

overwhelmingly rejected by evangelical Christians have been tapped to represent a Republican Party that Hartmann claims is controlled by a "Christian Taliban"? It makes no sense.

The question must be asked: Why do progressives continue to shriek into the night about a bogeyman that recent history and current events have shown to be nothing more than a figment of their over-exercised imaginations? Again Williamson: "The Left is selling an odd and ambitious agenda: turning the United States into...one big public utility administered by one big DMV in Washington" — where it currently enjoys the pleasures of power (and will continue to do so pending the outcome of this month's presidential election). "That's a tough sell, and tough sells need enemies. Choos-

ing to make an unpopular religious minority the face of all that is wrong with a society isn't exactly unprecedented." Demonizing a religious group is, in fact, a timeworn political strategy: Christians had that honor in the Roman Empire, as did Jews in Nazi Germany, Kulaks in Soviet Russia, and Sunni Muslims in Iran.

Of course, these were actual, extant religious groups that were easily identifiable and, therefore, easy targets for persecution. Today's target group, the trumped-up American Taliban, is nothing more than a phantom menace, the stuff of (bad) cinematic fiction.

The lesson for movements that define themselves by their opposition is that if a suitable enemy doesn't exist, it is necessary to invent one. ■

WHAT DO WE KNOW & HOW DO WE KNOW IT?

HURD BARUCH

THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception honors Jesus' miraculous conception without a human father, right? Wrong! The Feast of the Presentation in the Temple honors the presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple, right? Wrong again! These are both *Marian* feasts, commemorating events in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Confusion is understandable because Jesus was conceived immaculately by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary

(Lk. 1:26-38), and He was presented in the Temple by Mary and Joseph when He was forty days old (Lk. 2:22-38), so when one thinks of an immaculate conception or a presentation in the Temple, one almost automatically thinks of the life of our Lord. But the two feasts mentioned above directly honor not Jesus but His mother (though, as always, by honoring Mary we ultimately honor her Son).

It has always struck me as odd that the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, celebrated on December 8, is treated with special reverence in the Church and is a holy day of obligation, yet the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, celebrated on November 21, draws little notice. Even the Mass readings for this day (Zech. 2:14-17; Mt. 12:46-50), as well as the readings from the Office of Readings, fail to address this seemingly significant event. The

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reason for this, however, is rather simple: There is *absolutely no reference* in the Bible to such a presentation. So, if there is no biblical basis for this feast day, how did it come to be celebrated in the Church? It turns out that its roots lie in Tradition, one of the three pillars of the Church (the other two being Scripture and the Magisterium).

My search for the genesis of this feast day led me to the liturgy of the Orthodox churches, in which Mary's presentation is known as the Entry of the Most Holy *Theotokos* into the Temple and is one of the Twelve Great Feasts. Its celebration can be traced to at least the seventh century in Constantinople, and the ninth century in the West. But the underlying tradition is much older; mention of Mary's presentation is found in manuscripts dating back to the first centuries after Jesus' death. At the time, there were well over a hundred writings circulating in the Roman Empire variously styled as gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses — some Christian, some gnostic, some a mixture — all purporting to be true accounts of what Jesus, and those around Him, had said or done. The Church had to sift through these manuscripts to arrive at a canon of what was genuine and suitable for use in the liturgy. She accepted very few, and the excluded ones became known by the term *apocrypha* (sing. *apocryphon*).

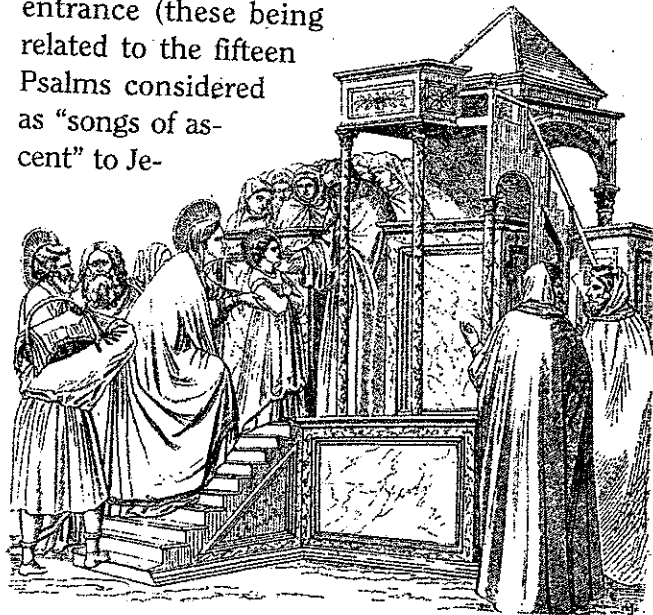
One of the rejected apocryphal documents is the "Protoevangelium of James" (also known as "The Infancy Gospel of James" or "The Book of James"). Its overall thrust is to glorify Mary as worthy to be called the mother of the Lord. It runs to fifteen printed pages, and begins with the difficulty Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, experienced in conceiving a child. Following the miraculous conception of Mary, the story continues through her birth, her presentation in the Temple, her service as a Temple virgin, her espousal to Joseph, the census and birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the visit of the wise men, and Herod's order to slay the children. It ends with the murder of Zacharias during the Roman soldiers' search for his son, John the Baptist.

Although the Protoevangelium's name falsely suggests that it was written by James, the "brother of the Lord," and that it predates the Gospels, it may in fact have been written before the end of the first century (and it clearly was well known in the Church in the second century). Thus, it is very possible that its contents *as to some events* reflect the memories

of those who had heard stories told by Mary and the Apostles. Other parts are clearly bogus, such as the passage about the midwife who was determined to confirm that Mary remained a virgin after Jesus' birth and found her hand withered for her lack of faith (and then restored in answer to her prayers).

The Church never officially accepted the Protoevangelium — indeed, at least two popes in the fifth century condemned it. However, some of its offshoots have been of great significance in Catholic culture, both Western and Eastern, beginning with a lengthier apocryphon (ca. A.D. 600) known as "The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," or "The Infancy Gospel of Matthew" (the authorship of which has been falsely attributed to both St. Matthew and St. Jerome). The first part of Pseudo-Matthew, in turn, gave birth to a short apocryphon known as "The Gospel of the Birth of Mary," which features a story that begins with the conception of Mary and ends with the birth of Jesus.

The descriptions of Mary's presentation in the three related apocrypha are all very short — running less than a page each — and the common story is simply this: Mary's parents bring her to the Temple when she is weaned, at age three, there to enter the Temple and serve as a Temple virgin. Pseudo-Matthew and the Birth of Mary both have an additional point in common: Mary is set down on the lowest of the fifteen steps leading up to the Temple entrance (these being related to the fifteen Psalms considered as "songs of ascent" to Je-



Giotto's Presentation

rusalem, Ps. 120-134), and she ascends the big steps all by herself. This particular scene has inspired masterpieces of Christian art — for example, Giotto's fourteenth-century fresco in Padua's Scrovegni Chapel, and Titian's colorful and symbol-laden sixteenth-century painting, *Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple*, which portrays the little girl, in a light blue dress, ascending a flight of steps toward the Temple door, where the high priest awaits her in full ceremonial regalia.

Many eminent churchmen in centuries past imagined and commented on Mary's presentation, including St. Alphonsus de Liguori, who began his commentary thus:

There never was, and never will be, an offering on the part of a pure creature greater or more perfect than that which Mary made to God when, at age three, she presented herself in the Temple to offer him not aromatical spices, nor calves, nor gold, but her entire self, consecrating herself as a perpetual victim in his honor.

All such writings and homilies are, however, ultimately derivative of the apocrypha, so to try to get additional details of what took place, I turned to a different source — the visions of mystics who claimed to have seen the presentation in their ecstatic state. One such mystic was Bl. Anne Catherine Emmerich (d. 1824), a stigmatic German nun who claimed to have seen detailed visions of the life of Christ and His mother, including scenes from Mary's presentation and what led up to it (found variously in *The Life of Jesus Christ and Biblical Revelations*, vol. I-IV; *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*; and *The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary*).

Another mystic who had such visions was Ven. Mary of Jesus, also known as Maria de Ágreda (d. 1665), a Discalced Franciscan nun who was the abbess of a convent in Ágreda, Spain, for about forty years. At the command of her superiors, she wrote down an account of the visions and locutions she had received over the course of years from the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and angels (found in *The Mystical City of God*, vol. I-IV). Although the Church has determined that these two religious sisters were indeed holy, she has not passed judgment on their visions.

I also took note of the writings of an Italian mystic of our era, Maria Valtorta (d. 1961), a Third Order Franciscan who likewise claimed to have had a vision of the event (described in *The Poem of the Man-God*, vol. I-V, a book the Church placed on the Index of Forbidden Books, until the abolition of the index in the 1960s).

So, what did these visionaries see? Mary of Ágreda and Maria Valtorta saw the genesis of the presentation in a vow Anne made at the time of her purification, when she brought little Mary with her to the Temple. Anne Catherine Emmerich saw it slightly differently: In her account, Anne made the vow when she brought Mary to the Temple as a baby, on the occasion of a sacrifice being offered. All three saw her presentation as taking place when Mary was only three years old — a child mature in mind and spirit far beyond her age. It was clearly not something her pious parents were determined to do regardless of her will; rather, Mary had already interiorly felt herself wholly dedicated to God.

The mystic with the most detailed visions is Sr. Emmerich, whose description runs to thirty pages. There is nothing like her specificity and completeness to be found in any apocryphal account, or all combined. One of the highlights in Sr. Emmerich's account is the questioning of little Mary by priests at her home to determine whether she was ready to become a Temple maiden. This revealed Mary's supernatural humility and self-denial. The priests told her that her parents had already vowed that she would never taste wine, vinegar, grapes, or figs, and they invited her to add other foods from which she would forbear. To everyone's surprise, she said she would eat neither meat nor fish, and drink no milk. She also gave up all spices and fruits, except for a yellow berry that poor people ate.

Mary also volunteered to sleep on the bare earth and rise three times in the night to pray. The priests slightly softened her proposed regimen by saying she should rise only once at night, like the other maidens, and eat fish on great feast days. The priests also referred to the practice whereby girls who entered without payment were obliged, when they were strong enough, to wash the blood-stained garments of the priests and other rough cloths. Since her parents were paying for her stay in the Temple, she was to be exempt from this labor, but she volunteered to do it anyway.

Another highlight of Sr. Emmerich's vision is the entrance ceremony in which Mary participated after running unaided up the fifteen steps to the Golden Gate. While the sacrifice of her father's animals was taking place, Joachim, Zechariah, and the Temple priests took Mary up to the altar. A priest cut off a few of her hairs and burned them in a brazier, and Levites transcribed her parents' words offering her up. Psalm 45 (a song for a royal wedding) and Psalm 50 (the acceptable sacrifice) were sung by maidens and priests, respectively. Then the priests led Mary up many steps to a raised place in the wall dividing the outer court of the Holy Place from the other court. Priests sang and read from scrolls while the High Priest stood inside at the altar of incense, offering incense.

After this, the priests led Mary to another hall, where waiting for her were the older Temple virgins, along with Noemi, an aunt of Lazarus, and the prophetess Anna, who prophesied, "Now the Ark of the Covenant, the Vessel of the Promise, is entering the Temple." Mary then bade farewell to her parents, and was taken to a festival among the Temple virgins, where she first asked each of them, and her teachers, whether they would suffer her to be among them. Thus ends Sr. Emmerich's vision of Mary's presentation, though not of her life as a Temple maiden.

Visions like the above are helpful for devotional meditation, but they have not been approved by the Church. The question must then be asked: Just what does the Church stand behind by way of the tradition of Mary's presentation? The answer is that in reviewing the three relevant apocrypha, I could not spot anything in them that the Church has explicitly adopted as tradition, other than the names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne (whom the Church considers to be saints), and that she was, in fact, "presented" in the Temple as a child.

Given that there was no prescription or custom calling for parents to bring their daughters to the Temple at age three for some sort of ritual or ceremony, it is clear that by acknowledging the apocryphal accounts of Mary's presentation, the Church accepts their explanation of the reason for the occasion. This was no mere "visit"; Mary was dedicated to God's service at the Temple and was to live there for

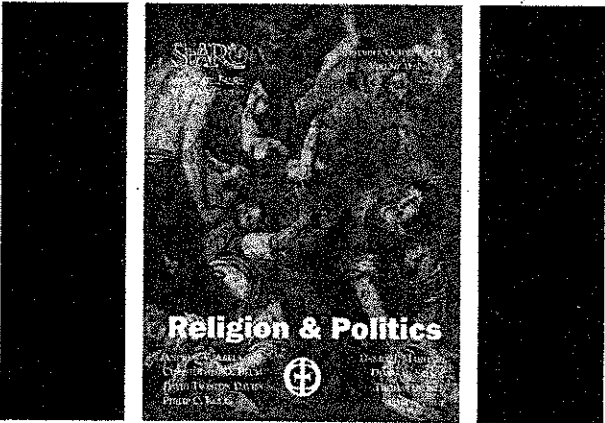
that purpose. (In this regard, compare the account of Hannah's dedication of her young son, Samuel, to the Lord, and his presentation to the Prophet Eli at the temple in Shiloh in 1 Sam. 1:20-28.)

What are we to make of this feast today? In general, it symbolizes self-offering and religious consecration. And in particular, I suggest that it can help us to appreciate better the Angel Gabriel's greeting, Mary's *fiat*, and the Incarnation.

Gabriel began his message with the words, "Hail, full of grace!" Now, we believe as a matter of faith that Mary was filled with grace at her Immaculate Conception. But the Annunciation took place about thirteen years after her presentation. What of the interval? What better way for Mary to have preserved her sinlessness and remained in grace than to live and serve in the house of God? What better training to have kept her thoughts focused on pleasing God? And what better way to have prepared her to be the Mother of God? As Jem Sullivan wrote, commenting on Giotto's painting of the event:

From a young age, Mary was consecrated to

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God. Even as she is presented *in* the Temple, she is being prepared to *become* the temple of the Lord, when she bears the Son of God into the world. At her presentation, Mary was endowed with the natural and supernatural gifts she needed for her role as the *Theotokos*, the God-bearer. For her entire life was a prepara-

tion for the indwelling of God in the world: first in her womb, and then in her heart and mind. (*Magnificat*, Nov. 2015)

That is why the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple is worthy of observance as a feast day in the Church's liturgical calendar. ■

MECHANIZATION AS TOTALITARIANIZATION

JOHN LYON

ARE WE LIVING IN GEORGES BERNANOS'S UTILITARIAN NIGHTMARE?

“**T**he modern world is essentially a world without liberty. There is no place for liberty in the gigantic mechanical factory which must be regulated like a clock.... Liberty is a luxury which cannot be permitted in a society which has decided to engage all its resources toward the end of maximum efficiency.... With each war to preserve freedom, they take from us twenty-five percent of the freedoms which still exist.”

These are not the words of some libertarian or populist conservative of our time, but were written almost seventy years ago by Georges Bernanos

(1888-1948). Best known for his penetrating novels *The Diary of a Country Priest* and *Under the Sun of Satan*, Bernanos delivered a series of lectures to audiences in France, Belgium, Algeria, and Switzerland in 1946 and 1947. After his death, the lectures were published in his native France, then translated into English and published in this country in 1955 under the title *The Last Essays of Georges Bernanos*. The quotation above is taken from an essay titled “Why Freedom?”

Why should we take the time to consider something written so long ago, particularly since things change so rapidly these days? What could a contentious Catholic novelist and curmudgeonly prophet see then that is still relevant now? Bernanos himself suggests an answer directly relevant to our post-9/11 world when he writes, “The day some new miracle of technology permits some physicist to manufacture in his laboratory some kind of matter which disintegrates easily, thus placing the destruction of an entire city at the mercy of the firstcomer, I think police troops will comprise nine-tenths of the population and a citizen will no longer be able to cross the street from one side to the other without twice taking off

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