

Seven in the Heart, One in the Hand: The Mediation of the Immaculate In the Poetry of Hopkins and Chesterton

“I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.

“Night shall be thrice over you,
And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?” (bk. 1, 254-261)

These words G. K. Chesterton placed on the lips of the Blessed Virgin Mary in his epic poem about a great war in early English history, “The Ballad of the White Horse.” The heavenly Queen, solicitous for the welfare of the Saxons, appeared to Alfred the Great (849-899), who had retreated to Athelney in the face of an inevitable victory for the invading Danes. “Broken to his knee,” he was tempted to think that “God had wearied of Wessex men/ And given their country field and fen,/ to the devils of the sea” (143-145). He asked the Blessed Virgin if it was true, and in Her maternal solicitude She responded in strangely enigmatic words, which were the answer to his prayer:

“I tell you naught for your comfort,
Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.”

The Queen of heaven promised that her domain would be an “iron cope” on the shoulders of the King of Wessex, not as armor, but as a burden of his authority. And, as a final benediction, by which he was sent off to a hopeless battle, She posed a question, which was left unanswered in Her disappearing: “Do you have joy without a cause,/ Yea, faith without a hope?”

When *The Times* recorded the defeat in Crete during the Second World War, the article was headed by the words of the Mass “Sursum Corda” and followed by the two stanzas of “The Ballad of the White Horse” which we have quoted.¹ In a moment of sorrow, the Queen of the Seven Swords was remembered by the people of Her dowry.

In this poem Chesterton challenges us all to remember Her sorrows and to realize in ourselves what it means to have joy without a cause and faith without a hope, i.e., in what way Her maternal love is manifested to us, when She holds up, as in a mirror, Her sorrowful and Immaculate Heart. Seven swords pierce that Heart, but one is in Her hand to defend us. This

¹ Joseph Pearce, *Wisdom and Innocence*. San Francisco: Ingatius Press, 1996. 166, 167.

sword She offers to us, that we, like Her, might fight the good fight, even under the weight of the “iron cope” of the cross.

In this paper I hope to demonstrate the presence of the doctrine of the Coredeemption and Mediation of the Immaculate in the poetry of G. K Chesterton and Father Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J. There are several reasons for the choice of the poetry of these two Englishmen: 1) because I believe I can show that the doctrine is present in their poetry--no, not in a theological formulation, but in an artistic one, which in my opinion represents a deep assimilation of the meaning and content of this doctrine of the ordinary magisterium; 2) because there is a remarkable complementarity between these two poets: Chesterton, a thomist, Hopkins a scotist; Chesterton, a layman and journalist, Hopkins, a priest and Jesuit religious; Chesterton, whose poetry was very spontaneous and unrefined, Hopkins, whose poetry was very studied and meticulous; Chesterton, whose prosody was traditional; Hopkins, whose prosody, though traditional in many ways, was still very innovative. Perhaps some would see in these more a contrast than a complementarity, but both Chesterton and Hopkins approached reality in terms of first principles, and directed their imaginations with truly Catholic sensibilities toward the assimilation of truth.

The scope of this paper limits me to providing only the background material that is necessary to understand what Hopkins and Chesterton are trying to accomplish in their poetry; however, the depth of their metaphysical insights, expressed more precisely in their prose, but present also in their poetry, is exactly what makes their verse so apt for expressing the full truth about Mary.²

² The metaphysical thought of Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874-1936) and Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) are strewn throughout their writings. In the case of Chesterton, his prodigious published and unpublished work spans many years and includes books, articles and columns written weekly for several periodicals. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, is in the process of republishing G. K. C.'s works. An excellent introduction to his life and thought is Joseph Pearce's biography *Wisdom and Innocence* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996). The standard biography was written within a decade of his death by his literary friend Maisie Ward (*Gilbert Keith Chesterton*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943). Enlightening in particular, in regard to the development of scholastic thought, are Chesterton's biographies of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Thomas Aquinas; *The Everlasting Man* is his *opus magnum* and is a profound expression of his insistence on the priority of truth, the uniqueness of Christian thought, and a refutation of secularist syncretism. All three of these works have been republished in one volume (Vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986). For a fairly complete anthology of G. K. C.'s poetry see *The Collected Poetry of G. K. Chesterton*. (London: Methuen, 1939). The first half of a more recently redacted, and more complete, anthology (Part 2 unavailable at time of this printing) is available in *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton (Collected Poetry*. Vol. 10, Part 1. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994). An excellent anthology of much of G. K. C.'s Marian poetry is *The Queen of Seven Swords* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1933). Finally, for the text of *The Ballad of the White Horse*, with an enlightening explanatory introduction see *The Ballad of the White Horse* (Ed. Bernadette Sheridan. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001).

A good introduction to the life and poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins is *A Hopkins Reader*, with the introduction to Hopkins' life by Dr. John Pick, followed by a good selection of his poetry and prose, including “The Wreck of the Deutschland (Garden City: Image Books, 1966). Elsewhere

On the contrary, most of the current objections to the Coredemption are pragmatic, and skirt the issue of whether the doctrine is true or not: the definition is inopportune; the term is ambiguous; a papal definition would be unecumenical. For both Hopkins and Chesterton truth is most important and fundamental, because it is truth that underlies all the things that change. In his novel *The Club of Queer Trades*, Chesterton, in answer to secular intellectualism of Sherlock Holmes, puts on the lips of his own detective, the mystic and poet Basil Grant, the following words: "Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It's only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up--only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars."³ That life which unifies and elevates is truth; it is truth which underlies and is metaphysically prior to all our experience. Father Hopkins for his part, sees this truth in his perception of beauty, as the kernel of each thing that exists, ultimately related to the mediation of Christ and the subordinate mediation of Mary. For both Chesterton and Hopkins Our Lady plays a central role in the Christian discovery of truth, and this is expressed with profundity and eloquence in their poetry. Many examples can be given; however, for our specific purposes here, and for the sake of brevity we will use as the basic structure of the presentation only two poems: The one of Chesterton we have already begun to consider; of Hopkins, we will use the foundational piece of his mature work: "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

Let us, then, for a moment, leave King Alfred to gather the chiefs for the Battle of Ethandune, while we consider from another point of view, the joy without a cause and faith without a hope, as Gerard Manley Hopkins saw it in the plight of "five Franciscan nuns, exiles by the Falck Laws, drowned between midnight and morning of Dec. 7th 1875."⁴

The Wreck of the Deutschland

On that fateful night, as Gerard Manley Hopkins was lying asleep in the comfort St. Beuno's College "on a pastoral forehead of Wales," as he notes in stanza 24 of the poem, the *Deutschland* an iron clad steamship of some 300 feet was hard into her second night of a slow tortured death in the North Sea near the mouth of the Thames. Twenty four hours earlier a furious snow squall

Hopkins' writings have been published in seven volumes: *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie, 4th ed. London: Oxford University, 1967; *Note-books and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. H. House. London: Oxford University, 1937; *Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. H. House and G. Storey. London: Oxford University, 1959. *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. Christopher Delvin. London: Oxford University Press, 1959; *Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*. Ed. C. C. Abbott, 2nd (revised) impression. London: Oxford University, 1955; *Correspondence of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Watson Dixon*. Ed. C. C. Abbott, 2nd (revised) impression. London: Oxford University, 1955; *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ed. C. C. Abbott, 2nd (revised) impression. London: Oxford University, 1956. For an excellent commentary on the poems with a useful reference section of terms used by Hopkins for his poetics, see Norman H. MacKenzie. *A Reader's Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1981. This is a companion work, i.e. the poems themselves are not included.

³ *The Collected Works of G.K. Chesterton*. Vol. 6. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991. 67.

⁴ From the dedication of "The Wreck of the Deutschland."

and an overconfident crew had run her aground upon the Kentish Knock, a great sand bank just off the east coast. For hours and hours the stranded and straining vessel fought for life under the continuous stress of the huge pounding breakers of the unrelenting storm. One hundred and thirteen passengers plus the crew were gradually driven from the lower decks to first class as the ship took on water, until the men were ordered into the rigging while the women and children scrambled onto a long unsubmerged table in the first class saloon just beneath a skylight.

Among the latter were five Franciscan nuns, exiles from Westphalia, Germany. They had fled their country perforce the Falck Laws, which gave the state virtual control over the Church and which eventually mandated the expulsion of all religious orders, save those who cared for the sick. Hopkins himself was already aware of the vicissitudes of religious orders in Germany, as he had met Jesuit confreres who had been thus displaced. Setting out from Bremen to New York on Saturday, 4 December, the nuns were headed for a convent hospital in Missouri to begin a new life. Instead, their lives ended in the early morning hours of the vigil of the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception with some sixty others of those who had embarked with them.

Hopkins had been deeply moved by the accounts of the survivors, variously recorded in the London newspapers. Having mentioned this to his rector, the latter expressed his wish that someone should write a poem about it. And so Hopkins broke a long poetic silence⁵ in order to memorialize the plight of the five nuns.

In particular, what had caught the imagination and sympathy of Hopkins about the story of the *Deutschland* was one of the five nuns, one taller than the rest, apparently the superior of the other four, who, as she stood with the women and children on the table in the flooding ship, distinguished herself in a remarkable way. In the nightmare of crashing waves and the blast of the storm, the terror of death loomed and descended upon the ship. A crew member climbed down from the rigging tied off by a rope to the aid of the women below, only to be "pitched to his death at a blow," and then to be "dandled the to and fro" for hours by the waves and wind to the horror of the others (st. 16, ll. 4, 6). Two people committed suicide, and at one point a

⁵ As a Jesuit priest, Father Hopkins stated that he could not in good conscience spend much time on poetry. Thus he made very little effort to publish during his life; he also complained at one time that he had none of "the inducements and inspirations that make others compose" and that his approach to the writing of verse had made it "so laborious" (*Reader*, 149). He also practiced an intense spiritual asceticism, and would at times refrain from writing verse for spiritual reasons. A devout Jesuit, Hopkins was especially attentive to the details of the Spiritual Exercises, and he persevered in his obedience to the demands of priestly and religious life at the expense of his personal inclinations (against certain distasteful assignments), and in the face of a sensitive temperament and terrible interior struggles. All of this, along with the "earnestness" of his poetry--Hopkins always insisted on writing poetry only about what was real and actual in his experience--converged to form an inspiration that was profoundly spiritual. Hopkins is well known for his so-called "Terrible Sonnets," which descry the profound spiritual desolation he experienced toward the end of his life (nos. 64-69, 74, in *Poems*, 99-103, 106-107). That desolation was long suffered in hope and was relieved only on his death bed. His last words were: "I am so happy. I am so happy. I am so happy." In "The Wreck of the *Deutschland*," Father Hopkins sees his own interior suffering in parallel with the sacrifice of the nun (sts. 2-4, cf. st. 24). In this context the Marian dimension of the poem tends to move swiftly through the idea of coredemption, from and to the personal suffering of the nun and the poet.

woman shrieking from the wheel house about her drowned child could be heard above the storm. According to Cardinal Manning's funeral sermon, the five nuns declined the opportunity to retreat to the rigging, leaving their vacant places for others. When four of their bodies were recovered after the rescue of the survivors their hands were found clasped in prayer. But the tall nun was remembered by many for her cry heard above both the storm and the shrieking woman. As water continued to fill the saloon she thrust her head through the skylight into the wind, sea and flash of the storm, calling: "O Christ, Christ come quickly."

Hopkins' Poetic Theory

Since any commentary on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, let alone on a poem as difficult as "The Wreck of the Deutschland," would require some background, and since in this case, as we shall see, the poetic theory of Hopkins is so related to the topic, we must include this somewhat parenthetical information on Hopkins poetics. "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is the first of Hopkins' mature poems and, in a certain sense, the key to understanding all his subsequent poetry. It is also one of the most demanding pieces written by this very recondite and somewhat eccentric poet. Indeed, the close friend of Hopkins, the poet laureate, Robert Bridges, asserts in his notes for the first edition of Hopkins' poetry, that the "The Wreck" is "the dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance, and confident in his strength from past success."⁶ Bridges, like many of the readers of Hopkins' poetry, was ambivalent toward the poetry. He obviously thought the work worth the editorial effort he invested in it, yet he was one of Hopkins' most severe critics. In the "Preface to Notes" of the first edition of Hopkins' poetry, Bridges catalogues what are in his opinion errors of taste: "affectation in metaphor"; "perversion of human feeling"; "exaggerated Marianism; "the naked encounter of sensualism and asceticism." He then defines all these faults with two concepts: oddity and obscurity.⁷

Hopkins' poetry is indeed odd and obscure, as he himself admitted. But there is a defense, one which is pertinent to our subject. Most of what Bridges objected to was due to the meticulousness with which the poet applied himself to capturing and expressing the essence of his artistic and spiritual experience. Every foot of his innovative rhythm, every choice of word, its turn of meaning, then used conventionally, now with a novel sense, every invention of a new word, every unusual turn of phrase or use of strange syntax, every linguistic device, such as end rhyme, internal rhyme, half rhyme, assonance, alliteration and consonance was carefully chosen and expressive of some kernel of insight.⁸ Hopkins was taken with the particularity of individual things in nature, what was singular about their beauty, and in what unique way they reflected divine beauty. He saw a parallelism between the beauty of the Creator and the creature, between the creature and man's experience of its beauty, between that experience and inspiration, between inspiration and ideas, between ideas and words and their sounds, rhythms, etc. Hopkins wrote: "all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism."⁹ The poet was often transported by the beauty of nature, and his journals were filled with spontaneously animated, yet meticulously wrought descriptions of his observations:

⁶ "Notes," Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems*. Ed., Robert S. Bridges. London: Humphrey Milford, 1918; Bartleby.com/122/101.html. 3/13/01.

⁷ "Preface to Notes," *Poems*. Bartleby.com/122/101.html. 3/13/01.

⁸ Cf. John Pick, "Introduction," *Reader*, 25.

⁹ "Poetic Diction," *Reader*, 136.

I do not think I have ever seen anything more beautiful than the bluebell I have been looking at. I know the beauty of our Lord by it. Its inscape¹⁰ is mixed of strength and grace like the ash tree. The head is strongly drawn over backwards and arched down like a cutwater drawing itself back from the line of the keel. . .¹¹

And this description of a single bluebell goes on for another some one hundred and thirty words, with a pencil sketch to further illustrate. The poetry which was often later crafted out of this raw material has the aura of the mystical, something received gratuitously and grasped through a mysterious gift, yet expressed through sustained and precise effort. Father Hopkins frequently reflected upon the relation of the created order to God, in the context of beauty and poetic inspiration, and developed a poetic theory and prosody¹² which reflected his metaphysical convictions.

That poetic theory and aesthetic has a connatural nexus with the idea of Marian mediation, and logically these ideas are linked in the thought of Hopkins, even if the relation is only implicit in his writings. The parallelism manifested in the created order extends itself to a relation between beauty and charity, and Mary, as the zenith of the created order and Immaculate Mother of God, definitively secures this nexus. This is true, because metaphysically prior to the parallelism of nature and grace, is the presupposition that the Incarnation has an absolute value for all of creation, and that, therefore, Our Lady is factored into that value.

For Hopkins, God is first principle of all things and somehow communicates himself to all His creatures already at the level of mere nature. Every individual thing, over and above its genus or species, has a particularity which in a unique way communicates the power, wisdom and goodness of God. Thus, nature itself is mediatorial, and this in a most individual way: every particular thing radiates the divine in a way that no other thing ever will. This radiance in the first place is in the intellectual order; however, when experienced as beauty, without diminishing

¹⁰ *Inscape* with its complementary term *instress* is explained on page 8 below.

¹¹ *Reader*, 95.

¹² Hopkins is well known for his extensive use of what he named *sprung rhythm*, which in fact he determined was present in older English poetry, and in some written near to his own time, e.g., that of Milton. In this type of meter the measure of the line is counted by stresses only, and not by the number of syllables, as is the case in common rhythm. In other words, all the feet do not necessarily have the same number of syllables, and stressed syllables may follow one immediately after another. Sprung rhythm has the immediate appearance of being comparatively irregular, or counterpointed in excess, and therefore licentious. But for Hopkins sprung rhythm allowed his verse to have both the “markedness of rhythm” and the “naturalness of expression,” since “it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech” (*Reader*, 144). By using sprung rhythm he was attempting to capture with great precision the essence of the things he described. As sprung rhythm is certainly a major contributor to the oddness of Hopkins’ poetry, one should remember his words: “I may say my apparent licences are counterbalanced, and more by my strictness. In fact all English verse, except Milton’s, almost, offends me as ‘licentious’. Remember this” (143). Hopkins considered himself actually quite strict in the application of the rules of prosody, insofar as he never wrote in an effort to embellish or impress, but strictly to express precisely the essence of the thing which inspired him. See “Author’s Preface” for the poet’s own explanation of sprung rhythm (*Poems*, 45-49).

its intellectual and universal aspect, such radiance is embraced more in the affective order (love is always posited in reference to the particular and individual, even where pure contemplation joins us ineffably to the divine: God is personal and individual, even if both Trinity and universal principle) and manifests a parallelism between the experience of beauty and the infusion of supernatural charity. In his perhaps greatest Marian poem, “The Blessed Virgin Mary compared to the Air we Breathe,” natural mediation and supernatural mediation coalesce and manifest this parallelism:

Wild air, world-mothering air,
Nestling me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleecièst, frailest-flixed
Snowflake; that’s fairly mixed
With, riddles, and is rife
In every least thing’s life;
This needful, never spent,
And nursing element;
My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air, which, by life’s law,
My lung must draw and draw
Now but to breathe its praise,
Minds me in many ways
Of her who not only
Gave God’s infinity
Dwindled to infancy
Welcome in womb and breast,
Birth, milk, and all the rest
But mothers each new grace
That does now reach our race--
Mary Immaculate,
Merely a woman, yet
Whose presence, power is
Great as no goddess’s
Was deemèd, dreamèd; who
This one work has to do--
Let all God’s glory through,
God’s glory which would go
Through her and from her flow
Off and no way but so (sts. 1-33).¹³

¹³ Hopkins wrote also in common rhythm, and indicated that this poem was in fairly regular “three-foot couplets.” He noted that “[i]t is partly a compromise with popular taste” (“Notes,” *Poems*, 283).

Nature performs, then, a “world-mothering” function (cf. l. 1). If air mothers the biological life within us, and beauty the poetic life, then Mary serves that maternal function in the order of grace. If all creatures are so ordered as to radiate the divine, then the zenith of the created order is *Mediatrix par excellence*.

Hopkins, then, formulated poetic experience in terms of what he called *inscape* and *instress*. In the passage from Hopkins’ journal quoted above, the bluebell’s “inscape,” he says, “is mixed of strength and grace like the ash tree.” If a landscape is outward and general, an inscape is inward and particular. For Hopkins, the perception of beauty is not merely a vague experience of the proportion of outer form, but the radiance of a specific inner form shining through its outer form. Within the generalities of a landscape, not only is there the individuality of particular beauty, but the revelation of the inner being that constitutes the individual. That is its inscape.

Complementary to the idea of inscape is instress. In reference to the inscape of the bluebell Hopkins says that “I know the beauty of the Lord by it.” This statement is illustrative of his general attitude toward created beauty and the way it affected him. For Hopkins, the unique beauty of the bluebell had an inner principle whose origin was Christ, and this principle was made evident in its outer manifestation of beauty, thus imprinting itself on the faculties of the observer, arousing within him an enthusiasm and inspiring a poetic expression of praise. According to one interpreter of Hopkins, R. K. R. Thornton, both the force by which this inner principle of inscape is formed and by which it impresses itself upon the faculties of the observer is called by Hopkins *instress*, the second term which defines Hopkins’ poetic theory.¹⁴

The inscape as the inner kernel of being, and the forming principle within both the object and subject is Christ. It is the Incarnate Christ as the summit of created beauty, i.e., within his human nature, that forms (instresses) each thing and leaves within it an objective trace or vestige of his beauty (its inscape), and it is Christ who illuminates (instresses) within man the likeness of his beauty through the inscape of created things.

In order to emphasize the importance of this theory to our topic, we do well to point out that Hopkins was delighted when he discovered the writings of Bl. John Duns Scotus. In the Subtle Doctor he found his intuitions confirmed. Scotus emphasized the individuality of created things, by virtue of a metaphysical principle, and our ability to know that individuality immediately. He also argued that all things are created, not only in the image and likeness of God, and the Word of God, but also that they bear the image of the Incarnate Christ, and so also that of His Holy Mother. This is the famous Franciscan Thesis, or the theory of the Absolute Primacy of Christ. Stated differently, it means that the Christian mystery is written into the fabric of creation, and this we experience, even prior to grace, though grace is necessary to grasp it. In Scotus, Hopkins found an advocate for his notion of parallelism, and its connaturality with Marian mediation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Quoted in Bernard Bergonzi, *Gerard Manley Hopkins*. Masters of World Literature Series. Louis Kronenberger, general editor. New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1977. 65.

¹⁵ For an overview of these philosophical positions of Scotus, with relative texts from the Subtle Doctor himself, see the work by Étienne Gilson: *Jean Duns Scot: Introduction a ses positions fondamentales*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1952. The basic texts concerning the Absolute Primacy of Christ can be found in Juniper Carol’s *Why Jesus Christ: Thomistic, Scotistic and Conciliatory Perspectives*. Manassas: Virginia, 1986. For Hopkins’ affirmation of the Absolute Primacy of Christ, see *Sermons*, 111 ff., 170, 275, 296.

Scotus departed in part from St. Thomas Aquinas' use of aristotelian hylomorphism, viz. that theory of Aristotle which posits as the constitutive principles of created physical beings: matter as the indeterminate, changeless substratum, and form as the principle of determination and change. According to this theory it is matter that constitutes the individual while form determines the species. E.g., matter, being indeterminate in itself, is determined by the form of a dog or a cat, or by different accidental forms which may change within the individual, like health or sickness. But one dog or cat is individuated from another by separate matter. In this way the concrete individual characteristics of this dog or cat recede into the background of the universal form. While not denying these distinctions Scotus posited a principle of individuation in addition to matter which he believed was necessary to take into account the particularities of individuals. This he called the *haecceitas* or *thisness*. Parallel to this ontological question is an epistemological one on which Scotus again differed from St. Thomas. The intellect, according to St. Thomas, is capable of knowing directly only universals, i.e. the purely intellectual, specific forms that are abstracted from sense experience. The singular, i.e., individual characteristics are known by the intellect only indirectly "by a kind of reflection" upon the "phantasms" formed by the senses and imagination (*Summa Theologiae*, p. Ia, q. 86, a. 1). For Scotus, both the universal form and the thisness of a thing are known by the intellect directly, in a single act, i.e., simultaneously.

For Hopkins, Scotus served to confirm his whole approach to aesthetics, and offer it a relation to sound Catholic metaphysics. Inscap is the *haecceitas* of the created thing, grasped in a unique way by man, in such wise that the impress of the inscape on the faculties of the soul offers not only knowledge of universal principles--and this most definitely--but also an immediate grasp of individual perfections, which for Hopkins were formed and impressed as the perfections of Christ. Here, it is the immediate and concrete encounter with individuals that is important--certainly in the light of truth, i.e. universal principles, and never deviating from them--but it is the individual which is the immediate impetus for the affective response or instress.

Thus, we can see the importance of the Franciscan Thesis to Hopkins' poetics. This famous theological opinion of Scotus is sometimes stated hypothetically as follows: If Adam had not sinned Christ would have still have become incarnate, not as Redeemer but as a king coming in glory. Stated more precisely as a point of fact, the predestination of Christ is absolute, i.e. not relative to the sin of Adam. In other words, God willed the Incarnation as his masterpiece before any other work of creation. In His omniscience, God knew Adam would sin, and therefore did predestine His Son to be Redeemer, but not as a fail-safe to His original plan. The motive of the Incarnation is independent of Adam's sin, though the Father willed that His incarnate Son redeem man from sin through the Cross. It is for this reason that the beauty of created things is ultimately the beauty of the Incarnate Christ.

Furthermore, the logic of the Absolute primacy of Christ, leads to the notion of the subordinate mediation of the Immaculate. Under the influence of Scotus the dogma of the Immaculate Conception became a teaching dear to the heart of Hopkins. Now the Church, in defining a dogma by using the formulation of a particular theologian, does not necessarily canonize or approve of all the arguments which lead to the formulation; however, it is a noteworthy fact to remember that there is an internal logic to the Absolute Primacy of Christ which leads to the conclusion of the Immaculate Conception. And while the Church in fact has never settled the question of the precise nature of Christ's primacy, the Scotistic position remains

For Hopkins, then, beauty in created things is not only Christocentric but also Mariacentric: Christ and our Lady together are the zenith of creation, and the exemplar for all that is. In Hopkins' Marian poems like "The Blessed Virgin Mary compared to the Air we Breathe" this is obvious, but even in poems whose immediate inspiration and matter are not Marian this shines through. In "The Starlight Night" the starlit dome of the sky and the beauty of nature all around is conceived of as the architecture of heaven, the barn which houses all the beauty that gathers the infinite perfections of Christ and His Mother:

Look at the stars! look up at the skies!
O look at all the fire folk sitting in the air!
The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!
Down in dim woods their diamond delves! the elves's-eyes!
The grey lawns cold where gold, where quickgold lies!
Wind-beat whitebeam! airy abeles set on a flare!
Flake-doves sent floating forth at a farmyard scare!
Ah well! it is all a purchase, all is a prize.

All is a prize to be instressed, to be bought, i.e., assimilated through an affective response of prayer, patience, alms and vows. But prized as the beauty of creation may be in itself, even more, what is contained within their inscapes, viz. Christ and His Mother:

Buy then! bid then! -- What? -- Prayer, patience, alms, vows.
Look, look: a May-mess like on orchard boughs!
Look! March-bloom, like on mealed-with-yellow sallows!
These are indeed the barn; withindoors house
The shocks. This piece-bright paling shuts the spouse
Christ home, Christ and his mother and all his hallows.

legitimate within the Church and supported by many fine competent theologians who are faithful to her teaching. This internal logic runs something like this: If Christ is predestined absolutely to become incarnate, and the mode of the Incarnation, as St. Bonaventure says is Marian, then Our Lady's predestination is in a sense absolute, also in reference to sin, though subordinate to that of Christ. We all appreciate the fittingness of a unique preparation for She who was to become God's Mother. But the logic is even deeper than that. Christ is predestined absolutely to be the New Adam, the new head of the human family. So then Mary is predestined absolutely to be the New Eve and share in that headship. All who are conceived and born are thus under Adam's moral headship, until they are baptized into Christ. The only exception is the New Eve, Mary, as She is never under the moral headship of Adam, since she is willed with Her son before Adam. In the order of this predestination She is not the child of Adam, but the Mother of Adam, and therefore conceived immaculate. If, then, the Immaculate Conception is the expression of Our Lady's absolute but subordinate predestination with Christ, it is so in view of her subordinate mediation.

Our Lady then is related to the inscape of things by way of Her predestination with Christ, and to the instress of the inscape by way of a kind of exemplary mediation in subordination to Her Son. She is truly the Mother of Fair Love, both in view of the experience of beauty and the infusion of charity.

In the context of Hopkins' poetic theory, then, it is possible to answer the objections of Robert Bridges.¹⁶ What Bridges unfortunately characterizes as "perversion of human feeling," and "the naked encounter of sensualism and asceticism," is actually the affirmation of the goodness of created things in their beauty, and the simultaneous insistence that only when the senses and imagination have been purified by Christ and his Holy Mother, who are at the heart or inscape of all things, are we able to experience beauty in all its significance, transcendence and exaltation. As for the accusation of "exaggerated Marianism," this same misunderstanding persists today among Protestants and those opposed to Marian Coredemption. Bridges was not Catholic and had no appreciation for Catholic metaphysics.

The Coredemption in the Wreck of the Deutschland

Hopkins builds his piece around the signal act of the nun who calls, "'O Christ, Christ come quickly," in the face of doom. He prefaces it in Part the First, stanzas 1-10, with an examination of the instress of the world through the experience, not only of beauty, but of suffering, and the beauty of suffering, if you will, in the light of faith in Christ. This is largely autobiographical, so that the plight of the nun is seen, in a sense, as the predicament of Hopkins, and by way of extension, the lot of all of us. Hopkins says that we are mastered by God not only by way of creation from whence we receive through nature His goodness, but also in our subordination to Him in suffering which we undergo, so to speak, at his hands. The poem begins:

Thou mastering me
God! giver of breath and bread;
World strand, sway of the sea;
Lord of living and dead;
Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh
And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
Over again I feel thy finger and find thee (st. 1).

The "sway of the sea," is under God's providence even when it becomes "the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps" (st. 13., l. 8). So in man what God has fastened in flesh seems to be "almost unmade" in subsequent meetings between them. But beneath the surface, something more is at work. When Hopkins says "Over again I feel thy finger and find thee," he is speaking of that action of Christ through grace which comes in the form of the cross: "I did say yes/ O at lightning and lashed rod" (st. 2, ll. 1, 2). The motion of the mind (cf. st. 4, l. 4), like the sea, is whipped by God into a fury, driving the soul by sweep and hurl "hard down with a horror of height" (st. 2, ll. 6, 7). But under the influence of "Christ's gift," described by Hopkins as "the

¹⁶ In a letter to Bridges (2/15/1879), Hopkins responds to the accusation of oddness: "No doubt my poetry errs on the side of oddness. . . But as air, melody is what strikes me most of all in music and design in painting, so design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling 'inscape' is what above all I aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer. This vice I have not escaped." See *Reader* 149-150. On his obscurity Hopkins remarks: "Obscurity I do and will try to avoid so far as is consistent with excellences higher than clearness at first reading." And: "One of two kinds of clearness one shd. have--either the meaning to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else, if dark at first reading, when once made out to *explode*." Quoted in *Reader* 26-27.

gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle," the storm swept soul, can "steady as a water in a well, to a poise to a pane" (St. 4., l. 5). Thus, the mystery of Christ "must be intressed," (st. 5, l. 7) not only in terms of the immediate beauty of God's creation, but also in terms of its terror, i.e. the "stroke and a stress that" both "stars and storms deliver" (st. 6, l. 5).

If, as we have suggested, the orders of nature and grace are parallel, the disorder in the world of nature is mediated through man. In other words moral evil, or the destruction of the inscape of Christ in man, outflows into the world through sin. In Christ, i.e., in his redemptive mediation by which He sanctifies suffering and overcomes "man's malice," (st. 9, l. 4) the terror of physical and moral woe, which is the result of sin, can be endured and offered. Thus man as mediator, draws out the true meaning of the inscape of created things both in their goodness as created, and as elevated to their redemptive and terrible significance. He sees in the distress of nature what he sees in himself, a storm bent on "We perish!" and a stress of grace along the lines of "Be still!" (cf. st. 25, l. 6). In this way Christ is "master of the tides,/ Of the Yore-flood, of the years fall. . .throned behind/ Death with a sovereignty that heeds, but hides, bodes but abides," (st. 32, ll. 1, 7-8).

But "here the faithful waver, the faithless fable and miss" (st. 6, l. 8). It is one thing to sublimate the experience of created goodness and find God, raising the mind,

To the stars, lovely-asunder
Starlight wafting him out of it; and
Glow, glory in thunder (st. 5, ll. 2, 4);

but to "christen" our "wild worst best" (st. 24, l. 8), as, according to Hopkins' interpretation, the tall nun did, i.e., to see the hand of God in contradiction and tribulation, is the crux of the problem which the poem addresses.

Christ Himself is the answer. The mystery of suffering follows Him from the beginning of His life to its end. Hopkins describes even the Incarnation in terms of this destiny: "Warm laid grave of a womb life grey;/ Manger, maiden's knee" (st. 7, ll. 3, 4). Here, I believe, there is already an intimation of the Coredeemption. God's being buried in the womb of the Virgin, from which He will escape without breaking the seal, alludes to His escape from the tomb after His death. In fact in his retreat notes Hopkins makes precisely this point when he reflects on chapter 12 of the Apocalypse where St. Michael attacks the fallen angels: ". . . It was a sort of crusade undertaken in defense of the woman in whom the sacrificial victim had lain and from whom he had risen, a sort of Holy Sepulchre and a heavenly Jerusalem. . ." ¹⁷ But the more immediate reference of the "womb life grey" is to His confinement, His subjugation to the conditions of this vale of tears. The Virgin prepares the incorruptible flesh of Jesus, remaining inviolate Herself. She prepares the Sacrificial Victim, and from the mercy seat of Her blessed knee, the Victim is presented for the "dense and driven Passion" (l. 5) In the context of the "womb life grey," seen as a "Holy Sepulchre" it is necessary to understand more than just the condescension of Christ. Yes, "He did not spurn the Virgin's womb," as we are reminded in the *Te Deum*, and we must certainly say that the suffering of Christ "dates from the day/ Of his going in Galilee," (l. 1, 2) i.e. from His conception; still, much more is implied by this stanza and the broader context of the poem.

¹⁷ *Sermons*, 201.

Once Hopkins has established that Christ is the revelation and resolution of the mystery of suffering, he indicates that in Christ the sanctification of suffering is disseminated throughout time and space. Norman H. MacKenzie, one of the editors of 1967 edition of *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, and an erudite Hopkins critic, identifies the river imagery in stanzas 6 and 7 as referring to the Incarnation, as opposed to the interpretation of another critic, John Keating, who sees here the rush of "indifference and irreligion."¹⁸ I would agree with MacKenzie's incarnational view, but would add that here the Incarnation is flowing through history in terms of the significance it gives to both physical and moral suffering. Hopkins speaks of the "discharge of *it*" through time "like a riding river" (st. 6, l. 7; st. 7., l. 6), "swelling" from what I would say is the mere experience of suffering in the past before Christ, to "high flood" in the era of Christ through the deliberate acceptance of the cross (st. 7, l. 6, 7). Before Christ "none would have known of it, only the heart, being hard at bay" (l. 8), but now the mystery is ripe for the taking, bursting, "sour or sweet" "brim in a flash full" in the mouth of our souls--not only because of the intensity of suffering, but also because of our assimilation of it through grace (st. 8, ll. 5, 6). And still suffering remains a paradox: "Hither then, last or first,/ To hero of Calvary, Christ,'s feet--/ Never ask if meaning it, wanting it, warned of it--men go" (st. 8, ll. 6-8).

To the "hero of Calvary's feet" we are brought by suffering, either by the "crash" of grace as exemplified in the conversion of St. Paul, or by the "lingering-out swéet skíll" of St. Augustine's conversion (st. 10, ll. 5, 6). We are brought to the cross either by "wrecking and storm" and "dark descending" or by His "most art merciful" and "stealing as Spring" (st. 9, ll. 4, 8; st. 10, 3), but to the cross we are brought, as was the tall nun on the dreadful night when the *Deutschland* was wrecked.

With stanza 11 Part the Second begins, and stanzas 12-16 are a poignant narration of the voyage, stranding, and disaster of the *Deutschland*. With stanza 17 begins the development of the central theme:

They fought with God's cold--
And they could not and fell to the deck
(Crushed them) or water (and drowned them) or rolled
With the sea-romp over the wreck.
Night roared with the heart-break hearing a heart-broke rabble,
The woman's wailing, the crying of child without check--
Till a lioness arose breasting the babble,
A prophetess towered in the tumult, a virginal tongue told.

What follows over the next several stanzas is a theology of grace, by way of narrative description. The subject of this description is the rising lioness, alluding to Christ, who is both the lion of the tribe of Judah and the lamb that was slain, victorious in His sacrificial victimhood (Apoc. 5: 5, 6). It is the "prophetess towered" like a "beacon of light" (cf. st. 29, l. 8), who, in the face of the "babble" of weakness and despair, gives witness to faith by her adherence to the cross. It is the "virginal tongue told," whose purity of heart, expressed by sacrifice, rings true. There, on the table in the ship with the water rising, the nun stands with Christ at the foot of his cross. She thrusts her head through the skylight, and her voice is heard above the storm:

Sister, a sister calling

¹⁸ *Reader's Guide*, 37.

A master, her master and mine!--
And the inboard seas run swirling and hawling;
The rash smart slogging brine
Blinds her; but she that weather sees one thing, one;
Has one fetch in her; she rears herself to divine
Ears, and the call of the tall nun
To the men in the tops and the tackle rode over the storm's brawling (st. 19).

The nun is about to begin what Hopkins calls her own "madrigal" (st. 18, l. 6), a spontaneous song which rises, with an "exquisite smart" (l. 2), in her suffering isolation (l. 3), from the "mother of being in me, heart" (l. 4); and, though shedding tears, she is also full of "glee" (ll. 6, 8). The nun is overcome with grace, which elsewhere Hopkins defines as "any action, activity, on God's part by which, in creating or after creating, he carries the creature to or towards the end of its being, which is its self-sacrifice to God and its salvation." It is "divine stress, holy spirit, and, as all is done through Christ, Christ's spirit." So grace is the Spirit of Christ leading the soul to "self-sacrifice." Therefore, the "heart," i.e., the will, cooperating with grace, is "mother of being in me." That being in me, which is born through the will, is Christ. In the same place as above, where he treats of grace, Hopkins writes that grace is "Christ in his member on the one side, his member in Christ on the other. It is as if a man said: That is Christ playing at me and me playing at Christ, only that it is no play but truth; That is Christ *being me* and me being Christ."¹⁹

As Hopkins sees the suffering Christ being mothered in the nun by her cooperation with the rush of grace, we are alerted to the underlying reality of the Immaculate's maternal mediation of which Hopkins is an advocate. In "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe," he grants to the Blessed Virgin Her part in our transformation in Christ through the "mother of being in me, heart":

If I have understood,
She holds high motherhood
Towards all our ghostly good
And plays in grace her part
About man's beating heart,
Laying, like air's fine flood,
The deathdance in his blood;
Yet no part but what will
Be Christ our saviour still (ll. 46-54).

Hopkins goes on in stanzas 22 and 23 to draw out further the sense in which the tall nun is "being Christ" by underscoring the significance of nuns numbering of five:

Five! the finding and sake
And cipher of suffering Christ.
Mark, the mark is of man's make
And the word of it Sacrificed.
But he scores it in scarlet himself on his own bespoken,
Before-time-taken, dearest prizèd and priced--

¹⁹ "On Personality, Grace and Free Will," *Sermons* 154.

Stigma, signal, cinquefoil token
For lettering of the lamb's fleece, ruddying of the rose flake (st. 22).

The wounds of Christ are a "sake" and "cipher" of his sufferings. Hopkins says that his use of the word "sake" indicates the "being a thing has outside itself," its "being abroad," which is "something distinctive, marked."²⁰ The five wounds are the sake of Christ's inscape, i.e. that distinctive sacrificial love which is the Word made flesh. The Word of God so marked with the mark of man's make, when spoken, is "Sacrificed." This mark Christ himself scores on his "own bespoken," thus allowing them to participate in his sacrifice. This the five nuns, who were Franciscans, would have well understood. Hopkins notes this in stanza 23:

Joy fall to thee, father Francis,
Drawn to the Life that died;
With the gnarls of the nails in thee, niche of the lance, his
Lovescape crucified
And seal of his seraph arrival! (ll.1-5)

St. Francis was thus marked by Christ with His five wounds, which, for the followers of St. Francis in the Order, became the sake and cipher of the perfection of sacrificial love, i.e., of a deep participation in Christ's own sacrifice of love. St. Bonaventure's *Major Life of St. Francis* gives us insight into this "Lovescape crucified" of the seraphic father in reference to the vision of the seraph and his stigmatization:

The fervor of his seraphic longing raised Francis up to God and, in an ecstasy of compassion, made him like Christ who allowed himself to be crucified in the excess of his love. . . . Eventually he realized by divine inspiration that God had shown him this vision in his providence, in order to let him see that, as Christ's lover, he would resemble Christ crucified perfectly not by physical martyrdom, but by the fervor of his spirit.²¹

And so finally Hopkins in stanza 24 brings us to the very foot of the cross. As the storms of his own tumultuous interior life were lulled by sleep "away in the loveable west" (l. 1), the nun, with her head through the skylight at deck level was face to face with the breakers of death:

She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly
Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails
Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':
The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best (ll. 5-8).

Immediately in stanza 25 Hopkins asks: "What did she mean?" This is a most difficult question. Hopkins himself proposes two answers which he immediately rejects, and the third, which he does accept, is not altogether clear as to its meaning. In fact, scholars do not agree on its interpretation. Hopkins himself admitted to Bridges that his poem was problematic, intentionally so: "Granted that it needs study and is obscure, for indeed I was not over-desirous that the meaning of all should be quite clear, at least unmistakable. . ."²²

²⁰ *Letters to Bridges*, 83.

²¹ 13, 3.

²² *Letters to Bridges*, 50.

The first possible answer to the question, he proposes in stanza 25: “Is it love in her of the being as her lover had been?/ Breathe, body of lovely Death” (ll. 3, 4). In other words, is the tall nun expressing an affective response to a meditation on Our Lord’s passion, seeing herself with a love like that of her spouse on the cross? In stanza 27 he will reject this solution on the grounds that the circumstances of the storm, under which the nun labored, were not conducive to meditation: “The appealing of the Passion is tenderer in prayer apart:/ Other, I gather, in measure her mind’s/ Burden, in wind’s burly and beat of endragonèd seas.” (ll. 5,6). Here we must be careful to note that Hopkins does not reject the nun’s participation in the cross of Christ, for what has already come before would not make sense in that context, rather he only rejects the idea that her cry is motivated by a tender appeal to the Passion, i.e., by a desire for relief through meditation on the Passion. What this means will become clearer as we approach her real motive, as I think Hopkins sees it.

Back again in stanza 25 Hopkins proposes the second interpretation of the nun’s cry for Christ: “Or is it that she cried for the crown then,/ The keener to come at the comfort for feeling the combating keen?” (ll. 7, 8). Could it be possible that the nun is simply exhausted by the whole ordeal and wishes that the storm would make a quick end of it, thus bringing the “comfort of the crown,” i.e. the reward of everlasting life? This too he rejects but only after presenting us images of heaven in stanza 26:

. . . . the jay-blue heavens appearing
Of pied and peeled May!
Blue-beating and hoary-glow height; or night, still higher,
With belled fire and the moth-soft Milky Way.”

Lines from later poems, like “May Magnificat,” “The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe,” and “The Starlight Night,” are reminiscent of Hopkins’ heavenly symbolism. But as beautiful as this may be, for Hopkins it is not what motivates the tall nun’s cry:

No, but it was not these.
The jading, and jar of the cart,
Time’s tasking, it is fathers that asking for ease
Of the sodden-with-its-sorrowing heart,
Not danger, electrical horror. . . (st. 27, ll. 1-5).

The next three stanzas give us what Hopkins considers the true meaning of “Christ, come quickly!” In the halting and chaotic lines of stanza 28, Hopkins struggles for a vantage point in the saloon under the deck of the *Deutschland* to get a glimpse through the skylight, but what he sees goes beyond the power of his mortal eyes:

But how shall I . . . Make me room there:
Reach me . . . Fancy, come faster--
Strike you the sight of it? look at it loom there,
Thing that she . . . There then! the Master,
Ipsè the only one, Christ, King, Head:
He was to cure the extremity where he had cast her;
Do, deal, lord it with living and dead;
Let him ride, her pride, in his triumph, despatch and have done with his doom
there.

Ipsa here is the Latin intensive pronoun *himself*, or *his very self* with two possible usages in this context: 1) as an emphatic pronoun of the third person; 2) as a pronoun used “to distinguish the principal personage from subordinate persons.”²³ “*Ipsa* the only one, Christ, King, Head”: the string of appositives certainly lends itself to emphasis, but also, I believe, defines *Ipsa, Himself* as the principle actor, the “Head,” and “the only one” in reference to the nun. This “only one” could be an oblique reference to the “One Mediator” of St. Paul’s First Letter to Timothy: “For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, Himself man, Christ Jesus” (2:5). But, as we well know, the Catholic understanding of St. Paul does not exclude subordinate mediation, but rather demands it, and so, I believe, does “The Wreck of the Deutschland.”

Dr. John Pick in his treatment of Hopkins as both priest and poet concurs: “Here is the perfect oblation, the perfect self-sacrifice, the perfect self-fulfilment, the Christus and the *alter Christus*.”²⁴ This technical term, meaning “other Christ,” ordinarily reserved for describing the ministerial priest, is referred by Dr. Pick to the nun, who, though not priest, nevertheless offers the same sacrifice as Christ, though not in a sacramental way.

Others are not so eager to follow this path of interpretation. Norman L. MacKenzie, whose approach to Hopkins is primarily literary, would hearken back to stanza 27, where Hopkins rejects an appeal to the Passion in the nun’s psyche, thereby minimizing, any reference to the cross.²⁵ I believe this goes a step too far. Indeed, what are we to make of the broader context of the poem, let alone Hopkins’ own clue which he delivers to us with the nun’s cry itself? “Was calling ‘O Christ, Christ, come quickly’:/ *The cross* to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst Best” (st. 24, ll. 7-9).

Nevertheless, MacKenzie sees clearly the difficulty of the passage and looks for an answer that will satisfy the immediate context. According to MacKenzie, stanza 28 is often interpreted as a mystical vision in which in ecstasy the nun sees “Christ the King riding to take personal charge of the souls of the survivors, of those dying and dead.” He comes to “have done with his doom there,” not in the sense of destruction, but in the sense of judgment, and the nun welcomes his coming as she passes from this world to the next.²⁶ But in the very next stanza we are drawn away from this interpretation:

Ah! There was a heart right!
There was single eye!
Read the unshapeable shock night
And knew the who and the why. . . (st. 29, ll. 1-4)

Somehow the nun reads the presence of Christ out of “the unshapeable shock night,” i.e., she sees Him somehow in the terror of the storm, not in some mystical vision. MacKenzie therefore turns elsewhere, and for the same reason cannot accept the theory of Dr. Elisabeth Schneider, who suggests that Christ came to the nun in some miraculous fashion while she was still alive. Interestingly, however, Schneider bases her argument on Hopkins’ use of the word “fetch” in stanza 19. We are told that, as the nun cries out, she “. . . that weather sees one thing one;/ Has

²³ *New Latin Grammar*. Ed. J. B. Greenough, et al. New York: Caratzas Brothers, 1975. 179.

²⁴ *Priest and Poet*, 49.

²⁵ *Reader’s Guide*, 49.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

one fetch in her; she rears herself to divine/ Ears. . ." (ll. 6, 7). This could allude to the "single eye" of stanza 29 (l. 2), but also to something else. Schneider points to Hopkins' use of the word "fetch" in his retreat notes, where he reflects on the Apocalypse chapter 12 in that same section, noted above (12): "I suppose the vision of the pregnant woman to have been no mere vision but the real *fetching*, presentment or adduction of the persons of Christ and Mary themselves. . ." Schneider takes this to mean, some miraculous physical presence, but Hopkins' very next sentence seems to indicate something even more: "And I cannot help suspecting that the attack on the woman which the dragon makes was, though I cannot yet clearly grasp how, the actual attack which he made, is making and will go on making on the human race."²⁷

This passage is extremely intriguing relative to our topic, as it indicates a mysterious mediatorial presence of Christ which is enjoyed also by the Immaculate. But what kind of presence is it? It does not appear to be a physical, or mystical or a merely moral presence, but something even more. As this passage was written six years after "The Wreck of the Deutschland," I would suggest that Hopkins' deliberate fogginess within the poem as to the full meaning of *Ipse*, is due to his own lack of clarity on this point. In some sense Christ is present to the nun, and this more truly than by mystical vision or even physical presence. But how? And how are Christ and his Mother present to St. John on Patmos in his prophetic state?

The terms used by Hopkins in his commentary on Apocalypse 12 are valuable clues which help answer these two questions. Schneider snagged onto the term *fetch*, and *fetching* in the context of both the nun's cry as a reaction to the presence of Christ, and of the presence of Christ and Our Lady to St. John, a presence which Hopkins seems to indicate transcends even time. This temporal transcendence would tend to preclude a physical presence in any ordinary sense, and the word *adduction* used by Hopkins in connection with *fetching* is significant in this regard. The use of the term *adduction* by Hopkins is almost certainly made under the influence of John Duns Scotus. The introduction of this term into traditional scholastic theology is properly attributed to the Subtle Doctor, who used the term in connection with his explanation of Eucharistic transubstantiation.

Scotus affirms the appropriateness of the traditional term, transubstantiation, and its definition as the teaching of the Church, which he holds to mean, as every orthodox theologian does, that, at the words of consecration in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, a mysterious total conversion of the substance of bread into the substance of the body of Christ, takes place, such that the substance of bread qua substance (*esse*) no longer exists and only the body of Christ exists in its place. This is taken for granted by Scotus, and by the term *adduction*, he only wishes to explain the manner by which the body of Christ is the term of transubstantiation. Thomists generally argue that the Body of Christ is the term of transubstantiation in its formal sense of the bread being converted into (thereby ceasing to exist) and passing into the Body of Christ, the presence which Body is actually produced by the transformation.²⁸ Scotus disagrees. In fact, he argues, the Body of Christ is preexistent to the transformation, though not present until its term, when the bread no longer exists qua substance. There is and can be no production, as the substance of Christ's Body is not given being (*esse*) by the transformation--because it preexists--but only a new

²⁷ *Sermons*, 200.

²⁸ Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, p. III, q. 74, a. 3, 4. St. Thomas does not expressly assert production relative to transubstantiation; however, this is generally held by his followers.

presence, here, where the substance of bread formerly was. Therefore the substantial presence of the Body of Christ, according to Scotus, is not *produced* by transubstantiation, but only *adduced*, i.e. given a new presence here.²⁹

That Hopkins should be inclined to attribute adduction to these Christological and Marian encounters is understandable in the light of his generally scotistic leanings. Hopkins would have been aware of Scotus' theory of adduction, not only because of his having read Scotus extensively, but also because, since the time of the great Jesuit theologian, St. Robert Bellarmine, many Jesuits had held the scotistic position on transubstantiation in some form.³⁰ Hopkins' clearly would not be inferring some kind of sacramental, or substantial presence in any strict sense, but likewise, it is also clear that he is inferring a really new kind of presence, one not covered by the categories that would be commonly attributed, viz. physical, moral, sacramental, or mystical. In fact the Franciscan Thesis lends itself to the introduction of such a category. If, the predestination of Christ and Mary is absolute, and concomitantly all things are created in the image and likeness of Christ, then Christ, and by way of extension, Mary, is present in all creation--not in any pantheistic sense, but in a mode which we might call *exemplary*. The inscape of created things is intelligibility qua the light of Christ, instressed by Christ in both the creative act and in that illumination of the human intellect by which we are able to know in a truly human way, i.e., in a way that makes us *capax Dei*. This I call *exemplary*, because, to repeat, this seems to be a question of something more than some kind of physical or merely moral causality. From Hopkins' point of view created realities are illumined by Christ insofar as they are related to him by way of His absolute primacy. If one insists on calling this a moral presence, then that is not to say, therefore, that it is indirect or remote. I say this is exemplary rather than merely moral, precisely because through it there is a direct influence on the heart and mind of man. The Woman clothed with the sun then, and her infant child is present to us, just as they were to St. John, because of the universal influence they have over all things created, and this from the beginning of time. And if the Red Dragon is present to us in his apocalyptic rebellion against Jesus and Mary, it is because he also has been present since the beginning, in his rejection of the absolute and joint predestination of the Child and his Mother, revealed to him before his fall, and before the creation of man.³¹ As for the tall nun in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," she experiences Christ in the storm (has one fetch in her, [st. 19, l. 6]), both because of her instress of the storms terrible "beauty," and because of the illumination which is proper to the theological virtue of faith. The connaturality of the idea of mediation to the parallelism of inscape/instress is evident here also, where the nun is mediatrix insofar as, by her intellect, illumined by faith, she is capable of elevating the significance of the terrible elements to a supernatural level. She is poet laureate, whose inspiration and lover's desire captures

²⁹ *Opus Oxiensis: Lib. IV Sententiarum*, d. XI, q. 3, in *Opera Omnia* (Wadding), v. 8, 624-25. See also accompanying commentary by P. Antonius Hiquaeus, 627-29. This is the edition that would have been available to Hopkins.

³⁰ Cf. a commonly used neo-thomistic manual by J. M. Herve, in which the Jesuit theologians who held to the adductive explanation of transubstantiation are given: *De SS. Eucharistia*. Paris: Berche et Pagis, 1939. Vol. 4. of *Manuale Theologiae Dogmaticae*, 58, no. 43.

³¹ In fact the immediate context of the quotation from Hopkins, concerning the Woman clothed with the sun, is precisely an interpretation of Apocalypse 12, which posits a primordial revelation of Jesus and Mary to Lucifer before his fall.

precisely the inscape of the storm, in a succinct but striking rhythm: "O Christ, Christ come quickly." This is the tearful, yet gleeful madrigal of stanza 18. As a literary critic MacKenzie arrives at the same conclusion:

In the tall nun's sight the *it*, the *Thing*, the *unshapeable shock night*, seem to become expressions of the Master of the elements, the wuthering winds are heard as divine words. No lull in the 'burly' is necessary. If we ask why the nun should *shout* her invocation to Christ to come quickly, the answer may be simply that the storm *is* God to her, though not in a pantheistic sense. . .³²

In stanzas 29 and 30 Hopkins goes on to give what I think is his justification for this interpretation. He compares the nun to St. Peter and the Immaculate. The nun who "read the unshapeable shock night," read in it the Word of God:

Wording it how but by him that present and past,
Heaven and earth are word of, worded by?--
The Simon Peter of a soul! to the blast
Tarpeian-fast, but a blown beacon of light (ll. 5-8).

The "prophetess towered" of stanza 17 (l. 8) is a beacon of light after the manner of St. Peter upon whom the Church is built. The faith of Peter, i.e., of the Roman Church, is as steadfast as the Tarpeian rock upon which is built the capital of Rome. The presence of *Ipsa* to the nun in the moment of her cry is dependent on her faith, and this allows her to elevate the instress Christ in the inscape of the storm, and concomitantly--and here Mackenzie would part company--to enter into the mystery of Christ's suffering.

In stanza 30, Hopkins compares this light-filled faith to that of the Blessed Mother and to her cooperation in Christ's sufferings; the immediate reference, however, is the nun's conception of Christ through faith, obedience and suffering:

Jesu, heart's light,
Jesu, maid's son,
What was the feast that followed the night
Thou hadst glory of this nun?--
Feast of the one woman without stain.
For so conceived, so to conceive thee is done;
But here was a heart-throe, birth of a brain,
Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright.

It is true that, like Mary, the nun keeps the Word of God, by reading correctly the "unshakable shock night," but she not only reads Christ in the storm, but becomes Christ by her cooperation with Him in her suffering. Indeed, the nun makes her cry and dies on the eve of the Immaculate Conception, imitating the purity of the Virgin's faith, realizing in her soul, what was realized in the Virgin's womb. Hopkins repeats this theme in "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe":

Of her flesh he took flesh:
He does take fresh and fresh,
Though much the mystery how,

³² *Reader's Guide*, 58.

Not flesh but spirit now
And makes, O marvellous!
New Nazareths in us,
Where she shall yet conceive
Him morning, noon, and eve;
New Bethlems, and he born
There, evening, noon and morn--
Bethlem or Nazareth,
Men here may draw like breath
More Christ and baffle death;
Who, born so, comes to be
New self and nobler me
In each one and each one
More makes, when all is done,
Both God's and Mary's Son (ll. 55-72).

In this poem a dynamic is presented that has as its principle the divine maternity of the Immaculate and is extended into the Church through Her maternal mediation: Not in flesh, but in spirit, the temple of our bodies become New Nazareths, “where she shall yet conceive,” and New Bethlehems where “he be born.” In the “Wreck of the Deutschland,” Hopkins expresses the same idea in the context of the death delivering storm. Our Lady is “so conceivèd” in order to conceive Christ. This being done, He must still be conceived in the hearts and minds of the faithful, and this is accomplished by cooperation with the cross: “But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,/ Word that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright.”

This “heart-throe” points to three things: First, to the “mother of being in me, heart” of stanza 18, where the will of the nun, in the *throes* of suffering, is so united to God in grace that “Christ is *being* Her and she *being* Christ.”³³ The second thing indicated is that this *heart-throe* alludes to the Coredemption as the ideal of the nun’s sacrifice. Again in the place where Hopkins reflects on Apocalypse chapter 12, he underscores this reality: “But as the Blessed Virgin, who bore Christ in the flesh without birthpangs, is with great birthpangs the mother of all men in the spirit. . .”³⁴ At the foot of the cross the Immaculate is in the *heart-throes* of the birth of the Church. Indeed, the sword of sorrow opens in her heart a flood of compassion for all men. Hopkins’ interpretation of the Apocalypse is one which today is a strong biblical argument for the Coredemption. In his *Biblical Mariology* Father Stefano Manelli interprets this scriptural passage in precisely in this way: “If the whole Son of Mary is Jesus, Head and Body, Mary is shown in joy at Bethlehem as the *Mother of the Head*, and on Calvary as the *Mother of the Body* regenerated unto the supernatural life of grace.” And quoting D. Ruotolo: “The virginal birth of the Redeemer did not cause the most holy Virgin any suffering, indeed it was accomplished in the most ineffable joyous ecstasy; but the generation of the Mystical Body of the Lord cost her the unspeakable suffering of Calvary, because she was the coredemptrix of mankind.”³⁵ Thirdly,

³³ Cf. 14 above.

³⁴ *Sermons* 170.

³⁵ *All Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: Biblical Mariology*. Trans. Peter Damien Fehlner. New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 1995. 358; 357, note 18.

the *heart-throe* indicates that the virgin-nun is emulating the Virgin-Mother. The poem is not about the Coredemption, but about the interior life of a soul; however, what is implied by the poem is that the basis for our participation in the work of the subjective redemption, which is precisely where an intense spiritual life will lead, as it did for the tall nun, is the Immaculate's participation in the objective redemption. Further implied is that our cooperation in the subjective redemption is accomplished under the influence and direction of Her maternal mediation. Or, as Hopkins says in "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe": "Let all God's glory through,/ God's glory which would go/ Through her and from her flow/ Off, and no way but so" (ll. 30-33).

MacKenzie does not see in the poem any relationship between the suffering of Our Lady and that of the nun. But, he does see that the "heart-throe, birth of a brain," does establish a relationship between the Immaculate Conception and the nun, both of whom hear the word of God, keep and speak it. The Immaculate Virgin witnesses the Incarnation of the Word and keeps the memory, pondering it in Her heart (cf. Luke 2:19). She responds to the Word of God, His fiat, by speaking her own in reply. Further, She is more blessed by Her immaculate obedience by which she conceives and gives birth to Jesus in flesh and spirit, than by her maternity of Christ the Head considered by itself (cf. Luke 11: 27, 28). As Hopkins says of the nun in stanza 30: "But here was heart-throe, birth of a brain,/ Word, that heard and kept thee and uttered thee outright." MacKenzie reports that his postgraduate students of literature "become uneasy with stanzas 28-30," because after the climax of the nun's cry in stanza 28, instead of focusing on Christ, *Ipse*, Hopkins immediately returns to the nun, comparing her with St. Peter and Our Lady. This seems to them to be anticlimactic, and the comparison of the nun to the Prince of the Apostles and the Immaculate Conception is in need of explanation.³⁶ I respectfully submit that a satisfactory explanation is given only if, along with the affirmation that the nun sees Christ in the storm, we also affirm that she has some presentiment of his presence within the reality of his sacrificial ministry in which she shares. This will only be clear if we see the nun emulating the Immaculate at the foot of the cross, and under Her coredemptive influence.

Stanzas 28-30 are capped by stanza 31, in which the Mary-like sacrifice of the nun is fruitful. The Marian, and I would say coredemptive elements from what has been said above are clear. The Marian heart-throes are realized in the nun, and she gives spiritual birth to the dying and the survivors who are in need of God's forgiveness.

Well, she has thee for the pain, for the
Patience; but pity of the rest of them!
Heart, go and bleed at a bitterer vein for the
Comfortless unconfessed of them--
No not uncomforted: lovely-felicitous Providence
Finger of a tender of, O of a feathery delicacy, the breast of the
Maiden could obey so, be a bell to, ring of it, and
Startle the poor sheep back! is the shipwreck then a harvest,
does the tempest carry the grain for thee?

The nun has "one fetch in her," and that is the apocalyptic reality of the Woman clothed with the sun, who is in the heart-throes of childbirth. At the moment of her cry, Christ is fetched in the

³⁶ *Reader's Guide* 57-58.

storm and is present, not physically nor by way of vision, but through his mediation, and the subordinate mediation of the Immaculate, a reality in Hopkins' mind, though not altogether clear, nor expressed altogether clearly in the poem, no less for that reason its hermeneutical key. This seems most evident to me, as Hopkins' affirmation of the absolute primacy of Christ and his theory of inscape/instress extend the parallelism of nature and grace to the mystery of suffering and redemption. As a scotist and an artist, Hopkins has given us a powerful--even if difficult to understand--cultural monument as a testimony to the reality of Marian Coredemption and Mediation, and to the fact that the joint predestination of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary remains the only true hermeneutical key to the understanding of the world. Toward the end of the poem we get a flash of St. John's vision, which offers us hope, when our hearts are "hard at bay."

Now burn, new born to the world,
Double-naturèd name,
The heaven-flung, heart-fleshed, maiden furled
Miracle-in-Mary-of-flame,
Mid-numberèd he in three of the thunder throne!
Not a dooms-day dazzle in his coming nor dark as he came;
Kind, but royally reclaiming his own;
A released shower, let flash to the shire, not a lightning of fire hard-
hurled (st. 34).

The Ballad of the White Horse

It is time for us now to return to King Alfred and the Battle of Ethandune. The struggles of the King of Wessex between the years of 875-878 led to the ultimate victory over the Danes in the invasion of Guthrum at the Battle of Ethandune. Not only did Alfred succeed in ending Danish supremacy in Wessex, but he established in its place Saxon supremacy and a unification of England. Chesterton was greatly inspired by Alfred and his conflict, because for him it was a struggle for the faith. Indeed it was. He said that by Alfred "England was saved from heathendom forever." At the end of the war the Danish king, Guthrum, agreed to peace and consented to be baptized:

Far out to the winding river
The blood ran down for days,
When we put the cross on Guthrum
In the parting of the ways (bk.7, 368-71).

Defender of the faith as he was,³⁷ Chesterton saw in the epic history and legend of King Alfred a testimony of God's love for England, and was moved by his Catholic sensibilities to assimilate the story in a mode that produced a work that was not only chivalric, but also spiritually moving. The motif of the White Horse was used in connection with a geological formation on a hill in Berkshire. From ancient times a 374 foot long figure of a horse had been cut out of the side of White Horse Hill. The turf was dug out, exposing the white subsoil below, so that the figure of the white horse could be seen against a green grass background. According to the legend

³⁷ Upon the death of Chesterton in 1936, Pius XI bestowed upon him the title of *Defensor Fidei*, a title not bestowed upon an Englishman since Henry VIII (Chesterton, 652).

accepted by Chesterton,³⁸ the Vale of the White Horse in Berkshire was the location of the Battle of Ethandune. In the mind of Chesterton, and in the text of the ballad, the white horse signifies the presence of Christendom. When Christians are in control of Wessex they tend the white horse and regularly cut the grass back to preserve the figure; when the Danes are in control of Wessex the figure is grown over. The ballad ends with the restoration of Christendom in Wessex, the establishment of the English Kingdom and the scouring of the horse (Book VIII).

To pick up where we left off, then, Alfred had retreated to Athelney under the threat of what seemed to be an inevitable defeat, and Our Lady appeared to him to inspire his continued resistance, not leaving him with much comfort, but only the enigmatic question ringing in his ears: “Do you have joy without a cause,/ Yea, faith without a hope?” The good king, then, gathered to himself, in “triple symbol” of the ages, three chiefs and their armies, one Roman, one Celtic, and one Saxon. To each he spoke the words of Our Lady, and won their loyalty for the battle: To the first chief, Eldred the Saxon, the King of Wessex said:

“Out of the mouth of the Mother of God,
Like a little word come I;
For I go gathering Christian men
From sunken paving and ford and fen,
To die in a battle, God knows when,
By God, but I know why.

“And this is the word of Mary,
The word of the world’s desire,
‘No more of comfort shall ye get,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher’” (bk. 2, 74-84).

In Chesterton’s poetry the Blessed Virgin is referred to more than once as the “world’s desire.” In “The Return of Eve” God looked upon the first Eve, “the beauty of Woman shattered” by original sin and cried:

“O crown and wonder and the *world’s desire*
Shall this too die?
Lo, it repenteth me that this too is taken;
I will repay,
I will repair and repeat of the ancient pattern
Even in this clay.”³⁹

Later on in the same poem, Chesterton calls the New Eve, Mary, the “world’s first love.”⁴⁰ Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, years after Chesterton had written these lines, wrote a book by the title *The World’s First Love*. I can find no reference which would acknowledge Chesterton as the

³⁸ Cf. bk. 2, 180-183. It is also argued that The White Horse of King Alfred--there are a number of such geological figures in England--is actually in Wiltshire. See “Introduction,” *Ballad*, xiv, xv.

³⁹ *Seven Swords*, 10.

⁴⁰ 11.

source, but, Sheen uses this phrase in two senses, both of which are helpful in interpreting the poem: First, in the sense that the Immaculate is in a unique way the object of the love of God and Man. She is the “blueprint love, whom God loved before the world was made,” the “Dream Woman before women were.” Secondly, She is the “world’s first love” in the sense that in Her Immaculate Heart God and all men are loved by *Her* in a unique way. Commenting on Her motherhood obtained at the foot of the cross, Bishop Sheen writes: “Making her the Woman or the Universal Mother was like a new creative word. He made her twice: once for Himself, and once for us in His Mystical Body. She made Him as the new Adam; He now installs her as the new Eve, the Mother of mankind.”⁴¹

I think we can gather the same meaning from Chesterton’s poetic usage of the phrase. The context of “The Return of Eve” is the creation and fall of man. The motif that runs throughout the poem is “the red mountains/ Of which Man was made.”⁴² The old Eve was formed, yes, from the rib of Adam, but the new Eve, from the Virgin Earth, according to “the ancient pattern/ Even in this clay.” She is, therefore, the unique beneficiary of God’s creative love, and so full of that love is Mary, that She merited to be the true Mother of all the living, giving flesh to Christ in His Head, and spirit in His Body. Describing the apocalyptic recapitulation of this scene in St. John’s vision, Chesterton, in “The Black Virgin,” reveals the Woman clothed with the sun:

Starlight and twilight thy refractions are,
Lights and half lights and all lights turn about thee.
But though we dazed can neither see nor doubt thee,
Something remains. Nor can man live without it
Nor can man find it bearable without thee.⁴³

Man cannot find it bearable without the Mother of God, because he is enamored of Her spiritual beauty, and also because he cannot live without the refractions of her love, i.e., without the rays of divine grace that flow from Her. She is indeed “the world’s desire.” That desire Chesterton knew in the grace of his own conversion:

The instant I remembered the Catholic Church, I remembered her, when I tried to forget the Catholic Church, I tried to forget her! When I finally saw what was nobler than my fate, the freest and the hardest of all may acts of freedom, it was in front of a gilded and very gaudy little image of her in the port of Brindisi, that I promised the thing that I would do, if I returned to my own land.⁴⁴

Thus in the mouth of King Alfred, the promise of the Virgin, that “the sky grows darker yet/ And the sea rises higher,” is part of the mysterious workings of grace, that flow from the heart of the New Eve, the Mother of All the Living, who at the foot of the cross experienced “a joy without a cause and a faith without a hope.” In Her maternal solicitude She called Alfred and his chiefs to follow Her path. That path, we must affirm was not merely the path to victory over the Danes and the unification of England, or even the preservation of Christendom, but the spiritual path to

⁴¹ New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952. 13, 244.

⁴² *Seven Swords* 9.

⁴³ 33.

⁴⁴ *The Well and the Shallows*, in vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1990. 463.

holiness and salvation. The spiritual undertow I think is obvious, and continually reinforced by the themes and imagery reoccurring throughout the Ballad and in Chesterton's other poems.

In order to stay within the bounds of this paper's purpose I must now unforgivably compress the ballad and the valiant deeds it records. Suffice it to say that King Alfred, after an initial victory in battle (Book V), and then the eventual slaying of all three of his chiefs (Book VI), was left in a predicament very much like the one he had been in when he had seen Our Lady, although his later doom and England's was far more imminent. The Battle of Ethandune was all but lost. In a long speech Alfred convinced what was left of his army that "death is a better ale to drink" (bk. 7, 119) than to drain the cup of surrender to heathendom. Convinced by their captain, the soldiers "stood firm" and "feeble" (153). Alfred blew his horn calling his men to the hunt, and "The people of the peace of God/ Went roaring down to die" (184). But in the desperation of the situation the Immaculate was present in Her causeless joy and hopeless faith:

And when the last arrow,
Was fitted and was flown,
When the broken shield hung on the breast,
And the hopeless lance was laid at rest,
And the hopeless horn was blown,
The King looked up, and what he saw
Was a great light like death,
For our Lady stood on the standards rent
As lonely and as innocent
As When between white walls she went
In the lilies of Nazareth.
One instant in a still light,
He saw Our Lady then,
Her dress was soft as western sky,
And she was queen most womanly--
But she was queen of men.
Over the iron forest
He saw Our Lady stand;
Her eyes were sad withouten art,
And seven swords were in her heart--
But one was in her hand. (185-205).

In the moment of supreme sacrifice, the Mother of God interceded on behalf of Her children. The seven swords of Her own heartfelt sorrow, became one which She wielded in hand on behalf of those for whom She suffered: In the first vision of King Alfred Mary had said to him:

"But you and all the kind of Christ
Are ignorant and brave,
And you have wars you hardly win
And souls you hardly save" (bk. 1, 250-53).

Thus we are shown how this intercession of the Immaculate in temporal war is also connected to a greater war for the salvation of souls. These wars hardly won and souls hardly saved are remarkably juxtaposed in another of Chesterton's poems whose theme is along the same lines,

viz., “The Queen of the Seven Swords.” That poem is actually the introduction to seven monologues delivered by seven saints of Western Europe, who, as Chesterton notes, “have no connection with the historical saints” that “bore their names,” but rather are types of the different nations, viz., St. James of Spain, St. Denys of France, St. Anthony of Italy, St. Patrick of Ireland, St. Andrew of Scotland, St. David of Wales and St. George of England. There, in “The Queen of the Seven Swords,” Chesterton records a dream in which he saw Europe as a waste land, and after surveying the panorama of desolation said: “There is none to save.”⁴⁵ It is obvious from his descriptions that the wasteland is typical of moral desolation. In the gloom, however, he saw a source of hope:

I saw on their breaking terraces, cracking and sinking for ever,
One shrine rise blackened and broken; like a last cry to God.

Old gold on the roof hung ragged as scales of a dragon dropping,
The gross green weeds of the desert had spawned on the painted wood:
But erect in the earth’s despair and arisen against heaven interceding,
Whose name is Cause of Our Joy, in the doorway of death she stood.⁴⁶

The Woman who had asked of Alfred “Do you have joy without a cause?” is in fact the Cause of His Joy, and this as She stands in the “doorway of death.” Thus we begin to understand that the doom of Alfred is not a joy strictly without cause, but one without any natural explanation, for his joy has its source in the Heart of the Queen of the Seven Swords. Chesterton goes on in “The Queen of the Seven Swords:

The Seven Swords of her Sorrow held out their hilts like a challenge,
The blast of that stunning silence as a sevenfold trumpet blew
Majestic in more than gold, girt round with a glory or iron,
The hub of her wheel of weapons; with a truth beyond torture true.⁴⁷

That truth which is beyond torture true is that faith which saves, not in spite of suffering, but because of suffering. Hence we understand what the Lady meant when She asked Alfred “Do you have faith without a hope?” Not a natural hope, or a conviction that things will get better, but a conviction that God is faithful to His promises. In “The Towers of Time,” Chesterton says that “the heart of the swords, seven times wounded,/ Was never wearied as our hearts are.” And in the poem “In October,” honor is due to Mary, because Hers was “The broken Heart and the unbroken word.”⁴⁸ Is this not why in his Encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*, the Holy Father compares the Blessed Virgin to Abraham, saying with St. Paul that *in hope believed against hope*, She is blessed for Her unwavering faith?⁴⁹

In “The Ballad of the White Horse,” Alfred goes to a hopeless war to save Christendom, and has as his clarion to battle he has the promise of suffering without respite. In “The Queen of the Seven Swords,” the seven knights of Europe approach Our Lady’s lonely shrine, with empty

⁴⁵ *Seven Swords*, 40.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ 41.

⁴⁸ 22, 30.

⁴⁹ 14, 20; Romans 4:18.

scabbards and empty hands. One by one the paladins pray for their respective countries, and confess the sins by which the wasteland was created. St. George is the last to speak: "We that have loved have failed thee. Oh fail us not!"⁵⁰ Then together all seven speak:

"We have lost our swords in the battle; we have broken our hearts in the world
Since first we went forth from thy face with the gonfalon's gold unfurled,
Disarmed and distraught and dissundered thy paladins come
From the lands where the gods sit silent. Art thou too dumb?"

They waited; and minute by minute the hush grew hollow with horror
From doubt; till a far voice spoke, as faint with pain and apart,
"Knew ye not, ye that seek, wherein I have hidden all things?
Strewn far as the last lost battle; your swords have met in my heart."

And it seemed that the swords fell down with a shock as of thunderbolts falling,
And the strange knights bent to gather and gird them again for the fight:
All blackened; a bugle blew; but all in that flash of blackness,
With the clang of the fallen swords, I awoke; and the sun was bright.⁵¹

Chesterton sees himself and all of Europe in the shoes of King Alfred. All are bound to have recourse to Our Lady to find their sword, in order to fight for Christ. That sword is in Her heart as sorrow and in Her hand as mediation. And it is only the sword from Her heart that can save us. The Battle of Ethandune in fact began when Alfred's Celtic Chief Colan, threw his away his sword like a spear, killing the blaspheming Dane Harold. Colan prefaced his act with a reference to the cross:

"Oh truly we be broken hearts,
For that cause, it is said,
We light our candles to that Lord
That broke himself for bread" (bk. 5, 210-13).

And after the throwing of the sword, the broken hearted Celt was rewarded by his King:

And the King said, "do thou take my sword
Who have done this deed of fire,
For this is the manner of Christian men,
Whether of steel or priestly pen,
That they cast their hearts out of their ken
To get their hearts desire" (271-76).

We can either loose the sword of militancy and break our hearts through sin as the paladins of Europe did, or we cast away the sword of self-concern and break our hearts through suffering out of love as did Colan. The Immaculate holds out to us the path she took, which is that of suffering willed out of love.

And so the only cause of our joy and hope in our faith is the coredemptive power of the Virgin, not independent of the work of Christ, but subordinate to it, in which we participate by means of our consecration to Her. Chesterton has Alfred rend an ancestral jewel from his armor and cast

⁵⁰ 49.

⁵¹ 50.

it at the feet of our Lady at the beginning of the epic--presumably the famous "Alfred Jewel," and from then on he acts in Her service (bk. 1, 177-182). In that service, and in the sorrow of Her Heart, Alfred ultimately is victorious, but it is only in Her heart and by Her sword that the battle hardly won and souls hardly saved is accomplished. "The Mother of God goes over them," cried Alfred,

"On dreadful Cherubs borne;
And the psalm is roaring above the rune,
And the cross goes over the sun and moon;
Endeth the Battle of Ethandune,
With the blowing of the horn" (bk. 7, 254-59).

Finally, Chesterton, the indefatigable propagandist, takes the opportunity of Alfred's victory to make him a prophet of coming wars. The first king of united England warns us of those who would come and try to take away the cross, our noblest Christian patrimony: "By this sign you shall know them," he says, "The breaking of the sword" (bk. 8, 273-74). Our salvation is secured by our love for the cross, and that is secured by Our Lady's sorrow and our acceptance of it. We hope that our dogmatic, spiritual and cultural acceptance of the Coredemption and Universal Mediation of the Immaculate will be a sign and instrument of our avoidance of the intellectual and moral decadence of our times. Chesterton warns especially of how that decadence tends to lead us away from Her. This Marian minimization is another sign by which we will know the new barbarians:

By thought a crawling ruin,
By life a leaping mire,
By a broken heart in the breast of the world,
And the end of the world's desire" (295-98).

The broken heart and broken sword of faithlessness and sin, leads to a denial of that desire which is love personified, the world's first love, the Immaculate who is Mother of all that is good, especially in the mystery of suffering, and our union with her in that suffering. Above the mortal remains of G. K. Chesterton and his wife Frances is a monument beautifully designed by the art critic and friend, Eric Gill, on which is carved the Crucified, and His Holy Mother: Our Lady standing in grief, her gaze locked upon that of Her Son. In his last days, Chesterton woke from a delirium and said: "The issue is now quite clear. It is between light and darkness and everyone must choose his side." During life he was known to make a mysterious sign with a match as he lit his cigar. Those who knew him well, knew that it was the sign of the cross. He made this sign on the doors of the rooms he entered, and he saw it formed in the branches of the trees. He was also known to have swung his sword cane, absentmindedly, as though it were a real sword, when he was lost in his speculations on the light that overcomes the darkness. At the end of the Battle of Ethendune he says that Alfred "put the cross on Guthrum"--a most accurate description of baptism and the faith of baptism. Chesterton knew what the real issue was, and is, and knew that it is at the heart of the world's desire.⁵²

Let us pray that the world's desire will continue to live in our broken hearts, through faith and joy; that we will stand with the Woman clothed with the sun, and in the heart-throes of life, read the presence of Christ in both the beauty and terror of the world. Our Lord invites us to

⁵² Cf. *Chesterton*, 649-50.

participate in His sacrificial ministry, to imitate the Coredemptrix, and, under the influence of Her mediation, to live in Her and through Her in Christ. We have Hopkins and Chesterton to thank for a deeper appreciation of this mystery and the encouragement to trust in the Queen of the Seven Swords, who continues to hold the sword of Her mediation on behalf of us all.