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(published with ecclesiastical approval)
MARY’S MEDIATION AND THE POPES

EAMON R. CARROLL, O. Carm.

When we call Our Lady "mediatrix of all graces" we mean that Mary is the channel of divine grace. She is not the source of grace, for Christ himself is the source—"of his fullness we have all received" (John 1:16). As Saint Pius X reminds us, "We are very far from attributing to the Virgin the power of producing supernatural grace, which belongs to God alone." And so in considering Mary’s mediation we must first treat of the mediation of Jesus Christ.

MEDIATION OF CHRIST:

What is the meaning of mediation in general? What does a mediator do? A mediator is one who stands in the middle and unites two persons or two groups of people who are opposed. To perform his office most effectively the conciliator must share to some extent in both extremes, and must also be acceptable to the opposed parties. Our Blessed Lord, the God-man, true God and yet perfect man, was uniquely fitted to be the mediator between God and mankind. Saint Paul describes Christ’s exercise of his mediatorship: "He is the mediator of the New Testament; that by means of his death they that are called may receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Hebrews 9:25). The entire life of our Lord, culminating in his passion and death, was the fulfillment of his mission of mediation. By offering his will completely to the Father, obeying the Father even to death on the cross, Christ, our mediator, destroyed the middle wall between God and men, wiped out the handwriting against us, and restored his human brethren to full friendship with God the Father. Our Lord fulfilled his mediatorship by becoming our "ransomer," our Redeemer. Only Christ could have done this, as Saint Paul explains: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and man, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2:5-6).

There are two phases to Christ’s mediation. The first is the work of the redemption accomplished "once for all" (Hebrews 7:27) by the sacrifice of Calvary. Yet the redemption Christ accomplished on the altar of the cross did not end there. The second phase of our Savior’s mediation is the application of the fruits of the redemption to each individual. This takes place in the manner determined by Christ, i.e., through the Church, the mass, the sacraments, and the other means of divine grace. Here is how Pope Pius XII explains the second phase of Christ’s mediation:
"It is necessary for each member of the human race to get vitally in touch with the Sacrifice of the Cross, so that the merits that flow from it may be bestowed upon him. We might say that on Calvary Christ has provided a bath of expiation and salvation, filled with the blood He has shed for us; but unless men plunge into it and there wash away the stains of their sins, they cannot be cleansed and saved. Therefore if individual sinners are to be purified in the blood of the Lamb, Christians themselves must co-operate. Although Christ, universally speaking, has reconciled the whole human race to the Father by His death, yet He has willed that all men should come and be brought to His Cross, especially by means of the Sacraments and the Mass and so take possession of the fruits which through the Cross He has won for them."

**OUR BLESSED MOTHER MEDIATRIX:**

What is our Blessed Mother’s place in the providential plan of the mediation of Christ? Saint Paul writes, “There is one mediator between God and man . . . Christ Jesus . . .” (I Tim. 2:5-6): How then can Mary be called a mediator? We turn for an answer to the teaching of the recent popes. In beginning this consideration of papal statements it may be helpful to point out in advance that the recent popes have presented a consistent and ever more clear picture of the meaning of Mary’s mediation; successive popes have taken statements of their predecessors and attached still deeper meanings to them. There is a coherent line to the teaching of Our Lady voiced by the pontiffs.

As Pope Leo XIII notes, the fact that Christ is the one self-sufficient and primary mediator, the truth Saint Paul so emphasizes, does not exclude the possibility of other mediators. These other mediators are of course secondary mediators, completely subordinate to Christ Himself as they help reconcile man with God. Pope Leo XIII appeals to the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas: “As the Angelic Doctor teaches, ‘there is no reason why certain others should not be called in a certain way mediators between God and man, that is to say, insofar as they co-operate by predisposing and ministering in the union of man with God.’ Such are the angels and saints, the prophets and priests of both Testaments; but especially has the Blessed Virgin a claim to the glory of this title.” Paul himself wrote to the Colossians: “We too have been praying for you unceasingly” (Col. 1:9).

Our Lady, the handmaid of the Lord, holds first place among all the mediators after Christ, “for no single individual can even be imagined
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who has ever contributed or even will contribute so much toward reconciling man with God." She is a "worthy and acceptable 'mediatrix to the mediator.'" Saint Bonaventure remarked: "She is the mediator between us and Christ, even as Christ is the mediator between us and God."

How does Mary share in the mediatorship of Christ? The two phases of the redemption are: 1) the gaining of the redemption by Christ's death; 2) the application of Christ's merits to individuals. Similarly, we can consider the mediatorship of Mary from the double standpoint of 1) her share in Christ's redemptive work accomplished on Calvary (thus we call Mary co-redemptrix); 2) her continuing role in heaven of dispensing the graces of the redemption to individuals (by reason of this, Mary is called the dispensatrix or dispenser of all graces.) We will take these ideas in order: firstly, Mary's mediation as co-redemptrix; secondly, the mediation of Our Lady as dispenser of all graces—presenting to Christ our wants, and passing on to us from Christ the graces we need.

MARY'S SHARE IN THE REDEMTIVE WORK OF CHRIST:

What share had Mary in the redemptive work Christ performed here on earth? By the fact of her consent to be mother of the God-man, the maid of Nazareth held an extremely important position in regard to the redemption, because God became man in order to redeem man. The very name, Jesus, was given the Son of Mary because "he shall save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Pope Leo XIII emphasized the importance of Mary's consent: "It was she surely who brought the Savior to men when they were rushing on to their eternal destruction, at the very time, that is, when 'in the place of the whole human race,' she received and wondrously consented to the message which the Angel brought to earth announcing the mystery of reconciliation. She it is 'of whom was born Jesus' (Matt. 1:16), she who is his true Mother and for this reason is justly regarded as Mediatrix to the Mediator." The present Holy Father has also insisted on the importance of Mary's consent at the Annunciation, e.g., in his English message to the South African Marian Congress of May 4, 1952: "... in the loving providence of God, it was Mary’s 'be it done unto me according to thy word,' that made possible the passion and death and resurrection of the divine Redeemer of the world. That is why one dare not separate the Mother from the Son. His death on Golgotha was her martyrdom; His triumph is her exaltation."
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The same papal message contains a beautiful paragraph on the influence of the Virgin Mother on woman's place in the home and in civil society. The example of the holiness of the peerless Virgin Mother, says the pope, has been "a mighty influence, that not only lifted woman from her especial degradation, but gave her the challenge to become the latent force that would give renewed and refined vitality to civilization. . . . The home and civil society have felt the quickening pulse of a life purified by woman's love and holiness."9

The emphasis placed by the popes on Mary's consent to God's invitation at the Annunciation has deeper significance than may at first appear. In our own day there is an increasing awareness that Our Lady is the ideal model, the perfect figure of the Church. It is in and through the Church, which is the living mystical body of Christ, that the union of God and man takes place. Through the Church occurs the reconciliation of man with God, the individual realization of the plan of the redemption. The lesson of the Annunciation is that man must freely assent to God's gift of grace; human beings must co-operate in the work of their own redemption.

Ancient writers often describe God's becoming man as the wedding of human nature to divine nature; and this marriage is a free and willing contract. So Saint Thomas says: What God was asking through the Annunciation was the consent of the Virgin in the name of all humanity" (III, q.30, a. 1). Pope Leo XIII explains it thus: "The eternal Son of God, when He wanted to take to Himself man's nature, and so enter a mystical marriage with the whole human race, did not do so before obtaining the perfectly free consent of His Mother-to-be, who played as it were the role of the human race itself."9 Pope Pius XII in his encyclical on the mystical body says the same of Mary's role: "... in the place of the whole human race, she gave her consent for a 'spiritual marriage between the Son of God and human nature'"."10

In speaking of Mary's share in the mediation of Christ through her consent at the Annunciation, it might be noted that the Protestant rejection of Mary's mediation follows logically from the Protestant denial of the possibility of man's co-operation in his own redemption. (We are speaking of course of recognized Protestant religious positions, not of the private belief of any individual non-Catholic.) A book just translated from Italian into English, The Virgin Mary, by G. Miegge, a Protestant theologian, really looks on Mary as Mother of Jesus Christ, true God and true man,
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and yet says: "In the Gospel story the annunciation is simply an announce-
tion, the communication of a sovereign decision that is extremely honor-
able for Mary—'Blessed art thou among women'—but concerning which
she can clearly act only in humble submission, as indeed she does, and
without her obedience being invested by her with the least quality of
merit." 11

Our Lady's reply to Gabriel's message was her consent to become
the Mother of the Redeemer, so that from this standpoint at least Mary
had a remote part in the redemption. Now we ask a further question:
was the Mother of the Redeemer still more closely associated in Christ's
offering of himself on the cross? Did she have a more proximate, more
immediate, more direct share in the actual redemption? Many theologians
think that Mary's share in the redemptive work of Christ went beyond
Nazareth and Bethlehem even to Calvary itself, and they argue particu-
larly from the statements of recent popes.

NEW EVE—MOTHER OF ALL THE LIVING:

The oldest idea about Mary found in Christian literature after the
New Testament is the notion of the 'new Eve.' The first promise of the
redemption at the closed gates of the garden of Eden included mention
of the woman who was to be associated with the Savior: "I will put
enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her
seed" (Gen. 3:15). Very early writers, even a disciple of the apostles-themselves, Saint Justin (d. 165), contrast Mary's life-bringing obedience with
the death-dealing disobedience of Eve. Saint Irenaeus (d. 200) calls Mary
the "Virgin who regenerates us"—implying a parallel between the first
Eve, "mother of all the living," and the new Eve, mother of those born
again through Christ's redemption. Cardinal Newman's studies on the
evidence of early Christianity led him to this conclusion about Mary's
mediation: "Saint Justin, Saint Irenaeus, and others, had distinctly laid it
down, that she (Mary) not only had an office (i.e. motherhood), but bore
a part, and was a voluntary agent in the actual process of redemption, as
Eve had been instrumental and responsible in Adam's fall." 12

Recent popes apply the "new Eve" comparison to Our Lady in
fulfillment of the prophecy of Gen. 3:15—a prophecy so strong it is called
the proto-evangelium, the primitive-Gospel. In Ineffabilis Deus, Pope Pius
IX wrote: "The Fathers and ecclesiastical writers taught that this prophecy
clearly foretold the merciful Redeemer of mankind, Jesus Christ, the
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Only-Begotten Son of God; that it is also pointed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer; and that at the same time it lucidly expressed the enmity that each of them would bear toward the devil. Wherefore, just as Christ, the mediator between God and man, obliterated in His human nature the decree that had been written against us, and nailed that decree triumphantly to His cross, in like manner did the most holy Virgin, joined with her Son by the most intimate and indissoluble bond, wage with Him and through Him her everlasting warfare against the poisonous serpent—and so in towering triumph crushed that serpentine head with her immaculate foot.”13

Saint Pius X chose as the ruling principle of his pontificate to restore all things in Christ, and among the means to this restoration he gave first place to loyalty to Our Lady. In the encyclical commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the definition of the Immaculate Conception, Saint Pius wrote: “If we trust in Mary as we should, especially now when we shall celebrate her Immaculate Conception with more fervent joy, we shall realize even at present that she is the Virgin most powerful ‘who with virginal foot crushed the head of the Serpent’.”14 The victory of the new Eve over Satan was a favorite thought of Saint Pius X; it is found in many of his documents.

The present Holy Father has repeatedly referred to both the proto-evangelium and the “new Eve,” especially in the Marian encyclicals, *Munificentissimus Deus, Fulgens corona,* and *Ad caeli Reginam.* At the definition of the Assumption the pope said: “... from the second century on the Holy Father portrayed the Virgin Mary in the role of the new Eve, subject surely to the new Adam, but intimately associated in that struggle with the enemy of hell, which, as the Proto-Gospel foretells, was to result in complete victory over sin and death...”15

ASSOCIATION OF MARY WITH CHRIST ON CALVARY:

Apart from the “new Eve” allusions, the popes specifically describe Mary as the associate of the Redeemer on Calvary. According to Pope Leo XIII Mary was “a co-worker with Christ in His expiation for mankind. She offered up her Son to the divine justice, dying with Him in her heart.”16 “She has not only assisted at, but participated in the mysteries of our redemption.”17

Saint Pius X stated: “The most holy Mother of God had not only the honor of ‘having given the substance of her flesh to the only begotten Son of God, who was to be born of the human race,’ whereby a victim
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was prepared for man's salvation, but she was also entrusted with the task of tending and nourishing this Victim, and even of offering it on the altar at the appointed time. The result was a never-broken community of life and labor between Son and Mother . . . when the last hour of the Son arrived, 'there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother.' Nor was she merely engaged in witnessing the cruel spectacle; rather, she rejoiced utterly that 'her Only-Begotten was being offered for the salvation of the human race, although her compassion was so intense that, if it were at all possible, she herself would have embraced even more eagerly all the sufferings that her Son endured.'

Too little is heard of Pope Benedict XV's pronouncements on Our Lady, but the heartbroken pope of the first World War who never lost his trust in Mary as mediatrix of peace has left us some forthright statements on the mediatorship of the Mother of Sorrows, e.g., "With her suffering and dying Son, Mary endured suffering and almost death. She gave up her Mother's rights over her Son in order to procure the salvation of mankind, and to appease the divine justice, she, as much as she could, immolated her Son, so that one can truly affirm that together with Christ she has redeemed the human race. For this very reason every grace we receive from the treasury of the Redemption is given to us as by the hands of the same sorrowing Virgin."

Pope Pius XI concluded his encyclical on reparation to the Sacred Heart by saying: "May the most gracious Mother of God be propitious to these our wishes and these our undertakings; she gave us Christ the Redeemer, she reared Him, she offered Him at the foot of the Cross as Victim for our sins; by such intimate association with Christ, and by her own most singular grace, Mary became and is affectionately known as Reparatrix." The jubilee year of the redemption, 1933, was also the 75th anniversary of the Lourdes apparitions. Pope Pius XI looked on the coincidence as providential and frequently coupled the two occasions in his statements. For example in the letter, Auspicatus profecto, naming Cardinal Binet papal legate to Lourdes, it is said: "The most blessed Virgin, conceived without original sin, was chosen to be the Mother of God so that she might be made an associate in the Redemption of mankind." On March 23, 1934, Pope Pius XI addressed a group of Spanish pilgrims as "come to celebrate by the side of the Vicar of Christ the 19th centenary of the divine redemption, and also the 19th centenary of Mary, the
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centenary of her co-redemption, of her universal motherhood."22

Perhaps the most significant of all papal statements on our Blessed Mother’s mediatrix activity on Calvary are the present pope’s words in *Mystici corporis*, the encyclical on the mystical body of Christ: “She it was who, immune from all sin, personal or inherited, and ever most closely united with her Son, offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father together with the holocaust of her maternal rights and motherly love, like a new Eve, for all the children of Adam contaminated through his unhappy fall, and thus she, who was the mother of our Head according to the flesh, became by a new title of sorrow and glory the spiritual mother of all His members.”23

**DISPENSER OF GRACES:**

After looking at Mary’s role, both remote and proximate, in the redemptive work of Christ, we now consider her place in distributing the graces of the redemption. In *Mystici corporis* Pope Pius XII writes: “May the most holy Mother of all the members of Christ . . . who now, resplendent with glory in body and soul, reigns in heaven with her Son, use her intercession with Him so that from that august Head abundance of grace may flow with steady stream into all the members of His mystical Body. May she now, as in times past, keep watch and ward over the Church with her most powerful patronage, and at length obtain from God times more peaceful for her and for the whole family of men.”24

In becoming the mother of Christ, Our Lady did more than give birth to Christ in His physical body; she also became the mother of all the members of the mystical body of Christ. Mary is mother of the “total Christ”—of the Head, who is our Lord, source of grace, and of all His members. We who belong to the church are the members of Christ, and we live spiritually with the grace that comes from Christ our Head. It is our Blessed Mother’s constant concern to mediate unto us that life-giving divine grace; she is the dispenser of all the graces of Christ.

Saint Paul says of Christ: “He is able at all times to save those who come to God through Him, since He lives always to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25), Is the same thing true in a secondary and subordinate sense of our Blessed Mother? We receive our answer from the popes.

Pope Leo XIII recalls the miracles worked at Mary’s request in the Gospel narrative: Christ “associated her with Himself in each of His first two miracles—the miracle of grace, when at the salutation of Mary the infant leaped in the womb of Elizabeth; the miracle of nature, when he
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turned water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana.’”25 In the rosary encyclical, Adiutricem populi, Pope Leo comments briefly on Mary’s example and counsel to the early Christians who saw her still on earth, and continues: “It is impossible to measure the power and scope of her offices since the day she was taken up to that height of heavenly glory in the company of her Son, to which the dignity and lustre of her merits entitle her. From her heavenly abode she began, by God’s decree, to watch over the Church, to assist and befriend us as our Mother; so that she who was so intimately associated with the mystery of human salvation is just as closely associated with the distribution of the graces which for all time will flow from the redemption. The power put into her hands is all but unlimited.”26

Saint Pius X wrote in 1904: “By this community of pain and will between Christ and Mary ‘she merited to become in a most worthy manner the Reparatrix of the lost world,’ and consequently, the dispenser of all the gifts that Jesus acquired for us by His death and blood . . . by maternal right she distributes the treasures of His merits . . . she is the principal minister of the gifts to be distributed. Christ ‘has taken His seat at the right hand of the majesty on high’ (Hebrews 1:3), and Mary as Queen stands at His right hand; ‘she is the safest refuge and the most trustworthy helper of all who are in danger, so that nothing is to be feared and nothing is to be desppaired of, under her guidance, under her patronage, under her kindness and protection.’ . . . it was granted to the august Virgin ‘to be together with her only-begotten Son the most powerful mediatrix and conciliaatrix of the whole world’.”27

Pope Pius XI closed the extended jubilee year of the redemption by a ceremony that took place at Lourdes, Easter week, 1935. In his radio message he addressed Our Lady in these words: “O mother of pity and of mercy, who when your most beloved Son was accomplishing the redemption of the human race on the altar of the cross, stood there both suffering with Him and as a co-redemptrix; preserve in us, we beg you, and increase day by day, the precious fruit of his redemption and of your compassion.”28

The present pope’s teaching on the queenship of Mary surpasses everything his predecessors have said about this privilege of Our Lady. Over the course of his glorious pontificate the supreme pontiff has missed no opportunity of emphasizing Mary’s glory as queen, even to founding
a new feast in honor of that Marian title. But Pope Pius XII has spoken of the queenship on three occasions in particular: a) on the occasion of the first public consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in the course of a radio-message to Fatima, October 31, 1942; b) when Our Lady’s statue was crowned at Fatima, May 13, 1946; c) finally, in the queenship encyclical at the close of the Marian year. In connection with his various public statements and documents on the royal dignity of Mary, the pope has also thrown further light on the extent of Mary’s power as mediatrix of all graces. For our Blessed Mother’s role as queen is in the empire of grace; the extent of her royal dominion shows us how completely she ministers in the kingdom of the grace of Christ. Mary is more closely associated with her Son, Christ the King, than any earthly queen is associated with her spouse the king. Notions of merely human queenship must be elevated to be correctly applied to Our Lady, because Mary is queen in her Son’s kingdom of grace, so appointed by God himself.

Mary’s titles to queenship are the same titles by which she is co-redemptrix and dispenser of all graces: first of all, the divine maternity—Mary brought about the beginnings of man’s salvation by giving us Christ the King, and thereby herself became queen of mankind. Her second title to queenship is a right of conquest—since Christ chose his mother to be his associate in the work of redemption. Our Lord was born a king; but He also won His crown by conquest—by the bloody victory of the cross. Mary’s second title to queenship was her co-operation in the work of the redemption. Just as Christ is king both as Son of God and as our Redeemer, so also in an analogous fashion Mary is queen both as Mother of God and as the companion of the Redeemer. It would be a mistake to fail to stress the motherly character of Mary’s royal rule. As Saint Therese of Lisieux phrased it, “Mary is more mother than queen.” Her queenship is one of mercy; the special sphere of her royal interest is grace; she rules men with a mother’s love.

In writing of Mary’s queenship Pius XII has important things to say of Mary’s share both in the gaining and in the dispensing of the graces of the redemption. Here are some of many possible examples:

In Caeli Reginam the pope explains that Mary is queen “not only because she is the Mother of God, but also because it was God’s will that she should play a unique part in the work of our eternal salvation” and
he makes his own the words of Pius XI: "It may also be said that this glorious sovereign Lady was chosen to be the Mother of God precisely for the purpose of making her a partner in the redemption of the human race." 29

In Bendito seija, May 13, 1946, the pope describes Mary's power as dispenser of all graces: "Having been associated with the King of martyrs in the ineffable work of human redemption as mother and co-operatrix, she remains forever associated with Him, with an almost unlimited power in the distribution of graces which flow from the redemption. Jesus is King throughout all eternity by nature and by right of conquest; through Him, with Him, and subordinate to Him, Mary is Queen by grace, by divine relationship, by right of conquest, and by singular election. Her kingdom is as vast as that of her Son and God since nothing is excluded from her dominion." 30

In the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, October 31, 1942, the pope said: "We consecrate ourselves forever to thee and to thy Immaculate Heart, O Mother and Queen of the world, so that thy love and protection may hasten the triumph of God's kingdom." 31 And in proclaiming the Holy Year, the pope asked God's blessing "to make of it, with the motherly help of Mary Queen of the world a year of increased faith, of superabundant grace." 32

MARY MEDIATRIX OF THE FAMILY:

For the Marian year, the Holy Father directed many of his messages to Christian families. Addressing the national Marian Congress of Mexico he said: "May Mary's sweet glance serve as a nourishment to protect the integrity and the unity of your faith, the purity of your morals and the holiness of marriage and of the family, thus putting into practice the Marian year program of Christian renewal." 33 And to the national Marian Congress held in India shortly afterwards, the pope's message read: "To Jesus, then, through Mary, leads the spiritual path of that authentic Marian devotion you publicly and proudly profess. . . . If you have entrusted to her maternal care and vigilance the most delicate and urgent of your family and social problems, the light and strength you seek is not hers to give, but only to procure from the Sacred Heart of her Son and Savior. She is the crystal-pure channel, not the fountain, of that super-abundant divine grace you beg through her Immaculate Heart for home and church and country." 34
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We have concluded as we began: our Blessed Mother is not the source of grace, but she is the "crystal-pure channel" of the life of our souls that comes from Christ. It is ever her greatest glory to be the handmaid of the Lord, and through her the Lord has done great things also for all of us.

FOOTNOTES

3. Fidentem piumque, in A.A.S. 29 (1886) 266.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Fidentem piumque, in A.A.S. 29 (1886) 266.
8. Ibid.
10. Mystici corporis, in A.A.S. 35 (1943) 247
19. Inter sodalitiam, in A.A.S. 10 (1918) 182.
23. A.A.S. 35 (1943) 247.
24. Ibid. 248.
27. A.A.S. 36 (1904) 454.
29. A.A.S. 46 (1954) 633-634; see also note (21).
30. A.A.S. 38 (1946) 266.
33. Sea el amor, letter of September 30, 1954, in L'Osservatore Romano, October 23, 1954; English from The Pope Speaks 2 (1st quarter, 1955) 57.
34. It would indeed be, radio-address, in Discorsi e radiomessaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII. 16 (1954-1955) 314.
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NO. 42—OUR LADY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT—Bishop Leon J. Suenens
NO. 43—CHRIST’S DEVOTION TO MARY—Joseph J. Panzer, S.M.
NO. 44—MARY, OUR SPIRITUAL MOTHER—William G. Most
NO. 45—MARY IN THE EASTERN CHURCH—Stephen C. Gulovich