

They are urged, moreover, to go to the philosophers themselves, to prove and supplement what must be the inadequacies of any introduction. Yet it is on this point that I must express some disappointment with Professor Armstrong's book. References are all too few. The short book list, with its selective citations of works and translations, helpful as it is bound to be, does not give what the more inquisitive student must have if he is going to use the sources. Perhaps the author feared that references might pile up and be distasteful or spoil the continuity of the text. Without a doubt some and perhaps many readers would prefer the elimination of notes. But on this score I like to recall Étienne Gilson's reply in his *Héloïse and Abélard*: "Here, then is a little book full of notes. They are no pledge of its style, but they are of its honesty.

Judged on the criterion, that an introduction to the history of philosophy should bring reader and philosopher together. Professor Armstrong's effort leaves something to be desired. It is not a book for the research student nor does it challenge comparison with such works as Copleston's *A History of Philosophy*. This is, perhaps to put it on the wrong level. But considered in the light of its special purpose, it is really a noteworthy contribution, and if not used as a text ought to be on the young philosopher's list of required reading. It can also be recommended to the general reader as an excellent synopsis of a complex but critically formative segment of western culture. It is readable, unobtrusively solid, understandable, written with considerable enthusiasm, chary of controversy and a tribute to the author's erudition and mastery of the vast field.

This is no more than what might be expected from a man of Professor Armstrong's background and attainment. Since he is not well known in this country, perhaps I may conclude with a few items about him. An Englishman, born in 1909, he studied at Jesus College, Cambridge, from 1928 to 1932, where he took his Master's degree in 1935. After various teaching and research posts at Cambridge and Swansea, he was appointed to the chair of Latin Literature and Classical Greek in the Royal University of Malta, which he held until 1943, when he suffered a breakdown due to the siege conditions of 1942. At present Professor Armstrong is senior lecturer in Latin at University College, Cardiff. He has written *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (1940) and has contributed to *The Clerical Quarterly*, *Mind*, *The Downside Review*, *Dublin Review*. He has also done some patristic studies on Augustine and St. Gregory of Nyssa for the *Eastern Churches Quarterly* and *Dominican Studies*. He is married, has five children and was received into the Church in 1932.

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## THE WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

A gem is not appreciated until it is dug out and polished. The twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse is such a gem. In the past dozen years a great increase of interest and study has been devoted to it. This interest sprang both from the endeavor to ascertain the significance of Holy Writ for the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Mother,<sup>2</sup> and to a great extent from the present day study of Mariology in general. Our problem is to identify the Vision and to find out the meaning of the chapter.

### LITERARY STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE VISION

Even from a literary point of view, the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse has artistic balance and beauty. It is like a drama in three acts, with the action moving swiftly. The eighteen verses of

\*G. M. Perrella, C.M., "Sensu mariolog. dell' Apoc. 12" in *Div. Thom.* (1940), 215-22; A. Rivera, C.M.F., "Inimicias ponam" et "Signum" "Sicut" apparuit in *Verb. Dam.*, 21 (1941), 113-22; 183-9; L. di Fonw, O.E.A. "Interno al senso mariolog. dell' Apoc. c. 12" in *Vuekihmi*, 3 (1941), 1-10; J. Sickenberger, "Die Messiasniutter in 12 Kap. des Apok." in *Icon.* 126 (1946), 357-427; J. F. Bonnefoy, O.F.M., "Les interpretations ecclesiologiques du ch. 12 de l'Apoc" in *Marianum*, 9 (1947), 208-222; E. S. J., "La Mediation Universelle de Marie" in *Maria. Etudes*, 1, 1947; J. Bover, S.J., "Marie, L'Eglise et le Nouvel Israel" in *Mana, Etudes*, 1, 1947; D. Unger, O.F.M.Cap., "Did St. John See the Virgin Mary in Glory?" in *Th. Stud.*, 11 (1949), 249-62, 392-405, 12 (1950), 75-83, 405-15; R. Murphy, O.C., "Allusion to Mary in the Apoc." in *Th. Stud.*, 11 (1949), 565-73; D. Unger, O.F.M.Cap., "Cardinal Newman and Apoc. 12" in *Th. Stud.*, 11 (1950), 356-67.

\*A comprehensive bibliography is given in *IER*, 12a (190), ———. Important of Apoc. 12 in this regard are: L. da Fonseca, S.J., "Maria nella S. Scr." in *Bibl.*, 28 (1947), 321-62; J. Coppens, "La definition de l'Assomption" in *Eph. Th. Louv.*, 23 (1947), 17-19; L. Hhograsst, "De definibilitate Assump. B.V.M." in *Grecl.*, 29 (1948), 34; M. Jupe, "La Mort et l'Assomption de la S. Vierge" in *Sfudi e /isii*, 1, 1948; "L'Assomption de la S. Vierge" in *Maria. Etudes*, 1, 1947; L. Poirier, "La ch. 12 de l'Apoc., fait-il allusion a l'assomption de la Vierge?" in *Assomption* (Montreal: Fides, 1948); G. Bissonette, "The twelfth chapter of the Apoc. and our Lady's Assumption" in *Marian Studies*, 2 (1951), 1-10. The Holy Father confined himself to the following statement regarding the Vision: "The Scholastic Doctors have recognized the Assumption of the Mother of God as something signified, not only in various figures of the

the chapter fall neatly into three parts with six verses to each part.\* *Act 1 (verses 1-6)*. Brilliant is the vision with which the act opens. It is a great symbolic sign or portent. The setting is heaven.<sup>4</sup> A Woman is engulfed in the dazzling brightness of the sun itself, as in a garment of light;<sup>5</sup> her feet tread on the moon.<sup>6</sup> She is radiant with the celestial ornament of twelve stars which form her royal crown. And she is Mother! That is the one occupation mentioned of her: child-bearing, with all the care and pain of child-bearing, all the ardor and labor of bringing forth: "And she was with Child and cried out in the pangs of birth and in pain to be delivered" (v. 2). Rut at once another sign or portent appears on the scene: a great red Dragon. His color is one of fire and war, his appearance one of worldly might and power.<sup>7</sup> Seven heads he has, each one crowned with a diadem. Ten horns of power are upon those heads. But the occupation mentioned of him is that of ruthless destruction. For "his tail swept down one-third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth" (v. 4).

Stars crown the Woman; stars are swept down by the Dragon. The Woman is in the act of giving life to the world; the Dragon

Testament, but also in that Woman clothed with the Sun, whom St. John the Apostle contemplated on the island of Patmos" (*Munificentissimus Deus*, *AER*, 124 (1951), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J.-M. Bover, S.J., "El cap. 12 del Apoc. y el 3 del Gen." in *Estud. Eccles.*, 1 (1922), 319-36.

<sup>4</sup> The expression: ἐν οὐρανῷ is used fourteen other times in the Apoc. and nowhere does it mean "on the heavens." Compare 4:1, 8:1, 11:15, 11:19; 12:7 f.; 12:10; 13:6; 14:17; 15:1; 15:5; 19:1; 19:14. This heaven is the abode of God.

<sup>5</sup> Clothed with a garment is the idea conveyed by: περιβλημίνην as the parallels show: *Apoc.* 7:9; 7:13; 10:1; 11:3; 17:4; 18:16; 19:8; 19:13; Yahweh is clothed with light as with a garment: ἀναβλλόμενον φῶς 111 (*Ps.* 103 [104], 2).

<sup>6</sup> In N.T. Greek: ὑποκάτω is interchangeable with ὑπό, "under": (*Apoc.* 5:3; 5:13; 6:9). But in every instance where the entire expression ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν is found in Scripture, it has the meaning of subjection: *Ps.* 8:7 (also quoted in *Hebr.* 2:8); *Mai.* 4:3 (*Hebr.* 3:21); in *Ps.* 109 (110): ὑποκάτω is also used when quoted by *Mark* 12:36 in B W D, 28 (1542) sys gg co. An apparent exception is *Mark* 6:11, "Shake off the dust from beneath your feet." But the figure is evidently different, and *Matt.* uses ἐκ.

<sup>7</sup> In *Apoc.* 6:4 the same adjective is used for the symbol of war. But its substantive πῦρ is chiefly used in N.T. to denote hell-fire. How this Dragon can said to be in heaven will be shown later.

is in the act of destroying a great part of it. Thus the two great figures of this scene are ushered in, described separately at first, as just mentioned, but then immediately in relation to each other. The Dragon is the sworn enemy of the Woman: "And the Dragon stationed himself before the Woman who was about to be delivered, so that when she was delivered he might devour her Child" (v. 4). Not satisfied with destroying the third part of the heavens, he is all out to devour the Woman's offspring. Why this hatred against the Woman and her Child? Why this desire to make an end of the Child? The reason is given as the action proceeds.

Now the scene changes and we are on earth. The Child is no other than the Lord of the world; "And she gave birth to a son, a male,<sup>8</sup> who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her Child<sup>8</sup> was caught up to God and His throne. Then the Woman fled to the desert, where she has a place prepared by God, that there they might nourish her for 1260 days."<sup>10</sup> Notice that what is said of the Woman and her Child spells a twofold defeat for the Dragon, namely, the failure to devour or harm the Child, for "he was caught up to God and His throne"; and the further failure to inflict harm on the Woman, for she hid herself and was cared for by God.

That ends the first act. The Woman and her Child disappear from the scene unharmed, unconquered. No wonder the Dragon wanted to snuff out the life of the Child, for, with all his power of seven heads, ten horns and seven diadems, the Dragon was but a usurper of world power. Here was the true Lord of the world.

*Act II (verses 7-12).* Again the setting is heaven. There is war and a battle: "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels going forth to make war with the Dragon; and the Dragon azjd his angels fought, and did not prevail, nor was their place found anymore in heaven" (vv. 7-8). Why were they cast out? There is no offense mentioned, other than the one given in the first part of the first act, where the setting was also heaven, namely,

«Spencer translates "a Male Child." The Greek has *ἴτεκεν υἱόν, ἀρσέν.*

«Both here and in v. 4 the Greek has *τὸ τέκνον.*

<sup>10</sup> A symbolic number. 1260 days is the same amount of time as 42 months (11:2-3; 13:5) or 3 and a half years. This latter expression seems to be that intended in 12:14: "a time [year] and times [dual form of time, i.e. 2 years] and half a time [half a year], as we find it in the Aramaic part of *Dan.* 7:25. Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, *Kommentar z. N.T.*, 4, 996 ff.

the Dragon had refused submission to the Lord of the world, the rightful heir of all.

But the action proceeds. The Dragon was cast down to the earth. Now the sacred writer tells us who the Dragon is: "He is the ancient Serpent (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος: *Gen. 3:14-15 LXX*) who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (v. 9). He will deceive men and blind them to the truth.

There follows a hymn of victory, sung in heaven. It sings the downfall of Satan, and the triumph of God's Anointed, the Christ. It sings further the triumph of martyrs, who, one with Christ, conquer the Dragon, namely, by choosing to die with Christ in testimony of the truth: "They have conquered him [the Dragon] because of the Blood of the Lamb and because of the utterances of their testimony. And they clung not to their life even when facing death" (v. 11). Thus it was the death of the Lamb that enabled these martyrs to triumph over the deceiver of the world. But the voice from heaven continues: "Woe to the earth and to the sea. Because the Devil has descended to you in great fury, knowing that he has but a short time" (v. 12). A woe is pronounced on the earth, the third of the woes mentioned in 11:14: "Lo, the third woe shall come quickly."<sup>11</sup>

*Act III (verses 13-18).* Again the scene is on earth and the action between the Dragon and the Woman is resumed. Now it is the Woman alone who is the object of his fury: "And when the Dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he went in pursuit of the Woman who had given birth to the son, the male. And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the Woman so that she might fly into the desert to her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times and half a time,<sup>12</sup> away from the presence of the Serpent" (vv. 13-14). So the Dragon fails to harm the Woman because she has God's special protection, symbolized by the wings of the eagle (as can be inferred from *Ex. 19:4: Dent. 32:11*).

A second attempt is made by the Dragon-Serpent (the Dragon is now called the Serpent by the Sacred writer) to overthrow the

<sup>11</sup> *Apec.* 8:13 mentions three woes to come upon the earth. Two are pronounced as accomplished in 9:12 and 11:14. The third is announced in 11:14 and evidently refers to the reign of the Beast (ch. 13). Thus *Afioc.* 12:12 connects the chapter with the following scenes in ch. 13.

<sup>12</sup> See note 10. *supra*.

Woman. Then the Serpent vomited water from his mouth like a river after the Woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream" (v. 15). This time help comes again to the Woman and it is from the side of the earth which opened its mouth and sucked up the river vomited from the mouth of the Serpent. So whatever may be tried, the Dragon-Serpent was foiled. He was unable to harm the Woman who remained inviolable against his attacks.

The final action of the Dragon in this chapter is his resolve to wage war on the remainder of the Woman's offspring. They are characterized as those who observe the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus (v. 17). Chapter 12 ends with the Dragon stationing himself on the shore of the sea to invest with his power and with his throne and with all his authority the Beast which comes up out of the sea (ch. 13). By its very appearance, the Beast is recognized as the Dragon's offspring.

From this mere literary analysis certain points are clear:

(1) The Dragon is Satan, who is the Enemy to the Lord of the world and to the one who bore the Lord of the world.

(2) The Lord of the world is, first of all, Christ the Messiah. St. John takes special pains to show that:

- (a) He describes him with a quotation taken from a psalm that is admittedly messianic:<sup>15</sup> "You shall rule the nations with a rod of iron" (*Ps.* 2:9). For no one else but the Messiah does the Old Testament claim such world-rule.
- (b) In explicit terms this is expressed in Apocalypse 19:11-16: "His Name is called Word of God. . . . He shall rule the nations with a rod of iron. . . . He has upon His robe and upon His thigh a Name. King of kings and Lord of lords."
- (c) In order that no one will miss the point, St. John inserts in our present verse (12:5) the word "all": "He shall rule all the nations with a rod of iron." There can be no reason-

<sup>13</sup> Observing the commandments of God and holding fast to the testimony of Jesus are the two marks by which one can tell the sons of God according to St. John's own elaboration in *1 John*, 3-5. See also *A Jot.* 14:12.

<sup>14</sup> St. John the Apostle is author of the Apocalypse according to the traditional view. Cf. J. Steinmueller, *Companion to Scr. Stud.*, 3, 388 ff. But see also the article by P. Gachter, S.J., in *Th. Stud.*, 9 (1948), 419-52.

<sup>15</sup> Its messianic character is frequently borne witness to in the N.T.: *Acts* 4:25-8; 13:33; *Hebr.* 1:5; 5:5. Such world dominion was not fulfilled in anyone but the Messiah.

able doubt then, that the Woman's offspring is Christ, the Messiah, the Lord of the world and universal King.

(3) The Lord of the world in this same verse also designates the members of Christ's mystical body. This follows:

- (a) From the grammatical context: The Woman brings forth a son, a male (*υἱόν, ἄρσεν*). There is no other mention of the Woman's bringing forth than this. Yet in the same chapter that offspring (*υἱόν, ἄρσεν*) is both individual and collective: individual, when it is designated as "the Child" (*τὸ τέκνον?*: v. 4 and v. 6); collective, when referred to as "the remainder of her seed" (*οὐκ ἄριστος τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς*: v. 17). Thus "the Child" and "the remainder of her seed" are both included in the "son, the male" (*υἱόν, ἀρσεν*) born of the Woman, as Lord of the world.<sup>17</sup>
- (b) This also follows from the parallel text of Apocalypse 2:27, where the members of Christ are given a share in the rule of the world: "To the victor and to him who guards my words to the end, I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron."
- (c) It is likewise the teaching of the earliest Fathers who comment on this chapter 12 of the Apocalypse. For St. Hippolytus, the son, the male, is Christ the perfect man, Head and members.<sup>18</sup> St. Methodius<sup>18</sup> and St. Victorious of Pettau<sup>20</sup> likewise.

<sup>10</sup> St. John must have meant to convey something by his deliberate use of the singular *τὸ τέκνον* twice (vv. 4,6), the general *υἱόν, ἄρσεν* twice (vv. 5,13) and the other collective terms: *οἱ λοιποὶ* (v. 17). The explanation given here does no violence to the text, but flows from it naturally. The Beloved Disciple surely knew the doctrine of the Mystical Body for he wrote long after St. Paul, and moreover he has given us the same truth in the Vine and the Branches (John 15). The Mystical Body of Christ is not a figure of speech, but a reality, and it can be described in different ways.

<sup>17</sup> The expression *εἰκεν υἱόν, ἄρσεν* hearkens back to *Is. 66.7* (*ἔστικεν ἄρσεν*) where the male child refers to the New Israel, taken collectively. But see note 44, *infra*.

<sup>18</sup> Hippolytus, *De Antichristo*, 3 and 61; *CGS* Berol.; Hippol. 1, 2 pp. 6 and 41 f. The English translation in Roberts (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5, 204 and 217) is inferior and inexact in these passages.

<sup>19</sup> Methodius, *Symposium*, 8, 4.18; *CGS* 85, 18 ff.; Roberts 6, 336.

<sup>20</sup> Victorious, in *Apoc.*: *CSEL* 49, 113; *MGL* 5, 336. It will be interesting to see what the recent microfilming of manuscript both on Mt. Sinai and in the Vatican library brings to light with regard to this and similar points.

(4) The Woman gives birth to Christ, Head and members, in one and the same act. Who is this woman, the object of Satan's fury, decked out as Queen of the Heavens, in the great throes of Motherhood in order to give to the world its rightful heir and king, and what role has she to play at this juncture of the apocalyptic visions, placed as she is before the reign of the Beast in chapter 13? From the foregoing is not the impression received that she is a concrete and individual personality? What prevents us from stating that the Woman symbolizes the Blessed Mother?

#### OBJECTIONS TO THE WOMAN SYMBOLIZING MARY

Formerly it was a frequent objection that the description of the Woman is incompatible with the Blessed Mother. Here are the chief points:

*First objection:* the birth-pangs. Several satisfactory solutions can be given to reconcile the birth-pangs with the Virgin-Mother who suffered no such birth-pangs in bringing forth Christ, the Messiah\*.

(1) To be born in pangs of birth (*ωδίνω*) does not necessarily refer to physical pangs of child-bearing. St. Paul tells the Galatians (4:19) that he is in the pains of child-birth again (*ωδίνω*) until Christ be formed in them. But he cannot mean the physical pangs of child-birth. In Romans 8:22 he says that all creation groans and agonizes until now (*συν ωδίνω*). In both cases there is a question of sufferings in general or sufferings of soul.

(2) Likewise the expression "to be in pain to be delivered" (*βασανίζω*) is used in the New Testament either for physical or spiritual suffering.<sup>21</sup> Thus the picture of the Woman in the throes of child-bearing can represent spiritual sufferings, cares and anxieties, or even persecution. In Jeremiah 30:6 it is a symbol of the sufferings of exile. For the earliest Fathers<sup>22</sup> it is the symbol of persecution or of the anguish of intense desire.

<sup>21</sup> In *Matt.* 8:6 it is physical: "Lord, my boy is lying in the house paralyzed in dreadful agony." in *2 Pet.* 2:8 it is spiritual: "Lot, that just man, had his upright soul tormented from day to day with the lawless doings of the people." The same expression (*βασανίζω*) is found four more times in addition in the *Apoc.* but each time it is used for torments in general (9:5; 11:10; 14:10; 20:10).

<sup>22</sup> St. Hippolytus, *l.c.*, considers it a picture of the persecution under Antichrist; St. Victorious, a picture of the anguish of desire of the ancient church, to bring forth the Messiah.

Consequently the picture *can* represent the universal Mother in her anguish of desire to bring forth Christ in the hearts of all men, or the spiritual sufferings which were the price of Motherhood of the whole Christ.

*Second objection:* The Woman has other children (v. 17) and this is said to militate against Mary's perpetual virginity. It is surprising that this objection is still made today?! Even a superficial examination of the use of the word Offspring (σπριγμα) in Scripture shows that it can stand both for physical offspring of carnal descent, and for those who are born in a spiritual manner of someone. In Galatians 3:29 Abraham's offspring (<nrc>/ia) are the Gentiles who believe, and thus become the spiritual sons of Abraham, but are not his sons by carnal descent. Scripture speaks of the seed of Satan, the Serpent (*Gen.* 3:15) and of the seed of God (*1 John* 3:9). So in Apocalypse 12:17, too, there *can* be a question of the spiritual progeny of the Woman and hence the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity would be left intact.

*Third objection:* The Woman in chapter 12 is a symbol. Hence it cannot refer to an individual. This statement is not borne out by the Scriptural use of a symbol.\* The Lamb in Apocalypse 5 with seven horns and seven eyes is a symbol and yet it surely does refer to Christ the individual (see also *Dan.* 8:21-22).

*Fourth objection:* The Apocalypse is written long after Mary's departure from this earth. According to its author it is a prophecy (22:18) and consequently deals with the future. Thus it cannot refer to things that happened to the Blessed Mother in the past. A proper understanding of the nature of the apocalyptic books satisfies this objection. Such books were common in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era. Symbols were used to signify events partly accomplished and partly to be fulfilled. The Apocalypse itself gives evidence of this. The Lamb in 5:6 is depicted as slain, and yet is about to execute the contents of the sealed scroll. The angel in 17:9 has the same to say about the seven heads of the Beast: "Five are fallen, one is, and the other

23 E.g. among others, A. Wikenhauser, *Offenbarung des Johannes* (Regensburg, 1949), p. 82. These same authors, however, do take the phrase as spiritual progeny, for they speak of the "spiritual progeny of the Church." Wherein then lies the difficulty of considering these children as the spiritual progeny of Mary?



is not yet come." Chapter 12, then, can refer to past events in Mary's life and still be prophetic of something in the future.

*Fifth objection:* The detail of the flight into the desert for 1280 days does not fit the Blessed Mother. To this it may be said that it could be a literary device of the author to express the Woman's exemption from all diabolical influence. Moreover, also from a historical standpoint, it is not incompatible with the life of Mary, even if nothing is known to correspond to it. But precisely this detail will be taken up further on.

Far from the description of the Woman being incompatible with the Blessed Mother, it lends itself admirably to any number of truths of Mariology: (1) Mary's fullness of divine graces and gifts, symbolized by being clothed with Christ, the Light of the world. (2) Her exalted position in heaven where the entire body of the elect form her crown of glory, twelve being the number for universality. (3) The divine Motherhood of her whose Son is Messiah, Universal King and Son of God (v. 5). (4) Spiritual Motherhood of the faithful by reason of which she suffered the birth-pangs of Calvary long before it became a reality (*Luke 2 :35*). (5) Her complete exemption from all diabolical influence so as to remain unconquered by Satan in every way.

Yet the minds of many remain unconvinced that all this is anything more than apt accommodation. It does not prove sufficiently that the Holy Spirit, the author of Scripture, *intended* the Woman to symbolize the Blessed Mother, so that such is the true scriptural sense of the symbol. We must proceed further, then, with our study.

IS MARY INTENDED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LITERAL SENSE?

It must be kept in mind that chapter 12 is a revelation given by God to St. John in a vision. Moreover, the Apocalypse is a prophecy (22:18). The Seer describes the symbolic vision as clearly as he can, but the full meaning of it is known to him only if it pleases God to make it known (cf. *Dan. 7:16*). God's meaning of the symbol in question, if not given by the sacred writer, will have to be ascertained by ruling out whatever the analogy of faith shows to be incompatible with the symbol; and at the same time by applying the other norms of Catholic exegesis (either literary or doctrinal as laid down by Pius XII in *Divino afflante Spiritu*!) if they help clarify the issue.

## EXCLUDING THE INCOMPATIBLE

(1) *The Woman is not the Israel of the Old Testament, taken by itself.* Some authors contented themselves with saying: "The Woman is the Chosen People of God, Israel, represented as a single person. From Israel the Messiah sprang according to the flesh amid heavy birth-pangs." The following reasons militate against such an assumption,

(a) Israel can never be said to be mother both of Christ (v. 6) and of Christ's followers or members (v. 17). If circumcision and the Law were necessary for Christians, as some early Judaizers advocated, this view could have some backing. But just the opposite is the case. Not by any connection with Judaism or the Synagogue did one become a disciple of Christ, but by Baptism, an entirely new institution of Christ. And in becoming a member of Christ in Baptism, one by no means became a member of Israel. Israel, then, is not the Woman who begets Christ the Head and His members.<sup>24</sup>

(b) A picture of a woman in birth-pangs may well represent Israel amid many sufferings giving the Messiah to the world, but the glorious Woman in v. 1 is poles apart from the reality of unfaithful Israel with her many failures and transgressions as the prophets depict her for us (cf. *Is.* 1:4-6; *Ez.* 16; etc.).

(c) Israel was never mother to Christians (v. 17). She persecuted them from the very beginning of Christianity.

(d) Israel's whole purpose was to give the Messiah to the world. If John had Israel in mind, his emphasis upon the Woman after the birth of the Child (vv. 13-17) is meaningless. To imagine that it refers to a special protection of God for the unbelieving Jewish people in the Christian era does not fit into the picture.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> These reasons are summarized from the excellent article of J. F. Bonnefoy, as mentioned in note 1. Attention can also be called to the fact mentioned above, that this mother, by one and the same act of motherhood, gives birth to both the personal Christ and the members of Christ, which can never be said of Israel. Cf. also J. Lortzing, "Die innere Beziehung zw. John 2 and Offb. 12" in *Theol. u. Gl.*, 29 (1937), 509 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. M. Meinertz, *Théologie des N.T.* (Bonn, 1950), p. 329. A different angle is to consider the Woman as the Church at the end of time when Israel shall have come into the fold. This will be taken up further on.

(2) *The Woman is not the Christian Church founded by Christ, taken by itself.*

(a) The Church may well be depicted as the mother of Christians, the members of Christ, but never of the personal Christ Himself. It is certain that the Woman's Child in v. 5 f. includes the personal Christ, so it is against all the rules of symbolism to designate as His Mother the very institution that He founded, which is rather symbolized as the New Eve coming forth from His side on the cross. The Church is the Spouse of Jesus Christ.

(b) Nor can we simply say that we have here a figure of speech which is elastic. First of all, a figure of speech is not identical with a symbolic vision. Moreover, a figure of speech has to correspond to the rules of thought. Would anyone ever think of calling the United States of America the mother of George Washington? Likewise it is incorrect to call the Church the Mother of Jesus.

(3) *The Woman is not the personified People of God, the Community of the Just of both Testaments, both faithful Israel out of which the Messiah took flesh and spiritual Israel, the Church, considered as one.* This is St. Augustine's interpretation, who holds that the Woman is the City of God from the just Abel down to the last Saint; and it is the opinion of several notable authors today.<sup>2</sup>

Against this we must note the following. No one doubts that in heaven the just of all times form one People of God, one Kingdom of God and His Christ, one Communion of Saints; no one doubts that the People of God in the Old Testament can well be represented by the symbol of a woman (as in the prophets and that the People of God in the New Testament can well be represented by the figure of a woman (as in St. Paul and the Fathers of the Church). But it is quite another thing to say that the same identical symbol can represent at the same time both the People of God in the Old Testament and those of the New Testament *in their sojourn on earth*. Their images are related to each other as type and antitype, figure and fulfillment; they have a different origin, organization, program of action, extension in time and place, and it

ME. B. APO, O.P., *St. Jean, l'Apocalypse* (Paris, 1933), pp. 193 f.; A. Gelin, *La sainte bible* (Paris, 1946), 12, 629; A. Wikenhauser, *op. cit.*, p. 82; M. Meinertz, *op. cit.*, p. 329; F. Gigot, O.P., Westminster version to the Apoc; R. Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 569.

is difficult to see how they can be blended together under one and the same symbol. If the observations concerning the *vióv ápaw* hold good, as was explained earlier in the literary analysis of Apocalypse 12, namely, that the Woman is Mother *simultaneously* of the personal Christ and His members, the Woman is not the Community of the just of both Testaments.<sup>27</sup>

(4) *The Woman is not Mary, taken alone.* Despite the fact that the symbolic vision of chapter 12 has been shown to correspond to many truths of Mariology, an adequate explanation of the Hight into the desert for 1260 days (vv. 6 and 14) is not forthcoming. This detail evidently connects the chapter with the foregoing (11:2-3) and the following chapter (13:5). It brings us to the final possibility.

THE WOMAN IS SIMULTANEOUSLY AN INDIVIDUAL  
AND A COLLECTIVITY

If we examine the symbols in the book of Daniel we find that they allow a certain amount of fluctuation in the objects they symbolize. Not that they fluctuate between designating various objects, but rather between a collective body and the chief representative of that collective body. The golden head of the statue in Daniel 2 refers to Nabuchodonosor in person and at the same time, the Babylonian Empire in its entirety.<sup>28</sup> The two-horned ram in chapter 8 (vv. 3 and 20), according to the tenor of the angel's ex-

<sup>27</sup> Does not the metaphor of the olive tree (*Rom.* 11:16-17) prove that one and the same symbol can symbolize both Old and New Covenants simultaneously? I do not think so. A real difficulty is encountered in understanding the root to be Abraham and the patriarchs. De facto, the branches do not derive their holiness from Abraham but from Christ. Abraham's holiness is likewise derived from Christ. Only after the Incarnation and the refusal of the Jewish nation to accept Christ was that nation rejected (temporarily) and the "branches cut off." It is Christ, then, who is the root that sanctifies the whole tree, if the branches are grafted on it. The olive tree, would be another metaphor for the Mystical Body of Christ as Origen already noted in his Commentary to Romans, 8, 11 (*MPG* 14, 1193). But the opposite view prevails today. See M. Bourke, *A Study of the Metaphor of the Olive Tree* (Washington, D. C., 1947).

<sup>28</sup> Daniel tells Nabuchodonosor that the statue he saw in the dream had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, etc. (2:32-34). But Daniel himself gave the interpretation: "Thou art a king of kings, Nabuchodonosor. Thou art the head of gold. But after thee shall rise up *another kingdom, inferior to*

planation, symbolizes the Medo-Persian Empire and at the same time its chief representative who fought the Greeks. Similarly with the he-goat in the same chapter. Tire son of man in chapter 7 symbolizes both the Holy One of Israel<sup>29</sup> and His people, the holy ones of God (vv. 14, 21, 27). In all these cases God *intended* to symbolize both the collective body and its chief representative by one and the same symbol, and in both cases we are dealing with the Scriptural sense of the symbol. There need be no question of a double, literal sense, for the collective body and its chief representative do not form two diverse objects, but one organic unity. They really are one.

Let us apply this to Apocalypse 12. The Woman signifies an individual,<sup>30</sup> and no other individual can be meant but Mary, for Mary alone became Mother simultaneously of the personal Christ and of those who are His members.<sup>31</sup> The Woman signifies, at the same time, a collective body that is organically one with Mary, namely, the Church, which is born of Mary, and is truly the fruit of her womb, and of which she is truly Mother and Ideal.<sup>32</sup> This

*thee*, of silver, and another of brass, etc." (2-37-40). But several kings succeeded Nabuchodonosor before the Babylonian "kingdom" was succeeded by another "kingdom." Thus Nabuchodonosor alone could not have been symbolized by the head of gold, but rather the Empire with him as its most important representative. This fluctuation has been well demonstrated by M. Gruenthaner, S.J., "The Four Empires of Daniel" in *C.B.Q.*, 8 (1946), 73. See also *Apoc.* 17:9 for a double signification of a symbol (*Coitfrat. Continent.* p. 67!).

<sup>28</sup> That the Son of man symbolizes Christ is evident from the world power that is fulfilled only in the Messiah (7:14; *Luke.* 1.33).

<sup>30</sup> The demands of the context corroborate this explanation of the symbol, for if the Dragon and the Male-child signify, first of all, individuals, so should the Woman.

<sup>31</sup> "In the same holy bosom of His most chaste Mother, Christ took to himself flesh, and united to himself the spiritual body formed by those who were to believe in him. Therefore, all we who are united to Christ . . . have issued from the womb of Mary like a body united to its head. Hence, though in a spiritual and mystical fashion, we are all children of Mary and she is mother of us all." Bl. Pius X. *Ad diem ilium* (ASS, 36 [1903-4]). 455. "Our Savior was constituted the Head of the whole human Family in the womb of the Blessed *Virgin*." Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis* ÇACWC ed., p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> The intimate relations of Mary and the Church is set forth by M. Scheeben. *Die Dogmatik*, 3, n. 1531; idem, *Martology* (Herder, 1947), 1, 211; 2, 66 f.; also by D. Unger, in *C.B.Q.*, 12 (1950), 407 ff.; G. Montagne, S.M.,

double signification of the symbol of the Woman was already considered common view in the fifth century in the West<sup>35</sup> and is represented by a steady line of interpreters down to our own day?<sup>4</sup>

Yet I think that the Woman (Mary) represents something more than precisely the Church in general here, and that is the Church in its final stage of perfection on earth, when the Ideal of the Perfect Woman which God always had in mind, has worked itself out perfectly in the Church, namely, when the Church of the Consummation has acquired the full likeness of the Ideal Virgin-Mother. I say the Church in its final stage on earth, for that is where chapter 12 fits into the Apocalypse, to wit: "when the mystery of God achieves its full perfection, in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound" (10:7; 11:15). That, however, is bound up with the return of Israel to Christ (ch. 11), at the time of the Antichrist (ch. 13).<sup>35</sup>

"The Concept of Mary and the Church of the Fathers" in *AER*, 123 (1950), 331-7. An excellent article dealing with the patristic treatment of this theme is that of H. Rahner, S.J., "Die Gottesgeburt" in *Z. f. K. Th.*, 59 (1935), 333-418.

<sup>33</sup> "There is no one of you who doesn't know that the Woman signifies the Virgin Mary who bore our inviolate Head, herself inviolate, who also showed forth in herself the ideal of Holy Church, so that as she remained a Virgin through giving birth to a son, so also the Church brings forth his members throughout all time, but does not lose her virginity." (*Brev. Rom.*, Vig. Pent. Lect. 5); words of St. Quodvultdeus c. 450, or a contemporary of his (*De symbolo* [MPL, 40, 661]). The wording of this testimony argues for a rather general acceptance of this view at that time. As to the Fathers in the East, Epiphanius (who spent 50 years in Palestine) comments already in the middle of the 4th century on *Apoc.* 12, and takes it for granted that the Woman signifies Mary (*Haeres.*, 78, 11 [MPG, 42, 716]). Andrew of Caesarea (between 500 and 600) also testifies that some before him interpreted the Woman to be Mary, but because of the "birth-pangs" he himself prefers to hold the view of St. Methodius (c. 312) that the Church is meant (MPG, 106, 320). These facts show that the patristic testimony of the Marian interpretation is not at all so late as some would have us think, but rather quite early.

<sup>34</sup> The history of this tradition is given by H. Rahner, *op. cit.*, pp. 397 ff.; far more comprehensively by A. Rivera in *Verb. Dem.*, 21 (1941); still more detailed by D. Unger in *C.B.Q.*, 1949-1950 (see note 1, *supra*). That the Woman refers to Mary and the Church is held by far more authors than is generally supposed.

<sup>35</sup> The most ancient patristic commentary on ch. 12 is that of St. Hippolytus (f 237), *loc. cit.*, who is very clear in stating that the Woman rep-

THE MEANING OF CHAPTER TWELVE

The salient features of chapter 12 can now be pointed out. But first of all let us recall that chapter 12 and 13 are intimately connected (cf. 12:6; 12:14; 13:5). If chapter 13 is the reign of the Beast, then chapter 12 is the setting of the stage for that event. And in that capacity, chapter 12 has a wide perspective. Prophecies, and eschatological prophecies in particular, often project the first and last phase of a given reality onto one and the same field of vision, the intervening interval being passed over. The prophet Joel gives us a good example of this when in one and the same vision he describes the first and the last phase of the Messianic era.<sup>88</sup> Our Lord does the same in the eschatological prophecy of the doom of Jerusalem and the doom of the world (*Matt.* 24) which has been characterized as the first and last phase of the

coming Judgment.

The Apocalypse, interpreted eschatologically, gives the same picture. It is the Grand Finale of the Kingdom of God on earth, the mosaic of all prophecies in a final synthesis.<sup>37</sup> Chapters 1-3 are the first phase of Christ's Kingdom on earth, the Son of man in the midst of the seven Churches, dictating the seven letters to the Oitirc contemporary with St. John.<sup>38</sup> Chapters 4-20 is the last

resents the Church at the time of the persecution of Antichrist. In a view, then, both lines of patristic interpretation of the "Woman" as namely, the one that (in both East and West) designates the at Mary, and the most ancient that designates the Woman as the Church

the time of Antichrist.

<sup>36</sup> Joel 2:28-32 (*Hebr.* 3:1-5) : "And it shall come to pass that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy . . . and I will show wonders in heaven, and in the earth, and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into blood, and the moon shall be turned into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken." (*Acts* 2:16-21) states that these words of Joel were fulfilled on the

the first phase of that prophecy was fulfilled. (1:8) <sup>37</sup> It is worthy of note that at the very opening of the book of Revelation, the Lord says: "I am the Alpha and Omega," (1:8) and the last, the beginning and the consummation. St. John to understand the visions granted to him according to the first and last phase, beginning and consummation of Christ's Kingdom on earth?

<sup>38</sup> That the seven Churches represent the universal Church is proved by the symbolism of the number seven, from the plural "Seven" of the Fathers of each promise (2:7, etc.) and from the conviction of the early Church

*phase* of Christ's Kingdom on earth, the Lamb executing the decrees of the sealed scroll, down to the last trumpet sound of the seventh angel, the third great woe, which is the reign of the personal Antichrist (the first Beast) in chapter 13.<sup>39</sup>

Yet just before that scene unfolds before the eyes of the Seer, another vision is introduced which gives the background and the deeper reason for chapter 13. It is that of the Woman and Dragon in their implacable enmity, seen in vision according to the *same prophetic pattern of the first and last phase*.

The very first phase when God unfolded His ineffable mystery of Mary, the perfect Woman, and her Divine Offspring before the gaze of the angels, and Satan refused to bow (vv. 1-4). The very last phase of that enmity when the mystery of God achieved its full perfection (10:7 and 11:15) in the Marian Church of the Consummation, which, as the perfect double of the Virgin-Mother, brings forth the man child in great sufferings, by begetting Israel in the latter days as members of Christ; and for these very reasons, the object of the full wrath and fury of Satan (vv. 5-6).

It shows us also the first and last phase of the defeat of Satan: the first phase when his pride was punished by his being thrown out of heaven (vv. 7-9); the last phase when he is defeated by the humility and faith of the martyrs under Antichrist, who lay down their lives with the Crucified Lamb, whose death spelled Satan's defeat on Calvary (vv. 10-12).<sup>40</sup> In both the first and the last phase St. Michael the Archangel plays an important role (see *Dan.* 12:1).

And finally it shows us the first and last phase of the Victory of the Woman and Child. The first phase is the prodigy of the Virgin-Mother and the Divine Child inviolable against all the cunning and attacks of Satan (v. 6). The last phase, the prodigy of the in-

<sup>39</sup> Today it is generally admitted that this Beast is not merely the pagan Roman Empire, but also the personal Antichrist and his empire of the latter days. Again we have the application of the principle of first and last phase: Antichrist in the first phase of Christ's Kingdom on earth (the pagan Roman Empire), and Antichrist in the last phase of that Kingdom (personal Antichrist and his empire).

<sup>40</sup> When prophecy focusses various events on a field of vision, chronological sequence is known to be neglected in many cases. The same can hold good here. If the woe in v. 12 is mentioned after the victory of the martyrs in v. 11, it does not follow that such is the order of things in time. Prophecy simply shows the connection between events.



violable Marian Church of the Consummation, after the return of Israel, miraculously protected by God from harm during the reign of Antichrist, as was Israel of old in Egypt (E.r. 9:16; 10:23; 12:13).<sup>41</sup> This is the flight of the Woman into the desert (vv. 6, 13-16). Once the Redemption has been accomplished, Christ is identified with His members and Mary with the Church. This view does seem to satisfy best the various details of chapter 12.

The glorious Woman of chapter 12 is the Blessed Mother of God and our Mother, clothed with Christ, the Light, Queen of the Universe, Conqueror over all her adversaries, God's chosen ideal for all the redeemed,<sup>42</sup> the sign of salvation for the sons of God. the sign of defeat to Satan and hell. The ever Blessed Mary symbolizes simultaneously (in this picture) God's prodigy of the latter times, the Church modelled on the Ideal Mother, giving birth to Israel as members of Christ, protected by God from the fury of Satan in the impending reign of Antichrist, when the mystery of God has achieved its full perfection.

Throughout the Scriptures, the Woman and her Child are the prodigy of God, the sign of man's supernatural salvation and divinization. That explains the fury of Lucifer in heaven (*Apw.* 12:3) in his refusal to agree to this plan of God. At the very moment that he had defeated our first parents, the prodigy of the Wonian and Child was proclaimed to Satan to be his eventual undoing and defeat (*Gen.* 3:14-15). Simultaneously the Woman and Child were the sign of salvation and victory given to mankind, the object of their faith and hope until the sign became a reality. Thousands of years later, when God's own people were on the brink of

‡ Worthy of note is Victorious of Pettau's interpretation, *loc. cit.* For him the 144,000 who were sealed from harm by God (7:4) are identical with the Woman protected from harm in ch. 12:14. It is remarkable that the 144,000 turn up again after ch. 13 as sharers of the Lamb's name and power in 14:1-5.

<sup>42</sup> As God's chosen ideal for His family on earth, Mary is also the Ideal Israel. She summed up in herself all the perfection of the Old Testament saints. Cf. J. Fenton, "Regina Patriarcharum" in *AER*, 122 (1950), 146-9; idem, "Our Lady Queen of Prophets" in *AER*, 124 (1951), 381-6; J.-M. Bover, S.J., "Marie, L'Eglise et le Nouvel Israel," *op. cit.* For another interesting angle of this ideal representation see L. Welsersheimb, S.J., "Das Kirchenbild der griechischen Vaterkommentare" in *Z. f. k. Th.*, 70 (1948), 448.

spiritual bankruptcy under King Achaz, the same prodigy of the Woman and Child was shown to Isaias as a guarantee of God's plans for His people (*Is.* 7:14). Micheas, too, saw the wonder. For him it was the Great Mother for whom all were waiting that she bring forth (*Mich.* 5:12). Nor were these the only prophets who were given to see the prodigy of God. But it was Elizabeth who, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, recognized the prodigy in reality, and proclaimed with a loud voice: Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb (*Luke* 1:42). And every child of God on earth repeats that phrase daily.

Isaias and Micheas saw the prodigy in vision before it became a reality. Both recognized a true Child and a true Mother (see *Matt.* 1:22). After the vision had been fulfilled, after the Redemption had been accomplished, after the Virgin-Birth of Christ and the divine Motherhood of Mary had been clearly set forth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the prodigy of the Woman and Child was seen again in vision, this for the last time, by the Beloved Disciple. Was it not a psychological necessity for him to recognize the Woman and the Child, the same prodigy of God, the same sign of supernatural salvation? But now from another angle. Now Calvary is past. Now the Woman can be seen in her great role of Mother of all the living, the role which wed her to suffering.<sup>43</sup> Does St. John need to tell us who she is, after he has brought out the similarity with Genesis 3:15 so strikingly?<sup>44</sup> And as if to

<sup>43</sup> Cf. A. Mullaney, O.P., "The Mariology of St. Thomas" in *AER*, 123 (1950), 197.

<sup>44</sup> The foundation for this assertion is v. 9, an undeniable reference to *Gen.* 3:15. Other points of identity are too evident to be overlooked. Nevertheless, L. Poirier, O.F.M., *op. cit.*, thinks that St. John is not referring to *Gen.* 3:15 but to *A.* 66:7 in this chapter: "Before she was in travail she brought forth, before pangs came upon her she gave birth to a man-child" (Kissane, *Isaias*). St. John is referring undoubtedly to *Is.* 66:7 also. But let us remember that *Is.* 66:7 depicts a virgin-birth for the man-child as Kissane notes very clearly: "Before she travailed. The subject is not Sion, but indefinite (a woman) and there is an implied comparison of Sion to a woman who gives birth to a son without having to endure the pains of child-birth" (*Isaias*, 2, 324). Irenaeus himself used this text of Isaias to prove the Virgin-birth of Christ: Quoting *Isaias* 66:7 Irenaeus continues: "Thus he showed His birth from the virgin was unforeseen and unexpected" (*The Demonstrations of Apostolic Preaching*, translated by J. A. Robinson [New York, 1920], p. 118). Thus both *Isaias* 66:7 and *Apoc.* 12:4 give us the same picture: God's prodigy, the wonderful rebirth of Israel from a Virgin-Mother.

foretell all doubt, he will tell us who she is, in the very last of his great writings, the Gospel (for the Gospel is written after the Apocalypse). There he will show us the Mother of all the living, the Mother of the sons of God. Christ Himself makes her known: Behold, this is thy Mother<sup>44</sup> (*John* 19:25 in the force of the Greek particle *ist*). That completes the Mosaic which the Beloved Disciple had been constructing all through his writings.<sup>40</sup>

But for John in the Apocalypse, the Woman and Child are not only a reality, they are also a symbol. Christ and Mary are seen in their all-embracing relation to redeemed mankind, the Church as the Body of Christ, the Church as the fruit of Mary's womb.

He to whom it was given to see at the very outset of the apocalyptic visions, the dazzling vision of Christ in the midst of the Church (the lamp stands, ch. 1), which is the vision of the first phase of Christ's kingdom on earth, was also given to see in chapter 12 the brilliant vision of Mary and the Church, the last phase of Christ's Kingdom on earth, the Church in which the Ideal has been realized, the Church in which the supernatural has blossomed to perfection. On that Church Satan vents his full fury for it is identified with the Woman whom he hates. But even the Beast, invested with all the power of hell, will never succeed in destroying the Woman, for she is God's prodigy also in the latter times, and the whole world will witness that her Bridegroom is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

With superb brevity, St. John has set forth in this chapter a grand prophecy. He describes what God wants His Church to be: a double of His Mother.<sup>47</sup> It is evident, then, why the Catholic Church has given such prominence to devotion to the Blessed

<sup>40</sup>Cf. T. Gallus, S.J., "Mulier, ecce filius tuus" in *Verb. Dom.*, 21 (1941), 289-97; J. Leal, S.J., "Beata Virgo Omnium Spiritualis Mater ex Jn. 19:26-27" in *Verb. Dom.*, 27 (1949), 65-73.

<sup>41</sup>It is characteristic of the Semitic mind to develop its theme gradually, by frequently coming back to it, and only in the end is the mosaic complete. See U. Holzmeister, S.J., "Steigernde Wiederholungen in den Schriften des N.T." in *Theol. Pr. Quartalschr.*, 90 (1937), 85-92.

<sup>42</sup>It is not without interest to note that wherever *Apoc.* 12 is used in the liturgy (in some 15 passages), the reference is to Mary and to no one else. Pius XII has made *Apoc.* 12:1 the introit for the new Mass formula of the Assumption. He does not take it precisely as a direct scriptural argument for the Assumption (as can be seen from the words of the encyclical given

Mother. There is more than an external motivation in it, there is an inner, vital and necessary relation.

For our times God has reserved the revelation made by the Blessed Mother, in which she requests the consecration of the whole world, the entire Church and every member in that Church, to her Immaculate Heart. Our gloriously reigning Pontiff has expressed his will that this consecration be carried out in every country, diocese, parish, and family. But a consecration is not merely the reciting of a formula; it implies a remodelling of heart and mind and ideals, an identifying of ourselves with the Mother who gave us Life. The Blessed Mother herself, then, has shown the way how the prophecy of Apocalypse 12 will be realized. She herself is gradually preparing the Church for the Age of Mary.<sup>46</sup>

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in note 2, *sufira*). Yet, the truth of our Lady's Assumption can well be contained in the picture of that perfect Woman, God's ideal for the redeemed (12:1), whose destinies are so intimately bound up with those of her divine Son. Cf. J. B. Carol, O.F.M. in his analysis of the encyclical in *AER*, 125 (1951), 264.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. R. Knopp, S.M., "Apostolic Consecration to Mary" in *AER*, 122 (1950), 350 f.; J. O'Maloney, O.F.M. Cap., "Sign in the Heavens" in *Orate Fratres*, 25 (1951), 532-41. \*

## EASTER EVE

### Part I

#### DECREE OF THE CONGREGATION OF SACRED RITES RESTORING THE SOLEMN EASTER VIGIL

From earliest times the Church was wont to celebrate in most solemn manner the vigil of our Lord's Resurrection, which St. Augustine calls "the mother of all holy vigils."<sup>1</sup> It used to be kept during the night hours preceding Easter Sunday. But as time went on the celebration, for various reasons, was anticipated—first in the early evening, then after midday, and finally in the morning of Holy Saturday. Along with this other changes were introduced, not without detriment to the original symbolism of the vigil service.

In our day, however, as we witness an ever-growing research in the ancient liturgy, there is born a lively desire to have the Paschal vigil restored to its earlier grandeur, especially by returning to the original time of its observance, namely during the night preceding the Sunday of Resurrection. There is a special pastoral reason in favor of such restoration—to encourage the attendance of the faithful. For Holy Saturday is no longer a holiday as formerly, and thus many of the faithful cannot be present at the sacred ceremonies when they take place in the morning.

Prompted by these reasons, many bishops, priests, and religious, as well as a large number of the laity have petitioned the Holy See to allow a return to the ancient practice of keeping the Easter vigil in the night hours between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. Pius XII, the Supreme Pontiff, has received this request in a gracious way, and owing to his interest and solicitude about a matter of such importance, has entrusted it to a special commission of experts in this field, who in turn have subjected the whole business to diligent consideration and study.

Finally, on the recommendation of the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of Sacred Rites, His Holiness has deigned to approve the directions which follow. The bishop of a diocese is granted the faculty for this year to restore the celebration of the Easter vigil to the night hours, as his prudent judgment will dictate, and the faculty is in the nature of an experiment. Therefore, the bishops who will avail themselves of this faculty are requested to make a report

<sup>1</sup> Sermo 219, *MPL.*, 38, 1088.