

divine Word which is of itself the Word raised above all words. In order to convey this divine transcendence of the Word, the Evangelist has placed before us simply 'Word' without any addition. And because the Greeks when they wished to signify something which in its being was apart from and elevated above all other things, were accustomed to add the article to the name which signified that thing, the Evangelist also, wishing to signify the separateness and loftiness of this Word above all things, added the article to the word *logos*; just as the Platonists wishing to signify separated substances, for instance separated good or man, spoke of 'the good in itself' or 'the man in himself'. Thus in Latin we might say 'In Verbum'—the Word.

THE MARIOLOGY OF
POLISH CHRISTMAS CAROLS

BY JULIEN WISNIEWSKY

OUR LADY has a prominent place in the mystery of the Incarnation. The time when the Church celebrates this mystery, that is, Christmastide—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany—is a sort of prolonged feast of Mary. No wonder that her place in Christmas carols and especially in Polish ones is outstanding.

The Blessed Trinity: The significance of our Lady can only be fully understood if it is viewed from the most fundamental truth, namely, the Blessed Trinity 'from whom all things proceed'.

In the Polish carols there is full awareness of this fact:

I believe in one God in heaven
The Father who created this world for himself
And in Jesus his Son,
In all things equal to the Father
Our Lord.
He desiring to save our human race
From the high heaven descended on earth
And was conceived of the Holy Ghost
Is born among beasts
From the maiden Mary . . .

This carol, which seems to be the Creed specially arranged for Christmastide, gives the proper setting for the whole problem. It introduces the right order. But it does not exhaust all the ways in which this truth is presented. There are other carols of rather more descriptive character:

God's Archangel Gabriel
Is sent to maiden Mary
From the Trinity's most blessed Majesty.

Sometimes carols follow very closely the traditional teaching that Mary is the Mother of the Divine Logos, the daughter of God the Father and the Spouse of the Holy Ghost:¹

¹ Pohle-Preuss: *Mariology* p. 19.

O daughter of the Eternal Father,
 Mother of God's only Son,
 Bride of God's Holy Spirit,

You are the Temple of God, Three in One.

There are also references to our Lady in carols which are composed in a form resembling doxologies. To take an example:

Glory be to God—one in the Trinity,
 To the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
 To him, who is in three persons
 But one in Divinity.

And glory be to the Mother of the Son,
 To the Maiden unspotted and holy . . .

Mother of God: The greatest title of Mary is 'God bearer'—'Theotokos' as the Greek Fathers said, 'Deipara' as say the Latins. The significance and consequences of this title must be realised in any true devotion to our Lady.

'We confess', says St Athanasius, 'that the Son of God became man by the assumption of flesh from the Virgin Mother of God',² and St Gregory Nazianzen declares: 'Let him who will not accept Mary as the Mother of God be excluded from God'.³

The carols dwell very often on the divine Maternity. Sometimes they sing simply that she is the Mother of God:

Oh joyful news, she brought forth a son,
 Mother Divine, the most pure . . .
 And after to Mary honour is given
 As Mother of God she is confessed . . .

Tidings have come unto us
 A Virgin brings forth a Son
 True God, infinite,
 By the sentence Divine
 In Bethlehem of Judea . . .

We can also find in these carols the comparison of the nativity of our Lord from Mary, with 'the eternal nativity'—the eternal generation of the Logos from the Father, before time in the mystery of the blessed Trinity:

From heaven and bosom of the Father, the Lord proceeds,
 Behold—this day of Mary, Jesus born . . .
 Before all ages begotten of the Father, in time of a Mother
 born . . .

Who in eternity is of the family of the Father
 Without a mother, from a mother this day for man's offence
 In a manger among the beasts, bound in swaddling clothes
 Has his birth, has his birth indeed . . .

The greatness of the Nativity is underlined sometimes in another way, as when a carol says that:

² *Orat. contra Arianos* IV, n.32, quoted by Pohle-Preuss *loc cit.*

³ *Epist.* 101 *ad Cledon*, c. 1, quoted by Pohle-Preuss *id.*

A Virgin . . . brought forth the Redeemer
Her Creator—most Wonderful
And parent . . .

But always these Polish carols show an awareness that Christ, born from Mary, is the Son of the Eternal God:

For sinful man, the Son of God most high
Of a Virgin pure was born, in a crib is laid,
Between two beasts he lies, O inconceivable . . .
Who, O who, O Creator, Lord of the universe entire
Laid thee there upon straw of Bethlehem's poor
manger?
Oh eternal Son of God, uncreated
But born today of the maiden Mary . . .
Our darling dear
The fair sweet son
Are you of your Mother poor?
Son of the Father infinite, incomprehensible,
God-man himself.

Mary's sanctity: Mary surpasses all other creatures in sanctity. The Council of Trent declared that Mary was by a special privilege preserved from venial as well as mortal sin through her lifetime. In 1854 her Immaculate Conception became a dogma of the Catholic faith. St Ephrem places in the mouth of the church of Edessa these words: 'Yes, truly, O Lord, thou and thy mother are the only ones who are perfectly beautiful in every way; for in thee, O Lord, there is no spot, and in thy mother no stain whatever. . . .'⁴

Let us quote a few carols dealing with Mary's sanctity; first a general statement of grace in Mary, and then the amount of these heavenly gifts, closely following the schoolmen's axiom *alii ad mensuram gratiam acceperunt, Maria autem gratiae plenitudinem:*

You have found Grace with your Lord. . . .
Only on you, the heavenly gifts
Are bestowed by God without measure,
You are full of the grace all men desire
Given to you from God.

The belief in Mary's exceptional holiness is presented in the next song:

Among women
Clean maidens
Thou art the purest.
O queen of the angels
No one to God
Was more pleasing than thou. . . .

And finally her Immaculate Conception is also mentioned:
You are full of light

⁴ St Ephrem, *Carmina nisibina* n.27, quoted by P. Pourrat, 'Christian Spirituality' I, p. 238.

And of great humility
 Conceived without sin
 And full of all glory.
 Through your nativity
 The world was consoled. . . .

Mary the Virgin: In connection with the perpetual virginity of Mary, St Augustine writes: *Virgo concipiens, virgo pariens, virgo moriens*.⁵ This statement describes the matter of the dogma of faith. We believe that Mary was a virgin before, during, as well as after the birth of her divine Son. To use the theological expressions: Mary was virgin *ante partum, in partu et post partum*.

Sometimes carols, like the following, express clearly the belief in Mary's virginity *ante partum*.

He came conceived in the pure womb
 Of the Immaculate Maiden,
 In the simplicity of our poor flesh
 Not appreciated by the world. . . .

Other carols deal with Mary's virginity *in partu*:

A lily is in blossom
 It is the maiden mild
 Who gave to us her own Son
 O happy news.
 She brought him forth in gladness
 In fullness of her maidenhead
 She blossomed forth a flowerlet
 Which has its roots in heaven. . . .

The following quotation mentions Mary's virginity *post partum*:

A maiden conceived the Son
 she brought forth Christ
 and remained pure virgin.

As an example of an affirmation of the complete doctrine that Mary was an inviolate we may notice the words of this carol:

Before delivery a virgin,
 After it a maiden clean,
 And in the miraculous childbirth.
 Her purity begins. . . .

The Liturgical Message: In order to present the position of Mary not as related to dogmatic truth considered in itself, but in relation to dogma lived through the mysteries of the liturgical year, it is necessary to show how Mariology is expressed in the official prayers of the Church. The same spirit is also found in the carols.

There is no need to dwell too long on the kind of cult that our Lady receives in carols. The cult offered there to her is traditional. It is superior to the veneration rendered to all other saints and yet distinct from the worship given to God alone. In other words, to use a technical expression, there is in carols a clear cut division

⁵ St Augustine, *De Catech. rudibus*, n.40, quoted by P. Pourrat *op. cit.* p. 237.

of *dulia*, *hyperdulia* and *latria*.

The relationship of our Lady to the blessed Trinity is expressed also in liturgical symbols by saying that Mary was preordained. This predestination of Mary we can find in these Polish carols:

The Lord had foreseen thee before all ages
And destined Thee for his temple on earth. . . .
She brought forth the Lord of ages, because she
was chosen

Foreseen from ages. . . .

Mary is indeed foreseen in the Old Testament. When during Christmastide the Old Testament is read in the Church's prayers, we share in the attitude of mind of the patriarchs and seers of Israel, who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Mary had been hailed in the prophecies of the Old Testament. She occupies there an important position, which is commemorated in the liturgy. It is natural, therefore, that the carols should refer to these Old Testament symbols.

Accomplished were all the hopes
Of the patriarchs of old
The longing of all was fulfilled
When the word was born of a virgin. . . .
O Isaias rejoice with us,
What in spirit you foresaw, that with our eyes we see
Behold a virgin has brought forth a Son. . . .
O holy mother of God, O holy virgin of virgins
You are the root of Jesse, you bear a flower of sweet
perfume,
You are inviolate and become the very gate of heaven
God's entry, when he came into this world.
The burning bush of Moses, yet unconsumed
Was your sign O maiden Mother.
God has chosen you as temple and ark of the covenant
When in your pure womb, dwelt the eternal Lord of
heaven.

When taking part in the mystery of the Incarnation with the Church, one is led also through the events of Mary's life connected with it. In this particular period of the liturgical year we celebrate certain special feasts of her own, such as the Immaculate Conception, Expectation, Purification, and some in which she is connected with Christ, such as the Nativity, Circumcision, Epiphany. All the events commemorated in these feasts are also presented in carols. To take a few examples:

(a) *The Expectation*.⁶ Our Lady replies to the Archangel's greetings:

⁶ This feast, which is not in the universal calendar and falls on December 18th, may be considered as the duplicate of that of the Annunciation. In reality it is the feast of the Annunciation transferred to this date, since that feast on March 25th, generally falling in Lent, cannot always be celebrated with fitting solemnity. cf. Cabrol, *The Year's Liturgy*, vol. I, p. 39.

'Always I have wished
 To be the handmaid of God's mother
 Be it done according to thy word.'
 As soon as she said these words
 The Lord was conceived in her womb

And by this consent, she gave praise and glory to God.

(b) *The Presentation*. Sometimes the events of Mary's life pass before us, as though remembered in her own thoughts. There is, for instance, one carol describing our Lady sitting beside the sleeping Christ and thinking of his future as Redeemer, under the influence of Anna's prophetic words, said during the presentation in the temple. Mary is afraid of Christ's future, as every mother is afraid for her child:

Gabriel's words console with hope.
 Sometimes the prophetic words of Anna
 Bring anxiety smouldering in her heart.
 Her joy is mingled with fear
 And fear spreads abroad
 Darkening her holy face. . . .

(c) There are also carols speaking of many events of Mary's life as, for instance, this one, which in the stanzas quoted commemorates four 'journeys' which were made by our Lady.

You went first into the hill country
 To visit Elizabeth
 And her you sanctified
 And John's birth.
 Then Octavius's order
 Compels you to go to Bethlehem
 In a hard time;
 And there you bring forth Jesus.
 Soon the cruel Herod
 Would tear your jewel from you
 And with him you flee to Egypt
 A stranger in strange homes.
 Every year according to the law
 According to God's decree
 You journey to Jerusalem
 To attend the holy meeting.
 Once God's calamity
 Brings you a great sorrow
 When you lose your Son
 And are in despair. . . .

(d) *The Epiphany*. Most of the carols dealing with the miracle in Cana present Mary's role there accurately according to the Gospels. The following quotation, however, in merry mood, adds some new details not mentioned in the New Testament. According to this carol, after the miracle was performed, the host asked Mary to taste the wine; she did it, and she enjoyed it:

When the holy maiden had tasted the wine,
 She asked for a glass filled to the brim
 And she said: I will drink tonight
 This miraculous wine
 In Cana of Galilee. . . .

There is one title of Mary, closely connected with the Church's prayer and describing well Mary's part in the redemptive work of Christ. This title is the 'Second Eve'. It explains Mary's position in the supernatural solidarity of redeemed mankind, with Christ, the Head of his mystical Body, Christ the new Adam, who washed away original sin.

The human race was lost through a woman, Eve, but has also been saved through a woman, Mary, the new Eve.

This point is clearly expressed in carols:

What Eve lost, the Virgin restored
 She bore a Son, O marvellous news. . . .
 The Lord created Adam
 Father of the human race
 And Eve the mother
 With an apple they sinned
 But you have restored what Eve had lost.

Finally, certain stanzas of these carols composed in the form of prayers, are often connected with our Lady. Some carols, when contemplating the mystery of the Incarnation, cannot stop at the mere description, but burst out in forms of praise:

Praise and glory to our Lord
 Born of the maiden Mary,
 For he has come to those he fashioned
 Fleeing from his heavenly courts,
 O grant that he may gain us, whom sin oppressed
 So let us sing—ever holy, holy, holy.

Other carols teach that the consideration of the Nativity should finish in a prayer:

The little child let us welcome
 Born from a maiden,
 Our Creator, let us ask him
 For a footstool in heaven.

There are also carols in which prayers are addressed to our Lady alone:

O maiden so mighty
 We cry day and night
 Be to us sinners a help in our plight
 Through thy intercession
 Obtain the remission
 Of sins, and salvation.—Amen.
 O Immaculate Mary
 The predestined mother,
 For the sake of the Infant

Lying poor in the manger
Win my soul for your vassal
In the heavenly mansions.

The prayers contained in other carols worship God explicitly through the intercession of our Lady:

It is right that we bless thee
And ask that thou pleadest
With thy Son, that great God may forgive us
Our debts through thy merits.—Amen.

Grant us, Virgin, ask your Son,
From exile here to bring us home
Through Christ thy womb's fruit. . . .

The true devotion to our Lady is the best way to him, who said that he is the Way.

The aim of this paper was to show the basis of this 'Way of Mary' as presented in the Polish Christmas Carols. It seems that carols were also used as means to teach in a form of simple songs, the true devotion to our Lady. We may conclude with the following quotations which dwell on this 'Way of Mary':

O venerable Mary, show us the sure way
Of the commandments of your almighty God,
He is the only hope
Of our salvation.

O beloved of God
We beg thee, be a straight way unto us
Leading to perfect life,
Bring us to eternal bliss. . . .

REVIEWS

SOUS L'INVOCATION DE SAINT JEROME. Par Valéry Larbaud. (Gallimard, 200 francs, 3rd edition, 1946.)

Perhaps 'Under the aegis of St Jerome' would best translate the title. For here is a well-known man of letters telling us that St Jerome, his personality, his literary style and his enthusiasms have been his inspiration throughout. 'What! Pray to St Jerome?' a young friend had said to him, 'you might as well pray to St Augustine; they are both too learned to listen to us.' From the literary point of view it is Jerome the translator who appeals to M. Larbaud. For Jerome rightly regarded translating as a fine art; his *De optimo genere interpretandi*, Ep. lvii, is, of course, the classic and M. Larbaud felt impelled to copy it out word for word. And what a translator Jerome himself proved! We all know of his Latin version of the Bible. But do we realise that its perfection is due to the fact that it was but the culmination of a long series of translations? Long before this he had translated Didymus the Blind *De Spiritu Sancto* and very much of Origen. But these were not inspired writers: hence his famous distinction: 'In translat-