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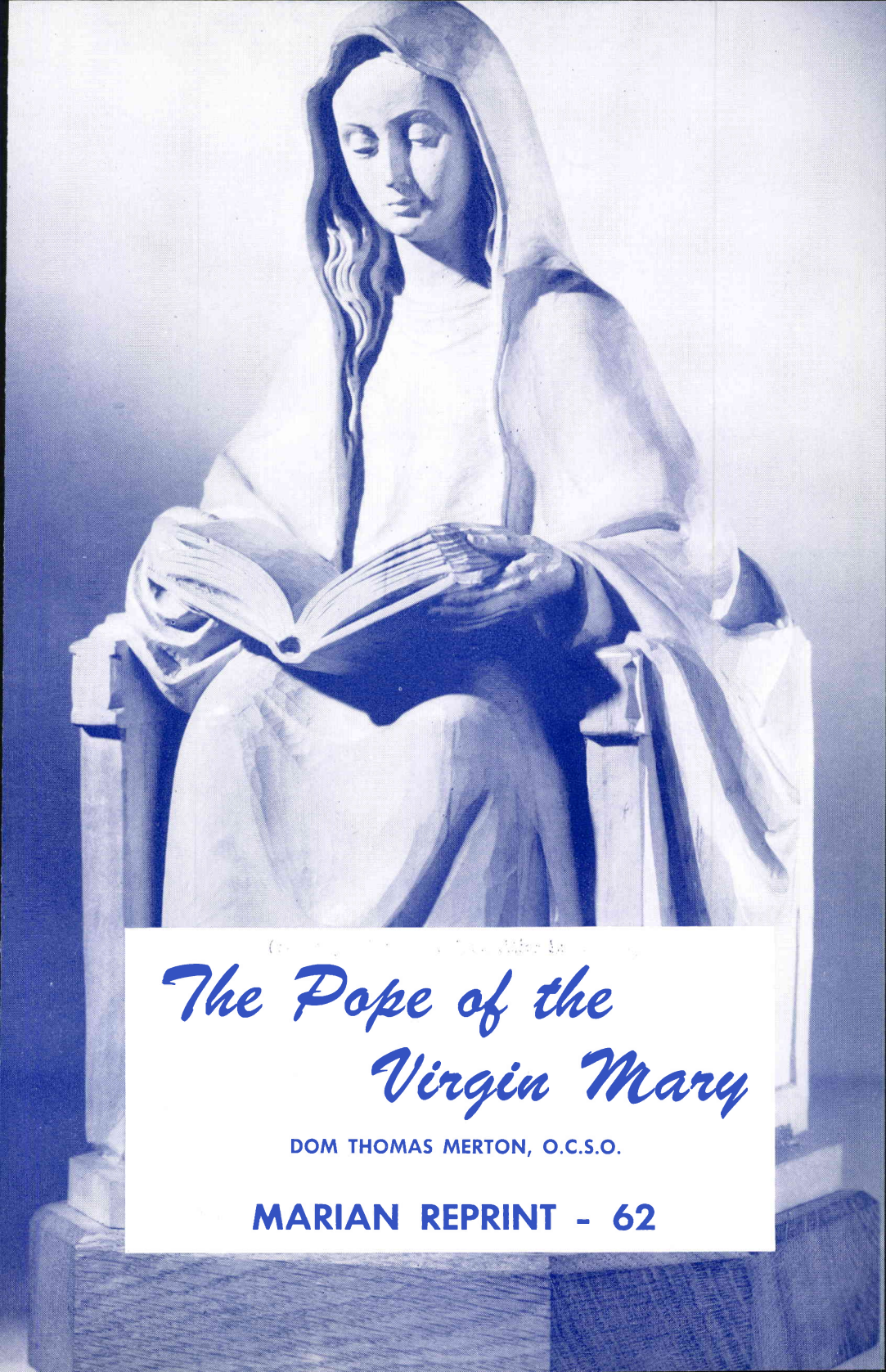
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*The Pope of the  
Virgin Mary*

DOM THOMAS MERTON, O.C.S.O.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Father Thomas Merton (Father Louis Merton, O.C.S.O.) needs no introduction to the American public. Since he wrote the modern classic "Seven Storey Mountain" more than ten years ago, he has been one of the best-known religious writers of our day. His first best-seller has been followed by such literary and religious gems as *Ascent to Truth*, *No Man Is An Island*, *Seeds of Contemplation*, *The Sign of Jonas*, *Bread in the Wilderness*.

In the present article reprinted from a book composed by eminent scholars from the entire world to honor the eightieth birthday of the Pope (Pio XII Pont. Max. Postridie Kalendas Martias MDCCCLXXVI-MDCCCCLVI), Father Merton speaks about the special relationship existing between the present Holy Father and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The title of the article "The Pope of the Virgin Mary" is indicative of the contents and of the tone of the article.

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A  
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# THE POPE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

DOM THOMAS MERTON, O.C.S.O.

The six words of this simple title are not without deep mystery. Indeed, if we pause to meditate on them we find ourselves plunged into the very heart of the greatest mystery, the sacrament of Christ in His Church: the mystery which has been hidden from eternity in God . . . made known to the principalities and powers through the Church (Ephesians, 3, 9-10). One of the things that distinguishes the Catholic from all others who claim to believe in the Son of God, is precisely that the Catholic sees Christ in His Vicar, loves and worships Him in His most holy Mother, and finds Him where He lives and speaks, obeys Him where He rules and sanctifies, in His Mystical Body, the Church. Of this Mystical Body, Mary is the Immaculate Mother and Christ's Vicar is the Visible Head. The pronouncements, the ardent prayers, the dogmatic definition, the liturgical honors with which our Holy Father Pius XII has glorified the privileges of the Immaculate Mother of God, Queen of Heaven and earth, have been perhaps the richest and most significant expressions of the life of the Catholic Church in one of the most tormented epochs of her history.

To speak of our Holy Father as the Pope of the Virgin Mary is to say more than that he has had a special care to intensify the fervor of the Church's Marian cult or to elucidate the hidden depths of her Marian theology. Pope Pius XII is the Pope of the Virgin Mary in a deeper sense than that in which we might say that a scientist is a man of science. A man of science is one who has made science the object of his life's work. He has chosen science as his career. But the Blessed Virgin is not merely someone whom the Holy Father has chosen as a specialty—as though he were an ordinary Mariologist. Rather, it is the Blessed Virgin who seems to have chosen him as her Pope—her special instrument, effecting in the Church the plans which God has deigned to place in her hands. He is the Pope who belongs to the Madonna, who is as it were moved and directed by her privileged action in the organism of the Mystical Body, in which her supreme charity makes her the mediatrix and dispenser of all the graces which flow down upon us from Christ our Head. This dependance of the Pope



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on the Virgin Mother, which has been made almost palpably evident by the teaching and action of Pope Pius XII, serves to make clear that every Pope has been, and must be, in this sense, the Pope of the Madonna. If the Blessed Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, of angels and of men, it is because Christ has given her to share in the fullness of His priestly mediation and His Kingly rule. She therefore rules the Church and, at the same time, in a mysterious sense, is the Church of Christ which she prefigured. How can the visible Head of the Church be anything else but the Pope of the Madonna? He lives surrounded by her power, enlightened by her wisdom, immersed in her maternal silence which still continues to bring forth on earth, the immense mystery of God made Man.

Do we know this Mother of God? We think we do, no doubt. But we never know her enough. Our view of her must continue to deepen, to grow, to expand: if it is not continually developing, it is no view at all. How does it develop? It is the Church who sees and knows the heavenly Mother. Our sight of the Madonna is nourished by the reports which come to us, of her, from the Church which makes her visible to us. Do we know the Blessed Virgin? Let us see her through the eyes of her Pope.

Whom does the Pope of the Madonna see, when he contemplates her in the great mystery of the wedding of God and humanity, "the sacrament of Christ and His Church" (cf. Ephesians 5, 32)? He sees her as the Immaculate Mother of God, assumed into heaven, yes. He sees her as Queen. He sees all the privileges which he has made clear to us. But I ask more: what are the concrete, living, human lineaments which the face of the Madonna reveals to the eyes of her Pope? This is an important question, because we can read and study the Holy Father's pronouncements and yet never come to know the Blessed Virgin as he knows her, to see her as he sees her. But this is the most important part of his mission as "her Pope." He must bring us to her not as an abstract object of study but as a Mother, a living and glorious Queen who intervenes powerfully in our own lives.

Let us think, first of all, of the venerable image of the Madonna which Pope Pius XII crowned in Rome at the end of the Marian year.

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Where was Christian art ever more invested with its truly sacred character than in the painting of Our Lady as *Salus Populi Romani*? There we see at once majesty and mercy, condescension and remoteness, familiarity and mystery. The lineaments of that holy face combine the artistic traditions and the racial features of Greece and Rome. The countenance of the Mother of all is the meeting place of East and West, and this picture is a portrait not only of the Virgin but of Holy Church. It is the meeting place of sadness and joy, of sorrow and victory, for here heaven and earth come together: and once again they meet in this picture because it is a portrait at once of Mary and of the Church. The sweet, and strong, and serious oval of her face is turned towards us, and the Christ Child in her arms looks up at her, as if He had abandoned to her all His concern for us and wanted to occupy Himself only with her. Her dark eyes, which beheld the Passion of the Christ, plunge into the depths of our souls, sanctifying them with their warmth and sobriety, with their unending gentleness, and with their sorrow.

Or again, let us open the Scriptures which the Holy Spirit has filled, everywhere, with mystical portraits of the Virgin Mother. Pope Pius XII sees Mary not only in herself but in her types, and perhaps the one which most accurately portrays to us his idea of the Blessed Virgin is the beautiful and intrepid Judith. The Madonna of Pope Pius XII is the great Queen victorious in all the battles of God, whose immaculate purity crushed the head of the serpent as Judith beheaded Holofernes "cutting off his pride with his own sword" (cf. Judith 9, 12). Mary is another Judith in her Magnificat which is "a canticle of joy and invincible confidence in the Divine Power whose works she undertook to carry out . . . (the divine power) fills her with holy daring and a strength unknown to nature."<sup>1</sup> Strength and holy daring are indeed characteristics of the Blessed Virgin which popular art and piety have not emphasized in our time. But The Pope of the Blessed Virgin is in every sense the Pope of Christian renewal, and he revives not only the ardor and clarity of the traditional Catholic conception of Mary, but also its completeness. The Madonna is indeed the valiant woman of the book of Proverbs (chapter 31), valiant not only for herself but also for us. For, as the Holy Father tells us, "She has also to communicate

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to men something of her own spirit—that courageous and even bold will which, in difficult circumstances and in the face of dangers and obstacles, is able unhesitatingly to take the necessary decisions and put them into effect with an energy not slackened, so that it sweeps along in its wake the tired, the weak, the doubtful and those who no longer believe in the justice and nobility of the cause which they must defend.”<sup>2</sup>

The Madonna of Pope Pius XII is above all the **Mater intemerata** of the Litany, the **Virgo potens** and the Queen of Martyrs, whose fortitude is proportionate to her purity and whose virginity of body is but the reflection of her radiant virginity of soul. For she was destined, in the eternal plans of God, to be both body and soul, the temple and dwelling place of the Word. Contemplating her splendor, which is the radiation of the divine light itself (**candor est lucis aeternae et speculum sine macula!**) (Wisdom 7, 26),<sup>3</sup> the Holy Father has spoken of Mary and prayed to her in terms which recall the hymn of joy of the high priest Joachim on Judith’s victorious return from the Assyrian camp. “Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honor of our people. For thou hast done manfully, and thy heart has been strengthened, because thou hast loved chastity. Therefore thou shalt be blessed forever” (Judith 15, 10-11).

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The whole work of the Pontificate of Pope Pius XII can be summed up in two words as a struggle for Christian renewal.

Christianity itself, by its very nature, is a constant struggle for spiritual renewal in a world of men whose fallen nature draws them ever downward in the corrupted oldness of what is evanescent because it is merely temporal. Christianity is new life, eternal life, life above the world and above time, yet in the world, and in time. It is a life in history oriented to a fulfillment in which history itself will be perfected and transcended and lifted up and offered to God as the gift of His Christ. Christianity is life and growth in Christ. Therefore both Christian life and Christian renewal come to us through Mary. She is Mother of the Mystical Christ just as she is Mother of the Physical Christ.

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"She is the holy Mother of all the members of Christ"<sup>4</sup> and, as the Supreme Pontiff says: "She surrounded the Mystical Body of Christ born from the pierced Heart of the Saviour, with the same maternal vigilance and the same zealous love as those with which she warmed and nourished with her milk the Child Jesus in the crib."<sup>5</sup> "With her fiat . . . in the supernatural order of grace, she became the Mother of all who through the Holy Spirit would be made one under the headship of her Divine Son."<sup>6</sup>

Spiritual motherhood, unlike physical maternity depends in large measure upon the consent of the one to be born. Our bodily life can persist without our own volition, but not so the life of the soul. Hence Pope Pius XII tells us that "devotion to Mary is the most abundant source of the renewal of Christian life."<sup>7</sup>

In all the great Marian documents of Pope Pius XII, in **Munificentissimus Deus**, **Fulgens Corona**, and **Ad Caeli Reginam**, we are taught that beyond doubt the Christian renewal is, in practice, so intimately bound up with the growth of love for Our Lady that the two are in fact inseparable. Pope Pius looks back to the definition of the Immaculate Conception in 1854 as he utters the solemn definition of Our Lady's bodily Assumption into heaven. These two great prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin are intimately connected with one another, and it would seem that the definition of the dogma that Mary was preserved free from all stain of original sin was the dawn of a new day for the Church. It was, says Pope Pius XII, the beginning of that great growth of Marian devotion which was to accompany the Christian revival—a revival which Divine Providence had seen fit to initiate even in the darkest hours of the world's materialism. The definition of the Assumption, the renewed emphasis on Our Lady's queenship, have added new strength to this irresistible movement which continues to draw souls to the Mother of all, awakening their confidence in her maternal love and spurring them on to do great things in her name.

If the Christian revival is so intimately bound up with love of Mary, it is the duty of every Christian to open his heart to the influence of the Heavenly Queen, and to show himself more and more her child



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and her subject, not only by his prayers and devotion, not only by his imitation of her virtues, but also by his consecration of his whole life and his whole being to Christ through her.

Love depends on knowledge. True devotion is nourished only by solid dogma, by the revealed word of God. If our love for Mary is to transcend the level of sentimentality and emotional velleities, it must be based on a faith which tells us who she really is, what is her power, what are her divinely given privileges. The definitions of the Assumption in 1950, and the celebration of the Marian year in 1954, one hundred years after the definition of the Immaculate Conception, had this for their chief purpose. In these two most significant acts of his pontificate, Pope Pius XII was intent on teaching the world the sublime dignity and the power of the Virgin Mother of God, for he knew that Christian renewal depended entirely upon their recognition. If once it could be made clear to men how loving a Mother they possess, and how powerful a Queen, they might turn to her and open their hearts to the grace which she would obtain for them, in order to convert their lives and consecrate them entirely to God.

The definition of the Assumption, then, was not only an act of homage to Our Lady, and by that fact an act of adoration offered to the Triune God, but it was intended as a sublime gift to the human race. By it, the Holy Father opened to all men a new portion of the "treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ" (Colossians 2:3). By it he made salvation yet more accessible, bringing men closer to the Mother of God, the Mother of Mercy and the dispensatrix of all divine grace. It is clear in **Munificentissimus Deus** that Pope Pius XII considered the definition as the culminating point of his pontificate, and the act which, by its supreme and central importance, would integrate and give significance to everything else he might accomplish. Here is what he said at the time:

"We who have placed our pontificate under the special patronage of the Most Holy Virgin, to whom we have had recourse so often in times of grave trouble, we who have consecrated the entire human race to the Immaculate Heart in public ceremonies and who have time

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and again experienced her powerful protection are confident that this solemn proclamation and definition of the Assumption will contribute in no small way to the advantage of human society since it redounds to the glory of the Most Blessed Trinity to which the Mother of God was united by such singular bonds."<sup>8</sup>

It would not be too difficult to throw a special light on most of the innumerable allocutions, letters, radio messages and other addresses of Pope Pius XII to all kinds of professional groups, on politics, sociology, science, economics, medicine, and the various professions, by showing how the doctrine they contain is ultimately related to the great truths which are implied in the dogmas of Mary's Immaculate Conception and of her Assumption. These truths are: the infinite holiness of God; the innate dignity of the human nature, made in the image of God, and of the human person created for divine union; the infinite hideousness of sin, and its disastrous consequences; and the infinite riches of divine mercy and wisdom, manifested in the Mystery of God's Providential plan to restore and reunite the fallen world to Himself in Christ. It is in Mary, the New Eve, conceived without sin and assumed bodily into heaven after death by reason of her sublime dignity as Mother of the Incarnate Word, that we see God's plan fully and gloriously perfected in a human creature. Mary is a human person in whom the whole Mystery of Christ shines forth in its highest realization. Therefore, our faith in the Assumption should lead naturally and easily to a deeper awareness of the great Mystery in which we live by the grace of God. It should open our eyes, as St. Benedict would say<sup>9</sup> to the "deifying light," which streams into our souls through the risen and glorified body of the Holy Virgin who gave her flesh to be woven into a temporal and eternal garment for the Word, the Redeemer of the world.

This is why, in defining the Assumption, Pope Pius XII expressed a hope for far greater and deeper results than the mere increase of devotion to the Madonna. Love for her should open the eyes of men to the whole mystery of Christ. Faith in her Assumption and docile subjection to her as our Queen reigning in heaven should at the same time teach us to see more clearly the meaning of the Church, and

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lead us deeper into the Mystery of Unity with God in Christ by making us live more fully the life of charity which is the life of His Mystical Body. In the words of the Pontiff, the Assumption should move "all who glory in the name of Christian with a desire in sharing in the unity of Christ's Mystical Body and of increasing their own love for her who in all things shows her motherly Heart to the members of that august Body."<sup>10</sup>

Besides this, however, Pope Pius XII believed that faith in Mary's Assumption should teach men a greater reverence for human nature itself, and a sense of the wonderful potentialities hidden by God within the human person. In other words the definition of the Assumption is in fact one of the latest expressions of that Christian humanism which has always been one of the glories of the Church.

True humanism is a doctrine which not only recognizes the natural powers of man and teaches him to transcend himself by attaining to the level of genius, but one which shows him a far loftier perfection in divinization and union with God. Christian humanism is an intellectual climate which fosters not only art, and science, and wisdom, but also and above all sanctity. The glory of the Virgin Mother of God, immersed in the light of Infinite Truth and completely transformed in the flaming Holiness of the Divinity, is revealed to us in order that all may see clearly to what a lofty goal our bodies and souls are destined. It is intended to strengthen our faith in that great doctrine which so inspired St. Paul, and which raised the early Christians so completely above the confusion and paganism of their times: the resurrection of the body. The Assumption should make "our belief in the resurrection stronger and render it more effective." Note the last words. Our contemplation of the great mysteries of our faith and of the prerogatives of Our Blessed Lady is intended to have a dynamic effect in our lives, transforming and divinizing them from within by the action of charity.

What should be the effect of our faith in the resurrection of the body? First of all, our faith in the resurrection should make us respect our bodies. It should save us from the nauseated pessimism with which a decadent philosophy is turning away from the flesh while it still

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despairs of the spirit. Faith in the resurrection of the body, and in the Assumption, should deliver us from the abyss of despair into which materialism and pride are at last plunging modern man and his society. It should teach us the immense spiritual value of our bodily life, and show us the hidden meaning of humble, everyday tasks which, when they are transformed by faith and obedience to God's will, can help to establish His Kingdom on earth, and give us a foretaste of heaven in the life of unity in Christ. In the words of Pope Pius, the Assumption should "convince us of the value of a human life entirely devoted to the Heavenly Father's will and bringing good to others."<sup>11</sup>

Once this has been made clear, we see without difficulty that the great Encyclical, **Sacra Virginitas**, although it does not concern itself directly with the Virginitas of the Blessed Mother, actually belongs in this Marian context. It is to be read as a sequel to **Munificentissimus Deus**, a kind of corollary to the definition of the Assumption. The Christian teaching on the value of virginity consecrated to God is one of the consequences of the Church's faith in the resurrection of the body. As we contemplate the consummate perfection of Mary's union with God, we reflect also that consecrated virginity is a marriage with Christ. We remember that Christian virginity is a higher perfection of charity, liberating it from the narrower bonds imposed upon it by family life and extending its force over the whole face of the earth. It liberates the soul of the monk, the priest, the consecrated virgin to abandon themselves entirely to God and to the service of His will. It bears witness in the highest way to our faith in the risen Christ, and engenders in souls a love for Him that will be strong, if necessary, even to the point of martyrdom. The beauty of souls consecrated to God is a reflection of the virginal beauty of the Mother of God, and makes visible and tangible the spiritual virginity of Holy Church.

**Sacra Virginitas** applies the doctrine of the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception to modern life, warning those Catholics who might allow themselves to be deceived by a false humanism into thinking that marriage is more sanctifying than virginity on the pretext that it offers a more natural and better integrated development of the whole human person. But this is not the case, except for those who are unable

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to assume the obligations of a consecrated life. For those who can hear the word of the Lord—**qui potest capere capiat**—(Matthew 19:12) and follow him, the solitude of heart which makes possible a spiritual marriage to God in virginity is far more effective and more sanctifying than the life of mutual help in marriage. The Assumption is there to remind us that both marriage and virginity are symbols of the union of the Church with Christ, and means by which individuals can be sanctified and arrive at perfect union with the Word, as did Mary who is at the same time the model of married and of virginal sanctity.

The Immaculate Mother of God is also the model and the source of all the states of perfection. She is the Queen of Contemplatives, and her benign influence moves and inspires the Christian apostolate and all who are engaged in active works of mercy. She is not only "the teacher of Virginity" who first led the life of Virginity consecrated to Christ<sup>12</sup> but also, by virtue of her present contemplation of the glorified humanity of the Savior, she purifies our hearts and gains for us the grace "to see God in the beauties of His creatures."<sup>13</sup> More than that, our faith in her divinely-given privileges enables us to unite ourselves with her in her adoration and contemplation of the Risen Lord, and finally it teaches us that Mary herself is, after Jesus, the center of the contemplation of the angels and the saints:

"We believe that in the glory where you reign clothed with the sun and crowned with stars you are, after Jesus, the joy and gladness of the angels and the saints."<sup>14</sup>

She who is the Mother of the Christian interior life is also the Queen of the Christian Apostolate, not only by the grace which she obtains to convert souls to Christ, but also by the fact that she participates in Christ's own rule over the minds and wills of men.<sup>15</sup> She rules men by love. Those she loves most are ruled most intimately by her influence, and of those she loves there is perhaps no class closer to her Immaculate Heart than the priest and apostles of Her Divine Son. The Holy Father says: "If the Virgin Mother of God is on fire with love for everyone, she assuredly extends to priests a special love for they reproduce in themselves the living image of Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup>



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Priests are, in fact, "the humble instruments of the mercy of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in wonderfully reviving the faith and charity of the Christian people."<sup>17</sup> In other words, they hold the key position in that work for Christian renewal which God has placed in the hands of the Immaculate Virgin. Constant union with the Madonna in all the moments of his life of prayer and apostolic labor will enable the priest to work more effectively and grow in the likeness of Christ. The Holy Father ends his apostolic exhortation **Menti Nostrae** by entrusting to Mary "the priests of the whole world in order that, through her intercession, God will vouchsafe a generous outpouring of His Spirit which will move all ministers of the altar to holiness, and, through their ministry, will spiritually renew the face of the earth."<sup>18</sup>

In our day, however, the priest depends in some measure upon the assistance of lay apostles. The scene of Catholic Action, in which Marian congregations and sodalities play a leading part, is therefore under the special protection of Our Lady. Members of these congregations live and work "under the direct guidance of the Blessed Virgin Mary"<sup>19</sup> striving for their own sanctification by charity and works of mercy, and supplementing the apostolic action of the Catholic hierarchy. Their importance is evident not only to Christians but also to the enemies of the Church who have instinctively directed the full force of their virulent attacks first against the clergy and then against those Catholic Action groups which do most to promote the work of Christian renewal—particularly the Legion of Mary.

The Holy Father has shared with us His vision of the dignities and prerogatives of Our Lady. But He does not wish to remain inert and passive in our admiration of them. If Our Lady has manifested herself so clearly to us and intervened so often in the chaotic affairs of our age, it is because she has a work to do in our world. And she does not intend to do this work alone. She insistently requires our cooperation. If we have truly seen in her our Mother and our Queen, it is for us to prove ourselves her sons and subjects by the ardor of our faith and the earnestness of holy zeal. Sentimental devotion is not enough. The Immaculate Mother of God requires of us a courageous

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integrity in virtue."<sup>20</sup> The Christian renewal of the world cannot be accomplished by men who are slaves of avarice, or sensuality, or pride. The Kingdom of Christ is the rule of His Divine Spirit, and if we fight for His Kingdom we must live and fight in the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5, 25). The first and most fundamental expression of Christian zeal is the struggle to liberate our own souls from the wisdom of the flesh which is an enemy of God. "For the wisdom of the flesh is death" (Romans 8, 6-7) and "the works of the flesh are fornication . . . idolatry . . . enmities, contentions . . . envies, murders, drunkenness. They that do such things shall not obtain the Kingdom of God" (Galatians 5, 19-21).

The first obligation of the Christian is obedience to the fundamental laws of God in order to leave the death of sin and embrace true life in Christ. This obligation is not made easy by a world that directly and indirectly strives in every way to blot out the clearest expressions of the divine will and to fog the keen inner vision of man's moral conscience. In order to live as sons of Mary we must have the strength to assume full responsibility for our own moral lives before God, and to resist with heroic courage the insistent attacks of anti-Christ propaganda.

In practice, this means that to be a son of the Immaculate Virgin one must embrace a life of mature Christian faith and fortitude, and imitate her own intrepid courage in obeying the voice of God. Here we come to the very center of the Holy Father's Marian doctrine. For as the **fiat**, which made Mary the Mother of God, was the source of all her stupendous prerogatives and dignities, so it is by imitating her obedience to the divine will that we will come to reflect in our own souls the sanctity of her Immaculate Heart. If the Church has laid open before the eyes of men the mystery of Mary's sanctity, it is precisely in order to challenge them to reproduce, in their own lives, the heroic faith of the Madonna. The following words of Pope Pius XII contain all the essence of His Marian teaching: "The grace of the divine maternity is the key which opens up to weak human scrutiny the untold riches of Mary's soul, as it is likewise a challenge commanding the inmost reverence of every human creature."<sup>21</sup>

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This is the secret of the Christian renewal. God's plan does not call for a miraculous intervention of the Blessed Virgin which will overthrow the enemies of the Church without any effort on the part of Christians. The renewal of the world depends, precisely, on the **interior renewal of Christendom itself**, "for only from Christian virtues may we hope to see the course of history take its proper, orderly direction."<sup>22</sup>

It is in this sense that the Queenship of Mary is a truth "which is capable of remedying the world's ills, freeing it from its anguish, and leading it toward the way of salvation."<sup>23</sup> Mary is queen by her participation in the Kingship of Christ, and His Kingdom is not of this world. The queenship of Mary is a spiritual reality, a reality above created nature, which nevertheless enters into humanity and penetrates it from within its own inmost depths. She is queen of our best and most intimate thoughts, of our noblest and most manly acts of love. She is queen of all that is best in us, for her queenship enters into our weak and infirm natures in order to elevate them, with herself, to the level of the divine. Pope Pius therefore warns us not to misunderstand the analogy of "queenship" as if it meant a purely exterior and political regime. Mary does not rule us from without, but from within. She does not change us by changing the world around us, but she changes the world around us by first changing our own inner lives.

The Supreme Pontiff concludes that Mary's queenship is a "supernatural reality which at the same time penetrates man's innermost heart and touches all that is spiritual and immortal in his very essence."<sup>24</sup>

Noble indeed, clear, strong and exalted is the teaching of our Holy Father concerning the Mother of God. If Catholic theologians are careful to follow the lines he has traced out, they will not give the impression that Mariology is merely another separate dogmatic compartment in a structure without integration. They will resist the temptation to speculate on Mary in terms so abstract that they remind one of the mathematical theorem. They will not separate the Mother of God from the vital organism of theological mysteries in the midst of which she lives and moves, and from which she derives all her glory. They will see everything that is hers in its right relation to that Divine Mater-

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nity which is the source of all her dignities and which centers her, as it were, in the very Mystery of the Incarnation.

If Catholic Marian devotion is careful to model itself on the pattern which has been given to us by Pope Pius XII, it will shun the superficiality and formalism which make a true Christian renewal impossible, and will concentrate on the interior consecration of our whole being to Christ, through the Blessed Virgin Mary.

As we contemplate Mary reigning in heaven with her Divine Son, we realize how fittingly the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception has been completed by the Holy Father's solemn definition of her bodily Assumption into heaven. Both definitions are centered upon the true, objective essence of the Blessed Virgin's claim to our reverence and love. And what is this? It is her **holiness**.

Modern thought has tended to lose the full objective meaning of the word "holy"—our idea of sanctity too often seems to focus on the subjective dispositions and the psychological acts of the soul who "becomes a saint." It is quite true that no one can become holy without practicing virtues. Yet the practice of virtue rather than to be itself the **essence** of holiness, is its indication, its condition, and its outward sign.

In glorifying the holiness of the "holy Virgin" the Church has always emphasized not so much those human and virtuous acts by which she gained possession of sanctity, as those divine and incomprehensible mysteries in which Holiness Itself took possession of her. A creature is holy when it is separated from all profane uses and consecrated to God, and we become holy in proportion as we are plunged in the holiness of the Almighty. To say that Mary is conceived without sin is to say that she was, from the first moment of her existence, set apart from all that is not holy, and to say that she is assumed into heaven is to say that she is eternally established in the unsearchable depths of the sanctity of God.

One of the most important achievements of the Marian teaching of Pope Pius XII is that he has made clear to us that Mary is not only

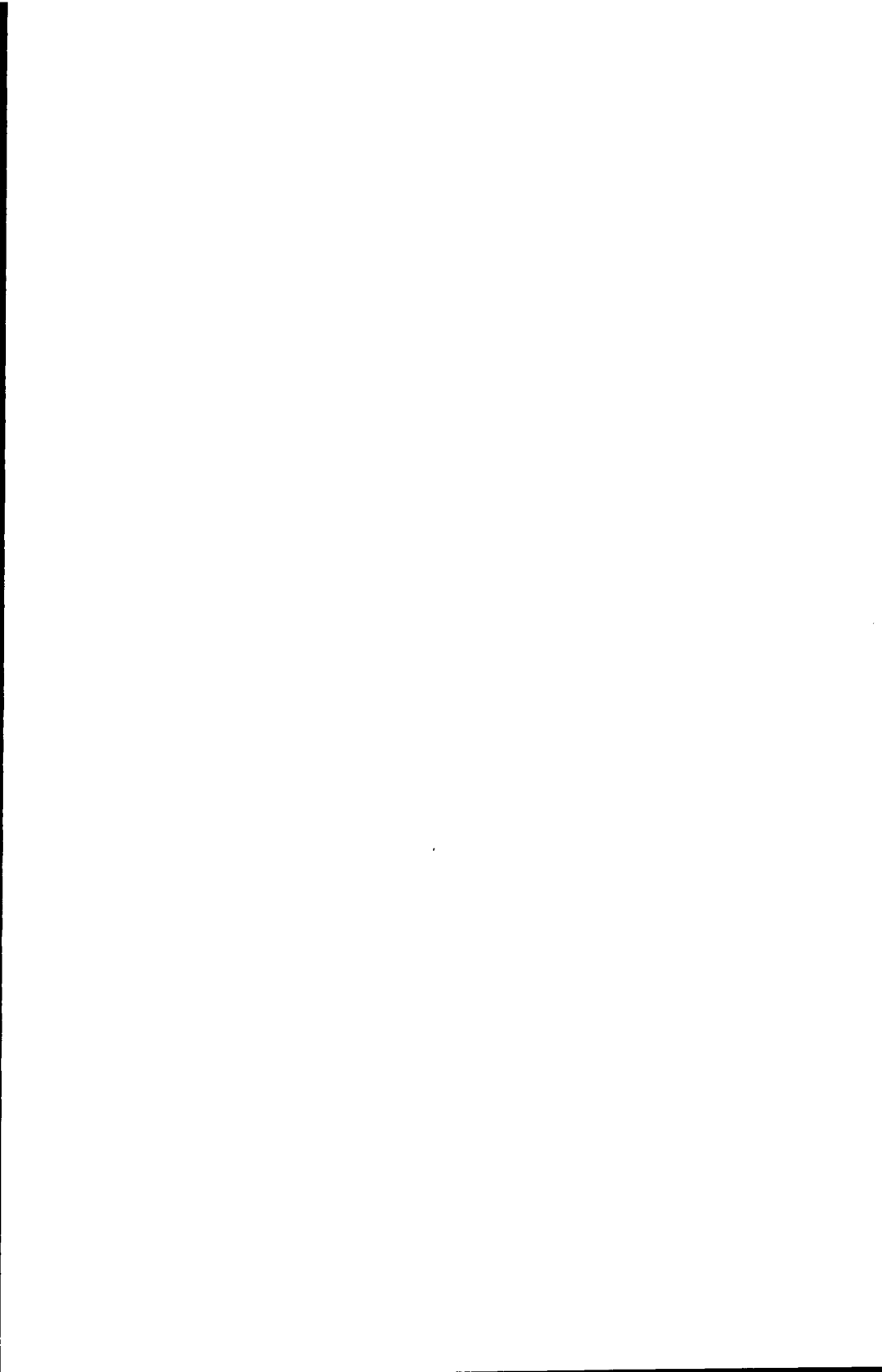
## THE POPE OF THE VIRGIN MARY

a sweet and gentle Queen, not only a sympathetic and tender Mother, but also and above all the **Holy** Virgin—**Virgo Sacrata**—the “Great Mother of God, Mary Most Holy.”

1. Le Testimonianze, address at the Crowning of the Salus Populi Romani, Nov. 1, 1954.
  2. Ibid.
  3. “For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God’s majesty, and the image of His goodness.”
  4. Words of St. Pius X, quoted in *Mystici Corporis*.
  5. *Mystici Corporis* (June 29, 1943).
  6. C’est avec une douce, radio message to Marian Congress of Ottawa, June 19, 1947.
  7. Fulgens Corona, Sept. 8, 1953.
  8. Munificentissimus Deus, Nov. 1, 1950.
  9. “apertis oculis ad deificum lumen,” *Regula Monachorum*, prologue.
  10. Munificentissimus Deus.
  11. All quotations here from *Munificentissimus Deus*.
  12. *Sacra Virginitas*, March 25, 1954.
  13. Prayer to Mary Assumed into Heaven, Nov. 1, 1950.
  14. Ibid.
  15. *Ad Caeli Reginam*, Oct. 11, 1954.
  16. *Menti Nostrae*, Sept. 23, 1950.
  17. Ibid.
  18. Ibid.
  19. *Bis Saeculari*, Sept. 27, 1948.
  20. Fulgens Corona.
  21. C’est avec une douce.
  22. *Auspicia quaedam*, May 1, 1948.
  23. Le Testimonianze.
  24. Le Testimonianze.
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