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Mary, Queen of the Universe

JAMES M. EGAN, O.P.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

"Mary, Queen of the Universe" is a title which Catholics are proud to bestow on our Blessed Mother. The Holy Father, as a crowning act of the Marian Year, was happy to proclaim the feast of the Queenship of Mary. In a masterful article, Father James M. Egan, O.P., demonstrates the theological bases of this title of our Lady.

Father Egan is a former editor of The Thomist, the Dominican quarterly of theology and philosophy. After theological studies at the Angelicum, Rome, he served on the Pontifical Theological Faculty of the Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C. Later he was a member of the faculty of the Angelicum, Albertus Magnus College, New Haven, Conn., and St. Mary's College, Monroe, Mich. Presently he is Chancellor of the School of Sacred Theology at St. Mary's, Notre Dame, Indiana.

Articles by Father Egan have appeared in Cross and Crown, The Thomist, Angelicum, Integrity, and Spiritual Life. He has contributed a paper, "Naming in St. Thomas' Theology of the Trinity," to the Walter Farrell Memorial volume, From an Abundant Spring (Kenedy, 1952). At the 1957 convention of the Mariological Society of America, he delivered an address on the death of Mary in the writings of the Scholastics.

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MARY, QUEEN OF THE UNIVERSE

JAMES M. EGAN, O.P.

Just a year ago, an ailing Pontiff, in order to add one more star to the crown of Mary, the Mother of God, expended some of his precious energy establishing a feast in the universal Church in honor of the Queenship of Mary. For a more profound appreciation of this royal title, accorded to Mary throughout the ages and now officially recognized by a liturgical celebration, it must be kept in mind that Mary is Queen in the Kingdom of which Christ is King.

With characteristic vigor and sweep, St. Paul presents us with a vivid picture of the Kingdom of Christ. (1Cor. 15:20-28, Spencer translation)

But, in fact, Christ has risen from the dead, the first-fruits of those who sleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the Resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, so also in the Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order; namely, Christ, the first-fruits; then, those who are Christ's at His Coming; then the end, when He hands over the Kingdom to God and the Father, when He abolishes all other sovereignty, authority and power. For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be abolished is Death. For God subjected all things under His feet. . . . And when all things have been subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subject to Him who subjected all things to Him, that God may be all in all.

On Calvary, Christ conquered sin, and Satan, and death; yet, we know it is not God's plan that all things be immediately subjected. There is still a struggle, as it were, and each generation of Christians is a part of that struggle. The Kingdom of God on earth, the Mystical Body of Christ, the Roman Catholic Church, is a militant Church; yet it is always good for us to bear in mind that the end is coming, the day, when, as St. Paul says, death shall be abolished, when all shall live again, when Christ, seeing all things perfectly subjected to Him, will turn back to the Father, so that God may be all in all. This is why the liturgists remind us that during the season of Advent, the Church wishes us to celebrate three Advents: there is the Advent that is past, the long preparation of the human race for the First Coming of the Incarnate Son of God; there is the Advent we must experience in our lives each year as we prepare for a more fruitful coming of Christ.
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into our souls; there is, finally, the Advent that we, as a Christian people, must hope for, the Second Coming of the Lord and the glorious establishment of the Kingdom of God forever.

We know that Mary is the Queen of that Kingdom of which Christ is King; but it is important for us to realize what her Queenship means, for herself and for us.

WHAT MARY'S QUEENSHIP MEANS

First of all, Mary is not a king who happens to be a woman and therefore is called queen. Elizabeth II of England is really the king of England: whatever royal power is left there, is in her hands. It is true, being a woman, she is called queen, but there is no one else—she alone has the fullness of royal power in England. Mary is not such a queen, because there is a King, and so Mary is Queen in this Kingdom, associated, as she always has been, with Christ, Who is King.

There is another sense, however, in which Mary is Queen, a metaphorical sense. In this way, also, the title of King is attributed to Christ. They are called King and Queen, because of the preeminence of their excellence: because of the natural and supernatural gifts that God bestowed upon Christ and Mary, they are the summit of all creation. The angels naturally, are more perfect, but supernaturally, they too fall far short of the greatness of Christ and Mary. We call the lion the king of the beasts, because we recognize in him a certain superiority over all the animals. Any object that manifests a certain excellence may receive from us the title king and queen. Certainly, then, they apply in a perfect fashion to Christ and Mary.

While it is most important that Christ and Mary should be seen as the summit of all creation, and hence endowed rightly, though metaphorically, with the titles of King and Queen, this is still not our ultimate meaning when we designate Christ as King and Mary as Queen. We mean rather that they are King and Queen in the proper sense of the word: that is, that they have a Kingdom and subjects over which they actually exercise royal power, Christ in His proper way as King, Mary in her proper way as Queen. Whence comes this royal dignity, especially to Mary, who is, after all, a creature? Since we cannot understand Mary without Christ, obviously we shall have to ask: Under what titles is Christ King? Pope Pius XI, when he instituted the Feast of the Kingship of Christ, indicated two titles.

First of all, Christ is King by birthright. He is born a King, not only
King of the Jewish people, but King of the Universe, because of the hypostatic union. The fact that Christ is the Son of God, in whom all authority rests, means that at the moment of His birth He becomes King. Mary is Queen by that same title of birthright, not by right of her birth, but of her Son’s. It is pointed out that Mary is not simply a Queen Mother, in the sense that she is the Mother of One who eventually becomes King. Since she is a Queen Mother, a certain amount of prestige, dignity, honor, and respect fittingly comes to her; still the Queen Mother is not strictly speaking, Queen. Mary is Queen by birthright, because the Child she bore is not Someone who becomes King later on; He is King from the moment of His conception, and the Church does not hesitate to accommodate to Mary the words of Solomon and his mother in the Old Testament: “He was crowned by his own mother.”

There is a very definite sense in which we can say that Christ, as man, was crowned King of the Universe by Mary His Mother. That is what we are concerned with here. We recognize that God is King, but we are concerned with Christ the Man as King. He becomes King because He is born of Mary; for that reason both enjoy royal dignity and power, by the very birth of the God-Man.

The Church assigns the title of Queen to Mary under a second aspect. Again, as the Holy Father points out, by right of conquest, because even though by birth Christ is King, His subjects are captive because of original sin and because of the tremendous weight of personal and social and international sin that presses on the world. At the moment when Christ came into the world, practically all of His subjects were captive to sin, to Satan, and to death. So it was necessary for Him to fight the battle of justice, of divine justice, and of divine mercy, in order that He might liberate men from their captivity. In this battle Mary is closely associated with Christ. She, together with Christ, paid the same price, offered as a Mother the same sacrifice that He offered—His own blood, His own life. And so, together, Christ and Mary, paying the price for our release, have an added title to our subjection. They are our King and Queen because they have redeemed us from captivity and gathered us into their own Kingdom.

FULLNESS OF POWER

A king and a queen must exercise royal power; how do Christ and Mary exercise the power they possess? We all know that ruling power (royal or not) has a threefold aspect. It is generally divided into
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legislative power, executive power, and judicial power. In our country, such powers have been distributed among various individuals or groups of individuals; thus, some have legislative power—Congress; the executive power rests in the President; and the judicial power resides ultimately in the Supreme Court. In a kingdom, all that power rests in one person—the king. He may communicate it, he may delegate it, but ultimately it all rests in him. In the Kingdom of God, all power has been given to Christ. So Christ, as King, has the fullness of legislative, executive and judicial power.

If Mary is not merely a Queen Mother, or Queen in the metaphorical sense, if she is Queen in the proper sense, then she too must have some sort of royal power, she too must rule. Otherwise, she is just a figurehead. Hence, we must ask ourselves: Can we say that Mary shares in the legislative, executive, and judicial power that is Christ’s? Has He given her a part in the actual ruling of His Kingdom? The exercise of regal power is ordered to the good of the subjects, to lead the subjects so to act in harmony, in community, that the common good of the whole kingdom be preserved and advanced. Certainly, everything comes from Christ as the Source. Can we say now that Mary is associated with Christ in a special way, that she, too, has a function to perform?

The answer, of course, is yes; Mary is Queen in the Kingdom of Christ and she shares in His royal power and in each of its three aspects. First of all, the legislative power. At first glance, we would be inclined to say that Mary does not share in the legislative power, for this is the power that initiates everything, the power that requires the fullness of prudence, of justice, of temperance, and of all the virtues, the power that is capable of foreseeing all the needs of the common good and then laying down the regulations, the rules, the laws that all the subjects must follow if they are to attain that common good. Certainly all the laws of the Kingdom of God here on earth are enacted by Christ. We know of no law that Mary has determined, no law of which she has been the source. As far as legislating for the Kingdom of God, that is totally in Christ, and in a minor way, in the hierarchy of His Church. The fundamental laws of Christianity have been established by Christ Himself, and Mary has had no part in initiating the legislation. We can say that she has approved it, has embraced it wholeheartedly. We can also say that she is its first subject. She is the one who manifests most perfectly what complete submission to the law of Christ
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will do.

MARY AND THE LAW

However, it is important to realize that there is a tremendous distinction between the New Law of Christ and the Old Law. St. Paul alludes to it continually. The Old Law was a law written on tablets of stone. The Old Law indicated what had to be done, but as St. Paul tells us, the Old Law did not give the means to do it. The New Law is a law of spirit and truth, a law of love. It has not been written down by the Legislator: Christ wrote no code of laws. It is true that much of it is written down in Sacred Scripture: there are Christian laws there, but we know that the New Law has been handed down principally by tradition, by the living voice of the Church, and that it is a law of love and a law of the spirit. It is a law that is promulgated by the Holy Spirit; it is written in the hearts of men. Promulgation is necessary if a law is to bind its subjects. Promulgation is definitely an aspect of legislative power. It is from this aspect that Mary shares in the legislative function of her Son. Under the direction of the Spirit of Truth and Love, Mary fulfills her role of installing the law of Christ into the hearts of men, helping them to understand it and to apply it in every event of their lives.

Once the law has been promulgated, it must be carried out; and here Mary enters into the executive aspect of her Queenship. She certainly possesses a share in the executive power in a very special way: this is a way that is most fitting for a Queen, who is also a Mother; for, in a certain sense, Mary initiates things. God has left to her the task of being conscious—not that He is not conscious Himself—but He has left to her the task of being aware, first of all, of what has to be done. Christ knew that the wine was giving out. He knew it as God. He knew it in the beatific vision, as well as by His infused knowledge. He probably even knew it by His acquired knowledge. He could see what was going on; He could see the disturbance, sense the embarrassment. Yet He never said a word. He left it up to Mary to bring it up. That is what is meant by saying that Mary initiates things in the executive order.

It can be said that in every case Christ leaves the initiative to Mary. She is the one who is conscious of what is needed. Her vision is such as to embrace all mankind, everything that pertains to the Kingdom of God and hereafter, from the beginning to the end. Mary,
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therefore, is always aware of the needs of all, and she is the one who
initiates by her intercession. Her prayer is all powerful.

In the beautiful Matins hymn for the feast of Our Lady, Mediatrix
of all Graces, occur the following words*:

These sacred fountains of God's saving water
Who shall direct them for a people purchased?
Given to Mary is this loving office
As Mediatrix.
Mary, Our Mother, all the graces garnered
By Our Redeemer unto us dispenseth;
Freely at her prayer her Son gladly raineth
Gifts of His bounty.

This is the function of Mary, sharing in a special way the executive
power, seeing to it that the fruits of the Redemption are applied to
every soul. So we know that every grace we receive, every grace
that anyone receives, has been first of all noticed, asked for, interceded
for, by Mary. It is a special gift of Mary's motherly love for us, which
she can easily bestow, because she is Queen. She is called Omnipo-
tentia supplex—suppliant omnipotence; not omnipotence itself—that
is God—but the next thing to it.

This is a wonderful aspect of Mary's function in our lives, be-
cause, even though she is joined to Christ in the work of redeeming us,
in acquiring everything that is necessary for the full perfection of the
kingdom, it is also up to her to share in His executive power in a pe-
culiarly maternal way. One of Mary's most precious titles is Almoner
of Grace; it means that Christ has placed everything in Mary's hands
so that she, knowing God's designs and God's will, dispenses them
to all of us.

The third aspect of royal power is judicial power. Theologians seem
hesitant to allow Mary any share in the judicial power of her Son. Yet
the doctrine of St. Thomas would seem to demand that Mary have a
share, for the Angelic Doctor explicitly admits others to participate
in judging. One reason given by theologians for excluding Mary is
that judgment is a manifestation of justice; hence the judge is the
symbol of God's Justice, whereas Mary is the Mother of Mercy. St.
Thomas, on the other hand, tells us that in all the works of God justice
and mercy are intertwined. He finds in the most unexpected works of

*Hymns of the Dominican Missal and Breviary, Byrnes, p. 293
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God this intimate conciliation of justice and mercy. It is true that the justification of a sinner is most perfectly a manifestation of God's Mercy; the condemnation of a sinner to punishment is primarily a manifestation of God's Justice; yet God rewards, and in rewarding satisfies the ultimate demands of justice; God condemns, but He never condemns as much as He might. There is always mercy in every judgment. Hence we can be sure that Mary too is present at every judgment. She is the Advocate of Mercy; and God knows how much we need her.

No matter what the judgment is, Mary is there, pointing out (not that God is overlooking them, but He has left it to her to be the Advocate of Mercy) all the things that are in our favor. There will be plenty of others to point out the things that are not. But we may be sure that Mary, together with our guardian angel, will be pointing out the good that we have done. The definitive judgment will follow from that balance between justice and mercy, and it will be pronounced by Christ alone.

THREE JUDGMENTS

St. Thomas also tells us that there are three judgments. There is the judgment that is going on continuously throughout our life, the rewards and punishments, the things that we receive and the things we do not receive, here below. We often wonder why people who seem to be ignoring God, who have no use for religion, prosper in a worldly way. That is the result of a judgment to grant them a certain amount of this world's goods even though they have ignored the rights of God. Another person, who has sincerely tried to please God, seems to have one trial after another. That is also a question of judgment—to discern what is going to be given. Really there is no great problem in this apparently unequal dealing with men. What God is doing in the one case is giving the man now a reward for what little good he has done, so that he will not have anything to hold against God when the end comes: "Behold, you have received your reward." In the other case, God is giving the man every opportunity to build up treasure in heaven. Here we have one form of judgment, and we can hardly doubt Mary's connection with it.

The principal judgment is the so-called particular judgment. This takes place at the instant of death, when each one will be judged by Christ. The faithful have always believed that Mary would be present then as the Advocate of Mercy.
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What of the final judgment? Is Mary going to be there, not merely as a spectator, but actively taking part? The notion that Christ has saved all judgment, and particularly, the last judgment, to Himself is not quite accurate. As a matter of fact, He Himself has promised some that they are going to sit in judgment with Him. Recall the incident when St. Peter said to Our Lord: “We have given up all things and have followed Thee.” As the author of the homily in the Office of St. Peter remarks: “Look what he gave up; an old boat and some worn-out fishing nets.” Anyway, he gave up everything he had. And he asks: “What reward are we going to have?” And Our Lord said to him: “On the last day, on the day of regeneration, you are going to sit together with Me, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” which, the theologians say, is everybody. So the fact of the matter is that some are going to share in judgment with Christ; and, according to Christian tradition, not only the Apostles. Referring to this passage, especially to the close link between: “We have given up everything,” and “The reward is: you shall judge,” St. Thomas very beautifully explains why the reward will be: “You shall judge.” The people who will be judged — if they have failed — have failed because they have not given up the world. They have tried to enjoy the good things of this world; they refused to detach themselves from creatures. Who else except one who has practiced detachment, has given up all things, will have the necessary balance, will be able to judge accurately, will be able to assist the Judge? So all those who have practiced detachment, especially those who have taken a voluntary vow of poverty, will assist in the last judgment. If this is true of the poor in spirit, if it is true of the Apostles, then it is eminently true of Mary, who is the most detached of all.

Others, then, are going to be associated with Christ in the final judgment. What are they going to do? St. Thomas says (Summa Theol., Suppl., q. 89): the detached will judge by cooperating in the task of revealing to each individual the cause of the damnation or salvation, both of himself and of all others, somewhat in the way the higher angels are said to illuminate the lower angels and men.

EXPLAINING THE SENTENCE

A word of explanation is needed to understand this function. The purpose of the final judgment is to justify the ways of God to man and to manifest the ultimate glory of God. As each one leaves this life, he receives his reward. St. Thomas is of the opinion that two groups
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will not be subjected to the final judgment—the very good and the very bad. All will recognize the justice of the reward or punishment meted out to them. The ones who will be judged are the ones that have a mixture, that were not too bad, or not too good. They were good enough to get to heaven, but not very far up; they were bad enough to get to hell, but not too far down. Here there might be a question, either in their own minds, or in the minds of others. There is no question of changing the sentence; there is merely the task of explaining it. Certainly, we will wonder about the fate of those we knew on earth. We have made judgments about the people we knew, yet we may find that in the end they do not have the place we thought they should have. We will like to know what were the elements that entered into the final judgment. That is the task assigned to the poor in spirit. Throughout the whole mass of men gathered together for the final judgment, there will be passing the Apostles, the voluntary poor, the poor in spirit. They will go about and explain to men, helping them to understand both the justice and the mercy of Christ's judgment of themselves and others.

If that is true of the Apostles and others, then it must be even truer of Mary; for no one has been so detached as she, no one so deeply poor in spirit. And I should like to think that I know where Mary will be on that last day. She will gather around her all the little ones who have never received the sacrament of Baptism, all those who are going to spend eternity in Limbo; and she is going to explain to them the justice and the mercy of God's dealing with them.
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