

ANGLIA DOS MARIAE: Why England needs Mary

A talk given by Fr Tristan Cranfield on March 15th 2020, at Our Lady of Ransom, Eastbourne

0. INTRODUCTION

In its basic meaning, consecration is the ‘setting apart’ of something for the duty of serving God alone. Think of the consecration of an altar in a church; it means that that altar cannot be used for any secular purpose, but that it becomes an instrument of worship. We talk about the altar being ‘sacred’ or ‘holy’, but that it is not, of course, meaning that the stone table itself possesses any special qualities.

When it comes to consecrating a person, things are somewhat different. Here, consecration can then be spoken of in three ways. It refers to a ‘setting aside’ that comes about by way of an external ceremony: think of an ordination, or the consecration of a virgin. But human beings are not merely material creatures, but also spiritual: they have knowledge (with that faculty known as the intellect) and desire (with the faculty known as the will), and thus consecration for them cannot be merely a matter of externals. For consecration to be truly received, there also has to be a second element: engagement of this free will inside them, ‘to go along with it’. And thirdly, for it to be more than a token consecration, for it to be truly fruitful they need to actively desire it; to become only for God in all they do. This is the difference between a man who has been ordained priest, and then does not live his priesthood, and one who tries with his heart to renew his priesthood every day.

In just over a week’s time, we will be called to make a consecration of ourselves and our country, England. Primarily, on Sunday 29th June, there will be an external consecration being performed by our bishops on us, and on our land. But as well, on the Wednesday before (which is the feast of the Annunciation) we are also asked to make the second type: an inner consecration made through our own desire, that will accord with this outer dedication. And this is the consecration that we will have also to live out and let grow and flourish.

Today then, I want to talk about what making such a consecration really means. Why Mary – and why England? What is so special about this land, traditionally known as Mary’s “Dowry”? And why should it need a re-dedication? To answer these questions, I will be looking at both the theology of Our Lady’s role in salvation (Mariology) and at the history of England; firstly discussing Our Lady as Mother and Mediatrix, then passing to her Patronage of England, before returning to the notion of what a personal consecration entails. Hopefully, discussing these elements separately will allow it to become clear why England badly needs this Marian consecration. May Our Lady be our guide!

1. OUR LADY: MOTHER AND MEDIATRIX

It all began with a ‘yes’. Our Lady’s consent to the angel: “Be it done to me according to thy Word” (Lk 1:38) is the moment the world changes. In agreeing to become the Mother of God, Mary allows the plan of salvation to take place. God called her into existence for no other reason than to fulfil this most awesome of all vocations. But still, she is a free agent and so, He asks her permission to take part in the plan to save mankind from sin. It is in this way that

Christ's taking on of human nature involves humanity's freedom from the very start, reversing the bad use of freedom that was made by humanity's forebears at the Fall. St Bernard speaks in the most marvellous way about this moment:

“If you consent, straightway shall we be freed. In the eternal Word of God were we all made, and lo! We die; by one little word of yours in answer shall we all be made alive...Answer, O Virgin, answer the angel speedily; rather, through the angel, answer your Lord. Speak the word, and receive the Word; offer what is yours, and conceive what is of God; give what is temporal, and embrace what is eternal.”¹

This last point of St Bernard's is crucial: thanks to God's extraordinary condescension, we can speak of a true exchange here between Him and Mary – almost as if between equals (although there really is no equality between God and any creature, even her). This exchange is important when we consider Mary's role in our salvation as ongoing. It means that she stands as the gateway to our relationship with Christ, God made man; by God, she is employed to do two things that are really two sides of the same coin: she both brings Jesus to us, and us to Jesus.

Let us consider these two sides. Firstly, then, Mary brings Jesus to us, and this is through the continuing effects of her 'yes'. After the Holy Spirit's power conceives Jesus in her womb, all that we receive from God comes through His humanity, working like an instrument; as St John puts it: “From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). And it is in this humanity, that he suffered, died and rose again, cancelling out sin and unlocking the gates of heaven. But the fact remains that it was Our Lady's exchanging of her will, so to speak, to become one with God's, that this took place. Even at the foot of the Cross, filled with a pain as perfect as her love for the child she was losing, she willed Jesus onwards, because she knew His mission to be the desire of her Father and His. That is a result of her sinlessness, never to will anything contrary to God's plan. In heaven, this still continues, her only desire that salvation be given to God's elect. We can say then without a shadow of a doubt, as the Second Vatican Council affirmed, that she is 'mediatrix' of all graces.² Thanks to her ongoing 'yes', it is through her that Jesus's power touches us, every time our will joins with that 'yes' too. It is through her 'yes' that we consent to baptism, and thus she is our mother, not in the order of the flesh, but in the order of the Spirit.

That is how Mary continually brings Jesus to us. Now: how does she bring us to Jesus? This is through not just her consent, but through what Jesus Himself asks of her. Mary is only *mediatrix* of graces for the reason that, in the first place, God has made her a mother. She is mother of our adoption into God's family, because God entrusts us to her. She is our refuge, our safe haven. At the foot of the Cross, this is made clear in one of Christ's Seven Last Words: “Woman, behold your son!” as he entrusts John to her keeping, and her to John's: “Behold, your mother!” (Jn 19:6) At that moment, the members of the Church, who are Christ's body, and their mother, are given to one another in a unique way. That feminine intuition, and confidence in the will of her son, that we see her employ at the wedding feast of Cana, works on our behalf too. Our desires, if pure and true, are hers also: our nourishment her concern, our daily problems tug at her heartstrings. This is the secret of understanding Mary's intercession for us in heaven. People sometimes wonder, if Jesus hears all our prayers and is the only Mediator between humanity and the Father, why we would bother pray to the Virgin Mary. But this is begging the question. God has not orchestrated our salvation in such

¹ St BERNARD of Clairvaux, Homily 4:8-9

² SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 62

a way that we can avoid praying with and through Mary; we are her spiritual children whether we like it or not, and every time we pray, it is through her to her Son who shares in her flesh. She is always involved in all prayer! That is part of God's providence.

Surely, then, to follow Jesus's command to 'behold our mother' is to our benefit, and enables us to grasp what God wished Mary to contribute to the relationship with Him in which he has brought her. She bore Jesus in her body; we wish to bear Him in our soul; she taught him, directed him, played with him; we wish to be taught, directed and uplifted by His divine joy. Few sentences express this in prayer better than the dazzling Collect that follows end the office of Compline in the older form of the Breviary, during Advent and Christmastide:

“Deus, qui salutis aeternae, beatae Mariae virginitate fecunda, humano generi praemia praestitisti, tribue, quaesumus, ut ipsam pro nobis intercedere sentiamus, per quam meruimus Filium tuum auctorem vitae suscipere”³

The complex syntax of the prayer mirrors the mental gymnastics that we have to perform to try and enunciate this mystery, which by faith we know intuitively and quite simply: that Mary's role in our salvation is essential, ongoing and marvellous. It is clear, too, that it is no way jeopardises the centrality of Jesus Himself. Mary, too, was saved by Jesus, as she was created preserved from sin. She stands infinitely below her God, as her Maker and Redeemer. Yet, it was He who conceded to be subject to her, as Her Son.

2. THE DEDICATION OF ENGLAND

Hopefully, from what I have said so far, we can see that devotion to Our Blessed Lady is necessary for all of us. But is it un-British? Some have said that Marian devotion is not part of our culture, being a Mediterranean affectation, better suited to those people lucky enough to come from warmer climes.

However, a look at the history of England shows that nothing could be farther from the truth. This is evidenced in the proliferation of shrines, poetry, artwork and devotional practices that the English have produced and loved over the centuries – especially before the sixteenth Century, where the political powers, corrupted by the lure of the Reformation, saw fit to try and suppress all things Catholic, including the cult of the Blessed Virgin.

There could never be enough time to bring forward all the examples of Marian devotion which have flourished in England, but I will take one or two – starting with those best known to us: Christmas carols.

England is particularly blessed with an extraordinarily rich tradition of carol singing that marks it out among European countries. Many of these carols are preserved in what were called 'primers' or 'books of the hours'. A 'book of the hours' was a prayer book for lay-people, often richly illustrated. Such was their popularity, that Books of the Hours were among the first books to be mass produced on production lines, after the advent of the printing press and sold in stationery shops all over 15th Century Europe!⁴

³ God, who, of eternal salvation, by way of blessed Mary's fruitful virginity, for humanity paid the price; grant, we ask, that we might feel her intercede for us – she by whom we earned to receive Your Son, the author of life.

⁴ cf. E. DUFFY, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580*, p. 211

Mediaeval English carols notably display a deep appreciation of Our Lady's role in salvation history, and shine with affection for her. One particularly fine example of this is "I sing of a mayden", found in the *Horae Eboracenses*, a book of the hours from York:

I sing of a m[a]yden that is makeles
kyng of alle kynges to here sone che ches.
He cam also styllle there his moder was
as dew is aprylle, that fallyt on the gras.
He cam also styllle to his moderes bowr
As dew in aprille, that fallyt on the flour.
He cam also styllle ther his moder lay
as dew in Aprille, that fallyt on the spray.
Moder & mayden was never non but che –
wel may swych a lady godes moder be.⁵

The historian Eamon Duffy notes that this hymn marries a great theological depth, and Biblical and liturgical resonances (Gideon's fleece; the *Rorate caeli* of the Advent season) with a deeply personal attachment to the Virgin. Duffy also notes that the love of carols is connected to another English fascination, which was the devotion to the Joys of Mary (nowadays normally counted as seven, but in Mediaeval England more commonly five: Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Mary's Coronation as Queen of Heaven). These joys were familiar to 'every man, woman and child from their endless reproduction in carving, painting and glass' all over the country, and they were central to the great cycles of plays that would be performed in towns and villages at Corpus Christi.⁶ But even more important than these Joys, Duffy on goes to say, were the Sorrows of the Virgin, which were a particular focus for prayer in time of plague. He notes:

'This quest for a share in the sufferings of Christ, through identification with Mary, dominated the piety of Christian Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It gave rise to literally thousands of treatises, hymns, poems, sermons and devotional images [...] Every parish church contained an image of this Mater Dolorosa, for all were dominated by a Rood across the chancel arch, invariably flanked by mourning figures of Mary and the Beloved Disciple. [...] There was a typical one at Long Melford in Suffolk: "a fair image of Our Blessed Lady having the afflicted body of her dear Son, and as he was taken down off the Cross lying along on her lap, the tears as it were running down pitifully upon her beautiful cheeks, as it seemed bedewing the said sweet body of her Son, and therefore named the Image of our Lady of Pity."⁷

Margery Kempe, born in King's Lynn in 1373, and author of what some consider to be the first autobiography in the English language, was highly devout, and described many examples of piety in her book. She highlights the power of the image of Our Lady of Pity by relating the effect that it had on her in her local church. She speaks about herself in the third person:

"throw the beholding of that pete hir mende was al holy occupied in the Passyon of owr Lord Ihesu Crist & in the compassyon of owr Lady, Seynt Mary, be which sche was compellyd to cryyn ful lowde & wepyn ful sor, as thei sche xulde a deyde. Than can to hir the...preste seying, "Damsel, Ihesu is ded long sithyn." Whan her crying was cesyd, sche seyde to the preste, "Sir, hys deth is as fresche to me as

⁵ cf. *ibid.*, p. 257

⁶ cf. *ibid.*, p. 257

⁷ cf. *ibid.*, p. 260, quoting W. PARKER, *The History of Long Melford*, London, 1873

he had deyde this same day, & so me thynketh it awt to be yow & to alle Christen pepil. We awt euyr to have mende of hys kendnes & euyr thynkyn of the dolful deth that he deyde for vs.”⁸

Many people must have had the same experience as Margery in being united with the pains of Mary as she beheld her dying Son, as it is said that there was scarcely a church in the country that did not contain such an image.⁹ That said, Our Lady of Pity was by no means the only way that the English loved to relate to the Mother of God. Another especially English devotion was that of Our Lady of ‘Gesine’ or ‘Bedgang’ – that is to say: ‘childbirth’. Our Lady is depicted lying down, with the child Jesus in her arms or at her feet, as if she has just given birth.¹⁰ In the case of difficult births, English women were recommended to wear a girdle with the Magnificat written on it.¹¹ Men and women wore rings inscribed with an image of Our Lady on the gem-stone – a practice that seems to be uniquely English.¹²

Devotion to Mary permeated every walk of English life and every English institution. We know that before the Reformation schools such as Eton and Winchester were dedicated to Mary. At Oxford colleges, hymns to the Virgin would be sung in the evening, and the poorer students would go begging from door to door, singing the *Salve Regina*. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer describes a student’s room in Oxford, and depicts the devotion of a poor scholar to Our Lady:

‘His *Almagest*, and books both great and small
His astrolabe, belonging to his art,
His algorism stones—all laid apart
On shelves that ranged beside his lone bed’s head;
His press was covered with a cloth of red.
And over all there lay a psaltery
Whereon he made an evening’s melody,
Playing so sweetly that the chamber rang;
And *Angelus ad virginem* he sang.’¹³

Even the names of English flowers, once upon a time, prove how the English imagined the beauty of Our Lady, as the highest of God’s creatures, to be reflected in the rest of creation. Each flower was also associated with the feast of Our Lady that would take place around the time of its blossoming. Snowdrops, for example, pushing up out of the ground in the chill and dark first days of the year, were known as ‘Our Lady of February’, or ‘Purification Flowers’. Lungwort was ‘Our Lady’s milk-wort’, and associated with the Annunciation. Clematis was called ‘Virgin’s Bower’ as it bloomed around the Visitation. Spiranthus, for the Assumption, ‘Our Lady’s tresses’. Gentian, for Our Lady’s Birthday, ‘Our Lady’s Fringes’. Milk thistle still had the same name – but the ‘milk’ in question referred to the white spots on its leaves, as if milk had splashed from Our Lady, as she fed our infant Lord when He was little.

⁸ cf. M. KEMPE, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. S. B. Meech and H. E. Allen, English Early Text Society, 1940

⁹ cf. E. WATERTON, *Pietas Mariana Britannica: a history of English Devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Marye Mother of God*, London, 1879, p. 240

¹⁰ cf. *ibid.*, p. 234

¹¹ cf. *ibid.*, p. 207

¹² cf. *ibid.*, p. 208

¹³ G. CHAUCER, *The Miller’s Tale*, ll. 22-30

All these beautiful names have sadly been lost; all except one: the marigold. This flower seems to have made people think of the glorious beams that shine around Our Lady's head in so many depictions, and was associated with every feast.¹⁴

England also abounds with some sixty shrines dedicated to Our Lady, many of which were destroyed at the Reformation, of which Walsingham today is the most famous, and the modern centre of Marian piety which we are celebrating in this re-dedication. Sadly, there is no time to go into further detail of these here, fascinating though that would be.

We have seen that England is a country that can claim a great heritage of devotion to the Blessed Virgin. But certainly this is true of lands throughout the Catholic world. But on the other hand, only England has that strange title: 'Dowry' of Our Lady.

According to the straightforward account, the title of the 'dowry' of Mary comes from Richard II, that is to say, at the end of the fourteenth century. But it seems that the title is really older still, and that Richard merely applied what was already well understood by the people. The idea is that King Richard, seeking the protection of the Virgin in a time of political unrest, dedicated England as Our Lady's dowry in a ceremony at Westminster Abbey on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1381. This event is supposedly commemorated in a painting which was sent to the Venerable English College in Rome, showing the King and Queen on their knees, making an offering of England to Our Lady, through the hands of St John, the inscription underneath reading: "*Dos tua Virgo pia haec est, quare rege, Maria*" (This is your dowry, O pious Virgin, for you to rule).¹⁵ This painting has not been seen for many centuries. (However, the very well-known Wilton Diptych, now housed in the National Gallery, depicts a similar scene.) The historicity of this event is attested in documents from Richard's reign, where again we find the word *dos*, this time on the lips of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel. At Lambeth, on 10th February 1399, by mandate of the king, he affirmed the special consecration of the English people to Our Lady, among all the nations, writing:

"The contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation has brought all the Christian nations to venerate her from whom came the beginnings of redemption. But we, as the humble servants of her own inheritance and liegemen of her especial dower, as we are approved by common parlance...ought to excel all others in the fervour of our praises and devotions to her."¹⁶

Note that as far as the Archbishop is concerned, it is the 'common parlance' that has already had the final say and named the country as *dos* or 'dower'.

England, then, is Mary's Dowry by common assent, but also by official decree. This consecration of Richard II's has also be re-affirmed over time. During the Reformation, we can surely say that the many martyrs of England showed their love of Our Lady too, and so the spirit of this ancient title was not forgotten. Furthermore, in the time following the Restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy to England, the title was re-affirmed again, this time by all the bishops in consort with Pope Leo XIII. Pope Leo requested to English Catholics to recall the consecration of their land to the Blessed Virgin; and, at the same time, to place her under the patronage of St Peter. In doing so, he spoke of:

¹⁴ cf. Waterton, p. 194-197

¹⁵ cf. *ibid.*, p. 13. The Latin given by Waterton is surely correct, whereas the version of this quotation given in the Behold2020 literature seems less intelligible.

¹⁶ cf. *ibid.*, p. 14

“the wonderful filial love which burnt the hearts of your forefathers towards the Great Mother of God, Christ’s happy minister in our salvation, to whose service they consecrated themselves with such abundant proofs of devotion that the Kingdom itself acquired the singular and highly honourable title of “Mary’s Dowry””¹⁷

At the beginning of this talk, I started by noting that consecration is a multi-layered concept, with two main aspects: the external dedication and the inner personal consecration. In Our Lady’s Dowry, as we have seen, there has always been both. Firstly, there is the act of consecration or dedication, if you like, that was performed by the archbishop at the behest of the king, and then later by the bishops and pope. This is an irrevocable, objective act. Secondly, there is the consecration that members of the faithful, throughout English history, have made of themselves, offering themselves to Our Lady as a personal commitment to her, knowing that they are, as Thomas Arundel put it, the “liegemen” of her dowry.

In most cultures, a ‘dowry’ is usually understood as a bride-price: in some, the money that a man must give to the family of the woman he marries, or, in others, that which he gives to a wife as a personal gift upon marriage. Some say that this idea is hardly a suitable metaphor for England being offered to Our Lady. In response to this criticism, Msgr John Armitage, the outgoing Rector of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, has noted that in England, traditionally a ‘dowry’ was quite a different kettle of fish. Here, ‘dowry’ was actually the gift made to a *mother*: an amount set aside for her in the event of her husband’s death, to provide for her. This usage is reflected in the term ‘Dower House’, the home of the widowed ‘Dowager’, a title we are all much more familiar with again nowadays thanks to Maggie Smith’s role as the Dowager Duchess of Grantham, in *Downton Abbey*! Richard II’s gift of England to Our Lady was thus a son’s gift of affection to his mother.¹⁸

But why should such a gift be necessary? The fact is that England, like all countries, is called to be a land of the Gospel. The Dominican theologian Aidan Nichols, meditating on the Third Luminous Mystery of the Rosary: The Proclamation of the Kingdom and the Call to Repentance, has noted that Jesus said: ‘Go into the whole world and make disciples of all nations’ (Mt 28:19). He did not say: ‘make disciples of individual persons’ here and there. The Gospel is meant to be lived in community, and thus to reach everyone, which is only really fully possible if it does not exist in a hostile culture, but permeates the structures of society, institutions. Its message of love wants to live and breathe and shape a culture. Christianity, as we are becoming more and more aware in our post-Christian society, needs not only to be taught, but ‘caught’; as Nichols says: ‘it has to permeate the ethos of education, the practice of business, the art people see, the literature they read, the laws under which they live, the customs they find in place among them.’¹⁹ In a way then, the English Catholic must pray that not only that many people be Catholic, but the land they live in be so too, so that the fullness of Christ’s light can permeate it. This once was a reality here, as England is a country inseparable from its Christian roots. Trying to define ‘Englishness’ is a notoriously difficult thing; people sometimes come out with values like tolerance, fair-play, patience as English virtues...but really they are Christian virtues at the heart, even if somewhat distorted or stunted. Our legal and political structures, sense of the common good and mutual responsibility enshrined in our laws, system of governance, social welfare systems, all

¹⁷ ‘The Consecration of England to the Mother of God and the Prince of the Apostles: A Letter from the Cardinal Archbishop and the Bishops of the Province of Westminster’, London, 1893

¹⁸ cf. ‘The Tablet’, {date?}

¹⁹ A. NICHOLS, *Lessons in a Rose-Garden: Reviving the Doctrinal Rosary*, 2012, p. 144

ultimately stem from Christ – even if today they might be put to use to do things that are far from consonant with God’s law or virtue.²⁰

It is the Gospel’s proclamation of the reality of sin, the reality of forgiveness through Christ’s Passion, and the reality of Christ’s reign as King that are desperately lacking in our public sphere. More and more religion is side-lined as a private affair, and Catholicism (along with other belief systems) seen as a competing truth in the market of truths, presided over by a neutral system of non-belief. But such a system cannot be neutral: rather it betrays an ideology by unquestioningly asserting its own supremacy over truth. This is itself dangerous: as it is relativistic. It means that many souls will never be disposed to receive the Gospel, believing it to be one truth available among many, thanks to the prevailing culture; or indeed that they will never hear the Gospel at all, because the compartmentalisation of religion from the secular realm means that they never come into contact with Christians who are free to proclaim it to them. England needs to be docile to the Gospel again – to receive the truth, and not be lost trying to forge a path where there is not truth. Our Lady, docile to the will of God, is her ready patron, who always says: “Be it done to me according to *your* Word”.

3. PERSONAL CONSECRATION

The ‘objective’ or external dedication of the country as Mary’s Dowry is surely not complete without the interior allegiance of Mary’s sons and daughters, who are being asked to make a special, individual consecration to her this month.

But what is this consecration? Consecration, in this second, inner sense, seems to be related to what St Thomas Aquinas calls ‘devotion’ (*devotio*). Devotion is an *act of the will* that directs us to do something else for the honour of God. The things that we do might be varied: something interior, like prayer, or something exterior, like a sacrifice, an offering of money, food or help; a work of charity: visiting the sick or the imprisoned. But for any of those actions to be truly ‘religious’ in the sense that they are performed with God as their motive, a separate, overarching act of our minds needs to take place first. This act of the will reaching out to God, then engages to will to perform these other acts – but that first act is that which Thomas calls ‘devotion’.²¹

What do we need to perform everything we do for God, i.e. with devotion? Surely we cannot have to say to ourselves every time we do anything: “I do this for God!” But also it is surely not enough just to have said: “I consecrated myself to Mary last week – that ought to do the trick” and while going on acting however we like! The answer is that this inner core of our consecration comes about through shaping the will to always follow God. This shaping is ‘virtue’ – the formation of a good habit. The virtue or good habit in question here is called by St Thomas ‘*religio*’ – but it doesn’t mean ‘religion’ in the sense we usually use it today. Religion, for Thomas, is a good habit that is part of the virtue of justice – and justice is the virtue of always giving everyone what they are owed. Religion is the virtue of giving God what He deserves – which is everything! Like all human virtues, religion is a habit which we can learn, by constant practice, and which we can be given through prayer; and it also is strengthened by faith, hope and love: those special gifts of God Himself. God wants us to

²⁰ cf. Nichols, p. 140

²¹ cf. THOMAS Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a II^{ae}, q. 82, a. 1, ad 2.

have this habit; it enables everything we do, to be with devotion: it becomes ‘automatic’, and a pleasure for us.

But why develop such a habit to make acts of devotion particularly with Our Lady as their object? This question has already been answered by what I said at the beginning of my talk, that Mary is the mediatrix through whose ‘yes’ we are directly brought into contact with Jesus the Word of God, and receive His grace. Being able to pray and perform every work, preceded by that act of the will that seeks her out as its motivation, means that each word, thought and deed becomes a petition to her that it be completed in her way – that is to say, with utter, unquestioning love for Christ and the members of His Body. It also means that we grow in a horror for sin – because we become less and less ‘used’ to our will wandering its own way into pleasures that lead us away from her Son. Mary also becomes for us a model which the imagination can hold brightly in mind – all her virtues: faith, hope, love, humility, purity, obedience, courage and so on – which enabled her to be greatest follower of Christ – become the blueprint of our own life where we seek to follow him. The habit of religion animated everything she did, summed up in the very greatest act of the will – her “YES” – which in turn proceeded from the greatest act of devotion that permits all others.

This form of consecration, however – because it is about a habit – also takes time, preparation and determination. It takes us really to engage our will and practice offering up everything to Our Lady. This is the science behind St Louis de Montfort’s 33-day long preparation for Consecration to the Blessed Virgin. It involves three stages, the first of which is a renunciation of sin and a recognition of our unworthiness and the hopelessness of our state without God. Sinful acts cannot involve devotion – as the will is turned away from God and concerned only with itself. In this way, it cannot join with either the will of Our Lady or Our Lord, both of whom are utterly unselfish and constantly act to praise God and love their neighbour.²² The second and third stages both involve, as well as many prayers and devotions to the Holy Spirit, Our Lord and Our Lady, a conscious raising of the mind to Our Mother throughout the day and before every action, so that, through grace, this becomes a life-long habit.

With these practices, St Louis tells us, our actions and prayers all become ‘by Mary, with Mary, in Mary, for Mary’, so that we do them perfectly ‘by Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus and for Jesus’. To understand we only have to think of Mary’s role in our salvation as Mother and Mediatrix, as I explained at the beginning of this talk. We do things *by Mary* because we follow her cue to say ‘yes’ only to the things of the Spirit, and thus to Jesus. To do this, we must abandon our own desires and plans, and entrust our present to her. We do things *with Mary*, because she is the Model of the Christian – the Mother who teaches us what every virtue looks like, and thus we do them with Jesus, who also learned from her. We do things *in Mary*, because as Mediatrix, she is the conduit through which grace comes to us – like that image of the Gateway that I used to describe how she both brings Jesus to us and us to Jesus. Every good action is performed with God’s grace, and we become aware of this the more we think of her as full of grace, and that that fullness is extended to us. More and more filled with grace, we are drawn ever deeper into Christ, and thus in Jesus, rise with Him on the last day to be filled with His glory. Finally, we do things *for Mary*, because we have been entrusted to her. She becomes Our Mother and thus we desire to please her and defend her as

²² cf. De MONTFORT, Louis, *True Devotion to Mary: With Preparation for Total Consecration*, trans. F. W. Faber, London 1863, repub. London 2013, p. 160

any son would want to defend his Mother, against everything that attacks her – that is to say, sin.²³ With the devotion that comes from these efforts, more and more, we can say that we live *for Jesus*.

Perhaps it is this last note – for Mary – that most resonates with the particular notion of England as Our Lady’s Dowry; we are motivated to give back, as it were, all that has been given to us by Jesus through Mary, and consider our lives, and the land we live in too – as a family gift.

4. CONCLUSION

At this start of this talk, I said that I would address the topic ‘Why England Needs Mary’. Perhaps a better title would have been – Why England Needs Mary – and Why We Do Too. The life and health of any country in the end, is not separate from the people who live in it. As Catholics living in society, and especially as lay people, we have a strange double task. We are both to be enemies of what St Paul, St John the other New Testament writers call *ho kosmos* (the world) – the Spirit of which draws us away from things eternal, and leads us to forget God and His love for us. But also we are called to love *ho kosmos* the world, which God so loved “that He gave His own begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Jn 3:16) That is to say: that we are not to abandon our brothers and sisters who do not know God, but draw them to Him, but sacrificing in love for them, so that they can discover the great sacrifice of Christ for all of us.

Mary is the irreplaceable doorway to Christ. She stands as the image of the Church, humanity fully alive in love, and dead to all sin; she represents the world totally restored in Her Son even as she is Mother of the Church and Queen of Heaven. England, despite her many, many failings, has always had a special significance as being her dowry. It will take more than the bishops’ say so to make this the case. It will take grace, offered to us by Jesus through the hands of Mary, to make us more and more like Her Son, and offer up the direction of our life: in the workplace, in the parish, in the family home, to her guidance, and reclaim this land for her, soul by soul. I end with a few verses that summarise this hope, from an English rhyme:

“Long years ago, ere faith and love
Had left our land for sin and shame
Her children called my blossoms bright
By their sweet Mother’s gentle name
And when, amid the leaflets green
They saw sweet ‘Mary-buds’ unfold
In honour of the Angel’s Queen
They plucked the Royal Marygold

I was the favourite of the poor
And bloomed by every cottage door
Speaking of Heaven’s Fair Queen to men
They loved me for the name I bore.
There is no love for Marye now
And faith died out when love grew cold
Men seldom raised their hearts to heaven
When looking at the Marygold.

²³ cf. De Montfort, pp. 118-120

But Marye from her throne on high
Still looks on England and on me,
The namesake of the Queen am I,
The Ladye of the Land is she.
And surely she must win once more
Her heritage to Christ's True Fold;
Then to her children, as of yore,
Will preach again the Marygold."²⁴

Let us pray:

O blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our most gentle Queen and Mother, look down in mercy upon England thy "Dowry" and upon us all who greatly hope and trust in thee. By thee it was that Jesus our Saviour and our hope was given unto the world; and He has given thee to us that we might hope still more. Plead for us thy children, whom thou didst receive and accept at the foot of the Cross, O sorrowful Mother. Intercede for our separated brethren, that with us in the one true fold they may be united to the supreme Shepherd, the Vicar of thy Son. Pray for us all, dear Mother, that by faith fruitful in good works we may all deserve to see and praise God, together with thee, in our heavenly home.

Amen.

²⁴ *Legends of Our Ladye and the Saints*, i, London, 1870, p. 77, quoted in Waterton, p. 194