

**MARY, OUR MOTHER
AND EDUCATOR**

An Applied Mariology

by Father Joseph Kentenich

Translated by Jonathan Niehaus

*(Note: this version was scanned electronically.
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Original Title:
Maria–Mutter und Erzieherin
(Fastenpredigten 1954)
Sermons one through seven

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INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of this collection of sermons (p. 142), Father Kentenich says:

“Our task is to adapt our personal image of Mary, i.e. the picture of her we carry (in our hearts), to match the image of her which God Himself has designed and brought to realization in the course of time. These Lenten sermons want to make a small contribution towards this end.”

One could say that this is the motive of the sermons which are made available to the English-speaking world through this book.

The author, Father Joseph Kentenich (1885-1968), has been the subject of a number of recent publications in English, including the full-length biography *Joseph Kentenich: A Life for the Church* (by Father Engelbert Monnerjahn, Cape Town: Schoenstatt Publications, 1985). The founder of the international Schoenstatt Movement is nonetheless only just beginning to become familiar to the English-speaking world, in part because all his works must be translated from his native German into English.

This book, *Mary, Our Mother and Educator*, hopes to open a central part of the thinking and theology of Father Kentenich, namely his picture of Mary. In addition, it is a selection of particular interest to the English-speaking reader because it was originally prepared for an English-speaking audience as a series of Lenten sermons.

Father Kentenich's acquaintance with the English-speaking world began in 1948, when he made visits of three months each to South Africa and the United States. An even longer opportunity would present itself a few years later. Misunderstandings about his work in Schoenstatt resulted in his being removed from the place of foundation in Schoenstatt (near Koblenz), West Germany. He subsequently spent a thirteen-year-

span, from 1952 to 1965, in the house of the Pallottine Fathers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in the United States.

Origin of the Sermons

This work, *Mary, Our Mother and Educator*, previously known in a mimeographed translation as the *Lenten Sermons*, was one fruit of those thirteen years. The exact circumstances of its origin cannot be determined with full certainty, but the most important facts are as follows: 1) The site of the sermons was Holy Cross Parish, whose church was immediately adjacent to the provincial house of the Pallottine Fathers in Milwaukee; 2) Father Joseph Haas was the Provincial of the Pallottine Midwest (*Mater Dei*) Province and the pastor of Holy Cross Parish at that time, and he delegated the task of preparing Lenten sermons to another Pallottine, Father Ray Piskula; and 3) Father Kantenich was asked to write sermons for these Lenten services and gladly obliged. What remains uncertain is who first suggested the idea of approaching Father Kantenich and who actually asked him. It is almost certain that it was either Father Joseph Haas or Sr. Winfriede Wagenbach who made the original suggestion. The primary goal was to inspire the parish to grow into a deeper spiritual union with Mary and to follow up on signs of interest in certain circles of the parish – particularly in the CYO (Catholic Youth Organization) and the Pallottine Fathers themselves – to build a Shrine of Our Lady of Schoenstatt on the parish grounds.

Happy though Father Kantenich was to oblige with the request to write such sermons, it was clear that his knowledge of English was too little to allow him to do so directly in English. The sermons were consequently composed in German and translated into English.

This took place in the following manner: Father Kantenich prepared an outline or script of his thoughts which he in turn dictated in sermon form to a secretary. Afterwards, the text was translated, primarily by Sr. Winfriede. Father Piskula took the translation and was responsible for the actual presentation of the sermons. The process of translating a sermon a week was

a major undertaking, of course, and it had to be done in two days' time, which left little time for refinement. Still, this translation was of such a quality that it could be used as the basis for the mimeographed *Lenten Sermons* (slightly revised in South Africa), which in turn served as a major support for this completely revised translation.

The sermons themselves were given during Lenten services which were held each Friday evening in the parish church, six Fridays in a row. These were the Fridays from March 5 to April 9, 1954. It should be noted, however, that the six sermons were not simply read to the parish – for that they were too long and complicated. How much Father Piskula used and how much he adapted and omitted is unknown. Still, that does not mitigate the fact that the sermons which Father Kentenich wrote were intended for the Holy Cross Parish, an American and English-speaking audience.

In addition to the six sermons which had been requested, Father Kentenich also wrote a “seventh sermon” (although the seventh Friday of Lent, Good Friday, did not have a sermon-service) and an “eighth sermon.” The former was not translated into English until the early 1970s, when Father William Brell undertook the task. This translation has also been thoroughly reworked and is included in this volume. There is also an eighth sermon which is actually a 180-page treatise on various topics which go beyond the limits set in the first seven sermons. It considers topics specific to the spirituality of the Schoenstatt Movement. Valuable as this sermon is, it has not yet been translated into English and is not found in this book.

Overview of the Sermons

As central theme for these sermons, Father Kentenich chose Mary, the Mother of Our Lord. His goal was to awaken the American soul as found in the Holy Cross Parish (a middle-class, second- and third-generation American parish in residential Milwaukee) to the great dynamic which he saw in the events of the times, in the Church, in the Schoenstatt Movement which

he had so carefully cultivated since its founding in 1914, and in his own soul: To God the Father through Christ with Mary in the covenant of love. In this dynamic the covenant of love with Mary was the key and decisive stepping stone, and the task before him was to show how urgently “right” this relationship is for individual, parish, and for our modern times.

The starting point which he chose was an interweaving of three realities that were immediately evident: The message of Lent, the large crucifix and statues of Mary and John which dominated the sanctuary of the parish church, and the fact that 1954 had been proclaimed a Marian Year for the whole Church. The thread of his argument then began a passage through the writings of 19th and 20th century popes concerning Mary and Marian devotion, through key apparitions of Mary, through the Marian experience of great personalities of the Church’s past, and through the witness of the Bible.

These all lead to the cornerstone of his own deep Marian conviction: The God-willed role of Mary in the plan of salvation. It is this role – mandated by our dying Lord’s words “Behold your Mother” and mysteriously decreed by God’s own election in how His universe should be – that brings her to us as Mother and Educator, as the one who rightfully calls us to a covenant of love with her.

That these thoughts are so central to his, and subsequently to Schoenstatt’s view of the world, is indicated by the wide range of topics which he touches upon in the course of the sermons: The call to sainthood, the dangers of collectivism, importance of prayer, the dignity of woman, the Blessed Sacrament, St. Vincent Pallotti, pilgrimage places, the two-in-oneness of Jesus and Mary, the baptismal covenant, God’s “game of love” that sends sorrows as well as joys, and childlikeness as basis of the relationship with the heavenly Father, to name a few. One of the great advantages of this selection from his works is indeed the broad overview it provides of what Father Kentenich has to say to our modern world.

About This Translation

As already indicated, these sermons have previously been available in other translations, translations which have served as a partial basis for this completely revised text. After consultation with a number of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary of the Waukesha province, it became clear that the final basis for this translation would have to be the German text as it is found in the published German edition of *Maria, Mutter und Erzieherin* (Vallendar-Schönstatt, West Germany: Schönstatt-Verlag, 1973, 2nd edition). The older translations therefore served as a help and a valuable support, but the German text has always had the final word. As a result, vast sections of the older translations had to be substantially revised and refined. Central to the effort was also the careful correction of the text and double-checking with the German original; this was done by Sr. Marihedwig Heisig.

Of major concern was the annotation of these sermons. The goal was a set of footnotes which would be both meaningful and useful to readers without access to the German language. This resulted in the elimination of many of the footnotes found in the published German edition (after all, those who are interested can find them there) and the addition of a number of footnotes which appeared to be necessary to help explain aspects which are more obvious to those from the German milieu than to those from the English-speaking world. An exception to the elimination of footnotes referring to untranslated German sources was made for Anton Koch's *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* and Ludwig Gemminger's *Der Marienprediger* (as well as a few other scattered notes of interest). This is to help give an insight into the style of the sermons, though it should be noted that in most cases Father Kentenich simply drew on these familiar sources from memory rather than in long hours of searching for exact quotes.

It is especially hoped that the footnotes can be of service to those who are interested in studying Father Kentenich's

Mariology more deeply. Those who have such an interest would do well to search out copies of *Papal Teachings: Our Lady* and *The Glories of Mary* (see Bibliography), since they are a great help in understanding both Father Kentenich's background and rootedness in tradition as well as his innovative perspective of what Mary means today.

At the close of this introduction it should be noted that a valuable asset of these sermons is their attempt to persuade an average audience: The language, although theological, is relatively simple, and the use of specialized terminology is kept to a minimum. It is hoped that this style and Father Kentenich's fervor for Mary is a combination which helps open the doors for many to Mary, our Mother and Educator!

Jonathan Niehaus
Münster, West Germany
June 7, 1987, Pentecost Sunday
and Opening of the Marian Year

GENERAL REMARKS

- Words and supplementary information in parentheses, unless otherwise noted, are from the translator.
- All foreign phrases – principally Latin – are italicized except the oft quoted *Ecce Mater tua* (Behold your Mother, Jn 19,27) and *Ecce filius tuus* (Behold your son, Jn 19,26) and generally known words like *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary) and *fiat* (Mary’s “Let it be done unto me,” Lk 1,38). Literary works are also in italics. All other use of italics is as found in the published German edition.
- Secondary sources which Father Kentenich has quoted in German have been correlated with existing English translations to the extent that this is possible. The German quote as found in the original text is given the benefit of the doubt, however, so that the sense in which it appears in the text is preserved. Comparison of the translation here and the given English source will therefore reveal variant wordings in most cases.
- Footnotes have been entirely reworked for this English translation and are not identical with the footnotes in the published German edition. Many of the references to other works in German have been omitted because of their limited interest. Those who do have interest in these cross-references are referred to the German edition.
- Citation of works in the footnotes follows the title of the book 1) in its English translation, if available, or 2) using the German title. The first citation is complete, whereas first citations in subsequent sermons are followed by a cross-reference to the first citation, e.g. *Heavenwards* (note 13, p. 38).

First Sermon

**ECCE MATER TUA: CHRIST GIVES US MARY
TO BE OUR MOTHER**

This morning, our Holy Mother the Church opened wide to us the season of Lent. She did so by marking the sign of the cross on our foreheads with ashes. In this way she expressed the fundamental attitude which should interiorly accompany us until the tolling of Easter's joyful bells.

Our ears still retain the words which the priest said as he signed each brow: "Remember, man, that you are dust and to dust you shall return."¹ It is an old familiar phrase. It applies in all times and for all lands. It applies to all people. It applies to us, too – yes, even to us who trouble so much throughout the year about the increase of our worldly possessions, who never weary of seeking physical comfort, good appearance, and beauty. It applies to us who through radio, television, and the press are constantly exposed to the heavy emphasis on physical attractiveness. This body of ours upon which we lavish so much care, will one day return to the earth from which it was created; it will return to the substance, the material, from which it was taken. Therefore, "Remember, man, that you are dust and to dust you shall return!"

These are urgent tones which thus reecho in our souls. Therefore, in the coming weeks we desire and will attempt, in keeping with the wish of the Holy Church, to pay less attention to our body, to avoid being so completely – indeed almost exclusively – absorbed by our worldly affairs. We wish to direct our thoughts higher: *Sursum corda*, lift up your hearts!² Look towards heaven! The season of grace, the season in which we can focus our attention once more on things eternal and divine and on our soul, has begun. *Sursum corda!* Lift up your hearts! Look towards heaven! Eyes and heart are captured by the great

1 From the liturgy of Ash Wednesday. See also Gen 3,19.

2 From the opening of the preface of each holy Mass.

drama of Golgotha with particular love and warmth during Lent. And as often as the bells call us to the Lenten sermons, these words of our Lord resound in our hearts: “When I am lifted up from earth, I will draw all things to myself” (Jn 12,32).

This explains to me the large attendance this evening in this holy place. We see Golgotha before us, and upon it Christ the Crucified, as it is depicted in the sanctuary of our Holy Cross Church.³ How often have we not gazed upon this setting without giving it any further thought? That’s how it often goes in daily life: What we see frequently no longer makes an impression on us. In the coming weeks, however, this scene should so capture our souls that we carry it with us into our daily lives so that it can take on form and life there.

He who is raised on the cross wishes to draw our hearts closer to Himself, in order that the promise may be realized: “When I am lifted up from earth, I will draw all things to myself.” He desires my heart, that heart which is so deeply filled with worldly concerns throughout the year, that same heart which innumerable many people, as well as the world and the devil himself, strive to win. Regrettably, not without success. The One who hangs on the cross calls our attention to Himself more insistently now than at other times. He makes good His rights over this heart which so many try to lure away from Him. He wants to draw our hearts to Himself. Each fiber should belong to Him. Every heartbeat should be for Him and for those to whom God has given the right and privilege to share our love. That is how His words are meant to be understood: “When I am lifted up from earth, I will draw all things to myself.” In this way we can also understand why the ringing of the bells has drawn us in such numbers to this Lenten sermon. He

3 At the time this sermon was written, the sanctuary of Holy Cross Church in Milwaukee was predominated by a large crucifix on the wall above the altar, with statues of Mary and John on either side. These figures were removed from the church when it was completely remodeled in 1958, and the wall behind the altar was removed to adjoin it with the previously separate chapel of the Pallottine Fathers, the community which cares for the parish.

who is raised on the cross draws us to Himself again and again with irresistible power. He helps us to forget the busyness of our everyday lives. He invites us to come to church, to listen with wrapt attention and to give our answer to the persuasiveness of His love.

Christ Presents us with Mary

When Golgotha begins to fill our understanding, we not only see the cross and the Crucified, but also our sorrowful Mother beneath the cross as presented in this scene in our sanctuary. *Stabat mater juxta crucem*. The Mother of Jesus stood next to and under the cross (cf. Jn 19,25). It appears to me as though our crucified Lord wants to expressly draw our attention to His Mother. It appears as though He calls to us again during this Lent with particular urgency and with the words which he spoke from the cross so long ago: “*Ecce Mater tua, Behold your Mother*” (Jn 19,27). “Make this year’s Lenten season a Marian school and time of training. Take care that the life of the Blessed among women becomes for you the way to Me and to the Blessed Trinity, and thereby to your eternal bliss!”

He tells us this:

1. Through the words of the currently reigning Pontiff⁴;
2. He repeats it through the words of the Blessed Mother herself;
3. He informs us of it through the words of many theologians of the past century.

During this first Lenten sermon then, let us listen with a thoughtful mind to what the Holy Father, our Blessed Lady herself, and the theologians say about the words “*Ecce Mater tua*” (Behold your Mother). But we ask you, holy Mother of God, grant that the words which we will hear may deeply touch our hearts. See to it that one day it may be said of us, too, “She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart” (Lk 2,19). Help us to pray with Vincent Pallotti, whose

4 Pope Pius XII.

canonization many are expecting this year: “Mary, may your life be my life”!⁵

God Leads us to Mary through the Popes

Our Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, has often called the attention of the world to our heavenly Mother. He did so particularly on two occasions: First in 1942 and then eleven years later in 1953. On October 31, 1942, the Holy Father consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary; In December 1953 he proclaimed 1954 to be the great Marian Jubilee Year⁶. By doing so, he repeated clearly and distinctly the words of our dying Lord, “Ecce Mater tua” (Behold your Mother). In both cases it took place with closest attention to the arch-violent, advancing enemy of today’s Christianity, its enemy incarnate: the collectivistic spirit of the times and its successful attempts to snatch the whole world from Christ’s power and to deliver it into Satan’s grasp⁷.

The consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary which was made during a radio message to Fatima on October 31, 1942, and which was renewed at St. Peter’s on December 8 of the same year, was the culmination of the twenty-fifth anniversary year of the apparitions at Fatima. We can best understand the attitude and intention of the Holy Father if we

- 5 Paraphrased from retreats notes, 1827. See *Vincent Pallotti – an Apostle and Mystic* by Father Eugene Weber (1927, trans. Horst Vollmer: New York, 1963), p. 131. Vincent Pallotti (1795-1850) had been beatified on January 22, 1950, the hundredth anniversary of his death, and would be canonized by Pope John XXIII on January 20, 1963.
- 6 The entire year 1954 was proclaimed to be an extraordinary holy year on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. This was then called the Marian Year. See p. 8.
- 7 For Father Kentenich, “collectivism” is not so much a political definition as it is one which describes a vision of man which threatens to degrade human dignity by reducing him to a mass-man. Outspoken exponents of collectivism are Communism, Naziism, and other forms of Fascism, but collectivism also rages in the West in the form of the mass-man. See especially p. 9 and footnote 12 on the same page. See also p. 107ff. and p. 118.

reread a few parts of the consecration prayer so it has a chance to work on us. While we are listening to the pleading words of the Pope, our hearts – to the extent that the words have a meaning for us – should pray along. In this spirit we pray with the Holy Father:

[“... Queen⁸ of the most holy Rosary, Help of Christians, Refuge of Mankind, triumphant in all battles for God! We, your suppliants, prostrate ourselves at your throne, confident that we shall obtain mercy and receive grace, the needed assistance and protection, during the calamities of these days, not indeed by our own merits, of which we presume nothing, but solely through the immense goodness of your maternal heart.]

“To you and to your Immaculate Heart, We, the common father of the vast Christian family, We, the Vicar of Him to whom was given ‘all power in heaven and on earth,’ and from whom we have received the care of so many souls redeemed by His Blood; to you and to your Immaculate Heart in this tragic hour of human history, We commit, We entrust, We consecrate, not only the Holy Church, the mystical body of your Jesus, which suffers and bleeds in so many places and is afflicted in so many ways, but also the entire world torn by violent discord, scorched in a fire of hate, victim of its own iniquities ... [J]ust as the Church and the entire human race were consecrated to the Heart of your Jesus, because by placing in Him every hope, It may be for them a token and pledge of victory and salvation; so, henceforth, they are perpetually consecrated to you, to your Immaculate Heart, O Our Mother and Queen of the world, in order that your love and protection may hasten the triumph of the kingdom of God. And may all peoples at peace among themselves and with God proclaim you blessed and intone with you throughout the whole world the

8 This paragraph is not quoted by Father Kentenich in his German manuscript, but is added here for the sake of completeness.

eternal ‘Magnificat’ of glory, love and adoration of the Heart of Jesus, in whom alone they can find truth, love and peace.’”⁹

It is of great importance to recall that the Holy Father did not perform this solemn act merely as a private person, but as representative of the entire world and Church. From this we can understand why the individual nations and peoples, why the individual dioceses, in whose name he performed the act, repeated it themselves in order to express their own devotion to Mary and their confidence in her. Consequently, those who hold the opinion that the Pope rushed into this consecration ill-advised because of the terrible and dire situation of World War II and “pressure” from the Fatima message are mistaken. It is simply not true. It was rather the fruit of calm deliberation at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, with the definite intention of inspiring the entire Church in all her members to make the said consecration. That should be all the more understandable since a lifestream in the direction of consecrations was already alive in the Church in the decades before this act, a lifestream that surged to the surface again and again.

The Lifestream Behind the Consecration of the World to Mary

This lifestream received especially strong impetus from the Marian apparitions of 1830 to St. Catherine Labouré (1806-1876), to whom we are indebted for the Miraculous Medal.

Already during the First Vatican Council (1869-70), several French bishops made a bid to have the whole world consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Holy Father who was then in office, Pius IX (reigned 1846-1878), was personally pleased by such a proposal. It was the same Pope who had

9 Pius XII, Prayer of Consecration of the World to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, October 31, 1942. English text quoted from *Papal Teachings: Our Lady* compiled by the Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, translated by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston, 1961), Nos. 373, 374, 380. Father Kentenich’s following thoughts reflect those of German theologian Carl Feckes in an article that appeared in *Katholische Marienkunde* (Catholic Mariology) (Paderborn, 1951), Vol. 3, p. 323f.

added the pearl of the Immaculate Conception to Our Lady's crown.

He would have gladly placed this new crown of honor on her head, but considered the time as not yet mature. He consequently called for ardent prayer.

This impulse was taken up by the Italian bishops and developed into diocesan consecrations. In France it developed into nothing less than a bonafide consecration crusade. Not only families and parishes joined the crusade and consecrated themselves to Mary, but even whole French dioceses did the same. Petitions were circulated at the same time to urge the Pope to dedicate the world to the Immaculate Heart. In the wake of this, Marian Congresses took the same stand and attempted to deepen and popularize this lifestream. The conditions gradually reached the point where it was expected that the consecration of the world would take place at the Eucharistic Congress in Lourdes in 1914. Pope Pius X, however, felt that it was better to wait for a more appropriate moment in the future. What he had intended to do did indeed happen with the radio message of Pius XII to Fatima in 1942. What we can conclude from all this with absolute clarity is that the Holy Father did not rush into anything. And in the course of the years, the Church in its individual countries and members has understood him well. She has taken up the wish of the Holy Father and set about reenacting this consecration by the way of organic growth.

This same act includes an aim and gives us a task for which we can prepare ourselves this Lent, While we attentively listen to the words of the Holy Father – Ecce Mater tua! Behold your Mother! Behold her Immaculate Heart! – we should be thinking about how we, in-our own parish and our own family, will take up this wish of the head of the Church, and how we can give and consecrate ourselves to our Blessed Lady. And here we let the Holy Father tell us that this consecration means nothing less than *a perfect covenant of love with our heavenly Mother.*

Holy Scripture tells us that St. John, in accordance with the words of Our Lord, “Ecce Mater tua,” took her into his care (cf. Jn 19,27), and it can be expected that she in turn took motherly care of him. Just as he sealed a covenant of love with her, we want to do the same. That is the aim of these Lenten sermons. In a later sermon we will hear about what this covenant of love looks in more detail, what it demands of us, and which gifts and graces it gives to us. For the present it is enough to hear and respond to the words of the Holy Father: *Ecce Mater tua* (Behold your Mother)!

Pope Pius XII solemnly repeated this *Ecce Mater tua* in 1950, when he showed Mary to all of Christianity – through the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin¹⁰ – in the splendor of her radiant beauty, as she is before the throne of God, and encouraged us to go to her in unreserved surrender.

He continued to give his encouragement in this regard through the proclamation of the Marian Year on December 8, 1953¹¹. This year 1954 should then, according to the Pope’s desire, draw the hearts and minds of all Christians – and therefore our hearts as well--in an increased measure to the image of Our Lady, and should awaken a Marian enthusiasm all over the world. This year is meant to bring an outspoken Marian century to a close, a century which began with the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and concluded with the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption of Mary (1950), and which has been characterized by an unprecedented upsurge of Marian devotion. But at the same time it should usher in a new century which will more precisely determine the entire future of the Church, give her an even more outspoken Marian character, and thus help her to attain Christ’s victory

10 Cf. Pius XII, “*Munificentissimus Deus*,” November 1, 1950.

11 Cf. Pius XII, encyclical “*Fulgens corona*,” September 8, 1953.

over the collectivistic enemy of the world and a time of tranquility and peace, of fruitfulness and prosperity.¹²

The World Situation as Background for the Consecration

All diplomatic and military efforts thus far have quite obviously failed to overcome collectivism. A further sign of this is the unsuccessful conference of the Big Four which met recently in Berlin.¹³ Against such a black background there is nothing left now but to share the confidence of the Pope in the Marian Year, and to share in the special help and protection of Our

- 12 Of interest in this context is a quote from Father Kentenich on collectivism: "... At breakneck speed we are approaching a unified civilization and culture. An entirely new image of world and man is being formed. The great question which gives no peace to those of knowledge and responsibility is always the same: Will this image bear the seal of satanic or of divine powers? "Collectivism appears in its various forms and announces that it will be heard. It is poised to leap into the entire world. Europe is already largely at its feet. In other parts of the world it attempts to make its victorious advance despite its being forbidden. "...We often deal with [collectivism] as if it were a system, and therefore walk fight by the core of its reality. We point out its flaws; it smiles and returns to the agenda, sure of victory. With its entire soul it holds fast to its image of world and society which it sees in its entirety and which it embraces with burning love and an admirable power to sacrifice; which remains unshaken when it is shown its errors. It sees, demands, and promotes a sociological reordering of world and humanity. Under its influence the problems of our modern age – which, as a consequence of the furious pace of intellectual and economic development, circle around the severely shaken relationships between individual and community, between individual and economy, between individual and technology, between individual and social mobility – accumulate with an unimaginable fury and crushing density. Its vision excludes the personal [ly experienced] God; it divinizes itself in His place..." (letter from Nueva Helvetia, Uruguay, May 6, 1948; also quoted in *Message: (September 7,) 1968* (South Africa), pp. 18-20). See also p. 118.
- 13 Reference is being made to the negotiating conference of the four occupying powers (Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States) held January 25 – February 18, 1954. The four countries were unable to come to an agreement about the future status of Germany or about the proposed treaty for the reunification of Austria.

Lady, who is correctly called “Victress in all God’s battles.”¹⁴ Pope Pius XII is not alone in his unshakable conviction. He drew on the same ideas and hopes which his predecessors on the Chair of St. Peter had already expressed.

When Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, he did so with the intention of persuading the Blessed Mother to bring the bark of the Church safely, securely, and victoriously through the stormy ocean of the extraordinary difficulties which were expected in the future. “We give ourselves,” wrote Pius IX in the papal Bull, “with fullest confidence to the certain hope that the most Blessed Virgin will attain for us through her effective protection, that the Holy Catholic Church, our Mother, will be freed from all difficulties and after overcoming all errors will grow daily and among every people and in every place, grow and blossom and rule..., so that all those in error be freed from spiritual darkness and find their way back to the path of justice”¹⁵ In 1904 – fifty years later – Pius X recalled this statement and solemnly declared to the whole Church that, “An inner voice seems to tell Us that our expectations will soon be fulfilled. Our salvation is nearer than we thought.”¹⁶

Can we not sense this same idea, this same feeling of expectation in Pius XII’s proclamation of the Marian Year? He too, possesses the same spirit of his great predecessors Pius IX and Pius X, and he is also imbued with the spirit that moved Leo XIII.

In numerous immortal encyclicals the great Leo XIII took an informed stand on all modern questions. In them he emphasized and recommended in his own way the use of all

14 This title was used by Pius XII (literal wording: “triumphant in all battles for God”) in the consecration prayer of October 31, 1942 as quoted above, p. 5.

15 Pius IX, *Litterae Apostolicae* “Ineffabilis Deus,” December 8, 1854. Cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 64.

16 Pius X, encyclical “Ad diem illum laetissimum,” February 2, 1904. Cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 223.

possible human means: the power of organization and of the press, of politics and of diplomacy. In fact, he has gone down in modern Church history as a diplomatic genius. Still, he did not place his final hope in such things. Our Blessed Mother was his ultimate hope. She is the one who must help the Church to victory over all her enemies. For him the great remedy of modern times which will influence the events of the world more than all diplomatic endeavors and which has a greater effect on public life than all organizational ones, is the Rosary. Those who pray the Rosary do more for the benefit of the whole human race than all the orators and deputies, more than all the organizers, secretaries and writers, more than all the capitalists even if they would make their entire wealth available to the Church. For him the Rosary is a sort of machine gun and atomic bomb, namely a weapon that is far superior to all the weapons of modern warfare in overcoming the enemy of God.¹⁷ It was because he believed this that Leo XIII wrote ten encyclicals on the Rosary, and gave the Church the month of October as the month of the Holy Rosary.¹⁸

It is touching to read what this modern Pope confessed at the end of his life to the whole Catholic world. He summarized all his writings and drew attention once more to the great storms the Church must face in the future. Time and again he was conscious of the fact that the Bride of Christ must use every available earthly means to master her enemies. But even that is not enough; that is insufficient. The best means that he could place at her disposal after long, long years of experience and based on his supernaturally anchored knowledge in order to secure her future, was a fiery reference to the words of our dying Lord which he made his own personal testament for the Church of the future out of his deepest conviction and most heartfelt emotion: “Ecce Mater tua” (Behold your Mother)!

17 Cf. Leo XIII, encyclical “Laetitia sanctae,” September 8, 1893.

18 Cf. Leo XIII, encyclical “Supremi Apostolatus,” September 1, 1883; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 92.

The words of the aged Pope breathe so much warmth, tenderness, and zeal that I think I should repeat them word for word: “We... shall never cease to promote the glory of so great a Mother, as long as life endures. And since, as old age weighs heavily upon Us, We feel that life cannot now last much longer, We are constrained to repeat to all Our beloved children in Christ those last words of His upon the cross, which He left to us as a testament: ‘Behold your Mother!’ Greatly rewarded indeed shall We be if Our exhortation succeeds in making even one of the faithful hold nothing dearer than devotion to Mary, so that those words which St. John wrote about himself may be applied to each: ‘The disciple took her into his own’ (Jn 19,27).”¹⁹

Mary’s Task as Mother Thrice Admirable

“Ecce Mater tua.” These are among the most consoling words Our Lord ever spoke to us during His fruitful life. Because it is so important, and because, according to the divine plan, it should be so deeply impressed upon our souls, Our Lord drew it into His last will and testament with the words from His dying lips. And because it is obviously God’s intention in the coming time to glorify His Blessed Mother in a special way as the Mother of all Christians, He repeats these words “Ecce Mater tua” in various forms and ways through the lips of the popes of the past century. Yes, these next one hundred years – such is our confident belief – will be a Marian century during which the Blessed Mother will prove her power, wisdom, and kindness in a unique way. This will be a century in which she will notably reveal herself as the God-chosen and official Bearer, Sustainer, and Educator of the children of God and vanquish all the enemies of God here on earth.

That is why we bow in deep humility before her power, wisdom, and kindness and trustingly call her Mother Thrice

19 Leo XIII, encyclical “Augustissimae Virginis,” September 12, 1897; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 203.

Admirable, (admirable in her radiant power, wisdom, and kindness)²⁰.

Mary's Threefold Function in the Kingdom of God

We bow before her threefold motherly function in the kingdom of God and call out to her a second time with deepest confidence and trust: Mother Thrice Admirable, in us, too, prove that you are three times admirable: Admirable as *the one who bears Christ*, admirable as *our Sustainer*, admirable as the *Educator* of the divine life in our souls.

We bow before your threefold task as the warrior who fights all the enemies of God here on earth. We bow before you who are admirable as victress over the power of the devil. We acknowledge that you are also admirable in your power to overcome the strong storms of our passions and drives, and we pray a third time – Mother Thrice Admirable, pray for us.

We have erected an altar here for this Mother Thrice Admirable. Under her picture we see the lifesize statue of Vincent Pallotti. He is, as we know, the founder of the Pallottine Fathers. But what is of special interest to us here is the fact that he is one of the greatest lovers and venerators of Mary of all time. That may well be the reason why the Church would like to grant him the title of Saint during this Marian Year.²¹ Vincent Pallotti constantly carried the testament of our Savior – Ecce Mater tua, Behold your Mother – in his heart and on his lips.

20 The parenthetical phrase is only found in the mimeographed copy of the manuscript. The title “Mother Thrice Admirable” originated with the “Colloquium Marianum,” a religious youth organization founded by Jesuit Father Jacob Rem (1546-1618) as a deepened form of the Marian Sodality. The title was revealed in a vision to Fr. Rem on April 6, 1604 in Ingolstadt, Germany. In the very first years after the founding of the Schoenstatt movement (1914) in Schoenstatt, (West) Germany, the example of the Colloquium became an inspiration for the first members. The “Ingolstadt-Schoenstatt Parallel” also had the effect that the favorite Marian title in Ingolstadt was applied to the Blessed Mother in Schoenstatt, a title which she has kept ever since. This title is often simply abbreviated “MTA.”

21 See footnote 5, p. 4.

For him, Mary was in all truth and in all circumstances of his life, his dearest, his sweetest Mother, with whom he retained the deepest and most tender spiritual attachment. He did nothing without her. All his actions were dependent on her. Thus she became for him nothing less than the teacher who taught him the ways of his spiritual life, the treasurer and giver of divine graces, and the great missionary from whom he expected miracles of inner transformation and education for himself and others as a simple matter of course.²² To put it in other words: She was for him in the fullest sense of the word the Mother Thrice Admirable.

Already in the years of his youth he set before him this guiding star for his self-education and apostolic activity: “I shall not rest until I, if this is possible, have achieved an infinitely tender love for my much beloved and much loving Mother Mary.”²³ That for which the youthful Pallotti strove with such vigor was indeed attained in a most perfect manner. He became a thoroughly Marian saint. He was even found worthy to be mysteriously united with the Blessed Mother in a “spiritual espousal.”²⁴ Everything that he called his own he gave to her. In return he received from her uncountably many proofs of her kindness, her wisdom and power, and above all a perfect transformation into Christ. As a result he likes to say: “I will praise the mercies of Mary into all eternity.”²⁵

In front of the altar of the Mother Thrice Admirable is a chest, and on it we read the words “contributions to the capital

22 Vincent Pallotti is the original source of the quote, “She is the great missionary – she will work miracles,” a quote which was frequently used by Father Kantenich (cf. pp. 19, 33, 72, etc.). Pallotti also said on one occasion when handing out pictures of the Madonna to out-going missionaries: “O how many miracles will Our Lady work! Behold the great missionary! My Mother, now you go out and preach (the Gospel) to this poor people!” Cf. the German biography *Vinzenz Pallotti* by Josef Frank (Friedburg bei Augsburg, 1952), Vol. 2, p. 493.

23 Cf. *Vincent Pallotti, an Apostle and Mystic* (note 5, p. 4), p. 125.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 130

25 *Ibid.*, p. 131

of grace.”²⁶ In it we find unsigned slips of paper telling of the sacrifices toward self-education which the contributors have made in order to move the Blessed Mother to vigorously take their self-education in her hand and to intercede for them the grace that they as well as their families and nation need to overcome the enemy of collectivism throughout the world. We find in this chest slips from children, from teenagers and adults, from men and women. The slips are a sign of how seriously they take the words which Our Lord so urgently proclaims in every possible situation through the popes of the past hundred years: *Ecce Mater tua!*

Our Answer to the Lord’s Testament

Yes, “*Ecce Mater tua!*” Behold your Mother! Now the words from the lips of our crucified Lord may practically sound like a new revelation. “*Ecce Mater tua!*” That is how it echoes to us from the mouths of the popes of the past hundred years. “*Ecce Mater tua!*” That is how it chimes in our souls as the answer to all modern problems and all personal difficulties. And what is our response to this “*Ecce Mater tua?*” Here is a first answer. It is as follows:

We firmly believe that Mary is not only the Mother of God and the Mother of Christ but also in truth and reality our Mother, my Mother, your Mother, therefore the Mother Thrice Admirable.

I. We Believe in Mary’s Task as Mother

The threefold task which our natural mother has regarding our physical life, our spiritual Mother accomplishes in our supernatural, divine life. She fulfills it in a most perfect manner. She is, therefore, to be addressed once more as three times admirable, admirable as the *One who generates life*, admirable as the *One who nourishes life*, admirable as *Educator*.

26 It may be possible that the English inscription actually read “contributions to Our Lady’s Treasury” but the translator is uncertain.

She co-generated us at the very instant when she pronounced her Fiat (cf. Lk 1,38). At that instant she not only gave life to Our Lord as individual person, but to the extent that He is Head of His Church, gave life as well to us who are members of His Mystical Body. We were born of her when, under the cross with most violent “labor pains,” she offered her Son to the heavenly Father. This is her first task as Mother. She fulfilled it in a most perfect way. Mother Thrice Admirable, we thank you with all our hearts for spiritually giving birth to us.

Her second task as Mother is the nourishing of the divine life within us. As the Co-Redemptrix under the cross, she has merited all the graces we have ever received, and as Mediatrix of all graces she channels these graces to us from heaven in her kindness. For this, too, Mother Thrice Admirable, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

Her third task as Mother is the education of her children. Here, too, our Blessed Mother has been faithful to her responsibility for us. Whatever has happened, whether by God’s passive permission or active intervention, whether it was success or failure, suffering or joy, sickness or health – Mary has had a part in it. So we repeat a third time, we thank you for that, too, with all our hearts, Mother Thrice Admirable.

I ask a second time: *What is our response to this “Ecce Mater tua?”* We pray filled with childlike confidence, Mother Thrice Admirable, show that you are *our* Mother!

2. *We Need Our Heavenly Mother*

In a sermon about the Blessed Mother an old missionary once confessed to all those present: “Though I am sixty years old, every day I feel I need a mother more than ever.”²⁷ Do we not realize more and more each day that we, too, need

27 Words of a Father Roh, S J, quoted here from the *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* (Homiletic Sourcebook), a fourteen-volume German work compiled by Anton Koch (Freiburg, 1939) and frequently used by Father Kentenich in the composition of his sermons, particularly for illustrative stories and examples. Here, No. 229: 7,2.

a mother? The whole Church feels this same sentiment more and more strongly with each passing day. At a priest's conference in Berlin it was recently said: We must lead the Blessed Mother onto the battlefield if we want to set up a bulwark against collectivism that will be invincible against its attacks, and if we wish to experience a second Lepanto.

We need the Blessed Mother, otherwise the Church will never be able to overcome collectivism. This is what the popes have been proclaiming for the past hundred years.²⁸

"We need the Blessed Mother," that is the cry that comes from the lips of the aged of this parish. "The Mother Thrice Admirable must help us bear all the loneliness and misery that come with old age, and she must walk with us through the dark portals of death into a better world."

"We need the Blessed Mother," that is what the fathers and mothers in our midst call out. They confess, "Without the Mother Thrice Admirable we would not dare to undertake this task of giving our children a proper Catholic education, of helping them find their right vocation in life, and of letting them go forth into the stormy ocean of public and social life." Perhaps the parents who possess this deep sense of responsibility toward their children feel like the chief of the army of Israel in the Old Testament. He had to go into battle against an enemy far stronger than he. He had only a handful of soldiers, and so he did not dare to start the battle. However, a prophetess sent to him by God encouraged him not to be afraid, but to place his deepest confidence in God. With faith and confidence the leader answered the prophetess: "If you will fight with us, we will dare to go into battle, and we also know we will be blessed with victory. But if you do not accompany us, we will not even dare to take our weapons into our hands."²⁹ The parents of this parish direct their plea to our Blessed Mother tonight

28 Cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Ingravescentibus malis," September 29, 1937; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, Nos. 340-342.

29 The story of Deborah, cf. Jgs 4,4-8.

in the same way: “If you go into the battle of life with us and our children, we dare to take up the fight again, and dare to hope we will be blessed with victory.”

“*We need the Blessed Mother,*” that is what the youth of our parish say – our young men and women. “Without the Mother Thrice Admirable it will be impossible to guard the lily of our purity and keep it without stain; it will be impossible to keep ourselves chaste so that we can enter matrimony with an undefiled heart, impossible to prepare ourselves for the battles of (single) life,³⁰ or – if God so will it – to choose a priestly or religious vocation.”

“*We need the Blessed Mother,*” chime the children. “Without a mother’s care we cannot grow in body and soul.” Perhaps they experience something like the Curé of Ars when he was a child. His father had assigned him hard work in the vineyard. It was too much for the little boy’s strength. In order to draw out every bit of strength and to fulfill his duty cheerfully, he took a small statue of Mary with him to the vineyard. He placed the statue about five paces ahead of him; then the work could begin. In his childlike simplicity he looked at Mary with a loving glance and then, with a plea from the depth of his heart, he asked her to help him as he put the spade to the ground. And it seemed as if an invisible power aided him. He knew he was working under the watchful eyes of the Mother Thrice Admirable, and that he was supported and carried by her power and strength. Soon he reached the place where the statue was. Again he walked five paces ahead, and the process repeated all over again. That is what he did until nightfall, and on the first day, under the eyes of his Mother Thrice Admirable, with her help, he had not only accomplished what his father had ordered him to do, but even more quickly than his older and stronger brother.³¹

“*We need the Blessed Mother,*” that is what your priests and pastors loudly and solemnly proclaim to the whole parish.

30 Insert found only in English texts and not in the German manuscript.

31 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk*, Vol. 4, No. 831: 7,3.

“The Mother Thrice Admirable is the great missionary – she must work miracles. Without her we could not dare to implore for sinners the grace of conversion and a true contrition in confession, or for the devout the grace of a deep and complete spiritual transformation. Without her, without our Mother Thrice Admirable, we would not dare to appear before God’s countenance either here on earth or in heaven above to give an account of our stewardship.”

And so we all want to form one united circle around our Blessed Mother and from the depths of our hearts repeat in unison as a response to the “Ecce Mater tua” of our crucified Lord: “Show that you are my Mother, show that you are the Mother of our parish, the Mother of our diocese, the Mother of our nation, the mother of the entire Church; yes, show that you are the Mother of the whole world.”

It is said that this same petition was once brought to our Blessed Mother by a pious soul, and the answer that he received from her was: “Show me first that you are my child and then I will show you that I am your Mother.” This is *the third answer* which we give our Mother Thrice Admirable at this solemn hour.

3. We Love the Blessed Mother

We want to show by our actions that we are her children. A genuine child avoids everything that causes his mother sadness and sorrow. The greatest sorrow we can cause our Mother Thrice Admirable is sin, for it was sin that murdered her divine Son, that pierced her heart with a sevenfold sword. We show we are children of our Mother Thrice Admirable, therefore, when we foster a deep hatred for sin, and as soon as we are torn away by passion and fall into sin, to find our way to holy confession. That is especially true now during Lent and this time of penance.

The mother of Louis IX would often say to her child, the later king of France, “My child, you know that I love you,

but if I knew that you would ever commit a mortal sin, I would rather have you immediately fall dead at my feet.”³²

We want to show, Mother Thrice Admirable, that we are your children.

A child makes his mother happy. He can read her every wish in her eyes. He celebrates all her feast days with great joy, and he finds no rest or peace until he has offered her those gifts which are dearest to her heart. With a joyful heart he desires to fulfill her words of instruction, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2,5).

Our Lord invites us to receive Holy Communion frequently. “Do whatever He tells you.” He urges us to lead a life of purity and generosity. “Do whatever He tells you.” He demands of us a life of unselfishness in the performance of good works. “Do whatever He tells you.” Yes, Our Lord even admonishes us to follow His example, even to die with Him on the cross if it should please the Father.

So in these coming days and weeks of Lent we wish to show our Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt that we have understood the words: “Ecce Mater tua.”

In the year 1929, at the time of the Marian Congress in Seville, Señor Ponte, the Spanish Minister of Education, delivered a very touching speech to the twenty thousand people who were present for the Congress. He said: My mother died when I was very young. Then my father, a man of genuine nobility, took me before the picture of Our Lady and told me, “My child, you do not live without a mother, for the Blessed Virgin is your Mother.” At these words, the minister’s eyes filled with tears and he said with intense feeling to the gathered assembly, “Love of our Blessed Mother is so deeply engraved upon my heart that in all the critical circumstances of my life I immediately breathe a prayer to the Mother of God, that prayer which is

32 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk*, Vol. 4, No. 847d: 7,1.

So very dear to the hearts of the Spanish people – the Hail Mary.”³³

We also declare with this Spanish Minister of Education that we cannot and do not wish to live without our Blessed Mother. Our love for her is written so deeply in our hearts that no power on earth, and no false tricks of Satan, can ever uproot it. Amen.

33 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk*, Vol. 1, No. 229: 2,1.

Second Sermon

MOTHER AND EDUCATOR FOR OUR TIME

During Lent, our Mother the Holy Church leads us day after day and week after week up Mount Calvary. Each year we have permitted her to take us by the hand, but in spite of this, the ascent is difficult for us to make each year anew. Would it not be expected – especially of us members of Holy Cross Parish – that Mount Calvary would have been conquered by us long ago, and that we would feel perfectly at home there? As often as we enter our beautiful parish church, the scene of Calvary in the sanctuary meets our eye: In the center Our Lord on the cross, at His right hand His Blessed Mother, at His left St. John.

What might be the reason that we still feel like strangers up there? Why do we not act more like the mountain climber who wanted to scale Mount Salève near Geneva? Since he was not familiar with the way, he entrusted himself to a guide. Both climbed the mountain light of heart. In the valley they were surrounded by a sea of fog which blocked their view in all directions and oppressed their spirits. They climbed higher and higher, but the fog did not clear. The mountaineer became impatient, but his guide calmed him and explained, “You must ascend to the cross, only at the cross everything will clear up.” The traveler was satisfied with the answer and let himself be led upwards. When he reached the summit and the cross there, he considered himself well-rewarded for all the sacrifices and difficulties of the ascent. An indescribable panorama met his eyes. Far beneath him were the city, Lake Geneva, the Rhône plain – but all were enveloped in a dense sea of fog. Above all this, the cross radiated in cloudless sunshine. There he found a deep sense of well-being; he could breathe more freely; all narrowness and oppression seemed to fly from his heart, and his eyes could not drink in enough of the magic beauty which

the sunlight had brought. And afterwards he found it hard to descend once more into that foggy plain, that dark valley.¹

Do not we, too, have a thoroughly competent guide who leads us to Mount Calvary? It is the Church which has performed this task with great skill for almost two thousand years. The sea of fog in which our daily lives are enveloped and which blocks the view of the sun is often impenetrable. Often we cannot see farther ahead of us than our own hand. The struggle for existence and pleasures of all kinds are patches of fog that so capture and occupy us that we cannot see through. Then we can hardly retain an eye of interest for anything else, least of all for the religious world, for God and our own immortal soul, for our crucified Lord, for death, eternal judgment, heaven and hell. So it is that we are far from the liberating joy of the mountain climber.

For us the mountain climber is St. Paul with his heroic outlook and his indomitable love for the cross. He surely had to endure more suffering than we do. More of life's mysteries burdened him than us. And yet he could say of himself: "Be it far from me to boast of anything but the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal 6,14). For him every cross he carried was a splinter of the cross of his Lord and Master, and his deep love for the Crucified gave him no rest. It drove him from land to land, from sea to sea. It made him the apostle of the nations. He found no rest until he, like his Master, was allowed to die a bloody death.

For us the mountain climber is Joseph of Leonissa (1556-1612). It almost sounds like a fairy tale to us weak-nerved and pleasure-seeking people of the twentieth century when we read about this holy Capuchin who had to undergo serious surgery. At that time the use of anesthesia was not known as it is today. In order to prevent any convulsions, he was supposed to be tightly bound. Joseph refused. "Why these straps and ties?" he asked. He pressed his crucifix firmly between his hands and told the doctors to begin. The doctors did as he wished, and

1 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* (note 27, p. 16), Vol. 1, No. 274:8,2.

no twitch, no sound of complaint interrupted their work. The sight of his crucified Lord had more effect on Joseph than all straps and ties.²

We are far removed from such calm and high-minded mountain climbing. But one thing we call our own: We do have the longing to emerge from this state of halfheartedness. We want to set up our tent on Mount Calvary permanently, want to become strong personalities like Paul and Joseph of Leonissa whom God can use as instruments for the renewal of the world.

Cardinal Stritch³ once said, “The American has within himself the timber from which to carve saints for our altars – all that is missing are the masterly hands to carve that wood.” We are made of the wood which the American (Cardinal) had in mind. We are made of the stuff from which something great can be formed. But who should carve such figures from the rough block of wood which we represent, (saints) such as world and Church need today in order to master the archenemy of Christendom and of all civilization? The answer was given by Our Lord from the cross: “Ecce Mater tua – Behold your Mother!” Behold the one who co-generated you, the one who nourishes you, the one who is the educator of God’s children here on earth and of the great saints and apostles in the Kingdom of God. Behold your Thrice Admirable Mother and Queen who wants to enter into a covenant of love with you.

It appears to be of tremendous importance to the living God, the One Who rules and guides world history, that His Mother be glorified. By using instruments that are childlike and humble, courageous and trusting, He wants to have Mary’s triumphal chariot drawn onto the battlefield of today’s crisis-filled era, and in that way regain peace for the world. That is why God never

2 Ibid., Vol. 1, No. 269:7,2.

3 Cardinal Samuel Stritch (1887-1958), American bishop and cardinal. He headed the diocese of Toledo, 1921-30; archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1930-39; and the archdiocese of Chicago, 1939-58, where he was named cardinal in 1946.

tires of repeating, through the lips of the Popes, the last will and testament of our Savior – Ecce Mater tua. God, however, is not satisfied with this...

God's Voice in the Apparitions of the Last Hundred Years

In order to win a hearing for the urgent desires of His heart, and in order to return to our world, which is so riled by hate and dis-sension, the peace for which it yearns, He also makes use of the lips of the Blessed Mother herself. By virtue of what is clearly a divine mandate, Mary shows herself to all Christianity in those apparitions of the last hundred years which the Church accepts as genuine. In the process, she has clearly made a point of showing herself to the world, indeed of emphatically drawing all attention to herself, and in that way impress on us the words, “Ecce Mater tua.”

She thereby plainly stresses three concepts:

1. She emphasizes her personal influence with God.
2. She draws to our attention her personal, tender concern for the welfare of human society.
3. In her motherly wisdom, she unbendingly and urgently demands of humanity the recognition of her power and kindness.

In other words, with unmistakable clarity she reveals her motherly power, her motherly kindness, and her motherly wisdom. That is how she interprets the words, “Ecce Mater tua.” And so we bow before her again and repeat the petition: Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt, pray for us. Show yourself to us and to our nation as the admirably powerful, the admirably kind, and the admirably wise Mother.

Towards this end, we want to investigate four visions⁴ and let them sink in until our hearts deeply comprehend the abundance

4 Referred to here are the apparitions of the Miraculous Medal (Paris, 1830), La Salette (southeastern France, 1846), Lourdes (southern France, 1858) and Fatima (Portugal, 1917). Although these four are implied, only the first two will be considered in any detail here.

and meaning of the motherhood of Our Lady for our time in its terrifying distress. We will therefore gladly hear, repeat, and answer the “Ecce Mater tua.”

In this sermon we will only deal with two visions. First we will consider each vision alone, so that we then may compare them with one another.

I

1. The Apparition of Catherine Labouré

The first vision takes us to the year 1830. Catherine Labouré (1806-1876), though still a novice in her convent, was given the task by Our Lady to have the Miraculous Medal with the well-known inscription “O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee” made and promoted. At that time she was called three times by a boy whom she assumed to be her guardian angel to go into the church at night. There in the sanctuary she saw the Blessed Mother clad in a long white dress and a blue veil. At her feet was a large globe and in her hands was a smaller one; these portrayed the world and each individual. Eyes turned upward, she lifted the little globe aloft to God in order to present and surrender it to Him. Her fingers were covered with precious rings which were set with many gems. Brilliant rays shone forth from the rings and her hands.

Our Lady lovingly explained to Catherine what she had seen in the imagery: “These rays,” she said, “symbolize the graces which I pour out upon the hearts of those who ask for them.” A short but very filled statement which clearly expressed the three components and tasks of her motherly office, thus bringing great joy to our hearts.

She is the one who pours out these graces. Strictly speaking, only God can give graces. Still, Mary says, “The graces which I pour out.” By that she expressly indicates her *motherly power* over the heart of God. She further emphasizes that she pours out graces upon mankind. Through this she shows her *motherly care* for all Christianity which she wants to lead to God. But in her *motherly wisdom* she wants to be asked for these graces.

Therefore she very clearly states that she pours out her graces upon those who ask her for them. In fact, she seems to have placed extra value on this asking. Thus she draws Catherine's attention to the fact that rays did not shine forth from all the gems, and in clarification added, "The gems without rays are the graces for which no one asks me."

During this Marian Year, innumerable many people raise their hands in prayer at Mary's throne. Our hands and hearts are also lifted up more frequently and fervently than at other times. They are raised to her in every need of body and soul, in our own hardship and that of others, in concern for the family and plight of our country, in the helplessness facing world and Church. How many gems on Mary's hands are now made to radiate and shine! How immeasurably vast might that ocean of grace be which is thus opened to tormented humanity! How extensive and how deep must and will be the effect on the destiny of the nations! How great is the hope we can share with the Holy Father for world peace and for the freedom of the Church and of all peoples! The Marian Year is indeed a chain of 365 Marian feast days and days of grace.

I say both in one breath: feast days and days of grace. What I want to say by that is explained to us by Vincent Pallotti. On the feast days of Mary he would joyfully exclaim, "Oh what a great celebration there is in heaven today, and how many sinners will be converted today through the intercession of our Blessed Lady!" One eyewitness reports that on such days Pallotti himself was "more joyful, more happy, more zealous, more fervent, and more radiant than on other days, which allows us to perceive the special graces which he was accustomed to receiving on these days."⁵

If we celebrate the Marian Year in the proper spirit, the floodgates of heaven will not merely be opened for one or the other day, but for every day of the whole year. Then we will experience how true it is that Marian days are days of grace,

5 Cf. Vincent Pallotti (note 22, p. 14), Vol. 1, p. 334.

and that a Marian Year means for us one enormous stream of graces. Thus at the end of the year it may not be difficult to gratefully confess with Pallotti, “I will praise the mercies of Mary into all eternity.”⁶

2. *The Apparitions at La Salette*

The second vision invites us to La Salette in France and to two shepherd children, an eleven-year-old boy and a fifteen-year-old girl. Both are watching their flocks. It is the year 1846. Suddenly the children see a noble woman sitting on a stone. She is bathed in radiant light and is crying. It is the Mother of God. She weeps over the impenitence of mankind. She threatens severe punishment if the people will not repent, but she also promises abundant blessings if they will come to their senses and find the way back to God. “If my people is unwilling to submit to God,” she says emphatically, “I will be forced to let go of the arm of my Son. It is so heavy that I can no longer restrain it. I have suffered long for your sake. In order to prevent my Son from turning away from you I must pray for you unceasingly. And yet you do not care. No matter how much you work and pray, you will never be able to sufficiently repay me for the burden I have taken upon myself for your sake.”

It should not be hard to see Mary’s motherly power, kindness, and wisdom in this vision, too, and to take in the “*Ecce Mater tua*” anew.

Her power is capable of holding back the just and punishing arm of divine Justice. Her influence on her divine Son is so great that He is held back from carrying out His judgement by her hand alone.

Her kindness towards mankind is even more clearly revealed. The Mother of Mercy suffers for the welfare of those given to her care, and she prays unceasingly for them that her divine Son does not leave the world, even so He has good reason to do so. Yes, she totally exhausts herself in her motherly concern

6 See note 25, p. 14.

for us, so much so that we will never be able to repay her for the effort she has made for our sake.

Her wisdom demands strict cooperation with this grace; that means, we must willingly subject ourselves to God, to His commandments, to the entire natural law, and – as she impressed upon the children later – that requires much, much prayer. Those who with mind and heart listen to and contemplate this vision in the spirit of faith, will not find it difficult to turn to the Mother of God who is also our mother in every circumstance and unconditionally entrust and surrender self and possession to her. With Cardinal Faulhaber⁷ they will repeat, “The Father of Mercy has not hung His graces in the sky like the stars, nor has He hidden them in the depth of the sea as He did His pearls: He has placed them in a mother’s hands and those are always ready to distribute them.”⁸

Those who lead a life in and with the Blessed Virgin will, on the basis of their own deep experience, joyfully confess with the Curé of Ars, “I have drawn graces from this heart so often that it would have been empty long ago if it were not inexhaustible.”⁹

No matter how great or hopeless our need as individual or community, our distress as family or nation, the Blessed Mother is *mightier* than the devil and his helpers’ helpers, is likewise mightier than all the princes and rulers of this world, mightier than all the frightful weapons of death of modern times. Therefore she can help us. She is endlessly *kind* – therefore she wants to help us. She is *wise* – therefore she expects the serious cooperation of all individuals, peoples, and nations everywhere. That is the clearly audible tone of the just described vision.

7 Cardinal Michael Faulhaber (1869-1952), bishop of Speyer, 1911-17, and archbishop of Munich and Freising, 1917-52, was among the most visible and vocal signs of Church authority in Germany between World War I and World War II.

8 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk*, Vol. 1, No. 229:4,1.

9 *Ibid.*, No. 229:7,1.

In the year 1906, Vesuvius – as it has so many times – erupted anew and spewed forth its sheaves of flame, spreading death and disaster far and wide. The flow of lava had already reached the first houses of the village Torre Annunziata when the village pastor, disregarding death and full of childlike trust hurried towards the stream of lava with a statue of the Blessed Virgin in his arms. He set the statue down and prayed out loud, “Hear me, dear Lady. Now help yourself and us! Turn back the destruction. If you do not do it, your image will be burned along with our village.” And as if guided by a hidden power, the great mass of lava suddenly stopped, turned aside, and then streamed past the village into the sea.¹⁰

With the Holy Father, we, too, confidently hope that Our Lady will hold the terrible lava stream of godless collectivism far from our country and nation and that she free the East from this frightful divine scourge.

II

When we compare the two visions, even without going into detail, we notice immediately in both cases how strongly Mary draws the attention to herself. Not only does she do this in the manner in which she reveals herself, but also in the words she speaks. Word and representation complement one another. They speak the same language; they speak an eloquent tongue.

1. That the Blessed Mother Draws Attention to Herself

First, the simple fact that the Blessed Mother visits this earth; that she, so to speak, leaves heaven and seeks concrete and living contact with mankind in order to be with us, to make us aware of her love and care, to teach us and show us the way out of the chaos of our modern times is a truth which really brings happiness and consolation. She proves in a way we can easily grasp, how strong and intimate the bond is which unites her to us, and how seriously she takes the responsibility

¹⁰ Ibid., No. 229:8,5.

towards us which God has entrusted to her for all times, even though we have made ourselves unworthy of her care through numerous faults, through our ingratitude and inconsideration, through sin and willfulness.

How happy we would be if our own mother to whom we owe our life, our physical and spiritual development and education would, after her death, come back to us from eternity in order to continue her educational task, in order to console and encourage us through her presence and through her words. How happy we would be if she would do this in our loneliness and confusion, in the uncertainty and darkness of life and in these unparalleled earth-shaking times, and in that way reunite the bonds of love, and through her instructive words and whole appearance clearly show us the road God wishes us to travel in our modern times! How much more conscious would I be of our belonging together, of the bond between this world and the next, between heaven and earth! How deep would the feeling of security and shelteredness take root and drive out all untimely anxiety and fear! How easy, on the basis of this experience, to live constantly in deep spiritual union with our Mother and to live in her and with her and from her and in that way become blind to the allurements that come from other created things, which want to draw us down into the abyss of sin and hell! Obviously, we then would be deaf to all false prophets of the present age!

That is how it went with St. Paul after his experience on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9,3ff.). From that time on, he knew only Christ, and at that, Christ the Crucified (cf. 1 Cor 2,2). Everything else he considered – as he put it – rubbish, be it honor and esteem, worldly goods or sensual pleasures (cf. Phil 3,8). That's how deep and lasting the impression was which the vision of the Lord made upon him.

Of course – as we must admit – we are not Catherine Labouré, nor are we the shepherd children of La Salette. We have never been privileged to experience a vision. That is why the effect of these apparitions will not be lasting for us. But

the Blessed Mother showed herself to the visionaries for our sake, too. The message which she revealed to them in word and image also applies to us. If both are to have their effect on us, then we must often make both the object of our meditation. Maybe then, in the course of time, we, too, will receive graces similar to those the blessed visionaries received.

In order to ease our meditation, it may be worthwhile to spiritually visit a shrine of Our Lady. There also – in a way similar to the apparitions – heaven touches earth in a special way. There Mary has settled in a special way in order to care for the sorrow-filled and lost children of Eve with an especially warm, motherly love.

Perhaps we will then be touched like Bishop O'Connor was when he dedicated a chapel of the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt in Madison near the (Queen of Apostles) Seminary. Deeply moved, he stated in his sermon: It is as if I heard our Blessed Mother whisper here in the shrine during the celebration.¹¹ Since that time many, many of those who have come to pray and have knelt in that shrine have expressed themselves similarly, admitting, "How well one can pray here, and how much peace of heart we receive by coming to this shrine!" That is easy to understand: the Blessed Mother dwells and has her throne there and wants to prove herself from there in a singular way as the Mother Thrice Admirable. As St. Peter once joyfully exclaimed when he saw the glory of the Lord on Tabor, "It is good to be here. Let us erect three tents!" (Mt 17,4) that

11 Paraphrase of the bishop's words. Referred to is the dedication of the Schoenstatt Shrine in Madison, Wisconsin, on June 20, 1953, the year before the sermons were prepared. Bishop William O'Connor (1886-1973), bishop of Madison (1946-67) presided at this dedication. In the best available transcription of his sermon, the words are as follows: "I am certain our Blessed Lady is here today. I can feel her presence. I am convinced that she is here. While I was sitting here and while I was celebrating Holy Mass, I seemed to hear her whisper. I am certain the ground we are standing on is holy ground." For more information, see Jonathan Niehaus, *A History of Schoenstatt in the United States* (Waukesha, WI USA: Schoenstatt Movement, 1983), pp. 26-29.

is how all feel when they enter one of these favorite places of our Blessed Mother in the spirit of faith.

That is very likely the reason that urges us on in the Marian Year to offer the Mother Thrice Admirable a shrine on our parish grounds.¹² She should come from heaven for us, too, and settle among us. As the great missionary, she should take the reins of our parish in her hands. She should be our educator, our leader in every moment of life. In a special way she should guide all the members of our parish through the dark portals of death (to appear) before the face of the divine Judge.

2. *Why the Blessed Mother Draws Attention to Herself*

When we contemplate these two visions in our moments of quiet, we feel obliged to ask *why the Blessed Mother draws attention to herself with such striking words.*

a) The fact that she does so is beyond doubt. Through the children of La Salette she tells us that she prays for us unceasingly that all our prayers mean little without her prayer. She draws our attention to the fact that she suffers for us, in other words, that our salvation costs her something; that, above all, it is she who holds back the arm of avenging justice, but that the sins of mankind are so great and numerous that it is almost impossible for her to continue to stay the punishing judgement of God. But even this is not enough. She amplified her words through actions. She wept painfully and bitterly over the impenitence of mankind. She weeps because she must threaten us with harsh punishment. She weeps because God's commandments are so little heeded, because, through this, her Divine Son is crucified anew and the sevenfold sword again pierces her heart (cf. Lk 2,35).

Even now, her personal interest in the welfare and woes of her children here on earth is truly strong – even though she enjoys the eternal bliss of heaven. Neither can we say that she doesn't

12 This urging was indeed realized with the dedication of the Schoenstatt Shrine at Holy Cross Parish on October 18, 1954, Cf. *A History of Schoenstatt in the United States*, pp. 39-42. See also below, Fourth Sermon, p. 96, and Sixth Sermon, p. 135.

care for us. This would be as untrue today as it was when she still walked on earth in mortal flesh, when she went in haste over the mountains to help her cousin with the delivery and birth of St. John (cf. Lk 1,39); when she helped the newlyweds at Cana out of their predicament and towards that end even engaged the miracle-working powers of her divine Son (cf. Jn 2,3ff.); when out of love for us she permitted the sword to pierce her heart, that is to say, she accepted loss of every kind, above all when she stood beneath the cross and offered up her only begotten Son to the heavenly Father out of love for us (cf. Jn 19,25).

She still carries us in her heart. She never casts us out even when we heap one sin upon another. “Out of sight, out of mind,” is how it frequently is with those who only love each other superficially, but not with the Blessed Mother. Her thoughts and her love are always directed towards us. She showers on us all her care. Everything that she was and was allowed to do for our Savior while on earth, she wishes to be and do for all her children until the end of time. She, therefore, never lets us out of her sight. She knows all our needs, little and great. She carries all of them in her heart. She presents them to our Savior and to our heavenly Father. She never wearies of repeating day after day, hour after hour, “Lord, they have no wine” (Jn 2,3).

She ever says: They have no wine of earthly security, no wine of freedom from difficult temptations, no wine of interior peace, no wine of fidelity to God and God’s commandments, no wine of the fear and love of God.

She does this even when it seems that she has withdrawn from us, when she appears to be silent – in much the same way that God can be silent, when heaven does not open in answer to our prayer and pleading, when He seems uninterested in our worries and needs, when there is no response from above, when no star shines into the darkness of our times and no help is in sight. Mary answers all of this clearly through the children of La Salette: “I pray for you unceasingly.”

It is good that we are reminded in this manner of just how conscientiously the Blessed Virgin exercises the motherly office

which she was so solemnly given for our sake for all times including the darkest hours of our lives. These dangers would otherwise be too great; that, in the struggle for existence, in the difficult battle for our daily bread and for our personal welfare, in the economic struggle for existence and in the turmoil that besets our souls due to the problems of modern life, we might forget our Blessed Mother and her tender care for us; though we have heard the words “Behold your Mother!” from the lips of Our Lord, we have practically no idea of what to do with it; we know how to apply it to the past, but fail to recognize the fact that it applies today just as surely as when it was uttered the first time. How consoling it is then to hear these blessed words from her own lips: “Behold your Mother!” That is the message she sends us through Catherine Labouré. Through it she draws our attention to the fact that we receive all graces through her; but that many graces are not yet given because we do not ask her for them. Let us listen to her exact words and allow each word to have its full effect. She says expressly: “These precious stones are the graces for which no one asks me.” She does not leave it as a merely general “for which no one asks.” She could hardly have emphasized more clearly her own person as well as her mission and her interest in us.

b) Though such a statement is consoling and causes us to rejoice, it does not prevent us from asking the question again: How is it possible that the Blessed Mother, in the visions we have described, places herself so plainly in the foreground, that she does not tire of repeatedly stressing her contribution to the redemption of the world? Is this not a contradiction of the picture that Sacred Scripture gives of her? There she always stands in the background; she quietly makes room for Our Lord. The picture of her which is portrayed there is so clearly identified with that of Our Lord that she, as an individual with her own personal interests, does not enter the picture at all.

She appeared in life as God had planned it from all eternity, and she played her part in this life and in heaven according to this plan. In every situation and every stage of her life, she

was perfectly absorbed in the person and interests of our Savior. She exists for his sake and only for his sake and for the sake of the redemption of the world; for that alone is her breathing; for that alone is her working, for that alone her suffering, for that alone her renunciation of self, for that alone was she assumed into heaven, for that alone did she become Queen of Heaven and Earth. She wants nothing for herself; she is concerned only with the person and work of the Lord. It is this concern for Christ which is her happiness and bliss in heaven.

If St. Therese, the Little Flower, could say that she wanted to spend her time in heaven sending a shower of roses upon the earth, how much more will Mary, the Helpmate of Christ, spend herself in loving concern for the physical and spiritual welfare of the children of God here on earth – these children who, in the deepest sense of the word, are her children.

But now the troublesome question returns: How is such selfless service as found in Mary's life to be reconciled with the attention she draws to her own person as we have seen in the described visions?

The answer should not be too difficult for those who can see more deeply into the relationship between Our Lord and our Blessed Mother. She is more than just His Mother in the physical sense; she is also His *official Helpmate in the entire work of redemption*. Without her freely given Fiat He did not wish to become man. Without her free consent He did not wish to die on the cross; without her, that is, without her cooperation, He does not want to dispense His graces. He therefore willed to have her with Him at all the significant moments of the work of redemption during His life on earth. That does not only apply to the scene of the annunciation, not only to Mount Calvary. His first miracle of grace, the sanctification of St. John in the womb of his mother, was worked in connection with Mary. The same applies to His first physical miracle, the changing of water into wine. In both cases the cooperation of the Blessed Mother is clearly evidenced. In the first instance Elizabeth solemnly declared, "The moment your greeting sounded in my

ears, the baby leapt in my womb for joy” (Lk 1,44). In the second case the Blessed Mother even had to overcome the seeming disapproval of Our Lord. In plain words He stated. “Woman, how does this concern of yours involve me? My hour has not yet come” (Jn 2,4). And yet he fulfills her request and works the miracle. He also works it for His apostles’ sake, for we read, “... and His disciples believed in him” (Jn 2,11). From all this we can only draw the conclusion that in the divine plan, Our Lord and His Blessed Mother are united forever in an intimate union of love, life, destiny, and mission for this world and for all eternity.

The Union of Christ and Mary

“What God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mt 19,6). These words may also be applied to the relationship between these two holy persons. In the divine scheme they live in full and eternal unity. Mary knows only Christ and His interests as the great purpose of her life, and He does not merely draw her into the closest vicinity of His Heart; He joins her everlastingly in the sense of the divine words, “Let us make him a helpmate like unto himself” (Gen 2,18). That is how she became the second Eve of the second Adam. The whole content of her life can be derived from these two passages: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1,38) and, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2,5). And He devoted Himself to her in the most important hour of His life. There on Calvary He moved Mary into the foreground with great love and care. It was at that moment that He made His last will and testament and spoke the words: “Behold your Mother! – Behold your son!” (Jn 19,27.26). These are both directive and creative words.

They are directive because they show the way for both the Blessed Mother and for human society. For all eternity Mary should consider mankind her child and should care for it. That is why Christ said, “Ecce filius tuus! – Behold your son!” And mankind should ever consider and love Mary as its loyally caring Mother.

Both of these directives are, at the same time, creative because they profoundly effect what they say. They give to the Blessed Virgin a motherly warm, a creatively rich and tender heart deeply concerned about the cares and needs of her children. But to the children they also give the warm and open heart of a child, with the indelibly tender affection of a child. That explains the secret bond of sympathy that exists between the Blessed Mother and Christianity; and also the secret sympathy of our own hearts (for Mary). It is a sympathy that is so deeply rooted within us that it cannot be easily destroyed. Often this bond survives and continues to function in souls even when their inner unity with Christ and God has been severed. The spiritual history of Christianity through the centuries can cite numerous examples to support this claim.

“What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”

This is an immutable law in the Kingdom of God. It also applies to our own lives. That which Sacred Scripture reports of St. John – “and from that hour the disciple took her into his care” (Jn 19,27) – must become a norm for our whole life and daily striving. She belongs in the house of our hearts; she belongs in our churches and in our homes. She belongs there – not separated from Our Lord, but intimately united with Him in indissoluble two-in-oneness.

What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

This also applies to our educational activity at home and in school, in our church societies and working places. And so we pray with great fervor.

“Let me extend the cross and the image of Mary
To all nations as the sign of redemption,
So that the unity intended by the Father’s plan of love
May never be separated.”¹³

13 From the hymn “O Holy Cross” at the conclusion of Father Kentenich’s “Way of the Cross of God’s Instruments.” This is part of *Heavenwards*, the collection of prayers which he wrote while imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camp in Dachau from 1942 to 1945. For the original German text see *Himmelwärts* (Vallendar-Schoenstatt: Schoenstatt-Verlag, 1945, 1973), p. 90.

Mary's Role for Mankind

When we now ask Our Lord why He draws His Mother so closely to Himself, why He united her so intimately with His own Person and His work – all in all, why He places her so much in the foreground that He would give her to us from the cross as His last will and testament, then He will answer very clearly and certainly: It is the plan of the Eternal Father.

God created human society in the image of the Triune God. Just as the Blessed Trinity is bound together in the manner of a family, human society should also be a family. In this family Mary is the Mother. She is the magnet, she is the lure, the line, and the sinker which God has let down to earth and uses to draw human hearts to Himself and, through her, bring them into an intimate union of love with Himself. Mary is not like a signpost on the road which points the direction but then stays behind without accompanying the hiker. Just as a mother in the natural order takes her children with her to God, so does the heavenly Mother. The more we are at home in her heart, the more quickly and surely will she find us a home with herself in God.

God could also draw us directly to Himself without a magnet, which means He could give us graces without Mary. But since He has decided it differently, we must follow the law which He has given. St. Bernard tells us: God simply determined that all graces should come to us through Mary.¹⁴ And Leo XIII points out that graces flow from the heart of Mary.¹⁵ God gives us the graces, Our Lord has merited them for us, and the Blessed Virgin intercedes them for us. Because God has decided it should be that way, we are simply dependent on her and her love for us, and our love for her cannot be great enough. But, once again, that does not mean that whoever dedicates himself first

14 Cf. Pius XI, encyclical "Ingravescentibus malis," September 29, 1937; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 338.

15 Cf. Leo XIII, encyclical "Jucunda semper," September 8, 1894; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 155.

to the Sacred Heart and then makes his consecration to the Blessed Mother does so because Our Lady could or would give him something which Our Lord cannot give. By no means! Whoever consecrates himself to both Hearts, whoever turns to both with his plea, is merely conforming to the order of grace and drawing diligently from all the sources of grace which God has made available to us according to His plan. It is always God who gives us grace; it is always the God-Man who has merited the graces for us; and it is always the Blessed Mother who intercedes for us and who, in a certain sense, has even co-merited them for us under the cross. Therefore, whoever gives and consecrates himself to Our Lady and who prays to her gives a wholehearted yes to the complete plan of God, and he may consequently expect an immense divine blessing.

Nothing Without You – Everything Through You, O Mary

We should now understand what is meant when we repeat these words: We are dependent on the Blessed Mother and her love for us, and we cannot love her enough in return. In the future, the fundamental law of our lives and our love, of our prayers and our actions, of our thinking and loving should be: Nothing without you, Mother Thrice Admirable, but everything, even the greatest and most difficult, through you.

“*Nothing without you,*” is what the centuries of Christianity confess using the words of the great Italian poet Dante:

“In heaven you are grace’s noonday torch,
To earthly wanderers, hope’s living spring:
So great, so gracious, so chosen,
That whoever seeks, but not through you,
Attempts to fly unwinged – and falls.”¹⁶

“*Everything, even the most difficult, through you.*” This is what the Church prays in St. Bernard’s Memorare: “(Remember, O most gracious Virgin, that) never was it known, that anyone who sought your help was left unaided.”

16 Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, 33, 10-15.

Above the altar of grace in the shrine of Our Lady of Altoetting in Bavaria, we find the words *Probatum est* – It is proven. What is proven? That the Blessed Mother has, in innumerable cases, shown herself to be the joy of the Church triumphant, the help of the Church militant, and the consolation of the Church suffering. Therefore we bow before her and proclaim with fullest joy and gratitude: Mother Thrice Admirable, pray also for us.

Probatum est: It is proven that in millions upon millions of cases the Blessed Mother has shown herself to be the Help of Christians, the Refuge of Sinners, the Consolation of the Afflicted here on earth. Therefore we pray a second time: Mother Thrice Admirable, pray for us, too! Show yourself admirable to us also, as the Help of Christians, as the Refuge of Sinners, as the Consoler of the Afflicted.

Probatum est: Countless people have experienced in life and death the protection of the Mother Thrice Admirable as the Virgin of Virgins, as the Virgin most Pure, as the Virgin Undeiled. Therefore we pray a third time: Mother Thrice Admirable, prove to us and to all whose purity is endangered that you are the Virgin of Virgins, the Virgin most Pure, the Virgin Undeiled.

Probatum est: The Litany of Loreto never tires of confirming that Our Lady is the Queen of Apostles, the Queen of Martyrs, the Queen of Confessors. So we pray a fourth time: Mother Thrice Admirable, show yourself admirable in our lives as Queen of the Apostles, too, as Queen of Martyrs, as Queen of Confessors.

We would never come to an end if we were to mention all the graces which the children of Eve have received from their treasurer, through their aqueduct of divine graces,¹⁷ in this valley of tears down through the millennia. We would have to repeat without end: *Probatum est, probatum est!*

17 St. Bernard (*Quadrag. de Evangelio aeterno, Serm. X,a.3,c.3*) refers to Mary as “aqueduct” of God’s graces, a title which Pope Pius X, encyclical “*Ad diem illum laetissimum*,” February 2, 1904; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 234.

Mary, the Easiest, Surest, and Shortest Way

There is a profound kernel of divine wisdom in the divine scheme which gives Our Lady such an outstanding position in His Kingdom. The way which God has chosen to come to mankind should be the way we choose to go to God. This way is Mary. Pope Pius X calls it the easiest, surest, and shortest way to the renewal of our lives in Christ, and to a deep union with God the Father.¹⁸

Perhaps you are worrying about your eternal salvation: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

Perhaps your soul is martyred by the realization that your husband's soul is in great danger: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

Perhaps your children are teenagers; the influence of a worldly environment is trying to topple the walls which your love and faithfulness have erected within their hearts: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

Perhaps the world and the devil are struggling for your heart and the hearts of your loved ones: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

Perhaps laziness and thoughtlessness or the bad example of your surroundings keep your family away from the confessional and the communion rail and the altar: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

Perhaps the insecurity of our times and of the conditions within your lives do not permit you to find interior rest and peace: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

Perhaps your health is broken and your life's strength is ebbing away: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

18 Cf. Pius X, encyclical "Ad diem illum laetissimum," February 2, 1904; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 224, see also Nos. 227, 234.

Perhaps financial difficulties have suddenly entered your life, and competition threatens to send you to your ruin: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

And when death reaches out its cold hands to touch your heart, when you are suffering the agony of dying, when your eyes are fading: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

And when you are facing the Eternal Judge and must give an account of all your words and actions: Do not forget the surest and easiest way, do not forget Mary!

God, Who created the world without man, does not want to redeem it without man's cooperation. This is what St. Augustine tells us. He wants the freely given cooperation of His free creatures. And when He places His Mother over all creation and bestows on her the unique task of being His official and permanent Helpmate, then He does so for the humiliation of the devil: Just as Satan brought sin and misfortune to the world through a woman, it is through a woman that his head shall be crushed. Moreover, He does so in order to restore to woman her honor: Just as the world was dragged into the abyss of destruction through Eve's fall, so will the second Eve be used as instrument for our redemption. He does so in order to repay Mary with love and gratitude for all the care which she so abundantly gave Our Lord. And finally, He does so in order to ease our way to the Heart of God. After all, our heavenly Father placed the yearning for a mother within our hearts in order to turn us toward our heavenly Mother and to let us be unfailingly guided by her into His own Heart.

Has not the question been answered now as to why Our Lord desires to see His Mother honored and loved by all creation?

Whoever understands this answer will not find it hard to grasp also why the Blessed Mother points so clearly and emphatically to herself in the described visions while repeating the same words in varying forms: "Ecce Mater tua!" The answer is always the same: That is how God our Eternal Father intended it to be. And as in Sacred Scripture, so, too, in the apparitions:

Mary appears in her official position as permanent Helpmate of Our Lord, and never as a private individual with her own special interests.

Since God has given us Mary as Mother, as Mother in the truest sense of the word He also wants us to love her genuinely in that capacity, just as He expects us to love our own mother because she gave us our natural life, nourishment, and education. And because God also expects earthly parents to require reverence, love, and obedience from their children so that they can fulfill their task as educators, the same may also be said of our heavenly Mother. Since she is truly our Mother, that is, the Mother of divine life within us, then in genuine motherhood she has a threefold task concerning us: She co-generates or co-merits this divine life for us beneath the cross; she nourishes it constantly – which she does through her mediation of graces; and she must form us into perfect reflections of Christ until we are one with Him in every situation, until we have reached Calvary and hang with our Savior on the cross. She is and will always be our Mother Thrice Admirable!

But she cannot draw us to these heights if we do not truly and deeply love her, if we are not ready – out of love – to let ourselves be shaped by her, even when it means she must cut and hurt us. Therefore Mary must desire that we love her, just as God demands it of us. It is not sufficient – at least not in this day and age – that she deserves this love and merits it ever anew through the many graces which she obtains for us in every situation. She must expressly draw the attention of her forgetful and superficial children of the twentieth century to the fact that it is their duty to give her their hearts so that she may transform and shape them into the Heart of Jesus and the Triune God.

She must do this today more frequently than in other ages because such towering education is, in the face of the confusion of the times, *especially difficult* today; because, in the face of the urgency of our times, powerful and holy personalities are *especially necessary* for the renewal of the world; and because

in the face of the spiritual and emotional fragmentation of modern man, it is *especially healing* in its effect.

We do not want to nor may we forget that we face a totally new age. World history has thus far been divided into ancient, medieval, and modern times, but now we stand on the threshold of the “newest times.” This new age, with its attendant labor pangs of distressing intensity, is sweeping through all peoples and nations. The foundations are now being laid for centuries to come. The way the dice fall today is where they will lie for a long, long time. That is why our Blessed Mother, as official Christ-giver, Christ-bearer, and Christ-bringer, is so concerned that her educational task for mankind be fulfilled in the most perfect manner possible. For this reason God apparently intends to visibly place her before the eyes of mankind and to call out again and again: Behold *your Mother* and, above all, behold *your Educator!*

Now we understand why Our Lady herself never tires of appearing here on earth and of drawing our attention to herself – in other words, why she never tires of exacting sincere childlike love with inner openness and willingness to cooperate with her educative intent and why she never tires of repeating the words “Ecce Mater tua” in one form and then another while pointing out her own person.

What our Blessed Lady says of herself during these visions, and the manner in which she reveals herself is nothing more than a visible application and a graphic description of Our Lord’s words for our modern era: “Ecce Mater tua!” Because her entire *being and acting is focused on Christ* and because her entire interest is, in the end, directed towards Him and His cause alone – she has no separate or personal interests of her own – it follows that she uses her influence, as always, for the sole purpose of leading her followers to Christ and – in Him – to the Father. She does this in the very same way that – in accordance with God’s designs – any good Christian mother considers it her favorite task to lead her children to their father. She sees it her task to take her children’s hearts as they are confided to

her, to accept them and then, united with her own heart, present them as one heart to the father. That is where the two-in-oneness between Christ and His Mother celebrate their greatest triumphs today: He will never tire of repeating: “Ecce Mater tua.” She willingly accepts these words from His lips but then unceasingly and effectively points to her Son, repeating, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2,5). Moreover, she carries all her children in her own heart into the heart of God.

Thus when she demands our cooperation, when she expressly wants us to turn to her, then she is only following God’s own educative practice. Did He, too, not say, “Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you” (Mt 7,7)? Do not the words, “Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt 7,21) come from Him? It is the same thought as that which the Holy Father recently expressed through his personal physician, Dr. Lolli. The doctor said that the Holy Father especially regretted that the children of the light show so little effective unity, team-spirit, activity, and readiness for sacrifice, and that the good are in danger of being overwhelmed by lukewarmness and sloth. Pope Pius XII also felt how strong the disparity is between the cries of “Evviva il Papa” (Long live the Pope) and the practical realization of these words through a life in accordance with the teachings of the Pope and the Church.

Behold your Mother, Protector, and Educator

Here we stand before great laws in the Kingdom of God, before basic questions and foundations of divine educative wisdom from which no one can be exempted. In the end it is God’s love as Educator which causes Him to place such demands on us. It is not without reason that the Eternal Love says the following of itself: “Even if a mother forgets her child, I will not forget you. I have written you upon the palms of my hands” (Is 49, 15f.). It is love, therefore, which causes God to demand so much of us. It is that same love which occasions

the Blessed Mother to descend, as it were, to this earth again and to repeatedly draw our attention to herself and to her mission in the Kingdom of God.

After all these considerations are we still surprised by such a fact? Why, if there is reason to be astonished, then it should be at the fact that the Blessed Mother is forced into following such a course of action. Does that not imply that we earthly pilgrims have forgotten that she, in all truth and reality, is our Mother, and that from heaven she has the task of protecting Christianity and educating us for the perilous times which we now face: that we have not been sufficiently aware of the entire significance of God's words "Ecce Mater tua"?

If we, too, belong to that category of Christians, then we want to use this Lent to develop a keen eye and ear for these truths and become more willing to follow (God's directives). From now on we want to see Mary as God sees her, as the permanent helpmate of Our Lord in the entire work of redemption, especially in her position as the protectress and educator of today's menaced Christianity.

Thus we desire that in the future, too, she be the protectress and educator who is able to fulfill the longing of Cardinal Stritch and carve saints for our altars from the wood out of which we Americans are made. We want to be the people in which she – as Sacred Scripture puts it – "takes root," where she "can find rest as in the inheritance of the Lord" (cf. Sir 24,12). For that reason, these words apply to that people: "Blessed the man watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts" (Pry 8,34). Blessed is he who spends his entire life near me, who through his dedication enters into a covenant of love with me and shapes his life accordingly. We Americans with our world mission want to become nothing less than Mary's people, a people that takes the dedication to Mary seriously which our forefathers made

many decades ago,¹⁹ and in whose heart and ears the words of the nations' great Mother and Educator have resounded countless times since: "I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue. Come over to me all you who desire me, and be filled with my fruits" (cf. Sir 24,18).²⁰

Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, we understand what you wish to tell us. With the Marian Sodalities we kneel before your picture today and pray fervently from the depths of our hearts: I choose you again today; I honestly, freely, and joyfully choose you anew each day as my Queen, my Protectress, and my Educator.²¹ In the future be and prove yourself my Mother Thrice Admirable more than ever before. Above all, be our Protector and our Educator!

Be our Protector! "We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God."²² Everywhere we have the feeling that the ground is collapsing under our feet, that the world is at the brink of a great abyss into which we could fall at any moment. This also

- 19 Reference may be being made here to the act of Father Jacques Marquette (French missionary and Jesuit, 1637-1675, who explored the Mississippi River basin and established Indian missions in the Great Lakes region), who in 1674 dedicated his Indian mission and the whole land to Mary; or to the act of dedication of the United States to Mary under the patronal title of the Immaculate Conception, which was made by the U.S. bishops in the provincial council of Baltimore in 1846.
- 20 The Vulgate translation is relied on here. Modern biblical research has determined that the "mother of fair love" verse is not to be found in any but a few of the Greek manuscripts, and most current translations consequently omit this verse (numbered variously as v. 18 or v. 24f). It would be necessary to read this quote in the New American Bible, for instance, between verses 17 and 18: "I am the mother of fair love, of fear of God, of knowledge, and of devout hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me is all hope of life and of virtue."
- 21 This sentence is a variation on a key part of the solemn consecration prayer of the Marian Sodality: "I choose you for my queen, my advocate, my mother... Accept me as your servant, your client, and your child."
- 22 First line of the ancient "Sub tuum praesidium," the oldest extant Marian prayer (from the 3rd century): "To you do we fly, O holy Mother of God."

applies to us Americans, even though we are militarily prepared like scarcely any other country. That is why we have a secret fear of the coming future. Who shall be the great protector of our nation? Who shall take our destiny in hand? “Ecce Mater tua!” People of America, behold your Mother – your powerful, kind, and wise Protector! Behold your Mother Thrice Admirable!

A visionary, spiritually gifted by God and recipient of the stigmata, cried out joyfully in an ecstasy one day, “The storm has calmed without reaching those who took refuge in her!” When she was later asked about this, she explained what her exclamation signified. In her vision it had been as if she had seen Mount Calvary before her, and the cross on which the divine Redeemer died for the world. At the foot of the cross was the Sorrowful Mother clad in a great, wide mantle. The entire mountain was covered by heavy, black thunderclouds which were rent by piercing streaks of lightning. A large throng of people approached in long procession to find refuge under Our Lady’s mantle before the storm broke. The visionary was afraid that this throng, despite its hurry, would be caught in the storm before reaching the protection of the mantle. Her fear was unfounded, for all, without exception, arrived safely and found a happy sanctuary and liberating protection. That was the reason why the stigmatist exclaimed in joy, “The storm has calmed without reaching those who took refuge in her!”

When we dedicate ourselves, our loved ones, and our entire nation each day to the Blessed Mother, when we seal a covenant of love in this manner daily, then we and our country have a right to stand under Mary’s mantle. Perhaps we can then hope that our country will be spared a grave catastrophe. But if in God’s designs it should not be so, we can be sure that our Blessed Mother will still prove herself as the great educator of our nation, and that, through the storms of the times, it will become as perfectly similar as possible to our crucified Lord, the victor over death and Satan.

In 1918 a young soldier²³ died a hero's death on the battlefields of France. He had made a covenant of love with the Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt in her shrine. Afterwards he wanted to be entirely educated by her and used as her instrument. He begged the Blessed Mother to come to dwell in Schoenstatt²⁴ as the great educator, to take his own education in hand, and at the same time to create a great Marian movement of renewal and education. Through this covenant of love he made himself entirely dependent on his dear Mother Thrice Admirable, willingly and trustingly permitted her to shape him in every situation of his life, and offered her not only all the sacrifices which he brought as contributions to the capital of grace – just as we do in our parish, as the chest in front of the altar of our Mother Thrice Admirable shows – but also gave to her in noble generosity his very life. Our Lady accepted his gift. He died in France with the reputation of sanctity. The Mother Thrice Admirable took his education so seriously, she tested him in every virtue so heroically and he had so willingly allowed himself to be educated and tested and transformed into Christ, that there is good reason to believe that he will be beatified in the near future. So many favors have already been received through his intercession that the Church has been able to open the process for his beatification. And the movement of renewal for which he desired to be a seed has been abundantly blessed. Schoenstatt has become a place of grace with a form all its own, and the Schoenstatt Movement wants to help impress the countenance of Christ on the nations, as instrument in the hand of our Three Times Admirable Mother and Queen.

23 Joseph Engling (1898-1918). He got to know Schoenstatt through contact with Father Kantenich while going to school in the minor seminary in Schoenstatt, West Germany (near Koblenz) in the time that the movement was first developing. For more about his life, see Father Alexander Menningen, *Joseph Engling, Master of Everyday Life* (Waukesha, WI, USA; Schoenstatt Movement, 1982).

24 In the shrine in Schoenstatt. West Germany.

25 The beatification process was opened October 4, 1951.

Yes, our Blessed Mother knows how to carve statues of saints for our altars. Therefore we ask you, Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, from now on, be the great Educator and Protector of our American nation so that it can fulfill its mission for the world. Amen.

Third Sermon

MARY'S MEDIATING POSITION

There are divine words whose creative power can only slowly be grasped in their complete fullness by our limited human intellect. That is just as true when the intellect is immersed in the light of faith. In painstaking research, the best minds have been at work year after year and century after century to remove the enveloping veils – and still they come to no end. New treasures are constantly being revealed, new vistas are ever being opened to our astounded eyes. Among these words are those of the last will and testament of our dying Savior: “Ecce Mater tua – Behold your Mother” (Jn 19,27).

The very fact that they were among the last words which His parched lips spoke gives us an inkling of their importance. Just before one closes one's eyes in death one does not deal with matters of trifling importance. It is always extremely important matters that are dealt with then. If that is true for ordinary mortals, how much more for the God-Man, the Savior of the world, Who was surely conscious of the unique importance of that moment. It was the moment around which all of world history revolves. He knew that. He saw the eyes of millennia turned toward Him. What He would say and do in that moment would set the course for humanity's future. It would determine their entire lives – indeed, their whole eternity. Millions upon millions of souls would turn to Christ the Crucified, would consider HIS words of instruction, would live in Him and with Him. After the fashion of this instruction they will live and suffer, die and rise again. The dying Redeemer of the world knew all this, and it profoundly influenced every deed and every word in His hour of death.

On the night before Passion Sunday, a twelve-year-old girl once came to a missionary. She kissed his hand and said, “Father, now it is Passion time, isn't it?” “Yes, my child,” was his answer. The child begged, “Please give me a holy card.” “What kind of a holy card should it be?” “I would like one,” she said, “that shows our Savior with the crown of thorns and his bloodied

countenance.” “And why that particular picture?” “Because it is Passion time, and I would like to have his picture before my eyes in order to think about Him all the time, and to mourn with Him until Easter.” This is true wisdom from the mouth of a child: “I would now like to have the suffering Lord before my eyes night and day.”

A similar story is told about a hermit. Three monks came to visit him one day in order to discuss their spiritual life. Stephen, the hermit, listened to them in silence. No word passed from his lips. The surprised monks finally questioned him, “Father, why do you not answer us? We make this trip especially to see you and to hear your wise counsel.” Stephen answered, “I am sorry, I am afraid I have not been listening to you. But what little knowledge that I can give to you, I will gladly share: Day and night I have but one image before my eyes – Our Lord as He hangs on the cross.” Again Stephen fell silent, and the monks slipped quietly away.¹

Mother of the Christian People

Whoever contemplates our crucified Lord, even if only in a superficial manner, whoever lets His last words sink into his soul, cannot overhear the God-Man’s creative *twofold mandate*: “Ecce Mater tua! Ecce filius tuus!” (Behold your Mother, behold your son!). He cannot overlook the Sorrowful Mother as she stands beside the blood-covered Sorrowful Man.

This “Ecce Mater tua” sweeps through the ages wherever and as long as our crucified Lord captures the eyes and hearts of men. Just as the Blessed Mother is called “negotium saeculorum”² – namely, the object of centuries of intensive research and loving investigation – and just as all have made their contribution to the investigation of her personal dignity and official position in the Kingdom of God and will continue

1 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* (note 27, p. 16), Vol. 1, Nos. 271:7,1.

2 “Occupation (of the thinking) of the ages,” a term used by St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153).

to do so until the end of time, so have the thoughts circled and continue to circle in the same manner around the words “Ecce Mater tua.” This applies in particular to our own times. No previous century has occupied itself so completely with this thought as the twentieth has.

If past generations have primarily dwelt on the position of the “Blessed among women” (Lk 1,42) in her relationship to God, if they have placed the main accent on the dignity of her divine motherhood, it is the *Mother of the Christian People* that now stands in the foreground of our interest, namely Mary’s relationship to humanity and the contribution to our redemption which she has made and will make till the end of time.

As has always been the case in questions involving Mary, our Catholic people with their warm heart have anticipated academic research. In the believing consciousness of the faithful, the Blessed Mother lives

as the Co-Redemptrix under the cross,
as the universal Mediatrix of all Graces, and
as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

This is the threefold interpretation which the faithful see in the “Ecce Mater tua”, in the “Mater tua”, namely in the Mother of all Christian faithful as distinguished from the “*Mater Dei et Mater Christi*” (Mother of God and Mother of Christ). So we call her our Mother Thrice Admirable once more:

admirable as the Co-Redemptrix under the cross,
admirable as the universal Mediatrix of all Graces from Heaven,
admirable as the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

There is a place where an image of Our Lady hangs in an orphanage. It shows the Blessed Mother clad in a white dress and a sky-blue mantle. At her feet are many children, young men and

young women, adults, and elderly, all praying in their need for help.³ Under the picture is the inscription “O, you our Mother.”

O, you our Mother! This is *Christianity's response to the motherhood of Mary*. Ever since she said, “Let it be done to me according to Your word” (Lk 1,38), we may call her Mother, our Mother. Uncountable are the throngs of the faithful which increase in number with each passing year and never tire of folding their hands in every situation of their lives to pray to Mary, “O, you our Mother!” From our lips and our hearts, too, the suppliant, jubilant cry will never cease: “O, you our Mother!” Children and children’s children drink in the love of the Blessed Mother – I could practically say along with their mother’s milk. And we will have no rest until they, too, can sing and pray with the same fervor: “O, you our Mother!” These words should accompany them through the dark portals of death and to the judgment seat of God. They should be part of their heavenly bliss for all eternity.

Let there be Mary!

Short and compact and with majestic tranquility, God’s omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness speak over the void and darkness of the world at the dawn of creation: “Let there be light” (Gen 1,2-3).

We read in Holy Scripture, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was void and empty and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light!’ And there was light” (Gen 1,1-3). Bright light sprang forth and warmed the whole universe. Thousands of suns and moons and millions upon millions of stars glowed, lighting heaven and earth. How creative is God’s command of power!

3 This image had its origin in the middle ages and was especially popular in central Europe, particularly in Germany, where this form is still very much to be seen. The imagery of Mary’s mantle also appears in Marian hymns, and is also found in the first line of the popular Schoenstatt hymn “Protect us with Your Mantle.” See also p. 77f.

A second time this earth was void and empty and wrapped in darkness. That was when the fullness of time had come, when Adam's fall had amassed an endless flood of sin and immorality and had nearly obscured man's vision of the living God, thereby causing such a disastrous collapse of the supernatural world (on earth). A second time God's omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness said, "Let there be light!" Or to be more precise, "*Let there be Mary!*" And there was light. And there was Mary. Mary, the star of salvation, shone forth in dazzling splendor and announced the coming of the Sun, Christ Jesus. The "Ecce Mater tua" wants to secure this second creative word of God for all times. And in a thousand-voiced echo the exultant cry has resounded throughout all the universe ever since: Mary, O, you our Mother! The saints in heaven never weary of repeating: Mary, O, you our Mother! Sun, moon, and stars joyfully take up this chant and pass it on rejoicingly: Mary, O, you our Mother! The earth, burdened as it is by the bane of Eve's fall, sighs and implores to heaven a million times over: Mary, O, you our Mother!

And as often as dark clouds gather on the horizon, as often as the earth begins to grow desolate and void, God's omnipotence, wisdom, and merciful love repeat over the abyss: "Let there be light! Let there be Mary! Behold your Mother!"

So it is, even now, when the earth is covered by pitch-black darkness, when the world is galloping towards a gaping chasm and there appears to be no escape. The words of God's omnipotence, wisdom, and love reverberate more powerfully and audibly than ever before through this valley of tears: "Let there be light! Let there be Mary! Behold your Mother!" Indeed, that is the meaning and purpose of the Marian jubilee year. Therefore the answer must rise up to heaven as never before: Mary, O, you our Mother! This is God's will. This is how He has spoken to us through the words of the Popes of the past hundred years, through the ecclesially approved apparitions of recent times, and through the collapse and the failures of all purely human means.

Is it not then obvious that we should unceasingly direct our hearts and glance towards heaven in order to take in (the fullness of) Mary's radiance until we fall to our knees, until our awed lips lead and our everyday lives boldly and courageously respond in prayer, "Mary, O, you our Mother"?

God's Picture of Mary

Where are the mortal lips and where the pen or brush that would dare depict Mary as God Himself carries her in His plans and realized her in the moment when He spoke, "Let there be Mary"? According to St. Bernard, Mary is the work of His hands which infinitely surpasses all of His other works except the human nature of the God-Man. All of His divine attributes, in a manner of speaking, attempted to outdo one another in order to create a first-class masterpiece: His omnipotence and wisdom, His kindness and holiness, His mercy and mildness.

We must therefore be content if we only sketch a dim reflection of her unsurpassable splendor. In order to make this task easier for us, we will restrict ourselves to the characteristics which Our Lady herself revealed to Catherine Labouré and the shepherd children of La Salette. The manner in which she revealed herself there is doubtlessly how she wishes to be seen and venerated in our time. We gladly take up this wish of hers.

We gaze upon her features until they are impressed upon our hearts, until we can say with a glowing conviction of love: The picture thus seen is *our picture of Mary*. It has become our own in such a way that it can no longer be dulled – much less erased – by the impressions of everyday life. It lives so strongly in us that it accompanies us wherever we go: on the streets, in the workshops, in our places of recreation, to churches and chapels, in cellars and living rooms, on airplanes and boats, and especially through the dark portals of death.

Three traits in particular shine forth brightly in the described apparitions:

her mediating position,
her primacy, and
her dominion.

We do not want to rest until the picture of Mary which we carry in our hearts assumes and radiates these same features.

This applies first of all to *Mary's mediating position*. The elements which interest us are three. We want to (1) look into the characteristic meaning, (2) probe then for the reasons for this meaning, (3) in order to more precisely follow its effect?⁴

Today we will only deal with the *meaning*. We will *first* answer the question

(I) What is understood by Mary's mediating position?
and *secondly*

(II) What practical consequences result from it for our own lives.?

I. Meaning of Mary's Mediating Position

The meaning is brought out clearly in the visions we have already described. Let us take another look at these two pictures; they give us a clear answer to the first question.

When Our Lady appeared to Catherine Labouré she carried a globe in her hand which she lifted up to God with open eyes in order to present and surrender it to Him. This means she gives the world and all mankind, symbolized in the globe, to God. That is especially true of those who dedicate themselves to her; she unites their hearts inseparably with the Heart of God. At the same time the graces which God gives to humanity flow through her hand. This is indicated by the precious tings set with gems from which rays of grace stream forth for all mankind.

4 These three elements can be followed in the contents of this and the following two sermons. The *Third Sermon* will now deal with the meaning of Mary's mediating position, the *Fourth Sermon* will look into the reasons, and the *Fifth Sermon*, in considering our response to that position, will be following its effect. Concerning the topics of Mary's primacy and dominion, see for instance, p. 74ff and p. 90ff respectively.

Mary thus stands in the middle between God and man. God uses her hand and her heart to dispense every manner of grace and blessing. And man carries his worries and cares, his sorrows and joys, his heart and his love, through her to the throne and into the Heart of God. For that we say: She holds a central, a mediating position in the order of salvation.

The Blessed Mother impressed this same meaning on the children of La Salette. She showed that she represents God's interests before man in that she called for conversion to God and subjection to His ordinances. Her concern for mankind was eloquently expressed by her bitter crying. By using all her strength she is able to stay the punishing arm of Divine Justice. She prays unceasingly for the interests of humankind. Yes, by her words she once again draws our attention to the anguish which torments her for our sake. The clear language of her tears did not suffice for her.

Even here she stands in the middle between God and man. With one hand, so to speak, she touches the Heart of God; with the other hand she reaches into the human heart and tries to unite them with one another. She carries God's wishes and graces to man, and man's yearnings and cares and gifts to God. That is her mediating position in the Kingdom of God, namely the position God has ordained for her in His Kingdom and which He especially desires to have acknowledged in our modern times. That is the faith-filled conviction which has made itself evident throughout the centuries of Christianity, and which has become embodied in manifold forms of expression, and which increasingly occupies intellectual circles today.

There is a legend about Adam and Eve which says that after they had sinned and doomed themselves and their descendants to perdition, and as they left paradise, they took an unknown and nameless companion with them. Out of compassion this companion had gathered together a bundle of joys and stole it secretly out of the garden of bliss in order to ease the burden of humanity on its passage through the millennia. This faithful companion is said to have invisibly

accompanied every member of the human race ever since and will never flee from his side. He stands at the cradle of the newborn babe. He is at the side of the youth. He helps man in the struggles of life and is the consoling friend of the aged as they totter towards the grave. He finds his way into the huts of the poor and the mansions of the rich. He visits the prisons and the hospitals. This faithful companion is the image of Mary which the offended God gave to our first parents when He said, "I will place enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. She shall crush your head and you shall lie in wait for her heel" (Gen 3,15). It is the Blessed Mother as Mediatrix between God and man, as the great sign of hope of fallen humanity, she who conceived and bore the Redeemer and through whom we are again accepted into God's grace.

Artists have depicted on canvas in many different ways the message behind this legend. There is a small work of art hanging in Regensburg. It shows one of life's pilgrims lying on the ground, completely exhausted and carrying a heavy cross on his shoulders. His glance is directed beseechingly upwards; his right arm reaches out in the same direction. What is he waiting for? He is waiting for Mary, the Help of the Sick, the Refuge of Sinners, the Hope of the Dying, the Mother Thrice Admirable. She appears to him with the moon under her feet, clothed with the sun, with a crown of twelve stars upon her head – the Apocalyptic Woman (cf. Rev 12,1). Again we see the picture of the Mediatrix between God and man.

It is the same image which King Solomon saw in a dream. It was as if he were standing on a hill, looking out into a dark and terrifying night. From the east the first signs of dawn became visible. The sky became brighter and brighter. Suddenly the dawn arose in splendor, and in the dawn a royal Virgin appeared: The moon at her feet, clothed with the sun, a crown of twelve stars upon her head. Even Solomon had never seen such an awe-inspiring image of a woman, and it drew from him the rapturous exclamation: "Who is she that comes forth like the

dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?” (Song 6,10).

We know the answer – it is Mary, the Mediatrix between God and man, the one who crushes the serpent. Pope Innocent III (reigned 1198-1216) explained the words of King Solomon in this way: “The moon shines during the night, dawn during twilight, and the sun during the day. Night stands for guilt, dawn for penance, day for grace. Whoever is prostrate in the night of guilt should look to the moon – he should cry in supplication to Mary, that through her Son she might help him attain a truly contrite heart, the dawn of penance. But whoever has already reached this point may now look to the dawn and implore Our Lady to illumine, through her Son, the way to satisfaction and the day of grace. But because the life of man on earth is a ceaseless struggle, let him who experiences an attack from the enemies of salvation – be it the world, the flesh, or the devil – look up to the well-ordered battle array: Let him cry in supplication to Mary, that through her Son she may send help from the Shrine and protection from Sion (cf. Ps 20,3).”⁵

Pope Innocent III clearly depicts the features of the Blessed Mother as Mediatrix between God and man. Countless legends take up the same theme and tell it in the colorful splendor of their imagery. Here is what the famous poet and patriot Theodore Koerner tells:⁶

There was a pious lay brother. His name was Medardus.⁷ He was skilled in painting and gave many convincing proofs of his ability. His abbot, therefore, gave him the task of painting a picture for the main altar. Medardus’ protestations were of no avail. He had to obey even though he felt he was unworthy to carry out this commission. He prayed and prayed, and he

5 Innocent III, sermon on the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

6 Theodor Körner (1791-1813), promising young German poet (he had contact with German greats Goethe and Schiller) who died at the age of 22 fighting for Germany’s freedom from French occupation under Napoleon.

7 This Medardus, though called “St.” Medardus in the works of Körner, is not to be confused with the sixth century French bishop St. Medardus (Medard).

contemplated day and night which picture might be most pleasing to God. At last he found it. And so Medardus painted a picture of Mary. He did it with great love. When it was finished, it received admiring exclamations from all who saw it. The eyes of the purest love of God, her sky-blue dress was sprinkled with golden stars. In her arms she carried the Child Jesus, who lovingly nestled close to the heart of His Mother. Under her feet writhed the devil in hatred and rage. He was black and ugly and clenched his taloned fists. His eyes burned with hellfire. He twisted powerlessly under the foot of the Immaculate Conception. While the figure of the Blessed Mother filled the spectators with rapture, the portrayal of the devil evoked aversion and loathing.

The legend goes on to state that the devil was enraged by this picture and planned his revenge. One day he appeared to the pious painter in a most horrifying form. He complained because Medardus had portrayed him so hideously and commanded him to paint another picture that would make sin and the person of Satan appear pleasant to the children of this world. If done, he would promise happiness on earth and an abundance of worldly pleasures. Otherwise, if he did not comply, Satan's revenge would follow: Destruction of the picture and the murder of the painter.

The devout brother needed little time to make his decision. He had now seen the devil in his true form. He rose and painted the devil just as he had seen him, and so the image became even more hideous than before. The work was soon complete. On the scaffolding he stepped back to take one more enamoured look, while the crowd below joyfully extended their congratulations. Then the devil suddenly appeared behind him and cast him down into the depths. In that very instant the Madonna, victress over hell, miraculously stretched out her hand from the picture to catch Medardus as he fell. Her arm became longer and longer until he was safely on the ground.

This is, of course, only a legend, but it clearly illustrates what I want to say when I call Our Lady the Mediatrix between God and man. The Holy Father and the great thinkers of the

Church express this same thought when they refer to our Blessed Lady as the Rainbow and the Star of the Sea.⁸

In salvation history *the rainbow* is the well-known sign of peace. It is, therefore, a fitting symbol of the Mediatrix between God and man, who has the task of restoring to mankind its peace with God (since it was she who bore the Prince of Peace and leads others to Him).

After the flood, Noah offered a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God for having been saved from the waters. Then God said to Noah, “Behold, I will establish my covenant with you... I will set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of a covenant between me and the earth. And when I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, then will I recall the covenant I have made between me and you ...” (Gen 9,11.13-15). Through this covenant God promised that He would never again destroy all humankind because of its sins, but would show mercy and forgiveness. As often as the Israelites saw the rainbow, they recalled God’s covenant and God’s mercy.

Mary is likewise the Mediatrix between heaven and earth, a sign of God’s mercy and kindness. Of her, too, it can be said: “I will set her like my rainbow in the clouds, and she shall be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. And when I bring clouds over the earth, she shall appear as the sign of peace, and I shall see her and remember the covenant which has been made between me and mankind.”

More familiar is *the image of the Star of the Sea*. It comes to mind as often as we sing or pray or hear the “Ave, Maris Stella.” What the Star of the Sea meant to the seafarers of old

8 The title *Rainbow* was used for Our Lady by St. Bonaventure (1221-1274) and is also found by Pope Pius X in his encyclical “Ad diem ilium laetissimum,” February 2, 1904; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 251. See also Pius VII, “Tanto studio,” February 19, 1805; *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 13; and St. Bernardin of Siena as quoted by St. Alphonsus Ligouri in *The Glories of Mary*, translated by Eugene Grimm, Brooklyn: Redemptorist Fathers, 1931 (Victory Missions reprint c. 1980), p. 203. The title Star of the Sea or in Latin *Maris Stella* is one of long standing in the tradition and popular usage of the Church and was already used by St. Ildephonsus (d. 667).

is what Mary means to us: a guide and salvation from all storms. Are we not also constantly surrounded by the violent waves of life and in frequent danger of perishing? How much joy and calm and security is imparted to us when, in such a situation, Mary, the Star of the Sea appears before us through the clouds! St. Bernard therefore encourages us: “My brothers, see with what sentiments of devotion God desires our veneration of Mary to be filled – He, Who has endowed her with the fullness of all He possesses. If we therefore possess any hope, any grace, any pledge of salvation, we should recognize that everything flows to us through her who is all sweetness... Take away the sun that illumines the world, and the day is gone. Take away Mary, the Star of the Sea of the great, wide ocean: What then is left, but deepest darkness, the shadows of death, and impenetrable midnight? Therefore, from the innermost depths of our hearts, with all the sentiments of our soul, and with all our strength, we should venerate Mary, for that is the will of Him Who has desired that everything should come to us through Mary.”⁹

Can we still find it difficult, then, to turn with St. Alphonsus to the Mother Thrice Admirable trustingly and pray, “If you are for me, there is nothing I can fear. I do not fear my sins because you can make up for the damage they have caused. I do not fear the devil because you are more powerful than all of hell. I do not fear your Son Jesus Christ because though He has good reason to be angry at me, one single word from you calms His anger. One thing only do I fear, that through my own fault I might omit commending myself to you and thus perish.”¹⁰

From this we can understand another statement of the same saint, a statement which we can read (in the lightframe) around the picture of grace at New Schoenstatt – *Servus Mariae*

9 St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo in nativ. B.V.M.*, 7.

10 St. Alphonsus Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary*, prayer at the end of Chapter II, p. 98.

Nunquam Peribit (A servant of Mary will never perish).¹¹ A child of Mary will never perish.

II. Consequences for our Daily Lives

With this thought we have already touched upon the second question which I raised earlier: What consequences result from Mary's mediating position? Now that it has become clearer to us what Mary's mediating position between God and man really is, it will be easy to draw practical conclusions for our everyday lives and for our striving. There are four consequences in particular. I will summarize them in the following catchwords:

We confess.

We give thanks.

We pray and trust.

We plan.

1. We Confess

We confess wholeheartedly that we believe in this mediating position of our heavenly Mother. This acknowledgment is simply a matter of course. What God has ordained must always be the norm for our actions. What He has ordered to be immutable and valid everywhere must be acknowledged as correct for every circumstance and made the norm for our lives and striving. After God has made the decision that the Blessed Mother should receive the fullness of grace not only for herself but for all humanity, after it has become a law in God's Kingdom that we do not receive any grace except through her, then we bow before her as the "aqueduct through which all graces come to us";¹² we

11 This statement has a long tradition in the Church. See especially Alphonsus' *The Glories of Mary*, Chapter VIII (pp. 220-247). "New Schoenstatt" is the Schoenstatt Shrine in Madison, Wisconsin (see note 11, p. 32) and refers to the fact that it is a new place of grace in the spirit of the Shrine of the Mother Thrice Admirable in the original Schoenstatt in Germany. Since 1982 this "New Schoenstatt" in Madison goes by the name of "Schoenstatt Heights."

12 See note 17, p. 41.

honor and venerate and love her as the universal Mediatrix of all Graces without whom her life in grace cannot develop, grow, and become fruitful. And it is not something left to our personal choice whether we turn to her or bypass her.

We may have other favorite saints with whom we foster a particularly deep relationship, but that does not give us the right to overlook and bypass Mary. We may possess a fervent love of Our Lord, but even that does not dispense us from loving Mary. On the contrary, our love of Christ must urge us to a deeper love of Mary. This is what Our Lord's testament exacts: "Ecce Mater tua!" The very essence of love requires it, for love includes a fusion of hearts and the propagation of life. Therefore love of Our Lord must mean to us the love of everything that has a place in His Heart. In a preeminent way that includes His own Mother – His permanent Companion in life and His permanent Helpmate in His entire work of redemption. It was her fiat He awaited before He would take on human nature; without her sacrificial presence under the cross He would not die; and without her cooperation He does not wish to fulfill His mediating office before the Father.

In other words, since the position of the Blessed Mother as the Mediatrix of all Graces is necessary for our salvation, our love of her is also necessary for our salvation. To this fact we unhesitatingly give our heartfelt yes and direct our lives accordingly. And the more intimate our love for her, the more we can consider our striving for sanctity to be secured. Therefore St. Peter Faber says, "Sanctity grows in the measure that we venerate Mary." St. Louis de Montfort teaches, "With Mary one makes greater progress in the love of Christ in a month than one would make in years of effort less united to her."¹³

13 St. Louis Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), (*Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, No. 222. For an English translation, see that of the Fathers of the Company of Mary in England (St. Helens, 1957), where this quote is rendered, "By this devotion, faithfully observed, you will give more glory to Christ in a month than by any other, however difficult, in many years."

Leo XIII summarized the opinion the Church concerning the necessity of Mary for our salvation when he said, “From the great treasury of all graces given us by Our Lord... nothing comes to us except through the mediation of Mary, for such is the will of God. Thus, as no man goes to the Father but the Son, so no one goes to Christ except through His Mother.”¹⁴ Leo is even more explicit about the way by which all graces come, making the opinion of St. Bernardin of Siena his own. According to the latter, “Every grace granted to man follows three successive steps. In a most beautiful order it is communicated from God to Christ, from Christ to Mary, and from Mary to us.”¹⁵

Thus it is easy to confess with St. Bernardin of Siena, “O, Mary, my Queen, because you are the dispenser of all graces, and because we can receive the grace of eternal bliss from your hands alone, our salvation depends on you.” With St. Alphonsus we can add, “God wills that we should have nothing that has not passed through the hands of Mary.”¹⁶ With St. Bonaventure we admit, “Because God Himself lived in Mary as our Redeemer and came forth from her, He desires all graces of salvation to proceed from Mary and to be distributed to us through her.” And with St. Bernard we declare, “As every mandate of grace that is sent by a king passes through the palace-gates, so does every grace that comes from heaven to the world pass through the hands of Mary.”¹⁷ “All possessions, all help, all grace which man has received from God and which he will receive until the end of the world,” Blessed Jordan tells us, “he has and will receive through Mary.”

14 Leo XIII, encyclical “Octobri mense,” September 22, 1891; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 113.

15 Leo XIII, encyclical “Jucunda semper,” September 8, 1894; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 155.

16 Actually a quote from St. Bernard. See *The Glories of Mary*, p. 163.

17 *The Glories of Mary*, p. 160. For many of the other quotes in this sermon, Father Kentenich used the German sourcebook *Der Marienprediger* (The Marian Homilist) compiled by Ludwig Gemminger, Regensburg 1863, especially pp. 68, 200, 505-506.

2. *We Give Thanks*

If we stop for a moment and look into our own lives, we will discover an immeasurable chain of all manner of graces. We have forgotten that we owe all of them not only to the “Father of mercies” (2 Cor 1,3) and the God-Man Jesus Christ, but also to our dear Mother Mary. Those who have been deeply penetrated by this truth will fall to their knees in deepest gratitude and pray, at least belatedly, with St. Leonard of Port Maurice, “All that I am and own I have from Mary. All good thoughts, all devout inspirations of the will, all heavenly sentiments of the heart I have from Mary. You need but read! For you will find these words written everywhere in my body and soul: Through the grace of Mary! On my tongue you will find written: Out of the grace of Mary! In my heart – if only I could show you my heart! – in the depths of my heart is written: From the grace of Mary! My kindest benefactress should be praised without end. And when I have attained my salvation, then I will have received it through the grace of my most exalted Lady!”

St. Leonard of Port Maurice would frequently acknowledge from the pulpit in words of glowing gratitude and tender intimacy, “When I think of the many and great graces which I have received from Mary as often as I have knelt before her picture, then it seems to me that I am a church with a venerated picture of Mary. In this church within me the walls are covered with little plaques of gratitude which say over and over again this one sentence: ‘Mary has helped!’”

Those who share the conviction with me that all the graces which they have received throughout their entire lives have come to them through Mary, and that they do not possess a single grace without her, will only now understand the full meaning of the words, “Mary, O, you my Mother,” as an answer to our dying Lord’s testament “Ecce Mater tua.” It will not be hard for them to answer

like St. Stanislaus Koska when asked why he loved the Blessed Mother so dearly: “What more can I say? She is my Mother.”¹⁸

Yes, Mary is my Mother, too! She is wholly my Mother. She is my Mother in the true sense of the word. She is my Mother because of the mysterious objective order of the fundamental relationship which unites her to me as is decreed by God’s wise and kind plan. She is my Mother because of the tender motherly care she has showered on me. Just as a natural mother cares for the temporal welfare of her child, I owe to my heavenly Mother my health in body and soul, my being kept from misfortune and being freed from disaster, and my being blessed with worldly goods. Just as an earthly mother educates her child for God and Church and country, I am indebted to Mary for my education. It is she who has planted within my heart a deep hatred of sin and who has given me a delicate conscience. It is she who moved me to deep contrition and a desire to make amends after I had fallen into sin. To her I owe my love for prayer, my desire to strive for a heroic love of God and neighbor, my hunger to hear the word of God, my joy in receiving the sacraments and my appreciation for austere mortification and active apostolate. Therefore I sing and pray with deepest gratitude, “I will praise the mercies of Mary into all eternity.”¹⁹

In the ancient acts of the martyrs we are told about a ten-year-old boy named Cyril and with what steadfastness he confessed his faith in Christ. The Roman judge thought that this case would be an easy one. He had the soldiers show the boy a burning pyre, the rack, and the executioner’s axe, as well as whips and pincers in order to intimidate him and shake his adherence to the faith. Courageously Cyril answered, “I do not fear your threats. I believe in Jesus Christ, the true Son of God and will continue to do so – come what may.” The judge asked him where he had learned these “things deserving of death.” Fearlessly the boy answered, “I acquired my faith from my mother, and she would never lie to me, so I confess that Christ is truly God.” And with

18 See *The Glories of Mary*, p. 64.

19 See note 22, p. 14.

this the brave, young hero joyfully lowered his head before the sword and died the death of martyrdom.

These words resound vibrantly in my ears: *This I have learned from my mother*. Countless saints repeat this with fullest conviction. “If you would ask me,” they exclaim, “who taught you to detest the world, I can give only one answer: This I have learned from Mary, my heavenly Mother. Who taught you patience in suffering, obedience, purity of heart, interior peace? This I have learned from Mary, my heavenly Mother. Who taught you the art of being able to be in close union with God in the midst of the hubbub of daily life, who the trait of trying to spread a pure, supernatural, and good atmosphere wherever you are, who the bold courage for all things concerning the spread of God’s Kingdom through apostolic and social works? The answer is always the same: This I have learned from Mary, my heavenly Mother. Through her example she has inspired me; always and everywhere she has proven herself to be the Mother of Grace.” Who of us would deny that we, too, must gratefully confess the same?

King Solomon once spoke of all that he owed to the wisdom which God in His goodness had freely given to him. Then he added, “All good things together came to me in her train, and countless riches at her hands; and I rejoiced in them all because Wisdom is their leader, even though I had not known that she is the mother of all that I have received” (Wis 7,11-12; cf. 1 Kgs 3, 4-14).

That which King Solomon owed to wisdom, we attribute to Mary, the Seat of Eternal Wisdom. Regretfully we must also admit that when we think of the ocean of graces and gifts in which our past lives has been immersed, we, too, must say: The Blessed Mother was my leader with her motherly wisdom, motherly love, and motherly power, and yet I did not know it. I did not know that she, in union with the Blessed Trinity and the divine savior, had the reins of my life in her hands, and that she revealed herself at all times and in all circumstances as the Mediatrix between God and myself. Therefore I must

never weary of repeating with (Vincent) Pallotti: “I will praise the mercies of Our Lady into all eternity.”

3. We Pray and Trust

In the future I want to be more aware of all this than I have been in the past. In every situation I will trustingly adhere to the Blessed Mother and go hand in hand and heart in heart with her to our Savior and to the Father. That befits her position in the Kingdom of God. She commanded it just that way at La Salette. She has said that we will receive many graces if only we ask her for them. This is the surest and easiest way for us. Therefore we will want to follow the admonition of St. Bernard in the future:

“You who have the impression that your life is spent quivering amid tempests more often than walking the earth, direct your eyes to this star if you do not want to perish in these storms. When the gales of temptation are unleashed and difficulties beset you on all sides, look up to this star, call on Mary. When the waves of arrogance and ambition, of slander and jealousy toss you from side to side, look up to this star, call on Mary. When the waves of anger, avarice, or lust pound against the bark of your soul, look up to this star, call on Mary. When you are shaken by the enormity of your faults, confused by the terrible wounds of your conscience, terrified by the horror of judgment – and all of this threatens to sink you in an abyss of despair and desperation, think of Mary. In dangers, fears, and doubts: think of Mary, call on Mary. Her name should never leave your lips, should never be absent from your heart. And in order to obtain her intercession, imitate the example of her life. When you follow her you will never go wrong, when you petition her you will never despair, when you gaze upon her you will never err. With her support and help you will never fall; with her protection you need not

fear a thing; under her guidance you will never grow weary; when she is merciful to you, you will achieve your goal.”²⁰

This admonition of the Saint is valid for all times. It is especially so for us moderns, for we – as the popes tell us – must fight against difficulties that exceed the common measure. We can no longer master them without special protection from Mary.

4. *We Plan*

Do you now understand, my dear friends in Christ, why we want to *erect a shrine* for our dear Lady in our parish during the Marian jubilee year – first in our hearts in a spiritual way, but then also in a visible manner on our church grounds? She should settle among us in a particular way as Educator and Shepherd of souls, and from here she should unfold her activity as Mediatrix. We priests desire only to be instruments in her hands. We enter the confessional and pulpit completely dependent on her. It is she who goes with us and through us into our schools and to the meetings of the various church organizations. It is she who goes with us and through us to visit the sick and bury the dead. She shall increasingly become the great missionary who works miracles of education and of care for the flock. With the words “*Mater perfectam habebit curam*” (Mother will take perfect care)²¹ on our lips and in our hearts, we priests gladly suffer all of the disappointments that are a part of the work of caring for the Master’s flocks and we can dare, day after day, to let down our nets until an abundant catch comes our way, that is, until our whole parish will have become a Marian family through and through that strives

20 St. Bernard of Clairvaux, sermon. In the old Roman Breviary this text is found in the fifth and sixth readings for the feast of the Holy Name of Mary (September 12). See also *The Glories of Mary*, pp. 95, 122.

21 The phrase “*Mater habebit curam*” (Mother will take care) comes from St. Vincent Pallotti. During World War I it came to be a much-used phrase among Father Kentenich and the first Schoenstatt sodalists. Later, Father Kentenich would add the word *perfectam*, that is, Mother takes *perfect* care. To those who encounter the phrase elsewhere, it is a help to know that “*habebit*” is the future form (will take care) and “*habebat*” (which occurs now and then) is in the past tense (Mother *took* perfect care).

for the heights. When we have succeeded in conveying a deep, intimate, personal love for the Blessed Mother to the children and the aged, to the men and women, to the boys and girls (of our parish), then we need feel no further anxiety; then we, the shepherds, may walk serenely through the dark portals of death to the Eternal Judge; we will then have been successful executors of the last will and testament of Our Lord: “Ecce Mater tua! Ecce filius tuus!”

Just as we are now gathered around the picture of our Blessed Mother, so do we desire to go through life together: entirely Mary’s very own. In noble competition we will not rest until we have been given a really deep and intimate love of Mary.

Perhaps it will then be possible to write on our tombstones the same words which appear on the grave of Cardinal Pie:²² “Tuus sum ego, Mater” – I am yours, Mother! This was his favorite saying throughout his life and his consoling word in death. It will, in all likelihood, also be the expression of thanksgiving which he will repeat through all eternity. I am yours, Mother! Thus did it sound from his lips in each moment of his life. Thus had he learned it as a child. Thus did he speak as a priest, thus also when they placed the miter on his head, and thus when they clothed him in the purple (of a cardinal). The exterior situation changed, but his daily program always remained the same: I am yours, Mother! He never undertook a trip without first visiting Our Lady in order to renew his covenant of love. This he did with the same words: I am yours, Mother. Thus this idea became a part of his very soul and became the summary of his entire rich interior and exterior life. So it was fitting that this thought should ornament his tombstone along with the request that all who visit his grave should make this ideal part of their souls, too, to live and die according to it.

So we ask, Mother Thrice Admirable, help us that we may all without exception learn to say from the depths of our hearts every day: I am yours, Mother! Amen.

22 Cardinal Louis Pié (1815-1880), Bishop of Poitiers, France.

Fourth Sermon
MARY, OUR MOTHER

The whole Catholic world lies prostrate at Our Lady's feet in this Marian Year as it daily sings her praises. At the same time, the Church triumphant, militant, and suffering unite as each attempts to outdo the others in honoring the Mediatrix between heaven and earth and in order to make her prophetic words come true: "From henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk 1,48). Thus the Mediatrix of all Graces manifests herself to us as the joy of the Church triumphant (in heaven), as the consolation of the Church suffering (in purgatory), and as the help of the Church militant (on earth) – as the Mother Thrice Admirable.

The Ave of the Church Triumphant, Suffering, and Militant

It is not difficult for us to imagine how it is in heaven so as to participate in the jubilation that surrounds the "Blessed among women" during this entire Marian Year, her who is full of grace, the Queen of heaven and earth. We need only follow Dante, the great Italian poet, and accompany him on his journey to the heavenly paradise. We ascend with him from level to level through all nine heavens until we reach the place where the Blessed Trinity lives in inaccessible light. Suddenly we hear the name "Mary" being called. For us it is too little to imagine the vision of God's glory alone. We want to gain an impression of Mary's splendor and glory as well. Dante envisioned her on a throne of light and sun, as the most beautiful, the purest and most perfect image of the Son of God who became man through her. We never tire of looking upon her again and again. She is surrounded by choirs of angels. At either side of her and at her feet we see row upon row of the assembly of the blessed who owe their salvation to her, the Mediatrix of all Graces. The Archangel (Gabriel) steps forth from the hosts of angelic choirs. He humbly bows before her and proclaims exultantly in the boundless halls of the celestial auditorium: "Hail Mary, full of grace" (Lk 1,28). The multitude of saints in unending procession voices its agreement: Adam and Eve, the patriarchs and

prophets, St. Joseph, the virgins and confessors, the martyrs and apostles. All of them pass in review, rejoicingly repeating the salutation of the archangel in their deepest gratitude: “Hail Mary, full of grace!” And in thousandfold echo it resounds: “Hail Mary, full of grace!” Enraptured by such an unparalleled spectacle, we too join in the song of praise: “Hail Mary, full of grace!”¹

The motto on the coat of arms of one house of the English nobility reads: “*Omni bono operi adsum*” – Where there is a good work to do, there I am. This should also apply to us, and most particularly in regard to the work of glorifying the Blessed Mother. Others may surpass us in riches or beauty, in power or fame, in learning or influence, but no one should outdo us in our love for Mary. Therefore: *Adsum!* I am there, wherever it is a question of increasing Mary’s honor. I am there, wherever her praises are sung: “Hail Mary, full of grace!”

In a vision on the feast of Mary’s birth, St. Hildegard was permitted to witness the birthday celebration in heaven. She saw the Blessed Mother seated on a golden throne, and upon her virginal lap was the divine Child. Both were surrounded by a resplendent honor-guard of angels from every choir. Hildegard then observed in detail the congratulations given by the women of heaven. The archangel Gabriel led the procession, uttering the dominant theme, “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women!” (Lk 1,28.42). A huge concourse of virgins from every nation followed. They repeated, “Blessed art thou among women!” Then came the married women and Christian mothers. They sang joyously, “Blessed art thou among women!” The widows then took up the greeting, “Blessed art thou among women!” Long rows of ladies of nobility appeared next and spoke, “Blessed art thou among women!” The queens came next, adorned with precious crowns on their heads, all joining in the jubilant chorus, “Blessed art thou among women!”

1 Cf. Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Paradiso, 31-33.

Adsum! (Here I am!) In spirit we join in and praise Mary, the Mediatrix between God and man, the solar image of womanly greatness, dignity, and beauty, “Blessed art thou among women!” Does not our Blessed Mother celebrate her birthday day after day during her jubilee year? Doesn’t she want to be born anew in mankind, and through us as her images bear Christ to all places? Therefore we shall never tire of honoring her each day and of exclaiming to her, “Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.”

Not only heaven, but also purgatory reverberates with the angel’s greeting. In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante journeys through purgatory. Wherever he goes he meets groups of poor souls who are singing Marian songs – especially the *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen) and the *Ave Maria* (Hail Mary) – or are praying together the Litany of the Blessed Virgin. They never stopped praying, “You Refuge of Sinners, pray for us. You Health of the Sick, pray for us.”²

They expect help from the Mediatrix of Graces in their inexpressibly dire need. They expect her to effect their liberation from this place of purification.³ They are deeply convinced that the Mother of Mercy has a special love for her poorest and most helpless children who are no longer able to do anything for themselves, who can no longer merit even the least grace. They take her at her word for what she once said to St. Brigit, “I am the Mother of the suffering souls. Through my intercession their pains are eased from hour to hour. That is how the Lord wishes it.”⁴ St. Vincent Ferret acknowledges this same sentiment, “Oh, how courteous and benevolent is Mary to the poor souls, for through her they constantly receive relief and refreshment.”⁵ For this reason St. Bernardin of Siena calls her the Mother of

2 Ibid., Purgatorio, 7,81; 10,40; 20,19.

3 Cf. St. Alphonus Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (note 8, p. 63), pp. 231-237.

4 St. Brigit of Sweden (1303-1373), *Liber Revelationum* 4. c. 138. See also *The Glories of Mary*, p. 232.

5 *The Glories of Mary*, p. 233.

the Poor Souls. She is especially that for those souls who have borne a deep love for her in their hearts while they were here on earth. They may hope to experience her special attention in the torment of purgatory. “Fortunate indeed,” as St. Alphonsus puts it, “are the clients of this most compassionate Mother; for she will be their consolation and help not only here on earth but also in purgatory.”⁶ The Saint goes even further, daring to maintain: “If you are a genuine client of Mary, you may expect to receive the grace of being taken into heaven at once without having to pass through purgatory.”⁷

Therefore, fortunate are those who give themselves entirely to the Blessed Mother, and who through their contributions to Our Lady’s capital of grace place all the merits of their good works at her free disposal for the salvation of souls. She will never let herself be outdone in generosity, neither here on earth nor in eternity, and therefore fulfill the words *Mater perfectam habebit curam* – Mother will take perfect care in each and every need.

Adsum! Here I am! It shall be my greatest concern in the future – even more than in the past – to love my Mother Mary tenderly and to supply her with my contributions to the capital of grace. Then I will not have any cause to worry anxiously about my eternal salvation.

Mary, Mediatrix Between Heaven and Earth

Mary, the Mediatrix between heaven and earth, is three times admirable:

admirable as the joy of the Church triumphant,
admirable as the consolation of the Church suffering, and
admirable as the protection and help of the Church militant.

This firm conviction has found a tangible form of expression in the portrayals of the Madonna with the protecting mantle.⁸ They repeatedly portray in colorful, unending variety the same

6 Ibid., p. 231.

7 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 235.

8 See note 3, p. 55.

idea: Mary protects and guides Christianity in every walk of life. Whoever has seen an image of this kind is lastingly impressed by the idea of Mary as the universal Mediatrix. I am reminded, for instance, of a well-known painting in the Cathedral in Graz (Austria). It depicts Mary, the powerful, kind, and wise intercessor at the throne of God, (Mary) the powerful Mediatrix. She is clothed in an immense mantle embellished with gold. Two angels hold the mantle wide open so that every walk of life can find a place beneath it. There children and the aged, boys and girls, men and women, priests, monks and nuns, nobility and dignitaries, kings and emperors, bishops and popes are kneeling at Mary's feet. All without exception are looking to the Mother of God for salvation. Not only the just are there, but also sinners of every kind.

That was demonstrated to St. Gertrude once in a vision. She saw many wild animals under the mantle of the Blessed Mother. They were being petted by her, the Refuge of Sinners. It was revealed to St. Gertrude that the wild animals symbolized the various kinds of sinners. That is the reason for the saint's conviction that no sinner who flees to Mary will ever perish.⁹ St. Alphonsus wants to say the same with his statement "*Servus Mariae nunquam peribit* – A servant of Mary will never perish."¹⁰

The more deeply we penetrate these truths, the more it dawns on us how great and exalted Mary is in her mediating position, and we can understand why the popes never tire of expecting her to save our menaced world and Church, nor of pointing to her again and again while repeating; "Ecce Mater tua!" It should no longer seem strange to us that the Blessed Mother points to herself and repeats the words of the dying Savior, "Ecce Mater tua!" Our only regret is that we have grasped this truth so feebly up till now and that we have not been serious enough about shaping our lives accordingly. In the future it will be different. In order to urge us towards that end, we want

9 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, pp. 86, 126, 134.

10 See note 11, p. 65.

to examine three questions: (1) the fundamental reason for, (2) the greatness, and (3) the limits of Mary's mediating position.

If our love for Mary is to develop within us in a rich and fruitful way, if it is to fulfill its historical mission for modern times, then it may not remain merely a sentimental love, but must rest upon sound convictions. Otherwise it will be like a tree that can be quickly and easily uprooted by the storms of the times.

The Fundamental Reason for Mary's Mediating Position

We have already answered the question concerning the fundamental reason for Mary's mediating position and activity several times in the course of these Lenten talks. The popes and theologians of the Church tell us very clearly: *It is so ordained in the plan of God*. God has deigned that the world be so ordered and in no other way. That is how He wants it. That is and remains the final, decisive reason. Mary is not only Mother of Christ in the physical sense, but is at the same time our spiritual Mother, and as such Christ's official and permanent Helpmate and Companion in the entire work of redemption. To put it more precisely, a twofold assertion can be made: Mary's work as permanent Helpmate is:

1. absolutely necessary for God,
2. (absolutely) necessary for man.

Tonight we want to consider the first thought.¹¹

When we maintain that God has made the Blessed Mother the absolutely necessary official Helpmate of Christ, that means He has given her the office of assisting Our Lord in every situation involving the redemption of the world; He has given her the office in such a way that, having devised this plan, He would never alter it and in a certain sense therefore never be able to or want to bypass it.

Two-in-Oneness: Mary in the Work of Redemption

Three stages can be distinguished in the work of redemption:
the beginning: the Incarnation,

¹¹ For the development of the second thought, see the *Fifth Sermon*.

the climax: His sacrificial death, and
the conclusion: the distribution of redemptive graces.

According to divine decree it was not permitted that our Blessed Mother be ignored in any of the three stages, and indeed she was not. It is one and the same divine decree of selection which embraces the Redeemer and His permanent Helpmate in inseparable two-in-oneness. To this one and the same divine decision, both (Christ and Mary) owe their existence, position, and mission which are so intimately bound up with one another. So inseparably are they united in their being, outlook, and task that both are – as follows God’s wish and will and His unchangeable plan – completely and permanently dependent on one another. Mary has been created and endowed solely for the Redeemer and for the sake of the Redeemer, and it was neither intended nor desired by the Redeemer to become man and offer to the Father His redemptive sacrifice on the cross and distribute the fruits of redemption – graces – to mankind without Mary’s freely chosen and freely given Fiat pronounced in the name of all mankind. She exists, as the theologians say, “solely for the Redeemer, solely for the second Adam. Separated from Him and without Him, the Virgin of Nazareth would never have been born.”¹² Both are so completely bound to one another in their being, life, and work that it is impossible to think of one apart from the other.

Mary at the Incarnation

First: Christ made Himself dependent on Mary at the Incarnation. It was for this reason that Gabriel came to her with that request, with his congenial appeal for her free assent. Pope Leo XIII says expressly, “When the eternal Son of God intended to take our human nature upon Himself for the redemption and ennoblement of mankind, and by this consummated a mystical espousal with the whole human race,

12 Carl Feckes (1894-1958), “Die Gottesmutterchaft,” in *Katholische Marienkunde* (note 9, p. 6), Vol. 2, p. 82.

He did not do this without first receiving the free consent of His selected Mother who, to a certain extent, represented in herself the role of the entire human race.”¹³

Through her free decision Mary offered to the Son of God the maternal seed of life and thereby made it possible for the Almighty to enter His creation – the Incarnation. This was the greatest achievement to which creation could aspire. From this we may begin to understand the jubilation which the Fiat of the Virgin of Nazareth awakened in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. Only at that moment could the great mystery (of the Incarnation) be realized. “And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1,14).

Mary on Golgotha

Secondly, we encounter that same mutual oneness and dependence between the Redeemer of the world and His Helpmate on Golgotha. Only after she had freely said – again, in the name of mankind – the required yes to the death of the Redeemer, only after she had freely renounced her Mother-rights in favor of our claim over Him, only after she had surrendered Him for the sake of our sins and united her sacrifice with His – only then could the Savior exclaim in accordance with the precise unfolding of God’s plan, “It is consummated!” (Jn 19,30). She uttered this yes: She stood under the cross (cf. Jn 19,25). She adhered to the divine plan in all its detail. She was faithful to her mission. Therefore Pius XII places on her lips the words, “I want to see Him die for the redemption and for the life of the world.”¹⁴ And so the sacrifice of Golgotha was brought to its conclusion. That same Pope also declared, “In this way she made herself Co-Redemptrix and our Mother at the foot of the cross... Thus she who was already Mother of the Head

13 Leo XIII, encyclical “Octobri Mense,” September 22, 1891; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 113.

14 Eugenio Pacelli (elected Pius XII in 1939), sermon in the French national church in Rome, November 11, 1937.

according to the flesh, became by a new title of sorrow and glory the spiritual Mother of all his members.”¹⁵

Dispensatrix of All Graces

Thirdly, from that perspective it may be understandable that and why the same divine plan decreed that the fruits of redemption cannot be distributed without cooperation between those two who have contributed so much to the objective redemption.

Pius X captures the viewpoint of the Catholic faithful when he teaches, “From Mary’s community of suffering and will with Christ she has merited the dignity of being the Reparatrix of the lost world and therefore of also being the Dispensatrix of all graces which Jesus has merited for us by His death and His blood.”¹⁶

Grignion de Montfort declares, “God the Son communicated to His Mother all that He acquired by His life and death ... He made her the treasurer of all that His Father gave Him as heritage. By her He applies His merits to His members; by her He communicates His virtues and distributes His graces ... God the Holy Spirit communicated His unspeakable gifts to Mary, His faithful Spouse, and He chose her as the Dispensatrix of all He possesses; so that she distributes all His gifts and graces to whom she wills, in the measure she wills, how she wills and when she wills; nor does He give any heavenly gift to man which does not pass through her virginal hands. For such is the will of God who has decreed that we should have all things through Mary...”¹⁷

Mary, Mother of Christianity

Whoever believingly views and grasps these three moments where Mary helps in her indispensable official character in the work of redemption (at its beginning, climax, and conclusion),

15 Pius XII, encyclical “*Mystici Corporis Christi*,” June 29, 1943; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 383.

16 Pius X, encyclical “*Ad diem illum laetissimum*,” February 2, 1904; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 233. Emphasis Fr. Kentenich’s.

17 *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (note 13, p. 66), Nos. 24-25.

will only then comprehend the deep and ultimate meaning of the words which the Savior spoke with dying lips and made His last will and testament: “Ecce Mater tua!”

According to those words, Mary is not only the Mother of God, but also the *Mother of Christianity* in the truest sense of the word. I say in the truest sense of the word, for she is not only our Mother because she loves us as any mother might. No, we are obliged to her for a true, a genuine, a maternal giving of life in the kingdom of grace. Indeed, it is a gift of life without which, according to the fullness of God’s plan, we cannot be children of God. This is the way Christian popular piety has always understood Mary’s motherhood.

A learned theologian, Scheeben, described it thus: “Since it is not Mary herself who is the true Head of humanity but Jesus Christ, she attains – as Mother of this Head – such a position in the sight of the rest of mankind by virtue of which she is truly the Mother of Christ’s Mystical Body as well, or, as Mother of Christ, she is also Mother of all Christians, and as physical Mother of God’s Son, she is spiritual Mother of mankind whose sonship in God is from the same Mother. This universal motherhood of Mary, which is usually called her mystical motherhood, is by no means to be considered merely a ‘moral’ or ‘so-called’ motherhood; it is rather in its own way every bit as real, organic, living, indeed substantial a relationship as is the physical motherhood of Mary and in all other mothers. For this builds on the genuine motherly relationship of Mary to Christ and the genuinely organic relationship of Christians to their Head Christ Jesus, and can be deduced in its final instance from Mary’s position as true Bride of God possessing the divine light of grace. These two motherhoods are so closely related that it can in fact be said: At Christ’s conception Mary conceived the being of the divine Word as *semen divinum* (divine seed) in such a way that from it – in and with Christ – mankind was

also to be born to God's sonship and that within her womb the conception of Christ... begot all men in God."¹⁸

We can also put it this way: *Mary is the Mother of the whole Christ*. The whole Christ is Christ as God-Man and Christ as Head together with those who are mystically united with Him. She is consequently Mother of the Head and of the members in the full sense of the word. She is Mother of Christ and Mother of Christians, though admittedly, as St. Augustine states, Mother of all Christians in a spiritual sense, yet completely and truly our Mother.¹⁹

St. Augustine expressed that same thought in still another way: "Mary is truly the Mother of the members of Christ the Head, namely our Mother: because through her love she has cooperated so that the faithful in the Church, which is made up of the members of the Head, will be born; and because at the same time she is physical Mother of that Head."²⁰

Here again we are not as much concerned with a maternal attitude or a motherly love as with a new fundamental relationship that is rooted in the order of being. If Mary has really and truly become our Mother through her motherly life-giving function, then we are not dealing with a mere pious platitude or a pleasant image or an attractive parable, but with a truth that has to be taken literally. Only then can we understand the full ramifications of the testament from the lips of the dying Redeemer of the world: "Ecce Mater tua!" We then understand the warm interest that our Mother has and must have for us, her children, as well as the strong bond of sympathy which draws us to her. The whole richness of Mary's mother heart begins to dawn on us along with the greatness of her mother duties and her mother rights.

18 Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888), outstanding German theologian of the 19th century. Here quoted from: Johannes Beumer, *Handbuch der katholischen Dogmatik* (Handbook of Catholic Dogma), Vol. 5 (Freiburg, 1954).

19 St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), *De Sancte Virginitate*, c. 6. See also *The Glories of Mary*, p. 49.

20 *De Sancte Virginitate*, c. 6.

Mary's Mother Heart

She loves us with a mother heart like no other heart that was or can ever be. St. Francis de Sales was of the opinion that there is no earthly bond which can unite one heart with another as strongly as the bond of mother love. This is indeed the general conviction of all people. Who then can grasp, who then can describe the immeasurable richness of Mary's love! St. Alphonsus Ligouri even made this statement: "If we concentrated the love of all mothers for their children and of all husbands and wives for one another, and of all the saints and angels for those who venerate them--all of this love would not equal the measure of love which Mary has in her heart for a single soul."²¹

I am this soul whom Mary loves so immeasurably. And I don't and didn't realize it. That's why my heart, too, is so insensitive to her, (why) her relationship to me and mine to her is so impersonal. I feel like an easily replaceable part in a big machine.

Can we imagine at all how inexhaustibly great the measure of love is with which the "mother of fair love"²² loves each one of us so very personally? If we had even a pale premonition of this love we would no longer go from door to door begging hungrily for a tiny drop of love from those around us. St. Alphonsus was apparently of the opinion that the measure of our love of neighbor is determined by the degree of our love for God.²³ Since Mary's love for God is so great that the fiery glow of love from the Seraphim and Cherubim is – as the saints teach us – but a cool breeze in comparison,²⁴ then her mother love, which is the most concrete and effective expression of her love of neighbor, must be of similar proportions--entirely apart from the fact that her mother heart is a singular, a unique,

21 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 58.

22 See note 20, p. 48.

23 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 57.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 58.

an unsurpassable creation and an unparalleled reflection of divine omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness.

That is why her love is as strong as death (cf. Song 8,6) which no one can resist, which destroys every power and spares no age or rank. No sacrifice is therefore too great for her love, no trouble too burdensome. There is no obstacle to which she surrenders. So that she can carry out her task, she is allowed to see us in God as (if looking) in a mirror – us and all our needs and cares down to the smallest detail. Thus one can say she is omnipresent through her knowledge of us and through her unlimited love for us. “The kindness of man,” St. Bernard teaches, “has its limits, but the Holy Virgin possesses an abyss of mercy which human wickedness can never exhaust.”

This mother heart began to beat for us maternally at the moment she pronounced her fiat, at the moment it began to beat for Our Lord. The instant she became the physical Mother of the Head of the Mystical Body she also became the spiritual Mother of the members of Christ and became my Mother, too. Her heart bled spiritually for me at the foot of the cross.

There was once a ship on the high seas. A storm lashed it back and forth, and slung it against a reef. The ship was wrecked and broke up. The entire crew perished. Only one mother could save herself and her child. They were driven onto a desert island. No human life was to be found anywhere. The specter of hunger soon loomed, but food was nowhere to be found. Soon they were both on the brink of starvation. In this moment of acutest need, the mother opened her vein and nourished her child with her rich, warm blood. The child survived and grew stronger, and when a rescue ship appeared, they were able to save the child, but had to bury the mother. We can imagine how later on, when the child had grown up, he would never tire of repeating, “How could I not love that mother who saved me with the very blood of her heart?”²⁵

25 Cf. *Der Marienprediger* (note 17, p. 67), p. 158.

Did not our Blessed Mother also give the blood of her heart for us when she offered up her Son in indescribable pain at the foot of the cross? Did she not do more than just open her vein, when through her yes she let the Precious Blood of her Son flow and exhaust itself? Did she not permit the sevenfold sword to pierce her heart in order to save us from eternal death? Where can one find another mother heart that can compare with Mary's heart in warmth and sacrificial love? And this heart now beats for us at the throne of God with an ineffably transfigured and most glowing love, and it will never weary of caring for us.

Mary – Mother and Giver of Life

Yes, Mary is really and truly my Mother. She not only loves me like a mother, she is my Mother. She has really and truly given me life, and I can and must clearly acknowledge that I owe the graces that I possess not only to Christ, but to Mary as well. Our Lord simply does not want to act as Mediator without her cooperation.

In the Original Shrine of the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt there is a monument of thanks on the wall which lists the names of those who were involved in the promotion of her realm during the first World War and who consequently experienced her special protection. One of them later went through a difficult crisis regarding his vocation: Should he become a priest or not? Would he be strong enough to fulfill the heavy responsibilities of a priest all his life? He was shaken by uncertainty. Then he remembered that his name was engraved in stone upon this monument of thanks, and he gained the inner certainty: Just as my name cannot be removed from this tablet of stone, even less can my name be erased from the heart of my Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt. She loves me! She is in all truth my Mother. She will take care of me. Therefore he courageously advanced to ordination and became a very zealous shepherd of souls. My name is likewise

inscribed in Mary's mother heart. No power on earth or in hell can remove or erase it; not even my sins can do that...

Because Mary not only possesses a maternal attitude and love, but because she is really and truly our Mother in the objective order of salvation, she must embrace the sinner as well as the poor souls in purgatory as her weakest and most helpless children with a special love for them. The very nature of mother love makes this an imperative.

From this point of view we can understand why she revealed herself to the children of La Salette with tears in her eyes due to the sins of mankind. She weeps bitterly. It is all she can do to hold back the avenging arm of divine justice. She loves the sinner and never abandons him. That is simply what the cry of her genuine mother heart requires of her. That is what the example of her Son demands, who came to seek what was lost (cf. Lk 19,10). Thus she is compelled by her knowledge and her concern for the infinite misery and frightening condition of those in mortal sin, and for the horrible fate that awaits them in hell.

Like the widow of Naim who followed the coffin of her son (cf. Lk 7,11-17), and St. Monica who never abandoned her sinner-son (and later saint) Augustine, but followed him over land and sea, so, and even more than this does Mary, the Refuge of Sinners, the Comforter of the Afflicted, the Health of the Sick carry her fallen and wayward children in her heart. The annals of pilgrimage places and tales of missions and retreats are filled with supporting evidence for this joyous fact.

Mary's Mother Duties and Mother Rights

Just as with the immeasurable richness of her mother heart, so too does the greatness of her mother duties and mother rights have its root in her office as Mother as is essentially and vitally founded in the objective order of salvation. This is how God wanted it. It was His decision that the children of God should not only have a Father but also a true and real Mother with clear-cut mother duties and mother rights.

Mary's Mother Duties

Regarding her mother duties, Leo XIII says, “In the person of His disciple John, Christ entrusted the entire human race to the loving care of His Mother ... With a generous heart she embraced the heritage of the enormous labors which her dying Son left to her, and she immediately began to fulfill all of her duties towards us all.”²⁶

St. Bernard takes her mother duties and traces their source even farther back – to that moment when she became a Mother in a twofold sense at the Annunciation. “When at the Annunciation the most Blessed Virgin,” he tells us, “gave the consent for which the Eternal Word had waited, she prayed to God from that moment on with an insatiable ardor for our salvation. She spent herself so completely in this prayer, that from that time on she always carried us in her heart as a loving Mother.”²⁷ It was then that she in all truth became our Mother. After a mother has given the gift of life to her child, she naturally takes over the duty of providing him with an ample measure of nourishment, education, and guidance. These are the three tasks which the Mother of Christianity, the Mother of Divine Grace has assumed by her mother office in the Kingdom of God after we – to quote St. Pius X – “have issued from her womb as the members of the Head who are united with the Head.”²⁸

In order to do perfect justice to all three duties, God has endowed her, in union with her mother office, a high degree of power over His own heart and an inexhaustible measure of kindness and of educative and guiding wisdom. We stand in awe before her *motherly power, motherly kindness, and motherly*

26 Leo XIII, encyclical “Octobri Mense,” September 22, 1891; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 114.

27 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 47, where this statement is attributed to St. Bernardin of Siena (Pro Fest. V. M. s. 8,a. 2,c. 2).

28 Pius X, encyclical “Ad diem ilium laetissimum,” February 2, 1904, cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 230.

wisdom and confidently ask: *Mater Ter Admirabilis*, prove yourself admirable to us, too – admirable in your power, admirable in your kindness, and admirable in your wisdom.

1. *Through Motherly Power*

Mary's power over the Heart of God has a twofold root. As the Mother of God she can be certain that her wishes and petitions will be heard. As Christ's permanent Helpmate in the entire work of redemption, as our Mother in the true sense of the word, she has both the position and the power of a co-reigning Queen in the Kingdom of her Son, the King of heaven and earth.

As the *Mother of Christ*, she is not only *virgo potens*, Virgin Most Powerful, but also the *interceding omnipotence*.²⁹ That means that our Savior has – in accordance with God's plan – drawn her so deeply into his own office as Mediator that she, to quote St. Anselm, "is almighty by virtue of her supplication just as God is almighty by the nature of his very essence."³⁰ Without her yes no grace is given by Him, and the intercession of all the saints is also dependent on her yes. "As Mother of God," declared a holy Father of the Church, St. John Damascene, "she has become the Queen over all things created."³¹ "She

29 Emphasis added. This title bore special meaning in the vocabulary of Fr. Kentenich, and is derived from the widespread currents of 19th and early 20th century Mariology. Application of the word "omnipotent" to Mary's suppliant power can also be found in earlier centuries as can be seen in St. Alphonsus Ligouri's *The Glories of Mary* (published 1750) in Part I of Chapter VI (pp. 179-189, especially pp. 179-181). In the papal literature of the late 19th century we find in Leo XIII's encyclical "Adiutricem populi," September 5, 1895, the following: "She, who once served as helpmate in the mystery of humanity's redemption, is ordained to be the giver of graces as well, which she does from this mystery for all times; towards this end she has been bestowed with almost unlimited power." (Cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, Nos. 169-170). It should be noted that Fr. Kentenich's term *fürbittende Allmacht* is not merely "all-powerful intercessor" but quite literally "interceding omnipotence". See also Paul Vautier, *Maria, die Erzieherin* (Vallendar-Schönstatt, 1981) pp. 112-113.

30 Cf. *Der Marienprediger*, p. 144.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

who made herself a humble handmaid has now become the Queen over all,” confesses St. Bernard in deepest admiration.³² In order to document this fact in a visible way – so say the holy doctors of the Church – God frequently answers our prayers more quickly when we turn to Him through Mary than when we turn to Him directly.

As *co-reigning Queen* in the kingdom of her Son, her power is founded on her unique role of cooperation in the objective redemption.

St. Bernardin of Siena draws the conclusion: “Jesus Christ is King of the universe. Mary is consequently Queen of the universe, so that all creatures who serve God must also serve Mary. But since all of the angels and mankind plus everything that lives in heaven and on earth is subject to God, all of these created beings are subject to Mary as well.”³³

Abbot Guerricus prays: “Continue, Mary, continue to reign in calmness and without interruption. Work and do as you please with the property of your Son. You are the Mother and Bride of the King of the Universe. It is therefore only fitting that you be Queen of His realm and have dominion over all creatures.”³⁴

2. *Through Motherly Kindness*

As her special jurisdiction, God’s kindness presented Mary with the Dominion of Mercy. Christian thought therefore refers to her simply as the Mother of Mercy. How often do we pray, “*Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae*” (“Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy”)!

St. Albert the Great strikes the deepest chord in the Catholic perspective when he says, “The title which is most befitting for the most Blessed Virgin in her most supreme dignity is that of the Queen of Mercy.”³⁵

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., pp. 162-163. See also *The Glories of Mary*, p. 36.

34 Bl. Guerricus of Tournai (c. 1075-1157), disciple of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 36.

35 Cf. *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* (note 27, p. 16), Vol. 1, No. 229:3,8.

Jean Gerson does not hesitate to state this as a fundamental law of divine government: God reveals His power through manifestations of justice and of mercy. The realm of justice He has reserved for Himself, but the realm of mercy He has turned over to Mary with the decree that all graces and mercies which He grants to mankind “go through the hands of Mary and be dispensed according to her will,” which is, of course, always in agreement with the divine will.³⁶

The answer which St. Bernardin gives to the question why the Church calls Mary the Queen of Mercy is in the same direction: “Because we believe that Mary opens the abyss of God’s mercy to whomsoever she wills, when she wills, and as she wills, so that there is no sinner, however great, who will ever perish once Mary intercedes for him.”³⁷

It is with good reason then that we may call her not only *interceding omnipotence* but also the *Queen of Mercy* or *interceding, omnipotent mercy*. Indeed these two titles relate extremely accurately just how God’s people in the Church sees the Mother of Christianity. These titles are the most beautiful jewels in her crown. The sources of our faith (scripture and tradition) agree. On their part they lend no support to the supposition that Mary would share in the judgement which the Lord has reserved for Himself. This explains the fruitfulness of those individuals and those communities who have entered into a covenant of love with the Blessed Mother and live in accordance with it. They experience miracles of spiritual transformation both in themselves and in those confided to their care. That is the meaning of the words which St. Vincent Pallotti so often said: “Mary is the great missionary, she will work miracles.”³⁸

36 Jean (or John) Gerson (1363-1429), influential French theologian and political figure. Here quoted from *Der Marienprediger*, p. 161. See also *The Glories of Mary*, pp. 37-38.

37 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 40, where it is attributed to St. Bernard.

38 See note 22, p. 14.

History and legend, poetry and prose unite in making that honored title “Mother of Mercy” comprehensible and brilliantly justify it.

“Remember that the Lord has only raised you to the throne so that you come to the aid of all the Jews.” These are the words of Mordecai to Esther after King Ahasuerus had given the order to kill all the Jews. Esther interceded for them and her plea was answered, for the king loved her (cf. Esther 4,12ff; 7). How could God permit Mary’s petitions to remain unanswered, for He loves her beyond expression and has elevated her to Queen of Mercy? Therefore we confidently join St. Bernard in praying: “You are the Mother of the King and the Mother of those exiled, the Mother of the Judge and of the guilt-laden sinner. As Mother of them both, however, you cannot bear to see contradiction stand between them. You will therefore never rest until your offended Child has forgiven the offender, and not only forgiven, but also calmed the wrath of the heavenly Father.”

3. Through Motherly Wisdom

Mary’s motherly kindness and mercy are also coupled with wisdom. Her task is not only to represent the interests of man before God, but also God’s wishes before mankind. This is similar to the task of the Savior in whose mediation she participates in such a unique way.

The Litany of Loreto calls her the Seat of Wisdom. True Christian wisdom, however, is love for the cross and the Crucified. Its symbol is the Man of Sorrows in the lap of the Mother of Sorrows. The crucified Lord is a stumbling block to the Jews and an absurdity to the Gentiles, but to those who are of God’s spirit, He is a proof of God’s wisdom and power (cf. 1 Cor 1,23.25). Motherly wisdom, therefore, cannot do otherwise. She must lead her children on the way of the cross which Our Lord went ahead of us, and on which she was allowed to accompany Him to the heights of Golgotha. She leads her favorite children to the very immediate vicinity of the cross and our crucified Lord. Because she herself suffered so ignominiously with the

Redeemer of the world, she has a very fine ear for the language and wisdom of the cross. Like and like go well together.

An event in the life of a German poet, Hartmann by name,³⁹ demonstrates that. One night, while he was still young, he and his mother were riding past a mill. In one room a light was still burning. In spite of the racket caused by the turning of the mill wheel, a child's cry could be heard from the room, and in between, the sound of lullaby after lullaby. The poet's mother stopped still as if paralyzed. When her son asked what was the matter, she explained, "Such crying and such singing as that which comes from the mill is known to every mother heart. The crying comes from a sick child, and the singing from a mother who would rather cry. No mother who has gone through the same experience can pass by without mourning with that sad mother."

Queen of Martyrs

How much suffering did our heavenly Mother go through during her life, especially under the cross!

She had to become the Queen of Martyrs in order to be united as perfectly as possible with Christ in her position as permanent Helpmate of Our Lord. That was so she could, in birth pangs, give birth to us and be able to deeply share in our sufferings. Therefore we can be sure that she understands the suffering of all who have a cross to bear and knows how to console us in every situation in a special way. Yes, she knows how to comfort us, even when she leads us to the cross, which no mortal human can escape, much less a member of Christ who is called to become like the scorned and thorn-crowned Head. At the "Seat of Wisdom" we discover true wisdom: Rest and security, consolation and joy in every kind of cross and suffering.

St. Vincent de Paul knew this. For that reason he would lead those who had a heavy cross to bear and who came to him to unburden their hearts, to a picture of Our Lady. There he would say: When the Seat of true Wisdom does not have

39 Presumably Hartmann von Aue (after 1160-after 1210)

any further consolation and joy for you, then no one else has any either. St. Bernard points out the reason: “Mary, the heavenly Virgin, became all things to all men. In the overabundance of her love she made herself debtor to all. She gives access to her mother heart to all, so that all may take part in its fullness of graces. In her the prisoner finds liberation, the sick health, the afflicted consolation, the sinner forgiveness, the just perseverance, the angels joy and bliss. Should we not then approach such a loving Mother with childlike confidence?”⁴⁰

Mother of Mercy

Mary is the Mother of Mercy, and her mercy is so great that no one can fully grasp the length and breadth, the heights and depths of it, for its length reaches to the last day, its breadth extends over the whole earth, its heights reach up to the City of God, and its depths go down to those who wait in the shadow of death, into purgatory, in order to liberate them.

When we penetrate into the truth of this rich endowment which God has so abundantly given to the Mother of Christianity – motherly power, motherly kindness, and motherly wisdom – then we (can) see that she is capable of fulfilling her motherly task in a masterful way, (her task) of nourishing us with every kind of gift and grace, of educating us to be as perfect an image of Christ as possible for the glorification of the Father – that should reach the point where we can say, “My life is Christ’s life: ‘The life I live now is not my own, it is Christ living in me.’ (Gal 2,20)” – and of leading us victoriously as her instruments in her battle against the devil and the world, so that Christ’s dominion be established on earth. With that it is no longer difficult for us to acknowledge her mother rights over us.

Mary’s Mother Rights

Mary has the right to our receptiveness, willingness, and openness. If Mary is really our Mother, then it is taken for granted that we, as real and genuine children, be receptive for

40 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 214.

the graces which she intercedes for us as nourishing strength for our spiritual lives, as well as for all the mercies of God which are offered to us through His guidance and provision in contemporary history, family history, and our everyday lives. It is no more than right and just that we willingly allow her to educate us, even when she takes us to Golgotha and our crucified Lord, and in the Holy Spirit to the Father, and that we be open for every sign which she gives us, and for all the ways in which she leads us as instruments in her hand for the propagation and deepening of the Kingdom of God and to overcome the collectivistic spirit of the times.

We can derive these three mother rights and the corresponding triad of filial duties from a single common basis: the rights and duties of generous filial love. Mother love exacts filial love. Both automatically unite and perpetuate themselves in a deep, mutual, indissoluble covenant of love which impresses an original stamp on our entire interior and exterior lives and on everything we do.

The Covenant of Love Between Mother and Child

This covenant of love with the Blessed Mother is the goal for which our whole parish strives during the Marian Jubilee Year. It should find its Visible expression and crowning in the Shrine which we will build for her at the end of this year after we have first erected it in our own hearts.

This covenant of love is for us, your priests, the great desire of our hearts and our hope for the future of our parish. If we take it seriously, Our Lady will take the reins of our pastoral work into her hands. Then we will be able to write across the front of our church *Mater habebit curam* (Mother will take care). The Mother Thrice Admirable will then take charge of the education of the children and the sick, of our boys and girls, of our men and women, of the widows and the aged. She, the Interceding Omnipotence, the Mother of Mercy, and the Seat of Wisdom, will assume the responsibility of seeing to it

that we will all meet again in heaven and that all who possess the wood of solid sanctity be carved into generous saints.

The time will come when we will be able to give a witness like that made by Father Zucchi⁴¹ on his deathbed. In a consecration at the age of ten he made a covenant of love with the Blessed Mother like the one we are striving and preparing for. He took it so seriously that he even signed it in blood. As the formula for his dedication he used a prayer that is well-known to all of us. He prayed: “My Queen, my Mother, I give myself entirely to you, and to show my devotion to you I consecrate to you this day: my eyes, my ears, my mouth, my heart, my entire self without reserve. As I am your own, my good Mother, guard me and defend me as your property and possession. Amen.”

Both covenant partners remained faithful to their covenant and to the obligations which they had taken upon themselves. In every circumstance of his life, Zucchi took special care to consider himself the property of Our Lady and to act accordingly. Mary, by virtue of the covenant of love which had been sealed, used him as her property and her instrument. On his deathbed, therefore, after a long and successful life rich in labor, the aged priest confessed: “To the Blessed Mother to whom I dedicated my life from childhood on I owe the fact that I never marred my soul with the stain of impurity or mortal sin.”

If we are as serious about the covenant of love as Father Zucchi was, we too can expect that serious sins will become fewer and fewer in our parish, that a deep religious spirit will awaken in every walk of life and (social) class: that in this way the Mother Thrice Admirable will glorify herself from her Shrine as “the great missionary.” But, of course, this presupposes that we really make the covenant of love the foundation of our lives and striving, that we make use of it at all times as a weapon against all the enemies of our souls.

41 Nicholas Zucchi, a 17th century Jesuit.

In a sermon, a great venerator of Mary, Father Segneri⁴², once interpreted the admonition of the apostle Paul, “Labor as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2,3), and applied it to the love of Mary. (We will change it again, and) instead of “love of Mary” we will say “covenant of love with Mary.” Thus transformed, Father Segneri’s words read like this: “Labor as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Such a soldier carries no other weapon” than the covenant of love with Mary, for he can only call himself a soldier of Jesus Christ when he lives in union with His Mother in a deep covenant of love. “Thus protected, he will defeat every enemy, and he will never be overcome in any battle. At the end of his life he will be able to say with happy certainty: I have fought a good fight, therefore I know the crown of the just awaits me! (2 Tim 4,7f).”⁴³ Amen.

42 Paolo (or Paul) Segneri (1624-1694), Italian priest and famous preacher.

43 Cf. *Der Marienprediger*, pp. 205-206.

Fifth Sermon

**THE COVENANT OF LOVE: RESPONSE TO THE
NEEDS OF OUR TIMES**

The proclamation of the Marian Jubilee Year urges us to consider the Blessed Mother under the cross – week after week – and to hearken to the words of our dying Savior: “Ecce Mater tua!”

The Mother of Sorrows is at the foot of the cross *on the mount*, which means she stands above the sordidness of life and the confusion of our times. This is the image which the popes so expressly point out as the great and effective means of salvation from the raging storms of our present age. The “Ecce Mater tua” which they urgently repeat on countless occasions calls our attention to the fact that the Blessed Mother, as the permanent Helpmate of the Lord in the entire work of redemption, is our true and genuine Mother, and that God does not answer the petitions and needs of us, her true and genuine children, without her. He never disregards her when He wants to send us a message or help us or bestow on us some gift, not even when we bypass her and call on Him directly or ask the help of the saints or of our guardian angel. Without Mary’s effective cooperation the world cannot find peace. Without her, our expectation of the peace for which we so ardently long and of the triumph of Christ’s Church over all her enemies on earth will be in vain.

There is a legend that King Solomon possessed a signet ring on which the name of God was inscribed by the hand of an angel. With this ring King Solomon is said to have had power over all the forces of nature and all the minds of the earth. As a result, all things were subject to him. The Mother of God is even greater than Solomon. She reigns in union with her Son over heaven and earth. She shares in a unique way in the power, kindness, and wisdom of the Blessed Trinity. She is the interceding omnipotence, she is the Mother and Queen of Mercy, and the Seat of Wisdom. The Lord was with her, the Lord is with her, He will be with her in all eternity. By virtue of this one and the same divine decree, they stand in indissoluble unity. This mysterious two-in-oneness in being and activity is the foundation and wellspring of her greatness

and mission and fruitfulness in the kingdom of God. Therefore she is also with us, and it must be and remain our task to be with her and in her, and in that way to be in and with God as Mary is. Just as God does not bypass her when He descends to us, so we too do not wish to bypass her when we ascend to Him. From now on we will do nothing without her, and everything without exception in her and with her. If she stands at our side, if she accompanies us, we may venture forward and go our way serenely and securely despite all darkness. We can confidently dare the greatest and most difficult things and not perish. If she accompanies us and vouches for us, then God is on our side; then He is with us. And if God is for us, who can be against us? (cf. Rom 8,31).

The Covenant of Love with Mary – Response to Our Lord’s Last Testament

We apparently give the best response to the testament of our Savior and the wishes of our reigning Pope (Pius XII), and to the aspirations of our own hearts when we express our childlike relationship to Our Lady through an explicit covenant of love with her. We give this answer by expressing, strengthening, and making permanent our relationship with her, and by making the covenant the *basis of our entire life and work* in the future. This is the aim which we, as a parish, intend to fulfill during this Marian Year.

It is a custom in some parts of Poland that the children, even after they have grown up, kneel before their mother whenever they are about to leave the house for an extended period of time or when they return home. They say, “Here I am, Mother, give me your blessing.” In the same way, we too kneel in spirit tonight and ask Our Lady for her motherly blessing: Here we are, Mother, give us your blessing. And we add to this the prayer: Help us to recognize once more and to understand more deeply why we may not bypass you in our loving and living. This is the thought which we wish to reflect on tonight. Mother, for that give us your blessing – us who are your children.

*Why should we make the covenant of love with Mary the basis of our entire life and work?*¹ The question has three answers:

The first is rooted in Mary's position in the plan of God,²
the second in the situation of the times,
the third in the situation of our own personal lives.

I. Mary's Position in the Plan of God

The first answer is not difficult to grasp. We only need to recall what we have already heard regarding the position of Mary in the plan of salvation and to draw the corresponding conclusions, just as we have already attempted to do so often.

A. The Supernatural Foundation of Veneration of Mary

1. Mary's Objective Position in the Order of Salvation

It almost seems unnecessary to reemphasize that God did not bypass Mary in the work of redemption, and does not do so today either. He did not do so in the beginning – at the Incarnation – nor at the climax upon Golgotha, and until the end of time He needs her as the Mediatrix of all graces. Forever hers are both a seat and a vote in the council of the Blessed Trinity. There she is both listened to and esteemed. No decision made there goes into effect without her agreement. Neither angels, nor saints, nor men find a listening ear at the throne of God apart from her. We cannot emphasize this truth often enough. From this must we not draw the necessary conclusion that it is God's deafly recognizable wish and will that we may not bypass the Blessed Mother? In any case it is definitely prudent, advantageous, and helpful for our salvation if we imitate God's practice and enter into an indissoluble covenant of love with her.

- 1 This sentence is not included in Father Kentenich's original text but is added in the published German edition for the sake of clarity.
- 2 A literal translation of the German would better show the play on the word "situation" which Father Kentenich uses: "The first is rooted in the situation of Mary's being..."

2. Reasons for our Surrender in the Covenant

The position of the Blessed Mother in the objective plan of salvation is and remains the deepest and most effective permanent reason for our unreserved surrender of self to her.

This surrender may be made easier for us because of a deeply rooted natural inclination or because of the abundant personal advantages which it brings. Such advantages for body and soul may be enticements or motives of a lower order (which God uses to attract the soul), or they may be the fruit and the result of our total surrender to Mary. However, the final and deepest reason is and will remain God's wish and will as it is expressed in the position He has given to Mary.

B. The Natural Foundation of Veneration of Mary

Due to the natural laws of human development, there is a strong fundamental drive for a mother rooted in our human nature which makes the human being very receptive to motherly love.

1. Correspondence Between Natural and Supernatural Realities

God, who created the natural reality in correspondence with the supernatural reality, responds to this drive by giving the children of God a true and genuine Mother in Mary. St. Bonaventure had this happy thought in mind when he found himself unable to admire and praise God's mercy enough, a mercy best demonstrated by the fact that God has given His Mother to be the Mother of mankind, and that in this way He has made the return to Him easier for the sinner who would not dare to approach Him directly.

Fénelon declares that love for Mary comes to the Christian – in a manner of speaking – at his very birth. It is transferred from the parents to the child, it is nourished and strengthened by the real flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in each Holy Communion, and it accompanies him all through his life until death.³ A natural-supernatural inclination is addressed here which is deeply rooted

3 Francois de Fénelon (1651-1715), French priest and later archbishop of Cambrai who wrote on education and its philosophy. Paraphrase here follows *Der Marienprediger* (note 17, p. 67), p. 155.

in the human heart, which nearly irresistibly draws it to Mary, and which often – even after many years of living without God – becomes an effective starting point for the grace of conversion. With his reference to Holy Communion, Fénelon also points to the fact that the flesh and blood of Our Lord which we receive in Holy Communion was received and accepted by Him from His Mother. Therefore St. Ignatius admonishes us, “Because in a certain sense the flesh of Mary is within you after Holy Communion,” namely the flesh which Our Lord received from her, “do not forget to thank her also for this mother love.” Whoever keeps this context in mind will understand what Fénelon means to say by maintaining that love for Mary is nourished by each Holy Communion.

2. The Need for Shelteredness and Education

Moreover, there is no denying that Mary’s bountiful, kind, and wise motherhood gives a proper answer to the need for shelteredness and education which is found in the child and in the adolescent whose pressing needs are associated with growing up. It addresses the need for complementation which lies in the masculine soul as well as the woman’s need for a healthy awareness of her own self-worth which is so endangered from all sides. At present this awareness (of the woman) is built almost exclusively on a masculine set of values, which is the reason why the woman is losing her specific mission in the confusion of our times. Deep love for Mary gives the child a warm mother heart to be its nest. For the teenage girl living in an increasingly technological, materialistic, and brutal world it secures depth and sensitiveness of personality. For the teenage boy it secures moral purity and knightly strength despite an increasingly erotic and sexualized environment. It provides the man with a healthy complementation for his spiritual being and the woman with a secured awareness of the relationship between the sexes, namely the consciousness of her equal worth in

comparison to man despite the many differences which make her unique.⁴

In this way the valuable starting points (for our relationship with Mary) which are found in our nature come together with highly commendable effects of the rational-psychological kind,

- 4 Father Kentenich's perspective on the dignity of woman is found in more detail in a work which he composed in 1944 while a prisoner of the Third Reich in the concentration camp in Dachau. This book, *Marianische Werkzeugsfrömmigkeit* (Instrument Piety), was posthumously published in German in 1974 (Vallendar-Schoenstatt). Among other things he considers Mary as a "mirror" in which we can better see our own reality: "To the believing eye and loving heart, the Marian mirror extensively unveils (the mysteries of) the orders of nature, redemption, and salvation and places the dignity and activity of the ideal of the woman in a powerful (new) light. In that way it makes a significant contribution toward solving the sexual crisis and the crisis between the sexes... To understand (this) it is necessary to recall the tragic background. After Adam, the 'king' of creation, was formed, Holy Scripture says, '... It is not good for man to be alone. Let us make him a helpmate like unto himself' (Gen 2, 18), '... male and female he created them' (Gen 1,27)..."

"Adam and Eve complemented each other in both what they did and what they were, rather like the poles of an ellipse. Through her loving devotedness to Adam, Eve exerted great influence over him. In an act of wanton abuse of this influence, she seduced her husband into breaking the divine command. Through his fall, original sin entered human history with all its evil consequences under which the children of Eve must suffer until the end of time. As humanity's mother had fallen, so would she be punished: in her devotedness to man. In her very being she had been conceived by God as Adam's equal companion and queen. In punishment she had to hear her difficult sentence: 'You will stand under your husband's power and he will have dominion over you' (cf. Gen 3,16). In the course of the centuries the man has thoroughly misused his dominant position, reducing the woman to a mere object of his lowest sensuality and a slave of his passions and lusts; and the woman was happy in this state – a sign of how low she had fallen in her own estimation.

"In Mary God gave back woman's lost crown. In her, woman has again become queen. The only purely created being who is allowed to enter into the most intimate imaginable union with God is a woman: the Queen of heaven and earth. In her, all the members of her sex experience the solar radiance of feminine dignity and beauty and a piece of their own God-given greatness. Around Mary there arises a healthy, permanent, and effective consciousness of the sexes, namely a conscious knowledge of and sensitivity to her own personal worth even when she is so different from man, a consciousness which preserves the nobility of Christian feminine dignity and the tender glow of holy virginity despite the dangers of the times." (pp. 191-193).

in order to draw people of every type and every walk of life to Mary and to bring them into the realm of her greater influence. Thus Mary becomes the “magnet” which attracts all hearts to itself, the “lure” which attracts all like fish and leads them into “God’s net”. All of this deserves attention and recognition. God took all of this into consideration when he drew Mary into His plan of salvation. It is therefore allowed that all of this play a motivating role in education and pastoral work, and for reasons of method may even temporarily dominate the foreground. Nonetheless, the final and deepest motivation, the one which transcends time and stands out above all others must always be God’s wish and will as He communicates it to us through Mary’s position in the order of salvation. If the natural reasons were therefore less fruitful than they actually are, if the fruits for the fulfillment, maturing, and enrichment of our nature were not so great, it would still not be permitted to ignore and bypass Mary on the way to God, to avoid the covenant of love with her. The reason is always the same. It cannot be impressed on us often and deeply enough: As Our Lord came to us in and through Mary, so we too should go to Him in and through her. This, without exception, is God’s holy will. The process of conformity with Christ cannot take place without her. We cannot go to the Father in the Holy Spirit without her.

C. Mary’s Mission in the Work of Redemption

When we bring together both the natural basis (of the veneration of Mary) and the corresponding results, and the supernatural position of Mary in the objective plan of salvation, wide new vistas are opened for understanding Pope Pius X’s fundamental insight that the easiest, surest, and shortest way to a vivid oneness with Christ and a deep penetrating love for the heavenly Father is through Mary.⁵ It becomes understandable why the Church places in her mouth the words, “He who finds

5 Cf. note 18, p. 42.

me shall find life and have salvation from the Lord” (Prv 8,35) and “He who puts me in the right light will have eternal life.”⁶

As often as we pray the Our Father and, in particular, as often as we acknowledge, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6,10), we are reminded of the fact that God has given Mary this mediating position which He does not want us to ignore or bypass but acknowledge in both theory and practice.

As often as we hear the last will and testament of our dying Savior – “Ecce Mater tua” – we recall just how outstanding that mission for the work of redemption is which was thereby solemnly and expressly conferred upon Our Lady before the whole world; and we act accordingly. As often as we ponder Mary’s exhortation, “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2,5), we are reminded of the fact that the “Ecce Mater tua” was spoken as His last wish before He died and implies a childlike-motherly covenant of love between her, our true Mother, and us, her true children.

We affirm with our whole heart what Mary said to St. Gertrude the Great during a vision, “One may not call my sweet Jesus my only Son, but my firstborn, for I have conceived Him as the first in my womb, but after Him, or rather through Him, I have conceived all of you, so that you are His brothers and my children and in Him I have taken you into the heart of my motherly love.”⁷ As often as our attention is directed to the person and mission of Mary during this Marian Year, we, like St. John, take her into our hearts and homes and give her there the place which God has foreseen for her. We thus respond to the testament of Our Lord, “Ecce Mater tua! Ecce filius tuus!” (Behold your Mother! Behold your son!) That should be doubly

6 As with the verse “I am the mother of fair love...” (see note 20, p. 48), this verse is found only in the Vulgate (Sir 24,31 using the old Vulgate) with the difficult Latin text, “*Qui elucidant me vitam aeternam habebunt.*” In the New American Bible this would have to be inserted between vs. 21 and 22.

7 Cf. *The Glories of Mary* (note 8, p. 63), p. 48.

and triply easy for us (to see) when we consider the present situation of the times.

II. The Situation of the Times

Why does God so strongly desire that His Mother be placed so much in the foreground today? Indeed, why does she so emphatically draw our attention to herself?. To these questions we have already given an answer. Whenever the Church has been in danger, she has looked to Mary's office as Mediatrix and Mother and consciously entered into a covenant of love, protection, and support with her. Success has never failed to follow. Countless examples from world and Church history could be cited to verify this point. Because the bark of Peter is tossed by storms of extraordinary strength in every part of the world, the popes so emphatically point to Mary. That is why they so strongly urge the Church to make the consecration to Mary, to seal a covenant of love with her. God speaks clearly in the confusion of our times.

Through her He also speaks a second and third message. Have we not already noticed how much we have pointed out Mary's personal and free cooperation in the entire work of redemption and how luminously the emphasis has been laid on Mary's position as Queen of heaven and earth? In the background is the profound wisdom of how God governs the world. In any given era this wisdom illuminates precisely those characteristics of Mary which are most necessary to combat the specific errors of the time. Simply said, the great error of our century is the collectivistic man and the collectivistic social order.

A. The Collectivistic Man and Mary as the Radiant Alternative

The collectivistic man is the mass-man, the "radio" man, the "movie" man, the "television" man who has lost the core of his personality. He simply allows himself to be fluttered about like a leaf on a tree – by the opinions of others, by the fads and trends of the time, and by the directives of his leaders and

dictators. He lives on outside impressions but is unable to assimilate them or digest them for himself. What he thinks and says is a slap-copy in printers' ink, an empty rattling off of what television and radio have served him in word and picture.

In his purest form, the collectivistic man is stripped of the nobility of his human dignity and of his royal freedom. He stands there de-divinized, de-personalized, robbed of morals and robbed of a soul, divided within self and at odds with his environment.

Mary is the radiant alternative. She lived the motto, "*Omnia uni,*" everything for the one God, in brilliantly exemplary fashion. She is wholly and entirely given to God. We know that she was created solely for Christ's sake and that she has unreservedly surrendered herself to Him and His work. Her entire greatness lies in the supernatural world.

In contrast to the de-divinized man, she is completely penetrated by God. All of her privileges clearly testify to that: The Immaculate Conception and divine Motherhood, her sinlessness and her Assumption, her co-redemptive position, her mediation of graces, and her Queenship.

At the same time she portrays a personality of outstandingly high morals who despite – indeed because of – her dependence on God is aware of the great gift of freedom within her. She willingly places this freedom at the disposal of the Giver of all things that are good, and He for His part respects the majesty of that free will, He who does not want to redeem and sanctify the world without the freely given Fiat of the Co-Redemptrix who speaks as representative of all mankind. In this way she confronts the de-personalized and moralless man with the personality which is free, rooted in God, and integrated in the supernatural order. She points out to us that God esteems and protects our freedom, too, and that He does not want to redeem or sanctify the world without our active cooperation. Just as the members of the body cannot exist and be fruitful without the head, so the head cannot get along without its members. This is the deep meaning of our contributions to the capital of grace. We do not want to merely receive from God and

Our Lady; we also want to effectively cooperate in the redemption of the world through our prayers and sacrifices.

The collectivistic man is soulless. He is heartless and insensitive. In contrast, Mary stands out as the Mother of kindness and mercy.

Modern man, so interiorly torn and divided, so locked into spiritual distance from those around him despite physical proximity, finds in Mary the ideal of a person wholly at peace: at peace with self, at peace with God, at peace with the surroundings.

In this way we can see why the “Ecce Mater tua” never ceases to resound in our times. It is a loud protest against the entire phenomenon of the mass-man and a vibrant appeal for its effective defeat. Mary is the one who overcomes all heresies – in the course of the centuries she has given brilliant proof of that fact. She will overcome the collectivistic heresies of our time, too. She does so through the ideal of her own personality and through her mediation of graces, which is aimed at the formation and education of great and powerful personalities who have the courage to follow her example in swimming against the stream. She seeks personalities that are ready to surrender themselves wholly to God for the work of redemption and have the courage to let themselves be crucified for their ideal. As we know from experience, Mary educates these great personalities and leads them as instruments in her hand onto the battlefield of our times and into the arena of life – into family and workshop, streets and byways, political life and houses of government. That is how the words “Ecce Mater tua” are meant to be interpreted today.

B. Collectivistic Society and the Christo-Marian Alternative

Together with the personality, the entire Christian social order is endangered and shaken to the very core. Just as the de-personalized individual counts for nothing more than an interchangeable part in a machine, modern collectivistic society as a whole is a machine whose individual parts are mechanically bound together and are kept in order and motion by the external

action of a dictator. The entire world is meant to become a single unified machine of unimaginable size. At its helm is meant to stand a world dictator who rules the entire earth. And as a matter of fact, a new Babel, a world order without and opposed to God is being formed. At the moment, America and Russia are locked in the struggle for world dominance.

Catholicism, too, proclaims a comprehensive world unity – but as an organic unity with a head at the helm and a warm heart that takes a personal interest in each individual member. The Head is Christ, the heart is Mary, and as long as neither holds their rightful position as apportioned by God’s plan, the world will be unable to find rest. Humanity is no mere organization. It is rather a great organism. It is a family. It therefore needs a head and a heart; neither the one nor the other may be absent. It is an immense kingdom. It must be ruled by a king and a queen – by Christ the King and Mary the Queen of the world. Both must be granted their rightful position and recognized in that capacity. Indeed what Sacred Scripture says of Adam also applies to the second Adam, “It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a helpmate like unto himself” (Gen 2,18). For Christ this Helpmate is Mary, the Mother of the human family and the Queen of the world. All efforts towards unity cannot come to fruition without Mary, who, on the twenty-fifth of March of the first year of the Christian era, became the Mother of the Head and our Mother and consequently heart of all mankind.

If Head and heart are to keep the world together they must first rule over the Church in their two-in-oneness; they must be commonly acknowledged as such in the dioceses and parishes, in religious orders and communities, and above all in and by each individual family. Without the renewal of the family there will be no renewal of Church and world. Our first deep and all-embracing concern must therefore be for this most basic cell of human society.

The dedication to the Sacred Heart of Jesus should be concluded and perfected by the dedication to the Heart of Mary.⁸ The covenant of love with our Savior is meant to be made secure in the covenant of love with His Mother. If both covenants are taken seriously, then the Christian social order will be saved and the core of the problems of social justice will be solved to the extent that this is at all possible. Like Head and heart, the members will then be bound to and among one another by the bond of love, and the time will come again when others will be able to say again of the community of Christians, “See, how they love one another.”⁹ See how the poor and the rich, how the exalted and the lowly, how the insignificant and the great form a single united family. See how all are responsible for one another and how – despite differing occupations and differing social classes – they care for one another, protect and support, carry and bear with one another and lift each other up! All of that should resound for humankind today in the words “Ecce Mater tua”.

III. The Situation of our Personal Lives

The third reason that drives us into the arms of Our Lady is what we have called the situation of our personal lives. Since we do not live in a vacuum, but are full-fledged children of our age who help form and are formed by our times, the general situation of the times greatly influences the situation of our own lives. The situation of our time is primarily affected by two considerations – by oppressing uncertainty and tormenting fear. The “Ecce Mater tua” applies in both cases.

8 In the published German edition this sentence is in italics and raised to stand as a separate heading.

9 In his work *Apologeticus* (198), Tertullian (c. 160-c. 220) wrote to defend the faith and practices of the Christians in a time of great anti-Christian sentiment in the Roman Empire. This quote (ch. 39, vs. 7) is found in the mouths of the pagans who cannot believe the charity practiced by the Christians.

A. Mary's Example in the Hour of Uncertainty

Mary's example, her intercession and educational activity succeed in revealing to us the intention God has in giving mankind its present twofold cup of suffering, a cup which is filled to the brim. All of us can sense that we are sitting atop a rumbling volcano that can erupt into death and destruction at any time. We sense that the world of today is in an unparalleled state of ferment. We have been torn out of our previous tranquil security and are filled with an inner fear and foreboding of all that lies ahead. At the same time we picture Mary's life as having been an unbroken stroll through flower-strewn meadows, devoid of serious conflicts or interior tribulation, free from all insecurity and fear. That, however, would be in complete disagreement with the hard facts. It blinds us to Mary's true greatness, to the heroism of the faith and love with which she responded to and overcame all insecurity and fear.

She experienced the night and darkness, the uncertainty and insecurity of the intellect as we do, even more so in fact. She did not understand the Lord's actions when the twelve-year-old Savior treated her with so little regard after she had looked for Him in sorrow for three days (cf. Lk 2,41-50). Is not our experience similar on many occasions?

She did not understand... How often she experienced this! How much darkness these words contain! She did not understand how her virginity could be reconciled with physical motherhood. Nonetheless, she blindly believed the message of the angel. She spoke her Fiat and became the virginal Mother of God (cf. Lk 1,34-38). She did not understand how the Child of her womb could be the Lord and King of the universe and yet lie helplessly in the manger (cf. Lk 2,7). She did not understand why He had to take to flight so soon after His birth and share the lot of the homeless and the poor. But again she believed blindly in Divine Providence and fled to Egypt (cf. Mt 2,13-15). She thus shows how we should act in similar situations. She returned to her homeland only after those who were seeking

the life of her Child were dead – not sooner nor later (cf. Mt 2,19-23). She did not understand why the Lord who would redeem and rule over the whole world should live for thirty years in such uneventful seclusion that, when His public life later began, the inhabitants (of Nazareth) would ask in astonishment, “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” (Mt 13,55). Mary did not understand this and many, many other things.

Despite the deathleaps that were exacted of her intellect by such a life, she blindly believed in Christ’s divinity and mission. She believed in it so strongly that at the beginning of his public life she, faith-filled and confident, expected a miracle of Him (cf. Jn 2,1-10). She was therefore prepared for His way of suffering, for her co-suffering of Christ’s agony and death. The apostles were scandalized and fled, but she stood believingly and faithfully to Him at the foot of the cross. Indeed, a radiant example for us in the darkness of our times.

B. Mary’s Example in the Hour of Fear and Distress

Mary most certainly did not lack anxiety or distress of heart. Her mother heart not only bore with Christ all the pain which He had to endure during His flight into Egypt and because of the ungratefulness of His friends and the persecutions at the hands of His enemies. It also suffered in a hard and bitter way because of the treatment she received from the twelve-year-old Jesus in the temple, something which she endured as a very difficult hour of agony. That is why she exclaimed with such emotion, “Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow” (Lk 2,48). His answer, which directed them upward to His heavenly Father, was, “Did you not know that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Lk 2,49). To her seeking spirit and her wounded heart, this provided abundant material for meditation and for inner reflection. This point is especially noted by Sacred Scripture when it says, “And his mother pondered all these things in her heart” (Lk 2,51).

When Our Lord hung on the cross, she was sufficiently prepared for this final surrender. Her heart was entirely free for all of God's plans. She not only gave up her Son for three days – she permitted Him to bleed to death for love of us and to be laid in the tomb.

In exemplary fashion she therefore overcame the uncertainties of the intellect through the heroism of her faith, and the fear and distress of her heart through the heroism of her trust and her love.

C. Mary Educates us to be Followers of Christ

“Ecce Mater tua!” As our Mother she has gone the way before us which each of us must tread without exception. “Ecce Mater tua!” Our Mother is, at the same time, our Educator, she who was brought up in the austere school of education of the Savior. As a consequence she has full insight into God's mysterious plans. She knows that the insecurity and fear which God has permitted to overshadow modern man is intended to make him more quickly similar to our crucified Savior and both usable and fruitful as seed for a new world. She knows and adheres to the immutable law that the kingdom of heaven endures violence (cf. Mt 11,12), that it therefore cannot be gained by playing games or seeking after pleasure, but only by severe self-discipline. She cannot and will not give us a dispensation from the decree which God laid down after the first sin, that human life here on earth is to be a strenuous warfare against the inclination towards evil in our hearts, against the influences of an infirm world and against the evil spirits who prowl about like roaring lions seeking those whom they may devour (cf. 1 Pt 5,8).

Her task as Mother is to preserve us from the many dangers that await body and soul. Her office as Educator urges her to help us and educate us, so that the tormenting insecurity and fear which has swept inevitably over the nations become a way by which we are more quickly freed from all that is not of God, and in Him alone seek and find the lasting tranquility

and peace of a home and a nest. Above all, she wants to prove and glorify herself as Educator by inspiring us to surrender ourselves unreservedly to her as her instruments in a covenant of love with her. She wants to inspire us into letting ourselves be formed by her into an *alter Christus* (another Christ) and an *altera Maria* (another Mary), a little Mary who is able to answer to the distress of modern life and times with a deathleap of intellect, heart, and will into the Heart of God the Father and who never wearies of offering self as an instrument for the redemption of the world, just as the Helpmate of the Lord has done before us.

Our Marian Consecration--A Covenant of Love with our Mother and Educator

Mary's position in the order of being, i.e. her position in the plan of salvation, as well as the present situation of our times and our personal lives, urges us with gentle force into the arms and heart of Mary, our Mother and Educator.

In order to give us a secure and permanent home there, it is not only she but also the Holy Father (Pius XII) who advises us to follow his example and make the same dedication to her Immaculate Heart which he has solemnly performed twice in the name of the universal Church. Our parish wishes to crown the Holy Year with just such a dedication made together. It is the purpose of these Lenten sermons to help prepare our hearts for this dedication.

This dedication, however, is the same as a mutual covenant of love between the Mother Thrice Admirable and ourselves. It is a mutual exchange of hearts, goods, and interests. For that reason St. Louis Grignion de Montfort says, "[She] (the Blessed Mother), seeing that a soul gives itself entirely to her (in the consecration as a covenant of love)... gives herself completely and in an ineffable manner to him who (by virtue of the covenant of love) gives all to her. She causes him to be engulfed in an abyss of her graces; she adorns him with her merits; she upholds him with her power; she enlightens him with her radiance; she

inflames him with her love; she communicates to him her virtues, her humility, her faith, her purity, etc.; she makes herself his surety, his supplement, and his very all with Jesus. In short, as he who is consecrated to Mary (by virtue of the covenant of love) is all her own, so is he (by virtue of the same covenant) all his own ...”¹⁰

What we call contributions to the capital of grace is the visible expression of this covenant. We give ourselves and all we have to Our Lady, but we also expect (that she will give) herself and all that she calls her own as a gift in return. We expect especially that she will transform us into Christ, that she will lead us in Him to the Father, and that she will draw us into her mission as permanent Helpmate of the Lord and so use us as instruments for the redemption and peace of the world. Our Lady takes such a covenant very seriously.

The Austrian ambassador to Munich, Lord of Binder and Knight of Kriegelstein, personally entered his name in the register of the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary – but as mockery and not out of any inner conviction. By so doing it was at least outwardly as if he had pledged himself to Mary in a covenant. From that moment on she never loosened her grip on the faithless mocker. She did not rest until she had him safely in the Catholic Church and through an exemplary death saw that he was saved. That is the manner of doing things of the *Virgo fidelis*, the Virgin most Faithful. Once she has accepted someone in a covenant of love, she will never release her hold on him until he belongs to Our Lord and has reached the goal of his life.

It has been said that the devil remains firmly in the shadow of those who have sold their souls to him. His last words are then certain to be, as in Goethe’s *Faust*, “Come to me!”¹¹ Or he will unremittingly point to his copy of the pact and call

10 *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (note 13, p. 66), no. 144. Words in parentheses inserted by Father Kentenich.

11 Johann Wolfgang v. Goethe (1749-1832), *Faust*, first part, last scene (in prison), line 214.

out to the victim who tries to escape his clutches, using the words of the Jew in Venice, "I stay here on my bond."¹²

Mary, the counterplayer to the devil, does the very same to us once we have entered into a covenant of love with her. She knows even better than the Prince of Darkness the priceless value of the human soul. The ransom for that was the precious blood of her Son and the sword in her heart. She therefore repeats in every circumstance of our lives, "Come to me, I stay here on my bond." She does so when we are tempted to sin. She does so when dark thunderclouds gather on the horizons of our times. She does so when she needs instruments in order to lead the Church to victory in the battle against hell. She does so when we are in financial need or having problems with our health. Above all, she does so when we are on our deathbed and must appear before the eternal Judge. Always and ever she repeats the words, "Come to me, I stay here." Throughout all eternity we will then praise the mercies of our dear Mother which she has shown to us in a special way since making the covenant of love with her and adopting it as our personal and common form of life. Amen.

12 William Shakespeare (1564-1616), *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, scene 1, line 240 (words of Shylock demanding that Antonio make good on his debt of "a pound of flesh to be by him cut off nearest the merchant's heart").

Sixth Sermon

WITH MARY INTO THE NEW ERA

The Catholic Action Convention which took place in the Auditorium last week had as its motto, "Meet the Future with Mary." We could say instead, "*With Mary into the New Era.*" The picture of the times painted by the talks (at the convention) was very somber. Christianity, it was said, no longer dominates and rules the earth. In Communism an opponent has arisen which we all take too little seriously; an opponent which – with great success – considers and deals with Christianity as a world view it has already defeated; an opponent which believes Christianity can be annihilated and overtaken without particular difficulty because its teachings are not alive in those who profess the faith – and (Christianity) is therefore nothing to be feared.

The Way to an Outspoken Marian Century

The gigantic battle which has flared up between these two powers which now fight for world supremacy is taking on increasingly blunter form and ever vaster proportions. The destiny of the world is on the line. The groundwork is being laid for centuries to come. The way the fronts form now is how they will remain through the lifetime of our children and children's children. For that reason, each of us bears a large share of the responsibility for the form that the world will take in the future. If this future – regardless of the specific characteristics it will have – is to bear a resemblance to the countenance of Christ, then Mary must step more into the foreground and be acknowledged everywhere as the official Christ-giver, Christ-bearer, and Christ-bringer. Standing next to Christ the King, she must hold the scepter over all nations as the Queen of heaven and earth and rule them.

This is the same line of thought which we have been following through our Lenten sermons and which is the personal conviction that we want to carry into our lives and into the intellectual battles of our day. The first sermon already keyed the fact that we must lead the Blessed Mother onto the battlefields of our times

as the (great) leader and onto the battlefields of our hearts as the (great) Educator. By so doing we make our contribution, so that the coming hundred years radiantly bear the name of Mary on their brow. According to God's plan they are meant to and must become a *Marian century* of unprecedented distinction, unlike any that history has thus far seen or experienced.

The sermons which followed exposed the deeper reason for this: It is Mary's official position in the divine plan of redemption which God wishes to luminously reproclaim today to all the world in order to subject the nations of the earth to her gentle scepter, lead them together as new men in a renewed Christian social order, and unite them into one great family in which Christ is the Head and Mary the heart. As *His* permanent Helpmate He wants to have her constantly at His side and to use her as His instrument. As *our* permanent Helpmate, she has been called to be ready to help us in every moment, to co-generate the divine life of grace within us, to educate and lead us into a way of life like Christ's, and to lead us into the divine battles here on earth and to help us to victory.

Mary as Christ's Helpmate and Modern Man's Leader and Educator

"It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2,18). These words resound from the dawn of creation and through the millennia. The man meant here is Christ. *It is not good that the Redeemer of the world be alone.* Strictly speaking, He does not need any human help or assistance at all. After all, He is God, He is almighty. But since it was decided in the council of the Blessed Trinity that the eternal Word take on human nature from a woman, He needed a mother. Therefore the eternal God spoke in regard to His Son: Let us make Him a helpmate (cf. Gen 2,18).

Christ's Helpmate

It is not good for man, for Christ, to be alone. This Helpmate would not only give Him human life, would not only place Him in a manger and wrap Him in swaddling clothes, would

not only dry His tears and coax Him to make His first smile, would not only flee with Him into Egypt to escape the designs of Herod and feed Him by the labor of her hands. No, she would also stand at His side, permanently helping in His entire life's work. That means she would truly become His physical and our spiritual Mother. That and that alone is the way it is ordained in the plan of the eternal God. That, too, is the way it happened in reality.

Let us make Him a helpmate who – to the extent that it is possible for one who is solely human – will be like unto Himself. That is how God's omnipotent word rolled and thundered and echoed throughout creation. Then Mary, as permanent Helpmate of the Lord in the entire work of redemption, became the masterpiece of divine omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness: the singular image and likeness of God, practically the shadow of the Son, free from original sin and personal guilt, virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ, full of graces and virtues, and bodily assumed into heaven.

Our Helpmate

It is not good for man to be alone. I am that man. That man is the whole of human society. *It is not good that we always face God alone.* Let us make him a helpmate. That helpmate is Our Lady. As Mediatrix she stands between God and us, between heaven and earth, between Creator and creation. In and with Christ she stands at God's side. In the same manner, however, she also stands at our side. She is God's Helpmate and our Helpmate. If God does not think it beneath His dignity to use her to come to us and to communicate with us and to bestow on us His gifts, then we certainly do not need to be ashamed to let ourselves be taken by her hand and into her heart and so be led to God.

Let us make him a helpmate like unto himself. Mary is like unto us. She belongs to the human race just as we do; like us she has Adam and Eve for her first parents. We are children of God, members of Christ, temples of the Holy Spirit – just as she is. She has suffered as we do, and except for sin, she was spared

no sorrow. We are, therefore, like her, and we should become even more like her from day to day. “Such as all mothers,” we read in the papal encyclical for the Marian Year, “are deeply affected when they perceive that the countenance of their children reflects a characteristic likeness to their own, so also our most sweet Mother wishes for nothing more, never rejoices more than when she sees those, whom she has adopted under the cross of her Son as children in His stead, portray the lineaments and ornaments of her soul in thought, word, and deed.”¹

Mary’s Influence over the Hearts of God and Man

God is infinitely wise. He therefore not only delegates tasks to us but also endows us with whatever is needed to carry them out. He makes the means available to us which suit the task and secure its realization. In order to make it easier for God’s Mother and our Mother to fulfill her mediating and maternal position – her office as permanent Helpmate of Christ in the entire work of redemption – He has bestowed on her a singular power over both His heart and the heart of man. For that reason St. Alphonsus speaks of her as a “ravisher of hearts” from whom the hearts of neither God nor man are safe.² Therefore, the Church applies to her the words of the bridegroom in the Song of Songs, “You have wounded my heart, my sister, my bride, you have wounded my heart” (Song 4,9).

1. Over the Heart of God

In a vision St. Bridget once saw Mary sitting on a triumphal chariot which was adorned with garlands of roses.³ For ages the rose has been regarded a symbol of victory. It was, for instance, the custom of the soldiers of ancient Rome and Gaul to ornament their helmets with roses before the battle and their

1 Pius XII, encyclical “Fulgens corona,” September 8, 1953; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady* (note 9, p. 6), No. 605.

2 Cf. St. Alphonsus Ligouri, *The Glories of Mary* (note 8, p. 63), p. 65, where St. Bernard is quoted using this term, and p. 69.

3 Illustrative material in this and the following section is taken from *Der Marienprediger* (note 17, p. 67), pp. 862-866.

shields after the victory had been attained. The roses which decorate the triumphal chariot of Our Lady – which we call the spiritual roses – are intended to praise Mary in an exalted manner as the “Victress in all God’s battles.”⁴ She overcomes both the Heart of God and the heart of man. St. Bernard refers to her as a “Flaming Rose” because of the fire of her love which nothing can resist, the fire of her zeal with which she conquers everything, and the fire of her majesty with which she overcomes all things. St. Gregory of Nichomedia declares unabashedly, “Nothing, O Virgin, can resist your power, nothing can resist your strength. Everything obeys your command, all is subject to you.” According to the opinion of St. Alphonsus, this applies not only to the angels and to mankind, but in a justifiable sense also to God Himself. St. Bernard draws our attention to the fact that although His hour had not yet come at the wedding feast at Cana, Our Lord nonetheless worked His first miracle because of her. St. Bernard further states that on earth she manifested a kind of omnipotence which she now exercises from heaven by the strength of her intercession. St. Anselm goes even further by making the bold assertion, “Just as you desire it, O holy Virgin, you direct the will of the Almighty. He permits Himself to be both defeated and conquered by you.”

Here we face the mystery of the harmony between the absolute sovereignty of the divine and the freedom of the human will. Both the will of God and the will of Mary are always in perfect agreement, and yet Mary’s will – whether she acts as the Queen-Mother or as the co-reigning Queen – never loses the individual freedom which God apportioned to her in His plan from all eternity.

2. Over the Human Heart

How strong Mary’s influence is upon the human heart cannot easily be expressed in words. Such things become clear (only) when the veil which covers the story of each soul is lifted. St.

4 Cf. Pius XII, Prayer of Consecration of the World to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, October 31, 1942; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 373 (quoted above on p. 5f.; see also p. 10).

Bonaventure accurately captures the believing conviction of the Catholic faithful when, expressing a kind of law in the kingdom of God, he explains, “The fire of her love overcomes all things.” What he wants to say is that there is no obstacle in the human person which she, in the long run, cannot overcome. She is capable of breaking the iron chains of our habits, snaps the tightest strictures, and knows how to resolve the most complicated predicaments. St. Bernard confirms this in his fiery manner: The flames of love in her heart, he says, “are vehement. They are like bolts of lightning which strike their mark quickly and unerringly; they fell the sinner just as the Lord felled Saul on the road to Damascus (cf. Acts 9,3f). She, the daughter of that God who in the Old Testament is called fire, she, the Mother of that Son whom the prophet Ezekiel (1,3) called a burning torch, consumes sin down to its very roots and burns up all bad habits and sinful inclinations of the soul. She tears away all the illusions and the empty dreams which the sinner makes for himself and destroys like cobwebs all fabricated reasons and pretexts which he tries to use as an excuse.”

St. Paul admitted how he bore the Philippians in his heart. He called on God as witness to how much he longed for each of them with the affection of Christ Jesus (cf. Phil 1,7f). The love of the apostle for his followers was undoubtedly very great, but what is it in comparison to the maternal love which Our Lady has for us, her true children, with whom she is indelibly united by bonds of mystical closeness? She shelters us in her heart because it is a genuine mother heart which beats for us at all times and consumes itself for us in the noble attitude of sacrifice. She shelters us there because she knows what a tremendous price her divine Son has paid for us. For us He sweat blood. For us He was scourged at the pillar and permitted Himself to be crowned with thorns. For us He carried the cross and accepted gall and vinegar to drink. For us He shed the last drop of His blood. At such a price we have been purchased (cf. 1 Cor 6,20). Indeed, after we view all this, we understand better how tenderly Mary bears us in her heart.

Finding Mary

If we summarize what we know about Mary's position in the divine plan of salvation and her power over the hearts of God and man, we understand why the Holy Father desires to draw her triumphal chariot onto the battlefield of our confused times and of our own hearts during this Marian Jubilee Year. We must draw this chariot, we must draw it ourselves, for *it is our task to prepare for her the way into our own hearts and onto the battlefield of our times*. God demands this cooperation from us. Our Lady herself exacts it of us. She wishes that we seek and find her. For this reason the Church places in her mouth the words, "He who finds me shall find life and have salvation from the Lord" (Prv 8,35). "Happy the man watching daily at my gates and waiting at my doorposts" (Prv 8,34).

Like the bride in the Song of Songs seeking her beloved, we wait with expectation for the Blessed Mother. To her, in and with Christ, belongs all the pure and childlike love of our hearts. We exclaim, "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, tell me where she is, the one my heart seeks. Tell me where she tames, where she rests, so that I find her and find happiness" (cf. Song 5,8).

It is a twofold question which we must raise. The question is where and how we can encounter Mary. Today we will consider the first question.⁵

If you have understood all that we meditated on regarding the Blessed Mother in the course of this Lent, it will not be difficult for you to independently discover where we meet Mary in everyday life, where we can seek and find her. We need only recall *two principles of Mariology*; then things will become fully clear which our Christian thinking and sentiment have always held to be true and have simply taken for granted without giving it much particular thought.

5 The question of *how* is considered in the Seventh Sermon. See p. 153.

I. Where Christ is, There Also is Mary

The first principle is this: Because, as is God's plan, Jesus and Mary belong together by one and the same divine decree of selection in an inseparable two-in-oneness of life and work, we will always find Christ's Mother wherever He is and works, and wherever she is active we will similarly encounter in some way the Redeemer of the world.

A. With Mary to the Altar

The Savior lives and works in a transfigured state in union with the Father. We also find His Mother there as Queen of heaven and earth. "Graced with a sparkling crown given by her Son, she reigns with Him as Queen over all... an almost infinite power has been bestowed upon her." This is the teaching of Leo XIII.⁶ Pius X says, "Christ is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high; but Mary is seated as Queen on His right hand, the securest refuge of those who are in peril, as well as the most faithful of helpers,"⁷ so that there is no need to fear since she is the leader.

Both Jesus and Mary are in intimate union with one another at all times, and after their fashion they fulfill the task of the redemption of the world. The more "our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3,20), the less likely it is that we will overlook the throne of the Queen of heaven. We also experience how true those words are which say, "He who finds me shall find life and have salvation from the Lord" (Prv 8,35). "Happy the man watching daily at my gates and waiting at my doorposts" (Prv 8,34).

The God-Man lives and works in a mystical sacramental way on our altars. With deepest faith we acknowledge:

6 Leo XIII, probably referred to is the encyclical "Iucunda semper," September 8, 1894; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 153, though the English translation given there deviates appreciably from the German translation quoted by Father Kentenich.

7 Pius X, encyclical "Ad diem illum laetissimum," February 2, 1904; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 234.

“Your Son offers Himself with meekness
For us as the sacrifice on the altar.
He is there as friend and as food,
Quietly close to us in every situation.”⁸

In this way Our Lord proves the truth of His words, “See, I shall be with you always, even to the end of the world” (Mt 28,20). “Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you” (Mt 11,28). “For God so loved the world, as to give His only-begotten Son; that whoever believes in Him may not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn 3,16).

Wherever our Savior lives and works, there we find His permanent Helpmate active in her accustomed fashion – namely through her love and care. She once kept faithful watch at His manger, accompanied Him through His childhood and youth, and attentively followed His public life with loving interest. She did not abandon Him during His passion, and she stood at the foot of the cross when He died. That is how intimately her life was united with His. Therefore Christian thought has always understood that she does not leave Him alone in the Sacrament of Love. There her love keeps watch with Him during the night hours while we sleep. There, as St. John Chrysostom tells us, she adores Eternal Love with the angels and archangels. She incessantly offers Him to the heavenly Father as the sacrificial gift of thanksgiving, petition, and atonement. She does it in our names and for us who so often leave the silent “prisoner in the tabernacle” to Himself because of our lack of fervor or our laziness or because of the outward bustle in our lives. She does that as the Queen of the universe in the name of all creation. In spirit we see her ascending the steps of the altar and standing at His side whenever He mystically renews the sacrifice of Calvary:

8 Fr. Joseph Kentenich, *Heavenwards* (note 13, p. 38), “Mass of God’s Instruments” (this verse untranslated in available English texts). See German original: “Dein Sohn bringt sich auf dem Altar”, p. 26.

“In the spirit of faith we see her stand
On Golgotha’s most holy heights,
His co-sacrificing Mother-Bride
Who looks upon us with kindest love.
With her Son she often herself – for us –
To the Father on His throne.”⁹

Mary’s Love and Care for our Eucharistic Lord

Yes, we now know where we can encounter Mary, where we can find her. Her entire love and care is given to the sacramental and eucharistic Lord and His interests. She renders the same service to Him today which she once gave Him while He was on earth. Just as she once bound His arms in swaddling clothes, today she holds back the arm of the eternal Judge. She does that because that is how it is ordained by God’s plan, because that is God’s will. Just as she once guided His steps and challenged His power with her petition, today she pleads without rest, “Lord, they have no wine.” And just as at that time she exhorted the servants with what could be called the motto of her life – “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2,5) – so it is that the same admonition which she once spoke continues to reach us today.

What has He told us? “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood shall live in me and I in him” (Jn 6,56). Do whatever He tells you!

What has He told us? “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Mt 16,26). Do whatever He tells you!

What has He told us? “The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force” (Mt 11,12). “Whoever wishes to be my disciple must deny his very self, take up his cross, and follow me” (Lk 9,23). Do whatever He tells you!

9 *Heavenwards*, “Mass of God’s Instruments” (this verse untranslated in available English texts). See German original: “Im Glaubensgeiste sehn wir stehn”, p. 32.

What has He told us? “Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this has no man, that he lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15,12f). Do whatever He tells you! As she stood in co-sacrifice under the cross, so now we find her spiritually present at each holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Those who have become accustomed to viewing Mary in connection with the altar and the sanctuary lamp have no difficulty in going to church in Mary and with Mary, walking with her and in her to the communion rail, ascending with her and in her to the altar to offer the Lord’s Precious Blood to the eternal Father with her hands, and proclaiming in her and with her from the altar the death of Our Lord throughout the day by living a life rich in love and sacrifice. She makes up for what we are unable to do; she continues what we have started; she perfects where we have failed. From her hands the Savior gladly accepts us and all that we give to Him and in Him and through Him to God the Father.

“When our hands come in contact with fragrant objects,” the Curé of Ars teaches us, “then they impart this pleasing scent to everything that we take in our hands. If we permit our prayers to pass through the hands of the Blessed Virgin, they acquire a wondrous fragrance.”¹⁰ On another occasion he stated, “If one wishes to bestow something upon a great personage, one entrusts it to someone who is in that person’s favor so that the homage is made more pleasing. Thus our prayers have a particular effectiveness if they are offered by the Blessed Virgin, because she is the only creature who never offended God. Everything the Mother asks of the Son is granted to her as well.”¹¹

Mary’s Participation in the Divine Government of the World

Once it is clear beyond doubt that God desires Mary’s cooperation in every situation and that He even makes Himself dependent on her cooperation both in principle and in practice, then such processes become significantly easier to understand, God does not only not

10 See Anton Koch, *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* (note 27, p. 16), Vol. 1, 229:4,4.

11 Ibid., 229:4,5.

feel slighted, but in fact especially esteemed and honored when we willingly and conscientiously orient ourselves toward His law of government and turn to Mary. Full of kindness and mercy, He has given over to her in a certain sense the dominion over His mercy while reserving for Himself the final day of judgement. The Divine Office for the Feast of the Mediatrix of all Graces, therefore, applies to Mary these words of Sacred Scripture: “Without your authorization no one in the whole world may move a hand or foot.” (cf. Gen 41,44)¹² And again, “Behold, my Lord has surrendered everything to me and He has confined everything to my power. Since she has been placed over everything, she rules over the whole house and over everything which has been given over to her.” (cf. Gen 45,8)¹³

The Two-in-Oneness of Jesus and Mary

How we can interpret this two-in-oneness between Jesus and His Mother is illustrated by an incident from the life of Alexander the Great. Quintus Curtius reports: “After King Alexander of Macedonia had defeated King Darius of Persia in several battles, he finally took him prisoner. When King Darius realized that he and his wife were in the hands of Alexander he decided to ask for clemency and freedom. He went to the king’s tent. Since he did not personally know Alexander, he mistook Alexander’s friend, Hephaestion, for the King. Darius genuflected before Hephaestion and begged for amnesty and forgiveness. Hephaestion indicated that he would have to go to Alexander. But the king raised his hand in a gesture of remonstrance and said with great meekness and love, ‘You did not err, Darius, for Alexander is Hephaestion and Hephaestion is Alexander.’ And with that he granted Darius his life and his freedom.”¹⁴

12 Benedictus antiphon, Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces (a feast which has variously appeared in this century on the dates May 8 and May 31 and which is not included in the revised calendar of 1969).

13 Ibid., response in the second canonical hour.

14 From *Der Marienprediger*, p. 726f.

And so, when we address our petitions to Mary, they are directed at the same time to her Son, and He understands and answers them accordingly. The love which is hers likewise extends to Him, and vice versa: Whoever approaches Him for gifts and graces, whoever gives Him his heart, draws her too – because of their two-in-oneness – either consciously or unconsciously into the common circle of interests. Whether I go from Mary to Jesus or from Jesus to Mary, in the end both desire that we experience them in the life of our souls as united in two-in-oneness, just as they are in the objective order of being.

With Mary to the Altar

Thus new light and a greater brightness falls on the words found in Mary's mouth: "He who finds me shall find life and have salvation from the Lord" (Prv 8,35). "Happy the man watching daily at my gates and waiting at my doorposts" (Prv 8,34). The promise which is contained in these words is particularly intended for a time when God obviously wishes to glorify His Mother in a special way, when He desires to use her as His instrument to bring peace to the world. Let us recall this principle: *Cum Maria ad altare!* (With Mary to the altar!) If it is at all possible, we want to walk to the altar each day with Mary, go with her to the communion rail, and kneel with her near the sanctuary light whenever our souls are troubled or joy fills our hearts.

B. Mary Chooses Special Places

The gates where Mary waits for us can be understood to signify, first of all and primarily, the doors of our churches where the sanctuary light is found burning. But at the same time and above all we can – indeed we must – see that the "gates" also refer to the Marian shrines, to her places of grace and pilgrimage.

1. Marian Shrines

There she has, as is attested to not only by the traditional piety of the faithful but also by many of the councils and in particular by the Council of Trent, erected her throne of grace

in a very special way so as to live and work among her people, to listen to their needs and accept their veneration, to prove herself completely as the Mother of the people in every situation, to take the education of the people into her hands and lead them victoriously through all the battles of our time. Just as the same sun shines in all places but shows a special fruitfulness in particular places and uniquely situated regions, and just as there are special springs of water with curative effects, so it is that Our Lady works in her places of grace in a particularly excellent manner. That means she is active there in a richer, more fruitful manner than she is in other places.

We need only recall the way she was active in the places which she specially visited during her life here on earth. Then we will know in detail what we may expect at her places of grace. In the home of her cousin Elizabeth, she revealed herself as the Mother of Grace. Only after Mary's greeting had sounded in Elizabeth's ear did it come to pass that John was sanctified in his mother's womb, and Elizabeth herself began to prophesy (cf. Lk 1,39-45). At the home of the newly wed couple in Cana, Mary intervened by mediating a miracle in the face of financial difficulties and thereby proved herself as the Bread Mother (cf. 2,1-12).¹⁵ When she was in the midst of the apostles in the cenacle, she called down the Holy Spirit in abundant measure upon the infant Church (cf. Acts 1,14). After the death of Our Lord she accompanied St. John to Ephesus where Christian life began to flourish under her influence, or at least that is what St. Augustine testifies. He refers to the praise which St.

15 The title "Bread Mother" was one given to Mary by Fr. Kentenich and his confreres during the life-and-death starvation crisis during the summer of 1942 in Dachau, where they were prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp. The significance of the title can be seen in a talk given by Fr. Kentenich on August 22, 1946 to the Schoenstatt Family of the diocese of Münster. There he described Mary's three crowns of gold, silver, and iron, meaning she is the Mother of Grace, Bread Mother, and Home Mother. The point is that Mary is not only concerned about our spiritual needs but also our physical needs and our need to have a real home. See Kentenich, *Familie Gottes* (Münster, 1984), pp. 54-58.

Paul had for the inhabitants of Ephesus (cf. Eph 1,15-16). “Read,” says St. Augustine, “the words of St. Paul to the Ephesians, which overflow with praise, love, and joy, those words to, the early Church in Ephesus regarding its thriving condition, its devotion and zeal in all good works. Read this, and you will recall that Mary lived there.”¹⁶ It is also St. Augustine who attributed the deep mystical insight of the “eagle” among the evangelists, St. John, not only to the fact that he was allowed to rest on the Master’s breast, but also because he was in constant contact with Mary.

All of these homes which Mary visited in a particular way – the home of Zechariah and of the newly married couple (at Cana), the Cenacle, and the parish house at Ephesus – are a clear indication of the inestimable riches which the Blessed Mother has given to her children from her shrines in the course of the centuries of Christianity especially in times of great danger. From there she calls unceasingly, “He who finds me shall find life and have salvation from the Lord” (Prv 8,335). “Happy the man watching daily at my gates and waiting at my doorposts” (Prv 8,34). “I am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope.”¹⁷

Through the privileges which he has granted such shrines for the Marian Year, the Holy Father shows that he shares this opinion. It is as if he desired that Mary’s places of grace throughout the world be more honored again. It seems as if he wanted our hearts and ears to become more receptive to the exhortation which Mary speaks in such places as God Almighty did once before: “I have chosen this place for my house ... Here my

16 Cf. *Der Marienprediger*, p. 384.

17 See note 20, p. 48.

eyes shall be open and my ears attentive to the petitions of those who pray here” (2 Chr 7,12.15). I have chosen this place.

From this standpoint we may be better able to understand why St. Vincent de Paul calls a land blessed which possesses many places of grace, and why he envies the people who has such a shrine in their midst¹⁸

Such places are – as one devout writer puts it – the most precious treasure that a country has; they are the hearth where holy love burns unceasingly; they are the sacred trees in whose shade the peoples find security; they are golden stars that never let the poor perish in the darkness of night during times of danger and in life’s storms, stars which let their gentle rays of peace and grace sink deep into our human hearts so they do not despair; they are like fountains of grace whose waters are never exhausted; they are like rivers of mercy that never run dry.

In the biography of St. Vincent de Paul we can read how deeply and simply Christian piety responds to such gifts. Vincent de Paul loved Mary’s sanctuaries of grace. “He fell to his knees and exclaimed with tears in his eyes, ‘O happy mountains, O happy river, O happy place, how greatly I envy you that you may be so near this fountain of grace. You men who dwell near the throne of God’s Mother, I beseech you to take me into your homes, that I may live and die near Mary, that my dwelling and my grave may be near her ...’ When he had to return home with his companions, he kissed the floor of the pilgrims’ church, and as long as the church was in sight, he would glance over his shoulder and weep bitterly.”

Such an attitude would strike us moderns as almost a sign of weakness if we were not familiar with Vincent de Paul, the great founder and apostle of charity whose Vincent de Paul Societies continue to live and work throughout the entire Catholic world. The warmth of his love for Mary never left him during his whole life. She became the secret of his life. She made him

18 This and the following examples are taken from *Der Marienprediger*.

a vigorous apostle and great saint to whom modern man looks with deep respect.

Just after his ordination he fell into the hands of pirates. He was wounded by an arrow and was sold into slavery. His master was a former Christian who had fallen from the faith and became a Moslem. Vincent had to do hard physical labor in the fields. However, he did not tire of praying and singing his favorite hymn, the *Salve Regina* (Hail, Holy Queen). The Mother of Mercy was the great hope in his imprisonment as the radiant star. It happened one day – almost by coincidence, one could say – that the wife of his master heard him. She wanted to know who this Mother of Mercy was of whom the slave had sung, and who the weeping children of Eve were in the song's text. Vincent then told everything which his glowing heart could about Mary's motherly love. Because his heart was so full, his words came to no end. This impressed the woman so much that she reproached her husband for having changed his religion. God's grace touched them both, and it came to pass that both converted and fled with Vincent to France. After regaining his freedom, Vincent vowed that he would work to ease the lot of Christian slaves which he himself had shared during his imprisonment. Only after a span of forty years was he able to fulfill this oath. He founded an order and sent his missionaries to the slaves.¹⁹

Wherever Our Lady erects her throne in a special way, Our Lord must also be at home in a singular manner. That explains why she so often has no rest until the sanctuary lamp may be lit in her shrines and the "silent prisoner of the tabernacle" has taken up His abode there. It also explains why all those who surrender themselves to her are – as if caught up in a

19 Cf. *Der Marienprediger*, p. 212f. St. Vincent de Paul (1580-1660), ordained in 1600, did indeed "disappear" around the year 1607, but historians have been unable to confirm the account of his slavery as depicted in popular tradition. He founded the Lazarists in 1625, who first sent missionaries to North Africa in 1645.

whirlpool – swept to Christ and with and in Him in the Holy Spirit to God the Father.

2. The Schoenstatt Shrine

Do you now better understand the importance of the fulfillment of our program for this year? We wish to erect a shrine in our parish for the Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt. How many graces may we expect for all families and circles if we do this in the proper spirit and protect the shrine in the future as an extremely valuable treasure! All that we know about such places of grace will become a joyful reality in our very own backyard.

Wherever the Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt settles, she is primarily and particularly active, as is her wont, as educator in our modern times. Her shrines are the formation centers and workshops of the new man and the new social order in the way that God desires for today, so that the Church can perfectly fulfill her mission for our times. From there she wants to draw human hearts to herself and educate them to become perfect instruments in her hand. All who dedicate themselves to her there, all who make a covenant of love with her will be taken by her into a serious school of genuine, solid everyday sanctity such as our times need. They will be placed by God into Our Lady's care, so that she may educate them to carry out His great plan.

With this we touch upon the methods which God uses when dealing with his favorite children. He gives them to His Mother to be educated, thereby very practically interpreting the last will and testament of our Savior, "Ecce Mater tua!"

3. In Mary's School of Education

In order to mention at least one of the many possible examples, I would like to consider the life of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, to whom Our Lord gave the task of introducing the devotion to the Sacred Heart into the Church, and who herself had a glowing love for the Sacred Heart. It should not be surprising that Our Lord entrusted her to the educative care of His Mother, nor may we wonder at the ways she was led. Margaret relates in her auto-

biography that Our Lord appeared to her before she entered the convent, and indicated that Mary was the educator which He had assigned to her. He said, "When you vowed your virginity to me, I chose you to be my bride, and we promised one another our mutual loyalty. I inspired you to do this before the world had had a chance to enter your heart, for I wished to preserve it free and pure for myself, completely free from any taint of worldliness. In order to keep it in this state, I shielded your will from all wickedness which could have corrupted it. Moreover, I gave you into the care of my Mother so that she prepare you for my plans." Our Lord repeats these words to all who make a covenant with Our Lady in our shrine: I give you into the care of my Mother so that she prepare you for my plans.

Our Lady always uses the same methods to do this. She protects her children with great care. At the same time, however, she does not rest until all have made themselves at home on Calvary in the nearest vicinity of the cross and have become fruitful for God's kingdom. She did this with Margaret Mary; she does the same with us. In the battle for her religious vocation, the saint was absolutely alone. All her relatives tried to change her mind by use of every conceivable means. Our Lady appeared to her again and comfortingly reassured her, "Do not fear. You will be my true daughter and I will be your true Mother."

Later, Margaret's superiors were uncertain about the authenticity of her extraordinary state. They therefore demanded a sign from heaven. Since Margaret was very ill at the time, she was ordered to pray for an immediate recovery. She did so and suddenly regained her health. Our Lady appeared to her on this occasion and said, "Keep courage, my dear daughter. Know that I restore you to health in the name of my divine Son. However, you will still have a long and wearisome road to travel: You will always be nailed to the cross, you will be wounded, hurt by the nails and scourged and crowned with thorns. But do not fear; I will never leave you, and I promise you my protection." Mary faithfully kept her promise, and for

that reason the saint used to call her “my good Mother” and would entrust herself to Our Lady in every situation.

“Already as a child,” she states, “I used to fly to the protection of the Blessed Virgin with all my intentions. She always showed me great compassion and preserved me from the greatest dangers... I liked to say the rosary to honor her, but always with bare knees on the floor, or else I would genuflect at every Ave and kiss the floor... When I suffered for four years under such poor health (while living in a boarding school) that I was unable to walk and no medical treatment gave any relief, I knew of no other recourse than to consecrate myself to our Blessed Lady, promising her that one day I would become her daughter (in the Convent of the Visitation) if she saw fit to cure me. Hardly had I made this vow then I was immediately restored to health, something which also gave a new assurance of her motherly protection. Mary achieved such a power over my heart that she ruled me as her possession entirely according to her wish and will, that she corrected me and taught me to do God’s will in everything...”

In Mary’s “school,” Margaret developed a glowing devotion to the Sacred Heart. We may understand her wise advice, “Unite your mind and heart as deeply as you can with that of the most Blessed Virgin, so that with her and through her you may offer fitting homage to the Word made flesh in her womb, and that you may adore and love Him in His seclusion. To this end offer the eternal Father the sacrifice which the most Sacred Heart of His divine Son offers Him in the fire of love on the altar of the heart of His beloved Mother, with the prayer that all hearts be converted and completely enkindled by His love.”²⁰

If we meditate on all this, we will realize that God thereby brings salvation to us in a special way, that our Mother Thrice

20 St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (1647-1690), presumably from her autobiography, although the exact published source used by Ft. Kentenich is unknown. The words in parentheses within these quotes were inserted by Fr. Kentenich.

Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt desires to make her abode in our parish as its educator. At the same time we can sense just how great that gift will be that we will leave behind for our children and children's children if Our Lady accepts our prayers and sacrifices and really erects her throne of graces in our midst. We confidently pray:

“May Schoenstatt become²¹ your favorite place,
Harbor of apostle spirit,
Leader into holy strife,
Source of everyday sanctity,
Blazing fire that glows for Christ,
Which blazingly scatters bright sparks
Until the world, a sea of flame,
Glow to the honor of the Blessed Trinity.”

II. In her Motherhood

We ask ourselves a second time: Where do we encounter Our Lady in everyday life? Where can we meet her? In order to grasp the answer which we are now allowed to give, we must recall a second principle of Mariology: Mary's universal office as Mediatrix and Mother shows us that God gives us no grace without her cooperation.

In order to understand this great law of divine government and the bestowal of grace, we can never impress upon ourselves often or deeply enough the fact that the Mother of God, according to the divine plan, is really and truly our Mother. Her fundamental relationship to us and our fundamental relationship to her are therefore deeply rooted in the objective order of being. Thus, if we orient ourselves toward the objective order, no relationship to a(ny other) saint, not even our favorite saint, is able to take on the same character or depth. Only then will the words of

21 Here the original text's "remain" has been modified by Fr. Kentenich to "become."

22 *Heavenwards*, final two verses of the hymn "Hold the Scepter," cf. Wisconsin translation, p. 92. In German original see p. 131.

our dying Savior, the “Ecce Mater tua!” which we have already heard so often, gain their full meaning and profoundest significance. Yes, in the spirit of faith we must feel our way into life processes and fundamental attitudes whose entire magnitude and uniqueness have not as yet been sufficiently researched. Here again, as in many other instances, the ordinary lives of God’s people in the Church may very well be far ahead of speculative dogmatic research.

Mary’s Greatness as Mother

Theologians attempt to examine the faith in Mary’s position in the work of salvation as it is enkindled and diligently guarded by the Holy Spirit in them (the hearts of the faithful), and deduce from that a final principle, a final root, a final source. They consider whether Christian piety is correct when it answers the question on the basis of the conviction which it holds with simple, faith-filled matter-of-factness – *Mary, by virtue of the divine plan, is in all truth our Mother, the Mother of Christianity, and the Mother of Divine Grace in the objective order of creation.*

Theologians affirm this belief, but they add that if one is to penetrate into its fullest context, one must view Mary in relation to the entire divine plan as Mother of the whole Christ, which means Mother of both the historical and Mother of the mystical Christ, which is Christ’s Mystical Body, the Church, whose Head is Christ.

The answer should be readily understandable. In the fourth Lenten sermon we considered this in detail. At the same moment that Mary became the Mother of Christ as individual person, she also became His Mother as Head of the Church; she consequently became our Mother at the same time. Therefore Leo the Great says, “All of the faithful were born together with Christ at His birth.”²³ St. Ambrose tells us, “In the womb of the Virgin there was at the same time an entire hill of wheat....

23 St. Leo the Great (d. 461), *Sermo* 26,2.

because from the one grain of wheat (Christ), the entire mass was able to be.”²⁴

The doctors of the Church distinguish two realities here. They speak of Christianity as a whole and of the individual Christian. They put it this way: Christianity as a whole was conceived by the Blessed Mother when she uttered her Fiat and when the eternal Word took on our human nature. Christianity came forth from her womb in violent birth-pangs under the cross. She fulfills the duties which she thereby accepted – to nourish and educate – through the Church and its graces. The individual Christian becomes a child of Mary at the moment when he becomes a member of Christ the Head. Our nourishment and education are closely related to our development in the life of grace. This intimate relationship between the birth of Christ and of Christianity, as well as of the individual Christian, is capable of shedding light on the unbounded greatness of Mary’s motherhood and on her inexhaustible richness as our Mother.

Mary’s Greatness as Mother of God and Our Mother

Theologians tell us that the dignity of Mary as the Mother of God is so toweringly high and exalted that it grazes the utmost limits of possibility. In other words, God may have been able to create a greater and more perfect universe, but not a greater Mother. That can be found in a statement which is attributed to St. Bonaventure: “The Mother of the Lord, Mother and Virgin, is the most worthy Mother. Her singularity is so outstanding that God could not have created a greater Mother. God could have formed a greater earth and a greater heaven but He could not have fashioned a greater Mother of God.”²⁵

As the reason for this we find, “When Mary conceived and bore God, the Blessed Virgin through her own natural role

24 St. Ambrose (c.339-397), *De institutione virg.* 14. See also *The Glories of Mary*, p. 48.

25 Conrad of Saxon (d. 1279), *Speculum B. Mariae V.*, tenth reading. This work was long attributed to Bonaventure.

touched upon the limits of divinity.”²⁶ She “is on the order of the hypostatic union.”²⁷

If the motherhood of Christ and of the individual Christian are as closely related as described here, then we begin to see how infinitely great and broad and deep Mary’s motherhood is and must be, not only as Mother of God but also as our Mother. Yes, even her motherhood with regard to us – namely her being our Mother as well as her maternal attitude which is rooted in that being – must be scarcely comprehensible in its greatness. It surpasses our powers of comprehension. Do we not stand here before the scale which the spirit of faith of God’s people, of the saints, and of the theologians – as nurtured in them by the Holy Spirit – tries to use to measure Mary’s maternal being and attitude, and despite all superlatives and super-superlatives in word and imagery is unable to reach the final satisfactory plateau?

The Measure of Mary’s Greatness

Just as her greatness as Mother of God is, to a certain extent, beyond the measure of comprehension, it seems that the same measure beyond measure comes into play concerning her being the Mother of all mankind – though without breaking the limits set for a created being. Mary is a creature and will always remain a creature. Though she is a masterpiece of divine omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness, her distance from the infinite God remains infinite. Nonetheless, we are still justified in asking whether Mary, as our Mother, could be more powerful, merciful, or wise than she already is; whether her dowry of mother love, mother duties, and mother rights could be greater or more perfect than they are. May we say that just as God could not create a greater Mother for His Son, He could not create a greater Mother of all mankind?

26 St. Cajetan (1480-1547), *In partem II-II. Thomae, quaest.* 103 art. 4 ad 2.

27 Francisco de Suárez (1548-1619), *In III. partem D. Thomae*, t. 2 in quaest. 27 disp. I sectio 2 n.4.

If these statements are correct, then we must be ashamed that our love for Mary, however great, falls far short of the measure which God desires and expects of us.

It may take a long time before we can repeat with St. John Chrysostom that Mary is our heaven on earth, our heaven in which the Lord has prepared a throne and dwelling in a singular manner, in which the angels are at home, in which the saints find a piece of paradise, and in which humanity, whose earthly pilgrimage is as yet unfinished, finds a place of tranquility and peace. In heaven there will be no more worry or care. Every tear will be wiped away. If Mary has already become a piece of heaven here on earth for me, then the Consoler of the Afflicted will dry my tears and I will experience the truth of what St. Ignatius once ventured to say: It is easier for you to number the stars of the heavens than to count the tears which Mary has already wiped away. No one who has shed tears in the presence of the Blessed Virgin has done so in vain. In heaven there will be no death, for as Scripture tells us, “There death will be no more” (Rev 21,4). Do not the words “He who finds me shall find life” (Prv 8,35) apply to the true venerator of Mary? And is this life compatible with the death of sin?

The bliss of heaven will last for all eternity. Eternal also is Mary’s love for us. Nothing can rob us of that love, neither ungratefulness nor coldness, neither indifference nor mistrust. If you cannot live without Mary here on earth – as St. Lawrence Justinian assures us – then neither does she desire to be in heaven without you.

How careless and nonsensical then are those who are afraid to give their hearts to Mary, who fear that they might give too much love and attention to their Mother, and who are even proud when they bypass her on their way to God. “Burned-out ruins” is what Segneri calls them. And Vieira speaks of them as dried-up rivers whose sources have failed.²⁸ How gaping is the contrast between such burned-out ruins and dried-up rivers and the plans of God which desire to exalt our Mother so highly and apparently want to glorify her in a special way in our present age.

28 Cf. *Der Marienprediger*, p. 854.

Be that as it may, it is certainly more understandable why Albert the Great could say, “The most Blessed Virgin does not belong in the same class as others since she is not one of many but one excelling all.” Therefore, wherever her maternal being and attitude are in the forefront, we will always find the impelling urge to go beyond the usual limits. Christian thought does not let itself be satisfied with a discussion of Mary’s might; she is unabashedly referred to as the “interceding omnipotence,” so that we can confess with St. Bernard: Whomever you look upon, O Mary, will be saved, and whomever you turn your eyes from will perish.

Mary’s Mercy and Love

There are similar words which praise her mercy and love. Here too, the usual standards are insufficient, and we see the unmistakable signs leading into the unbounded. Her kindness, love, and mercy are inexpressibly great.

“All mountains and hills,” St. Bonaventure fervently exclaims, “all rivers and oceans, all creatures of heaven and earth call out to us: So immensely, so infinitely, so inexpressibly has Mary loved us that she has given her only Son for us, for our salvation, for our bliss.” That is the best, the greatest, the highest proof of her love for us.²⁹

Let those step boldly forward, cries St. Bernard, let those stop loving her who can claim that they called on Mary and were forsaken by her. For she eternally stands as the Help of Christians, the Health of the Sick, and the Consoler of the Afflicted; because it will be true through all eternity that there is no wound which her love does not bind, no tear her compassion does not dry, and no sinner whom her mercy does not lead to God when he flies to her arms.³⁰

29 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 59.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

Henry Seuse exclaims enthusiastically, “Heaven and earth will pass away before Mary would abandon a soul.” “Besides God,” says St. Germanus, “no one has a greater love for us than Mary.” “Just as heaven transcends earth because of its bliss, so Mary surpasses all creatures because of her love,” confesses St. Jerome. And St. Bonaventure asks: “Is there anyone on whom the sun does not shine, or anyone for whom Mary’s mercy does not radiate?”³²

Mary’s Kindness, Wisdom, and Power

Mary’s wisdom is held in such esteem that the words of praise applied to the eternal wisdom are also applied to her. She is called the Virgin Most Prudent and the Seat of Wisdom. This maternal wisdom, kindness, and power has its roots, in accordance with God’s plan, in the objective order of her motherhood in the realm of grace, a position which Mary shares with no one, not even with any of the saints.

In the marketplace in Bamberg (Bavaria) there is a figure that portrays Our Lady with the Child Jesus. It bears the profound inscription, *Hac estis origine nati* – here is your origin and your birth. The meaning is that both Jesus and Mary are participants – each in their own way – in our spiritual birth in God. We owe to both Jesus and Mary the divine life within us, at the moment of its origin as well as during its development, even if the manner in which that takes place may vary.

It is told of Astioges, King of Media, that he saw a grapevine growing from his daughter, a vine whose branches embraced all of Asia. When the dream was interpreted for him, he was told that the son of his daughter would be lord and ruler over all of Asia. And she did indeed become the mother of Cyrus who brought all Asia under his scepter. It was not in a dream but through the archangel

Gabriel that the message came to Mary that she would bear a Son who would say of Himself, “I am the true vine” (Jn 15,1). With

31 Bl. Henry Seuse (or Suso, 1295-1366), famous south German mystic and Dominican friar. Here quoted from *Der Marienprediger*, p 24, 352.

32 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 214.

His branches He not only encompasses one land and one kingdom but the whole world. “And His kingdom will have no end” (Lk 1,33). Thus we owe our life in God not only to the tree Vine, Jesus Christ, but as ordained by God’s plan also to Mary, the soil from which He went forth by virtue of her freely chosen Yes.

The mystical two-in-oneness between Jesus and Mary which is thus expressed remains in effect for all eternity because of the immutable laws of the divine plan. Mary could therefore say to St. Bridget, “I never come to you alone. Just as I was never without Jesus on earth, so I am never without Him now. We are together when you pray to me and when you meditate on my love, just as when you receive Communion and, in a certain sense, partake of my flesh and blood together with the Flesh and Blood of Jesus Christ, which and to the extent that He received them from me.”

Mother and Mediatrix

Whoever understands the inner correlation between Mary’s position as Mother of God and Mother of humanity will have no difficulty seeing that all the special privileges which derive from her divine motherhood can also be seen in the same way in connection with her being and acting as Mother of mankind.

“From this point of view, her virginity still has the significance that she should give up the possibility of having physical descendants so as to become Mother of the whole Church through the only-begotten Son whom she conceived and bore in undefiled purity. Her complete freedom from sin increasingly enabled her to fulfill the task of giving the life of grace to a sinful humanity in that rebirth. Because she has also been taken up into heaven, body as well as soul, and thereby reached the goal of her earthly pilgrimage in a perfect way, she is truly capable of caring for her children as Mother, children who are still on their way home to the eternal goal, on their way to that home in God the Father, but also in her, the Mother. Even the title Dispensatrix of All Graces does not have a strange sound when we realize that

Mary is in truth the Mother of all redeemed Christians who are entrusted to her care.”³³

Mary’s motherhood necessitates her mediating office and vice versa. Her universal motherhood encompasses her universal mediating position. The greater our insight into God’s wondrous designs for Mary in her admirable motherhood, the easier it will be for us to agree with Leo XIII that “of the great treasury of all graces given to us by Our Lord ... nothing comes to us except through the mediation of Mary, for such is the will of God,”³⁴ or call her, as Pius X did, the “dispensatrix of all the gifts that our Savior purchased for us by His death and His blood.”³⁵ It is likewise easier for us to say the prayer for the day from the Mass of the feast of the Mediatrix of All Graces: “Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator with the Father, you have also made the Blessed Virgin our Mother and Mediatrix. Graciously grant that all who approach you asking for your aid may rejoice in having obtained everything through her.”

Mary’s universal Motherhood and mediating office finally give us an answer to the question of whether and to what extent Mary knows for sure about us and our personal concerns and needs. Theologians generally assume that the blessed in heaven, by virtue of their immediate vision of God, see in God as in a mirror whatever is of personal interest to them and of interest for their mission, for instance, what happens to their relatives or the intentions of all those who are entrusted to their care. When we apply this to Mary and recall that she is in all truth our Mother and is consequently in a significant personal relationship with each individual, then it immediately follows that she knows about all the wants and needs of humanity,

33 Quoted from Johannes Beumer, “Maria, Mutter der Christenheit” (Mary, Mother of Christianity), in *Katholische Marienkunde* (note 9, p. 6), Vol. 2, p. 223. Beumer himself does not give the source of the quote.

34 Leo XIII, encyclical “Octobri Mense,” September 22, 1891; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 113.

35 Pius X, encyclical “Ad diem illum laetissimum”; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 233.

that she is omnipresent through her knowledge, through her power, and through her tender motherly love.

To Summarize: Where Do We Find Mary?

It is now easy for us to answer the question: Where do we meet Mary on the basis of her office as Mother and Mediatrix? The answer can only be: Wherever and to the extent that divine and human interests are involved; wherever and to the extent that God's care for His kingdom on earth and for all human need coincide, especially when the cross appears in human lives and the history of mankind.

As a result, St. Bernard says, "Of her fullness we have all received: for captives redemption, for the sick healing, for the afflicted consolation, for sinners forgiveness, for the just grace, for the angels joy, and finally for the whole Blessed Trinity glory, and the person of her Son a human nature – all so that no one need hide from her warmth."³⁶

The Litany of the Blessed Virgin provides a more tangible description of the scope of Mary's interests and tasks. It emphasizes what the world owes to her, what Mary means to heaven and earth, and what she is able to do in heaven and on earth. St. Francis de Sales calls the Litany a treasure-chest for souls, and St. Alphonsus praises it as an inexhaustible source of spiritual wealth.³⁷ We can and may add that it is a concentrated summary of the entire teaching of the Church regarding Mary – in prayer form. But for our present purposes we are interested only in the fact that it supplies an invocation for each human need and intention and thereby describes in more detail where and when Mary meets us and where and when we meet her.

St. Jane Frances de Chantal was teaching her spiritual daughters to spend half an hour each day in silent meditation before the picture of the Blessed Mother. She revealed a booklet which she had written in her own hand. It was the Litany of

36 St. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo de duodecim praerogativis B.V.M.* See also *The Glories of Mary*, p. 214.

37 See for instance *The Glories of Mary*, p. 697f.

the Blessed Virgin. Jane Frances explained, “See, my daughters, if you wish to draw from this prayer the complete fullness of its consolation, then meditate on how everything we know about Mary is contained in it and with what devotion and confidence we should turn to her for refuge. If we are weak, she is the Virgin Most Powerful; if we are in need of graces, she is the Mother of Divine Grace; if we are uncertain, she is the Seat of Wisdom; if we are sad, she is the Cause of our Joy and the joy of the entire universe.” In this way St. Jane Frances explained all the invocations.

It is not difficult for us to extend these thoughts for ourselves. If we are being persecuted, she is the Queen of Martyrs. If the responsibility for the salvation of souls is weighing heavily upon us, she is the Queen of Apostles. If the burden of our guilt or the guilt of others is tormenting us, she is the Refuge of Sinners. If someone is lying ill on his deathbed, she is the Health of the Sick. When our youth is harassed by temptations against purity, she is the Virgin of Virgins, the Virgin Most Pure. When all of Christianity endures affliction, she is the Help of Christians.

The greater the affliction that torments us, the greater the importance of a decision for the Kingdom of God and the salvation of souls, the more the Mother of Christianity is open and interested, and the more easily she lets us find her and move her to help us.

That is why genuine Christian faith is aware of her special nearness in times of great universal need in which – as we experience today – the Church’s destiny is being decided for centuries to come. As a result, Pius XII, through his consecration of the whole world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and his proclamation of the Marian Year, has touched the main nerve of the Christian soul. It is therefore not difficult for any of us to follow his example.

That is why all noteworthy Catholic enterprises want to remain in contact with Mary and why history backs up the Frenchman who said that all Catholic ventures which fail, do so for want of Marian spirit.

That is why children and sinners – they need especially many graces – why those tormented by severe temptations, particularly against faith and purity, or why those who face the choice of their occupation or are called to a vocation in the priesthood or religious life – upon them and their decisions depends so much for the Kingdom of God – why those who are dying and whose last moment will determine all eternity, (why all of these) have a special right to have these grace-filled encounters with Mary.

Mary, Our All

When we compare Mary's position in the work of redemption with our numerous, indeed unending possibilities to encounter Mary, we must stand back in awe before God's wisdom. That which wisdom plans, it unswervingly and perfectly fulfills. "Mary is our greatest treasure," St. Bernard tells us.³⁸ "She is the treasurer of all graces. All the treasures of mercy are in her hands, and she alone has been chosen, by virtue of the divine plan, to hold the key to them and distribute them to mankind as she thinks best," says St. John Damascene. "With her we have life, without her we fall into death," notes Henry Seuse. In fact, the *Salve Regina* does not speak of her as "our way to life" but quite simply "our life." "Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope..." Carlo Dolci, a famous Italian painter of pictures of Mary,³⁹ in the company of some of his friends once visited the cemetery in his native town of Siena. He suddenly stopped in front of one of the graves and began to weep. His friends asked him who was laid to rest in that tomb and why he was so overcome by grief. His answer was: Here rests my all! – It was the grave of his mother.

May we not also say in a similar sense, without doing God any injustice but rather conforming entirely to His divine plan of salvation that *Mary our heavenly Mother is our All*? Yes, she remains

38 The quotes in this section are from *Der Marienprediger*, pp. 356-361.

39 Carlo Dolci (1616-1686).

our All because her maternal love never dies, and the arm of her interceding omnipotence, wisdom, and mercy is never shortened. She meets us everywhere: in those places where the sanctuary light burns and in the shrines, and wherever divine or human interests are at stake. It only depends on us whether we find our way to her, into her heart and at her hand. Amen.

*Seventh Sermon*¹

THE MARIAN CONSECRATION

It is the intent of the Marian Jubilee Year to reveal to Christianity as perfectly as possible the image of Mary as God planned it from all eternity and brought it to realization in the fullness of time. This year wants to especially awaken a deeper understanding of the last will and testament of our dying Savior, the “Ecce Mater tua” (Behold your Mother), and thus see to it that the Mother of Christianity take the destiny of our modern, confused world into her powerful, wise, and kind hands, and – as our Mother with her heart of overflowing love, as treasurer of all graces, as Mother of Divine Grace with her magnificent abundance of graces, and as official Christ-giver, Christ-bearer, and Christ-bringer – together with her divine Son visits the world and Church and grants lasting peace.

Mary is inseparably united with her divine Son for time and eternity. Where she is, there He is also. She brings the Savior to whomever she visits. This was already true when both were still on earth. Now that both are in heaven, where there is no longer any separation, this two-in-oneness is of even greater intensity, even more indissoluble.

Two-in-Oneness, Then and Now

It is not as if today’s Christians had forgotten or overlooked Mary. Leo XIII could already state with great satisfaction about his own era, “We believe it to be part of the designs of Providence, that in these times of trial for the Church the ancient devotion to the august Virgin should live and flourish in the greater part of the Christian world... It has always been the habit of Catholics in danger and in arduous times to fly for refuge in Mary, and to seek peace in her maternal goodness, which shows

1 Fr. Kentenich continued his thoughts in this seventh sermon despite the fact that he had only been asked to prepare six sermons for the Fridays in Lent.

that the Catholic Church has always, and with justice, put all her hope and trust in the Mother of God.”²

Since Pope Leo’s death, the difficulties of the Church have grown immeasurably. But the lifestream around Mary has increased proportionately. Through the proclamation of the dogma of Mary’s Assumption,³ devotion to Mary has received a fresh impetus, and desires to achieve a certain crowning fullness in the Marian Jubilee Year.

Our Task

Our task is to adapt our personal image of Mary, i.e. the picture of her we carry (in our hearts), to match the image of her which God Himself has designed and brought to realization in the course of time. These Lenten sermons want to make a small contribution towards this end.

It may still take some time before we can state what Prince Camillo Borghese admitted on one occasion. He had been privately asked what had contributed most to his advancement in life, and he answered, “I have stood time and time again before the pictures of the Madonna painted by Raphael and the other great masters. In that way I gradually drew in my own heart a picture of the Mother of God even more beautiful and noble than all the works of our masters could produce. That image of Mary fills me with rapture and enthusiasm as often as I think of it, and it awakens in me the longing to behold the virginal Mother of God one day face to face in eternity. Whenever I am tempted to sin I tell myself: If you sin, you will surely not be permitted to see Mary in her glory. That thought has always kept me from evil and given me renewed zeal in my striving.”⁴

2 Leo XIII, encyclical “Supremi apostolatus,” September 1, 1883; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, Nos. 93, 82.

3 November 1, 1950.

4 Camillo Borghese (1552-1621), elected Pope Paul V in 1605. This quote from *Homiletisches Quellenwerk* (note 27, p. 16), Vol. 4: No. 845:8,1.

It may still take some time before our love for the Blessed Mother has grown so much that after our death our heart would be kept in a shrine of Our Lady, as is true of Prince Maximilian of Bavaria, whose heart is kept in (the Shrine of Our Lady of) Altötting. There we find this inscription hewn in marble: “Here rests the heart of Maximilian, Crown Prince of Bavaria. During his life it beat for the greatest deeds and in love for Our Lady. Know this, pilgrim, that even after death Maximilian still loves Mary.”

Though our love for Mary, when compared with this sublime degree of love, may seem like a small flame alongside a raging blaze, at least we know that God has bestowed upon the “Blessed among women” a position in the plan of salvation as Mother and Mediator, a position that may not be bypassed. We know how brilliantly God has equipped her for it and how glad she is to follow His intentions and prove herself everywhere as the Mother of Mercy. We also know that she is at our side in all situations to champion our interest before God and God’s interests before us. This gives us the renewed courage to make Vincent Pallotti’s resolution our own: “I shall not rest until I, if this is possible, have achieved an infinitely tender love for my much beloved and much loving Mother Mary.”⁵

We are fortunate in having the opportunity everywhere and at all times to meet Mary, to talk to her, and to show her our love. It only remains to be asked: *How* are we to meet her?⁶

In the Marian Consecration

If I were to summarize everything which the Holy Father (Pius XII) has said and recommended to us during the time of his pontificate, be it orally or in writing, it would have to be as follows: We come to Mary as perfect covenant partners, holding in one hand the sacrificial bowl, in the other the rosary, and invested with the scapular.

5 See note 23, p. 14.

6 Or, how are we to find her? This "how" is the second part of the question raised in the Sixth Sermon, p. 124.

The Holy Father does not weary of encouraging all the faithful to reenact on their own the consecration which he made twice in a most solemn manner in 1942 as representative of the whole world and the universal Church. This Marian consecration amounts to a perfect mutual covenant of love between the Blessed Mother and us. The two partners involved in this act are the Blessed Mother as our Mother and Queen and we as her children. Through the consecration, each one gives himself to the other for time and eternity, in deep mutual love, wholly and undividedly. For this reason Pope Pius XII, in an address given to Roman members of the Marian Sodality, called this consecration a total gift of self to Mary for time and eternity.⁷ And on the occasion of the canonization of St. Joan of France, he characterized it as “an absolute and total surrender of self to Mary.”⁸

St. Louis Grignion de Montfort makes it very clear how Mary responds to this total surrender. He declares, “[Mary], seeing that a soul gives itself entirely to her gives herself completely and in an ineffable manner to him who gives all to her. She causes him to be engulfed in the abyss of her graces; she adorns him with her merits; she upholds him with her power; she enlightens him with her radiance; she inflames him with her love; she communicates to him her virtues, her humility, her faith, her purity...; she makes herself his surety, his supplement, and his very all with Jesus. In short, as he who is consecrated to Mary is all her own, so is she all his own ...”⁹

The consecration to Mary is consequently an event of profound significance in the lives of individuals and of entire communities and nations.

7 Cf. Pius XII, address to the Marian Sodalities in Rome, January 21, 1945; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 389.

8 Pius XII, address at the canonization of St. Joan of Valois (1464-1505), May 28, 1950.

9 *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (note 13, p. 66), No. 144.

The Marian Consecration: A Mutual Exchange of Interests, Goods, and Hearts

As we already know, the consecration to Mary includes a perfect mutual exchange of interests, goods, and hearts.

1. A Perfect Mutual Exchange of Interests

First of all, by virtue of the covenant of love, I make Mary's interests my interests and she makes my interests hers.

This is the exchange we refer to in the well-known consecration prayer "My Queen, my Mother, I give myself entirely to you..." when we say at the end, "As I am your own, my good Mother, guard me and defend me as your property and possession."

We know the sphere of interests of Our Lady. Her life and deeds, like her being, are oriented entirely toward Christ, are entirely centered on His person and mission. She exists solely for His sake. There is no other reason for her existence. Therefore she expends herself for all time, wholly, perfectly, and exclusively for the interests, the needs and cares, the tasks and intentions of Christ and the Kingdom of God. Through the consecration we are drawn into this realm of values as perfectly as possible, we who through the circumstances of our modern times are in constant danger of succumbing to the pleasures of the world, to its routine and bustle and to material goods and values. Thanks be to God – we may and must now confess – that the Blessed Mother has taken on this responsibility in the covenant. Our cares are her cares, be they financial or related to our health, intellectual or spiritual, individual or communal concerns. By virtue of the consecration she takes on a full measure of co-responsibility for all of this. This also holds true, and in a very particular way, for our educational needs, regardless of whether the education of self or of others is at stake.

In the previous sermon we already heard how Our Lady proved herself as educator in the life of St. Margaret Mary

Alacoque because of the latter's consecration. Many more examples could be cited. Let me give just a few.

While she was carrying her child in her womb, the mother of St. Andrew Corsini (1301-1374) dreamt that she had given birth to a wolf who ran into a church and there was changed into a lamb. The dream frightened the mother. It moved her to give the little child to the Blessed Mother in a consecration and to thus hand over to her the care for his education. As the boy grew up, the first part of the dream became reality. Andrew turned disobedient, obstinate, wild, and unruly to the point that his mother could no longer manage him. All she could do was rededicate him over and over again to Our Lady and to turn over to her the responsibility for his development. She begged Mary to see to it that the second part of her dream might also be fulfilled. One day Andrew was stubborn and unruly again. His parents were so distressed and downcast over his conduct that his mother's anxiety burst forth spontaneously from her sorely oppressed heart. With tears in her eyes she revealed her secret without really wanting to, for in her excitement she said, "You really are the wolf I saw in my dream." These words struck the boy like a bolt from the blue. Perplexed, he asked, "You mean, Mother, that I am a wolf?" Since his mother had already disclosed half of the secret to him, she did not hide the rest but explained to him the whole dream. She also told him that she had dedicated him to the most Blessed Virgin and had handed over to Mary the full responsibility for transforming him from a wolf into a lamb. The little sinner was shaken to the depths of his soul. He could not sleep that whole night. The thought that he belonged to Mary and that she had taken over the responsibility for his education to sanctity would not let him close his eyes. Soon he made his decision. At daybreak he went to church, prostrated himself in humility before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, and prayed from the bottom of his heart, "Virgin Mother of God, I am dedicated to you. From now on I want to belong entirely to you. But you must beg your Son for me to pardon the sins of my youth." From that

moment on the Blessed Mother effectively took his education into her hands, and he willingly permitted himself to be formed by her. Eventually he entered a Carmelite monastery, became bishop, (of Fiesole in 1349) and was canonized.

Innumerable Catholic parents dedicate their children to Mary. The mother of St. Elzear (1285-1323) followed this custom, too. While dedicating him she prayed, “Lord, if my child would ever offend you in mortal sin, take him to yourself before he loses his baptismal innocence.” Later, our Savior appeared to her and said, “Know that I have given my own Mother as educator to your dear son whom you love so much. Therefore, your mind can be at ease concerning him.” Here, too, Mary brilliantly fulfilled her task as educator. Elzear would later be canonized (in 1371).

If Mary is not always successful in her educational work, the cause may lie in the fact that not all who have consecrated themselves to her are willing to cooperate with her intentions.

One cannot overlook how greatly the popes of the past hundred years have stressed the expected responsible work on self-education when they speak about devotion to Mary generally, and about the (Marian) consecration in particular. Thus, like his predecessors, Pius XII stated at the canonization of St. Louis Grignon de Montfort, “The author of *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* distinguishes in a few precise words this authentic devotion from the false or more or less superstitious devotion, which consists only of exterior practice and superficial sentiment. Such a devotion leads those who cultivate it to live as they think fit and remain in sin, presuming to receive an extraordinary grace in their last hour.”¹⁰ The papal encyclical for the Marian Year therefore stresses not only a return to Christ but also a careful and conscientious observance of God’s commandments.

10 Pius XII, address at the canonization of St. Louis Grignon de Montfort, July 21, 1947. English text quoted here from *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 433, though variation in sentence structure has meant a somewhat longer passage than that which Fr. Kentenich uses in German.

There once was a rich young man who because of his high station in life and his money felt he could permit himself all manner of sinful excesses. One night he dreamt he was about to leave his room to commit a serious sin. On his way he had to pass a picture of the Sorrowful Mother. In his dream it seemed as though Our Lady called to him, “Stop! Where are you going?” That very moment she drew the sword from her heart and offered it to him with the words, “Take this sword and plunge it into my heart instead of crucifying my Son by mortal sin and piercing His heart.” With that the young man awakened and changed his life.

Thus Our Lady, in the covenant of love and with great tenderness, makes our true interests her own. She helps us break the chains of sin. She cools the heat of our passions which at times threaten to smother us. She stands beside us when drought and dryness parch our souls. She takes us by the hand when the agony of death contorts our face and we take that lonely walk through the portals of death. Nor does she desert us when we are helplessly exposed to the flames of purgatory and longingly wait for the beatific vision.

“Would that someone fetch me a drink of water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem” (1 Chr 11,17), exclaimed David. St. Methodius tells us that Mary is this well by the gate of Bethlehem. Yes, there are many other wells – which means that there are many other saints we could turn to – but they do not effectively help us without the well by the gate of Bethlehem, without Mary. That is how fruitful the mutual covenant of love, which is contained in the consecration, proves itself to be. And beyond that the consecration is also a mutual exchange of goods and hearts.

2. A Mutual Exchange of Goods

The two partners say in effect: What is yours is mine, and what is mine is yours. Mary gives us everything she calls her own, namely the Child in her arms to whom she has given all her love. She places Him, so to speak, in our hearts and

forms us according to His image. She lets the “Ave” resound in our ears, and places the “Magnificat” (Lk 1,46-55) and the “*Ecce Ancilla Domini*” (Behold the handmaid of the Lord, Lk 1,38) upon our lips. In other words, she makes us like unto herself in everything. She implores for us the tongues of the Holy Spirit which enable us to say “Abba, Father!” (Rom 8,15). She offers us the sevenfold sword of her heart, without which we cannot be transformed or become one with our crucified Lord, which is the meaning of our lives. Finally, she lends us the arm of her interceding omnipotence which enables us to ask, confidently and at all times, that our claims of love be fulfilled, and to share in her “omnipotence.” In return Mary expects that we place ourselves and all that we have and are unreservedly at her disposal. Our eyes, our ears, our hands – in short, all our interior and exterior faculties belong to her. She does not rest until they have become Marian hands, Marian ears, and Marian eyes and serve her mission for the kingdom of God. We give ourselves entirely to her, with all our faculties of body and soul, and with the merits of our good works. Even our earthly goods are used only in dependence on her, and for her mission and ours.

What we refer to here is usually called our “contributions to the capital of grace.” Here the statement applies: *Totum pro toto* – all for all. Everything belongs to her; she may and should use everything for the purpose of redeeming the world. By doing so we harbor the silent wish and the confident hope that she will settle here in her shrine and will educate, use, and guide the American people in their great mission for the world, or – to quote a letter written by Pius XII to the Polish bishops – that she will make her abode here “where her image smiles with motherly benevolence on the crowds of suppliants.”¹¹ The consecration, therefore, does not make us soft and self-centered, or closed and narrow-minded. This is how we

11 Pius XII, letter to the Polish bishops “Cum iam lustris abeat,” September 1, 1951; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 542.

understand Pope Pius XII's admonition that "the devotion to Mary... cannot be merely self-interested, a piety which sees in the powerful Mother of God only the distributor of benefits, and especially benefits of a temporal order; nor can it be a devotion aimed at securing only repose, that thinks only of removing from life the holy Cross of troubles, of struggles, of suffering; nor can it merely be a sentimental devotion of sweet consolations and enthusiastic displays; nor finally – no matter how holy it may be – a devotion exclusively anxious over its own spiritual advantages. A... true child of Mary, knight of the Virgin, cannot be content with a simple service of honor; he must be at her orders in all things; he must be the guardian, the defender of her name, of her high prerogatives, of her cause; and he must bring to his brethren graces and heavenly favors from their common Mother, and fight unceasingly at the command of her who '*cunctas haereses sola interemit in universo mundo*' (alone has overcome all heresies throughout the world)."¹²

Yes, those who have consecrated themselves to Mary in the covenant of love are wholly and permanently at her disposal. This is true even when others object.

That is what the parents of Blessed Crispin²³ had to experience. While he was still very young, his mother instilled in his heart a deep love for Mary. Before he was five years old, she took him to church and knelt down with him before a venerated picture of Mary. His mother said, "See, my child, the Mother of Jesus is also your Mother. Today I consecrate and surrender you to her. Love her deeply, always trust in her kindness, and honor her as your Queen." This event made a lasting impression on the child, and it directed the whole course of his life. From that moment on, Mary was for him always "my Mother and Queen." His heart was inflamed with a pure love for her. On

22 Pius XII, address to the Marian Sodality in Rome, January 21, 1945; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 393. The statement "*cunctas haereses...*" is taken from the office of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the old breviary.

23 (Now St.) Crispin of Viterbo (1668-1750), canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1982.

Saturdays and on the vigils of her feasts he fasted on bread and water for love of her. He never tired of singing songs in honor of Mary on every imaginable occasion. His mother had taught him to seek refuge in Mary in every need and danger by saying with childlike simplicity, "Mary, help!" He faithfully followed her advice, so that in every difficulty the petition "Mary, help!" came spontaneously from his lips and from his heart. And he always received assistance, even in dangerous situations. One day he and his playmates had climbed a tree. Suddenly the branch broke. The other boys were badly hurt, but not Crispin. In his childlike way he had not forgotten to utter his "magic" words, "Mary, help!" On another occasion a colt ran him down. They picked him up for dead. But again his magic words had not failed him he came away without a bruise or scratch. Such was the tender love with which his Mother and Queen cared for him ever since his consecration. When Crispin was ten years old he served an apprenticeship with a shoemaker. Because he was so diligent in his work, his master would give him a little spending money every Saturday. Crispin used it to purchase flowers for his Mother and Queen; but they had to be the best, befitting so majestic a Lady. When he was twelve, he witnessed a ceremony in which two Capuchin novices pronounced their vows. Immediately he felt the resolve: "I, too, wish to belong to this militant host. I feel the cross of St. Francis in my heart, and I want to keep it there forever." But Crispin had made his decision without consulting his parents, who did not want to let him go. He consoled them by reminding them of his consecration to his Mother and Queen. "Why do you weep," he said, "did you not dedicate me to the Holy Virgin when I was five years old? This was a voluntary gift on your part, and it is beyond doubt that Mary has accepted it. Therefore you should not regret ever having made it. I do not belong to myself anymore, but to Mary." And so he became a Capuchin Brother. He remained faithful to his covenant with Mary until death. It is to this covenant that he owed the grace of a death

in the reputation of sanctity and his beatification by Pope Pius VII (in 1806).

The extent of the mutual exchange of interests and goods through the covenant of consecration is revealed in the consecration prayer signed by Ferdinand III at Louvain in 1640: “I lovingly and dutifully acknowledge my adherence to the covenant established under your protection, O Mary, august Lady. I entrust to you myself and my dear ones, my wife and my children, the entire Holy Roman Empire over which God has placed me as head, the lands of my inheritance. To you and your protection I entrust my people and the armies that fight for you and your Son. Take me as your property, me who for your Son, who for you, who for the honor of you both live, rule, and battle. I therefore desire to be yours, O Mary! To you belongs whoever is mine. To you belong all my possessions, my kingdoms, and my imperial crown. My peoples shall belong to you and my armed forces. Protect them! Be victorious through them, rule and reign through them. This do I promise, thus do I pray. 1640. Lovingly and dutifully, Ferdinand.” Yes, lovingly...

3. A Mutual Exchange of Hearts and Love

The mutual exchange of interests and goods between the two covenant partners, between the Blessed Mother and us, can in the long run only be deeply effective when rooted in a perfect mutual exchange of hearts and love.

Pope Pius XII explicitly expects a mutual and universal fusion of hearts as a result of the Marian consecration. Those who make this consecration, says the Pope, should “freely, resolutely, and energetically conform to this purest Heart.”¹⁴ But what is this mutual conformity of hearts if not a mutual fusion of hearts? After all, love is a unifying and assimilating inner force. Love lives by a

14 Pius XII, Address at the canonization of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort, July 21, 1947. For excerpt from address (but not the part quoted here) see *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, Nos. 431-435.

mutual transference of life. That two people in love become similar in thought and action is, as experience teaches, a fruit of the deep union of their souls, of the mutual fusion of hearts. This hidden law of development is what the Pope had in mind when on one occasion he said – in reference to a familiar Scripture passage – “*Diligentes enim se diligit*,” (namely) those who love her will be loved by her in return (cf. Prv 8,17). Moreover, the degree of love determines the intensity of the return of love. Thus we may, as Schoenstatt’s Third Founding Document¹⁵ does, place upon Mary’s lips the words, “*Ego perfecte me diligentes perfecte diligo*” (I love those perfectly who love me perfectly).¹⁶ When I love the Blessed Mother perfectly, she will respond to this love in the same way. But the implications run in the other direction, too: I will make every effort to love Our Lady in my thoughts and deeds just as she loves me. This clarifies what is meant by the perfect mutual exchange of hearts and love. It is a matter of a heart for a heart, one for the other, until both hearts know only one and the same beat – two hearts and one beat – or, until a perfect and lasting mutual fusion of hearts has been attained. What this means is most easily understood when we compare the two hearts.

a. What is Mary’s Heart Like?

“As often as I consider Mary’s love,” says St. John Berchmans, “I really blush with shame.” Just as the rays of the sun shine everywhere, so Mary’s mother love embraces all souls. “If you would tell me,” exclaims Henry Seuse with fervor, “that at this very moment no miracle of Mary’s love had occurred, I would

15 Because of their fundamental importance, three documents in the history and development of the Schoenstatt Movement are given particular weight as Schoenstatt’s “Founding Documents.” These are 1) Father Kentenich’s talk on the establishment of a place of grace in Schoenstatt on October 18, 1914, 2) a letter written by Father Kentenich for the 25th anniversary of the movement, October 18, 1939, and 3) three talks given by Father Kentenich in the Dachau concentration camp on September 24, October 18, and December 8, 1944. These latter talks are referred to here.

16 An allusion to the Latin wording of Prv 8,17, *Ego diligentes me diligo*. See *Schoenstatt: The Founding Documents* (Waukesha, c. 1975), pp. 24 and 87.

enumerate to you the hundred miracles of the next moment. And if you would declare that Mary has not loved us during this hour, I would make known to you the innumerable tokens of Mary's love in the next hour. Count the flowers in the meadows during May, count the buds and leaves in spring, count the gnats and flies in the summer air, count the grains of sand on the seashore, count the snowflakes and raindrops, and you have counted the miracles, the tokens of love and the blessings of the mercy of Mary."

To the uninitiated, such exclamations and descriptions seem exaggerated and fantastic. They appear to be expressions of a heart no longer governed by intellect and will. But for us who recognize Mary's position in the plan of salvation, such expressions are but a stammering attempt to put into words what Our Lord has told us in His last will and testament: "Ecce Mater tua!" They only draw the obvious conclusions from that joyous fact that Mary is indeed, and in the true sense of the word, our Mother, and will remain so for time and eternity. St. Bernard says, "It is not the name that makes a mother truly a mother to her children, it is her love." To this we add: And if such a love, as in our case, is founded not only on a way of thinking but also on a real conferring of life, then we may not doubt its genuineness, its greatness and depth. That is doubly and triply true when backed up by the creative words of the omnipotent, all-loving God: "Behold your Mother! Behold your son!"

In order to make the incomprehensible greatness of Mary's motherly love a little more understandable for us, theologians like to make use of the following Bible passage: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life" (Jn 3,16).

Lessius¹⁷ takes, so to speak, every word into his hands in order to try to more closely determine its true weight. He declares,

17 Belgian Jesuit Leonard Lessius (1554-1623). Indentation and emphasis in the following quote has been added to this translation for the sake of clarity.

“Who while pondering such words can hold back his admiration, his feelings, his tears.?”

“*God* the almighty, the all-kind, the all-wise, who gives to each, yet is sufficient unto Himself, who shares with all, yet receives from no one; who enriches all, yet needs no one;

“*God so loved*, so beyond measure, beyond expression, so heedless of self;

“*God so loved the world*, the world and mankind burdened by the curse of sin, afflicted by death and every sort of suffering, so impure, so hostile, so ungrateful, so obstinate, so unworthy of the love of God; valued and priced so highly;

“*that He gave His only-begotten Son*, not gold and silver therefore, not the earth and all its treasures, not an angel, not a cherub or seraph, but His only-begotten Son, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, of equal substance, equal power, equal majesty with the Father and the Holy Spirit;

“*that He gave Him to poverty, hunger, and coldness, to mockery and persecution, to scourging and crowning with thorns, to blows and beating, to unheard-of suffering, to death on a cross;*

“*that He gave Him to us as the Way we must walk, the Truth we must believe in, the Life we must hope for, in order to gain salvation;*

“*that He gave Him as ‘a light of revelation to the Gentiles’ (Lk 2,32), as Shepherd for the protection of the sheep, as High Priest and Sacrifice of satisfaction for sins, as King for the establishment of the kingdom of grace and the founding of the Church, as Redeemer to liberate us from the power of Satan and hell, as Judge of the living and the dead, for the reward of the good and the punishment of the wicked.*

“*God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son that those who believe in Him – both corde, with the heart of justice, and ore, with the mouth of blessedness – ‘who acknowledge Him before men’ (Mt 10,32), acknowledge Him as the true Son of God, as the Savior of the world, as the*

One before whom ‘every knee should bend in heaven, on earth, and under the earth’ (Phil 2,10);

“*may not perish*, may not be robbed of their soul and eternal bliss, may not end up in hell;

“*but have everlasting life*, be numbered among those to whom the Judge extends the invitation, ‘Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ (Mt 25,34).”

Theologians tell us that this same passage (Jn 3,16) may be properly applied to the Blessed Mother as well. It would then read: Mary so loved the world that she gave her only-begotten Son, that those who believe in Him may not perish, but have everlasting life.¹⁸

Who can fathom the greatness of this voluntary sacrifice and the abyss of love that opens up to us here! Mary surrenders her Child to the pillory of the cross, the Child who is her God, her sole joy and delight, her happiness, her very life. While other mothers collapse in tears at the natural death of their children, Mary stands beneath the cross during the violent death and shameful murder of her only-begotten Son who, according to public opinion, dies a criminal. She stands there calm and collected, surrendering herself willingly to God’s will, the sevenfold sword in her heart, fully conscious of the saving importance of this great event. It almost appears as if she had the obligation and intent to suffer there beneath the cross – at the hour of our birth – the pains she had been spared at the birth of her only-begotten Son, and thus help acquire for all who would be granted the honor of suffering similar creative birth pangs for the Kingdom of God in the course of the centuries, the grace of the same steadfast, silent standing beneath the cross.

In order to get a feel for the entire greatness of the co-suffering of the Mother of Sorrows, St. Gregory of Nyssa places a helpful key in our hands. The hearts of Jesus and Mary, as he says, were like two harps: When one was plucked, the other

18 Cf. *The Glories of Mary*, p. 59.

vibrated though no one had touched it. This means that everything the Man of Sorrows suffered in body and soul turned into a tender and profound, into an inexpressible, interior, and motherly co-suffering and bitterly tormented her body and soul. Only thus will we be able to grasp the meaning of the words: “And she stood beneath the cross” (Jn 19,25).

St. Jerome applies this law with loving attention to details. It is his conclusion that “as many wounds, as many nails, as many lashes as tore the flesh of Jesus, just that many times Mary’s soul was martyred.” And St. Bernard asks the Sorrowful Mother compassionately, “Tell me, where did you stand? Was it beside the cross? No, you were hanging (in spirit) on the cross.” And again, “she died while she lived, and she lived while she died. You see, she could not die because hers was a living death. Christ could die in His body, but she could not die in her soul.”

On Golgotha’s heights Mary embraced the eternal Father’s plan of salvation so heroically that, in the opinion of St. Ambrose and St. Anselm, she herself would have been ready to surrender her son unto death had the executioners been wanting in their task.¹⁹

St. Alphonsus lets us measure the dizzying heights of Mary’s love not only by means of the infinite wealth of her universal motherhood which, within the limits of creation, cannot be surpassed in greatness and depth. He uses a larger measure; he directs his glance upward toward God and downward to Mary’s love for God. His conclusion is this: Because there has never been nor ever will be a creature that has or could have a greater love for God than Mary, there has never been nor ever will be a person who has or could have a greater love for humanity than she possessed.²⁰

Peter Damian gives this matter the final and deepest expression when he declares, “I know, O Lady, that you are

19 Ibid., pp. 57, 60.

20 Ibid., p. 58.

the most loving, and that you love us with an invincible love, because your God has loved us in you and through you with the greatest love.”²¹ Because love can only be rewarded with love, we want to love her as much as possible in return.

From this perspective it should not be difficult for us to join in singing the praises of Mary with those, both great and small, who have exalted Mary through the ages. This is the jubilant cry that arises from their grateful hearts: Who, O Blessed Lady, could ever measure the expanse, the magnitude, the grandeur, the depth of your love? The expanse – she comes to the aid of all who call upon her. The magnitude – her love fills the universe. The grandeur – it reaches up to the city of God. The depth – it descends to those who walk in the shadow of death and calls them to the light.

What is said of the eternal Father applies therefore also to Mary. Having given us His only-begotten Son, the greatest and most precious gift, why should He not have given us in Him everything, including that which is less precious than the Son of God? Did not Mary make a similar sacrifice of love for us under the cross? Her kindness and mercy have but a single limit – her power. (And for that) she is the interceding omnipotence. Her love for us is “strong as death” (cf. Song 8,6), i.e. there is no obstacle she is incapable of overcoming. Neither time nor separation, neither ingratitude nor death can retard or stop the immeasurable stream of her love.

We often experience how human love gradually exhausts itself and seeks a change, or how the human heart flits like a bird from one branch to another. It is not so with Mary. Her love is deep and abiding and eternal, similar to the very love of God. Earthly love which is not completely genuine, easily and quickly grows cold and weak under external separation. Mary’s love for us is not affected by this weakness. She is always near us. She sees us, she loves us in God and because of God who remains eternally unchangeable. Earthly love quickly

21 Ibid., p. 66.

collapses when returned with ingratitude. Mary's love is unselfish and pure, and is not turned aside by ingratitude. Even death cannot separate us from her. She is and remains our Mother. Lovingly she accompanies us to the judgment seat of God, there to defend us and lead us safely into heaven, or to be at our side with help and consolation in purgatory.

This is what the heart is like that is given to us in the covenant of love.

b. What is My Heart Like?

What is my heart like, the heart over which Our Lady obtains a right through my consecration?

As the Carmelite St. Albert (of Jerusalem) used to say, our hearts should be formed after the fashion of the four elements: pure like water, humble like the earth, free and generous like the air, and glowing like fire.

Purity, humility, magnanimity, and ardent love are the four qualities proper to a genuine Marian heart. Whatever we lack in this regard is given us by the Blessed Mother – because of our covenant of love with her – in that mysterious mutual fusion of hearts. She does not rest until our love for her and God is pure in intention and expression.

The intention must be pure. Neither force of habit or custom, neither etiquette or lip service should draw our hearts to Mary in some merely superficial or external manner, nor should selfish secondary motives be the decisive factor in the long run. Our hearts belong to Mary because faith shows us her position as Mother of Christ and of Christians; in other words, because she has shared in generating our divine life, because she nourishes us constantly with graces, and because she effectively educates us for our mission in the Kingdom of God and leads us into battle. To put it another way: In her own way Mary has shared in gaining for us all the graces necessary for salvation and for reaching the height of sanctity, and we obtain these graces through her. None is given to us without her. Love for her stands or falls, grows or declines with our love for God. Love for Mary

and love for God go hand in hand; they increase and decrease together. The purity of such an intention makes and keeps the human heart and human life chaste and pure, truthful and just.

A Marian heart will and must reflect the humility of the Handmaid of the Lord. It thinks little of itself. It does not assume a superiority over others. It is content with its state, its conditions and situations. St. Bernard even maintains that Mary's service lies essentially in humility.

A heart is generous and free when its love for Mary and God is free from internal and external compulsion, free from any kind of human fear, and when it gives itself only and always in dependence on the partner in love.

A heart may be called ardently glowing when it sheds its light in every direction, illuminates and warms, and is directed upward to the Eternal.

Do we now understand what is included in the consecration to Mary as a perfect mutual covenant of love, a perfect mutual exchange of interests, goods, and hearts?

The Consecration – Decision to Strive for Christian Perfection

Secondly, if the consecration is looked upon in this expanse and depth, its meaning for individual and community, for peoples and nations is not just a far-reaching, well-deliberated, and conscious decision to strive for the highest Christian perfection; it is also, because of its Marian character, a proven, a classical way of securing this striving and our salvation, and of bringing about a deep reform of individual and community, of nation and society.

In 1939, Pope Pius XI called the way “through Mary to Jesus” – the way that is consciously, completely and perfectly embraced in the consecration – simply “classical.”²² There can therefore be no question of this being a detour. In 1933, he called it “the most beautiful, the most heart-warming, and the

22 Pius XI, address to the international college of the Order of Servites, 1939.

surest way.”²³ With that he repeats the well-known statement of Pope Pius X (1904): “Who cannot see that there is no easier and surer means to unite everyone with Christ than the veneration of Mary?”²⁴ On another occasion Pius XI declared: “It is the unanimous conviction of theologians and one which has always been shared by Christian hearts and corroborated by broad experience, that no one will suffer eternal death who has Mary as patroness.”²⁵

Pope Pius XII defined the aim of those who have consecrated themselves in a special way to Mary as breaking with half-heartedness and mediocrity, renouncing sin and superficiality, and courageously professing the ideal of sanctity (1948);²⁶ especially in the form of everyday sanctity or of one-hundred-percent Catholicism (1946).²⁷ For this reason he also warns that the consecration should not be made carelessly and without deliberation. He insists on a serious preparation and a carefully considered personal decision: “The consecration ... is a total gift of oneself to Mary for time and eternity. It is a gift of oneself which may not be confused with an empty gesture or a sentimental act. It is rather something totally efficacious that must take on reality in an intensive Christian and Marian life, in an apostolic life in which the sodalist makes himself a servant of Mary, becoming, so to speak, the visible hands of the Mother of God here on earth. Out of this dedication must spontaneously break forth, like a stream, a superabundant interior life which overflows in all the exterior works of deep devotion: In acts

23 Pius XI, address at the canonization of Bernadette Soubirous, 1933.

24 Pius X, encyclical “Ad diem illum laetissimum,” February 2, 1904; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 224.

25 Pius XI, letter to the superior general of the Carmelites, March 18, 1922.

26 Cf. Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution “Bis saeculari,” 1948.

27 Cf. Pius XII, radio message for the coronation of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, May 13, 1946; cf. *Papal Teaching: Our Lady*, No. 416, where Pius XII speaks of “a convinced and fearless Catholicism.”

of divine worship, love, and zeal for the kingdom of God” (1945).²⁸

In a letter to the fifth French National Congress, the Pope wrote in the same vein, “The consecration to Mary may not just be a proclamation of the lips or the result of a hasty decision which therefore possesses only passing effectiveness; it must rather be a cry for effective moral reform, for necessary reform in the sphere of individual and family life, in the sphere of civil and social life, in the sphere of national and international life.”²⁹

The Marian Consecration Seen in its Broader Context

Thirdly, if we wish to penetrate more deeply into the meaning and purpose, into the essence and character of the consecration, we must view it in its broader context. In particular, it is a question of clarifying two truths of special importance.

1. Our Yes to the Basic Relationship Between Mary and Christianity

First truth: The consecration is very simply a childlike and trusting, a heartfelt and consistent yes to the basic relationship between Mary and Christianity and the individual Christian, which is deeply rooted in the objective order of being and living, and which is effective in all dimensions.

We have come to know this basic relationship as a definite, a clearly recognizable, and a very fruitful Mother-child relationship. To those familiar with this truth, it is evident that the consecration consciously affirms, joyfully proclaims, and faithfully eternalizes this fact. In other words, it allows the objective order of being down to its last ramifications to become the perfected order of living, to become my life’s norm and

28 Pius XII, address to the Marian Sodality in Rome, January 21, 1945; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 389.

29 Pius XII, letter to the Marian Congress at Rennes “Multiples et fécondes,” June 30, 1950; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 463, where the English translation varies widely from the German translation used by Ft. Kentenich. The German text has been used here as the basis for this translation.

life's form. The covenant of love which exists between Mother and child on the objective level, is acknowledged in the consecration in a conscious, voluntary, and unconditional manner, and is made the personal and permanent form of living and acting for time and eternity. Consequently, it may, will, and must be considered the classical answer to the testament of our dying Lord, "Ecce Mater tua! Ecce filius tuus!", and be considered the most perfect, appropriate, and timely imitation of St. John's example as he describes it in such unmistakable terms: "And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (Jn 19,27).

Through the covenant of love we bring to realization the command of our Savior. In essence we do so in the same manner as St. John – we take Mary into our hearts and give her the place of honor there which in and with God is her due. As a result, we may expect that this spiritual in-one-another between Mary and us and the mutual fusion of hearts will bring fruits similar to those St. John was given, fruits for our own spiritual growth towards communion with the infinite God, and fruits for the entire spectrum of pastoral activity.

Those who understand the inner relationships between Mary as the Mother of Christ, as the Mother of Christianity, and as Mother of the individual Christian, see clearly that Mary, by her fiat, conceived in her womb and nourished with her blood not only the Incarnate Son of God but in and with Him Christianity as well – because and in as much as Christ is Head of the Church. In Him Mary carried and nestled Christianity in her arms. In Him she gave it total care. In Him she solidly established it on earth while standing beneath the cross. While on earth, she was always with Christ, and in Him with Christianity, with the Church: at the Incarnation in Nazareth, at the manger in Bethlehem, at the adoration of the magi, at the presentation in the temple, at His death on the cross, and at the descent of the Holy Spirit.

For this reason the Church is irresistibly drawn by mystical bonds to Mary, to the Mother of Christianity, to the Mother

of the Church. Pope Leo XIII concludes, “It is certainly due only to the faith of the Church that we are drawn by an almost overpowering and yet gentle impulse to Mary.”³⁰

Evidence and expression of these overpowering and yet gentle impulses toward the Blessed Mother – impulses which act in the Church rather after the fashion of a “law of nature” – are to be found in the special times which are dedicated to her. Think of the wreath of Marian feast days which adorn the liturgical year, of the Marian months of May and October. Think of the Marian days in each week, of each Saturday, of the call to pray the Angelus three times a day. Evidence and expression of these impulses are the places given to Mary as her own all over the world in cities and villages, on mountains and in valleys. Countless Marian churches and chapels, from the solitary wayside chapel in the woods to the towering cathedral, speak their eloquent tongue. There is hardly a little village church, no matter how poor, that does not have an altar for Mary or a statue in her honor.

And who can count the statues and paintings, be they those of the popular devotion or works of art, that keep alive the memory of the Blessed among women. Add to these the songs and prayers, the litanies and hymns in her honor, count the “Ave Marias” and the “Salve Reginas” that are sent up to her throne! Remember too that no sacrifice (of the Mass) is celebrated, no procession held, without awakening and deepening some remembrance of the Mother of God. Finally, do not forget the countless societies and communities, orders, institutes, and confraternities that have placed themselves under her protection and spread her love into the farthest corners of the globe.

Putting this all together, you begin to understand what Leo XIII meant by the “overpowering and yet gentle impulse” which urges the Church toward Mary. Wherever we Catholics look: Everywhere a sign of Mary. Wherever we listen: Everywhere

30 Leo XIII, encyclical “Octobri mense,” September 22, 1891; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 115.

we hear the glory of her name. Wherever we go: Everywhere we meet faithful children of Mary who do not hide their love for her. We meet brave knights of Mary who courageously stand up for their Queen and her honor whenever needed. We meet countless children of the Church who prove themselves Mary's covenant partners in every situation, no matter whether they have made a formal covenant of love with her or not.

In short, the Church is deeply immersed in a Marian atmosphere and does not rest until all her children belong to Mary and answer her mother love with filial devotion. Thus the Church, who is herself a Mother, honors Mary her Mother – the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the individual Christian. Thus she gives realization to Mary's prophetic words, "Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Lk 1,48). Moreover, the Church teaches us never to meditate on and celebrate the mysteries of our redemption without Mary. The Church takes care that we not only celebrate the feasts of Our Lord throughout the liturgical year, but also those of Mary. Jesus and Mary belong inseparably together. That is how they exist in the plans of God; that is how they are active in the liturgy of the Church, and that is how they should be seen and honored in our personal lives.

This holds true in a special way in the lives of Christianity's heroes, the saints. They represent the spirit of the Church in the most perfect manner. Their lives are the surest proof of the meaning of the "classical way" of "to Jesus through Mary." They do not practice a Marian minimalism; their love of Mary is not stingy and anxiously doled out. In all situations they follow the principle "*De Maria nunquam satis*" (Of Mary never enough).³¹ We cannot hold Mary in too high esteem. We can never love her too intimately or be too solicitous about permitting her to shape us in the image of Christ. Whether and to what extent the saints expressly made a covenant of love with Mary would have to be studied in each individual case. In their daily

31 Attributed to St. Bernard of Clairvaux.

lives, however, all without exception lived out of the mother-child relationship in their own way.

“The greatest saints,” according to Vincent Pallotti, “were the most ardent devotees of Mary, because that devotion makes the spirit receptive for greater graces of sanctification... O Mary, you Intercessor and Refuge of Sinners, you Queen of Saints and Mother of Mercy! Who would refuse to honor in you the Most Holy Trinity? O Mother, who would refrain from imitating the just on earth and the angels and saints in heaven? Who would consider themselves wiser and more intelligent than the Most Holy Trinity so as to think he must place limits on his glorification of you! It is enough not to believe, not to say, that you are God. After that, no spirit, no tongue, no matter how highly they esteem you and shower you with praises, will ever be able to comprehend and worthily commemorate the treasures of the Divinity that are enclosed within you.”³²

During his life Pallotti himself took the covenant of love seriously, particularly as it is found in the fundamental relationship between Mother and child and as solemnly proclaimed in the last will and testament of our dying Savior, “Ecce Mater tua! Ecce filius tuus!” That is why Pallotti’s love for Mary took such intimate form. For him Mary was the great Mediatrix and therefore his Mother and Educator. Referring to her as his Educator he called her the “teacher in spiritual life” and the “great missionary” who is able and willing to work miracles for the salvation of souls. Referring to her as Mother he saw her as Co-Redemptrix, treasurer and distributor of graces, or simply as intercessor at God’s throne. At the prime of his life, the union of love between him and Mary soared beyond the forms of filial devotion and took on a bridal character. This happened on December 31, 1832. Pallotti himself described the event as follows: “In order to triumph through a miracle of mercy over the ingratitude and inconceivable unworthiness of the most miserable creature that ever lived or ever will live

32 Quoted from Josef Frank, *Vinzenz Pallotti* (note 22, p. 14), Vol. 1, p. 340.

among the subjects of her kingdom of mercy, the sublime Mother of Mercy condescended to enter with great compassion into a spiritual espousal with this subject. She gives him as dowry all she possesses; grants him a deeper understanding of her divine Son; and as Bride of the Holy Spirit sees to it that he will be totally transformed interiorly in the Holy Spirit.”³³

What we have called a perfect mutual exchange of goods, interests, and hearts, and what we have characterized as being the result of the filial-maternal covenant of love, leads back in an extraordinary special case to a bridal covenant of love. Reference is therefore not merely made to an exchange of goods. Pallotti speaks of a dowry and thus conforms to the idea of espousal, for the word dowry signifies everything that bride and groom bring into their new relationship.

What Pallotti was given by virtue of this covenant in the line of a deep understanding of Christ and an inner spiritual transformation into Christ, is what we expect of the consecration. Of course, the determination of the degree (of that grace) is something we leave to God’s wisdom and unfathomable mercy. All the saints are greatly indebted to the Blessed Mother for this twofold grace, even if their mutual relationship never took on such a bridal character. Furthermore, not everyone is capable of expressing his gratitude with an equally glowing fervor and in brilliant and meaningful terms like Pallotti. After having briefly reported the fact of the spiritual espousal, Pallotti wrote, “Oh, the mercy of Jesus, who in favor of an ungrateful, miserable, unworthy, wicked, impious, even the most impious person who ever lived or will live, answers without hesitation the petitions of His Mother! Oh, the mercy of Mary, of the Immaculate Queen, who for the most miserable, most ungrateful, and most wicked sinner whom she has ever had and will have among her subjects in the kingdom of mercy, begs so kindly, intercedes, and implores graces. Mercy, mercy, mercy! Heaven is filled with the mercies of Mary. I shall sing of the acts of mercy of the Lord eternally!

33 Cf. *Vincent Pallotti – An Apostle and Mystic* (note 5, p. 4), pp. 130, 162.

I shall sing of the acts of mercy of Mary eternally! My God and my All!"³⁴

2. The Marian Consecration and the Task of Baptismal

Instruction

In this context we need to recall a second truth which will enable us to gain a deeper understanding of the covenant of love with Mary.

In the previous sermon we heard that each of us as an individual became a child of Mary at the moment we became members of Christ. That happened in holy Baptism. It is, therefore, the grace of Baptism which makes us members of Christ and children of Mary at one and the same time. Baptism is often referred to as the "baptismal covenant." That tells us that we are drawn by baptism into the covenant of love which the Savior sealed with His blood in the New Testament, and which therefore gives a new note and title to the covenant character of the whole history of salvation.

It is the task of baptismal instruction to develop the objective covenant of love thus made into a subjective, personal covenant of hearts between two covenant partners, between Christ and the Christian, between God and the child of God. This should not only happen at certain special and decisive moments in our lives, as they are marked by the sacraments; no, if at all possible, it should be done daily in the context of Holy Mass. From the altar, our entire workday should gradually be stripped of its indifference, its unobliging and impersonal character, and should be made into a single great game of love between Christ and Christian, between the Father and the child of God.

For the human covenant partner who lives entirely in the spirit of his baptismal contract, who has made it his life's form and norm, the goal and meaning of his life, all vicissitudes of life, no matter how varied, confusing, or oppressing, are gifts of love and tokens of endearment. They are a careful soliciting

34 Ibid., p. 131.

of love, an enticing and awakening greeting of love from the divine Covenant Partner, who with loving concern feeds the birds and clothes the lilies (Mt 6,26ff), without whose will no hair falls from our heads (Mt 10,29f), who as God of love wants to elicit a loving response and a brave and warm return of love, wants to rouse and preserve it and take it into the stream of love which issues forth from His heart and again returns there. These (sufferings and hardships of life) are tests of the genuineness of our love. They are expression and means for the growth of greatness and strength of the covenant of love which we have made.

“You look on us with a father’s glance,
You let us share the happiness of your Son;
You design for us what shall be given us
For the eternal salvation of our souls.

Each suffering is a greeting from you,
Which lends wings to our souls.
They powerfully set the course for the future,
Sustaining the energy of our striving.

They force us to renew our decision
To say our yes for Christ,
Until He alone lives in us
And works through us and seeks you.

As the sunflower turns
To the sun which richly endows it,
So we turn with heart and mind
To you, Father, believingly.

We see you standing fatherly and quietly
Behind each happening,
Embrace you with loving ardor,
Go to you joyfully and full of sacrificial courage.”³⁵

The consecration and the fruitfulness that comes from such an outlook on life are radiantly mirrored in the father-child relationship of the natural order. A look at this human relationship will give us a faint idea of what is meant here.

“If a stranger came and tried to lift an unattended child from his carriage, the child would cry loudly and struggle with all his strength. But if it is his father who comes, even though he might be a rough man with a wild beard and a harsh voice, the child, upon recognizing him, will squeal with delight, stretch out his arms, and permit his father to pick him up without objections. The child surrenders himself with infinite confidence to the perhaps impetuous play of the father. He permits his father to raise him high in the air, to swing him in a circle, to toss him up like a ball; the child is not afraid, for it is his father who does all this. When the father carries him into a dark room, the little one only presses closer to his father. If he acts as though he would swing the child out the window, the child only shouts with joy. And when the father pretends to eat his little darling, skin and all, the child only laughs and begs, ‘Do it again!’ He knows his father will never harm him. His little heart is aware that his father loves him and so he trusts him without limit. Never does the child feel as sheltered as when his father plays with him, even when the game takes away every security other than the father’s mighty arm.

“Isaac, the fleet-footed lad, did not run away from his aged father Abraham on Mount Moriah. He permitted Abraham to bind him and to place him on the kindling wood, thinking in astonishment, ‘What is my father doing with me today.’

35 *Heavenwards* (note 13, p. 38), from the Creed of the “Mass of God’s Instruments” (these verses untranslated in available English texts). See German original, p. 26.

“If a child is able to place such confidence in his earthly father, how much more should he – once the insight of faith has been attained – be able to feel that he is given over to the heavenly Father who can never fail? Are not the vicissitudes of life tokens of divine power which want to take all securities from the soul so that it may learn, through total surrender and detachment, to rest solely in God’s fatherly love?”³⁶

From this point of view, those who see earthly life as an image and parable of a higher reality understand the deeper meaning of the words, “Unless you become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18,3). They will not find it difficult to discover and understand in the mirror of Christ’s life the laws of God’s educational wisdom. As the Father dealt with His only-begotten Son, so, and following the same rules, His fatherly wisdom and love now deal with us, His dearly beloved children, the members, the brothers and sisters of His only-begotten Son.

So it is that all of life’s events, whether joys or sorrows, advance us toward a deeply personal contact and a most vibrant relationship with the divine Covenant Partner who has planned them one and all for our personal salvation, or who at the very least has permitted them. In this way a hardening of the heart and emotions or petrification of forms and customs into lifeless rituals is made entirely impossible. Such malformations need only be feared when existing forms have not been created by personal love or are not lastingly animated by it.

The supposition gradually awakens in us that only those who are genuinely children can unaffectedly master modern life with its tremendous convulsions. They – and perhaps only they – are able to endure the pressure of mass-existence which none of us can escape in our world of shrunken dimensions, and to accept it without falling victim to the crowd mentality and

36 Oda Schneider, *Er ordnete in mir die Liebe* (He set the love in me aright), Vienna and Munich, 1954, p. 66f. The author wrote this book largely on the basis of her experience in the Schoenstatt Movement.

to losing the core of their personality. They succeed – and again perhaps they are the only ones who can do so – in progressing with relative ease through the unusual new conditions which otherwise shackle like unbreakable chains, so as to ascend to the true freedom of the children of God which will joyfully lead to the ruin of the looming specter of self-reliance gone awry, of adoration before the “golden calf” of money, higher standards of living, and pleasure. Neither will these break down in the face of disappointments, but rather scurry like “chicks beneath the shadow of the wings” of the heavenly Father³⁷ to find refuge from the frightening danger of the circling vulture, of brutal, covert political, economic, or military dictatorship. Without the heavenly Father we are completely at their mercy.

Because and in as much as the grace of Baptism makes us children of Mary as well, this grace is objectively and in essence also a covenant of love with the Mother of God. A total baptismal education, therefore, consists of making this objective Mother-child relationship – in addition to the membership in Christ and childhood in God – a deep, personal covenant of hearts. That is the meaning of the Marian consecration as we understand it and have described it. It is, therefore, a freely chosen yes on our part to the fundamental Marian relationship contained in the grace of Baptism. Thus in its total structure, namely in its preparation and subsequent renewal and deepening, the consecration may be considered an important part of baptismal education. Living this consecration should be considered a means of allowing this basic relationship to grow and develop into its perfection.

The Inner Relatedness of the Covenants with God and Mary

Both relationships, in their own manner, have their foundation in Baptism and are not difficult to understand for those who have gained an insight into the basic relationship between the love for Mary and the love for Christ. The interrelatedness can

37 Cf. Ps 91,4; applied to Mary in *The Glories of Mary*, pp. 94-95.

be expressed in one sentence: *The covenant of love with the Blessed Mother is an expression of and a means toward, and an outstanding safeguard of the covenant with God.* Obviously, the covenant of love with Mary belongs to a lower order, but is nevertheless, in accordance with God's plan, of extraordinarily great importance. Just as the way to Christ is through Mary, so, too, the covenant of love with her must be considered and valued as simply the classical means of securing and making fruitful the covenant with God. Each is dependent on and requires the other, each expects and promotes the other.

The "Mother of Fair Love" has no greater interest or more important task than to set the love in us aright, that is, to transform, after her own likeness, all who have given their hearts to her into fully formed children of a singularly great and organic love of God and neighbor. She sees to it that the covenant with her, which is already a natural consequence of the covenant with God, will develop through the Holy Spirit into a deeper covenant with Christ the Lord and with "the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor 1,3), as well as into a perfect transformation into Christ. Only in this manner does the beatitude "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God" (Mt 5,8), receive its full meaning. Thus we understand the admonition of the poet:

"Let go as if were nothing things of worth,
And likewise let each word fade from your mind,
For one thing alone its weight decisive keeps:
The heart, the heart alone; so that you find
'Twas given you to place in Mary's hands,
That heart in heart you live in God, refined."³⁸

Only then does the petition to the Blessed Mother receive its full meaning:

"Still their inordinate and infirm drives
And may their entire being submit to God.

38 *Er ordnete in mir die Liebe*, p. 100 (English translation by the translator of these sermons).

Their ardent hearts should be His very own
And their sacrificial love be faithfully dedicated to Him.

May they powerfully reject every love
That cunningly seeks to tear them from your side,
That desires to taint the shine of their purity
And wilt the laurel of their virginal crown.

They have sealed a covenant with you;
May it remain firm as if forged in bronze.
Then I know they are secure, faithfully protected,
And do not fear the fury of the flood.

You will lead them home victoriously to the Father
So that they will sing hymns to the Lamb.
I firmly believe that no one will be lost,
Who remains faithful to his covenant of love.”³⁹

As the Seat of Wisdom, Mary exactly follows the rules and principles of God’s educational wisdom which she became acquainted with and learned to live and love in the workshop of the divine Educator as the science of the saints.

“A mother plays with her baby to develop his strength and abilities. She coaxes him to look at her and recognize her. She hides herself so he will seek her. She walks away from him so he will run after her. She tosses him into the air to teach him to become courageous and to trust her. How great her joy when the child takes up her little games joyfully and bravely – though not without considerable effort – becoming more and more alert and agile, when he cries for joy as often as he finds her after hiding, or catches her as she runs away. Does not our fatherly-motherly God do the same? The soul is meant to converse with Him in prayer, yet cannot find Him. Faith alone confirms that He is present. That suffices. He is too great and too near for us to perceive Him, and if He has gone beyond

39 *Heavenwards*, from the “Prayer of the Shepherd.” In the Wisconsin translation see p. 82, in German original see p. 138.

that and hidden Himself in play, (it is) so that the soul seek Him, call Him, wait for Him, and speak with Him as though beholding Him eye to eye."⁴⁰

This is the constantly recurring rule in the game of love between God and man. The divine Lover seems to withdraw from the loving soul for periods of time; He cloaks Himself in darkness. He does this so as to be sought by the soul with intense desire, to be found anew and embraced tenderly. That is how He acted in the case of our dying Lord who cried out in pain, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27,46). That is how He worked in the life of (Mary,) the masterpiece of His hands, the great Educator of Christianity, when He let her seek Him for three days in sorrow (cf. Lk 2,46). This painful searching is already a deep encounter of love between two lovers. It is the prerequisite and thermometer of the greatness and fruitfulness of the mutual exchange of hearts. From this point of view, the admonition of the psalmist becomes clear, "Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice! Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face untiringly" (Ps 105,3f).

Who should then be surprised that in our education for the "ball game" of life the Virgin most wise gives careful attention to the valuable lessons which she learned in the Savior's school of love? She who does so is the one upon whose lips the Church has placed the words: "I was at his side..., ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere in his world, delighting to be with the sons of men" (Prv 8,30f). "He who finds me shall find life" (Prv 8,35).

So it happens that she does not spare her favorite children the dark labyrinth of the night of faith and the martyrdom of the tortured and lonely heart, until at last the soul is purified and, in deep intimacy with the God of love, can sing and say, "My God and my All! My beloved is mine and I am his" (Song 2,16). It may be that from time to time during this period the soul finds itself in great tribulation and will join St. Teresa

40 *Er ordnete in mir die Liebe*, p. 106.

of Avila in complaining to the Lord, “Lord, if this is how you treat your friends, it is small wonder that you have so few!” Nevertheless, the rules of the game remain unchanged as long as we walk in mortal flesh.

“He who does not die from his love
Does not know what love is.
He who still seeks joys for himself,
And does not forget his own self,
He who still raises his head a little
To fame’s enticement,
He who still lives his own life
And is not immersed in the other’s,
He who still speaks about his love,
Is not totally enchanted.
Only when the last idol is broken
Does the heart truly love – though not knowing how –
And receive true recognition from God.”⁴¹

That is how the covenant of love with the Blessed Mother takes on the form that includes the consecration to her. So all-encompassing is its significance for Christian living in our crisis-filled times.

Pope Pius XII leaves no doubt about his hopes and expectations as representative of Christ here on earth. In his encyclical of May 1, 1948, “*Auspicia quaedam*,” he declares, “It is our wish, consequently, that wherever the opportunity suggests itself, this consecration be made in the various dioceses, as well as in each of the parishes and families. And we are confident that abundant blessings and favors from heaven will surge forth from this private and public consecration.”⁴²

If we take everything which we have heard in this solemn hour and turn it over in our minds once more, letting it sink in, we will better understand what it means when we maintain

41 Ibid., p. 133.

42 Pius XII, encyclical “*Auspicia quaedam*,” May 1, 1948; cf. *Papal Teachings: Our Lady*, No. 451.

that the Holy Father wishes that we meet the Blessed Mother as perfect partners in love, that is, he wishes that we completely and undividedly consecrate ourselves, and thus conclude with her a perfect covenant of love and shape our whole life according to it. The consecration should become a decisive mark in our personal lives and in the history of our parish and nation. He (the Holy Father) therefore demands of us a serious and well deliberated decision. For this reason we do not want to act over-hastily. We have until the end of the year to give it proper thought. We would like to use the occasion of the dedication of our shrine as, God willing, the occasion for our personal consecrations and the consecration of our whole parish.

During the Thirty Years' War, the famous Field Marshal Tilly was about to go to battle against his foes. Before giving the command to attack, he recollected himself in prayer before a picture of Our Lady. Scouts brought message after message: The battle had already begun. At last Tilly rose from prayer, pointed enthusiastically to the picture of Mary, and confidently declared, "Mary will help us." Two hours later the enemy was defeated.

Mary will help us. *Mater habebit curam* (Mother will take care). With her help we will win the battles which arise within ourselves and which leave us no rest. With her help we too will emerge victorious in the battles of our modern times. Amen.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Father Joseph Kentenich, father and founder of the Schoenstatt Movement, an international movement of Catholic renewal, was born in Gymnich, near Cologne, Germany in 1885. Ordained in 1910, he was still a young priest when he founded the Schoenstatt Movement in 1914 with a handful of high-school boys. During World War II he was detained by the Nazis from 1941 to 1945, including over three years in the concentration camp in Dachau. He died in Schoenstatt, West Germany in 1968.

Thirteen of his years were spent in Milwaukee (1952-1965), where he wrote this collection of sermons at the request of colleagues. Originally prepared during Lent of the Marian Year 1954, these sermons present a broad overview of Father Kentenich's perception of Mary's role as Mother of God and Christianity, and Educator in the existential crises of the modern day. A devoted son of Mary himself, Father Kentenich gives the firm basis for a relationship with her such as he experienced it, including the fundamental building block of the entire Schoenstatt spirituality: the covenant of love with Mary.