

“I simply propose, with the freedom that the Church allows me to believe, after a long study of the Mystical City and of the voluminous writings that have been published for and against it, and especially after reading the dossier of the proceedings before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, to believe, I say, that the revelations of Mary of Ágreda on the life of the Blessed Virgin have the right to the respect and esteem of all those who are capable of reading them; that they deserve to occupy a distinguished place among writings of this nature; and that the discreet use that can be made of them can powerfully revive piety in souls by developing the understanding of the fundamental mystery of the Christian religion, the Incarnation of the Word, and by raising one’s thoughts on the sublime role of Mary, Mother of God, in the whole economy of the divine plan.” – Dom Guéranger, Article 11, ¶ 15

He wrote these articles “...with the intention well allowed to a child of the Catholic Church to avenge the Queen of Heaven of an outrage which she received almost two centuries ago, and which had not yet been repaired.”

– Dom Guéranger, Article 28, ¶ 15

Mary of Agreda
and
The Mystical City of God



28 Articles by
Dom Prosper Guéranger, OSB

Abbot of Solesmes, theologian, liturgist,
historian, and author of *The Liturgical Year*

Originally published in *L'Univers* (Paris: 1858-1859)



Translated from the original French using DeepL.com by

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© 2024, HOMBOL Publications, 8711 N. St. Michaels Rd., Spokane, WA 99217
www.neemcog.com

Printed by Refuge of Sinners Publishing, Inc., 5271 E. Mann Rd., Pekin, IN 47165
<https://www.traditionalcatholicpublishing.com>

March 2024

*In loving gratitude to the
Sacred Heart of Jesus
and the
Immaculate Heart of Mary
for revealing to Thy servants the
Life and History of most holy Mary, the
Mystical City of God,
so we may know Thee better,
love Thee more,
and serve Thee without faltering.
By the testimony of Thy great servant,
Dom Prosper Guéranger,
may all, resting assured in the approbation
given by Thy holy Catholic Church,
know that the Mystical City of God
may be freely read by all the faithful.*
- the Editor

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Editor's Preface

In these 28 Articles, published in French in *L'Univers* (Paris: 1858-1859), Dom Prosper Guéranger, O.S.B. (1805-1875), Abbot of Solesmes, and eminent Catholic theologian, historian, liturgist, and author of the monumental *Liturgical Year*, defends private revelation in general, and specifically the *Mystical City of God* by Ven. Mary of Jesus of Ágreda (1602-1665). He examines the *only* Magisterial source regarding this book and its author, the 510-page dossier *The Cause for the Beatification of the Venerable Mary of Jesus of Ágreda*, the original of which is in the archives of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome. He gives public testimony that, according to various Papal pronouncements, the *Mystical City* is allowed free circulation and may be read by all the faithful. His integrity, scholarship, prudence, and source material are unimpeachable. *Roma locuta; causa finita.*

Corroborating testimony was given by Fr. Peter Mary Rookey, OSM, Consultor General of the Servite order, who examined the *original* dossier in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome in July 1957, confirming the findings of Dom Guéranger (see Appendix 1 for details).

My primary goal in publishing these articles is, by the testimony of Dom Guéranger, to extinguish any controversy regarding whether the *Mystical City of God* may be freely circulated and read by the faithful. If anyone asks whether the book may be read, the answer of the Catholic Church is yes, as proven by Dom Guéranger in these Articles. Therefore let no one discourage or forbid the reading of this Life and History

of the sacrosanct Mother of God, Mary most holy, for this would be hindering the sanctification of souls, frustrating the very purpose of these revelations.

The principal testimony of Dom Guéranger that the *Mystical City of God* is approved by the Church for all the faithful to read is found in Article 12.

Yet all of these Articles are highly relevant in understanding our situation today; for this reason they are well worth your time to read them. Dom Guéranger studies in detail the theological and liturgical aberrations regarding the veneration and honor due to the Blessed Virgin Mary which arose in France in the latter part of the 17th century. He centers his study on the attempted censure of the book by the Theological Faculty of the University of Paris (known as the Sorbonne) in 1696, showing how a Jansenist cabal (his word) rammed its scandalous ‘censure’ through the Sorbonne by trampling on the laws and procedures of this eminent Faculty, and brutally silencing all opposition. Even though the ‘censure’ is proven to be entirely null and void, nevertheless the scandal given caused a cooling of the fervor of devotion to Our Lady, the concomitant decline in devotion to, and even belief in, the Incarnation, and finally the ascendancy of Rationalism which would triumph in 1789 in the bloody French Revolution, whose cry of *liberty, equality, fraternity* echoes into our day in the usurpation of the Papacy in 1958, the triumph of Modernism at Vatican II, and the sacrilegious, invalid, and soul-destroying *Novus Ordo Missae* and invalidated ‘sacraments’.

These 28 Articles, along with the synopsis for each one, were translated verbatim from two websites. The first is

a digital archive of the French National Library where the *actual photographic images* of the original *L'Univers* Articles are published. Reading them on that site is like having the original magazine in your hands. I have given the URL for each article in the Table of Contents; see Appendix 2 for a screenshot and instructions for navigating this site.

The second website is www.domgueranger.net; Appendix 3 has a screenshot and instructions for this site.

I have added paragraph numbers to each Article for ease of reference.

Finally, I wish to extend heartfelt gratitude to a friend who is a Canadian seminarian and native French speaker, versed in theology, for comparing and proofreading the DeepL translation word-for-word with the original French, and for his helpful and charitable corrections, suggestions and support.

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Article 1: May 23, 1858

Introduction. The reasons of Dom Guéranger for choosing the subject of these articles. Presentation of the character of Mary of Ágreda.

1. I suspend for a moment the studies on naturalism in history to inform the readers of *L'Univers* of a book almost unknown in France, but famous nonetheless in more than one way, and whose reprinting is not one of the least distinguished events at the current time. When I say the *Mystical City [of God]* of Mary of Ágreda is almost unknown in France, I only want to express that it is not unusual, and I have often experienced it, to meet men seriously devoted to the study of theological matters who do not even suspect the existence of this marvelous *Summa* produced in Spain in the 17th century; and neither is it uncommon to find pious people who have made use of the masterpieces of mystical literature from France and abroad, yet for whom, however, the name of Mary of Ágreda and the very existence of her astonishing if not superhuman work have been the object of the deepest and strangest oblivion until now. The reason for this oversight (for it is one) will be evident from the accounts I shall give. Yet what is important at the moment is to point out that this new edition of a book which the Sorbonne censured one hundred and sixty years ago, Rome at the same time, after having severely examined it, let us even say harshly, decided to leave it in the hands of the faithful, in the expectation that [the Magisterium] would soon encourage its propagation. It is true that our century has just been, by the mercy of God, the happy witness of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God; now this great fact is destined to respond powerfully against the tendencies

which the last half of the 17th century had induced in French piety. The return to the Roman Liturgy has already cast many prejudices behind us; the solemn proclamation of Pius IX, welcomed in France with such marked enthusiasm, will complete the dissipation of the last clouds,¹ the sad product of an era that the enemies of our faith celebrate with too much satisfaction for us not to have the right to sense that [the above-mentioned tendencies] were not favorable to the true interests of the Church and her doctrine.

2. Today, when naturalism has taken root so deeply, the discussions undertaken among educated men with the aim of fighting it would be ineffective in affecting the masses; it is then that the goodness of God intervenes, by means of facts, to incline minds and hearts towards the ancient manner of sensing and understanding the ancient faith. And focusing first of all on the veneration² of the Blessed Virgin, is there a Catholic among those who were born at the beginning of this century who does not recognize that French piety has made an immense step forward in this respect, and that all the teachings we received in our youth, all the books we were made to read, were far from preparing us for this expansion of which we are

¹ Alas, some of these clouds still linger today, eclipsing the light which God and Our Lady have sought to spread through this book; hence these Articles. [Ed.]

²The author uses the proper theological term *cult* throughout these articles. But the French word *culte* (from the Latin *cultus*) translates to *cult* or *worship*, both of which have a decidedly negative connotation in common usage regarding devotion to Our Lady. Hence to guard the sensibilities of those who might not know the full theological definition of this term, I have chosen to translate the French word *culte* as *veneration* in these articles, asking pardon of those versed in theology. [Ed.]

witnesses and with which we associate ourselves with so much happiness and profit for our souls? Do we not see at the same time that devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is increasing daily in unhoped-for ways, and that French piety is tending more and more to imitate Roman piety towards the divine mystery? The beneficial reaction, which is not possible for us to conceal from ourselves, must have begun at the point where we had suffered the most, because at that point it had gone so far that national doctrines had been formulated, as if there could be such in Christianity. It was therefore necessary that Christ be fully glorified in his Vicar. No sooner had the return been assured in this respect than the need to honor this same Christ in his Mother with a more fervent veneration manifested itself, and there was no lack of calls from above. We remember the Miraculous Medal of the Immaculate Conception, and the prodigies of grace of which the altar of Our Lady of Victories became the source. Everything being thus prepared, Christ in person in the Holy Eucharist has claimed his rights; many of the faithful have felt called to come more often and more closely to pay Him their homage. A new outpouring of graces has descended, and already it can be affirmed that in our country the Blessed Sacrament receives more honors and a more assiduous attendance in a single month than He used to obtain in the course of a year. Thus the sublime mystery of the Incarnation, which is the destruction of all naturalism, is more appreciated and better sensed in its consequences, and a revolution as serious as it is peaceful has taken place and is spreading in Christian souls, whose habits it has happily modified.

3. This is not the place to examine this very recent condition of French piety; I will return to it elsewhere. I

only want to say that the goodness of God has come to our aid in the need we had for a greater esteem of the supernatural. Is it necessary to add that the diabolical supernatural,³ by an ever-present envious rivalry, has dared to risk its manifestations in broad daylight, and that it has managed to capture more than one imprudent soul? Unfortunately, some were far from being able to resist enemies of which they were almost unaware; so they toyed⁴ with them. Proudhon is more progressive: he dedicates his last work to Satan. There will perhaps still be some among us who will see in this dedication only an eccentricity. They are greatly mistaken. Our struggle at this time is, as the Apostle tells us, “with the rulers of darkness”, with the “spirits of wickedness”, even more than with the “brute force” of this world. With the help of naturalism, the cursed angels have pushed back their borders to our land, and it is because the goodness of God has been moved by our perils that He has deigned to shorten the times and allow us to benefit at last from the full manifestation of the prerogatives of She who is the hope of the world which her Son has redeemed.

4. Regarding this solemn proclamation of the sovereign privilege⁵ which reveals to us in Mary the predestined Mother of a God, the illustrious Spanish virgin who is the subject of these articles was not a witness to it; but she greeted it from afar, she prepared it.⁶ The noble and Catholic land of Spain, in the century

³ ‘*surnaturel diabolique*’ [Ed.]

⁴ ‘*jouait-on*’ [Ed.]

⁵ i.e. the solemn definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1854 [Ed.]

⁶ ‘*She prepared it.*’ The irrefutable explanation and defense of the Immaculate Conception in the *Mystical City of God* all but ended

of Mary of Ágreda, sent more than one embassy to the Roman Pontiff solely to implore the definition;⁷ yet the very Christian court never produced it. Hence it took another epoch, other dangers for the old Europe, other trials for the Church, a supreme hour. In short, we have seen, we have heard; before our eyes the Christian Creed has been completed. But when we look back now in the light of the celestial torch, certain traces of the divine decrees which might have seemed indecisive become luminous; we understand what we had not understood, we can explain the attraction for some, the repulsion for others, and we are no longer surprised to see the *Mystical City* reappear on the ruins of the Sorbonne which censored it.

5. The writer to whom Spain and Catholicity owe this extraordinary work was born in Ágreda, in Old Castile, in 1602, the same year that Queen Margaret, wife of Philip III, monarch of Spain, gave birth to our great and pious Anne of Austria. Two Castilian noblemen, Francis Coronel and Catherine of Arana, were the father and mother of the heroine whose life I am writing about here. They named her Mary. Later, in religious life, this name was completed; she was called Mary of Jesus, a touching appellation which the first faithful of

the theological debate on this prerogative, and prepared the way for its solemn definition. [Ed.]

⁷ Ven. Mary herself many times during her life petitioned the Holy Father to solemnly define this dogma, and though it took nearly 200 years, truth finally triumphed; this triumph is surely the greatest public fruit of these revelations for the Church and for Our Lady herself. Ven. Mary likewise petitioned for the solemn definition of Papal Infallibility, a timely fruit of the first Vatican Council in 1870. Incidentally, Dom Guéranger was appointed by Pope Pius IX to help write the solemn definition of *both* of these dogmas. [Ed.]

Jerusalem used to designate the Mother of God. Before the age when a child is capable of receiving the first instructions, little Mary was informed by a supernatural light⁸ which in a moment enlightened her understanding and strengthened her will. God made himself known to her as the principal cause of all other causes, as the Creator of the universe, preserving and vivifying all that has being. In this light she knew the primitive state of human nature and the gifts of grace that embellished it, the ravages of sin in fallen man, and all the evils originating from this unfortunate source. At the same time she felt drawn to God as the sovereign good and infinite beauty, and her heart was enamored of Him with a love that took nothing away from the deep abasements of adoration. The knowledge of good and evil was also given to her, and she resolved to constantly seek the good and vigorously flee from evil. Yet seeing that she could not persevere in the good without divine grace, and that this grace can be lost through sin, she then conceived a lively fear of offending God, and this fear remained in her as the foundation of the whole edifice and as a principle of security. This marvelous enlightenment, entirely within

⁸ As readers of the *Mystical City* know, this same enlightenment vouchsafed to her was given in its superlative degree to Our Lady in the *first instant* of her existence in the womb of St. Anne. Thus God singled out, withdrew, and prepared this child at such an early age for her vocation: The writing of the Life and History of Our Lady, and the imitation of her virtues. Could She have merited this? No, but neither did Our Lady merit the Immaculate Conception; it was freely given Her by the foreseen merits of Christ her Son to prepare Her for the Divine Maternity. It would seem very likely that Mary of Ágreda was freely given this extraordinary enlightenment by the merits of the Blessed Virgin Mary herself. [Ed.]

the intimacy of her soul, left the child in a state of elevated life from which she never departed. All creatures from now on appeared to her as so many steps destined to raise her to God, and she understood the unity of the divine work in which she was to occupy her place by loving and serving her Creator. A great calmness, a tranquil serenity had been the result of the celestial impressions she had received; in this state, she considered all earthly things with benevolence, but without desire, the sins of men without being shaken by them, all the activity of this world without it affecting her in any way.

6. But soon the divine communications ceased, and Mary found herself as if in a desolate solitude. The convictions she had drawn from the divine light remained with her, but God no longer made Himself felt. Her soul was now plagued by fear, thinking she had deserved such a misfortune; yet she was still unaware of the dangers from which the goodness of God preserves the most privileged souls when He interrupts for them the course of those delights which are out of proportion with human weakness. Mary fell into a deep melancholy; various illnesses successively exhausted her strength. She had scarcely reached her sixth year, and already it seemed as if the cup of afflictions had been exhausted by her. Her mother, a woman of high virtue and distinguished mind, was distressed at the sight of this child, who seemed to her as sickly in soul as in body. She attributed to an incurable indolence the helplessness in which her daughter found herself incapable of emerging from the painful state in which she had been put by that cloud which had suddenly robbed the child of the divine light, without which she could no longer live. "What shall we do with this girl?" said Catherine of Arana; she would

be good neither “for the world nor for the cloister.” The mother was innocently mistaken due to her ignorance of the superior gifts which Mary had received. Little by little, however, the mother’s worries were dispelled when Catherine, judging that it was time to attend to her daughter’s religious instruction, soon discovered the rich background of enlightenment which God, before any human education, had placed in her. Such a discovery totally changed the mother’s ideas about her daughter; she understood what a treasure she had overlooked, and now, devoting herself to furthering God’s purposes for the child of benediction He had given her, she helped her with her journey along the way that was opening up before her.

7. Mary was reborn to life, and God, without yet returning to her the favors He had lavished on her in her infancy, made Himself felt once more in her by interior influences which directed her towards the goal to which she should tend, and which severely rebuked her for the imperfections into which human frailty sometimes led her. She understood better the harmony of the divine mysteries, the economy of the supernatural virtues, the relations of the external world with the invisible world; in a word, she was developing for high destinies in the order of grace. God revealed to her at an early age the value of virginity in his eyes, and on the feast of Christmas in 1610, Mary, eight years old, felt drawn to take for her Spouse forever the divine Redeemer, who on that day had been born for her and for the human race in Bethlehem. A tranquil joy told her that her offering had been accepted. From that moment on, an outward progress was recognized in her that struck all eyes; it was no longer only the family that had changed from disdain to admiration for the little Mary, the whole city of Ágreda rejoiced to have in its bosom this visible

angel that God had given to his people. The confessor of this extraordinary child told of prodigies of virtue, and miraculous gifts began to appear. The people of the house liked to recount an event that had taken place before their eyes and which already showed what favor the little Mary enjoyed with her Creator. One day, several poor people came to the door of Francis Coronel's house. Having searched in vain for the key to the chest where the money for the house expenses was kept, he turned to Mary, whose tender compassion for the unfortunate he knew. "Well, Mary," he said, "how do we go about giving alms to these poor people? I can't find the key to the chest. See if you can open it." The child, without being asked any longer, untied one of the pins that fitted her clothes, and inserting it in the lock, opened the chest with as much ease as if she had used the key. The poor were relieved, and the holiness of the young girl shone with a new brilliance.

8. At the age of twelve she declared to her parents her intention to consecrate herself to God in the religious life; this openness surprised no one in this deeply Christian family. Mary was offered entrance to the monastery of Tarragona, and was about to take advantage of this favor, when everything was changed by divine intervention. Catherine of Arana had reached a high level of prayer, and one day God made known to her his plans for her and her family. He made it clear to her that she and her husband were to embrace the religious life, as well as all their children; that Francis Coronel and his two sons were to live under the rule of the seraphic St. Francis; that she and her two daughters were to practice the religious life in their own house, which was to be converted into a convent. Astonished by such an unexpected communication, Catherine of Arana went to consult her confessor, Fr. John of

Torrecilla, of the Observance of St. Francis, a man of great sanctity. He had received the same manifestations in prayer, so it was impossible for his spiritual daughter to doubt that God was the author of such a wonderful plan. They set to work. The house of Francis Coronel was far from being spacious enough for the purpose to which it was to be dedicated, and the family income seemed insufficient; but with help from on high, everything was organized. When the time came, the father and the two sons went to the Franciscan novitiate, and on January 13, 1619, Mary, a little over sixteen years old, enclosed herself with her mother and younger sister under constant enclosure in the house that had been her cradle and where her whole life was to be spent. The church that had to be built had been completed in the first days of December of the previous year, and the holy mysteries had been celebrated there for the first time on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. A religious institute established under the same title of Mary Immaculate, and placed under the direction of the Order of St. Francis, whose rule it followed in part, existed at that time in Spain. By a particular disposition of the Queen of Heaven, it was to this institute that the mother and the two daughters turned to obtain the servants of God who would initiate them into the spirit and practices of the kind of life they wanted to embrace. Three nuns from the convent of the Immaculate Conception in Burgos came to take charge of the convent, which was soon populated by the finest of the young virgins from the city of Ágreda.

9. The limits that have been set for us do not allow us to describe here in detail the progress of our heroine in the paths of religious perfection. Too much time would be needed to recount the various stages she had to pass through to reach divine union, the assaults which were

made against her by the spirit of darkness, the practices of mortification by means of which she violently subjugated the flesh to the spirit, the persecutions of which God allowed her to become the object for several years, and which consolidated her in humility and patience. Her gentleness and charity triumphed over this last trial to such an extent that soon her sisters, changing from mistrust to the most tender esteem, raised her despite her objections to the office of Abbess, which she held for thirty-five years.

10. Mary of Jesus made her solemn profession on February 2, 1620, the feast of the Purification of Our Lady. It was at this time that the extraordinary gifts which she had experienced in her early childhood began to take their course again. The ecstasies and raptures became almost continuous. In her moments of union with God, her body rose from the earth, and losing its natural weight, it became mobile at the slightest breeze, like a light feather. The features of her face took on a new beauty; her complexion, usually brown, became radiantly white; she looked like a seraph. A thought, a feeling that crossed her soul, the sight of a holy image, a word that she heard said were enough to bring about these states, which lasted for long hours, but which always yielded, at the very moment, to the slightest injunction of obedience, without this injunction even needing to be manifested in words; a simple interior command brought her back to ordinary life. These sublime states were soon made known to the outside world, and the ecstatic was subjected to the severe examination of Fr. Anthony of Villacre, provincial of the Friars Minor of the Observance, who did not delay in recognizing in Mary of Jesus all the characteristics of the safest and most proven mystic. This judgment was a great consolation to the servant of God, who had been

sorely troubled by such extraordinary favors; for she feared that she would be the plaything of the spirit of malice, which can sometimes transform itself into an angel of light. Nevertheless, always fearful of these external graces, she obtained by means of entreaties to her divine Spouse that they cease little by little, without her losing anything of the terrible trials with which He had allowed the devil to torment her. This woman, truly strong, preferred struggle to rest; full of confidence in God and contempt for herself, she chose to suffer and to fight rather than to taste in advance delights which seemed to her premature and too far above her virtue. A more common life was the object of her ambition, and by means of efforts on her part, and condescension on the part of God, she succeeded in maintaining herself in it most of the time, and was able to conceal from the knowledge of men some of the wonders which were being worked in her and by her. There is one, however, and one of the most astonishing, which burst forth at the moment when she least expected it, and which I believe I must relate in detail as a characteristic trait of the ways in which it had pleased God to establish Mary of Jesus, and as being of a nature to throw a precious light on all that remains for us to recount of the supernatural communications of which she was the object.

Article 2: June 6, 1858

Missionary zeal of Mary of Ágreda. Her mysterious action in the evangelization of New Mexico. Fr. Benavides. Mary of Ágreda in contact with the King of Spain.

1. Admitted to an intimate relationship with God through the sublimity of her prayers, Mary of Jesus was no less attentive to the miseries of men. Not only did her sisters in religion receive from her all the care of the most maternal tenderness, she was also the visible instrument of Providence for the city. But what motivated her compassionate interest more than anything else was the fate of souls after this life. Like her admirable compatriot St. Teresa, she suffered cruelly from seeing so many unfortunate victims of heresy and unbelief, and her most earnest pleas to God sought to reduce their number. She was especially concerned about the conversion of the peoples of southern America, whom the religious of St. Francis were evangelizing with great zeal at that time in the lands under Spanish rule. God made known to her in prayer that his mercy had prepared special help to accelerate the conversion of the numerous peoples of New Mexico.

2. This revelation stimulated the zeal of Mary of Jesus in favor of these infidels, and God willed that she should have something more than the merit of intercession; for then began in her a series of phenomena of grace which gave her the right to be counted among the apostles of these idolatrous countries. During a quite long period of her life it happened that she, in her ecstasies, suddenly felt transported to distant and unknown regions. The climate was no longer that of Castile; she felt herself

under the rays of an even hotter sun. Men of a race she had never met were before her, and God inspired her to speak to them without fear and to proclaim the faith. The ecstatic, obeying this command, preached the law of the true God to them in the Spanish language, and these infidels listened to her with docility. It was not only once that Mary of Jesus fulfilled this wonderful role: The first ecstasy thus experienced was followed by more than five hundred of the same kind. She was always in the same region to continue her work. It seemed to her that as the number of her converts increased, a whole nation, with the king at the head, had resolved to embrace the faith of Jesus Christ. At the same time she saw the Spanish Franciscans, whom God had destined to gather this rich harvest, at a great distance, but they were unaware of the existence of this people living in an unexplored region. Mary advised the Indians to send some of their own to these missionaries to ask them for ministers of salvation who would come and confer holy Baptism on the new converts.

3. These experiences of the ecstatic were too extraordinary and lasted too long for her to allow her director to remain unaware of them. She therefore revealed them to the Franciscan religious under whose guidance she lived. But what could be the source of such phenomena? How did they occur? Was Mary of Jesus bodily transported across the seas, or did her soul act alone in these encounters? So many questions were discussed between the director and the Servant of God. As for the source of these experiences, it was too obvious that it could not be sought in any influence of the spirit of malice. Everything was founded on zeal for the salvation of souls; Mary's intentions were upright, and her ecstasies were an embarrassment to her, since they provided an occasion for her to be noticed, and she

asked God unceasingly that He would be pleased to deliver her from them. Satan is not divided against himself, so he had nothing to do with a matter that involved only the greater glory of God. It was more difficult to determine whether the ecstatic was in reality transported to the midst of her beloved Indians, or whether her action was to be purely relegated to the operations of the soul aided by supernatural help. Mary of Jesus repeated the names of various localities in New Mexico; she was able to describe the customs of these peoples, their dwellings, their weapons, their occupations; she reported their long conversations with her. The difference in climate also struck her. In her rapid flight, it seemed to her she passed from a region enveloped in night to another one illuminated by the sun. She passed over a vast expanse of sea, and over dry land, before arriving at the place where the Spirit was directing her. On one occasion she intended to distribute to her Indians some rosaries which she kept in her cell; coming out of ecstasy, she looked for these objects and could not find them, however diligently she tried.

4. In spite of such indications, which seemed to point to a bodily change of place, Mary still persisted in believing that everything was happening in her mind. She was strongly tempted to think that these phenomena could well be no more than an innocent and involuntary hallucination, easier for her to admit than the idea of such a great usefulness that God had thus drawn, and by such a means, from such a weak and unknown creature. One cannot be surprised at the uncertainty which Mary of Jesus felt with regard to the mode of her operations during these ecstasies, when one remembers that St. Paul himself, speaking of a rapture which he experienced, declares that he does not

yet know whether he was taken up with his body or without his body (II Cor. 12:2). More confident in his conclusions, the director of the Servant of God believed that the Sister was bodily transported to the places of her evangelical labors. He based his opinion on the physical impressions which the change of climate made on Mary, on the long series of her works among the Indians, and finally on the opinion of several learned persons whom he thought he should consult in great secrecy.

5. Divine Providence, after having covered with mystery the merciful works it deigned to perform through the Sister, was finally preparing its dazzling manifestation. It was around the year 1622 that Mary of Jesus had begun to experience her laborious ecstasies. Up to that time the Franciscans who were engaged in the conversion of the indigenous peoples of New Mexico had accomplished little. A few more years passed, during which the harvest seemed to become more abundant; but the missionaries were too few in number for the extent of the field they had to cultivate. One day they were approached by a group of Indians of a race they had not yet encountered in their excursions. These Indians announced themselves as the representatives sent by their nation, and they asked for Baptism with great fervor. The missionaries, surprised at the sight of these natives, whom they believed no one had yet evangelized, hastened to ask them from where they derived such a desire. They answered that for a long time a woman had appeared in their country announcing the law of Jesus Christ; that she disappeared from time to time, without them being able to discover the place of her retreat; that it was she who had made known to them the true God, and had instructed them to go to the missionaries in order to

obtain for themselves and for their fellow countrymen the grace of the Sacrament which remits sins and makes children of God. The astonishment of the missionaries increased still further when, intending to question these Indians about the mysteries of the faith, they found them perfectly instructed in everything. They then asked them for information about this marvelous woman, seeking to obtain some description; but all that the Indians could say was they had never seen a similar person. A few descriptive details of the costume gave the missionaries reason to think that she might be dressed as a nun, and one of them, who had with him the portrait of the venerable Mother Louise de Carrion, who lived in great reputation for sanctity in a convent in Spain, showed it to the Indians, thinking they might perhaps recognize in it the features of their apostle. The Indians, after considering the portrait, replied that the woman who had evangelized them was indeed wearing a veil like the one whose image was shown to them, but that her facial features were completely different, being young and of great beauty.

6. At that time the Franciscan missions of New Mexico were led by Fr. Alonso de Benavides, who was full of zeal and worthy of receiving such a touching reward for his holy labors. He did not delay in fulfilling the wishes of the Indian multitude, and sent with the envoys several religious whom he charged with the task of collecting such a consoling harvest. It took several days of travel to arrive among the unknown tribes. The most lively demonstrations of joy and gratitude greeted the ministers of the Gospel, and their astonishment grew steadily, for they were able to observe at every step that in all the individuals of this people Christian instruction was complete. The chief of the nation, the particular object of the solicitude of the Servant of God,

wanted to be the first to receive Baptism with all his family, and the whole nation followed in a few days.

7. Following such events, one can easily excuse the pious curiosity, even the impatience, of the missionaries to know who this mysterious woman was. Fr. Alonzo de Benavides in particular was anxious to return to Spain for the time being, in the hope of discovering the retreat where his miraculous cooperatrix was hidden. Finally in the year 1630 he was able to take advantage of the departure of a ship, and as soon as he disembarked in Spain he went directly to Madrid. The general of his Order, Fr. Bernardine of Siena, was in that city at that time. Benavides hastened to show him the wonders for which he had thought it necessary to undertake the journey to Europe. The general knew Mary of Jesus; according to the duty of his office, he had examined thoroughly the state of the dispositions of the Servant of God, and he had remained convinced of the holiness as well as the sublimity of her ways. The thought came to him that this privileged soul might well be the very one whom God had chosen to work such great wonders, and he shared his impression with Benavides. But as he suspected that the humility of the Sister would make her unresponsive to him regarding secrets she had not confided to himself, he resolved to use the means of religious obedience to force her to explain herself. He therefore gave Benavides letters by which he constituted him his commissary in this matter, requiring Mary of Jesus to answer in all simplicity the inquiries that this religious would judge appropriate to address to her. At the same time he gave Benavides letters of referral for the provincial and the confessor, and with these dispatches the missionary left for Ágreda.

8. When he arrived in that city Benavides communicated these letters to the provincial, Sebastian Marcilla, and to Fr. Francisco de la Torre, who had recently become the confessor of the Servant of God, and then went with them to the convent of the Immaculate Conception. Having brought Mary of Jesus to the grate, he told her the orders of the general, and the humble virgin was forced to declare everything she knew about the object of Benavides' mission to her. With great confusion, but with the most perfect obedience, she manifested the beginnings and the continuation of the ecstasies she had experienced and all that had happened in them, adding with frankness that she had remained in complete uncertainty as to the manner in which her actions had been able to be exercised at such a great distance. After having received these confidences, Benavides questioned the Sister on the particularities of the places she had visited so many times. He found her to be as well-informed as he himself could be about everything that concerned New Mexico and its inhabitants. She told him in great detail the topography of these lands, describing everything and using proper names, as a traveler who had spent several years in these regions might have done. She even confessed that she had seen Benavides and his religious many times, noting places, days, times, circumstances, and giving special details about each of the missionaries. One can easily imagine the consolation Benavides felt at having finally met the favored soul of God whose miraculous action he had witnessed even in the region of his distant works. He took advantage of his stay in Ágreda to talk to her frequently about her missions in New Mexico and the measures she had to take to expedite the evangelization of the tribes that had not yet been converted to the true

faith. Finally, he penetrated so well the secrets of this blessed soul that he confessed afterwards that the esteem he had conceived for the sublime virtues of Mary of Jesus exceeded even the admiration he had for the prodigies whose mysterious source he had come to seek overseas.

9. However, before leaving Ágreda Benavides wanted to write a declaration of all that he had observed,⁹ both in America and in his conversations with the Servant of God, and he expressed in this document his personal conviction regarding the manner in which the action of Mary of Jesus had made itself felt to the Indians. He insisted on believing that this action had been corporeal. On this question the Sister always kept the same reserve, and later in a statement she wrote herself she based her doubt on the words of St. Paul which we quoted earlier. She concluded thus: "What I believe to be most certain with regard to the manner is an angel appeared there under my figure, preached and catechized the Indians, and the Lord showed me here in prayer what was happening." If we rely on the testimony of Mary of Jesus, which cannot fail to be of great weight here, then there would not have been, in these marvelous circumstances, the divine use of the prodigy of bilocation which is found in the acts of several saints, notably of St. Francis Xavier and St. Alphonsus Liguori. The ardor of the Sister's zeal for the conversion of the Indians would have been completed in its results by the cooperation of a celestial spirit, and the soul of Mary of Jesus alone would have crossed the distances at those moments when, almost detached from the body by ecstasy, she associated herself with works that were the product of her prayers

⁹ known as the *Benavides Memorials* of 1630 and 1634[Ed.]

and sufferings. The fact remains one of the most marvelous in the annals of sanctity, and it seems to me that it gives a true idea not only of the divine communications that Mary of Jesus received, but also of the sincerity of her character.

10. Before Benavides left, she gave him a letter of exhortation for his confreres whom he would soon join. In this letter she recommended her beloved Indians to them, and encouraged them to work with ever new courage for the great work that was so dear to her heart. Back at the mission center, Benavides told his religious the happy results of his trip, and gave them the touching letter he was carrying. He then wrote a new account of the whole affair, and placed it with the Sister's original letter in the archives of the Franciscan custodianship in New Mexico. A copy of this report was sent to Madrid, to the Royal Council of the Indies, in 1668, three years after the death of the Servant of God. But the marvelous facts contained in this report were not then unknown in Spain: The voyage of Benavides in 1630, its purpose and its results, had not gone without notice, and it was generally known that the convent of the little town of Ágreda was inhabited by the religious soul whom God had more than once associated with the plans of his mercy towards the infidels of another hemisphere.

11. The year 1643 brought Mary of Jesus into contact with an illustrious person with whom she began a relationship that lasted the rest of her life. This personage was no less than Philip IV, King of Spain; grandson of Philip II; husband of Elizabeth of Bourbon, daughter of Henry IV; brother of our Anne of Austria; and father of Maria Theresa, wife of Louis XIV. This prince, who was aware of the celestial gifts that shone in the Servant of God, went to Saragossa and made his way to Ágreda in order to see her and to recommend to

her the interests of his kingdoms. The meeting took place on July 10, and the King enjoyed the conversations with the Sister so much, and found them so profitable for the good of his soul, that he insisted upon a regular correspondence with her, which continued between them until the death of Mary of Jesus. The mode of these letters required by the King was somewhat extraordinary, and probably related to some point of etiquette of the Spanish court. The King folded the paper in the middle; he wrote on one half and the Sister answered on the other, and thus all these letters remained in the King's possession. The letters were very frequent during this period of twenty-two years, for the King did not let any mailing opportunity go without writing. However, more than once the illnesses which overtook the Sister prevented her from being as exact in her replies as the Prince would have desired. Before relinquishing each letter she copied both the King's words and her own in obedience to her confessor, who had ordered this measure of prudence from her; this is how some parts of this interesting correspondence have been preserved, the originals having been dispersed after the death of the King. The ministers shared them out of a sense of devotion to the Servant of God, and it would be impossible to bring them completely together today. A manuscript in the Imperial Library contains copies of forty-two of these letters, both from the King and from the Sister, and these letters themselves have been the subject of an interesting publication which we owe to Mr. Germond de Lavigne. The book appeared in 1800 under this title: *Sister Mary of Ágreda and Philip IV, King of Spain*. The edition is given with a great care and accompanied by a work of very lucid historical critique. The editor makes no secret of his respect for religion, nor of his

courageous sympathy for the Sister. One regrets only a few inexact appreciations, which have no other source in Mr. Germond de Lavigne than a quite excusable ignorance of mystical theology. His book, in any case, makes one love, esteem and admire Mary of Ágreda.

12. Philip IV, although he was not deprived of noble qualities, was in fact a rather poor sovereign. The lineage of Charles V and Philip II had been exhausted early on, and the 17th century saw the decline of Spain for lack of a prince able to support the high destinies of this monarchy. But all the misfortunes seemed to have accumulated on the head of Philip IV, with Portugal detaching itself from the crown of Castile, Catalonia giving itself to France, Naples stirred to rebellion, and the treaty of Munster imposing upon the son of Philip II the renunciation of the United Provinces. These misfortunes were not redeemed by the brilliant feats of arms of Don Juan of Austria, nor by the blows of the sword that Condé came to offer in support of the Spanish cause. It is especially regrettable that the unfortunate prince so rarely escaped from the inertia of his character, even in the midst of such trials. However, it should be said that the reputation of Philip IV had only to gain by the publication of his correspondence with Mary of Jesus. It is a grand spectacle to see an absolute monarch carry on, during twenty-two years, an intimate exchange of letters with a poor cloistered nun who never flattered him and did not cease to remind him of his duties as Christian and King. It is easy to understand that neither Philip nor the Sister had any human interest in continuing this correspondence; yet if there was some esteem for the prince who showed himself so eager to consistently listen to words so far beyond the level of his life, one must above all be struck by the firm and solid virtue of the Sister, whom

such high trust always left in the humble and disinterested attitude in which she had chosen the best part of this world.

13. During the long years that this correspondence lasted there was not a single state interest that the King did not discuss with the Servant of God. If the spirit that reigned in Mary of Jesus had been according to the world, she would undoubtedly have been tempted to take advantage of the importance she was suddenly given. This was not the case. At the beginning of the correspondence it seems she gave counsels of high bearing upon the administration, if they had been followed; yet she immediately understood the prince was not thereby obliged to radically reform his government, and she limited herself from then on to maintain in him the pious feeling which resulted from the relations of Philip with God, as a man and as a Christian King. Never was there any recommendation or request; only a single interest expressed under all forms, her solicitude for the salvation of the King. One feels that the Servant of God has the legitimate interests of her country at heart; but she deplores especially the bloody fight which divides France and Spain. This last feeling led her to venture to address a letter to Pope Alexander VII, begging him to intervene between the two courts and preserve peace. The influence of the Pontiff was felt indeed in the negotiations which brought the Treaty of the Pyrenees, and consequently this peace of which Maria Teresa was the pledge.

14. To give the reader an idea of the letter exchange between Philip IV and Mary of Ágreda, and also to clarify more and more the character of this admirable woman, before entering the account of the ardent controversies which arose regarding her, it will not be useless to give here a sample of her advice to the King.

I prefer to take the letter in which she goes the furthest in her opinions on the government. One will appreciate there at the same time the uprightness of the views, the nobility of the sentiments, and the dignity of the style of our ecstatic. Nothing is more interesting to study than the interior of these souls often visited by the Divinity, and in whose depths grace, having as it were absorbed nature, establishes an ineffable serenity which puts them in a position to pronounce with complete freedom on the things of a world which they have surpassed, and to which they no longer have any attachment except by the will of the sovereign Master. The letter is dated October 13, 1643; the Sister expresses herself thus:

15. "Although the departure of Your Majesty from Madrid has aroused some opposition, it does not seem to me to be inappropriate. In taking this resolution, Your Majesty has placed himself under the protection of the Most High, trusting in his providence and in his holy Name, as Peter did when he cast his nets into the sea. It is this constancy, without a doubt, that has earned Your Majesty the happy successes which you relate to me: The arrival of the fleet and the deliverance of Oran. With it again, if Your Majesty takes care to avoid everything that could thwart the divine will, you will be able to gain strength and courage for new undertakings; for when the goal is good, God does not refuse his help to those who implore Him. Your Majesty's lack of self-confidence, knowing how fragile our human nature is, made of clay, is not an obstacle to the marvelous works of the Lord; on the contrary, it attracts and solicits them. This is what happened to King David when, recognizing and weeping over his faults, he offered to love and serve the Lord. Today I do as King David did, and with prayers, penances and tears I ask God, as a merciful Father, to deign to look upon

the upright and praiseworthy intentions of Your Majesty and upon your afflicted heart. I myself, Sire, when I consider you in this state, groan and weep from the depths of my soul.

16. "I confess frankly that these kingdoms and this monarchy are in great danger. These wars, these dissensions between princes, between Christian kings, are our chastisements which the Most High sends before forgiving the sins which have offended Him. This very chastisement is a proof of the affection that the divine Majesty has for these kingdoms and this monarchy, which owe Him so much gratitude. But when the old errors cease, when they are disavowed before the Lord, then his divine goodness knows how to change threats, punishments and rigors into caresses, favors and benefits. I trust in the clemency of the Most High; and if Your Majesty perseveres in his right and holy resolutions, if he makes everyone follow the same path, correcting evil, administering justice when necessary, without any human consideration, rewarding the good, seeing to it that the poor are not humiliated because they are poor (for God made himself poor here on earth for us), always seeking to raise him up because of his humility, lowering on the contrary the pride of the rich and the proud¹⁰ whenever they forget the rules of the divine law, which is equal for all, I hope the mercy and justice of heaven will have happy effects for you.

17. "To discredit some in order to serve others seems to me something worthy of blame, when one can say what is proper without prejudicing the honor of others; I therefore believe that the persons who spoke to Your Majesty meant that among those who come closest to

¹⁰ cf. Lk. 1:52 [Ed.]

you, there are some who are useless to the Government. The essential qualities of each one are, in fact, very often foreign to the knowledge and skill necessary for good government; and there are also some whose talents and ability could be more useful to you. The government of such a vast monarchy is an important matter, and it must be entrusted only to men who are truly capable; and since God has distributed talents unequally, it is necessary to choose and seek out those who are better suited. The greatest misfortune is, that when everyone should be thinking only of the common good and that of the Prince and the King, showing disinterestedness, all on the contrary think only of their personal interest, care only for their own well-being, and make flesh and blood of everything.

18. "This happens, Sire, during peace as well as during war: Your Majesty is impoverished, his people likewise, and those who engage in business are happy and rich. Each of them wants to get closer to the center;¹¹ they envy each other, and emulation divides them. It would be good to put them all on the same level, to share your confidence among them, so that each one would think he is the most advanced, without Your Majesty granting more to one than to the other. This is why the Author of nature placed the heart in the center of the body, so life and warmth would reach all the members equally; this is why the sun occupies the

¹¹ *chacun d'eux veut s'approcher davantage du foyer.* She would appear to mean that they want to ingratiate themselves with the King in order to gain more power and/or enrich themselves. [Ed.]

center of the universe,¹² so that it may illuminate us without distinction.

19. “The people who spoke to Your Majesty may have yielded to yet another motive, based on the common opinion of this world. They hate the former government (*under prime minister Olivares*) because they attribute to it our present misfortunes and calamities; and since the effects of a change of regime cannot be instantaneous, they believe that the same men are governing, and that those who hold power with Your Majesty only want to please those who brought them there. It would not be out of place to give wise satisfaction to the world, which demands it, because Your Majesty needs it. I would make myself better understood in another way, rather than by confiding in the pen; it is impossible, in writing, to satisfy your Majesty in a complete way. I trust that if Your Majesty acts according to the will of the Lord, the Lord will send you many consolations, as well as happy successes to this monarchy; for his divine clemency wants us to merit mercy in order to use it in our turn towards his people. He especially wants us to weep over our faults, to correct them, so that we will never demerit his forgiveness.”

¹² *le soleil occupe le centre du monde.* This is not to be taken literally; she is speaking analogically. Here *monde* has been translated as *universe* instead of *world*. [Ed.]

Article 3: June 20, 1858

Study of the character of Mary of Agreda. Her correspondence with Philip IV of Spain. Her solicitude for the Queen. The death of the crown prince and his appearances to the Venerable.

1. The study of the character of Mary of Jesus is necessary above all if one wants to appreciate her momentous work, the *Mystical City [of God]*. From this point of view, Monsieur Germond de Lavigne has rendered a real service by publishing all he has been able to find of the Sister's correspondence with Philip IV. It is impossible not to be struck by the tone of simplicity and detachment which reigns in all the letters of Mary of Jesus. She has only one goal: To be useful to the soul of the King, to raise him above his passions and the natural weakness of his character, and for that purpose to talk about the grandeur of God, his sovereign dominion over all created beings, and the duties of each created being towards Him in all the situations of life. Often the style of the Sister rises to the dignity of the subject; one acknowledges this woman whose intellect was constantly engaged in the highest questions of theology, and she is at her ease only in these outpourings of her gentle and meditative soul. It is with difficulty that she occupies herself with other matters, and in answering the King on the political affairs which he transmits to her she scarcely does anything but express her sympathies in detail regarding each of the disclosures which the Prince has made to her. One feels that she leaves her contemplations only to obey a duty. She bears toward the King an endearing sentiment, but this correspondence, so glorious and so intimate, far from

flattering her, seems sometimes a burden of which she would like to be relieved.

2. Philip IV, answering a letter in which the Sister seemed to express some reluctance in continuing to write, said to her: "Although you claim your letters are useless to me, I cannot give in to your opinion, since my experience proves otherwise. I find great value in all of them, and I derive great usefulness and excellent profit from them. I especially recognize in them, displayed in a most evident manner, the affection you have for me and the desire you have for my honor, and I am deeply grateful to you. Please continue, Sister Mary, and ask the Lord to help me follow your teachings, whose aim and effect are for my salvation" (July 16, 1657). An illness of the Sister having caused a gap of four months in the correspondence, the King wrote to her in reply to her first letter to him while convalescing: "Your indisposition has caused me much concern and distress, especially when I knew it was dangerous, for I bear you a lively affection. It would have been very cruel to be deprived of you, if Our Lord had called you to eternal rest; but I have always hoped He would not close the portal through which I hope to see the remedy for my greatest ills come, and that He would not deprive me of the help of your advice. I was very pleased to see from your letter that you are already feeling better; I urge you to take care of your health, which is of great concern to me. I also thank you for the letter you wrote me, and for everything you told me you did for me and for this monarchy at the time when you were suffering most. I would like to be able to put your advice into effect, so holy and just is it. I am very happy you are answering my questions; I assure you I want to fulfill all my obligations as a Christian and as a King, and if the results correspond to my desires, I would

have nothing to ask. I will make every effort to follow your teachings and carry them out as far as I can. All my actions will have as their goal the fulfillment of the law of God, which is the principal end to which everyone must aspire. I will take every care to avoid offending Him, and for all this I ask you to help me with your prayers, for I am too weak to reach the goal alone" (November 20, 1657).

3. Mary of Jesus responded to this letter from her King as follows: "I continually have new reasons to thank Your Majesty for the continual favors I receive, and for the benevolence with which Your Majesty deigns to condescend to me and empathize with the afflictions which have overtaken me. I am too insignificant to deserve such favors. Your Majesty deigns to value my earthly life, though I consider it so useless that I would like to be able to offer and sacrifice it first for the service of the Most High, and then for that of Your Majesty. All my attention, all my concern, and all my care in this valley of tears have as their goal that God be not offended, whose goodness is immense, whose mercy is infinite, and who protects us; that his holy faith be preserved and observed; that the crown of Your Majesty be encompassed by prosperity and happiness; and that Your Majesty be saved. It is by these desires, formed in the depths of my heart, that I wish to discharge the debt I have contracted to Your Majesty, as well as by a lively and affectionate compassion for the afflictions and tribulations which beset the royal heart of Your Majesty" (May 24, 1658).

4. We understand that the influence of this holy soul on the Prince was not entirely without result, and the eagerness with which he always listened to such language certainly recommends him to the esteem of posterity. He had revealed himself completely to Mary

of Jesus in their meeting of July 10, 1643; he had confessed his culpable weaknesses, and had not been offended by the language of his holy confidante. In his repentance he wrote a few months later these lines, marked by Christian humility: “I hope from the mercy of God that He will have pity on us, and that He will help us to overcome the predicament we are in. The greatest favor that his blessed hand can do for me is to make the punishments that my sins have brought upon these kingdoms fall upon my person alone; for I alone deserve them, and not my people, who have been and always will be true Catholics” (October 4, 1643). Mary of Jesus had felt a lively sympathy for the Queen, and she was happy to think that henceforth no new sorrow on the part of the King would trouble her life. Replying to Philip, who had spoken to her in his previous letter of the happiness he had felt at being reunited with his family after an absence, she said to him: “How holy and just is the joy Your Majesty has experienced in seeing the Queen our Lady and the princes again in health; may the Lord be pleased to keep them under his invisible protection! I love Her Majesty the Queen very much, and my soul rejoices to know that Your Majesty judges her for her worthiness, and knows how to love her as much as she deserves” (January 8, 1644). Elizabeth of France did not survive this letter for more than a year, for she died on October 6, 1644, taking with her the regrets of all Spain. Philip IV was then forty years old. The following year his only son, don Balthazar Carlos, passed away in his turn, being still in the years of adolescence, and the crown was going to remain without heir. The King thought of contracting a new marriage. His choice was the Archduchess Mariana of Austria, his niece, a princess who was far from

matching the qualities that had been admired and loved in the daughter of Henry IV.

5. Mary of Jesus extended her interest to the new Queen, and eagerly associated herself with the hopes of the King, who wrote to her on September 2, 1652: "I cannot help but call your attention to the male succession of my house, for I see the hopes I had envisioned fading away. I recommend this matter to you; continue your prayers for this purpose, for I believe it is useful for the service of Our Lord. Indeed, as many male heirs as I give to this monarchy, so many columns will I lay for the support of the Catholic religion." The following year the prayers of the Sister seemed to have obtained the result the King was waiting for: Mariana of Austria was pregnant, after six years of marriage. However, a miscarriage came to reverse the legitimate hope of the Prince and the nation. The Sister, to whom the King had written about his misfortune, replied on September 13, 1653: "The letter I received made me happy, yet at the same time I was saddened by the loss of our hopes concerning the pregnancy of the Queen our Lady. I confess my weakness, and cannot hide my affection for Your Majesty: This bitter news has brought tears to my eyes, and I have found no other relief than to turn to the Most High and implore his mercy once again, begging Him to console this monarchy and give Your Majesty an heir as soon as possible. I beg Your Majesty not to let himself be brought low by so many afflictions, and not to blame these tribulations on adverse fortune. Many have succumbed in prosperity; very few have been able to find the strength they have acquired without adversity."

6. For a Prince of the character of Philip IV, unhappy and weak, the counsels had to relate to two points:

Resignation to the decrees of divine Providence, and the need to rid himself of his natural passivity to fulfill, under such circumstances, the duties of a sovereign.¹³ Mary of Jesus spared her royal disciple neither of these two directions. Philip IV had just learned of the surrender of Barcelona, and had immediately entrusted the news to his pious confidante. Before congratulating him on a success so desired, and as if she had foreseen new misfortunes, which indeed did not fail to arrive, she starts by highlighting the value of adversity in the condition in which man is placed in this world: “Divine Providence,” she says, “sends us prosperity and adversity for our greater good and to guide us to eternal salvation. But human nature, weakened and tainted by Original Sin, runs greater dangers with delights than with sorrow, because, as Daniel says, the steps of men are unsure and know not how to lead them according to right judgment; rather, they lead them according to their natural propensity towards pleasure, enjoyment, well-being, rest, wealth; and death comes before they reach the goal of their desires. Sorrows and tribulations have the good effect of restraining, subduing, mortifying and taming the passions; they act as a safeguard and ballast in the perilous navigation of this valley of tears, to prevent the vessel of the soul from sinking, and they only allow it to satisfy its tastes and its will when it has arrived safely at port” (November 15, 1652). But the acceptance of the trials that God sends does not in any way authorize passivity and cowardliness: “God loves great courage,” said the Sister to her King, “because great courage accomplishes great things, and the great things produced by man in his state of weakness are a proof of the assistance of the Almighty. I therefore wish

¹³ cf. Ps. 26:14 [Ed.]

your Majesty great courage, because he needs it to repair the misfortunes of his people. Therefore, let Your Majesty arm himself with strength, and the most effective strength is that which God gives with grace, and He will not refuse it to Your Majesty if in asking for it he expresses his sorrow for the past and hope for the future."

7. I allow myself to pull these threads from an unfortunately incomplete correspondence; yet these quotations are not without importance. First they reveal to us in Philip IV a Christian King who takes pleasure in receiving the instruction of a simple and obscure woman because he recognizes in her superior virtue, and it seems to me it presents a rather beautiful spectacle; moreover, they make us penetrate still more deeply into the character of Mary of Jesus, and show us, it seems, she is quite free from what is called eagerness and exaltation. There is nothing more placid than this style, nothing less pretentious than these counsels; one senses in the soul that produces them that tranquility of order which results from subdued passions and intimate union with God. I would stop here this investigation of a royal correspondence if a marvelous incident, which involves a high degree of interest regarding the interaction of the Sister with the King, did not have the right to appear in its turn in this analysis. I want to speak about what happened at the death of Don Balthazar Carlos, in whom Philip IV suddenly lost his only son and the heir to his crown.

8. The young prince, aged seventeen, was unexpectedly taken from life, either by the clumsiness of the doctors who treated him incorrectly, or, at least it was feared, by some mysterious crime buried in the darkness of a court intrigue. God manifested to Mary of Jesus some light on the subject, and the King insisted

that the Sister tell him what she had learned in a supernatural way about the prince who had been so quickly taken away from his fondness and his hopes. We have the report that Mary of Jesus addressed to the unfortunate father of Balthasar Carlos; it will not be without interest to extract some features from it.

9. The Sister tells us that a month before the catastrophe she sensed in prayer that a new blow was threatening the kingdom, and on October 6, 1646, three days before the death of the prince, she knew this blow would strike a member of the royal family. She soon learned, along with all of Spain, that the heir to the Catholic crown had just died; but God made it known to her that the young prince was destined to enjoy eternal bliss after sufficient atonement, which God wanted her to contribute in shortening. Shortly afterwards the soul of Balthasar Carlos appeared to Mary of Jesus, imploring the suffrages of her charity. This soul was accompanied by its Guardian Angel, who belonged to one of the superior hierarchies and shone with dazzling radiance. These apparitions took place frequently; but on October 26, in the church of the convent, in broad daylight, the young prince, always accompanied by his Angel, showed himself to the Sister, and no longer confining himself to asking for her prayers, he spoke to her as follows: "Mother,¹⁴ the Most High wants to make you hear, through my voice of a child¹⁵, true science and prudence. When I lived in my mortal body I was ignorant of this divine science, because the coarseness of the body and its corruption give rise to obscure darkness in souls; but as soon as I had shed the weight of mortality, I opened up to a new light which I did not

¹⁴ Ven. Mary was Abbess of her convent. [Ed.]

¹⁵ *par mon organe d'enfant* [Ed.]

yet know, and my Angel himself informed me of many things which I will make known to you. I assure you, Mother, that since this knowledge has come to me, if the most high and powerful God were to grant me to return to the world and reign in it, even if I were certain of my salvation, I would not willingly accept; because of the errors and deceptions I now know about I would not want to return to the life I left. I have great compassion for my poor father, knowing as I do that he lives surrounded by so much betrayal, lies, fraud and wickedness on the part of those who should be helping him. I would like to enlighten him about all this, to make him benefit from the light I enjoy and the truth I see and which is hidden from him, so he may know the perils in which he lives."

10. In another apparition to Mary of Jesus, Don Balthasar Carlos confided to her that God, in his mercy, had taken him out of the world in order to save him from the plot that the spirits of malice had formed to destroy him by giving him over to vices and depraved habits, "in a way which would render him unworthy of divine grace and make of him a wicked king, ruling without the fear of God. Already," the young prince continued, "the demon had chosen and designated some people by whose hands his evil designs would have been carried out; but the Providence of the Most High thwarted them by hastening my death. If the infanta, my sister Maria Theresa, is not brought up in the fear of God, if she is not surrounded by people capable of guiding her well and giving her good instruction, it is to be expected that what happened to me will happen to her." Is there anything more moving than the accents of this voice which rises from the very bosom of expiation, rendering gratitude to God and testimony to that tender solicitude which those we mourn still

preserve for us? This filial piety from beyond the grave, this fraternal tenderness which perseveres even in the midst of the anguish of a soul which divine justice is purifying through suffering, is something as touching as it is instructive. These solemn warnings coming from an invisible world were not without influence on the conduct of Philip IV, and perhaps we are indebted to them for those high virtues whose halo surrounded the whole life of Maria Theresa, and which helped her to support so many trials which awaited her in Versailles. The young prince then spoke to the Sister about the providential role of the House of Austria,¹⁶ which he said was “the support of the Church.” It was the eve of the Treaty of Munster, where the cause of the Church, after thirty years of bloody war, was to succumb along with the cause of the House of Austria.

11. The soul and the Angel had insisted several times to Mary of Jesus that she should warn the King of the responsibilities which weighed upon him. The Servant of God was very reluctant to obey, rightly thinking that such confidences could have unfortunate consequences for many people of the court. She expresses her concerns thus: “I told them that I had never declared anything to the King that could harm any of his servants; that by not naming anyone, and by declaring those around him guilty of bad advice, I was exposing myself to the suspicion of those who were not in the wrong. The soul answered me that it was the will of God, and I should conform to it without fear.” Here we have new proof of the extreme thoughtfulness of Mary of Jesus, and of the distance she kept from anything that was likely to bring her out of her obscurity. Moreover, her entire life bears witness to her humility and charity,

¹⁶ also known as the House of Hapsburg [Ed.]

and I would almost say her indifference to the extraordinary favors which heaven had showered upon her.

12. Finally, after eighty-three days of atonement, the soul of the young prince was called to enjoy eternal glory. On January 1, 1647, when Mary of Jesus was praying in the church of the convent, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, a radiant apparition appeared to her in ecstasy. She heard the heavenly order given to several angels to bring the young prince. No sooner had this happy soul arrived in the presence of the Lord, than at the same moment the beatific vision was communicated to him, and he suddenly became more resplendent, the Sister says, than several suns combined. The Queen of Heaven received him as her son, the angels and saints as their brother and companion, and there was an outpouring of universal joy in heaven. One last time the glorified soul addressed the Sister; it was again to give her some advice that she was to transmit to the King. Mary of Jesus consoled the unfortunate father, revealing to him the happiness which this son, whose death had been so bitter to him, was finally enjoying; and in obedience to the instructions given her she added the advice which she had been charged with transmitting to this prince, but still, as the report shows, with a very marked reserve, as we see from these final words: "I will not go any further, because what I have said seems to me to be sufficient."

13. It is easy to understand, after all that has just been related, what place his communications with Mary of Jesus held in the life of Philip IV. We said they lasted twenty-two years; the King wrote at every opportunity, and the responses of the Sister were never interrupted except by her illnesses. Unfortunately, the manuscript

of the Imperial Library, in addition to the gaps of several years that it presents, does not show the correspondence beyond May 24, 1658. Mary of Jesus was taken from this world on May 24, 1665; Philip IV, already bent under the weight of so many misfortunes, received this painful loss as the final blow. He died on September 17 of the same year, leaving the sceptre of Spain to a debilitated child of three years old, and in whom the race of Charles V was to die out. What remained was the Spanish nation, in which the Catholic faith has been able to maintain a vitality that has not been exhausted, and which gives reason to believe that its destiny is far from over. May she never forget what she owes to her princes of the house of Austria, to Philip II in particular! It is to him that she is indebted for the purity of its faith, and it is by the purity of its faith which is mingled with his blood that she has been able to traverse two centuries and a half without being, so to speak, subjected, and retaining in spite of everything this intimate energy which, even in our degenerate century, was able to produce the marvels of courage that marked the war of independence, and those other marvels of genius that Europe admired in its Catholic philosopher Jacques Balmès, and in its Catholic publicist Donoso Cortès. She has always looked upon Mary of Ágreda as one of her most pristine glories; she has upheld that glory, we shall show, at the very moment when elsewhere every effort was being made to tarnish it. Mary of Ágreda protects from heaven the Spain she loved, and which keeps her memory so faithfully!

14. This illustrious Servant of God had not yet completed her earthly course when the whole of the Iberian Peninsula knew her name and was proud of her virtues. The little town of Ágreda had become famous

because of Mary of Jesus, whose prayers and merits had protected it for so many years. The news of her impending death was received as a public calamity. From all directions processions arrived at the church of the convent, carrying on their banners the most venerated holy images. These pious faithful, unable to enter the retreat where the Servant of God, in the midst of the sufferings of her last illness, was ready to be reunited with God, asked that these tokens of their piety and trust be placed in their name near the bed of the dying nun, hoping to obtain from Heaven that her life would be prolonged for them. It was in the midst of these tokens of the affection of the people that Mary of Jesus returned her holy soul to God, having lived sixty-three years, of which she had spent forty in religion and thirty-five as abbess.

15. This is not the time to examine the value of the writings she left; we will return to that at our leisure. At the moment it is only a question of knowing if we should consider Mary of Ágreda as one of those souls who walked the path of sanctity to the end. It seems that there can be no doubt about it, not only because of the marvelous gifts that shone in her, but especially because of the heroic virtues with which her life was constantly filled. The Apostolic judgment on her Cause has not yet been rendered, and I hasten to defer to the decree of Urban VIII, declaring that everything I have said in this matter rests on a purely human certitude. Yet I will add that shortly after the death of the Servant of God the Holy See, upon preliminary investigations, declared her Venerable; that the Bishop of Tarragona, Don Michael de Escartin, pronounced as Ordinary in the same way on the presumed sanctity of his diocesan subject; and that the learned Fr. Joseph-Ximènès Samaniego, General of the Order of St. Francis and

later Bishop of Plasencia, wrote the life of the Servant of God on the most assured testimonies and in the form required for the procedures of the Cause for Beatification. This biography is the one placed at the beginning of all the editions of the *Mystical City*, and the author upholds in it the complete and unquestionable sanctity of Mary of Ágreda. Finally, an even more imposing authority is that of Benedict XIV. This Pontiff, as is well known, had exercised for thirty years the office of Promoter of the Faith in the Sacred Congregation of Rites. No one before him, and no one since by all accounts, has possessed more abundantly the science necessary to judge the causes of sanctity; his great work on Beatification and Canonization is the law to this day in these matters. This being said, Benedict XIV was convinced of the sanctity of Mary of Ágreda. In the brief he addressed to the General of the Order of St. Francis, dated January 16, 1748, in which he recounts all that had been done in the various Congregations concerning the illustrious Sister, and desiring to advance the conclusion of the Cause, granted dispensation from certain forms of ordinary procedure, and he does so, he says, to testify “to the pious affection we rightly nourish for the Servant of God; *propter piam affectionem quam erga ancillam Dei merito fovemus.*” I draw, at this moment, only one conclusion: It is that it would be unbecoming to speak disrespectfully of the person of Mary of Ágreda.

Article 4: July 18, 1858

Presentation of the book *The Mystical City of God*. The visions of the Venerable Mary of Ágreda. Her reluctance to write the book. The triumph of obedience. Textual criticism.

1. We have seen in the preceding articles what idea one should form of the person and virtues of Mary of Ágreda, and how the learned and wise Benedict XIV had no difficulty in expressing, even in one of his most serious briefs, the tender veneration with which he was imbued for this Servant of God. It now remains for us to make known to our readers the famous book of which Spain is proud, and which, for more than a century, has made the humble and innocent Mary of Jesus a sign of contradiction. We will continue to proceed with the facts.

2. It was eight years after the convent of the Immaculate Conception had been founded in the little town of Ágreda, and Mary of Jesus had finally triumphed by her patience and heroic charity over the trials with which the beginning of her career as a religious had been strewn. She had reached her twenty-fifth year when the unanimous choice of her Sisters brought her to the dignity of Abbess. The humble virgin, judging herself incapable of such an office, fell into a profound sorrow to which she would have succumbed had not the goodness of God come to her rescue. He deigned to reassure her and showed her that such was his good pleasure; but so great was the aversion of the Sister for any kind of superiority that she would have had endless difficulty in bearing the weight of that which had been imposed upon her if the Mother of God herself, to whom she had recourse, had not given her the assurances of continual protection:

“My daughter, console thyself,” she said to her one day; “and let not this labor disturb thy heart. I shall be thy Mother and Superior whom thou shalt obey, and the same I shall be to thy subjects. I shall compensate for thy faults, and thou shalt be my attendant through whom I shall work the will of my Son and my God.”¹⁷

3. From that moment on, communications between the Queen of Heaven and the Servant of God became more frequent and intimate. Mary instructed her pupil in all the mysteries of her life, all her virtues and grandeur, and the young Abbess penetrated ever more deeply into the sublime mystery of the Incarnation in the measure as the excellences of the Mother of God were revealed to her. It was especially on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin that Mary of Jesus received these enlightenments. On one of these occasions, God made it known to her that his intention was that she write down what was thus manifested to her, so it might serve for the edification of her neighbor. This divine mandate was for the Sister the object of the most formidable trial she had ever undergone. An overwhelming discouragement, which proceeded from misunderstood humility, took hold of her, and she struggled for a long

¹⁷ *The Mystical City of God, New English Edition* (Spokane, WA: 2nd edition, Jan. 2023), *Introduction to Part I*, ¶ 7. Dom Guéranger quoted from an undetermined French translation; many of the quotations are somewhat inexact. In these Articles I have bypassed the French and quoted the same passages from my *New English Edition* (on which I have worked daily for almost 17 years), for which I have used an exact copy of the original Spanish of Ven. Mary (Barcelona: Librería Religiosa, 1860 and 1888) reprinted exactly from the original 1670 edition of Fr. Joseph-Ximénes Samaniego, General of the Order of St. Francis and later Bishop of Plasencia, who was the religious superior and biographer of Ven. Mary; he took his edition from the original autograph manuscript of the Servant of God. [Ed.]

time against the divine will, trying to justify her resistance by the weakness of her sex, for which, she thought, it was not appropriate to become involved in such sublime matters. For several years she felt herself being pulled in opposite directions, expressing only with reserve to her directors what was going on with her on this subject, and begging God with tears that he would deign to enlighten them so they would preserve her from all illusion and any error against the faith of the Church. Mary of Jesus herself gave an account of all these anxieties, and she adds that she would have been very happy if her directors had been able to lose sight of and forget the communications she had felt obliged to make known to them regarding the commands she had received.

4. The Sister has preserved for us the terms of one of these commands which were given to her concerning the book she was to write. One day, on the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, God made her hear these words:¹⁸ “My spouse, many mysteries pertaining to my Mother and the Saints have been made manifest in the Church Militant; but many are still hidden, [especially their interior lives and secrets,] and these I desire now to make known, and I desire thee to put them down in writing according as thou art guided, and especially by most pure Mary. I shall reveal and explain them to thee, for until now I have, according to the hidden designs of my wisdom, kept them in reserve, because the time for revealing them was not befitting or opportune to my providence. Now it is, and it is my will for thee to write. Obey, soul.” One cannot help but relate these

¹⁸ *The Mystical City of God*, Introduction to Part I, ¶ 10. The passage in brackets is from the original Spanish edition; perhaps it was missing in the edition he used. [Ed.]

words to those written in the eleventh century by one of the most venerable doctors of the Church of France, Pierre de Celles, Bishop of Chartres: “I believe and confess that there is more unknown to us about the Holy Virgin than known. *Credo et confiteor plura apud nos ignota de Virgine sancta quam nota.*” (Lib. IX, Epist. 10). At the same time, it is permissible to hope that these unknown marvels will one day be manifested, and it is not for man to lay down the rules which God must follow when He deems it appropriate to unfold more fully the picture of the grandeur of his Mother.

5. The reluctance of the Sister had to come to an end, however, and further resistance would have become sinful. It was up to religious obedience to triumph over the pusillanimity to which she had given in for too long. Divine Providence sent as a director for the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Ágreda one of the most learned and pious members of the order of Saint Francis, Fr. Francis-Andrew de la Torre, who already knew Mary of Jesus and had subjected the spirit and ways of the Servant of God to a severe examination when he had visited the monastery as provincial. This venerable person was sent to the convent administered by his Order in the city of Ágreda, and he spent the last twenty years of his life there, except for a few short intervals, one of which involved the important event that we will relate shortly. He gave all his care to the privileged soul whose rare sanctity he had appreciated, and he placed such a high value upon the favor which Heaven had granted him in placing under his care this admirable model of all the virtues that he refused one of the most prestigious bishoprics of Spain, offered to him by Philip IV, rather than move away from Ágreda. The King did not insist; he himself esteemed the Servant of God too sincerely not to understand the importance of

keeping close to her such a director enlightened in the ways of God.

6. It had been nearly ten years since Mary of Jesus had received from on high the first calls to write the history of the Mother of God on the basis of the lights which had been given to her, when Fr. Francis de la Torre judged that the time had come for her to finally surrender to what Heaven was asking of her. He had been able, without disrespecting the divine will, to study at length the phenomena of grace which were taking place in his penitent, "to test the spirit," according to the rule of the Apostle; however, ten years employed in such investigations was a long enough term that it was not possible to wait any longer without risking opposition to the clearly manifested intentions of the Most High. The Sister was therefore ordered to put aside all her hesitations and fears, and to take up her pen to write down all she had gathered in prayer about the life and greatness of the Mother of the Savior. More than one storm of discouragement assailed the Servant of God while she was engaged in this task; nevertheless, obedience made her victorious, and the book, begun in 1637, was entirely finished in a short space of time.

7. Mary of Jesus entitled it *The Mystical City of God*. The City is one of the biblical allegories under which the Mother of God is signified; the Liturgy consecrates it by using Psalms LXXXVI and CXXVI in the offices of the Blessed Virgin, where the Lord is shown making himself the guardian of his City, and where the Psalmist cries out: "Glorious things are said of thee, O City of God!"¹⁹ We will be able to describe elsewhere the

¹⁹ Ps. 86:3. The Communion of the Mass for Dec. 8, the Immaculate Conception, says: *Glorious things are said of thee, O*

entire course of the book and appreciate its main details: at present it is only a matter of describing the history of its composition. Having finished writing it, Mary of Jesus occupied herself with making a copy of it which she wanted to offer to Philip IV as a supplement of her correspondence with this King. This manuscript is alluded to in a letter of October 25, 1643, where the Sister says to the King: "The desire to contribute to the happiness of Your Majesty makes me prolix; nevertheless, I want to remind him of what I wrote in a chapter of this history of the Mother of God that Your Majesty knew." And we can see that Philip IV liked the book, by these words of a letter to the Sister, dated March 7, 1644: "In spite of my many occupations, I seize every moment that I can spare to read some passages of the history you have sent me. I have already read a large part of it, and it interests me in the highest degree; it is a work whose reading is very appropriate in this holy season of Lent." After the death of the King, the manuscript was deposited in the library of the Escorial.

8. But an incident of a completely unforeseen kind destroyed the original manuscript of the *Mystical City*. Fr. Francis de la Torre was obliged in 1645 to take a rather lengthy absence. He had been elected provincial in the Order, which led him to visit his province and later to go to Toledo to attend the General Chapter.

Mary; and the Tract (for votive Masses) says: *Glorious things are said of thee, O city of God*. Hence the infallible Liturgy of the Church equates, by extension, Mary with the city of God. This is surely no coincidence, for it was the magnificent defense of the Immaculate Conception in the *Mystical City of God* which essentially ended the debate regarding this primordial privilege of Our Lady, though it took nearly 200 years for its formal declaration. [Ed.]

During this interval, a religious who had once been one of the directors of Mary of Jesus was given as confessor to the convent of the Immaculate Conception. This religious, without taking the trouble, as Francis de la Torre had done, to study for many years the ways in which God had established the penitent, and primarily faulting the orders which had been given to her to engage in the writing of the book, claiming that a woman should not be involved in writing, commanded her to throw into the fire at once not only the *Mystical City*, but all the other spiritual writings she had composed in obedience to the commands of Francis de la Torre. Such a command was too much in keeping with the reluctance that Mary of Jesus had always felt, and she had abandoned herself too completely to obedience to hesitate for a single moment. So everything was given up to the flames, and one can judge the annoyance that Francis de la Torre felt when he returned to Ágreda and learned from the Sister to what extent the confessor charged with temporarily replacing him had pushed rigor and indiscretion.²⁰ She felt reassured by her intention to obey, and by the fact that if God was truly the instigator of the work to which she had given herself up only out of submission, He would know how to take the means to bring about the end He had in mind. Francis de la Torre was not unaware that a copy of the *Mystical City* was in the hands of Philip IV; but respect for His Royal Majesty forbade him the thought of taking any step to put himself in possession of this manuscript, upon which the King placed the highest value, and from which he never parted. Would not Philip IV, moreover, have had

²⁰ Not that Ven. Mary would have expressed this; it is the assessment of the author. [Ed.]

the right to show himself offended by the little consideration someone had shown for a person whom he honored with his friendship and his confidence, and whose least writings interested him in such a high degree?

9. In this situation, Francis de la Torre did not hesitate long. Convinced that God does not do such great works to leave them buried in oblivion, he ordered the Sister to write the *Mystical City* again, and to trust in the lights with which she was assisted more than ever as she walked towards perfection. Mary of Jesus accepted this new sacrifice; but during the eighteen months that Francis de la Torre lived, continual illnesses, pressing business, and various attacks by the enemy prevented the Servant of God from giving even the beginning of execution to the orders she had received. On his deathbed Francis de la Torre handed over to one of his confreres, to be placed in the hands of the provincial, various manuscripts that he possessed of the Servant of God, and he died on March 19, 1647, in the sentiments of the most tender piety, helped powerfully in this last passing by the prayers and holy works of the penitent, who felt keenly the loss of this precious guide whose zeal and enlightenment she had experienced for so many years. However, Mary of Jesus having learned that Francis de la Torre before his death had entrusted the manuscripts of which I have just spoken to his companion, and fearing these various manuscripts would sooner or later be made public, she gave herself no rest until they were returned to her. The custodian had to give in to such strong entreaties, and all these papers were given to the Sister in the same closed box where Francis of the Torre had consigned them.

10. The General of the Order of St. Francis had reserved to himself the appointment of a successor to the confessor of whom Mary of Jesus had just been deprived; but the occupations of his office having prevented him from carrying out this task as promptly as would have been appropriate, the Servant of God returned to the same director who had ordered her to burn the manuscript of the *Mystical City*. This religious, having learned that some manuscripts that had been in the possession of Francis de la Torre had come back into the hands of the Sister, ordered her to throw them into the fire, which she did punctually and always with the same alacrity. These acts of force to which the Servant of God was subjected were ignored by her superiors; this was the reason why the confessor continued his office until his death, which was not long in coming. As for Mary of Jesus, she felt content in having finally found peace. Regarding God, she had no scruples about having resisted, since she had finally yielded and obediently written the book which so many demands from above had required of her; regarding herself, no reproach of conscience could alarm her, since in destroying her work she had only acted in virtue of the obedience which bound her. Not only had she been forced to destroy the *Mystical City*, but even the smallest pamphlets of spirituality which Francis de la Torre had made her write. She thus returned with delight and without the least accountability to the happy obscurity from which she had never wanted to leave. Finally, her contentment would have been complete if it had been possible for her, as she had tried to do, to break her letter exchange with Philip IV, and thus lose all importance in a world which she had wanted to flee even before having known it.

11. Divine Providence, which is never contrary to itself, and which always comes to its ends all the more surely the more it sometimes seems to deviate from them, disposed of matters quite differently than the Sister expected. After the death of the director of whom we have just spoken, a religious of the highest merit, Fr. Andrew de Fuenmayor, found himself in charge of the convent of the Immaculate Conception of Ágreda. He took up his post in 1650 and remained in that position until 1665, the year of the death of Mary of Jesus, whom he assisted in her last moments. This learned Franciscan in turn studied the ways of the Servant of God, and after having learned all that had happened and consulted his superiors, he gave the order to the Sister to write a second time the life of the Mother of God. Mary of Jesus could not refuse her assent to a command given her in the name of religious obedience, and it was on the basis of this second writing, a monument of the highest abnegation, that the book was printed and spread. This new writing reproduced the first one verbatim, as we were able to convince ourselves by comparing it with the manuscript she had given to Philip IV and which is preserved at the Escorial; there were only some additions of which the Sister herself gives notice, the content of which is rather insignificant on the whole. Andrew de Fuenmayor then obliged the Sister to write her own life; unfortunately at that time Mary of Jesus, burdened with infirmities, could only write with extreme difficulty. She therefore could only accomplish part of her task, and the work remained unfinished.

12. Let us now come to the implications of all that we have said. It is recognized that Mary of Jesus was a person of high sanctity, and constantly favored by heavenly lights. It is no less certain that she wrote,

under the title of *The Mystical City of God*, a history of the Blessed Virgin given by her by means of celestial communications regarding the actions and the grandeurs of the Mother of God. We have seen by the facts how far the Sister was from seeking in this work a satisfaction of vanity, or to indulge a whim of the imagination. For a long time she dared to resist the commands from above which urged her; if she took up the pen, she did so only by the pure motive of obedience. We saw her destroy with the most heroic simplicity this very voluminous book, to the writing of which she had devoted long hours; all her other writings were sacrificed by her with the same self-denial. Finally, if later on she began to write again, she did so only in order not to oppose obedience. I ask you, do we not have here all the desirable guarantees of uprightness, sincerity and truth, and is it not permissible to conclude, even before examining the book, on the sole appreciation of the sanctity of its author and of the circumstances which accompanied its writing, that such a book deserves by itself the greatest respect?

13. But here is a serious objection which must be answered before going any further. It has been said that the sanctity of Mary of Ágreda is beyond doubt; nor can it be doubted that she wrote, according to her revelations, a history of the Blessed Virgin, entitled *The Mystical City of God*. However, is the book published under this title the Sister's own work? Did someone else give us his ideas, his reveries, under the cover of a respectable name? Has the comparison with the original manuscript been made? This comparison, if it took place, and if it is given as decisive, is it at least guaranteed by an authority that one can admit as irrefutable? Until these objections have been answered are we not exempted, you might say, from the respect

that you demand for a work as extraordinary as the *Mystical City*, published under the name of the venerable Abbess of Ágreda?

14. The solution of this objection would have been impossible a century ago; it has become easy today. There are few books that have aroused as much controversy as the *Mystical City*; but consequently there are few whose history has been surrounded by so much light. We shall see later on the account of the violent debates which arose on its account; at present, it is only a question of its material authenticity. This question was primarily raised during the pontificate of Benedict XIV, when the process for the beatification of the Sister was resumed. The wise Pontiff, in the learned brief he addressed to the General of the Order of St. Francis on the state of the cause, established with the greatest clarity the necessity of a serious examination of the true author of the printed book. He therefore appointed a special commission for this purpose, whose object would be to prepare the conclusions which would then be submitted to the Roman Pontiff, to whom alone it would belong to give a sovereign decision. Benedict XIV then laid down the manner in which the commission should proceed. First of all, the manuscript upon which the *Mystical City* was written was to be compared, with the help of experts in handwriting, with the other writings and letters that are known to be unquestionably in the handwriting of Mary of Jesus. But since the mere material resemblance of the writings can only provide a semi-proof, the Pontiff requires that the comparison of style be undertaken next, which will join its result to that of the comparison of the writings, so as to bring together all the elements necessary for a certain conclusion, whether negative or affirmative. Certainly one could not demand greater commitment

and precautions from Rome in this serious matter. The commission appointed by the Pope was composed of Cardinals Gentili, Cavalchini, Tamburini and Belozzi, with the collaboration of the canon regular Father Gallo, the Somascan Father Baldini, the Piarist Father Sergio, the Celestine Father Orlandi, and Louis de Valenti, promoter of the faith.

15. The rather thankless work imposed on this commission in the year 1745 was not yet finished at the death of Benedict XIV. It is true that these same men, who were among the most highly regarded in Rome for their knowledge and integrity of character, were often distracted by other duties imposed on them by the Pontiff, which need not be mentioned here. The cause therefore dragged on and on, and could not even be completed under the agitated pontificate of Clement XIII. It was only under the pontificate of Clement XIV, on March 11, 1771, that it was finally resolved. The decree of this Pontiff, the existence of which was known only in our country, was published in its entirety in 1856, in the *Analecta juris Pontificii*, July issue, and here are the answers which it contains and confirms. The first question was: Is it certain, in the judgment of the experts in handwriting, that the manuscript of the *Mystical City [of God]* is in the same hand as the other writings that we know for certain to be by Mary of Ágreda? The experts answered on May 7, 1747: "Yes, it is certain that the Venerable Servant of God Mary of Jesus of Ágreda herself wrote the work in Spanish, distributed in eight volumes, and entitled: *La Mystica Ciudad de Dios*." Regarding the second question, less material and more delicate, it naturally took longer for the answer to be given. Death had cleared the ranks of the commission formed by Benedict XIV, and those who composed it under Clement XIV were Cardinals

Cavalchini, Francis Albani, Marefoschi and Chigi, having as cooperators Gallo and Dominic di San-Pietro, promoter of the faith. On March 9, 1771, the commission replied to the question: Is it certain from the style of the other writings of Mary of Ágreda that she herself wrote the book the *Mystical City*? “Yes, there is uniformity of style between the book *The Mystical City of God* and the other writings of the Venerable Servant of God Mary of Jesus of Ágreda that have been produced, and it can be concluded that the above-mentioned book was truly composed by the Servant of God.” Two days later, Clement XIV affixed the seal of his pontifical approval to both conclusions, and the decree was published in Rome.

16. This is the answer I believe I can give to the objection raised above. It is extraordinary that a book, after having passed from the state of manuscript to that of printed matter, should become the object of such an investigation, and that the favorable result of the investigation should be accepted and published by so high an authority. Such has been the privilege of the *Mystical City*, and there is thus no basis for complaint.

Article 5: Aug. 1, 1858

Rules and principles regarding private revelations.

Their importance in Christianity. Heretics hostile to private revelations. Harmful influence of naturalism. Fleury opposes private revelation. Why God chooses women for such revelations. Signs of credibility of such revelations.

1. Before entering into the presentation of the outline of the *Mystical City*, it will not be out of place to establish certain principles about private revelations, and about the importance that we can and must attribute to them in the economy of Christianity. In the absence of sufficient enlightenment on this point, which Catholic theology has not, however, left in the dark, it often happens that all these revelations are too lightly and systematically rejected, or that an exaggerated confidence is placed in them. Both are reprehensible precisely because of their excess; it is therefore important to establish the doctrine which governs this matter.

2. It cannot be denied, without incurring the charge of temerity, that there have existed at various times in the Church private revelations which are nonetheless recognized as having a divine source. The Church, in the holy Liturgy, often bears witness to this, and the matter itself is too important to faith and morals for one to maintain that there has been an error in the matter. I will quote for the moment only the Collect used in the Office and Mass of the illustrious St. Bridget. The Church declares in it that God revealed *celestial secrets* to this saint, alluding to the book of her Revelations. Features of this nature are numerous in the Legends of the Breviary, which are merely an abridgment of what we read in the Bulls of Canonization, where as we

know every word is weighed, and which offers a summary of the long and serious procedures that were carried out before the judgment. Therefore we cannot, without seriously failing to show the respect due to the Church, think and say that there have not been, in the course of the centuries, these divine manifestations made to certain holy souls, not only for their instruction and particular consolation, but also for the benefit of the faithful, in whose regard the Church has judged it appropriate to recommend the books which contain them.

3. The permanence of the gift of revelation in Christianity is formally recognized by St. Thomas when, after speaking of the prophecy of St. John on the end of time, he adds: "In every age there have always been some persons endowed with the spirit of prophecy, not for the purpose of revealing a new doctrine of faith, but for the guidance of human conduct." (2, 2a quest. 174, art. 6.) The learned theologian Salmeron (*In Evangel.*, tract. 69) makes no difficulty in applying to these divine enlightenments the words of the Savior, "I have yet many things to say to you, but at present you could not bear them (John XVI);” and in this Salmeron merely repeats what had been taught before him by several orthodox doctors.

4. If we go through the annals of the Church we are struck by this succession of personages favored with supernatural lights. The Epistles of St. Paul to the Corinthians reveal to us with what abundance these gifts were multiplied in the primitive Church. The assemblies of the faithful were so frequently marked by these phenomena of grace that the Apostle is obliged to give the faithful rules of conduct for using these heavenly favors with order and discernment. Later on this gift of vision and prophecy was like the gift of

miracles: Both were restricted by the wisdom of God, yet they never entirely ceased in the Church, of which they have remained one of the essential characteristics. One can easily follow the trace of private revelations through the centuries, beginning with the instructive visions contained in the Acts of Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, and continuing with the Lives of the Desert Fathers and the numerous and authentic accounts given in the writings of the Fathers up to St. Gregory the Great. One remains convinced that the direct communications of heaven with earth, by means of these enlightenments granted to individuals, did not cease during these first six centuries, which were particularly the age of the great Doctors. Did we ever hear these solemn men speak out against this ever extraordinary way of teaching, under the pretext that the Holy Scriptures and the Tradition of the Church must suffice? Do we not rather see them expressing themselves with marked respect, St. Augustine for example, for these private manifestations of facts and truths which maintain the impulse in Christian souls, and facilitate, by enlightening them, our aspirations towards the still invisible world?

5. The reason for this is they had in mind this rule of the Apostle: "Extinguish not the Spirit; despise not prophecies; but prove all things, and hold fast that which is good" (I Thess. V). It is clear that St. Paul is not speaking here of the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments; under no circumstances could the Christian be allowed to choose between these divine oracles, to test them, to weigh them, and to retain or reject at will what would seem acceptable to him. When the Apostle recommends that the Spirit should not be extinguished, he is not speaking of the Holy Ghost in so far as He dictated the prophecies to David, to Isaiah; for the work

of his inspiration is recognized and published throughout the world by the holy Church, with the obligation for all the faithful to receive it with the submission of faith. Rather, he means those particular enlightenments which “this one and the same Spirit” produces in certain souls, and which, being received by others with contempt, may be extinguished, that is to say, may be deprived in part of the effects which they were intended to produce.

6. Private revelations were not to be the exclusive privilege of the first six centuries. We follow the luminous trace of them in the Acts of the Saints; but they become more abundant, and if I may say so, more voluminous, as we approach our times, as if God wanted by this means to sustain the mystical element threatened by the approaches of rationalism. The century of Abelard had the revelations of St. Hildegard, whose spirit was judged and approved by Pope Eugene III. In the following century St. Dominic and St. Francis, whose mission was to raise so powerfully the supernatural sense in the people, were no less illustrious as Seers than as Thaumaturgists. The end of the century which had the glory of possessing them presents the precious revelations of Bl. Angela of Foligno. The first half of the 14th century, when the Church was in such peril, offers us the great St. Gertrude with her sister St. Mechtilde, and at the end the famous St. Bridget with the immortal St. Catherine of Siena. In the 15th century we find St. Frances of Rome, whose revelations contributed so much to sustaining piety in the capital of the Christian world, and at the end of the century St. Catherine of Genoa. The 16th century is sufficiently filled by the seraphic Teresa [of Ávila] and the sublime Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, who belongs to this period, although she lived until the year 1607.

7. This enumeration is very incomplete; I wanted to include only the most famous works. As it stands, it will suffice to show in action that important characteristic of the Church which I have mentioned above, by virtue of which she has possessed in her bosom at all times souls to whom it pleases God to communicate extraordinary lights, some of whose rays are reflected upon the society of the faithful. It is therefore not surprising that this phenomenon of grace occurred in Spain in the 17th century. There is more: Ecstasies and raptures being undeniable facts and common enough, to a certain extent, to arrive from there at the revelations of which we speak, only one thing is needed, that God commands the privileged ones who experience these sublime states to write what He makes them know in these times of communication. It is rare that such an order is given; yet it is conceivable that it could be, and no more is needed to explain the existence of written revelations.

8. It was natural that heresy, jealous of a gift it could not imitate, should blaspheme this characteristic of the true Church. The school of Luther did not fail to do so, and Melanchthon wrote early on against all the private revelations which were building up the piety of the faithful. The Centuriators [of Magdeburg] soon followed suit, pouring forth insults against the Church which had praised, after examination, the books of the likes of St. Hildegard, St. Bridget, and St. Catherine of Siena. Later, the apostate Archbishop Mark Anthony de Dominis, in his *Ecclesiastical Republic*, pursued these manifestations of divine goodness with no less scandal. Protestantism, however, could not keep entirely to the rationalist path on this point; it had, in its turn and at various times, its Seers; and the sect of Wesley, through its ignoble counterfeits, pays homage even today to the

mystical principle which forms one of the constitutive elements of Christianity, and which finds its expression in the revelations which holy souls receive in calmness and humility, and which they sometimes make public under the correction of the holy Church.

9. Naturalism, which began to penetrate our country at the end of the 17th century, gradually diminished the esteem for private revelations; if they did not become the object of contempt, they fell into oblivion. Without mentioning the *Lives of the Saints* by Baillet, was it possible not to be carried away when one heard Fleury, the one who was called the wise and judicious, express himself on this subject with such astonishing candor for a Catholic: “This idle, and therefore equivocal, devotion has been most common for about five hundred years, particularly among women, who are naturally more lazy and of a livelier imagination. Hence it is that the Lives of the Saints of these last centuries, St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Siena, Bl. Angela of Foligno, contain little more than their thoughts and speeches, without any remarkable facts. These female saints undoubtedly spent a lot of time giving an account of their interior to the priests who directed them; and these directors, biased in favor of their penitents whose virtue they knew, easily took their thoughts for revelations, and the extraordinary things that happened to them for miracles.”

10. It is clear that Fleury, who only wants to see here the directors of these female saints, would have done better to ask himself what the Church had thought about the divine enlightenments with which these Servants of God were favored. He would have found that the Bulls of Canonization very expressly recognized the supernatural gifts in which he only wants to see the result of laziness and imagination, both aided by the

complacency of the directors. If he had then opened the Breviary, he would have found there in abbreviated form these same facts produced and certified with an authority regarding which it is not permitted, in these matters, to oppose the freedom of the critic which one enjoys with regard to purely historical facts. But one cannot help but recognize that such language, used by a serious man as Fleury was, had to be a destroyer of the confidence which the faithful of France, as well as those of the whole world, had possessed until then in those marvels of grace for which the Church professed such serious respect. I will observe in passing that these words are taken from the VIIIth Discourse on Ecclesiastical History, which has to do with the religious state; that Scipio de Ricci drew verbatim from this same discourse all the principles which he unveiled regarding this subject in his Synod of Pistoia; and that these same principles were solemnly and expressly condemned in the Bull *Auctorem fidei*.

11. One senses, in reading the words of Fleury, that one of the reasons which lead him to speak so lightly of private revelations is that they often came through women. Melanchton, the Centuriators, and Marc Anthony de Dominis had not failed before him to point out this particularity with disdain; de Dominis, in his easy Latin, goes so far as to call St. Catherine of Siena a *femella*. The fact is that God seems to have preferentially chosen women for these kinds of communications, the first of which were recorded in writing, as we have seen, as far back as the great martyr St. Perpetua. To quote St. Teresa here is to give her a voice in her own cause; but I am writing for Catholics. “It is a truth,” says the prophetess of Carmel, “that the number of women to whom God does similar favors is much greater than that of men; I heard it from the

mouth of the holy Friar Peter of Alcantara, and I saw it with my own eyes. This great servant of God used to tell me that women make much more progress in this way than men, and he gave excellent reasons for this which it is unnecessary to relate here, but which were all in favor of women" (*Life of Saint Teresa by herself*, chap. XL).²¹ To the testimony of the famous contemplative, let us add that of the Angelic Doctor. "Science," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "and generally everything that contains the idea of greatness, is an occasion for man to consider himself, and not to give himself up completely to God. Hence devotion is often stopped in its tracks by this obstacle, whereas in the simple and in women, with this elevation restricted, devotion develops with fullness; although he who knows how to lower before God his knowledge and his other superiorities can derive from this very fact an increase in devotion" (2a, 2æ quest. 82, art. 3).

12. Thus simplicity and the absence of pretension already serve to explain why God so often chooses from the weaker sex the persons to whom He wishes to bestow the highest favors. There is also here the application of a primordial law of Christianity which the lack of space does not allow us to explain and justify here; let us limit ourselves to recalling a single circumstance of the Holy Gospel. The dogma of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the basis of the Christian religion: "If Christ be not risen," says the Apostle, "then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain" (I Cor., XV). Now, to whom did Jesus Christ first manifest his Resurrection? To women, as a reward for their love. This manifestation preceded the one He made later to the Apostles, who were nevertheless

²¹ cf. I Cor. 1:27 [Ed.]

charged with preaching to all nations the mystery of the risen Son of God. And how were these women received, who went straight to the Apostles to tell them what they had seen? Was their testimony believed? St. Luke tells us that what they said seemed to the Apostles to be an effect of delirium, *sicut deliramentum*, and that they did not believe it (Luke, XXIV). Nevertheless, they had received orders to carry out this mission with the disciples. Is it not to be believed that Fleury, if he had been in the company of the Apostles, who had not yet been enlightened by the Holy Ghost, would have rejected the testimony of Magdalen and her companions as they did? I will not examine here to what extent the Savior's disciples were obliged to rely on this testimony; I want to certify only one thing, that the revelation was divine, and that Our Lord did not think it beneath Him to manifest it to women. When in the evening the Savior appeared to the assembled Apostles, they must have regretted not having welcomed the triumphant news earlier and with greater grace; but these regrets were not to change anything in the celestial disposition in virtue of which the favors from on high are distributed. Furthermore, the Church is less proud than Fleury; in the 13th century she instituted the feast of the Blessed Sacrament as a result of a revelation that the Savior had deigned to make of his intentions on this subject to a humble nun in Belgium. In the 19th century the Church finally enjoyed the universal feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, at the request of the French Episcopate to the Holy See; and the origin of this solemnity is again a revelation with which the Redeemer of men favored a cloistered woman, a Sister of the Visitation from an obscure convent in France.

13. We should not therefore find it extraordinary that God, master of his gifts, should bestow on one sex rather than the other the mysterious favors of his intimate communications; we must leave this to his disposition, and bow to the facts which alone can put us on the path of his ever-wise designs. What is important for the Christian who wishes to know the things of God to the extent that we are permitted here below is to know that in addition to the general teaching given to all the children of the Church, there are still certain lights that God communicates to souls whom He has chosen, and these lights pierce the clouds when He deems it appropriate, so they spread far and wide for the consolation of simple hearts, and also to be a certain trial for those who are wise in their own eyes. It cannot be denied that the totality of the insights which have come to us by this way are of the most imposing effect, and have had since the first centuries of the Church a real influence on a more intimate understanding of dogma, morals and spiritual doctrine. If it is asked what degree of belief is to be given to the details which are to be found in private revelations, even in those which the Church has praised as containing "heavenly secrets," the theologians who have dealt with the subject answer, first of all, that these revelations, insofar as they affirm things which are contained neither in Scripture nor in the Tradition of the Church, cannot in any way be the object of theological faith; they lack the explicit sanction of the Church, and this sanction could only be given insofar as the supernatural fact would be produced in confirmation of this or that detail. To deny the existence of these private revelations in the Church would be to insult the Church which honors and protects them; to grant them the faith which is due only to the word of God would be to fail in the conditions

under which the first of the theological virtues must be exercised, which requires as its essential basis the testimony of God himself. Those to whom God deigns to make these manifestations must believe them with true faith, if the revelation is guaranteed by arguments of complete certainty; those to whom the Seer communicates what he has thus divinely learned, being reduced to a human and fallible intermediary, have only to give to it the assent which we give to probable things, an assent to which we give the name of pious belief. This is little, no doubt, if we consider the invincible certainty of faith; it is much, if we think of the shadows that surround us.

14. It is not necessary to belabor this obvious principle, that private revelations must always be compared with the doctrine of the Church regarding dogma, morals, and dogmatic facts, and that any private revelation which contradicts it must be immediately abandoned. It may happen that these manifestations, which one has serious reasons for considering as divine, seem to settle questions debated in the School; is this a reason for abandoning them, as if one were obliged to believe that these questions would remain unsolvable for ever? It seems not, since it is undoubtedly true that God knows the truth of the matter, and that nothing can prevent Him from manifesting it if He judges it opportune. And besides, has it not happened more than once that questions freely discussed in the School for a certain period of time were later defined by the Church? Hurtado, Del Rio and Matteucci go even further when they teach that private revelation should not be abandoned simply because it goes against the common opinion of theologians.

15. Yet what signs of credibility must be present in the person given to be favored with heavenly lights?

Benedict XIV sums them up in this way: “She must not have asked for these kinds of graces; she must not have desired them; she must have communicated them to men learned in these matters; she must have preserved, in the midst of these favors, tranquility and poise of soul, have excelled in humility, and continued to chasten her body” (De Beatif. et canoniz., lib. III, cap. ult.). These signs are easy to observe, and one understands how necessary it is to find them in every person who speaks in the name of Heaven in virtue of an extraordinary mission.

16. I believe what I have said is sufficient for those who would be inclined to disdain private revelations; I will add a few words for the benefit of those who have an exaggerated confidence in them, which would be another disadvantage. We have just established that in no case is it permissible to apply to them the adherence of theological faith, yet this is not saying enough. I would add that more than once in these revelations what is false can be found mixed with what is true. The people whom God favors with supernatural enlightenments are not therefore constituted in a state of permanent inspiration. They present themselves to the divine action with their natural faculties, their opinions, their previous ideas, the result of teaching, reading, and their own reflections. The divine light which penetrates them momentarily does not aim at rectifying these imperfections which do not create an obstacle to the union of God with the soul. If there is error, if there is prejudice in these personal ideas, this innocent error, this prejudice, remains in its place, and if it happens that the person takes the pen to describe what she saw and felt at the moment when the enlightenment occurred in her, it is difficult, not to say impossible, for her to always distinguish what belongs solely to human

weakness from what is the real and positive memory of this non-personal light which visited her. She knows and can tell in all truth what her eyes have seen, what her ear has heard, what her soul has felt; but in this state she was not transformed into another, and the supernatural effect having ceased, she returns to ordinary life, where she finds herself penetrated by divine things, but not freed from the inaccurate ideas which the celestial light was not intended to remove. God, therefore, will let her write or allow her to write under his dictation; and in the work she produces there may be human things mixed with revealed things. Some contradictions will be pointed out in facts of a secondary nature which put one book of revelations at variance with another. There will sometimes be assertions which are in dissonance with such and such a conclusion acquired by historical science; these slight inconveniences should have been expected, since God never intended for us to compare the collections of private revelations with the inspired books of the Holy Scriptures, which are his own word. In the former, there will be edification and matter for pious belief; in the latter, the faithful will seek and find the object of his faith.

17. These assessments, already made by authors who have dealt with the phenomena of the mystical life, and which have been summarized by Benedict XIV, take nothing away from the importance of private revelations, they only put them in their true light; and besides, they refer to a rather limited number of points. There are even books to which they remain entirely extraneous in their application. Thus, the *Life of Saint Teresa* written by herself, though full of revelatory features, does not offer a single line to which they can be related. It is different with books of revelations in

which facts older than the narrator are recounted; here one feels there is room for more than one misunderstanding, especially if the person, before receiving the enlightenment from above, had already probed these same facts with the help of books and his own meditations. But there always remains that superhuman tone, soft and strong at the same time, an echo of the divine word that has resounded in the soul, an unction which penetrates the reader and soon obliges him to say: This is not of man. The heart gently warms up when reading it, the soul feels desires for virtue that it had not yet experienced, the mysteries of faith become more luminous, the world and its hopes gradually fade away, and the desire for heavenly goods, which seemed to be dormant, awakens with a new ardor.

Article 6: Aug. 15, 1858

The influence of the *Mystical City of God* on art.

Murillo. The Incarnation and art. The thought of St. Anselm on the perfections of Mary. The importance of humility and obedience. The virtues of Mary of Ágreda. The purpose of private revelations is the sanctification of the soul. Purpose of the ecstasies of Mary of Ágreda. Mary as the Gate of Heaven.

1. It was in the year 1670, five years after the death of Mary of Jesus, that the *Mystical City [of God]* was published in Madrid. The whole Catholic kingdom was thrilled to hear the wonders of the Mother of God, and all the splendor with which she appears in this extraordinary book offended no one in that land where the ancient faith had remained so pure. Simple souls felt and understood; the learned became more enlightened, and far from encountering obstacles in the Universities of the [Iberian] peninsula, the book was welcomed and revered there as one of the most precious documents of divine science. Spain thus placed among the most cherished monuments of its national glory *The Mystical City of God*.

2. It was right that Catholic art should draw its inspiration from this superhuman work. [Bartolomé Esteban] Murillo had passed his fiftieth year, but his brush was still in full vigor. Until then, his [paintings of the] Virgin had been admired for their pious and profound expression, but the pronounced realism that is one of the characteristics of his painting had held him back from the mystical ideal of such a great subject. More than once, however, the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, so dear to Spain, had solicited his genius. Such a subject is only accessible to the artist

when he has understood Mary, not only in her divine maternity, but also in her eternal predestination, by virtue of which she was, from the very first moment of her existence, the Mirror of the sanctity of God, and the supreme endeavor of omnipotent goodness. Theology had been able to initiate the doctors to such a sublime view; it was reserved to the *Mystical City* to make it popular. The Catholic genius of Murillo felt elevated to new heights, and after having tried his hand at painting the dome of the cathedral in Seville, where he was able to represent Mary Immaculate with a superiority that left all his previous attempts far behind [see below], and not yet satisfied with his work, he once again tackled this cherished subject, and this time it was to bequeath to the Catholic world the highest and most complete expression yet given to the most inaccessible of all the subjects upon which Christian art must be exercised.



The Immaculate Conception
Murillo, dome of Seville Cathedral

3. It is not a mediocre glory nor an ordinary fortune for France to have come into possession of this masterpiece,²² and this at a time when the definition of the sacred dogma, to which this magnificent painting pays homage, was moving almost the entire nation, and making it clear that France, through all its upheavals, is tending to become once again the empire of Mary. But I believe I must put here in comparison these two great things: The painting of Murillo and the *Mystical City*; the inspiring book and the work which came out of it. Let us stop in front of this admirable painting. Murillo has chosen the moment when the soul of Mary has just been united to her body; the whole being of the future Mother of God pays her homage of gratitude and love to the Creator who has deigned to raise her, a daughter of Eve, to the most sublime degree of original sanctity. There is no need to point out that, by a necessary and agreed fiction, the artist who wants to represent the mystery of the Immaculate Conception must always give Mary the features and stature of a person already grown, and aware of the marvelous gift by which God has prevented her. The heavenly creature painted by Murillo is truly the one whom the Angel will greet one day as full of grace. This “grace floods her entire being; it is that impetuous river that flows through the City of God, intoxicating it with delight” (Psalm XLV). Astonished and delighted, but calm at the same time, the beloved of God turns towards the Author of so many good things, and her grateful soul is entirely absorbed in the look of humility and love she sends Him. Her mouth seems to say: “The Almighty has

²² Murillo masterpieces grace the covers of the *New English Edition of The Mystical City of God. The Immaculate Conception* adorns the first volume, *The Conception*. [Ed.]

worked great things in me”; her heart beats softly in her chest, which is protected by her virginal hands; and such is the effect of this silent and penetrating scene, that only after having contemplated the invisible beauty for a long time does the eye stop for a moment on this external beauty, which is only the reflection of that of the most holy and perfect soul that God has created. The airy pose of this figure, which has nothing earthly about it, indicates to us “the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven adorned as the Bride for her Bridegroom”. (Apoc. XXI). Happy is the earth that her feet will tread! Her white robe and her azure mantle complete, by their sacred character, the celestial vision. Murillo felt everything, understood everything; his realism abandoned him, all his types are exceeded; it is not from the earth, this time it is from heaven whence he took his model.



The Immaculate Conception by Murillo (1678)

4. Such is this famous painting, which has the right to be counted among the treasures of a nation, and which enriches France today at the expense of Spain, to which remains however the eternal honor of having produced it. One should not be surprised that in the eyes of many it has seemed below its reputation; to be admired and appreciated it needs to be understood, and to understand it, it is necessary to place oneself by faith at the center of the Christian dogma. It is then that one comes to feel that if "the beauty of the King's daughter is all within", as his forefather the Psalmist sang (Psalm XLIV), the Catholic Christian alone possesses the key to the mystery, and is alone competent to appreciate Murillo's sublime work, which was conceived and executed only for him.

5. In turning now to the work of Mary of Ágreda, we do not change the subject of admiration; as I have said, both are contemporaries, and one is the offspring of the other.²³ We will thus analyze quickly, as far as it will be possible, the three parts of the *Mystical City* by limiting ourselves to the principal and characteristic features. We will add to this analysis the criticism to which it can give rise, after which we will enter into the history of the vicissitudes which the book itself has experienced in Rome, Spain and France.

6. Before going any further, it is essential to place ourselves in the point of view of the writer, whether we consider her assisted by the light from on high, or whether we want to see in her book only a work of genius, a sublime epic, whose starting point and main lines are borrowed from Christian revelation. Mary the Mother of God can be considered from two points of view: She is the privileged woman to whom it was

²³ i.e. the book inspired, even *brought forth*, the painting [Ed.]

given to conceive, give birth to, and nourish with her virginal milk the Son of God made man; she is also the human creature par excellence, the miracle of divine omnipotence, the abyss of grace, so by herself, due to the magnificent gifts which rest in her and which were to prepare her for her sublime ministry, she is personally entitled to special homage. Some, as we shall see, have limited themselves to the first point of view; others, and in particular Mary of Ágreda, have added the second. After the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the combination of the one with the other became essential for anyone in a position to apply the logical procedure to the objects of his belief.

7. Already in the eleventh century the profound philosopher St. Anselm posed this axiom on the perfections of Mary: It is necessary to recognize in Mary a sanctity which has above it only the very sanctity of God. Later, St. Thomas took up this axiom and made it one of the foundations of his theory of the perfections of the Mother of God. Once this principle has been admitted, it would be unconscionable to be surprised that extraordinary gifts, all of them subordinated to this marvelous sanctity, were accumulated in Mary, in whom the thrice-holy God recognized the created reflection of his own sanctity. It is opportune to repeat here the words of Pierre de Celles which we recalled in another article,²⁴ that in the Mother of God there are many wonders which will only be revealed in the course of the centuries. We, in turn, are witnessing this unveiling of the glorious titles of the Queen of Heaven; yet it can be said that they are reproduced nowhere with such completeness and

²⁴ cf. Article 4, ¶ 4 [Ed.]

magnificence as in the books of the *Mystical City* by Mary of Ágreda, whatever allowance one makes for human thought.

8. The Sister opens her narration in this way: "This most high Lord (after the long resistances that I have mentioned and many disordered fears, and great delays born of my cowardice, by the knowledge of this immense sea of wonders upon which I am embarking, and fearful of drowning myself in it) gave me to feel a power from on high, strong, gentle, efficacious and sweet; a light which enlightens the understanding, subdues the rebellious will, calming, rectifying, governing, and calling to the republic of the interior and exterior senses, and surrendering the whole creature to the pleasure and will of the Most High, and seeking in all things his glory and honor alone."²⁵ Thus prepared by divine action, Mary of Jesus was put in touch with six heavenly spirits who were to assist her in her work. Two others, belonging to the superior hierarchies, then showed themselves to her, and she knew that they had deep secrets to reveal to her. The Sister having manifested too ardent a desire to be put in possession of these mysteries, they rebuked her severely. In her confusion, she said to them: "Princes of the Almighty and messengers of the great King, why having called me dost thou now detain me, doing violence to my will and delaying my joy and happiness? What force is thine, and what power which calls me, inflames me, entreats me, and yet detains me all at the same time;

²⁵ *The Conception*, Book I, Chapter 1, paragraph 2. For all citations from *The Mystical City of God* the following abbreviations will be used: Con. = *The Conception*; Inc. = *The Incarnation*; Tran. = *The Transfixion*; and Cor. = *The Coronation*. Also note the citation given is the paragraph number, not the page number. [Ed.]

which drawing me after the odor of my beloved Master and his ointments, yet restrains me with strong fetters? Tell me the cause of this.”²⁶ The blessed spirits answered, “Because it is necessary, O soul, to come discalced and despoiled of all thy appetites and passions in order to know these exalted mysteries, which are incompatible with tenebrous inclinations and cannot be accommodated to them. Take off thy shoes like Moses, for such was the command given to him before he could see the miraculous bush.” The Sister humbly resumed: “Princes of heaven and my lords, much was asked of Moses, who in earthly nature was given angelical operations; but he was a saint, and I am but a sinner full of miseries. My heart is disturbed, and I am in conflict with the servitude and the law of sin which I feel in my members and which is opposed to the law of the spirit.” The answer of the Angels was this: “Soul, a very difficult enterprise is asked of thee if thou had to execute it with thy powers alone; but the Most High, who desires and asks for this disposition, is powerful, and He will not deny thee his help if from thy heart thou ask his assistance and thou prepare thyself to receive it. And his power, which caused the bush to burn and yet not be consumed, can prevent also the fire of the passions which encompass and beset the soul from consuming it if it truly desires to be liberated. His Majesty asks for that which He desires, and can execute what He asks. Reassured by Him thou canst accomplish that which He commands. Take off thy shoes and weep bitterly; call out to Him from the bottom of thy heart so thy prayers may be heard and thy desires fulfilled.”

²⁶ Con. 4, and the same for the rest of the quotes in this paragraph [Ed.]

9. Thus Christian mysticism, far from being vain fodder for pride and the imagination, constantly solicits the soul to new efforts of virtue, and by this character it differs essentially from those natural or artificial hallucinations with which naturalism constantly strives to confuse it. In the mystical way, the soul takes a new step only on condition of a new purification. The approach of a more intimate divine light reveals to it new spots in itself which it did not see before, and the whole work of its sanctification seems to it to begin again. Such is the precaution that God takes against pride, whose danger becomes so formidable at these heights.

10. After her colloquy with the two angels, the Sister saw a veil which hid a very rich treasure; and she ardently desired for the veil to be lifted so she could see the marvel that it covered. It was then said to her: "Obey, soul, in what was enjoined and commanded thee; despoil thyself of thyself, and this sacrament shall be revealed to thee."²⁷ Let us listen to the Sister herself give an account of the effect that these words had on her: "I resolved to amend my life and to overcome my appetites; I sighed and wept with many aspirations from my inmost soul for the manifestation of this blessing. As I was proposing my resolutions, the veil which covered my treasure began to be lifted. Presently the veil was raised entirely and my interior eyes saw what I shall not know how to describe in words. I saw a great and mysterious sign in heaven: I saw a Woman, a most beautiful Lady and Queen, crowned with stars, clothed with the sun, and the moon was at her feet." Then the angels said to her: "This is that happy Woman whom

²⁷ Con. 5, and the same for the rest of the quotes in this paragraph.
[Ed.]

St. John saw in the Apocalypse, and in whom are enclosed, deposited, and sealed up the wonderful mysteries of the Redemption. So much has the Most High, the almighty God, favored this creature that it causes admiration to us, his angelic spirits. Attend and look upon her prerogatives; write them down, since for this purpose they shall be manifested to thee according to the manner suitable to thee."

11. Ordinarily, private revelations have as their sole end the advancement and sanctification of the soul to whom they are given; yet here we see another end, the edification of the faithful by the public manifestation of these wonders. But God is far from losing sight of the interests of this soul which He has chosen to instruct others. He therefore speaks to her in his turn, and she hears these words which penetrate her to the very depths of her being: "My spouse, I desire thee to finish what thou hast determined with earnestness, and seek Me carefully, love Me fervently, and for thy life to be more angelic than human, forgetting entirely earthly things. I desire to raise thee from the dust as one who is poor, and as a needy one from the dunghill, so while I raise thee thou mayest humble thyself, and thy spikenard give its sweet odor in my presence. Knowing thy weakness and miseries, persuade thyself with all thy heart thou dost merit tribulation, and in it humiliation. Behold my grandeur and thy lowliness, that I am just and holy, and with equity use my mercy to assist thee, not chastising thee as thou dost deserve. Seek above all this foundation of humility in order to acquire the rest of the virtues so thou mayest comply with my will. And in order for thee to be taught, corrected and repreahended, I appoint as thy Teacher my Virgin

Mother; She shall instruct thee and direct thy footsteps toward my pleasure and approval.”²⁸

12. It must be admitted that there is no trace of flattery in this language; rather, one finds in it that firm and distinctive tone which one often notices in the divine communications made to other holy souls. Let us compare such an account with the delusions of false mysticism, of Swedenborg for example; is it not true that we are at the other extreme? There, everything is exaltation, intoxication, madness; here, everything is calm, humble, passive; it is the servant of the Lord who listens and bows; it is the Lord himself who speaks as Master to his creature whom He desires to raise up to Him, by drawing her away from herself. The Mother of God was present at the moment when the sovereign Master spoke thus to the Sister; she deigned to say to her: “My daughter, I desire thee to be my disciple and companion, and I shall be thy Teacher; yet be aware thou must obey me with fortitude, and from this day on no trace of a daughter of Adam must be recognized in thee. My life, the works of my pilgrimage on earth, and the wonders which the mighty arm of the Most High wrought with me, must be the mirror and the model for thy life.”²⁹ The Sister prostrated herself before the throne of the King and Queen of the universe, offering to obey whatever they commanded, and rendering gratitude to the Lord for the honor and favor He deigned to give her. She renewed into her hands the vows of her religious profession, and promised to cooperate with all her strength to amend her life. God then said to her, “Behold and see.” She opened her eyes, and saw a magnificent ladder with many steps,

²⁸ Con. 6 [Ed.]

²⁹ Con. 7, and the rest of the quotes in this paragraph [Ed.]

and a multitude of angels around it, while others were ascending and descending upon it. And God said to her: "This is the mysterious ladder of Jacob,³⁰ which is the house of God and the gate of heaven;³¹ if thou shalt dispose thyself and thy life such that my eyes find nothing reprehensible, thou shalt ascend upon it to Me."

13. This promise greatly incited the Sister's desires. She would have liked without delay to climb that sacred ladder which was called at the same time the House of God and Gate of Heaven; but she did not yet penetrate its mystery. She sighed after the end of her captivity, and all inflamed she "longed to arrive where there would be no obstacle to my love".³² She spent a few days in solicitous self-reflection, seeking relief in a new general confession and in correcting the imperfections she could discover in herself. After this laborious interval, God made it known to her that this symbolic ladder signified the life, virtues and mysteries of the Mother of God, and He said: "I desire thee, my spouse, to ascend this ladder of Jacob and enter through this Gate of Heaven to know my attributes and contemplate my divinity. Arise then and walk, ascend by it to Me." It seemed to the Sister that she was climbing this ladder, and discovering in this ascent the most ineffable of the wonders that the Creator had worked. She was then inspired anew to write what she had seen and would see, in order to revive among men the profound respect with which they should be filled towards God, just as His immense Majesty deigns to become familiar with them, and also to reveal to them what they owe to

³⁰ cf. Gen. 28:12 [Ed.]

³¹ Ib. 17 [Ed.]

³² Con. 8 [Ed.]

their great Queen and charitable Mother in the work of the Redemption.

14. Mary herself deigned to formulate the heavenly intentions in these words to the Sister: "My daughter, the world has great need of this doctrine, since it does not know nor does it have the reverence due to the omnipotent Lord; and due to this ignorance the audacity of mortals provokes the rectitude of his justice to afflict and oppress them. They are dominated by their forgetfulness and overshadowed by their darkness, without knowing how to seek the remedy or find the light; and this comes upon them because they lack the fear and reverence which they ought to have."³³

15. Thus the manifestation of the excellences of Mary had as its last end to rekindle in men respect for the Divinity; and so it is always when the Church and its doctors endeavor to exalt the grandeurs of this forever blessed creature. Heresy claims that we Catholics, by exalting and developing the mystery of Mary, are tending to produce a new divinity. Nothing is more unjust or false. Through the understanding of the wonders of the Mother of God, the intellect comes to a fuller view of the divine mystery of the Incarnation; and it is only through this mystery that it is possible for us in this world to acquire the true knowledge of God. Mary is truly the mystical ladder, the Gate of heaven; we must climb by her, we must enter by her, in order to arrive with certainty and with full light at the One who is, in a more comprehensive sense, the Door by which we must enter: *Ego sum ostium*, He says (Jn. 10:9). Yet He thinks it good for his Church to greet Mary with confidence, saying to her also: *Salve, Porta!*

³³ Ib. 9 [Ed.]

Article 7: Sep. 12, 1858

Synopsis of the *Mystical City of God*, Part I, Books 1 and 2, *The Conception*: From the Immaculate Conception to the Incarnation.

1. The *Mystical City* is divided into three Parts, of which we will make a rapid analysis in succession. Let us begin with the first. Without doubt there is no need to warn the reader once again that the details which follow are in no way imposed on his faith, and that he remains completely free to consider this vast synthesis as a purely human work. Is it only that? It would be difficult to maintain this, if one takes into account all the details that have been produced. Be that as it may, the least that can be said in praise of this work is that it remains one of the most imposing monuments of human genius, and that it presupposes in its author the most marvelous penetration of the mysteries of Christianity, the deepest knowledge of its morality, and a rare understanding of Holy Scriptures.

2. The Sister begins by giving, with great clarity and admirable precision, notions about the divine light by which souls obtain certain superior knowledge in ecstasy, and she describes in particular the phenomena of this kind that she has experienced. Then going into detail, she begins with the contemplations of the divine essence which were granted to her, including the eternal generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Ghost. She has seen that the three divine Persons have formed from all eternity the decree to communicate themselves to creatures. This decree, simple and indivisible in the knowledge of God, was shown to her in a successive order, so that she could appreciate its content and extent, and the Sister, in expounding it, divided it into six instants of purpose. In the first instant

God, contemplating his own perfections, judged that it was appropriate and virtually necessary³⁴ for Him to communicate them *ad extra*, by pouring them out upon creatures, and in such a way that this communication would be as perfect as possible according to the various proportions of the beings to be created. In the second instant, God decreed that his glory would be the motive and the end of his work; in the third, that the order and harmony among the created beings would reach the highest perfection, and for this purpose the Word would assume human nature, so among all creatures there would be One who would become the personal link of all the others with the Divinity. In the fourth instant, God decreed that all possible graces would be the prerogative of the humanity of his Son, and that the Word would become incarnate by means of a Mother, in such a way that this Mother of an incarnate God preceded in the divine intention, always by a precedence of reason, the decree in virtue of which all other creatures were to be produced. Hence the torrent of the divine perfections must flow upon her in all the fullness compatible with the condition of a created being. It was at this same fourth instant that God resolved to create, for the habitation of the incarnate Word and his Mother, heaven and earth, destined subsequently to serve also for the habitation of the other creatures called to live under the scepter of the incarnate Word. In the fifth instant God decreed the creation of the angels, who will be divided into nine choirs and three hierarchies; their end will be to know and love God, and they will be subject to the incarnate Word as their Head, and to his Mother as their Queen. All the graces by means of which they will merit the

³⁴ *presque nécessaire* [Ed.]

beatific vision will be granted to them in view of the future merits of the God-Man. It was at this same instant that God decreed the election of the good angels and the reprobation of the wicked ones, in anticipation of the fidelity of the former and the disobedience of the latter; as well He resolved to destine heaven to be the dwelling place of the righteous, the earth and the rest for the use of the other creatures, and the center of the earth to be the prison of the rebellious spirits. In the sixth instant the decree is given by which God has resolved to create a special people for the incarnate Word; this people will be the human race, which will participate in the nature that the Son of God will deign to take. Ordained at this same instant is the future mode of propagation of the human family, which will proceed from a first man; the series of graces emanating from the merits of Christ to put our race in a state to reach its end; and the integrity of original justice, if man wants to preserve it. The fall is foreseen, as well as the decree in virtue of which each child of Adam will contract the original stain; yet the Mother of the God-Man will not be included in this decree,³⁵ since the plan to which her creation relates is anterior by reason to that which applies to the formation of the human race.

3. After this presentation, the Sister gives a commentary on the eighth chapter of the book of Proverbs, where she shows the idea of Christ and his Mother conceived in the divine mind before that of the other creatures. She then explains the economy of the Incarnation on the hypothesis that man would not have sinned. Coming then to the creation, she explains that the angels were drawn out of nothing when God said *let there be light*, and that the separation of good and evil

³⁵ cf. Esther 15:13 [Ed.]

spirits took place at the moment when, as Moses says, God separated light from darkness. The angels were in the state of trial for a short time. God revealed to them the mystery of the Incarnation, and the duty they would have to reverence not only his divine essence, but the humanity of the Word, and to recognize the Mother of the God-Man as their Queen, superior to them all in the gifts of grace. Here the Sister expounds upon the beautiful passage of the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse, where the woman clothed with the sun appears, with the moon under her feet, and around her head a crown of twelve stars; then the rage of the dragon against this noble and glorious creature, the combat fought between the Angels, and the fall of Lucifer. The archangel Michael, the principal victor in this formidable struggle, is indicated as being henceforth, with Gabriel, the prompt and powerful messengers of the incarnate Word and his Mother.

4. It was on Sunday, the first day of creation, that the rebellious angels began to oppose God and form their plots against Christ and the ever blessed Woman. The next day their rebellion was punished forever. For the next two days they deliberated in their envy over the means of harming these two special objects of the omnipotence of God, and were permitted to subject them for a time to temptation. However, God had continued the creation of material beings, primarily for Christ and his Mother, and secondarily for other men. On the sixth day He formed Adam after the type of the future Christ, and Eve after Mary as she was represented in his divine mind. He deigned to indulge himself in these copies of an original which was to be the masterpiece of his power and love, and he showered them with his most select graces. The envy of Lucifer rose to its height against these two privileged beings,

and he believed at first that Adam was Christ and Eve his Mother. After their fall, he indulged in a ferocious joy, which soon turned to spite when he saw that they had recovered the divine grace by contrition.

5. The Sister then goes through the prophetic lines of the law, by means of which God shows the continuity and unity of his designs. Finally, the world had reached the highest degree of its corruption and seemed to defy divine justice; this was the moment God had chosen to make his supreme mercy manifest. Joachim and Anne were living in Nazareth of Galilee; Gabriel was sent to both of them, and prepared their [nuptial] union. Yet twenty years passed, and this union remained always sterile. A new message from Gabriel came to announce to the two spouses that their sterility would cease and they would soon have a daughter, that this daughter would be illustrious and filled with the Holy Ghost, and that they would have to offer her to God in the temple from her childhood. Anne alone was notified by the Angel that this daughter of benediction was to become the Mother of the Messiah. Meanwhile, the august Trinity is preparing to create the blessed soul destined to animate the admirable creature to be conceived in the womb of Anne. The honor of God demands that grace be poured into the soul of the child with an abundance proportionate to the role that she will have as the Mother of the Son of God. The immensity of the gifts destined for so many millions of angels and men who have deserved reprobation will be poured into her as a supplement to the graces prepared for her, so the Most High will not be frustrated in the glory he expected from his work.

6. God declares to the holy Angels that the moment has come when this work will receive its primordial completion. A thousand of these blessed spirits will

receive the custody of his privileged creature. She is finally conceived by the happy Anne in the manner of the other members of the human race; however, the concupiscence of the flesh does not interfere to mingle its imperfection in this solemn moment of the life of the two holy spouses. It is on a Sunday that the existence of the Mother of God begins; on the following Saturday, the soul is created and united to the body. This is the sacred moment the Church calls the Immaculate Conception. In creating this soul, God says, "Let Us make Mary in our image to be our true Daughter and Spouse, in order to be the Mother of the onlybegotten Son of the Father."³⁶ At that moment a grace superior to that which God has bestowed upon all beings called to the supernatural state flooded this blessed soul, and the voice of God was heard saying "this is very good." Anne was rapt in ecstasy at the moment when the soul of her glorious daughter came to animate the body destined for her daughter, and [the effects of] this holy exhilaration lasted the nine months that she carried this precious deposit within her.

7. From the first instant in the womb of her mother Mary possessed the use of reason; the theological and moral virtues were infused into her in an incomparable plenitude; universal knowledge enlightened her intelligence; the divine essence was manifested to her, although in a mode distinct from the beatific vision. The child, enlightened by such ineffable lights, deeply adored the divine Majesty who filled her with so many favors. The entire history of the human race being revealed to her, the fall of Adam made her shed abundant tears; she implored with ardor the salvation of her race, unaware yet, and for a long time, that she

³⁶ Con. 220 [Ed.]

herself was to be the necessary instrument of this salvation. Here the Sister pauses to give an interpretation of chapter XXI of the Apocalypse, where we see the new Jerusalem descending from heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband; this is the prophecy of the Immaculate Conception, and the inspiration for Murillo's sublime painting.

8. Meanwhile Lucifer, who knew that the time of the divine Incarnation was near, was scouring the earth to find out if the woman whose sign he had once seen in heaven had appeared. Anne was the object of his snares during her pregnancy, because he had noticed in her particular characteristics of holiness, and that angels sometimes appeared near her; but the efforts of the infernal serpent were without result. Mary was born on September 8, at midnight. Anne immediately offered her to God to be the living tabernacle of his incarnate Son. When she entered the light, the child was seized with a rapture that took her away from all sensible objects for a long time. At this solemn moment, the dawn of the salvation of mankind, the holy angels sang the most marvelous music near the daughter and the mother. God immediately sends Gabriel to Limbo to announce to the righteous who were detained there the birth of the Mother of the Messiah; at the same time He orders other angels to take the newly born child up to heaven for a few moments. Mary deeply adores the divine essence, of which she obtains a fleeting vision. God makes her sit beside Him on his own throne, to show that He has given her dominion over all creatures. The child takes advantage of this moment of favor to ask for the hastening of the salvation of the world by the Incarnation; she learns that the fulfillment of the ancient promise will not be delayed much longer. The august Trinity decrees that the child will receive the

name of Mary, and that this name will be a source of consolation and salvation for all those who invoke it with love and confidence. But it is time for Mary to be returned to her mother. The holy angels respectfully take her up and return her to the arms of St. Anne. Eight days later, a numerous procession of blessed spirits descended from heaven carrying a splendid escutcheon on which shone the name of Mary. Anne, informed of the heavenly plan, declared to the family that this was the name that her happy daughter should bear, and the future Mother of God was henceforth called Mary on earth as in heaven. The Sister asked our great Queen how she had been able to enter heaven before the Redeemer had opened the gates, and Mary answered her question by telling her that heaven remained closed only to those who had contracted original sin.

9. Then comes the account of the purification of Anne. The high priest Simeon receives the child in his arms with great consolation, without yet being informed of her destiny. Anne renews her vow to offer her daughter to the temple when she reaches the age of three. Lucifer, witnessing the mother's purification, is reassured to think that she must have given birth to an ordinary child, since she is subject to the law like other women. The Sister then gives various details about the childhood of Mary. The Queen of Heaven often wept in her cradle at the thought of the sins of men, imploring the coming of the Messiah. Her sleep did not interrupt the acts of love which constantly flowed from her heart. She suffered hunger and thirst like other children. The swaddling clothes which wrapped her were not painful to her, because she knew that the incarnate Word would be bound in his Passion. If it happened that she was given back the use of her arms for a moment, she immediately stretched them out in the form of a cross,

thinking of her Beloved, who was to die in that position. The angels of her guard often showed themselves to her all resplendent with an unparalleled brightness. They bore a motto: “Mary Mother of God”, yet the child did not understand the meaning of this motto, nor did the angels explain it to her. Mary spoke with them from the moment of her birth; but with men, even with her mother, she did not speak until she was a year and a half old, wanting to keep secret, as far as possible, the high favors God had bestowed upon her from the womb. Her first word heard by men was to ask her parents for their blessing. When she was a child, she desired to take part in the most arduous household chores, but [since she was not permitted to do this by herself],³⁷ when alone she engaged in such labor with the help of her angels. When she had to be clothed, she asked her mother for clothes made of a coarse and poor material; but once this request was made, she submitted in this, as in everything else, to her mother’s wishes.

10. When she had reached three years old, Joachim and Anne took their daughter to the temple to be presented to the Lord. The transport of the holy Ark [of the Testament] to the house of God built by Solomon had been the figure of what was accomplished on that day. As Mary, held by the hand of her mother, was entering the temple, an unusual light suddenly broke out and a voice was heard saying: “Come, my Beloved, my Spouse, come to my temple.”³⁸ The young maiden went up the fifteen steps after bidding farewell to her parents and asking their blessing. The high priest Simeon entrusted her to the women who were responsible for bringing up the young girls thus offered

³⁷ Con. 399 [Ed.]

³⁸ Ib. 421 [Ed.]

until they reached the age for marriage; among these women was Anna the Prophetess. Shortly after entering the temple, Mary was taken up to heaven for the second time by the angels, where she enjoyed the vision of the divine essence for a few more moments. God having spoken to her of the treasures He destines for those who love him, Mary asked for the sorrows and afflictions of life, in which love is most exercised, to be her share, and they were granted to her. She then proposed to offer to the divine Majesty the four vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and perpetual enclosure in the temple. God answered that He accepted only the vow of chastity; as for the other three vows, she could practice them freely. Then Mary took a vow of perpetual chastity in the presence of the Divinity, and resolved to renounce all human attachments and to obey all creatures for the sake of God. Immediately the Seraphim clothed her with splendid adornment and the most precious jewels, and the Holy Trinity placed on her head the crown of empress. The robe of the maiden was dazzlingly white, and on it was written in golden letters the words: "Mary, Daughter of the eternal Father, Spouse of the Holy Ghost, and Mother of the true Light."³⁹ But the humility of the Virgin prevented her from going deeper into this prophecy of her destiny. Then the Most High accepted her as his bride and placed in her hands all the treasures of his grace,⁴⁰ commanding her to ask for anything she desires. Mary then implored again the coming of the Son of God on earth; she asked God to bless her parents, to comfort the poor and the afflicted, and for herself to fulfill always more fully the good pleasure of her Creator. Then the

³⁹ Ib. 434 [Ed.]

⁴⁰ Ib. 436 [Ed.]

angels brought her back to the place in the temple from which they had taken her.

11. The Sister then explains in great detail the virtues which developed in Mary, and which made her soul the most complete and faithful of all those which God has created and could create.⁴¹ This whole part is of great beauty, but the analysis would lead us too far. The story begins again with the death of St. Joachim, which took place six months after the entrance of Mary into the Temple. The heart of the young maiden suffered greatly in this ordeal, but she knew how to reconcile in an ineffable way filial tenderness with the most tranquil submission to the divine will. She sent her angels to her dying father, and the old man learned from them, before he closed his eyes, that his daughter would one day be the Mother of the very Son of God. Joachim had reached his sixty-ninth year; he had lived twenty-three years with Anne, whose care surrounded him at his deathbed. Meanwhile Lucifer, uneasy regarding the incomparable brilliance of the virtues of Mary, feared that she was the woman whose appearance had been the terror and expectation of the demons for more than four thousand years; a council of the infernal spirits was held, and it was resolved to attack her virtues, which seemed to be so unshakeable, by means of domestic persecutions. The companions of Mary were then aroused to oppose and defame in all things the most holy of creatures, and God allowed these cruel machinations to have full success with the priests and the persons in charge of the education of the young girls of the Temple. At the same time, God withdrew from the already afflicted Virgin all the interior consolations with which she had hitherto been inundated; and this

⁴¹ excepting, of course, the most holy soul of Christ [Ed.]

state of trial lasted for nearly ten years, during which the virtues of the future Mother of God took on a new impetus and made her even more worthy of her sublime destiny. She was twelve years old when her angels told her that her mother would soon die. This news was vividly felt by the tender heart of the maiden; in order to soften the bitterness of the news, God ordered the angels to take Mary to her dying mother, while one of them took her place, under her appearance, in the Temple. The scene of the farewell of the daughter and mother is of incomparable beauty. Anne gently fell asleep in the Lord, in the arms of her daughter; but God did not allow St. Anne to reveal to her the secret of the honors reserved for her. According to Mary of Ágreda, St. Anne lived for fifty-six years and was twenty-four when she married St. Joachim. The Sister recalls in this place the sentiment of those who have written that she was married three times; but she declares, without formally disputing this sentiment, that nothing of the sort was ever made known to her.

12. The death of the pious Anne was for Mary the time when she was to recover the divine consolations from which she had been weaned for so long, for the great mystery was soon to be accomplished. God, who was bringing back to her the torrent of his tender graces, suddenly manifested to her that she was to take a husband. The Virgin, faithful like Abraham, subordinated her reason and her will before the divine reason and will, and entrusted herself to the sovereign power of the Most High, who had received and accepted her vow of virginity. At the same time, Simeon received orders from Heaven to call a meeting of the council of priests to choose a spouse for Mary. It was agreed to gather all the young men of the tribe of Judah; among them was Joseph, a native of Nazareth,

thirty-three years of age, a man of great modesty, who at the age of twelve had taken a vow of chastity. The high priest gave each of the aspirants a dried-up branch of a tree, announcing that the one in whose hands this branch would blossom would be the husband of the daughter of Joachim. The branch that was given to Joseph was immediately covered with flowers, and at the same time a dove appeared on the head of this just man. He was proclaimed the husband of Mary, who had just completed her fourteenth year. The espousal was celebrated on the eighth of September, which was the anniversary of her birth. Joseph soon took his spouse to Nazareth, and it was there that they communicated the secret vow that bound them both to chastity. A respectful tenderness developed between the couple, yet Joseph was overwhelmed by the majesty of his spouse, though he knew nothing yet of the graces God had bestowed upon her, nor of the honors that were prepared for her, the glow of which was to fall upon him. At Nazareth, Mary and Joseph took the inheritance that Joachim and Anne had left them, and they divided it into three parts: The first was offered to the temple, the second was distributed to the poor, and the third was given into the administration of Joseph. Joseph then asked Mary if she would allow him to take up the trade of carpenter, which he had learned in his early years; the Virgin gave her consent, not in order to increase the wealth of the house, but in order to help the poor. There was a competition between the two spouses regarding who would obey the other. The humility of Mary prevailed; the Virgin only stipulated the freedom to give alms to the poor of the Lord. Here ends the first book of the *Mystical City*. Mary of Ágreda ends it with an explanation of chapter XXXI of the book of Proverbs, which contains the portrait of the strong

woman, whose features she applies to Mary, according to the understanding she had been given.

Article 8: Sep. 26, 1858

Synopsis of the *Mystical City of God*, Part II, Books 3 and 4, *The Incarnation*: From the Incarnation to the Return of the Holy Family from Egypt to Nazareth.

1. The second part of the *Mystical City* is the most extensive of the three; it extends from the Annunciation to the Ascension. We will begin today the analysis of it, which we will complete in the following article.

2. The time is near when the Son of God was to become incarnate in Mary. New heavenly favors were lavished on the future Mother of the [incarnate] Word in preparation for her sublime ministry. The nine days preceding the visit of the angel [Gabriel] were each filled with a wonder. On the first day, the one who was to be the Queen of creation was initiated into the works that God had accomplished in bringing heaven, earth, light and angels out of nothing. The next day, the divine work of the second day of creation was made manifest to her, and she was admitted to share in the omnipotence over all created beings. Mary, however, did not want to take advantage of this power for herself, but commanded the elements to deal with her indiscriminately and to treat her as if she was the last of the creatures. On the third day, the mysteries of the waters and plants were revealed to her; on the fourth, those of the celestial bodies. Yet in the midst of all these splendid manifestations, which initiated her into the universal knowledge, Mary, ever more concerned about the misery of men, insisted with even greater ardor on the Divine Majesty to send the Redeemer. On the fifth day, she knew all the classes of beings that came out of nothingness on that same day. On the next day, God made known to her the earthly animals, and finally the nature of man, by whose creation God had

completed the work of the sixth day. On the seventh day, which was the day of rest for the Lord, she was taken up to heaven by the angels. The Holy Trinity was pleased with her because of the increase in her virtues, and the angels were commanded to clothe her with a new and symbolic garment which was in harmony with the incomparable beauties of her soul and with her forthcoming dignity as Mother of God. On the eighth and ninth day, the blessed spirits again transported her to heaven. Each time she saw the divine essence; each time also she multiplied her requests for the acceleration of the grace promised to the world.

3. She had come down to earth when Gabriel finally received from the Almighty the order to bring the message of the Incarnation to She who was so ardently imploring the accomplishment of this great mystery, without ever having suspected that she was destined to be its glorious and necessary instrument.

4. The Sister places here several details regarding the person of Mary. The future Mother of God was then fourteen years, six months and seventeen days old; her height surpassed that of women of her age; she had an oval face, and features of great delicacy; her complexion was clear, though a little browned; the forehead broad, the eyebrows well arched; the eyes large and of the most modest expression, of a color between black and [dark green],⁴² and whose beauty was tempered by an ineffable sweetness; the nose straight and regular, the mouth small and ruddy; the whole was a beauty which will never be met in any human creature. Her clothes were simple, almost poor, of a silvery gray, tending toward ashen.

⁴² Inc. 115 [Ed.]

5. While the celestial ambassador traveled through space, the Virgin found herself immersed in the contemplation of the divine mystery of which she had learned in heaven, and from God himself, that the moment was near. When the divine Word himself traversed the heavens to come to rest in her, the spheres shook and the commotion predicted by the Psalmist was felt by all material creation. Man alone felt no effect; God had arranged it so the mystery of the divine abasement would be surrounded by silence, as it was already surrounded by the shadows of the night. There were only a few righteous people who felt at that moment an unknown emotion of joy, with a presentiment that the Messiah was coming. At the same time the archangel Michael was sent to limbo to bring the fortunate news, and the demons felt themselves furiously driven back to the depths of hell.

6. Next comes the Gospel account of the Annunciation. At the moment when the Virgin consented to the will of Heaven, the humanity of the Word was formed in her from her most pure blood, the soul was created and united to the body, and the personal union of the two natures in Jesus began to last forever. The mystery was accomplished on a Friday, March 25, of the year 5199. The Sister insists on this date,⁴³ which is in accordance with the chronology of the Septuagint, and which she says was expressly revealed to her as the only sure one. In the same instant in which the Son of God became incarnate in her, Mary

⁴³Commanded by her superiors to inquire whether this is the true and certain date, Ven. Mary was told it is, and gives as further reason that this date “agrees also with the count of the Roman Church in her Martyrology under the guidance of the Holy Ghost”. cf. Inc. 138 [Ed.]

was favored with the beatific vision, and knew in the light of God the meaning of all the Old Testament types concerning her, which her humility had hitherto kept her from understanding. But at the same time she saw what the trials, sufferings and death of her divine Son were to be, and from that moment she began to feel the anguish of a tender and maternal compassion. After this momentary vision of the divine light, there remained in her something resplendent that appeared in her features. During the time of her pregnancy six thousand angels adored God in her as in the glorious Ark of the New Testament; they helped her in her work and served her when she was not under the watchful eyes of Joseph, whom Heaven had not yet made aware of the mystery. The birds often came to visit her, singing and chirping around her, and did not fly away until she had blessed them.

7. No sooner had the Virgin begun the vocation of her Divine Maternity than she asked and obtained from Joseph the favor of going to visit Elizabeth, her cousin, of whose happy pregnancy Gabriel had informed her. Joseph accompanied her on the journey, which was twenty-seven leagues⁴⁴ long and lasted four days. More than once on the road the presence of God residing in his spouse made him feel a happiness as new to him as it was unknown. At the various stations on the journey, Mary consoled the poor and healed the sick. Among other things, she restored to health a young girl who had been exhausted by fever which was leading her to the tomb.

8. The Sister gives the name of Juda to the town where Zacharias lived. She then relates the scene of the

⁴⁴ Since a Spanish league is approx. 3 miles, this gives a distance of some 80 miles. [Ed.]

Visitation. John was sanctified in the womb of his mother, Mary having obtained this grace for him. Elizabeth had the favor of seeing the incarnate Word in the womb of his glorious Mother, as through most pure glass. Thus, as the Sister remarks, three women were the first confidants of the mystery of the Incarnation: first Anne, then Mary, and finally Elizabeth. The Visitation took place on the eighth day after the Annunciation. Mary stayed with her cousin until the day after the circumcision of John the Baptist, and left for Nazareth on July 2 with Joseph. She showered the child of Elizabeth with her caresses, but she did not kiss him, reserving her kisses for the Son of God, whom she would soon hold in her arms and press to her heart.

9. The violent oppression which the demons had felt at the moment of the Incarnation led Lucifer to scour the earth in order to discover the cause of this diminution of their power. He called together a council of the infernal spirits, and declared to them the desperation he felt at the decline of his empire. He had believed at first, he said, that Mary was destined to become the Mother of the Messiah; but this woman must be a virgin, and Mary had received a husband. Nevertheless, her strength against the demons is so irresistible to them, that there is reason to fear that there is some hidden mystery in her. Satan therefore concludes that hell must now direct all its ambuses against her. The Son of God, in the bosom of his Mother, addressed the heavenly Father, and asked him to support her against the violence with which she was about to be assailed. The demons tempted Mary to pride, greed and anger,⁴⁵ but the Virgin was invincible. They sought to destroy her and her Child, and Lucifer

⁴⁵ in fact, all seven capital sins; cf. Inc. 340ff. [Ed.]

showed himself to her in the most hideous and frightening forms; yet the Mother of God remained undisturbed. He and his legions were overthrown by a word from her mouth; and seeking to flee, they could not leave her presence until she had commanded them to return to the abyss.

10. It was the fifth month since the Incarnation when Joseph realized that his spouse would soon become a mother. The Sister relates the details given in the Gospel, and adds that the Angel sent to Joseph to enlighten him on the mystery of the Divine Maternity was Gabriel. She then recounts in a touching way the apologies Joseph addressed to his chaste wife, and the adoration he paid to the divine fruit of her womb. Then come some details of the way the two holy spouses lived in Nazareth. Their house was divided into three rooms; in one Joseph rested, in the other he worked, and the third was inhabited by the Virgin. They had no servants or handmaidens. The clothes of the Virgin never wore out or got dirty; if she changed them sometimes, it was only in order to hide this miracle from the eyes of others. The works she did were of a consummate and incomparable perfection. Although she prepared meat for Joseph, she never ate it herself. She ate fruit, fish, ordinary bread, and some cooked herbs. She often read the Holy Scriptures to her spouse and interpreted them to him, but she did not dwell upon the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the future sufferings of Christ in fear of saddening him. Seeing the birds pay their simple homage to the Mother of God, Joseph said to Mary: Shall I then let these innocent and irrational creatures surpass me in their respect for you? Sometimes the necessities of life were lacking in the house; then the Virgin commanded these birds to provide for them. They would leave and return,

soon bringing some fish, and even bread. Joseph and Mary never set a price for the work they had done for others; they were content with what they were given, and it happened that from time to time this payment did not come. More than once, being without any provisions, they waited until evening for the meal that Heaven finally sent them by a prodigy. Mary often sang beautiful songs that the Holy Ghost inspired in her, but which have not been recorded.

11. The time of the virginal birth finally arrived. Mary prepared in advance the swaddling clothes for the newborn Child; she sprinkled them with fragrant water and put them in a basket which she had destined for this purpose. As the day approached when she would be able to enjoy the sight and embrace of her divine Son, her love increased; but the memory of the cruel Passion to which He was destined suddenly overshadowed these untold joys. She then asked her Son as a grace to be associated all her life with his pains. Joseph got a donkey for the trip to Bethlehem, and the two spouses departed. God had nine thousand more angels to accompany the Queen of Heaven on her journey; Mary and Joseph often sang harmonious songs with these blessed spirits. On the way they suffered greatly from the cold and the inclemency of the season, against which Mary would never use in her favor the power she had received over the laws of nature. More than once the angels had to support her in the fatigues which overwhelmed her. The holy travelers arrived in Bethlehem on the fifth day after having left Nazareth, a Saturday evening. They knocked in vain at the doors of fifty houses to obtain lodging, and were reduced to retreating to a cave used as a stable outside the city. The Sister then recounts the birth of the Savior and explains the privilege of Mary in the divine childbirth, as the

Church teaches. Michael and Gabriel respectfully received the Child who, while still in the arms of the two angels, greeted his Mother in the most affectionate terms. The voice of the heavenly Father was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."⁴⁶ The ten thousand angels adored prostrate, and the other blessed spirits who were in Heaven descended to the earth, which was at that moment like a new heaven. The heart of Joseph was overflowing with untold joy, and without special help this joy beyond human strength would have destroyed his mortal existence. When the Virgin had wrapped the Child in swaddling clothes, she received Him and placed Him in the manger on some hay. Immediately an ox came from the meadow and stood next to the donkey. Mary commanded the two animals to warm the newborn with their breath; they bowed down before the Child, and thus the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled to the letter: "The ox has recognized his master, and the donkey the crib of his Lord."

12. Mary dispatched Michael to Limbo to announce to the righteous, especially to Anne and Joachim, the happy birth of the Son of God. Another angel was sent to Elizabeth and to John her son. Elizabeth immediately sent Mary some linen for the Child and some money for their needs. Zacharias, Simeon, and Anna the Prophetess also received an angelic message. All the righteous people on earth felt a sense of joy at the moment when Christ was born. There were wonderful movements in material nature, the stars shone with a new brilliance, and the star that was to bring the Magi suddenly appeared in the sky. Trees were suddenly covered with flowers and fruit. In various places several

⁴⁶ cf. Inc. 481 [Ed.]

temples of idols collapsed. These events were noticed, but were attributed to various other causes. The Angel who appeared to the shepherds was Gabriel. The shepherds, after adoring the Child, stayed in the cave until noon, and Mary served them a meal. The painful rite of circumcision frightened the heart of the Virgin for her Son; she consulted the Most High, representing to Him the reasons which would exempt the Child from this painful ceremony. The answer was that He should be treated like the other children of Israel. Many angels descended from heaven with the name of Jesus engraved on resplendent escutcheons; they were to form the court of the Redeemer until his Ascension. The circumcision was performed in the cave, and during the ceremony Mary, in spite of her afflicted heart, wanted to hold her Son in her arms. She dried the wound with a cloth, which received the first fruits of the liberating blood, and gave it to Joseph to be treasured. As long as the pain of the circumcision lasted she held the Child in her arms night and day. Yet the angels tried to soothe her maternal anguish by singing melodious songs with Joseph in honor of the name of Jesus that had just been given to the newborn Child.

13. Mary knew that the Magi had been on their way since the day of the Nativity of her Son, but she kept it a secret. The angels received orders from heaven to inform Joseph; Mary in turn told him that they should both stay in Bethlehem until the day of the Purification. The weather in the cave was severe, but the Virgin used her power over the elements to disarm their rigor towards her Son and her spouse, without accepting this relief for herself. Three times a day she nursed the child, and the caresses He lavished upon her made her feel a joy which her mortal life could not have endured, if the divine power of such a Son had not sustained her.

14. The Magi came from Persia, Arabia and Saba. They were righteous in their works and devoted to the sciences, governing their small countries wisely and by themselves. They communicated with each other and awaited the coming of the Messiah, whose coming they had known through their relations with many Jews. An angel appeared to each of them and revealed to them this Messiah had been born, and they were to follow the star that appeared in heaven. Without consulting each other they prepared their gifts and set off with their retinue and their camels. Soon they found themselves together on the road to Judea, and communicated to each other with great joy the simultaneous revelations they had received. The Sister then describes the arrival of the Magi at the stable. The star stops above the head of the newborn Child; a dazzling light, of which the Child was the focus, fills the cave; and the angels become visible to the three travelers. A divine impulse reveals to them that this Child is God, and that the Mother who presents Him to them is a Virgin. Prostrate, they asked Mary for the favor of kissing her hand; instead, she presented them with the divine hand of her Son. The three Kings remained in the grotto for three entire hours in an ecstasy of admiration and love. The next day they returned to offer their mysterious gifts. They tried, but in vain, to make the Virgin accept the precious stones of the highest price that they had brought; she thanked them [but declined], and in return for their good will she gave them some parts of the swaddling clothes of her Son. After their departure the Virgin distributed the gifts [of gold, frankincense and myrrh], partly to the temple, partly to the priest who had circumcised the child, and finally to the poor.

15. Soon afterwards the Holy Family withdrew to a house in Bethlehem to avoid the crowds which the

news of the journey of the eastern Kings had attracted to the stable. The Sister says that this sacred place [of the Nativity] was then entrusted to the care of an angel, who watches over it to this day; and she adds that one of the most effective means that Catholic princes can use to strengthen their reign is to make themselves protectors of the Holy Places of Palestine. The Child Jesus spoke to his Mother, but only to her; it was only after a year that he began to speak to Joseph. The time of the Purification arrived. Before leaving for Jerusalem, Mary wanted to see again the cave, and she kissed with love the earth of that humble place where the Son of the eternal Father had deigned to be born. The journey to Jerusalem was like a glorious procession; thousands of angels accompanied the sacred group. On the way it was cold; the little limbs of the divine Child shivered, and tears flowed from his eyes. Mary again used her power over nature to counteract the inclemency of the season in favor of her Son. Simeon and Anna received interior notification that the Savior of the world was approaching, and they prepared a house to receive the Holy Family. At the sight of the Child, Simeon was divinely enlightened regarding the mystery of the two natures, and the greatness of Mary. Anne, who had raised her in the temple, also received great favors. Mary wanted to stay nine days in Jerusalem, and each of these days she went up to the temple to pray. But already the anguish predicted by Simeon for the incomparable Mother was being felt cruelly, for it was necessary to flee as soon as possible to Egypt to avoid the effects of the anger of Herod. Before leaving, Mary sent a message to Elizabeth, warning her to take her own son to safety. Elizabeth responded by sending her cousin money, food and linen for the journey, and the Holy Family was already in

Gaza when the bearer of these items joined them. The holy travelers had to cross the desert of Bersabee, which is sixty leagues wide.⁴⁷ They were reduced to spending the nights under the stars. The angels kept watch, and the Child slept in the arms of his Mother, who also kept watch and conversed with God and with the heavenly spirits. One day a violent storm seized them, and the Virgin again used her power to protect her Son, without thinking of herself; the Child, in his turn, gave his orders and commanded the angels to guard his Mother against the inclemencies of the weather. More than once they suffered from hunger, and the angels provided them with food. The ordeal lasted a long time.

16. Finally, after fifty days of walking, they arrived in Egypt, in Heliopolis.⁴⁸ The divine Child raised his eyes to heaven and prayed for the salvation of this unfaithful nation. He then commanded the demons who inhabited the idols to return to hell, and there was a shaking in all the temples of Egypt; many idols fell. Yet so humble and so obscure had been the entry of the Son of God and his Mother into that country that the demons did not know to whom to attribute the unforeseen blow which had fallen upon them. Mary made a deep impression on the people of the city of Heliopolis who saw her and talked with her; many of them recognized the true God at the sight of the healings she performed and upon hearing her persuasive words. Mary and Joseph left that city with the Child and went to Hermopolis. There were also many temples and idols there, and at the approach of the Son of Mary the demon that occupied a tree was

⁴⁷ approximately 180 miles [Ed.]

⁴⁸ present day Cairo [Ed.]

driven away by an invincible force, and the tree itself bowed to the ground as its Creator passed by. This prodigy happened several times on the way of the Holy Family in Egypt, and the Sister confirms in particular the tradition of the Christians of Cairo about the tree and the fountain which are still shown in that region. The principal residence of the Holy Family in Egypt was in Heliopolis, where they returned after having visited in other cities. There Mary converted many infidels to the true God.

17. The Sister then proceeds to the massacre of the Holy Innocents, which was being prepared when the Holy Family left [Jerusalem]. Mary knew that her Son had obtained for these children the use of reason at the time of their martyrdom so they could offer themselves as a sacrifice to God. It was then revealed to her that Zachary had died four months after the birth of the Savior, and that Elizabeth had gone into the desert with her son. Elizabeth died three years after her husband, and John remained in the desert. Mary, who could not leave Egypt to assist her dying cousin, sent her some of the angels of her guard. Through the ministry of these heavenly spirits she provided for the child in the desert until he was old enough to provide for himself.

18. The ensuing details are about the childhood of Jesus. For a whole year He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and bound with blankets. Mary then wove Him a common colored tunic which He wore all his life, for it grew with Him, and upon it the soldiers cast lots on Calvary. The Child agreed to wear shoes until He became a man and began to preach, but He refused to wear linen under his tunic. The color of this tunic was brown and silver-gray combined into a shade that cannot be described in words. As for the outer garment which the Savior took off in the Upper Room before

washing the feet of his disciples, it was also the work of Mary, but she made it in Nazareth.

Article 9: Oct 10, 1858

Synopsis of the *Mystical City of God*, Part II, Books 5 and 6, *The Transfixion*: From the Finding in the Temple to the Ascension.

1. The Sister recounts with great interest the departure of the Holy Family from Egypt, the regrets of the inhabitants of Heliopolis, and the touching circumstances that signaled their return to Nazareth. She then describes the interior of the holy house, and the dispositions of Mary in this humble and laborious life. It was then that the incarnate Word worked especially to dispose his Mother to become the most perfect expression of his most holy humanity, so she might serve as a complete type of Christian holiness to all the faithful. He prepared her first by humility and detachment, suspending the caresses He had lavished on her until then, and showing her a grave and severe face. Such a deprivation was sorely felt by the heart of the most tender of mothers; yet her courageous soul overcame to the end the hard trial imposed on her by the One in whom she had to recognize not only her Son but her Creator, in whose presence the most perfect creature is only nothingness and imperfection. The ordeal lasted thirty whole days, during which the heart of Mary experienced an anguish that surpassed all the sufferings of the martyrs.⁴⁹ A delightful ecstasy, during which the Virgin saw the divine essence, put an end to this bitter period which seemed to her to have lasted for ages. She found again all the tenderness of her Son, who had afflicted her only to raise her up again, and who was pleased to reveal to her all the treasures of the law of grace. A new light poured upon her the

⁴⁹ This could be called her *dark night of the soul*. [Ed.]

knowledge of all the mysteries of the doctrine and all the truths of the morals of Christianity, which her Son was to promulgate, and she possessed them in a degree superior to the knowledge of all the ages and all the doctors.

2. Next comes the account of the journey Jesus made to Jerusalem in the company of his parents when He was twelve years old. The Gospel tells us that He disappeared for three days; the Sister says that it was during an ecstasy that God had sent to Mary that He escaped his Mother's sight. The conversation that Jesus was having in the temple with the doctors when He was found by his parents was about the characteristics of the Messiah. The doctors maintained that He should appear in brilliant glory; Jesus showed them, on the contrary, that this brilliance and majesty would shine in the second coming and not in the first. Mary and Joseph, says the Sister, did not grasp the meaning of the words of Jesus [addressed to them],⁵⁰ both because of the emotion in which they were seized, and because they had entered the temple too late to grasp the connection between the words Jesus addressed to them and the ministry He had come to carry out there. The Sister then recounts the teachings Jesus gave to his Mother after the return to Nazareth. He revealed to her the role she was to play in the salvation of mankind, and introduced her to the doctrine of the divine Sacraments which would later be instituted.

3. When Jesus reached the age of eighteen, Mary was in her thirty-third year. For the rest of her life she miraculously retained the strength, freshness and beauty she had at that time, unaffected by afflictions or the

⁵⁰ The author is speaking of the words recorded in Lk. 2:49, *did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?* [Ed.]

passage of time. Joseph, however, though still far from old age, felt his strength declining, and soon, in obedience to his august spouse, he had to give up his work entirely; nevertheless, it was still necessary to provide for the support of the poor household. The Virgin Mother worked with greater zeal than ever, and her noble hands, which Solomon praised in the prophetic portrait of the strong Woman, handled the spindle day and night, and wove the linen and fabrics. The last three years of the life of Joseph were especially difficult. Mary served him with respectful tenderness. During the last nine days of his illness, angels did not cease to sing melodious music at the bedside of the dying man, who before leaving this world was blessed with a divine light in which he knew the highest mysteries. Mary buried him with her own hands, assisted by the ministry of her angels. Joseph had reached his sixtieth year when he left this world; his soul was welcomed into limbo with the greatest joy. The Sister says that he had been sanctified from the womb of his mother, and she insists, as St. Teresa had done before her, on the greatness of the power he enjoys with God, and on the eagerness and confidence with which men should have recourse to him.

4. Jesus and Mary lived from then on in the house at Nazareth. The divine communications continued in favor of the Mother of God, yet they were often bitter to her heart. Jesus sometimes spoke to her about the painful Passion He was to suffer, and the ingratitude with which most men would repay his sacrifice; Mary would then fall into deathly languishes, which would have taken her life had not the divine power preserved her. Jesus was often obliged to support her in his arms. During the three years preceding his preaching He made some excursions with her to the lands of the tribe

of Nephtali. Their passage was marked by many benefits, yet the divine Doctor of men did not yet declare Himself; He merely told those He found willing to listen to Him that the Messiah had come. The Sister then leads her reader to John the Baptist. Mary had provided for him in the desert through the ministry of her angels until he was nine years old. This holy Precursor had set up a large cross in his solitude, with which he performed the works of his penitence. When he left the desert, never to return, the angels brought this prophetic sign of the Redemption to Mary, and she kept it all her life, together with another cross which she received from the hands of her Son himself.

5. At last the public career of Jesus was about to begin. God first asked Mary if she would consent to give her Son for the salvation of the world. The Mother of men gave her consent to Heaven for such a sacrifice, as she had given before to become the Mother of God. Leaving his Mother to go first to the desert, Jesus bade her a tender farewell, and told her that He was relying on her to be his companion and Coadjutrix in all He had to do and suffer for the salvation of men. The Sister describes the sorrow of Mary at the absence of her Son, from whom she had never been separated except for the three days He had been in Jerusalem. Frequent messages through the angels somewhat mitigated her sorrow. Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan, and He gave the waters the power to cleanse the stains of our sins, establishing Holy Baptism as the seal of the members of his Church. After coming out of the water the Savior himself administered this Sacrament to his Precursor, after which He went into the desert. Mary knew of the scenes of the temptation, and Jesus sent her part of the meal which the angels served him after his fasting, which the Virgin had imitated in Nazareth in

union with Him. He remained in Judea for ten months without returning to his Mother, and it was during this time that He chose his first disciples. They asked him for the favor of being introduced to Mary, and he returned with them to Nazareth. They met her with great reverence, and witnessed the homage she paid to Him who was her God and her Son. During the short stay of Jesus with his Mother He baptized her, so the one who was to be the support of the Church after Him would be marked with the seal which gives her the right to live in its bosom.

6. The wedding at Cana took place shortly afterwards. The bride and groom were relatives of the Virgin through the lineage of St. Anne. The Sister declares that the groom was not St. John, as many have claimed; this Apostle was already following the Redeemer. Jesus treated the spouses with great kindness, and it was on this occasion that He raised marriage to the dignity of a Sacrament. In the miracle of the change of water into wine, Jesus did not give Mary the name of Mother; He simply called her Woman. He wanted to express by this reservation, says the Sister, that by giving him human nature she had not transmitted to him the divine power of miracles, and to highlight the two distinct natures that were united in Him. When Mary left Cana she followed her Son, and was only separated from Him at short intervals. The Gospels record that other women followed the Savior; Mary took care of them, and gave them formation in faith and virtue by her instruction and example. The great effects her Son produced often caused the admiration of men to fall upon her; suffering in her humility, she asked the Savior the favor of being left more in the background. It was to condescend to this humble desire that Jesus replied to the woman who so

enthusiastically exalted the one who had carried Him in her womb and nourished Him with her milk: “Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.”

7. The narrative of the Sister then turns to John the Baptist. The Precursor is in prison because of the intrigue of Herodias. Jesus and Mary enter his dungeon;⁵¹ it was in their presence, and assisted by his God and the Mother of his God, that he received the death blow. John the Evangelist was particularly dear to Mary; of all the disciples he was the one who loved her most tenderly. He helped her in her work and was the first one who, after the Ascension of the Savior, gave her the title of Mother of God. Mary also had a special affection for Magdalene. The happy penitent consulted her about the attraction of embracing the desert life when the time came. Mary deigned to approve her plan, and later, in her grotto of Saint Baume, Magdalene was visited by the Mother of God. The other holy women and all the disciples were the object of the loving care of Mary, and all were spellbound by her words and presence. Judas alone stood in contrast to them. Several times he had been exhorted by her for his vices; he despised her maternal admonitions, and the disdain he conceived for the Mother led him down the fatal path which ended in his becoming a traitor to the Son. The Queen of Mercy often came back to try to win over this hardened heart, but it was in vain. When the Savior declared his intention to establish among the Apostles a bursar in charge of keeping the money, Judas proposed himself for this job, which would be so dangerous for

⁵¹ Their appearance was miraculous and invisible to all others except St. John the Baptist himself. cf. Tran. 362 [Ed.]

him, and he even tried to use the mediation of Mary with her Son to obtain it.

8. The preaching of the Savior had already lasted two and a half years. Jesus was in Galilee; he went up to Tabor, where the great event of the Transfiguration took place. Mary was away for a few days at Nazareth, and the angels were commanded to bring her to the holy mountain, where she witnessed with the three Apostles the glory of her Son. The Savior then came to Nazareth, and soon left that city for Jerusalem in the company of his Mother. The sorrowful Passion was approaching. I pass over the raising of Lazarus, the anointing of the Savior in the house of Bethany, and the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. Lucifer and the other demons were becoming more and more alarmed regarding Jesus; various indications made them fear He was the Messiah. Foreseeing that his death could be [their ruin], they tried to stop these odious projects [by persuading] Judas, the wife of Pilate, Caiaphas, and the [Pharisees]. But these efforts were useless; human passions had taken their course, and nothing could stop them. The demons became enraged, and realizing that they would not be able to hinder the sacrifice of the Just One, they resolved to make Him at least perish with the most cruel death. Meanwhile, Mary was plunged into a sea of desolation at the thought of all that was being planned against her Son. She was present in the Cenacle at the moment of the institution of the divine Eucharist, but in an apartment separate from the one where Jesus was holding the Passover with his disciples. After the eating of the Passover lamb, a higher table was set up in the form of an altar, and the cup and paten were placed upon it, each of which was fashioned from a beautiful emerald. Jesus placed the unleavened bread on the paten, and poured wine into the cup Himself. The

angels brought Enoch and Elias to the Cenacle so these two fathers, one of the natural law and the other of the written law, might witness the mystery of the law of grace. The Father and the Holy Ghost manifested their presence as at the Jordan and on Tabor. Mary adored the divine mystery from the place where she was; when it was performed, and when Christ himself had taken communion, he detached a fragment of the sacred host and entrusted it to Gabriel to carry to his Mother. The august mystery remained in the bosom of the Virgin as in a tabernacle until the day when the sacrifice was offered by the hands of St. Peter; she was admitted [to Holy Communion], enabling her to renew the presence of the Holy Eucharist within herself. It was St. Peter to whom Christ entrusted the care of giving the host to Enoch and Elijah, who were then brought back by the angels to the place they inhabited. Judas had received the sacred species in his mouth, and he intended to take it away and deliver it to the enemies of the Savior. Mary knew of this plan, and she commanded her angels to take the [consecrated species] out of the mouth of the traitor and [put them back].⁵²

9. When night fell Jesus left the Cenacle, having taken affectionate leave of his Mother. The master of the house offered Mary to stay in the place she had occupied; she accepted, and it was from there that she witnessed and participated in all that happened to her Son during that terrible night and the morning that followed. The Sister describes the agony of the Savior, and says that the angel sent to him was Michael. The demons, who had been driven back into their caverns at the time of the institution of the Eucharist, ceased to feel the force that had been oppressing them, and they

⁵² cf. Tran. 488 [Ed.]

became very agitated. At the moment when Jesus in his agony experienced the sweating of blood, Mary, in the retreat where she was withdrawn, felt by the effort of her compassion a similar effect. When Judas had consummated his treason, this Mother of Mercy obtained a last grace to touch his heart; but the traitor stifled the inspiration of repentance sent to him, and his obstinacy was consummated. When the servants of the high priest chained Jesus, Mary felt herself manacled in similar bonds. In the defection of the Apostles, Peter and John were the ones whose courage held out the longest. John the disciple was known by Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas. Mary suffered cruelly to see the Apostles desert her Son; she prayed ardently in order to obtain their return; and during this eclipse of the Apostolic College faith, hope and charity were maintained in her with ever-increasing ardor, and she alone represented all the vitality of the Church before the Most High.⁵³ In his despair Judas went to hang himself on a tree outside the city at noon on Friday, and his body hung there for three days, after which the

⁵³ This brings to mind the famous affirmation of St Athanasius (Epistle, 356 A.D.): *'Even if Catholics faithful to tradition are reduced to a handful, they are the ones who are the true Church of Jesus Christ.'* Dom Guéranger further evokes the notion that the Church was reduced, on Holy Saturday, to one person, namely the Blessed Virgin Mary: *'St. Paul tells us that our religion is vain unless we have faith in the mystery of our Lord's Resurrection — where was this faith on the day after Our Lord's death? In one heart only — and that was Mary's. As it was her chaste womb that had held within it Him whom heaven and earth cannot contain, so on this day, by her firm and unwavering faith, she resumes within her single self the whole Church.'* (*The Liturgical Year: Holy Saturday morning*, Vol. 6, p. 549). [Ed.]

demons took him body and soul into a horrible cavern [of hell].

10. Jesus was dragged by his bonds through the streets of Jerusalem with the utmost barbarity. Lucifer had the temerity to try to put his hand on the chains; a command from Mary stopped him short, and he was reduced to inciting the rage of the men who carried out this odious work. It was at the house of Annas where Peter denied his master for the first time; the other two times were at the house of Caiaphas. This sad weakness of the leader of the Apostles caused Mary to shed many tears. After midnight the servants of the high priest, wishing to take some rest, locked Jesus up in a filthy dungeon, where they returned later and inflicted the most outrageous treatment on Him. The Son and Mother continued to communicate with each other, but Mary had not yet come out of her retreat. At daybreak, when her Son was being taken to Pilate, she went out to see Him and worshipped Him as He passed by. She did not, however, enter the house of Herod, although she followed [by special vision] the entire scene which took place there. The Sister says that Lucifer, always preoccupied with preventing the sacrifice, the consequences of which he feared, frightened the wife of Pilate in a dream so she would prevent him from passing the sentence of death on Jesus; this woman was named Procula. The reluctance of Pilate to shed the blood of the Just One was also suggested to him by the anxieties of Satan; but the greater fear of the threats of the Jewish authorities led him to overcome it.

11. The Sister then recounts the scourging of the Savior; the details are frightening. She puts at 5,115 the number of lashes the executioners inflicted upon Jesus in this torture. Mary, who was present but hidden, felt them all, and bloody tears fell from her eyes. Her

features were so altered by the shock that John and the three holy women could not recognize her. After the crowning with thorns, Pilate presented the Savior to the people, saying: *Ecce Homo!* At that moment the Virgin, John, and the three women adored Him on their knees. Mary prayed for Pilate, and many good movements arose in him, as we see from the Gospel, but he did not follow them. The Sister gives the text of the sentence of death that he carried against Jesus. The cross was fifteen feet long and made of heavy wood; the Savior, upon receiving it, testified how much He had desired it, and Mary hailed it as the instrument of our salvation. The moment it was placed on the shoulder of Jesus the demons felt their strength weaken, and they wanted to flee. Mary commanded them to stay and be witnesses of the love of God for men, the object of their envy. Jesus came forward, his face bruised and covered with spittle. Neither John nor the holy women could bear this spectacle without fainting; yet the Virgin remained steadfast in her countenance, though weeping as she was, and prey to all the pains of her Son. Jesus fell several times on the way because they hastened his footsteps. The weight of the cross cut a deep wound in his shoulder. In her tender compassion Mary begged God to inspire the executioners to think of someone else to carry part of this heavy burden; she was soon granted her wish. She obtained from her Son, by an interior request when He arrived at Calvary, that He not drink the bitter beverage that was presented to Him. The executioners [tore the crown off while stripping] Jesus of his tunic,⁵⁴ but then they thrust it back on his head. They proceeded to the crucifixion, with the cross lying on the ground; and it may be said that the Virgin

⁵⁴ cf. Tran. 667 [Ed.]

was nailed to it with her Son by the heartfelt compassion with which she felt in herself the stress of the nails and the cruel dislocation of all his limbs on that cruel rack. The Sister counts only three nails in the crucifixion, but she tells us that the executioners turned the cross upside down when the Savior was tied to it, in order to rivet the nails.⁵⁵ This peculiarity was found again in the ecstasies of St. Veronica Giuliani in recent times.

12. When the cross was finally raised, Mary, kneeling before the tree of salvation laden with its divine fruit, asked the heavenly Father for the prodigies which signalized the moment when the Savior expired, in order to confound the pride of the Synagogue. The chief priests blasphemed at the foot of the cross, and threw stones and dust at the body of their victim. At the last words of Jesus as He expired, Lucifer with all his cohort was cast into hell and felt his power broken. Up to that moment they were forced to remain chained on Calvary, but they were writhing like snakes. The death of Christ gave force to his testament, as the Apostle teaches;⁵⁶ but Mary was charged with its execution. The Sister gives the content of this testament of the Savior from the height of the cross, pronounced inwardly to his Father, before the seven words which He spoke audibly. In the depths of hell Satan confessed his defeat; he recognized in [Mary] the Woman who had been shown to the angels,⁵⁷ and who was the primary cause of his downfall. Yet in his pride he announced his plan to reverse the work of salvation, which came to us through

⁵⁵ However, at the command of the compassionate Mother the Angels held the cross just off the ground. cf. Tran. 676 [Ed.]

⁵⁶ cf. Heb. 9:17 [Ed.]

⁵⁷ cf. Tran. 716; Con. 90ff. [Ed.]

Mary, by raising heresies and schisms. Regarding this the Virgin informed the Sister that Satan would undertake cruel machinations against her because she would reveal his plans and humiliations; she added that if, in these last centuries, the power of the demons is more energetic, it is because they have gradually emerged from the stupor into which they had been plunged by the violent blow they received when the Saviour expired. The narrative continues with the piercing of the side of Jesus by the spear of Longinus. The descent from the cross takes place; Mary is the first to venerate the crown of thorns and the nails, then she receives the body of her Son in her arms. The sacred body is embalmed and put in the tomb; then Mary returns to the Cenacle, after having ordered her angels to guard the tomb of her Son.

13. On Saturday morning, the Virgin directed John to seek out Peter and bring him to her. The unfaithful disciple, who had been weeping for his sin since the previous day, arrived at the feet of the sorrowful Mother, who deigned to strengthen him and pray with him. The Sister then describes the interior of the terrestrial globe. Hell is like its glowing core; on one side is purgatory, which is much smaller; on the other limbo, divided into two parts, one of which was occupied by the [just already purged], and the other continues to be occupied by the children who died without baptism. After the last judgment, these children will inhabit another dwelling. The soul of Jesus descended into the limbo of the holy Fathers, and by his presence transformed it into paradise. He remained there in the company of these saints until the following Sunday morning at three o'clock, when He was reunited with his body. Anne, Joseph and Joachim were among the Saints who were also resurrected at the

[command] of the Savior; Adam and Eve, who were not resurrected, were allowed to contemplate the Redeemer's bloody and torn body in the tomb [before He rose].

14. The first apparition of the risen Jesus was to Mary. This appearance of the Son to the Mother lasted three whole hours; it was right that she who had suffered with Him should share his rest and his triumph. She remained enclosed in the Cenacle for the next forty days, and when the Savior was not appearing to his disciples or others, He stayed there with her and compensated her for what she had endured in order to unite herself to his merciful designs for mankind. A few days before the Ascension of Jesus, the three divine Persons manifested themselves to her and declared that she would take care of the nascent Church, and that she would be its Mother and Mistress. New graces were conferred upon her to fulfill this new ministry with plenitude. The Sister reports that Mary used her authority to recommend to the Evangelists that they speak of her in their accounts only in the simplest terms, and only what was necessary.⁵⁸ When her Son ascended to heaven He took her with him, while leaving her on earth by the miracle of bilocation. Mary witnessed the triumph of her Son, and the joys of her heart as a Mother and as a perfect creature rose to their highest point. The Holy Trinity offered her to take possession of the throne that had been prepared for her;⁵⁹ Mary preferred to return to earth and postpone

⁵⁸ cf. Cor. 560ff. [Ed.]

⁵⁹ In the first paragraph of the Coronation, Ven. Mary writes: “[T]he Son of God and of Mary took Her with Him in order to give Her possession of the ineffable rewards She had until then merited, and to assign Her the place which He had prepared for Her from

her happiness and glory until she had, following the example of her Son, consecrated to the salvation of mankind the gifts that the Lord had placed in her for the growth and blessing of the Holy Church.

his eternity for these merits and *the rest which She would have merited*” (emph. added). Thus just as the Son of God left the bosom of the Father in order to assume a passible *nature*, Our Lady left the right hand of her Son to (re)assume a passible *state*; and just like her Son, She could gain no additional *essential* glory, since She would have been freely given in advance the reward for what *She would have merited*. In Cor. 2 Ven. Mary says: “[T]he only reason for parting this blessed state was the *charity and humility* of this admirable and sweetest Mother, for her love urged Her to come to the assistance of her children and seek the manifestation and exaltation of the name of the Most High in the new evangelical Church... She knew how much more precious it is to merit a reward and crown than to possess them gratuitously in advance, even if they happen to be those of eternal glory” (emph. added). Hence, just like her Son, this was an act of pure and consummate charity and humility, which might well be called the *Imitation of the Incarnation*. [Ed.]

Article 10: Nov. 21, 1858

Synopsis of the *Mystical City of God*, Part III, Books 7 and 8, *The Coronation*: From Pentecost to the Assumption and Coronation.

1. The third part of the *Mystical City* begins with the return of Mary to earth after the three days she had spent in Heaven at the time of the Ascension of Christ. St. John alone witnessed the wondrous arrival of the Queen of Heaven, who declined occupation of the throne prepared for her in eternal glory until the Church of her Son was sufficiently developed to do without her presence and maternal care. The Sister says that St. John also had this descent of the Virgin in mind when he celebrated the new Jerusalem arriving from heaven to earth, adorned as the Bride for her Bridegroom, and she gives the interpretation of this passage from the Apocalypse.⁶⁰ Mary, back in the Cenacle where the Apostles were gathered, offered herself to God to fulfill the ministry to which she had momentarily sacrificed the joys of heaven. St. John, who saw her glory at that moment, felt a dazzling effect that reminded him of the emotion caused him on Tabor by the rays of the glory of his Master. Yet the radiance with which the Mother of God was surrounded remained hidden from all others; and the wonders which were manifested in her later years were veiled, lest the Gentiles, if they had known of them, be led to regard Mary as a deity.

2. During the days preceding the coming of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of God prayed with the Apostles and disciples in the Cenacle. She often addressed them with touching words which delighted them. They asked her to designate the one who was to replace Judas in the

⁶⁰ Apoc. 21:2ff. [Ed.]

Apostolic College; Mary declined this honor, and reminded the assembly that any initiative of this kind belonged to Peter, vicar of her Son. After ten days of waiting the Holy Ghost descended, according to the promise of the Redeemer. The effects of his presence were for the inhabitants of the Cenacle the principle of a new life wholly filled with zeal and light; and for Mary, the infusion of a special grace for the ministry she was to fulfill. The whole city was moved by the commotion announcing the presence of the Holy Ghost, and for this reason a great multitude of people gathered around the Cenacle. While Peter was addressing this multitude, Mary was praying in the background and obtaining efficacy for his words. The Prince of the Apostles led the new converts to the presence of Mary, and revealed to them the dogma of the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God. Then began the all-powerful intercession of Mary for the faithful who entrusted themselves to her; she obtained for them from her Son this happy privilege. It was decided by St. Peter that Baptism would be conferred on believers on the following Sunday, the day on which we celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Trinity. Mary determined, in the meantime, that the common life should be that which the first faithful would lead, and proposed that six irreproachable persons be established who would be the depositaries of all the goods of which the disciples of Christ had divested themselves.

3. Finally, on the eighth day after Pentecost, the believers gathered in the Cenacle, and Peter explained to them the nature and effects of Baptism; this, the first of the Sacraments, was administered to them; they were approximately five thousand in number. Peter then celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time, and at that moment the Cenacle, in which the

Savior had instituted it two months earlier, was illuminated with divine splendor. The one hundred and twenty people on whom the Holy Ghost had descended the previous Sunday received Communion under both species; the others under the species of bread only. Mary also participated in the divine mystery. The sacred host which she frequently received from then on remained in her from one Communion to the next.

4. Lucifer, however, began to lay snares for the Church. Mary stopped his efforts against the faithful, but he turned his rage against the Apostles, whose ministry called them to bear witness to Christ. They were imprisoned; Mary sent one of her angels to them to put an end to their captivity. It was she who, through these celestial spirits, inspired Gamaliel to give wise counsel to the leaders of the Synagogue, which earned the Church a little tolerance. She assisted St. Stephen in his martyrdom, and by her prayers obtained the conversion of Saul. When the time came to write the Symbol⁶¹ of the faith, the Virgin was present. The Holy Ghost descended again upon the Apostles; each of them, filled with divine fire, pronounced one of the articles; and the Symbol being complete, Mary, the principal member of the Church, recited the profession of it in the hands of St. Peter and before the eyes of her colleagues. She sent copies of it by the hand of her angels to the seventy-two disciples who were evangelizing far away. The time came for the division [of the world] by the Apostles. Peter, in the presence of Mary, distributed the various provinces of the world to his brother Apostles, and the Holy Ghost manifested Himself again at this solemn moment. Mary gave each of the Apostles a garment similar to the one she had

⁶¹ i.e. the Apostles' Creed [Ed.]

once made for her Son with her own hands, and added to them some precious relics of the Redeemer that she had kept. They soon left for the countries to which they were to preach the faith. Mary often used the help of her angels to transport them from one place to another, especially when they wished to meet or consult Peter, or pay their respects to their august Queen. She also communicated with them frequently, and among other news, she informed them of the conversion of St. Paul.

5. James the Greater was the first of the Apostles to leave Jerusalem. He embarked at Joppa, now Jaffa, and sailed to Sardinia; from there he landed at Cartagena. He then went to Granada and then to Saragossa. It was there that the Mother of God, who had a special tenderness for him, appeared to him and left as a monument of her presence the famous image that Spain honors under the name of Our Lady of the Pillar. The most magnificent promises were made to the happy land that possesses this sanctuary, and in her truly Spanish heart the Sister celebrates the happiness she feels in living in a convent that is only two days away from Saragossa; she adds, however, that the promises of Mary were conditional, and that the sins of Spain could halt their effect. The Mother of God then left for Ephesus in the company of St. John, to whom Peter had entrusted the task of evangelizing Asia Minor. The journey was made by sea; it was the first time the Queen of the world was transported upon the water. The fish and sea creatures paid her homage, surrounding the ship on all sides; the crew of the ship was amazed at this marvel, the cause of which they could not understand.

6. Mary lived in Ephesus in a house occupied by several widowed ladies; John also had his lodging there. From this humble retreat she made her power felt

by the demons, who were opposing the preaching of the Apostles with violence from all sides. St. James soon left Spain according to the order he had received to go to Jerusalem. He wanted to see Mary one last time. He went first to Ephesus, where he took leave of the Mother of God, after having asked her to assist him in the martyrdom he was soon to undergo in Jerusalem. Mary granted him this grace, and when the head of the Apostle had been cut off by order of Herod Agrippa, she herself presented his soul to God in heaven, where she was taken up for a few moments. The body of the Apostle was taken to Galicia on a ship guided by several angels appointed by the Queen of Heaven for this purpose. It was also she who sent one of these heavenly spirits to rescue St. Peter from the prison where Herod had locked him up after the martyrdom of St. James. Shortly afterwards, this wretched prince suddenly perished by heavenly wrath before the eyes of the people. God willed that the sentence for this just vengeance be pronounced by Mary herself,⁶² in virtue of her power as Queen and Protector of the Church.

7. Lucifer, irritated by the fact that he constantly encountered the hand of Mary busily thwarting all the machinations he was attempting against the faithful, complained to God and asked that he be allowed to fight against her, as he had done in the past against Job. God granted him this power, in order to bring out even more the sanctity and power of this heavenly Mother.

⁶² Here is the sentence: “[B]ecause [Herod] has made himself a pertinacious enemy of God, unworthy of his eternal friendship, by the most righteous justice of God I condemn him to the death he has merited *so he will not incur greater torments in hell by executing the evil deeds he intends*” (Cor. 419; emph. added). Thus even in pronouncing justice, her mercy still shines forth. [Ed.]

Meanwhile, Mary begged the Lord to help with his mercy the progress of the Gospel in Ephesus, still enslaved to the cult of Diana. This false goddess had been in the beginning a human creature, one of those warlike women whom Satan had raised up in ancient times, who had passed from Scythia to Asia and were called Amazons. Many [false] virgins served the magnificent temple where the idol was kept. Mary commanded one of her angels to overthrow this asylum of pagan superstition, and in a moment it was nothing but a heap of ruins. The profane virgins who worshipped Diana there perished under the rubble, except for nine of them whom Mary had taken under her protection. The magistrates of Ephesus made inquiries to discover the authors of the disaster, but their investigations came to nothing. They attributed the matter to chance, and the temple was rebuilt lavishly after the departure of Mary for Jerusalem. It was already rebuilt when St. Paul came to Ephesus. The Sister notes that the secular historians who recorded the first destruction of the temple of Diana by Erostratus kept a profound silence about this second destruction.

8. After having accomplished this act of dreadful justice against paganism, Mary was elevated to the title of Captainess of the armies of the Lord against all his enemies. Then the words of the divine Canticles are fulfilled, where it is said that the Bride is “terrible as an army set in array.”⁶³ Eighteen cherubim received the order to clothe their august Queen with a luminous armor. The Church recognizes this new prerogative of the Mother of God by the title given her of “Help of Christians,” and by attributing to her, among other victories over the enemies of the Church, that of

⁶³ Cant. 6:3 [Ed.]

Lepanto and the deliverance of Vienna in 1683. Lucifer continued his ambushes against Mary; he sought to tempt her with vainglory, appearing before her and saying, "Mary, all the world honors and celebrates thee."⁶⁴ Our Lady, in her firm humility, despised this base flattery.

9. Meanwhile, Peter had returned from Asia Minor to Jerusalem, and the Mother of God soon went there herself. Leaving Ephesus, she bid a fond farewell to the pious women who had gathered around her. There were sixty-three of them, many of them virgins, including the nine who had been saved from the destruction of the temple of Diana. Mary specified to them the kind of life they should follow, and thus they formed the first convent of the Christian Church. The Queen of Heaven had spent two and a half years in Ephesus when she left that city. The ship that was carrying her to Jerusalem was beset on the way by a furious storm that Lucifer, assisted by his infernal legions, had raised. The waves were rising with such fury that more than once, to avoid the shocks, the holy angels had to raise the ship above them. This dreadful storm, which surpassed in horror all that had been seen on the sea until then, lasted fourteen days.

10. When she arrived in Jerusalem, Mary visited the places in the city marked by the memory of her Son. He appeared to her on the Mount of Olives; it was then that she asked and obtained from Him that the Church be freed from the Judaic observances. This was the subject of the speech of St. Peter at the Council of Jerusalem, which was held in the following days, and where the exemption from the Mosaic rites was promulgated for all the baptized faithful. The Sister then explains the

⁶⁴ cf. Cor. 452 [Ed.]

mysteries of the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse, where we see the struggle of the Dragon against the Woman, and the shame of his defeat. Lucifer was struck down and plunged back into hell, and his power was almost nothing during the last years that the Virgin was to spend on earth; during this time no heresy arose in the Church. Mary was fifty-six years old when she returned to Jerusalem. After her battle with Lucifer, she was again taken up to heaven, where she asked God that the holy Gospels be written. When she returned to the Cenacle Peter, by a movement of the Holy Ghost, appointed the evangelists who were to write down the works and doctrine of the Redeemer at the proper time. St. Matthew immediately began to write his Gospel in Hebrew; St. Mark followed closely behind and wrote in the same language; later, while in Rome with St. Peter, he translated his account into Latin. St. Luke composed his Gospel in Greek while in Achaia. Mary appeared to him, and he conferred with her on the particulars which he relates about the Mother of God with more abundance than the others. As for St. John, it was after the death of Mary that he wrote his Gospel to oppose the heresies that were corrupting the purity of the faith. Later, when Peter was in Rome, Mary appeared to him. She showed herself seated on a throne, but she came down from it to honor the Head of the Church of her Son, and conferred with him about the institution he was to make of the feasts of the Birth and Passion of the Savior, and of the Holy Eucharist. Peter also established the solemnity of Sunday, and the feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost. The Prince of the Apostles soon afterwards made a journey to Spain and visited the Churches founded by St. James. On his return to Rome, one day when he was distressed by the tribulations of the Church in that city he instructed the holy angels

assigned to guard him to express his anguish to Mary. God commanded them to take his Apostle to Jerusalem, to the Mother of all consolation. Peter returned to Rome relieved, and found the position of the Church improved.

11. The life of Mary in Jerusalem was spent in contemplation of the sufferings of her Son, reminded of this by so many places, and she often shed tears of blood on the Via Dolorosa. Every week she retired to a secluded place from Thursday until the following Sunday at noon; during this time she followed all the scenes of the Passion of the Redeemer, suffered all the pains, and thus [obtained from the Lord great favors and benefits for those devoted to his most holy Passion].⁶⁵ On Sunday morning she was relieved by the memory of the Resurrection of her Son and the consolations He came in person to lavish on her. As she constantly carried the divine Eucharist within her, Christ often sent angels to earth to gaze upon the great mystery of love in his living tabernacle. Mary worked with her hands to make the sacred vestments that were to be used for the Holy Mass. At the end of her life she gave no more than half an hour for sleep, and her food was a little bread and sometimes fish; yet she only ate and slept in order to obey St. John, and she could have lived entirely without food and sleep. Meanwhile the desire to be forever united with her Son was growing and diminishing the strength of her body. When she was languishing due to the effects of her love, the Savior ordered the holy angels to take her to heaven every Sunday so she could taste the joys of the Resurrection. On earth she celebrated every year the anniversaries of her Immaculate Conception, her

⁶⁵ cf. Cor. 581 [Ed.]

Nativity, her Presentation in the Temple, and her marriage to St. Joseph. The Savior usually appeared to her on these days, and she asked St. John to bring her the most destitute among the poor, and she served them on her knees.⁶⁶ To celebrate the anniversary of the sublime mystery of the Incarnation which had taken place in her, she dedicated nine days each year, beginning on March 16. Christmas brought her immense joys; her angels gathered around her and sang once again the hymn they had sung in Bethlehem. Mary also celebrated the arrival of the Magi and the baptism of Jesus Christ. Every year she imitated the forty-day fast her Son had completed on the mountain; at the end of this holy quarantine, the angels came to bring her food, and her divine Son deigned to serve her himself. On Good Friday she felt nailed to the cross of the Savior for three hours. On Ascension Day she was taken up to heaven, and each time she was given the option of remaining in the glory and vision of God or returning to earth to care for the newborn Church. Mary always preferred to return to her labors, leaving it to the divine will to determine when she should leave this earthly dwelling and be reunited forever with her Son and her God. The anniversary of Pentecost was marked each year by the special visit of the Holy Ghost, who descended upon her in the form of a heavenly flame. Finally, she celebrated a feast in honor of the Holy Angels, and another in honor of all the Saints [of the human nature].⁶⁷ These practices of the Queen of Heaven, by which she sanctified all the principal periods of the liturgical year, were to ensure to the

⁶⁶ cf. Cor. 635 [Ed.]

⁶⁷ cf. Cor. 688 [Ed.]

faithful who would celebrate them in union with her the most abundant and precious graces.

12. Mary was in the sixty-seventh year of her life when Gabriel was sent to her at a time when she was praying for sinners. After giving her the greeting of the Annunciation, he respectfully told her that in three years her exile would end. After the departure of the Archangel, the Mother of God prostrated herself and said: "Earth, I give thee thanks, because without my merit thou hast sustained me sixty-seven years. I ask thee to help me arrive at the end I desire, the vision of my Maker."⁶⁸ Then turning to the other creatures, she says again, "Ye heavens, planets, stars and elements, I also thank thee for what thou hast done in the preservation of my life. Help me anew to improve my life in order to be grateful to my and thy Creator."⁶⁹ During these last three years nature, by a mysterious instinct, felt a deep mourning, being on the eve of losing the One whose presence had increased her energy and embellished her finery. The stars faded in the firmament, and have not since recovered the brilliance with which they had shone during the life of the Queen of Creation. The birds in particular felt a sensitive sorrow which they testified by making heard around the Cenacle their plaintive cries, instead of those joyful songs which for so long they had repeated. The wild animals themselves expressed their sorrow: One day a multitude of them came out of the forests and descended from the mountains, rushing to Mary at a moment when she was praying on Calvary. These ferocious animals surrounded her, lay down on the ground at her feet, and vented their distress with howls.

⁶⁸ cf. Cor. 701 [Ed.]

⁶⁹ Ib. [Ed.]

13. At last the departure of the Queen of Heaven for the kingdom of heaven arrived. She went to take leave of the Holy Places, and to venerate one last time the footsteps of her Son on this earth which she was about to leave. She then commanded the angels of her guard to watch over these blessed places when she was in heaven. Then addressing the Christian Church, for love of which she had suffered such a harsh and prolonged exile, she said: "Holy Catholic Church, thou shalt be the Mistress of the nations to whom all owe reverence."⁷⁰ She bade farewell to the stars, the elements, and all the creatures of this lower world, thanking them again for the help she had received during her mortal life. She then made her will, and disposed of the immense treasure of all her merits for the benefit of the Church Militant, and this offering was ratified by her Son. Three days before her death, so fortunate for her and so lamentable for the earth, the Apostles found themselves miraculously transported to Jerusalem. Peter said to them with sadness: "God desires [now to raise up to the throne of eternal glory his most blessed Mother, our Mistress]."⁷¹ Meanwhile the Cenacle was perfumed with the most fragrant scents; concerts of a celestial melody could be heard;

⁷⁰ Cor. 722 [Ed.]

⁷¹ Cor. 734. Here is the rest of St. Peter's statement, so beautiful and touching: "*His divine disposition wills that all of us be present at her most happy and glorious Transition. When our Master and Redeemer ascended to the right hand of his eternal Father, though He left us bereft of his desirable sight, we still had his most holy Mother for our refuge and true consolation in this mortal life; yet now that our Mother and our light leaves us, what shall we do? What help and what hope do we have to encourage us on our pilgrimage? I find none except the hope that we shall all follow Her in due time.*" [Ed.]

the building of the Cenacle cast a glow that spread far and wide, and attracted a gathering of people around the building. The hour had come. God, who by a continual action was holding back the effects of love in the heart of Mary so it would not break the bond which unites the soul to the body before the appointed time, ceased to hold back this sublime impulse, and at once the soul, breaking the fetters of mortality, soared into that infinite center towards which an irresistible attraction was drawing it.⁷² The Apostles, the Church, the world, and all the creatures of this world were orphaned at the same moment. The earth was covered with darkness as it was at the death of Christ; yet in return, God delivered all the captive souls in purgatory at that hour, for it was fitting that the entry into heaven of the one who was to be its Queen should be signalized by the munificence of the King of that divine abode. Mary was reaching the end of her seventieth year when she was taken from the earth. Her exile from her Son had been twenty-one years, four months and nineteen days.

14. The holy body, surrounded by heavenly light, was placed in the coffin by the Apostles with the same clothes with which it was covered on the funeral bed. The funeral of the Mother of God was attended by the

⁷² Since She never sinned, She owed no payment of death. Nevertheless, God gave Her the choice whether to die or not. She freely chose to die a natural death, and this for two main reasons. First, to imitate her Son, who by nature was exempt from death, yet freely chose to die for us. The second is extremely beautiful and touching: *"To imitate her children and brethren of the human race by dying upon the earth"* (Cor. 2). She died in order to *imitate us!* She wanted to experience what each of us will go through at death so we would know *She knows what I am going through*. O Mother of Compassion! Truly we can say *Thou hast imitated us far better than we could ever imitate Thee!* [Ed.]

whole of Jerusalem; Jews and Gentiles took part in it, except for a few whose hearts had remained insensitive to the impulse that God was inspiring in the population of this great city. For a year the tomb exhaled the sweetest perfumes, and the room in the Cenacle where Mary had expired kept this marvelous odor even longer.

15. The soul of Mary did not have to pass through the particular judgment to which every human soul is subjected upon leaving this world. She was immediately placed at the right hand of the humanity of the Word, on the throne of the Divinity. Three days later, God commanded this glorious soul to reunite with her body, which lay in the tomb in the valley of Josaphat, beneath the walls of Jerusalem. The Son of God then said to the inhabitants of Heaven: "My Mother was conceived without stain of sin...my flesh is her flesh, and she cooperated [with Me] in the works of the Redemption; therefore I must raise her just as I rose from the dead, and this shall be at the same time and hour."⁷³ The soul of Mary thus descended to be reunited with the body. The Mother of God, resurrected, came out of the tomb like her Son, without the stone that covered it being disturbed, and only the clothes and shrouds remained in the tomb. This resurrection took place on Sunday [immediately after] midnight,⁷⁴ and the Virgin Mother rose to Heaven in body and soul. When she arrived near the throne of the Divinity, the eternal Father said: "She has a right to our kingdom, which must be recognized by crowning Her."⁷⁵ The uncreated Word said, "To my true and natural Mother belong all the creatures who were created and redeemed

⁷³ Cor. 766 [Ed.]

⁷⁴ Ib. 768 [Ed.]

⁷⁵ Cor. 777 [Ed.]

by Me, and of all things over which I am King She must be the legitimate and supreme Queen.”⁷⁶ A voice was heard from the throne itself, the voice of the eternal Trinity, saying, “Thou shalt be the Queen and Lady of all mortals in order to command and detain death and preserve their lives. Thou shalt be the Empress and Lady of the Church Militant. If the faithful, and all the children of Adam, call upon Thee from their heart, and serve and oblige Thee, Thou shalt help and remedy them in their labors and necessities. Thou shalt be the Friend, the Defender, and the Captainess of all the just and our friends; all of them Thou shalt console, comfort, and fill with benefits according as they oblige Thee by their devotion to Thee. For this We make Thee the Depositary of our riches and the Treasurer of our goods; We place into thy hands the helps and favors of our grace so Thou mayest dispense them. We desire to grant nothing to the world which does not pass through thy hands, and We desire to deny nothing which Thou dost desire to concede to men. Everywhere shall angels and men obey Thee, because everything that is ours is thine, just as Thou hast always been ours, and Thou shalt reign with Us forever.”⁷⁷ God then commanded all the inhabitants of Heaven to render veneration and homage to their Queen.

16. The resurrection, the Assumption, and the Coronation of Mary took place on August 15, which that year was Sunday; the body had remained in the tomb for thirty-six hours. Peter, desiring such a marvel which he had known by heavenly revelation, to be manifested to the Church, went with the other Apostles to the tomb of the Virgin. When they opened it, they

⁷⁶ Ib. [Ed.]

⁷⁷ Ib. 778 [Ed.]

found only the shrouds and the clothes, and an angel came down from heaven and said to the Apostles: "Ye men of Galilee, why art thou astounded and detained here? Thy Queen and ours now lives body and soul in heaven, and reigns in it forever with Christ. She sends me to confirm thee in this truth, and to tell thee on her part that She recommends to thee anew the Church, the conversion of souls, and the spread of the Gospel. She desires thee now to return to thy ministry with which thou art charged, and from her glory She shall take care of thee."⁷⁸ These words encouraged the Apostles; and they experienced the truth of them, especially at the hour when each of them had to suffer martyrdom, for then she appeared to them, received their souls, and presented them herself to the Lord. The Sister ends her immense account with these words: "Other particulars concerning the transition and resurrection of most holy Mary were not manifested to me, and thus I have not written of them, nor during this entire divine History have I had any choice but to record what I have been taught and commanded to write."⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ib. 782 [Ed.]

⁷⁹ Ib. [Ed.]

Article 11: Dec. 5, 1858

The luminous doctrine of the *Mystical City [of God]*. Exegesis of the book. Its sources. Existence of private revelations. Mary of Ágreda and Scotism.. Objections made to the book. Comparison of the book with the Apocrypha and the previous writings of women who also had revelations. Comparison with Anne-Catherine Emmerich. The thinking of Benedict XIV on private revelations.

1. The analysis we have given of the three books of the *Mystical City* may have helped the reader to form an idea of the vast narrative contained in this book; however, the little space we had at our disposal, and also the fear of letting ourselves be carried away by the charm of the narratives, have forced us to omit a thousand details as interesting as those we have produced. But what we have not been able to render in any way is the abundant and luminous doctrine which emerges so magnificently from the whole of this astonishing book; it is the admirable unction with which it is all penetrated, and which seizes the soul of the Christian reader, and disposes him to taste ever more fully the divine mystery of the Incarnation to which all the greatness of Mary leads. Finally, it is that superior understanding of Holy Scriptures which the Sister demonstrates at every step, a quality which opens a new light on this soul as distinguished by acquired knowledge as it is sublime by heroic virtues and gifts of grace.

2. The reader will perhaps now ask what to think of the source from which this book, which I am not afraid to call without equal, proceeds. Are we entitled to consider it as a purely human product of genius joined to piety? Or should we consider this monumental

History of the Mother of God as a body of celestial revelations which has not suffered any mixture, and which shows itself to us in complete certainty, as much regarding the substance as the details? We shall see later that this has been the opinion of a great number of learned doctors. Without faulting their confidence, which they have justified by voluminous memoirs filled with the most serious theological and critical erudition, I would think it safer to say, perhaps, that just as not everything in this wonderful book is human, not everything in it may be the product of divine communications. There is no doubt a long way to go from this moderate appreciation to the proud judgment of those who only wanted to see in the *Mystical City* an unworthy rhapsody in which blasphemy vies with impropriety. But frankly, for a Catholic who is aware of the decree of Clement XIV, by which the autograph manuscript of the book is recognized as authentic, and who remembers at the same time the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, her continuous ecstasies, her long resistance to take up the pen, her perfect obedience in throwing into the fire the writing that had cost her so much labor and sacrifice, it becomes impossible to see in such a work only a toy of the imagination. The human mind, when it gets lost in its thoughts, does not proceed in this way. What will it be, then, if our reader, wishing to judge for himself at last, begins to read the *Mystical City*, if he agrees to follow the Sister to the end of her work, if he experiences for himself this process so full of harmony, so simple and so sublime in the way she proceeds, if he is a man who can feel this accent of conviction, this zeal for the salvation of his neighbor which reigns everywhere? The experience of many gives reason to believe that he will say, as they do: "This is not how we invent." He will see for himself

that the Sister is entirely in good faith; and if it occurs to him that perhaps she would have been the victim of a hallucination, he will not be slow to recognize the insufficiency of such a hypothesis to explain a work whose writing is as serene and consistent in its vast course as the scientific volume written by the most serious doctor.

3. I only recall here the principles laid down above, namely that private revelations exist in the Church; that they are given from above for the purpose of producing an influence on the faithful; that the Church has recognized them in principle, and recommends many of them in fact; that it is rash to despise them in general; that if they can be the object of divine faith in souls who experience them, they never have more than a purely human certainty for others; finally, that they do not always arrive to us pure of natural alloy, God permitting it so that we are never tempted to put their authority on the same level as that of the Sacred Scriptures. All this doctrine is applicable to the *Mystical City*; it is up to the readers of this book to appreciate its content according to these principles. I will therefore limit myself to answering a few general difficulties that have been alleged against the work of Mary of Ágreda.

4. First of all, one is surprised to find in a book written by a woman the familiar use of the terms of Scholasticism on matters pertaining to philosophy, and on those which depend on theology properly so called. Must we conclude that all this terminology was divinely revealed to the Sister? Or should we recognize the hand of some learned Friar Minor, who would have practiced giving a learned form to the data that would have been supplied to him by Mary of Jesus? Neither of these two hypotheses is acceptable. First of all, the hand-written

manuscript of Mary of Ágreda was submitted to the Holy See; it was compared with the other writings of the Sister, and the Apostolic judgment was rendered on the perfect authenticity of the writing. Moreover, this use of scholastic terms affects only a relatively small number of passages in the *Mystical City*. As for attributing them in the Sister to a divine illustration which would have put her in possession of these words and their definition, it seems that it would be to multiply the marvelous without any necessity. It is much simpler to recognize here that natural background which is always very rich in souls that grace raises to higher lights; and as for the way in which this background could have been formed, to remember that Mary of Jesus, gifted as she was with a superior intelligence, and concentrating all the faculties of her soul on things of the supernatural order, was in constant contact with learned Franciscans from whose talks she was able to draw the philosophical and theological notions which were necessary for the analysis of her thoughts and impressions.

5. It has been said that the revelations of Mary of Ágreda were rejected because of her predilection for the doctrines of the Scotist School, whose concepts would thus acquire a kind of consecration to the detriment of the rights of the opposing School. I have had occasion above to anticipate this objection by pointing out that everything depends here on the reality of the revelations: If they are true, God, who is not unaware which of the two contradictory systems expresses the truth, has not forbidden Himself to manifest, when He pleases, what we should believe. It is understandable that the Church refrains from deciding on matters that Tradition does not elucidate; but it would be a little bold to want to limit the revealing power of God to the

measure of authority He has been pleased to confer on his Church. As for the fact itself, is it true to say Mary of Ágreda constantly agrees with the Scotist school? I know that this has been said very loudly and very harshly; however, in the meantime, here is the result of the research on the book that was submitted to the Congregation of Rites in the process of the beatification of the Servant of God: In twenty-nine places in the *Mystical City* the Sister expresses herself in the Thomistic sense, opposed to that of the Scotist School; so that there are, in all, only two points on which she teaches in the sense of the latter, namely the Immaculate Conception of Mary, and the Incarnation of the Son of God in the case where Adam had not prevaricated. On the first point, the Church has since confirmed by a solemn definition the sentiment so dear to Duns Scotus; and as for the second point, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi expressly professes it in her revelations, about which the Church says in the Legend of the Breviary: "*Diuturnas et admirabiles extases passa est, in quibus arcana cœlestia revelavit.*" There is therefore no reason to be overly concerned about the partiality that Mary of Ágreda would have shown for Scotism.

6. Another accusation seriously leveled against the *Mystical City* is that one encounters many new things in it. I confess that this objection surprises me, as it has surprised others. Indeed, what is the purpose of the book? Is it not, as the author announces, to manifest the hidden mysteries of the life and grandeur of the Mother of God? Hence how can we be surprised to find in it things that are not to be found elsewhere? Either it is a question of doctrine or of facts. Is it a question of doctrine? It is clear that if this doctrine is new in the sense that it cannot be reconciled with the faith of the

Church, we must say anathema to it. But if it agrees with the common teaching, in such a way that it is only the application or the consequence of it, there is no novelty; otherwise it would be necessary to stop the very development of theology. We shall return to this subject when we have to speak about the Parisian censorship of 1696. Is it a question of facts? There is only one remark to be made: Either these facts imply contradiction with other revealed facts, or they are repugnant to the divine perfections, or lastly they allow the revealed facts to remain in their integrity and offer nothing contrary to the wisdom and power of God. In the first two cases the book must be rejected as bad and dangerous; in the third case, it would be against all justice to reject a book for the sole reason that it contains facts unknown until then, when the author of the book declares first of all that her aim is precisely to produce such facts. I see only two ways to oppose the *Mystical City* for this reason: Either to say that private revelations are impossible and do not exist, which is declaring oneself against the Church, which admits the possibility and the existence of them; or to say that Mary of Ágreda was a madwoman or an impostor, which would be difficult to reconcile with the high wisdom that shines in all that she wrote, and with the sublime virtues and divine gifts that shone in her, and that won for her, among others, the tender veneration of a Pontiff as enlightened as Benedict XIV was.

7. Yet here are others, and perhaps the same ones, who arrive and tell us that the *Mystical City* is not tenable, given that many of the facts which are related in it are found in the apocryphal books which were written in the first centuries of the Church. The answer to this difficulty is quite easy: If the Sister taught that we must consider as inspired and canonical books

which the Church has excluded from the canon of the Holy Scriptures, there is no doubt that we should reprove her work; but from the fact that in some places of the *Mystical City* there may be certain facts which are found in the apocryphal writings, does one have the right for that alone to reject this book? It would be necessary to maintain that everything contained in these apocryphal books is false and erroneous; yet such an assertion would lead the adversary much further than he wants to go. He is evidently under the burden of a misunderstanding; otherwise, he would remember that more than once the canonical books themselves have alleged facts reported in books declared to be apocryphal. Thus St. Paul, writing to Timothy, alludes to the two magicians of Egypt, Jannes and Mambres, who resisted Moses; St. Jude speaks of the dispute of Satan with the archangel St. Michael concerning the body of the lawgiver of the Hebrews; and the same Apostle alleges the prophecy of Enoch. It is therefore not demonstrated that a book, in order to be declared apocryphal by the Church, must be supposed to contain as many errors as words; in the strictest sense of the word, this qualification [of apocryphal] does not imply anything else except the book is not canonical. If we admit that it contains fables, as we are able to observe for all these kinds of writings, it will never follow in good logic that everything in it must be absolutely false and absurd.

8. Others have pointed out the contradictions that the accounts of Mary of Ágreda present, in some points, with previous revelations. The revelations of St. Bridget, St. Magdalene de Pazzi, St. Colette, St. Elizabeth of Trebia, Blessed Veronica of Binasco, and the Venerable Marianne of Jesus have been cited as containing some details that are contrary to those

contained in the *Mystical City*. Would this be a sufficient reason to reject the book? One cannot say, when one remembers that private revelations, even the most serious ones, are never absolutely guaranteed to be free from some mixture of error or misunderstanding.

9. Now, on which side will the error or misunderstanding be? It is necessary to examine this in detail. Thus, what the Sister says about the three days that the body of Mary remained in the tomb is objected to, since a revelation [attributed to] St. Bridget puts the number at fifteen days; Benedict XIV demonstrates that this alleged revelation was falsely attributed to St. Bridget. Mary of Ágreda saw six soldiers scourging the Savior, whereas St. Magdalene of Pazzi tells us that sixty were present at this barbaric event; yet she does not say that all of them took part in it, so where is the contradiction? St. Colette gives three daughters to St. Anne, while the Sister gives her only Mary, Mother of God, as a daughter. Benedict XIV teaches that the revelation of St. Colette on this subject is apocryphal. As for the revelations of St. Elizabeth of Trebia, of Blessed Veronica of Binasco, and those of the venerable Marianne of Jesus, they have not been the object of any control in the Church, since the hand-written manuscripts have not been examined or judged; it would not be fair, therefore, to conclude against the value of the accounts of the *Mystical City*. In any case, I refer to the general principles set forth above, which are applicable to each of these revelations, whose sole purpose is to serve the edification of the faithful, and in no way to increase the scientific domain, unless particular circumstances are encountered, the concurrence of which is very rare.

10. But there is a much more serious contradiction, and one that will be much noticed today by the readers of the *Mystical City*; it is the one that exists very flagrantly on several points between the accounts of Mary of Ágreda and those of Catherine Emmerich, which enjoy great vogue, and which serve piety wonderfully. I begin by saying that I profess a sincere respect for everything that comes authentically from Catherine Emmerich, a personage whose holiness of life is indisputable, and who has the advantage of being contemporary with us. This respect is also professed by Father Faber, a very competent judge in this matter, who in his last and precious work, entitled *The Foot of the Cross*, says the following about the two ecstasies, with regard to a fact of the Passion about which they both agree perfectly:⁸⁰ “This is the attractiveness of Our Lady’s apparitions in the revelations of Mary of Ágreda, compared with her portrait in the visions of Sister Emmerich. The instincts of the Spanish nun were more true than those even of the artistic soul of the German ecstatic” (Chap. 1, § IV). One could not better characterize the two servants of God. The former prevails over the latter in feeling; the latter is superior to the former in artistry. The poetry of the work of Mary of Ágreda is more grandiose; that of Catherine Emmerich turns more to genre painting. It seems that Divine Providence wanted to serve each century according to its attraction. The characters of Catherine Emmerich never speak, so to speak; they perform before the reader a kind of eloquent pantomime which leaves the soul a little in the dark; those of Mary of Ágreda speak often and at length, in the Castilian style;

⁸⁰ that Our Lady *stood* at the foot of the Cross (Jn. 19:25) and did not *faint* as is so often, yet erroneously, depicted in art [Ed.]

but what life, what feeling, what light, what doctrine in these discourses! It is not the profound conciseness of the interlocutors of the Gospel; it is easy to feel the difference between the inspired writer and the soul that God favors with a fleeting light, and which then tries to find and render, in its own language, what it has seen and heard.⁸¹ One is moved by reading Catherine Emmerich; one is both moved and enlightened by reading Mary of Ágreda. We had to go through the first one in order to return to the second; admirable condescension of God for French piety, which found itself cruelly frustrated, at the end of the 17th century, of a support which would have helped it so powerfully in the midst of the trials it was going to have to undergo.

11. Be that as it may, the two ecstasies differ in important respects. The Spaniard gives only one daughter to St. Anne, she places her death before the espousal of Mary, and she says the Mother of God died in Jerusalem; the German attributes three daughters to St. Anne, says she lived until the birth of the Savior, and places the death of Mary in Ephesus. There is no possible way of reconciling the two; one of them is necessarily mistaken. It would not be difficult to show,

⁸¹ The primary difference between the two is this: Ven. Mary received her revelations by means of *intellectual* visions, i.e. directly infused into the intellect, bypassing the senses and not admitting of personal interpretation; the only difficulty is to find proper terms with which to express what she *knows* to be true. The revelations of Ven. A.C. Emmerich, as described here by the author, appear to be *imaginary* visions, not in the sense of *made up* or only *imagined*, but rather a lower type of vision in which images and feelings are displayed to the imagination; she then tries to describe what she is seeing or feeling, and there is room for personal interpretation. [Ed.]

with more time and space than we have at our disposal, that outside of all revelation, the sentiment of Mary of Agreda on the death of Mary in Jerusalem is the one that gathers the most historical and archaeological proofs in its favor, and to draw from this a bias that is quite advantageous for the *Mystical City*, to the detriment of the accounts of Catherine Emmerich. Numerous arguments of convenience, to which serious and multiplied authorities unite, recommend in preference the sentiment which recognizes only one marriage and only one childbirth in this happy woman to whom it was granted to give to the world the immaculate fruit of her womb. Yet there is still something else to be said on this question: The work of Mary of Agreda exists entirely in her own handwriting, recognized and certified; she even wrote it twice. However, regarding Catherine Emmerich we have only interspersed dictations, painstakingly produced, often amended, the whole of which, it is true, is of great beauty, and frequently bears the trace of a superhuman light and action; but it seems that, in the case of a conflict, one would have some difficulty, if one takes into account all that militates in favor of the Spanish nun, to subordinate her to Sister Emmerich. Besides, the occasions when they contradict each other are rare, and one has reason to often admire with what harmony their contemplations meet and intertwine. In reading the published summaries of the visions of the German ecstatic, one cannot help but recognize a providential action which was exerted first on the part of Europe, where rationalism had wreaked the most havoc, to arrive then to us, and to help powerfully to revive that pious faith which had been languishing for too long, and which abstract teaching would never give.

12. I do not know whether it is worthwhile to raise one last objection among those to which the *Mystical City* has been subjected, and which consists in finding it wrong that the Sister repeats here and there in her book that she speaks in the name of God, that what she manifests comes from God, etc. To those who were astonished by this language, it was simply answered that, according to the principles of theology, every person who finds himself the subject of a divine revelation is entitled to express himself in this way, that he is bound to make the act of faith on the truth or the fact which is divinely manifested to him, and that, consequently, one cannot be surprised by the assurance which he makes apparent when he gives an account of what has happened in him. It does not follow that his testimony alone can authorize the act of divine faith in those who hear or read him; everything remains in the domain of purely human certainty, as long as the revelation is not proposed as divine by the Church. Now the Church can recommend certain private revelations to the confidence of the faithful, as She does, for example, for those of St. Bridget; but She will never ask for the assent of theological faith, since the motives of credibility which alone could determine this faith do not rise high enough to give it a foundation. They are reduced to the sanctity of the person, to the suitability of what he says in comparison with revealed doctrine, to the absence of any contradiction with the divinely known truths; all this leaves the faithful entirely free to admit or not to admit the revelations in question. But again, it does not follow from this that the ecstatic must speak with doubt and hesitation about what he has seen or heard; his testimony is only serious in so far as it is given with assurance; and those who reproached Mary of Ágreda for speaking in the name of

God had at least forgotten that St. Bridget does the same thing in her approved revelations.

13. Likewise, there is no reason to be surprised to hear the Sister declare that her book is a gift from heaven to earth, a favor reserved for unhappy times, when the Church has much to suffer and souls are in great peril. We shall see later if the state of religion was such at the time of the publication of the *Mystical City*; but it is certain that if the repulsion of which the book was the object at home constituted a certain risk, in the case of admitting the supernatural origin of the *Mystical City*, the solemn recommendations of the Sister that it be accepted did not in themselves establish a strict obligation to accept it.

14. Another question arises from those we have just dealt with. The Sister, let us admit it, saw and heard in her celestial contemplations all that she wanted to express; but was she content with the expression? In spite of her uprightness and her good will, did she not alter these divine communications that she received by desiring to translate them into human language? In a word, does the book fully render the revelations? Hasn't an error by excess, or by defect, crept in? In this situation, the Sister, while maintaining on the one hand the firmness of her assertions which respond to her intimate sense, humbly submits on the other hand the whole *Mystical City* to the judgment and correction of the Holy Roman Church. This infallible Church will not have to pronounce on what happened between God and the Sister; but it is up to Her to judge whether the expression is correct and orthodox. Such is the admirable and divine constitution of the Catholic Church, by means of which the rights of the soul who deals directly with God in contemplation are respected and guaranteed, while at the same time the public

manifestations which may be made of these divine colloquies become immediately subject to that infallible control which God Himself has deigned to establish in order to preserve His flock from all danger of error, where such error would be most dangerous.

15. These general views of the *Mystical City* will suffice for the present. I shall not enter into the details of the various points in this book which may give rise to difficulty. Some of them have to do with history and chronology, others with physics, and others with theology. Everything has been put into question; on the other hand, the objections have been answered skillfully and competently. My intention has never been to maintain that everything is absolutely equal in the book; I simply propose, with the freedom that the Church allows me to believe, after a long study of the *Mystical City* and of the voluminous writings that have been published for and against it, and especially after reading the dossier of the proceedings before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, to believe, I say, that the revelations of Mary of Ágreda on the life of the Blessed Virgin have the right to the respect and esteem of all those who are capable of reading them; that they deserve to occupy a distinguished place among writings of this nature; and that the discreet use that can be made of them can powerfully revive piety in souls by developing the understanding of the fundamental mystery of the Christian religion, the Incarnation of the Word, and by raising one's thoughts on the sublime role of Mary, Mother of God, in the whole economy of the divine plan. If anyone asks me where I get this confidence which supposes in Mary of Ágreda such a high knowledge of celestial secrets, I will answer with these words of Benedict XIV: "Divine visions and apparitions are recognized according to the person to

whom they happen, according to the manner in which they took place, and according to the effects they produce. If the person who experienced them is filled with virtues; much more, if everything is related to divine worship; if there is nothing in the vision or apparition that turns one away from God; and if, after the visions and apparitions, humility, obedience, and the other Christian virtues not only persevere in the person who has experienced them, but rise to an even more sublime degree; then there is no way of doubting their supernatural and divine quality: *De earum qualitate supernaturali et divina non erit ullo modo dubitandum.*" (*De servorum Dei Beatific. et de Beatorum Canoniz.*, lib. III, cap. LI)

Article 12: Dec. 19, 1858

The adversities of the book. The various examinations.

The intervention of Rome. The decree of June 26, 1681. Bl. Innocent XI suspends its execution. The various incidents and Roman interventions until Benedict XIV.

1. We are now entering into the account of the adversities which the book of Mary of Ágreda underwent, and we will try to render in all its truth this intriguing episode of the ecclesiastical history of the 17th century. *The file of the procedure on the book before the Sacred Congregation of Rites, printed in few copies and forming 510 folio pages, will serve as our basis* [emph. added].⁸² It contains an immense number of documents, with the help of which one can verify the accounts of some historians who spoke of this great affair. I will thus draw largely from it, and without other preamble, I enter into the matter.

⁸² It is extremely important to understand that Dom Guéranger personally examined a copy of this dossier of Magisterial documents, which is the *only* original source material on the matter approved and published by the Holy See. In July 1957, Very Reverend Peter Mary Rookey, O.S.M., Consultor General of the Servite Order, examined *the original folio* in the archives of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome, and he came to the same conclusions (cf. Appendix 1). Thus Divine Providence gave evidence of this Magisterial approval of the *Mystical City of God* on the very eve of the cataclysmic usurpation of the Papacy in Oct. 1958, and its concomitant suspension of the exercise of Magisterial authority. My source for this is *The Age of Mary*, published by The Servite Fathers, Chicago, IL, Jan.-Feb. 1958 edition, pp. 87-90. I have a pdf file of not only this article, but of the entire issue, if anyone wishes to examine it. My email is neemcog@gmail.com. [Ed.]

2. As we have reported, Mary of Jesus had given up her holy soul to God on May 24, 1665, in the convent of the Immaculate Conception in the town of Ágreda, in the diocese of Tarragona, in Castile. She left in manuscript the three Parts⁸³ of the *Mystical City*, and the moment had arrived when this extraordinary work, which was already being discussed for some time, was going to enter the public domain by way of printing. Philip IV, who closely followed Mary of Jesus into the grave, possessed, as we have said, a copy of the book;⁸⁴ before reading it, he had submitted it to the examination of several learned doctors, whose judgment was completely favorable. This would be enough for the use of a simple manuscript; but to be introduced into the public forum in a country where the supervision of any printing was as severe as in Spain,⁸⁵ it became necessary to increase the number of censors and to give publicity to their judgments. This book had become the heritage of the Order of St. Francis, whose Minister General at that time was Fr. Alfonso de Salizanes. This venerable head of the great family of Friars Minor

⁸³ Ven. Mary divided the *Mystical City of God* into three Parts and eight Books. It is currently published in English in 4 Volumes: Part I is *The Conception* and includes Books 1 and 2; Part II is *The Incarnation* (Books 3 and 4) and *The Transfixion* (Books 5 and 6); and Part III is *The Coronation* (Books 7 and 8). [Ed.]

⁸⁴ This was a copy of the *first* writing of the book by Ven. Mary which she sent to Philip IV. Ven. Mary, at the command of a substitute confessor, burned her autograph manuscript of this first writing (a labor of six years; he said women should not write in the Church), but later, without possessing the copy the King reserved to himself, rewrote it word-for-word (with a few unimportant additions). This second writing is what was judged by the Church and what we have extant today. [Ed.]

⁸⁵ due to the Spanish Inquisition, which at that time had already censured a number of false revelations [Ed.]

resolved to call upon the most learned theologians at his disposal. He commissioned the examination from six of the most learned doctors of the Order, to whom were added by public authority Fr. André Mendo, a Jesuit, qualifier of the Holy Office and professor at the University of Salamanca, and Fr. Diego de Silva, a Benedictine, General of his Congregation, and afterward Bishop of Cadiz. The opinions of all these learned personages were favorable to the publication of the book. The *Acts* of the Cause of the Servant of God reproduce only the reasoned judgments of the Jesuit and the Benedictine; both conclude that the book is perfectly orthodox and of supernatural origin. I regret that I cannot give here the text of these long and reasoned approvals. They bear the date of the year 1666.

3. Another examination of the book was made by the Bishop of Tarragona himself, Miguel de Escartín, and the result was no less in favor of the *Mystical City*. The motivated approval of the Prelate is remarkable for the abundance of proofs he gives of the divine assistance to the Sister, and for his thorough knowledge of the principles of mystical theology. The book, thus guaranteed by such serious authorities, was finally given to the public; it appeared in Madrid in 1670. The success it suddenly enjoyed throughout Spain was immense. This people, so devout to Mary, could not fail to accept with enthusiasm a work which treated with such magnificence the greatness and excellence of the Mother of God, and put in such a luminous light the sublime mystery of her Immaculate Conception. However, as it is quite common for controversies to arise when it comes to the work of God, there were

complaints against the book, perhaps due to rivalries among the theological Schools,⁸⁶ as has been thought; and soon after its appearance, the Spanish Inquisition issued a decree suspending its reading and sale. Then began a new and severe examination which lasted fourteen years, after which the Holy Office allowed the book to circulate. These precautions could be, during their duration, inconvenient for individuals; but the triumph of the *Mystical City* was all the more brilliant on the [Iberian] peninsula, and no human book has enjoyed there a more lively and universal popularity. Portugal, although separated politically from Spain for some years, yet still united in the same religious sympathies, soon wanted its own translation of the book. It was published in 1680 in Lisbon, with the reasoned approval of three famous doctors, Fr. Francis of Almada, a Jesuit, Fr. Anthony of Morales, a Trinitarian, and Fr. John of the Mother of God, a Franciscan.

4. During these same years, however, Rome was dealing with the Sister and her book, and the most serious incidents regarding them were occurring in this center of the Catholic Church. First, in 1671 the Congregation of Rites had admitted the cause of Mary

⁸⁶ Primarily the Franciscan School under Duns Scotus, which upheld the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, and the Dominican School under St. Thomas Aquinas, which did not. Since Ven. Mary of Ágreda, whose religious community, the Conceptionists, was of the Franciscan school, records such a powerful defense of the Immaculate Conception in the *Mystical City of God*, many Dominican theologians took offense, viewing the book as an attempt to settle the issue without the Magisterium having decided; that decision came after nearly 200 years later by the definition of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX on Dec. 8, 1854. [Ed.]

of Ágreda among the causes of beatification, and received the documents of the process begun locally by the Bishop of Tarragona regarding the reputation of sanctity, the virtues, and the miracles of the Servant of God. On January 28, 1673, Clement X signed the commission for the introduction of the cause and approved Cardinal Portocarrero as Ponens. The matter was proceeding with the usual slowness, when suddenly, under the pontificate of Innocent XI, who succeeded Clement X, the *Mystical City* was denounced to the Holy Office in Rome. It is completely unknown by what influence the book was placed in such a critical situation at the very moment when its author had taken an official place among the revered figures for whom serious reasons made her worthy of being submitted to the examination of the arbiters of human sanctity. In any case, on June 26, 1681, a decree of the Roman Inquisition appeared which prohibited the reading of the *Mystical City*. The Postulator of the cause of the Servant of God, in the memorandum addressed to Benedict XIV and which, in the style of the Congregation of Rites, is called *Antepreliminary*, in explaining the fact of this severe prohibition, explains it by the difficult circumstances in which Rome found itself at the time. The heresy of Quietism had just reared its head in the Church, and had covered itself with the veil of mystical theology. Four years earlier, Innocent XI had condemned the perverse doctrine of Molinos, and Molinos had come from Spain to dogmatize in Rome, where the Inquisition had to arrest this false mystic and put him on trial. It was known that the Spanish Inquisition still had the book of Mary of Ágreda under seal; such seem to have been the reasons which led the Holy Office in Rome to use such rigor against the book whose history we are following. The

Postulator enumerates various features of the annals of the Church in which one sees the authority of the Holy See proscribing, because of the circumstances, certain manners of expression and certain practices which in other times were allowed, the danger no longer existing.

5. The decree of June 26, 1681, soon became known in Spain, and it caused a great sensation there. Since in this country all decrees emanating from the Roman authority were always received with perfect submission, the clergy and faithful had only two choices: Either renounce the *Mystical City*, which was the delight of the nation, or obtain from the Holy See that the decree of the Holy Office be at least suspended. The latter measure could still be hoped for, since the decree of the Roman Inquisition was issued by the Congregation with the simple consent of the Pope, and was not one of those which the Pontiff himself issues through the voice of the Congregation, and which thereby become irrevocable. King Charles II immediately made requests to Innocent XI; Queen Louise and Queen Mother Marianne joined their supplications to those of the King. The Spanish ambassador was ordered to represent to the Holy Father how much the piety of the Spaniards would be harmed if the prohibition of the Holy Office was not softened, and how there was little to fear in this country regarding the abuses the tribunal had wanted to prevent by such a rigorous prohibition. Innocent XI, whose sanctity and greatness of soul the whole Church venerates, yielded to these requests, and on November 9 [1681] he replied to the King with a brief in which he informed him of the orders he had just given to stay the execution of the decree, "although," he added, "such a measure was not in the customs of the Inquisition." We know, in fact, how serious this Congregation is in its operations, and

how unaccustomed it is to go back on what it has determined; the consideration it enjoys is at this price. At the same time the Pontiff addressed two other briefs to the two Queens in response to their requests, and he gave them the assurance of the suspension he had pronounced. Moreover, and this shows once again the systematic independence of the Spanish Inquisition, this tribunal waited another five years after the briefs of Innocent XI to lift the sequestration to which it had subjected the *Mystical City*. It was not until July 3, 1686, that it issued the decree that allowed the book to circulate throughout Spain.⁸⁷

6. Innocent XI had done little in favor of the *Mystical City*, however that little was much if one considers the greatness of the prerogatives of the Roman Inquisition. It was thus necessary to implore from Rome a little more latitude in favor of a book so harshly treated. Charles II returned to the task with the successor of Innocent XI, Alexander VIII, whose short pontificate was so full. The Pontiff, going one step further than his predecessor, and interpreting the measure Innocent XI had taken, declared that the book could be read with impunity by the faithful; however, this interpretation was not made public out of respect for the jurisdiction of the Holy Office. Proof of this is found only in the correspondence on file of the Spanish court with Rome. The Catholic King requested, both in his own name and in the name of his people, something even more

⁸⁷ Perhaps this 1686 decree explains why some believe the books may be read *only in Spain*. The jurisdiction of the Spanish Inquisition was for Spain only, whereas the jurisdiction of Pope Innocent XI was, of course, universal. Hence his suspensory decree of 1681 had (and has) the force of law throughout the Universal Church. See paragraph 8 below for confirmation of this fact. [Ed.]

honorable for the book. He therefore insisted by letter to Innocent XII, successor of Alexander VIII, that the *Mystical City* obtain the approval of the Apostolic See. This was asking much, and did not sufficiently recall that this approval, which is very rare in this type of case, and had become very sensitive after the fate the book had suffered at first before a court as revered as that of the Inquisition, is never required for a book to circulate freely and usefully in Christendom. Nevertheless, in order to satisfy the desire of the King, the Pope, by a Brief of March 23, 1692, addressed to Charles II, was willing to discuss the book of Mary of Ágreda at his own tribunal, and appointed a commission of three Cardinals, Carpegna, Spada and Laurea, to examine this work.

7. It was, as we shall see, while this commission was engaged in the work imposed on it by the Sovereign Pontiff, that the Sorbonne published its censure against the book. We will treat separately in the following articles the entire history of this censure and the incidents which accompanied it and followed it. I continue to peruse the file of the cause of the book in Rome. There are two briefs of Innocent XII to the Spanish queens Louise and Marianne, dated September and November 1696, in which the Pontiff expresses himself with great benevolence. Clement XI succeeded Innocent XII in 1700, and maintained the provisions that his predecessor had made. It happened in 1704 that a new edition of the catalog of the Index appeared in Rome, published by the presses of the Apostolic Chamber. The public was very intrigued to read in it the name of the *Mystical City*, placed alphabetically among the names of prohibited works. It is known that the catalog of the Index contains not only the titles of the works censured by this Congregation, but also those of

the books proscribed by the Holy Office. On the other hand, it was a known fact that in none of the editions of the catalog of the Index published in Rome after the suspensory decree of Innocent XI in 1681 had the name of the *Mystical City* been found. Was this insertion in 1704 the result of malice, or was it a sign of Apostolic will? It was not long before this issue was decided. Clement XI, in a particular Congregation held on June 5, 1705, ordered the book of Mary of Ágreda to be deleted from the catalog of forbidden books, and since then no edition of the *Index librorum prohibitorum* has ever carried it.⁸⁸

8. A new incident occurred in 1713. The Bishop and Inquisitor of Ceneda, in the state of Venice, decided to issue an edict in which the *Mystical City* was henceforth prohibited in the diocese, based on the decree of the Holy Office of 1681. It would be difficult to comprehend today the motives and influences that had brought about this measure. The Spanish court, always attentive to the honor of the holy Abbess of Ágreda and her work, was not long in learning of this action insulting to both, which had just been perpetrated in one of the most obscure dioceses in Christendom. Philip V, heir of the pious concerns of the house of Austria, which he had replaced on the throne of Spain, protested against this insolence to Clement XI through his ambassador. The Pontiff referred the cause to the

⁸⁸ The fact that this shocking insertion occurred, and yet (to my knowledge) no one was found who would admit to it, is deeply disturbing to me, a mere layman, and is a prime example of the underhanded and cowardly attacks against the book. This has the hallmark of insolent Jansenist and Gallican intrigue, trying to circumvent the Magisterium (or *climb up another way* [Jn. 10:1]) to censure a book which the Roman Pontiff allowed to be read and was personally overseeing its examination. [Ed.]

Holy Office itself, and on September 26, 1713, that congregation issued a decree suppressing the edict of the Bishop and Inquisitor of Ceneda, since the suspensory decree of Innocent XI must apply to the whole Church.⁸⁹ Such a judgment, rendered by such a tribunal, was certainly a great success for the book, and could easily balance the Parisian censorship.

9. Meanwhile, the commission instituted by Innocent XII and maintained by Clement XI for the examination of the work did not advance. Its members died one after the other and were successively replaced, without any result of their labors being seen, and everything indicated the book would end up remaining in the simple state of any book which is allowed to circulate, without either approval or reproach. Philip V, dissatisfied with these interminable delays, appealed to Benedict XIII in 1729 in order to finally obtain some solution. The Pontiff, in response, had the Congregation of Rites issue a decree⁹⁰ on March 21 of the same year, stating that the cause of the beatification of Mary of Ágreda would be resumed without a new examination of her book, *and that the book itself could be read and re-read without hesitation throughout the world* [emph. added].⁹¹ This somewhat accelerated decree departed

⁸⁹ ...since the suspensory decree of Innocent XI must apply to the whole Church. The permission granted by Innocent XI in 1681 was not for Spain only. [Ed.]

⁹⁰ This decree, issued by the express will of the Sovereign Pontiff, is irrevocable, as explained by the author in paragraph 5 above. Since it is a decree of the Roman Pontiff for the Universal Church in a matter of faith and morals, it is infallible according to the solemn definition of Papal Infallibility at the Vatican Council in 1870. [Ed.]

⁹¹ This is the definitive Papal Decree allowing the books to be read. From this point on we *must separate and distinguish* the

from one of the essential rules of the Congregation of Rites, not because it authorized the reading of the book, but because it allowed the instruction of the cause of beatification to be bypassed without the prior judgment of such an important writing by the Servant of God.⁹² It was therefore necessary to expect some reaction that would restore a more regular situation. Indeed, under Clement XII, successor of Benedict XIII, the commission of examination of the book was reinstated, at the request of Philip V himself, who, undoubtedly, had not liked the exemption.

10. The situation is complicated here by an [alleged] decree of the Holy Office dated November 9, 1730, which, with the assent of Clement XII, revokes the decree of the Congregation of Rites issued under Benedict XIII on March 21 of the previous year, and orders that the beatification of the Sister should not proceed until after consultation with the Holy Office. Is this decree authentic?⁹³ This is the question that the

Magisterial judgment of the *Mystical City of God* from the cause for the beatification of Ven. Mary. The book may be *read and re-read* as decreed by Benedict XIII, while the cause for the beatification was to continue, with any further investigation of the book being done for the sole purpose of determining if anything in the book would impede this cause. cf. Article 13, ¶ 1 [Ed.]

⁹² ...mais en ce qu'il permettait de passer outre dans l'instruction de la cause de béatification, sans le jugement préalable d'un écrit aussi important de la Servante de Dieu. To me, the main point is this: The Sovereign Pontiff has definitively decreed that the book may be read and re-read; the fact that he bypassed the protocol of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in allowing the cause to continue is his prerogative as Supreme Pontiff. [Ed.]

⁹³ So the Holy Office supposedly issues a decree revoking a decree of Benedict XIII, and relegating the issue to itself? Is a true Pope not the Sovereign Pontiff with universal jurisdiction which cannot be superseded? This once again has the foul odor of Gallicanism,

Postulator of the cause of Mary of Ágreda examines in his *Antepreliminary* addressed to Benedict XIV, and he concludes in the negative, relying not only on the fact that *the original is not found in the archives of the Holy Office* [emph. added], but also on the fact that Clement XII, by decrees of 1733 and 1734, expressly charged the commission of examination to continue its functions, to receive all the briefs, and to conclude the question without having to refer it to anyone but His Holiness.

11. Things were in this state when Benedict XIV ascended to the Holy See. This Pontiff did not delay upon receiving new requests on behalf of Philip V, whose zeal did not abate. He thus instituted, by a decree of August 3, 1745, a new commission, formed like the preceding ones within the Congregation of the Rites, and with the goal no longer being the approval of the *Mystical City*, but simply that of pronouncing if the book does or does not contain matters contrary to the faith or to Christian morals, or principles new or opposed to the doctrine and the practice of the Church. This was the usual way of dealing with the writings of the Servants of God whose beatification process is open. Benedict XIV, like his predecessor Clement XII, makes no reference to the claims made in the decree, authentic or not, of the Holy Office; on the contrary, he announces that the matter will follow its course according to the customary process. Moreover, the practice of the Congregation of Rites has never been to call upon the action of the Congregation of the Holy Office in its proceedings.

which is but a forerunner to the heretical “collegiality” of the false council of Vatican II. [Ed.]

Article 13: Jan. 16, 1859

The commission created by Benedict XIV. The Brief of Benedict XIV of 1748. France takes note of the book of Mary of Ágreda. Fr. Croset.

1. Benedict XIV had thus reserved to the Congregation of Rites the subsequent judgment on the *Mystical City*, but only from the point of view of the beatification of the Sister. It was no longer a question of giving approval to the book, but simply of knowing if it contained anything that could impede the success of the cause.⁹⁴ The commission to pronounce on the work, chosen within the Congregation of Rites, was composed of the Cardinals Anthony Gentili, Albert Cavalchini, Fortunato Tamburini and Joachim Besozzi, to whom were added Antoine Gallo (canon regular), John-Francis Baldini (Somascan), and Celestin Orlandi (Abbot of the order of the Celestines). Louis Valenti, promoter of the faith, had to fulfill his office by gathering in a report, at the ordinary time, all the difficulties, of whatever nature they were, of which the book was susceptible. The postulator of the cause was Fr. Prudence Iniguez, of the order of the Friars Minor of the Observance, Definitor of the province of Burgos.

2. The commission, as we have said, had been instituted by the papal decree of August 3, 1745. It held various sessions in the presence of Benedict XIV until the end of 1747. The promoter of the faith, Valenti, submitted his report in which, according to the custom practiced in these kinds of causes, he did not omit any objection to the book. The lawyers, Philippe Azzon and

⁹⁴ Here the author declares the critical distinction and separation between the judgment of the book, which had already been allowed for reading, and the cause for her beatification. [Ed.]

Joseph Luna, answered in great detail all the difficulties, and the file was printed in Rome for the use of the members of the commission, in the course of the year 1747. It is from this interesting collection that we draw, as has been said, most of the details that we have produced and that we will produce again.

3. In such a delicate question, the Pope was in no hurry to pronounce. His attachment to the memory of Mary of Ágreda was very strong, and his regard for the book was visible; but the rules of the Congregation of Rites on the examination of writings attributed to Servants of God state that one should not deal with these works unless it is incontestably demonstrated that they are by the hand of the person whose beatification is being pursued, and Benedict XIV did not consider this point to be sufficiently proven with regard to the *Mystical City* and to Mary of Ágreda. No study or comparison of the manuscripts had yet been undertaken, and the Pontiff felt the need to complete this part of the procedure in order to set aside any examination of the book and advance the cause of the Sister if it was not evident that the book had come from her pen; or, if it was by her hand, to pronounce, finally, on the question of its orthodoxy.

4. Things had reached this point when, on January 16, 1748, the Pontiff addressed a very extensive Brief to the Most Reverend Fr. Raphael of Lugagnano, General of the Friars Minor of the Observance, in which he set out in great detail the situation of the cause, and showed it to be completely settled on the point of the authenticity of the book. Moreover, as we have noted elsewhere, Benedict XIV professes in the Brief a sincere veneration for Mary of Ágreda, and deigns to use his Apostolic authority in a remarkable way to accelerate the progress of the cause. Either the

documents necessary to support the authenticity of the work of Mary of Ágreda were long in coming, or matters of greater importance, of which there was no shortage at the time, took away from the Pontiff the leisure he would have devoted to finally completing this question, so the last ten years of the pontificate of Benedict XIV passed without the cause appearing to take a step forward. Then came Clement XIII, whose reign was so cruelly agitated. The Spanish court, which had been given over to philosophical ministers under Charles III, hardly thought of promoting the cause for beatification of a 17th century nun in the court of Rome; moreover, it withheld its requests, as it did at that time for the cause of the venerable John of Palafox, whose dossier was magnificently reprinted at the expense of His Catholic Majesty. Under the pontificate of Clement XIV the question of the authenticity of the *Mystical City* came to the surface again, and it was then that it was definitively decided in the affirmative, as I have related above.⁹⁵ This solemn act was the last one that the Holy See made in the cause of Mary of Ágreda. It was on the eve of those terrible commotions which made men lose sight of so many questions of a secondary interest; less than ever the court of Spain, soon delivered to the intrigues of Godoy, showed itself disposed to renew to the Roman Pontiff its prolonged hereditary requests in favor of the holy friend of Philip IV. On the other hand, the order of St. Francis, agitated successively by the most furious storms, and succumbing under the wind of the revolutions in so many of its provinces, had enough to do to maintain itself upright after so many storms. The *Mystical City* and its Venerable author seemed to have fallen into

⁹⁵ cf. Article 11, ¶ 2; also Article 26, ¶ 8 [Ed.]

eternal oblivion when, in the last few days, a new French edition appeared and gave us the idea of devoting a few columns in this journal to highlighting the importance and the vicissitudes of a book that we consider ourselves fortunate to have been able to get to know and to study early on. It would perhaps have required some courage twenty or thirty years ago to dare to raise the merit and the importance of a work of mysticism which succumbed, for France at least, a century and a half ago, under the anathemas of the Sorbonne. Today, when the feeling of the greatness of Mary has been revived in so many Catholic hearts, and when the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God, recognized and proclaimed as a revealed dogma, has extended the horizons of faith so widely, there is no great merit in raising certain points of view which another less favored generation had ignored.

5. The essential thing was to appreciate, first of all, the acts of the Apostolic See in relation to the book itself, and to ascertain whether Rome had allowed the faithful to read it freely. We saw first a decree of the Holy Office proscribing the *Mystical City*, and then soon Innocent XI suspending the execution of this decree, "contrary," he said, "to the customs of the Inquisition." Alexander VIII came next, who declared that the book could be read with impunity by any of the faithful. Clement XI, by express order, had it erased from the Index, in one of whose editions it had been fraudulently inserted. Under the same Pope, the Bishop and Inquisitor of Ceneda, who thought he could prohibit its reading in that diocese, had his edicts suppressed by the Holy Office itself, which declared in the sentence that the suspensory decree of Innocent XI "had force throughout the whole Church." Benedict XIII added, to so many marks of Apostolic tolerance in

favor of the book, an express decree that the *Mystical City* could be read and retained by everyone. Clement XII and Benedict XIV, without regard to an alleged decree of the Holy Office which would have once again reserved the book to its tribunal, had it examined outside this Congregation by commissions which were to refer only to the Pontiff. At the same time the Italian translation of the *Mystical City* was circulating freely in Rome and throughout the Papal State. This is certainly more than enough to conclude that if the extraordinary book whose history we are writing was a sign of contradiction, at least its reading remained free to all the faithful subject to the judgment of the Holy See. Yet at the risk of repeating what I have said elsewhere, I will add that it is rather difficult to escape from a reasoning which presents itself after the inspection of the facts; it is if, on the one hand, the high sanctity of Mary of Ágreda cannot be doubted, and if, on the other, the authenticity of the book as written by her hand is no less certain, one cannot help but conclude that the *Mystical City* is entitled to the respect of all those who believe in the existence of private revelations. Now we have proven that the Church expressly admits not only the possibility but the fact of such revelations, although the faithful remain free to admit or deny them, without infringing the faith essential to salvation. One cannot blame those who count the judgment of the Sorbonne for nothing, independent of the more than strange circumstances in which it was rendered. It is time now to approach this famous episode; but beforehand permit me to insert certain facts before the year 1696, which is that of the censure.

6. It was in 1694 that France was able to know, by a special publication, the books of the *Mystical City*. Pierre Grenier, at first the King's prosecutor at the

office of finance in Bordeaux and later a King's counselor, a person of high piety and remarkable intelligence, of whom we shall have occasion to speak again, was the first to take upon himself the task of publishing in French not a complete translation, but an *Abridgement and Examination of the Mystical City of God*; such was the title of his book, which was published in Perpignan in 1694. The work was provided with an approval signed by three doctors of the University of Toulouse, namely Casemaiou (dean), and Rabii and Gisbert (royal professors). This document, which is very long, is too important for us not to give at least some extracts; they will serve to show that not all our faculties of theology followed the prejudices which triumphed at that time in the University of Paris. We shall have to note the same fact when the time comes to speak of the judgment which the Faculty of Douai pronounced on the *Mystical City*.

7. "We have read," say the three doctors, "with serious application the book entitled *Summary and Review of the Mystical City of God*, composed by M. Grenier, King's Counselor, and we have judged it and consider it worthy of the piety, the genius, and the reputation of its author, who is already known in the world by his excellent works. This great personage, who devoted the last days of his life to making a translation into our language of the divine History of the Mother of God, an admirable Life which one may piously believe to have been revealed to the Venerable Abbess of Ágreda, judged appropriate to give by way of preface a faithful and judicious Abridgement of this book, in which abridgement, not content with a simple exposition, he endeavors to justify, with as much science and solidity as one can, the propriety and the possibility of the extraordinary things which are there

recorded; and this with a marvelous unction, very appropriate for inspiring in his readers the desire to penetrate still further the magnificence of the *Mystical City of God*, of which he promises them the sight. We do not deny that in this Compendium there are certain new facts which we have never heard before, and extraordinary revelations which rise above all that we have believed until now; but we see nothing contrary to faith or good morals in these facts, nor in these extraordinary revelations, nothing which surpasses even the greatness of Mary. Finally, there is nothing that does not fit perfectly with the general and implicit idea we have of the excellence of the Mother of God, whom the Holy Fathers call incomprehensible, and whom the Church has always considered as a creature apart, elevated above all other creatures by the most special and extensive privileges. This book is intended only to develop this general idea, and to enable us to perceive in a more distinct manner what we see in an obscure way, namely the divine life of the Mother of God and the admirable wonders which it has pleased the Lord to work in her.

8. "Such a book is a very opportune help for us in these last times, to increase the instruction of the faithful, to support and develop the veneration of Mary, and to confound her enemies. This life of the Blessed Virgin will be like a universal example in which each one will find what he should imitate, according to the words of St. Ambrose: *Mariæ vita, omnium disciplina*. These sublime prerogatives, by which God has exalted her above other creatures, will warm the zeal of the faithful, who were beginning to languish, by revealing to them the special veneration they owe her; and the spectacle of this so perfect conformity of Mary with her Son will confound the enemies of her glory, those who

seem to have taken it upon themselves to belittle her, to reduce her to the condition of other creatures, claiming that to demote her in this way is to work for the exaltation of Jesus her Son, of this most loving Son who, on the contrary, employed his power to make her conform to Himself, and who in his divine Majesty never received a greater external glory than that of which the exaltation of his beloved Mother was for Him the source.”

9. In the continuation of the approval, the Doctors of Toulouse congratulate the author for having known how to prepare souls for the marvelous things contained in the book of the Sister, by accommodating himself to the French genius, and recalling the doctrine of theologians on the kind of free adhesion of which private revelations can be the object. The book is dated November 25, 1694.

10. At the same time a Recollect friar named Thomas Croset was working on a French translation of the *Mystical City*, which probably prevented the publication of the one that Pierre Grenier was preparing. The first volume of the translation of Fr. Croset appeared in Marseille in 1695. The book spread rapidly and was a great success with pious people, in spite of the cooling which was already felt in the veneration of the Holy Virgin. It is remarkable, however, that it was not published in Paris, which was then the center of the movement opposed to the demonstrations and sentiments of the ancient piety towards Mary; the south of France had been better able to preserve itself from the invasion of this innovative spirit. A great number of letters can be read in the case file, all relating to the favor which the *Mystical City* immediately enjoyed among souls who had known how to preserve themselves from the contagion. I will quote

only one, that of Mother Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament, in the world Catherine du Bar, foundress of the Benedictine nuns of the Blessed Sacrament, a personage illustrious for her holiness and her genius, and whose life is one of the glories of the Church of France in the 17th century. Here is what she wrote to Fr. Croset on October 27, 1695, when she was prioress of the house on Rue Cassette in Paris.

11. "My most Reverend Father, it is true that a creature who does not have the honor of being known to Your Reverence must seem imprudent to bother you with these lines; but I am so delighted, my most Reverend Father, with the reading of the book of the *Mystical City of God*, which you have translated from Spanish into French, that I could not help but give you my most humble gratitude. I can say that I am so much obliged to you in my own particular way, and that I would like to be able to show it to you by actions of grace more effective than words. You have done, my most Reverend Father, a favor to all of France which cannot be expressed. I have thanked Our Lord for having prolonged my life to have the consolation that I received by reading your precious book; what it contains is so divine that one cannot help being taken away from oneself, seeing the prodigious wonders that God has worked in his most Holy Mother; all that remains for me to desire is to see, before I die, the continuation of this divine work, which awakens love and respect for this august Queen of Heaven and earth, and redoubles the devotion of those who lacked veneration for her. I repeat to you my humble thanksgiving, and I do not doubt that this divine Mother will give you admirable rewards. If she recognizes so abundantly the small favors rendered to Her Majesty, judge what yours will be, my most Reverend Father; for

nothing more heavenly has ever been done or seen, nor anything more worthy of the glory of the most immaculate Mother of God. I beg you to add to the grace I receive from your goodness the help I ask of your holy prayers to this precious Mother of Mercy, to obtain for me perfect contrition for my infidelities in her service and my reconciliation with her divine Son, so I may not be eternally deprived, as I deserve to be, of the possession of the Son and the Mother. This is all I have to desire; I hope for it from your charity, through the efficacy of your prayers to her. She will never be able to refuse you, if you have the goodness to pray to her for the one who is, with profound respect, my most Reverend Father, your most humble, most obedient and obliged servant." -- Sister Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament, prioress.

12. At the time when the venerable Mother was writing these lines, in which her faith and humility are so naturally portrayed, she was far from suspecting that in the very city of Paris, from which she postmarked her letter, a plot had been formed for several months to censure and classify among the impious and scandalous books the very book which had been her delight.

Article 14: Jan. 31, 1859

The act of the Sorbonne against the *Mystical City*.

Theology in France in the 17th century. The great names of the French school. The beginning of the decline. The role of Mary according to Monsieur [Jean-Jacques] Olier.

1. The act of the Sorbonne against the book of Mary of Ágreda, if one considers the content of the censure and the circumstances which preceded it, accompanied it, and followed it, was not simply the condemnation of a book whose acceptance could not be required of anyone on any grounds; one finds in it, unfortunately, an indication of the deviation which had been noticed in France for several years in the understanding of certain truths of Christianity, and especially in the appreciation of the consequences of the divine mystery of the Incarnation. The existence of this deviation is palpable as soon as one takes the trouble to compare the works of theology, the sermons, and the books of piety which came out of the French publishers from the beginning of the 17th century until about 1670, with the writings of the same kind which were published in the last twenty years, and with those which the 18th century produced. The point of view changes with the years; the dogmas remain, but the more one advances after 1670, the more the horizon of speculation narrows. It is always the same form, but a great number of points of application and developments which had preoccupied the doctrines of the learned generations of the past fade more and more into the shadows. The last limit of this beautiful French theology on the mystery of the Man-God is the great treatise of Thomassin, *De Incarnatione*, which appeared in 1680; but besides the fact that one would look in vain for many of the

magnificent speculations which were so familiar to its first initiators in the Oratory, one feels that the beauties with which this admirable book is filled are still a reflection of the teachings with which the youth of the author was saturated.

2. It was an imposing school of theology, the one that the 17th century, in beginning its course, met in the Faculty of Paris: André Duval, Fenardent, Isambert, Maucler, etc., were its columns; the impulse they gave was still felt at the time when Nicolas Cornet filled the office of rector of the college of Navarre. The Catholic movement which, towards the end of the previous century, had saved the faith and the fatherland in France, was bearing its happy fruits. A multitude of holy souls, replaced one after another and always in considerable number, shone within our Church. The old religious orders were being reformed with the help of that great Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld, Archbishop of Rouen, who so gloriously sums up in himself all the vitality of an era in which good prevailed over evil. New institutes were rising under the breath of the Spirit of God; the work of the seminaries, delayed by the constant refusal of the court to allow the publication of the decrees of the Council of Trent, was finally coming to fruition through the help of supernatural intervention and inspired zeal. A sense of fully Catholic life was felt, and this fortunate period extended until 1660, the year of the death of St. Vincent de Paul, the last person of that time to be placed on the altars. Without doubt the influence of such a past did not stop at this event; the previous sap had been too abundant to fail in one day, yet it was not renewed.

3. One finds oneself then in the glorious period of the century of Louis XIV; it is the 17th century itself, so loved, so praised by our separate philosophers.

Everything there shines with human glory; letters, arts, philosophy, weapons, and politics bring France to the highest point of consideration. However, something essential must be missing; for this so glorious century, in which everything seems so solidly established, will soon bequeath to France the 18th century; and it will only take the Regency not to bring about, but to allow the desolating wounds that had long been veiled by seductive appearances be seen in broad daylight. One understands then the sad presentiments of Bossuet on atheism, which he foresaw to be the last of the heresies, and on the strange abuse that was to be made of the philosophy of Descartes. Whatever may be said, it will always be so in a Christian nation if its progress is not enlivened and directed by the supernatural element, from which it never escapes with impunity; such is the case with peoples as with individuals. It is not that a certain Christian decorum was not maintained with honor until the end of the reign of Louis XIV, and did not delude more than one observer of good faith. Thus M. Picot, in the new edition of his *Mémoires sur l'Histoire ecclésiastique du XVIII^e siècle* (*Writings on 17th Century Church History*), retains the general Introduction which we read at the head of the work in the previous edition. In this historical glance he admires the whole of the 17th century; he does not suspect any danger; everything seems to him to be flourishing, both persons and things; and one has not arrived at the half of the first of the six volumes of his account of the 18th century when one feels the ground, deeply undermined, sinking little by little, while waiting for it to collapse completely, dragging with it all that it supported. The Viscount of Melun, in the preface to the life of his holy and illustrious relative, Mlle de Melun, has otherwise seen and appreciated a situation which should have

been no mystery for anyone. After having briefly reviewed the spiritual riches of the 17th century, the marvels of sanctity which shone there, he recognizes that the second part of this century cannot be compared with the first, and notes the deplorable impoverishment which we have noted.

4. The Holy Scripture gives us an understanding of this phenomenon which reason would find difficult to explain. David teaches us that there are two plagues to be feared for societies, the suspension of the element of holiness, and the diminution of truths among the children of men: *Defecit sanctus; diminutæ sunt veritates a filiis hominum.* (Psalm XI) That holiness failed in France as the 17th century progressed is something no one can dispute. It goes without saying that I am not speaking here of the ordinary righteous; there are always some. I mean to speak of those sublime characters whose presence is an indication of the predilection of God for the land where He places them, and whose heroic virtues the Church is charged with proclaiming. As for the diminution of truths, to be sure whether this scourge could have afflicted the latter part of the 17th century, it is sufficient to consider whether the final period of the great century was as concerned as the first with this principal truth for the earth, namely the mystery of the Incarnate Word. If we look for the reason for the Christian superiority of the first sixty years, we will not find it elsewhere than in the magnificent set of views which the Holy Ghost first suggested to the chosen men who were to be the center of that life so abundant with which Christian France then seemed to overflow. Pierre de Berulle, Fr. de Condren, Monsieur [Jean-Jacques] Olier, do they not seem to have received the mission of initiating the Christians of that time into the ineffable sweetness of

Jesus Christ, of revealing to them the height, the breadth, the depth of the mystery of the Incarnation? Do we not find the impetus they tried to communicate towards this central mystery of all Christian life, inspired by the same source in all the holy souls of the time, about which we have such a large number of monographs? Is it not this understanding of Jesus Christ which gives to the so numerous sermons of the youthful Bossuet this enthusiasm for the mysteries which still seizes the reader after two centuries, and forces him to agree that for a long time we have not spoken like this, or felt like this. The reason is easy to find: It is that education has changed. Bossuet was able to see this himself. Not more than twenty years after his death he ceased to be appreciated as a preacher, he who had captivated so long and so early the court and the city by his nourished and passionate eloquence. From then on, people desired rational discussion in the pulpit, especially when it came to morals.

5. God forbid that anyone should take my words to mean that faith in the Incarnate Word was lacking among the faithful in what is essential. The fact of the Incarnation, and its primary dogmatic consequences, were always, as in the past, the object of indispensable teaching in the pulpit and in the School; however, we no longer found this insistence, this abundance on such a subject, of which Berulle, de Condren and Olier had given the example. They made the whole of religion come out of the Man-God and return to Him unceasingly; in a word, they concentrated all Christianity in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And today, when we reread their writings, we cannot help but recognize two things: First, that therein lies the secret of that Christian greatness which illuminates the whole of the first half of the 17th century; second, that

the weakening which we notice in the second half is a direct result of the evident loss which the century suffered with regard to the doctrines expounded with such perseverance and breadth by these three illustrious figures. I quote them by name, and I recall their luminous writings; not that I pretend to give them as the authors of a teaching which has its source higher than human intelligence, yet they formulated the views and sentiments which animated so many holy souls and inspired so much devotion in the great epoch which occupies us. Truth was not diminished then, for all things were seen in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word; we had the point of view of God himself in what concerns this created world. Later on as knowledge expanded we thought we were expanding, as if all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom were not, as the Apostle tells us, gathered and hidden in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:3). Progress was made, but it was outside the unique and central point of view towards which all the energy of these high intelligences and these great hearts, whose sublimity astonishes us today, had converged. From then on it was balance that was lacking in the synthesis. Jesus Christ is the universal Way; everything must therefore pass through Him and be linked to Him. From then on, however, He was only spoken of when it was necessary to speak of Him; it was a complete revolution, and all the more assured in its effects, which were as if imperceptible, distracted as we were by the philosophical movement, and the thousand overexcitations brought about by progress of all kinds, which rose up on all sides and was no longer subordinated to faith.

6. Nevertheless, as the Christian synthesis which triumphed in the first half of the 17th century was founded entirely on the preponderance in all things of

the idea of the Incarnate Word, it followed that the dogma of Mary, Mother of God, essential cooperator in the Incarnation, should also have its universal application, though secondary, to the whole of the Christian views on the world of nature and that of grace. Berulle, de Condren and Olier, so rich in doctrine on the great mystery of the God-man, could not fail to turn their contemplations to the role of Mary in the Church, to the role which God assigned her in the government and sanctification of every human creature. Their speculations on this subject are as vast as they are harmonious on the whole. It was then understood what was too much forgotten later, that the Divine Maternity entails all the types of prerogatives and excellences compatible with her being a both a creature and the One who shares with the heavenly Father the right to call the uncreated Word her Son; that she is, after this eternal Son, the great fountain⁹⁶ of the world; that in her were deposited all the perfections which the magnificence of her mission called for; that finally this mission of Queen of creation did not consist only in conceiving and giving birth to the humanity of the Mediator, but in cooperating with Him and subordinate to Him in the formation of the elect who are his members. It must be admitted that these ideas were already very far from the minds of most people in 1690. It was no longer the time when Fr. Poiré published the *Triple Crown of the Mother of God*, a composite of her principal greatness of excellence, power and goodness; when Fr. Binet gave the public the *Masterpiece of God, or The Sovereign Perfections of the Blessed Virgin, his*

⁹⁶ i.e. fountain of grace. [Ed.]

Mother; when Father Eudes⁹⁷ poured out his enthusiasm in his beautiful books on the Heart of Mary; where Mother Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament traced with such a firm hand the lines of her doctrine on the permanent union of operation between the Son and the Mother; where the pious doctor Louis Bail wrote his *Affective Theology*, in which he posited with such certainty his vast theses on the prerogatives of Mary; and there were still extant, around 1680, the conferences of Fr. d'Argentan on the greatness of the Blessed Virgin, though the author was born in 1614 and was a Capuchin.

7. The thousand theses to which all this Marian doctrine gives rise were, in the great period which ended in 1660, the object of the most learned studies. Scholasticism had probed them, contemplation had penetrated them; the idea of Mary illuminated all Christian doctrine with its gentle and serene radiance. The mystery of the glorious Trinity led to a description of the relationship of Mary with each of the divine Persons; grace was not sufficiently known until the channel through which it is poured out upon us was manifested; the Church was not described in all its aspects until the sovereign action which the Mother of God exercises over her was exposed. However, there was a period lasting for a century and a half when this light withdrew. The truths remained, no doubt, but they were diminished. This period marks the beginning of our misfortunes, as well as the un hoped-for return of our hopes. The year 1696 would not have welcomed the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception with the same happiness as the year 1854. We are

⁹⁷ Since he was canonized in 1925 by Pius XI, he is now St. John Eudes, feast day Aug. 19. [Ed.]

aware of this today, it is just to admit; yet as we said at the beginning of this series of articles, much has been given to us because of our wretchedness. Mary, Mother of God; Mary always virgin; Mary conceived without original sin; Mary honored with the veneration of hyperdulia; such were for a long time the only theses of our Marian theology. From now on they are no longer sufficient; it is time to formulate others, for which there is no lack of justification.

8. Mary of Ágreda tells us that the Lord, speaking of the book He commanded her to write, said to her:⁹⁸ “It is the time in which the attribute of my mercy must be more abundantly manifested, and in which I desire my love to be not idle; now, at this hour, when the world has arrived at such an unfortunate age, and when, after the Word has become incarnate, mortals are more careless of their welfare and seek it less...I desire to furnish them an opportune remedy if they desire to avail themselves of it for returning to my grace. Those who find it shall be very happy, and blessed shall they be who shall know its value; happy and very wise shall they be who with reverence shall scrutinize it and understand its mysteries and sacraments.” It might be argued that Mary of Ágreda is merely saying here what she wants, and that it is very strange to hear the 17th century called the one of all that, since the Incarnation of the Word until then, would have been the most distressing. I will answer that the *Mystical City* was made public, strictly speaking, only in the last twenty years of this 17th century. It was badly received in France. How would it have been received there fifty years earlier? Quite differently, I dare say; and as proof, I call as an irrefutable witness the pious Olier. Science

⁹⁸ *The Conception*, Ch. 1, ¶ 9 [Ed.]

and prayer had already revealed to him all that the Sister knew in her contemplations. I am not speaking of the facts of detail; I am speaking of the theory, which is quite otherwise important, and which, once admitted, makes it easy to accept the facts.

9. It is especially in his as yet unpublished works that M. Olier gives expression to the light that God had placed in him on the role of Mary in creation; it is there that he develops what he had only sketched out in his printed writings. We read with admiration that "God having had, from all eternity, the intention of going out of Himself by the ways of love to beget his Son in the flesh, He first provided Himself with a helper. He would have formed this wonderful masterpiece with his own hands if He had wished to send his Son into the world in immortal and glorious flesh. In this temporal generation the Son would not have needed a mother, any more than Adam did; but foreseeing sin, and desiring it to be expiated by the death of his Son, He resolved to send Him into the world in passible flesh. In order to beget Him in this way, God the Father chose the most holy Virgin as his helper and spouse. She is with Him the principle of the temporal generation of the Word, and does with Him in the Incarnation what He alone does in eternity. The affection of the bridegroom for the bride surpasses all other affection, and goes as far as unity. God the Father, having chosen the most holy Virgin as his only spouse, conceives for her all the affection of the spouse, He endeavors to show it to her, and this is infinite, immense, and incomprehensible to any created mind.

10. "The spouse who enjoys the rights and prerogatives ordinary to spouses enters into possession of her spouse and in perfect sharing of all his goods, in perfect unity of heart and soul, of thought, of will, and

becomes one with her spouse; from which it follows that she has a share in his designs, his orders, and his works. Thus God the Father, like a holy and faithful spouse, wants to put the most holy Virgin in union with his Person, with all his goods, his treasures, his glory, and orders with her all his designs. First of all, with her He orders the holy mystery of the Incarnation, not only on earth by means of the acceptance of the proposition of the Angel, but in heaven, before all ages. It is incomprehensible how God in eternity, before the formation of all creatures, had this bride present to his mind.⁹⁹ For God there is neither future nor past; everything is present in his eternal light; He sees all things distinctly. From all eternity there was in God the Father a character, a figure, that represented Jesus Christ; He always saw the incarnate Word and all his members. Mary was present to the spirit of the Father as needing to cooperate in this great mystery. The consent of Mary, which was necessary for the Incarnation,¹⁰⁰ and on which rested the whole edifice of the true religion, as well as all the figures and prophecies, the whole economy of salvation, He foresaw and knew it before all time. He saw in the depths of the soul of the Blessed Virgin a fullness of faith, of love, of wisdom, of submission; what her

⁹⁹ cf. Prov. 8:22ff. [Ed.]

¹⁰⁰ This is *precisely* what so many Protestants deny, and even some Catholics tend to forget – that without her freewill consent we would not have Christ. Put in simplest terms, *She could have said no*. This one truth, it would seem, explains in its essence why we Catholics love her, thank her, pray to her, honor her, and hopefully try to imitate Her in her cooperation with God's grace. Luther's denial of free will, along with all its other fatal consequences, robs Our Lady of the merit of her freewill consent, and the love and honor due to Her, consequent upon it. [Ed.]

thought and her feeling would be, knowing the strength and the virtue of the grace with which He would fill her. Knowing her will and the disposition of her heart, and already drawing from her this consent, which He saw as truly as when she confirmed it to the Angel, He saw from all eternity the holy mystery of the Incarnation. He saw the same in the vocation of all his adopted children, who are the members of Jesus Christ, the completion of this great mystery, and of whom Mary was really to be the Mother according to the spirit.”

11. “If, in the plan of God, the wife was to be the helper of the husband, it was not only so that she would contribute to the birth of children, but so she would contribute by maternal solicitude and advice to their education and establishment. Without doubt, in predestining us to become members of his Son, God the Father called us according to the decree of his will and by a pure effect of his grace which He gave us before all ages, having already created us in Jesus Christ; but, in calling each one of us in this way, God consulted with his holy Spouse whom He held present to his mind. He saw in her what He would have approved of if she had been created, what would have pleased Him if she had been in the world; and He acted in accordance with his intentions and purposes, with pleasure and delight for her. He knew what inclinations his holy Spouse would have, because of the extent of the wisdom with which He would fill her. Those princes who, having espoused a princess in infancy, and contracting for her, promise to have her ratify the acts done in her name; likewise, when God has given being to Mary, He will show her the economy of his designs for each soul, and she will expressly agree to them, thus making visible what from all eternity He had invisibly

intended with her. And this conduct of God explains how it came about that all graces were, are, and will be given forever through Mary.”

12. “Thus the eternal Father, having chosen her for his helper very similar to Himself in the formation of his family, forms with her Jesus Christ, who is the Head with all his members, posterity and descendants. With God as Father, she is Mother of Jesus Christ and of his Church; together with her the eternal Father calls whom He wills to become the members of his Son. It will be the same with her for the rest of the circumstances of the great work of the Incarnation, and especially for the creation of the universe, which is its continuation. As a man, the Word needed a temporal dwelling place; all the members of Jesus Christ were in the same necessity, and God resolved to create this world so they might live in it before going to glorify Him. God, therefore, destined this world to serve as a dwelling place for his Son, and He resolved to create it in that magnificent grandeur and beauty so rare that it would be a place fit for the august dignity of Him who was to inhabit it. In creating this world, then, God the Father had present the helpmate¹⁰¹ He had chosen to form his family; and He ordered with her the temporal dwelling of this same bride, and of that of his Son and of all his adopted children, as a bridegroom disposes of his house and lands with the participation of his beloved bride. Mary is the universal womb where the world and the Church were produced. She carried within herself all the work of God, being made a participant in his power, wisdom, love, fruitfulness, in a word, in all his divine perfections, God having prepared her from all eternity to be with Him a principle of all things.”

¹⁰¹ cf. Prov. 8:30 [Ed.]

13. M. Olier then moves on to the explanation of the texts of the Sapiential Books which Mary of Ágreda, in agreement with the Church in the liturgy, applies to the Blessed Virgin. Those of our readers who are familiar with the *Mystical City* will agree that, in the single fragment we have just quoted, the profound and pious French author shows himself to be in perfect agreement with the Sister on the starting point of her entire doctrine; one can even say that the *Mystical City* is there in its entirety.

Article 15: Feb. 13, 1859

The magnificent doctrine of Monsieur Olier. Decline of the mystical sense in the second half of the 17th century. The Sorbonne and the authority of the Roman Pontiff. The dogma of Mary and the dogma of the Roman Pontiff are brothers. The Usuard Martyrology and the Assumption of Mary. Bishop Gilbert de Choiseul. The *Monita salutaria*.

1. The magnificent doctrine of M. Olier on the Mother of God was not personal to him, as we have said; but it summarized with great plenitude that part of the beautiful conceptions on the mystery of the Incarnation, to which so many holy and noble souls had given themselves up in the first half of the 17th century. I have quoted only a few lines, but I have no doubt that more than one reader will join me in expressing the desire to see the religious public soon admitted to enjoy so many precious pages from the pen of M. Olier, which have unfortunately remained unpublished until today.

2. These very lofty views of the Mother of God, which were after all only the development of what the Fathers taught, the scholastic theologians discussed, and the mystics foresaw, gradually faded away as the order of faith and the order of reason became separated in the philosophical method which prevailed at that time. As we have noted elsewhere, it was no longer enough to separate these two orders in theory, which is essential; they tended to be isolated in practice. There was the domain of reason and the domain of faith; and unfortunately they began to apply too freely to the things of the second the procedures which could be used in the first. The result was that while the Christian life became poorer as a result of this double way of

seeing and feeling in practice, theology, now confined in what was called its limits, shrank to narrow proportions which took away its growth. Previously theology was linked to everything, and everything was linked to it, because there is the supernatural side in all things; henceforth, a theologian was a specialist, and condemned to see only one side of things.

3. It is a fact that the mystical sense progressively gave way to the philosophical sense as the 17th century rushed towards its end; all the productions of that time bear witness to this. The mystery of the Incarnation is too closely linked to the mystical order for one to hope that its consequences, all belonging to the order of faith, would not be gradually repressed. It was thought to be enough to simply maintain the dogmatic and didactic basis of the mystery, and by elucidating it through condensed theses and solid treatises; but the derivatives of the doctrine of the Incarnation, which raise so high the immense prerogatives of Mary and the notion of the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, were no longer the object of that searching and that love which had been known in the first half of the century, and which had been rewarded by such precious fruits of sanctity. Far from it, they fell into oblivion, and imperceptibly quite opposite ideas prevailed.

4. One was able to see this as early as 1663, when the Sorbonne went in a group to the audience of Louis XIV to present as its doctrine six proposals restricting the authority of the Roman Pontiff, proposals which, reduced to another form nineteen years later, rose between Rome and France like a kind of rampart shielding the latter against the solicitudes and services of the common Mother. And the Sorbonne, to accomplish this audacious act, chose the moment when the court of France was in rupture with Rome,

following an unfortunate incident in this city, a misfortune for which the authority of the Pope could not be responsible, and which it had to expiate by the most harsh humiliations and after the threat of schism. Our pious Anne of Austria was soon to disappear; she has the right to be counted in the first half of the century. In this sad affair of the Corsican guards, her filial piety towards Rome had to suffer; though she intervened and gained something from her son, the declaration of the Sorbonne, as incompetent as it was disloyal, remained to produce its fruits.

5. They were not long in coming. Two years later, the Faculty arbitrarily censured several propositions of the book of Jacques Vernant favorable to the divine authority of the Sovereign Pontiff. Alexander VII addressed his requests to the King to obtain the suppression of this inconsiderate judgment, but the King was deaf to the complaints of the Pontiff. The latter was obliged by his office to issue a Bull condemning the censorship, and this doctrinal Constitution, which is inserted in the official Bullarium of the Holy See, was stopped at the border of France, challenged by the Sorbonne, and condemned by our courts of justice. A few years later the learned Fr. Thomassin, having published the first volume of his *Dissertations on the General and Particular Councils*, and having defended in this book with the greatest moderation the rights of the Roman Pontiff in the Councils, saw his work prohibited and referred to the Assembly of the Clergy of 1670. Science lost a great deal, since the book was not published; but it must have been realized that for a long time to come the French would be condemned to hear only reduced, incomplete notions about the Vicar of Jesus Christ, and even ones seriously altered by interests and prejudices.

6. The dogma of Mary and the dogma of the Roman Pontiff are brothers: Both proceed from the mystery of the Incarnation.¹⁰² The Son of God needed a Mother, and since the Ascension He desires a Vicar on earth. Protestantism and Jansenism felt this correlation; they also rejected, each according to its own method, the prerogatives of the one and the other. In France, where everything was weakening at the time we are dealing with, the attacks on the authority of the Pope were to be accompanied by other attacks regarding the veneration of the Mother of God.

7. The first fact that we encounter relates to the year 1668. Here is the incident: The Metropolitan Church of Paris had not accepted the Roman Martyrology published by Gregory XIII. It continued to use the Martyrology of Usuard for the office of Prime, in virtue of the privilege it had maintained of preserving its liturgical books. However, the Martyrology of Usuard contains, on the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, a sentence by the author in which he declares that he does not wish to settle the question of the bodily Assumption of Mary. This is not the place to discuss this question. Usuard was only a simple monk of the abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, in the ninth century, and his feeling is of little importance on a matter of criticism already decided in the affirmative in the sense of the bodily Assumption, by the assent of all the

¹⁰² Ven. Mary during her lifetime petitioned the Holy Father to solemnly define both the Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility; strong, reasoned defenses for both dogmas are in the *Mystical City*, perhaps a key reason why the Sorbonne, within which Jansenism and Gallicanism were on the ascendency opposed it so vehemently. And Dom Guéranger himself, a staunch defender of both dogmas, was appointed by Pope Pius IX to help write both solemn definitions. [Ed.]

Churches of the East and West, and by the most serious body of authorities, even before the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception had come to bring the most irrefutable of confirmations. However, the piety of the chapter of Notre-Dame had led it, as early as 1549, to remove the sentence in question from the copy which served for the office of Prime, and a kind of Sermon was added in its place, in which were gathered with more or less eloquence and feeling the arguments which militate in favor of the bodily Assumption of the Mother of God.

8. It was thus more than a century ago that the passage of Usuard had ceased to be read in Chapter, and its suppression had taken place with the aim of paying homage to the Mother of God, by making disappear some lines offensive to her honor and for the belief of the Church. One can even say that this suppression had the advantage of putting the liturgy of the Church of Paris in agreement with itself, since this Church had preserved at Mass and in the office of the feast of August 15 the beautiful Collect of the Gregorian Sacramentary, in which is professed so expressly and in such eloquent terms the belief in the bodily Assumption. Nevertheless, on July 18, 1668, in a chapter assembly of the Church of Paris, the motion was read to suppress the Sermon of 1549, which in itself was not a great inconvenience. Yet they wanted something else: They asked for nothing more nor less than the reinstatement of the sentence of Usuard. The proposal was made and supported by dean J.-B. de Contes, and by Canons Claude Joly, de la Barde, de Tudert and Chastelain. Fortunately the Chapter did not agree entirely with the dean and the four canons just named. Opposition arose, and the authors of the proposal were reduced to handing over the decision to

the Archbishop of Paris, who was then Hardouin de Pérefixe. The Prelate proceeded with great prudence, and after reserving time for reflection, he granted the suppression of the Sermon; but instead of allowing the sentence of Usuard to be inserted in the copy which the Chapter of Paris was then having made of its Martyrology, he demanded that the words of the announcement of the feast of the Assumption in the Roman Martyrology be inscribed instead.

9. At another time, this would have been only a local incident; but in 1668 there was a first manifestation of a latent evil which was not to be long in erupting to the surface. Immediately, in 1669, a book by Canon Claude Joly appeared under the title: *De verbis Usuardi quæ in Martyrologio Ecclesiae Parisiensis referuntur in festo Assumptionis B. M. V.* In this dissertation, written with science and skill, the author, while protesting his personal belief in the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, took the defense of Usuard and his too famous sentence, and insensitively led his reader to doubt the substance of the question. The book was written with great moderation, and had nothing that recalled the style of a certain pamphlet that the author had published at the time of the Fronde, and which had the honors of the fire in 1665. Claude Joly nonetheless succeeded in influencing opinion by this first manifestation of ideas contrary to the fullness of the favors which God granted to Mary. Yet ancient piety still had its representatives, and the time had not yet come when one could put forth without complaint systems opposed to what so many Saints and great geniuses had believed and taught until then. Two canons of the Church of Paris, doctors of the Sorbonne and opponents of the motion of the five, answered vigorously and learnedly to the book of Claude Joly: Nicolas Ladvocat-Billiad, by a writing

entitled: *Vindiciae parthenicæ* (Paris, 1670); and Jacques Gaudin, under this title: *Assumptio Mariæ Virginis vindicata*.

10. But the moment was not long in coming when the whole system of opposition to the veneration of Mary would appear formulated in its complete crudity. The ground was being prepared little by little; in the mean time, it was necessary to be gentle and not to collide head-on with what still remained in France of prejudices.¹⁰³ A pamphlet published on the frontier would easily penetrate the kingdom;¹⁰⁴ by giving it a very small size, one would obtain that it would be read by a greater number of people; by giving it initially in Latin one would attenuate the scandal; it could be translated into French, for the use of the women and the people, when the first reaction would have passed over; finally, it would be necessary to choose a very hypocritical title, yet sufficiently piquant to tempt curiosity. The vile pamphlet appeared in 1673, in Cologne; it was anonymous, and had for editor a certain doctor named Adam Widenfeldt. Its title was: *Avis salutaires de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie à ses dévots indiscrets.*¹⁰⁵

11. The author had the art of covering all his odious system with a veneer of respect for the Blessed Virgin.

¹⁰³ i.e., adherence to the beliefs and practices of the veneration of Our Lady which had been passed down throughout the ages from the earliest days of the Church [Ed.]

¹⁰⁴ It seems in this passage that the author is lambasting the machinations aimed at infecting as many souls with the sacrilegious poison contained in this wicked pamphlet which was, as he says in paragraph 11 below, “produced by Satan”. [Ed.]

¹⁰⁵ Here are the titles in Latin and English: *Monita salutaria B. V. Mariæ ad cultores suos indiscretos; Salutary admonitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary to her indiscreet devotees.* [Ed.]

He dared to put in the mouth of Mary all the instructions destined to destroy the trust and admiration that the Christian must have for her. No one confessed the sublime greatness of the Divine Maternity more than the author; but Mary could not be the Refuge of sinners, since she hates everything that God hates, and God abhors the sinner. She could not be our Mediatrix, since we have a Mediator who must suffice for us superabundantly; we must not consider her as a Queen, since she herself said that she was only the handmaid of the Lord; the love that we would have for her would be a theft that we would do to God, who alone has the right to be loved; She cannot but be offended when she is called the Mother of Mercy, as if mercy did not belong to God alone; the elaborate decoration of her altars does not please her; pilgrimages to her miraculous images are vain; and she does not like to be bothered with the prerogatives that God has conferred upon her. It is easy to see how this is all about Protestantism; I limit myself however to a few lines, since it would be necessary to transcribe in whole this pamphlet of fifteen pages in folio to have an idea of the venom with which it abounds. Even today, reading it would give pause to anyone who is not at least a little familiar with Marian theology through his studies. One senses that such a writing was not produced by Satan to remain without effect; it broke through, and its influence was immense not only in our country, where one finds its trace in thousands of productions during more than a century, but it went to cast its roots in Portugal, then in Spain, then in Naples, then in Austria, then in Lombardy and in Tuscany, in all places where Jansenism found a way of insinuating itself in the course of the last century.

12. But the important thing, after its publication, was to introduce it into France, the country for which it had been intended, as if it were to spread from there to the rest of Catholic Europe. For that it was necessary to find a bishop who liked it and took it under his responsibility, but a bishop considered for his science and for the gravity of his morals. Gilbert de Choiseul, Bishop of Tournai, had the misfortune to be this bishop. First placed in the See of Comminges, he had attracted the confidence of the Jansenist party, although he had accepted the Apostolic Constitutions against the new errors. He had been seen as a mediator between Port-Royal and the court; his ideas on the power of the Holy See were very progressive, and we know the debate he had with Bossuet at the Assembly of 1682, in which the Bishop of Meaux was obliged to combat his principles. As soon as the pamphlet *Monita salutaria* had appeared, Gilbert de Choiseul hastened to allow an edition which he coated with his episcopal permission. The scandal was great in the diocese of Tournai, and to such an extent that the prelate felt obliged to give a long letter to justify his conduct and the book itself. This piece ended thus (page 93): “I therefore declare to all the faithful of this diocese, of whatever sex and quality they may be, that they must be in the sentiment of this Pastoral Letter, and I order for your edification, my dear children, to all pastors, vice-pastors, preachers, catechists, schoolmasters or schoolmistresses of this diocese, to preach or teach the doctrine it contains ; and to disabuse the people of what has been said against the *Monita salutaria B. V. Mariae*, by having them read and explained to them in their true sense; with the prohibition of saying anything to the contrary, under the penalties of law.” The decree is dated June 7, 1674, and printed in Lille, with an excerpt from the privilege of

the King. I do not need to add that this piece is a bibliographical rarity.

13. One is bewildered, while reading it, by the incredible¹⁰⁶ good faith of the Prelate, who however was not lacking in theology; but Gilbert de Choiseul had a consistent mind, and he let himself be carried away by the current to which he had given himself, and thousands of others were to follow his example. How could he not see, for example, the crude sophism of the *Monita* when it says the Blessed Virgin herself declared that she is only the servant of God, and that consequently she would not be comfortable with the deception of being called Queen and Mistress? With the slightest reflection one would remember that Mary spoke in this way before she was the Mother of the Son of God; and with a little theology, one would understand that as soon as she became the Mother of God, she did not cease to be a servant as a creature, but suddenly ascended as Mother of God to a dignity and honor above which there is only the dignity and honor of God himself. The assertion of the pamphleteer is therefore quite simply an impiety, which we find again word for word in the Protestant pamphlets with which France is flooded at this very moment.

14. However, it is necessary to be fair with Gilbert de Choiseul, and to add that, in the course of his Mandate, with regard to certain rumors which had spread that the libel was referred to the Holy See, he commits himself to submit to the Roman condemnation, if it took place, which he seems to doubt. Nevertheless, the libel was proscribed the same year by a decree of the Index, dated June 16, 1674, shortly after the publication of the Mandate of the Bishop of Tournai. We do not see that

¹⁰⁶ *incroyable* [Ed.]

this Prelate withdrew the so imprudent act that he had launched, and the Assembly of the clergy which was held shortly afterwards does not seem to have been concerned about it.

15. The Catholics of Flanders, among whom the ancient devotion to Mary was not lacking, wounded that the pamphlet had appeared with the approval of a Flemish doctor, Jean Gillemans, censor of the books in the diocese of Ghent, and frightened of the dangers which the piety of the faithful ran, published various refutations of the cowardly impiety of which this production was filled. One of the most distinguished was the one entitled *Jesu Christi monita maxime salutaria de cultu dilectissimæ Matri Mariæ debite exhibendo*; and this other, *Cultus B. V. Mariæ vindicatus*, by Fr. Jérôme Henneguier. The author [of the *Monita*] wanted to reply and published, or had published, a defense entitled: *Monita salutaria B. V. Mariæ vindicata*. A new decree of the Index, dated June 22, 1676, struck down this new writing. However, a doctrinal censure was desired which went to the very heart of the questions raised by the pamphleteer, and all the more so since the influence of his damnable ideas was always gaining ground. In his writing, which is all in sentences, one could read a maxim which summarizes the whole quite well. Widenfeldt had Mary say, in the sixth paragraph: “*Laus quæ mihi defertur ut mihi, vana est*; praise that is addressed to me, as to myself, is vain praise;” from which it follows that Mary had no right to any homage by herself. Finally, on December 7, 1690, Alexander VIII, judging it necessary to enlighten the faithful by an express sentence on a matter as important in Christianity as the proper and personal dignity of Mary, formally condemned this proposition: *Laus quæ defertur Mariæ ut Mariæ, vana*

est, forbidding, under penalty of excommunication reserved to the Roman Pontiff, its teaching, defense and even repetition other than to combat it. This proposition is inserted as the twenty-sixth in this important dogmatic decree of Alexander VIII, which fixed the doctrine on so many points.

16. France produced an excellent refutation of the *Monita*, which we owe to the pen of the pious and learned Pierre Grenier, whom we have already mentioned in connection with his introduction to the *Mystical City*. In this book, entitled *Apologie des dévots de la Sainte Vierge*, which appeared in 1675 in Brussels, because it would have been difficult to find doctors in Paris who would agree to put themselves forward with an approval, the author notes the progress that the libelous doctrine was making every day in France; we shall see here successively the traces of it. As long as a doctrine is not yet formulated, its progress is slow and uncertain; when it has taken a body, it penetrates everywhere, and offers a stubborn resistance which it did not present before. The *Monita* was for the opposition to the veneration of the Holy Virgin the serious and registered formula, as the six propositions of the Sorbonne had been a few years before, for the opposition to the rights of the Roman Pontiff. The truths diminished, and the error was summarized in order to last.

Article 16: March 13, 1859

The pamphlet *Monita salutaria*. The breviary of Paris.

The harmful action of Monsieur Baillet. The devotion to the Holy Virgin ridiculed by him.

1. The pamphlet *Monita salutaria* had been the manifesto of the many parties that conspired against the devotion of love and faith that the whole of Catholicism renders to the Mother of God. Published in Latin and abroad, it had found one of the most influential prelates in the Church of France willing to take it under his patronage. Quickly translated into French, it circulated freely, to the scandal and peril of the faithful. Only one condition was missing to ensure the success of the ideas that the odious faction was destined to spread: It was that a doctor of the Sorbonne undertook to give it the form of a French devotional book, and to publish this work with the approval and privilege of the King. This is what happened in 1693, as we will relate shortly.

2. But in the meantime, it was necessary to prepare peoples' minds, to incline them towards a less tender and less enthusiastic devotion towards the Virgin Mary. The effective way to obtain this result was to modify the liturgy in the Church of Paris; for the ancient formulas of public prayer, the work of centuries of faith, testified too highly to a belief in the prerogatives and power of Mary, very different from that which they wanted to substitute. A commission had been instituted by Archbishop Hardouin de Péréfixe for a reform of the Breviary and the Missal of Paris. This prelate died before the work was completed, and his successor, François de Harlay, maintained the commission which prepared the Breviary published in 1680 and the Missal which was published in 1684. Since the Bull of St. Pius V, the liturgical books of the Church of Paris which

were included in the favorable exception had been the object of several reforms under the Gondy, and always the corrections had been applied in the direction of the Roman piety. This time it was different, and clear-sighted minds were able to foresee that the liturgy was going to become a means at the service of those who had resolved to modify according to their system the religious sense of the French.

3. The soul of the Parisian commission was the same Chastelain, canon of Notre-Dame, whom we saw appear in the cabal which, under the pretext of restoring a text of Usuard, tended to undermine the confidence of the faithful in the bodily Assumption of the Mother of God. We do not have to present here a complete study of the liturgical books published by François de Harlay; we have attempted it elsewhere; it is simply a question of pointing out the characteristics of this Liturgy regarding the veneration of the Blessed Virgin. In the preceding article I recounted the tactful and appropriate way in which Hardouin de Péréfixe stopped the deplorable attempts of some members of his Chapter to deny the privilege of Mary in her Assumption. After the death of the prelate, Chastelain was able to take his revenge. The Breviary of the Gondy contained, on August 15, lessons taken from St. John Damascene, in which the bodily Assumption of the Mother of God was celebrated in energetic and magnificent terms; this passage disappeared from the Breviary of 1680. The earlier Breviaries contained a host of Responsories and Antiphons in honor of Mary, found not only in the Breviary of St. Pius V, but even in the Responsories of St. Gregory. These pieces, remarkable for their ancient form and the ineffable unction they exude, were among the most precious monuments of Tradition, of which the Liturgy is, according to Bossuet, the principal

instrument. In the Breviary of 1680 they were ruthlessly, and I would say skillfully, sacrificed. From then on, in the Church of Paris, and of course in the other Churches of France, one had to stop repeating these beautiful and instructive words: “Rejoice, O Virgin Mary; for it is Thee who hast destroyed the heresies of the whole world;” and these: “Let me praise Thee, holy Virgin; give me strength against thy enemies.”

4. Since the first centuries of Christianity the Churches of the East and West had applied to the Blessed Virgin, in the office of her feasts, certain passages from the Sapiential Books in which the sacred author first has in view the greatness of the Incarnate Word, and at the same time recounts, under a sublime obscurity, the predestination of her who is to be the Mother of God in the flesh. The practice of the holy Church and the luminous commentaries of the Doctors have made sacred as well as precious this interpretation, which was attacked by the reformers of the 16th century, and which we have seen elevated by Pius IX in the Bull for the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. All these passages were deleted from the Breviary and the Missal and replaced by others. The Churches of the East and West celebrate the feast of March 25 under the title of the *Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin*, thinking that the glory of the Son of God, incarnated on this day, could not be offended. The new Breviary had changed this popular title, and the feast of March 25 was now called the *Annunciation of the Lord*,¹⁰⁷ *Annuntiatio Dominica*.

¹⁰⁷ Montini (“Paul VI”) made the same change of name for this feast in the calendar of the *Novus Ordo Missae*; it is glaringly

These changes were significant, and made it clear that, according to the prevailing ideas of the time, the reduction of the veneration of Mary was one of the means of bringing the Liturgy to greater perfection.

5. At the same time, a man whose erudition and extreme boldness were destined to exert an influence as fatal as it was to be extensive was established in Paris. Worthy emulator of Ellies Du Pin, Adrien Baillet entered in 1680, as librarian, the office of the general counsel, later president of Lamoignon. One could already get an idea of the direction of the ideas of this person by reading his *Life of Richer*, his *Life of Descartes*, and his *History of the disputes of Boniface VIII* with Philippe-le-Bel. But the most dangerous of his works is the one which, under the title of *Lives of the Saints*, published in-folio, in-quarto, in-octavo, exerted such a disastrous influence on French piety, and deserved to be proscribed by the Holy See, under the dates of March 4, 1709 and January 14, 1714. To a mind of this caliber, the *Monita salutaria* must have seemed an invaluable book, whose maxims could not be spread too widely. Baillet therefore conceived the project of a book which he would entitle: *De la dévotion à la Sainte Vierge et du culte qui lui est dû*,¹⁰⁸ and in which he would make penetrate all the spirit of the Flemish pamphlet by inserting in it at the same time a number of praiseworthy sentences, with strong protestations of the greatest respect for the Mother of God.

erroneous and absurd, since the announcement was not made to Our Lord but to Our Lady. [Ed.]

¹⁰⁸ *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the veneration which is due to her* [Ed.]

6. The book, dedicated to Mme de Lamoignon, appeared in 1693 in Paris. It did not lack the approval of doctors, but the most notable was that of Dr. Hideux, parish priest of Holy Innocents Church, who has since become a notorious figure in the pomp of Jansenism. There were some timid complaints in favor of Catholic piety on a point of such importance, so insolently attacked in the work. An anonymous memorandum addressed to the Sorbonne, in which justice was demanded for the veneration of the Blessed Virgin, was printed; also published was a *Letter to Dr. Hideux, parish priest of Holy Innocents Church, on his approval of the new book of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*. Finally, the noise became so strong that the archbishop de Harlay was obliged to examine a production which raised such complaints. The examiners appointed by the prelate found the book without reproach, and its success was then assured. It is true that a decree of the *Index*, dated September 7, 1695, and renewed for the second edition on October 26, 1701, came to warn the faithful to distrust a book in which the poison, having been disguised, was not less dangerous; but already at that time the condemnations of the Roman *Index*, intended to serve as a warning for the entire Church, were regarded as without value for France by a crowd of faithful too docile to the prejudices which were instilled into them. Nevertheless, the Sorbonne felt the blow, and the revenge which it drew from the censure that Rome had inflicted on a book guaranteed by Dr. Hideux and three others was, as we shall see in detail, the censure which the Faculty itself undertook and consummated against the *Mystical City [of God]* of Mary of Ágreda. It must be admitted that the plot was not lacking in skill, and that, as for the result, one could expect all the disfavor possible for the Spanish book on

the part of a public which had tasted more and more of the book of Adrien Baillet.

7. But it is important to go through the work and point out its main features; nothing can serve more to enlighten the reader on the spirit of the system which prevailed in France towards the end of the 17th century, and on the manner in which it was applied. The great determined cause put forward by the whole dominant school was this: To rid teaching and worship of anything that might give Protestants a pretext for scandal.¹⁰⁹ This is the same idea which we saw put forward by certain Catholics in 1854, in the days before the definition of the Immaculate Conception; and those who know a little ecclesiastical history will also remember the violent pressure which the Fathers of the Council of Trent felt for a long time from those who wanted that holy and illustrious assembly to concern itself solely with the reform of morals, and not to irritate heretics by dogmatic definitions. People who allow themselves to be taken in by such traps are very blind or very foolish; but, in return, those who set these traps know perfectly well what they are doing. Catholics have, after all, more rights in the Church than heretics who do not belong to it; and we do not see that all these concessions of doctrine and practice have brought them back into the fold of the common Mother. Far from it; they noted with sectarian joy, in numerous writings, the variations they recognized between the way in which the veneration of the Blessed Virgin was understood in France at the end of the 17th century, and the way in which it was preached and practiced in earlier times. They were able to recognize and say that

¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that this very goal triumphed at the false Council of Vatican II some 270 years later. [Ed.]

the teaching and practice of Rome on this subject were in opposition to those which were paraded before them. I imagine that our teachers of that time would have acted with more dignity, and at the same time with more skill, if they had offered the spectacle of an ever closer conformity to the directions which the divine center of unity constantly communicates to the various members of the great body of the Church. A dogmatic decree of the Holy See had just anathematized this proposition: *The praise of Mary, as Mary, is vain praise*; this condemnation should have been published from the rooftops, and everyone, Catholics and heretics alike, would have understood that to be in union with the Church it is not enough to venerate Mary in the act of her divine maternity, but that this Queen of heaven and earth has a personal right to the homage of every creature because of the proper perfections that are in her and the power that God has conferred on her. Instead, the Sorbonne, which in the 16th century had been able to draw up such a courageous censure of the errors with which the writings of Erasmus were filled, found nothing to say against the *Monita salutaria* which Rome had proscribed; all its anger was based on the humble and pious writing of a poor Spanish nun, a writing of which the Protestants were not unaware of its immense popularity in one of the largest provinces of the Catholic Church, just as they were also aware of the special consideration with which Rome treated it. It was to give the dissenters to understand that, in spite of all the beautiful theories that one unfolded in front of them on the unity of the Church, there was only one country in the world where one knew well what to hold on the true veneration due to the Holy Virgin. Still, this great *Middle Kingdom* had to be significantly minimized, for France had been enlarged by various provinces in

which the old way of feeling and acting in religious matters still showed itself to be quite lively; and we have seen above that the Faculty of Theology of Toulouse, the organ of teaching in one of our old provinces, had not failed to proffer its support of Mary of Ágreda, on the very eve of the day when the Sorbonne was to cover with ignominy this name for which Benedict XIV professed such explicit veneration fifty years after the censure of Paris. It is doubtful that the act of the Sorbonne ever converted a single Protestant; but it is easy to imagine the disdain that such inept and passionate undertakings inspired in those who were supposed to be brought back by giving them such spectacles. I do not speak of the weariness, the uneasiness, and the bold ideas that such proceedings would naturally engender among the faithful themselves; what is certain is that disbelief, as soon as it was allowed to lift the mask a few years later, found little resistance, and was soon able to irresistibly drag the nation into the greatest misfortunes. The *diminution of truths, the extinction of holiness (defecit sanctus, diminutæ sunt veritates)*, prepared this terrible situation under which we are still struggling. I ask forgiveness from the reader for this too long digression, and I return to the book of Adrien Baillet.

8. The author first lays the foundation of devotion to Mary, which is her quality as Mother of God, to which he pays homage, and then moves on to the veneration that is due to this incomparable creature. According to him, “of so many honors that are paid to Mary on earth, she accepts and receives only those offered to her by the true children of God” (p. 7).¹¹⁰ Thus sinners must

¹¹⁰ The unbelievable insolence, grotesque impiety, and bold slander of Baillet in daring to put words into Our Lady’s mouth calls to

take it for granted that their tributes to the Mother of God will never obtain a favorable look from her, and they can dispense henceforth with coming to weary with their presence the one whom the Roman Church nevertheless calls the Refuge of Sinners. Besides, the court of the Queen of Heaven will not be numerous, for the author warns us that “if in our veneration of Mary we love something other than God, or something not related to God, this veneration becomes idolatry” (Ib.). How many *idolaters* there are in the Church of God, which, as our holy faith teaches us, is not composed only of the perfect! These are the *Monita salutaria* in all their crudeness. Further on, Baillet tells us: “Mary cannot suffer people to profess to love her unless they love God above her, and unless she is loved in relation to Him. She has no other friends than those of God” (p. 8). Woe, then, to him who counted on her to effect his reconciliation!

9. The author then endeavors to confuse the love which the Christian must have for Mary with that to which he is bound towards God, always with the aim of discouraging the devotees of Mary, who have not yet arrived at the highest perfection; he does not admit a love of Mary which is for Mary, because, he tells us, “right reason, the natural order, and the eternal law demand that man love God alone” (p. 12). Thus, in order to annihilate the love of Christians for Mary, Baillet finds it necessary, and understandably so, to overturn paternal love, filial love, spousal love, fraternal love, friendship; sentiments which, in order to

mind Montini (“Paul VI”) who, in altering the form of consecration for Holy Mass (thus invalidating it), said: “*We wish the words of the Lord to be these.*” It seems such arrogance could only originate in the fetid mind of Lucifer himself. [Ed.]

be Christian, must be related to God, but which, if they did not legitimately exist in themselves, would not be susceptible to this supernatural relationship. The thinking of the author, tempestuous in itself, sometimes hides itself, but more often it betrays itself, as when he openly teaches that “to love the Blessed Virgin after God consists in loving her only *in God*” (p. 14); that “the honors we pay her must be related *solely* to her author” (p. 16); that “to honor this holy Creature is nothing other than to honor God” (Ib.). Baillet especially disapproves of the *flattery* (that is his word) that is too often addressed to the Queen of the universe; he teaches us “that she is not less outraged by flattery than by superstition” (p. 24). So according to Baillet, there is a danger of flattery toward Mary when one takes as a pretext to praise her without measure, “that the praises which are legitimately due to her are above the efforts of all her preachers” (Ibid.). The Church, however, in the beautiful and ancient Responsory *Sancta et immaculata*, professes this same feeling of our impotence to praise worthily this privileged creature, and Baillet knew this admirable liturgical formula, which only disappeared from the Breviary of Paris in 1736 when the theories that were put forward in 1693 had borne fruit.

10. Further on (p. 34) the author, speaking of the titles of Mediatrix, Advocate, Mother of Mercy and Grace, which the Church gives to Mary, dares to say: “We confess in good faith that we have not found these titles in the writings of the Apostles or of their disciples,¹¹¹ and that our language seems to have been unknown to the first faithful.” For the time being, this remark will not displease the Protestants; yet in the

¹¹¹ a prime example of *sola Scriptura* [Ed.]

meantime a simple faithful could reply to the learned doctor that the Apostles, having left us no rules for the language we should use when it is a question of praising Mary, we defer to the Church which is directed by the same Holy Ghost who inspired the Apostles. As for the non-liturgical terms of *Co-Redemptrix* and *Reparatrix*, Baillet thinks that the Church had *thought it could conceal or excuse them* in the writings of some zealous people. It is not my place to undertake here the justification of these terms used by theologians of the first order; the reader can consult what the learned Fr. Faber says about them in his beautiful book entitled *The Foot of the Cross*. But if our doctor does not agree to give amnesty to the title of *Co-Redemptrix*, he has found a way to give a good meaning to that of *Mother of Mercy*. Listen: “We call the Blessed Virgin Mother of mercy and grace, because He of whom she is Mother is the only author of grace and mercy” (Page 45). This is ingenious, and will certainly not scandalize Protestants. But that is not all: In order to banish from the minds of Christians any temptation to consider Mary as Mother and minister of mercy, Baillet announces to the sinner that this Advocate in whom he hopes will be his terrible and pitiless judge on Judgment Day, for he says “we would not, to flatter our imagination, lower the condition of Mary below that of the Apostles whom Jesus Christ promised to make judges of the twelve tribes of Israel, or that of all the other saints who are to judge the nations” (p. 49). Thus, let us no longer see in Mary a compassionate Mother of men; let us tremble at the thought of her as at that of a formidable judge.¹¹² Baillet does not love Mary; that is

¹¹² Simply put, this over-emphasis on severe judgment, to the detriment of compassionate mercy, is a hallmark of Jansenism.

a judged question.¹¹³ Yet he exposes himself a little to the risk of his sinner saying to him: “Since, according to you, Mary must appear on Judgment Day, armed with the vengeful wrath of divine anger, that moment not having arrived yet, I beg you to let me implore in her the Mother of Mercy. The Apostles and the other saints who are to judge the world with Jesus Christ on the last day deign, in the meantime, to show themselves accessible to our wishes and our confidence; why should I not expect from the merciful Queen of heaven a kindness equal to her power?” We will come back to this book, pardoned in Paris and condemned in Rome; it played too great a role in the historical episode we have undertaken to recount, and it has exercised too serious and too long an influence for us to deal with it only in passing.

[Ed.]

¹¹³ cf. Jude 22 [Ed.]

Article 17: March 28, 1859

The harmful work of Baillet (continued). Bourdaloue and the veneration of the Holy Virgin.

1. Baillet, pursuing the course of his attacks against the veneration of the Mother of God, seeks to divert from its meaning the title of *Refuge of Sinners*. First of all, he says that Mary “has pity on sinners only insofar as Jesus Christ, her Son, warns her of their needs and inspires in her the desire to pray for them” (p. 52). We see here a new application of the system of the same school: To totally absorb the action of Mary into that of God, and thus skillfully remove from her all personality by a false and abusive application of the principle of the union of glorified beings with God. Baillet does, however, consent to Mary being “the Refuge of penitent sinners who seriously wish to return to God” (p. 53). That is certainly the minimum. He adds that the Church *permits* us to give her this title, explaining it as he does. This *permission* is rather strange when it is the Church herself who teaches us, by her example, to call Mary the *Refuge of Sinners*; but the school to which Baillet belonged was very far from considering the formulas of the liturgy as coming from the Church. It only aspired to make disappear, as soon as it could, all those which one had not yet dared to reject in 1680.

2. Our author then points out to his reader as *impertinent* those who dare to say that the veneration given to Mary by sinners who are not yet penitent “always seems better than irreligion and impiety” (p. 51). He does not admit that these tributes can serve to excite some compassion in the heart of the Mother of God in favor of those who offer them. According to him, “it is in order to protect the honor of the Blessed Virgin that impenitent people must be deprived of all

hope of having her accept their veneration as long as they remain in their unfortunate situation" (p. 56). "As long as a man is not converted, he may well venerate Mary, but it is no longer her that he honors, but some idol under her name that the imagination of the sinner has set up for his passions" (p. 64).

3. The titles of Our Lady and Queen of Angels and men, which Catholics attribute to Mary, and which the Church consecrates in her true liturgy, find no more grace before Baillet than the trust of sinners towards her. Mary enjoys a superior beatitude in heaven because of her merits; this is mainly "what makes her called Queen of the Angels and Saints" (p. 77); thus, no throne, no royal prerogative in the heavenly court for the Mother of God. Baillet continues: "The Church has no intention of dividing the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, who is named by right in the Apocalypse as King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (p. 80). Does it follow that if the King of Kings wants to freely and by grace hand over the power of Queen to his Mother, He loses the power that belongs to Him *by right*? Baillet apparently fears this, and so he warns us authoritatively that "Mary will always be the *servant* of her Lord, who is also ours" (p. 81). However we may, as the amiable doctor tells us further on, "call the holy Virgin the Queen of all the Saints in the sense that we say: The King of the stars and the Queen of the flowers" (p. 87). This is all that the school that triumphed in 1693 can allow.

4. If the reader now asks in what way Baillet was affected on the subject of the Immaculate Conception, it is easy to answer this question from his book. First of all, he posits that nothing favorable for the Immaculate Conception can be deduced from the institution of the feast; "for," he tells us, "if we celebrate the Conception and Birth of Mary, it is the advent of Jesus Christ that

we are celebrating” (125). It is a big deal for him, no doubt, for Baillet to tell us this. There is only one problem: The Church teaches us something quite different in her true liturgy, which we will hold to until she is pleased to change it. But what about the doctors and the universities, including the Sorbonne, who support the privilege of Mary? Baillet gets rid of them; he tells us that they are people “who act decisively on the credibility that one must have of a thing that it has not pleased God to reveal to us” (p. 132). We shall soon see, in the matter of the *Case of Conscience*, that the Sorbonne took advantage of the advice given to it here by Baillet. As for the substance of the question, the author finally vented himself: “God,” he said, “sanctified Mary before her birth, removing from her in a moment all concupiscence, whereas the other saints were sanctified over the course of their lives” (136). This was bold after the decree of Alexander VII;¹¹⁴ but this decree, which was law throughout the Church, and which so effectively prepared the solemn definition, could be looked upon as still reformable in the eyes of the new French school which relied on the Declaration of 1682. In order to clarify his thought, the learned author added a few pages later, with regard to the feast of the Nativity, that “the Blessed Virgin had the advantage over St. John of having been sanctified in the womb of her mother *earlier than him*; and it is quite reasonable that the Church should pay tribute to a birth whose sanctity goes *back even further* than that of the Precursor” (p. 141). Let us not forget that the book was examined in Paris, and that it came through the ordeal unscathed, and let us ask again if it is really true that at the end of the 17th century truths were *diminished*. Let

¹¹⁴ *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*, 8 December 1661 [Ed.]

us imagine such a book submitted to the examination of an André Duval, a Berulle, a Condren, a Cornet, an Olier, a Vincent de Paul; but they were already far removed from these men of doctrine and Catholic synthesis, and their successors hardly worried about the past, and even less about what the pastors and schools in the other provinces of the Church thought and taught. The great doctors and holy men of the first half of the 17th century had revered in the mystery of the Immaculate Conception the glorious fulfillment for Mary of the prophetic threat which God made to the enemy of the human race.¹¹⁵ What would they have thought when they saw the doctors of the School of Paris granting amnesty to a book which read: “It is by the word of Mary that Jesus took away the original sin which St. John had from Adam, and it seems that this point is the execution of that solemn threat which God made to the serpent seducer of Eve to have his head crushed by a woman” (p. 161). It is beyond doubt that these men, so pious and so learned, would have protested against such audacity.

5. In return, the cabal which had laid a trap for the belief in the bodily Assumption of Mary, supposedly in connection with the restitution of a text by Usuard, had gratitude to render to Baillet when, in a book destined to become popular, one heard him say: “In order to authorize the conjecture of the resurrection of Mary, they *pretended* to seek the reasons why her body, wherever it was buried, not only did not perform miracles, like that of the other saints, but did not even appear on the earth” (p. 198). This was enough to encourage Chastelain and the other correctors of the Breviary of Paris, and they found reason to congratulate

¹¹⁵ cf. Gen. 3:15 [Ed.]

themselves on having rid the Parisian liturgy of all those passages from the Sapiential Books which antiquity applied to Mary in the divine service, when Baillet came to tell the faithful that “the Church has carried her zeal, if one dared to think, beyond what can be imagined within the bounds of the human condition, when she borrowed from Scripture, in favor of the Mother of God, what the Holy Ghost dictated only for eternal Wisdom” (p. 205). Baillet *does not dare to think* that the Church blasphemes; but he knows better than the Church what the Holy Ghost meant in his Wisdom; he knows better than the Church the scope of the Scriptures. These things were not revolting at the time, and what is curious is that it was hoped to bring back the Protestants by abandoning the Church. They did not come to the rendezvous; but, on the other hand, the Catholic sense, against which everything conspired, even the liturgy itself, sank more and more.

6. In two chapters, Baillet sets out to denigrate the confraternities and pilgrimages in honor of the Blessed Virgin. His arguments were repeated at the synod of Pistoia and censured in the bull *Auctorem fidei*. It goes without saying that intentions are always veiled under great maxims and under protestations of right intention; yet these kinds of maneuvers are effective, and when one considers all the harm they have done, one is not surprised that the Church has pointed out the wiles of the enemy. It was certainly very audacious to dare to say that the Church merely *tolerates* the practices of the confraternities (p. 214), when it is clearer than day that there is not one of these associations which has not been showered with favors by the Holy See, which has not been canonically erected by it, and whose practices have not been enriched with precious indulgences. Today, in matters of religion, whether one says Rome

or the Church, everyone understands the same thing, because everyone knows that Rome cannot be on one side and the Church on the other, nor the Church on one side and Rome on the other.¹¹⁶ In the time of Baillet the distinction was constantly being made, and it was no longer surprising to hear that the Church *tolerated* what Rome *approved*. It is true that all this did not give great solidity to the religious edifice in France, and the following years made this only too clear. In the meantime Baillet, who has no sympathy either for the Scapular or the Rosary, graciously uses the word *sortilège*¹¹⁷ (p. 224) in connection with these sacred objects; according to him, to use them, unless one is on the way to perfection, is *pharisaism* (p. 223). But here is what is even stranger: "It is to use these symbols," says our author, "against the intention of the Church and of those to whom they are attributed, to take them as signs of distinction which should make a difference between the confreres or associates of one congregation and those of another. It is not to take sides that we should enroll in the confraternities; it is not to divide Jesus Christ or tear his Church apart. The Scapular should not separate those who place themselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin in one way from those whom the Rosary holds under another; and the confreres of the one and the other society cannot regard the faithful who are not members as profane and foreigners, without making themselves guilty of schism and partiality. What would it be like if the confreres,

¹¹⁶ Is not this same opposition repeated in our day by the adherents of the "Recognize and Resist" position, whose attitude and practice seem to be that the *Church* must resist what *Rome* teaches and does? [Ed.]

¹¹⁷ *magic spell or charm*, essentially a charge of superstition [Ed.]

blinded by a love of society, pretended to draw alone all the fruits of their prayers and good works, without wanting to share them with the other faithful who were not members of their confraternities? This would be to break the Communion of Saints, which cannot suffer this exclusion (p. 226)." It is easy to see what upsets Baillet about the confraternities; it is the indulgences which Rome has bestowed upon them. We will agree with him that the indulgences granted to the Confraternity of the Scapular are not the same as those granted to the Confraternity of the Rosary; but what can we do about it? I see only one way to avoid the inconvenience; it would be to enroll in both. This is possible, commendable even; then there will be no more danger "of dividing Jesus Christ and tearing his Church apart." As for the means by which Baillet would like to prevent, with regard to certain graces, the *exclusion* of those who do not belong to the confraternities, I confess that I do not see how to achieve this. These graces are usually Indulgences granted to confreres, as confreres, by the Apostolic See; is it in our power to extend them to those who are not members of the associations of which we are members? Unless we say, with Luther, that indulgences have no reality, Baillet would be obliged to agree that the confreres are not entitled to do what he wishes. Why then does he accuse them of breaking the Communion of Saints? Basically, the confraternities in themselves displease him; he sees that Rome sets them up and approves them; but that is not exactly a reason for him to accept them. He is convinced that the Church merely *tolerates* them, and on that account he must also *tolerate* them himself; but it must be admitted that he does not put up with them willingly.

7. As for pilgrimages, our author does not fail to render judgment. According to him, “the Church is far from approving the capricious devotion of those who would like to steal the time they owe to their parishes to give it to pilgrimages or to other less necessary visits to foreign places, under the pretext that the Blessed Virgin is honored there more particularly, since it would no longer be her spirit that they would be following, but the particular movement of their self-love” (p. 236). All that was missing was to add the Protestant axiom on the subject, and Baillet does not fail to do so: “It is not the place,” he says, “but the heart that God looks at in our sacrifices and our prayers (p. 237). It is still being carnal to have more attachment and complacency for one of these places than for another, and it is one’s own satisfaction or oneself that one seeks rather than the honor of the Blessed Virgin” (*Ibid.*). I refer the reader to the Bull *Auctorem fidei*, where all these beautiful things are judged and qualified as they deserve, and I will spare him the author’s platitudes about miraculous images and the decoration of the altars of the Blessed Virgin.

8. It was thus in this way that it was permitted to speak of Mary and her veneration in the capital of the most-Christian kingdom at the end of the 17th century; and it was easy to foresee that the *Mystical City* would offer little attraction to minds that were on the lookout for the book of Baillet, or let us say better, to minds whose tendencies this book contained. Bourdaloue still occupied in 1693 the pulpits of the churches of Paris. His zeal for the honor of Mary obliged him to protest against so many indignities; and although he had to do so with a very significant discretion, his second Sermon for the Feast of the Assumption has remained as a historical monument of the state of mind at that

remarkable time. “There may be indiscreet devotees in the world, among those devoted to the service of the Virgin,” says the serious and eloquent Jesuit, “I am willing to agree with you; and if there are such, God forbid that I should pretend to excuse or authorize them here! But there can also be indiscreet censors of devotion to this same Virgin; and this is what we do not think enough about. Regarding these two disorders, we make a point of avoiding the first, yet it happens every day that we take false merit or bizarre vanity from the second.” The speaker then enters into the matter, and raises the principal accusations which the *Monita salutaria* and the book of Baillet have brought against the devotees of Mary: The perfidious reproach of attributing divinity to the Mother of God, the titles of honor which the Church attributes to her, the privileges of her Conception and her Assumption, the allegedly exaggerated confidence in her power, her so consoling prerogative of being the Refuge of Sinners. I will not analyze this speech, which everyone can read; I will limit myself to quoting a passage which will serve as a conclusion to all that we have said, in the last articles, on the state of minds in France with regard to the veneration of the Blessed Virgin, at the end of the 17th century.

9. “What should we think of a spirit always ready to raise doubts about the greatness of Mary and her most illustrious prerogatives, always trying to imagine new tricks to make us suspect them; putting all his study into disturbing the piety of the people, and by all his subtleties seeking only to narrow it, to discredit its oldest practices, perhaps to destroy it, instead of working to maintain and extend it? Ah, my God, that the ministry of our word is necessary today to defend the honor and veneration which the Christian world is

in a position to render to the holiest of Virgins! After the first men of our religion had exhausted themselves in celebrating the greatness of Mary; after they had despaired of finding terms commensurate with the sublimity of her state; after St. Augustine, in the name of all, had confessed his inadequacy and protested loudly that he lacked expressions to give the Mother of God the praise that was due to her, *quibus te laudibus efferam nescio*: Must I be obliged to combat the false reservations of those who fear to praise her excessively, and who dare to complain that she is honored too much? Here is, however, one of the disorders of our day. As morals have been perverted by an appearance of reform, the simplicity of worship has been altered; as the faith has become lukewarm and languid, it has been made to appear lively and ardent, on the basis of I don't know how many articles that have served only to excite disputes and divide minds without edifying them. If these so-called zealots and indiscreet critics of the veneration of the Virgin had been called to the council and their opinion taken into account, they would never have consented to this multiplicity of feasts instituted in her honor. These innumerable temples and altars dedicated to God in her name would not have been to their liking. So many practices established by the Church to maintain our piety towards the Mother of God would have shocked them; and if they were listened to, they would have decided to abolish them. It did not matter to them, nor would it matter to them, that under the vain pretext of this judicious devotion, but judicious according to their sense, which they wanted to introduce into Christianity, religion would be reduced to a dry speculation, which would soon degenerate, and which in our days, in fact, degenerates only too visibly into a real lack of devotion."

Article 18: April 11, 1859

The public opinion wrought in France by Baillet rises against the *Mystical City*. The cooling towards the Marian devotion. The sympathies of the Sorbonne for the new ideas. The consequences of Cartesianism. The end of scholastic theology in France. How did it come to this? The Sorbonne of 1696.

1. Public opinion, wrought in France by books such as that of Baillet, which moreover was not isolated and was only moving in the direction of the new movement that Port-Royal had imprinted on Christian piety, this opinion, we say, must have been reluctant to welcome a work such as the *Mystical City*. In some distant provinces the ancient devotion to Mary would still hold out for a longer or shorter time, because at that time the pressure of Paris on the rest of France was not what it is today; but with the years, the chill that began in the heart would eventually invade the extremities. The complaints of Bourdaloue were to remain without effect in a capital where the Liturgy had already given the signal of the reductions to be made in the tributes rendered until then to Mary throughout Christendom. It was therefore to be expected that the censure which the Sorbonne was preparing against the Spanish book would be welcomed with sympathy by the numerous party which liked and propagated the new doctrines, and with a certain indifference by the masses which obediently followed the impulse which the movement of ideas imposed upon it.

2. Within the school which was to carry the devastating judgment there was undoubtedly, and we shall see it by the facts, more than one doctor who still resisted the general drive; but a profound revolution had

been declared in the study and teaching of theology, and this revolution was to triumph over all obstacles and establish itself victorious for a long time. Let us suppose that the denunciation of the book had been made before the Sorbonne in 1640; it is beyond doubt that the fate of this book would have been quite different, in the same way that at that time the book of Baillet would not have avoided condemnation. The doctors of that time, taking upon themselves the duty of judging the *Mystical City*, would first have examined the book in its relation to the revealed doctrine which is the subject of the express teaching of the Church, in order to judge whether it contained some point contrary to that doctrine. Let us suppose that the book had emerged victorious from this confrontation; our doctors would encounter in this work many conceptions which go beyond the ordinary statement of dogma, and draw the reader into an order of ideas superior to that in which the common mind holds; moreover, they are aware that skilful and profound theologians who had applied themselves to the greatness and prerogatives of Mary would have taken the trouble to reread and scrutinize them, without being put off by the size of the volumes, and sometimes by the subtlety of an Albert the Great and a Scotus. Finally, the subjects treated in the incriminated book being presented there as a product of the communications of prayer, and the Church having expressly recognized that divine illustrations sometimes come to the assistance of the intelligence of the truths which are the heritage of the Christian revelation, our judges would have appealed to the documents which we possess in this genre in order to appreciate the relationship or the analogy which the visions of the nun of Ágreda presented or did not present with these venerable products of sanctity and

ecstasy. The sentence, based on such an investigation, would have been, I dare to believe, very different in 1640 from the one rendered in 1696, when they proceeded in a completely different way.

3. But times had changed and, progress or not, the procedure for judgments of this nature had become much simpler in the Sorbonne. Theology had accepted the situation that the new philosophical school had made for it, and, proud to be decorated with the beautiful name of positive, it compensated by its disdain for the old scholastics for the annoyance that had been caused by the somewhat hasty halt of Cartesianism, which had relegated it to a region apart from which it would no longer have any reason to leave in order to interfere, as in the past, in all branches of human knowledge. In a word, philosophy was *secularized*, and theology was reduced to its strict domain, from which it was then judged that it should never have left. This situation is perfectly appreciated by a famous Cartesian, Pierre-Silvain Régis, in his curious book entitled: *The Use of Reason and Faith, or the Harmony of Reason and Faith* (Paris, 1704). Speaking in this book of the method of the scholastic doctors, who constantly applied the philosophical process to the elucidation of dogmas and to the realization of the universal synthesis by the alliance of the truths of faith and the products of reasoning, this author points out these efforts as an unfortunate attempt which the advent of Cartesianism came to stop very appropriately by putting everything in its place. "This disorder," he says, "which came rather from theologians than from theology, had prevailed in past centuries; but it has finally been remedied in our own, where we see theology more refined and treated with more dignity than in the past. In our days reasoning is

given less weight than authority. The historical foundations of Christianity are demonstrated as truths of fact, and those who have admitted them are thereby reduced to the belief in the Trinity and all the other mysteries. *Philosophical proofs are no longer mixed in.* It is to this point that the University of Paris has reduced the main part of its theology. It is only to be hoped that it will continue as it has begun, for which there is reason to hope.”

4. The Reverend Fr. Gratry makes the following remarks on these words: “Without insisting on what is astonishing in this judgment, which sees disorder, *unregulated* usage, and a *lack of dignity* in the theology of the past centuries, represented by St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angel of the School and the prince of the Catholic theologians, let us limit ourselves to noting how Cartesian philosophy did for its part what the Sorbonne did for its own. Efforts were made to separate, more than in the past, the two orders of reason and faith, each of which in their own sphere have their own authority. Philosophers and theologians mutually agreed to extricate themselves, to maintain as separate the two authorities and their own consistency....

5. “Thus, under the pretext of Cartesianism, those who delved into philosophy confined themselves to their reason and to their clear ideas, and from there judged everything: authority, tradition, faith. But on the other hand, the theologians, abandoning philosophical proofs and reasons, and ‘taking the matter higher,’ as Regis says, theology became more and more obscure, especially in the eyes of those who wanted only clarity. St. Augustine said: ‘I exhort your faith to the love of understanding;’ the Middle Ages had taken as their motto: ‘Faith seeking understanding;’ St. Thomas Aquinas had said: ‘Theology can receive from

philosophy a great manifestation of its dogmas;’ one was thus deprived of a means of manifestation, that is, a means of introducing into the minds of men the revealed divine light.” (*On the Knowledge of God*, vol. I, chap. VI)

6. One could not better appreciate than the Christian philosopher does here the consequences of the crisis which Cartesianism had produced in the minds of a great number of theologians at the end of the 17th century and during the period which followed. “We were depriving ourselves of a means of introducing the revealed divine light into the minds of men,” to which we must add the obvious fact that we ourselves, in certain cases, were rendering ourselves incapable of perceiving this divine clarity at the very moment when it was most needed. I know all that can be said, and with good reason, about the abuse of Scholasticism in the 14th and 15th centuries, and about the drawbacks which were mixed up with its method at the very time when it functioned with the greatest grandeur and usefulness; but one would have to be blind not to appreciate the immense services which it had rendered to Christian synthesis, the developments which it had brought to all truths without exception, and the marvelous link which it had established between them. When Protestantism appeared, it felt at first what an obstacle for it were these impregnable ramparts that the hand of the doctors had raised during four centuries. The cry of the Reformation was this: *Tolle Thomam et dissipabo Ecclesiam.*¹¹⁸ The Sommists, in fact, were the bulwark behind which orthodoxy rested in safety. Heresy, after having circled around without discovering the weak point by which it would have slipped into

¹¹⁸ *Take away Thomas and I will destroy the Church.* [Ed.]

position, resolved to employ the battering ram. This formidable engine of war consisted in repeating in every way that the doctrine of the Catholic Church had been altered; that Scholasticism, after having disfigured it, had loaded it with monstrous extraneous accretions; that it was urgent to return to the very terms of Scripture and the Creeds, to recover, in a word, primitive Christianity.

7. Such was the attack; the defense was no less lively. Our doctors of the first period endeavored to maintain the honor of Scholasticism, while extending the field of their research into the monuments of patrology. They were careful not to deny the conquests which intelligence had made for the glory of the faith, not to be ashamed of this progress of doctrine which St. Vincent de Lérins so admirably defined in his *Commonitorium*, progress which consists not in creating new dogmas, but in better penetrating those which were revealed from the beginning, in better understanding their relationships, in bringing together around the same center the rays of the same light. The Sorbonne of that time understood early on where the prejudices which arose against Scholasticism could lead, and as early as 1526 it had already made a solemn demonstration by publishing a reasoned censure against the insolences of Erasmus on theology.

8. Throughout the 16th century, our controversialists did not depart from this fidelity; their polemic showed itself day by day more nourished by the traditional texts, the study of which became easier by the publication of the works of the Fathers, which spread little by little, assistance of which the scholastics had been deprived; yet nobody thought of abandoning our illustrious doctors. The great Bellarmine, who was, as soon as he appeared, the leader of the Catholic

controversy, continued to quote with honor the theologians alongside the Fathers, their learned and luminous conclusions alongside the precise testimonies of antiquity. One would not have resigned himself then to the divorce of philosophy and revealed doctrine.

9. The school of Baius, which was later that of Jansenius, inherited the antipathy of Calvin against Scholasticism. To hear the new doctors, who had skillfully infiltrated defeated Protestantism in broad daylight, it was necessary to use a single procedure to obtain all truth on the largest questions of the Christian Creed: The scope of the Redemption of Christ, predestination, the effects of the fall of Adam, grace, free will, and the meritorious motive of the acts of man. For all this, note what St. Augustine thought and wrote; this is, according to this school, the whole theology, as regards these fundamental dogmas of the Christian system. There is no need to point out that the sect cruelly abused St. Augustine, finding ways to make him say sometimes the very opposite of what he thought; but it could not bear the fact that to separate the chaff of the doctrine it preached from the good grain of revelation, it appealed to the luminous definitions of the doctors of the 13th century. St. Thomas, with whose colors the sect would have liked to cover itself, was no more than a scholastic like the others, when the ideas so broad, so clear, and so precise of the Angel of the School on the distinction and the parallel conditions of the order of nature and the order of grace were asserted to these clever doctors. However, they held firm against this principle of immobility, so contrary to the progress of theological science throughout the centuries; the Catholic doctors interpreted St. Augustine, first by himself, which was sufficient, and then by the principles of Catholic synthesis. The decisions of the

Holy See came to their aid, at the risk of leading the defeated to repeat on the Bulls what Saint-Cyran said to St. Vincent de Paul about the Council of Trent, which he called not an ecumenical Council but a *Council of scholastics*.

10. Throughout the first half of the 17th century and a little beyond, the portion of the French school that held to orthodoxy maintained the true principles of teaching. A precious development, produced by the ever better and more numerous editions of the writings of the Fathers, enriched the science of dogma daily, at the same time as our doctors were able to ascertain through the study of the ancient interpreters of Tradition that doctrine had been indebted to their work for a movement just as real towards synthesis as that which the Scholastics were reproached for having imprinted on divine science. The two rivers of Patrology and of the School still flowed freely side by side, or better said, they united their waters; and it was a beautiful moment for theology when the candidate of sacred science held open, at the same time on his desk, both the Commentaries of a Suarez on the Summa of Saint Thomas, and the Theological Dogmas of a Petau.

11. How then did the separation take place? How did it come about, insensibly and in a very short interval, that the theological synthesis, which until then had assimilated all truth of any order by revealing its relations with the supernatural, was henceforth relegated to a distant region and reduced to being only the strict and literal interpreter of the revealed texts and of the passages of the Councils and the Fathers which note the transmission of the meaning contained in these texts? The Cartesian Régis explained this phenomenon to us, and moreover one can easily understand it. A philosophy had prevailed which, not in theory but in

practice, led the minds to isolate the truths of faith from those which reason perceived; the necessary alliance of these two orders was broken. Philosophy roamed freely over its vast domains, without risk of encountering theology, which had accepted a throne beyond the frontiers of reason. The philosopher who was at the same time a Christian greeted theology with respect as he passed by; but he who was no longer a Christian, and the breed quickly multiplied, refrained from paying her the slightest homage, and the time soon came when he hurled insults and sarcasm at her. It was then, as we have already said, that one could see how much that life of faith and sanctity, which had seemed to be the character of the 17th century until the end, gradually weakened and threatened to die out. This had to be the case, since it is necessary for the Christian, philosopher or not, to live by faith, and any science which in practice has no contact with the supernatural principle is contrary to the end of man and leads him, whatever he does, away from the God of the Gospel. There are some, it will be said, who have withstood the test, I know; but what efforts have they not had to make to maintain themselves with a Christian sense in regions from which Christianity was banished? The proof that these efforts cost man is that for more than a century the word philosopher and the word unbeliever have seemed to have the same meaning. But let us return to theology.

12. The second stumbling block it encountered in the success of Cartesianism was the application to it of the fundamental principle of this philosophy, I mean rational evidence admitted as the only basis. Without doubt it was not in this sense that, in order to be accepted, the mysteries had to be evident in themselves; the application of the Cartesian principle was done in

another way. It was said: What is evident in theology is authority; therefore theology will consist henceforth in collecting the facts of authority, and in grouping them in the various treatises. It goes without saying that we are not speaking here of Christian demonstration, which is prior to the act of faith; we are speaking of Dogmatics. The authoritative facts are the texts of Holy Scripture, the formal decisions of the Church, and the express testimonies of the Fathers. Theology will no longer leave this enclosure; it will be called *Positive*. But so many works of the preceding ages, this powerful verdure of the previous theology which had raised a world of questions, brought forth so many lights around the dogmas, and revealed so many relations, all this was left aside as impotent, devoid of authority, without control, deprived finally of the name of *Scholasticism*. The alliance of Positive and Scholastic would be the ideal of theology; it failed, and it was at a time when the ever-increasing publication of the monuments of ecclesiastical antiquity would have made it easier than ever. One must read in the *Discourses* of Fleury his contemptuous invectives against the doctors of the Middle Ages, and hear Bossuet in his *Correspondence* say with an accent of disdain that "in Rome, Scholasticism takes the place of everything," if one wants to see how radical the split was.

13. But how can one keep up with the incessant movement of clarification and development which takes place around the revealed dogmas, and prepares the express definitions which each century has seen, if theological science is limited to collecting texts? Even if, as it happened then, all the resources of erudition were employed to elucidate them, to polish them like so many diamonds, there is not there that powerful elaboration of a Thomas Aquinas, of a Bonaventure, of

a Scotus, of a Suarez, of a Vasquez, who with the help of the philosophical method were constantly expanding the field of Dogmatics and, keeping in touch with the superabundant vitality of the Church, were nurturing the constant germination of the initial truth, which first grows leaves, then flowers, and finally fruits, whose maturity the Church acknowledges by its doctrinal decrees.

14. France at that time contained a considerable number of dissidents whom one would have liked to convert. Disciples of the 16th century reformation, children of Calvin, they abhorred Scholasticism and its doctors; they were approached with proposals of agreement. Efforts were made to show them the identity of the beliefs of the present Church with those of the primitive Church; this was a useful use of the Positive, but the recruits were not numerous and quickly stopped. Something held back the impulse of our separated brethren: They had no faith in this unceasing and ever-increasing life of truth in the Church. It was therefore useless, and at the same time unwise, to restrict within Catholic society that vitality which is our good and our right, in order not to frighten off outsiders. This was the principle of Baillet and the *Monita salutaria*; we shall see that it was the same with the Sorbonne in the affair of the *Mystical City*. And have we not read and heard what many have been saying and writing lately, that we should think about what Protestants would think of a dogmatic definition of the Immaculate Conception? The brilliant school of converts in England, which is the joy of the Church, understands it differently. Dr. Newman had not yet given his name to the Catholic Church when he already understood that making the Protestant controversy a pure question of *positive* theology was not the way to reach an agreement, since it is not a

question of the neophyte who joins Catholicism uniting himself to the Church of the fourth or fifth century, but rather to the Church of today, whose domain, in terms of doctrine, after so much work and so many definitions, is much more precise and extensive than the one it enjoyed twelve or fifteen centuries ago. The illustrious doctor, even before his abjuration, published the *History of the Development of Christian Doctrine*, in which he posited the necessity of the existence of a living theology, not a dead or immobile one. Never before had St. Vincent de Lérins obtained such a valuable commentary. Shall I recall the books of Fr. Faber, so eagerly received in France? I leave aside the doctor of asceticism, the profound observer of the human heart, the incomparable poet; I want to speak only of the theologian. This man of such a positive spirit is a disciple of Scholasticism; he has searched it, scrutinized it ardently; he brings back the most abundant riches; it is there that this so firm and developed view, this almost universal tact, was formed. No one has a taste for all our doctors of every era more than Fr. Faber; no one has a better sense of the Church and of supernatural truth in all the forms which represent and express them. Certainly such a doctor would not have opined with the so-called majority of the Sorbonne in 1696; and I say this not only because he is respectful in his writings towards Mary of Ágreda,¹¹⁹ but even more so because he professes to repudiate none of the phases of theology. In our country, this queen of science succumbed to starvation after her divorce with Scholasticism, after the sequestration to which she had resigned herself. No one rose to continue the theological dogmas of Thomassin.

¹¹⁹ He quotes from the *Mystical City* in some of his books. [Ed.]

Apart from Tournély and his successor, there were only a few rare special treatises, and a host of teaching manuals, whose not very impressive series continues to this day. The great works of theology lay under a thick layer of dust in the libraries; and when M. Cousin, in the errands of his eclecticism, encountered the monuments of Scholasticism, uttered a cry of admiration, I remember the naïve astonishment of more than one learned man, to whose ears the word Scholasticism had never resounded except as meaning a method of argumentation

15. Our doctors of 1696 had not yet reached that point, thanks be to God! In their time, Scholastic theology still retained a remnant of prestige in the other schools of the capital, especially among the Religious clergy; it was being supplanted day by day, but it would have been impossible to put an end to it all at once. From all that has just been explained, it follows that the *Mystical City*, in 1696, found judges in the Sorbonne who were quite different on a great number of points, as far as doctrine was concerned, from those it would have encountered in 1640. At the latter time the defenders of the book would, I suppose, have put forward such and such an assertion of St. Thomas, which alone covers and protects the whole theory of the Sister on the greatness and prerogatives of the Mother of God; this would have been enough to immediately stop all the efforts of the cabal. They would have said, for example: “The Angel of the School teaches that the humanity of Christ, insofar as it is united to God, and the Blessed Virgin, insofar as she is the Mother of God, have a certain infinite dignity which comes to them from the infinite good which is God; so that, on this side, there can be nothing which is above them, since nothing can be above God” (1. Quest. 25. Art. 6). Now it is only

from the viewpoint of Mary as the Mother of God that the Sister exposes the excellences of Mary; there is not one idea that does not relate to this point of view. Only one thing had to be safeguarded, that is, the notion of Mary as a creature; the Sister has done so constantly. Yet beware: By restricting the consequences of the Divine Maternity of Mary, one will be led to undermine those which result for the humanity of Christ from his union with the Word:¹²⁰ the one and the other, although in different ways, are in contact with the infinite. The Sorbonne of 1640 would not have condemned the book, but that of 1696 had to answer as follows: “We do not find all this philosophy in the passages of the ancient Fathers which treat of the holy Virgin; St. Thomas was a scholastic who made speculation as he pleased. This could remain silently buried in the *Summa*; as for producing it before the public, we are opposed to it, in the interest of the conversion of Protestants. As for the faithful, they have the book of Baillet. This book is

¹²⁰ Herein lies a brief summary of why the *Mystical City* is so important. Catholics know that to exalt Mary is to exalt Christ her Son; Protestants, and Jansenist heretics, say the opposite, that the veneration of Mary detracts from that of Christ. The *Mystical City* was reserved for the latter ages when Protestantism, which rejects devotion to Our Lady, was eroding devotion to, and even belief in, the divinity of her Son. The revelation of the Life and History of Our Lady was reserved by Christ for our times for this very reason, to bring souls back to Him through his Mother. “He that shall overcome, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go out no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the *city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God*, and my new name” (Apoc. 3:12; emph. added). This is a clear allusion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and her Life She revealed to Ven. Mary, as well as her numerous apparitions such as La Sallette, Lourdes and Fatima. [Ed.]

registered, it is true, on the catalog of the *Index*; but the *Index* does not make law with us. We have our own, and we are going to inscribe the *Mystical City* in it, with the appropriate qualifications."

16. I said that the Sorbonne of 1640, in the event that such a book had been referred to it, would have confronted it with the conclusions of the doctors of the various ages on the subject, and then, entering into the case, it would have conferred on the orthodox value of the facts given by the Sister as revealed, the documents of mysticism, and the venerable collections of illuminations which other holy souls have received in prayer and which are read with the approval of the Church. It would have been to judge the similar by the similar, a very natural rule. But in 1696, respect for this kind of production was not the order of the day. One was soon to hear Fleury, who in his *Discourses* sums up so perfectly the spirit of his time, pouring scorn on the writings of St. Catherine of Siena, St. Catherine of Genoa, and Bl. Angela of Foligno. What fate was in store for the Spanish venerable when such a serious man treated the Saints honored by the Church in this way?

17. Our doctors must have been equally shocked to find in the *Mystical City* so many miracles, so many interventions of angels, so many divine favors granted to Mary, of which the Gospel does not speak. All this, from the Cartesian point of view, lacked the necessary evidence, and moreover presented no analogy with the simplicity of the Gospel accounts; it had therefore to be rejected.¹²¹ The doctors of 1640 would have taken the matter quite differently. They would have said: If the

¹²¹ Essentially the Protestant heresy of *sola Scriptura*, which dares to limit God's revelation to his written Word alone. [Ed.]

Sister presented her book to us as an unpublished historical document on the life of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, we would have more than one objection to make; but this book is a collection of revelations. We know that all that relates to Christ and Mary is far from having been written in the Gospels; St. John himself attests to this. Has God forbidden himself to make anything known to us? Does not the Church admit that communications of this kind have taken place? If the details of the *Mystical City* do not contradict either the sacred text or the teaching of the Church, it is illogical to reject them merely because they have been unknown until now. Rational evidence has no place in the judgment of contingent facts; and all the less so here, since adherence to these kinds of revelations can never be binding on the conscience. As for the alleged contrast of the Sister's accounts with the simplicity of those of the Gospel, we do not accept it. Without doubt the Evangelists, guided by the Holy Ghost in the narration of the facts of the Savior and his holy Mother, have endeavored to bring to light, most of the time, the aspects by which the life of the two, which was to serve as a model for us, came closer to our condition in the present life; but is this a reason for forgetting the places where the marvelous is shown with so much splendor in these same narratives of which we would like to see only the simplicity? In Bethlehem the army of angels sing their concerts near the newborn God; the star that leads the Magi to his cradle from the depths of the East; at the Jordan the opening of the heavens, the divine dove, the voice of the Father; the audacity of the devil who carries the Redeemer; the angels who serve Him in the desert; Jesus on Tabor, surrounded by Moses and Elias, dazzling the three Apostles with the rays of his glory; the three-hour eclipse at the approach of his

death; when He breathes his last the earthquake, the split rocks; soon afterwards the open tombs, and the dead rising: It seems, after that, that the Gospels can hardly be alleged as books in which the marvelous is hardly shown, and that, on the contrary, when reading them, one feels that it must have been constantly interwoven with the life of the Savior and of his Mother. That the Evangelists only collected a proportionately small number of features is easy to understand, when one remembers the purpose of their work, which was to instruct and to touch rather than to dazzle; but just as there were many features of divine simplicity which in their brevity they omitted, it would be absurd to deny that there must also have been a large number of marvelous events which they were not inspired to write. God knows both, and it would be as ridiculous as it would be impious to think that it is beyond his power or contrary to his wisdom to manifest them in the course of the centuries.

Article 19: May 15, 1859

The censorship of the *Mystical City [of God]* by the Sorbonne in 1696. The sources. The role of Bossuet. How to explain the decision of Bossuet.

1. We begin today the account of the events which prepared and accompanied the Censure of the *Mystical City* by the Sorbonne. This story is long and of great interest; nothing makes us better aware of the state of mind in France at the end of the 17th century, and the changes that opinion had undergone in the previous thirty years regarding the way of understanding certain points of revealed doctrine. I will not return to the details with which we have indicated these three great facts: The innovation introduced into the theological method, the abandonment of the great theories on the mystery of the Incarnation, and the direct attacks against the veneration and the prerogatives of the Mother of God. I recall here only for the record that the *Mystical City*, first prohibited in Rome by the Holy Office, had been almost immediately delivered from this blight by the intervention of Innocent XI; that subsequent Pontiffs permitted its reading; that the Spanish Inquisition, after fourteen years of the most severe examination, declared it free from all doctrinal error; that the Faculty of Theology of Toulouse, in 1694, approved all its principles; that persons of the greatest piety and of unquestionable elevation of spirit, such as the illustrious Mother Mechtilde of the Blessed Sacrament, spoke of it only with admiration; that before the publication of the book, men profound in mystical theology and in the contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation, such as M. Olier, had sensed and even expressed the principal and fundamental views of the author of the *Mystical City*; that Sister Mary of Ágreda,

considered separately from her book, is recognized as a person of the most eminent sanctity, favored with the most marvelous and at the same time the most assured ecstasies; that the writing and publication of this book were not inspired in the Sister by the desire to make a name for herself since, far from willingly taking on this work, she resisted ten whole years before undertaking it, and that after having completed it, she threw the manuscript into the fire at the first request of her confessor;¹²² that finally such a Pope as Benedict XIV, who knew better than anyone all that had been done and said in France against Mary of Ágreda and against her book, had no trouble saying, in a Brief on this very book, that he professed the most tender veneration for the author.

2. The sources from which we draw the details which follow are: The file of the cause of the Sister before the Sacred Congregation of Rites,¹²³ five letters addressed from Paris to Rome by a doctor of the Sorbonne, at the height of the discussion, the object of which is to give an account of it, dated July 16 and 26, August 6, September 17 and October 1, 1696; a very detailed dispatch from the Apostolic Nuncio in Paris, Mgr. Delfini, Archbishop of Damascus, to Cardinal Spada, Secretary [of State] under Innocent XII; the vigorous protest of two doctors of Sorbonne, the Monsieurs Duflos and Dumas, appealing to the Parliament of Paris the violation of all the rules as an abuse, by means of which a bold party extorted the Censure from the

¹²² This was a *substitute* confessor; her regular confessor was away at the time. When he returned, he ordered her to rewrite the book, and after years of hesitation she rewrote what is still extant today.
[Ed.]

¹²³ cf. Art.12, ¶ 1 with its footnote [Ed.]

Faculty, surprised and deprived of its freedom; the correspondence of Bossuet and the diary of the abbot Le Dieu, his secretary; finally, a historical writing published in Cologne, in 1697, under the title of: *Censura Censuræ, quæ sub ementito Facultatis theologiae Parisiensis nomine vulgata est*. I leave aside Fr. d'Avrigny, who on this question uses that flippant tone which his readers know and which is not always appropriate. The impertinences he allows himself on the very person of the Venerable Servant of God are regrettable, and contrast with the conduct of his Society in this whole affair, according to the testimony of Abbé Le Dieu and the information provided in the dossier of the Cause.

3. If we are to believe Bossuet's secretary in his diary (June 1, 1700), this Prelate would have been "the sole promoter" of the Censure which the Sorbonne brought against the *Mystical City*. I do not think that one can admit this assertion in its entirety. There is no doubt that the Bishop of Meaux had a great influence on the Faculty in this meeting; however, the first impulse did not come from him. Bossuet, in these years, exercised on the Church of France a kind of theological dictatorship; it was impossible to attempt anything in the matter of doctrine without immediately feeling the necessity of obtaining his endorsement and even his assistance. The men who were preparing an attack on the *Mystical City* found themselves obliged early on to sense the opinion of such a great doctor on the project upon which they had resolved. In their intention, which they were certainly careful not to admit, the censorship of the book of Mary of Ágreda was to be the revenge of the censure which Rome had just made regarding the book of Baillet. Moreover, the judgment which the Sorbonne would pass, unless it could be brought to its

senses, would be from another point of view a way of defying the authority of the Holy See; for it was known that, at that very moment, a commission appointed by the Pope was examining the book of the Sister. It was to be expected that the Nuncio would go to the King with his complaints about this lack of respect for the Apostolic See; but the King could be warned in time, and what Prelate was better able than Bossuet to take the lead with Louis XIV, who had in him unlimited confidence in all that had to do with religious matters?

4. The great Bishop of Meaux was then in his decline; he was touching that period of decay which Abbé Le Dieu has so sadly described, day by day, in a manuscript from which Bossuet's eloquent and skilful historiographer had the good taste to borrow only selected passages, but which has now, by its complete publication, fallen into the public domain. However, the energy of the noble old man was far from being extinguished. One was able to notice it in this same year 1696, which saw the beginning of the fight between him and the Archbishop of Cambrai; yet at the same time the prelate had retained, and age had increased in him, this facility of character which more skilful people had too often exploited in the past. His leniency toward Jansenism still continued, and one finds him, in the diary of Le Dieu, obsessed by people who should not have had access to a man like him. We saw him corresponding in a tone of the most intimate confidence with Jean de Neercassel, bishop of Castorie, whose book he praised, but which was condemned by the Holy See; and Baillet, after the censure of his book in Rome, presented himself as a visitor to Germigny and was welcomed with benevolence. Fr. Bossuet, who belonged to the party, governed his uncle at will, and dragged him into steps which distressed Madame de

Maintenon and embarrassed Louis XIV. The Defense of the Declaration remained in manuscript; and one conceives that the court, after the peace of Innocent XII, could not for a long time allow the publication of it. But the author, after such long waiting consumed with this sterile and infelicitous work, and having recognized that on such a delicate occasion where he needed the benevolence of Rome, his responsibility incurred by the composition of this book, the existence of which no one was unaware, could become embarrassing, enjoined his nephew, who was then in Rome, to reassure adroitly the susceptibilities and the anxieties that the pontifical court could have conceived.

5. But when the instincts of this dictatorship of which I spoke a moment ago awoke in the old doctor, he pushed to excess. What vivacity did he not employ, though in vain, to have the *Nodus prædestinationis dissolutus* of the pious and learned Cardinal Sfondrati¹²⁴ condemned in Rome? What was not his indignant astonishment when Fénelon refused to adhere to his pastoral instruction *on the states of prayer*? With what tone of universal Master did he not formulate his complaints, in his pointed *Relation of Quietism*, against the refusal of the young Archbishop to receive the lesson of him whom so many others accepted as the supreme moderator? Fénelon having answered the *Relation* by another *Relation* not less interesting, Bossuet, in his *Remarks* on this answer, claimed, as having been violated, the rights of his *antiquity*, an expression which has been admired by some, but which renders quite well that long possession of homage and deference which the prelate believed himself entitled to claim at the end of his career. With what ardor, to face

¹²⁴ He found the remains (relics) of St. Cecilia. [Ed.]

his adversary, did he not throw himself into the study of the mystics, which he had neglected until then? What strength of will he showed in pursuing the errors of his colleague, and without realizing, in his impulse, that he himself was deviating from the truth on an important point! Did he not give proof of a quite juvenile impatience, and perhaps a little too freedom from restraint, when, in order to hasten the Apostolic judgment, which was too long in coming, he had the idea of renewing in the Sorbonne the scene which had taken place against the book of Mary of Ágreda, and succeeded again this time in intimidating a great number of doctors? In the affair of the *Memoirs of China*, did we not see him push for the censorship of this work, which its defenders supported by alleging obvious passages of the *Discourse on Universal History*? The Assembly of the clergy of 1700, of which he was the soul, and which Count de Maistre has so seriously studied and characterized, testified still better to the vivacity of the impressions felt by this ardent nature, and to his fidelity to the ideas which prevailed in the entire second part of his life.

6. One might perhaps ask how Bossuet, who spoke so worthily of the Blessed Virgin in his Sermons, was able to attack the *Mystical City* so fiercely; for it must be admitted, and we shall see it in the continuation of this account, that his conduct in this affair was of the utmost violence. I will answer first of all that the admirable sermons of Bossuet on the mysteries and the greatness of Mary belong to the first period of the life of the great orator, and are affected by the education which was then given to young clerics. M. Floquet, in his Studies so precious, so new, so thorough on the life of Bossuet, assigned the date of these sermons as worthy of attention for the content as for the form; but

even if we did not have this beautiful work of criticism, it would be easy to determine the time at which these masterpieces were composed, not only according to the study of the style and the oratorical tone, but much more by the nature of the ideas and the feelings which are expressed there. André Duval, Berulle, de Condren, Olier, Cornet, still breathe in these speeches; one finds in them the echo of their teaching, but an echo embellished by a young, strong and vibrant voice, whose tone has never been heard since. At the end of the 17th century the Blessed Virgin was no longer spoken of in this tone; to convince oneself of this, it is sufficient to compare these marvelous Sermons with the pages that Bossuet devotes to Mary in the *Elevations on the Mysteries*. There all is noble, worthy, touching even; but the sublime role of Mary is appreciated only by way of commentary on the text of the Gospels; the conceptions which Bossuet, at the beginning of his career, had received from his masters, and which he knew how to clothe with so much brilliance and animate with such a rich feeling in his sermons, have disappeared. We have said enough about the causes and effects of this revolution in teaching. Bossuet has left a four-page pamphlet on the *Mystical City*, which we shall speak of at our leisure; yet in the meantime, we must agree that nothing could be harsher, more contemptuous, or more violent. The author caught fire at the thought that this book, if it was not shot down, would pass for a *Fifth Gospel*¹²⁵ in the eyes of the people; this is what Abbé Le Dieu tells us, and the aged doctor was revived to stop such a great scandal. It is

¹²⁵ This unfounded accusation calls to mind what Dom Guéranger calls the *perfidious reproach of attributing divinity to the Mother of God* (Art. 17, ¶ 8). [Ed.]

thus not the passion which is lacking in the attack; one is astonished only that the learned Bishop does not pay any attention to the imposing number of doctors who had judged the book before him, and had approved and admired it. It is easy to foresee that, pursued with such outrage, the book could well succumb where the influence of a man who speaks so loudly and so firmly reigns; but if one supposes a return to the ideas which reigned in France, as elsewhere, fifty years earlier, it is easy to foresee one of those appeasements which restore freedom of judgment, and make one hardly realize the excesses which preoccupation had produced. Bossuet and the Sorbonne of 1696 would have condemned Catherine Emmerich, as they condemned Mary of Ágreda. Who would think of censuring Catherine Emmerich today? And would anyone dare to accuse the countless readers and admirers of the revelations of the German ecstatic of wanting to turn them into a *Fifth Gospel*? The Catholic people have more sense; we have established above that private revelations are one of the means God uses to maintain the supernatural sense; men will not change this plan. They may, to a certain extent and for a certain time, intercept the light which the goodness of God has prepared; this is a tragedy and a responsibility, yet divine mercy may return to the charge, and it is then that we are able to see how short the wisdom of man is, and how capable of error, even when, as the Savior says, he flatters himself with the idea he has done God a service (Jn. 16:2).

7. Bossuet, as I said at the outset, was entirely uninvolved in the first maneuvers of the supporters of Baillet against the *Mystical City*. The cabal did not think of reclaiming the weight of his authority and influence until it had finally decided on its plan to

attempt a coup. It was as early as October 1695 that the plot was formed to attack the veneration of the Blessed Virgin again on the occasion of the [new French translation of the] *Mystical City*, the first volume of which, translated from Spanish by Fr. Croset, had just arrived in Paris. Dr. Hideux and his coterie quickly felt that such a book was likely to impassion the readers for or against the ideas it expressed, and that the principles of the *Monita salutaria* and of book of Baillet could suffer either failure or advancement, depending on the manner in which the affair was conducted. To let circulate a Spanish work composed by a holy woman,¹²⁶ a work which assaults at the same time the spirit, the heart, and the imagination, was to expose itself to see reviving more alive than ever among the faithful of France this enthusiasm for the Mother of God, which one had worked so much to attenuate; it was to clear the way for the reaction which Bourdaloue, from the height of the pulpit, had shown to be urgent. On the contrary, to persecute the book, to cover it with ridicule, to make it odious, as filled with things opposed to true doctrine and true piety; to take advantage of the occasion to give to understand that those who endeavor to raise the greatness of the holy Virgin are prone to fall into the most deplorable excesses; to censure as illusory and contrary to reason the ways of the mystical life; there was enough there to tempt the rebellious and unorthodox spirit of this party solidly established within the Sorbonne, and which was to provide, so few years later, the forty signatories of the *Case of Conscience*. This other consideration, that the Pope had just established a special Congregation for the doctrinal examination of the *Mystical City*, was not likely to stop

¹²⁶ *béate* [Ed.]

them; they were too intent, as I have already said, and as will become clear, on avenging their friend Baillet, who had been mistreated by the *Roman Index*.

8. The end of the year 1695 and the first two months of the following year were spent in preparations. The news was spread among the public that a book had come from Spain which was the height of scandal, a book which elevated the Blessed Virgin to almost divine honors, a book which had to be destroyed at all costs if one did not want to lose all the fruit which the revocation of the Edict of Nantes had brought about for the conversion of Protestants. Finally, in the month of March, they thought they were in a position to make a first overture within the Faculty on a project of censorship. As it was usual that the Sorbonne never proceeded to a judgment of this nature without having obtained the consent of the civil authority and of the influential members of the episcopate, the doctors succeeded in having the first president de Harlay, the chancellor Boucherat, and Louis-Antoine de Noailles, who had just ascended to the archiepiscopal see of the capital, warned against Mary of Ágreda and her book. Bossuet must have been forewarned at an early stage; however, the first mention of this affair in his correspondence is in a letter to his nephew, then in Italy, dated May 26. "The good people and the true scholars," says the prelate, "are terribly provoked." One sees that the cabal had not lost its time, having been able to operate in a few months this terrible uprising. Could we not say that the enemy was at the gates of Paris, or that the Koran had just been promulgated in this capital, with the danger of seeing the entire population pass under the yoke of Mohammed? And yet it was only the book of a poor nun favored with the gift of miracles, and who had died in the odor of sanctity,

thirty years ago. It is against this extraordinary book, which contains as much as one could want, though certainly inoffensive, that these good people and these true scholars rose up, who two years before had accepted the odious book of Baillet which had been censured by the Holy See!

9. Finally on May 2, everything being prepared, doctor Lefèvre, syndic of the Faculty, challenged the *Mystical City* before the general assembly of the Sorbonne. The denunciation concerned the first volume of the work, the only one in French that had yet been given to the public. It was now a question of designating the commissioners who would be in charge of writing the report. It was the custom of the Faculty, in the least cases, never to elect less than sixteen; the influence of the syndic, who could already count on the informed members of the Faculty, and on the complete ignorance in which the others still were on the subject of a book which was not yet widespread, obtained, one does not know how, that the number of the commissioners would not go beyond four.¹²⁷ The doctors who belonged to the Order of Saint Francis were aware of the situation; the book, which is one of the glories of the Seraphic Order, was known to them; they therefore felt the need to ask that at least the four doctors not be chosen from among the members of the Faculty who were most ardent for the principles of Thomism. These requests were to no avail, even though one of these doctors was the grand vicar Le Tellier, Archbishop of Rheims, a prelate of great credit, who played such a decisive role in the theological questions

¹²⁷ This is merely the first of many machinations which make this rather sordid affair strikingly similar to the night trial of Christ. [Ed.]

of that time. The Faculty separated after this operation, and awaited the report which was to satisfy the passion of some, while others would learn the true depth of this entire affair.

10. Paris soon knew the news of what had been done in the Sorbonne on May 2; and the Nuncio Delfini had to concern himself with an affair in which the honor and prerogative of the Holy See were involved. Bossuet wrote to his nephew on June 24, 1696: "The Nuncio has made some efforts to prevent the course of the censorship of the Faculty; it seems we will move forward." These first steps of the Nuncio, who was already enlightened as we can see, were neither the last nor the most important; we will have others to relate, and they were moreover self-explanatory, at a time when one saw a simple Faculty of Theology, which is nothing in the Church except through the Holy See, embolden itself to summon to its tribunal a cause pending at that of Rome. In the same letter Bossuet, speaking of Fr. Cloche, General of the Dominicans, with whom his nephew had to deal during his stay in Rome, said in a tone of voice that was not very kind to anyone who did not feel inclined towards Thomism: "The Father General of the Dominicans is too clever and too sensible not to find the book of the Mother of Ágreda ridiculous, even if she did not make God a Scotist." That is called knowing how to take advantage of everything. The attraction of Bossuet was not for the school of Scotus; but if, by chance, this school, so profound, sometimes met with truth, one does not see why in this case God, who is Truth, should forbid Himself, when He reveals, to do so in a way favorable to the Scotists. Now, that the school of Scotus was sometimes right is what it is impossible for any Catholic to doubt today, after the Bull defining the

Immaculate Conception. Scotus had said *voluit, decuit, fecit*,¹²⁸ Pius IX pronounced, in the midst of the outpouring of the whole of Catholicity, that this is what Scotus had thought, and how God had revealed it.¹²⁹ One can therefore no longer throw at the head of someone, as an insult, the epithet of Scotist; this is as much to the credit of the Spanish holy woman, who in addition, as I said, is far from having always followed the principles of the school of Scotus.

11. In his pamphlet on the *Mystical City*, Bossuet develops this same sarcasm: "From the third chapter to the eighth," he says, "it is nothing other than a refined scholasticism, according to the principles of Scotus. God himself gives lessons and declares himself a Scotist, even though the nun remains in agreement that the party she has embraced is the least accepted in the School."¹³⁰ But what! God has decided it, and we must believe Him." There is something more to be said on this subject. First of all, it can be said that if Duns Scotus, who was undoubtedly a great doctor, could have made a mistake, other doctors are no more assured of infallibility than he was. It is good to be a Thomist, when one has the taste for it; but all the Thomists in the

¹²⁸ *God willed it; He deemed it fitting; He did it.* [Ed.]

¹²⁹ This is how Ven. Mary states it: "*Let human frailty with humble piety approach this wonder, confess the grandeur of the Creator, and render gratitude for this new benefit conceded to the entire human race in their Reparatrix. Let the heat of disputation cease, vanquished by the force of divine light; for if the infinite goodness of God (as shown to me) in the Immaculate Conception of his most holy Mother looked upon original sin as if angry and disgusted with it, and gloried to have a just cause and opportune occasion of casting it forth and stopping its current, how can that seem proper to human wisdom which was so abhorrent to God?*" (Con. 222) [Ed.]

¹³⁰ cf. I Cor. 1:27 [Ed.]

world could not take away from God either the faculty of knowing, or that of revealing what it is in its essence regarding the problems disputed in the School. Mary of Ágreda does not pose as a university doctor who comes to impose her conclusions. She simply says that God has revealed this and that to her, and she does even better: She submits everything she says to the correction of the Holy Church, the only judge of the value of private revelations. Do we think we have finished everything by saying and repeating that she makes God a Scotist? This could have ended the question in Paris, in 1696; yet we will soon declare how the Franciscan school was treated in the Sorbonne. But then, on December 8, 1854, the Catholic world saw this school place at the feet of Pius IX, who had just proclaimed the great word, the silver lily, symbol of Mary immaculate and triumphant; and since then it seems to us that Mary of Ágreda could henceforth wear the epithet of Scotist without blushing, even if it were inflicted on her by Bossuet himself.

Article 20: May 29, 1859

The commissioners in charge of drawing up the draft censure. The pleadings during the general assembly. Fr. Mérou. President de Harlay. Again the intrigues of Bossuet. Cardinal d'Aguirre.

1. The four commissioners charged to draw up the project of censorship in the assembly of the Sorbonne of May 2 were unable to deliver their work until the following July 2. In a letter of June 30, 1696, Bossuet speaks thus about the business: "Monday, the commissioners will make their report on Mother Ágreda. They must qualify ten or twelve propositions, and deal with the rest in bulk. The Faculty will not have time to deliberate at the *Prima mensis*: I do not know any more." The prelate was at this moment at Germigny, but he returned to Paris a few days later, as we shall soon see. The commissioners had taken their time; two whole months had been used by them to draw up the plan of attack, and they were going to launch their *factum* in a session which, according to the customs of the Sorbonne, tolerated no deliberations. It was a skilful way of taking possession of the opinion, in the middle of a body of which one part of the members was already ill-informed, and the other part had not yet declared itself.

2. The assembly of the *Prima mensis* was held on the appointed day. The work of the commission was read there. The censure was divided into fourteen articles, and noted sixty propositions of the *Mystical City*, with the most severe qualifications. Against the customs of the Faculty, this report had been printed as if it had been a judgment in form, and not the preparatory work of a simple commission, even whose formation had been marred by irregularity. But that was not all: The

doctors agreed to meet on the 14th of this month, the day on which the deliberations would begin. In vain many of them complained about the shortness of the time allowed for examining a doctrinal censure that dealt with so many proposals; in vain they represented that the commissioners had taken two whole months to prepare their work, and that it was contrary to all propriety to grant the judges only thirteen days to hear the case and prepare their sentence; in vain they demanded the very moderate term of one month to study the book; yet the cabal prevailed, and the day of the discussion was maintained at July 14. This was the second time in this strange affair that the desire of the majority yielded to the pressure exerted by the minority.

3. There was, however, at this first session a protest which led to serious consequences, at least for the one who had the courage to make it. A doctor of the Order of St. Francis, Fr. Mérou, took the floor to raise a preliminary question on which it seemed to him that the Faculty had passed too easily. He said that the reigning Pope, Innocent XII, having appointed a Congregation in Rome specially charged with the examination of the *Mystical City*, the respect due to the Apostolic See demanded that the judgment of this Congregation be awaited, all the more so since it involved matters of extreme delicacy, revelations, and mystical ways. The speaker recalled that since the faculties of theology had no jurisdiction, but merely the right to make advisory judgments of purely arbitrary authority, their duty was to show the greatest reserve in such difficult matters; that the decrees of Leo X, of the Fifth Lateran Council, and of Urban VIII, expressly stated that when the Apostolic See had in its hand a cause of this nature, it was henceforth forbidden for the Ordinaries themselves

to know about it; that, moreover, prudence did not permit in a matter as serious as that which was intended to be referred to the Faculty to proceed without having studied the book in its original language,¹³¹ even if it meant going back to the autograph manuscript; that otherwise one was exposing oneself to unjustly burdening an author with the faults of her inept translator; that in order to be in a position to pass a serious judgment on the *Mystical City*, it was necessary to take note of the character of its author, to know her life, the graces with which the Sister had been favored, the opinion which the persons who had followed and directed her had of her, and to apply in the examination of this cause the rules for the discernment of spirits, which are traced out by Gerson; that this was the manner of proceeding of the Holy See in cases of this nature. Finally, Fr. Mérou concluded that the Faculty had only one thing to do at this time, which was to leave to the Apostolic judgment this cause which was already before it.

4. These courageous words caused a violent uproar in the assembly; as is most often the case in deliberative meetings, the minority tried to intimidate the majority by their clamor. In the midst of the noise which resounded in the room, Fr. Mérou managed to make his voice heard loud enough for it to be understood that he was appealing this question to the tribunal of the Sovereign Pontiff. At these words the cries increased, and it seemed, says one of the reports recorded in the Roman collection of the cause, that a blasphemy had been uttered. The tumult having finally subsided, a doctor of great reputation for knowledge and virtue, Fr.

¹³¹ The Church never judges a book using its translation, but only the original or authentic copy. [Ed.]

de Rubec, rose and took up the proposal of Fr. Mérou. He had the courage to say to these misguided men that the assembly should show the same deference to the Holy See as it knew how to show to the Archbishop of Paris on occasion. He recalled that the Faculty, which had recently begun censoring the library of Dr. Ellies du Pin, stopped immediately upon learning that the prelate of the diocese was preparing a judgment against this work. Fr. de Rubec concluded that the Sorbonne, whose doctors receive their title only from the authority of the Apostolic See, should show on this occasion their respect for this sacred authority, the only source of their dignity and honors.

5. The energetic step of this secular doctor, who was not afraid to come to the aid of the poor Franciscan, whose motion had almost been stifled under the irritated protests of the cabal, made several other members of the Faculty take heart, whose names have unfortunately not been collected in the relations contained in the dossier of the cause of Mary of Ágreda. Continuing to insist on the preliminary question, these doctors complained that the group of complainants wanted to drag the Faculty to censure a book which had no other crime than to raise the glory of the holy Virgin as high as human intelligence can itself rise when it comes to the Mother of God, while this same Faculty let pass every day without complaint a crowd of books infected with Socinian, Photian, and Jansenist tendencies, and while the books indicated by the Roman *Index* circulated freely, without the Faculty taking the trouble to stop their flow. There were even doctors who took to task the book of Baillet on devotion to the Blessed Virgin, asking why the Sorbonne, after this book had been condemned in Rome, had not undertaken its censorship, which would

be much more appropriate than that of the book by the Spanish nun. Some pushed even harder, and recalling the past of the Sorbonne, cited various censures which it had rendered in the past against the detractors of the veneration and the greatness of Mary, and remarked that it had never been seen to prosecute either a book or even a proposition which were to the glory of the Mother of God. They asked if by chance the Sorbonne, on this occasion, wanted to provide a fact in support of the word that Cardinal DuPerron had pronounced at the States of Blois, when he had said that this Faculty changed its principles every twenty-five years according to the ideas of its patrons. It was seen, they added, professing the infallibility of the Pope at the time of Cardinals Richelieu and Mazarin, and now it repels this doctrine. Under the Archbishop de Harlay the Faculty pursued the Jansenists, today it spares them; should we be surprised that, once zealous for the honor of the Blessed Virgin, it now welcomes tendencies jealous of the honor to which this Queen of Heaven is entitled?

6. Such claims were too vigorous a renewal of the effort made by Fr. Mérou not to exasperate the adversaries of the *Mystical City*. They began to shout again,¹³² and with such insistence that the majority accepted, out of sheer exhaustion, the meeting for the 14th, which was again called. Before the session closed, several doctors asked for copies of the book to be handed out, so that everyone could check whether the propositions noted had been faithfully extracted, and whether the commissioners had correctly understood the meaning of the author. Unheard of! the request was

¹³² This is reminiscent of the mob shouting “crucify Him, crucify Him”; it is clearly mob rule. [Ed.]

rejected.¹³³ It was insisted that at least two copies be deposited in the Faculty registry; this claim was similarly rejected. It became clear then that the leaders of this whole affair had resolved to lead the Faculty to an act of violence, not to enlighten its religious views. A mysterious and all-powerful influence was hovering over the Sorbonne, and this influence found only too many members in this society willing to accept it and push things to excess. The doctors for whom honor and conscience forbade to opine in an uninstructed cause, and who were reluctant to vote against a book which they would have known only by a few sentences extracted by an arrogant and passionate commission, did not believe themselves relieved of the obligation to examine for themselves the question on which they would have to pronounce. Contrary to all previous practices, they were refused the evidence; they resolved to obtain it by another means. They therefore went to the booksellers and asked for the *Mystical City*. The booksellers answered that all the copies had been removed from their stores by public authority, and the doctors were reduced to doing without. This strange and significant fact, which we read in the reports sent to Rome, is naively confirmed by Fr. Le Dieu in his diary, on June 1, 1700: “[Bossuet],” he says, “as soon as he was aware of this book, made me look for it in Paris, that is to say the same one printed in Marseilles and translated into French, and he also wanted to have the Spanish original, which was printed in three folio volumes. *He immediately spoke about it to M. Boucherat*, chancellor, who wanted to read it in Spanish, and who was eager to understand what

¹³³ An undeniable sign of bias and prejudice; these relative few had already formed their judgment. [Ed.]

[Bossuet] had reported to him about it.” I omit here, for convenience, a rude comment¹³⁴ of the chancellor about the Sister. Le Dieu continues thus: “Finally, M. Boucherat *had the tome suppressed, which had started to be sold in Paris*, and withdrew the privilege, with a prohibition to print the sequel.”

7. But it was not enough to make the book inaccessible to those from whom a judgment against it was requested; it was a question of taking revenge on these two independent doctors who had dared to recall the laws of honor and conscience to a body of which one part of the members was more than convinced, and the other intimidated to excess. The first president de Harlay sent Fr. Mérou to the Parliament, and after a very harsh warning, he sentenced him to exile in Noyon. This was a curious way of encouraging free votes in the cause that had been opened. The loyal Franciscan left for the place of his exile, and it is there that he composed a booklet of which I will speak later, but from which I did not want to borrow anything in this account in order not to infringe upon complete impartiality which such a delicate subject demands. Fr. de Rubec was also summoned by the first president of the Parliament. This doctor was highly regarded within the Faculty because of his talent, his piety, and his birth; it was thus important to get rid of his influence as soon as possible. De Harlay did not dare to address the same reproaches to him as to Fr. Mérou, but he expressly forbade him to appear again at the Sorbonne assemblies. Le Dieu here again confirms our records regarding this fact, which would be sufficient in itself to

¹³⁴ epithet, insult, mockery – a prime weapon of the willfully blind... *do we not say well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?* (Jn. 8:48) [Ed.]

put the reader in a position to appreciate the value of the censure which was brought against the *Mystical City*. He tells us at the same date: "M. the president de Harlay summoned Fr. de Rubec, and forbade him to enter the assemblies of the Sorbonne, because of the excessively intense speeches which he had made there." Fr. le Dieu gives us these details as the summary that Bossuet made in his presence, on June 11, 1700, in the afternoon, on all that had happened in the affair of the book of Mary of Ágreda.

8. After the threats came the benevolent requests. Paris still contained a great number of doctors whose unquestionable science and well-known piety could make one fear opposition if they were to present themselves at the upcoming assemblies. They negotiated with them; they employed, to divert them from appearing, those types of requests which are at the same time orders and prudent counsels due to the dignity of those who are willing to descend to address them; *talium virorum intercessione*, says one of our records; *quorum preces præcepta, et monita mandata sunt*. Frassen, a learned Franciscan, known for his excellent *Disquisitiones biblicæ*, and Fr. Morel, an Augustinian religious, a man of great authority, were thus got rid of. The Carmelites were confined to their convents, and more than one secular doctor was warned to fend for himself. These maneuvers may seem inexplicable today to those of our readers who are accustomed to seeing certain times and certain men only through a prism that is always favorable; yet for those who have taken the trouble to study the history of the Church in the 17th century in the primary sources, they have nothing to surprise them.

9. Bossuet arrived in Paris from Germigny shortly after the *Prima mensis*. On July 9 he wrote to his

nephew: “I arrived here on Saturday; I found the affair of Mother of Ágreda started. The deputies have made their report, which has been printed; the Faculty must begin to deliberate on Saturday the 14th, and continue until the end of the affair. *The Cordeliers*¹³⁵ have their own brigade; but it is believed that everything will pass according to the opinion of the deputies.” There was, indeed, good reason to hope so; but it is curious to hear about the *brigade* of the Cordeliers after the affair of Fr. Mérou in the Parliament. Everyone was soon able to see that the brigade was elsewhere than among the Cordeliers. Bossuet then recounts the incident concerning Fr. Mérou in this way: “A ‘Cordelier’ named Mérou said that he was the bearer of two writs in which His Holiness reserved this affair to himself; and in the event that it was overruled, he declared he would appeal to the Pope. He has since withdrawn his appeal in the assembly itself. It was known that there were no briefs that carried what he said, and the deliberation was annulled. You know that what engaged the Faculty in the examination of this book was that it had the approval of two of its doctors. M. the first president summoned Mérou, because he had wanted to present writs which had not passed through the ordinary forms, and I have just been told that he had been sent out of Paris.” It is obvious that the cabal had circumvented Bossuet on his return from the countryside, and that to make the protest of Fr. Mérou more odious they had imputed to him alleged wrongs which were likely to compromise him before the magistrates. Pursuant to the *liberties* of the Gallican Church, this Church was not *free* to make use of a Papal

¹³⁵ i.e. Franciscans, thus called because of the cord they wore as part of their habit [Ed.]

Brief which had not been approved by Parliament. Did Fr. Mérou have the imprudence to claim to be the bearer of two briefs? This is not to be believed. The accounts recorded in the Roman dossier do not say a word about it, nor does Barbier, in his *Dictionnaire des Ouvrages anonymes*, in the place where he exposes, without benevolence, the conduct of Fr. Mérou in this circumstance. The ‘Cordelier’ would have spoken of the two decrees by which Innocent XII had just instituted and named the congregation of cardinals and theologians charged with examining the book of the Sister; he would have been able to say that he had these decrees in his possession, and it would not have taken more than that to incite the president de Harlay to exile a man of character whose presence was going to become an embarrassment. As for the retraction that Fr. Mérou would have made of his appeal to the Pope, no trace of it was found in the reports either. Amidst the noise in the room, many things must have been said on both sides, the meaning of which was not clearly perceived.

10. We find in the lines of Bossuet which I have just transcribed a comment which can point us toward the maneuvers which the faction had employed to put in question the book of Mary of Ágreda. “You know,” says the prelate, “that what engaged the Faculty in the examination of this book was that it was provided with the approval of two of its doctors.” It is obvious that it is by this angle the leaders had approached Bossuet, wanting to dissimulate the kind of incompetence which one could allege to them in their claim to judge a book published in Marseilles, and consequently in the competence of another Faculty. It is regrettable that the great Bishop did not stop them at first by proposing to them as much more urgent the censorship of the book

by Baillet, printed in Paris, with the approval of two doctors of the Sorbonne. But at the time when Bossuet wrote this letter, his ardor to pursue the *Mystical City* had reached its peak. Let us listen to his language: “All the world is raised against the *impious impertinence* of the book of this Mother.” Reading such words, one is astonished at the excesses to which circumstances can sometimes lead a serious man; for after all this *impious impertinence* of the book of the Sister did not strike the eyes of so many thousands of doctors who read and examined it; Rome, after having thought of stopping the course of the work, then allowed it to circulate in complete freedom.¹³⁶ These expressions should have been used for the book of Baillet, which circulated with approval throughout the whole of France. Yet on this point the great doctor was silent,¹³⁷ as he had been silent so many times before when faced with the threatening works of the Jansenist party. There is more, and it is necessary to say all things in this historical study regarding one who saw in Mary of Ágreda only *impious impertinence*, yet had blamed with bitterness the Roman censure of Baillet. Writing on June 25 of the previous year to Fr. Renaudot, who had sent him from Rome a copy of the censures of the Holy Office against the book of this same Baillet and against the *Année chrétienne* of Le Tourneux, he said: “I give you thanks, Monsieur, for the copy of the sentences of the Inquisitions. Is not the deposit of faith safe in such hands? God will watch over his Church, which has great need of his benevolence.” Nothing shows better than these words the desolate situation that was

¹³⁶ Some will still deny this and impede the free circulation of the book. *He that has ears to hear, let him hear.* (Mt. 11:15) [Ed.]

¹³⁷ The dictum of law is *silence implies consent.* [Ed.]

established between Rome and France. The contempt of the Apostolic authority gained ground every day; the books censured in Rome did not cease for that reason to be esteemed in France; one took up the cause of their authors; one isolated oneself more and more from the center of unity, and one prepared that violent situation which burst twenty years later at the time of the publication of the Bull *Unigenitus*¹³⁸ and exposed the abyss which the proud spirit of our doctors had dug.

11. Among the great personages of Rome with whom Bossuet had sought to accredit his nephew was Cardinal d'Aguirre, with whom the Bishop of Meaux had put himself in contact since the previous year. John Saenz d'Aguirre, a Spanish Benedictine, was one of the most esteemed members of the Sacred College in terms of both science and piety. In 1683 he had published in Salamanca, under the title of *Defensio cathedræ sancti Petri*, a courageous refutation of the Declaration of the Clergy of France; ten years later he published in Rome the collection of the Councils of Spain. It was with regard to this last work that Bossuet opened relations with d'Aguirre, and he professed to the end for this great Cardinal a particular esteem, which does honor to both of them. It seems that the overtures made by Bossuet's nephew to the Spanish Eminence about the Sorbonne enterprise had not entirely satisfied the French envoy; for Bossuet, at the end of the letter we are dealing with, seems to want to reassure the latter: "M. Cardinal d'Aguirre," he tells him, "did not want to explain himself on this matter; apparently he did not want to approve of a bad thing, nor to condemn what his nation, as well as his king, approves of." Bossuet

¹³⁸ *Unigenitus Dei Filius*, issued by Clement XI and dated Sept. 8, 1713, which condemned Jansenism [Ed.]

was here completely deluded; and we shall not delay in showing, by the correspondence of d'Aguirre, how much his way of judging the *Mystical City* differed from that of Bossuet. The latter saw only *impious impertinence*, whereas the former recognized the most holy and orthodox doctrine.

12. While the Bishop of Meaux was giving an account to his nephew of the incident which had taken place in the Sorbonne on July 2, the Nuncio, informed of what had happened, was thinking of taking the means to stop the scandal; and the same day (July 9) that Bossuet wrote the letter which we have just read, Delfini addressed to Cardinal Spada a copy of the project of censorship, and gave him an account of the means by which he was going to try to protect the honor of the Holy See in an affair in which it was so seriously compromised. He had learned that Fr. La Chaise had seen with displeasure the proceedings of the Sorbonne against the book of Mary of Ágreda, and that he had spoken out against the project of censorship brought to light by the commission of the four doctors. The Nuncio thought it necessary to send a man who enjoyed his confidence as well as that of Fr. La Chaise to this influential personage. The latter admitted to the envoy of Delfini that, knowing the source of all this movement, which came from the intervention of certain persons whose influence was all-powerful on the Sorbonne, he had thought it necessary to go to the King to beg him to stop a plot the consequences of which were offensive to the Holy See. His Majesty had replied that it was not his custom to interfere in such matters, and that he was convinced that the Sorbonne would do nothing that was not appropriate; so Fr. La Chaise remained convinced that for his part there was nothing more to be done. However, the deliberations had begun

in the Sorbonne. Delfini then turned a different direction and addressed himself to a lord of the court who is not named in the dispatch, but of whom the Nuncio speaks as a man devoted to the Holy See and particularly agreeable to Louis XIV. At first the King gave this person the same answer he had given to Fr. La Chaise, but the confidant of the Nuncio having redoubled his efforts, His Majesty deigned to speak of the affair to a personage who is not named, but who is designated in the dispatch as governing everything in the Sorbonne. This person answered the King that the discussion was too far advanced to be suspended, that everyone wished to know the outcome, and that any delay in the conclusion would be a dishonor to the Sorbonne. The King communicated this answer to the confidant of Delfini, who secretly transmitted it to the latter; and it became clear from then on, for the representative of the Holy See, that he had nothing else to do but to withdraw, as he said, in the most complete reserve, and to await the event.

Article 21: June 15, 1859

New attacks of the Sorbonne and the adversaries of the *Mystical City*. Bossuet again. The session of August 6. The opponents of the Virgin Mary, despite the secular tradition of the Sorbonne. The outcry against Spanish mysticism and the tradition of the Church. The courageous defenders of the Servant of God. Correspondence of Bossuet against Mary of Ágreda.

1. The opponents of the *Mystical City* had flattered themselves that they would achieve the censorship of the book by storm; they were mistaken. The printing of the report of the commission, the exile of Fr. Mérou, the prohibition forbidding the abbot de Rubec to reappear in the Sorbonne, the threats and the caresses lavished on the doctors whose independence was feared, the care taken to sequester the copies of the book by the authority of the chancellor, the refusal of the Sorbonne to provide the book to the judges who were to pronounce on its orthodoxy, in a word, all this entourage of violence and partiality did not prevent the discussion of the cause from dragging on. We read in one of the documents contained in the Roman file that a good number of doctors who had attended the session of the *prima mensis*, and had been witnesses of the impassioned maneuvers utilized by the falsifiers in the report, were taken with such disgust that they abstained from setting foot in the Sorbonne as long as the discussion of the cause lasted. Nevertheless, the defenders of the prerogatives of Mary were still found in such large numbers among the members of the Faculty present that it was only after thirty-four sessions that the discussion was finally closed, willingly or not. The leaders had not counted on such opposition,

and we will see soon by what means they were able to triumph over it.

2. While waiting for the conclusion, Bossuet wrote to his nephew, under the date of July 23, 1696: "The deliberation continues in the Sorbonne on the Mother of Ágreda; the opinions are strongly divided on the manner of censuring it. Those who favor the book drag on their opinions." One finds in one of the letters sent to Rome during these stormy days, on July 26, the names of three of the doctors who from the beginning energetically supported the perfect orthodoxy of the book; they are doctors Carron, parish priest of St.-Pierre-aux-Bœufs; Fromageau, the same one who left very esteemed resolutions of the *Case of Conscience*; and Chevillier, librarian of the Sorbonne, a man of knowledge as extensive as varied. These three courageous men were not afraid to say they knew persecutions could be the price of their zeal, but were resolved to obey God rather than men. These doctors could certainly not be reproached for being sons of St. Francis, since they were secular priests; but we can see from a letter of August 6, which can be read in the dossier, that in the days that followed they had the satisfaction of seeing several of their colleagues, enlightened by the discussion, abandon the cowardly impressions given to them by the report, and side with the defenders of Mary of Ágreda without human respect. New violence ensued; several of these doctors were ordered not to appear again at the sessions. As for the Franciscans, they were told collectively, by the civil authority, to henceforth refrain from opening their mouths on the question. They had to be grateful to M. the Premier for not having expelled them from Paris, as Fr. Mérou had been.

3. In a letter to his nephew, dated August 6, Bossuet gives from his own point of view a statement of the situation. He says: “The deliberations of Mary of Ágreda continue on the same footing. The Mendians [sic] and their supporters occupy the time with *vain and bad* speeches, hoping that authority will be used to hasten the deliberations; nothing will be done. This *rabble*¹³⁹ is *enraged* against me, because they want to believe that I act more than I do and want to do in this matter.”¹⁴⁰ It was only after this letter that the religious mendicants were forbidden to speak; yet it is easy to see how their complaints annoyed the prelate. It must even be admitted that he goes beyond all measure here, and that it is difficult to recognize in the expressions he uses the young and eloquent Fr. Bossuet who, thirty or forty years earlier, celebrated with so much enthusiasm in his beautiful panegyric on St. Francis the sublime love of the Seraphic Patriarch for poverty. Today the sons of this *desperate lover* of perfect poverty are, in the eyes of the old man, nothing but a *rabble*, and an *enraged* one at that, and this because they dare to defend the orthodoxy of a book that so many doctors admire, and the honor of a Servant of God, whose heroic virtues have already earned her the title of Venerable. Their speeches are also *vain and bad*, as well as those of the doctors who have the courage to protest against the unheard of and unjust pressure on the Faculty and regarding support of the prerogatives of the Mother of God, which are here in question even more than the

¹³⁹ The French word used here is *engeance*. Several different online translators render this word as *rabble*. While another word could have been used, this rather derogatory term is certainly consistent with how Bossuet viewed these Franciscans. [Ed.]

¹⁴⁰ In a case such as this, doing nothing is doing everything. [Ed.]

book of the Sister. Moreover, Bossuet defends himself from being the main driving force in this deplorable affair; we must believe him. The leaders dragged him along by their flattery; they wanted to cover themselves with his respected name; he gave them pledges, no doubt; his sympathies are for them; but it is obvious, by this confidential letter, that if he rendered services to the party, notably by his intervention with the chancellor, it would not be fair to put all the responsibility on him, which he had no reason to disclaim in this letter. This is what leads us to admit, only with the reservation I have made, the assertion of Le Dieu, in his Journal, where he claims that Bossuet had said, on June 1, 1700, "that he was grateful to have been the *only* promoter of the censure of Mary of Ágreda." It seems that the part that the illustrious bishop took in this affair is already great enough, since it results from direct information, so one need not accept to the letter the statements of the secretary.

4. On August 6 they held in the Sorbonne the thirteenth conference, and the letter from Paris dated this day and inserted in the Roman file informs us that until this moment there had been only four of the old doctors who had declared themselves for the opinion of the commission; more than forty had taken the defense of the incriminated proposals. The faction, worried about the final result, and not yet finding enough security in the forced silence of the Franciscans and in the elimination of the most courageous secular doctors, had recourse to an expedient from which it expected favorable results. It was to summon from the province a certain number of doctors upon whom one could rely, and who, having right of suffrage in a Faculty where they had taken their degrees, could facilitate the surprise attack. There was still a new illegality there,

because the regulations of the Sorbonne stipulated that the doctors who had not attended the *proposal* of a cause did not have right to take part in the *conclusion*. But everything was allowed against the book and its author. Matters, however, were not progressing rapidly; it was then that the syndic and the four deputies of the commission resolved to make a supreme effort. They took the floor and, forced to fall back on the principles which govern Catholic theology regarding the doctrine of the prerogatives of the Mother of God, they were seen to note in the most solemn and least suspicious manner the ravages which had been wrought in the Catholic beliefs of the country for several years. It became clear to anyone who wanted to understand that the dogma of Mary was more at issue in this controversy than the book of the seer of Ágreda. The abandonment of scholasticism was bearing fruit, and the so-called Positive was spreading its own.

5. Here then is the plan of defense of the censure as it emerges from the speeches of these doctors. The syndic Le Fèvre, Dr. Rolland, and grand vicar Le Tellier, Archbishop of Reims, were of the five the most daring in their language. They said first of all that all the private revelations which have been published in the Church are pure inventions, beginning with those of St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Siena, and St. Teresa; then, going further into the matter, they affirmed that the ancient Fathers who spoke enthusiastically of the greatness of Mary were only poor Greek writers (*miserabiles græculi*); that St John Damascene was nothing but a hotheaded corrupter of theology (*delirus theologie deturpator*); St. Anselm, St. Bernard, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas, Abbot Rupert, [St.] Albert the Great, are bearable on dogma, superstitious in ascetic and devotional matters, but condemnable when

they speak of the Blessed Virgin, because of the excesses in which they indulge in order to honor her (*tolerabiliter ubi dogmatice; ubi vero ascetice et devote scripserunt, superstitione; et præsertim de Deipara virgine, damnabiliter, propter excessus honoris.*) I hardly need to add that all these beautiful¹⁴¹ things were said in Latin, the only language admitted for the speeches and motions which were made at the sessions of the Faculty. One recognizes in these desolate manifestations the strange deviation whose causes we have already recognized, and which led us to point out the last period of the 17th century as the time when the Catholic sense suffered most deeply in France. Thus, the time had arrived when mystical theology was no longer regarded as a serious science, and the revelations of canonized Saints were no longer considered to be anything but reveries. St. Andrew of Crete and St. Proclus of Constantinople were no more than miserable enhancers in their panegyrics of Mary; and yet what are their praises of the Mother of God when one compares them with those which are much more bold, numerous and eloquent, those of St. Ephrem and St. Cyril of Alexandria, those great and voluminous doctors, before whom every Faculty of Theology must bow? And St. John Damascene, the father of the theological method: Why was he pursued if not because his didactic allure condemned the supposed progress that was being made in the School? St. Anselm found no favor either; his motto, *faith seeking understanding*,¹⁴² was no longer applicable, as long as Cartesianism had established in principle the divorce of philosophy and theology, the latter remaining queen in its domain, it is true, but on

¹⁴¹ belles; again, he is speaking ironically [Ed.]

¹⁴² *fides quærens intellectum* [Ed.]

the condition of limiting itself henceforth to collecting and comparing texts. As for St. Bernard, all that he had been able to advance on the prerogatives of the Holy Virgin had to be suspect. And those poor scholastics, St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, we were willing to admit they were *bearable* as far as dogma was concerned; but their Marian conceptions, their general views on the mystery of the Incarnation (for, in the end, it was a question of the consequences and applications of this divine dogma), all that was only *superstition* and theories worthy of *condemnation*. It was necessary, said our doctors, to accustom the people to confine themselves to the terms of the Gospel¹⁴³ when it is a question of forming an idea of the holy Virgin; now, they added, she is called in the Gospel *Woman* and *Mother of Jesus*; this must be enough. Thus, by the means we have indicated, the theology of these men was freed from both Tradition and scholasticism, which are so admirably united in the elucidation of the sublime role of Mary.

6. However, an obstacle stood in the way: The centuries-old tradition of the Sorbonne regarding the Immaculate Conception, and the oath taken by each of its members to uphold this truth. The defenders of the *Mystical City* had appealed to duty, and shown the help that a book whose theory of the Immaculate Conception was the entire foundation of the School of Paris brought to its doctrine, and the scandal that this school would give if it dared to censor this book. These doctors crossed the barrier, and the old Masters of the Sorbonne heard them with indignation advance that the doctrine which they had sworn to defend, before receiving the

¹⁴³ the heresy of *sola Scriptura* [Ed.]

bonnet, was a doctrine which was dubious, changing,¹⁴⁴ and entirely useless (*dubiam, mutantem, ac prorsus inutilem*), and that it was enough to say that Mary had been sanctified, without one being able to know at what moment. We shall see that later this boldness of language caused some embarrassment, and how the cabal went about compensating for the indiscretions which had escaped its leaders on such a delicate point.

7. It is common for those who devalue the prerogatives of the Holy Virgin to show at the same time little respect for the authority of the Church, as we have seen in this circumstance. The defenders of the book had relied on the authority of the liturgy, which is, as Bossuet himself taught, “the principal instrument of the Tradition of the Church”; they had pointed to the testimonies contained in the Roman liturgy on the greatness and prerogatives of Mary, and held them up against their opponents as a shield which effectively protected a large part of the assertions in the book. Our doctors were not deterred by the feeling of respect and deference which every Catholic feels in the presence of the highest teaching of the Holy Church: They said, without being moved, that the Roman Breviary and the prayers consecrated by the use of the Church, which were alleged in favor of the ideas of the Sister, were miserable and full of lies (*Miseriis et mendaciis scatere*).¹⁴⁵ It is easy to understand that it is not a question here of historical legends for the composition of which the Church did not receive the privilege of infallibility, but rather a question of the formulas expressing the belief. The revolution was thus declared,

¹⁴⁴ a frightening portent of Modernism [Ed.]

¹⁴⁵ Whatever else may be said of them, these “doctors” are certainly not Catholics. [Ed.]

and the doctors, it must be said, did nothing but translate into brutal words the spirit of the liturgical reform of the Parisian books carried out by François de Harlay, while waiting for that much more radical edition of 1736.

8. The Parisian correspondent, doctor of the Sorbonne, who sends to Rome all these details, insisted upon the depth of the wound they denote. In his eyes this abhorrence of the supernatural,¹⁴⁶ which was already driving so many men of this time to reject all that rose above the letter,¹⁴⁷ harbored the fatal seeds of a separate philosophy which, on the destined day, would raise its head and reveal a new France, the France of the 18th century. He does not fear to say that, from then on, the Sorbonne contained more than one Socinian, and that Jansenism was a mask under which many concealed their deism.¹⁴⁸ This reminds us of what Bossuet said somewhere about doctor Launoy, that several years before he held certain meetings in Paris whose members already professed Socinian ideas. Our correspondent, wanting to summarize the final goal of the tendencies that arose in the trial of the book of Mary of Ágreda, makes no difficulty in saying that the promoters of the censorship had the goal of reducing religion to rationalism and naturalism¹⁴⁹ (*quorum*

¹⁴⁶ of course, an essential feature of naturalism [Ed.]

¹⁴⁷ They kill the *spirit* by the *letter*. cf. II Cor. 3:6 [Ed.]

¹⁴⁸ These men would seem to be the forerunners of those who reared their ugly heads publicly in 1717 in the Freemasons. Had they already infiltrated the Church at that time, at least in France? [Ed.]

¹⁴⁹ It seems *possible*, even *probable*, that the rejection of the *Mystical City of God* will have the same effect in our day. Moreover, to exalt reason above faith, and nature above grace, is the antithesis of Catholicism. Rationalism and naturalism lead

omnium scopus est ad rationis normam atque naturae legem revocare religionem). But let us return to the story.

9. The syndic of the Faculty and the four deputies were succeeded by Dr. Feu, parish priest of St.-Gervais. He surpassed all bounds by his violence and appeared worthy of his name,¹⁵⁰ says one of our narrators (*ignitus totus re et nomine*). He began with insults to the Sister so crude that the pen refuses to transcribe them. We will speak later about the pretext that the adversaries took to hurl insolent remarks about the author of the *Mystical City*. The Chancellor competed in impropriety, as we have seen, with Doctor Feu. This one, at least, spoke Latin. To the insinuations against the morality of the Servant of God he added, without blushing, accusations of idolatry, Pelagianism, Lutheranism; in short, impiety, and concluded that Mary of Ágreda was worthy of the fire as well as her book. It must be admitted that these doctoral orgies are rather reminiscent of those which took place in Rouen during the trial of Joan of Arc.

10. Yet these excesses did not dampen the courage of the defenders of the Servant of God. They rose in numbers to face the attack. The first to speak was Dr. Février; he protested against the indignities that had just been heard, and compared the situation of the Sister, so cowardly outraged in an assembly of doctors, to that of the Savior himself, delivered as a prey to the Sanhedrin, and hearing Himself charged with accusations that He

logically to atheism, but perhaps more importantly to a total rejection of objective truth (Modernism) and morality; we see this today. [Ed.]

¹⁵⁰ literally *fire* [Ed.]

did not deserve.¹⁵¹ He compared to Herod, who toyed with Christ without taking the trouble to know Him, those who attacked the book and had not seriously studied it, and to Pilate those who wanted above all to be seen as the friend of Caesar in this affair. By Caesar, our correspondent tells us, Dr. Février meant M. of Reims and M. of Meaux, before whom many trembled. This speech, full of verve and passionate indignation, infuriated those whom he was singling out so severely; they often interrupted him with their clamors and, basing their claim on past excesses, had the doctor served, without fulfilling the ordinary formalities, with a ban on appearing again at the Sorbonne assemblies. Dr. Mortier then took the floor and moved the issue to another level. His motion could be summarized as follows: Since the book of the Sister is presented as a collection of revelations, it belongs to the Holy See to judge its value; and in fact, Rome has already taken notice of it; its doctrine is sound and orthodox; the project of censorship of the deputies is scandalous and injurious to the Faculty. The cabal, irritated more and more against the two doctors, looked for ways to make them repent of their opposition and frighten those who thought the same way. The syndic Le Fèvre lodged a complaint in Parliament against Drs. Février and Mortier, and it would have resulted in some inconvenience to them if Louis XIV had not made it known to the first president de Harlay that his express wish was that he would henceforth abstain from any intervention in this sad affair. Public opinion in the capital was moved by a dispute between doctors that had lasted so long. The faction had even gone so far as

¹⁵¹ This entire wretched affair has much in common with the night trial of Christ; the parallels are striking. [Ed.]

to publish several defamatory pamphlets against Mary of Ágreda and her defenders, and the scandal, as it spread, awakened in many people the ancient respect for the prerogatives of the Mother of God; the King himself, who had not deemed it appropriate to defer to the claims which the Apostolic Nuncio had indirectly transmitted to him, felt the need to refrain from lending the support of his Parliament in a cause in which he was beginning to glimpse certain aspects which could be injurious to religion. But if the members of the judiciary, who at the beginning of the affair had not spared arbitrary measures, found themselves stopped in the execution of their desires, the chancellor remained faithful to the impressions which Bossuet¹⁵² had given him from the beginning. The defenders of the *Mystical City* had prepared several replies to the pamphlets launched in the public against this book; the permission to print was refused to them, and we will see later that when one thought of finally enlightening the public opinion on the unworthy maneuvers of which the Sorbonne had been the venue, one was obliged to have recourse to foreign presses.

11. It is useful now to return to the correspondence of Bossuet, which will give us some interesting insights into the progress of the affair. The Prelate writes to his nephew, dated August 20: "I am very pleased that the book of the Mother of Ágreda is known. What delays the conclusion of the Sorbonne is one hundred and eighty opinants, among whom the indirect defenders of the book, secret partisans of the Cordeliers, speak for

¹⁵² Given the evidence presented, it seems certain that without the support of Bossuet this scandalous censure would never have been rammed through the Sorbonne, regardless of the nefarious machinations utilized toward this end. [Ed.]

four, five and six hours.” It is clear by these words that Bossuet persisted in seeing in everything and everywhere Cordeliers; perhaps he needed to give himself this pretext in order not to worry about the numerous irregularities of which this unfortunate affair was, so to speak, rife. The fact is that these poor Cordeliers were silent, and by command, and that there was even among them more than one famous doctor who had not even been allowed to cross the threshold of the Sorbonne. Frankly, this way of calling a ‘Cordelier’¹⁵³ any man who independently follows the feeling of his conscience is reminiscent of the system by virtue of which we have heard, for so long, people who did not care to think for themselves on matters that concerned their moral responsibility being called ‘Jesuits’. Among the doctors who spoke for the *Mystical City*, after those whose names we have collected, we can still quote Fathers Roynet, grand vicar of Paris; Bauchet, parish priest of St.-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet; Caphéla, parish priest of St.-Germain-l’Auxerrois; Gaye, Le Moine, etc, very independent characters, whom the children of St. Francis were hardly in a position to reward for their zeal, but who, on the other hand, exposed themselves to more than one annoyance by thus braving the powerful men who were pursuing a book which they wanted at all costs to render odious. Let us agree today: It is not the Cordeliers that these doctors claimed to support, it was quite simply the honor of the Mother of God, which seemed to them in danger; and who would dare to say that under such circumstances they were wrong?

¹⁵³ Thus *Cordelier* became a mere epithet, like *Samaritan* in Christ’s day and *Sedevacantist* in our own. [Ed.]

Bossuet reproaches them for speaking at length; it is permissible to think that the matter was worth it.

12. In a letter of September 3, the prelate expresses himself almost in the same terms: "The deliberations of Sorbonne on Mary of Ágreda," he says, "are about to come to an end. Apparently, the decree will pass to the opinion of the deputies. It is necessary to attribute the length to the number of opinants, who are one hundred and eighty, and to the affectation of those who, recruited by the Cordeliers, wanted to evade or postpone the condemnation." Again the Cordeliers; Fr. Le Dieu in his journal claims that the Jesuits were the leaders of the opposition. Whatever it was, one can always say that Bossuet, when he had taken his side in an affair, did not willingly allow anyone to delay in following him. His discontent is even more apparent in the letter of September 4: "The affair of the Mother of Ágreda, it is said, is going to be completed in the Sorbonne, and will pass to the opinion and the qualifications of the deputies, with some slight explanations. The length of the deliberation must be partly attributed to the number of the deliberators, who were one hundred and eighty. There was also a lot of affectation in the *cabal*; we saw on this occasion how many *false devotions* were in the heads of several doctors, how much *misguidance* there was in certain minds, and how many *monastic cabals* in a body which was supposed to be purified of them." With all due respect to the author of this letter, could one not have replied that the *cabal* was on the side of those who openly violated the regulations of the Faculty and who, by the authority of the Parliament, got rid of those of their colleagues whose freedom was in their way? The *false devotions*, the *misguidance* of minds, the *monastic cabals*: How astonishing and distressing this language

is!¹⁵⁴ Not a word of apology for these doctors who defend the Mother of God against the wretches who outrage her! And this bitterness against religious orders inspires Bossuet to say this about the Jesuits in the same letter: "I believe that, in the end, good or bad, they will become orthodox!" Here is indeed the 17th century in its last period; we had been on the march since 1660. On September 8 Bossuet writes: "The censure against the Mother of Ágreda draws to its end. It will pass by fifty votes to the opinion of the deputies. We say some very beautiful things and, from time to time, great miseries."¹⁵⁵ We shall soon see how the censure passed, and by what means a majority was formed. As for the *beautiful things* and the *miseries*, the application of these epithets depends entirely on the point of view from which one places oneself in relation to the substance of the question.

13. Bossuet wrote this last letter from Meaux according to the news which had been transmitted to him; but the party had to be reassured in Paris too. One of the records of the Roman file attests that, on the eve of the conclusion, all the voters having been heard, the situation of the Faculty could be defined in this way: Against censorship, almost all the old doctors and the majority of those of middle age; for censorship, the young doctors in rather large number, and the minority of those of middle age, and some only of the old doctors. One must recognize here the influence of the new principles which had prevailed in theological education. The cabal was therefore not without concern,

¹⁵⁴ Perhaps this is what the author of the *Imitation of Christ* meant when he said: *I would rather practice charity than know how to define it.* (Book 1, Chapter 1) [Ed.]

¹⁵⁵ *grandes pauvretés* [Ed.]

and the proof of this was seen when, the deliberations having ended, the trustee Lefèvre addressed the assembly on the situation. He said that after the experience he just had, he personally regretted that the affair had been initiated, and that this regret was shared by the authors of the report. It was known, moreover, that one of the commissioners had gone so far as to say that, for his part, he would willingly reduce the censure to four of the twenty counts contained in the proposed censure; it would thus appear that the speeches of the opponents had not been so *vain* and so *bad*, and that their *false devotions* and their *misguidance* of mind had not seemed such to everyone, since one of those most interested in the condemnation was seen to be retreating. The syndic added that, in the state of things, the public having taken part in the debate, the honor of the Faculty demanded that the affair end with a judgment; he went so far as to promise that the censorship project would be reformed in such a way as to satisfy everyone. Among the young doctors, many were taken in by this apparent benevolence, and the conclusion of the affair was fixed for September 17. We shall see how things went then.

Article 22: July 18, 1859

The last session of the Sorbonne and the vote of censure. The historic day of September 17, 1696. Request of the two doctors Duflos and Dumas.

1. On September 17, 1696, Bossuet wrote from Paris to his nephew: "The Agréda affair is due to finish today, and should pass *magno numero* to the opinion of the deputies." It was indeed this day that, with the help of audacious maneuvers, the cabal finally won the triumph towards which it had been tending for several months. One hundred and fifty-two doctors were present at this memorable session. One heard at first the opinions of some members of the Faculty who had not yet opined; yet no sooner had the last one finished expressing his opinion than the syndic Le Fèvre, without having submitted to the Faculty the project of censorship amended according to the claims of so many doctors in fulfillment of the promise he had solemnly made in the session of August 6, gave the order to count the votes right away, with the aim of arriving by surprise at the conclusion so desired by the faction. I quickly pass over the details which the reader will find later in a notarized protest which was drawn up the same day, of which a certified copy is in the Roman file, with the letters and other documents which form the basis for our written report. It suffices to say, for the moment, that the doctors had not been summoned, as was customary for the concluding sessions; that those who were present and who were not in the conspiracy had gone to the Sorbonne only to hear opine those members of the Faculty who had not yet spoken; that the verification of the votes was formally refused, in spite of the strongest complaints of the majority; and finally that the sentence which condemned the *Mystical*

City was declared and consummated only by the mouthpiece of the syndic, who said aloud in the room: “There are one hundred and fifty-two votes; of these, eighty-five are in favor of the censure;” and by the assent of the dean, who added: “To which I conclude with you.” After these words, the dean declared the session adjourned; complaints arose on all sides; the tumult was at its height; yet, valid or not, the censure had been carried; the influences of the outside, joined to the intrigues of the inside, had triumphed; and the Faculty was about to enter on its registers a judgment worthy of appearing beside so many others which, like this one, were the result of the malevolent passions which we have so often seen, since the 13th century, agitate and prevail in its bosom.

2. When we read this all-too-famous censure in the collection of d’Argentré, where it is inserted in its place, without any historical commentary, and when one reads the article on Mary of Ágreda in Feller’s Dictionary, in the Universal Biography, and in all the copiers of each, for example M. Bouillet, many honest readers of our time, not very familiar perhaps with the history of the Sorbonne, remain convinced for all their life that the Spanish holy woman¹⁵⁶ had composed a quite ridiculous and abominable book. The judgment of the Sorbonne, to which the great name of Bossuet is united with so much pomp, becomes for them the equivalent of a sentence carried by an ecumenical council; and it does not even occur to them that it could well be that other Faculties of theology which were as good as that of Paris might well have passed diametrically opposite judgments of the book and its author. We shall soon give proof that this was the case.

¹⁵⁶ *béate* [Ed.]

Of all the Roman Cardinals, there was none whom Bossuet esteemed more than d'Aguirre in terms of knowledge and integrity; and we shall soon hear d'Aguirre himself express his feelings on the *Mystical City* in terms quite opposite to those which Bossuet used in his virulent pamphlet. A little reflection on the passages of the correspondence of Bossuet and the diary of Le Dieu, which were reproduced above, would let us foresee enough that the freedom of the opinions and the votes in the censures of the Sorbonne were not precisely what preoccupied the influential men, to whom it seemed good to provide to their private feeling the support of a judgment of this Faculty. These views may seem a little haphazard to those who have not thoroughly studied the history of the Church in the 17th century, yet we have little right to be surprised: This history has not yet been written. Hence it does not have to be rewritten, but rather written from the beginning. Such a work will require hard efforts; but, God willing, it will see the light of day. Other cares and advancing age do not allow me to devote my remaining strength to a work I would have liked to do; but it seemed to me that by recounting here in some detail an episode of the year 1696, about which our most voluminous historians are silent, I would arouse in many of my readers the desire to know at last the real state of doctrines, the character of persons, and the interplay of institutions at a time which most have seen only through panegyrics or conventional accounts. The 17th century opens, in every sense, the door to the 18th; we have said this enough, but it is a serious drawback that it has not yet been demonstrated.

3. In the meantime, let us return to the history of September 17, 1696. It is understandable that the sixty-seven doctors who formed the minority, as declared by

the syndic, had to leave with indignation a session in which not only the regulations of the Sorbonne had been violated, but the most basic requirements of probity due to the refusal to verify the votes. What recourse is there in such a situation? The influence of the high-profile figures to whom they knew the coup must be attributed was all-powerful. More than once in the course of the deliberations measures as arbitrary as unforeseen were taken to strike those who had the courage to speak according to their conscience. However, there were two doctors whom human fears did not stop. May their names remain in honor, because they braved, for the glory of the Mother of God which was being outraged, the consequences of a brilliant step whose first effect was to show in broad daylight all the ignominy of a cabal, and all the shame of an oppression, both of which remind us all too much, albeit in abbreviated form, of what happened at Ephesus at the time of John of Antioch. These two intrepid men were Amable Duflos and Hilaire Dumas. At the end of the session, they went to the Castle¹⁵⁷ of Paris, and had the following protest written by a notary, which we give at length because of its great importance.

4. “Today, the seventeenth day of September, one thousand six hundred and ninety-six, at two o’clock in the afternoon, appeared before the King’s counselors notaries at the Castle of Paris, undersigned, M. Amable Duflos, priest, doctor of theology of the Faculty of Paris, house and society of Navarre, residing on rue des Singes, parish of Saint-Paul; and M. Hilaire Dumas, priest and doctor of theology of the aforementioned Faculty, house and society of Sorbonne, and formerly adviser in the Court of the Parliament, residing on rue

¹⁵⁷ *Châtelet* [Ed.]

Françoise, parish of Saint-Médard: Saying that, in the ordinary assembly of the said Faculty of the second day of last May, M. Le Fèvre proposed to said Faculty the examination of a book entitled the *Mystical City of God*, etc., composed in Spanish by Sister Mary of Jesus, and translated into French. The said book having been received by the assembly to be examined, four deputies were appointed by the dean and syndic to confer among themselves on the said book, in order to extract from it the propositions which they judged deserving of censure, and then to make their report to the said Faculty. This having been done, the aforementioned deputies made their report to the ordinary general assembly of the first day of July also last, and revealed there that they had extracted from the aforementioned book the principal propositions which deserved censure, and that they had noted in them the qualifications which suited them; and the syndic required that the propositions, as well as the qualifications which formed the opinion of the deputies, be printed, to be distributed to each doctor.

5. "When the matter was discussed, many doctors were of the opinion that only the propositions extracted from the aforementioned book should be printed, and not the qualifications, in order not to prejudice the opinions of the doctors of the aforementioned Faculty, and not to do anything against the custom observed at all times in such a meeting; the other opinion, however, did not let it pass, and this was done with great haste. The assembly was postponed to the fourteenth in the following month. A document was distributed to all the doctors, entitled: *Sententia Dominorum deputatorum*, etc., *Opinion of the Lord Deputies*, which writing contains more than sixty propositions, at the bottom of each of which are the qualifications of each. On this

day the deputies began to explain their opinion; and in the following assemblies, which have continued to this day to the number of more than thirty, the doctors who attended the proposal of this examination all stated their opinion, each one according to his rank of seniority; in which all the doctors opining were divided in a great number of different opinions; some wanted the book to be censured only by notes and general qualifications; others wanted particular proposals condemned, and differed in the choice of proposals and their qualifications. The last doctor having finished opining today around ten o'clock in the morning, and being concerned with the recognition of the votes and the counting of them, and a great number of those who had previously opined being absent from the assembly, it was desirable that another assembly be designated so all those absent could be present, and in which all the different votes would be received aloud and recognized by each one, to see what he wanted to add or to subtract from it; that we could at least agree on two principal opinions, or that we were divided into so many different opinions that we could not unanimously agree on the same opinion, which was all the more necessary since it was easy to get confused in the collection of opinions, and some had recognized that their opinions had been badly written, the clerk of the Faculty not having enough experience or skill to be able to do it exactly. The Society had made recent use of this practice in the last Censure it made, in 1683, of the proposal presented to it by our lords of the Parliament, as testified to by several doctors who were present, principally M. Pirot, chancellor of the University of Paris, who was then syndic.

6. "However, the aforementioned M. Le Fèvre, present syndic, not only did not request that another

Assembly be designated to reread, review and count the votes, but without saying anything, having risen from his place, he went to stand beside the clerk to read the votes, and when it was pointed out to him that he should be assisted in this function by the two registrants of the Society, chosen to be witnesses of what is done by the syndic in his functions, he insisted that he was fit and able to perform this function alone, even though they persisted in protesting to the contrary. After which, several doctors having requested several and various times that he at least read aloud the votes, so each could recognize if his had been faithfully written, and see whether he wished to persist or switch to another opinion, the abovementioned syndic, having disregarded all these requests, after a few moments spent turning over the sheets upon which the clerk had written these opinions, without having read aloud any of the said opinions, nor named any of the opinants, nor having been able himself, in so little time, to read the votes, nor count them, which would have required more than two hours, he rose and said aloud: *'Sunt 152 suffragia, ex quibus sunt 85 pro sententia deputatorum. There are 152 votes, of which 85 are for the opinion of the deputies.'* And immediately the dean said with haste: *'Ita vobiscum concludo. To which I conclude with you,'* and immediately adjourned the Assembly, even though the aforementioned participants represented to him that this conclusion was null, the opinions having been neither read nor counted, as they should have been, especially after the instantaneous request which had been made, and that the plurality was not for the opinion of the deputies, such as they had printed it, that there were not half who would have agreed entirely and who would not have made some exceptions and modifications to it. This was so evident,

that after approximately half of the opinants had stated their opinion, the aforementioned syndic said aloud in full assembly, and repeated it several times in several assemblies, that the deputies, taking advantage of the enlightenment of all those who had opined, would reform and change their opinion in such a way that it would please all, that all would be satisfied. After this declaration by the syndic, several agreed with the opinion of the deputies under this condition promised by the syndic, indicating that they would find several things to criticize in this opinion, such as it was printed; which condition was to be carried out before the conclusion. This condition was not fulfilled, since the syndic concluded the meeting in favor of the opinion of the deputies, without changing or reforming it.

7. "And whereas this endeavor of said dean and the syndic is of a perilous consequence, and tends to ruin the discipline of the Society and to render contemptible its decrees and censures, which would depend only on these two persons, said testifiers were persuaded that it was a matter of the honor of the Faculty of which they are members, and of their conscience, to petition for justice regarding such an undertaking, to manifest the nullity of said conclusion pronounced this day by said lord dean, and to appeal against it to our lords of the Parliament as an abuse; of all which said declarations, requests and protests, they have asked the undersigned notaries to take note of them, who have issued them the present document to serve them as they see fit; and furthermore the aforementioned testifiers have given to one of them power of attorney on behalf of the other to serve the present act of protest on the aforementioned dean and syndic, and on the aforementioned clerk, and that they protest the nullity of the aforementioned conclusion for the reasons set out above, to posit

opposition in their own hands to it being passed to the prejudice of the aforementioned protest against the confirmation of the said alleged conclusion; and that in the event that this occurs they may appeal such an abuse to our lords of the Parliament, and thus they shall advise. Done and passed in Paris, in the study of Prieur the elder, one of the aforementioned notaries, and signed, the day and year above declared, the minute of the present, which remained with the aforementioned notary. Signed: Robillard. Prior."

8. The two doctors waited until September 28 to serve to the dean and the syndic of the Faculty the protest that we have just read. They had hoped they would not overlook a censure extorted by such deplorable means; but having learned that the cabal had resolved to take advantage of the approaching session of the *Prima mensis* to publish its triumph, Duflos and Dumas had their act of opposition deposited with the two principal members of the Sorbonne. Here is the signification of the text, such as we find it following the protest, in the Roman file of the Cause, where these two parts, as well as all those we have used in this part of our account, are certified, regarding the fidelity of the transcription, by an apostolic notary accredited in the court of Rome. Here, then, is the signification of the text:

9. "In the year one thousand six hundred and ninety-six, on the twenty-eighth day of September, at the request of the said sirs Amable Duflos and Hilaire Dumas, who have each taken up residence in their own house, where they reside as above designated, was shown and served the aforesaid act of protest and thence delivered to and left in the presence of M. Guiscard, dean of the said Faculty of Theology, at his domicile of the college of Navarre....and to M. Le

Fèvre, syndic of the said Faculty, by me René Pallu, bailiff of the Mint Court, residing on the island of Notre-Dame, street and parish of Saint-Louis, undersigned, insofar as they are not unaware of it, further declaring to them that the said sirs Duflos and Dumas are opponents, as they hereby object in their own hands to the confirmation of the aforementioned alleged conclusion, protesting in the event that, to the prejudice of the aforementioned protest, it would be overruled, to appeal as a matter of abuse before our lords of the Parliament, or as they see fit, of which act, etc. Signed: Duflos, Dumas, Pallu.

10. We thought that the very text of the protest which we have here published would interest the reader. It is easy to notice the extreme reserve maintained by the two doctors: Not a single word betrays their personal opinion regarding the book in question; if they protest, it is in the name of the violated laws of probity, of Sorbonne regulations trampled underfoot. There would not have been a chance of success for an appeal to the Parliament in favor of the Spanish Venerable; nevertheless, they say enough to fully confirm the other accounts. Pending the details of the *Prima mensis* of October, when the botched Censure *per fas et nefas*¹⁵⁸ was published on September 17, we are able to draw various conclusions that are not without historical significance.

11. According to the admission of the syndic Le Fèvre, there were sixty-seven votes in favor of the *Mystical City* in an assembly decimated by fear, by the arbitrary banning of several doctors from taking part, and by the illegal exclusions of Fr. Mérou, the abbot de

¹⁵⁸ Doing something *by any means, right or wrong*, ignoring law, procedure and morality. [Ed.]

Rubec, Dr. Février, etc. I say it is no small honor for the book of the Sister to have obtained, under such circumstances, sixty-seven more approvers.

12. The correspondence inserted in the Roman dossier, in explaining the strange conduct of the syndic who refused to read and check the alleged eighty-five votes in favor of the project of censorship, tells us that of this number there were votes on which only four or six proposals were disapproved; others in which the notes of the proposals were softened; others which contained protective reservations for the honor of such an illustrious Servant of God; others in which it was agreed that the book, not having been produced in the original, the censure made on the translation was null and void. It was known that only twenty doctors had accepted the project of the deputies, and that among these twenty there was no lack of doctors who boasted of not having read a single line of the incriminated work.¹⁵⁹ Hence we are entitled to conclude, and the conduct of the syndic sufficiently proves it, that there were not eighty-five votes in favor of condemnation.

13. Finally, since the regulations of the Sorbonne were scandalously and brutally violated in the counting of the votes, the nullity of the judgment follows, and it can be said in all truth that, whatever the competence or incompetence of the Faculty in a cause which the Holy See had reserved to itself, the censure being null because of the lack of the essential formalities, it is inaccurate to say that the *Mystical City* of Mary of Ágreda was condemned by the Sorbonne.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ May it not be so in our day. [Ed.]

¹⁶⁰ For the same reason it is inaccurate to say the *Mystical City of God* was condemned by the Church in 1681, since, according to Cardinal Aquaviva before Benedict XIV, “the prohibition [of the

books] came out from the Sacred Tribunal without its having before it the writings of the venerable authoress, either in the original or in authentic copy." This quote was translated verbatim from *the original dossier* on the Cause in the archives of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome in 1957 (just before the calamitous usurpation of the Papacy) by Fr. Peter Mary Rookey, OSM, Consultor General of the Servites. His article *Innocent XI and the Mystical City* was published in the magazine *The Age of Mary* (South Bend, IN), Vol. V, No. 1, January-February 1958, pp. 88. I have both this article and the entire magazine, a special edition devoted exclusively to the *Mystical City*, in pdf format; email me at neemcog@gmail.com and I will email either or both to you. It is truly a most merciful work of Divine Providence that this article was printed in early 1958, just before the church of darkness (as named by Our Lady of La Salette) clenched its putrid grip on the Papacy. And it is also amazing that Fr. Rookey wrote the article at Servite Headquarters in Rome, the very same place in which Cardinal Odescalchi resided as a Servite Tertiary before his election as Pope Innocent XI. The Odescalchi family was still living next door, and Fr. Rookey was privileged to attend the Beatification of Bl. Innocent XI by Pius XII on Oct. 7, 1956. [Ed.]

Article 23: August 7, 1859

The protest of Doctors Duflos and Dumas. The strong reactions of the adversaries of Mary of Ágreda. The intervention of the Cardinal de Noailles. His Jansenist influences. The censorship. Dr. Hideux. The various publications on this censorship. The Spanish reaction. Fr. Gabriel de Noboa. The University of Salamanca and its defense of Mary of Ágreda.

1. In the interim between September 17, the day on which the censure had been so irregularly pronounced, and the *Prima mensis* of October, when it was to be promulgated, the leaders [of the cabal] did not let a matter so close to their hearts go dormant. The protest lodged in Parliament by Drs. Duflos and Dumas was a source of great concern. It revealed in too incriminating a manner the scandalous campaigns and unheard-of violence which had taken place in the Faculty, and the public could demand an account of a judgment executed against all the rules, and a plot in which some very considerable figures outside the Faculty were involved, and on the inside several doctors who were very outspoken against it. If the appeal of Duflos and Dumas happened to be endorsed by doctors who were unhappy at having been crushed by their colleagues, the result could be for many a rather embarrassing situation. The rumor even spread that the appeal to the Parliament was no longer the work of two isolated individuals, and that the signatures were multiplying at the bottom of the protest that they had filed.

2. In this difficult situation, the party felt it had to resort to the intervention of Louis-Antoine de Noailles, who had taken possession of the see of Paris a year earlier, and whose credit was strong at court. This

prelate, of weak character, and who under the pressure of the Jansenists had accumulated during his long episcopate a whole series of inconsistencies and deplorable acts, seemed to them the most efficient and docile auxiliary they could choose. For his part, Noailles had been for the party of moderation in the cause of the *Mystical City*. Dr. Roynet, his vicar general, in order to save the honor of the Mother of God from the insolent attacks to which she was subjected in the project of censorship, had proposed, leaning on the desire of the Archbishop, an opinion according to which the book would have been censured as a unit¹⁶¹ in its French translation, without extraction of proposals, and subject to the Spanish original, which the Sorbonne had declared it would not touch, no more than the reputation of the Sister. This middle ground also had its drawbacks, since the translation of the book could be faithful, and indeed it was except for rare imperfections, and since, moreover, the Apostolic See having taken possession of the book and appointed a congregation to examine it, neither the Sorbonne, nor anyone in the Church, had any right to judge it.

3. In any case, the Archbishop was worked on and persuaded to adopt the censure as it had been carried, with the extracted propositions and the violent qualifications contained therein; he demanded only that it be preceded by a sort of prologue in which the Faculty would express its profound respect for the Blessed Virgin and profess its attachment to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the bodily Assumption of the Mother of God. This prologue was, in fact, written, and one cannot help but remember the one placed at the head of the Declaration of 1682, in

¹⁶¹ *in globo* [Ed.]

which the dignity of the Apostolic See is elevated in such beautiful language. In both of these pieces, in fact, the portico is of a grand style and seems destined for a completely different building than the one to which it gives entry. As for the Censure of Mary of Ágreda, the nuncio Delfini, in his dispatch of October 1 to Cardinal Spada, cleverly said: "There is an exordium in honor of the Virgin; but I don't know whether she is crowned with roses or thorns. *Non so se più di rose, o di spine.*" This, however, was the only compensation Noailles asked for in order to put himself at the service of the cabal. Henceforth, the cause was all his own. Dr. Dumas was summoned to the Archbishopric, and the prelate forbade him to appear at the *Prima mensis*. Duflos appeared in his turn; but, firmer than his colleague, he supported his protest, and declared that he would go to the Sorbonne. Among the doctors opposed to the censorship, several were in the dependence of the Archbishopric for the posts they held; he managed to intimidate them, and obtain from them the promise of a discreet silence at the session which was going to be held.

4. All the artillery was in place when October 1 arrived. The syndic read the act of censure before the assembly. The prologue, which spoke with honor of the Mother of God, astonished the doctors in favor of the *Mystical City*, who had heard such different language during the deliberations; they also noted that the censure had undergone certain modifications, and that new proposals and notes had been inserted which had neither been communicated nor submitted to the deliberations of the Faculty. Duflos indignantly renewed his protest. The syndic replied that he was not bothered; he ordered the secretary to write the censure on the registers of the Faculty and, without having

taken the advice of the assembly, he moved on to the order of the day, according to the style of our deliberative assemblies, and opened the proposal on another matter. This audacity provoked a movement of discontent on the part of a certain number of doctors whom they had not succeeded in chaining; they demanded discussion on the prologue and on the lines stealthily added to the censure. The syndic withdrew into a restrained silence; his position was becoming difficult. Yet suddenly the leaders of the cabal rose with a commotion from their benches and announced their intention to withdraw; he took advantage of this unofficial movement to declare the session closed. This was the final act of this great drama which had lasted seven months.

5. The reader is now in a position to appreciate the value of a famous act which certainly bears no trace of the spirit of wisdom, moderation and justice one would expect to find in the doctrinal judgment of a theological faculty. If we ask ourselves who profited by this censure, wrested by intrigue and violence from a body which rejected it, it will be easy to answer. First of all, the enemies of the veneration of the Blessed Virgin, whose activities I have made known, must have counted this as a new success; their disgraceful language sufficiently demonstrated, in the course of the sessions, their professed distaste for the devotion of the Church to the Mother of God. Doctor Hideux¹⁶² and his accomplices had wanted to avenge their friend Baillet, as well as the *Monita salutaria* censured in Rome; they succeeded by the means they had chosen. In the second place, a new insult was directed at the Apostolic See, whose essential rights were being infringed by the

¹⁶² Doctor *Hideous* indeed! [Ed.]

Parisian censorship. In the third place the Faculty, now under the influence of a Jansenist and even somewhat Socinian minority, and soon to be rid of its former doctors who were aging and disappearing in their turn, was emboldened after such a coup in the path of new ideas, and prepared the opposition it dared to make twenty years later to a dogmatic constitution¹⁶³ received by the universal Church. Finally, by its brutality (that is the proper word) towards the Venerable Servant of God Mary of Ágreda, the Sorbonne disparaged as much as it could the mystical ways, which are, it is true, hardly bearable to rationalism, but whose disregard and soon oblivion prepared the Church in France, under the aspect of sanctity, for a sterility of which our annals bear no trace anywhere else. What is not less sad, perhaps, in the midst of this fatal *diminution of truths*¹⁶⁴ which is the hallmark of the last forty years of the 17th century, is to see the Sorbonne faction in 1696 supported from the outside by influential people so highly placed in the Church.¹⁶⁵ It is thus easy to understand what the Nuncio Delfini meant in the above-mentioned dispatch, when he ended his account with these significant words: "It would be a disgrace for the one who wanted to support this venture to recount all the disorders and all the intrigues which were utilized to achieve this result. *Sarebbe, indecoroso, per che hâ voluto sostenere tale impegno il dirsi tutti i disordini,*

¹⁶³ He almost certainly means *Unigenitus* of Sept. 8, 1713, which condemned Jansenism. [Ed.]

¹⁶⁴ cf. Ps. 11:2 [Ed.]

¹⁶⁵ Could these be early forerunners of the infiltrators of the priesthood and hierarchy who slithered in from the foul sect of the Freemasons? [Ed.]

tutte le manifatture, che per giungere a tal fine si sono fatte.”

6. Before going further, it will be of interest to several readers to give here details of the various publications to which the Censure of the *Mystical City* has given rise. The first is a pamphlet contrary to the book of the Sister and intended to prepare the minds of the people for a condemnation. It is entitled: *Letter to MM. Dean, Syndic and Doctors of the Faculty of Theology of Paris. 1696.* This attack was immediately answered by a supporter of the book, in the pamphlet whose title is: *Answer to a libel against the Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus of Ágreda entitled: Letter to MM. the Dean etc. 1696.* The Censure having been pronounced, the following writing appeared in favor of the book: *Letter of M. ***, lawyer in the parliament, to M. ***, doctor in the Sorbonne, in Touraine. From Paris on October 20, 1696.* The authors of the Censure defended themselves by a writing entitled: *Summary of the disputes caused on the occasion of the discussion of the book which is entitled the Mystical City of God. Paris. 1696.* The following year, a defense of the *Mystical City* was printed in Cologne under this title: *Censura censuræ, seu confutatio sententiae DD. deputatorum facultatis Theologiæ Parisiensis, cum observationibus et notis in Censuram, quæ sub ementito sacræ Facultatis theologiæ Parisiensis nomine vulgata est.*¹⁶⁶ This document is of the greatest interest, in terms of both facts and doctrine. The following one is no less

¹⁶⁶ *The Censure of the censure, or the refutation of the opinion of the Doctors, deputies of the Faculty of Theology in Paris, with observations and notes on the Censure which was falsely published in the name of the sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris, as it was popularly called.* [Ed.]

important, and it was similarly printed in Cologne in 1697. It appeared under this title: *The Affair of Mary of Ágreda and the manner in which her condemnation was set up by a cabal in the Sorbonne*. This pamphlet was attributed to Henri de la Morlière, doctor of the Sorbonne, who disavowed it in an article entitled: *Justification of M. Henri de la Morlière. 1697*. Barbier attributes its composition to Fr. Mérou. In the same year, there is also the following document: *Opinion on the Censure of the book composed by Mary of Jesus, abbess of Ágreda*. The author, like the previous ones, defends the *Mystical City*. The same is true of the rather pointed pamphlet entitled: *Letter from a colonel of the infantry to the Reverend Fr. Quesnel, a priest of the Oratory, concerning the book by Sister Mary of Ágreda*. The controversy still continued in France on this subject in the first half of the 18th century; but the defenders of the *Mystical City* were always forced to publish their books abroad, or through clandestine publishers. In 1719, the all too famous doctor Louis Ellies Du Pin updated his *Abrégé de l'Histoire ecclésiastique*, and he took advantage of the opportunity to insult the book of the Sister and to advocate to excess the so-called Censure of the Sorbonne. This more than daring author, whose works are almost all listed in the catalog of the *Index*, and against whose tendencies Bossuet himself has energetically protested in a special work, had formed the project to publish a direct defense of the Censure; however, his suspicious orthodoxy would have harmed the cause he wanted to support, so he was therefore ordered to keep quiet. It was not until more than twenty years later, in the year of his death, that he found the opportunity to express his feelings, and this quite in passing, in the *Abrégé historique* of which I have just spoken. Someone replied to him under this

rather long title: *Very humble remonstrance from the translator of the books of the V[enerable] M[ary] of Ágreda to M. Louis Ellies Du Pin, doctor in theology of the Faculty of Paris, on the unjust censures and scandalous invectives he has inserted in the IVth volume of the Histoire de l'Église en abrégé, against these heavenly books, and against this most illustrious nun who died in odor of sanctity, and whose beatification or canonization has long been worked on in Rome.* In 1735 Fr. Goujet, a zealous follower of the Jansenist party, published his first supplement to the Dictionary of Moréri; he inserted in it a new diatribe against Mary of Ágreda, in which he claimed responsibility for the article in the Dictionary itself. An anonymous person claimed in the following pamphlet: *Response to an article of a certain Supplement of the Dictionary of M. Moréri, in which the books of the Mystical City written by the venerable Mother of Ágreda are treated in an unworthy and unjust manner.* Finally in 1737 appeared this last writing: *Letter on the Censure made in the Sorbonne of the book of Mary of Ágreda.* Such is, for France, the literary history of this great debate, by joining together the passages which we quoted from the correspondence of Bossuet, the diary of Le Dieu, and the documents contained in the Roman file. It is easy to understand that if the defenders of the *Mystical City* had been given the freedom to speak and write in broad daylight, opinion would not have been distorted as it has been since 1696 in all French books, except for the clandestine pamphlets which we have just listed, most of which are undated and all of which without the name of the author.

7. In Spain, the news of the Parisian censorship had to produce, and did indeed produce, as much astonishment as indignation. Everyone knows that if

there was one country in the world where theology was then cultivated with extreme care, this country was without question the Catholic Kingdom. Before allowing the printing of the *Mystical City*, the Spanish Inquisition had withheld the manuscript for fourteen years, and only after hearing contradictory opinions from the most renowned doctors on each of the assertions it contained was it released to the press. Once the book had been published, all the universities of the kingdom were preoccupied with it; theological science had examined it in every sense, and from so much learned research had resulted the general conviction among the doctors of this country that the work of the Sister was as unassailable in terms of orthodoxy as its reading could be profitable to the faithful. The whole of Catholic Spain was thus drinking from the wellsprings of the *Mystical City*, and at the same time as it drew from it a new increase in chivalrous devotion to the Queen of Heaven, it penetrated more deeply into the understanding and love of the divine mystery of the Incarnation, of which the mystery of the Mother of God is the key.

8. Let us therefore judge the impression that must have resulted in this country at the sound of this Censure from beyond the mountains, which came to brand as *heretical* and *impious* a book so admired and loved beyond the Pyrenees. It is understood that the Censure presented itself under the imposing name of the first university of the kingdom of France, and that it arrived in Spain without any information capable of shedding light on the odious intrigue of which the alleged judgment of the Sorbonne had been the effect. On this question the Spaniards found themselves in exactly the same situation as any man in France today who has read regarding Mary of Ágreda only the books

of which our libraries are filled. But instead of bowing their heads and attesting *per verba magistri*, as we have done for too long, the Spanish doctors did not fail to submit to the scrutiny of a rigorous theology both the propositions extracted from the book in Paris, and the notes with which they had dared to taint them. A solid, detailed rebuttal became necessary; it was not long in coming, and it was the first of the Spanish universities, the one whose theological science was esteemed throughout the world, the University of Salamanca, which wanted to give itself the honor of producing it. It appeared in 1698, under the title: *Palestra Mariana, in which the Censor published under the false name of the sacred faculty of theology of Paris, propositions extracted from the first volume of the Life of the most holy Mother of God published in the Spanish language, by the Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, Abbess of the convent of the Immaculate Conception of the Town of Agréda, is vindicated.*¹⁶⁷ The author was Fr. Gabriel de Noboa, a Franciscan of the Observance and doctor in the University of Salamanca.

9. But such a book could not be considered the work of a simple private individual. It is known that the city of Salamanca contained a college of doctors for each of the religious orders dwelling on Spanish soil, and in which were educated, under their particular observance, the subjects that these orders sent to study and take degrees at the University. Nothing was more imposing than the votes of these numerous colleges uniting to

¹⁶⁷ *Palæstra Mariana, in qua a Censura sub ementito sacrae facultatis theologiae Parisiensis nomine evulgatata, propositiones deceptæ e primo tomo Vitæ SS. Dei Genitricis editæ Hispano idiomate V. M. Maria a Jesu, Abbatissa conventus purissimæ Conceptionis Villæ de Agréda, vindicantur.* [Ed.]

approve or disapprove a doctrine. The book of Fr. Gabriel de Noboa was put to the test, and he emerged victorious. The University of Salamanca, through its various colleges, where all the religious orders of such diverse genius were represented, endorsed the book, showered it with praise, and protested most energetically against the censure published under the name of the Sorbonne.

10. Nothing is more interesting than the compilation of these approvals of the various colleges, long, detailed, full of life and enthusiasm for the book so unjustly attacked. The doctors put aside the severity of scholastic language; they try their hand at the oratorical genre, and call upon all their classical memories to adorn their long and solemn sentences with verses borrowed from ancient inspiration. The fervor of orthodoxy, the gentility of the old Castilian customs, with the professorial tone, all combine to form an ensemble as rare as it is endearing. We find ourselves suddenly transported to the bosom of that illustrious theological tribunal, whose rulings are still so highly regarded in the School today; we live with those men of yesteryear, so serious and so sincere, whom we knew in our clerical youth under the generic name of *Salmantenses*; and frankly, when we come to recall the ignoble scenes at the Sorbonne in September 1696, we cannot help but feel a pang of sorrow. The two Schools succumbed in succession under the blow of revolutions, but only one could sum up its entire past in these words of the Apostle: *I fought the good fight, I kept the faith.* Only one has accomplished, immaculately, its long and glorious course.

11. In 1700 the collection of approvals given by the various colleges of the university was printed in Salamanca itself, under this truly Spanish title, which I

will translate in order not to give the reader the trouble of going through half a column of Latin. It reads: “Defense of the *Mystical City of God*, or collection of the judgments passed on the doctrine of this book by all or almost all the colleges of religious of the University of Salamanca, famous throughout the world, in the approval of the *Palæstra Mariana apologetica*, published against the printed Censure under the real or supposed name of the Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris, which condemns various propositions of the first volume of the *Mystical City of God*, translated into French by the Reverend Fr. Thomas Croset, Recollect minor, in which *Defense* the Censure of Paris finds itself very seriously and very justly struck by the Censure of Salamanca, at the same time as the Royal Convent of Saint Francis of Salamanca presents this same censure to the University of Paris, so the latter, taking the interests of its honor, which has remained intact in past centuries, may disengage itself from the imputation made to it of a judgment apt to defame it, and proceed against the authors of the alleged Censure.” The epigraph reads, “*Judge not, that you may not be judged.*” Finally, the bottom of the title contains this analysis: “In a public session of Doctors and Masters, both regular and secular, the University of Salamanca declares the Censure published under the name of the Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris to be entirely unjust, entirely null, invincibly refuted in the *Palæstra Mariana apologetica*, and finally manifestly convicted; and the propositions of the *Mystical City of God* noted in Paris to be sure and exact, liable of falling under the divine revelation; in as a result of which the university of Salamanca praises and recommends the entire doctrine (*totam doctrinam*) of the revelations of the *Mystical City of God.*”

12. We then find in the collection the letters of the Catholic King which charge the University to examine the *Palæstra Mariana* and to render its judgment on the book, together with the favorable response rendered by this Body. Then begins the series of approvals given to the book of Fr. Gabriel de Noboa by the various colleges of the Religious Orders: The Dominicans come first, followed by the Augustinians, the Benedictines, the Jesuits, the Cistercians, the Mercedarians, the Carmelites, the Trinitarians, the Clerics Regular Minor, the Minims, the Basilians, the Hieronimites, the Premonstratensians, the Reformed Augustinians, the Discalced Mercedarians, the Theatines, and the Discalced Trinitarians. The Doctors of Salamanca who were not religious complete this imposing list. I regret that lack of space does not allow me to give a fuller account of this truly national monument of Catholic Spain. Here, then, are two Universities: One, driven by a factious minority which openly violates laws and regulations, and reduces the majority to helplessness; the other, which proceeds with the calm and dignity of yesteryear. The same book occupies the attention of two Universities: That of Paris, or rather the people who speak in its name, declares that the book in question is abominable; that of Salamanca modestly refers the judgment of the fact of the revelations to the Holy See, and declares that the doctrine expressed in these same revelations is pure. To which of the two Universities shall we adhere? To the one that has been free, or to the one that has had an act imposed upon it that it rejected? The answer is easy, it seems to me.

Article 24: August 22, 1859

The reaction of the court of Madrid. Cardinal d'Aguirre. His letters to the Abbot de Pomponne and to Louis XIV. The failure of the Cardinal to have the Censure removed.

1. The universities of Spain had felt keenly the quite unexpected challenge that the Sorbonne seemed to have thrown at them, and they had responded. The court of Madrid was not less interested in the debate. For it, the memory of Mary of Ágreda was sacred; the Servant of God had been the friend of Philip IV, and his counsel in more than one important situation for the Spanish monarchy. The whole nation delighted in the *Mystical City*; the cause of the beatification of the Sister was, in Rome, under the patronage of the Catholic King, and we have seen that the change of dynasty did not suspend the active interest that the government of Madrid put in this cause: Philip V pursued it with as much zeal as his predecessor could have mustered. But this cause could suffer some disfavor because of the Parisian censure. The promoter of the faith, always zealous in his duty to seek out and put forward all the pretexts which one could oppose to the success of a cause of beatification, would not fail to make ring loud and clear the reputation of the school of the Sorbonne and the stigma which it was purported to have inflicted on the *Mystical City*.

2. Rome then possessed, among the Cardinals, a Spanish subject with a reputation almost equal to his merit. [Cardinal] d'Aguirre, who came out of the Benedictine cloister, a solid theologian, a simple soul with integrity, had been aware of the attempts that deplorable passions were making in Paris against the *Mystical City*. We have seen above that Bossuet had

recommended his nephew to the Cardinal; but the latter had shown himself full of discretion when the envoy of the Bishop of Meaux had sought to probe his dispositions. It could hardly be otherwise, at a time when a special congregation appointed by the Pope was examining this same book. Moreover, the prudence of d'Aguirre prevented him from declaring openly to Bossuet how improper it seemed to him, on the part of a theological faculty which is nothing but by the Holy See, to make such a claim in a cause which the Holy See held at that very moment pending at its tribunal. His friendly relations with the Bishop of Meaux, who was so involved in this unfortunate affair, also imposed on him a particular reserve. Bossuet and d'Aguirre held each other in high esteem; they sent each other the works they published. d'Aguirre, still a simple monk, had courageously attacked the Declaration of 1682¹⁶⁸ by his *Defensio Cathedrae S. Petri*, which appeared in Salamanca in 1683; but Bossuet has rendered justice to his adversary, and though divided in sentiment with the Spanish scholar on points of such high importance, he did not miss any opportunity to show the high regard in which he held his knowledge and character.

3. The Cardinal thus awaited the outcome of the deliberations of the Sorbonne on the *Mystical City*. The news of the censure of the book arrived in Rome by the dispatch of the nuncio Delfini, and naturally caused a painful impression on d'Aguirre, this censure being at the same time an attack against the honor of the Blessed Virgin and a new undertaking against the rights of the Holy See. However, he would have abstained from any action, under the circumstances, if the court of Spain had not called for his intervention. But what could

¹⁶⁸ It expressed the principles of the heresy of Gallicanism. [Ed.]

d’Aguirre do? Rome was offended, and had to be; but it was not for the Magisterium to take up the defense of a book it was examining at that very moment. d’Aguirre thought that the revocation of the Parisian censure was the only way to clear up the situation. It seemed to him that Louis XIV was quite powerful enough to overcome a theological faculty, and he resolved to negotiate. His letters on this affair are found in the Roman dossier, from which we have already borrowed so much precious information.

4. The first document we find on this subject is a letter from d’Aguirre addressed to Abbot¹⁶⁹ de Pomponne, dated May 24, 1698. After thanking this personage for a literary tribute he had received, the Cardinal expresses himself thus: “I was consoled to learn that M. du Pin does not intend to attack the work about which I wrote, in another circumstance, to Your Illustrious Lordship, and I have reason to hope that the Sorbonne itself will soon come to understand that the censure published against this same book should not be sustained, not only because it was fulminated in the midst of a tumult, but also because the most illustrious personages which it comprises did not take part in it; from which it can be inferred that it had as its principal cause the dissensions which existed at that time.” Further on, d’Aguirre adds these words, “I hope the most Christian King, impelled by his incomparable zeal for the defense of justice, will soon suggest to this distinguished University a course of action conformable to our projects, and thus give new lustre to the immortal glory he has acquired by his heroic actions.” d’Aguirre was under a great illusion; he was unaware of the

¹⁶⁹ Commendatory Abbot to the royal abbey of Saint-Médard at Soissons and at Saint-Maixent [Ed.]

obstacles which his project was bound to encounter on the part of the great figures implicated in the affair. If it had only been the doctors, there is no doubt that the orders of the Court would have been abundantly sufficient to expunge a censure extorted by intrigue and violence. But the King had unlimited confidence in Noailles and Bossuet,¹⁷⁰ who pushed him; and he made it a point of conscience to follow their direction in all religious matters. It was therefore in vain that the Cardinal wrote to Louis XIV the letter which we shall read, which nevertheless remains one of the most interesting documents of that time. Here it is, as it reads in the Roman dossier:

5. “Sire, the benevolence with which Your Royal Majesty has deigned to regard me constantly, as attested to me more than once by the Cardinals de Bouillon, d’Estrées, and de Janson-Forbin,¹⁷¹ gives me the boldness to lay this new letter at the feet of Your Majesty, not only to renew to you the expression of my unalterable devotion, but also to give you proof of the zeal which animates me for the increase of your glory.”

6. “The Catholic King, my natural sovereign, has transmitted to me in these last months the order to use all my possible efforts with the Holy See to obtain a goal to which he aspires with extreme ardor. His Majesty assumed that I was informed of his desire to be able to venerate the Venerable Mother of Ágreda on the altars, both to satisfy his own devotion to her, following in the footsteps of Philip IV, his glorious father, and to condescend to the supplications addressed to him by all his kingdoms and domains, and all his subjects of every

¹⁷⁰ Once again we see the primary responsibility for this sad affair rests upon Bossuet. [Ed.]

¹⁷¹ I believe he means Forbin-Janson. [Ed.]

state and condition. His Majesty enjoined upon me first of all to request the approval of the work that the aforementioned Servant of God had left written entirely in her hand on the Life of the Blessed Virgin, a work that was later published in three volumes in folio.

7. “In order to carry out the royal orders of my sovereign, whom I made it my duty to serve at all times as a most faithful subject, with sincere love and inviolable punctuality, I immediately applied myself, with all the care and eagerness possible for me, to the most exact examination of all the contents of the aforementioned books; and although my whole life has been devoted to study, I am obliged to confess that all that I have been able to extract and learn during fifty continuous years of sustained application to all branches of science is little, or even nothing, compared to the profound doctrine that I have discovered in the aforementioned books; doctrine fully in conformity with the Holy Scriptures, the holy Fathers, and the Councils.¹⁷² It therefore seemed to me that, just as it is

¹⁷² It is important to note that d’Aguirre was made a Cardinal by Blessed Innocent XI, who said his equal in learning was not at that time to be found in the Church. One therefore may judge the great worth of Cardinal d’Aguirre’s words. Regarding the *Mystical City*, he began as a prudent skeptic; however, it must also be noted that both Innocent XI and Cardinal d’Aguirre, when called upon to judge the book, *read it for themselves*. This is, in fact, the only way to know its excellence and importance. It cannot be stated too emphatically that anyone in our day who believes the *Mystical City of God* is condemned by the Magisterium, and moreover refuses to accept the testimony provided in these Articles, should follow the example of this Sovereign Pontiff and this Cardinal and read it for himself. It might also be added Dom Guéranger himself, an eminent spiritual and intellectual giant of the 19th century, and author of the monumental *Liturgical Year*, also read the *Mystical City* for himself, and wrote these 28 articles, no doubt out of a

evident that no mortal man, however learned, could naturally have suggested and provided the Venerable Mother with such elevated and sublime notions, one must morally believe and remain convinced that this great Servant of God wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and under the assistance of the most holy Virgin, so all may recognize and confess that the arm of divine omnipotence alone worked in this strong Woman.¹⁷³ This conclusion is further confirmed by the spotless life this Servant of God always led, by the profound humility¹⁷⁴ that constantly governed all her actions, by the sublimity of her mind, by the solidity of her perfection, by all the virtues she practiced in a heroic degree, by the miraculous circumstances of her happy death, and finally by the reputation of her sanctity so constant and so widespread; all reasons that facilitated her obtaining the title and honors of Venerable on the part of the Holy See, with the hope of arriving, in time, at canonization.¹⁷⁵

sense of piety, justice and *reparation* to the most holy Mother of God for the impious insult offered Her, and the ensuing damage caused by the heretical faction of the Sorbonne, the foul odors of which still waft about in our day. [Ed.]

¹⁷³ cf. Prov. 31:10ff. This is quite exalted praise coming from such a learned and pious Cardinal. [Ed.]

¹⁷⁴ *Humility* is the key which unlocks the floodgates of grace, understanding and devotion contained in the *Mystical City*. The great miracle worker of the last century, Fr. Solanus Casey, who *prayed* the book on his knees daily for 53 years, once said that one needs humility and devotion to Mary (that is, *True Devotion*) in order to truly appreciate this book. [Ed.]

¹⁷⁵ It is very important to understand that the Magisterium undertook the study of the *Mystical City* to see if there were errors in faith and morals which would hinder or preclude the beatification and canonization of Ven. Mary of Agreda. After decades of intermittent scrutiny, Benedict XIII issued a decree on

8. “Nevertheless, I did not think it appropriate to the union and perfect understanding which, since the peace treaty so gloriously sealed, has existed between the two nations of France and Spain, that I should take any step in this court (of Rome) on the project in question, if the obstacle which has arisen as a result of the exceedingly harsh censure that the distinguished University of Sorbonne had brought against the first Book of the Servant of God was not first removed.

9. “I have always made it a point of honor, in my speeches as well as in my writings, to praise this most famous University which has given to the world so many famous authors, to this most flourishing kingdom so many worthy prelates, and to the Church of God such zealous defenders. It was for me, I confess, a cause of joy in learning of the censure to learn at the same time the complete irregularity with which it had been fulminated, and that a small number of doctors, urged even by the opposite party, had contributed to this work by joining a cabal rather than out of ill will and adherence to those who had formed a perverse design against the aforementioned books. Indeed, it could not have occurred to me that so many prelates, so

March 21, 1729 stating the Cause would proceed and *the book itself could be read and re-read without hesitation throughout the world* (cf. Art. 12, ¶ 9). The fact that Ven. Mary of Ágreda has not been beatified and canonized *has nothing to do* with the *Mystical City*, but with the fact that according to a decree of Urban VIII all the writings of a candidate for beatification must be studied, and it was (and is) not known which of her other writings are still extant. My personal belief is that the real reason she has not been canonized is this: God gave her the choice to be canonized or not, and she declined in order not to draw any attention or devotion away from Our Lady and the Life and History which She has given the Church through her. *She must increase, and I must decrease.* [Ed.]

versed in all branches of science, equally famous by their piety, and who are the epitome of the Sorbonne, could have overlooked the fact that the aforementioned books, before being released to the public, were for fourteen entire years the object of the most rigorous examination that has ever been seen on the part of the supreme Inquisition of Spain, and that after the most exact discussion they were approved by the most distinguished and learned subjects of this kingdom; and this to such an extent that if one wanted to maintain that the censure of the Sorbonne is well-founded, one might as well stigmatize and charge as ignorant all those learned men, skilled in all the sciences, deeply versed in mystical and scholastic theology, and no less distinguished for their piety, whom the supreme Inquisition utilized in the examination of the aforementioned books, and who, after prolonged study and deliberation, unanimously agreed to approve¹⁷⁶ them.

10. "I recall that when the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome censured the aforementioned books and forbade their reading, Innocent XI, of holy memory, having understood the dangerous consequences that could result from such a prohibition, and considering the fervent respect with which all the kingdoms of Spain and the royal persons considered and venerated the aforementioned books, as soon as Their Catholic Majesties, and especially Queen Marie-Louise de Bourbon, Your Majesty's most worthy niece, made their first representations to him, His Holiness

¹⁷⁶ The word used is *approuver*, *approve*. In saying the *Mystical City* is *approved* by the Magisterium for reading by the faithful, one must not confuse *approve* with *recommend*; this is an important distinction to make. [Ed.]

suspended the prohibition by means of a special Brief from the Congregation, stating that it could not be enforced until the Holy See issued a new declaration. Now, if a pontiff so zealous for justice, in order to comply with the urgings of the Princes, and also for the consolation and repose of these kingdoms, believed that he had to revoke a decree of the Congregation of the Cardinals of the Holy Office, a Congregation which has always enjoyed such great authority throughout the Christian world, against all previous custom and form: How much more reasonable and worthy of the applause of all nations is it that the Sorbonne, after having examined with greater maturity the said censure, which it should have rejected and not recognized as its own, on so many grounds, because of the unfortunate circumstances in which it was undertaken, continued and published; after having, I say, reflected on the considerable harm that this act may cause to the Spanish nation, take the resolution to annul it in the presence of such urgent motives, and to remove an obstacle that could delay in this Court of Rome the advancement of the cause of the Servant of God.

11. "And if the Sorbonne did not consider these reasons sufficient, it seems to me that one could appeal to major reasons drawn from the political point of view. It is known to everyone that the encouragement of this great Servant of God was the unique principle and motivator which prompted and inspired Philip IV, of glorious memory, notwithstanding the many difficulties he encountered, to conclude the marriage of the most serene *infanta* Maria Theresa, his daughter, with Your Royal Majesty, a marriage from which resulted so many advantages, not only by the birth of the most serene Dauphin and the three royal princes, upon whom rests the hope of Europe and the security of the royal

succession in France, but from which may still result other advantages easy to conceive according to the circumstances of the times. Heaven seems to be preparing the happy events that the true friends of general tranquility already foresee.

12. "Things being therefore in this state, it seems to me that, in the present situation, Your Majesty must not allow the Spanish nation to receive such an affront in the above-mentioned cause, nor that the wishes of Their Catholic Majesties, who have so much desired and still so ardently desire its happy success, should be dishonored by it. This is what gives me the boldness to present to Your Royal Majesty my most humble supplications, in order to obtain from You that, for the reasons stated above, You deign to give orders to the Sorbonne, so after having examined the matter more closely, it may annul the censure which it has rendered. By doing this Your Royal Majesty will imitate the example of the Emperor Constantine who, on learning of the hasty condemnation of Saint Athanasius by the bishops gathered at the Council of Tyre, complained to them in these terms: 'I do not know what is meant by these things which you have dealt with in such a tumultuous manner at your Council. It seems to me that the truth has been oppressed by audacity. Divine Providence will know how to dissipate the evils which have been the manifest result of partisanship; it will give us to see if in this gathering you have taken some interest in the truth, and if, in your judgment, you have proceeded without partiality. Therefore I recommend you all to come before me, and give an accurate account of your conduct.'

13. "It will be in this manner, I hope, but with language more gentle and worthy of his royal greatness, that Your Majesty will deign to insinuate his intentions

to this illustrious University; and the latter cannot fail to condescend to such a just representation, from which will follow the happy event of which Your Majesty will have all the glory, and which will procure for all the subjects of the King my master the honor of recognizing themselves indebted to the greatness of Your Majesty, whose hands I most humbly kiss."

- Rome, July 17, 1698.

14. This document of such high interest portrays d'Aguirre in his entirety. It reveals both the Spanish subject and the friend of France, the candid and modest scholar perhaps more than the skilful diplomat. The reader will see there with interest the proof of the assertion which he read at the head of this work, regarding the pro-French influences of Mary of Ágreda on Philip IV. The Cardinal does not fear to remind Louis XIV that it was to the Servant of God that he was indebted for his marriage to Maria Theresa of Austria, and soon, by a necessary, albeit belated, consequence of the will of Charles II, which would call the house of France to collect the rich succession of the kings of Spain. Such titles, it seems, recommended the memory of Mary of Ágreda to France; yet far from it, she received from us little more than contempt. Almost all our books printed since 1696 contain a chorus of diatribes and contemptuous epithets¹⁷⁷ copied from one another, such that it may have taken some courage to dare to raise a name so denounced in this country. May the heroic Servant of God forgive from heaven those who insult her, for they know not what they do, and may she still preserve for France something of the affection she cherished for it when, as a poor unknown nun, she lived, prophesied and died in one of the most

¹⁷⁷ which, one might say, re-echo into our own time... [Ed.]

obscure¹⁷⁸ convents in one of the most humble villages of Spain!

15. No doubt there is no need to add here that the entreaties of d’Aguirre for the revocation of the unjust Sorbonne censure did not succeed with Louis XIV any more than those of the nuncio Delfini had succeeded in stopping the conspiracy of which it was the result. The Prince was guided at that time, in religious questions, by the influences of Noailles, and Noailles was governed by Bossuet. It was the end of the 17th century. A few years later Philip V, on the throne of Spain, accepted with the crown the patronage of the Sister to the Holy See. In France, doctor Hideux triumphed, with his worthy acolyte Baillet; the impetus given continued, and was soon to annihilate even in the liturgy the age-old forms of the veneration of the Mother of God.

16. The reader will have noticed in the letter of d’Aguirre the judgment of such a learned man on the doctrinal value of the *Mystical City*. I will not stop to comment on it. We remember that according to Bossuet this book is an *impious impertinence*; according to d’Aguirre, its orthodoxy is complete, and its depth beyond human genius. It must be recognized here, as with the Declaration of 1682, that a deep disagreement sometimes divided these two great men. May we at least be allowed to conclude that the *impious impertinence* of the book of Mary of Ágreda is not obvious, and let us continue to read it, since the Church has permitted its circulation and use.

¹⁷⁸Self-effacement is one of the great hallmarks of a true instrument through which private revelation is given. Such souls desire to be known *only insofar as* God can be served and glorified thereby. [Ed.]

Article 25: September 18, 1859

The letters of Cardinal d'Aguirre to Cardinal de Noailles and to Bossuet. The importance and the audacity of the Jansenist faction of the Sorbonne. The Case of Conscience. The Bull *Unigenitus*. Intervention of the royal authority. The Jansenist and Gallican attacks against the Roman liturgy and Marian devotion. The new edition of the *Mystical City* in Augsburg. The faculty of Louvain and the *Mystical City*. The role of Lenglet.

1. [Cardinal] d'Aguirre did not limit himself to writing to Louis XIV the urgent letter we have reproduced in the preceding article; the desire he felt to see the Sorbonne itself restored to its freedom, and annul the Censure which was spreading everywhere under its name, led the learned Cardinal to undertake other steps. He was not unaware of the part Bossuet and Noailles had taken in the affair, and of the credibility they enjoyed. He therefore resolved, after having waited more than a year for the result of his letter to the King, without obtaining anything, to direct his requests to the two prelates. d'Aguirre wanted to clear the honor of Mary of Ágreda, and at the same time to render a good service to the court of Madrid; but he was not a diplomat, and adopted in his negotiation with the two French bishops a mode of intervention which proved his good will rather than his discernment. His letters to Bossuet and Noailles are dated August 4, 1699; in them he courageously confesses his esteem for the *Mystical City*. But in order to obtain the abolition of the Censure, he no longer relies, as he had done in his letter to the King, on the irregularities with which this act was tainted; he blames everything on the French translator who, according to him, had constantly altered the

meaning of the propositions of the Sister, thereby rendering them worthy of censure. One can imagine it would have been difficult, in a letter to Bossuet, the instigator of the Censure, to attack it from the point of view of the loyalty of those who had written it; but as Benedict XIV remarked in the Brief we referred to earlier, d’Aguirre was risking a great deal by wishing to maintain that the translation of Fr. Croset was just a tapestry of misinterpretations. This defense was acceptable, at most, for only one of the erroneous propositions; however, the Spanish language was known well enough that it was easy to see that the French translator, if he had not rendered all the beauties of the original, had nevertheless known how to express the literal meaning quite consistently. It is evident that, in his desire to obtain justice for a book unjustly despised, and also to correspond to the ardent desires of Spain, d’Aguirre was mistaken about the means to be used, and that his well-known candor had led him into an illusion. Moreover, this was the last step he took in favor of the *Mystical City*, for he died on August 11, 1699, a week after having written or dictated the two letters in question.

2. It is easy to understand that these last steps of the Cardinal remained as ineffective as the first. The censure of Mary of Ágreda remained in the collection of the decisions of the Sorbonne; but it must also be said that this act did not bring fortune to the Faculty. The Jansenist faction it contained within it became more close-knit and more audacious. It tested its strength in 1700 by condemning several propositions taken from the *Memoirs of China*, and again succeeded in dragging the majority of the doctors along with it by using outside influences. This little-known episode deserves a separate history; but the *Case of Conscience*

showed even more clearly what havoc evil doctrines had wrought in this famous University. In 1702, forty doctors joined together to sign a practical decision by which they recognized that a *respectful silence*, without conviction, was sufficient with regard to the Apostolic Constitutions on the subject of Jansenius. This was a new outbreak of the war that had been thought to have been ended for forty years by the peace of Clement IX. The scandal rose to a climax, and it was clear that among the forty signatories were doctor Hideux and the other perpetrators of the censure of Mary of Ágreda. It was by attacking the veneration of the Blessed Virgin that these men had become so emboldened as to declare a new war against the Church that would last for nearly a century and lead to the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*.¹⁷⁹ In order not to be misunderstood, the *Case of Conscience*, which supposes a clergyman consulting the Sorbonne on the orthodoxy of his ideas in matters of religion, contained two articles in which the allusion was obvious. We read there, in the glossy style of the

¹⁷⁹ Here the author is clearly stating the heretical doctrines and actions of this small, wretched cabal in the Sorbonne played a *causative* role in fulminating the French Revolution, a revolution which gained its ultimate triumph at Vatican II. Yes, the initial fire which ignited the conflagration of rebellion we see today was started by the *heretical cabal in the Sorbonne in 1696*. This is strong corroboration of what I have long believed: The rejection, and even contempt, of the Life and History of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and its concomitant lessening of devotion to Her, had a significant role in the universal cataclysm which has befallen our beloved Church, for only Our Lady could have obtained from her divine Son the mitigation or even cancellation of this great chastisement, so detrimental to souls. *It is to make reparation to Her, and to help bring about her triumph, that I have dedicated both my New English Edition and the publication of these Articles.* [Ed.]

Monita salutaria, these two articles: “6° He does not believe that devotion to the saints, and especially to the Blessed Virgin, consists in all the vain wishes and frivolous practices that we see in certain authors. 7° In truth, he does not believe in the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin; but he is careful not to say anything against the opinion opposed to his own.”

3. Thus, by approving the sentiments set forth in the so-called *Case of Conscience*, which had been written by Petitpied, one of the members of the cabal of 1696, the forty doctors indirectly violated the oath they had taken to support and defend the Immaculate Conception, and showed in broad daylight the link which united the vast system of the Jansenist heresy. The article on the *Case of Conscience*, in which the infallibility of the Church on dogmatic matters was contested, was particularly disturbing; but at the distance we are from the events, it is easy for us to recognize the similarities of doctrine. The authorities intervened to suppress this audacious attempt. Not only did Clement XI condemn the *Case of Conscience*; but all forty doctors, except two, successively retracted their signatures. Bossuet saw that the time had come for him to abandon the lenient attitude he had adopted towards the most dangerous of the sects; he then began a great work to vindicate the authority of the Church, compromised by the Sorbonne faction, but death stopped this work, worthy of such a great doctor. Happy if, more resolute and foresighted, he had devoted to the defense of the truths which Jansenism was striving to obscure, the vigils he devoted for so many long years to the sterile and wretched Defense of the Declaration of 1682!

4. However, the evil continued to spread within the Faculty. The old doctors who had been so faithful to the

ancient traditions disappeared one after the other, and the Faculty remained in the power of the faction. The Bull *Unigenitus*, the rule of the Catholic faith, having been published in 1714 by the assembly of the clergy, the Sorbonne received the order from the King to insert this solemn judgment of the Holy See in its registers. The Faculty resisted, and it took a new order to obtain the requested insertion. The death of Louis XIV, which took place the following year, allowed the doctors to show their audacity in broad daylight. The syndic Ravechet led the majority of his group into revolt, and on January 4, 1716, the Faculty, in which a victorious faction had succeeded in having the innocent doctrines of the *Mystical City* condemned as heretical, consummated a formal act of heresy twenty years later by having a doctrinal judgment of the universal Church struck out of its registers. The minority of doctors who dared to resist were then deprived of attending the sessions of the Faculty. The violent enemy of Mary of Ágreda, doctor Hideux, presented to Cardinal de Noailles an address signed by thirty parish priests of Paris, who proclaimed this doctor to be their dean, and in which they loudly protested their resistance to the dogmatic decision which condemned the doctrines of the book by Quesnel.

5. In 1720, when the royal authority intervened, as was its duty, to put an end to such scandals within the prime faculty of theology in the kingdom by expelling the principal leaders, the disorders gradually ceased, and orthodoxy regarding matters of grace was finally re-established in this famous school. Few people asked themselves what had been the principle of such a frightening revolution, which had shown heresy triumphant even where it should have met its most constant adversaries; by what influences it had accepted

the yoke of a faction which breathed only contempt and hatred of Rome; and finally, on what occasion its disdain for ancient piety toward the Mother of God had appeared in broad daylight. The important dogmas which Jansenism sought to undermine attracted the full attention of the orthodox more directly, and the vast extent of the system of the sect too often escaped their notice. The articles of the famous *Case of Conscience* which received the least attention were those relating to the Blessed Virgin; and yet it was obvious, and everyone understands it today, that the forty doctors who had signed it had wanted, by means of these articles, to link the censure of the *Mystical City* to the solemn act of Jansenism which they were accomplishing by signing the *Case of Conscience*. But the revolution had already taken place in French piety. The *Monita salutaria*, sponsored by a bishop as respected as Gilbert de Choiseul; the book of Baillet condemned in Rome and rehabilitated in Paris; the alteration of the Liturgy in the Breviary of Harlay with regard to the veneration of the Mother of God; so many more or less learned books in which the most venerated traditions of Catholic piety were beaten to a pulp; and finally, the sad fate which the book of the Sister of Ágreda had experienced, a book whose sale was prevented by the police at the same time as the Sorbonne was supposed to imprint on it the most odious stigma: All these occurrences explain only too well the deviation which was then established. We have already seen how the fervent devotion to the divine mystery of the Incarnation, which had fructified the whole of the first part of the 17th century, had cooled in the second, and how the Cartesian system of the isolation of philosophy from theology had brought about the discredit and soon the abandonment of those

magnificent and luminous conceptions which the genius and faith of the scholastic doctors had produced by uniting them.

6. It was in the midst of this situation that Jansenism, which had been able to flourish in Paris during the long episcopate of Cardinal de Noailles, judged that the time had come to use the liturgy to strike a new blow at the piety of the faithful towards the Blessed Virgin by reducing her veneration to even narrower proportions than those left to her in the Harlay Breviary and Missal. We know that it was in 1736 that the new Parisian liturgy appeared. Its authors had taken no account of the previous books, in order to apply more widely their entire system of doctrine; and they themselves celebrated, in the *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques*, the importance of the triumph which they gained by the success of this skilful work. The new Breviary, under the pretext of avenging the rights of Christ, took away from the Mother of God the popular title of two of her principal feasts. On March 25 it was no longer the *Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin*, but the *Annunciation of the Lord*, *Annunciatio Dominica*; on February 2, the title of the feast read: *Presentation of the Lord and Purification of the Blessed Virgin*, as if the universal Church had lacked respect for Christ by not expressing his name in the name of this solemnity. Baillet thus triumphed after his death. The feast of the Conception was maintained on December 8, yet they dared to remove its Octave. The office of January 1, which until then had served almost exclusively to celebrate the Divine Maternity, lost the last traces of its ancient composition. Its magnificent antiphons, which date back to the fifth century, had been erased; those of the Assumption and the Nativity, handed down to us by the Antiphonary of St. Gregory, had been replaced by

others in which the name of Mary was not even pronounced. The lessons from St. John Damascene, which on the day of the Assumption proclaimed the resurrection of the Mother of God, were replaced by others which did not mention her at all. The *Ave maris stella* was banished from the office of Vespers on all feasts of the Blessed Virgin; it was relegated to the Little Office, which was not usually sung before the people; even so this hymn had been so disgracefully distorted by the most malicious alterations, to such an extent that it was necessary to restore the ancient lesson by means of an insert. It seemed as if the authors of the new Breviary were trying to fulfill the wish of that doctor of the Sorbonne whom we heard declare, in the discussions on the *Mystical City*, that there was no need, after all, to give the Blessed Virgin any other titles than those found verbatim in the Gospel. The sense of the grandeurs of Mary could not fail to diminish in France when, in most dioceses, liturgical innovation spread and came to disaccustom the faithful of so many usages and formulas which the centuries had dedicated to the veneration of the Mother of God, and which were maintained in the rest of the Church. In return, how much must we thank the divine goodness which deigns to restore to us in these days the venerable forms of the piety of our fathers, the true liturgy which proceeds from authority, antiquity and universality, and which carries with it light and life!

7. Let us return to the history of the book to which we have devoted this long study which is now drawing to a close. On the eve of the day when the Sorbonne, which had wanted to stigmatize the *Mystical City*, was preparing to desolate the Church by the saddest and most shameful defection, the book obtained an authentic testimony of esteem and admiration within

another University, whose decisions had long captured the interest of the theological world. In 1715 a new edition of the *Mystical City* was to be published in Augsburg, and in order to do so with greater certainty it was decided to obtain the approval of the University of Louvain. Two doctors and professors were commissioned to give a reasoned opinion on the work; they were Herman Damen, president of the Arras College and censor of books, and Antoine Parmentier, president of the Great College of Theologians. It should be noted that they wrote eighteen years after the censure of the Sorbonne, and that nothing obliged them to give such a lengthy reasoned opinion; hence they had the express intention of responding to the unjust attacks of which the book was subjected, and of defying human respect¹⁸⁰ on a question where it exercised its empire so widely. Here is the text of this important approval:

8. “Salutary regulations founded in reason warn against new revelations; yet at the same time we are obliged to recognize that, even in these last times, God is at liberty to produce them; for his arm is not shortened. However, such revelations cannot be considered infallible and coming from God, unless our holy mother the Church proposes them to us to believe in this way; for God has willed that our faith in the Gospels themselves should be based on the proposal made to us by the true Church concerning them.

9. “But while waiting for the Church to approve or reject those presented to us under the title of the *Mystical City of God*, after a serious and attentive

¹⁸⁰ It is a certain concession to human respect to tiptoe ever so delicately around the titles, “dignity”, and respect demanded by those who themselves trampled on the honor and respect due to the sacrosanct Virgin Mother of God. [Ed.]

reading of this work, we declare that, according to our opinion, the faithful can read it without any danger to the integrity of the Faith, nor to the purity of morals, and that nothing will be found in it which tends to laxity, nor which leads to indiscreet rigor. On the contrary, we think this book will be very useful in increasing the piety of the faithful, the veneration of the Blessed Mother of God, and the respect due to the Mysteries of our holy Faith. The strong and the weak, the learned and the ignorant, will be able to gather happy fruits from its reading; for everything that is most sublime which theology teaches is treated therein with so much ease, and expressed in a way so new, so simple, and so clear, that we can say that only sound judgment is needed to arrive by the reading of this work at the understanding of the highest mysteries. Furthermore, this simplicity is accompanied by so many reasons, such luminous proofs, that one would scarcely find anything similar elsewhere. More than a thousand texts of Holy Scriptures are explained in an equally natural and sublime way. We encounter throughout the work beauties unknown until today, and which, hidden under the letter, are found developed, and are thus brought to light. In short, it is nothing more than a fabric of the words and sentences of the Holy Books, but so happily woven, that although these words and sentences belong to the various Books of Scripture, it seems they were prepared to be united in this book,¹⁸¹ and to serve the use that the Venerable Mother of Ágreda makes of them.

10. “The instructions which the Blessed Queen of Heaven gives at the end of each chapter contain the

¹⁸¹ An imaged comparison could be made here: It is as if Ven. Mary has woven a *seamless tunic* of Scripture verses. [Ed.]

most refined moral doctrine; while instructing the reader, they persuade him and lead him, by a gentle force, to the love of virtue and hatred of vice, which are portrayed in the most vivid colors; and not only do they contain the spirit, but they are filled with a singular unction which inflames the souls with a sacred fire.¹⁸² In meditating on them, one experiences a special grace not found in the reading of ordinary books; the more one reads this one, the more one encounters taste and pleasure in it.¹⁸³ Indeed, such is the attraction that this book carries in itself, that someone who has once begun to read it finds it difficult to stop.¹⁸⁴

11. “The novelty and diversity of the subjects which are there pressed together entirely seize the reader, yet in a pleasant way, so no fatigue is felt. He remains convinced that if the hidden life and actions of Christ and his holy Mother have not been known until now under the features by which they are described in the book, not only could they have been such, but it is even appropriate if they were as there described. Everything in this work is worthy of the divine majesty and of the abasements to which it subjected itself; everything corresponds perfectly to the holiness of the most pure Virgin, and to the dignity of the Mother of God, such

¹⁸² This is *precisely* what devotees of the book experience, yet cannot find words to express it to others. If one desires to be enkindled with this sacred ardor, no doubt produced by the Holy Ghost, pleased with the devotion shown to his Spouse, then one must read the book with humility and devotion. And as with all spiritual reading, we should pray beforehand for the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Ghost; for example, by praying the *Come, Holy Ghost* before spiritual reading. [Ed.]

¹⁸³ *O taste, and see that the Lord is sweet.* (Ps. 33:9) [Ed.]

¹⁸⁴ *Draw me: we will run after thee to the odor of thy ointments.*
Cant. 1:3 [Ed.]

that we can find nothing there that is not in perfect harmony.”

12. “Nevertheless, we are not surprised that this work has encountered opponents who have criticized it and treated it severely. What book appears today that is not subjected to the critical spirit of the time in which we live? Has not God himself allowed the sacred books which contain his divine word to be attacked by the learned of this century? The pagan philosophers called them insane, just as the crucified Christ himself was labeled, and the audacious children of this world do the same today. We even grant that this book contains some passages about which difficulties can easily be raised. There are some that have embarrassed us and still do.¹⁸⁵

13. “Yet when we consider what we have just said about the beauty and usefulness of the work, we think these few places should not prevent us from giving it the praise it deserves, especially since we ourselves can be mistaken. This approach seems to us all the more reasonable since in this work everything leads us to believe there is something more than human. We could not without levity attribute to vain imagination a book so exquisite, so sublime, and so consistent. It is impossible to be persuaded that an impostor could have conducted a work of such scope, in which the author walks with equal step through so many of the most difficult and disparate matters, without ever straying or

¹⁸⁵ Having studied the book for over 40 years, and having studied anatomy and embryology in medical school, I find her descriptions and terms to be discreet (never graphic), yet precisely suited to explain the admixture of nature and grace in such mysteries as the Immaculate Conception, Nativity of Our Lady, the Incarnation, and the virgin birth of Christ. By divine faith we know these *did* happen; this book wonderfully and discreetly describes *how*. [Ed.]

contradicting herself, though she enters into innumerable details of facts and circumstances."

14. "One encounters in this divine history things so elevated, so apt to delight the heart, so perfectly linked, that we could well understand it could only be a work of genius. On the other hand, one cannot attribute to the devil a work which, beginning to end, breathes and inspires only humility,¹⁸⁶ patience, and love of suffering; and since it has been demonstrated that the Venerable Mother who transcribed this book is at the same time its author, so it is impossible that she composed it without particular help from God. We therefore conclude, from the point of view of the public good, that it is fitting that the *Mystical City of God* should be made publicly available,¹⁸⁷ because of the immense usefulness which must result from it.

15. "This is our opinion and our critique, which we submit entirely to the supreme judgment of the Apostolic See,¹⁸⁸ which alone has the right to pronounce on such matters. Louvain, July 20, 1715.

16. As we can see, the calm and dignified tone which reigns in this piece, which we have faithfully translated

¹⁸⁶ Perhaps the real treasure of this book is how it reveals the *humility* of Christ and his most holy Mother; I think of this book as the *Mystery of Humility*. This is, perhaps, the reason why Dom Guéranger calls the book *a certain trial for those who are wise in their own eyes* (Art. 5, ¶ 13), and why certain otherwise learned persons will not read it; it exposes one's *pride* (and prejudice), and as it were demands amendment by humility if true spiritual fruit is to be drawn from its reading. And regarding this requisite humility, it could be said succinctly: Many won't read it *because they haven't read it.* [Ed.]

¹⁸⁷ literally *voie le jour* [Ed.]

¹⁸⁸ Note the Catholic submission to the Apostolic See, as opposed to the insolence of the heretics who refused obedience. [Ed.]

from the Latin,¹⁸⁹ is a far cry from the violent invectives of the doctors of the Sorbonne; and if we join this reasoned testimony of the University of Louvain to those of the Faculty of Theology of Toulouse and the University of Salamanca, we cannot help but conclude that the *Mystical City*, so dear to the learned Cardinal d’Aguirre, has gathered around itself a large enough number of theologians not to fear the passionate attacks of a few others. It remains for me to speak of doctor Amort and the books he wrote in the last century against the work of Mary of Ágreda; this will be the subject of the following article. I will end this one by mentioning two opponents of very different merit who spoke of the book with as much contempt as confidence around the same time. One is Lenglet du Fresnoy, a somewhat equivocal personage as we know, who in his *Traité historique sur les Apparitions*, published in 1751, reprinted the 1696 pamphlet entitled: *Lettre à MM. les doyen, syndic et docteurs en théologie de la Faculté de Paris*, of which he admitted being the author. Lenglet follows with a *Mémoire* which he published at the same time against a printed *Lettre* of Fr. Clonseil which was a reply to his own, and which was soon censured by the Sorbonne; and he also acknowledges himself to be the author of a letter in Latin, dated June 30, 1697, and addressed to Father Matthieu, prior of the Discalced Carmelites of Madrid, on the *Mystical City*.

17. In his *Traité sur les Apparitions*, Lenglet claims that it was he who first had the idea of a Sorbonne censure against Mary of Ágreda, and that he conducted

¹⁸⁹ It is safe to assume he took this Louvain approval from the dossier of the *Cause* which has formed the basis of these Articles. [Ed.]

the whole affair. He was born in 1674, and was not even twenty-five years old in 1696; his assertion must therefore seem a little suspect, unless it is to be understood of the intrigues within the Faculty which preceded the open attack against the book; for it is well known, according to everything we have said cited from official documents, that influences far more serious than those of Lenglet were exerted to bring about the deplorable result which we have related. We must therefore reduce the role of the young doctor to what it really was by simply recognizing that his restless and turbulent character, which later led him into an existence so inconsistent with his state and so sadly ended, may have led him to take certain steps which prepared the cabal, deaf at first, bolder later, which we soon saw soliciting from eminent persons the support it lacked, and without which it could have done nothing. In any case, we must admit that the zeal of Lenglet for Baillet and his doctrines did not set his life on a path very reassuring for his salvation. The other character is the famous Muratori. One knows enough what prejudices this erudite but not very theological man nourished in himself about certain Catholic beliefs, and particularly about the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin. Benedict XIV, in his brief to the Grand Inquisitor of Spain, speaking of the writings of Muratori, expresses himself thus: "How many things worthy of censure are contained in these books! How many examples of this kind we ourselves have encountered while reading them! *O! quam multa in eis reperiuntur censura digna! Quot hujusce furfuris nos ipsi eos legentes offendimus!*" We can thus appreciate the services rendered to historical science by the learned librarian of Modena, without believing ourselves obliged to share the prejudices he sought to

spread on certain religious matters, sometimes under the pseudonym of Lamindus Printanius, sometimes under that of Antonius Lampridius. A mask may disguise the error, but it never embellishes it.

Article 26: October 9, 1859

The judgment of approbation of the University of Louvain. The role of Benedict XIV. Fr. Amort fights to the death against the *Mystical City*. The response of Father Gonzalez Matheo. The Brief of Benedict XIV. New attack by Amort and new reply by Father Gonzalez. Amort truly indefatigable. The criticism of Father Sedlmayr. The decree of Clement XIV. The new French edition of the *Mystical City*.

1. The judgment of approbation given to the *Mystical City* by the University of Louvain in 1715 gave us an insight into the 18th century. This period offers in its turn several interesting facts which it is appropriate to note. We have already mentioned the congregations instituted by the Popes for the examination of the book. Clement XI, upon his accession, confirmed the one formed by Innocent XII. Benedict XIII created a new one at the request of Philip V. Finally, Benedict XIV had just ascended to the Holy See when a last and violent attack was suddenly declared against the work of Mary of Ágreda. This time the blow did not come from France; because of the censorship of 1696, the *Mystical City* was no longer known [in France]. It was more or less known that a Spanish nun had published in the previous century a Life of the Blessed Virgin filled with absurd and unseemly details, and that the Sorbonne at the time had done justice to it; but the book, which we know was forbidden, had become rare, and it was hardly spoken of except on the basis of the statements of others. It goes without saying that Spain remained faithful to the *Mystical City*; Belgium read the book in its translation, Italy in its own, and Catholic Germany also enjoyed the one it had produced early on. A Canon Regular of the abbey of Polling in Bavaria,

named Eusebius Amort, already known in the literary world for a few pieces of work whose number increased over the years, took an ardent zeal against the work of Mary of Ágreda and resolved to fight it.

2. At first he did so with some moderation in a special work which he published in Augsburg in 1744 under the title: *De Revelationibus, Visionibus et Apparitionibus privatis Regulæ tutæ*. In this book, which is curious like all the books by Amort, it is immediately clear that the author has set himself the goal of overthrowing the *Mystical City*, and that the rules he gathers and coordinates with varying degrees of success are directed against this work. One should not look in these two volumes in quarto for elevation of thought, nor for the traits of a lofty mind, since in all his accounts Amort is rather short-sighted. His ideas are common, yet he has a trait of tenacity of which he has often given proofs in his literary life, but nowhere so evident as in the controversy which occupies us at this moment. After having set out the rules for judging private revelations, according to the principal mystical authors, Amort goes into detail and examines a certain number of points which he draws from the revelations of St. Gertrude, St. Elizabeth of Schouaw, Bl. Angela of Foligno and Bl. Veronica of Binasco. From there he moves on to the *Mystical City*, of which he gives an analysis of 250 pages in which he brings out, from his point of view, the facts and the doctrine that this book is supposed to contain. This summary is quite interesting and must have cost the author a lot of time and work. It is followed by a severe assessment of the Sister's book from the point of view of historical criticism and theology. It would be impossible to give here an idea of this meticulous report in which the author, reducing to categories all the articles of doctrine which he contests,

pronounces most of the time without proofs, and with an assurance of which one would hardly find a comparable example.

3. What is astonishing in this bellicose demonstration is to see Amort, when he is brought to speak about the censure of Sorbonne, take the defense of Mary of Ágreda on the principal heads of the doctrine incriminated by the doctors of Paris. For example, he blames them for having censured the following propositions: "That God gave to Mary all that He could give to a creature; that all the favors of which Mary was the object, including the Divine Maternity, draw their origin from the Immaculate Conception; that Mary is the Mediatrix of Grace, the Reparatrix of men, the Coadjutrix of the Redeemer." After such concessions made to the doctrines of the *Mystical City*, one is surprised that the new critic shows himself to be so rigorous on an immense number of points which are far from having the same importance; it is however so, and one can say that his criticism extends to almost all the assertions contained in the work. If Amort had confined himself to discussing certain theses of history and chronology, and concluding against this or that of the views of the Sister, none of the enlightened readers of the *Mystical City* would have been inclined to find it bad; for it is recognized in principle, as we have established above, that private revelations are subject to contain some mixture of error as a result of human weakness, which does not always know how to discern the preconceived ideas which sometimes cast their shadow even in the midst of these fleeting illustrations with which God favors his chosen ones. But the learned Canon Regular is gracious about nothing; he posits his conclusions on a host of scientifically debatable points in history and chronology, and he does not admit that

even by means of a divine revelation his ideas could be reformed. Likewise on the theological doctrines of the *Mystical City*, he seems to be unaware of what the scholastic doctors have taught about the role of Mary in the divine plan of the Incarnation. Without doubt, no theologian has brought together in such a magnificent synthesis all the scattered rays of the incomparable glory of the Mother of God,¹⁹⁰ yet it must be said, and the discussions which the book by Amort brought about have shown this, one does not meet in the *Mystical City* a single assertion on the greatness and the mission of Mary which has not been supported, at least in origin, by some orthodox doctor, and often by the Fathers themselves and by the ecclesiastical writers of antiquity. The astonishment of Amort would have ceased if he had been more familiar with theological scholarship, which had already become rare in his time.

4. In any case, his book, published in 1744, was strongly attacked, as early as 1747, by Fr. Diego Gonzalez Matheo, a Franciscan of the Observance, who published in Madrid the defense of the *Mystical City* under the title of *Vindiciae Ágredanae*. At the same time a second defense appeared in Munich, composed by Fr. Landelin Mayr, another Franciscan, under the title *Valde probabilis et efficax præsumptio pro certitudine revelationum V. Mariae a Jesu de Agréda*. Both of these voluminous works fought hard against the assertions of Amort, and it cannot be denied that the answers they give to the Canon Regular are usually quite conclusive. Gonzalez and Mayr follow their adversary everywhere and do not spare him anything. One only regrets that these two men, more versed than Amort in scholastic theology, are notably inferior to him in historical

¹⁹⁰ He is speaking here of the *Mystical City of God*. [Ed.]

criticism and in the knowledge of natural sciences. Their works, worthy of serious attention, offer more than one weak side, so it is fair to acknowledge that the *Mystical City* was not then fully vindicated by these two authors.

5. The following year, on January 6, 1748, Benedict XIV addressed to the General of the Order of St. Francis the famous brief mentioned above, in which the Pontiff recounts all that had happened up to that time concerning the book of Mary of Ágreda. At the end he mentions the work of Amort and the reply of Gonzalez, and without taking sides with either of them, he announces that the examination of the attack and the defense will take place in the Congregation instituted to pronounce on the orthodoxy of the *Mystical City*. The news of this brief rekindled the ardor of Amort, and the year 1749 did not end without his having given to the public a new quarto, which he entitled rather brutally: *Controversia de Revelationibus Ágredanis explicata, cum epicrisi ad inoptas earum revelationum Vindicias editas a P. Didaco Gonzalez Matheo et a P. Landelino Mayr.* The book was printed in Augsburg. Amort had been fought vigorously and without literary consideration by his two adversaries; but it must be admitted that, in this last work, he left them far behind by the violence of his language, and let us speak plainly, the rudeness of the insults which he addressed to them. He went so far as to devote an entire chapter to collecting the grammatical errors Gonzalez had missed while writing his *Vindiciae Ágredanæ*. The book is dedicated to Benedict XIV, to whom Amort denounces his adversary, imploring upon him a condemnation. In sum, this new production of the Canon Regular contains nothing new; the Latin is free of grammatical errors, we must agree; but the arrogance and the self-

protection are everywhere, joined to a very Germanic naivety which too often turns to the preposterous. It is to be noticed in this book that Amort reverses his previous position by adopting the Censure of the Sorbonne against the *Mystical City*, doubtless forgetting that he had fought against it five years before, so violent was the crisis that had made him experience a contradiction which he certainly did not expect.

6. Gonzalez was not a man to let insults get him down. In 1751 he was able to publish a victorious answer to Amort's attacks. It was in folio and bore this title: *Apodixis Ágredana pro mystica Civitate Dei technas detegens Eusebianas*. In this work, Gonzalez maintains infinitely more dignity than his adversary; but it is necessary to admit that it strains him. More than eighty passages of the *Mystical City*, distorted by Amort, are restored in their true terms and their true sense, which contributes much to overthrow the scaffolding of reasons that Amort had raised against the work. Gonzalez asked the latter to account for the lengths he had gone to in reproducing in full the *Animadversiones* of the Promoter of the faith on the book of the Sister without giving the answers, so precise and so learned, which the advocates of the Cause provided, and he repairs this all too significant omission. On questions of historical criticism and natural science, we see that the Franciscan has put himself in a position to provide his opponent with more solid replies, and this part of his *Apodixis* is of special interest. The excursions into the field of theology are generally successful; the questions are constantly brought back to the most precise terms, and the serious reader ends up congratulating himself for having followed a controversy, too lively it must be admitted, but whose results offer so many advantages.

7. As Gonzalez was giving his last word on the *Mystical City*, the indefatigable Amort was launching a new work against Mary of Ágreda. This book, written in the same tone as the previous ones, was entitled: *Nova Demonstratio de falsitate revelationum Ágredaniarum, cum parallelo inter pseudo-Evangelia et easdem revelationes* (Augsburg, 1751, in-quarto). Amort had believed to draw a great advantage from the connection which certain passages of the *Mystical City* present with some particulars which are related in the apocryphal Gospels. This system of argumentation is not reliable. As we noted above, it would first have to be proved that these false gospels, most of which were written in the first century of the Christian era, contain absolutely nothing but fables, and this is what will never be demonstrated. These books are not canonical, and they contain often absurd stories; but nothing authorizes the conclusion that they are all a tapestry of lies from one end to the other. This was how the hypercritics of the end of the 17th century reasoned, I agree, when they wanted to take away the names of Joachim and Anne from the parents of the Blessed Virgin, given that these names were transmitted by means of the apocryphal Gospels; but these learned men forgot to prove the main point of their argument. Amort did not think of this either; his book can therefore be dismissed out of hand until it is shown that everything in these documents of such great antiquity is false, and no one will ever do that. It would be difficult to explain how these accounts could have any credibility whatsoever, however limited, if they were not linked in some way to the life and actions of our Lord and his holy Mother. In any case, this was the last writing that Amort published on the *Mystical City*. Should we attribute this cessation of struggle to

weariness, to the effect produced on him by the solid reply of Gonzalez, or to some higher injunction? It is difficult to know today; I would rather believe that certain measures taken by the authorities regarding his intemperate polemic could have played a part in his silence. It is certain that his boldness had ended up scandalizing Catholic Germany, especially when one had seen him allow himself to be led to the point of undermining the belief in the Immaculate Conception by means of attempting to reduce the prerogatives of the Mother of God, with the aim of better refuting, he thought, the imaginations of the Sister of Ágreda. The enlightenment was given on this so delicate point by Father Sedl-Mayz, a German Benedictine, in a criticism which he published on another work of Amort entitled *Idea divini amoris*. At the same time, on December 12, 1749, we find a letter from Maximilian-Joseph, Duke of Bavaria, addressed to the provost of Polling, in which the prince complains strongly about the scandal caused to the faithful of his states by the irresponsibility of Fr. Amort concerning the belief in the Immaculate Conception, and enjoins the provost to prevent from now on this religious from publishing anything on these matters. However, this forbidding of the sovereign did not stop Amort in the publication of which we have just spoken, and which was published in 1751; but it should also be noticed that this author, entirely devoted to the confrontation of the *Mystical City* with the apocryphal Gospels, does not have the occasion to return to the theses which he had treated in his preceding writings, and which had caused some sorrow to the Catholics in his country.

8. As we move into the 18th century we no longer encounter anything outside of Rome on the subject of the *Mystical City*. Under Benedict XIV, the

Congregation formed by the Pontiff for the examination of the book was halted, along with the Pontiff himself, by the uncertainty which still reigned on the true author of the work. The original manuscript had not yet been produced, and the comparison of the handwriting and style of the Sister had not yet been made. I have described above how the question was finally settled juridically, under Clement XIV, by an Apostolic decree declaring, after all the necessary comparisons and expert opinions, that the *Mystical City* of God is truly and authentically the work of the venerable Sister Mary of Jesus, abbess of the monastery of the Immaculate Conception of Ágreda.

9. After this decree, which was issued in 1771, I find no more facts relating to the *Mystical City* until the publication, in Paris, of the new edition which gave rise to these articles. The end of the 18th century was hardly the time when a mystical work could be glorified, and the spirit of naturalism which triumphed in the first half of the present century left little hope that one would in our day hear good things about a book which Bossuet and the Sorbonne had condemned in 1696. The best Catholics of France, and among them more than one theologian, lived and died without having even heard the name of Mary of Ágreda. Yet at the present time, just as we must expect all kinds of chastisements,¹⁹¹ so

¹⁹¹ *de même que nous devons nous attendre à tous les fléaux.* This is a rather cryptic, yet ominous, statement. Having already linked the horrid and scandalous 1696 Sorbonne censure with the calamity of the French Revolution, he is here speaking of further chastisements. The timing is interesting: The Secrets of Melanie and Maximin given to them by Our Lady of La Salette (1846) had been delivered to Pius IX in 1851; they speak of a universal chastisement of the Church in 1864, including the famous

we must recognize that the goodness of God is felt through the most unexpected visits. The definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception marked a point of demarcation in the middle of this century which will not be erased. Twenty-five years ago I was in a position to write this long series of articles on Mary of Ágreda; I refrained from doing so. Today, if one may judge from the many letters of encouragement I have received, even from abroad, this subject has found a public that is interested in it. This is a consoling indicator, and a proof that many prejudices have

prophecy *Rome will fall and become the seat of the Antichrist*. Yet this chastisement was delayed 100 years or so, occurring with the usurpation of the Papacy in 1958, Vatican II, and the invalid *New Mass* and Sacraments. But what caused the 100-year delay? It seems to me it was the definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, which Pius IX may well have done not only for the honor of Our Lady, but to obtain from Her the prevention (or at least postponement) of the prophesied 1864 chastisement. This succeeded; yet when a later Pope failed to consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart as She requested at Fatima, and not enough Catholics amended their lives, the prophesied cataclysm fell upon the Church. Having studied the history of the censure and prejudice against the Life and History of Our Lady, this statement of Dom Guéranger confirms what I firmly believe: Disdain for the private revelations in this, *Our Lady's own book*, and the concomitant indifference, prejudice, and even contempt (sadly still present among so many today) for this Life and History in which Our Lady is honored and extolled in the most unequivocal terms, bear a direct link to the catastrophe we are experiencing today. It is my hope that publishing a *New English Edition*, and these Articles of Dom Guéranger, will aid in the sanctification of souls, and that many true Catholics, both laity and clergy, will read it for themselves in a spirit of devotion and *reparation* to Our Lady, so She can obtain from her divine Son a true Pope in order to end this chastisement of the Church and obtain salvation for countless souls. [Ed.]

fallen,¹⁹² and others are going away. God is doing his work despite all obstacles; and He is giving us much today, because without these extraordinary gifts Christianity would be in peril beyond its strength.¹⁹³ We need not fear too much, therefore, in these days when we have seen Mary, the *Holy City*, descending from heaven, showing herself to the earth in all the splendors of her original purity. Let nations be agitated, let states be shaken, let the earth, shaken to its foundations, send forth a plaintive roar; the rainbow is nonetheless there, motionless on the clouds, a pledge of hope for better days.

10. The new edition of the *Mystical City*, published by the widow Mme Poussielgue, is correct, easy to read, and much preferable to the old edition in three quarto volumes. It is to be regretted that a new translation has not replaced that of Father Croset, which has merely been updated here and there. It was also seen with a certain displeasure that the original title was not reproduced. Instead of reading: *The Mystical City of God, or the life of the most holy Virgin*, one would like to find in this translation, as in all the previous ones, the grand title of the original: *The Mystical City of God, miracle of his omnipotence, abyss of grace, divine history and life of the most holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, manifested in these last ages by the same holy Virgin to the Venerable Mother Mary of Jesus, abbess of the monastery of the Immaculate Conception of the village of Ágreda*. The word *or* which one reads in the

¹⁹² May these Articles have the same effect in our day. [Ed.]

¹⁹³ This is a very strong statement which has been verified in our time. Hence the great need for the advice and admonishment from heaven called *private revelation*, and especially the revelations of the Life and History of Our Lady given to Ven. Mary. [Ed.]

new title is also unfortunate, and sounds rather awkward in French. To the name of Mary of Ágreda have been added the words *of the Order of St. Francis*. Besides the fact that this is a new alteration of the Spanish title, this modification is not exact. The nuns of the Immaculate Conception are affiliated to the Order of St. Francis and directed by the Franciscans, but they are not Franciscans. Finally, the volume which contains the life of the Venerable Sister contains an *Appendix* on the history of the book, which would require some rather important modifications. In conclusion, I submit these slight amateur critiques to the respectable editor of the *Mystical City*, congratulating her for having understood so well the needs of pious souls, and for having had the glory of restoring to France a treasure of which it had been unjustly deprived for nearly two centuries.

Article 27: Oct. 23, 1859

The background of the ideas which occurred on the subject of the *Mystical City* at the time of the censure of the Sorbonne. The pamphlet of Bossuet. The consequences of Bossuet's position.

1. The history of the book of the Seer of Ágreda has taken us far beyond the limits we had set ourselves; and yet, when we look back, it seems to us that we have passed quickly over this multitude of facts we had to gather and relate. We believe that we have, at least as far as our weakness allows, vindicated the venerable memory of one of the holiest souls of the 17th century, who has been indignantly outraged in a host of writings for nearly two centuries. It remains for us to say a few words about the background of the ideas which arose on the subject of the *Mystical City* at the time of the censure of the Sorbonne and since. Was it only this poor Spanish book that was being attacked then? Was this outburst aimed only at the marvelous narratives with which the pages of the Sister are filled? It is clear from all that happened then, and from what has happened since, that the book caused shock, because it gave an idea of the Mother of God different from that which the prejudices of the end of the 17th century wanted to convey. We have explained at length the causes of this lowering of the level of theology, so we do not have to return to it. But it is important to study in the documents of the time the impression caused by the *Mystical City*, so we may better judge the state of mind at that time. We cannot draw the information which is necessary to us from a more reliable source than in the pamphlet of Bossuet against the book, and in the Censure of the Sorbonne itself; we will thus summarize

successively these two documents which are connected one to the other.

2. The pamphlet of Bossuet, which occupies four pages in octavo in volume XXX of the edition of Versailles, carries the title of *Remarks*; it is a kind of report on the *Mystical City*, intended to be given to the Chancellor of the kingdom with the aim of stopping the circulation of the book. The tone is very harsh, and one feels that the author does not want to miss his goal. He begins thus: "The sole purpose of this book conveys its condemnation. It is a girl who undertakes a diary of the life of the Blessed Virgin, in which is that of Our Lord, and in which she proposes nothing less than to explain, day by day and moment by moment, all that the Son and the Mother did and thought, from the moment of their conception to the end of their lives,"¹⁹⁴ which no

¹⁹⁴ This is not merely absurd exaggeration, but rather *slander*. When Ven. Mary told Our Lady that she feared no one would believe her, the Virgin Mary said (*Coronation* ¶ 620-621, emph. added): "Take notice that giving credit to this History and all it contains does not depend on the instrument but on its Author, who is the highest Truth, and upon the contents of thy writing, and in this regard not even the most supreme Seraphim could add thereto, nor canst thou detract from it or diminish it. For an Angel to write this History would not be appropriate; yet if he would *the incredulous and slow of heart would nevertheless find a way to slander him*. It was necessary for the instrument to be a human person, but it was not proper for this person to be the most learned or wise, for then this work might be ascribed to his knowledge and thus occasion the danger of having the divine light esteemed no higher, or even lower, than human knowledge, or it might be attributed entirely to human forethought and ingenuity. It is to the greater glory of God that this person be a woman, who can rely neither on her own knowledge nor her own ingenuity. I also take special glory and pleasure in this, and that thou art this instrument, since thou and all others shall know there is nothing of thy own in

one has ever dared to do." I pass over the tone of contempt and insult, confining myself to reminding the reader of the respectful testimonies of the most thoughtful esteem which the same book has received from Cardinal d'Aguirre, friend of Bossuet, and from the universities of Toulouse, Louvain, Salamanca, etc. It is absolutely necessary that they were already divided regarding the substance of other matters, to differ so widely in the appreciation of a book. There is also no point in rehashing all that the men of the Sorbonne committed to the Jansenist faction, the future signatories of the *Case of Conscience*, the future appellants of the Bull [*Unigenitus*], pronounced on the book in the direction opposed to d'Aguirre and the universities. To return now to the reproaches which Bossuet makes to the *Mystical City* in the passage which has just been reported, it seems to me that these words give rise to two questions. If one supposes that the book was written according to a divine impulse, would it be forbidden for God to manifest in a continuous way the details of the events of the life of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin? No one would dare to limit the divine power in this. What then becomes of the objection, since the Sister constantly says she does not intend to say anything of her own, but claims to speak only from what has been manifested to her? In the second place, is it true to say that in the *Mystical City* one finds related "day by day, moment by moment, all that the Son and the Mother did and thought"? The Chancellor was obliged to believe him on the strength

this History, and thou must not attribute more to thyself than to the pen with which thou writest, since *thou art but an instrument in the hands of the Lord and the manifester of my words.*" [Ed.]

of such testimony; yet the readers of the *Mystical City* know that the details are far from being so abundant; they know that if one can indeed follow day by day and moment by moment certain episodes, there are not only days and weeks, but even months and years about which the Sister says absolutely nothing. Catherine Emmerich is infinitely more precise than Mary of Ágreda, and we do not see this precision alleged as a reason to reject her accounts.

3. Bossuet then objects to the title of *divine History* which the Sister gives to her book, “by which,” he says, “she wants to express that it is inspired and revealed by God in all its pages.” Would it not be better to inquire of the Sister herself as to the importance she attaches to her work and the meaning she gives to its title? As she is convinced of the reality of the divine communications which have put her in a position to write the mysteries of the life of the Mother of God, and as she believes that she has received from Heaven the order to take up the pen, in spite of her repugnance, it is natural that she should not consider her book as a human composition, but as proceeding from the divine light. It is permissible to deny, if one wishes, the reality of her ecstasies, especially if proofs are given, but one should not be surprised that the Sister titles her book after the point of view she must necessarily have. Will it be said that such a title is inspired by the pretension of putting the *Mystical City* on the same level as the revealed Scriptures?¹⁹⁵ Yet all readers of the book know

¹⁹⁵ The *Mystical City of God* can be said to be to Our Lady what Holy Scriptures is to Our Lord: She is a *creature*, He is *God*; her Life and History was written under *Marian* inspiration (that is, under her control and direction, even dictation), the Holy Scriptures under *Divine* inspiration. Many have found the Life and

that Mary of Ágreda submits it¹⁹⁶ in twenty places to the correction of the holy Church, conforming herself in advance to the judgment that the Church will make of it, and confessing regarding herself that she is only a poor, ignorant woman. This is not the language of an author who would like to present her book “as inspired and revealed by God.” Bossuet adds, “Scripture is the only history that can be called divine.” In the strict sense of the term, we must agree; but in a more extended sense, we have no difficulty in calling divine the celestial communications which a soul receives in prayer, although she then renders them with more or less imperfection if she chooses to write the details.

4. “The detail is even stranger,” continues the severe doctor; “all the tales which are collected in the most apocryphal books are here proposed as divine, and an endless number of others are added with astonishing affirmation and temerity.” The assertion would indeed be as rash as it is astonishing if the Sister took her narratives from her own background; but until it is shown that Mary of Ágreda is mistaken or deceiving us in giving her narratives as having been manifested to her in ecstasy, it is evident that the accusation is gratuitous. In fact, God knows many things that we do not know, and nothing prevents Him from making them known if He judges it appropriate; and if the account given to us by those to whom it has pleased Him to manifest something of it contains nothing contrary to the doctrine of the Church, we are no doubt free to

History of Our Lady to be the best way to gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of Scriptures, just as the best way to know Christ better is to know His Mother better, since She *is* the perfect imitation of Christ. [Ed.]

¹⁹⁶ perhaps he means *mentions submitting it* [Ed.]

refuse our assent to it; however, we would need to have direct proofs to accuse the person of temerity, especially if the sanctity of his life remains unquestionable.

5. One cannot help but consider as excessively rigorous the place where Bossuet objects to the passage in which the Sister recounts the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. Let us read the chapter, and we will see if it is fair to say that it “is horrifying”. No doubt the Sister dwells, as she always does, on this essential episode; but one would look in vain for those unseemly terms which one has a right to expect after such a solemn and violent denunciation.

6. The Holy Scriptures contain a host of passages that are infinitely freer; is it permissible to be scandalized by them? No matter what one does, one will not transform into licentious details a few pages written with all possible gravity on a most serious subject. Some readers of another time could be astonished by it; the current language would, I agree, tolerate with difficulty this simplicity; but if it were true, as the illustrious critic says, that one must “prohibit forever the entire book to modest souls,” how can it be explained that so many doctors in whom piety is equal to science have read it without being shocked, and recommended it with so many exhortations to the admiration of pious souls?

7. Bossuet then strongly criticizes the Sister for saying the soul of the Blessed Virgin was united to the body more quickly than in other children; that the moment when this union took place caused the Divinity a superior joy, because of the relationship this creature forever blessed was to have with the glorious Trinity; that Mary, from her mother’s womb, informed of the misfortunes of humanity, shed tears over sin and the

deplorable consequences that it has brought about for our race; that the Virgin, immediately after her birth, was taken up for a few moments into the empyrean heaven in body and soul; “things of which no one has ever heard,” he adds, “and which have no conformity with the analogy of the faith. “ Is there any reason to be surprised that these details have never been dealt with, when we hear the Sister declare that if she recounts them it is only because they have been divinely manifested to her? Who does not see that any new revelation becomes useless if, in order for it to merit credence, it is necessary that it only concerns things of which one has already heard? It had been thought until then that a revelation consisted in the manifestation of hidden and unknown things; should we then renounce this fundamental notion only in order to decry the *Mystical City*? As for the conformity of the facts in question with the analogy of faith, it has been discussed in all the learned writings of which I have amply catalogued. These writings had not yet appeared at the time when Bossuet wrote these lines; they were published in response to the censure of the Sorbonne, of which he was one of the principal instigators. Yet it is permissible to think that if he had known them and weighed them, his judgment might have become less severe.

8. Regarding the discourses which one encounters at every step in the *Mystical City*, and in which God, the holy Virgin, the angels, and the other characters in the scene express their thoughts: Is there not also some trace of concern which is a little too lively when Bossuet declares that these speeches alone “must cause the whole work to be rejected,” because one finds there nothing but human views, thoughts and reasonings? In the eyes of other critics, these speeches are the richest

part of the book; it is there that sentiments are involved with a marvelous delicacy and abundance. Without doubt, as we readily agree, the ineffable conciseness of the holy Gospels renders in a manner more vivid and profound the feelings expressed by the speakers; but the sacred writer is inspired by the Holy Ghost, who suggests to him with precision his own terms, whereas the ecstatic is reduced to rendering himself what he has felt, what he has heard;¹⁹⁷ hence the stylistic efforts that he is obliged to make, when he wants to express the feelings which have remained imprinted in his memory. When it is a question of rendering the interior words which express the will of God, and which can only be manifested to the ecstatic by means of an abstract view, it is clear that the human locutions employed for this purpose are extremely imperfect, since they seek to render in an exterior and coarse language what in the divine essence has had only an interior expression. But we must be careful not to make a reproach to the Sister which would fall on the Holy Scriptures themselves, which apart from the words which came from the mouth of the incarnate Word are also reduced to making use of the steps and figures of human language to translate the thoughts and intimate will of God. *Let us make man to our image and likeness. Behold Adam is become as one of us. Come, let us go down, and there confound their tongue*, etc. This is certainly human

¹⁹⁷ While this is true for *corporeal* and *imaginary* visions, Ven. Mary received revelations via *intellectual* vision, vastly superior, in which truth is directly infused into the intellect, bypassing the senses or the imaginative faculty. Here the difficulty for the seer is putting into words not what one has seen, heard or felt (as with Ven. A.C. Emmerich), but what one *knows* to be true; and Ven. Mary expresses this difficulty many times in the *Mystical City of God*. [Ed.]

language; yet one wonders by what other means the inspired historian could initiate us into the divine thought. And not only Moses, but the Prophets offer us unceasingly these divine monologues, and it does not occur to any Christian to see in them a degradation of the thoughts of God. On the contrary, it seems that this verbal translation, however minute it may be, apart from, I repeat, the communications which the incarnate Word has deigned to make directly to us, remains, in spite of its imperfections, the only means by which man can come to know the sentiments of God, so long as it does not please His Divine Majesty to reveal Himself to him in the fleeting hours of contemplation. It goes without saying that between the interior discourses of God which the Holy Scriptures render to us, and those which we read in the *Mystical City*, there is an immense distance as to certainty and authority; but it is good to note also that the principle of criticism which Bossuet uses here would go so far as to apply also to the revelations of St. Bridget, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Magdalene de Pazzi, etc., in which God is heard quite often to speak in a continuous human language even for long intervals.

9. The illustrious adversary then attacks her on the favor she [allegedly] imputes regarding Scotism. "From the third chapter to the eighth," he says, "it is nothing but refined scholasticism according to the principles of Scotus. God himself gives lessons in it and declares Himself a Scotist, even though the nun remains in agreement that the position she embraces is the least received in the school. But what! God has decided it, and we must believe it." It is easy to see here that the Thomist doctor is not always level-headed in the presence of the School of Scotus, and his tone is reminiscent to some extent of the *Provincials*. We have

already spoken of the Scotism of the Sister.¹⁹⁸ Obviously, if Scotus is right in his sublime theories on the mystery of the Incarnation, God knows it; and if God knows it, who could prevent Him from saying it, even to the Abbess of Ágreda, if He sees fit? So let us be Thomists if we like; but let us not go so far as to interfere with God's own freedom. It is true that we are living in a time when Scotism has won a prize that the French theology of the end of the 17th century was reluctant to give it; that is why the defenders of the *Mystical City* raise their heads a little. Bossuet adds that the Sister even outraged the principles of the school of Scotus, "by having God say that the decree to create the human race preceded that to create the angels." It is, however, a matter of pure consequence. If God, in the general plan of creation, proposed the glory of his incarnate Word, what wonder that the creation of human nature, to which his eternal Son was to be united, was the primary goal of his operation, and that the angelic nature, superior to ours, but not called to the same honors, was presented from then on as a magnificent complement to the work of God, rather than as a final goal? Does not the Apostle teach us that the God-Man is also the Head of the principalities and powers, who had to wait for the fullness of time to be accomplished in order to receive from this incarnate Word what they still lacked in glory and felicity? I have had occasion to recall above how M. Olier, at Saint-Sulpice, arrived by way of prayer at the same conclusions on these matters as Mary of Ágreda in her cloister in the heart of Castile. The 17th century was still illuminated by the rays of holiness which later faded and did not regain their original splendor.

¹⁹⁸ cf. Art. 11, ¶ 5 [Ed.]

10. Bossuet, in concluding, reproaches the book as having “a dull and languid length”; yet he adds that this book “will be read by weak minds like a novel, by the way quite well woven and quite elegantly written.” The *strong minds* call the others *weak minds*, that is too true; but has it not happened sometimes that the strongest minds have suffered certain weaknesses, and that the minds considered weak have seen further and higher than the former?¹⁹⁹ In a host of writings Bossuet speaks of the so-called ultramontane doctrines as a system impossible to hold, new, contrary to tradition, born in the dark ages, in the midst of the confusion of ideas; and we have seen the greatest genius of these recent times, the man whose name is still growing, Joseph de Maistre, raise, by his adherence as simple as firm, these same doctrines called ultramontane, and in which strong minds had known to see in the informed product of the Middle Ages only pitiful errors. Bossuet and de Maistre are two great geniuses; the tributes of posterity will follow both of them to the last day of the world; yet there are fundamental points on which they are in disagreement; on these points it is necessary to abandon one or the other. On the constitution of the Christian Church, on the extent of the God-given powers of its head, the one must have been a strong mind, the other a weak mind. Who will decide? An authority that both revered: The Church! The Church, which by its practice alone decides in such matters. Let us open our eyes and see which of the two she is with in her conduct. But I hasten to return to the Sister.

11. It is thus recognized that the *Mystical City* is at the same time a book “of a dull and languid length,” and “a novel, by the way quite well woven and quite

¹⁹⁹ cf. I Cor. 1:27 [Ed.]

elegantly written.” Here is the literary judgment, somewhat obscure and contradictory; at least one can conclude that the book is not without some beauties, to have obtained from such a judge a sentence still so favorable in these four pages intended to immolate it once and for all. A few lines below, the formidable critic strikes a new blow: This book, he says, is “a fable which only makes a perpetual mockery of religion.”²⁰⁰ One could not be more forceful; yet the only surprise is that so many learned men did not surrender to this blow. Here is the last line, and it is even stronger: The book of Mary of Ágreda “is only an artifice of the devil to make people believe that they know Jesus Christ and his holy Mother better by this book than by the Gospel”. It is obvious that, given such a statement from such a hand, the Chancellor could not hesitate to take out of the hands of the French a book which is only a *perpetual mockery* of their religion and an *artifice of the devil* to take away their true faith. It is thus merely with the Gospel that France passed from the 17th century to the 18th. Voltaire did not have to overthrow the rampart of the *Mystical City*; he beat the Gospel itself to a pulp. And we know how softly the nation resisted the attacks of the philosophical spirit, and how quickly the Christian sense disappeared from individuals at first and soon from the masses. Voltaire gave himself up to the perpetual mockery of religion; and it is permissible to believe today that he succeeded

²⁰⁰ This gratuitous charge seems a bit ironic, since this entire pamphlet (a screed, really) is nothing more than a *mockery* of Ven. Mary and the Life and History of Our Lady. The long-term effects of Bossuet’s encouragement of the crooked Sorbonne censure, and his own vitriol against the book (which no doubt kept many souls from reading and profiting spiritually by it), *still linger on in our own day*. [Ed.]

in this in a more fatal way than the free circulation of the book of the Spanish Seer would have done.

28th Article: Nov. 7, 1859

Analysis of the censorship of the Sorbonne. French theology at the beginning of the 18th century. The decline of Marian theology and devotion. Private revelations. Examination of the various articles of the censure.

1. Let us now go through the Censure of the Sorbonne, and consider the points of the doctrine of Mary of Ágreda upon which this judgment was based. The Sister had emphasized the importance of the divine manifestations contained in her book, giving us to understand, on behalf of God, that the publication of this book was a new favor which God granted to men following the mystery of the Incarnation; that in this age, the most unfortunate which had happened since the coming of Jesus Christ, He had resolved to manifest his love for men with more plenitude by revealing to them the hidden marvels He had worked in Mary, in order to bring them back more effectively to the worship of his divine majesty. The Censure charged these assertions with ‘scandal’ and ‘impiety’, taking them in the sense that the Sister wanted to say that her book was a benefit of greater importance than that of the Incarnation. It is clear that the Sorbonne would have been right to describe the proposition with this severity if it had presented such a scandalous meaning; the fact is that the text does not present this meaning at all. The French translator had used too strong an expression, it is true, by employing a superlative belied by the context and by the whole book, in which the Sister does not cease to exalt the mystery of the Incarnation as the supreme effort of the goodness and power of God towards men. The sole purpose of her book is to give the faithful a better appreciation of this mystery by giving them a

more complete idea of the mission and excellences of the Mother of God. As for the inaccurate translation of the Spanish word, it was rectified in the course of the deliberations of the Faculty by the supporters of the book; but the explanations remained null and void, and the Sister had to personally bear the penalty for the error that had escaped her translator. One remembers that d'Aguirre protested, in a letter to Bossuet, against this not very delicate procedure.

2. What was the thought of the doctors who wrote or supported the Censure? One saw it clearly enough by the detailed account of their meetings, which we gave above. Having lost sight, through the weakening of the Christian sense of what the Apostle calls the *breadth* and *length*, the *height* and *depth* of the sublime mystery which is the unique key to God's plan for the human race, they professed, it is true, the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Word; but, under the pretext of reserving their homage for the God-man, they reduced the mission of Mary to the fact of the Divine Maternity, and rejected any idea tending to develop such a vast role that the admirable creature fills in the economy of the world, who shares with the eternal Father the right to say "my Son" in addressing the divine Word. That one can have a notion of the mystery of the Incarnation without embracing all this we do not dispute; but no one will ever have a complete view of this masterpiece of divine power and goodness if he does not penetrate the personal greatness and action of Mary.²⁰¹ The

²⁰¹ It is as if the Virgin Mother of God was being viewed through the warped lens of the heresies of Luther and Calvin, i.e., that She did not exercise free will consent at the Annunciation, since God had absolutely predestined Her as the Mother of the Savior. She was to them a mere passive instrument, as if God would operate

records of Christian theology attest that as the dogma of the Incarnation is illuminated through the centuries with all the rays of knowledge, the prerogatives of the Mother of God develop and expand in proportion. The learned essay given to the public by Fr. Passaglia on the Immaculate Conception shows enough what the Fathers expressed on this subject, either by learned induction or by the intuition of their genius. At Ephesus the dogma of the unity of the Person [of Christ] did not triumph without carrying with it, in the same movement of ascent, that of the Divine Maternity; and Saint Cyril of Alexandria, in his address to the Council, enunciated on the prerogatives and the action of the Mother of God theories of which the *Mystical City* hardly offers more than the application and the development. Following the Fathers came the scholastic doctors, who scrutinized, with the help of dialectic, the acquired notions and facts which Tradition had transmitted to them; they thus drew out the Marian synthesis, and this was to the glory of the divine mystery of the Incarnation, which is the sole cause and source of the greatness of Mary. The first half of the 17th century, as we have said, still understood it in this way; in 1696, it

this greatest of his works without her consent and cooperation. That is not how God operates with souls; He respects and protects the free will He has given them. The essential fact is this: *She could have said no* at the Annunciation; to deny this is to deny free will, which is heresy. That She consented by her free will out of pure charity for us is why God demands that we pay her the affectionate debt of gratitude, love and honor we owe to the one upon whom God depended for the Redemption of the human race and the salvation of the elect. Moreover, I believe there is no better or more succinct way of explaining why we Catholics love and honor Her so much: *She could have said no*, and hence we would not have Christ our Redeemer and Savior. [Ed.]

was different. Without really suspecting it, the ideas of the reformers of the 16th century were insensibly being adopted. They did not deny that the Word, taking on human nature, needed a mother, but they were stubbornly zealous in attenuating the idea of the importance that could be attached to the person of Mary, and this, they said, in order not to deprive the Man-God of the tributes to which He is entitled. Nothing could be more ill-advised except blasphemy; for it is sufficient to reflect for only a moment to understand that the prerogatives of Mary being only the consequence of the mystery of the Incarnation, the more theological science extends them, the more the mystery itself is glorified. But theology having accepted the divorce which philosophy proposed to it at that time, at the same time as politics isolated itself from Christian law, these conclusions ceased to be considered for anything. Our doctors, in love with their so-called Positive, had contempt for the Scholastics, and no longer even wanted to look at a proposition which they did not find in express terms or absolutely equivalent in the Fathers; deduction no longer existed for them. Still, if they had read the Fathers well, it is to be believed that they would have recognized in these writings of antiquity many elements which would have revealed to them the point of contact which obviously unites the results of true Positive to those of the learned scholasticism of the 13th and 14th centuries. The book of Fr. Passaglia proves this abundantly with regard to the great Marian thesis which it is intended to clarify.

3. In any case, French theology at the beginning of the 18th century presented itself to the attacks of the enemies of revelation with a lessened idea of the Mother of God; and the piety of the faithful not being so abundantly nourished on this point, as it is easy to

realize by comparing the books published at that time with those of the first half of the 17th century, and by noting the modifications which the liturgy had already undergone, the piety of the faithful was, let us say, lukewarm. Now it was precisely this moment that the Sorbonne chose to proscribe a book full of life, where the ancient sap of faith and love circulates with superabundance, where the richest conceptions of the mind unite with the depth of feeling and all the magnificence of the highest poetry. They do not understand that the Man-God, wanting to raise the world which is collapsing, has judged it appropriate to revive respect for his Mother;²⁰² rather, it seems to these doctors that Mary is too insignificant for God to have made her, better known, the instrument of the regeneration of a Christian nation which is dissolving. In conjunction with the secular power, they stop the circulation of such an idea as contrary to the respect due to our mysteries. The new century began, and we know how it ended. Unbelief and the depravity of morals reached their peak, and not only Mary, but Jesus Christ was dethroned, driven out of the law in the name of progress, and the little faith that remained took refuge in the depths of private conscience. Would it not have been better in 1696 to go back upstream in the already rapid current? But one could hardly think of it then. In an assembly gathered in the name of the King, the rights of the Vicar of Jesus Christ had been clarified and formulated on paper, without asking whether a particular nation had the authority to decide on a point

²⁰² Might it therefore be inferred that not only the *effect*, but the very *cause*, of this decline was diminishing devotion to the loving Mother of Our Lord, and that as a remedy He ordained the revelation of Her most holy Life and History? cf. Apoc. 3:12 [Ed.]

which interested all the others just as much, and without seeming to suspect that here too it was a question of one of the most serious consequences of the mystery of the Incarnation: Christ represented in Peter with a fullness that men have no more right to limit than they had the right to create. Let us repeat: At its beginning, the 17th century had a higher idea of the Mother of God and the Pope than it had at its end; therefore, it had at its beginning a deeper understanding of the God-Man than that which it had at its decline. But let us return to the Censure and go through its various articles.

4. The second article concerns private revelations in general. The Sister had applied to them these words of the Savior at the Last Supper: "I yet have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." This passage of the Gospel is generally applied to private revelations by all theologians who have treated of them, up to and including Benedict XIV; but this does not prevent the doctors from using in this connection the qualifiers of 'false proposition', 'rash', 'scandalous', etc. And because Mary of Ágreda, reporting these words of God which she claims she has heard, expresses that these words contain an infallible truth, which could not be otherwise if God really spoke, the doctors accuse her of derogating from the authority of the Church, as if she demanded for her book an adhesion of divine faith, and as if she had not expressly and in several places submitted it to the correction of the Church.

5. In the third article, the Sister is again called 'scandalous' for having used the term "adoration" in expressing the honors paid to Mary by the holy angels. They agree, however, that in the Scriptures and in the Fathers, this term is used with regard to mere creatures. Undoubtedly, in a few isolated lines where this term is

used without explanation, its legitimate use could be contested; but in the *Mystical City*, where one hears the Blessed Virgin confessing her nothingness in the presence of God on almost every page, it would not occur to anyone to take this biblical expression in the sense of a divine homage. In the fourth article, the Sister is characterized as ‘evil-sounding’ and ‘insulting’ to the divinity of the Word for having said that the Son of God interceded on behalf of humanity before the throne of the Divinity. It is clear that if Mary of Ágreda had wanted to say that the second Person of the Holy Trinity would have professed an inferiority with regard to the other two, she would be seriously reprehensible; but it is enough to see the context to remain convinced that it is only a question here of the disposition of the divine Word to assume a human nature in order to save man, and of the love which He deigned to profess eternally in the bosom of his Father for our race, to which He had to dedicate Himself in time under a created and mortal nature.

6. The fifth article censures, without detailing them, five passages of the book as ‘offensive to pious ears’. We have already spoken of the sensitivities which arose in France concerning one of the chapters of the book. The *Mystical City* is in no way a book intended for children; the loftiness of the ideas, the gravity of the tone, the rigor of the moral teaching, would quickly put off those who would try to read it. This book, from which everyone can read, is suitable in itself only for people of a mature mind, and the details it contains can offer them no danger. There are no sensual descriptions or free expressions; everything is serious and grave. Innumerable judgments have been made on the book since its publication; the most learned and commendable characters have praised and admired it,

and until the French critics of 1696 it had not occurred to anyone to point out that it was immoral.²⁰³ But everything had to be used to cast away a book which was unfortunately rejected by the instincts and prejudices of the time and the country.

7. The sixth censured proposition expresses that God gave the Blessed Virgin “all that He willed, and willed to give her all that He could, and could give her all that was not the very being of God.”²⁰⁴ This is noted as ‘false’, ‘reckless’, and ‘*contrary to the Gospel*’!!! We have seen that Amort himself, the fiery opponent of the *Mystical City*, defends this proposition against the Sorbonne. There is nothing in it that is not found in [the works of] scholastic theologians who have examined the importance of the mission of the Mother of God; but one wonders in what way the Gospel especially can be contrary to it.

8. The spirit of our doctors continues to show itself in their seventh article. There they censure the Sister for having said that all the prerogatives of Mary derive from the fact that she was conceived immaculate, and that “without this benefit all of them would appear imperfect and defective, or like a sumptuous edifice without a solid and proportionate foundation.”²⁰⁵ These

²⁰³ Unfortunately, I have personally heard this charge of *immorality* levied against the book. Yet if we consider that the Spanish Inquisition, known for its rigor, took fourteen years to scrutinize the book word-for-word, and finding nothing to censure, allowed it free public circulation, it is evident that if there was anything *immoral* in the book the Inquisition would have detected it and condemned it as such. [Ed.]

²⁰⁴ Con. 251 [Ed.]

²⁰⁵ This quote is from Con. 252. Yet Ven. Mary states in Inc. 578: “Among the more rare and excellent privileges of most pure Mary, the chief one is that She is Mother of God, which is the foundation

propositions are noted as ‘false’, ‘rash’, and ‘contrary to the integrity of the faith’; whereas, say the censors, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, professed by the Sorbonne, does not belong to the Catholic faith. We have seen above what the private sentiment was of the authors of the Censure on this point, and how forty of them declared themselves in the matter of the Case of Conscience. As for the substance, Mary of Ágreda, writing according to divine revelation (for it is from this point of view that one must place oneself in order to judge her doctrine), could say that such and such a truth, not yet authentically defined, is in reality the basis of such and such another which has been the object of a solemn definition. It was enough that she did not require divine faith for the first of these two truths. Since that time the Church, in defining the dogma, toppled the Censure; but, putting ourselves in the point of view of the Sister, her assertion was perfectly tenable as early as 1696. Amort, who is not suspect [on this

of all the rest; the second is that She was conceived without sin...”. And Almighty God explains it thus (Con. 193): “This dignity of being free from sin is due and corresponds to that of being Mother of the incarnate Word, and for Her is in itself more estimable and beneficial, since it is a greater good to be holy than to be only mother; yet to the being of the Mother of God all sanctity and perfection is proper.” Since Ven. Mary uses the analogy of a building, let us ask ourselves: What do we praise in a magnificent building – the edifice or the foundation? From the point of view of God and man it is the edifice (the Divine Maternity in this case); yet Our Lady, in her humility, always treasured the Immaculate Conception by which She was exempt from sin and hence never displeased her Beloved. She herself expresses this in Lk. 1:34: *How shall this be done, because I know not man?* She always exalted virtue over dignity, and would have even refused the Divine Maternity if it meant the loss of her spotless virginity. [Ed.]

point], understood this himself, and rebuked the Censure.

9. What the Sister says about the government of the holy Church which the Blessed Virgin is said to have exercised from Pentecost until her Assumption earns her, in the eighth article, the charges of ‘false’, ‘rash’ and ‘erroneous doctrine’. This censure falls on an immense number of Catholic doctors who thought that God did not leave Mary on earth after the Ascension of her Son, so that she remained there inactive and without any action on the faithful and on the Apostles.²⁰⁶ The outpouring of the Holy Ghost on the Mother of God in the Cenacle was undoubtedly intended to make her fit for the new mission reserved for her here below; and far from finding it strange that Mary, whose power is above all creatures, would have exercised over the Church an authority that was both sovereign and maternal, one should rather find it astonishing that it would have been otherwise. The accounts of Mary of Agreda reconcile in an admirable way the submission of the Blessed Virgin to the authorities established by Christ for the government of the Church militant, with the dependence which St. Peter and the other Apostles professed and had to profess towards the highest of all creatures. Yet as we have said, in 1696 the

²⁰⁶ He would seem to be speaking here of the days just after the Ascension. The *Mystical City* says Our Lady was taken to heaven by Christ at his Ascension, yet remained on earth by bilocation so the Apostles would not be overcome with distress in seeing Her also leave them. During the three days of this bilocation She had limited use of her faculties on earth, and full possession of them in heaven. Then God gave Her the choice to remain in heaven forever or return to the earth; in an act of supreme charity She chose the latter, and helped prepare the Apostles for Pentecost. cf. Tran. 801 and Cor. 1 [Ed.]

consequences of the mystery of the Incarnation were no longer being investigated so deeply.

10. The ninth article shows to what aberrations the innovators of the time were led. The Sister had applied to the Mother of God, at the same time as to the incarnate Word, Chapter VIII of the book of Proverbs; this earned her the charges of 'falsity' and 'temerity'. The reason given by the doctors is that the unanimous interpretation of the Fathers attributes this famous passage exclusively to the divine Word. One could have asked the censors first of all to point out a single one of the Fathers who, in interpreting the eighth chapter of Proverbs, declared that the mysterious passage in question excludes the Mother of God. Then they would have been asked to answer this question: Does the Liturgy, which Bossuet calls the principal instrument of the Tradition of the Church, understand this passage in the sense in which Mary of Ágreda understood it? If indeed this is the case, it follows that the notes of 'falsity' and 'temerity' will apply not only to the Spanish Seer, but to the Church itself. And it is a fact that since the greatest antiquity the Latin liturgy and those of the East have applied to Mary the eighth chapter of Proverbs. What can we conclude from this other than the Sister of Ágreda was in good company under the censure of the doctors of Paris? In France it was possible to erase from the Missals and Breviaries all the Epistles, Antiphons and Responses which had expressed up to then the mysterious interpretation in question; but France is not the whole Catholic Church, nor did she have the right to renounce of her own accord one of the most sacred and ancient forms of Marian doctrine. And finally, by the mercy of God, the day was to come when, by returning to the Roman

Liturgy, she would regain possession of this same form which had been taken from her only for a time.

11. Mary of Ágreda relates that the Blessed Virgin in the course of her mortal life was several times taken up to heaven by the ministry of the holy angels; for God willed, because of his immense love for her, to give her a foretaste of the beatific vision. These assertions in the tenth article are described as 'false', 'rash', and 'contrary to the word of God'. The reason given by the critics is that heaven was only opened to men by Jesus Christ in his glorious Ascension. It was easy to reply that the mode of redemption applied to Mary being quite special, as we see in the fact of the Immaculate Conception, there is no reason to be surprised that various favors were granted to her which could not be granted to other members of the human race. The doctors attack, in the eleventh article, and similarly qualify as 'false', 'rash', and 'contrary to the word of God', the doctrine of the Sister who teaches that St. Anne, after having given birth to the Mother of God, was not strictly bound to submit to the purifications which the law of Moses imposed on women who became mothers.²⁰⁷ The question is whether this law had any other reason than to confess the humiliation which the conception of each individual of the human race brings with it, because of the original sin which it contracts. If this is so (and who could doubt it?), it clearly follows that the daughter of Anne having been conceived without the original stain, the mother was not included in the prescription of the law, and consequently, by submitting to it, she was fulfilling an act to which she was not strictly bound.

²⁰⁷ cf. Con. 344 [Ed.]

12. The Sister had said that Mary was “in all things the Mother of Mercy and the Mediatrix of Grace, without losing any occasion, time or activity by which She could gain grace for Herself and for us.”²⁰⁸ Would anyone believe today that this proposition is censured by the doctors, in the twelfth article, as ‘false’, ‘erroneous’, and ‘injurious to Jesus Christ’, the only Mediator and the only Savior? Amort himself blamed this part of the Censure, which seems to have been dictated by Baillet or by the author of the *Monita salutaria*. It is by such means that one imagined to convert the Protestants after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. It was all too easy for them to reply to the Parisian doctors that the Sacred Faculty was indeed making commendable progress, but that it was to be feared that the Catholic Church was not always in agreement with it. In fact the Church, without deigning to pay attention to the censure of 1696, has not ceased to present Mary to us as being in every way, according to all our needs, the Mother of Mercy and the Mediatrix of Grace; and this, without believing that she derogates from the character of Redeemer and divine Mediator which is in Christ,²⁰⁹ since delegated power, far from absorbing the power from which it emanates, on the contrary attests to it in the most noticeable way. As for what the Sister says, that Mary merited for us at the same time as she merited for herself, who does not see

²⁰⁸ Con. 402. *See ye that I have not labored for myself only, but for all that seek out the truth* (Eccl. 24:47). [Ed.]

²⁰⁹ St. Paul said of Moses: *Why then was the law? It was set because of transgressions, until the seed should come, to whom he made the promise, being ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator* (Gal. 3:19). If Moses was a mediator between God and man, how much more is Our Lady Mediatrix between her Son and man? [Ed.]

that this is pure Catholic doctrine on the Treasury of the Church, into which the superabundance of the merits of the saints, made fruitful through the blood of Christ, comes to form a common resource in favor of the Church militant and the Church suffering? It must be admitted, however, according to the doctrine not only of the Sister, but of the most profound scholastic doctors, that the association of Mary with all the meritorious works of Christ was incomparably closer and at the same time more extensive in its effects than that of all the elect together; so the mediation of Mary must be regarded as universal and inexhaustible because of the character of the Mother of God, whose scope extends far beyond the needs of all men together.

13. The thirteenth article pursues the Sister with the charge of ‘falsity’, ‘scandal’ and ‘sacrilege’, for having said that the light which is in Mary would be sufficient to enlighten all men and to lead them along the sure paths of a blessed eternity.²¹⁰ According to our doctors, this is attributing to a creature what only the Word can do. But if she begins by telling us that Mary was drawn from nothingness like the other creatures, and that each and every one of her prerogatives were granted to her by the gratuitous goodness of the Creator, how can we not recognize, with her also, that She who is the *Seat of uncreated Wisdom*, the *Mirror* on which eternal *Justice*

²¹⁰The Holy Ghost says of his beloved Spouse: *For I make doctrine to shine forth to all as the morning light, and I will declare it afar off. I will penetrate to all the lower parts of the earth, and will behold all that sleep, and will enlighten all that hope in the Lord. I will yet pour out doctrine as prophecy, and will leave it to them that seek wisdom, and will not cease to instruct their offspring even to the holy age* (Eccl. 24:44-46). It is indeed the very height (or depth) of irony that the Sorbonne censured the *Mystical City of God* in which Our Lady fulfills this very prophecy! [Ed.]

is reflected, could, if need be, serve as a torch for men to whom she would transmit the light she has received?²¹¹ Shall we stop saying that the sun illuminates us here below because there is no other light in it than that which the Creator has placed there? And in the supernatural order, when St. John, speaking of the heavenly Jerusalem, the type of both the Church and Mary, tells us that “the nations will walk in her light,”²¹² shall we accuse this Apostle of blaspheming Christ, who called Himself the *Light of the world*?

14. Thirty-six passages gathered from the *Mystical City* form the material of the fourteenth and last article and are features borrowed from the narratives of the Sister. They are qualified collectively as ‘reckless’ and ‘contrary to the reserve imposed by the rules of the Church’; they are accused of reproducing the fables of the apocryphal Gospels, and of exposing religion to the contempt of heretics. We would be afraid of tiring the reader by reproducing here these numerous passages which scandalized the doctors; here are only a few samples. The cabal of the Sorbonne makes it a crime of Mary of Ágreda for having said that Lucifer and his

²¹¹ This could indeed be called a “black and white” issue, for black absorbs all light and reflects none, which is what Lucifer did in attributing to himself the gifts and light given him by God; hence he transformed himself from a luminous angel to the prince of darkness. On the contrary, white reflects all light, and Our Lady perfectly reflected her gifts and light, humbly confessing in the Magnificat that “He who is mighty hath done great things to me”. She is the mirror of the Divinity and Queen of the kingdom of light, while *profound darkness* is reserved for Lucifer and his followers. During their lives this light, seen by a privileged few, formed the halo we so often see depicted emanating from Christ, his Mother, and the Saints; it is a reflection or emanation of the eternal light. [Ed.]

²¹² Apoc. 21:24 [Ed.]

demons, immediately after their fall, plotted against the God-Man and against his Mother, because the proposal of the mystery of the Incarnation had been the test to which the fidelity of the Angels was subjected; that God, in creating the first man and the first woman, took Jesus and Mary, who were later to be the honor of humanity, as his types; that St. Joachim and St. Anne, who had vowed their only daughter Mary to God, felt great sorrow when they had to part with such an accomplished child; that St. Anne knew early on the future destiny of her happy daughter, while St. Joachim did not know of it until the moment of his death; that the conception of Mary took place on a Sunday; that thousands of Angels were assigned to the guard of honor of a creature called to such high destinies from the first moment of her existence; that Mary, in her mother's womb, paid her respects to God and shed tears over the misfortunes of humanity; that God sent to the inhabitants of Limbo the news of the birth of the Mother of their Liberator, etc. All these propositions and others have nothing contrary to the divine perfections; many of them are in the obvious analogy of the faith; and there are some that were supported by learned theologians before Mary of Ágreda, for example, that the trial of the Angels consisted in the manifestation of the mystery of the Incarnation; and Bossuet himself, an approver of the Censure, teaches, according to the Fathers, that Adam was formed on the future type of Jesus Christ. The doctors treat Mary of Ágreda, in this fourteenth article as if she had invented all these details; this was to prejudge²¹³ the question

²¹³This *prejudice* manifests itself even into our day and, in my observation, for three main reasons. First, the same errors exposed and deplored by Dom Guéranger's study of the Roman *dossier* in

very indiscreetly. If they intended to reject any private revelation as a reckless dream, it is not clear what they would gain from it with regard to the Protestants; for after all, the Catholic Church admits private revelations in principle, and recommends many of them in fact. But at that time people wanted at all costs a religious doctrine that was national. It was already in place, since 1682, regarding the constitution of the Church; one should not be surprised to see this claim extended to other points. But our heart sinks when we realize how narrow the French idea of the Mother of God had already become in 1696. No more enthusiasm, no more love, no more life; everything is extinguished and frozen, and the 18th century is at the door.

15. I stop here this long episode, which carried me so much beyond any foreseen limit. It was about the unknown; it is the best excuse I can offer, with the intention well allowed to a child of the Catholic Church to avenge the Queen of Heaven of an outrage which she received almost two centuries ago, and which had not yet been repaired.²¹⁴ I regret that typographical errors, quite excusable in a rapid printing, have too often

these Articles are perpetuated even today, misleading and misinforming so many. Second, because the book is being judged not by its cover but *by its title*. Understood correctly, *mystical* does not mean fanciful, imagined or *mythical*; this book is the sober and serious Life and History of our Immaculate Queen revealed by Her to a humble Spanish nun and approved for reading by the Church. And third, and perhaps most importantly, I do not recall ever having heard of or met anyone who opposes the book who *has read the entire book*; it is the *only* way to understand its importance and unction. It is my hope that many, especially priests, will do so; it may be read for free on my website, neemcog.com. [Ed.]

²¹⁴ In our day it still has yet to be repaired; this is the entire purpose for publishing these Articles. [Ed.]

obscured my thought and my expression; but, in order to comply with the numerous requests made to me, I will try to remedy this inconvenience by publishing again and in volume this fragment of dogmatic history which competent judges have been kind enough to believe worthy of their interest.

Appendix 1: Corroborating Testimony

Fr. Peter Mary Rookey, OSM, Consultor General of the Servite order, examined *the original* dossier in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation of Rites in Rome in July 1957, and his findings agree with those of Dom Guéranger. They were published in an article entitled *Innocent XI and the Mystical City* in the Jan.-Feb. 1958 issue of *The Age of Mary* (The Servite Fathers, Chicago: Vol. V, No. 1, pp. 87-90). It was certainly providential that this corroborating testimony was given just a few months before the cataclysmic usurpation of the Papacy in Oct. 1958.

Here are two especially pertinent quotes.

“The Archivist of the Congregation allowed us to take out the original, handwritten, yellow-mellow, Latin manuscript: The Cause for the Beatification of the Venerable Mary of Jesus de Agreda. The date reads 1773.” (Rookey, p. 88)

“Blessed Innocent XI died without carrying further the cause of the books of Ven. Mary de Agreda. However his forthright Brief suspending [the] condemnation of the Holy Office, helped his successor, Pope Alexander VIII²¹⁵ in his decision. The latter Pontiff’s words as they appear in the manuscript before us in our manuscript run: ‘Hos libros posse ab omnibus impune legi’; These books may be read by everybody with impunity.” (Ib. 90).

²¹⁵ A typo has it as “XIII”. [Ed.]

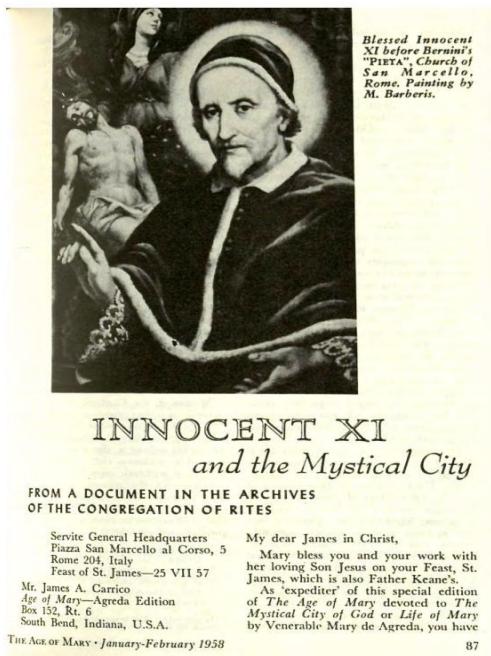
The full magazine may be purchased at:

<https://www.bookemon.com/book-profile/the-age-of-mary-magazine-january-february-1958/681374>

To view the article, go to:

<https://www.bookemon.com/flipread/681374#book/96>

Below is a screenshot of the first page of the article.



*Blessed Innocent XI before Bernini's
statue of
San Marcello,
Rome. Painting by
M. Barberis.*

INNOCENT XI and the *Mystical City*

FROM A DOCUMENT IN THE ARCHIVES
OF THE CONGREGATION OF RITES

Servite General Headquarters
Piazza San Marcello al Corso, 5
Rome 204, Italy
Feast of St. James—25 VII 57

Mr. James A. Carrico
Age of Mary—Agrada Edition
Box 152, Rt. 6
South Bend, Indiana, U.S.A.

My dear James in Christ,

Many thanks and your work with
the loving San Juan de your Priest, St.
James, which is also Father Keane.

As 'expeditor' of this special edition
of *The Age of Mary* devoted to *The
Mystical City of God or Life of Mary*
by Venerable Mary de Agreda, you have

Appendix 2: Original *L'Univers* Articles

- 1) This is a digital archive of the French National Library (BnF) where the *actual photographic image* of the original *L'Univers* Articles are published. Reading them on this site is like having the original magazine in your hands. Below is a screenshot of Article 1 (blown up for legibility; you will need to do this).



- 2) Once you have accessed this site, bookmark it for future access. To go to a specific Article, simply choose the correct date in the upper left window. Be sure to include the year – 1858 or 1859.
- 3) To increase size, scroll toward (or away) from you using two fingers on your touchpad.
- 4) To scroll around, use one finger while holding down the left click button.
- 5) There is no copy/paste function on this site.
- 6) On the following page is a table which shows Column number and page number for each article.

Article Number	Date	Page Number	Column Number
1	May 23, 1858	3	3
2	June 6, 1858	2	5
3	June 20, 1858	3	4
4	July 18, 1858	3	4
5	August 1, 1858	3	4
6	August 15, 1858	3	4
7	September 12, 1858	3	4
8	September 26, 1858	3	4
9	October 10, 1858	3	2
10	November 21, 1858	3	4
11	December 5, 1858	3	3
12	December 19, 1858	3	5
13	January 16, 1859	3	5
14	January 31, 1859	3	4
15	February 13, 1859	3	5
16	March 13, 1859	3	4
17	March 28, 1859	3	1
18	April 11, 1859	3	3
19	May 15, 1859	3	5
20	May 29, 1859	3	5
21	June 15, 1859	3	4
22	July 18, 1859	3	4
23	August 7, 1859	3	5
24	August 22, 1859	4	1
25	September 18, 1859	3	4
26	October 9, 1859	3	5
27	October 23, 1859	3	4
28	November 7, 1859	3	1

Appendix 3: domgueranger.net

- 1) This is a French website which presents the Articles of Dom Guéranger in an easy-to-read format which can be copied and pasted.
- 2) Go to www.domgueranger.net Below is a screenshot of the home page top menu bar.



- 2) Click on *Saintes et mystiques* and choose Marie d'Agreda. This is what you will see:

le premier des biens		
Marie d'Agreda – 28e article	Marie d'Agreda – 27e article	Marie d'Agreda – 26e article
Marie d'Agreda et la Cité mystique de Dieu. 28ème article : Analyse de la censure de la Sorbonne. La théologie française au début du 18ème. Le déclin de la théologie et de la dévotion mariales. Les révélations privées. Examen [...]	Marie d'Agreda et la Cité mystique de Dieu. 27ème article : Le fond des idées qui se sont produites au sujet de la Cité mystique, à l'époque de la censure de la Sorbonne. L'opusculle de Bossuet. Les conséquences de [...]	Marie d'Agreda et la Cité mystique de Dieu. 26ème article : Le jugement d'approbation de l'université de Louvain. Le rôle de Benoît XIV. Le Père Amort lutte à mort contre la Cité mystique. La réponse du Père Gonzalez Matheo. [...]

- 3) For some reason, the Articles are in reverse order. Click on *28e Article*. The URL looks like this:
<http://www.domgueranger.net/marie-dagreda-28e-article/>
- 4) To go to the first Article, replace *28e* with *1er*.
<http://www.domgueranger.net/marie-dagreda-1er-article/>
- 5) To go to any of the rest of the Articles, simply replace the *1er* with *2e* or *3e* or *4e*, etc.