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## **Mary of Israel**

John M. Oesterreicher

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## MARY OF ISRAEL

**T**OWER OF DAVID, her Litany calls our Lady, comparing her heart, strong and full of grace, to a fortress, to a tower bedecked with a thousand shields and all the bright armor of the mighty (Cant. 4:4). No less does the liturgy of her feasts abound in biblical language like this.

Wondrous though it is, it is in the order of things that the Church, in her delicate reverence for Mary, should praise her in the idiom of the Old Testament. There are no better words and images than the words and images of Israel in which to unfold her dignity, for in Israel is she rooted and of Israel did she spring, she who is the Mother of the Christ and the Mother of all nations. Hence, from the days of the Fathers, faith and affection have sought her in the pages of the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Psalter, in all the books of the Old Covenant, and have found her there in hidden beauty.

### MARY FORETOLD BY THE PROPHETS

A few, indeed very few, prophetic utterances speak of Mary. And it is in no way surprising that there should be only a few, for is she not the Lady of holy discretion? She is there, in these prophecies, announced and concealed, for both to announce and to conceal is the manner of prophecy: to announce darkly and to conceal in words of light.

#### *Genesis*

Mary appears first in the great vision of Genesis, which has, so truly and so beautifully, been called *Protevangelion*, the earliest good tidings, the first and mysterious announcing of the Savior. "Then the Lord God said to the serpent," we read:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
between your seed and her seed;  
He shall crush your head,  
and you shall lie in wait for his heel (Gen. 3:14-15).

No sooner had man fallen than the great promise was given, no

sooner had he chosen death than hope was born; and woman, who had brought sin into the world, was made the bearer of hope.

The woman of whom this prophecy speaks is first Eve; but more deeply Mary, the woman *par excellence*, the second Eve, who was in spirit what the other was only in body: mother of all the living. And the seed of woman is first all of Eve's children, whom God assured He would not abandon; but more deeply, the Fruit of Mary's womb, who has crushed the enemy's head, broken his dominion. He overthrew Satan, and did it as Satan lay in wait, the very moment that he injured His heel, wounded the lesser part of Him, His humanity. By His death on the cross, Christ frustrated the devil and forever brings him to nothing. Do we not have in this prophecy the gospel in bud, for in it Christ's birth, His passion, and His triumph are intimated?

The Redeemer promised in these first tidings of our salvation is called the Seed of the woman, as if to foreshadow that He will be the One conceived by the Holy Ghost, the One born "not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). Thus the beginnings of Scripture mysteriously extol Mary, the Virgin. No doubt, the *Protevangelion*, like all prophecy, is obscure, but having been fulfilled, it can be heard with a new hearing; and to new ears it speaks "a new thing," the thing impossible with man but possible with God.

And if this heavenly pledge is understood in the light of faith, it suggests still other mysteries of our Lady's life, her perpetual purity, her Immaculate Conception, indeed her Assumption. For the enmity decreed by God between the serpent and the woman knows no interruption, so that not for a single moment did she bear the yoke of sin.

To repeat, the woman whose seed is powerful enough to smash the power of the serpent is Eve, the first woman, and more fully Mary, first among women.

But we may also understand the woman as the Church, our mother, the Church of the Old Testament, whose summit was Mary, and the Church of the New, whose best portion she is. In this way, then, the seed is mankind, struggling against the serpent's encirclement, a struggle which would be entirely in vain, however, were not the grace of Christ given to the sons of Eve. But nowhere is this war

waged so valiantly as by the disciples of the Lord, to whom He gave “power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19), the disciples whom the Apostle comforts: “The God of peace will speedily crush Satan under your feet” (Rom. 16:20).

It should not be bewildering to see these several interpretations together, for they are in no way contradictory; far from it! By saying that the woman of the *Protevangelion* is Eve, but also the Church, Jewish and Christian, and above all, the Blessed Virgin; by saying that the seed is Christ, but also those in whom He is reflected, His forerunners and followers; by giving these various explanations, we profess the fulness of Christ — of Christ, in whom are focused all things, whose light, shining now in splendor, illumines all that was dim in the former Dispensation.

The several explanations, differ though they may to a quick glance, do not diverge — they meet, they are one. And they show Mary to be the fountain into which flows that river of grace we call the Old Covenant and from which spring the living waters of the New.

#### *Micneas*

The great hope of Genesis became the hope and solace of Micneas the prophet, when, around the year 700, the word of God came to him. He knew his people degraded and distressed; he witnessed hostages taken into captivity; he foretold doom and disaster, God’s anger that would bring about punishment and purging! But he was no prophet of perdition; rather did he serve the God who “delights in mercy,” who in the end will put away the iniquities of Israel, cast its sins into the bottom of the sea, and make true the promises given to the fathers in the days of old (Mich. 7:18-20). The prophet saw his people’s calamity, and yet looked ahead, and saw in the spirit a woman and child, the Messiah and His Mother. This was his prophecy:

But you, Bethlehem Ephrata,  
a little one among the cities of Juda,  
out of you shall One come forth unto Me  
who is to be the Ruler of Israel,  
whose going forth is from of old, from ancient days.

Therefore will He give them up  
till a Mother bears child.  
Then the remnant of His brethren shall return  
to the children of Israel.

And He shall stand and shall feed His flock  
in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God (Mich. 5:2-4).

Always laboring under human respect, under the false and unwarranted awe toward might, we find it hard to understand God's sovereign choice of the small, the weak, and the despised. But in choosing the least, He manifests His infinite majesty, His perfect freedom. So, among all the stars, He chose our sun; among its planets, this; on the earth, a small corner, a remote province of Rome's vast empire; and there in Palestine, a little town. Of all peoples, He chose one despised among the nations; and of all the maidens in Israel, one poor and unknown. From her, He took flesh, He the Ruler of Israel, its Shepherd, who "shall be peace" (Mich. 5:4).

But even before He took flesh, He was, and was at work. For in the Hebrew, "His going forth" suggests His activities no less than His origin. To Him, then, the Ruler to come, Micheas' prophecy attributes God's deeds of old, the interventions of the Angel of Yahweh in the lives of Abraham, of Jacob, of Moses, the interventions of "ancient days." And in "ancient days," in the bosom of the Father, is His eternal origin, while a Mother shall give birth to Him in Bethlehem.

The people of Israel, the prophet knows, will be at the pleasure of its enemies till a woman, the Woman of the Protevangel, ushers in the Messianic times, "till a Mother bears child," or, as other translations read, "till she, who will bear, shall bear," "till she, who travails, shall bring forth."

In the word "travail" resound the many sorrows and afflictions of Israel. "Be in pain and labor, O daughter of Sion, like a woman in travail," the prophet had said (Mich. 4:10). These were the "birth pangs of the Messiah," but the people little more than endured them while Mary willed them. Not that in the birth of her Child she knew physical distress, for He came forth from her like sunlight which, piercing a crystal, does it no hurt, leaves no scar, bestows on it only splendor. We know that Christ left His Mother's virgin body

as He left the virgin tomb, their seals remaining inviolate. We know she suffered no pain, hers — so the *Magnificat* tells — were the pains of compassion. The pity with which she felt her people's affliction as her own, her vehement desire to see the Redeemer, her love that would speed time, truly make her the "woman in travail."

*Isaias*

To "the Woman whose Seed shall crush the serpent," to "the Mother who shall bear Israel's Ruler and Shepherd," Isaias gives another glorious title: "Virgin Bringer of God our Deliverer." Is there not, in this triad of Genesis, Micheas, and Isaias, the unfolding of one great vision? Is it not like one word ever more sharpened, like one prophecy ever approaching its fulfilment?

Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son  
and she shall call his name Emmanuel, God-with-us,

we read in the seventh chapter of Isaias.

These so signal words and their surrounding text have raised many problems and received various interpretations, to deal with which would be impossible here. But one problem we must consider. It is often objected that the Hebrew word *almah* used by Isaias, which we translate "virgin," does not mean "virgin" in the strict sense, but only "young woman" or "unmarried maiden of marriageable age," and that the technical term for "virgin" is *betulah*. No doubt, this is true literally, but did not the Jews' high regard for chastity make these two words in effect interchangeable? Is not the English "maiden" an equivalent for "virgin," and has not the German *Jungfrau*, that is "young woman," come to mean precisely "virgin"?

In any case, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made for the Jews of Alexandria some 250 years before Christ, rendered *almah* by *parthenos*, that is, "virgin." Above all, St. Matthew — the Evangelist who wrote his Gospel for the very purpose of strengthening his Jewish brethren become Christian and of convincing those of his brethren still aloof that Jesus was the Messiah — cites Isaias' prophecy and claims its fulfilment. And he does so without hesitation, indeed with the simplicity and assurance of an Evangelist who knows whereof he speaks.

When St. Matthew spoke with the tongue of revelation, he made manifest, he made us understand with certainty, the deepest content of the prophecy. But we may well ask how much Achaz and his court, to whom it was addressed in 734 B.C., understood. His throne was being threatened by foreign princes, and defeat, according to the customs of the day, might have meant the wiping out of his house, the house of David. In terror and desperation, Achaz sought the help of the Assyrian king, the dread of the Near East. His submission to the Assyrian was not only cowardly; it was distrustful of the divine promises, for God had pledged that the house of David should bring forth the One who would rule the earth forever.

At that moment, Isaias approached the king, holding out God's help. Any sign, any miracle the king demanded, God would perform to strengthen his faith, to assure him that He would save the throne of David. The king, however, sanctimoniously declined to "tempt the Lord," whereupon the prophet cried out: "Hear, O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men, that you must weary my God also? Therefore, of Himself, the Lord will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and she shall call his name Emmanuel."

Because of some of the lines following on these, several writers have suggested that Isaias, in compenetration — the prophetic gift that sees two events in one — announced the advent of two infants: a son to Achaz, and another Son, a greater Prince, whom Achaz' heir foreshadowed. However this may be, Emmanuel is clearly the Messiah. He is the sign that David's throne will stand forever.

A Child is born to us,  
a Son is given to us,  
and sovereignty is on His shoulder;  
and His name is called  
Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty God,  
Father for ever, Prince of peace. . . .  
On David's throne and over his kingdom (shall He rule) . . .  
henceforth and for ever.

"The zeal of Yahweh, the angel-surrounded, will accomplish this," the prophet concludes (9:6,7).

And He will accomplish it through a woman, the Woman promised from the beginning. She — no human father — shall name her

Son Emmanuel, Isaias tells. Though Achaz little grasped the message; though later generations hardly understood its entire meaning till it was fulfilled; though even she of whom the prophecy speaks did not comprehend its breathless mystery till the angel opened her eyes — still, the Virgin-with-Child was the promised sign. She is the pledge of God's power, the earnest of His love for man, the token that the kingdom is near.

When the Holy Ghost came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, the face of the earth was changed; the world of the spirit became more real than the world of sense; eternity, not time, was revealed the true measure. So close are we drawn to the "other" world in this mysterious, mighty deed of God that we can say:

O world invisible, we view thee;  
O world intangible, we touch thee;  
O world unknowable, we know thee;  
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.

#### MARY FORESHADOWED BY HOLY WOMEN

The Old Testament foretells Mary — lofty instrument for our salvation, ready to the hand of God — in prophetic words, but also, sometimes faintly, sometimes most strikingly, in figures of flesh and blood. Whatever their shortcomings and imperfections, the holy women of the Old Law foreshadowed her, the perfect Woman. They were her dawn, and she was the embodiment of the purest and holiest in them. She was, she is, to quote St. Pius X, "after Christ, the end of the Law."

There were first the women of patriarchal days. At the very beginning of the Covenant stands Sara, princess most beautiful. Miraculously she conceived her son, the heir of promise, who later was to bear to his Golgotha the wood for sacrifice. When she bore him, Abraham called him Isaac, "he laughs," for with laughter was he received. And in his birth, a birth of great joy, Bethlehem was anticipated, where the Blessed Virgin was to bear the Delight of the world.

To woo Mary and unfold before her the plan of redemption, Gabriel was sent; in like manner, and yet so unlike, Eliezer, the servant, was sent to win Rebecca as Isaac's bride. With holy trust,



Rebecca put herself into the hands of the messenger. Her "I will" (Gen. 24:58) was the first measure of that perfect faith which said to the archangel: "Be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).

In the next generation, Lia rejoiced over Ruben's birth: "The Lord has had regard for my misery" (Gen. 29:32); when she brought forth Juda, son of the future, ancestor of glory, she proclaimed: "I will praise the Lord" (Gen. 29:35). This was not the full *Magnificat*, but the prelude to Mary's hymn of praise and thanksgiving: "My soul magnifies the Lord . . . because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid" (Luke 1:46-48).

Rachel, on the other hand, bore her younger son in grief and, dying, called him Benoni, "son of my sorrow" (Gen. 35:18). Of her Jeremias said:

A voice was heard in Rama,  
weeping and loud lamentation;  
Rachel weeping for her children,  
and she would not be comforted,  
because they are no more (Jer. 31:15).

Is it not as if God had drawn in her the contours of the Mother of sorrows?

When the house of Jacob was enslaved in Egypt, Jochabed, the mother of Moses, lived her name, "God is my glory." Living only for her child, who was to be Israel's savior, and lead his people out of pagan darkness, she became the mother of the Exodus. For herself she wanted nothing; content with obscurity, in this she resembled Mary, who became the Mother of an exodus far more marvelous; who, choosing silence, had only one desire, the glory of God her Son.

Then there is Mariam, Moses' sister, who guarded his childhood with love's concern. Had she not shielded his infancy, he could never have come down from the royal palace to save his people. Thus, though not herself Israel's savior, still, she is a cause of their joy. Was she, the virgin, in the fore of those who crossed the Red Sea, as she was the leader of the Hebrew women in their song?

Sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously triumphant;  
horse and chariot He has cast into the sea.

With all of Israel she rejoiced:

My strength and my courage is the Lord,  
and He has been my Savior.  
He is my God, I praise Him;  
the God of my father, I extol Him. . . .  
Who is like to You, magnificent in holiness?  
O terrible in renown, Worker of wonders (Exod. 15:21,2,11).

In all this, Mariam the prophetess is a figure of the greater Mariam.

After the children of Israel had entered into the land of promise, and dwelt there for a time, and sinned, and been punished, Debora arose, a mother in Israel, who snatched her people from the power of men. Wedding valor and song, she answered God's grace:

Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!  
I to the Lord will sing my song,  
my hymn to the Lord, the God of Israel (Judges 5:3).

There moves through the canticles of Mariam and Debora a contempt for earthly might. Both knew its frailty; both were convinced that it is futile to resist the Lord. Nothing can resist Him in whose presence "the earth quaked and the heavens were shaken, while the clouds sent down showers." Nothing can resist the Lord in whose presence "the mountains trembled" (Judges 5:4,5). The same disregard inspired our Lady's song:

He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.  
He has put down the mighty from their thrones,  
and has exalted the lowly (Luke 1:51-52).

One of the humblest, loveliest women of the Ancient Dispensation was Ruth, the Moabite, who lived "in the days of the Judges," over a thousand years before Christ; and that she, a pagan, should have become one of its saints, indeed, the ancestor of David, shows the wondrous scope, the New Testament breadth, of the Old Testament. Begging to come under the wings of faith, she vowed to Noemi, her mother-in-law:

Wherever you go I will go,  
wherever you lodge I will lodge,  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God (Ruth 1:16).

In so few words, in a breath, she expressed selfless devotion, rare trust and readiness. Sensitive to the tender touch of grace, Ruth merited to be mother not only to David but to the one who was ever alive to the promptings of the Spirit and is hence the model of man's perfect response to God's challenge.

There were two women, Judith and Esther, who helped rescue their people from certain doom. Some scholars think that they are not historical figures, that the books which speak of them are religious fiction, written for the encouragement of the people. The arguments for and against need not detain us here. For whether the books are poetry of faith, or straight history, or history somewhat freely told, still, the two women, greathearted and self-forgetting, point to the future.

After Judith had cut off the head of Holofernes, overthrown the enemy of God's people, she was welcomed:

Blessed are you, daughter,  
by the Lord the most high God,  
above all women on the earth (Judith 13:23).

A like welcome rang on the lips of Elizabeth and has been re-echoed in the hearts of many generations.

You the glory of Jerusalem,  
you the joy of Israel,  
you the honor of our people,

the multitude greeted Judith (Judith 15:10). There rests a shadow on Judith's deed, but the Church is not ashamed to see in her a suggestion of the great Woman who was to follow her; indeed, the Church makes the people's salutation her own. When, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, she sings of Mary: "You the glory of Jerusalem, you the joy of Israel, you the honor of our people," the words receive their full meaning.

And similarly, what Esther intimated, Mary fulfilled. The kingdom's most beautiful woman, chosen and greatly honored, Esther had no joy else than in the Lord, the God of Abraham. And she interceded for her kinsmen: "O God, mighty above all, hear the voice of those who have no other hope" (Esther 14:18-19). A mediatrix, she stood before God, the all-seeing Savior, and with heart atremble but bold, approached the royal throne. Having been

exempted from that death with which the king had threatened all her brethren, she in turn became the minister of their salvation. And so is Mary minister of our salvation.

As the beginning of the Old Testament holds out the vision of the great Woman, so its end tells of the Queen of martyrs. The second Book of Machabees speaks of the mother who saw her seven sons slain in the space of one day but stood fast in the hope of the Lord. Never did she turn her eyes from the bitter torments of her sons. In the same spirit, Mary offered her only Son and Lord to His heavenly Father.

At the cross her station keeping,  
stood the mournful Mother weeping,  
close to Jesus to the last.

Seven sorrows the Machabean mother bore, seven deaths she died, before she died herself. And seven sorrows pierced the heart of Mary, anchored in the hope of the Lord. Truly the women of the Old Israel foreshadow its greatest daughter, the Mother of the New. They are like fragments, like little stones which, pieced together, form a mosaic of her who is the Woman of women.

#### MARY MIRRORED BY SIGNS

Love sees its beloved everywhere. We must not chide the lover, for what he sees is not mere fancy; rather is his eye widened to the fullness of things, their innermost word, their intimate bonds. Thus the poet Novalis had to sing: "*Ich sehe Dich in tausend Bildern, Maria, lieblich ausgedrueckt.*" "In a thousand images I see you, Mary, exquisitely revealed." Thus the Fathers of the Church discovered our Lady in figures and symbols; as they turned the pages of the Old Testament, many a place, many a thing, lovingly spoke of her.

Paradise spoke of her, the virgin earth, the soil rich and fair though untouched by human labor. So did the wonder-tree in the garden, bearing a fruit wondrous beyond telling. So did the Ark of the Deluge which, built at God's bidding, was not harmed when all else was harmed. They all spoke of her, for she is in truth another paradise, another tree of life, the ship in which dwelt the true Noe.

As the Fathers turned the pages of Scripture, they saw her mirrored in the dove which brought the peaceful olive leaf; in Jacob's

ladder, where earth and heaven meet ; in the holy ground where the Lord appeared, which Moses was not allowed to approach ; in the awesome bush which burned and was not burnt, which in the fire's red glory kept its green splendor.

Love saw and sees the Virgin Mother in the staff of Aaron, the rod which flowered at the will of God, surpassing nature's rule ; the Chosen one of grace in the ark of the Covenant, fashioned of incorruptible wood, covered inside and outside with pure gold ; the Bearer of the Savior in the precious urn which held the manna, heaven's bread, or in the inspired Book of Moses, for in her the Word took shape, not of letters but of flesh, the Word which was to be read by the whole world.

The little cloud which Elias saw rising out of the sea and which brought a great rain (3 Kings 18:44-45) ; the eastern gate of the sanctuary which, Ezechiel was told, must be shut and shall not be opened and through which no man shall enter because the Lord the God of Israel has entered through it (Ezech. 44:1-2) ; the mountain from which was cut, not by the hands of man, the Cornerstone that is Christ, the stone which, as Daniel said, would smite the great idol of paganism (Dan. 2:34) — all these tell of her who holds so singular a place in the economy of salvation.

The cedar of Lebanon and the cypress on the range of Hermon ; the holy hills and mountains, Sinai, place of revelation, and Sion, throne of God ; the tabernacle and the temple, both God's mysterious abode, are among the images of Mary (cf. Ecclus. 24:17 ; Ps. 18:6 ; 45:5-6 ; 67:16-17 ; 86:1-3,5 ; 131:13).

#### MARY SUNG BY THE CANTICLE

Mother of the prophets' Hope and Lord, great sister of Israel's holy women, in and through Christ the secret of so many sacred realities of old — Mary is all these. She is hidden also in the Wisdom books and in the Song of Songs. The great song, with its ardent dialogue, its passionate exchange between lover and beloved, is filled with images and themes found in the prophets and elsewhere in the Bible: trees and waters, mountain, vineyard, and garden, daybreak, noon, and night, sleep and waking, search and finding, flock and shepherd, bride and bridegroom.

This shows it to be not a canticle standing all alone, completely

apart from the rest of Scripture; rather is it *the* song of Scripture, singing even more fervently what all of Scripture sings. Its fire, its inwardness, its accent, make it a climax. Origen saw it as the highest rung of his scale of the major Old Testament canticles, a scale that led Israel, and leads the soul, from labors and purifications to rest.

But it is more than the highest of the canticles; it is the most intense presentation of God's dealings with Israel, the epitome of the annals of divine love which is the Old Testament. Not that it lists any historical events; on the contrary, it seems to draw the biblical drama into a few almost timeless moments. It seems to point to the future, to Messianic days. The Canticle of Canticles is a parable of Yahweh's love for Israel and Israel's love for Him — but Israel entire: the people of the Advent, and the people of the fulness of time, the Church; and no less each soul, pursued with the same everlasting love with which God pursues Israel. And though there is, of course, no direct reference to our Lady, and though the story of the Canticle's beautiful country maiden, the Shulamite, is in no way similar to our Lady's, still, the Shulamite often bears our Lady's features.

Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth —  
For Your love is more precious than wine (Cant. 1:1).

I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine,  
who feeds His flock among the lilies (6:2).

Thus the bride — the Shulamite, Mary — sings. And these are some of the praises given the Shulamite — nay, Mary:

Who is she that comes forth like the dawn,  
fair as the moon,  
pure as the sun,  
dauntless as an army with banners (6:9)?

You are beautiful, My love, as Thirza,  
lovely as Jerusalem,  
dauntless as an army with banners (6:3).

You are all fair, My love,  
and there is no spot in you (4:7).

Therefore the Church uses these verses and others on the various feasts of our Lady, for of whom can God better say:

She alone is My dove, My perfect one.  
She is the only one of her mother;  
She is the chosen one of her that bore her (6:8).

What Israel was always meant to be, Mary of Israel truly was:

A garden enclosed is My sister, My bride,  
a spring enclosed, a fountain sealed (4:12).

#### MARY AKIN TO WISDOM

In looking at the Shulamite, the Church sees the face of Mary; and in reading of Wisdom, pure and pregnant, perfect likeness and partner of the Most High, His child and favorite, the Church again cannot help thinking of her who is Wisdom's seat and singular vessel. There is no arbitrariness in the way the liturgy appropriates certain Sapiential texts to our Lady; rather is it the Church's understanding of God's loving design that makes her speak of her in words that apply first, and only there fully, to Wisdom who dwells with God from ever to ever.

I was set up from eternity,  
from the beginning,  
before the earth was made.  
The depths were not as yet,  
and I was already conceived (Prov. 8:22-23),

Wisdom says; and so can Mary, planned from everlasting in the mind of God, pre-eminent in grace and glory, foremost of all creatures. The Lord made her His masterwork: ordained from of old, she was the fabric woven for generation on generation. Though the work of an instant — the fruit of grace — she was sketched out for aeons. It has been said that her virginity was rehearsed in the angels, her charity in the seraphim, her wisdom in the cherubim, her integrity in the heavens, her splendor in the stars, her grace in the growing meadows, her fruitfulness in the trees, in the beasts her breath and life. Limned in the virtues of all the just, she was called by St. Bernard "*negotium omnium saeculorum*," "the undertaking of all the ages."

Mary holds this cosmic position because of her oneness with Christ. When God was about to hasten our redemption, His first work was her conception, her sinless beginning, His next her birth.

Only then was time ready for the Word to descend, so that, having taken humanity in the Virgin's womb, He might lovingly ascend the cross. Inebriated, as it were, with men, He ran through Israel's villages and towns, preaching the kingdom, bringing forgiveness, offering life. And in all this, from the manger to the cross, our Lady was one with Him, able to say:

My delights were to be with the children of men (Prov. 8:31).

This, the loving design of God — Mary's pre-eminence in the realm of grace, her oneness with Christ, her cosmic position — moves beneath these and other texts of the Sapiential books. In them we see her veiledly, as throughout the Old Testament. And this is as it must be, for she is the Lady of sweet modesty who, even through the Gospels, walks with her dignity veiled. Of Nazareth, her home, it was said that nothing good could come out of it; Bethlehem, the town of her delivery, was called "a little one among the cities of Juda." And yet the maiden from Nazareth, the mother from Bethlehem, is — Queen of the World.

*John M. Oesterreicher*

## LEGITIMATE LITURGICAL CUSTOMS CONTRARY TO RUBRICS

**T**HE assembly of French Cardinals and Archbishops, meeting this summer, issued through its official episcopal commission for pastoral and liturgy a national directive on the subject of unauthorized liturgical initiatives. While recognizing that liturgical "experiments" are often motivated by a laudable desire for a living liturgy allowing of easier participation by the people, the directive insists on what Canon law and *Mediator Dei* clearly state about the exclusive authority of the Holy See in this matter of liturgical legislation. It continues:

*"Therefore every effort, avowed or otherwise, to modify the Roman liturgy in an illegitimate fashion, must be rejected. Does this mean that any modification whatever is impossible without the posi-*