished by a mother, the one who rules over all being ruled by a woman, and finally the eternal Word made flesh in time? Truly then this wonder was the greatest wonder. And yet this glorious woman believed. So she had such strength of faith that she merited for the Son of God to say to her: *As you have believed, so be it done to you* [Mt 8:13].

### CHAPTER 3

#### **The extent of faith in the Virgin was evident in that she knew she was to be an unworthy co-operator in this great mystery**

Thirdly, the great faith of the glorious virgin was evident in the third light in that she realized and understood that, unworthy as she was, she was to co-operate in so great an event. She heard from the Angel: *Behold you shall conceive and bring forth* [Lk 1:31]. Perhaps she was disturbed by this because she recognized she was not capable of co-operating in so great a mystery. But enlightened by a divine ray, understanding the will of God, she announced herself as a handmaid co-operating in such great salvation. To this end the Angel was sent to her as a watcher to a watcher, Gabriel to the Virgin. In Daniel 4:10 [4:13] there is written in a mystical sense: *Behold a watcher came down from heaven*. Sleep was sent into the Virgin, not as it was to the first man so that woman could be formed from him but the Angel was sent to a virgin [Lk 1:26-27] so that the Wisdom of God might become incarnate in her: watcher to watcher so that she might be aware of so great a secret and also become a voluntary and prompt co-operator and minister. It was necessary then for the Angel to speak and draw out her consent in faith; it was also necessary for the Virgin to reply, to express her consent and so show her belief, and this is not possible without speech. How could the Virgin have believed had the Angel not announced? Or how could the Angel announce unless having been sent by God? According to the Apostle in Romans 10:14-15: *How shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they be sent?* The blessed Virgin had such great faith that the Angel could apply to her the words of Matthew 15:28: *O woman, great is your faith*. It became clear that she would conceive the Son of God as the Angel had said, and so she said: *Be it done to me according to your word* [Lk 1:38]. She said, *to me*, not for me; as if she had said: What I heard in my ear from the Angel's greeting and in my mind by an act of faith, *be it done to me*, that is, in my womb by the incarnation of the divine word.

O word filled with every joy and delight, to hear the blessed Virgin say: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word!*

This is the word those above, namely, the angels waiting to be restored, wanted to hear; those in hell awaited, namely, the holy fathers waiting to be freed from hell; their descendents wanted, namely, to be redeemed by your Son; what foreigners longed for, namely, the desire of creatures to be satisfied by you. Blessed Virgin, you gave the word of your most worthy and virtuous consent and took the Word of your virginal conception from the embrace of your most divine Father<sup>19</sup>

Our Lady, hold on to what you have; keep for us what you hold; accept our prayer and devotion; and for us present before your Son effective prayers, so that we may reign together forever with you and with your Son, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reign together in glory forever and ever. Amen.

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Anonymous, *In Lucam*, c. 1 (Senis, Bibl. Commun., cod. U. VI. 4, f. 11d).
- <sup>2</sup> Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 16sq.) and the following quotation comes from here.
- <sup>3</sup> *Super Missus est*, hom. 1, n. 5 (PL 183, 59).
- <sup>4</sup> Anonymus, *In Lucam*, c. 1 (f. 13ab), with many changes and additions.
- <sup>5</sup> Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 17).
- <sup>6</sup> Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 17-19), with a few changes and additions.
- <sup>7</sup> See *Super Missus est*, hom. 1, n. 9 and hom. 2, nn. 2-3 (PL 183, 61ff. and 60ff.); and also Bede, *In Luc. evang.*, I, c. 1 (PL 92, 321).
- <sup>8</sup> Sermo 142 (PL 62, 582).
- <sup>9</sup> Olivi, loc. cit., (VIII, 19), with a few changes and additions.

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<sup>10</sup> Rather c. 2, # 9 (PG 3, 647).

<sup>11</sup> Rather ch. 2, # 10 (PG 3, 650).

<sup>12</sup> Sermo 9, n. 2 (PL 183, 815).

<sup>13</sup> Reference has not been found.

<sup>14</sup> *De fide orthodoxa*, III, c. 1 (PG 94, 983).

<sup>15</sup> Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 16), with some changes.

<sup>16</sup> *Brev. Rom.*, In festo Praesentationis B.M.V.; Officium B.M.V. in sabbato; Officium p  
Vesperas.

<sup>17</sup> Namely, *De sancta virginitate*, c. 3, n. 3 (PL 40, 398).

<sup>18</sup> Cap. 16, n. 34 (PL 42, 90).

<sup>19</sup> From Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, I, c. 7 (f. 12c) with many changes and additions.

**SERMON 6**

**On the annunciation of the glorious virgin  
During the day  
Again on the virginal consent**

*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word;* again in Luke 1:38 and in the Gospel for today. May I use in a worthy and genuine way the words of glorious Bernard<sup>1</sup>, ‘There is nothing pleases me more, nothing that terrifies me more than to speak of the glory of the Virgin Mother’. I state, my own unworthiness terrifies me, but the praise and excellence of the Virgin delight me. Hence, I want to stammer again and again over such admirable matters and beyond what was said above of the virginal consent. The blessed Virgin said to the Angel making the announcement: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.* Three things should be reflected on in this admirable consent: the admirable object of the consent; secondly, its admirable action; thirdly, its admirable help.

**ARTICLE 1**

**On the fourfold object the blessed Virgin had before her when  
she consented to conceive the Son of God**

Firstly, we should reflect on the admirable object of this consent. Four objects are to be found in the consent. ‘Think, therefore: firstly, of the object for which she consented; secondly, the object according to which she consented; thirdly, the object to which she consented; fourthly, the object on account of which she consented’<sup>2</sup>. The first object was Jesus Christ, the second, the Holy Spirit, the third, the eternal Father, and the fourth, the human race.

## CHAPTER 1

### **That the blessed Virgin in the annunciation consented to conceive a visible and mortal Son of God who was able to suffer**

Firstly, we should reflect:

On the object for which she consented, and this was the Son of God, Jesus Christ, that he might be, as far as concerned her, her true and natural son, mortal, truly able to suffer, who was to die for the restoration of the whole world and to make satisfaction for the sins of all. But it was impossible for her to have consented worthily and correctly to such and so great an object without casting, raising and most sincerely opening all the affections of her soul to it. She must also have turned her attention most clearly, have felt most intimately and believed strongly but in total stillness. It was impossible also unless, faced with the remarkable nature and singular offering of the object or the way in which she related to it, she had submitted herself most humbly, making nothing of herself, so that, totally forgetful of self, she could be transformed into him and, in accord with what can happen in the way of love, she would become completely his, or become one and the same with Christ himself. This implied being extended and raised in the highest way into the abyss of the Trinity and unity, that is, into the personal and original condition according to which she existed in herself and according to which she related to the Father and to the Holy Spirit proceeding from him. Further it implied being deeply involved in the admirable humiliation that the Son of God wanted to take on, so that emptying himself he might become in her womb an infant able to feel pain, to submit later to most bitter punishments for the sins of all and to show a model of crucified life to all. Therefore, this is what it meant to consent to the Crucified one, or to the One to be crucified, to the price of the abundant satisfaction for all sins, to the merit or reward, to be an intercessor and mediator for the restoration of all the elect who were to be formed and formed from him and within him.

**CHAPTER 2****That the blessed Virgin in the conception of the Son of God had as her object the Holy Spirit promised to her by God the Father through the Angel**

Secondly, we should reflect on the object according to which she consented and this in truth was the Holy Spirit, that is:

The most wonderful overshadowing promised to her by the Angel, indeed by God through the Angel, to sanctify her in a worthy way for such a Son, to fill and change her even bodily into the child to be formed from her in a most spiritual and supernatural way. We shall see that the power that changed a lower state into a higher was as great as when one is in preparation for or actually going up to a high Order, or from a state of active life to the peak and state of contemplation, or going from this world to another; at such a time a person feels as if close to a kind of death, in which he or she dies to a whole state and to a former life. A person experiences a certain transcendent difficulty and a kind of strangeness, or unaccustomed newness numbing all the person's senses and this at times causes in the body a great dread and rigidity. But the first state of the Virgin was further removed from the following state of her motherhood, than the state of the most faithful and good person differs from a previous state. Therefore, in the hour of her consent to that state she felt herself pass through a kind of unspeakable death when comparing her previous state to a state that was totally beyond this world; it belonged to a most extraordinary region or dwelling, namely, to certain secret and exalted depths of God, in which and by which she was settled and irrevocably contained. For a poor lady or handmaid, knowing of the imminent visit of a king to her, immediately begins to be astonished and fearful out of a great shame; she is full of anxiety and worry as to how she might welcome him worthily. How much more would the Virgin, aware that the superabundant and incomprehensible overshadowing of the majesty of the Son of God and of the Holy Spirit was soon to come upon her, be most fearful out of a divine fear and reverence; would she not be totally confused and trembling, most worried and trembling as to how to receive them

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worthily? Who would be able to say or think through just how much this was in her?

She knew what is written in Sirach 32:4: *For your reverence great grace shall come to you.*

### CHAPTER 3

#### **That the blessed Virgin knew she was chosen as the bride of the eternal Father for the conception of the Son of God**

Thirdly, we should reflect on the object to which she consented:

namely, to God the Father who was offering his Son to her as to his bride and asking for her consent to this. Therefore I ask you, just how much in this offering did she feel obliged to God offering her such things? Did she feel obliged to love God above all much more than previously? Did she feel obliged to obey God above all, to serve, thank, and acknowledge such a singular grace and love? In this she would become the Father's bride so that the Father and not another might send his Son into her soul and womb, and might inflame and change her by the most divine Spirit so that from her and in her the Father might form a body for his Son who would then be truly Son of God and son of the Virgin. I do not want to imply in what has been said above that she did anything other than what she was bound to do according to the measure and proportion of the Father's offering and of the gift offered; this is sufficient to surpass incomparably the merits of all the saints. Note also, how much it was right and necessary for her to take hold of her whole soul and affection so as to assent and unite herself worthily to the eternal truth that was presenting to her, in a way incredible and inaccessible to us, unutterable truths equally of the present and the future or what was yet to be done. Nor were the aforementioned addressed to a simple old woman but to a person in whom the most basic foundations of the whole restoration of us and of the world were to be suddenly placed and built. And this through the medium of her faith, hope and great love that were at the same time a humble and submissive assent and consent.

#### CHAPTER 4

### **That the blessed Virgin understood she was to conceive the Son of God for the reparation of the human race**

Fourthly, we should reflect:

why she consented, namely, to bring about the reparation and recovery of the whole world, in which her own salvation and reparation were included and this for the ensuing praise and glory of God. So I ask: How much did she love and desire this fruit and outcome? Augustine, in his sermon *De nativitate*,<sup>3</sup> says: ‘O blessed Mary, the whole captive world asks for your assent; you, Lady, have made the world a hostage of your faith. Do not delay, Virgin; answer the word quickly and take the Son. Give in faith and experience virtue’. If, therefore, her consent, in accord with the scope of the task proposed to her, had to be based on and extended to it; if also, in accord with the origin of divine predestination, the salvation of all the elect depended on this consent of the Virgin, would not reason demand that the predestining God give to this consent a worthy efficacy and virtue?

#### ARTICLE 2

### **On the fourfold perfect act of the virtues that the Virgin accumulated in the conception of the Son of God**

Secondly, we should reflect on the admirable action of this consent. Concerning this, note carefully ‘how, in an ineffable transcendence, she accumulated for herself the perfections of all sublime actions’.<sup>4</sup> For the present I take only four actions of a virginal soul among the most perfect people: firstly, the act of martyrdom and patience; secondly, the act of piety and mercy; thirdly, the act of chastity and purity; fourthly, the act of both ways of life, namely, the active and the contemplative.

## CHAPTER 1

### **That in a wonderful martyrdom the blessed Virgin dedicated and offered herself to God in the conception of the Son of God**

Firstly:

I take the internal and highest act of martyrdom by which a martyr offers him or herself as a rich holocaust to the Lord. The Virgin offered herself to that ineffable death, as we have said above in chapter 2,<sup>5</sup> and to that ineffable fire by which in the very conception of Christ she was completely enkindled. And if before this she was more ready than others to offer herself to every death and martyrdom for the sake of God, how much more so in this hour! If all who have entered the state of Christ by baptism, *are buried with him*, according to the Apostle in Romans 6:3-6, *by baptism into death*, and their *old self was crucified*, how much more was the Virgin crucified with Christ in the hour of this conception! For from the moment of conception every inner act in the soul of Christ was directed to make satisfaction to God for all and that by his inner decision he opened himself to every punishment and death pleasing to or demanded by God. It is clear that the Angel, or God through the Angel, put before the Virgin that the Son to be conceived was to be the future redeemer and saviour of all. Otherwise she would hardly have been enlightened towards God, without understanding that the Son of God could not be mortal and born from her except under extreme and difficult conditions. Moreover, for a most honourable, chaste and married virgin girl to know that she is to become pregnant but not from her husband, nothing would come to her more quickly and reasonably, than that she would be thought of as an adulteress by her husband, and disgraced and rejected by him as an adulteress. Therefore, the blessed Virgin by consenting to pregnancy laid herself open to the confusion just mentioned, something more horrible to her than any other kind of confusion and death.

But it could be said that she was easily able to think that God, at least for the sake of avoiding insult against the Son, would not allow her to be exposed to such confusion; against this is the factor that because she knew he was to make satisfaction, he would have to bear confusion and punishment fitting for such satisfaction, and so she had little reason to think that God would

not allow this and worse things to be done against her Son. Moreover, in this at the least the wonderful constancy in her heart appeared because, as far as can be seen in the Scriptures, she did not ask the Angel for protection against such confusion, nor for advice or any assurance about the event itself. As a sign that a crucified woman conceived the Crucified one, God in supreme wisdom decreed that on the same day as she conceived Christ, she also suffered.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Out of admirable piety for the human race, the blessed Virgin chose to conceive the Son of God**

Secondly:

I take the act of piety and mercy. By this consent she longed for most deeply and obtained the salvation of all the elect; by this consent she dedicated herself in a most singular way to the salvation of all and to their Saviour, so that from then she would carry all people in her womb as a most authentic mother carries her children. Augustine, in his sermon *De Nativitate*<sup>6</sup>, says: ‘O blessed Virgin, who is able to offer you worthy expressions of thanks and commendations of praises, you who by a singular consent hastened to help a lost world? What praises may weak human nature offer you who by your action alone have found the way to recovery? So, by your merits accept every exile and inadequate thanks’, and as you take the offerings, by praying excuse our faults.

## CHAPTER 3

### **That in her consent to the conception of the Son of God a triple chastity shone forth in the blessed Virgin**

Thirdly, ‘I consider the act of chastity and mental cleanliness and purity that indeed shone forth in this consent in a triple way’: firstly, in the intention of virginity, secondly, in the increase of holiness; thirdly, in the experience of divinity.

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Firstly, such chastity and purity shone in the intention of virginity; because, as far as it was in her, she shunned union with a man even for the conception of the Son of God. So, to the Angel announcing the conception of the Son of God, she said: *How shall this be done, because I know not man* [Lk 1:34]?

That is: *Because* I am in a state and vow of never knowing *man*. As if she had said: I know that God has many ways of doing this; but one way, as far as I am concerned and from the desire of my soul, is far from my spirit and completely alien to it, namely, that I might conceive by knowing a *man* carnally, even to conceive God. Note how she drew back from anything contrary to her beloved, that is, God, for she hated not only to offend God but also every corrupt and wrongful action, in so far as she could do this without being offensive to God; the conjugal act could be such a case, and especially if it was directed towards a divine child; and even this, as far as she was concerned and in an absolute sense, the blessed Virgin held in such distaste, that this was the reason why she spoke these words to the Angel. And I think the main reason why the method of conception determined by God from eternity was not revealed to her, was so that her intention and words would clearly indicate her most excellent love and zeal for virginity and purity, and this to the highest degree.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, she shone in an increase of holiness:

From the promise of the Angel telling her of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the refreshing overshadowing of the Most High, she knew perfectly that she was to be purified of every original infection, and that what was to be born from her would rightly be clean and holy. Therefore, in this consent she agreed from within herself, from the marrow of her being and with all her heart to a total cleansing and purification.<sup>8</sup>

Thirdly, she shone in an experience of divinity;

God is the highest purity and chastity and entry to God is open only to a heart wiped clean not only from all that is carnal, but also from every vain thought. It is clear that the higher one ascends in divine matters, the more strongly is the soul affected

by the whole gambit of divine purity. Therefore, when the Virgin ascended by this consent to God about to be conceived, it was necessary for the consent to be imbued ineffably with an experience and affection of divine chastity. Hence, by this action she was rightly made the Virgin of virgins. According to Anselm,<sup>9</sup> 'it was fitting that the Virgin who was to conceive God should shine with such purity than which under God a greater could not be imagined'.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

#### **That in her consent to the conception of the Son of God there were present elements of the active and contemplative ways of life**

Fourthly:

I consider the actions of both ways of life, namely, the active and contemplative. With the soul centred on the conception of God, the action of itself and directly was totally contemplative. But since this conception had to be celebrated from her flesh and in her flesh, and since she had to be totally free for the care of the child to be born, her consent was also the noblest form of active life, belonging to no other than to the Mother of the Son of God.

From the four previous and other similar actions, it can easily be seen how all the actions of the most perfect virtues were accumulated in the often mentioned consent of the Virgin.

#### **ARTICLE 3**

#### **On the fourfold help given to the blessed Virgin in the conception of the Son of God**

Thirdly, we should reflect on the admirable help given to the virginal consent. Four helps came together in this admirable consent: the first was divine election; the second, virginal perfection; the third, angelic support; the fourth, paternal affection.

## CHAPTER 1

### **That the blessed Virgin was chosen from eternity to be the Mother of the Son of God**

The first help was divine election.

The discerning grace and love or will of God in choosing beforehand the Virgin as the Mother of the Son, in putting this election before her by the Angel and in asking her consent beforehand, provided a basic help for this admirable consent. It is clear that the discerning grace and love of God could not give a like or similar help to one of the saints. It is also clear that as the discerning charity of God is extended to someone from a greater and higher reason of love, this moves the person more strongly. Also if God fittingly and effectively chooses someone for a difficult task, it is necessary for the person to move in a way proportionate to the level of difficulty of the task for which God chooses the person, and especially where there is no rebellion or lack of good will on the part of the person responding. But the task of the motherhood of God, to which God chose the Virgin, was the highest task that could be given to a mere creature. Therefore, the discerning grace of God in the highest way came to and moved the heart of the Virgin for this work. Therefore, this work in the highest way shared the perfection and influence and Godlike likeness of the One discerning, of the loving charity of God from which charity it came.<sup>10</sup>

## CHAPTER 2

### **That the perfection of the virtues and graces in the blessed Virgin provided a help in the conception of the Son of God**

The second help for this consent:

was virginal perfection, that is, her formal grace and virtue, that, on the evidence of the Angel Gabriel in Luke 1:28, was so great that she was said to be in a singular way *full of grace* and *blessed* beyond others. And the Angel said to her: *The Lord is with you* in a singular way. Taking it as certain that she was also *full of grace* beyond others so that the habit of charity and other virtues was

much stronger in her than it ever was in any saint while in this life, then I hold: Every holy and individual mind is more strongly equipped, prepared and ready to do some work in a worthy, reverent and faultless manner, the more the person feels and knows that the work demands every perfection, that is, that it is more divine, is done with greater strength, effort and caution so that it can be done worthily, fittingly and more pleasing to God the Father. But every faithful mind is aware that the highest task is to conceive God and become the Mother of God; therefore, everyone feels or should feel that the action closest to this is the most perfect action. But this was the consent of the Virgin; therefore, since she felt herself chosen and approached by God for this and that this consent was asked of her, it was necessary that, from her deepest self, with all her strength and virtues, she should equip, prepare and open herself to so great, singular and unusual grace by accepting it worthily and totally without sin. But this was done by her in her consent that was worthy and right; therefore, the consent proceeds from all her virtues and efforts, just as a huge stone in a machine is thrown by the strongest impulses of the whole machine and all its parts.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **That for the conception of the Son of God the whole angelic nature gave its support**

The third help for this consent was angelic support.

For the hierarchical influence of all the angels was active in this to help and, according to Dionysius,<sup>11</sup> our whole hierarchy is ruled by their ministry. It is clear that in all their ministry to us, they desire and aim at nothing other than the universal healing and salvation of the elect. But in the hour in which Gabriel was sent to the Virgin, all knew that through the consent of the Virgin the head and source of our healing was to be formed, namely, Christ in so far as he is a man. Therefore, in that hour all the desires and efforts of the whole angelic curia or hierarchy were intent on helping the Virgin by their ministry in order that so great a work would be accepted and completed. They did this by praying for it to God with all their energy and also by influencing her in accord with the nature of their hierarchical order.

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For all the seraphim, taking such help from God, had an influence on the cherubim, the cherubim on the thrones, the thrones on the dominations, the dominations on the virtues, the virtues on the powers, the powers on the principalities, the principalities on the archangels, the archangels on the angels, the angels on Gabriel, Gabriel on the blessed Virgin.

Nor is it important whether or not all had an immediate influence or whether it was one representing all. Nor should you wonder if one representing all could do more than could be done when representing a few or even when acting on its own. For that part of the string of a bow that is the only part to touch and fire the arrow shoots it much more strongly because it works with the strength of the whole bow rather than by its own strength. We see the same thing when the legate of a large community or city, or of some great and powerful army, moves more powerfully and strongly and influences the hearts of those to whom he is sent whether that be from fear or obedience or love, because he acts as the representative and with the authority of all the citizens and the whole community, and not as one coming with the authorization of only half or a third part or on his own personal authority.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

#### **That the merits and prayers of the saints helped in the consent of the Virgin**

The fourth support for this consent was a fatherly affection.

The whole body of the earlier saints who, certainly, either implicitly or explicitly, desired above all before God their Saviour for eternal life and they cooperated by helping as a reward. Therefore, for this reason, the intentions or holy desires and merits of all were virtually in agreement in asking for the Saviour to be sent by God; and, consequently, for her and her coming through whom and in whom the Saviour of the world was to be given. If then God paid attention in this work to the merits of all the earlier saints and fathers, it is clear that God gave to the Virgin grace predetermined by the merits of the saints.

If then all that has been said in the three preceding articles is taken into account, one grasps the final goal of this admirable consent:

The final goal was that she, endowed with every dignity and perfection, become the Mother of God in flesh and soul; this goes infinitely beyond anything else under God that a human being could think or say. If, therefore, such an ineffable goal was in proportion to her merit, it was necessary that the meritorious perfection of this consent also be in proportion to the perfection of the goal.

**Objection:**

But perhaps some foolish person will think and say against the preceding that the Virgin could not have thought of so many and important things in such a brief time.

**Response:** But such foolishness is overcome in a triple way: firstly, by a practical example; secondly, by faith; thirdly, by a spiritual experiment.

Firstly, it is overcome by a practical example. If the king of France, without any doubt and solemnly, were to make definite through one of his highest ranking leaders or companions, his intention to marry a poor girl of his kingdom, it is clear that immediately in that hour she would think with the highest admiration of the unspeakable courtesy, love, and the complete magnificence of the royal dignity or kingdom of the king and of all his counsellors. She would be conscious of how much and what things were being offered and given to her, to what she was being raised, with what variety of precious objects she was to be adorned, and to what offices and delights she was to be committed with the members of the king's household in conversations and so on. Nor should you wonder that in a single action almost numberless objects at the same time are present in the mind, because with one glance of the eye there are presented at the same time as if in a flash to our sight the sky with the stars, the atmosphere with its clouds and birds, water with its waves, ships and fish, the earth with its grass, trees and beasts, castles and cities, and valleys and mountains, springs and rivers.

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Secondly, it is overcome by faith. The Lord gave to the Prophets and Apostles wonderful enlightenments, both concerning divine and human matters, as fitted their apostolic and prophetic office. What reasonable person would feel that to her who was chosen to be the Queen of the world and the Mother of God, would not be given an enlightenment adequate and proportionate to her dignity and high standing, especially when such a consent and action is asked of her that without enlightenment and strength it could not be done by her in a worthy and correct manner.

Further, perhaps you believe that at that hour the Virgin was without knowledge of divine matters and ignorant like a common girl. Recall that before this she was said to be *full of grace* and *blessed* beyond other women and that God was present to her in a singular assistance. Recall also that she received so much grace from her first sanctification in the womb of her mother that she could and actually did avoid even the least venial sin. This could not have happened unless she had received the highest wisdom in what she was to do and avoid, love and obey, and believe or not believe.

Thirdly, even a beastly person is overcome by a spiritual experiment. According to the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 2:14: *Sensual persons do not perceive these things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to them*, that is, firmly settled. When the Spirit of God subtly penetrates and inebriates a mind as it flows freely, innumerable rays of divine light and wisdom multiply and spread out in the mind. It enters the mind just as the rising sun enters the world. Wisdom 7:22-24 says: *This Spirit is one, manifold, subtle* and the wisdom from which it comes is *more active than all active things, reaching everywhere by reason of its purity*. Hence, as it wishes, it shows at the same time things both past and future; for, according to the Apostle as above in 1 Corinthians 2:10: *The Spirit searches all things yes, the deep things of God*, and so *the spiritual person judges all things*, as above in 1 Corinthians 2:14-15. And so Mary is rightly named as 'enlightened' or 'enlightening' even though, in matters of the Spirit and wisdom, what she had beforehand was minimal to what she received in the conception of Christ.

Finally, may I use the words of devout Bernard:

Through you blessed finder of grace, bearer of life, mother of salvation, we have access to the Son so that we might be accepted by him who was given to us by you. Your integrity excuses before God the sin of our corruption, your humility before God begs pardon for our vanity. Your abundant love covers *a multitude of sins* (1 Pet 4:8), and your glorious fertility bestows on us a fertility of merits,

so that finally by your merits we may possess your Son in glory, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit glorifies and rewards you and all the saints forever and ever. Amen.

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *In Assumptione B.M.V.*, sermo 4, n. 5 (PL 183, 427).
- <sup>2</sup> From Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 6-11), from where the four quotations in this article are taken, with some changes and additions.
- <sup>3</sup> *Sermo 194, De Annuntiatione dominica*, serm. 2, n. 3 (in the works of Augustine, PL 39, 2105ff).
- <sup>4</sup> From Olivi, *De Dominica*, q. 1 (VIII, 11-14), and the four quotations that follow come from here.
- <sup>5</sup> Page 96.
- <sup>6</sup> *Sermo 194, De Annuntiatione Domin.*, sermo 2, n. 5 (in the works of Augustine, PL 39, 2106).
- <sup>7</sup> From Olivi, *In Ioannem*, c. 2 (cod. Laur. Plut. X dext. 8, f. 21c); see below on page 95.
- <sup>8</sup> From Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 14-15 and 19), and the two following quotations are taken from here.
- <sup>9</sup> *De conceptu virginali et originali peccato*, c. 18 (PL 158, 451).
- <sup>10</sup> From Olivi, *De Domina*, q. 1 (VIII, 1-6, 20-23), and the six following quotations are taken from here.
- <sup>11</sup> See *De cael. hierarch.*, c. 1, # 3 and c. 4, # 3 (PG 3, 122 and 182).

SERMON 7

**Tuesday after Palm Sunday  
On the angelic greeting explained in an orderly way**

*She thought what manner of greeting this might be* [Lk 1:29]. Because the Lord Jesus Christ held his Mother closer and dearer than other saints and more powerful in her intercession for us, so he wanted her to be loved, honoured, greeted and venerated more than all the saints. To contemplate her and her virtues most attentively and to be most ardently devoted to them enkindles the affections to the highest pitch, raises up and enlightens the mind to the highest virtues of Christ and to Christ himself. 'In prayer and devotion it is simply better and more useful to turn to the Mother of Christ for help than to other lesser saints'.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, to stir up devotion and enkindle our affection for the Virgin Mary, I have set out the Angel's greeting with her help so as to show the fourth religious element, namely, that of the Angel sent. To do this, I take the text of Luke 1:29 where it says of the greeting: *She thought what manner of greeting this might be*. In these words it is clear that this salutation was full, firstly, of admirable reflection: *She thought*; secondly, of admirable praise: *what manner might be*; thirdly, of an admirable greeting: *what manner of greeting*.

Firstly, it is shown to be full of admirable reflection because *she thought*, namely, the blessed Virgin, so that we might learn from her example to contemplate the mysteries of this greeting. And that its high mysteries may shine forth more clearly, three things should be reflected on and thought about. Reflect, firstly, on the state of virginity, secondly, on the Angel's example, thirdly, on the wonderful gain.

Firstly, reflect on the state of virginity in this greeting. She is the queen of mercy, the temple of God, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, always sitting at the right hand of Christ in eternal glory as the Prophet in Psalm 44:10 [45:10] says: *The queen stood on your right hand, in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety*, namely,

of all the saints. So she is to be venerated, greeted, and adored with an adoration of special veneration. Solomon, in 1 Kings 2:19, prefiguring this and as a figure of Christ, *arose* from his throne *to meet* his mother and *bowed to her*. She sits at the right hand of the King so that as often as you adore Christ the King, you also adore the Mother of Christ; so she should be venerated frequently with this greeting.

Secondly, reflect on the example of the Angel. If angels greet her, how much more are we bound to do this? Luke 1:28 says: *The Angel being come in to her said to her: Hail, full of grace* etc. Bernard<sup>2</sup> says on this: ‘Who is this virgin so noble to be greeted by an angel yet so humble to be engaged to a carpenter?’ Therefore, learn from the Angel to greet Mary.

Thirdly, reflect on the wonderful gain. When one devoutly greets the Virgin, one is greeted in turn by her. The glorious Virgin Mary is a most courteous queen who cannot be greeted without returning a wonderful greeting. If you say a thousand *Hail Mary’s* in a day, you will be greeted back by the Virgin a thousand times. The Apostle, Romans 16:6, encourages us in this mystery when he says: *Greet Mary*. And so it is clear how much this greeting is worthy of reflection, because *she thought*.

Secondly, it is clear that it is worthy of admirable praise for she says: *what manner*. This greeting is to be praised for three reasons: firstly, for its dignity; secondly, for its sweetness or pleasantness; thirdly, out of gratitude.

It is praised, firstly, for the dignity contained in this greeting. The whole greeting is full of wonderful mysteries all of which give out and overflow with the scent and sweetness of our salvation. Who will be so ungrateful and stupid as not to recall with this greeting the beginnings of our salvation? The Angel says, *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you*. Every word is full of high mysteries as will be clear further on.

Secondly, it is praised for its sweetness. The Prophet says of those who taste and savour this: *How sweet are your words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth* [Psalm 118:103 (119:103)]. Sirach 24:27 [24:20] says: *My spirit is sweet above honey, and*

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*my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb.* The legacy of the Virgin Mary is her greeting from people; she inherited this by her devotion so that now the *Hail Mary*, like the *Our Father*, is willingly used by every Christian.

Thirdly, she is praised out of gratitude. It is a great ingratitude to take such gifts from our Lady, glorious Mary, and not acknowledge the giver or greet her with thanks. In reproaching such an ungrateful person, Sirach 41:21.25 [41:17.20] writes: *Be ashamed of silence before them that greet you.*

Thirdly, it is shown that it is an admirable greeting because she adds: *this greeting*. In the whole sequence of this angelic greeting the main mystery is stated in order: Firstly there is the greeting: *Hail Mary*; secondly there is the praise: *blessed are you*; thirdly, there is a petition: *Holy Mary, pray for us sinners*.

#### ARTICLE 1

##### **On the triple excellence of the glorious Virgin, namely, of nature, grace and glory**

The first mystery is in the greeting. In this greeting the triple excellence of the Virgin is shown: the first is of nature, the second, of grace, and the third of glory.

#### CHAPTER 1

##### **That the blessed Virgin surpasses in many ways all others in nature**

The first is the excellence of her nature. The excellence of this nature is shown in three ways in the word *Hail*.<sup>3</sup>

*Hail*, firstly means without woe. And this in three ways that cover the whole feminine experience, namely, of shame, labour and pain. She was without the woe of shame in conceiving, without the woe of labour in pregnancy, without the woe of pain in giving birth. For, as Bernard<sup>4</sup> says, she was 'fertile without corruption, pregnant without discomfort, without pain in childbirth'.

The reason why she was without the woe of shame is that she conceived without corruption, not by human seed but by a mystical breathing forth, as the Angel said to her: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you* [Lk 1:35].

She was also without the woe of labour because *the power of the Most High* overshadowed the weight of love and the gentle pregnancy.

Further, she did not have the woe of pain because the birth was without damage for the Angel said to her: *The Holy who shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God*. That entrance was reserved for the *Prince* alone; it was not violated as he went out any more than when he entered, as is mystically represented in Ezekiel 44:2-3. Apart from the blessed Virgin, in no woman was nature exempt from this triple curse. Hence, it is said of Eve in Genesis 3:16: *I will multiply your sorrows, and your conceptions; in sorrow shall you bring forth children* etc.

The excellence of nature in the Virgin is shown in a second way because she was immune from a triple woe, namely, of concupiscence, sin and punishment. In Revelation 8:13 the flying eagle calls out about this triple woe: *Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth*. The blessed Virgin was without the first woe, that is, without the harsh rule of concupiscence because she was conceived without it, as we have learnt from the testimony of Solomon who, in Song 4:7, says: *You are all fair, O my love, and there is no spot*, that is, of original sin, *in you*. Or it was totally cast out by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit; So the Psalmist in Psalm 45:5 [46:4] says: *The Most High has sanctified his own tabernacle*, that is, the blessed Virgin in whom the Lord Jesus Christ dwelt for nine months.

She was without the second woe, namely, of both mortal and venial sin. Augustine<sup>5</sup>: ‘Excepting the Virgin Mary of whom, I do not want any question to be raised when speaking of sin. Therefore, with the exception of the Virgin, if it were possible to gather together all the men and women Saints, and if they were asked if they had committed sin, what could they answer other than what 1 John 1:8 says: *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us?*’

She was without the third woe of punishment that consists in the separation of body and soul, the turning to ashes and dissolution of the body. For just as the Lord did not allow his *Holy One*, that

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is, Christ, *to see corruption* [Ps 15:10 (16:10); Acts 2:27; 13:35], neither did the Lord allow the holy one from whom the Holy One was born to see corruption, but she was assumed body and soul into heaven.

Moreover, the excellence of nature in the Virgin is shown in a third way in the *Hail* because she was without the triple woe of the flesh, the world and the devil<sup>6</sup>.

Or, the three things of which 1 John 2:16 speaks were absent in her: *All that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life.* ‘She excluded avarice by poverty, lust by virginity, the devil or pride by humility, because she possessed these virtues most perfectly and so she was rightly addressed by the Angel with: *Hail*’.

From the practice of the Church, the name Mary is added immediately when the *Hail Mary* is recited; this was foreshadowed by the evangelist Luke 1:27 when he said: *And the Virgin’s name was Mary.* It is correct that the name of Mary should be added. Mary means ‘star of the sea’, ‘a bitter sea’, ‘lady’ and ‘enlightened’.<sup>7</sup> She is a star for those who sail *this great sea that stretches wide its arms*, and in which *there are creeping things without number* [Ps 103:25 (104:25)]. But above all she is a star because through the birth of her Son she radiates a beam that enlightens our mind. She was also a bitter sea when, as foretold by Simeon in Luke 2:35, a sword pierced her soul during the passion. She became a Lady in her assumption when she was ‘exalted high above the choirs of angels’,<sup>8</sup> and declared ‘Queen of heaven and Lady of the angels’,<sup>9</sup> She was wonderfully enlightened when her soul was put into her body, more wonderfully in the conception of the Son of God, but most wonderfully in her assumption and glorification, when beyond the blessed angels and souls united together she remained enlightened by the divine vision. Behold the first virginal excellence by which she surpasses all others in nature.

## CHAPTER 2

### That the blessed Virgin in many ways far surpasses all others in grace

The second excellence is an excellence in grace to which the Anger refers: *Full of grace* [Lk 1:28] and it can be expounded by a triple interpretation.

The first is:

*Full of grace.* Grace, I say that is bodily, spiritual and singular. Her bodily grace was the grace of virginity in the flesh; so in Song 4:12 she is called *a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed up*. Her spiritual grace was an abundance of virtues in her soul; so in Song 4:15 her soul is called *the fountain of gardens, the well of living waters*. Her singular grace was the presence of the Son of God in her womb. So in Song 7:2 there is written: *Your belly is like a heap of wheat*, that is, full with the grain of which in John 12:24-25 is said: *Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground*, that is, in the blessed Virgin by the incarnation, and *dies* in the passion, *it remains* a single grain etc.

The second interpretation of *full of grace* is: She had an emptiness or depth of humility, purity of virginity and firmness of charity, because she had these virtues most fully and in their highest form. Three things are necessary if a vase is to be filled and hold good liquid, namely, that the vase be empty or deep, that it be clean, and that it be solid or firm; all these were in the Virgin Mother. So in the words of Song 6:9 the angels ask reverently about her: *Who is she who comes forth as the morning rising? Fair as the moon* from virginity, for the moon is a cold body; *bright as the sun* from most fervent charity; *terrible as an army set in array* from her deepest humility than which nothing is more terrible to demons.<sup>10</sup>

The third interpretation of *full of grace* is: Every grace given in this world comes through a triple process: from God it comes to Christ, from Christ to the Virgin and is then distributed to us by the Virgin in a most orderly way.

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Firstly, the Lord God is the giver of all grace according to what is written in James 1:17: *Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.*

Secondly, it comes from the Lord Jesus Christ as man. For he, living in this present world, merited for us every grace that God from eternity had decided to give this world, as is written in John 1:16: *Of his fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.*

The third step is from the blessed Virgin. From the time she conceived God in her womb, she had a certain jurisdiction or authority, if I may say so, over every temporal procession of the Holy Spirit, so that no creature received a grace of virtue from God other than through the distribution of the Virgin Mother. For while Christ is our head from whom every outpouring of divine grace flows into the mystical body, the blessed Virgin is the neck through which this flow passes to the members of the body; Solomon in Song 7:4 testified to this when he said while speaking of Christ: *Your neck*, that is, the blessed Virgin, is *as a tower of ivory*. So Bernard<sup>11</sup>: ‘No grace comes from heaven to earth without passing through the hands of Mary’.

Rightly, therefore, can she be said to be *full of grace* for from her all graces flow into the Church militant; in Genesis 2:6 this is prefigured by the spring that rose out of the earth and irrigated *all the surface of the earth*. In Psalm 45:5 [46:4], the Psalmist says: *The stream of the river rejoices the city of God*, that is, the Church militant.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **That the blessed Virgin in many ways far surpasses all in glory**

The third excellence of the Virgin is her glory as implied by the Angel:

*The Lord is with you* [Lk 1:28]. But not *with you* in any ordinary sense as with others with whom the Lord is *with them* by a giving of grace, but the Lord is *with you* in a particular way for he is in you by a giving of nature; in the womb of the Virgin our nature

was united to the divine nature and this was indeed a particular glory in the Virgin. So it is written of her in Proverbs 11:16: *A gracious woman*, that is, one full of grace, finds *glory*. She is the person of whom Proverbs 10:1 says: The glory of the Father is a *wise son*, and this is Christ. The Angel says then: *The Lord is with you*, and this can be interpreted in three ways.

The first interpretation of *the Lord is with you*: 'The Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord'.<sup>12</sup> The Lord Father is *with you* because you are the bride of the Father; the Lord Son is *with you* because you are the Mother of the Son; the Lord Holy Spirit is *with you* because you are shown to be the treasure of the Holy Spirit. However, 'there are not three Lords' incarnate in you, 'for there is one Lord', namely, the incarnate Son because in you *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* [Jn 1:14].

The second interpretation of *the Lord is with you*: The Lord was *with you* before the womb, *with you* in the womb, *with you* after the womb. He was *with you* before the womb in many types and prophecies. So in Genesis 6:14 there is a type: *Make an ark of timber planks* etc. There is a prophecy in Isaiah 7:14: *Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son*. Psalm 45:5 [46:4] refers to sanctifying in the womb when it says: *The Most High has sanctified his own tabernacle*. Luke 1:31 applies to making her fruitful after the womb when it says: *You will conceive in your womb and bear a son*.

The third interpretation of *the Lord is with you*: The Lord is *with you* in your soul, *with you* in the womb, *with you* in power. He is *with you* in your soul through the abundance of your virtues and so Luke 1:28 says: *Hail, Mary, full of grace*. He is *with you* by his presence in your womb; Luke 1:31 says: *Behold you shall conceive in your womb, and bring forth a son*. He is *with you* in power for the needs of sinners since you may get from God for us whatever pleased your charity. As a type of this mystery, Solomon, in 1 Kings 2:20 said to his mother, that is, Christ to the Virgin: *My mother, ask, for I must not turn away your face*. It would then be her fault if she were unwilling to please him for our sake. Devout Bernard<sup>13</sup> says: 'All people have a direct access to God. There you have a Mother before her Son, a Son before his Father. The Mother shows her upper body and breasts to her Son, the Son shows his side and wounds to his Father. No person could be refused here where so many signs of charity are

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present'. Behold the sweet *with you*, and may it always be with me and with you.<sup>14</sup>

So, from what has been said, the first mystery, namely, the greeting to the Virgin Mary, is clear.

## ARTICLE 2

### On the triple blessing shown in the Angel's greeting

The second mystery is a mystery of praise for a triple praise is stated in order: the first is for the blessed Mother, the second, for her blessed Child; the third, for her blessed name.

## CHAPTER 1

### That the blessed Virgin is declared blessed among women in three ways

The first praise is for the blessed Mother. So there is added: *Blessed are you among women* [Lk 1:28]. This can be explained in three ways.

The first interpretation is as follows: *Blessed are you among women*, that is, more than all women because you reached the third degree of blessing for women, and no other woman ever reaches or can reach this degree. The first degree is to be fruitful but not as a virgin; the second, to be a virgin but not fertile; the third, to be both a virgin and fruitful. The first two are common to other women but the third belongs only to Mary; so in Luke 10:42 there is written: *Mary has chosen the better part which shall not be taken away from her*. A good part is that she is fruitful, a better part is that she is a virgin, and the best part is that she is a virgin and a mother, something given only to Mary. At the same time reflect on something unheard, namely, that among all women these three things came together in Mary. At the one time she was a person both giving birth and a virgin, a mother and daughter, full and empty, full with the Son of God, empty of male seed. In Luke 1:49, the blessed Virgin called out in joy saying: *He who is mighty has done great things to me, and holy is*

*his name.* In Psalm 97:1 [98:1], the Psalmist says: *Sing to the Lord a new canticle because he has done wonderful things.*

The second interpretation is as follows: *Blessed are you among women*, for a triple reason: She shared the blessing with every role and kind of women. She was a virgin among virgins, fruitful among married women, continent and chaste among widows. So in Sirach 24:13 [24:8] there is said to her: *Let your dwelling be in Jacob, and your inheritance in Israel, and take root in my elect.* *Jacob* means ‘a wrestler’,<sup>15</sup> and this represents the role of married people. *Israel* received a name from the Angel who shrunk the sinew of his thigh [Gen 32:25-32], and so prefigures continence. The elect are rightly called virgins because *they follow the Lamb wherever he goes*, as stated in Revelation 14:4.

The third interpretation is as follows: *Blessed are you among women*, that is, by women. This is due to the triple blessing women have received against the three evils from which they are freed by the blessed Virgin: the first evil was the shame of Eve; the second, the curse of the Law; the third, an abasement of nature.

The first evil was the shame of Eve. What woman would have dared to come forward when it was through a woman that the whole human race was lost? As a sign of this she is given a veil for the head. But the blessed woman, Mary, made amends for this confusion when through her the human race was saved. A Gloss<sup>16</sup> on the text *The Angel Gabriel was sent* states: ‘A woman deceived by the devil introduced death; but against this a woman taught by the Angel brought salvation’.

The second evil was the curse of the Law by which every childless woman in Israel was cursed; Deuteronomy 22.<sup>17</sup> This was a harsh regulation and heavy yoke on all the daughters of Eve! If they have children they have to suffer, and if they do not have children they are cursed. This curse was wiped away by blessed Mary, the first of virgins,<sup>18</sup> since she was the first to consecrate her virginity to the Lord. So the Psalmist, in Psalm 44:15 [46:14] says of her: *After her*, the Queen as the first to

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dedicate her virginity to the supreme King, *virgins shall be brought to the Lord*, that is, to Christ; *her neighbours*, that is, widows and the continent who are thought of as *neighbours* to virgins, *shall be brought to you*, namely, to Christ. There is a prefiguring of this mystery in Exodus 15:20 when *Mary took a timbrel and all the women went forth after her with timbrels and with dances* etc.

The third evil was an abasement of nature or condition. The natural condition of women is lowly and weak. Proverbs 31:10 says: *Who shall find a valiant woman?* But in fact she was found quickly, *far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her*; the price was Christ who came from the side of God the Father, his fortitude overthrew the devil and so ended the abasement of women. Judith 15:10, in which Judith is speaking in the person of the Virgin, says of these three evils: *You are the glory of Jerusalem*, against the shame of Eve; *you are the joy of Israel*, against the curse of the Law and so they rejoice as people set free; *you are the honour of your people*, against the reproach of abasement.

## CHAPTER 2

### On the blessed fruit of the virginal womb

The second praise is for the blessed Child and this is in the words: *Blessed is the fruit of your womb* [Lk 1:42]. These are the words of Elizabeth when the Virgin visited her. When greeting the Virgin, the Church joins these words to the greeting of Mary so that from both choirs, namely, of angels and of humans, it shows that the glorious Virgin is to be venerated and greeted. Elizabeth rightly says: *Blessed is the fruit of your womb* because she is blessed in five ways.

Firstly, she is blessed in the glory from which she came because it is said above of the Virgin: *Blessed are you among women*.

Secondly, blessed in beauty, as stated in Psalm 44:3 [45:2]: *You are beautiful above all others*; in Wisdom 7:26: *She is the*

*brightness of eternal light and an unspotted mirror; and further in Song 5:10: My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands etc.*

Thirdly, blessed in smell, as stated in Song 1:3: *Draw me, we will run after you to the odour of your ointments;* and Genesis 27:27: *The smell of my son is as the smell of a plentiful field.*

Fourthly, blessed in taste, as in Psalm 33:9 [34:8]: *Taste and see that the Lord is sweet;* and Song 2:3: *I sat down under his shadow, whom I desired, and his fruit was sweet to my palate.*

Fifthly, blessed in worth, as stated in 1 Corinthians 6:20: *You are bought with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body.*

### CHAPTER 3

#### On the three excellences of the name Jesus

The third praise is for the blessed name of Jesus, of whom for the moment it is enough to reflect on three things, namely, its brevity, grandeur and pleasantness.

Firstly, note its brevity as a word because it has only two syllables so that it is not difficult to pronounce and use frequently this most holy name. Hence in Romans 9:28 and Isaiah 10:23 we read: *A short word shall the Lord make upon the earth* and the short word is the name Jesus, the incarnate Son of God.

Secondly, reflect on the grandeur in virtue; Acts 4:12: *There is no other name under heaven given us, whereby we must be saved.* And Philippians 2:9-10: *God has given him a name which is above all names, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.* Moreover, out of reverence for the glory of this most holy name, the Church has issued a Decree, Extra, *De immunitate ecclesiarum*, chapter, *Decet domum Domini sanctitudo*<sup>19</sup>, where is said:

On coming together there, that is, in a church, and by showing a special reverence they lift up that name *which is above all names*, apart from which *no other name under heaven is given us*

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*whereby we must be saved*; this is the name Jesus Christ who *shall save his people from their sins* [Mt 1:21]. And what was written as a general rule, namely, *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow*, each person does for him or herself, especially whenever in celebrating the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist that glorious name is mentioned, he or she bends the knees of the heart, or shows reverence by an inclination of the head.

Therefore, as is clear from the above, when we say the *Hail Mary* and come to the name *Jesus* we should at least bow our head.

Thirdly, reflect on the sweet taste of this name. So Bernard<sup>20</sup>: ‘Jesus, honey in the mouth, a melody to the ear, a son of joy in the heart’. And in another text<sup>21</sup> he says in song:

Sweet memory of Jesus, - giving true joy of heart;  
but more than honey and anything else – your sweet presence.  
No song is more pleasant, - no sound more joyful,  
no thought sweeter – than Jesus the Son of God etc.

### ARTICLE 3

#### **On the three things that come at the end of the Angel’s greeting**

The third is the mystery of petition that the faithful are accustomed to add at the end of the greeting and praise in the *Hail Mary*. In this petition there are three elements: firstly, to call upon; secondly, to praise; thirdly, to ask.

### CHAPTER 1

#### **That in every need the blessed Virgin is to be called upon**

Firstly, she is called upon by the faithful when they say: *Holy Mary*. This is right. Mary means ‘star of the sea’ and we who travel by night across *this great sea that stretches wide its arms* [Ps 103:25 (104:25)] must watch for this star that is closest to Jesus, the cardinal point. We do this not only so that we can set our course with safety by its flashing brightness, but also that we

might be able to call upon her with confidence in our every need. So Bernard<sup>22</sup>:

In dangers, difficulties and when doubtful think of Mary, call on Mary, do not let her name be far from your mouth or far from your heart; and to obtain the help of her prayer, do not depart from the example of her way of life. Following her you do not go astray, asking her help you are not desperate.

## CHAPTER 2

### **How great the dignity to be the Virgin Mother of God**

Secondly, she is praised by the faithful when they say: *Mother of God*. This is the high praise we give her when we say *Mother of God*, something not found in created persons such as angels or human beings, nor is it found in the uncreated persons. This is a dignity that cannot be understood, namely, that she should have the Son of God as one divine being coming from the Father and one human being coming from the Mother. So it is a greater gift to be the Mother of God than 'that she be the Lady of the creatures of God, because this depends on the other just as a branch on the root'.<sup>23</sup> For this reason we prefer to call her Mother of God than Lady of the world or universe.

## CHAPTER 3

### **On the petition customarily put at the end of the Angel's greeting**

The third and last petition is added when we say: *Pray for us sinners*. To the degree that she is more prompt and strong in intercession, more worthy, reverent and gracious when asking as the mediatrix between sinners and God, to that degree, other things being equal, it is more useful to have her as a mediatrix. But to what can a mother's request be compared? She stands for us as a suppliant on the right hand of the Son as truly Queen because she is the Mother of the supreme King by her generous conception, she is the daughter of the supreme King by a gracious

adoption; she is the bride of the Supreme King by her glorious assumption.

I say, such a Queen stands, on behalf of those who ask devoutly, to intercede against the anger of the Judge, to excuse the failings of our weakness, to help by accepting for us the outpouring of the divinity. May Jesus the Son of God, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever, pour this into us by grace and in the future by glory.

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NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> From Olivi, *De excellentia et perfectione Virginis gloriosae* (Senis, Bibl. Commun., cod. U. V. 5, f. 45b).
- <sup>2</sup> *Super Missus est*, hom. 1, n. 5 (PL 183, 58).
- <sup>3</sup> The Latin word for *Hail* is *Ave* and in the next paragraph there is a play on this with the word for *woe: vae*.
- <sup>4</sup> *Sermo in Dominica infra Oct. Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 7 (PL 183, 433).
- <sup>5</sup> *De natura et gratia*, c. 36, n. 42 (PL 44, 267).
- <sup>6</sup> From an anonymous *Comment. in Lucam*, c. 1 (ff. 7d-8a) and this applies to the following quotation; see above, I, 62, note 2.
- <sup>7</sup> Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis* (PL 23, 842); see Bonaventure, *Purification, Sermon 1*, p. 11; Conrad of Saxony, *Speculum B.M.V.*, lect. 3 (*Bibl. franc. ascet, Medii Aevi*, II), Ad Clars Aquas 1904, 24sq.
- <sup>8</sup> *Brev. Rom.*, In Assumption. B.M.V.
- <sup>9</sup> From the hymn 'Ave, Regina'; see U. Chevalier, *Repertorium hymnologicum*, I, Louvain 1892, 122.
- <sup>10</sup> From an anonymous *Comment. in Lucam*, c. 1 (f. 8ab).
- <sup>11</sup> *Sermo 3 in Vig. Nativ. Domini*, n. 10 (PL 183, 100).
- <sup>12</sup> From the Symb. Athanasium; Denzinger, *Enchir. Symbolorum*, n. 39.
- <sup>13</sup> The following text does not seem to come from Bernard; it is found in Ernardus Abbas, an acquaintance of Bernard, *De laudibus B.M.V.* (PL 189, 1726).
- <sup>14</sup> From an anonymous *Comment. in Lucam*, c. 1 (f. 8bc).
- <sup>15</sup> Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis* (PL 23, 795).
- <sup>16</sup> *Ordinaria* on Luke 1:26, in Lyranus; the anonymous *Comment. in Lucam*, c. 1 (f. 9c) has the same comment
- <sup>17</sup> A curse of this kind is not found in the text; in the Old Testament fruitfulness is portrayed as a blessing from the Lord as in Deuteronomy 7:14; Exodus 23:26; being childless gave rise to confusion in a woman

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as in 1 Samuel 1:6; but Jerome, *Epist. 48 ad Pammachium*, n. 10 (PL 22, 500) has: ‘The childless are cursed in the Law’.

<sup>18</sup> *Sermo in Dominica infra Oct. Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 7 (PL 183, 433).

<sup>19</sup> *VI Decretal.*, III, tit. 23, c. 2 (II, 1061).

<sup>20</sup> *In Cant.*, serm. 15, n. 6 (PL 183, 847).

<sup>21</sup> *Iubilus ryth. de nom. Iesu*, strophies 1-2 (PL 184, 1317).

<sup>22</sup> *Super misus est*, hom. 2, n. 17 (PL 183, 70ff.).

<sup>23</sup> From Olivi, *De excellentia et perfectione Virginis gloriosae*, f. 44b.

**SERMON 8**

**Wednesday after Easter Sunday  
On the most admirable grace and glory of the Mother of God**

*The queen stood on your right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety* [Ps 44:10 (45:9)]. For the glory and honour of the most blessed Virgin, the Mother of God, in this fifth meditation on the glory of paradise, and for the beginning of our sermon I will take an introduction:

from the words of her most devout son, glorious Bernard, in the beginning of the sermon *De Assumptione*.<sup>1</sup> He says: 'Here all ability will come together and golden speech shine with majesty. May the Mother of God, the Lady of the world, the queen of heaven make *the free offerings of my mouth acceptable* [Ps 118:108 (119:108)]. She improves understanding, directs style, and sprinkles the tongue of the poor with more pleasing speech'.<sup>2</sup>

May she deign to do this for me today so that, as I stammer, I may draw from her glories something that is in accord with the prophetic words that say: *The queen stood on your right hand in gilded clothing surrounded with variety*.

We can distinguish three meditations on the Virgin Mary in these most sacred words: firstly, we can contemplate her crowned with graces: *The queen stood*; secondly, exalted in glory: *on your right hand in gilded clothing*; thirdly, honoured by all: *surrounded with variety*. In fact, these three meditations, from the Psalmist of the Old Testament, John the Evangelist also has in his vision in the New Testament; so Revelation 12:1 says: *A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars*

**ARTICLE 1****On the twelve graces and excellences of the blessed Virgin, by which, as with twelve stars, she was crowned as queen in the present world**

Firstly, we should meditate on the blessed Virgin crowned with graces because the Psalmist calls her queen: *The queen stood*. John the Evangelist says that she had *on her head a crown of twelve stars*. We should then meditate on her as a Queen crowned with *a crown of twelve stars*. So great is the grace of the Virgin Mother that the more her graces, virtues and dignities are seen by the faithful and devout as worthier, sweeter and purer, the more do they influence them more purely, sweetly and divinely, and the more do they savour the highest purity, sweetness and divinity of God in a way that is sweeter, fuller and higher. So we should distinguish twelve wonderful graces, like the twelve stars of the crown she had also in this pilgrim life.

The first grace is nobility, the second, preservation, the third, merit and the fourth, power.

Four others are to be added, namely, extreme excellence as the first, rule as the second, a kingdom as the third and mediation as the fourth.

Four more are to be added: the first, completion; the second adornment; the third, retribution; the fourth, beyond understanding. And so there are twelve stars.

**CHAPTER 1****The blessed Virgin was a nobler woman of the world in her flesh**

The first star is called nobility. The blessed Virgin was a nobler person or nobler creature than all the persons or creatures who were or could have been or could have been born. Indeed, Matthew 1:17 listing three groups of fourteen *generations from Abraham to Christ*, describes how she was born from fourteen Patriarchs, from fourteen kings and fourteen leaders according to how they distinguish and list some of them<sup>3</sup>. The first fourteen extends *from Abraham to David*

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inclusive and contains fourteen Patriarchs; the second, from *David to the transmigration of Babylon* and contains fourteen kings; the third, from *the transmigration of Babylon to Christ* inclusive and contains fourteen leaders.

Luke 2:23-38 in describing the nobility of her lineage, listed her genealogy from Adam and Eve down to Christ who is God. The Lord Jesus Christ who did not have a mother in heaven nor a father on earth, received all his humanity from the Virgin. Hence, he received from his mother the dignities coming from humanity, namely, of lineage so that he could be called a son of David, of consanguinity so that he could be said to have brothers from a noble line.

From where else than from the glorious Virgin did he become the last leader, the last king and last patriarch of all the people of Israel? This was done so that it would be abundantly clear that all nobility of body, given to the human race in Adam by the Lord God, was given primarily so that it would come down through many generations to the Virgin and through the Virgin Mother to end in Christ.

Hence, God laid down quite literally in the law such cleanliness, not only in human bodies but also in vases, houses, camps and in all things belonging to the people of God, so that the people for the sake of Christ should preserve that nobility and cleanliness. But when Christ came, it was abundantly clear that there was nothing left of all the cleanliness and nobility of the Jews who did not believe in him. As a result, whereas the Jewish people had been most clean and noble before Christ, now they seemed to be the most base and lowly of all other nations.

Clear experience bears this out because after Christ, as they testify publicly, they never had a patriarch, king nor another leader so that what he said of himself in Revelation 2:8 might be verified: *These things said the first and the last; the first, namely, what was God's first intention for his people; and the last, namely, the patriarch, king and leader for that people.*

So, because the Evangelists attribute to this young woman all the excellences, noble thinking, offices, dignities and nobility that could be found in any human being from their lineage, we should prefer

their witness to all the princes and princesses, queens and kings, emperors and empresses, and to all the powers, tribes and languages of the whole world.

## CHAPTER 2

### **That the whole world after the sin of our first parents was, by the love of the blessed Virgin, preserved by God**

The second star is called preservation. Mary alone, for many thousands of years before her birth, firstly and principally preserved the lives of Adam and Eve and all their children. It is sure that Adam and Eve, by their own sin, merited not only the destruction of death and annihilation but also divine vengeance, for God *is not a respecter of persons* [Acts 10:34<sup>4</sup>], just as neither the sin of the angels nor human sin is allowed to go unpunished. But divine vengeance exempted her because of the outstanding reverence and most singular love of God for the Virgin. God loved her in the fullest way from eternity more than all the creatures who were created but were not to be united to God; moreover, the first man and woman were preserved and saved from the annihilation they deserved.

The reason for this is because this blessed young woman was in the seed of Adam in a seminal form; the power to produce the young woman was implanted in the first parents until it was to be drawn out as something existing. Jesus, the Son of God, was to be born from her and he was the only one to come forth from the Virgin and from no other according to the bodily substance existing in Adam. The merciful God was then indulgent to the first parents and did not annihilate them; otherwise neither the Virgin nor Christ or God clothed in human flesh would have come.

Therefore, for the sake of this noble creature God saved the first parents from their sin, Genesis 3; Noah from the rising flood, Genesis 7; Abraham from the slaughter of King Chedorlaomer, Genesis 14; Isaac from Ishmael, Genesis 21; Jacob from Esau, Genesis 27; the Jewish people from Egypt and from the impious hands of Pharaoh, Exodus 12; from the red sea, Exodus 14; from the calf in the desert, Exodus 32; from the hands of various tyrannical

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kings, namely, Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 3; from the captivity in Babylon, Isaiah 13; from the Assyrians, 2 Kings 17; David from a lion and a bear, 1 Samuel 17; from Goliath, same chapter; from Saul, 1 Samuel 18. And, to sum up in a brief word all the deliverances and mercies shown in Old Testament, I do not hesitate to say that God did this solely because of the reverence and love of this blessed young woman for which God in predestination preordained from eternity that she would be honoured beforehand in all her works.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **That the merit of the blessed Virgin in the conception of the Son of God surpasses the merits of all mere creatures**

The third star is called merit. The glorious Virgin merited more in her single consent, namely, to the conception of the Son of God, than all creatures whether they be angels or humans in all their actions, passions and thoughts. Indeed, all who merited were able to merit, in accord with their various states and levels, nothing other than the glory of eternal happiness. But the Virgin in the glorious consent merited the ending of an inclination to sin, the first position in the world, dominion of the whole universe over all creatures, the sceptre of the kingdom, the fullness of all graces, of all virtues, of all gifts, of all blessings, of all the fruits of the Spirit, of all knowledge and especially of the highest theology, of the interpretation of words, of the spirit of prophecy, of discernment of spirits, of the working of virtues, of the graces of healing. She merited to be fruitful in virginity, the motherhood of God, to be the star of the sea, the gate of heaven and above all to be named the queen of divine grace and the queen of mercy; this can be proved in many ways.

Firstly, this name fits her better than if she was called an empress for empress is a name more of fear and sternness, while queen is a name more of providence and moderation. Moreover, I do not think that in the whole of sacred Scripture God is ever called an emperor but king, a name of majesty.

Secondly, she is more correctly called queen of mercy rather than Lady of ladies, or queen of queens or goddess of goddesses. All

these imply dignity and excellence in comparison with those who are greater or lesser. If she were to be called goddess of goddesses, she would not be seen as goddess or queen of sinners or devils. Likewise, she is not correctly spoken of as Queen of peace and love since this would not apply to all the members of her kingdom.

Thirdly, it is better for her to be called Queen of mercy than queen of power or wisdom. In wisdom, power is understood but not the reverse; in mercy, wisdom and power are understood but not the reverse. Hence, mercy includes in itself the other three; and so Queen of mercy is queen of power and wisdom but the reverse does not apply.

Fourthly, she is not correctly called queen of glory or queen of grace or queen of justice because glory, grace and justice of themselves only imply a giving of gifts and a taking away of evil. Of itself, the kingdom of mercy embraces more and extends itself further than a kingdom of glory or grace or justice. But power, dignity and rank are greater when compared to what is broader and greater; therefore, the blessed Virgin Mary should be named after the highest dignity, namely, Queen of mercy.

Fifthly, on the same point, glory is only in heaven, not on earth, not in hell, not in purgatory; but mercy is in each of these; therefore, mercy is the greatest kingdom; and rightly is the highest queen named Queen of mercy.

Sixthly, she should be called queen of mercy for whatever is higher than what is high, is higher than something lower; but mercy is *over all the works of God* [Ps 144:9 (145:9)] and the kingdom of mercy is above mercy. Therefore, the Queen of mercy determines the power over all things; but this belongs most properly to the Virgin; therefore, she is rightly Queen of mercy.

Seventhly, she is Queen over her Son's inheritance and estate and this is mercy. 'An attribute of God is to be merciful and to spare always'<sup>5</sup>; therefore, the blessed Virgin is rightly the Queen of mercy.

Eighthly, it can be proved from Isaiah 18:4 where the Lord says: *I will consider in my place*; Gloss<sup>6</sup>: In what way is mercy a place? The proper place for a king is the kingdom; therefore, mercy is the kingdom of a king and queen. But, strictly speaking, a king and

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queen are people who own a kingdom just as the king or queen of France own the kingdom of France. For this reason, the most blessed Virgin is rightly called queen of mercy because she owns the kingdom of mercy.

#### **CHAPTER 4**

#### **That the blessed Virgin could do for God something God could not do as God**

The fourth star is power. The blessed Virgin could do for God more than God could do as God. Between the Virgin and God some things were contrary and contradictory but these were harmonized when God came to the Virgin. Think, firstly, that it was impossible for God not to generate; it was impossible for the Virgin to generate. Secondly, it was impossible for God to generate what was not God; it was impossible for the Virgin to generate God. Further, thirdly, it was impossible for God to generate with another person; it was impossible for the Virgin to generate without another person. Therefore, God came to the Virgin, and it was necessary for the Virgin to generate but not to generate a person other than God, and not from a person other than God. But God as God could only generate God; while the Virgin made God a man; God was unable to generate something that was not infinite, immortal, eternal, not subject to suffering, that could not be touched, invisible under the form of God; but the Virgin made him finite, mortal, poor, temporal, able to suffer, able to feel, visible in the form of a servant, incarnate in a created nature.

O unspeakable humility of the Creator! O unthinkable virtue of the Virgin Mother! O incomprehensible height of the mysteries of God! A Hebrew woman makes an entry in the home of the eternal King; a young woman, I know not with what charms, I know not with what caution, I know not with what vehemence, seduced, deceived and, as I might say, wounded and captured the divine heart and enclosed the wisdom of God. Therefore, the Lord was overcome by the blessed Virgin and, in Song 4:9, said:

*You have wounded my heart, my sister spouse, you have wounded my heart.* Gloss<sup>7</sup>: ‘Out of love for you I have taken flesh’ and ‘you have wounded’ my heart ‘on the cross’ with its first wounds. She was the firstborn of her Son and he came into the world more to redeem her than for any other creature.<sup>8</sup>

So, from the flesh of the Virgin, I say as I weep, God clothed the highest in humility, clothed supreme delight with punishment, clothed utmost opulence in poverty, clothed the brightest light in darkness, clothed the highest honour with insults, clothed the most lovable with scourging. Truly, it was utterly impossible for God the Father to do all this from within the Godhead. Therefore, in this is the prerogative of the Virgin, because what God was not able to do, was granted to no other creature. That she gave birth in this way brought about everything for the salvation of the human race. Hence, just as what *the Father gave to the Son is greater than all*, as written in John 10:29, so what the Mother gave him *is greater than all*.

What else is there to do than to cry out and say with Gregory<sup>9</sup>: ‘O wonderful respect of piety for us by both parents of Jesus Christ! O inestimable love of charity of God and the Virgin who handed over their common Son to redeem a servant’, *from the exceeding charity* [Eph 2:4] by which God and the virgin loved us poor sinners.

These are the first four stars while another four are to be added.

## CHAPTER 5

### **That only the eternal Father and the blessed Virgin were able to have a Son who is God**

The first is exceeding excellence. The person of the Virgin was of such exceeding excellence that this unthinkable dignity, namely, that she might have a son who is God, is found neither in uncreated persons nor in created persons such as angels and humans; this is found only in one divine Person who is God the Father, and in one human person who is Mother. Certainly, this privilege was given in this way to this person alone because it is impossible for the person of the Son or the person of the Holy Spirit to generate God; in them nature does not have a primacy of fruitfulness, nor the intellect to

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speak some word in reality, nor fruitfulness and the potential to produce an image, as there is in the Father. Hence, just as it is impossible for the Father to produce another Word since the Word generated is most perfect and exhausted all the Father's potential to generate; so it is impossible for a woman to be able to give birth to God other than by a new power given her by God; it is certain that this will never happen in the future. The potential to conceive and give birth to God joined to human nature follows from what we say about Christ being in the loins of the Fathers by the bodily substance that came down from Adam to the Virgin. It was impossible in fact for this to happen in any woman other than in the Virgin Mary. This potential was finished by the birth of Christ from human nature, so that whoever would say that a divine person could be made human in some other person by bodily substance would have to be punished as a most wicked heretic.

## CHAPTER 6

### **That as many creatures serve the blessed Virgin as serve the whole Trinity**

The second star is rule or, as we like to say, service. As many creatures serve the glorious Virgin Mary as serve the Trinity. For all creatures, whatever level they may hold among created beings, be they spiritual as angels or rational as human beings, whether they be corporal as heavenly bodies or elements, as well as all that is in heaven and on earth, whether they be the damned or the blessed, are all subject to the divine empire and subject to the glorious Virgin. For he who is the Son of God and of the blessed Virgin, wishing, as I would say, to equate in some way the realm of the Mother with the realm of the Father, he himself who is God, served the Mother on earth; hence, in Luke 2:51, there is written of the Virgin and of glorious Joseph: *And was subject to them*. Moreover, this is true, namely, that all things, including the Virgin, serve the divine empire. And this also is true, namely, that all things, God included, serve the empire of the Virgin.

**CHAPTER 7**  
**That by right of inheritance the kingdom of the whole world  
passed to the blessed Virgin**

The third star is a kingdom. By the law of succession and by a right of inheritance, the first place and the kingdom of the whole universe is due to the blessed Virgin. Although the blessed Virgin, a nobler person than any other who was or will be in the universe, was of such great perfection that, even if she had not been the Mother of God, should none the less be the Lady of the world; because her Son in the first moment of his conception merited and obtained the monarchy of the whole universe, as the Prophet testifies in Psalm 23:1 [24:1], saying: *The earth is the Lord's and its fullness, the world and all they that dwell in it.*

Therefore, from the obligation coming from the conception of the Son of God, the care and management of all this was placed on the Virgin, something that was given by her Son until her Son reached the lawful age, just as she was his careful nurse and source as the laws demand.

Nor would it be surprising if so generous a queen had slipped in her work of administering the world: firstly, because she was a woman; secondly, a young woman; thirdly, a shy virgin; fourthly, she was poor; fifthly, she was totally committed to the care of the Son of God and of herself; sixthly, because she was not recognized as the Mother of God nor received as the Lady of the world, just like the Son who ordered the life and actions of the whole world, but was not recognized as God nor received as the king and heir of the world, as John 1:10-11 says: *The world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came to his own and his own received him not.*

Accordingly, the Mother, conscious of the power of the hidden divinity in her Son, set aside the care of administering civil matters. But where she was able to act justly, she did what she could, as is clear in John 2:3 where she asked for comfort in a public matter and for an increase of wine in a wedding. In sorrow she looked for her Son lest the world lose its Lord; but when her only Son died on the cross and when there was no one on earth to succeed him, she

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became the Mother of all things with all its rights, and in this way acquired the primacy over all.

We never read that this succession was revoked, but, with the efficacy of a divine gift and the grace of the Virgin interceding, we see it become explicitly clearer every day, while we preach of her as the Lady and Queen of all things.

Christ never spoke of a monarchy of the universe since without a previous decision of his Mother it could in no way be done. Moreover, he knew that his Mother was able to annul a will of the Son if it had been drawn up to her disadvantage.

From all this it is abundantly clear that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, by a right of inheritance, has a royal ownership and receives a renowned primacy over all things that are under God.

## CHAPTER 8

### **That no grace comes down to us other than given through the hands of the Virgin**

The fourth star is completion. From the time the Virgin Mother conceived the Word of God she received, as I would say, a certain jurisdiction or authority over every temporal procession of the Holy Spirit; with the result that no creature ever receives a grace or power that is not given by the pious Mother. Hence Bernard<sup>10</sup> says most devoutly: 'No grace comes from heaven to earth, without passing through the hands of Mary'. Jerome, in a sermon on the Assumption,<sup>11</sup> says: In Christ was the fullness of grace as in the head as the source; but it was in Mary as in the neck passing it on. Hence, in Song 7:4, Solomon says to Christ about the Virgin: *Your neck as a tower of ivory*. For, just as through the neck, living energies come down from the head to the body, so through the Virgin living graces pass from Christ the head to his mystical body.

Hence, the order of the flowing of the divine graces is this: firstly, they flow from God into the blessed soul of Christ, then into the soul of the Virgin Mother, and then into the Seraphim, and so successively into the other holy orders of angels; next into the Church militant. Since the whole divine nature, its total being,

potential, knowledge and the divine will was enclosed within the womb of the Virgin, I do not hesitate to say that the Virgin from whose womb, as from an ocean of divinity, streams and rivers of all graces flowed,<sup>12</sup> had a certain jurisdiction over the flow of all graces.

In fact, as the Mother of God she obtained by a natural right this privilege in the world, so that she is rightly named Queen of mercy, as had been foretold;<sup>13</sup> the reason for this is the magnificence of her Son who is *King of Kings and Lord of Lords* [Rev 19:16].

I find two most worthy dignities in Jesus, our King, namely, that while he is the eternal God generated from eternity, he also brings forth the eternal God by breathing out the Holy Spirit. He, enclosed in the womb of the Virgin, was generated in eternity by God the Father as the eternal God, and in the same eternity this child, in the womb of the Mother, breathed out and brought forth God. The blessed Virgin shared in such an infinite way in the first dignity of the Son, namely, that he is generated by God, that Jesus cannot be called more accurately Son of God than Son of the Virgin; the Son of God, clothed *in the glory that he had before the world was* [Jn 17:5] and sitting on the Father's throne, is no greater, nor less nor worthier than when wrapped in poor *swaddling clothes and lying* in a manger in the hay [Lk 2:7]. Because she is the Mother of the Son of God who brings forth the Holy Spirit, all the gifts, powers and graces of that Holy Spirit are given through her hands to whom, when, how and how much the Spirit wishes.

We have already touched on two groups of four stars; now we are to go on to the third.

## CHAPTER 9

### **That the blessed Virgin is the completion and perfection of all created nature**

The first star is completion. The sacred Virgin completed in their final perfection all the natures and perfections of the world. For although God in the creation of the world made nothing imperfect but all perfect as their nature required, however, the completion of

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all perfection was delayed until the birth of the Virgin and was reserved to the Virgin alone.

All beings long for a most noble being, living beings for the most noble living thing, sensitive for the noblest sensitive being, thought for the noblest thought, births for the best possible birth, rational beings for the most singular rational being, spiritual beings for the most excellent spiritual being. While all things existed in an imperfect condition, provision was made for the world that one woman, blessed beyond all others, would bring by her birth the highest and final perfection to all species of things.

Note, loving soul, that this blessed young woman brought such great perfection to the universe that she is not capable of further perfection; nor is God able by ordinary power to provide her with more perfection. Indeed, if the Father or the Holy Spirit were to be born from a woman, the world would gain nothing; because all that pertains to nobility, divinity and eternity is spread in the world and made present through the Virgin in the eternal Person who was born from the most blessed Virgin. Nor is it something great for the Virgin to have brought the final perfection to the perfections of the world, when she brought some perfections to the very Maker of the universe, for example, the beginning of an enterprise to the eternal principle, a temporal span to the divine eternity, a bodily weight to immense infinity, a new beauty to eternal splendour, for all of which there was written: *I have seen an end of all perfection* [Ps 118:96 (119:96)], namely, the blessed Virgin Mary.

#### **CHAPTER 10**

#### **That the whole Church militant is adorned and decorated from the blessed Virgin**

The second star is adornment. From the flesh of the blessed Virgin and from what came out of her body the whole beauty and value of the sacraments of the Church of God are made, finished and completed.

It is certain that the whole institution of the sacraments and all other sacraments are ordered to their final end which is the Eucharist,

the most excellent Sacrament of all sacraments; the Eucharist is made and consecrated when bread is changed into the body of Christ. Although in the body of Christ there is at the one time the divine substance and a soul, only the substance of bread is changed into the substance of the flesh, not the divinity and the soul; so this Sacrament is the culmination of all the sacraments.

And so that I might praise more explicitly that most worthy and most blessed flesh taken from the Virgin, I say that the Most High dignified her with such infinity of nobility, that while Jesus was living in the flesh of an actual man, he could have lost the form of a man but never the form of God; it was not true to say: 'This body is God'.

## CHAPTER 11

### **How much the blessed Virgin gave back to God for all that God gave back to us**

The third star is retribution. The blessed Virgin Mary on her own did more for God or as much, as I would say, as God did for the whole human race. Certainly, I believe that God will be kind to me if now I speak for the Virgin.

We should put together what God did for us and reflect on what the Virgin Mary did to please the Lord.

Firstly, *God formed us from the slime of the earth* [Gen 2:7]; but Mary formed him from 'from' her 'most pure blood'<sup>14</sup> and most pure flesh, things superior to all that is in the world.

Secondly, God imprinted the beauty of God's likeness on us [Gen 1:27] but the glorious Virgin imprinted on him her own likeness. For just as she is the most beautiful among all women, so Jesus is the most beautiful and *handsome of men* [Ps 44:3 (45:2)].

Thirdly, God made us without the passions of hunger, thirst, heat, cold and suchlike; but the diligent Mother of Jesus, the kindest of all people, met all its passions, namely, hunger, thirst, nudity, cold, heat, as follow from a condition of utmost poverty, and this with maximum patience.

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Fourthly, God clothed us with garments of skins [Gen 3:21]; but the blessed Virgin clothed him in the manger with the poorest swaddling clothes [Lk 2:7] and, later, a seamless coat [Jn 19:23] that was superior to all the clothes of the world.

Fifthly, God taught us wisdom; but the wisest and most caring Virgin taught Christ to run from what was harmful to a child and to follow her.

Sixthly, God nourished us with the fruits of paradise; but the blessed Virgin nourished Christ with her most sacred milk, 'from a breast filled from heaven',<sup>15</sup> the least drop of which surpassed all the fruits of the earthly paradise and of the whole world.

Therefore, taking point by point, namely, what God did for us and what the blessed Virgin did for God, you will see that Mary did more for God than God for us, and for consolation one can say that because of the blessed Virgin, made as she was by God, in some way God is more in debt to us than we are to God.

## CHAPTER 12

### **How incomprehensible are the perfections of the glorious Virgin**

The fourth and final star is beyond understanding. Just as the divine perfections are beyond the understanding of every mind, so the perfections of graces that the Virgin received in the conception of the Son of God, were understandable only to the divine mind, to Christ and to her.

Indeed, that God could beget God did not need an arrangement in God because it followed from God's nature; from this nature and intellect God would produce the Word in all things equal to God; in fact it is impossible, given the fruitfulness of God, that God would not generate. But that a woman could conceive and give birth to God is and was the miracle of miracles. If I may say so, it was necessary for a woman to be raised to a certain divine equality by an infinite perfection of graces, an equality never experienced by a creature.

Hence, I believe that neither a human nor an angelic mind could ever grasp the inscrutable abyss of all the charisms of the Holy Spirit that came down on the blessed Virgin in the hour of the divine

conception<sup>16</sup>. When the angel Gabriel [Lk 1:34-35] announced this and the blessed Virgin queried and said: *How shall this be done because I know not man*, the Angel confessed ignorance of so great a mystery and said: *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you*, as if to say: I am ignorant of what you ask me but the Doctor of eternal wisdom, to whom alone this highest of mysteries is reserved, will teach you by a most enlightening experience.

## ARTICLE 2

### **On the excellence of the grace of the blessed Virgin in the kingdom of God**

Secondly, we should reflect on the blessed Virgin raised up in glory; of this the Psalmist says: *On your right hand in gilded clothing*. The blessed Virgin stands *on the right hand* of God when, beyond all others, she is raised up after her Son in the more significant eternal goods; and this indeed *in gilded clothing*, that is, with her body now glorified and from the splendour of this, after her Son, the whole city of the blessed is made bright. John, in Revelation 12:1, adds: *A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun*. This text can be the theme in the present article in which the intention is to speak of the glory that the Virgin has in the kingdom of God. In this text a triple mystery is stated: the first is in the sign: *A great sign*; the second is of the appearance: *appeared in heaven*; the third is of glory: *a woman clothed with the sun*.

## CHAPTER 1

### **That the blessed Virgin is a wonderful sign by which grace, glory and an understanding of the divine are revealed to us**

The first mystery is in the sign. John says of this: *A great sign*. The blessed Virgin is called *a great sign* for three reasons: firstly, of great grace; secondly, of great glory; thirdly, of great understanding.<sup>17</sup>

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Firstly, the blessed Virgin was a sign of great grace made evident and given in the incarnation of the Son of God. 'A sign opens and closes what is signified; and so the blessed Virgin in her immaculate womb opened and shut in the Son of God for us by her gift of great and infinite grace', when namely, *the Word was made flesh and dwelt* in her [Jn 1:14]. Hence, in Ezekiel 32:7, the Lord says: *I will cover the sun with a cloud*, that is, Christ hidden in the Virgin. And Isaiah 7:14 says further: *The Lord shall give you a sign: Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel*, which means 'God with us'.<sup>18</sup> See that the blessed Virgin is a sign of great grace when by her grace she made God to be with us by assuming flesh. So, in Luke 1:30, the angel Gabriel said to her: *You have found grace with God*; because she alone found again for us the grace lost through Eve. So Augustine, in the sermon *De Assumptione*<sup>19</sup> says: 'Eve, one who increases sin, Mary, one who increases merit. Eve hinders by killing, Mary benefits by giving life. Eve wounded, Mary healed'.

Secondly, the blessed Virgin is a sign of great glory; indeed so great that, as will be clear below,<sup>20</sup> she surpasses and rejoices all the angelic citizens beyond what can be expressed.

Hence, Sirach 43:7 says: *From the moon is the sign of the festival day*. Literally, at the beginning of the lunar month the moon is hidden from human eyes and yet is completely covered in light by the sun and most closely joined to it; then, as in the text, was the feast of the New Moon.<sup>21</sup> And so the glorious Virgin Mary, in her assumption, was hidden from human eyes and made Godlike by the whole blessed Trinity; she was joined to her Son on his glorious throne and, with a new joy and rejoicing, she consecrated the feast of heavenly and great glory.

So in Proverbs 11:16 there is written of the Virgin: *A gracious woman*, that is, the truly gracious blessed Virgin, found *glory*, namely, a new glory in paradise, as will be clear below.<sup>22</sup> And rightly did she who found the lost grace on earth, find a new glory in heaven.

Thirdly, the glorious Virgin is a sign of great understanding.

A sign leads to knowledge of what is signified; so the Virgin Mary more than any other creature leads to wisdom and to an understanding of her Son and of God. So, in Isaiah 49:22, the Lord says of her: *I will set up my standard to the people,*

that is, the Lord says that by my sign, which is the glorious Virgin, I will give deep understanding of myself and of my Son. Therefore, she is called the gate of heaven, because through her the deep and sacred mysteries of heaven, of the Scriptures and of the sacraments are unlocked.

## CHAPTER 2

### **On the triple heaven in which the glorious Virgin is shown to be a model in her imitation, glory and devotion**

The second mystery, stated by John, is appearance. So he says: *Appeared in heaven.* This virginal and heavenly sign appeared in a triple heaven: firstly, in the heaven of the Church; secondly, in the heaven of glory; thirdly, in the heaven of the soul.

It appeared, firstly, in the heaven of the Church, namely, of the Church militant; of this heaven Revelation 21:1 says: *A new heaven and a new earth.* The blessed Virgin appeared in this heaven to give an example to all of right living. Hence Ambrose, in the book *De virginitate*<sup>23</sup> says of the Virgin:

That I may be silent on her other virtues, she was a virgin not only in body but also in mind; humble of heart, serious in words, prudent in her spirit, hesitant to speak, more studious in reading, placing her hope not in the uncertainty of riches but in the prayer of the poor, intent on work, modest in speech, not seeking the approval of people but of God, injuring no one, wishing well to all, rising to higher things, not envious of equals, shunning boasting, following reason, loving virtue. When did she grow tired of a humble person, when did she laugh at a weak person, when did she avoid a needy person? Nothing piercing in her eyes, no impudent words, no shameful action; no wild gesture, no feeble steps, no careless word, so that the appearance of her body might be an expression of her mind and a sign of probity. She was shown to be such a person by the Evangelist

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in Luke 1:27-28, chosen as such a person by the Holy Spirit. Why would I delay on details? She was worthy, she from whom the Son of God would be born.

Finally, so that I may conclude with a word of the same Ambrose,<sup>24</sup> 'such was Mary, that her life alone could be a discipline for all'. So the blessed Virgin is an example of all virtues for the Church militant.

Secondly, this virginal sign of glory appeared in heaven, namely, when she was assumed body and soul into heaven and by this adorned the whole heavenly curia. Hence, blessed Bernard, in a sermon,<sup>25</sup> says: 'The presence of Mary brightens the whole world so that already the heavenly homeland glows with the shining brightness of the virginal light'. Hence, Sirach 43:1 says: *The beauty of heaven with its glorious show*, namely, the Virgin Mother of God.

Thirdly, this virginal sign appeared and daily appears in the heaven of a soul a heaven of which the Prophet in Psalm 113:16 [115:16] says: *The heaven of heaven is the Lord's*. The word heaven, since it may be said to come from the word to hide,<sup>26</sup> can indicate the soul that remains hidden from us. This sign of the Virgin appears in the heaven of a soul, namely, when a just person or a sinner has not forgotten devotion to the Virgin but, in this secular sea that is full of dangers, quickly lifts the eyes of devotion to Mary, called the star of the sea.

Hence, Bernard says in a sermon<sup>27</sup>:

If you are disturbed by the enormity of sins, if troubled by an unclean conscience, if terrified by the horror of judgment, if swallowed up in a pit of despair, think on Mary, call on Mary, do not let her be far from your heart, nor be far from your mouth; thinking on her you do not err, following her you do not go astray, holding on to her you do not fall, with her protection you are not afraid, with her as leader you do not tire, with her favourable to you, you succeed. And so you can experience in yourself how rightly it was said that the *Virgin's name was Mary* [Luke 1:27], 'the star of the sea'.<sup>28</sup> All Christians should then, as they sail on the waves of this world look to this 'star of the sea', as it is near to the pole, that is, to God; and direct their lives according to this example. Whoever does this will

not be blown about by the wind of vain glory, nor broken on the rocks of adversity, nor swallowed up by the abyss of the Scylla of pleasures, but will arrive happily in the harbour of eternal quiet.

So Bernard.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **On the triple sun by which the soul and body of the glorious Virgin, clothed in sunlight, light up the whole of paradise**

The third mystery, as stated by John, is called glorification of which he says: *a woman clothed with the sun*. The blessed Virgin is said to be clothed with a triple sun: firstly, with the sun of love; secondly, with the sun of brightness; thirdly, with the sun of splendour. The first relates to her will that glows with the love of God; the second, to her mind that shines with the light of God; the third to her body that, more than all the blessed, fills the whole of paradise with splendour.

Firstly, she is said to be *clothed with the sun*, namely, of the hottest and most glowing love by which she, more than all the blessed, loves God and her Son Jesus Christ. Hence, Bernard<sup>29</sup> says:

With the fire of this love, the lips of the Prophet [Isa 6:6-7] are purified and by it the Seraphim are enkindled. But the Virgin deserved much more than this, namely, not to be touched fleetingly but to be enveloped, even to be overwhelmed and as it were enclosed by the fire. Certainly, because of the brightest and hottest clothing of this woman, by which all things are known to be so excellently illuminated, I would say that in her there is nothing gloomy or in the least less light, but it is not right to think of it as tepid.

So Bernard.

Secondly, the blessed Virgin is said to be clothed with the sun of brightness, namely, from the light of glory that she has in her soul. Hence, Bernard<sup>30</sup>: Finally, she is *'is a woman clothed with the sun*, that is, clothed with ineffable brightness; *clothed*, I say, *with light as with a garment* [Ps 103:2 (104:2)], of which the Apostle says: *Put on*

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clothing, *the Lord Jesus Christ*’; for the glory of God was adorned over every creature.

Thirdly, the blessed Virgin is said to be clothed with the sun of splendour, namely, the light that she has also in her body from the overflowing glory given to her soul by God, of which Bernard<sup>31</sup> says: ‘O Lady, how familiar you have become to him, how near, even how intimate. You clothed him with the substance of flesh and he clothed you with the glory of majesty; you have clothed *the sun with a cloud* [Ezek 32:7], you are clothed with the sun itself’, namely, both in body and soul.

The glory of the Virgin differs from the glory of other creatures as much as the sun differs from other lights in the sky; in a certain sense, just as the other greater lights are made bright by the sun, so the whole heavenly curia is rejoiced and adorned by the glorious Virgin. So Bernard, in a sermon *De Assumptione*<sup>32</sup> says:

When the glorious Virgin was taken up to heaven, she added a significant increase to the joys of the heavenly citizens. For if *the soul* of the unborn child, John, *melted* when Mary spoke, what was the joy of heavenly citizens when they merited to delight in her presence, to hear her voice and see her face?

And Augustine says in a sermon *De nativitate Virginis*<sup>33</sup>:

You have adorned with a new and ineffable glory the very heaven and all it contains by your entry into it, and by your presence you have increased its previous glory, beyond what can be expressed; by the new and most excellent glory of your virtues you brighten it and illuminate it with the immense light of your graces.

The seven excellences or dignities with which the blessed Virgin shines clearly show how great is her glory in heaven: the first is called motherhood; the second, charity; the third, conformity; the fourth, tranquillity; the fifth, capacity; the sixth, unity; the seventh, abundance.

## CHAPTER 4

**That because the blessed Virgin is the Mother of God she merits  
to be raised up in glory above all the blessed**

The first dignity or excellence of the glorious Virgin that shows her great glory is called motherhood. Her greatest excellence is to be the Mother of God:

It is greater that she is the Mother of God than that she is the Lady of all God's creatures; the latter depends on the former as a branch on the trunk. Therefore, it is to be held as certain that she is above all the orders of angels as she makes up and contains a complete and total state to which, according to right reason, another person cannot fittingly be added, because her state of its nature from its incommunicable dignity demands unity. Just as in no way could there be many Christs, nor could God be many human beings, so in no way is it fitting for the Son of God to have more than one natural mother. Likewise, natural reason openly and directly dictates from the law of grace that the mother of the king of all is to be placed on the royal throne above all the orders of ministers and military. Hence, because she was chosen as mother she was chosen for a dignity that surpasses every dignity of ministers and servants. The nature of the Mother's love for God and for her own Son could never be experienced in the affection of any other kind of person who is not in fact the Mother of God.<sup>34</sup>

As stated in Hebrews 1:3-4, Jesus the Son of God *sits on the right hand of the majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, so he has inherited a more excellent name than they*, and the name is that he is truly God by the grace of union. Likewise, the Mother of the Lord Jesus, glorious Mary, has been made *so much better than the angels*, and *has inherited more* than all creatures so that she received the *name* of the most worthy Mother. In Psalm 8:2 [8:1], the Prophet says: *For your magnificence is elevated above the heavens*. The Virgin Mary is called the *magnificence* of God because just as God made from nothing such a wonderful universe and such wonderful angels, so also she was no less magnified in their restoration. From an infected, lost and damned human nature God made Christ the man, and from the feminine sex regarded, according

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to common thinking, as a lowly order among rational beings, gave a Mother to him and to the whole heavenly curia.

In this it is clear that the great and *High Lord looks down on the low things* [Ps 112:4.6 (113:4.6)] and so *regards the humility of his handmaid* [Lk 1:48] that all angelic and human generations would magnify him for this. Just as the magnificence of the divine power and rule shines forth in the human Christ, so the human, tender and maternal magnificence of piety shines forth from the Mother of Christ. This happens to such an extent that just as Christ is born and conceived spiritually in the heart of each blessed or just person, so, by the example of the natural Mother of the Son of God, all may glow in him as in a true son. This magnificence of the Mother magnifies God more than all other creatures taken together, so she is rightly said to be raised up above the heavens, that is, above all the angels.

## CHAPTER 5

### **In what glory the glorious Virgin is above all other blessed in paradise because of her love**

The second excellence of the Virgin that shows her glory is called charity.

The orders and states of glory are distinguished principally according to higher and lower levels of divine love. On a common level of love they cannot be distinguished, since all share in this; nor by some level that is not a level of divine love, can one be placed above another in greater closeness or intimacy with God. The maternal love incomparably transcends all other levels of love for God, apart from the love in the soul of Christ that is directed in a real way towards God as towards one's own person.<sup>35</sup>

## CHAPTER 6

**That in paradise the glory of the Mother of God is more conformed to the glory of Christ than that of all the other blessed**

The third excellence of the Virgin that shows the greatness of her glory is called conformity.

For the soul of Christ and Christ, in so far as he is man, transcends every order of mere creatures or of created nature. But the level of the Mother is conformed to that of Christ as man whose human nature transcended every order of the first condition and, therefore, he was not able to be contained by the universe. So the dignity of the motherhood of God is so connected to the work of the incarnation that it was not able to be given in any other way.

So the Church<sup>36</sup> says to the Virgin: ‘Heaven itself cannot contain the One whom you bore in your womb’. Hence, in Sirach 24:8, the blessed Virgin says of herself: *I alone have compassed the circuit of heaven*. ‘Accordingly, the order of this maternity and maternal dignity is above the whole gambit of the first order of the universe, and consequently above the whole gambit of the orders of angels and hierarchies.’ Hence, Bernard says in a sermon<sup>37</sup>: O womb holding more than the heavens, more spread out than the earth, broader than the elements, you were able to contain him whom the whole world could not comprehend and who with three fingers holds up the weight of the world.

**CHAPTER 7**

**That the loving and approving glance of the Son of God towards his Mother raises her above all the blessed**

The fourth excellence showing the greatness of the glorious Virgin can be called tranquillity.

The filial glance of Christ towards his Mother had to be most singular, loving and transcending, so that he could not glance at the whole heavenly curia taken together, apart from the Mother, with such reverence, nor with such a glance or with such love. The higher

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God esteemed one of the blessed, so much the stronger and higher in happiness is a likeness of God imprinted on that person, and the higher is God observed, taken and accepted by the person. Therefore, it is inexplicable with what height, breadth and intimacy of glory the Son of God relates to his Mother; and likewise with how great a height, breadth and intimacy he is taken by her. However, such an imprinting of the glory of God on them in such glances on the blessed is the very basis of their glory. Hence, the aforementioned glance of God on his Mother is the basis of her royalty, and her sitting or place on the throne is her royal and glorious crown.

So Jerome says in a sermon *De Assumptione*.<sup>38</sup> ‘There was no place on earth more worthy than the temple of the virginal womb in which she received the Son of God; nor in heaven is there anything more sublime than the royal throne on which the Son of Mary honoured Mary’.

### CHAPTER 8

#### **That the blessed Virgin forms a level above every other creature**

The fifth excellence of the Virgin is called capacity. According to Dionysius,<sup>39</sup> the gifts of lower beings in the kingdom of heaven are in a more excellent form in the higher beings, so that there can be almost no comparison between them, unless it is that of a circumference around its centre. Therefore, since the blessed Virgin is above every order, to such an extent that she constitutes an order that cannot be shared, as had been foretold, it follows that above all the lower orders, whether of angels and humans taken together, she is immeasurably before them, and whatever glory is in every glorified lower nature, both angelic and human, is much more excellently in the Virgin Mother of God. There is no doubt that the numerous and great multitude of the other blessed acknowledges this because it has nothing to do with a greater essential or substantial glory. In spiritual matters greater and better are regarded as the same. Hence, there is more substantial glory in one Seraph than could be in all the lower angels even if, which is impossible, their number was infinitely multiplied.

It also has to be added that no order among mere creatures in heaven so surpasses an order immediately joined to it as much as the glory of the Mother of God surpasses everything inferior to it. A reflection on the levels of ecclesiastical orders can lead to an understanding of this. Whatever lower orders are able to do can be done and even incomparably more by the priestly level, just as a bishop is above a priest and the same thing is clear from the Pope being above bishops.<sup>40</sup> The same can be understood of the bodies in the universe. For all higher bodies contain all the lower bodies and even inestimably more; the infinite wisdom of God has most fully arranged this in the levels of glory. For according to the Apostle, in Romans 1:20, *the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made*, that is, they are understood when seen.

## CHAPTER 9

### **That the blessed Virgin in glory is more united to God and to God's Son for eternity than all other mere creatures**

The sixth excellence is called unity. The more the blessed are united with God, the more glorious they become in God; but all creatures united at the one time are not as closely united with God as is the blessed Virgin on her own. To understand this it is necessary to note the six rises or steps of union with God and that by these steps creatures go up step by step to God: the first is the union of creation; the second, of knowledge; the third, of love; the fourth, of glorification; the fifth, of maternal conception; the sixth, of personal union.

The first is the ascent of the union of creation, that is, by sharing in being, by which beings are joined to God as to their efficient, exemplary and final cause.

The second is a union of knowledge, namely, by the power of understanding by which intellectual beings are united to God as to an object understandable by the grace of faith, by which we are united to God as to a supernatural being who is credible, believed and who should be believed.

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The third is a union of love, namely, through the gift of grace giving love by which we are united to God as to a friend and beloved.

The fourth is a union of glorification, namely, through the vision and enjoyment of eternal glory, through which a soul is united to God as to an object seen face to face.

The fifth is a union of maternal conception, by which the Virgin became the Mother of God, so that the flesh of the Virgin and the flesh of Christ would be one and the same,<sup>41</sup> but not referring to the divinity in Christ.

The sixth is personal union.

However, in each of these any single one infinitely exceeds another, because the inferior, even if multiplied an infinite number of times in its species, would not equal a superior. This can be made clear. It is clear, firstly, because to be, infinitely exceeds not to be because an infinite number of non beings are not equivalent even in a minute point to something that exists.

Secondly, it is clear because an infinite number of non rational beings is not able to equal one rational being.

Thirdly, it is also clear because the minds of unbelievers and enemies of God do not equal one faithful person who is a friend of God. So Sirach 16:3 says: *Better is one that fears God than a thousand ungodly children.* This indeed is true except in so far as some of these in the predestination of God become in a future time faithful friends of God.

Fourthly, it is clear because whatever can be given, excepting the vision of God, does not equal one blessed person since all things taken together do not make one blessed person; although, to the extent that a higher level of glory is included in a gift of grace, by hope and deservedly and by way of a preparation, such a gift in its nature may be said to exceed, to a certain measure, a level of inferior glory.

Fifthly, it is also clear since that union or ascent through the original or maternal conception, infinitely transcends all lower levels just as in that ascent is included the maternal love corresponding to it as fully perfected. Because just as common love is perfected in glory, so the maternal love of God is perfected in Mary.

Sixthly and lastly, it is also clear because the ascent coming from personal union is of such transcendence that even if others were infinitely multiplied they would not be able to equal it. And I say this

as in personal union there is included a beatific meditation of a mind personally united to God.<sup>42</sup>

Note that the fifth ascent of union into God, namely, through maternal conception, infinitely surpasses all the other preceding unions. From this it is abundantly clear that as much as such a union in the present world surpasses other unions in grace, to such an extent it now surpasses in glory in paradise.

## CHAPTER 10

### **With what an abundance of grace and glory the blessed Virgin is endowed by God**

The seventh excellence of the Virgin, showing the greatness of her glory can be called abundance. A double abundance was given by God to the blessed Virgin: one of grace, the other of glory.

Firstly, on the abundance of grace, Jerome<sup>43</sup> says in a sermon *De Assumptione*: ‘Full of grace, and well full, because it is given to others partially; however, for Mary there was poured out at once the complete fullness of grace that was in Christ although in another manner’ and differently. And he added<sup>44</sup>: ‘For in Christ was the abundance of grace as in the head pouring out; but in Mary as in the neck through which it passes’, as spoken of at greater length in Article 1, Chapter 8.<sup>45</sup> From this it is clear that, excepting Christ, as much grace was given to the Virgin by the Lord as it was possible to give to a mere creature.

Secondly, she was given an abundance of glory while in paradise a sharing of divine glory is given only partially to others. But, according to Bernard,<sup>46</sup> the blessed Virgin:

penetrated the deepest abyss of divine wisdom, beyond what one could believe, so that she seemed to be immersed in *unapproachable light* as far as is possible for a creature without personal union.

## ARTICLE 3

**On the triple honour by which the blessed Virgin was and is honoured**

Thirdly, we should contemplate the Virgin honoured by all, since the Prophet says of her: *Surrounded with variety*, namely, the blessed Virgin stands *on the right hand* of God. The glorious Virgin takes her place *on the right hand* of God *surrounded with* a triple *variety*: firstly, of excellences; secondly, of differences; thirdly, of graces. Rightly then could John say of her: *And the moon under her feet*. She had the first variety before going up to heaven; she has the second in heaven; she dispenses the third to us from heaven. From all these she is glorified and honoured in the highest way.

**CHAPTER 1**

**That the blessed Virgin, while she lived, surpassed all that is temporal, rational and affectionate**

The first variety by which the blessed Virgin *stands on the right hand* of God is her excellences. There are three excellences of the present life by which the blessed Virgin was honoured: the first, of what is temporal; the second, of what is rational; the third, of the affections. These are represented by the moon that has three natures: firstly, it is changeable and so temporal; secondly, it is bright and so rational; thirdly, it is cold and so represents the affections. All of these, like the moon, were put beneath the feet of the blessed Virgin.

The first excellence is of the temporal. Temporal goods are regarded as most excellent but, like the moon, they are changeable and subject to imperfection. But the Virgin had these *under her feet*, because she controlled everything in her affections out of contempt lest in some way they might change her love for her Son; the love of a changeable good always in some way detracts from the love of a good that is unchangeable. Therefore, Augustine says to God in his *Confessions*, book X<sup>47</sup>: ‘One loves you less who loves something with you when it is not loved for your sake’.

The second excellence is of the rational for the blessed Virgin made little of the knowledge of all the sciences and of an active and

passive knowledge of creatures in comparison to the most excellent knowledge of Christ. Note, *the moon under her feet*. The Apostle shared in this when, in Philippians 3:7-8, he said of himself: *The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ. Furthermore, I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord.*

The third excellence is of the affections. So great was the love with which the blessed Virgin even in this present life loved Christ, that all other loves of this present life, whether past, present and future, in comparison with him were as the *moon under her feet*. So in Sirach 24:24 the blessed Virgin rightly says of herself: *I am the mother of fair love*; as if to say: Because I am the Mother of God, I have a love that is just as superior to all other beauty as the sun is superior to the moon.

## CHAPTER 2

### How much accidental glory and joy increase in all the blessed from the glorious Virgin

The second variety in which the blessed Virgin *stands on the right hand* of God is in the differences that are found in the glory of the blessed, as the Lord in John 14:2 says: *In my Father's house there are many mansions*. And further in 1 Corinthians 15:41: *Star differs from star in glory*, that is, one blessed differs from another in beatitude, that is, in the quantity of glory. Nevertheless, it must be noted according to Richard<sup>48</sup> and Bonaventure, in IV *Sent.*, d. 49<sup>49</sup>:

That in beatitude two things must be kept in mind. Firstly, the object of beatitude, namely, uncreated good, shared by all as one and the same thing. The second thing to be kept in mind is the disposition of the blessed by which they share in it as they see the good clearly and love it perfectly. From the point of view of the object shared, no one is more blessed than another as all are equal in glory because they all share in the same object. But from the point of view of the disposition of the blessed, one is more blessed than another in so far as one sees God more clearly and loves God more perfectly. For those who are equal in the power of nature but are not equal in the

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habit of grace, or who are equal in the habit of grace but unequal in the power of nature, are not equal in the way they see and love God, and consequently are not equal in being blessed because of an unequal disposition in the blessed. Hence, a Gloss<sup>50</sup> on John 14:2: *In my Father's house there are many mansions*, says: that is, 'different rewards of merits'.

Having said this, it has to be noted that the boundless mutual love of the blessed for one another increases, almost infinitely, the number of joys between them according to the perfection of those loving and of those loved; from this there increases in an amazing way the differences of accidental glory among them.

There are three differences among the blessed: some of them are equal in glory, some are greater, while some are lesser. However, according to Augustine, in *Super Ioannem*,<sup>51</sup> among them 'there will be no envy of unequal brightness, since the unity of charity will reign in all'. And Gregory, in *Moralia*<sup>52</sup> says: 'Such force joins us in that peace so that whatever one has not received personally, that person rejoices at having received it in another'; a single beatitude of joy will be in all even though the rank of life is not the same in all. From all this, the blessed Virgin will be honoured by all in such harmony.

For firstly 'there are some who among themselves are equal in glory, and these, from love, double the aforementioned accidental joy among them for each other'.<sup>53</sup> The reason for this is because they love themselves in equal measure and are aware that they love themselves; from this each blessed person rejoices as much over another equal in glory as over him or herself, but in extension not intensity. And the same is understood of those similar in this present chapter, according to Richard.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly:

Some are greater in glory; and these duplicate in themselves accidental joy for any who are less than them in glory; they do not do this so that they might see that they love themselves, how much they love, but because they rejoice over the glory of each lesser one as much as over their own since they understand that each is glorious according to his or her capacity.<sup>55</sup>

‘Hence, Peter rejoices more over the good in Linus than does Linus himself.’ However, according to Bonaventure, in IV, dist. 49 towards the end,<sup>56</sup> ‘from this it does not follow that they rejoice as much as if they possessed that good; because if they possessed it, they would have greater charity and a more intensive power of rejoicing’.

Thirdly, however:

Some are lesser in glory; and these duplicate their accidental glory as often as they recognize those who are more glorious, those who out of love for them duplicate their joy. Now, however, lesser saints see one saint ten times greater in glory than themselves, another a hundred times, one a thousand times, another a hundred thousand times, another a thousand times a thousand and yet another a thousand times a thousand thousands etc. And such greater saints number almost infinite thousands; hence, the lesser ones, as often as they acknowledge one is more gloriously blessed than themselves, duplicate their joy by recognizing they are loved by one greater than themselves only so that in each of them glory may be duplicated for their sake. Now on the question under discussion, we compare on the one hand all the love the saints have for one another even when taken together with, on the other hand, the love by which a lesser blessed loves the glorious Virgin. I believe that the love of even the least glorious blessed exceeds all the love of the other blessed taken together, both angelic and human, when it is not directed to the blessed Virgin or to Christ the man or to God. And while many reasons can be given for this, for the sake of brevity we add four. They are: firstly, because of the conception; secondly, because of compassion; thirdly, because of glorification; fourthly, because of love.

Firstly, because of the conception, for even the least blessed knows clearly that the blessed Virgin, since she is the Mother of God, did more for his or her salvation than the whole rational nature taken together did or could do, taking into account the excellence of her most beloved Son<sup>57</sup>

who was the instrument of their redemption, salvation and glorification, taking into account the merits, prayers and example of the Virgin.

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Secondly, because of compassion:

Such a blessed person openly understands that the whole rational nature did not endure nor could it endure as much sorrow and punishment for their redemption, as the Mother of God endured, taking into account the love with which she loved her Son,

as, in Luke 2:35, Simeon predicted to her when he said: *And your own soul a sword shall pierce*. According to some<sup>58</sup>:

So great was the sorrow of the Virgin at the death of Christ that if it were divided among all creatures able to suffer, all would suddenly perish. But this sorrow was so enclosed in the soul of the Virgin by virtue of the Spirit who came upon her that it was not allowed to spread in any sensitive part of her body, lest she were to die suddenly before the proper time.

Thirdly, by her glorification: the glory of the Virgin Mother of God was so great, as is clear from what has already been said, that it surpasses in glory angelic and human nature joined together as much as the circumference of the earth exceeds its centre, since she was to understand that in her Son she was like another person clothed with divinity.

Fourthly, by her love: so great is the love of the blessed Virgin for the least glorified, that all the love, by which in the kingdom of heaven angelic and human nature loves anyone already blessed, is, as said already, like the centre when compared to the circumference of the universe or less; this is said in respect to the love by which the glorious Virgin loves the least of the blessed, taking account of the principal source from which such love draws its origin. Because of this love the joy of the Virgin is doubled when she sees that the least of the blessed is glorious in full and quiet desire according to his or her capacity. And so by this love and in this way for each saint the joy of the Virgin in heaven is multiplied. The least of the saints, on seeing how much he or she is loved by the glorious Virgin, that her great glory increases because of this least saint, and as often as he or she understands that her great glory increases because of him or her, so much the more is he or she enkindled in love for her and is gladdened over her glory; as often as he or she understands that she excels in glory, so often is he or she gladdened over her glory more than over his or her own glory. Therefore, if a lesser saint in the

kingdom of heaven, is so loved by the blessed Virgin and, as already said, he or she loves her so much, it necessarily follows that all the saints who are higher in glory are loved more by her and they are more on fire with love for her. From this, accidental glory, according to the way already explained, is multiplied in her on account of them and in all on account of her.

Therefore, who could express the infinite joy and love by which the glorious Virgin Mary actively and passively in this triple difference is surrounded and honoured in a variety of ways by accidental glory? All of these three differences of the blessed can be said to be placed *under the feet* of the Virgin; as if wanting to indicate that her accidental glory differs from the glory of those mentioned above as much as the sun differs from the properties of the moon.

### CHAPTER 3

#### **On the wisdom of the blessed Virgin and how she was invited to heaven. And that the greatest sinners obtain mercy from her merits**

The third variety, by which the glorious Virgin stands *on the right hand* of God, is the grace that in this world is given to us pilgrims through her and for this she is to be most honoured. It has been said above in Article 1, Chapter 8<sup>59</sup> that no grace from heaven comes to us except by her dispensing it. This singular office was given divinely from all eternity, as Proverbs 8:23 states: *I was set up from eternity*, namely, as one who dispenses heavenly graces. Also, in Song 4:8, the bridegroom said when inviting her to this office: *Come from Lebanon, my spouse, come from Lebanon, come, you shall be crowned from the top of Amanah, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards*. There are three things to contemplate in these sacred words: firstly, a candidate; secondly, invited; thirdly, crowned.

Firstly, I say, to contemplate the Virgin as a candidate for office; Lebanon means 'whiteness'.<sup>60</sup> The blessed Virgin shone with a triple brightness: firstly, with a brightness of divine wisdom; secondly,

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with a brightness of virginal innocence; thirdly, with the brightness of a most upright life.<sup>61</sup>

Firstly, she shone with the splendour of divine wisdom, since she was *the brightness of eternal light, an unspotted mirror and more beautiful than the sun* [Wis 7:26.29]. The blessed Virgin was enlightened with such light, even while she was in the womb of her mother, that she not only had the full light of reason, but also of the highest contemplation. Indeed, in the opinion of some,<sup>62</sup> in this light she understood four things perfectly, at least the genus of each one:

firstly, created irrational nature; secondly, created rational nature; thirdly, created spiritual nature; fourthly, divine uncreated nature. This distinction includes in itself knowledge of the Creator and of every creature because she knew every other creature in the light of the Creator, as the Prophet in Psalm 35:10 [36:9] says: *In your light we shall see light*. She was raised to such high contemplation that, in the womb of her mother, she would contemplate God more perfectly than anyone of mature age ever contemplated; even while sleeping she surpassed even those who kept watch awake in the contemplation of God,

as she says in Song 5:2: *I sleep and my heart watches*. Note the brightness of divine wisdom.

Secondly, she shone with the brightness of virginal innocence. Hence, all the thoughts of her heart, like the *Nazirites*, were *whiter than snow, purer than milk, more ruddy than the old ivory, fairer than the sapphire*, as stated in Lamentations 4:7.

Thirdly, she shone with the brightness of a most upright life and practised every virtue; hence, Jerome, in a sermon on the Assumption<sup>63</sup> says: 'If you examine closely, there is no virtue, no splendour, no grace, nor brightness that does not shine in the glorious Virgin'. More is said on this above at the beginning of Article 2, Chapter 2.<sup>64</sup>

Secondly, to contemplate the Virgin as invited, for three times there was said to her: *Come*; she was invited three times, namely, firstly, to leave the world; secondly, to go up to heaven; thirdly, to enter into God.

Firstly, she was invited to leave the world and so there was said to her: *Come*, namely, from the place of unhappiness, that is, this world; hence, in Song 2:10, the bridegroom says to her: *Arise, make haste, my love, and come*, that is, leave earthly corruptions. And the text continues in verse 14: *My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow place of the wall*. The body of Christ is rightly compared to a pierced *rock* and a *tottering wall* [Ps 61:4 (62:3)]; because during the passion he was filled with clefts in the senses and the punishments of suffering. Therefore, he calls the Virgin a *dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow place of the wall* who, for as long as she lived, with dilated vision and spacious flight through the clefts of the sufferings of the body of Jesus Christ and through the hollow place of the wound in his side always lamented in her sorrows and was continuously hidden; but now she is invited to the joy of the resurrection.

Secondly, she is invited to go up to heaven, namely, by progressing through the choirs of the heavenly hierarchies; for Jesus invites her, so that crossing through the midst of the angels, protected by their company, she might go beyond the dignity of all the blessed spirits. Hence, Song 2:10-12 says: *Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land*. These *flowers* are angelic spirits that *have appeared* to the virgin *in the land* to draw her out of the prison of this life; for these went up with the Virgin as she ascended 'streams of water from above, and as on the days of spring flowers of roses and lilies of the valleys surround her'.<sup>65</sup>

Thirdly, she is invited to enter into God, that is, to receive everlasting glory from God, as if it had been said to her: *Come*, most beloved bride, mother and daughter, enter the garden of delights, be introduced to the inaccessible secret and to the delight of the divine Persons in the most blessed Trinity. So in Song 5:1 the bridegroom says to her: *I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh, with my aromatical spices; I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk*. This is the garden of the Ahasuerus who is the blessed of God, who

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formed the queen *by the hand and care* [of the king]; Esther 1:5. This is *the crown of beauty* [Wis 5:17] and *the crown of glory* [Isa 28:5], by which the Virgin is crowned above the angels; as a result within the glory of the Trinity she alone is more exalted, loves, receives, experiences and enjoys more the glory of the most blessed Trinity, than all other mere creatures taken together, and everyone shares after the Son in this glory.

Thirdly, to contemplate the Virgin crowned, because there is added: *you shall be crowned* etc. The most merciful Mother begs for five most special graces for wicked sinners, namely, that they may turn to God. These can be called five precious stones adorning this crown of the Virgin, so that it is clearly evident that her glory so overflows onto others, that after her Son she is the special cause of salvation for sinners; for because of the Virgin's great love both Jesus himself and the whole most blessed Trinity frequently forgive the most wicked sinners.

The first stone is called *Amana* for it says *you shall be crowned from the top of Amana*. *Amana* is 'a mountain of Sicily',<sup>66</sup> and means 'an enemy to him' or 'confining him' or restraining him' or 'his oppressor',<sup>67</sup> it refers to people who are biased, tyrannical, cruel murderers and oppressors of the poor, who devour widows and orphans; by the top of this mountain is implied the worst in the crimes listed above.

The second stone is called *Senir* and so it adds: *from the top of Senir*. *Senir* is a mountain in Judea in which it is said that lions live; it means 'an offensive smell' and represents carnal people. In the top of the mountain *Senir* represents also the worst in the crimes listed above.

The third stone is named *Hermon* and, therefore, it adds: *and Hermon*. This also is a mountain of Judea in which, similarly, lions live and it means 'denounced' and refers to the profane, excommunicated and sacrilegious. On the top of *Hermon* indicates also the worst in what was listed above.

The fourth stone is called 'the mountains of the leopards', and so there is added *from the mountains of the leopards*. These are liars, double dealers, deceivers, hypocrites, people who are not genuine,

forgers, traitors, people who are cruel and full of spiteful skills, named as leopards for their cruelty and the pattern of their skin. The extent of the harm they do is indicated by *the mountains*.

The blessed Virgin is crowned over all these because they are converted by her merits or by her merits they are conquered by her children. The glorious Virgin is adorned in heaven with this *variety* of graces and she dispenses these graces to us who are like the *moon under her feet*.

O woman, blessed by all and above all! You are the nobility and preservation of the human race; you are the breadth of merit and the perfect power of all creatures; you alone are the Mother of God; you are the Lady of the universe, the Queen of the world; you dispense all graces; you are the perfection of the universe and the adornment of the holy Church; you are our satisfaction before the giver of all good things; you are the incomprehensible breadth of all virtues, gifts and graces; you are the chosen and most worthy vessel made by the first Worker; you who could contain the essence of God are the temple of God; you are the garden of delights; you are the example of all good, the consolation of the devout and the beginning and adornment of all salvation; you are the gate of heaven, the joy of paradise and, beyond what can be expressed, the glory of the supreme God. Stammering, we state these praises and your excellences but as beggars we beseech your great sweetness. In your kindness, make up for our inadequacies so that we may be able to praise you worthily forever and ever. Amen.

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Rather Nicolaus Claravall, *Sermo 40 in Assumpt. B.M.V.* (in the works of Peter Damian, PL 44, 717).
- <sup>2</sup> From Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, IV, c. 38 (f. 198a).

- <sup>3</sup> On the question of the genealogy see Barth. De Pisis, *De vita et laudibus B.M.*, I, fructus 4 (Venice, 1596, 72-81).
- <sup>4</sup> See also Romans 2:11; Galatians 2:6; Colossians 3:25; Ephesians 6:9; 1 Peter 1:17.
- <sup>5</sup> With some changes, this is found in the Prayer of the Mass for the dead on the day of death.
- <sup>6</sup> Lyranus, on Micah 1:3.
- <sup>7</sup> *Interlinearis*, on this text in Lyranus.
- <sup>8</sup> From Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, IV, c. 38 (f. 199a).
- <sup>9</sup> The text in Gregory cannot be found, but with some changes the text is found in the Easter Proclamation.
- <sup>10</sup> *Sermo 3 in Vigilia Nativitatis Domini*, n. 10 (PL 183, 100); see above page 115.
- <sup>11</sup> The following words are not from [Pseudo] Jerome, but from Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, I, c. 78 (f. 9d), from where Bernardine took them. Ubertinus after quoting the text of *Epistola 9 ad Paulam et Eustochium*, n. 5 (in the works of Jerome, PL 30, 127) says: 'The fullness of all the grace that was in Christ came into Mary but in a different way', and then adds a short comment of which Bernardine thought Pseudo-Jerome was the author.
- <sup>12</sup> On this see above pages 114-115.
- <sup>13</sup> See above pages 128-129.
- <sup>14</sup> So Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa*, III, c. 2 (PG 94, 986); in Lombard, III *Sent.*, d. 3, c. 1 (II, 558).
- <sup>15</sup> *In Circumc. Domini*, ad matut., resp. 8.
- <sup>16</sup> For the following see Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, I, c. 7 (f. 11c).
- <sup>17</sup> Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, IV, c. 40 (f. 201cd), is Bernardine's source for this triple division and this applies to the following quotations except for the one from Augustine.
- <sup>18</sup> Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis* (PL 23, 829).
- <sup>19</sup> *Sermo 208*, n. 4 (in the works of Augustine, PL 39, 2131).
- <sup>20</sup> Page 144.
- <sup>21</sup> Numbers 10:10; 28:11-15; 1 Samuel 20:5.24; 2 Kings 4:3; 1Chronicles 23:31; 2 Chronicles 2:4; 8:13; 1 Esdras 3:5; Psalm 80:4 [81:3]; Isaiah 1:13-14; Ezekiel 45:17; 46:6; Hosea 2:11; Colossians 2:16.
- <sup>22</sup> Pages 144-152.
- <sup>23</sup> Rather *De virginibus*, II, c. 2, nn. 7 and 10 (PL 16, 209ff.).
- <sup>24</sup> Loc. cit., n. 15 (PL 16, 210).
- <sup>25</sup> *Sermo 1 in Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 1, (PL 183, 415).
- <sup>26</sup> Isidore, *Etym.*, III, c. 21 (PL 82, 170). In Latin the word for heaven is caelum and the word for to hide is celare.

- <sup>27</sup> *Super Missus est*, hom. 2, n. 17 (PL 183, 70ff.), with many changes, especially towards the end.
- <sup>28</sup> Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis* (PL 23, 842).
- <sup>29</sup> *Sermo in Dominica infra Oct. Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 3 (PL 183, 431).
- <sup>30</sup> Loc. cit., n. 6 (PL 183, 432).
- <sup>31</sup> Loc. cit., with some changes.
- <sup>32</sup> *Sermo 1 in Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 1 (PL 183, 415).
- <sup>33</sup> Rather Eadmerus Cant., *De excellentia V. Mariae*, c. 8 (PL 159, 572).
- <sup>34</sup> From Olivi, *De excellentia et perfectione Virginis gloriosae*, f. 44bc.
- <sup>35</sup> From Olivi, loc. cit., f. 44c, from where come the texts quoted in the two following chapters.
- <sup>36</sup> In Communi featorum B.V.M., ad matut., resp. 1.
- <sup>37</sup> Rather Nicolaus Claravall., *Sermo II de Annunt. B.M.V.* (in the works of Peter Damian, PL 144, 558): ‘O womb spread out more than the heavens, more ample than the earth, holding more than the elements, you enclosed the One who encloses everything, and in you the God of glory rested’.
- <sup>38</sup> Rather Bernard, *Sermo 1 in Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 3 (PL 183, 416).
- <sup>39</sup> See *De cael. hierarchia*, c. 12 (PG 3, 291ff.).
- <sup>40</sup> From the beginning of this chapter the material comes from Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, IV, c. 41 (f. 202cd), with some changes.
- <sup>41</sup> See *De Assumpt. B.M.V.*, c. 5 (in the works of Augustine, PL 40, 1145).
- <sup>42</sup> From Olivi, *De excellentia et perfectione Virginis gloriosae*, f. 44cd, with some changes and many additions, for example, Olivi has: ‘The fifth [level] through original conception’, while Bernardine has: ‘The fifth is a union through maternal conception’.
- <sup>43</sup> *Epist. 9 ad Paulam et Eustochium*, n. 5 (in the works of Jerome, PL 30, 127).
- <sup>44</sup> The following words, as indicated above on page 135, note 11, are not from Jerome but from Ubertinus.
- <sup>45</sup> Page 135.
- <sup>46</sup> *Sermo in Dominica infra Oct. Assumpt. B.M.V.*, n. 3 (PL 183, 431).
- <sup>47</sup> Cap. 29 (PL 32, 796).
- <sup>48</sup> De Mediavilla, IV *Sent.*, d. 49, pars 2, q. 8, under *Respondeo* (f. 223a) and the text from him is found below.
- <sup>49</sup> Pars 1, a. unicus, q. 6, sub *Respondeo* (IV, 1010b-1011a).
- <sup>50</sup> *Interlinearis*, on this text in Lyranus.
- <sup>51</sup> Tract. 67, n. 2 (PL 35, 1812).
- <sup>52</sup> Lib. IV, c. 36, n. 70 (PL 75, 677).
- <sup>53</sup> From Hugo Pantiera, *Tractati*, tr. 1, c. 8 (f. 14v).

- <sup>54</sup> IV *Sent.*, d. 49, pars 5, q. 8 (f. 230d); See III *Sent.*, d. 31, pars 3, q. 3 (f. 115cd).
- <sup>55</sup> From Hugo Pantiera, loc. cit.
- <sup>56</sup> Pars 1, a. unicus, q. 6 ad 4um (IV, 1011) and the words immediately before this come from here.
- <sup>57</sup> From Hugo Pantiera, loc. cit., ff. 14v-15r, from where the following quotation comes.
- <sup>58</sup> Namely, Hugo Pantiera, *Tractati*, tr. 1, c. 8 (f. 15v) from where the text is taken but with some rearranging and changes.
- <sup>59</sup> Page 135.
- <sup>60</sup> Strabo, *Glossa ordin.*, on this text (PL 113, 1148); Pseudo-Jerome, *Epist. 9 ad Paulam et Eustochium*, n. 9 (PL 30, 131); se Jerome, *De nominibus hebraicis* (PL 23, 781, 789).
- <sup>61</sup> This triple distinction with almost all the material of the chapter, often taken verbatim, was suggested to Bernardine from Ubertinus, *Arbor vitae*, IV, c. 38 (ff. 198c-199a).
- <sup>62</sup> Namely, according to Hugo Pantiera, *Tractati*, tr. 1, c. 10 (f. 18v), from where the text quoted below was taken with some changes and the addition of the reference to the Prophet.
- <sup>63</sup> *Epist. 9 ad Paulam et Eustochium*, n. 15 (in the works of Jerome, PL 30, 138).
- <sup>64</sup> Page 142.
- <sup>65</sup> *In festo Assumpt. B.M.V.*, ad matut., resp. 1.
- <sup>66</sup> Strabo, *Glossa ordin.*, on this text (PL 113, 1148); and Lyranus, *Glossa ordin.*, on this text, also for the two mountains as in the following, but instead of 'Sicily' it has Cilicia'.
- <sup>67</sup> See Hugo de S. Charo, *Postilla in Cant.*, on this text (III, f. 126a); and Lyranus, on this text, where the following interpretations are found.