

The Incarnation in Contemporary Prayer

by

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Bonum est celebrare Dominum, et psallere nomini tuo, Altissime—Psalm 91

The following essay was written in response to a request from a friend in religion. In all that is said, the author intends to be in complete submission to the teaching authority of Holy Mother Church.

Pray, gentle reader, that what I have presumed to write may not turn to my judgment and condemnation, but rather be a safeguard and a healing remedy to my soul.

1) The question as posed, “The Incarnation in contemporary prayer”, presents two separate concepts. The first, the Incarnation, is indeed so great a mystery that one can only turn to the writers of the Church and pray for the graces necessary to understand them. The second, the matter of contemporary prayer, will be discussed first.

2) While it is true that prayer can be contemporary in the sense that it is said at a given time, it would seem that the idea of contemporary prayer as such is a contradiction in terms—rather like “atheistic Christianity”. The essence of prayer is to “elevate the soul to God” (St. John Damascene and Tanquerey among others). Now prayer is directed towards God, who while present in the “everlasting now” (Eckhart’s phrase) is neither ancient nor modern, but essentially eternal. Thus it is that St. Hilary of Poitiers says “it is a pious saying that the Father is not limited by time” and the Council at Anerya states “if anyone says that the father is older in time than His Only-Begotten Son, and that the Son is younger than the Father, let him be anathema”. To place the “heart” in a given time or place, a specific historical situation, is to imprison it in flux and to make it mutable, while it is its very nature (we used to say thanks to habitual grace) to seek what is immutable, to escape “these mortal coils” of which time with its successive stimuli is a characteristic feature. Since prayer is communicating (com-union) with the Father, it is communicating with what is (*ens*), with the uncreated, and when effective, “lifts one out of

time”. Thus Eckhart says that the “intellect’s object and sustenance is essence, not accidental”, and again, “the life that is, wherein a man is born God’s son, born into the eternal life...is a-temporal, un-extended, without *here* and *now*”. Thus it was that the Blessed Suso said of a saint, “I knew a man—whether he was in time or not, I do not know”.

3) It would seem self-evident that God is in Himself, eternal, and that, as St. Augustine says, “in eternity there is no change...time does not exist without some movement and transition” (*City of God*). Now prayer that does not partake of love and knowledge, the former being of the will and the later of the intellect, is hardly prayer. St. Thomas Aquinas says that “knowledge takes place in the degree in which the thing known is in the knower...knowledge is perfected by the thing known becoming one with the knower in its image”. But spiritual knowledge can only pertain to the truth and the truth is by its nature eternal. To deny this is to deny Christ who said “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”. Love, says St. Thomas, “takes place inasmuch as the lover is united with the real object of his love...love causes the very thing itself which is loved to become one with the lover”. Thus every “lover” trows his lover to be eternal, be he an ancient Roman or a modern Lothario. Every *act* of loving and knowing is timeless, though its object may vary and even be temporal. To amplify this further, let us remember that “love resides in the will” and that “the movements of the free-will are not successive but instantaneous” (St. Thomas Summa I–II, 113, 7). The same points can be made for knowing when it pertains to the divine, for the very concept of enlightenment implies instantaneity. Thus it is as Rumi says in the Mathnawi, “the journey of the spirit is unconditioned with respect to time and space”.

4) The reality of the eternal present is bound up also with the action of the Holy Ghost, whose operation is immediate: “and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind”. Moreover, God has loved us since eternity, and if we say that he loves us “now” we must again turn to St. Thomas (*de Trin.* 1.4) where he cites Boethius as saying that “God is ‘ever’ (*semper*) because ‘ever’ is with Him a term of present time, and there is great difference between the ‘now’ which is our present, and (the ‘now’ which is) the divine present; that *our* connotes changing time and sempiternity, while God’s ‘now’ abiding, unmoving, and self-subsistent makes eternity.” Furthermore, St. Gregory the Great instructs us that “our Redeemer offers a holocaust for us without ceasing, Who without intermission exhibits to the Father His Incarnation in our behalf... He offers a perpetual sacrifice...for His very Incarnation is itself the offering for our purification” (*Commentary on Job*).

5) Now individual prayer (as opposed to canonical prayer) has as its aim, not only to obtain particular favors, but also the purification of the soul: it loosens psychological knots or, in other words, dissolves subconscious coagulations and drains away many secret poisons; it externalizes before God the difficulties, failures and distortions of the soul, always supposing the prayer to be humble and genuine, and this externalization—carried out in relation to the Absolute (another timeless word)—has the virtue (strength) of re-establishing equilibrium and restoring peace; in a word, of opening us to grace.

6) The only contemporary problem in prayer is the inability of contemporary man to pray. A

normal man prays, for if the man is not a metaphysical animal, he is only an animal. The mediaeval description of Antichrist is one of a man whose knee joints are formed “backwards”, thus one who cannot kneel. If Christ’s words have no meaning for modern man, this is because modern man is sick (an illness one might add primarily of the visual and auditory organs). It is not prayer, tradition and the Gospels that have lost the “relevance”, but modern man who has become irrelevant in his way of life. Surely the cure of the disease is never to be achieved by the patient giving his physician the virus!

7) If one considers the nature of prayer, be it individual or canonical, it must contain the following elements. It is not enough for a man to formulate his petition, he must also express his gratitude, resignation, regret, resolution and praise. In his petition, man is concerned to look for some favor, provided it is of a nature agreeable to God, and so to the Universal Norm; thankfulness is the consciousness that every favor of destiny is a grace which might not have been given; and if it be true that man has always something to ask, it is just as true, to say the least, that he has always grounds for gratitude; without this, no prayer is possible. Resignation is the acceptance in advance of the non-fulfillment of some request; regret or contrition—the asking of pardon—implies consciousness of what puts us in opposition to the divine will; resolution is the desire to remedy transgression, for our weakness must not make us forget that we are free; finally, praise signifies not only that we relate every value to its ultimate source, but also that we see every trial in terms of its usefulness.

8) Now none of the concepts in the preceding paragraph can be expressed in a completely contemporaneous manner. One may ask for a Cadillac instead of a chariot, but one still must ask with resignation, gratitude, regret, resolution and praise. Moreover, the very words that one is forced to use in all these categories are not new, but have existed from all time, for they are innate (*in-natus*) in the soul that raises its heart and mind to God. Sadly, much of the current liturgical prayer is just noise precisely because it fails to incorporate in its expression these very attitudes that have been with man since his creation. To void prayer of its volitive and intellectual components is to reduce it to “feeling”; (don’t go to Church unless you feel like it, as some priests now openly say), and to make it subject to the sins of pride, ignorance and intellectual sloth which as Hillaire Belloc clearly shows are the characteristics of the “modern mind”.

9) Let us pray to God that we be lifted out of time and that our minds and hearts be raised to what is eternal and timeless. “*Munda quoque cor nostrum ab omnibus vanis, perversis et alienis cogitationibus; intellectum illumina, affectum inflama...in secula seculorum, Amen*”¹ (from the traditional prayer said before reciting the office’). In our life of prayer says St. John Climacus, “we should constantly be examining and comparing ourselves with the holy fathers and the lights who lived before us” (*Ladder of Divine Ascent*). Let us not invent new ways to pray lest “we

¹ “also cleanse our hearts from all vanity, from all perverse and strange thoughts. Illuminate our intellect, inflame our will...forever and ever, Amen”

bubble out folly” (Proverbs). Let us not, as Eusaebius says (*Preparation for the Gospels*) seek to “cut for ourselves a new kind of tract in a pathless desert”.

10) If we are not bound by time and contemporaneity (as the “modernist” is by definition), in understanding the Incarnation, we are free to examine the writers throughout time who have spoken on the issue. For while doctrine may be made more explicit, (as for example the Immaculate Conception,) it cannot evolve. What is doctrine is true, and Truth cannot change. To believe that we can be better theologians than Saint Paul, or know more than the Church Fathers is one of the great falsities of our age. One of two things must be accepted. Either there is theological progress, and then theology is not important, or theology is important and then there is no theological progress (F. Schuon). Let us have the humility to say with Origen who, writing in the second century, stated “Paul understood what Moses wrote much better than we do...” (Prologue to his commentary on the Song of Songs).

11) Now the word Incarnation is derived, according to the Catholic Dictionary, from the Gospel of John, “and the Word was made flesh”, and as the same source says, “In the language of Holy Writ, flesh means synecdoche, human nature of man (cf. Luke 3:6; Rom 3:20)”. St Athanasius’ phrase, “the Word was made manifest” in creation is even more clarifying, and he goes on to say that “the renewal of creation has been wrought by the self-same Word who made it in the beginning” (*De Incarnationis Verbi Dei*). Now “in the beginning” does not imply an origin in time, but an origin in the First Principle, and from this the logical deduction follows that God (the Eternal) is creating the world *now*, as much as he ever was. Thus Eckhart says “God’s beginning is primary, not proceeding” and again, “the eternal Word is being born within the soul, its very self, no less, unceasingly”. Having established the simultaneity of the creative act, let us turn to Saint Bernard’s fifth sermon for Advent:

In the first coming, He comes in the flesh and in weakness; in the second, He comes in spirit and in power; in the third He comes in glory and in majesty; and the second coming is the means whereby we pass from the first to the third.

12) Eckhart says “It is more worth to God his being brought forth ghostly in the individual virgin or good soul than that He was born of Mary bodily.” He says further that “God created the soul according to His own most perfect nature that she might be the bride of his only-begotten Son...so lifting up the tent of His eternal glory, the Son proceeded out of the Most High to go and fetch his lady whom His Father had eternally given to him to wife and restore her to her former high estate”. Thus it is that our Co-redemptrix is at one and the same time, His mother, His daughter, and His bride, crowned in heaven as His queen. That is why Our Lady embodies in her those virtues in their plenitude that we must make our own, if like her we are also to bear Christ. “Be it done unto me according to Thy Word”. In this one respect we can make God our prisoner, for God is bound to act, as Eckhart says, “to pour Himself out (into us) as soon as ever He shall find us ready”, and this pouring forth of Himself can only occur in the timeless and ever-present “*now*”. Again as Eckhart says, “the Father speaks the Word into the soul and when

the “Son” is born the soul becomes Mary”. May we be *virginized* (as St. Theresa of Liseaux says) so that we might become pregnant. “I am not chaste unless Thou ravish me”.

13) There is not much trouble in believing that a man called Jesus was born 2000 years ago. We can assume that anyone who is Catholic will accept this as God Incarnate. There is much greater difficulty in believing in the transubstantiation (the word is not even used by current theologians), but this also is an In-carnation. I suspect the current disbelief in the transubstantiation is no different than the disbelief of Christ’s contemporaries in His Messiahship. The perfidy of the Jews did not lie in their racial origins (for were not almost all of the early Christians of the “chosen race”?), but in their disbelief. Almost no one believes in the final coming (except perhaps as some sort of vague “Omega” tied to the concept of the evolutionary perfecting of man), for to do so is to fear, and the “fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”. Those who think fear is out of style would do well to know that St. Francis prayed in his dying blessing for this gift to be given to his brothers.

14) The Mass recapitulates all this for it is the ever-recurring eternal sacrifice in which He is made flesh repeatedly and in every moment of the day somewhere in the world. When Saint Hugh of Lincoln used to raise the Eucharist, he was seen to hold the baby Jesus in his hands, an experience repeated by many saints including Père Lamy in France in the present century. This is why the current and post-mediaeval emphasis on the historicity of Jesus is so inappropriate, for even if the whole thing were a myth, occurring “once upon a time”, it is still true, as many myths are. (This is not to imply a denial of the historical fact, for what is true in principle is also true in time, but to point out that the historical proofs of Christ’s birth are to an intelligent person the poorest arguments for the validity of the Faith).

15) But for us here and now, for contemporary man, it is the “second coming” that we must consider. To quote Peter of Blois:

We are now in the second coming, provided only we are such as that He may thus come to us; for He has said that if we love Him, He will come into us and take up His abode with us. So that this second coming is full of uncertainty to us.

Guaranger (whom Saint Theresa of Lisieux recommends to us as a great spiritual writer) says:

We must remember that, since we can be pleasing to our Heavenly Father only inasmuch as He sees within us His Son Jesus Christ, this amiable Savior designs to come into each one of us, and transform us, if we will but consent unto Himself, so that henceforth we may live, not we, but He in us. This, in reality is the one grand aim of the Christian religion, to make men divine through Jesus Christ: It is the task which God has given to His Church to do, and why she says to the faithful what St. Paul said to his Galatians: “My little children, of whom I am in labor again, until Christ be born within you” (*On Advent*).

16) Finally, one must consider the “prayer of the Incarnation” for surely the “Word made flesh” is in a most singular manner manifest in His Name. *In Nomine Jesu omne genu flectatur, coelestium, terrestrium, et infernorum.*² “Let us offer the sacrifices of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name” (Heb. 13:15). “Let the desire of our soul be Thy Name, and the remembrance of Thee” (Isaiah 26:8), and so “let us rise up and walk in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (Acts 3:6), that “believing, we might have life through His Name” (John 20:31). Are we not told that “if we ask the Father anything in His Name, He will give it to us” (John 14:14). “Let us praise His great and terrible Name, and give glory to Him with the voice of our lips, and with canticles in our mouths and with harps” (Eccles. 29:20). For His Name is “as oil poured forth” (Canticle of Canticles 1:3), and “where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them” (Math. 18:20). And who are the “two or three”? According to St. Catherine of Siena (*Dialogues*) and St. John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*), they are “the memory, the intelligence and the will”.

17) In the Old Testament we are told that if the Divine Name is invoked upon a country or person, it belongs henceforth to God; it becomes strictly His and enters into intimate relations with Him (Gen. 48, 16; Deut. 28:10; Amos 9:12). Thus it is that in the office of Compline we say every night “*Tu autem in nobis es, Domine, et nomen sanctum tuum invocatum est super nos...*”³ In Genesis (4:26) we read “and to Seth, in turn, a son was born and he named him Enoch. It was then that men began to invoke the Lord by Name” (Jew. Publ. Soc. trans.), and Eusebius in a gloss on this passage says:

Enos, which is “true man” by a well-applied appellation, for it is said that we ought to consider and to call no other a “true man” than him who attains to the knowledge of God and to piety, who is at the same time full of knowledge and reverence. (*Prep. for the Gospel*).

And Enoch walked with God! Moses and Aaron invoked the Name of the Lord (Psalms), for “*Bonum est celebrare Dominum, et psallere nomini tuo, Altissime*” (Psalms).⁴

18) “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was made flesh”. St. Bernadine of Siena says “everything that God has created for the salvation of the world is hidden in this Name of Jesus”, for “the Name is origin without origin”, and “is as worthy of praise as God Himself” for the “Name is like unto that which it represents” (*Sermon on the Name of Jesus*). Lactantius says that Christ Jesus “was the Son of God from the beginning” and Jesus Himself said “before Abraham was, I AM”. Saint Bernadine of Siena says again, “Christ was given His Name at the beginning of time” quoting Isaiah “I the Lord called forth the Name”. St. Bernard says that “the

² “In the Name of Jesus all (creation) bows down, in heaven, on earth, and in hell”.

³ “For You are in us O Lord, and Your holy Name is invoked over us”.

⁴ “For it is good to celebrate, O Lord, and to sing Your Name, O most high”.

Name of Jesus was known to the angels from all eternity and was revealed to us ‘in the fullness of time’” (*On the Song of Songs*).

What is the “fullness of time”? Eckhart informs us:

The fullness of time is of two kinds. In the first place a thing is fulfilled when it is done, as day is done at eventide. So when time drops from thee, thy time is fulfilled. Again time is fulfilled when it is finished, that is in eternity... Here there is no before nor after: everything is present, and in the perfection of time, and I am perfect and am truly the Only Son and Christ. May we attain to this fullness of time. So help us God, Amen.

19) Hermes the Shepherd says that for a man “to receive the Name of the Son of God is to escape death and give way to life” (*Pasteur*, Book III). He says further that “the Name of the Son of God is great and immense, and this is what supports the entire world” (*ibid*). St. John Chrysostom instructs us to “thus abide constantly with the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that the heart swallows the Lord and the Lord the heart, and the two become one”. Saint Ignatius of Antioch went to his martyrdom invoking the Divine Name and the letters JESUS were found inscribed upon his heart in Gold after he died.⁵ This so impressed St. Ignatius of Loyola that he changed his name from Inigo to Ignatius (Father Laturia’s biography). St. Ambrose greatly loved the Name and felt that while it was contained in Israel like a perfume in a closed vessel, the New Covenant was a vessel opened from which it poured forth *ex abundantia superfluit quidquid effunditur (de Spiritu Sancto)*.⁶ St. Paulinus of Nola referred to it as “a living ambrosia...if one tasted it just once, one would not be able to be separated from it” (letters). St. Augustine says of it “*quod est nobis amicus et dulcius nominare*” (*City of God*) St. Bernard says “Jesus is honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, a song of delight in the heart” (*Song of Songs*). Saint Patrick advocated the use of the “Prayer of Jesus” in Ireland (*The Golden Legend*). Saint John of the Ladder tells us to “strike our adversaries with the Name of Jesus, there being no weapon more powerful on earth or in heaven”. St. Thomas Aquinas informs us that “St. Paul bore the Name of Jesus on his forehead because he glorified in proclaiming it to all men, he bore it on his lips because he loved to invoke it, on his hands for he loved to write it in his epistles, in his heart for his heart burned with love of it. (Cited in *Wonders of the Holy Name*). Richard Rolle says, “O good Jesu, Thou hast bound my heart in the thought of Thy Name, and now I can not but sing it: therefore have mercy upon it, making perfect that Thou hast ordained” (*Fire of Love*). Angelus Silesius says “The sweet Name of Jesus is honey on the tongue: to the ear a nuptial chant, in the heart a leap of joy” (*The Wandering Pilgrim*). Eckhart that “believing in the Name of God we are God’s sons.” Richard of Saint Victor says that “the invocation of the Name is the possession of salvation, the receiving of kisses, the communion of

⁵ Similar statements are made about St. Camillus de Lellis and the Blessed Suso.

⁶ Poured forth from its abundance, almost as if a flood.

the bed, the union of the Word with the soul in which every man is saved. For with such light no one can be blind, with such power no one can be weak, with such salvation none can perish.” Thus it was that the Name of Jesus was in the mouth of Saint Francis “like honey and the honeycomb” (Thomas of Celano); thus it was that St. Francis de Sales died with the Name of Jesus on his lips (Lehodey, *Holy Abandonment*); and thus it was that Dante said in the *Paradiso*:

There is the Rose wherein the Word Divine
made itself flesh...

The Name of the beautiful flower which I ever invoke, morning and evening...

20) The Angelic greeting embodies in it the Name of Jesus, which as St. Catherine of Genoa states, is its essential core and essence (*Dialogue*). It is of interest that the rosary only came into common use in the Church in its present form after Pope Urban ordered that “the adorable Name of Jesus” be added to the salutation in the year 1262. Both Saint Gertrude and the Blessed Jane of France were assured by Our Lady that this was her favorite prayer. Thomas à Kempis states that whenever he said the Hail Mary, “heaven rejoices, the earth wonders, the devil shudders, hell trembles, sadness disappears, joy returns, the heart smiles in charity and is penetrated with a holy fervor, compunction is awakened, hope is revived.” Truly, the Name of Jesus is “the jewel in the lotus”.

21) One must ask why saints like the Blessed Suso, Saint Camillus de Lellis, Saint Jogues, the martyr of the Hurons, Saint Joan of Arc, Saint Louis de Montfort, and in our own times, Sister Consolata Betrone,⁷ to say nothing of the entire Hesychast tradition of Mount Athos down to the present day, are so devoted to the Invocation of the Name of Jesus. Part of the answer lies in the fact that only man, being made in the “image of God” in a direct and integral manner, has the gift of speech. This being so, speech as well as intelligence and will must play a part in salvation and deliverance.

Indeed, both intelligence and the will are actualized by prayer which is speech, both divine and human, the act relating to the will and its content to intelligence. Speech is as it were the immaterial though sensory body of our will and of our understanding. (But speech is not necessarily exteriorized, for articulate thought also involves language). If this is so, apart from the canonical prayers imposed on the Universal Church, nothing can be more important than the repetition of the Name of God. Thus Origen says, the Name of Jesus “calms troubled souls, puts devils to flight, cures the sick, infuses a kind of wonderful sweetness, assures purity or morals, inspires kindness, generosity and mildness...” (*Contra Celsum*). Eckhart says, “God is the Word which pronounces itself. Where God exists he is saying this Word: where he does not exist he

⁷ No attempt is made in this text to cover the tradition of the Prayer of Jesus in the Orthodox Church. We are trying to illustrate its use in the Roman Church. The reader is referred to *The Way of the Pilgrim* (Seabury Press, New York), and *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart* (Faber, London), and *On the Prayer of Jesus* by Bishop I. Brianchaninov (Watkins, London).

says nothing. God is spoken and unspoken... Father and Son expire their holy breath, and once this sacred breath inspires a man, it remains in him, for he is essential and pneumatic.” For “the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). Does not Joel in the Old Testament assure us that “whosoever shall call on the Name of the Lord shall be delivered.” Saint Bernadine of Siena says that “the Name is like unto what it represents” and Eckhart says that “the eternal Word is spoken in the virgin soul by God Himself”. Thus the invocation of the Name in the heart incarnates into us the fullness of the Trinity in so far as we can bear it. It slowly transforms us till at last, through the Grace of God, we and the Name become one. If part of the mystery of the Incarnation resides in the statement of Saint Iraneus (and many others) that “God became man that man might become God” surely we can say that God gave us His Name that we might incorporate it into our hearts and with our memory, intelligence and will absorbed in the Name, be able to say with the Blessed Angela of Foligno “Thou art I and I am Thou”, and to say with Saint Paul, “I live, not I, but Christ in me”.

22) The invoking of the Name is not *per se* a mechanical guarantee of salvation, for not everyone “who cries Lord, Lord, will be saved”. A donkey carrying perfume on his back still remains a donkey, though he runs the risk that some of the scent may rub off on him. Every time we invoke the Name of Jesus, we make an act of love, of faith, and of hope. Whether we invoke the Name alone, or include it in some formula such as “Sacred Heart of Jesus”, or as Sister Consolata did,⁸ “Jesus-Mary, I love you, save souls”, we assume an attitude that is at one and the same time resigned, regretful, resolved, and full of praise. The sweetness of this primordial sound overwhelms the soul and all its faculties, causing them to harmonize with—to sing and dance in accord with, the beats of his most sacred Heart. “Blessed is he who dances the dance of joy” (Henry Suso). This is why it is also possible for us to invoke the Name of Mary, for her Name reverberates with the same power and beauty as that of her Son’s, the Son to whom she is simultaneously mother, bride and daughter. Thus the saints have invoked her name and said of it all that they have said of Jesus. St. Anthony of Padua invoked her name constantly. Henry Suso said of her name “O sweet Name! what must Thou be in heaven, when Thy Name is love-inspiring on earth!” The Abbot Franconus said that next to the holy Name of Jesus, the Name of Mary is so rich in grace and sweetness that neither in heaven nor on earth is there any other name that so fills the soul of man with grace, hope and sweetness. Saint Alphonsus Liguori sang forth:

Gladly shall my lips repeat
Every moment Thy dear Name.

⁸ *Jesus appeals to The World - from The Writings of Sister Consolata Betrone*, by Father Lorenzo Sales, Soc. of St Paul. NYC, NY. 1971.

To invoke the Name of Mary is to invoke the Marian virtues so well summarized in the Magnificat that make the soul receptive to the Christic virtues. He who says Jesus says God, and equally, he who says Mary says Jesus, so that the Ave Maria—or the Name of Mary—is, of the divine Names, the one which is closest to man.

23) Now God in naming Himself, firstly determined Himself as Being and secondly, starting from Being, manifests Himself as Creation—that is to say that He manifests Himself “within the framework of nothingness” or “outside Himself”, and so “in illusory mode”. Man for his part, describes the inverse movement when he pronounces the same Name, for this Name is not only Being and Creation, but also Mercy and Redemption. In man, it does not create, but on the contrary “undoes”, and that in a Divine manner since it brings man back to the Principle. As seen by God, the Divine Name is a determination, a limitation and a “sacrifice”. As seen by man it is liberation, limitlessness and plenitude. The Name when invoked by man is nonetheless always pronounced by God, for human invocation is only the “external” effect of eternal and “internal” invocation by the Divinity. What is sacrificial for the divine is liberating for man. All Revelation, whatever may be its form or mode, is a “descent” or “incarnation” for the Creator, and an “ascent” or “ex-carnation” for the creature.

24) The relationship between the Eucharist and the Name is indeed close. Thus in the old liturgy we used to say “*Panem celestam accipiam et nomen domini invocabo*, and *Calicem salutaris accipiam et nomen domini invocabo*”.⁹ Indeed, one can say that the invocation of the Name has the same relationship to other forms of prayer as the Eucharist has to other sacraments. Thus it was that Saint Bernadine of Siena gave to his cypher of the Name of Jesus the appearance of a monstrance; the Divine Name carried in thought and in the heart through the world and through life, is like the Holy Eucharist carried in procession. Thus Meister Eckhart says the following of the Name and could have said the same of the blessed sacrament: “The Father neither sees, nor hears, nor speaks, nor wishes anything but His own Name. It is by means of His Name that the Father sees, hears and manifests Himself. The Father gives thee His eternal Name, and it is His own life, His being and His divinity that He gives thee in one single instant by His Name.” (*Commentary on the Gospel of St. John*). Similarly, what Saint Eumard says of the Holy Sacrament could be well said of the Name, “The Eucharist is the Kingdom of God on earth. My body becomes Its temple, my heart Its throne, my will Its happy and humble servant, my love Its victory” (*Eucharistic retreats*).

25) In the Old Testament we are instructed “Let nothing hinder you from praying always” (Sirach 18:22), and in the New Testament Saint Luke tells us to “keep watch, praying at all times” (21:36). Now this evangelical council can be fulfilled in many ways according to the manner in which the soul is called by God, for as Christ says “I have chosen you”—it is always God who calls us, and not we who call Him. For those who are called to invoke the Name, no

⁹ “I shall take the bread of heaven and call upon the Name of the Lord” and “I shall take the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the Lord”, words said by the priest as he communicates.

form of prayer is more simple, more direct and more suitable to the present times than this. We read in Zacharias (13:8, 9):

Two parts in all the earth shall be scattered. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined: and I will try them as gold is tried. They shall call on my Name and I will hear them. I will say “thou art my people”: and they shall say “the Lord is my God”.

This passage is part of the prophecy pertaining to the “last times”. And who are the third part that are brought through fire? Cornelius Lapidé in his commentary says they are that portion of mankind that remains faithful to God. Thus it is that an eastern saint said: “The lights of some people precede their invocations, while the invocations of some people precede their lights. There is the invoker who invokes so that his heart may be illuminated, and there is the invoker whose heart has been illuminated and (therefore) he invokes.”

26) A word of warning! The use of a method of prayer offends the “modern mind” which is in its essence in revolt against authority, against reason and against discipline. The modern mind wants above all to “feel”, for in feeling he makes himself the criteria of his own state of soul, and feeling requires neither thinking nor discipline. *De gustibus non est disputandum*.¹⁰ The modernist who argues that “the Holy Spirit bloweth where it will” is essentially Calvinist and argues against the freedom of the will. He denies that it is within our power to turn away from the light and to reject grace. The modern mind forgets that John the Baptist cried (as in the wilderness of the modern world) “Prepare ye the way of the Lord”. He forgets that Advent must precede Christmas and that Advent is a penitential season. He may admit to the need for methodology in science, in business, or even in madness, but denies its role in religion. Love and Faith are reduced to “feeling” and feeling can never be methodical. Now what is this preparation that must precede the coming of Christ? It is the training of the will which requires Obedience, Discipline and Virtue. It is also the training of the intellect which requires the abandoning of Pride, Ignorance and Intellectual sloth, the three characteristics, as Belloc says, of the “modern mind” (*Survivals and New Arrivals*).

And if there is to be no method, there is to be no direction. Everyone is to be his own spiritual director, and the fact that a person who is his own lawyer “has a fool for his advocate” is entirely forgotten. (An Eastern sage has said “a man who is his own spiritual director has the Devil for his guide”.) Gold to be purified must go through the fire, and the smith is our director. To enter the spiritual life without a guide is to ignore the words of Christ—“the blind cannot lead the blind”, it is to ignore the repeated warnings of almost all the saints including John of the Cross and Theresa of Avilla. It is to ignore the evangelical councils embodied in all the traditional catechisms. It results as Philo says, in a person “wandering around in the maze of his own personal opinions”. Indeed, it is to play the role of Eve in the Garden of Eden! It is in every sense

¹⁰ “There is no disputing about matters of personal taste.”

of the word, to “play with fire”.

27) Thus we are led to pray that whatever form of the Incarnation of the Word may be for us revealing (i.e. that form in which we can realize—make real—His essential Unity), we will at last arrive at that state so well described by Ruysbroeck when he says:

When the inward and God-seeing man has thus attained to His Eternal Image, and in this clearness, through the Son, has entered into the bosom of the Father: then he is enlightened by Divine Truth, and he receives anew, every moment, the Eternal Birth. (*Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*).

JESUS-MARIA

The season of Advent, 1974