

Translation Notes by Margaret Coats, Ph.D.

Latin text in *Hymn of Saint Casimir* (London: Robson, Levey, and Franklyn, undated but perhaps circa 1900).

* The starred verse is the only one not found in the *Hymn's* Latin text but does appear among the twelve Latin verses of *Omne Die* in *Paroissien Romain* (Solesmes, 1896, pages *187–*189). The additional verse is placed in the present translation as suggested by its placement in the *Paroissien*. Located thus, it provides a direct address to the Virgin before a series of imperative verbs, making the speaker seem more courteous and less abrupt. The usage corresponds to the author's practice at other points in the work. If the editor and translator of the *Hymn* knew a Latin text with 61 verses, he perhaps omitted this one in order to follow his plan of presenting the work in "decades."

NOTES

7. The speaker's address to his senses makes a remarkable request. The senses are to give glory to Mary by bringing her often to mind. This means that when the powers of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell are exercised, the things seen, heard, tasted, touched, and smelled will remind the speaker of the Virgin. The sensible world bears traces of her, just as it does of God, its creator. The senses call up memories of the Virgin and continually provides fresh impressions to be stored in memory and associated with Mary, to her honor.

26. The paramount request for memory again emphasizes that the speaker relies on this power of the soul to accomplish his aim in giving due praise to Mary.

34. This verse refers to lines from the Virgin's own poetic composition, the Magnificat.

*He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.
He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.* Luke 1:52–53

54. This verse provides a succinct statement of the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity (before, during, and after childbirth).

The literary genre of the work is that of a rhymed psalm. The Latin psalms, clearly divided into half lines, and displaying many modes of parallelism derived from their Hebrew originals, are the best comparisons for the author's chosen means of expression. The quote of the Magnificat in verse 34 identifies that canticle as another model, especially because two of its half lines (Luke 1:52b–53a) form the substance of the two half lines in this verse.

Rhyme is the author's formal design, and itself holds a meaning—if the work is complete in 60 or 61 verses. In the Latin text, the last words of each half line rhyme, and within each half line are two more rhymes, giving a rhyme scheme aabccb for each complete verse (30 syllables per verse, with syllables 4, 8, 15, 19, 23, and 30 involved in the rhyme scheme). If each rhyme word is printed as the end of a line (as in *Hymn of Saint Casimir's* rhymed English translation), the whole poem has 360 lines. This is one line for each day of the year, rounding the number of days per month to 30 and multiplying 30 days by 12 months. The approximation has been acceptable elsewhere for literary purposes, and the poem's opening words *Omne die* ("every day") might seem to announce the design. With the additional verse offered in the present translation, the poem has 366 lines, the number representing a year and a day, and thus often thought to suggest eternity. Complete thoughts and sentences are longer than the rhyme lines, and vary a great deal in length, but there is a year's worth of music in the 360 short lines marked out by the rhyme words (or a year and a day's music in 366 lines). The end of the cycle is reached when *ejus festa, ejus gesta* from the first verse is repeated as *tua festa, tua gesta* in the last. The reprise shows that the crown or chaplet or garland of praise for Mary becomes a full circle as the "days" add up to a "year." Or, it suggests that the hymn extends into eternity, beginning anew on the 366th "day."

This interpretation of the poem's numerology is more satisfying than the six-decade devotion proposed in *Hymn of Saint Casimir*. The thoughts developed offer no reason to read the poem as six equal groups of ten verses each, nor to pause for an *Ave Maria* after each "decade." Sentences spill over from the second supposed decade into the third, and from the fifth into the sixth. One reads, rather, the sometimes expansive and sometimes brief cogitations of a psalmist, regularized by the rhyming sounds whose full number suggests the wholeness achieved in year of days. The author's words do not, in fact, attempt to offer a complete catalogue of the Virgin's feasts and accomplishments (they do not mention her role in Christ's Passion, for example). It is only the numerical and musical program, denoting the continually repeated cycle of a year, that renders the poem complete.