



Consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary in the English tradition and the title of “Our Lady’s dowry”

Paul Haffner

“THE contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation” wrote Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1399, “has drawn all Christian nations to venerate her from whom come the first beginnings of our redemption. But we English, being the servants of her special inheritance and her own Dowry as we are commonly called, ought to surpass others in the fervour of our praises and devotions.”¹ We see from this testimony of the highest ecclesiastical authority in the land, that by the fourteenth century England was commonly called throughout Europe *Our Lady’s Dowry*.² This title is one of England’s greatest glories.

However, well before the time of Archbishop Thomas Arundel there was an extensive theologically-based tradition of devotion to Our Lady in Britain. The earliest Christian writers in England exhausted every epithet and title they could find to express the immacu-

¹ D. WILKINS, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* (1737), tom. iii. p. 246.

² A *dowry* (in Italian *dote*, in Latin, *dos*) is the money, goods, or estate that a woman brings to her husband in marriage. Originally, the purpose of a dowry was to provide money or property for the establishment of a new household, to help a husband feed and protect his family, and to give the wife and children some support if he were to die.

late purity and perfect sanctity of the Blessed Mother of God. The Venerable Bede quotes the words of the Irish poet Sedulius :

To her we sing
 Who bore in time the world's eternal King,
 And peerless in the human race has found
 A mother's joys by virgin honours crown'd.³

To Bede she is the *Genitrix incorrupta*, the *Virgo incomparabiliter benedicta*, the Mother undefiled, the Virgin blessed beyond compare. In imagery culled from the Song of Songs, St. Aldhelm addresses her as the garden enclosed, the sealed fountain, the one Dove amid the threescore queens, and many other titles.⁴ Alcuin writes verses in which he names her his sweet love, his honour, the great hope of his salvation, the Queen of Heaven, the flower of the field, the lily of the world, the fountain of life.⁵

A manuscript now in the University Library at Cambridge, called the Book of Cerne, and which belonged to Ethelwald, Bishop of Sherborne in 760, contains the following prayer to the Blessed Virgin, a clear monument both of the faith and devotion of the Anglo-Saxons in the time of Venerable Bede: "Holy Mother of God, Virgin ever blest, glorious and noble, chaste and inviolate, Mary Immaculate, chosen and beloved of God, endowed with singular sanctity, worthy of all praise, you are the advocate for the sins (peril) of the whole world; listen, listen, listen to us, holy Mary. Pray for us, intercede for us, disdain not to help us. For we are confident and know for certain that you can obtain all you will from your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, God Almighty, the King of Ages, who lives with the Father and the Holy Spirit, for ever and ever. Amen."⁶

³ St. BEDE THE VENERABLE as found in T. E. BRIDGETT, *Our Lady's Dowry, or, How England gained and lost that title* (London: Burns & Oates, 1935), p.23.

⁴ See St. ALDHELM as found in BRIDGETT, *Our Lady's Dowry*, p.23.

⁵ See ALCUIN OF YORK, *Opera* ed. Froben (Regensburg: 1777), Tome ii, p. 223,

Tu mihi dulcis amor, decus, et spes magna salutis
 Auxiliare tuum servum, clarissima virgo...
 Tu regina poli, campi flos, lilia mundi,
 Hortus conclusus, vitae fons, vena salutis...

⁶ See BRIDGETT, *Our Lady's Dowry*, p.24: "Sancta Dei Genitrix, semper Virgo beata, benedicta, gloriosa, et generosa, intacta et intemerata, casta et incontaminata, Maria immaculata, electa et a Deo dilecta, singulari sanctitate praedita, atque omni laude digna, quae es interpellatrix pro totius mundi discrimine, exaudi, exaudi, exaudi nos, sancta Maria." The Manuscript is marked LI. i. 10.

The notion of Marian consecration in England, as elsewhere, is based on the doctrine of Our Lady's incomparable holiness. The British Isles also played a most significant role in developing this doctrine. Doctrinal reflection on the perfect holiness of Mary in relation to her Son considered that this perfection had to go back to the beginning of her existence. The turning point came when Bishop Theoteknos of Livias in Palestine, who lived between 550 and 650, moved in the direction of this original purity. In presenting Mary as "holy and all-fair", "pure and stainless", he referred to her birth in these words: "She is born like the cherubim, she who is of a pure, immaculate clay."⁷ This last expression, recalling the creation of the first man, fashioned of a clay not stained by sin, attributes the same characteristics to Mary's birth: the Virgin's origin was also "pure and immaculate", that is, without any sin. The comparison with the cherubim also emphasises the outstanding holiness that characterised Mary's life from the very beginning of her existence.

In the eighth century, St. Andrew of Crete was the first theologian to relate the new creation to Mary's birth:

Today humanity, in all the radiance of her immaculate nobility, receives its ancient beauty. The shame of sin had darkened the splendour and attraction of human nature; but when the Mother of the Fair One *par excellence* is born, this nature regains in her person its ancient privileges and is fashioned according to a perfect model truly worthy of God The reform of our nature begins today and the aged world, subjected to a wholly divine transformation, receives the first fruits of the second creation.⁸

His image of the new creation is further reinforced in another place: "The Virgin's body is ground which God has tilled, the first fruits of Adam's soil divinized by Christ, the image truly like the former beauty, the clay kneaded by the divine Artist."⁹ St. John Damascene, also in the eighth century, expressed a belief in Mary's freedom from original sin in a way which approaches the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception: "O most holy daughter of Joachim and Anne, hidden from the principalities and powers, and from the fiery arrows of the Evil One. You set your dwelling place in the wedding chamber

⁷ THEOTEKNOS OF LIVIAS, *Panegyric for the feast of the Assumption*, 5-6.

⁸ ST. ANDREW OF CRETE, *Sermon I on the Birth of Mary* in PG 97, 810.

⁹ ST. ANDREW OF CRETE, *Sermon I on the Dormition of Mary* in PG 97, 1067.

of the Holy Spirit and were conserved without stain as the bride of God, because with this nature of yours you became the Mother of God.”¹⁰ St. John Damascene also stressed the supernatural influence of God upon the generation of Mary by her parents St. Joachim and St. Anne. He proposes that, during the generation, they were filled and purified by the Holy Spirit, and freed from concupiscence: “O most blessed loins of Joachim from which came forth a spotless seed! O glorious womb of Anne in which a most holy offspring grew.”¹¹ Consequently according to John Damascene, even the human element of her origin, the material of which she was formed, was pure and holy.

A feast of the Conception of Mary (or Conception by St. Anne), which started in the monasteries of Palestine at least as early as the seventh century, was not based on the full understanding of Our Lady’s freedom from sin expressed in the later feast of the Immaculate Conception. This feast in the course of centuries became the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, as theological refinement brought about clear ideas regarding the preservation of Mary from all stain of original sin. The earlier feast also appeared during the sixth and seventh centuries in the Greek Church as a celebration in honour of the conception of Our Lady by St. Joachim and St. Anne on December 9th, and by the tenth and eleventh centuries it had become firmly established as a holyday.¹² Probably the feast passed to Naples, which lay on an important trade route from Greece. A marble calendar dating from the ninth century testifies that the feast was celebrated at Naples.

The feast passed by way of Naples to the West, where it first took root in Ireland. Around the year 800, there is a record of a Feast of Our Lady’s Conception being celebrated in Ireland. At the turn of the millennium, the English liturgical books show the feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December. For example, the pontifical used at Canterbury in 1023, the pontifical used at Exeter by Leofric who was bishop from 1050-1073 and the “Leofric Missal” all contain

¹⁰ ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homily on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 7 in PG 96, 671.

¹¹ ST. JOHN DAMASCENE, *Homily on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, 2 in PG 96, 663: “O lumbos Ioachim beatissimos, ex quibus mundissimum semen iactus est! O praeclaram Annae vulvam, in qua tacitis accrementis ex ea auctus atque formatus fuit fetus sanctissimus.”

¹² See St. ANDREW OF CRETE, *In conceptionem Sanctae Annae* in PG 97, 1307. This text for the feast of Our Lady’s conception probably dates from the seventh or eighth century.

prayers for the feast of the Conception of Mary.¹³ Further definite knowledge of the feast in the West comes from England from a calendar of Old Minster, Winchester, dating from about 1030, and in another calendar of New Minster, Winchester, composed between 1035 and 1056. The feast was also kept at Worcester, Exeter, Canterbury, and in the surrounding localities. The feast was endorsed by episcopal authority and was observed by the Saxon monks with considerable solemnity. The establishment of the feast in England took place before the Norman Conquest in 1066.

Many Anglo-Saxon writers speak of tried to express the idea of absolute sinlessness and perfect excellence which had been impressed on their minds by their first teachers in the faith, and which was developed by their constant study of Holy Scripture and Sacred Tradition and their meditation on the mysteries of Redemption. There were among them no native heresies to be refuted, no tongues pretending to honour the Incarnate Son of God by slighting and depreciating His chosen Mother.¹⁴ They speak of her immaculate purity in terms which could include the grace of the Immaculate Conception; but not until it had been denied were English writers zealous in its defence. Then, indeed, Alexander Hales, Thomas Hales, Richard Middleton, Robert Cowton, John Marchely, and others wrote learned tracts against the opponents of Mary's singular privilege, and none were more zealous than the English in celebrating the feast of the Conception.¹⁵

An important theological development came about around 1120, when Eadmer, a monk of Canterbury, wrote the first treatise on the Immaculate Conception, and protested against the suppression of its liturgical celebration. Wishing to promote the restoration of this feast, the devout monk rejected the Augustinian objections to the privilege of the Immaculate Conception, based on the doctrine of the transmission of original sin in human generation. Eadmer countered the Augustinian objection by writing that the Holy Spirit could not be absent from the special beginnings of Mary: "Where the Spirit is, there is freedom from sin."¹⁶ Eadmer proposed that God chose Mary from all eternity to be His dwelling-place. Based on the idea of the house

¹³ Cf. A. VACANT & E. MANGENOT, *Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique* (Paris: 1927), Vol VII part 1 cols 990-991.

¹⁴ See BRIDGETT, *Our Lady's Dowry*, p.24.

¹⁵ These are Franciscan writers mentioned in the *Collectanea Anglo-Minoritica*.

¹⁶ EADMER, *Tractatus de conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, 9, in *PL* 159, 305.

built by Wisdom for itself (Pr 9:1-16), Eadmer pointed out that God could not have allowed Mary to be stained by sin. “The foundations” of His palace “would be weak if the conception of Mary were in any way corrupted by the stain of sin.”¹⁷ Instead, Mary became a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. Eadmer also fittingly employed the image of a chestnut “which is conceived, nourished and formed beneath its bur and yet is protected from being pricked by it.” Even beneath the bur of an act of generation which in itself must transmit original sin, Eadmer argued, Mary was preserved from every stain by the explicit will of God who “was obviously able to do this and wanted to do so. Thus if he willed it, he did it.”¹⁸

Despite the reflections of Eadmer, the great theologians of the 13th century followed St Augustine according to the following argument: the Redemption accomplished by Christ would not be universal if the condition of sin were not common to all human beings. If Mary had not contracted original sin, she could not have been redeemed. Redemption in fact consists in freeing those who are in the state of sin. In particular, St. Bernard opposed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the celebration of the Feast in France in a forceful letter.¹⁹ St. Bernard held, following Augustine and Jerome, that in marital union there was always some taint of sin, which made it difficult for him to envisage how Mary could have been conceived immaculate: “Could sanctity have been associated with conception in the embrace of marriage, so that she was conceived and sanctified at the same time? That is not reasonable. How could there have been sanctity without the sanctifying Spirit? How could the Holy Spirit be associated in any way with sin? How could sin not have been present where concupiscence was not absent?”²⁰

Richard of St. Victor wrote a treatise answering St. Bernard, pointing out that the flesh of Mary needed no purification as it was sanctified before conception. Among those who also took up the pen

¹⁷ EADMER, *Tractatus de conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, 13, in *PL* 159, 306.

¹⁸ EADMER, *Tractatus de conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, 10, in *PL* 159, 305. The famous expression is “potuit plane et voluit; si igitur voluit, fecit.”

¹⁹ See St. BERNARD, *Letter 174* in *PL* 182, 333-336.

²⁰ St. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX, *Letter 174 to the Canons of Lyons*, 7 in *PL* 182, 335: “An forte inter amplexus maritales sanctitas se ipsi conceptioni immiscuit, ut simul et sanctificata fuerit, et concepta? Nec hoc quidem admittit ratio. Quomodo namque aut sanctitas absque Spiritu sanctificante, aut sancto Spiritui societas cum peccato fuit? aut certe peccatum quomodo non fuit, ubi libido non defuit?”

in defence of the feast, and of the doctrine it involved, was Nicholas, Prior of St. Albans in Hertfordshire. His original treatise or letter is lost, but we have part of a correspondence (to which it gave rise) between him and Peter, Abbot of St. Remi, and afterwards Bishop of Chartres, more commonly known as Peter of Celles.²¹ Peter explains that his only objection is the novelty of the feast now introduced. Nicholas would have objected that how dare a mere abbot to fill up the wells of ever-springing devotion, or forbid them to be dug deeper. Do not the moderns drink of the same Holy Spirit as the ancients? In the temple of God may not everyone bring his offering, whether gold, or silver, or precious stones, or other poorer gifts goat-skins, or anything else? The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin was not solemnised at the beginning of the Church ; but as the devotion of the faithful increased, it was added to the other solemn festivals. Why then should not the zeal of Christian devotion now add the day of her Conception. To this Peter replies that he would far more willingly open the cata-racts of heaven and the fountains of the deep in honour of the Virgin than close them. No doubt it ever was lawful and ever will be lawful for the Church, the Spouse of Christ, during her sojourn in this world, according to the changes of times and of persons and of things, to vary her decrees, and to find new remedies for new diseases, and to appoint new festivals for her saints. But gold and silver have a mint in which they must be coined—the seat of Peter and the court of Rome, which holds the principality and the keys of heaven. It belongs to her to open to us, in the dispensation of God, the secrets of God s counsels, and the oil of grace runs down from the head (Aaron) to the borders of his vestment.

Nicholas relates an interesting episode which he had heard from some Cistercians, who were truly religious men and true lovers of the Blessed Virgin. A certain lay brother then at Clairvaux, of holy life, in a vision of the night saw Abbot Bernard clad in snow-white garments, but having a brown stain on his breast. Surprised and sad he asked the meaning of this. The saint replied, “Because I wrote what I ought not on the Conception of our Lady I bear this spot upon my breast, the sign of my purgation.” The brother related what he had seen, and one of the brethren committed it to writing. It was brought before a gen-

²¹ St. Bernard was canonised in 1165, twenty years after his death. The correspondence must therefore have taken place between this date and the year 1180, when Peter became Bishop of Chartres.

eral chapter of the order, and by common consent the writing was burnt, since all the abbots preferred rather to endanger the glory of the Blessed Virgin than the good fame of St. Bernard.²²

St. Aelred of Rielvaux (1109-1167) was renowned for his writings in praise of Mary, such as the following excerpt:

If the Lord is to be praised in those saints by whom He works miracles, how much more is He to be praised in her in whom He the Wonder of wonders was made flesh ! If they are to be praised who keep their chastity, how much more she who chose virginity, and received fruitfulness as its reward ! If they are to be praised by whom God raised the dead, how much more she by whose sanctity the whole world has been raised from death eternal ! Let us, then, praise her with our mouths, and beware lest we insult her by our acts. He gives but feigned praise who cares not to imitate what he praises. He truly praises Mary's humility who strives himself to be humble. He truly praises her chastity who execrates and scorns all impurity and lust. He truly praises her charity whose whole desires and efforts are to love both God and his neighbour with a perfect love.²³

The Premonstratensian abbot, Adam Scot, who wrote about 1180, speaks in the most glowing language of the honour due to the Mother of God:

Mary is our mistress, our advocate, our sweetness and our life, our hope and our mediatrix. She is the Mother of God, the Queen of angels, the conqueror of the devils, the refuge of the miserable, the solace of orphans, the help of the weak, the strength of the just... But these are words which will sooner be exhausted than her prerogatives will be explained, so great is the fulness of her grace. Mary is the temple of the Lord. Like Anna in the temple of Jerusalem, let us not depart from it day or night. Let us venerate this temple, let us rejoice and exult in it; let us pray in it and hope in it ; and praying, praising, and trusting, let us not depart from it. The humanity of Christ is a holy temple, indeed the holy of holies, in which dwells all the fulness of the Divinity corporally (Col 2:9). But that temple also is holy, His blessed and glorious Mother, in whom He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and dwelt for nine months. Most glorious, most beautiful temple of the only-

²² See T. E. BRIDGETT, *Our Lady's Dowry*, pp.29-30.

²³ St. AELRED OF RIELVAUX, *Sermon 20* in *PL* 195, 522-24.

begotten Son of God, open to us the door of your mercy and clemency; permit us to enter you, and receive the prayers we offer in you. We raise our voices to the Lord in you, that He may hear our voice from His holy temple, and our cry may enter into His ears. My brothers, never depart from this temple; pour out your prayer and declare your tribulation within it. Mary is the Mother of Christ, and the prayer you present through her will be listened to by God, who, born for us, yet yielded to be hers (*qui pro nobis natus, tulit esse tuus*).²⁴

Similarly, Peter de Blois, Archdeacon of Bath wrote this passage around 1180:

Mary, who shall speak your praises? Who shall tell of your power? Though the daughters of Sion exalt you, though queens praise you, and all the assembly of the saints proclaim your glory, yet are all honours and all praise, compared with your blessedness, but as a torch compared with the sun, or a drop with the vastness of the ocean. In our miseries and our distress thou art ever prompt and powerful to help. You are sweet in the mouth of those who praise you, sweet in the hearts of those who love you, sweet in the memory of those who invoke you. Every sex and age and condition, all tribes and peoples and tongues, magnify you. You are the chosen myrrh, the column of aromatical smoke, the bundle of myrrh on the Spouse's breast, the pine-tree outstretching its branches of grace and salvation. Among all and above all you are blessed and most blessed; the most beautiful, most gracious, most glorious Mother of Him who grants grace and glory, honour and everlasting life; to whom be all honour and glory, for ever and ever. Amen.²⁵

The great breakthrough bringing greater understanding of the Immaculate Conception came with William of Ware and his pupil, Blessed John Duns Scotus. They were able to distinguish between a prevenient grace and a restorative grace, both of which were fruits of the Redemption. In particular, Scotus made the decisive step forward. Thus he introduced into theology the concept of Redemption by preservation, according to which Mary was redeemed in an even more wonderful way: not by being freed from sin, but by being preserved from sin. Scotus indicated that "it is a more excellent benefit to pre-

²⁴ ADAM SCOT, *Sermon 40*, in *PL* 198, 357.

²⁵ PETER DE BLOIS, *Sermon 38*; *Bib. Max.* t. xxiv. p. 1117.

serve from evil, than to permit someone to fall into evil, even if one is freed from it afterwards. Therefore, if Christ merited grace and glory for many souls, and Christ is the Mediator for all of these, why could not someone be in debt to Him for her innocence?"²⁶ He proposed that the freeing of Mary from the stain of sin required, as a precondition, the creation and infusion of her soul, but that in terms of time, the sanctification and the animation were simultaneous.²⁷ Scotus also resolved the problem of how to square the Immaculate Conception of Mary with the issue of the universality of original sin. Christ is the perfect Mediator and perfect Redeemer, and thus it would be most fitting for Him, not only to preserve His Mother from all stain of actual sin, but also from original sin.²⁸ Thus Scotus held that Christ, the perfect Mediator, exercised the highest act of mediation precisely in Mary, by preserving her from original sin. Scotus proposed the famous formulation concerning God's power to preserve Mary from all stain of original sin, made popular by his disciple Francis de Mayronis: "it was possible, it was fitting, therefore it was accomplished."²⁹

This paper proposes that it was precisely the devotion to Mary Immaculate that is correlative with the consecration of Britain to Mary as her dowry. Westminster was the shrine of St. Edward the Confessor, traditionally held to have been the first to make this dedication and in whose reign (1061) the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham had been founded.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, England like the other parts of Europe had a great veneration of Our Lady, and early in this period a famous shrine in her honour sprung up in the calm and lovely countryside near Norfolk, three miles from the sea. Its origins are obscure, but according to the tradition a noble widow, Richeldis de Faversham, said that in a vision the Mother of God had led her in spirit to the little

²⁶ Bl. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Questions in Libro III Sententiarum*, d.3, q.1, in *Opera Omnia* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), vol. 7/1, p. 92-93: "imo excellentius beneficium est preservare a malo, quam permittere incidere in malum, et ab eo postea liberare. Videtur enim quod cum Christus multis animabus meruerit gratiam, et gloriam, et pro his sint Christo debitores, ut mediatori; quare nulla anima erit ei debitor pro innocentia?"

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.94-97.

²⁸ Bl. JOHN DUNS SCOTUS, *Reportata Parisiensia*, Book 3, d.3, q.1, in *Opera Omnia* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969), vol. 11/1, pp.432-433, in particular p. 433: "Mediator perfectus praevenit omne peccatum actuale. Hoc concedunt omnes de beata Virgine: sed redemptio universalis est contra originale quam contra actuale: igitur ex hoc quod redemptor universalis, perfectius et immediatius praevenit originale, quam actuale."

²⁹ FRANCIS DE MAYRONIS, *In III Sent.*, d. 3, q. 2, a. 1-3. «Potuit, decuit, ergo fecit».

house of the holy family in Nazareth, bidding her to build a replica of it in England in honour of the Annunciation. This little house was built and is said to have endured for four hundred years; panelled with wood, its darkness was lit with tapers and, as time went on and many pilgrims came with gifts, it gleamed with gold, silver and precious stones. And from a seal preserved from the thirteenth century we know that it contained a figure of Our Lady enthroned with the Child in her left arm. This is one of the most beautiful medieval representations of Mary, *The Seat of Wisdom*.

In time, the small fragile house built by Lady Richeldis of wattle and daub was enshrined in a splendid Lady Chapel and in the thirteenth century, a great Priory Church was erected beside it. Sometime between 1130 and 1153 it passed into the hands of the Augustinian Canons who were made the guardians of the shrine.³⁰ Walsingham was not the only place of pilgrimage to Our Lady in England, but it became the most famous of them all. Records are filled with the names of the rich and famous who travelled here, for it was considered the New Nazareth, the shrine that honoured above all the Mystery of the Incarnation. The *Pynson Ballad* recounts the foundation of the little house of Nazareth and with it, the dowry tradition:

Walsingham, in thee is built New Nazareth
Where shall be held in a memorial
The great joy of my salutation,
First of my joys, their foundation and origin
Root of mankind's gracious redemption,
When Gabriel gave me this news:
To be a Mother through humility
And God's Son conceive in virginity.

O England, you have great cause to be glad
For you are compared to the Promised Land, Zion
You are called in every realm and region
The Holy Land, Our Lady's Dowry.
In you is built new Nazareth,
A house to the honor of the Queen of Heaven
And her most glorious Salutation
When Gabriel said at Old Nazareth,

³⁰ See A. VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2004), p.182.

Ave, This same joy shall here be daily and for ever remembered.³¹

It was chiefly because of the importance of Walsingham that England received her titles, “the Holy Land” and “Our Lady’s Dowry.”³² Several English kings were devotees of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. Henry III’s son, Edward I, credited Our Lady with saving his life as a youth. He was playing chess in a vaulted room, when for no apparent reason, he felt the urge to get up from his seat. Seconds later a large stone fell from the roof and landed on the very spot where he had been sitting. Indeed so constant was the stream of pilgrims, that after the fourteenth century the approach to the Lady Chapel was guarded by still another shrine dedicated to St. Catherine of Mount Sinai: the *Slipper Chapel*, as it was called, the word deriving from the term *slupe*, or “way through.” Countless writings bear witness to the influence of Walsingham in these days, but perhaps the words of the generally critical Erasmus of Rotterdam are significant. In 1513, Erasmus visited Walsingham and wrote “When you look in, you would say it is the abode of saints, so brilliantly does it shine with gems, gold and silver ... Our Lady stands at the right side of the altar ... a most grateful fragrance greets the nostrils.”³³ He also added that the water from the Walsingham spring was “efficacious in curing pains of the head and stomach.”³⁴ Before Our Lady of Walsingham, Erasmus bowed his head in filial devotion and a votive ode according to the mode of his age, in Greek, tells us of his sentiments in visiting that hallowed spot.

Hail! Jesu’s mother, blessed evermore,
 Alone of women God-bearing and virgin,
 Others may offer to thee various gifts,
 This man his gold, that man again his silver,
 A third adorn thy shrine with precious stones;
 For which some ask a guerdon of good health,
 Some riches; others hope that by thy aid

³¹ The Pynson Ballad was written in the mid-fifteenth century (c.1460) and printed by Richard Pynson in 1495. It is often referred to as *The Pynson Ballad*; however, its author is unknown. The only extant copy was discovered in the Pepys Library at Magdalene College, Cambridge.

³² VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, pp.182-183.

³³ DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Pilgrimages to Our Lady of Walsingham and St. Thomas of Canterbury* (Westminster: John Bower Nichols and Son, 1849), pp.14-15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.20.

They soon may bear a father's honoured name.
 Or gain the years of Pylus' reverend sage.
 But the poor poet, for his well-meant song,
 Bringing these verses only, all he has,
 Asks in reward for his most humble gift
 That greatest blessing, piety of heart,
 And full remission of his many sins.³⁵

Twenty-seven years after Erasmus wrote his poem, "Walsingham," the diamond in Our Lady's Dowry was no more. In 1538, during the reign of Henry VIII, Walsingham was desecrated by the enemies of the Church, totally destroyed, and its sacred image carried to Chelsea and burned. In 1578, Queen Elizabeth I visited Walsingham accompanied by Sir Philip Howard. Ironically, St. Philip ended his life in 1595 in the Tower of London, a martyr for his Faith. He is believed to be the author of the *Walsingham Lament*, based on the experience of his visit to the ruined priory years before. Here are the final two verses of this eleven verse lament:

Weep, weep, O Walsingham
 whose days are nights,
 blessings turned to blasphemies,
 Holy deeds to despites.
 Sin is where Our Lady sat,
 Heaven turned is to hell,
 Satan sits where Our Lord did sway,
 Walsingham, oh farewell!³⁶

Walsingham fell into complete oblivion. For five centuries the little house of Nazareth, the Lady Chapel, the Priory Church, the innumerable road chapels that led to the heart of the great shrine, and even the memory of this holy place lived only in the heart of a few. However, Walsingham is not a legend today. The records, the documents and archives of the miracles, which were once performed there have been destroyed, but another miracle has taken place. In the nineteenth century, some archaeologists were fortunate enough to find in their

³⁵ When Erasmus was at Cambridge in May, 1511, he wrote to his friend Andreas Ammonius, that, in fulfilment of a vow, he was about to visit the virgin of Walsingham. and to hang up some Greek verses there. These verses are given in his works as collected by Frobenius in 1540. English translation from DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, *Pilgrimages to Our Lady of Walsingham and St. Thomas of Canterbury*, pp.102-103.

³⁶ VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, pp.185.

excavations some important remnants of the holy place. Events followed in rapid succession and were intimately connected with other new signs of life in the Catholic Church in England. During the 1860's Charlotte Pearson Boyd took an interest in an ancient building used as a barn which was in reality the Slipper Chapel.³⁷ At first Miss Boyd was a devout Anglican. In the 1890's she was able to purchase the building which used to be the medieval chapel. Before the extensive restoration work was completed, she became a Catholic. In 1897, Pope Leo XIII re-founded the ancient shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, and pilgrimages were permitted to resume. On 20th August 1897, a procession of pilgrims from King's Lynn to the Slipper Chapel marked the renewal of public devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham. Its details and its location make the Slipper Chapel one of the architectural gems of fourteenth century England. After the first archaeological discoveries toward the end of the nineteenth century, before the existence of the Slipper Chapel had been discovered, the nearby parish Church of Kings Lynn was established as the new Walsingham Shrine. Finally in 1934 a new statue, designed after the ancient one burned in 1538, was enshrined in the restored Slipper Chapel. The same year, the English Bishops named the Slipper Chapel the Roman Catholic National Shrine of Our Lady. Since then Walsingham has regained its splendour and importance. There is no Lady Chapel and world-famed Priory Church, no gifts of Kings decorate the simple walls, but the deep spiritual devotion of the ever increasing masses of pilgrims equals the faith and zeal of those of the Middle Ages. In 1948 Cardinal Griffin, Archbishop of Westminster, dedicated Great Britain to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. This marked the highest point in the miraculously revived history of Walsingham. The historical ceremony took place at the site of the old priory, tens of thousands attending. The years between the discovery of the remnants of Walsingham and the reestablishment of the shrine at the Slipper Chapel in 1948, significantly enough, were the years which followed Newman's appearance on the religious and national scene. The new blossoming of the Catholic spirit—in every aspect of the country's life—which helped strengthen the harmony in the entire nation was unparalleled. When Pope John Paul visited Britain in 1982 the image of Our Lady of Walsingham was brought to London where it was the centrepiece of a major rally attended by the Holy Father.

³⁷ VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, pp.185.

England consecrated as Our Lady Lady's Dowry is closely linked with the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Ransom. The origins of the Feast can be found in the Mercedarian Order, founded in the early thirteenth century by St Peter Nolasco and St Raymond of Penafort to ransom Christian slaves taken by the Muslims during their frequent raids on Europe. The Order's original name was the 'Order of the Virgin Mary of Mercy of the Redemption of Captives of St Eulalia' (an early martyr venerated in Barcelona). The Feast of Our Lady of Ransom (celebrated on 24 September) was applied to England with the idea of praying for the full conversion of England to the Catholic Faith, so that it could once again become Mary's Dowry. Devotion to Our Lady of Ransom came to express the desire of Catholics in England to restore her Dowry to Mary. In 1993, the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales presented to Rome proposals for a new liturgical calendar for England and Wales. These were finally approved by the Vatican to take effect from Advent 2000. Among the changes is a new feast of Our Lady of Walsingham to be celebrated as a memorial (a feast in East Anglia) on September 24th. The feast replaces that of Our Lady of Ransom, which was the only feast of Our Lady proper to England. The Guild of Our Lady of Ransom has long connections with the Shrine and it is unlikely that the old title of Our Lady of Ransom will disappear altogether nor will the title, Our Lady of Mercy, which is also associated with September 24th.

The Dowry tradition is strongly connected with the Chapels of Our Lady of the Pew in the Palace of Westminster and in Westminster Abbey. The origins of the name "pew" are obscure, but there is good reason for associating it with the French *puissant* ("powerful"), as it was common to anglicize French words, and an Englishman would probably pronounce this word as "pewssant" anyway. Moreover, there is the association of the French shrine of Our Lady of Le Puy, and, as some contend, the Latin *podium* ("strong support") is the origin, the connection with the hill shrine of Le Puy as a strong-point further connects with the idea of power, and with Our Lady's title *Virgo Potens*.³⁸ Other commentators link the expressions Pew with "puits" for wells, as there were no less than four wells beside St Stephen's chapel. The nineteenth century antiquary Edmund Waterton suggested that the

³⁸ See M. ELVINS, "The Origin of the Title 'Dowry of Mary' and The Shrines of Our Lady at Westminster". Appendix in *Catholic Trivia, Our Forgotten Heritage* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002).

word might have been taken from Our Lady of Pity, shortened by a careless scribe to “pty” and then to “pui”.³⁹ In any case the first chapel of the *Pieu* or Pew was on the south side of that of St. Stephen’s in the royal Palace of Westminster, the site of Cotton-gardens.⁴⁰ More familiar to us today is the shrine in the Abbey Church. The Palace shrine, rebuilt after a fire in 1452, survived the Reformation, but was finally destroyed by fire in 1834. The Abbey shrine had been established in an unprecedented way. The Chapel of Henry VII being the original Lady Chapel (in the apse beyond the high altar), the little shrine which has now become the focus of attention began with a widow’s benefaction for the soul of her husband. The Countess of Pembroke (whose husband Aylmer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, has a fine effigy in the Chapel of Saints Edmund and Thomas) established a mortuary chapel for daily Masses for her husband next to the Chapel of St. John, and she presented the Abbot of Westminster with an alabaster statue of Our Lady. This is probably how the Abbey chapel came to be, because the monks of Westminster had just lost a battle with the canons of St Stephen’s with regard to ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Palace of Westminster, and thus were debarred from the Palace shrine of Our Lady of Pew. The Abbot therefore apparently lost no time in establishing with the Countess’ gift a secondary shrine of Pew which, unlike the other, with its restriction to courtiers, would be accessible to all. The Countess’ will, proved in 1377, records that the statue of Our Lady was already in position at the secondary shrine of Pew. And, according to the Sacrist’s Roll of 1378-80, the image of the Blessed Mary called “Le Puwe” was already much in evidence.

In 1381, England was ravaged by the Peasants’ Revolt, when the introduction of the poll tax caused the south-eastern counties to rise in open rebellion. Jean Froissart gives a vivid description of the manner in which the young King Richard II of England prepared to meet the rebels, led by Wat Tyler, at Smithfield:

Richard II on the Saturday after Corpus Christi went to Westminster, where he heard Mass at the Abbey with all his Lords. He made his devotions at a statue of Our Lady in a little chapel that

³⁹ See VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, p.212.

⁴⁰ Cotton House, the town house of Sir R. Cotton, founder of the Cotton Library, was near the West end of Westminster Hall

had witnessed many miracles and where much grace had been gained, so that the Kings of England have much faith in it.⁴¹

Thus King Richard II knelt amidst a great throng of his subjects to re-dedicate England to Mary, as her Dowry. Richard made at least two pilgrimages at this time to Our Lady's Shrine in Walsingham and to that of St. Edmund at Bury. The saintly Edmund, king of East Anglia, where Walsingham was situated, had been martyred for the faith by the Vikings in the 9th century. In the [Wilton] diptych (above) the three "dowry kings", as they are known, are depicted with St. John the Baptist, Richard's special patron. Another chronicler, Strype, described the event thus:

On the coming of the rebels and Wat Tyler, the same King went to Westminster... confessed himself to an anchorite; then took himself to the chapel of Our Lady of Pew; there he said his devotions, and went to Smithfield to meet the rebels.

The outcome of the meeting was favourable with Wat Tyler throwing down his arms and taking up the King's colours. Naturally the King and Court regarded this as a miracle wrought by the Holy Virgin, and therefore set about encouraging her veneration at Westminster. After his success in quelling the rebels, and their acceptance of the standard of the realm, Richard returned to meet his mother at Westminster and to give thanks. Froissart records the young King's words as follows: "Yes, Madam ... rejoice and praise God, for today I have regained my kingdom which I had lost." And he placed the Kingdom under Our Lady's protection, in thanksgiving for having regained it:

Dos tua Virgo pia Haec est, quaere leges O Maria, This is your Dowry, O Holy Virgin, therefore rule over it, O Mary.

From this and other evidence, we learn that the Pew Chapel had already been in existence for some time before Richard II's reign.⁴² What, therefore, was the situation which occasioned Richard II's re-ordering of the shrine? In the answer to this question lies the clue to

⁴¹ J. FROISSART, *Chroniques de France, d'Angleterre et des païs voisins*, c.76.

⁴² M. T. ELVINS, *Catholic trivia: our forgotten heritage* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002), p.138.

the origin of England's title, *Dos Mariae*, "Mary's Dowry".⁴³ The original shrine, as we stated, was housed in a chapel within the Palace of Westminster attached to the Collegiate Church of St Stephen. This shrine survived the Reformation, but, as already explained, was finally destroyed in the fire of 1843. Today its exact location may be determined by the site of the Speaker's House next to the now restored Church of St. Stephen. It was to this greater shrine that the sovereigns of England went to beseech the help of Our Lady, but the little chapel in the Abbey survives with evidence to show that it was patronized by at least one sovereign in particular.⁴⁴

The royal chapel of St Stephen to which was annexed the smaller chapel called Our Lady of the Pew had been converted into the Parliament by Edward VI, and the paintings on the wall were covered over with oaken panels. In 1800, when the Act of Union united the English and Irish Parliaments, some alterations had to be made to the chamber. When the panelling was taken off the wall, paintings were revealed in the interstices, which were as fresh and clear as the day they had been covered up, owing to their being protected from the air. According to the parliamentary reports of the time, behind the Speaker's chair was a picture of the Virgin and Child with St. Joseph bending over them, and King Edward III and his Queen and his sons and daughters making an offering to Our Lady. Fr Bridgett attempts to explain the significance of this image:

It may either have commemorated an historical event, or its execution may be considered an historical event in itself. It is not, nor does it record an act of private devotion... Acolytes were holding lighted tapers and two angels were represented as taking part in a solemnity. It is the consecration of England, through its Sovereign to the Blessed Virgin. It was before the eyes of every King and noble until hidden by Edward VI.⁴⁵

The Abbey shrine is probably more significant as evidence for England's title, *Dos Mariae*, as its existence as a shrine dates from the time of Richard's successful bid to keep his throne, and it is probably a grateful monarch's gift to his people who did not have access to the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.139.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ T. B. BRIDGETT, "England's Title: Our Lady's Dowry: its history and meaning" in *The Church of Old England* vol. III (CTS: London, 1894), pp.15-16.

greater shrine within the Palace. Moreover, the traces of painting on the walls of this little chapel are irrefutable evidence of King Richard's patronage, as there are on the east wall remnants of the King's "white hart" badge. Therefore, what was originally a chantry chapel, the King by all accounts transformed into a public shrine dedicated to Our Lady of Pew. This was the lesser shrine, but perhaps the more significant, as its foundation marked the gratitude of King Richard to Our Lady for the safe return of his realm, in offering it to her as her dowry.

A search for clues must include the examination of what ecclesiastical *objets d'art* have survived from this period of Richard's reign, especially those specifically associated with the monarch. The one notable example is, of course, the Wilton Diptych, housed today in the National Gallery. In this Wilton Diptych, the scene of the young King kneeling before the Queen of Heaven is "exquisitely depicted in glowing colours by an unknown artist".⁴⁶ As to the origin of this Diptych, a theory was first put forward by the late Everard Green, Rouge Dragon Pursuivant of the College of Arms. He held that it was a votive offering made to the (greater) shrine of Our Lady of Pew on the occasion of Richard's coronation in 1371. W. G. Constable wrote in 1929 concerning this theory as follows:

The king is known to have visited this shrine shortly after that ceremony, and to have made a special offering there. It is suggested that the eleven angels [on the Diptych] wearing the King's badges, of a white hart, and of a collar and pendant of peascods, stand for the age of the King at the time of his coronation (eleven years) or could also be his monetary offering of eleven "angels" ("angel" as a monetary unit apparently not having come into use until Richard's reign). The red-cross banner [being offered to Our Lady in the Diptych] Green regarded as an offering to the Virgin to symbolize England being the *Dos Mariae*, as described in a mandate of Archbishop Arundel.⁴⁷

It is Richard who refurbished the chapel in the abbey, and commissioned the Wilton Diptych which shows him placing himself and

⁴⁶ VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, p.214.

⁴⁷ W. G. CONSTABLE, "The Date and Nationality of the Wilton Diptych" in *The Burlington Magazine*, No. CCCXVI, Vol. LV. Cf. Sir MARTIN CONWAY, *The Times* (26 June 1929), p.17.

England (signified by the banner with a George Cross and a miniature representation of England) under Our Lady's Protection. Furthermore, at the special desire of the king, this mandate was issued at Lambeth on 10 February 1399, and reads as follows:

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

The diptych is believed to echo an earlier altarpiece, which is known to have hung at one time at the Venerable English College in Rome.⁴⁸ The historian F. Alfad (alias Griffiths, SJ), writing before the French troops sacked Rome in 1798, stated that in his time at the Venerable English College in Rome there existed an ancient painting (since destroyed) of a King and Queen who, on their knees, were making an offering of England to Our Blessed Lady for her dower through the hands of John the Baptist, with this inscription: *Dos tua pia laecese, quare leges, Maria*. A rough translation of the rather obscure Latin begins: "This is your dowry, pious Virgin..."⁴⁹ This surely was a portrait of Richard II and his consort, Anne of Bohemia. The attitude in which they are represented would certainly seem to commemorate an offering of the English realm to Our Blessed Lady as her dowry. In the British Library, there is further evidence for this ancient painting; the manuscript, from the reign of James I, reads as follows:

In the Church of Saint Thomas Hospitall in Rome [the original name for the English College] there is a very faire painted and gilded Table of Imagerie works, standing before the Altars of Saint Edmund the martire, once a King of England;. . . It is in length about five foote, and about three foote high.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, p.215.

⁴⁹ E. WATERTON, FSA, *Pietas Mariana Britannica* (1879), pp.11-17. See also ELVINS, *Catholic trivia: our forgotten heritage*, p.143.

⁵⁰ BRITISH LIBRARY, Harley MS no.360. See also ELVINS, *Catholic trivia: our forgotten heritage*, p.143.

The manuscript goes on to describe a young king kneeling before the Lady and holding between his hands a “patterne of words, *Dos tua Virgo pia Haec est*” (“This is your dowry, O pious Virgin”).

The barely visible image of the white hart above the altar of Our Lady of Pew, and the heraldic combination and either side of the door, suggest that this chapel was used by King Richard II, and that the Wilton Diptych was created as an altarpiece for this shrine. Although there are earlier indications that England was Our Lady’s dowry, this consecration became generally acknowledged during the rein of Richard II.⁵¹ Indeed, at the end of the Richard’s reign, Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote: ‘The contemplation of the great mystery of the Incarnation has brought all Christian nations to venerate her from whom came the beginnings of Redemption. But we, as the humble servants of her own inheritance and liegemen of her special dower, as we are approved by common parlance, ought to excel all others in favour of our praises and devotion to her.’

St. John Fisher, just around the time of the Reformation in 1526, wrote a threat against those who would deny Our Lady’s role, and so expressed the traditional faith of the British people in Our Blessed Mother: “Woe to those wretches who try to lessen the pre-eminence of this glorious Virgin even by a hair’s breadth, which I hear is being done by the followers of Luther. For this, without any doubt, Divine vengeance will overtake them, unless they quickly repent and amend.”⁵² Much later, Blessed John Henry Newman wrote of a Second Spring in which he foresaw that England would return to the consecration of Our Lady’s Dowry:

Arise, Mary, and go forth in thy strength into that north country, which once was thine own, and take possession of a land which knows thee not. Arise, Mother of God, and with thy thrilling voice, speak to those who labour with child, and are in pain, till the babe of grace leaps within them! Shine on us, dear Lady, with thy bright countenance, like the sun in his strength, O stella matutina, O harbinger of peace, till our year is one perpetual May. From thy sweet eyes, from thy pure smile, from thy majestic brow, let ten thousand influences rain down, not to confound or over-

⁵¹ VAIL, *Shrines of Our Lady in England*, p.215.

⁵² St. JOHN FISHER, *De Sacerdotio*, cong. iii., cap. 34. col. 1294: “Vae miseris illis qui Virginis hujus gloriosae praecellentiam vel pilo minuere student, quod tamen a Lutheranis audio factitatum. Propter quod haud dubie manet eos ultio divina, nisi maturius resipiscant.”

whelm, but to persuade, to win over thine enemies. O Mary, my hope, O Mother undefiled, fulfil to us the promise of this Spring. A second temple rises on the ruins of the old.⁵³

In the private revelations of the English mystic Teresa Higginson (1844-1905) the importance of Mary's Dowry was stressed once again:

And it seemed to me that Mary prayed with me and reminded Him her divine Son that this England is called her Dower and He filled her hands with graces and blessing for us and a new glory as it were shone around her the reflection of the glory that surrounds the Seat of divine Wisdom.⁵⁴

Teresa Higginson stated that Mary is still our Mother and England remains her Dowry.⁵⁵

The doctrine of Our Lady's Dowry also features clearly in the teaching of some recent Popes. In 1967, on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, Pope Paul VI referred to the Dowry at an ordination of some British clerics:

On this feast, at this Ordination performed by the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles, We turn confidently to Saints Peter and Paul, that they may intercede for these new Priests and secure every blessing upon their service to the people of God. We pray also to the Saints of England, Scotland and Wales, particularly to Saint Bede the Venerable, heavenly patron of your College. Above all, We claim the loving assistance of the Mother of God for these new shepherds from that land so long and affectionately known as "Mary's Dowry".⁵⁶

On his Pastoral Visit to England in 1982, Pope John Paul II elaborated the doctrine of Our Lady's Dowry and its importance for the spiritual future of England:

⁵³ Blessed J. H. NEWMAN, Sermon 10, *The Second Spring*.

⁵⁴ TERESA HIGGINSON, *Letter* of 16 July 1881, as found in C. KERR, *Teresa Helena Higginson* with an Introduction by P. HAFFNER (Leominster: Gracewing, 2008), p.118.

⁵⁵ See TERESA HIGGINSON, *Letter* of 23 April 1900, as found in C. KERR, *Teresa Helena Higginson*, p.272. The Dowry of May is also indicated in a letter of June 1889 in *ibid.*, p. 248.

⁵⁶ PAUL VI, *Homily at priestly ordination* (25 January 1967).

Our society needs to recover a sense of God's loving presence, and a renewed sense of respect for his will. Let us learn this from Mary our Mother. In England, "the Dowry of Mary", the faithful, for centuries, have made pilgrimage to her shrine at Walsingham. Today Walsingham comes to Wembley, and the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham, present here, lifts our minds to meditate on our Mother. She obeyed the will of God fearlessly and gave birth to the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Faithful at the foot of the Cross, she then waited in prayer for the Holy Spirit to descend on the infant Church. It is Mary who will teach us how to be silent, how to listen for the voice of God in the midst of a busy and noisy world. It is Mary who will help us to find time for prayer. Through the Rosary, that great Gospel prayer, she will help us to know Christ. We need to live as she did, in the presence of God, raising our minds and hearts to him in our daily activities and worries.⁵⁷

Addressing some English bishops on their *ad limina* visit in 1992, Pope John Paul II linked the English devotion to Our Lady with fidelity to the successor of St. Peter: "The Church in England can rightly take pride in being 'the dowry of Mary'. Through the prayers of Our Lady of Ransom may all the Catholics of your country continue to 'hold to the Catholic faith, remain devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and obedient to Peter.'"⁵⁸ During the *ad limina* visit, in January and February 2010, of the English bishops before Pope Benedict XVI's visit to England in September 2010, the Holy Father invoked the intercession of Our Lady of Walsingham, intimately linked with the no-

⁵⁷ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Homily at Wembley Stadium* (29 May 1982), 4.

⁵⁸ Pope JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the bishops of Great Britain on their ad limina visit* (26 March 1992). See Collect for the Mass for the Memorial of Our Lady of Ransom. At least on two other occasions Pope John Paul II had referred to England as Our Lady's Dowry. The first was his *Letter to Monsignor George Adam Hay, Rector of the Venerable English and Welsh College in Rome on the occasion of the fourth centenary of its foundation* (26 September 1979): "And may all of you who are sharing in this jubilee be confident in the protection of Mary, Mother of Christ and Mother of the Church. May you, who come from a land for so long called her Dowry, always experience her loving care." The second was his *Address to British pilgrims on the occasion of the Beatification of George Haydock and his eighty-four companion Martyrs* (23 November 1987): "Your country has for centuries been called 'the Dowry of Mary': in this Marian Year let us together call on Mary that through her prayers, joined with the prayers of these Blessed Martyrs, we may all grow in holiness of life and fidelity to Christ our Lord and King."

tion of the Dowry: “May Our Lady of Walsingham guide and protect you always.”⁵⁹

The spirituality of Our Lady’s Dowry is expressed in this prayer for the conversion of England with which we conclude our paper:

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

Sommario: *Nel contesto della recente visita di Papa Benedetto XVI nel Regno Unito, l’articolo, esamina il concetto di Inghilterra come la dote di Maria (Mary’s Dowry). Dopo aver esplorato la base di questa tradizione nella riflessione teologica inglese riguardo alla santità della Madre di Dio, culminando nella definizione del dogma dell’Immacolata Concezione, l’articolo descrive come la devozione della dote di Maria fu associata alle capelle reali di Westminster ed il luogo di pellegrinaggio di Walsingham. Dopo il periodo della Riforma, la devozione alla dote di Maria è ricominciata, come indicata negli scritti dei mistici e le dichiarazioni dei Papi.*

Parole chiave: Mariologia, Inghilterra, Dote di Maria, Immacolata, Duns Scoto, John Henry Newman, Benedetto XVI.

Key words: Mariology, England, Our Lady’s Dowry, Immaculate Conception, Duns Scotus, John Henry Newman, Pope Benedict XVI.

⁵⁹ Pope BENEDICT XVI, Address to the bishops of the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales on their *ad limina* visit (1 February 2010).