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THE MOTHERHOOD OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“I can only explain,” wrote William Butler Yeats in 1937, “by that suggestion of recent scholars—Professor Burkitt of Cambridge commended it to my attention—that St. Patrick came to Ireland not in the fifth century but towards the end of the second. The great controversies had not begun; Easter was still the first full moon after the Equinox. Upon that day the world had been created, the Ark rested upon Ararat, Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt; the umbilical cord which united Christianity to the ancient world had not yet been cut, Christ was still the half-brother of Dionysus.”¹ An Irish-born modern poet, Yeats’s Christian faith came into much discredit not only for the above remark but for several others also which could be as shocking and repulsive to any of his Christian contemporaries as to a modern Christian nurtured by the rudiments of a credulous and blind faith. For he had rhymed four years ago :

An abstract Greek absurdity has crased the man—
Recall that masculine Trinity. Man, woman, child (a daughter or
a son)

That’s how all natural and supernatural stories run.
Natural and supernatural with the self-same ring are wed.
As man, as beast, as an ephemeral fly begets, Godhead begets
Godhead.

For things below are copies, the Great Smaragdine Tablet² said.³ Yeats’s contention above can be reduced to this : Irish Christianity is much more ancient than it is officially recognised. The beliefs of

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1. W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (London : Macmillan, 1961), p. 514.
 2. Smaragdine Tablet, Yeats elsewhere explains, is the same as the Emerald Tablet of Hermes (W. B. Yeats, *Op. Cit.*, p. 146). This Hermes, though very much associated with the Kabbalah, seems to be not different from the Pastor Hermes of ancient Patristic tradition.
 3. W. B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London : Macmillan, 1969), pp. 328–9.

that ancient Church underwent a sea-change after it came under the influence of Hellenic Philosophy, which introduced the concept of a masculine Trinity that may be rightly called, as will be shown below an "abstract Greek absurdity."

Yeats, whose poetic self was virtually his Christian one, was fully convinced of the far more ancient origin of Irish Christianity. There are historical records and proofs to show that the Irish Church received its Christian faith not from St. Patrick in 432, as is commonly held, but from the Egyptian monks as early as the second century. This is established by the testimony of St. Prosper,⁴ endorsed by the authority of Venerable Bede in his History of the Church and, even more recently, confirmed by Zimmer in his *Keltische Studien*. Tertullian wrote in the third century that the "Bretons are subject to Jesus Christ,"⁵ whereas Pope Celestine I sent the deacon Palladius as their first Bishop "to the Irish who believed in Christ"⁶ and not to convert them. Ireland, let us not forget, by the close of the third century, had a well-organised Christianity which was represented by three Bishops at the Council of Arles in 314. The *Acta Sanctorum* mentions Declan, Bishop of Waterford, born in 347, and the Bishop of Albe who met St. Patrick. St. Chrysostom wrote in 387 that there were Churches and altars in the British Isles. Pelagius, whom St. Augustine and St. Prosper confronted in 400, was generally believed to be a 'British Scribe' and St. Jerome speaks of his Irish descent.⁷ It was the existence of this pre-Patrician Christianity and its faith that Prof. Burkitt brought to the attention of Yeats. The umbilical cord which united this Church to the ancient world was cut only after what Yeats calls "Greek absurdities" were introduced into Ireland.

Though the reaction of Yeats and the suggestion of Burkitt were about the Irish Church, the issue in question concerns every Christian believer. It seems to strike at the very roots of the Christian dogma to say that the traditional idea of a masculine Trinity is a "Greek absurdity." How many of our pious and devoted Christians, for example, would not rather shudder at the thought of having to say 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Mother'

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4. Cf. John Dowden, *The Celtic Church in Ireland*; Hill Burton, *History of Scotland*; Skene, *Celtic Scotland*; Louis Gougaud, *Gaelic Pioneers of Christianity*.
 5. Dom Charles Poulet, *A History of the Catholic Church*, Vol. I (London: B. Herder), p. 204.
 6. Poulet, *Ibid.*, p. 208.
 7. Douglas Hyde, *A Literary History of Ireland* (Ernest Benn, 1967), p. 106.

instead of the 'traditional,' in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.'? Yet, that is precisely what is being proposed in the following sections.

I

Professor Crawford Burkitt, during the opening years of this century, pointed out to Yeats that the early Irish Christianity drew its beliefs from Egypt, especially through the monks of the Syriac-speaking Oriental Church. This scholar was pained to see that some of the fundamental dogmas of the Church were later distorted and disfigured, especially after the Scholastic philosophy came to play a predominant role in the Christian dogmatic system, partly to satisfy a 'popular sentiment' but chiefly through the application of sophisticated human logic to divine affairs. Burkitt's conclusions were further supplemented and endorsed, as late as the seventies, by another scholar, Robert Murray, a noted Orientalist and authority on the Syriac-speaking Church. The central issue these scholars explored was the gender of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. Few scholars and Ecclesiologists, let alone the average believer, would perhaps be happy to accept that the Holy Spirit is a Mother and not another male divine person as, in course of time, Christian tradition came to have it.

Pious sentiments and feelings, however strong, blind practice and subconscious response, however deep-rooted, apart, it can be conclusively shown that the Holy Spirit, in fact, is the Divine Mother in the Trinity. Facts are always facts, both in the divine and human realms, irrespective of popular beliefs. The primary source of this exploration is the Bible itself and a few Fathers of the Syriac Church.

The word RŪH, in Semitic languages, is feminine; but its equivalent *Spiritus* in Latin is masculine and *Pneuma* in Greek is neuter. Accordingly the Holy Spirit in ancient Syriac writings, "before the influence of Greek theology made itself felt,"⁸ is always feminine. Thus the oldest Syriac version of the Bible, dating back to 200 A.D. explicitly calls the Holy Spirit "she;" for example, John XIV, 26 reads: "The Spirit, the Paraclete, She shall teach you everything." But *Peshitta*, the fifth century authentic Syriac version, also officially

8. Crawford Burkitt, *Early Eastern Christianity: St. Margaret Lectures 1904 on Syriac-Speaking Church* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1904) p. 88.

used by the Church of Edessa, has changed 'She' or 'it' into 'He' in the above instance and in several other places like Luke IV, 1; XII, 12; and John VII, 39. However, truth, self-resplendent and vindicated by its own testimony, defies all human caprice and contrivance. Turn, for example, to the most crucial passage in the Gospel, the scene of the Annunciation as recorded all too graphically and vividly in Luke I, 35, even according to the *Peshitta* which has been, almost, compelled to conform to the norms of Orthodoxy (Rūhā d-khūdshā thēsê (third person feminine singular) ū-hâilê d-êllâyâ nângên (third person masculine singular) âlâik). "The Holy Spirit will come upon thee, and the power of the most High will overshadow thee." It seems curious to remark that this passage makes a clear distinction between the Holy Spirit and the power of the most High, the former followed by a feminine verb and the latter by a masculine. Let it be clearly borne in mind that the issue in question is to determine the gender of the Holy Spirit and the text under consideration is precisely concerned with the divine (pardon the expression!) procreation. No other text, therefore, would help this need better.

The present writer does not claim to have any mandate to interpret the Holy Writ nor does he propose to intrude upon that authority exclusively claimed by the Church. However, before proceeding to give a sober explanation of the above text, he begs to be excused on the same lines as did St. Augustine who, when he interpreted the hidden meaning of Genesis, reacted, in his *Confessions*, to the usual fear of any future critic or interpreter: "Moses meant not what you say, but what I say." St. Augustine met this objection in the true spirit of Christian charity: "Why not rather as both, if both be true?"⁹ The clear distinction between the 'Holy Spirit' and the 'power of the most High' is explicitly to safeguard the motherhood of the Spirit and to maintain the separate masculine identity of the Father who is the 'power of the most high.' The Father knew, to use the Biblical expression for the act of procreation, his consort the Holy Mother and the offspring of this act is the Son. This divine impregnation needed a human configuration to be translated into the terms of flesh and blood; therefore the power of the most High only 'overshadows' Mary or selects her in a singular manner and the Holy Mother only 'comes' or puts herself in the place of Mary rather than impregnates her. For we know that the mating of male with male is as absurd as the mating of female with female. We can thus safely assume that a divine ovum was fertilized by the union of the divine Father and Mother

9. St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XII.

outside the womb of the Virgin Mary wherein it was later implanted. The latter process is called, in Biblical terms, 'overshadowing.' If modern science could perform a similar prodigy in the case of human parents, should we hesitate to concede as much to the all-powerful God? "Divine Trinity, then, is God the Father (Male), God the Mother (Female) and God the Child (Generation), copied by the human trinity—human father (male), human mother (female) and human child (generation)."¹⁰

Another Biblical instance where the overwhelming evidence points to the Motherhood of the Holy Spirit is Genesis 1 : 2 in which the role of the Spirit is expressed by the word RHP both in Hebrew and Aramaic. This word suggests the brooding or hovering action of a mother-bird conveyed through the traditional imagery of the Mother-Spirit, and the brooding action is expressed by the Syriac verbal noun RÜHHĀPA. The fundamental suggestiveness of this passage remains unimpaired, despite the grave disservice later translations, especially modern ones, of the Bible have done by the indiscriminate use of the word 'spirit' or 'breath', words which have come to convey different connotations in the ecclesiastical terminology. It may be the hovering of the Spirit over the waters in Baptism, as the Syriac Fathers Aphrahat¹¹ and Ephrem¹² meant or the action of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist and in the Holy Order as the latter again believed.¹³ It may be added that these Fathers did not attempt so much to inter-relate the concept of the Holy Spirit-Mother and Mother-Church as to consider the Holy Spirit specifically as a feminine person in the bosom of the Holy Trinity, though they were well aware of such a tradition already developed by several Fathers, especially of the Western Church.

The idea of the Holy Spirit as Mother strongly suggested by Genesis 1 : 2 becomes yet more clear in the light of Deut. 32 : 11 and Exod. 19 : 4 where the bird imagery appears again in the verbal root RHP (RIHEP in the Hebrew version and RAHEP in the Syriac). God protects his chosen people:

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10. P. J. Jacob, *W. B. Yeats and Christianity : A Doctoral Dissertation*, Dharwad, 1979, p. 457.
 11. Aphrahat, *Demonstration*, VI. 292·24–293·5.
 12. Ephrem, *Hymnen de Epiphania* 6, 1. ed. Beck E., *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 186, Syr. 82, p. 160.
 13. Ephrem, *Hymnen de Fide*, 10·16–17, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 154, Syr. 73, p. 51; *Carmina Nisibena*, 19·2, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 218, Syr. 92, p. 50.

As an eagle watches over its nest, hovers (YERAHEP) above its young, spreads its pinions and takes them up and carries them upon its wings, Yahweh alone led him . . .

And again, "how I carried you as if on eagle's wings . . ." It is therefore more reasonable to render Genesis 1 : 2 as 'the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters' than with such modern usages as 'a mighty wind swept over the surface of the waters'¹⁴ or as 'only an awesome wind sweeping over the water.'¹⁵ There is no attempt, however, to ignore the fact that the exact connotation of RHP—both in Hebrew and Syriac—is not yet established beyond all question. Despite all vagueness regarding the action contained in the word RHP, the few Old Testament contexts invariably relate it to a Mother-bird. Therefore the Syriac tradition developed this distinct connotation preferably from the text of Genesis 1 : 2 instead of the succeeding texts or later Patristic usage.¹⁶

Granting that there is a shred of vagueness about the real significance of the term RHP and further that the tradition on this issue is none too universal and unanimous, a closer and dispassionate look at this Biblical text is very rewarding. Genesis 1 : 2 begins by stressing that the earth, after creation, has been "barren" and an "empty waste" where, as yet, there wasn't any sign of life. The Spirit of God hovered over the waters, a part of this empty earth, as if this hovering action were preordained to bring life where there was no earlier trace of it. It may be recalled in this context how Biology has proved that the earliest life, in the form of algae, originated in the sea or water; even the liturgical language and practice of the Church closely associate water with life and the process of spiritual regeneration. But water, without seminal life implanted in it, is still barren, and no life can emerge out of it. Not even the Father who created the earth out of nothing could independently evolve a new life out of the earth or water without the concurrence of his Spirit who, we should say, acted as the female principle supplying the ovum to be fertilized and evolved into viable life. We confess, in the Creed, our faith in 'the Lord, the Giver of Life,' in reference to the Holy Spirit, implying, as a matter of fact, that the Spirit has a sex; for common sense would have us believe that without the coming together of the opposite sexes no

14. *New English Bible*, 1970.

15. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 3.

16. Cf. F. Lenzen—Deis, *Die Taufe Jesu nach den Synoptikern* (Frankfurt; 1970), p. 133,

new life is possible. This is exactly what happened in the beginning of creation. Therefore, it was not a slip of the inspired writer's pen to use the word RHP in the above text to convey symbolically the hovering action of a Mother-bird, which is all but the most appropriate imagery for the Mother-Spirit. What happened in the beginning of creation may be further seen only as a figure of what would happen again, ages later, at the time of the Annunciation.

II

The most incontrovertible evidence to establish the Motherhood of the third person of the Trinity comes from the Fathers of the Syriac Church. For reasons of brevity and lack of space only two leading Fathers of this Church, Aphrahat and Ephrem, are examined in this context. To carry out a more extensive survey for our purpose is not necessary either. Aphrahat, commenting on John XIV, 26, ascribes in a Doxology¹⁷ "glory and honour to the Father and to His Son and to His Spirit, the *living* and *holy*." It is surprising that Aphrahat uses 'living' and 'holy' as feminine adjectives which cannot be naively turned down as mere grammatical niceties in the light of what he elsewhere says, while discussing Genesis 2 : 24 : "Who is it that leaves Father and Mother to take a wife ? The meaning is this. As long as a man has not taken a wife he loves and reveres God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother, and he has no other love. But when a man takes a wife he leaves his father and his mother, those whom I have designated above."¹⁸ Aphrahat's attitude towards matrimony, in the modern context, may not be quite acceptable as Christian. But his conclusion that the Holy Spirit is a mother is too clear to be confused with the Greco-Latin Western tradition, by now well-established, of the Church as mother who, instead of the Spirit, rears children for Heaven. He would, as an ascetic, call the faithful the children of the Church but their true Mother is the Holy Spirit. In a passage in *Demonstration* he shows that the Christians are the sons of the covenant, regenerated by the church through Baptism. But his primary concern is to show the action of the Mother-Spirit who hovers or broods over the Baptismal waters. Baptism bestows the Spirit of Christ upon us and as soon as the priest invokes "the Spirit, 'she' opens the heavens and descends and hovers over the waters,

17. XXIII. 63 = *Wright* 498.

18. Aphrahat, *Demonstration XVIII, On Virginitly and Holiness*, 840·8-15,

and those who are baptised put 'her' on."¹⁹ It must be remembered that Aphrahat employs in this context the same term RHP found also in Genesis 1 : 2.

Syriac writers like Aphrahat were little concerned with the Church as Mother as they were already, and more convincingly too, under the influence of the earlier Semitic-Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit as Mother. This tradition always saw the Holy Spirit in the image of a bird, eagle or dove, the latter becoming more common in later years. It is firmly held that when the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his Baptism in the form of a dove it was only the process of an original simile taking the shape of a concrete image.²⁰ St. Jerome, for all this concern for orthodoxy, does not hesitate to draw upon the *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, where the Spirit addresses Jesus when he comes out of the water : " My Son, in all the prophets I was awaiting you, that you might come and I might rest in you. For you are my repose, you are my first born Son, who reign for ever."²¹ It cannot be argued that the early Jewish Christians believed that the Holy Spirit was only speaking on behalf of the Father as the same Gospel, in another instance, is much more emphatic : " Then my mother, the Holy Spirit, took me by one hair of my head and carried me away to the great mountain Tabor."²² Surprisingly enough, Origen quoted this phrase twice and Jerome three times.

Ephrem, the leading luminary of the Syriac Church, though far more explicit, is yet under the influence of later orthodoxy and its purging process. He too, according to the Syriac tradition, declines RUHA as feminine, but only once seems to be interested in her actual femininity. His text, now available in Armenian, draws a mask over the gender of the Spirit : " It is not said of Eve that she was Adam's

19. Aphrahat, *Ibid.*, VI, 292-24-293-5.

20. L. E. Keck, 'The Spirit and the Dove,' *New Testament Studies*, 17, 1970-19, 41-67 discusses the details of this manifestation of the Spirit; F. Lentzen-Deis, *Die Taufe Jesu nach den Synoptikern* (Frankfurt : 1970), pp. 170-80 examines the nature of the dove image.

21. Jerome, In Isa. IV (on 11 : 1-3) *Corpus Christianorum seu Nova Patrum Collectio* (Turnhout-Paris : 1953, LXXIII. 1, 148, Patrologia Latina. ed. Migne J. p. 24, 148 C-d.)

22. K. Aland, *Synopsis Quatuor Evangeliorum*, (Stuttgart : 1964), p. 34 gives several references on this topic. The *Gospel of Thomas* contrasts the mother who 'gave me the life' with Jesus' physical mother. B. Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (Eng. tr., London, 1961), p. 138 does not consider this contrast as a lacuna. Cf. also G. Quispel, *Vigiliae Christianae*, 18, 235 (Amsterdam : 1964) and *Makarius* (Leiden : 1967), p. 95.

sister or his daughter but that she came from him; likewise it is not to be said that the Spirit is a daughter or a sister but that (She) is *from* God and consubstantial with Him."²³ The probable purging of Ephrem's Syriac text can be easily established in the light of other parallel passages in the Armenian version. In this specific case it might well have been, in the Syriac, 'daughter' instead of 'son' since the pronoun 'She' is retained in the Armenian. Another passage in the Armenian version reads: "By the conception of the Virgin, learn that *he* who without wedlock brought forth Adam from the virgin earth (also) without wedlock formed the second Adam in the womb of the Virgin."²⁴ The *Gospel of Philip* (tr. Wilson), p. 147 has a similar passage: "Adam came into being from two virgins, from the Spirit and from the virgin earth." The expression 'virgin earth' is rather Judeo-Christian than 'Gnostic' in the light of Ephrem's remark in the *Hymnen de Nativitate et Epiphania*, ed. Beck, E., 1, 16 and 2, 12. But A. Orbe prefers to call this expression a 'typological parallel' rather than the Judeo-Christian view of the Spirit as Mother.²⁵ But we cannot ignore the fact that Orbe is under the Greco-Latin influence which considers *Pneuma* as neuter and *Spiritus* as masculine. His source is primarily Gregory Nazianzen going back, through Methodius, to Clement's *Extracts from Theodotus* and the homily '2 Clement.' But it only further shows rather a Judeo-Christian origin than a Gnostic.

At this point it would be pertinent to ask what Ephrem really had in mind. If Ephrem was convinced of the femininity of the Holy Spirit, and his Syriac text was so tampered with, why should he venture to mock at Bardaisan's doctrine of the Spirit? Ephrem's *Hymnen contra Haereses*, 55 is one long sneer at Bardaisan's views.²⁶ It is not because Bardaisan had a gnostic background but because he tried to draw a personal allegory between the Holy Spirit and the moon goddess of Malbog, Hierapoils. But another passage, similar to the objection of Ephrem, stands out in sharp contrast to the use of Bardaisan.

23. *Commentaire de l'Evangile Concordant, Version armenienne*, ed. Leloir, L., 19, 15. *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 137 (Armenian Text), 1, 277, 11-15.

24. *Ibid.*, 2, 2. *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, p. 24. 16-19.

25. A. Orbe, 'La Procesion del Espiritu Santo y el Origen de Eva,' *Gregorianum*, XLV, 1964, 103-118.

26. See *Bardaisan of Edessa*, pp. 209-212.

Spirit (ruha) lifted up her voice,
She cried aloud and said, 'My Father, my Father,
Why didst thou create me ?'²⁷

What Aphrahat, Ephrem and others have held out against the exigencies of the Greco-Latin orthodoxy, is, as will be shown in our conclusion, quite in conformity with unbiased, simple Christian sentiments.

III

This part of the present study is chiefly concerned with what, in ecclesiastical terminology, is called 'apocrypha' which are normally considered to be of secondary value. There is no need to go into their validity as far as truth is concerned, except to remind ourselves that truth knows no boundary or limitations except that of human nature. If, accordingly, the so-called non-canonical 'apocrypha' seem to conform to that unspoilt human nature one can safely accept them.

It cannot be ignored that some of the leading Fathers of the Church, in spite of all their studied apprehensions, did not hesitate to draw upon these sources as, it seems, they could not resist their compelling evidence. Origen and Jerome quote the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* in confirmation of their view that the Holy Spirit is the Mother of Jesus because She does the will of the Father. Later use of the word 'Theotokos' to refer to the Virgin Mary and the development of Ecclesiology which came to uphold more and more the motherhood of the Church have certainly eliminated this early belief about the sex of the Holy Spirit. "Perhaps it was inevitable that the thought of the Holy Spirit as the Queen of Heaven should be eliminated from Christian Theology, but before we condemn the doctrine altogether let us remember that the theology of the age which followed its final disappearance, at the bidding of popular sentiment, by a false application of logic to divine affairs, degraded the Christian vocabulary with the word *Theotokos*."²⁸

Most of the apocrypha seem to represent faithfully the early Judeo-Christian belief which, definitely, cannot be confused with the gnostic tradition. It has already been pointed out above how Jerome quoted from the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* also to prove the role of the Spirit in Baptism. If popular belief is any standard of truth, it can be safely asserted that the early Christians had no qualms

27. Mandaean *Canonical Prayer Book*, ed. E. S. Drower (Leiden : 1959), p. 74.

28. Burkitt, *Op. Cit.*, p. 90.

about the Motherhood of the Holy Spirit. Among the apocryphal works often quoted, the *Odes of Solomon* deserves special attention. These Odes, in fact, are closer to the Judeo-Christian tradition than to the Gnostic. Ode 24 speaks of the Baptism of Jesus :

The dove fluttered over the head of our Lord Messiah,
Because He was her head.
And She sang over Him,
And her voice was heard.²⁹

Although this Ode speaks of the femininity of the Spirit, it does not clarify if she is in fact the mother of Christ, about which Ode 36 is more explicit. After declaring that Jesus rested on the Spirit of the Lord and She lifted him up to heaven, Charlesworth the translator makes Christ himself speak :

The Spirit brought me forth before the Lord's face
And because I was the Son of Man (Syr. bārñāsâ).
I was named the Light, the Son of God.³⁰

It may be objected that in this passage, it is not Christ but the author of the Odes who speaks. So what ? Does it not, at any rate, show that the Spirit is a mother ?

The Odes also, following the Biblical usage, employs the bird imagery, especially of the dove, in the context of the Baptism of Jesus. Ode 28, 1-2 tells that Christ is protected by the Spirit as by a Mother :

As the wings of doves over their nestlings,
And the mouths of their nestlings towards their mouths,
So also are the wings of the Spirit over my heart.
My heart continually refreshes itself and leaps for joy,
Like the babe who leaps for joy in his mother's womb.³¹

Whatever be the specific connotation of the dove image, as scholars dispute, the inevitable conclusion is that the Spirit is a Mother who not only generates the Son but even protects and watches over him, and, in the baptismal context, it can be safely concluded that the same role of the Spirit includes the life of the Christians as well.

Perhaps the strangest Ode is 19 which, to some, contains a good deal of anthropomorphism but is explicit and emphatic on the maternal

29. *Odes of Solomon* (Tr.) J. H. Charlesworth, pp. 97-100; nn. 1-4, p. 99.

30. *Ode* 36, 1-3; Charlesworth, pp. 126-128.

31. *Ode* 28, 1-2; Charlesworth, pp. 107-111.

characteristics of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a mother who releases the milk of the Father's breasts, surprising indeed, to feed the Son and his followers :

The Holy Spirit opened her bosom,
And mixed the milk of the two breasts of the Father.
Then She gave the mixture to the generation without their knowing,
And those who have received it are in the perfection of the right
hand.³²

Though the *Ode* says that the Mother of Jesus is the Spirit, it has not forgotten to discuss the role of the Virgin Mary who too became "a mother with great mercies"³³ to remind us of what the Church calls the annunciation, but in the most human language of reason. It also goes on to discuss the virgin birth of Christ but not in the traditional language. Even if the milk imagery is explained away as the symbol for the word of God³⁴ or as the type of the milk and honey offered to the neo-baptised, the generation of the Son through the Spirit is obvious.

The conclusions of the *Ode* stand further confirmed by several remarks from other apocrypha like the *Gospel of Truth* or the *Gospel of Philip* : "The Father opens his bosom; but his bosom is the Holy Spirit."³⁵ The passage might appear to make the Father bisexual.³⁶ The unanimity among the apocrypha has led Charlesworth to conclude that the *Odes* can have little to do with Gnosticism.³⁷ To say that the Virgin Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit is absurd, because, according to the *Gospel of Philip*, a woman cannot conceive of another woman. "Some said : Mary conceived of the Holy Spirit. They are in error . . . when did a woman ever conceive of a woman ?"³⁸

In the light of what has been so far discussed we might rather ignore a few additional testimonies found in works like the *Acts of*

32. *Ode* 19, 1-7; Charlesworth, pp. 81-84.

33. *Ode*, *Ibid.*

34. St. Iranaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 62 (ed.) Harvey, W. II, 292.

35. *Gospel of Truth*, 24, p. 14. tr. K. Grobel (London : 1960), pp. 92, 94 with notes, pp. 93, 95; tr. in Grant, *Gnosticism, an Anthology*, p. 151.

36. The Hindu mythology believes that Brahma split himself into two and became Vishnu and the union of the two is supposed to be Mahesh.

37. J. H. Charlesworth, 'The Odes of Solomon—Not Gnostic,' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXXI (Washington, 1969), 357-369.

38. *Gospel of Philip*, 17 (103) 23-8; tr. R. McL Wilson, (London, 1962), p. 80; Cfr. A. Orbe, *Espiritu Santo*, pp. 95-99.

Thomas or the *Hymn of the Pearl* as they seem to contain more gnostic language. These works vary much between their Greek and Syriac versions wherever there is a reference to the Spirit about which Murray remarks: "The Syriac and the Greek texts differ in the amount of such (Gnostic) language, and the Syriac is thought to have been somewhat purged in the interests of orthodoxy."³⁹ These works, therefore, only further strengthen our conclusion.

Now, to turn from the world of facts to the devotional and somewhat sentimental one of Christian asceticism. It can only be said that the devotional patterns did not determine the facts but that the process was rather the other way round. C. G. Jung too reminds us of a psychological need to find the feminine close to the Godhead but this "became increasingly satisfied by growing devotion to Mary and the Church."⁴⁰ The gender of the Spirit varying in different languages only makes Jerome dismiss the whole idea and say that 'there is no sex in God.'⁴¹ But Murray remarks that Jerome's opinion is 'unhelpful' and 'unnecessary' when the 'Isaiah School' itself acknowledges a maternal principle in God and Jesus often compares even himself to a mother-bird.⁴² The devotional approach to this issue is becoming more outspoken day by day, especially in modern times, with both modern writers⁴³ and ascetics from the 12th to the 20th century, writers like Richard of St. Victor and Scheeben,⁴⁴ for instance. The Christian artists who fashioned the fresco of the Church of Urschalling in Bavaria or the retables of the *Cartuja* of Miraflores, Burgos, did not fail to see the Holy Spirit as a Mother. The testimony of a contemplative nun in France, but for its informal nature, should set at rest all future speculations on this issue: "More and more I see in Him (Holy Spirit) a maternal principle in our regard and even, so it seems to me, in the bosom of the Trinity. But to express this, words fail me."⁴⁵

39. Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Traditions* (C.U.P., 1975), p. 317.

40. Murray, *Ibid.*, p. 319.

41. St. Jerome, In Isa. XI (on 40: 9-11). *Corpus Christianorum seu Nova Patrum Collectio* (Turnhout-Paris: LXXIII, 1, p. 459-75-86, Patrologia Latina. ed. Migne, J. P. 24, 419b).

42. Mathew; 23: 37.

43. A. Cabassut, 'Une dévotion médiévale peu connue, la dévotion à Jésus notre mère', *Rev. d'Asc. et Myst.* 25, 1949, 234-45; P. Molinari, *Julian of Norwich* (London, 1958), pp. 169-76.

44. A. Orbe, 'La Procession,' p. 118.

45. *Contemplative Nuns Speak* (London: 1964), pp. 118-119.

Fulton J. Sheen has almost explicitly, though in a different context, asserted the need of a mother in the Godhead. "Can religion", he asks, "do without motherhood? It certainly does not do without Fatherhood, for one of the most accurate descriptions of God is that of the Giver and Provider of good things. But since motherhood is as necessary as fatherhood in the natural order — perhaps even more so — shall the devoted religious heart be without a woman to love?"⁴⁶ Sheen writing, of course, in the 'orthodox' ascetic tradition of the Western Church, would satisfy this need with devotion to the Virgin Mary. The most fundamental attribute of God is that of the Giver of Life and the life-giving or the generative process necessarily implies the female partner, who deeply inspires love, while a father evokes respect and submission. Sheen goes on to argue that "it is inconceivable that such love should be without a prototype Mother."⁴⁷ He seems to be unconsciously led by the force of the Yeatsian argument explained in the beginning of this discussion.

The universal respect and worship shown to an ideal woman is only the spontaneous expression of the natural and hidden instinct of man to seek and worship a divine Mother. In many primitive and pre-Christian religions, it has become a myth and legend as, for example, the worship of Aphrodite and Adonis at Paphos in Cyprus. "If we survey the whole of the evidence on this subject," writes Frazer, "... we may conclude that a great Mother Goddess, the personification of all the reproductive energies of nature, was worshipped under different names but with a substantial similarity of myth and ritual by many peoples of Western Asia."⁴⁸ The Jewish tradition has, from time to time, idealised a woman which can be seen to have culminated in the Christian approach to the Virgin Mary. The idea of the feminine principle in God, Sheen argues, deteriorated, among the Hindus, into the worship of the sacred cow: "Even in this decay of the feminine principle," he adds, "there is to be detected a grain of truth... Though the Western world makes fun of this symbol of religion, it is nevertheless a kind of glorification of motherhood and femininity in religion."⁴⁹ After a brief survey of religious beliefs and practices in various parts of the world, Sheen concludes: "Wherever the people are primitive, in the right sense of the term, there is devo-

46. Fulton J. Sheen, *The World's First Love* (Allahabad: St. Paul's Society, 1954), p. 208.

47. Sheen, *Ibid.*, p. 209.

48. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 436.

49. Sheen, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 217, 218.

tion to motherhood.”⁵⁰ And he cites the examples of Japan and the primitive African tribes. Frazer also proves that most of the primitive eastern religions, especially those of Asia Minor, maintained a consistent faith in a Mother Goddess as life-giver and symbol of their love. We cannot be guilty of drawing any rash conclusion if we accept this as a shadow, perhaps in a crude and not yet well-defined form, of the faith in the Holy Spirit as the maternal principle in God. The popular worship of Osiris or Isis as the goddess of fertility also can be reasonably seen in the same light. They only prove that the attribute of Life-Giver is essential to the concept of God and, for that reason, a feminine principle has to be there necessarily.

This discussion may be closed with the remarks of MacGregor Mathers, the chief proponent of Kabbalah, as the force of his argument cannot be easily ignored: “Now for some reason or other,” writes Mathers, “best known to themselves, the translators of the Bible have carefully crowded out of existence and smothered up every reference to the fact that the Deity is both masculine and feminine. They have translated a feminine plural by a masculine singular in the case of the word ELOHIM. They have, however, left an inadvertent admission of their knowledge that it was plural in Genesis 4 : 26 : “And ELOHIM said; Let us make man.” Again (4 : 27), how could Adam be made in the image of the ELOHIM, male and female unless the ELOHIM were male and female also ? The Word ELOHIM is a plural formed from the feminine singular, ALH, ELOH, by adding IM to the word. But inasmuch as IM is usually the termination of the masculine plural and is here added to a feminine noun, it gives to the word ELOHIM the sense of a female potency united to a masculine idea, and thereby capable of producing an offspring. Now we hear much of the Father and the Son, but we hear nothing of the Mother in the ordinary religions of the day. But in the Qabalah, we find that the Ancient of Days conforms himself simultaneously into the Father and the Mother, and thus begets the Son. Now this Mother is ELOHIM. Again we are usually told that the Holy Spirit is masculine. But the word RUCH, Spirit is feminine as appears from the following passage of the Sepher Yetzirah: AchTh Ruch ALHIM CHIIM, Achath (feminine, not Achad masculine) Ruach Elohim Chiim : One is She the Spirit of the Elohim of Life.”⁵¹

50. Sheen, *Ibid.*, p. 219.

51. MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, (London : Macmillan) pp. 21-22.