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# 004 - The Imitation of Mary

Placid Huault

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# *The Imitation of Mary*

PLACID HUAULT, S.M.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

"The Imitation of Mary" is taken from *the Mother of Jesus*, a book by Father Placid Huault, S.M. Father Huault was born in the archdiocese of Rennes, Brittany in 1859 and was professed as a member of the Marists in 1882. After his ordination he served as professor of philosophy in England and later in Spain. An attraction to the missions which had already called his brother, Father Francis Huault, to the Marist New Caledonian missions, brought Father Huault to the South Pacific in 1891 where he was stationed at Meanee, New Zealand, for twelve years. In 1905 he was named superior of Villa Maria in Sydney, Australia, where *The Mother of Jesus* was published in 1906.

A second Marian work, *The Queen of May*, was published in 1907, two years before Father Huault's death. Benziger released his *The Son of Man* posthumously in the United States in 1912.

Upon publication of *The Mother of Jesus* in 1906, Archbishop Redwood wrote: "It is rich, very rich, in substance and doctrine; in fact the best book I know in the English language on the Blessed Virgin." "The Imitation of Mary" forms part of the last chapter which treats of the love and imitation of Mary and is the natural conclusion of the whole work.

(published with ecclesiastical approval)

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# THE IMITATION OF MARY

PLACID HUAULT, S.M.

Mary lives in the hearts of men, not only by the worship which she receives, not only by the praises which are lavished on her, not only by the love of which she is the object, but, especially by the wonderful influence which the imitation of her virtues exercises on the Christian world. Christianity is more than a religion of the mind and of the heart; it is a religion of the will. The mind believes the Divine truths of revelation; the heart loves the sacred objects which are presented to its affection; but the will prompts the whole man to imitate what he worships. Imitation is the perfection of love; it is its consummation; it springs from it like the fruit from the lovely flower. We naturally imitate what we love. Christianity is a religion of imitation because it is a religion of love.

**WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND THE IDEAL TO WHICH WE ARE** directed to conform our lives is none else but our heavenly Father Himself: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). But how are we to imitate God? Is He not infinite in all His perfections and therefore too far removed from our weakness? Our heart is bent towards the earth, our will is inclined to evil, and we feel an irresistible craving for the sensible things of this world. It was this craving which made it so difficult for God to raise us from our degradation. We are surrounded on all sides by visible forms which solicit our hearts, whilst our heavenly Father "inhabiteth light inaccessible" (I. Tim., 6:16). Oh! that we had a visible God, a visible and palpable ideal in flesh and bone whom we could imitate! The Incarnation has given us this ideal in the adorable Person of our Lord Jesus-Christ. He is the pattern, the archetype of all perfections. "Christ alone is without blemish," says Chateaubriand, "He is the most brilliant copy of that supreme beauty which is seated upon the throne of heaven. Pure and sanctified as the tabernacle of the Lord, breathing naught but the love of God and men, infinitely superior by the elevation of His soul to the vain glory of the world, He prosecuted, among sufferings of every kind, the great business of our salvation, constraining men by the ascendancy of His virtues to embrace His doctrine and to imitate a life which they were compelled to admire."



But here again, our Divine Model, in as much as He is God, is too high for our misery. His splendour would dazzle and blind our weakness. We want a type purely human, one that will reflect all the perfections of the God-man, and at the same time will adapt them to our needs. We have this type in the mother of Jesus-Christ. Mary is the most perfect copy of the Incarnate Word. She is the summary, the compendium of all the marvels of sanctity which He contains. They are condensed in her as in a focus of mild radiance. She is the incarnation of virtue, the personification of holiness, and even as man unites in his nature all the perfections of the inferior creation, so does Mary unite in her soul all the wonders of the supernatural world. The Angel of the Annunciation expressed this beautifully when he called her "full of grace;" she was in his eyes like a garden enclosed where the loveliest flowers of perfection and virtue exhaled their most delicious perfume.

**THIS SUBLIME MODEL HAS BEEN PLACED BEFORE US FOR OUR** imitation, and God in exhibiting it to men addresses them the words spoken to Moses: "Look and do according to the pattern that was shown thee in the mount" (Ex. 25:40). It is not sufficient therefore to admire and love this great creature. If our devotion stops there, it will remain idle and will bear no fruit. True devotion to Mary is not confined to affectionate sentiments or to exterior practices and devout exercises in her honour, it consists in imitation. Without imitation, our love may indeed be sincere, and we do not deny that it is so in many sinners, but it is necessarily incomplete. There cannot be perfect friendship between persons who have **no moral resemblance, because true love either finds a likeness or creates it: "Amor aut pares invenit aut facit."**

True love of Mary then consists in a serious and continual application to reproduce the dispositions and sentiments of her immaculate heart. The imitation of Mary is the most simple and the most natural way of acquiring perfection; it is most pleasing to God and supremely delightful to the holy Virgin. In fact, what more acceptable homage can we render her than to study her virtues and make them the standard of our lives? What can be more agreeable to her heart than to strive, after her example, to be pure, humble, modest, meek, patient, resigned? If the artists who represent on canvas, or in marble and brass, her celestial features are so dear to her, what shall we say of those whose souls are living copies of

her virginal perfections? Besides, should it not be the pride and glory of a good and noble child to imitate his mother? Our Lord reproved the Jews who gloried in their title of children of Abraham, while by their works they gave the lie to their illustrious origin: "If you be the children of Abraham," he said, "do the works of Abraham" (John 8:39). Likewise a sinner said one day to Mary: "Show thyself a mother!" She answered: "Show thyself a son." Hence, as St. Bernard says, if you wish to obtain the help of her prayers, do not cease to follow her example.

**NO DOUBT, GOD EXPECTED GREAT THINGS WHEN HE PROPOSED**

this sublime ideal to the imitation of men. His expectations have not been vain. Well and faithfully has humanity responded to His invitation. Mary has, after her Divine Son, created the Christian type; her influence has powerfully affected the destinies of the world, it has contributed to the moral regeneration of mankind. When we open our eyes to the state of **ignominy into which the pagan world had fallen before the coming of Christ**, and come to consider the standard of Christian morality, we see that a great change has passed over the human race. Man has been regenerated, the prevalent maxims of paganism have been overthrown, new relations among men have been substituted, the old order of things has disappeared, the teachings and maxims of the Gospel have pervaded society, and we may say without fear of contradiction that even the bitterest opponents of Christianity breathe, in spite of themselves, in the pure atmosphere of Christian civilization.

Let us consider Mary's share in this glorious revolution. First of all, in order to regenerate the world, it was absolutely necessary to raise woman from her condition of slave, and to restore her to the honour and dignity of wife, to the rights and privileges of mother. It has been said that wherever Christianity does not prevail there is a tendency to the degradation of woman. History affords us sad and melancholy proofs of this fact. Now Mary has given to the world a new type of womanhood; she has placed woman in the rank which belongs to her, she has made her a queen in her home and has won for her the respect, veneration and esteem of all generations. Who could tell how far-reaching in its consequences was this uplifting of the ideal of womanhood, if we consider the powerful influence of the Christian mother, the Christian wife and the Christian sister on the Christian home and on society at large.



## **FRANCE OWES HER PUREST GLORIES TO A CHRISTIAN WIFE,**

St. Clotilde, to a Christian mother, Blanche de Castille, and to two Christian virgins, St. Genevieve and Joan of Arc. The moral code of Christ on the regeneration of woman may be summed up in the following words: Equality of man and woman before God, both having the same origin and the same destiny; unity and indissolubility of marriage; pre-eminence of virginity over marriage; and to crown all, the Divine Maternity showing all that is purest and fairest condensed and exemplified in Mary.

Protestant women should never forget what they owe to the mother of Jesus-Christ: "The world is governed by its ideals," says Lecky in his History of Rationalism, "and seldom or never has there been one which has exercised a more profound and, on the whole, a more salutary influence than the mediaeval conception of the Virgin. For the **first time, woman was elevated to her rightful position, and the sanctity of weakness was recognized as well as the sanctity of sorrow.** No longer the slave of man, . . . woman rose in the presence of the Virgin-mother into a new sphere, and became the object of a reverential homage of which antiquity had no conception. The moral charm and beauty of womanly excellence was, for the first time, felt."

## **THESE ARE REMARKABLE WORDS, AND WE RECOMMEND THEM TO**

the serious consideration of our non-Catholic brethren. They will see and understand that there is in the devotion to the mother of God something more than mere poetry; they will see and understand that this devotion has contributed more powerfully to the betterment of fallen man than all the reformers of the world.

Another well-known Protestant writer, who has been styled the most eloquent and original of all writers upon art, John Ruskin, expresses himself on this subject as follows: "After the most careful examination, neither as adversary nor as friend, of the influence of Catholicity for good and evil, I am persuaded that the worship of the Madonna has been one of its noblest and most vital graces, and has never been otherwise than productive of true holiness of life and purity of character . . . There has probably not been an innocent cottage home throughout the length and breadth of Europe during the whole period of vital Christianity in which the imagined presence of the Madonna has not given sanctity

to the humblest duties, and comfort to the sorest trials of the lives of women; and every brightest and loftiest achievement of the arts and strength of manhood has been the fulfilment of the assured prophecy of the Israelite maiden: 'He that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name.'

#### **WOMAN THUS RESTORED BY MARY TO HER FORMER DIGNITY HAS**

given to the world the example of the most sublime virtues; she has showed herself equal and in many instances superior to man, in deeds of valour and heroism utterly unknown in pagan times. History tells us of the innumerable multitude of valiant women who, in the course of ages, have freely and joyfully sacrificed their lives and shed their blood for the sake of virtue and for the glory of God. "Blessed be God," says St. John Chrysostom, "woman is valiant in death! She introduced death into the world, and to-day she destroys that ancient weapon of the devil. From being weak by nature and opened to every assault she has become an invincible weapon in God's hand. Woman is valiant in death! Who is not in admiration? Let the Gentiles blush, and the Jews and they who do not believe in the resurrection of Christ be confounded; for, I ask, what greater proof is there of the resurrection than this astounding revolution? Woman is valiant in death, which the saints have before now found so formidable and so terrible." What a sight to behold these pure victims showing in the weakness of their sex a fortitude which nothing could overcome, and dying for the Son of Mary, in the flower of their age and in the face of that world that was smiling on them!

There is nothing in the whole of pagan antiquity to rival the sublime scene of the martyrdom of St. Perpetua. She belonged to a noble and illustrious family and was brought up in all the refinements of opulence. She was in the prime of life, being only twenty-two years of age, and was idolized by her relatives and friends. Snatched away from her palace, she was thrown into a dungeon. There she was told that she must either renounce Christ or die an ignominious death. She had but to make a sign or to say a word, to be restored again to all the comforts and luxuries of life. Her father and mother, who loved her passionately, her brothers and husband, of whom she was the pride, were inconsolable at her sad misfortune. She had a little infant whom she loved with all the energies of her maternal heart. Great God, what a temptation! But she



remained valiant to the end. Knowing that she was to be devoured by wild beasts, she trusted in God and cried to Him for help. Calm and serene, undisturbed by the shouts of the pagan multitude or by the roar of panthers and lions, she encouraged and consoled her fellow-martyrs, and with a joyful countenance entered the arena, where she consummated her sacrifice.

### **THIS EXAMPLE OF SUPERHUMAN ENERGY AND INTREPID COURAGE**

is not an isolated fact. Agnes, Cecilia and Philomena, the flower of Roman virgins, Agatha and Lucy, the illustrious maidens of Sicily, Tarbula, the noble Persian princess, Catherine, the learned virgin of Alexandria, Blandina, the young and delicate slave of Lyons, Eulalia, the Agnes of Spain, and a whole legion of others were not less valiant than Perpetua.

The Christian woman has in many other ways shown her gratitude to God for the honour conferred upon her sex, in the person of Mary, and for her reinstatement into her former rank and dignity. After the example of the immaculate Virgin, she has consecrated her virginity to the Lord, in order to serve and love Him alone. By this celestial virtue, she has become an Angel of purity and an Angel of devotedness and sacrifice. No one can tell the innumerable benefits bestowed on mankind by virginity; no one can tell the noble deeds of which it has been the source. It is from it that the greatest works of Christianity have originated, it is through it that Christianity itself has been perpetuated. The conversion of pagan nations, the institutions of charity, the reformation of abuses, all these are the fruit of virginity.

### **FIFTEEN CENTURIES AGO, ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, TREATING THIS**

subject, said: "The Greeks have had some men who, by the force of philosophy, came to despise riches, and some too who could control the irascible part of man, but the flower of virginity was nowhere to be found among them. Here they always gave precedence to us, confessing that to succeed in such a thing was to be superior to nature and more than man." The same Doctor adds: "The Jews turn with abhorrence from the beauty of virginity, which indeed is no wonder, since they treated with dishonour the very Son of the Virgin Himself; the Greeks however admire it, and look up to it with astonishment; but the Church of God alone cultivates it." Time has not changed the dispositions of men: now, as in the age of St.

John Chrysostom, heresy despises virginity, the pagan world admires it, but the Church alone produces it.

How often has the world wondered at the sight of those pure creatures, those daughters of Mary, so brave and yet so modest, always ready to face every danger and to bring consolation to every human woe! Nothing can discourage them, nothing can daunt them. You may see them on the battlefield dressing the wounds of the soldier fallen in battle; you may see them in public hospitals, in the midst of plague and pestilence, or facing the most loathsome and incurable diseases; you may see them shut up for life with lepers and other outcasts of society; you may see them in the island of the ocean and in the deserts of the most inhospitable lands, in search of souls redeemed by the blood of Jesus-Christ. They seem to say to every suffering: "Thou art my father and my mother," and to every human woe: "Thou are my brother and my sister." Humble and resigned, they repay the ingratitude of the world by their devotedness and love; they suffer every wrong without giving any pain. Noble daughters of the Virgin-Mother, they are dead to the world and fearless against all the assaults of hell. They know that their virginity is their surest safeguard and the main-spring of their great works. They know that the best proof they can give of their love to their celestial mother is to imitate the three virtues so dear to her heart, namely, poverty, chastity and obedience.

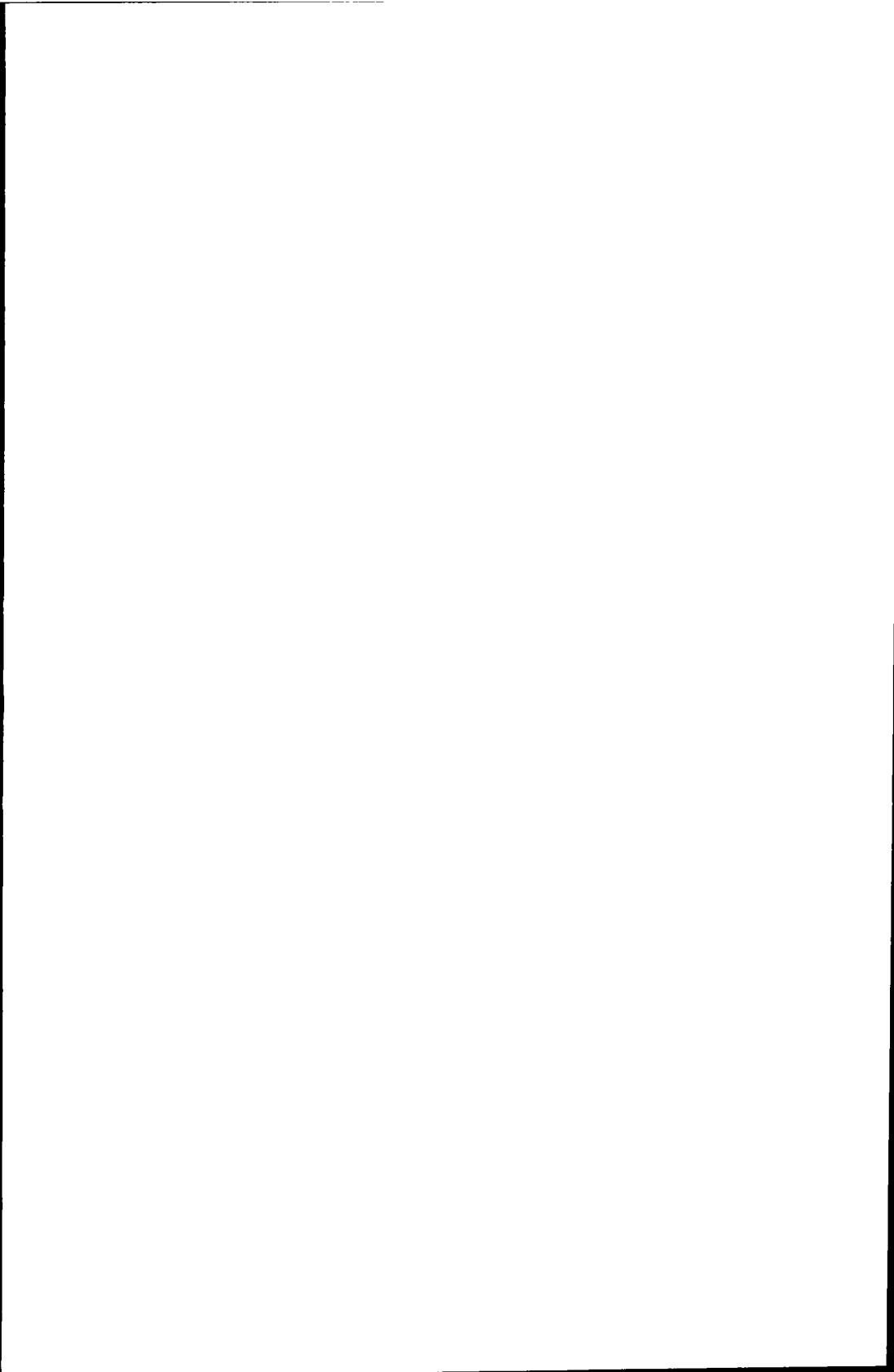
**BUT IT IS ESPECIALLY IN THE INTERIOR OF THE HUMAN SOUL THAT** Mary's imitation is fruitful in wonders of holiness, abnegation and self-sacrifice. The faithful servants of the holy Virgin penetrate into the sanctuary of her perfections and reproduce in their lives her lovely virtues: her humility, her charity, her meekness, her purity, her poverty, her spirit of retirement. They even enter into her interior dispositions, her thoughts, her judgments, her desires, her intentions, in order to conform their own sentiments to those of their great model. Before acting, they renounce their own views to adopt those of Mary; they disappear, as it were, in their own eyes, in order that she might reign supreme in their hearts. They say to themselves: If Mary were in my place, with what perfection would she not perform this action, discharge this duty! If she were at my side, to watch and encourage me, how would I acquit myself of the same action, of the same duty.



Mary, although sheltered from danger, took great care to avoid the least occasions of sin; at her example, I will keep watch over my eyes, over my ears, over my tongue. Mary had nothing to fear from the world, and yet she loved retreat and cherished to be unknown; at her example, I will detach myself from all earthly things and live with God and for God alone. Mary was obedient, she was perfectly resigned to God's holy will; at her example, I will submit my judgment and my will to the wishes of my superiors, and henceforth my fancies will no more be the rule of my life. Mary was recollected; she kept herself incessantly in the presence of God; at her example, I will guard against distractions and learn to esteem the interior life. Mary was kind, affable, obliging; her conversations were characterized by a gentle and attractive charity; at her example, I will be careful to avoid frivolous talk, criticisms and all that might wound the virtue of charity. What were the thoughts of Mary? How elevated, how pure, how well-regulated! What were her desires, the longings of her immaculate heart? I will copy my model and will suffer no impression, no aspiration, in my mind or in my heart, unworthy of my celestial mother.

**THUS MARY BECOMES THE MISTRESS OF THOUGHTS, THE AFFECTIONS,** the words, the actions of her faithful servants. A pagan philosopher said once that if we wish to be virtuous we must live as though we were always in the presence of a great personage. The servants of Mary do more than this; it is not enough for them to live in the presence of their celestial mother; they think as she thought, they love what she loved and as she loved, they speak as she spoke, they act as she acted, or rather she thinks, she loves, she speaks, she acts through them. They are like instruments in her virginal hands. They conceal themselves under the shadow of her merits and her virtues, and their souls become beautiful with her beauty, glorious with her glory.





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