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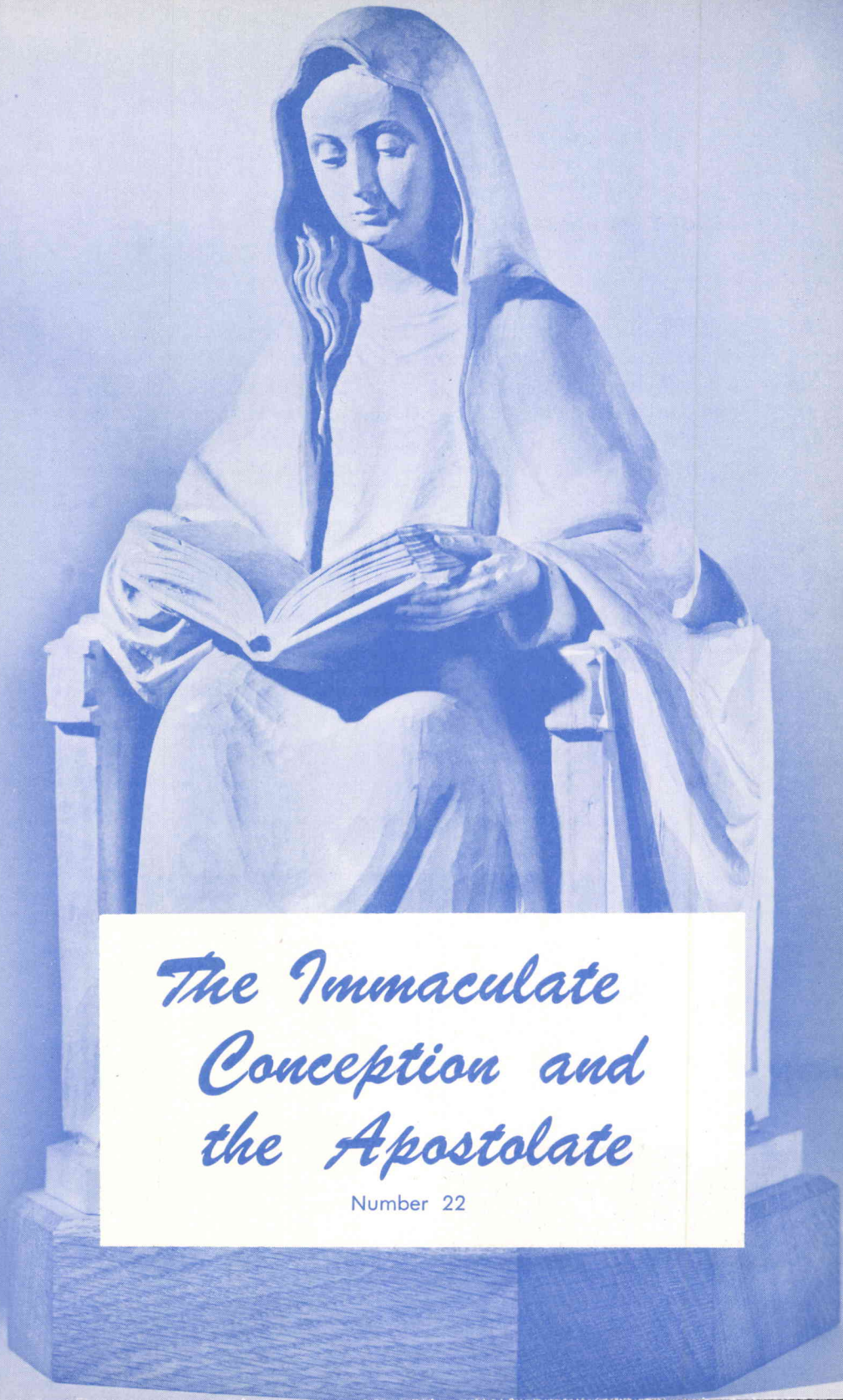


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*The Immaculate
Conception and
the Apostolate*

Number 22

ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Rev. Philip C. Hoelle, S.M., is director of the Marian Library, and on the staff of the department of Religion at the University of Dayton. He took his doctorate at the Ohio State University and his licentiate in Sacred Theology at the Catholic University of America. His teaching assignments have taken him to Marianist schools in Ohio and Iowa, and he has had wide experience as a spiritual director and retreat master.

Using the Legion of Mary as an especially good example, Father Hoelle points out all of the apostolic implications of the Immaculate Conception for our times. He shows that true understanding of the Immaculate Conception naturally fosters the apostolic spirit.

"The Immaculate Conception and the Apostolate" is taken from an anthology on the Immaculate Conception, *The Promised Woman*, published by Grail Publications in 1954.

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The Immaculate Conception and the Apostolate

Philip C. Hoelle, S.M.

Immaculate is a word which a Catholic almost instinctively associates with Mary. For the militant Catholic, the very word is a rallying cry because it strikes at the heart of sin. Because we do not fully understand sin, we do not fully appreciate the Immaculate Conception. The Immaculate Conception means nothing if sin means nothing. It is without meaning for the rationalists and secularists who deny the existence of original and personal sin. An apostle of Mary, however, draws from the Immaculate Conception both his inspiration and his master plan. He sees sin and the effects of sin in society; the very purpose of the apostolate is to draw men from sin to the life of grace. Now to whom shall the apostle look for a model in his battle against sin? Mary is the only human model we have who from her conception was always free from the enslavement of sin. She is the only perfect Christian, the only human being who ever lived up to God's original plan for the human race.

NEVER FOR A SINGLE INSTANT WAS THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN under the sway or power of the devil. Militant Catholics, seeking an ideal to follow, an inspiring model to copy, a victorious standard to rally around find all three in Mary who is "terrible as an army set in array." The Immaculate Conception is the symbol of conquest over sin and death, for Mary is an object of terror to the powers of hell. Do not accounts from Red China show how the Communists fear the Legion of Mary which holds aloft this standard of the Immaculate Conception in all its missionary work?

An apostle is another Christ; he is another son of Mary. As a son of Mary he participates in his Mother's mission in the modern world. That mission is but the extension of the mission of Christ — the sanctification of the world. In God's Plan, Mary was conceived free from original sin that through her mediation and the cooperation of her apostles, all men might be saved. An ideal devotion to Mary can never be a purely personal matter; it must have a social, an apostolic character. To be other sons of Mary means to follow the first Son of Mary Immaculate Who came into the world, born of a Virgin conceived without sin, in order to save that world.

THE LEGION OF MARY IS AN OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE OF AN apostolic movement inspired by the devotion to the Immaculate Conception. On September 7, 1921, the eve of Our Lady's Nativity, the first Legionaries of Mary were enrolled in Dublin. On the table around which the first members assembled was a statue of the Immaculate Conception. Such a statue still remains at the center of every meeting of the Legionaries. Under her auspices the first members discussed how they could best please God and make Him loved throughout the world. The primary devotion of the Legion is to the Immaculate Conception, and is expressed in the crushing of the serpent's head as described in the promise of the Redeemer in the text of Genesis.

In placing himself at the disposal of the bishop of the diocese and the parish priest for every form of social service and Catholic Action, the Legionary proposes to himself the task of personal sanctification by prayer and active cooperation. His trust in the Immaculate Virgin is boundless because he knows that her power with God is without limit. He is convinced that in his apostolic work he is acting as an instrument of Mary, and is, as it were, the heel with which she does the crushing of the serpent's head. Really it is the Incomparable Virgin's own apostolate, her relentless warfare against sin, in which the Legionary is engaged. She acts in and through the Legionary to the extent that the Legionary places himself at her free disposal and under her maternal guidance. In the Legion, Mary Immaculate is the Queen and she calls the Legionaries to their places in the ranks, commands them on the field and personally inspires them to advance under her invincible banner.

SINCE A LEGIONARY IS AN APOSTLE HE MUST STRIVE TO LIVE MORE by the life of grace than by the life of nature. The Immaculate Virgin has always been in grace and during her whole life on earth she lived that life of grace as perfectly as possible for a creature; even the angelic ambassador of the Heavenly Father addressed her as "full of grace" and the Church invokes her as Queen of angels. The Legionary must never refuse to give as generously as he can, no matter what he is asked to do; only then can he look to Mary to complete and purify, to perfect and ennoble his efforts in the apostolate.

If there is question of saving souls, of facing risks to help one's neigh-

bor, of being ready to pay the price of heroic devotedness to duty, who will answer the call if not the Legionary, the soldier of quality in the Queen's Army? The official mission and the special weapon of the Legionary is to fill the souls of his neighbors with a childlike love for his Queen, for he is convinced that he must bring Mary as Queen into hearts and homes if Christ is to reign in individuals and in families. He has learned from his Queen that men are not converted by logic but rather by personal influences and kind deeds. She fills the Legionary's soul with kindness and love and devotedness so that in his apostolic works he avoids humiliating others and forcing them to yield against their wills.

THE LEGIONARY DISCOVERS THAT IT WAS GOD'S PLAN TO INAUGURATE the reign of grace through Mary. He tries to understand more and more the tremendous importance of the Virgin Mary's consent to the Incarnation. The fate of mankind hung in the balance as the Father chose to elicit the consent of the Maid of Nazareth. The Legionary is grateful that the fate of men was safe in her hands! In return for the divine gift of the Incarnation he hastens to join his generation in calling her blessed and he never misses an opportunity to proclaim her praises.

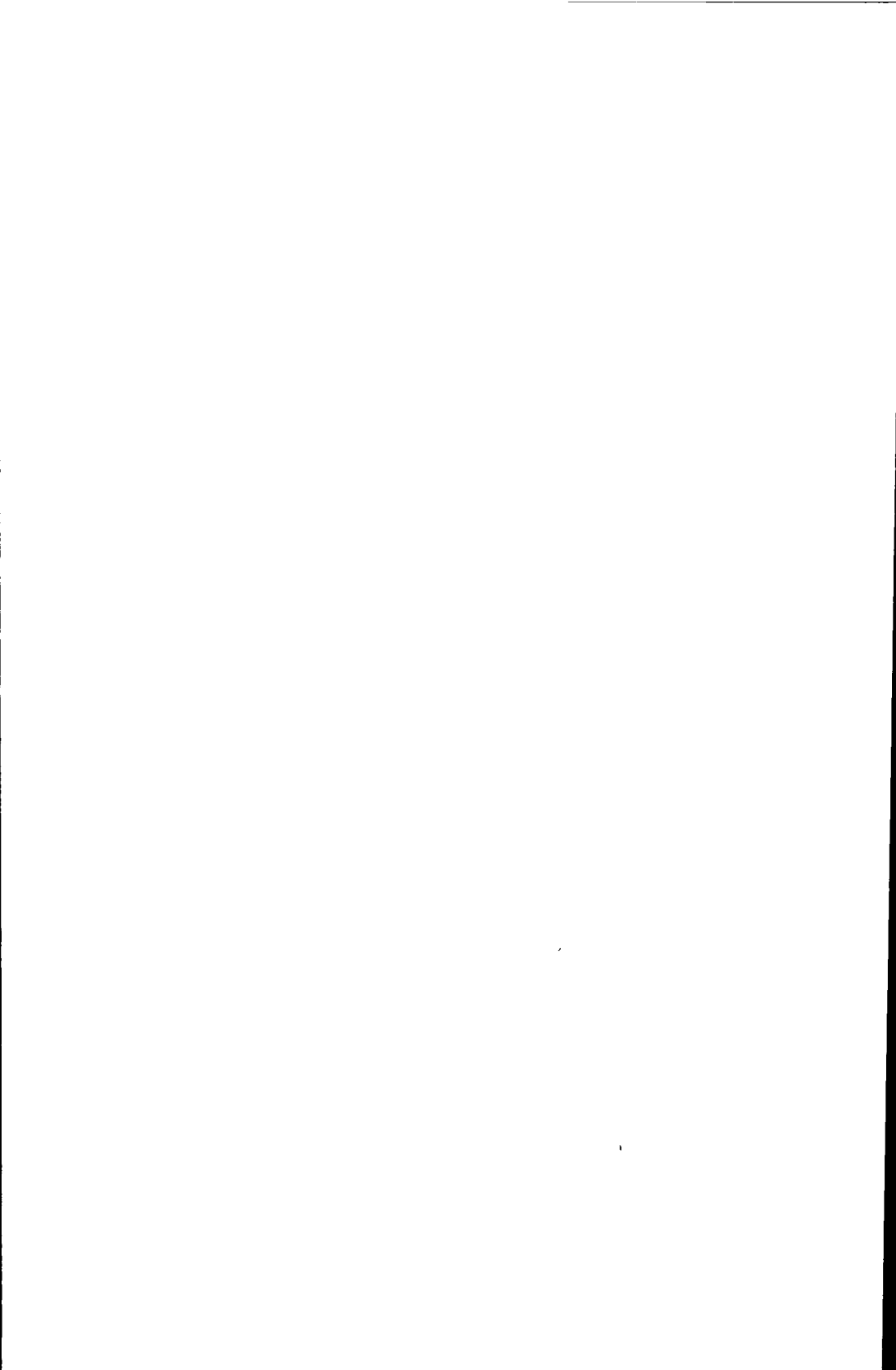
He is constantly aware that the sacred records reveal Mary as taking her Son to the hill country to sanctify John the Baptist, as presenting Him to the native shepherds and the foreign princes, as offering her First-Born in the temple. He remembers that it was her request at Cana that ushered in the signs and wonders and mighty deeds with which He proved His mission from the Father. He can never forget that on Calvary she was the representative of mankind and that Christ did not offer Himself to His Father without her approval and her offering made on behalf of all her children. And at the birth of Christ's Mystical Body on that glorious Pentecost, Mary was there with the Apostles in prayer and waiting. As his faith deepens and his zeal quickens, the Legionary begins to view the daily life of every Christian as nothing else but the forming of Christ anew in every soul that cooperates with the mysteriously effective movements of divine grace flowing from Calvary. He sees Mary, the true Mother, distributing these divine graces into the souls of her spiritual children and thus forming over and over Christ in redeemed human souls.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LEGION IS TO MIRROR MARY; THUS EVERY

Legionary lives but to bring Christ to souls. The Immaculate Mother's duties towards her children will continue to the end of time and thus as long as there are souls to be saved she will be in need of faithful servants to help her in her work of distributing graces. Mindful that Christ advanced in wisdom and age and grace under Mary's gracious care for thirty years and that the Beloved Disciple, who took her into his own home, advanced farther and probed deeper into the divine mysteries than any other of the Apostles, the Legionary gladly entrusts to her maternal solicitude both his person and his future, his hopes and his fears, his plans and his actions and eagerly submits to her gracious guidance. Ever conscious that she alone has conquered all heresies and that she will never cease to crush the serpent's head, the Legionary confidently takes his place in her glorious Legion, convinced that the Immaculate Virgin, terrible to Satan, will always triumph over her adversary. Well did Pope Pius XI prophesy on September 16, 1933, when he bestowed a special blessing on the Legion of Mary: "The image of Mary Immaculate on its standard portrays high and holy things."

The Immaculate Conception, then, is much more than just another privilege of Mary to be admired by her children. It is a call to apostolic action, to the Marian apostolate for our own salvation and the salvation of our fellowmen. It is a participation in Mary's mission: the application of the merits of Christ to individual souls in their battle against the evil one. In this battle, the Immaculate Virgin is both model and leader.





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