

The Emmanuel Prophecy of Isaias

'ECCE VIRGO CONCIPIET, ET PARIET FILIUM, ET VOCABITUR NOMEN
EIUS EMMANUEL', ISAIAS 7:14

Every prophecy has its dogmatic aspect and its apologetic aspect, by which is meant the justification of the doctrine found in the prophet's words. It is consequently the purpose of this paper first to indicate the authority for the doctrine of Christ's virginal conception which the Church finds in our text, and secondly to attempt to show how that doctrine is contained in the text as read in its whole context. Strangely contrasted with the unanimity with which all members of the Church accept not only the doctrine itself but the text as proclaiming that doctrine is the variety of opinions concerning the relation of the text to its context. To treat adequately of these contending views would require an article by itself and it is not proposed to detail and discuss them here. They may be read in the commentaries and encyclopaedias. So it will serve the interests both of brevity and of clarity if this paper is confined to the exposition of a single interpretation.

The dogmatic proof of the true meaning of Isaias's words is the universal belief of the Church as manifested from the beginning and first in the inspired text of St Matthew 1:22f. After recording the words of the Angel that Mary's Child had been conceived 'of the Holy Ghost' he adds that this was the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Isaias. That this was the literal meaning intended by the Evangelist was the unanimous teaching of the Fathers. Thus St Justin: 'So that (text) «Behold a virgin shall be with child» means that she will conceive without commerce with man. For if she had been intimate with anyone, she would no longer be a virgin. But the power of God came upon the virgin and overshadowed her and made her pregnant while she was a virgin'¹. St Irenaeus: 'The Holy

¹ ST. JUSTIN, *Apol.*, I, 33 (PG 6: 382).

Spirit was careful to signify by the announcement [both] his generation from a virgin and that his being was God (for this is the meaning of the name Emmanuel)². St John Chrysostom: 'Though this wonderful prophet spoke obscurely, nonetheless he proposed everything. For as long as a virgin remains a virgin, how can she give birth except of the Holy Ghost? For no one can set aside a law of nature except the Creator of nature'³. St Ambrose: 'St Luke himself declared her to be a virgin saying «And the name of the virgin was Mary». And the prophet taught it when he said «Behold a virgin shall conceive in the womb»'⁴. These are representative texts out of many that might be quoted⁵.

A papal pronouncement on the text of Isaias and its citation by St Matthew was occasioned by a German priest named Johann Lorenz Isenbiehl (1744-1818). He was professor of oriental languages and exegesis in the seminary at Mainz. In his book *Neuer Versuch über die Weissagung vom Emmanuel* (Coblenz 1778) he proposed the view, previously unheard in the Church, that St Matthew was merely accommodating the text of Isaias to the virginal conception of Christ. That is to say that the prophet had not foretold that miraculous conception and that the evangelist did not quote it as a prophecy referring thereto but merely as words capable of bearing a sense applicable to Christ and our Lady. This opinion was condemned by Pius VI in 1779 and towards the close of that year Isenbiehl signed a retraction⁶. The Pope condemned his opinion that the prophecy had no messianic import 'in any sense either literal or typical'. The idea that St Matthew quoted the text in what is commonly but loosely called the accommodated sense was condemned. Whether it is messianic in the literal or only in the typical sense was left open⁷. Both opinions had found defenders among Catholics and no reflection was cast on either. The earliest reference to the typical interpretation is made by St Jerome: 'One of ours [that is, a member of the Church]

² ST IRENAEUS, *Contra Haereses*, III, 4 (PG 7: 951).

³ ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM *in hunc locum* (PG 56: 84).

⁴ ST AMBROSE, *Expos. Evang. S. Luc.*, II, 4 (PL 15: 1554).

⁵ See L. REINKE, *Die Weissagung von der Jungfrau und vom Emmanuel*, *Jes 7: 14-16*. Münster (1848) 229-383.

⁶ Cf. *Allgemeine deutsche Biographie*, XIV, Leipzig (1881) 618-20; *Encicl. Cattolica*, s. v.; VIGOUROUX, *Dict. de la Bible*, III (1903) 987-9.

⁷ PIUS VI, *Divina Christi*, Sept. 20, 1779: 'Maxima se prodidit catholicorum offensio cum praedicari audierunt propheticum oraculum de divino Emmanuelis ortu ex virgine non ad virgineum Deiparae partum, quem prophetae omnes annuntiaverunt, non ad verum Emmanuelem, Christum Dominum, ullo sensu sive litterali sive typico pertinere...'. Incidentally it may be mentioned that this was the first papal document to speak of the typical sense. Pope PIUS XII spoke of it at some length in *Divino Afflante Spiritu*: AAS 35 (1943) 311 f; *Enchiridion Biblicum* (1954²) 552 f.

maintains that the Prophet Isaias had two sons Yashub and Emmanuel and that Emmanuel was born of the prophetess his wife as a type of the Lord [our] Saviour⁸. The great Doctor has been said more than once to have condemned this manner of understanding the text, but this is a strange blunder. It arose from the unaccountable introduction into his text of the word 'judaizans', as if to hold this view was to abandon the Catholic position⁹. Other exponents of the typical view are Jacobus Tirinus, S. J.¹⁰; Richard Simon¹¹; Petrus Daniel Huetius¹²; Augustine Calmet, O. S. B.¹³; Bernard Lamy¹⁴; Peter Schegg¹⁵; M. Le Hir¹⁶. This is the view which will be developed in the following pages with some fresh developments. As an indication that this interpretation is suggested independently to various

⁸ ST JEROME *in hunc loc.* (PL 24: 109 CD): 'Quidam de nostris Isaiam prophetam duos filios habuisse contendit, Jasub et Emmanuel; et Emmanuel de prophetissa uxore ejus esse generatum in typum Domini Salvatoris'.

⁹ The word 'judaizans' occurs in the text published by Erasmus (apud Basileam 1516, Tom. V): 'Quidam de nostris judaizans...'. So also in the edition of M. Victorius (Parisiis 1609, Tom. II), who does not mention the reading in his notes. It is absent from the more critical edition of D. Valarsi (Venetiis 1767², Tom. IV) and from the reprint of his text by Migne. The word does not fit the context, for St Jerome continues that according to this opinion 'Emmanuel... (significet) gentium vocationem postquam verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis'. There is nothing redolent of Jewish thoughts here. The word occurs in the text as quoted by RICHARD SIMON, *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (Rotterdam 1689) 254. Simon however is emphatic in disagreeing with this supposed view of St Jerome's. He defends the contrary 'quoy qu'en dise Saint Jérôme'. E. W. HENGSTENBERG repeated the false reading, *Christology of the Old Testament*, English translation, II (Edinburgh 1856) 61. He says the author is severely criticized by St Jerome. A. PENNA, *Isaia* (Torino 1958 in *La Santa Bibbia* edited by S. Garofalo) repeats the word, p. 99, but says that 'the interpretation is admissible from the doctrinal point of view'.

¹⁰ J. TIRINUS, S. J., *Com. in Scripturam*, II, Antverpiae (1632) *in hunc loc.*

¹¹ R. SIMON: 'Cette Prophétie, comme, la plus-part des autres, a deux sens: le premier, et qui se présente d'abord, regarde la femme du Prophète Isaïe: le second qui est plus étendu, et qu'on peut appeler spirituel ou mystique, appartient au temps du Messie' (see note 9), 254 f.

¹² P. D. HUETIUS, *Demonstratio Evangelica* (Parisiis 1690), 353 b. Again the type is the son of Isaias.

¹³ A. CALMET, O. S. B., *Com. Lit. in omnes Libros Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, Versio Latina, V (Lucae 1733). On 7: 14 he writes: 'Nec praeterendum est, Prophetam ita loqui, quasi geminos Emmanueles exhibeat'. But in his 'Dissertatio in... Isai 7: 14', *ibid.*, 517, he says: 'Duplex est sensus, alter ad literam, alter traditione indicatus'; 'duos sub nomine Emmanuellis viros agnoscimus oportet', the two being the Messiah and the son of Isaias.

¹⁴ B. LAMY, *Com. in Harmoniam ... quatuor Evangelistarum* (Venetiis 1735), 36 f: 'Verba prophetiae aliud praeferebant in fronte, aliud sub involucre'; and the type is the son of Isaias.

¹⁵ P. SCHEGG, *Der Prophet Isaias, übersetzt und erklärt*, I (München 1850), 87.

¹⁶ M. LE HIR, *Les trois grands prophètes* (Paris 1877), 66 f.

minds by the scrutiny of the text it is worth adding that the present writer became convinced of the correctness of this view before learning of that of the above-mentioned authors. That this typical interpretation is in harmony with the method customary in the Old Testament we have the assurance of St Jerome that 'this is the wont of Holy Scripture to set down in advance by means of types what was to come in the future'¹⁷. This is not, it need hardly be said, a law governing all prophecies. Each must be considered in its context but must not be prejudged by reference to another prophecy. In our present enquiry the context of the Emmanuel prophecy embraces chapters 7 and 8, and it is exclusively in that context that it should be judged. Other and later Isaianic predictions have their own contexts.

It will be a help to clarity in our exposition if one or two *prolegomena* are discussed beforehand. The first concerns '*almā*, the key-word in 7:14. In the investigation of the meaning of a word there are two dangers which should be but are not always avoided. One is to rely on etymology. Words frequently develop meanings which could never have been anticipated from their known origin. Such is the case with 'mathematics'. And if 'lieutenant' had kept its original meaning it would be a synonym of 'locum-tenens' from which the English language sharply distinguishes it. Another method of no less danger is to rely on the meaning of a word in cognate languages. This could be illustrated by many examples. Thus English 'ignore' and French 'ignorer' have very different connotations. So have Hebrew 'bayith, beth' and Maltese 'bit' signifying respectively 'house' and 'roof'. On the other hand a known popular etymology, even when incorrect, can be a safe guide to the meaning in which a word was understood by those who followed it.

The word '*almā*' stands in the same relation to '*elem*' as '*malkā*' 'queen' to '*melek*' 'king'. Therefore originally as '*elem*' means 'a young man' '*almā*' will have meant 'a young woman'. But as remarked above words often develop a specialized meaning, and such a development is very natural in the present case. The word being used of young women who on account of their age were normally unmarried came to have the double connotation of both youth and maidenhood or virginity. This is exactly what happened in the case of the German word 'Jungfrau', which according to the meaning of its two elements signifies 'young woman' but actually means 'maiden', this English word combining the same two elements. The Greek language in spite of its rich vocabulary has not one single word corresponding to 'maiden' and 'Jungfrau'. In that language therefore the complex idea could only be expressed by the combination of two words, the Greek παρθένος being applicable to a virgin of any age. Thus we find that

¹⁷ ST JEROME, *Com. in Dan.*, 11: 21 ff (PL 25: 565 D).

the Septuagint translation, which being made before the rise of Christianity is free from any suspicion of theological bias, for the word 'almā has παρθένος both in Gen 24:43 and in Isai 7:14 and νεανίας in the other texts where it occurs. This shows that the translators understood the Hebrew word to have the double connotation. Moreover the word νεανίας is itself not far from giving the full meaning. It is translated in Liddell and Scott's lexicon as 'girl, maiden'; the word 'girl' though not expressly connoting virginity, nonetheless suggests it. This is noted by Fathers of native Greek speech. Thus St Cyril of Alexandria in view of the fact that Aquila in Isai 7:14 uses the word νεανίας remarks: 'Though this virgin is spoken of as νεανίας, that does not prevent her being a virgin'¹⁸.

This meaning of 'almā is borne out by the popular etymology of the word revealed by Aquila's translation of it in Gen 24:43 by ἀκόχρυφος, that is one hidden away as keeping within the home to avoid mixing with men. The word thus well expresses the care taken to guard the virginity of the unmarried womenfolk in the home. St Jerome found the same etymology from the Hebrew root 'lm 'to hide' in the Septuagint translation of the title on Ps 9¹⁹. This origin of the word, however, is improbable, though it is probable that he had learnt it from Jewish sources, either from his instructors or from Aquila. That maidens were kept safely confined to the home is shown by several texts. Thus as far back as the time of David Amnon in spite of his passion for Tamar could find no access to her as long as she remained at home, although she was his half-sister. He had to have recourse to a ruse to have her brought to him on his simulated sick-bed, 2 Sam 13:1ff. Ecclus 42:9-14 manifests both the anxiety caused to a father by his daughters and his care to guard them. II Macc 3:19 speaks of 'the maidens who were kept in ward', and III Macc 1:18 of 'the virgins who had been shut up in their chambers'. And in IV Macc 18:7 the mother of the seven Maccabean martyrs says: 'I was a chaste virgin and did not step beyond my father's house'²⁰.

The meaning of 'almā as 'maiden', 'Jungfrau', to which we have been so far led, was proposed long ago by St Jerome: 'not only a virgin but a virgin of youthful age and in the years of adolescence'²¹. He supports the connotation of virginity by the statement that in the

¹⁸ ST CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA *in hunc loc.* (PG 70: 204).

¹⁹ ST JEROME on Isai 7: 14 (PL 24: 108 A).

²⁰ See further PHILO, *De Specialibus Legibus*, III, 169: 'What becomes womenfolk is to mind the house and to stay at home, maidens within the enclosure confining themselves within the inner door and grown women within the house-door'. Also *Contra Flaccum*, XI, 89.

²¹ ST JEROME *in hunc loc.* (PL 24: 108 C): 'non solum virgo sed virgo junioris aetatis et in annis adolescentiae'.

Punic language a virgin is called by this same term 'almā²². This would be a natural semantic development and there is no reason to doubt his accuracy. He was well placed to obtain reliable information on the point both through his widespread correspondence and through the constant stream of pilgrims who arrived at Bethlehem from all parts of the Christian world²³. It remains now to see how the meaning arrived at for the Hebrew word fits or is supported by the other passages where it is found in the Old Testament.

In Gen 24:43 the word is used of Rebecca who is shortly to marry Isaac. In 24:16 she is described as a 'girl' or 'damsel' and as a 'virgin whom man had not known'. This description specifies both elements. In Exod 2:8 it is applied to the sister of Moses watching over her infant brother among the bulrushes. Miriam is nowhere spoken of as married. According to Cant 1:3 the bridegroom is one who attracts the love of maidens. They are mentioned again in 6:8 where they form a group distinct from queens and concubines, and therefore are indicated as maidens. The word occurs in the title of Ps 45(46)1 and in I Par 15:20, but there is no illustrative context in these passages. The same is true of the title of Ps 9:1 where further the reading is uncertain. They occur again in Ps 67(68)26 as timbrel players in a procession. Here too the word 'maidens' seems to fit the context best. The last passage where the Hebrew word is used is Prov 30:19, which has been variously understood. To the present writer the meaning seems to be the following. The strange marvel that an eagle can wing its way in the sky, that a snake can progress without apparent means of locomotion over smooth rock, that a heavy ship can support itself in the sea, all this is equalled by the way of a man with a maid. And it is wonderful that two such diverse beings as a man and a woman with widely differing abilities and interests should at a certain age begin to be more interested in each other than in other members of the same sex contrary to the attraction previously felt at an earlier age. Then someone has added a further reflection which forms no part of the original fourfold saying. In this it is said that equally marvellous is it that a woman can commit adultery and after calmly proclaim that she has done no wrong.

Another point that can conveniently be dealt with as a *prolegomenon* is the position of verses 17-25. There is admittedly no strict chronological sequence in the prophecies of Isaias. His opening vision and mission are narrated only in chapter 6. Even in the historical

²² ST JEROME, *ibid.*, 108 B.

²³ The true root meaning of the radicals 'lm is uncertain. It was probably 'to be youthful', as this seems best to explain the development of meanings in the cognate languages. The suggestion that the Arabic *ghalima* 'to be lustful' gives the basic meaning is improbable. The noun *ghūlām* is applicable to a male from infancy up to young manhood; cf. E. LANE, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London 1877), s. v.

books there are many deviations from the actual succession of events. Moreover the text of Isaias shows marks of certain accidental misplacements²⁴. It would therefore be no reason for surprise if 7:17-25 were not in its true context as in fact it does not appear to be. The terrible disasters foretold in verse 17, unequalled since the schism of the northern tribes after the death of Solomon, did not fall on Achaz. Yet as the passage now stands it is said that they fall upon him, for in the context 'on thee' can refer only to that king. Through the power of Tiglath-pileser, the Assyrian king, Achaz was freed from the Syro-Israelite invasion at the price of tribute paid to that monarch. During the reign of Achaz there was no invasion either by Assyrian or Egyptian such as is threatened in this passage. Moreover the theme of milk and honey is used in a sense quite alien to that of verse 15 where it also occurs. In 7:22 the context indicates the stress to be on the paucity of inhabitants rather than on the poverty of their fare. Various passages show that the normal foodstuffs of the people were corn, wine, and oil²⁵. But in the devastated condition of the country after the predicted invasion, with agriculture at a standstill, these would not be available, and the small remaining population would have to subsist on foods obtainable without prolonged labour, such as milk and honey. But this is not the ordinary implication of milk and honey. That the land flowed with milk and honey is in many passages a way of emphasizing the richness of its products²⁶. In Num 23:27(28) the context indicates that abundance of milk and honey is a metaphorical expression for the fertility of the land in producing grapes, pomegranates, and figs. Consequently in Isai 7:15, where the phrase is used without restriction of meaning, the reader and the original hearers would inevitably understand that the child would enjoy a diet proverbially desirable and indicative of plenty. There is moreover evidence that milk and honey were ordinarily given to young children²⁷. So the sentence 'cream and honey shall he eat when he can reject evil and choose good'²⁸ means that prosperous times will quickly return after the invasion of the kings of Damascus and Israel. Lastly the natural continuation of 7:14-16 is 8:1-4. This is broken by the insertion here of 7:17-25.

²⁴ Isai 5: 25 belongs with chap. 9 as is shown by the same refrain in 9: 12, 17, 21 and 10: 4; 38: 22 fits in before 38: 7; 41: 6 f is completely out of context but makes sense with 40: 19.

²⁵ Deut 7: 13; 11: 14; 12: 17, etc.

²⁶ Exod 3: 8, 17; 13: 5; Lev 20: 24; Deut 6: 3, etc.

²⁷ S. BOCHART, *Hieroicoicon* (Lugduni Batavorum 1692), I, Lib. II, cap. 51, col. 630 f; II, Lib. IV, cap. 12, col. 525.

²⁸ With the use of the Hebrew verb 'to know' in the sense of 'to be able' compare the French 'il sait parler anglais' for which the English equivalent is 'he can speak English'. For the use of the preposition *l'* with the infinitive with temporal reference, cf. Gen 24: 63.

However, the main thesis of this paper does not depend on the correctness or otherwise of the opinion that 7:17-25 is an 'errant block' inserted in an alien context. Even if its incorrectness were proved, it would still remain that the two milk and honey references occurring in different contexts would have to be understood differently in accord with the general sense of the passages in which they are read.

After these preliminary remarks the way is now open for a closer approach to our subject. The occasion of the prophecy was the Syro-Israelite invasion of Judah, the purpose of which was to force that kingdom into an anti-Assyrian alliance. To this end Rezin and Pekah intended to change the dynasty and to put Tabeel, a creature of theirs otherwise unknown, on the throne of Judah. The war had therefore messianic import, for the success of the two kings would have spelt the end of the Davidic dynasty. To ensure the permanent success of their enterprise, according to the ruthless policy of the age, all male descendants of David who might have made a bid for the throne, would have been exterminated. And it was to the house of David that God had made the promise of perpetual royalty with its messianic implication, II Sam 7:14. In this war, of itself of small import in world history, an issue was at stake of vastly greater importance than the victory of the one party or the other. The survival of the messianic dynasty of David was in the balance. The intervention of God is therefore no cause for surprise.

The superior strength of the coalition had plunged Achaz, his court, and the people into a state of trepidation when he was accosted by the prophet Isaias with a message from God to put all fear aside as the two kings would prove impotent and their design would come to nothing. Isaias had brought with him his son as God had bidden him. This son had a name of symbolic import — Shear-yashub 'A remnant shall return'. The boy was thus a reminder of promised divine protection and of the divine assurance that, come what might, the Chosen People would never meet with complete extinction or dispersal such as overtook the ten tribes. This message of encouragement to Achaz and his court was however accompanied as a warning against disbelief by the threat of (ultimate) disaster, which in fact came to pass at the time of the Babylonian invasion and conquest.

Achaz, who was a wicked king as is narrated in II (IV) Kg chap. 16, did not believe, but despite his wickedness God was patient with him and ordered Isaias to offer him a sign. No ordinary sign was offered. He was free to choose whatsoever he might care to ask for, whether in the heavens above or in the earth below. This really astonishing offer again emphasizes the unusual importance of the occasion. More was at stake than the repulse of invaders. And the reader is prepared for something extraordinary whatever it may be. Achaz with a pre-

tence of piety refuses to ask for the offered sign. 'Therefore', declared the prophet, 'the Lord himself will give you a sign'. 'Therefore', that is because Achaz refuses, God will take the matter into His own hands. Then the sign is announced: 'Behold a maiden²⁹ shall conceive and shall bear a son and shall call³⁰ his name Emmanuel [which means 'God with us']. Cream and honey shall he eat when he can reject evil and choose good, for before the boy can reject evil and choose good, the lands³¹ shall be forsaken of whose two kings thou standest in dread. [8:1-4] And the Lord said to me «Take thee a large scroll and write thereon with customary characters 'Maher-shalal-chash-baz». Then I took me trustworthy witnesses, Urias the priest and Zacharias, the son of Barakias. I went into the prophetess, who conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said to me: «Call his name Maher-shalal-chash-baz, for before the boy can name «Father» or «Mother» the strength of Damascus and the booty of Samaria shall be carried away before the King of Assyria»'.

What first impresses the reader is the identity of the prediction concerning Emmanuel and of that concerning Maher-shalal-chash-baz. Each speaks of the two invading kings, the Syrian and the Israelite, whose capitals were respectively Damascus and Samaria. In each case disaster is foretold for their lands, which will be forsaken with their wealth and spoil carried away captive by the Assyrians³². And in each case this is to come to pass within a short space of time. This interval of time is defined in two different ways — as the time required by a child before it can address its father and mother by their names and as the time required before it can consciously choose what it likes and reject what it dislikes.

²⁹ The Hebrew definite article is used where English requires the indefinite article in those cases where a person or thing is indefinite in itself but is 'the one' spoken of by the writer. So Jael struck 'the tent-peg' into Sisera's temple, Jg 4: 21. Amos 5: 19 speaks of a man flying from 'the lion', the one threatening him. Cf. GESENIUS-KAUTZSCH, *Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford 1910²), § 126 *q*. So in Isai 7: 14 'the maiden'.

³⁰ 'She shall call': so the Hebrew with unusual form of the verb. Vulgate and Peshitta 'shall be called'; LXX (B) with Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion 'thou shalt call'; LXX (Sin.) 'she shall call', (Q) 'you shall call' (first hand).

³¹ Hebrew 'the land' in accordance with the idiom by which things, of which each of several has one, are spoken of in the singular.

³² The conquest of Syria and of Israel is recorded both in the Bible and in the Assyrian inscriptions. Damascus and Rezin: II (IV) Kg 16: 9; Annals of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727) in D. D. LUCKENBILL, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia I* (Chicago 1926), §§ 777, 779. It was in the second of two campaigns against Damascus recorded in the eponym lists 733 and 732 B. C. (Luckenbill II, p. 436) that Tiglath-pileser succeeded in capturing that city. Israel and Pekah: II (IV) Kg 15: 29; Annals of Tiglath-pileser III (Luckenbill I, §§ 815 f: 'all of its people with their goods I carried off to Assyria').

This identity of the predictions concerning Emmanuel and the second son of Isaias gives rise to the conviction that the two passages refer to the same child. Like the first son, Shear-yashub, the second also bore a symbolic name, Maher-shalal-chash-baz 'Swift is booty, speedy is prey', referring, as is clear, to the imminent despoliation of the territory of the two kings. He also received a second, symbolic name 'Emmanuel' which by its meaning 'God with us' was at once a promise and a reminder of divine protection in the crisis. And this name is a further indication of the identity of the child whose birth is foretold in 7:14 with the child whose birth is recorded in 8:3. For in the verses immediately following, 8:5-8, where the mention of the two kings, Rezin and Pekah, the son of Remaliah, shows that the subject of discourse is still the same, Emmanuel is addressed by name 'the breadth of thy land, O Emmanuel', 8:5. And it is an error to suppose that of human beings only to a king could the words 'thy land' be addressed. The words are used in speaking to Jonas³³. In the case of Emmanuel the propriety of the usage is enhanced by the fact that his birth and name were portents of significance for the whole country. The existence of the two names is no proof that the text speaks of two different children. On the other hand it would be an error to think that the son of Isaias had two personal names. Apart from a change of name the simultaneous use of two names is not recorded before hellenistic times. In regard of the double name the son of Isaias was in the same position as our Blessed Lord. His name was Jesus and He was not known as Emmanuel, though the name was applicable to Him in a far truer sense than to the son of Isaias. It must be remembered that whereas for us names are mere labels useful and necessary to distinguish persons, for the Hebrews they had the further function of signifying character, nature, or office. Hence the change from Abram to Abraham, Simon to Peter, and so in other instances. Hence it became possible, in place of a change of name, to use a purely symbolic name descriptive of some important characteristic. Thus of the messianic king foretold by Jeremias, 23:5f, it is said: 'This is the name by which they shall call him «The Lord is our justice»'. And precisely the same name is announced for Jerusalem in messianic times, Jer 33:16. Yet this has never been the name of the holy city either as replacing 'Jerusalem' or as a current alternative. Like Emmanuel this name or title is purely descriptive and symbolic.

The promised child was therefore to have a function as a living memorial of assured divine assistance symbolized by the title Emmanuel. He was also promised as a sign. In what sense was the

³³ Jonas 1: 8; also to Abraham, Gen 12: 1; to Jacob, Gen 32: 10; to Hadad, who, though of royal blood, was not a king, I (III) Kg 11: 22.

birth of the son of Isaias a sign? His conception and birth were not miraculous. In the ordinary course of nature he had a human father and mother. Nonetheless there was a quite unusual procedure before his conception. The prophet called in two men, well-known at the time, as witnesses and proceeded to write the name of a male child on a large scroll in unmistakably legible characters. Now no man can have certainty without divine revelation that he will have a child within the immediately succeeding period of nine months. Still less is any man in a position confidently to foretell that this child will be of the male sex. And the impossibility of certainty has additional ground if the future mother has not already given proof of her fertility. And this was the position at the time of the announcement, for the future mother was to be a maiden, one as yet unjoined in wedlock. And this sign was given to meet the need of the existing situation, to persuade the king and the people to put their entire trust in God and not to think of appealing to the human help of Assyria, which is what Achaz actually did, II(IV)Kg 16:7ff.

This sign is an insuperable difficulty facing the theory that the prophecy of 7:14 is exclusively and literally a prophecy of the conception and birth of Christ. How could an event which was to come to pass after seven hundred years be a sign in the time of Achaz to meet the peril of the existing situation? Moreover verses 14 to 16 cannot be understood as speaking of different children, and verse 16 speaks of the child as living at the time of the depopulation of the enemy kingdoms. Certainly we have no right to alter the wording of a well authenticated text in order to make it fit a preconceived theory. So to do is not exegesis but eisegesis.

The mother of the promised child is spoken of as a maiden, 7:14, and as a prophetess, 8:3. As Isaias already had a boy, Shear-yashub, this cannot have been his first wife, as the term '*almā*' would not be applicable to her. The reason why the mother is called a prophetess is obscure as nothing more is known about her. Was she a prophetess in her own right? Or was she called a prophetess as the wife of a prophet? Or could she be called a prophetess as the mother of one whom his father spoke of as 'sign and portent in Israel', 8:18?

Who, if anyone in particular, was entrusted with the imposition of the name 'Emmanuel' is uncertain on account of the varying evidence of the Hebrew text and ancient versions³⁴. Probably the Hebrew supported by the Sinaitic codex of the Septuagint is correct in attributing it to the mother. It was generally a maternal privilege though there are numerous cases in which the name was chosen by the father³⁵. Nothing of importance therefore can be deduced from

³⁴ See note 30.

³⁵ See the lists given by G. B. GRAY in Hastings' *Dict. of the Bible*, III (1900) 481 b.

the bestowal of the name by the mother if indeed it was she who gave it. As the name was not strictly personal but an appellation significant of the child's function, the passive form 'shall be called' given in the Vulgate and the Peshitta seems the most appropriate, suggesting as it does the common recognition of that function.

The foregoing consideration of the text and context of the famous prophecy has led to the conclusion that it refers in the first place, in the literal sense, to the son of Isaias. That this reference does not exhaust its full meaning is clear from the dogmatic argument outlined at the beginning of this paper. The question now arises whether the context gives any suggestion of the ultimate messianic meaning. The messianic significance of the whole episode has already been mentioned. The success of the design of Rezin and Pekah would have meant the destruction of the Davidic dynasty and the murder of all David's descendants in the male line and so the thwarting of the divine promise to David through Nathan of a line of successors culminating in the messianic king. Moreover the unusual solemnity of the offer to Achaz of whatsoever sign he might choose to ask, whether in the heavens above or in the earth below, portended something of greater moment than present preservation from the peril of invasion. The importance of the prophecy is further enhanced by the fact that God Himself offered the sign in spite of the king's refusal. Then the knowledge that the Old Testament led up to Christ and contains many prefigurements of Christ and of the messianic dispensation strongly suggests that this solemn passage was also intended by God as a link in the harmony of the Old and New Testaments. And this probability becomes a certainty when in the light of the evangelical history we see that the words of the prophecy were so framed as to fit so exactly the virginal conception and birth of Christ.

Yet though the words fit the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is with an important change of meaning. The prophetess was a maiden before she became a mother but lost her virginity in the process. Our Blessed Lady retained her virginity. She was the Virgin Mother of Christ. This is the teaching and the belief of the Church. The question that concerns us here is this: is there any justification for understanding the prophecy in this fuller and more perfect sense? The answer is provided by a principle which may be deduced from the teaching of St Paul. This principle is that texts of the Old Testament referable to Christ must in that reference be understood in the full amplitude of which the words are capable. This must be illustrated by one or two examples.

Christ was a perfect man. Therefore whatever is said of man as such, of innocent man unstained by sin, is true also of Christ. Now Scripture teaches that God conferred on man dominion of the world, Gen 1:26-28. This teaching is recapitulated in Psalm 8:6 in the

words 'Thou hast put all things under his feet'. In the literal sense of the Psalm this dominion conferred on man as such is limited by the natural capacities with which God has endowed man. But the words are true also of Christ, and, as St Paul knew, are true of Him, the God-Man, in the fullest possible sense. Hence he wrote: 'When he said that all things have been subjected [to him], it is clearly with the exception of him who subjected all things to him', I Cor 15:27. Thus St Paul understood the words in the fullest possible sense. Again whatever is true of the Hebrew theocratic kings as such is true also of Christ, for He too was a king of the line of David. Hence the words spoken by God through the prophet Nathan of Solomon and the other theocratic kings 'I shall be to him a father and he will be to me a son' are true also of Christ. Understood of Solomon and the other purely human kings this promise is one of adoptive sonship only. Yet when it is applied to Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews the words are understood in the fullest possible sense of natural sonship: 'To whom of the Angels did he ever say: I shall be to him a father and he will be to me a son?', Heb 1:5. Here it must be noted that a fundamentally important dogmatic truth is being established, and the argument would be invalid if the words did not in the divine intention bear the meaning proposed. It is such texts as these that lead to the principle proposed, namely that texts of the old dispensation when applicable to Christ bear the fullest possible meaning. And this means that in our prophecy the maiden retains her virginity even as a mother.

The fuller and deeper meaning extends also to the name Emmanuel. As an appellation applied to a merely human being 'God with us' signified God's protection and fatherly care. Applied to Jesus Christ the same name signified that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity had taken to himself a human nature and walked this earth as a man among the sons of man.

A deeper and spiritual meaning also attaches to the liberation from the power of the enemy. The liberation of which Maher-shalal-chash-baz was a sign was from the destructive power of the two kings hostile to Judah. The liberation of which the birth of the true Emmanuel was a sign was from the dominion of the devil and the powers of wickedness.

EDMUND F. SUTCLIFFE, S. J.

Heythrop College,
Chipping Norton,
Oxon. England.