

THE AUTHORITY OF DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT

III

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IN this final article we shall examine and contrast the verdict of two traditions upon one of the most far-reaching and divisive of all doctrinal developments, the cultus of our Lady and the Saints; the tradition of historic Christendom in East and West, and the tradition of the Churches of the Reformation. The development of Mariology, which is of course a part of Christology, from the virginal conception and the divine Motherhood, clearly grounded in the New Testament, to our Lady's perpetual virginity, her Immaculate Conception and her corporal Assumption, together with the universal mediation of her merits and intercession, is viewed by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches upon precisely similar principles; the later developments being regarded as implicit in New Testament doctrine. It is true of course that since the definition of the Immaculate Conception was promulgated by Pius IX, Orthodox theologians have unanimously denied what they formerly treated as an open question. Dr E. L. Mascall has remarked on the suspicion of the West that the real objection is not so much to the dogma itself as to the mode of its promulgation. He goes on to suggest the need for a deeper investigation by the Orthodox of the nature and transmission of original sin, with a view to clearing away misunderstandings concerning its bearing upon the doctrine as defined.¹

This universal tradition of the cultus of our Lady, a wholly developed doctrine, found in the Scriptures in seminal form

1 *The Mother of God*, 'The Dogmatic Theology of the Mother of God', by E. L. Mascall. (Dacre Press, Westminster 1949; page 47.) A footnote says that in the discussion, following the paper from which we have quoted, Dr George Florovsky pointed out that before 1854 there were in fact a number of prominent Eastern Orthodox theologians who defended the Immaculate Conception. It should not be forgotten that in the Western Church also, during the Middle Ages, the doctrine was contested by many theologians, including St Thomas Aquinas. The divine Motherhood (*theotokos*) and the perpetual Virginity (*aeiparthenos*) have both been the subject of ecumenical decisions by General Councils of the Church. The Assumption, though universally believed in the East, has never been formally defined. But then, as has already been noted, there has been no general Council of the East for eleven hundred years.

only, was rejected at the Reformation in deference to the insights of the Reformers, who claimed not only to set right abuses, but, on the strength of those insights, and in opposition to the authority of the Church's Tradition, to decide what were abuses, and what were not. Even the Church of England, though it retained our Lady and many of the Saints in its Kalendar of feast days, abolished from its public formularies both prayers for the dead and prayers for the Saints. It will be to the central Anglican position then, as expounded in Professor Turner's Bampton Lectures, upon which we have already drawn to a considerable extent in illustration of Anglican principles, that we shall turn to see how the setting aside of the historic tradition of Christendom can be justified.² In the conclusions which he draws in his closing lecture Professor Turner challenges the doctrine of a closely knit unity between Scripture and Tradition, such as Cardinal Newman's famous *Essay on Development* maintains. He warns those who press most strongly for the full results of the process of development, and raise the charge of arrested development against those who cannot accept its whole content as true, that they themselves must recognize and guard against the opposite danger of accretion, the accumulation of elements in greater or less degree extrinsic to the original data, in the interests of a fuller or more rounded system. A Catholic theologian would find himself in general agreement with this warning, granted the elimination of the question-begging phrase 'in the interests of a fuller or more rounded system', and that he and Professor Turner were not deeply at variance about the meaning of 'extrinsic to the original data'. He would also add that this office of recognizing and guarding against the danger of accretion to the deposit of Faith is precisely the work of the *schola theologorum*, and that their disputes and controversies down the ages are proof that they have been and are by no means neglectful of their duty.

Professor Turner holds that there is need for the application of some further principle, other than the mere fact of development, to guarantee the theological truth of its results, especially in regard to doctrines which cannot commend themselves, with the cogency of the Trinitarian dogma, as valid reflections of

2 *The Pattern of Christian Truth*. A study of the relations of Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church. The Bampton Lectures for 1954, by H. E. W. Turner. (A. R. Mowbray, 1954.)

the biblical data. The criteria he suggests for this purpose are the principle of coherence, the logical articulation of the Christian Faith into a systematic whole, and the principle of correspondence with the biblical facts themselves. A Catholic theologian would reply that the *schola theologorum* of the Catholic Church necessarily applies both these criteria to all doctrinal developments inclusively, but that logical coherence is not always enough. A coherence perceived by divinely guided intuitive insight is sometimes necessary. On this ground he would question whether a truth implicit in, but not logically deducible from, the biblical data is necessarily a less valid reflection of those data than one perceived by logical inference.

Having laid down his criteria Professor Turner applies them specifically to the development of Catholic Mariology to which Newman applied his theory in a favourable sense. His first objection is that there is no historical evidence for the dogma of the Assumption, and he adds that for the closely knit theory of the relation between Scripture and Tradition the explicit presence of a doctrine in one or the other, or at one date rather than another, is a matter of purely secondary concern. Others starting from different premises cannot however be so easily satisfied. The premises he himself starts from are evidently that our belief in the truths of our Faith and the events involved in them rests directly upon historical evidence, the evidence of the gospels. This premise however is quite inadmissible in traditional Catholic theology, whether it be the theology of the Patristic age or of the Scholastics. Our belief depends upon the conviction that God speaks to us through his Church, and that we believe what he says because it is God who speaks. Scientific history can and does support that conviction in different degrees, but the conviction rests upon it only indirectly. If scientific history were able to prove conclusively that an event involving a revealed truth never happened, only then would our faith in God's word to us through his Church be destroyed. The evidence in the New Testament for the Resurrection and the Virgin birth is hardly historically sufficient, but since we believe that the Apostolic preaching, which tells us of them, is God's Word to us in his Church, we are satisfied that what faith tells us is at least compatible with the historical evidence, such as it is, and in no way contradicts it. There are truths of Faith then that have some

degree of historical evidence to corroborate them; others have little or none and others again are of such a nature that they lie altogether beyond the range of historical verification. To this latter class belong our belief in infant baptism and baptism by heretics as consonant with revealed truth, in the inspiration of the individual books of the New Testament, in the efficacy of praying to the Saints and in the perpetual Virginity, Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of our Lady.

Professor Turner holds that the coherence claimed for the doctrine of the Assumption with that of the Incarnation is a false coherence because the devotional pressure behind the definition is monophysite in tendency. In proof of this he quotes Mr Graham Greene:

‘The definition of the Assumption proclaims again the doctrine of our Resurrection, the eternal destiny of each human being. It is the history of Mary which maintains the doctrine in its clarity. The Resurrection of Christ can be regarded as the Resurrection of a God, the Resurrection of Mary foreshadows the Resurrection of each one of us.’³

These words, doubtless rather clumsily untheological, are certainly patient of a monophysite sense. They can however, and I think should, be more benignly interpreted. Mr Greene is pointing out that the Assumption is an underlining of the meaning of our Lord’s Resurrection for us. Thinking of him as God the Redeemer, we may forget that it is through his risen Humanity that we are redeemed. But our Lady’s Assumption proclaims again what our Lord’s Resurrection basically assures us of, and reminds us that she is the first human being redeemed by her Son, and in her we can recognize our own redemption and resurrection. Another Catholic layman, Professor A. H. Armstrong, a vigorous inopportunist at the time of the definition, puts the same point better:

‘The definition of the dogma of the Assumption does now seem to me to be a providential reminder to our generation of what the revealed truth about our nature and destiny, and that of the material universe, really is. For the dogma presents to us the only human person who has ever lived a fully normal human life and attained the proper end of man, the Virgin kept free from all original and actual sin, and taken up body

³ *Life*, November 1950.

and soul into the glory of heaven; and in the taking up of her body we can see an anticipation of what is to happen to the whole material creation. And this normal state and proper end of man is shown us as something which we can neither know about or attain to except by supernatural means.⁴

Professor Turner passes from this not very securely founded modern evidence of a connection between the cultus of our Lady and a monophysite tendency in the Christology of the Catholic devotional atmosphere to note that the beginnings of this cultus coincide with the reaction in the Church against Arianism, which resulted in a strong and widespread devotional urge, especially in the East, to exalt the divinity of Christ at the expense of his humanity. The bias resulting from this was a persistent feature of the thought of a whole Christological tradition. Supernature like nature abhors a vacuum and devotion to our Lady and the Saints, as Karl Adam has pointed out at some length,⁵ came in to fill the yawning gap left by the diminished sense of the reality and function of Christ's humanity in the work of redemption. Professor Turner does not, however, advert to the fact, as Karl Adam does, that it was Rome and the West which gave way very little to this monophysite temptation and continued in her liturgy, unlike the Orthodox East, to lay emphasis on our approach to the Father through the Sacred Humanity, *per Christum Dominum nostrum*. The monophysite tendency, however, seems to be recurrent in human nature, owing to the difficulty of keeping a due balance of comprehension in the understanding of the mystery of God made man. It is to be found in Lutheranism and Calvinism, as well as in certain lines of spirituality within the Catholic Church.⁶

To conclude from a fifth-century monophysite tendency, as Professor Turner does, that the coherence of Catholic Mariology in the doctrine of the Incarnation is unsound because rooted in an ill-balanced emphasis, and that it fails in consequence to pass the test of legitimate development, is to mistake a very small area of a historical situation for the whole of it. The small area is surely quite inadequate to account for the origin of the development of the doctrine as a whole, within the historic tradition of

4 *Downside Review*, 'Theology and the Liberal Arts', Spring 1955; pages 134-135.

5 *Christ Our Brother*. London 1931; pages 38-76.

6 vide *Le Christ, Marie et l'Eglise*. Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P. Paris 1951. Part II.

East and West, though it may at times and places have given it an added impetus. For the true source of this cultus, we must go back to the days of persecution, in the second and third centuries, and see it as an implication of a fuller development of the conception of the Church as Christ's Mystical Body. In the first decades of the Church's life the new converts had their eyes firmly fixed upon the Lord's return; the present kingdom and that which was to come seemed to them scarcely separable in thought. It was not till the Parousia began to seem less imminent that the Christian consciousness turned to occupy itself with thoughts of those who had gone before them with the sign of faith, and what their relationship was with those still struggling in the world. The beginnings of this change of attitude cannot be fully traced. The catacombs, and other primitive Christian monuments, however, bear witness that very early indeed the merits and prayers of the martyrs and confessors of the Faith were invoked. It is here that the beginnings of the realization of the place and work of the Church triumphant are to be looked for; the great army of intercessors who could assist by their merits and prayers those still engaged in their warfare below.

From the beginning it was ever present to the consciousness of the Church that intercession was its life principle.

'It was in prayer that the Church was founded. For ten days all the Apostles "persevered with one mind in prayer and supplication with the women, and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with his brethren". Then again at Pentecost "they were all with one mind in one place", and the converts they made are said to have "persevered in prayer". And when, after a while, St Peter was seized and put in prison with a view to his being put to death, "prayer was made without ceasing" by the Church of God for him; and when the Angel released him, he took refuge in a house, "where many were gathered together in prayer".'⁷

As the mind of the Church became more explicitly aware of the existence of the Church Triumphant, it was natural that the faithful should come to rely more and more upon the accumulating power of prayer transferred thither progressively into the very presence of God and his Christ. And so, again in Cardinal Newman's words:

7 Cardinal Newman in *Difficulties of Anglicans*, Vol. II, page 69. London 1892.

'Intercession thus being a first principle of the Church's life, next it is certain again, that the vital force of that intercession as an availing power is (according to the will of God) sanctity.'⁸

Very early in the Church's history the faithful began to think of our Lady, the Mother of God, as the second Eve, who by her faithfulness and purity herself became the Mother of the faithful, reversing the evil brought about by the first Eve, the Mother of all living. This doctrine is found, within the second century, fully established and stated in almost identical terms by Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Tertullian. These Fathers represent the Christian gospel, as it was then received, in Asia Minor and Gaul, in Palestine and in Rome and Africa. This is how Cardinal Newman summarizes their teaching:

'They unanimously declare that she was not a mere instrument in the Incarnation, such as David or Judah may be considered; they declare she co-operated in our salvation not merely by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon her body, but by specific holy acts, the effect of the Holy Ghost within her soul; that as Eve forfeited privileges by sin, so Mary earned privileges by the fruits of grace; that as Eve was disobedient and unbelieving, so Mary was obedient and believing; that as Eve was a cause of ruin to all, Mary was a cause of salvation to all; that as Eve made room for Adam's fall, so Mary made room for our Lord's reparation of it; and thus whereas the free gift was not as the offence, but much greater, it follows that as Eve co-operated in effecting a great evil, Mary co-operated in effecting a much greater good.'⁹

If the Church thought thus of our Lady, so universally, within the lifetime of those who had known, if not St John himself, at least those whom St John had taught, we may well conclude that this doctrine was explicitly Apostolic. It seems likely too that further development of its implications did not take place until Nicaea, Ephesus and Chalcedon had done their work in formulating the Church's mind in regard to the hypostatic union. The definition of *theotokos* at Ephesus was certainly a signal for the renewal of a process which, under the divine guidance promised by our Lord to his Church, has led to the fully developed Mariology of the historic tradition of Christendom. The roots of that development

⁸ *ibidem*, page 69.

⁹ Newman, *ibidem*, page 36.

lie in the doctrine of the Divine Motherhood of the second Eve and all that it implies, itself the principal safeguard of the reality of the Sacred Humanity of the second Adam. As Eve, to be the Mother of all living, was created in grace, and lost that grace by sin, so Mary, in virtue of her Son's redeeming power, was preserved from the penalty of sin and conceived in grace, that she might be the Mother of the redeemed. As Eve by loss of grace became subject to death and corruption, so Mary, because of the grace of her sinlessness, dying like her Son, like him was not to see corruption, being taken up body and soul to heaven, there, at the head of the company of the blessed, to carry out, until the consummation of all things, the intercessory office of her divine Maternity. This doctrine vindicates therefore the coherence of Catholic Mariology with the Incarnation and its full purpose in the divine plan, since our Lady's co-operation in bringing it about is the basis of her present co-operation in the whole work of redemption being wrought by her Son in his Mystical Body the Church.

The second principle by which all doctrinal developments must be checked, according to Professor Turner (and with the principle itself we have made it clear that we are far from disagreeing), is correspondence with the biblical data. But the kind of correspondence must be carefully defined. If the fact of the Assumption, for instance, as an integral part of our Lady's place in the economy of Redemption is considered *extrinsic* to the biblical data, it should be so only because it is not contained among them as a recorded fact of history. It is *intrinsic* to them as an inference drawn, together with many other inferences, from a whole set of facts, actions, events, prophecies and visions, recorded in Scripture, and realized as types of God's actions in the future. Such inferences are drawn, not by logical or metaphysical necessity, but by a sense in the mind of the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, which perceives in the light of all those varied data, comprising his dealings with the old and the new Israel, how God acts and has acted. Professor Turner seems to be asking here for a correspondence with biblical data of a very narrow factual kind, which would rule out any deeper understanding of the Scriptures as mediating revelation to us in a single pattern, gradually and, as it were, organically disclosing itself through history. The field of authentic biblical typology in this regard, even though it has

been, and still is, perhaps, made to produce more than can be legitimately drawn from it, can hardly be dismissed as 'a few metaphorical expressions which might be explained in this sense but which can be better interpreted without it'.¹⁰

In subjecting Catholic Mariology to the test of correspondence with the biblical data Professor Turner confines himself, however, to the Gospel incidents in which our Lady figures during the public life of our Lord. By his treatment of these incidents, therefore, his position must be judged. He says of them that our Lord appears, in three out of the four of them, very definitely to dissociate his Mother from himself in all matters concerned with his Incarnate mission to the world, and that this provides an important biblical principle against which all Mariological developments must be checked. For his more detailed establishment by exegesis of this principle we have to look elsewhere than in the Bampton Lectures, and we find it in his sermon preached before the University of Oxford, which had the recent definition of the Assumption for its subject.¹¹ It can hardly be said that the exegesis in this sermon is impressive; its attempt, in fact, to show these incidents as evidence of a complete dissociation between Christ and his Mother in the work of redemption comes near to making nonsense of the sayings they contain.

In commenting on the marriage feast of Cana in Galilee Professor Turner gives our Lord's reply to his Mother in its harshest English form (the A.V. and R.V.), and evades the necessity, which every commentator must surely see to be indispensable, of explaining this reply in terms of the statement 'My hour is not yet come'. Nor does he even mention, let alone account for, the astonishing fact that the implicit request was granted and that our Lady knew from the reply that it would be. Admittedly the interpretation of this incident has always proved a problem to commentators in every age, but the problem is hardly solved by ignoring two of the most important elements in it. An exegesis that at least takes account of all the problematic elements, and makes sense of the puzzling dialogue, can be embodied perhaps in the following paraphrase: 'It is no business of ours now because my hour, the hour of my Passion, is not yet

¹⁰ Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth*, page 490.

¹¹ *Theology*, 19th February, 1951. 'The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary', pages 64-70.

come. When that hour has come, then it *will* be our business; your business to bring before me the needs of my people, and my business to grant your unspoken request. Nevertheless even now I will do as you ask. . . .’

This interpretation accounts for the element of dissociation that our Lord’s reply undoubtedly contains, and, at the same time, takes us straight to that other incident, also recorded by St John, which Professor Turner dismisses as Christ’s one kind word to his Mother. The word spoken from the Cross, ‘Woman, behold thy Son . . . behold thy Mother’, viewed in the light of Cana can be seen as the inauguration, after the temporary separation of the public ministry, of a new relationship between Mother and Son. Faithful at the foot of the Cross, Mary becomes the Mother of all the faithful, personified in the disciple whom Jesus loved.¹² Again, Professor Turner’s reading of the answers to the woman in the crowd (Luke xi, 27, 28), and to those who gave Christ a message from his Mother and his brethren (Mark iii, 31), is open to the charge of making nonsense of other equally inspired New Testament passages.¹³ If the woman’s adoring ejaculation, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore thee . . .’ is set aside by our Lord with the words: ‘Yea, blessed rather are they who hear the word of God and keep it’, what becomes of the greeting of St Elizabeth, ‘Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb’, and of our Lady’s own words in the Magnificat, ‘All generations shall call me blessed’? Altogether, surely, it is more consonant with sound exegesis to say, with the liturgical tradition of East and West alike, that here our Lord is pointing to a reason more fundamental still for her blessedness, her sinlessness.

It would seem then that to make coherence with the general pattern of Christian doctrine, and correspondence with the biblical data, as judged by human reason, the ultimate determinants of truth or falsehood in doctrinal development, serviceable though they may be as preliminary checks, is likely to overstrain the faculty of reason, by bringing our final and vitally important judgments under the uncertain sway of our own presuppositions.

12 For the substance of this suggested interpretation I am indebted to Professor G. Temple’s very interesting comment on this incident. ‘Conversation Piece at Cana’, *Dominican Studies*, Volume VII, 1954.

13 Incidentally Professor Turner at this point makes what seems an unwarranted and tendentious identification of the ‘friends’ in Mark iii, 21, who said ‘He is beside himself’, and his Mother and his brethren in Mark iii, 31, who were without, seeking him.

It has been possible, as we have seen, to reject in this way not only the historic tradition of Christendom, in favour of Reformation insights, but also not inconsiderable parts of that heritage which the Church of England has itself retained in the classical theology of the Caroline divines. It seems relevant here to put the question whether it is likely that Christ our Lord, who is in his Church, and the Holy Spirit, who, according to his promise, guides it into all truth, would have left it with an authority so fallible in the preservation of that truth as to allow it, in such a vital matter, and to such a wide extent and at so very early a stage in its history, to choose the road to error. Anglicans themselves, when they accept the guidance of the historic tradition, have not seldom reached in this matter, as in others, conclusions of scholarship concerning the biblical data identical with those of the Catholic Church. This is an additional confirmation for Catholics in their belief that the only safe *ultimate* criterion of the truth or falsehood of doctrinal development is the living voice of the Church.

CATECHISM FOR ADULTS:

XI. 'THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS'

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THE worship of the Christian community culminates in the sacrifice of the Mass. At Mass, a priest, assimilated by his ordination to the High Priesthood of Christ, offers, in the name of Christ, a true sacrifice to God. This act of sacrifice is identified with our Lord's sacrifice on Calvary for though the manner in which the victim is offered is different, the victim is the same. The body given and the blood shed is made present through the signs of the bread and the wine. More than that, Christ who died then and once and for all released the bonds of sin, is now,