The Writings of
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PART ONE

Ego Sapientia

1. Ego Sapientia

Mary must shine forth
more than ever in these latter times,
in mercy, in strength, and in grace.
—St. Grignion de Montfort

The words which the Church places in the mouth of the Blessed Virgin are not, “I, the wise,” nor “I, the wisest of all creatures,” but “I, wisdom—Ego Sapientia.” Of a very good person we may say that he is goodness itself, but this attribution is to be understood in a purely metaphorical or parabolical sense. There are only two cases in which one may predicate an abstract term of a concrete term in an essential proposition: when it is a question of God or of the transcendentals. “Abstract things,” says John of St. Thomas, “cannot be truly predicated of concrete things, nor concrete things of abstract things, because of the mode of signifying . . . although sometimes they are really identical, as in divine things Divinity and God, Paternity and the Father.” How then can the Blessed Virgin claim the sovereign affinity to God which such a mode of attribution implies?

2. Ut orietur lumen indeficiens

What is proper to wisdom? The adage says, “Sapientis est ordinare—It is for the wise man to order.” How are we to understand the term “to order”? Two things are included in the notion of order: distinction and principle. Principle is that from which something proceeds in any way whatsoever. Principle
implies proceeding. Proceeding or procession is a movement from a principle, movement which can be understood in the broad sense of any action, the action of thinking as well as of physical motion. Accordingly insofar as the principle is a principle of place, a principle of time, or a principle of nature, order will be divided into local order, temporal order, and the order of nature. Of these three orders the last is the most profound, since it implies the notion of origination, inasmuch as nature is “that from which is first born the thing which is born—ex qua pullulat pullulans primo.” Under another aspect order is divided into universal and particular order according to whether the principle is absolutely first or first in a given genus only.

What order is in question in the adage: “It is for the wise man to order?” It belongs to the wise man to set things in order, says St. Thomas, “because wisdom is the highest perfection of reason, the proper role of which is to know order.” Since order implies principle, and principle implies relation, the intellect alone can grasp order as order. “Since the intellect (unlike the will) draws things to itself, and proceeds by passing from one to the other, it can compare and formally grasp the relation of one thing to another; the intellect therefore possesses within itself the primary root and cause necessary for ordering things—comparing them among themselves and establishing a relation of one to the other.” However, the mere knowledge of an order is not, as such, sapiential. Simple apprehension can attain order, and every science involves a certain order. Wisdom alone will be the highest perfection of reason insofar as it implies an order proceeding from a principle which is wholly first. The verb “to order” expresses this originative primacy. “It is not to be ordered,” says Aristotle, “but to order, which belongs to a wise man.” That is why wisdom is radical. It not only shows the interlocking of one thing with another, but it grasps things in their primary root, wherein all the things that proceed therefrom are, in a certain way, pre-contained; and it grasps this root under its proper formality of origin. If this root were not at the same time origin, the absolutely first principle would be in dependence upon that of which it is the first principle; the multiple would then have, as such, the nature of a first principle.

Wisdom may be predicated substantially only of a thing which in its being and operation is of the nature of the first principle from which all things proceed by way of origination. It would not suffice for it to attain the primary root solely according to knowledge because then it would be wise only, but it must substantially possess the nature of a first principle, and know itself as such.
In order for the Blessed Virgin to be called Wisdom, she must be first principle in this sense. She must be herself first principle, not merely according to intellect and will, but also according to her substance and being. And who is first principle according to his very being except God? To be truly a first principle would not Mary have to be such a first principle even in her relation to God, would she not have to be so close to God that she would somehow participate even in His nature of first principle, be as the root of the universal order, even, in a way, that from which God Himself proceeds in a certain manner, the origin and genetrix of God?

3. Ecce virgo concipiet

*Fear not, Mary, for thou has found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father; and he shall reign in the house of Jacob forever.* The Virgin gives birth to the God-man, the branch of Jesse has flowered. She is henceforth truly the *mother of God,* she who has engendered God.

Generation means vital origin and assimilation. It is the procession of a living thing from within a living thing conjoined as a principle of life which assimilates the product of generation to its proper nature by virtue of this very procession. Generation consists therefore in expressing a likeness propagative of the nature of the generator. The generator draws that which is generated from its own substance while forming it. If the Blessed Virgin is truly a generator, this definition of generation must fully apply to her. Let us here note that although in the act of conception the mother is merely a passive principle which, while properly a nature, does not of itself imply an active and expressive assimilation, nevertheless, considered in her relation to the one engendered, the mother is properly an active principle which vitally assimilates the one engendered. An assimilative action takes place formally in the production of the passive principle of conception, a production which results from the active generative power of the woman, in view of the one engendered. For this reason, the mother participates actively in the vital assimilation of the one engendered. She is properly a genetrix.
Birth regards primarily and principally the being of the hypostasis and person. Hence, since the Blessed Virgin is the mother of Christ according to the hypostasis, she is truly the mother of God and of the man, of the God-man. In relation to that in Him who is born, the Blessed Virgin is properly cause and origin of God, *causa Dei et origo Dei*. Being the cause of the cause of all things, the mother of God is consequently the mother of all things. “She is the mother of all things,” says St. Albert, “and God the Father is the origin of all things: but whatever is per se the origin and cause of the cause is per se origin and cause of that which is caused. But she is the mother of Him who is the cause and origin of all things: therefore she is per se the mother of all things.” Is she not under this aspect an absolutely universal cause? Is there any work of God which is not to be related to her as to its principle?

Insofar as she is the substantial principle of Him who made her—genuisti qui te fecit—she fulfills by her divine maternity an essential condition of the appellation “Wisdom.” Since she is truly mother of the Son, and the Son is incarnate Wisdom, she is the mother of Wisdom engendered entitatively both of the eternal Father and the temporal mother. “She is the mother,” says Cornelius a Lapide, “of the eternal Wisdom incarnated in her. Just as the Son is Wisdom engendered and incarnate, so she is the Wisdom which engenders and incarnates.”

4. *Fiat!*

Nevertheless, Wisdom implies knowledge, a procession according to knowledge. In order that the Blessed Virgin be truly Wisdom, she must, even in relation to God, in addition to her divine maternity according to the flesh, attain to the nature of a first principle according to intellect. That is what she declares in her *Fiat*—*may it be done unto me according to thy word*. The *Fiat* of Mary is the echo of the *Fiat* of Genesis, the word whence proceeds the new order to which the ancient had been ordered. *For behold I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former things will no longer be remembered, and will no longer come to mind.* “God who made all things,” says St. Anselm, “is Himself made from Mary (*ipse se ex Maria fecit*) and thus all that He made He has made again.”
My heart hath uttered a good word. “When the angel had spoken,” says St. Augustine, “Mary, full of faith and conceiving Christ in spirit before conceiving Him in her womb, said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.”17 “The Blessed Virgin,” adds St. Albert, “would not have engendered Christ in the flesh if she had not first of all conceived and preserved the Word in the ear of her heart (aure cordis), bearing Him so to speak in the womb of her heart (in cordis utero).”18

The Fiat of Mary—on this word, principle of the Eternal Word by whom all things are made, depends the entire new order. Judge Mary to be wisdom, and the whole universe will be remade. “Hasten, O Virgin,” cries St. Bernard, “to give your answer. O my Sovereign, pronounce the word which the earth, hell, and heaven await. . . . Say but the word, and receive the Word; give your word and receive the divine Word: pronounce a passing word and embrace the eternal Word.”19 Be it done unto me according to thy word. Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.20 Let the Holy Spirit take my flesh and unite it intimately to the Son of God. Let the Word that is the Light become flesh.

M. Olier, in the most express way, tells us that in her Fiat the Blessed Virgin imitated the procession of the Son in God according to knowledge.

. . . Just as [the eternal Father] engenders His Word through all eternity by His knowledge, by a return upon and vision of Himself, so He wills that Mary, the supremely perfect and holy image of His virginal fecundity, should engender the Word with knowledge; and for that reason He decrees that she shall give her consent to the generation of the word in flesh in an express and solemn way presupposing knowledge and reason. Whereas other mothers will not know the one who is to be born of them, He wishes that Mary should know previously what manner of son she shall conceive: an angel will make known to her that this son will be the Son of the Most High, both God and man, the Redeemer of the world, and that His reign will endure forever.21

5. In columna nubis

This God, whose mother she is, is God the Redeemer who as Redeemer is the final and consequently absolutely first cause of the entire universe, for
Christ was never efficaciously willed as the end of all things except as the Redeemer. As Mother of the Redeemer, Mary is inseparably united to this final cause as co-principle. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before he made any thing from the beginning. I was set up from eternity, and of old before the earth was made. Mother of Emmanuel, that is to say, of “the Mighty with us,” she is the first one predestined among all pure creatures. “She came from God in the beginning,” says St. Albert, “because from all eternity she was predestined to become the mother of the Son of God.”

The mother is inconceivable without the Son, nor is the Son and the Redeemer Son conceivable without the mother. She proceeds from Him who made her in order that He might proceed from her. It is as principle that she proceeds from the Principle: her procession from the Principle is ordained in the procession of this same Principle, and she envelops the Principle in her procession from Him, she is held by Him in His procession from her. I came out of the mouth of the most High, the firstborn of all creatures. In coming out of the mouth of the most High she is herself the mouth which proffers the Word. Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth. She proceeds from the true light, from Him who is the unfailing light. Ego feci ut in caelis oriretur lumen indeficiens. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father, precontains all things, including the Virgin, and causes Himself to be contained in the womb of the Virgin. He whom the whole universe cannot contain has enclosed Himself in your womb, becoming man. The Son and the mother thus constitute from the very beginning a kind of circular motion wherein the principle is the term, and the term, principle, a motion which is the symbol of Wisdom which reaches from end to end. This circular motion of Wisdom, which is more mobile than mobile things, is like unto play: playing before him at all times.

6. A mari abundavit cogitatio ejus

Being truly the mother of God, the Blessed Virgin is bound to the hypostatic order in the most intimate way possible for a pure creature. “Hence,” says St. Albert, “since birth primarily and principally has respect to the being of the hypostasis and the person, and secondarily to the nature, the Blessed Virgin is called the mother of Christ according to the hypostasis, which hypostasis is...
God and Man, and this is why she is the mother of God and of the man—although she is not consubstantial with God except with respect to His human nature, since consubstantiality taken in itself means nothing other than convenientia in substance. Birth, then, belongs primarily and of itself to the person, and to the nature by consequence and secondarily.”

33 She alone among all pure creatures thus occupies the very summit: *I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in the pillar of a cloud*, wherein the incarnate Wisdom is hidden. 34 Starting out from the summit of heaven, her course terminates upon the same summit. *A summo caelo egressio ejus: et occursus ejus usque ad summum ejus—His going forth is from one end of the heavens, and his circuit ends at the other.* 35 She alone has compassed the circuit of heaven, of all mere creatures she alone is the Wisdom which has penetrated into the bottom of the deep. *Gyrum caeli circuivi sola, et profundum abyssi penetravi—I alone have compassed the circuit of heaven, and have penetrated to the bottom of the deep.*

It would be impossible for a pure creature to be raised any higher. By the grace of her maternity, she exhausts, so to speak, the very possibility of a higher elevation.

The plenitude of the Blessed Virgin deprives her of all emptiness. As long as a vessel can receive anything, it retains some emptiness. That is why every creature includes a certain emptiness, because it can also always receive a greater grace. But she alone is full of grace, because she could have no greater grace. She would have to be herself united to the divinity in order to conceive a grace greater than that according to which that is drawn from her which is united to her. Unless she were herself God, it is impossible to conceive a greater grace than that of being the mother of God.

7. Gratia plena, in Sion firmata

In order to be praised and glorified in Mary, God was not content to express Himself in her maternity alone, in which Mary herself does not accomplish in the fullness of her being a complete return to the principle. “Thus, maternal parenthood,” says St. Augustine, “would have been of no advantage to Mary if she had not experienced more joy by bearing Christ in her heart than in her
flesh.” 38 She was full of grace even before her consent to maternity. The angel called her full of grace before the Holy Spirit had come upon her.

The Holy Spirit descended upon Mary in order that she might be the mother of God, and in order that she might thus attain to the hypostatic order since she was already full of grace. Because she belongs to the hypostatic order which of itself carries with it a higher form of sanctity, her maternal dignity demands sanctity by fittingness and connaturality. If by God’s absolute power there had been maternity without sanctity, then the Holy Spirit would not have descended upon her after the manner of a mission in the absolute sense, because the Holy Spirit would not havedwelt in her, but would have descended upon her in the relative sense according to a mission. 39

Fullness of grace in Mary thus becomes the root of her consent to maternity, of the most free and liberal act that a pure creature can accomplish, of the most radical human act, upon which all the works of God are made to depend. For her thoughts are more vast than the sea, and her counsel deeper than the great ocean—A mari enim abundavit cogitatio ejus, et consilium ejus ab abysso magno. 40 Chosen in the beginning of all the works of Divine Wisdom, the strength and sweetness of the power of premotion caused to spring up in her a vast determination wherein she is established and establishes herself as first principle. There is none that can resist thy will, if thou determine to save Israel—Non est qui possit tuae resistere voluntati, si decrevis salvare Israel. 41 Because she herself becomes a sapiential principle, it is fitting that in her quality as Wisdom she be imbued with immutability. 42 And so I was established in Sion—Et sic in Sion firmata sum. 43 “Confirmation in good was fitting for the Blessed Virgin,” says St. Thomas, “because she was the mother of divine Wisdom, in which there is nothing defiled, as it is said in Chapter 7 of the Book of Wisdom.” 44

Just as our liberty is so much the more our own since it is received universally both with regard to act and modality (Deus est qui operatur in nobis et velle, et perficiere—For it is God who of his good pleasure works in you both the will and the performance 45), so the fact of being first principle, as with the Blessed Virgin since it is entirely received according to this properly divine modality, is all the more truly her own. There is thus established be-
tween the grace of maternity and her sanctification a certain circular motion which it has pleased God to arouse within her. It is God, the origin of all things, who gives her the power of giving herself as origin of God. “Behold all things are subject to the command of God, even the Virgin, behold all things are subject to the Virgın, even God.” By her free consent to the maternity which properly comes from her nature, God gives the Blessed Virgin the means to raise herself further to the dignity of her maternity which both fittingly (congrue) and connaturally demands sanctity.

8. Mitte radices

In this exhaustive superabundance of grace and glory expressed in her, the Blessed Virgin accomplishes the return to the principle under the very aspect of principle of all grace and glory. To her in her quality of Wisdom it has been confided to place in the elect the principle of their conversion to God, to place in them the divine roots. Then the creator of all things commanded me and said to me; and he that made me, rested in my tabernacle, and he said to me: Let thy dwelling be in Jacob, and thy inheritance in Israel, and take root in my elect—Tunc praecepit, et dixit mihi Creator omnium: et qui creavit me, requievit in tabernaculo meo, et dixit mihi: in Jacob inhabita, et in Israel haereditare, et in electis meis mitte radices. In this Wisdom dwells all the grace of the way and of the truth, in her all hope of life and of virtue.

9. Appropinquavit ad mare

A House built by Wisdom—Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum. “Mary is the sanctuary and the place of repose of the Holy Trinity, where God is present more magnificently and divinely than in any place in the universe, not excepting His dwelling above the Cherubim and Seraphim.” This indwelling is so full and so complete that as Wisdom the Blessed Virgin is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of his goodness—Candor lucis aeternae, speculum sine macula Dei majestatis, et imago bonitatis illius. This image is so perfect that it in turn fulfills the function of root and exemplar for all creatures. This image was the sapiential
exemplar that God followed in the composition of all things. *I was with him forming all things—Cum eo eram cuncta componens.* By this she is united to the consubstantial image of the Father, to the incarnate Wisdom, to the Word by which all things were made, and without whom was made nothing that was made. Being the image of Goodness, she imitates the original in universal diffusion of goodness, and she gives to things their first impetus and motion: as spouse of the Holy Spirit who is compared to the waters, and who *moves over the waters* and, herself a spirit of Wisdom, she too can say: *I, Wisdom, have poured out rivers. I, like a brook out of a river of a mighty water; I like a channel of a river and like an aqueduct, came out of paradise—Ego sapientia effidi flumina, ego quasi trans aquae immensae de fluvio.* Her diffusion is so universal that she reaches God and imitates the manner in which God Himself is found in every diffusion of His goodness: *And behold my brook became a great river, and my river came near to the sea—Et ecce facta est mihi tramis abundans, et fluvius meus appropinquavit ad mare.* A mirror of unspotted purity of the majesty of God, this created Wisdom is in its effusion of graces like a formal sign: no limitation is imposed upon her mediation. That is why she is called *subtilis.* “She reacheth everywhere by reason of her purity. She is a vapor of the power of God, and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the almighty God, and therefore no defiled thing cometh into her—* attingit autem ubique et capit propter suam munditiam, vapor est enim virtutis Dei emanatio quaedam est claritatis omnipotentis Dei sincera et ideo nihil inquinatum in illa incurrit.*” This same tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, this dwelling built by Wisdom, this holy city, this new Jerusalem, this new heaven which renews the earth, becomes the tabernacle of God with men.

10. Omnia innovat

Order is implied by wisdom. Wisdom is at once one and manifold, steadfast and mobile. Wisdom may be predicated of the principle of the sapiential order insofar as this principle is the root, and pre-contains the order, of which it is the principle. Together with her Son at the very origin of the universe, she is in a way the root of the universal order: *Ego sum radix—I am the root.* That which God principally desires in the universe is the good of order. This order is better in proportion as its principle, which is interior to the universe, is the more profoundly rooted in God. But Mary is the purely
created principle of this order, the purely created principle which is nearest to God and the most perfect that can be conceived. As a principle of the sapiential order, she participates in the unity and the unicity of this principle, she is at once an *emanation* and an *indwelling*, her power extends to all things which take from her their constant renewal. We conceive vital emanation as a constant renewing from within, and in their relation to the first principle things receive being in an ever-new procession. Whatever being they might have of themselves would be nothingness. *One is my dove, my perfect one. And being one, she can do all things, and remaining in herself the same, she reneweth all things*—*Una est columba mea, perfecta mea. Et cum sit una, omnia potest: et in se permanens omnia innovat.* Daughter of the eternal Father, mother of the Son, spouse of the Holy Spirit, she is rooted in the order of the Trinity, and she links up the order of the universe in a radically new way to the order which is in God according to the processions. *Thy neck is as a tower of ivory*—*Collum tuum sicut turris eburnea.*

11. *Imago bonitatis illius*

As the principle whence comes the good of the universe, as *Regina et Domina* of all things, she is a good separated from the universal order, a good which is properly universal, a good which in its indivisible and superabundant unity is the good of all things. This good is better than the good which exists as a form in the order of the parts of the universe, it is anterior to it and is its principle, as the leader is the principle of the order in an army. Her good does not even imply a material dependency upon the things which are ordained or upon the form that is their order. Being wisdom, *all her glory is from within*—*omnis gloria ejus filiae regis ab intus.* Because she carries with her the notion of the properly universal common good, because she is for us the principle of every spiritual good, it is not enough to love the Blessed Virgin as one loves oneself, nor to love her as much as oneself. Just as it is necessary to love Christ more than oneself, so too it is necessary to love the Blessed Virgin more than oneself.

Each loves himself, after God, more than his neighbor. One must love others as oneself, hence one’s own self is so to speak the primary exemplar of those one must love; oneself as participating in the divine glory
and others as associated in this participation. I except, however, the Lord Christ, even as man, and the Blessed Virgin the mother, because they take on the character for us of a principle diffusive of grace and blessedness. Christ as man is the head (caput) of glory, and the Blessed Virgin is the mother of this head, and she is the neck through which grace descends from this head down to us, and for this reason we should love them more than ourselves. 64

12. Circumdata varieteate

When from another point of view, we consider the Blessed Virgin as interior to the universe, we can compare her to the intrinsic good of the universe, a good which consists in the form which is none other than the order of its parts. This form is comparable to the visage and the face. In this form consists the highest dignity of pure creation, that is to say, that which by God's will is the most desired for itself and most perfectly ordered to Him. Considered as a separate good of the universe, the Blessed Virgin is more worthy than the order of the universe whose transcendental principle she is. On the other hand, when we consider her as interior to the universe as a part, the dignity of the universe is greater than that of the Blessed Virgin considered, not absolutely, but formally insofar as she is a part, a consideration which in her case is secondary.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that even under this aspect she remains the intrinsic root of the dignity inherent in the universe as a form and at the same time she has the greater share in this dignity. The dignity of the whole depends materially upon the dignity of the parts and upon the relation that these parts have to one another. But the excellence of the inferior parts is contained in a more eminent way in the superior parts themselves. The superior parts are to the inferior parts as form: the splendor that the inferior parts derive from the subordination to the superior is greater than that which they themselves have of themselves absolutely. This derived splendor is foremost in the ordination of the parts to the whole. Considered from the aspect of the parts, the excellence of the principal part is of the nature of a form for all the subordinated parts. Consequently the Blessed Virgin is, as a part, the form and the purely created principal cause of the dignity which or-
dains them most proximately and most perfectly to the dignity of the whole. As the prior and principal part, she draws all the other parts after her toward the dignity of the whole. *Draw me, we will run after thee—Trahe me: post te curremus.*

Among all the purely created parts of the universe, she participates in a greater degree in the order of the universe, and she is invested in a greater way with its splendor and variety. Her splendor is most comparable to that of the whole (*decora sicut Jerusalem—comely as Jerusalem*), she is surrounded with the variety of all the other parts—*circumdata varietate.* She is that purely created part of the universe thanks to which it can be indueed with a great dignity. A spring rose out of the earth, watering all the face of the earth—*Fons autem ascendebat de terra, et irrigabat omnem faciem terrae.* “Face of the earth, that is to say, dignity of the earth,” St. Augustine comments, “is a name very rightly (*rectissime*) applied to the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, she whom the Holy Spirit, who is called in the Gospel by the name of fountain and water, waters so that out of the clay there might be formed the man who is placed in paradise to dress and keep it, that is, in the will of the Father, in order to accomplish it and keep it.”

13. *Quasi rota in medio rotae*

If she is already so beautiful and so worthy of praise as a part of the universe, *even without that which is hid within—absque eo quod intrinsecus latet,* how much more so is she as a separate principle and good. Under the latter aspect she is absolutely anterior to her character as part and a principle in relation to this character as a part. Her position as a part is ordained to her position as a separate principle. She is born within to be a separated principle, she is born in the universe to become the mother of all things. That which is without proceeds from that which is within, and that which is within proceeds thence in order to proceed without. As a separate principle she is more within the universe than when considered as a part within it. *Intrinsecus ejus per circuitum—as the appearance of fire round about.* There is thus established a circular motion between her dignity as a separated principle and her dignity as the noblest part of pure creation, a circular motion which embraces the very order of the parts of the universe. The order and dignity inherent
in the universe are thus all the more intimately linked to the separated principle insofar as this principle is at the same time the principal intrinsic part of the universe. This circular motion imitates in a way the circular motion between the incarnate Wisdom and the mother of this Wisdom, which in turn imitates more deeply still the circular motion between the Father and the perfect and consubstantial image of the Father, *as it were a wheel within a wheel—quasi sit rota in medio rotae.*

14. *De fructu suo cognoscitur*

The fact that her Son infinitely surpasses her in privileges and dignity manifests the sovereign dignity of the mother. It is her Son, *the fruit of her womb,* the word whom she has drawn from her heart, who surpasses her infinitely.

We grant that her Son surpasses her in all privileges: but this, far from diminishing the praise of the mother, exalts it in that she has not only engendered a Son equal to her, but a Son infinitely better than herself. Under this aspect the goodness of the mother is rendered, in a sense, infinite. Each tree is known by its fruit: hence, if the goodness of the fruit makes the tree good, the infinite goodness of the fruit manifests an infinite goodness of the tree.

15. *Mons in vertice montium*

In his admirable commentary on the Sapiential Books, Cornelius a Lapide expresses in the most formal way the primary reason for this appellation of Wisdom from the point of view of the end, which is the cause of causes. How can the Blessed Virgin be made to say the things which Wisdom says of itself: *I brought it about that in the heavens there should rise light that never faileth—ego in caelis feci ut oriretur lumen indeficiens—and I have poured out rivers—ego sapientia effudi flumina?* To this I answer, first, that in the mystical sense these words should be understood as follows: I brought it about that in the heavens, that is, in the Churches, Christ should be born, He who is the sun of justice; I have
brought it about that in the Church there should rise the light of faith. Furthermore, the Virgin, comparable to a sea of graces, pours out her rivers upon the Church and the faithful. Secondly, according to the literal sense, one should read: I have been the cause for God to create the light, the heavens, the sea, the rivers and all the universe. The creation of God is ordained, as to its end, to the justification and glorification of the Saints, accomplished by Christ through the Blessed Virgin; for the order of nature was created and instituted for the order of grace. Thus, then, it is because the Blessed Virgin was the mother of Christ that she subsequently becomes the mediatrix of all the other graces instituted by Christ; whence for the same reason, she was the final cause of the creation of the universe. Indeed, the end of the universe is Christ such that His mother and the saints, that is to say, this universe was created in order for the Saints to enjoy grace and glory through the intermediary of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. That is why the final cause of the creation of the universe was the predestination of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints. Although Christ and the Blessed Virgin are parts of the universe and consequently posterior to it in the order of material causality, nevertheless they are anterior to it in the order of final causality. There is thus a certain reciprocal dependency between the creation of the universe and the birth of Christ and the Blessed Virgin. God did not wish Christ and the Blessed Virgin to be born except in this world; nor did He wish that this universe exist without Christ and the Blessed Virgin; on the contrary, it was for them that He created it. He wished that the whole universe, no less than the order of grace, should be referred and ordained to Christ and the Blessed Virgin as to its complement and end. Christ and the Blessed Virgin are thus the final cause of the creation of the universe and at the same time they are its formal, that is, exemplary cause, namely the idea. In effect, the order of grace in which Christ with the Blessed Virgin occupies the first place is the idea and exemplar according to which God created and disposed the order of nature and of all the universe.76

16. Quae est ista?

Are we not amazed at the supereminent beauty of this pure creature, of this purely created Wisdom? Is she not called “Mother most admirable,” that
is, Mother, principle, whose cause is unfathomable? Mary, the most astounding of all mere creatures, allows us, in a manner most proportioned to us, to surmise the incomprehensibility of Wisdom which precedes all things. _Who hath searched out the wisdom of God that goeth before all things?—Sapientiam Dei praecedentem omnia quis investigavit?_ To what purely created work could she be compared? _There was no such work made in any kingdom—Non est factum tale opus in universis regnis._ Is she not so astounding that, according to St. Bernard, even the princes of the celestial court are filled with astonishment: _Who is this that cometh up from the desert, leaning upon her beloved? Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?—quae est ista quae ascendit de deserto; quae est ista quae progreditur quasi aurora consurgens pulchra ut luna electa ut sol terribilis ut acies ordinata?_
PART TWO

Nigra sum, sed formosa

17. Universae viae Domini misericordia et veritas

Why does the Holy Virgin tell us “I am black, but beautiful—Nigra sum sed formosa”? What connection could there be between the attribution of wisdom and of blackness that signifies a state of inferiority, as can be seen in the term ‘but’? Far from excluding one another, would not these two qualifications have a link of dependence between them? Would there not be a very intimate connection between that blackness the mother of God attributes to herself and her note as first principle?

To gauge the nature of this link, we must go back to the primary motive and to the universal way of God’s communication without—ad extra. But this motive is nothing other than the divine goodness insofar as it is diffusive of itself. The root of the primary way of this diffusing and of this manifestation outside is mercy. All the ways of the Lord are mercy and truth—Universae viae Domini misericordia et veritas. That is why St. Bernard calls the mercy of God causalissima causarum—of causes the one that is most cause. Mercy is the first root, even of justice. “But the work of divine justice,” St. Thomas writes,

always presupposes the work of mercy and is grounded in it. Nothing is owed to the creature save because of something preexisting in him, or pre-considered in him: again, if it is owed to the creature, this will be because of something prior. And since we cannot be involved in an infinite regress, we must come to something which depends solely on the good of the divine will, which is the ultimate end. For example, it is as if we should say that to have a hand is owed to man because of his rational soul; and to have a rational soul, in order that he be man; and he is a
man because of the divine goodness. So it is that mercy shows up in any work of God, as its first root. And its power is saved in everything consequent upon it, and even operates more strongly in it, as the primary cause has a stronger effect than does the secondary cause.  

Mercy, having the meaning of absolute universal root, extends from one end of the universe to the other. Even the sovereign dignity of the Incarnation is willed only with a view to the manifestation of the divine glory by way of mercy and justice. Any dignity other than God’s own is only a relative absolute. “The end for the sake of which the glory of God should be made manifest is by way of mercy and justice; hence because the Incarnation can accomplish this effect of manifesting mercy and justice in man’s redemption, the motive for willing the Incarnation was not the dignity of the Incarnation taken absolutely, but the Incarnation as bringing about such an effect.” Since it has the note of the perfectly universal root, “mercy is apparent even in the damnation of the reprobate, not as completely relaxing it, but in a way alleviating it, never punishing beyond what is due.”

The concept of mercy includes a quite eminent perfection: it is the virtue of the superior precisely as superior.

I reply that it should be said that a virtue can be the highest in two ways: in one way, taken in itself; in another way, by comparison to the one having it.—In itself indeed mercy is highest, for it pertains to mercy that it flows to the other, and, what is more, that it makes up for the defects of the other; and this belongs most to the superior. Hence to be merciful is said to be proper to God, and in it His omnipotence is especially made manifest.

But with respect to the one having it, mercy is not the greatest, unless he who has it is greatest, having nothing above himself but everything else beneath him. For one who has others above himself it is higher and better to be joined to the superior than to make up the defects of inferiors. Therefore, as for man who has God superior to him, charity, by which he is united to God, is more powerful than mercy through which he supplies what is lacking in his neighbor. But of all the virtues which pertain to the neighbor, mercy is most powerful, as its act too is more powerful, for to supply the lack of another is, as such, the act of one superior and better.
18. Miserationes ejus super omnia opera ejus

If mercy is fulfilled in the elevation of the inferior, this elevation will be the more merciful and revealing of the divine goodness and omnipotence when it raises up that which is most inferior. In other words, we can judge the measure in which God has willed to manifest Himself by the degree of merciful raising up that He has chosen to realize.

If the divine mercy is already manifest in creation, it shines forth even more insofar as it raises others above their defects (inquantum defectus aliorum sublevat). The Lord’s mercies are above all his works—Miserationes ejus super omnia opera ejus. But among all defects, properly speaking evil is the greatest. It is evil, insofar as it has the note of misery, which will be the motive of the plenitude of mercy, of mercy victorious over evil: “evil is the motive of this mercy.”

19. Angeli fortudine, et virtute cum sint majores . . .

In order to gauge the height and depth of what God has chosen to make manifest outside Himself, we must see the baseness of the nature He has elevated above all other creatures. It is indeed in this that merciful omnipotence most properly shines forth. Let us consider first off the hierarchy of created things in the perfection that belongs to them by nature.

At the summit of creation envisaged from a purely natural point of view are found the angels, pure spirits, beings very perfect with respect to both substance and operation. Their essence being simple, each of them is of itself a complete and individual species, subsisting outside every common natural genus. Each of them exhausts a degree of being. Radically hierarchized, each of the angels occupies in this hierarchy an absolutely determined place. Even the lowest pure spirit constitutes by himself a universe incomensurably more perfect than the cosmos and humanity combined.

The cosmos and its most perfect interior term, humanity, are only a remote echo of the spiritual universe—quaedam resonantia. One can show this by considering in a dialectical manner the angelic hierarchy in the sense of its inferior limit. In proportion as the angels are distant from Pure Act, the simplicity of their essence diminishes. The limit of this departure from the note of simplicity is an essence composed of matter, form, and privation.