DECREE IN CAUSE OF SAVOY PRINCESS IS PUBLISHED

GENEVA (NCWC) The decree of Sacred Congregation of Rites, introducing the cause for beatification of Marie Clotilde of Savoy, daughter of Victor Emmanuel II, has been published at the Vatican. The decree recalls the many Christian virtues in the life of Marie Clotilde from the time of her childhood at the court of Napoleon III. After the fall of the Second Empire she lived in exile in Switzerland and, in 1871, became a Dominican Tertiary under the name of Maria Catherine of the Sacred Heart.

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Our Mother Mary, 'The Mother of Jesus'

In his "Reply to Dean Inge"—to which I have referred more than once in this column Belloc wrote "The Mother of God is ours also." Christmastide would seem to be an appropriate time to ask, in what sense is the Mother of God truly our Mother also? For in our daily thoughts, in the familiar representations of Catholic art and in the Christian literature of nineteen centuries—as we priests find it in our Breviary at this season the Virgin Mother and her Divine Son are more constantly inseparable than at any other season of the liturgical year.

It is worthy of note that in his Gospel, the Beloved Disciple in referring to the Blessed Virgin never calls her by the name of Mary. He refers to her always as "the Mother of Jesus."

Interesting also is the reason for this given by the commentators: "In his last hour Jesus established the relation of mother and son between Mary and John, and a child does not usually address his mother by her first name."

SPIRITUAL SENSE

When we speak of Mary as our Mother, we are of course speaking of a spiritual motherhood. Hence arises the question: In what way, in what sense is Mary our spiritual Mother? Or what comes to the same thing, What has made her our spiritual Mother. What is the cause of her spiritual motherhood? It may also be asked: When did she become our spiritual Mother? And again it may be asked, in fact it must be asked: Is she the spiritual Mother only of the Faithful? or only of the saintly among the Faithful? or is she the spiritual Mother of all men (women of course, included)? (Unfortunately we have in English no one word to express human beings of both sexes, as does the Latin word homines).

Origen, the most learned of all the early Christian writers, in his commentary on the words addressed from the Cross to the Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple "Woman behold thy Son . . . Son behold thy Mother" interprets these words as meaning that Mary becomes thereby the Mother of all the faithful. But (so far as I can understand him) he limits Mary's motherhood still further by his definition of "the faithful." Christ, he says, lives in his perfect followers, hence as Mary is the Mother of Christ she is the Mother of all in whom Christ lives; in other words, in all who live the life of grace, in all who are in the state of sanctifying grace.

This interpretation, it seems to me, borders on heresy; and if taken in an exclusive sense, would result in heresy. If taken in that sense, none of us could with certainty claim Mary as our Mother. For who knows that Christ lives in him? that he is in the state of grace? No one, according to Catholic doctrine. We hope, but we have no certainty.

BASIS FOR HOPE

"No man knoweth," says the inspired writer, "whether he be worthy of love or hatred, by all that is before him." We don't know with certainty, says St. Thomas Aquinas; but, he adds—and his words are significant and practical—this hope has its most solid foundation "when we can say that for our love of God we are entirely detached from the things of this world." Hence, except we fall into the heresy of some sects who believe in their "conversion," that they are "saved" as a result that they are of the "elect," we could not, according to Origen if I understand him, claim Mary as our Mother.

But the fact is Mary's motherhood does not depend on the declaration from the Cross. That declaration did not make her our Mother. She was already our Mother; and she was already mother of all men, not merely of the faithful or of the elect.

The plain literal meaning of the declaration from the Cross was that Christ in his last hour, looking with compassion on his desolate Mother, provided for her future by commending her to the care of the Beloved Disciple.

Henceforth, in this special way, John is to consider Mary as his Mother, and Mary is to consider John as her son. This special relationship, is confirmed by John's own words: "And from that hour the Disciple took her to his own."

I have said this is the plain literal meaning of Christ's words from the Cross. There is no objection to other and derived interpretations, provided they avoid the near heretical ones mentioned.

TWO FACTS CITED

The Catholic doctrine of Mary's spiritual and supernatural Motherhood of all men rests on two facts: (1) Mary is the Antitype of Eve. Eve is the natural mother of all men because she is the origin of our natural life. Mary is our spiritual Mother because she is the origin of our spiritual life. (2) Mary is the spiritual Mother of all men because she is the Mother of the Saviour of the Redeemer, of all men. He is the head of the new order. The Mother of the head is also Mother of all the members. He is the "first born" in that order. His Mother is Mother of all born to that order.

Mary, then, became our Mother, not on Calvary, but at the moment she became the Mother of Jesus, at the moment the Word the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God himself, co-equal to the Father, became Man in her womb. It was that fact that made her our Mother. All the other reasons derive from that fact.

This is theology, but just today it has a practical meaning. For that reason I have made it the subject, when I happened, accidentally, to read an essay of the late Canon Sheehan the author of "My New Curate." In this essay he quotes a passage from a history of the Crimean War by an English Protestant named Kinglake.

IN MARY'S NAME

Kinglake tells that the Russian soldiers struck down on the battlefields of Alma and Balaklava begged the British officers and men for quarter for the sake of Mary "Mother Mary" — "Virgin Mary," thinking, as Kingdale observed, "that however Christian sects may differ from one another the name of Mary at least would be dear to all," the symbol of gentleness, compassion mercy and loving motherhood.

There is now, after 90 years another war in the Crimea. The Holy Father and our Bishops have exhorted us to pray for peace and to pray for it to Mary during this month, when we commemorate her Immaculate Conception and the Nativity of her Divine Son.

There are Russian soldiers falling daily on battlefields or near the Crimean battlefield of 1854 and I have no doubt the name of Mother Mary is often on the lips of most of them, for in the little peasant homes from which they came they have still an icon of the Virgin Mary with a perpetual light burning before it.

The same may be said of many, very many, perhaps half, of the German soldiers on the many battle fields. Anyway, Mary is the Mother of all.

In our prayers—and out of them—let us remember that fact and not give way to feelings of hysteria and revenge and hatred.

So Mary "the Mother of Jesus" is our Mother also. She is the Mother of all men. Let us thank God for our Catholic faith. Its principles are the only ones that can ensure permanent peace on this sorrowful star that is called the earth.

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