

# God's Own Mother

By Mark Alessio

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In 434 A.D., St. Vincent of Lerins, a priest of the monastery at Lerins, a pair of islands lying off the Bay of Cannes, wrote in defense of Mary's title, "Mother of God," which had been attacked through various Christological heresies:

- Photinus denied the Divinity of Christ, teaching that reverence was due God the Father only.

- Apollinaris denied the presence of a human soul in Christ, and taught that the flesh of the Savior descended from Heaven and was not formed from the flesh of Mary.

- Nestorius taught that there were two persons (Divine and human) in Christ, instead of the two Natures united in the one Person of the Savior. Because of this, he declared that Mary could only be called *Christotokos* (Mother of Christ), not *Theotokos* (Mother of God). This erroneous teaching was dealt with by St. Cyril and the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., during which Nestorius' views would be condemned and Our Lady's title, "Mother of God," would be dogmatically defined.

Only three years after the Council of Ephesus, St. Vincent of Lerins wrote a powerful defense of Our Lady's title, *Theotokos*. While reading these inspired words, it would be well to recall that the heresies attacked by St. Vincent are alive in the Church today, promoted by Catholic "teachers" who claim that Jesus did not always know He was God, and who downplay the importance of Christ when engaged in ecumenical dealings with religions that do not believe in the Triune God. St. Vincent of Lerins wrote:

"We must therefore take utmost care to be precise in our confession, so as to say that Christ is not merely One, but that He always has been One. It were, indeed, an intolerable blasphemy to assert that, although you admit His now being One, you contend that He once was not One but Two — One after His baptism, but Two at the time of His birth. We cannot escape this enormous sacrilege unless we assert that humanity has been united to divinity through the unity of Person, not through the ascension or resurrection or baptism, but within the Mother, in Her womb, and — even more — in the Virginal Conception itself. Because of this unity of Person, it happens that what is proper to God is ascribed to the man, and what is proper to the flesh is ascribed to God — indifferently and without distinction. Therefore, as it

is written in Holy Scripture: ‘He that descended from Heaven, the Son of Man who is in Heaven’ (Jn. 3:13), and ‘crucified the Lord of glory’ (1 Cor. 2:8) on earth. Furthermore, since the body of the Lord was made and created, it is said that the ‘Word’ of God Himself was ‘made’ (Jn. 1:14), His wisdom filled up. (Eccl. 24:35), His knowledge created (Eccl. 1:4, 24:36); therefore do the prophetic writings refer to His hands and feet as ‘pierced’ (Ps. 21:7). Through this Unity of Person it also becomes perfectly clear — by reason of a similar mystery — that it is most truly Catholic to believe (and most impious to deny) that the Word of God Himself was born from the Virgin even as the flesh of the Word was born from an Immaculate Mother.

“Therefore, may God forbid that anyone should attempt to defraud Holy Mary of Her privileges of divine grace and Her special glory. For by a unique favor of Our Lord and God She is confessed to be the most true and most Blessed Mother of God (*Theotokos*). She is truly the Mother of God, not merely in name, as a certain impious heresy claims, because She gave birth to a man who later became God, as we call the mother of priests or bishops such, because she gave birth, not to a priest or a bishop, but to a child who later became one. Not thus, I say, is Holy Mary the Mother of God, but rather because, as has already been said, in Her sacred

womb was accomplished the mystery that, by reason of a certain singular and unique Unity of Person, even as the Word is made flesh, so the man is God in God.”\*

These words of St. Vincent are worth re-reading many times over. They present a remarkable defense of the Incarnation and of the dignity of Mary and Her Divine Maternity, not in the technical language of theology, but through common-sense arguments based solidly on Sacred Scripture and nature. By the Divine ordering, the integrity of the Incarnation of the God-Man has been preserved in the most simple and universal of all natural images — a mother holding her infant. It is an image understood by all, by every man and woman who ever was or ever will be born. It is even reflected, to its own degree, in the animal kingdom. There is no more universal image in nature. It’s as though the Holy Trinity said, “Let us clothe this mystery in the most recognizable image possible, so that all can perceive it.”

And, yet, this image of Mother and Child was despised by the heretics challenged by St. Vincent and others. In order to sidestep the beauty and simplicity of the Divine Maternity, they created the most absurd of

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\* *The Commonitories*, Chapter 15 (*On the Antiquity and Universality of the Catholic Faith Against the Profane Novelties of all Heretics*).