

1952

# 002 - The Meaning of Mary, [with] Litany for Our Times

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Lois Schumacher

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## Recommended Citation

Reynolds, Robert L. and Schumacher, Lois, "002 - The Meaning of Mary, [with] Litany for Our Times" (1952). *Marian Reprints*. Paper 2.

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*Litany for Our Times*

ROBERT L. REYNOLDS

*The Meaning of Mary*

LOIS SCHUMACHER

A  
MARIAN  
REPRINT

The Marian Library  
University of Dayton  
Dayton, Ohio

Number 2

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS . . .

Robert L. Reynolds and Lois Schumacher were formerly editors of *Today*, one of America's most stimulating Catholic periodicals, published in Chicago. Founded in 1946 by John Cogley and James O'Gara, *Today* proposes "the concrete application of Catholic principles to the problems of an increasingly complex and secularized world." Commenting on *Today* in *Books on Trial* (November, 1951), Dan Herr writes: "I like *Today* because it proves that a Catholic student magazine can be lively, alert, progressive, adult, and uncompromising. I recommend it to students of all ages—and that should include just about everybody."

Mr. Reynolds graduated from Notre Dame University, where he majored in literature, in 1949. During his junior and senior years he edited *Concord*, a national monthly for college students. He joined the staff of *Today* in 1949, and "Litany for Our Times" appeared in the May, 1951 issue. Since 1953 he has been managing editor of *Jubilee*.

Miss Schumacher became associated with *Today* in the fall of 1948. She graduated from Madonna High School, Aurora, Illinois, and attended the College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, Minnesota. "The Meaning of Mary" was first published in *Today* (November, 1950). While she still writes occasionally for the Catholic press, Miss Schumacher, now Mrs. Louis A. Marrone, has given up her editorial activities since her marriage five years ago.

*(published with ecclesiastical approval)*

*First printing, February, 1952*

*Reprinted, July, 1956*

# THE MEANING OF MARY

LOIS SCHUMACHER

**T**HE appearances of Our Lady at Fatima and other places have often occasioned the remark that ours is the "Age of Mary." We suppose that what is meant by this remark is that, more even than past ages, we who are lost in the maze that is the twentieth century need a Mother to show us the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Actually, however, every age in the Church has been an Age of Mary. So intimately is she bound up in the entire mission of the Church that St. Bonaventure could write: "Whoever seeks Christ apart from Mary seeks Him in vain." Considering her tremendous importance in our lives, it might be well to take a look at two mistaken attitudes with which many Catholics approach Mary.

**THE FIRST ATTITUDE IS** exemplified by those who see her as a sort of spiritualized Mrs. Anthony or heaven's own Ma Perkins (even though they would think these comparisons shockingly irreverent). It is the mentality that conceived of her as "The Catholic Soldier's Pin-Up Girl" during the last war. It is the mentality that rejoices over alarmingly inappropriate drivel like the current song-hit about Our Lady of Fatima, bells and all. It is the mentality that says the Blessed Virgin cries every time a girl whistles, that demands statues and pictures of a Hollywood Madonna fondling an infant out of a Gerber's ad. It is the mentality that waxes ecstatic about all the external details of an apparition of Our Lady and ignores her message to do penance. It is the mentality that likes verses and prayers sweet, and the sweeter the better, because it is more concerned with producing an emotional devotional mood than with praying with the will and the understanding.

This mentality has been decried often enough in the pages of TODAY and someone is sure to tell us once more that "you just don't love Our Lady," but it cannot be pointed out too often that religion and sentimentality are basically incompatible; any wedding between the two is bound in the long run to have disastrous consequences in the society of the

Mystical Body. And again, of course, we must stress that this is not a subjective condemnation of those who are sentimental. That is one of the things that puzzles Screwtape in C.S. Lewis' **Screwtape Letters**. The Demon is furious at the fact that God "often makes prizes of humans who have given their lives for causes He thinks bad on the monstrously sophisticated ground that the humans thought them good and were following the best they knew." That, however, does not make sentimentality (which, be it understood, is **not** the same as sentiment, but the corruption of it) any less detestable, no matter where it is found.

**THE SECOND WRONG ATTITUDE** about Mary may be found in those who regretfully admit that they never had much devotion to Mary and find it difficult to pray to her. Often they are really striving for sanctity, but devotion to Mary plays very little part in their spiritual lives. Most often they are **men**, rightly repelled by much of the effeminate claptrap surrounding popular devotion to Mary. Sometimes they think devotion to Mary "unmasculine." This is an utterly false idea, stemming perhaps from the fact that the modern world in general has lost sight of the dignity and meaning of true womanhood. Few people understand the real meaning of the words "womanly" and "manly." Shelley Winters, the Petty Girl, the career-wife, the magazine woman, whose power can never be underestimated, and even the good Christian girls who have been sucked in by these prototypes—all these have pushed the idea of the "Valiant Woman" down the drain.

Taken together, these two groups comprise no minority in the Church; which is why it might be well to take a fresh look at some of the central truths about Mary. Perhaps those truths have become drab through unthinking familiarity, or so coated over with many words and devotions that few of us are able to see the wood for the varnish.

The first great truth about Mary is, of course, the fact that she is the Mother of God. We speak those words "trippingly on the tongue" each time we pray the Hail Mary—so trippingly, in fact, that we no longer realize their staggering import. Mary, by virtue of her simple "fiat," is



**the Mother of God.** To have suddenly even a dim understanding of the meaning of those words is, in the spiritual order, like being struck by lightning.

Secondly, one of Our Lady's less-known titles is "Mother of the Mystical Body." That means that she is **our** Mother. And that is perfectly logical. If Mary is the Mother of Christ, then she is the Mother of the **whole** Christ, of Whom we are members through Baptism. She knew that when she uttered her "fiat." Christ announced it to us on the Cross: "Behold thy Mother . . . Behold thy son." Nor is that to be understood in a figurative sense, the way we would speak of George Washington as "The Father of Our Country." It is to be taken literally. Each one of us received the life of the body in the womb of an earthly mother; each one of us received the life of the soul, divine life in Christ, in the womb of Mary.

This is what Fr. Bernadot, writing in **Our Lady and Our Life**, means when he says that Mary knew that "the mystery of the Incarnation would not be completed in one instant in her womb, but would be accomplished little by little until the end of time by the formation of Christ's members." God willed it that way. He willed that the graces merited by Christ be dispensed through Mary. All grace, **every grace comes to us through Mary**, and in no other way. We cannot be born spiritually, we cannot grow spiritually, we cannot live spiritually without the help of Mary our Mother, the Mediatrix of All Grace. That is why Gerard Manley Hopkins, in one of his most beautiful poems, compares the Blessed Virgin "to the air we breathe"—"this air which, by life's law, my lung must draw and draw."

**ONCE THE BASIC TRUTH** about Mary—that she is the Mother of God—is understood, every teaching about her follows logically. She was conceived without original sin because God had chosen her to mother His Son and knew from all eternity that her answer would be "yes." She was full of grace, blessed among women, the only purely human creature who never turned aside from the will of God. She was assumed, both in body and in soul, into heaven. Thus the Church lauds her with all of the beautiful titles of her Litany. Thus we call her "our life, our sweetness and our hope."

And lest we think of her as too distantly great or holy to be approached by us or, at the other extreme, as a sort of stimulus for the emotions, we would do well to recall a few of the things that Scripture tells us about her:

Is she so bound up in the things of heaven that she has no understanding of the things of earth? **"They have no wine."**

Is she the weak, fainting, spineless creature that some holy pictures would have us believe? **"There stood by the cross of Jesus His mother." "Stabat,"** she stood, says Bernadot, "like the priest at the altar, absolute mistress of her thoughts, her feelings, and her will."

Is she naive because she is pure? **"How shall this be done since I know not man?"**

Does she know the meaning of anxiety? **"Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."**

Does she know what it means to be rebuffed, to be hurt? **"Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without, seeking Thee. But He answering . . . said: Who is My Mother? . . .Whoever shall do the will of My Father."**

Is she falsely humble, like so many "holy people"? **"Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."**

Does she know the meaning of human friendship? **"And Mary rising up in those days went into the hill country with haste . . . and saluted Elizabeth."**

One could go on and on, proving that Mary can be turned to in every joy and sorrow and counted upon, like all proud mothers, to show us her Son. To approach her with either slobbering sentimentality or cold intellectualism is to miss the meaning of Mary—and of Christ.

# LITANY FOR OUR TIMES

ROBERT L. REYNOLDS

**"IN THE** vast conflict of our times," says the introduction to **The Mary Book**, "we cripple ourselves desperately if we leave [Our Lady] unsummoned." To us, that seems to be not only a statement which is profoundly true, but one which needs to be recalled and acted upon with particular vigor in our day.

Caught in the "vast conflict" of a century which has already produced two world wars, millions of people have heeded Mary's words spoken during her apparitions at Fatima; they have been summoning her to prevent the new and almost certainly more terrible disaster which threatens us.

We have not, perhaps, given equal attention to asking her to intercede for us, personally and as a community of worshippers, in order that we may become better Christians and that our prayers for peace may be more acceptable to her Son. For some of us, devotion to Our Lady has often been obscured by an overlay of sentimentality and pietism; for others, this overlay has caused us to neglect any devotion to her at all.

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to remember that the central fact about Our Lady is that she, as Christ's mother, is the principal channel through which all graces flow from Christ to the world.

*Holy Mother of God, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to remember another fact about Mary, too—the fact that she was a Jew, and that, therefore, the anti-Jewish prejudice of which many of us are guilty is, as Leon Bloy said, "the most horrible slap our Lord suffers in His ever-continuing Passion; the bloodiest and the most unforgiveable, because He receives it in the Face of His Mother."

We are quick to deny that we are prejudiced, and yet a great deal of it remains within us. It comes out in little ways—in our unconscious and erroneous belief that "big business" is controlled by Jews; in our certainty that "we can spot a Jew anywhere" by certain physical character-



istics; in our effort to avoid coming in contact with Jews, whether at social functions or in our residential neighborhoods; even in our certainty that we are "as tolerant as the next guy."

*Tower of David, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to imitate Our Lady's all-out gift of herself, to recall that for her there was no holding back, that she followed Christ along the route to Calvary and braved the sneers of the crowd to stand beneath His cross. And in our own lives we have given the gift of ourselves with our lips, but not with our hearts. We have refused Negroes admission to our schools and colleges on the ground that it might antagonize some parents and students; we have hesitated to join any of the various forms of the apostolate because they seem so ineffective, and besides, they take up so much time; we have refused to join unions, or to become active in them, because none of our friends do, and because they would think it strange if we did.

*Virgin most prudent, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to enlarge our concept of purity, to stop restricting it to a negative, how-far-can-I-go attitude. We have condemned indecent magazines and books and yet we read without discrimination "decent" magazines which emphasize—in stories and ads—physical appeal as the most important thing in life. We have condemned birth control, and yet, even if we don't practice artificial birth control, we compromise by using the rhythm system without a really sufficient reason. We have condemned movies and television shows in which women appear scantily clad, and yet the formals at Catholic school and college proms are not notably more modest.

*Mother most pure, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to prevent ourselves from being swept along in the tide of hopelessness which is the peculiar temptation of our age; we need to remember Our Lady's complete subjection to the will of God. In a time when confidence in God's providence, calm acceptance of His

will for us and for the world, and determination to practice the virtue of hope should be the marks of every Christian—so that others can draw faith from us to whom Faith has been freely given—we are uncertain, weak, fickle. We mourn the sadness of men, without realizing what it is that will turn their sorrow into joy.

*Cause of our joy, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to remember constantly that there are priests, religious, and lay people dying for Christ in other countries. As fellow members of the Mystical Body, we suffer with them, and our prayers go out to them, that they may keep the Faith. We need to pray at the same time for the Church, that these sacrificed lives, this blood poured out, may be again, as it was in early Christian times, the seed for a new growth of the Body of Christ.

*Queen of Martyrs, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to understand the minds and hearts of those outside the Church, whose gropings for the truth we witness every day of our lives, so that we can do our share towards making the blood of martyrs fruitful in our own country. Each person we meet is a different problem, and we must find a way to understand him, to bring him the Truth we possess. We must be wise, humble, and charitable—not superficial, arrogant and condescending—so that he may see Christ fully, and not merely a pale, perhaps distorted image of him. We need the grace to consider non-Catholics first of all, not as people in error, but as potential members of the Mystical Body.

*Seat of wisdom, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to realize that, whatever the vocation in which we find ourselves—whether we are students, housewives, business men, craftsmen, career women, professional people—our vocation is not an end in itself, nor is it a segment of our lives which we may divorce from our central task of finding our way to God. We have been given our

particular talents and inclinations in order that we may bring Christ into these fields. It is there that we find our apostolate, there that we must live our Christianity, there that we find our salvation.

*Queen of apostles, pray for us.*

**WE NEED THE GRACE** to work towards all these things:

- the growth of a mature spiritual life
- the rooting out of prejudice from our hearts
- the all-out giving of ourselves, without regards for what others think of us
- the strength to assert, in the face of an overwhelming tide of contrary propaganda, that purity is something positive and possible
- the practice of the virtue of hope that we may give strength to the weak and despairing
- the consciousness that it is a suffering Church to which we belong —and the implications of that fact in our lives
- the wisdom to understand others and to help bring them the Truth we possess
- the courage to make our daily lives an apostolate

If these sound like impossible tasks for ordinary men and women to accomplish, it is time for us to remember that we are not “ordinary men and women.”

*Queen of all saints, pray for us.*



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