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Juniper B. Carol

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## OUR LADY'S IMMUNITY FROM THE DEBT OF SIN

*By the* REV. DR. JUNIPER B. CAROL, O.F.M.

(Sermon delivered during the Holy Hour in connection with the Sixth Annual Convention of The Mariological Society of America in St. Louis, Mo., on January 3, 1955.)

*May Our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ be eternally  
praised, loved and worshiped in the Most Holy  
Sacrament of the Altar.*

### DEARLY BELOVED IN CHRIST:

If God is admirable in His Saints, as the royal prophet loudly proclaims Him to be, He is undoubtedly more admirable in the Queen of all Saints, His own Mother. The learned dissertations which make up the program of our Mariological Convention this year can scarcely fail to corroborate this truth by revealing to us some of the ineffable grandeur and dignity of Our Blessed Lady, by allowing us a glimpse at least of her exalted position in the divine economy. The deeper a theologian endeavors to fathom the sublime mystery of the Divine Motherhood, the more he is baffled at its tremendous implications affecting virtually every other phase of the sacred science of theology.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing of these theological implications is the one concerning the nexus between Our Blessed Lady and the universal law of sin. I am referring specifically to the much-debated problem of the so-called "debt of sin" in Our Lady. And it is precisely to this fascinating aspect of Mariology that I would like to direct your attention this afternoon. Nor should anyone be surprised that a highly controver-

sial point in theology has been chosen for an occasion as solemn and sacred as this. All fears of incongruity disappear when we recall that for centuries before 1854 the Immaculate Conception itself, which was then a controverted question, was also a favorite theme in Catholic pulpits everywhere.

The theological background for our reflections will be furnished by the unique place which Our Lady occupies in the hierarchy of creation. It is self-evident to all that the dignity of created being increases in direct proportion to their share in the perfections of their Creator. Now, Almighty God communicates Himself according to three degrees or hierarchies of perfection: the order of nature, the order of grace, and the order of the Hypostatic Union. Theologians agree without difficulty that Our Blessed Lady, being directly involved in the Incarnation of the Divine Word, transcends the orders of nature and of grace. In the happy phrase of Cardinal Cajetan, she alone, by her natural operation, touches the very limits of the Divinity. She does not, of course, belong to the Hypostatic Union; but she belongs to the Hypostatic Order inasmuch as it was in her and through her that the Union was accomplished.

The ineffable relationship established between Mary and the Persons of the Adorable Trinity, as a result of the Hypostatic Union, imprints on her whole being a new, distinctive character, a unique rank which automatically raises her far above all other choirs and hierarchies of creatures. She stands in a category of her own, a category which far surpasses any and everything which is not God.

If Christ represents the very zenith of all divine operations, the incomparable Woman who conceived Him and bore Him must be, of necessity, indissolubly united with that luminous point of creation. If Christ is the most precious jewel in the vast empire of creation, His Virgin-Mother is the precious ring in which that radiant jewel is set by the very hand of the



Almighty. Beyond that, no created intellect, however gifted, can perceive anything which is not the Godhead Itself.

Having set forth this premise, I would draw your attention to a fundamental axiom which the Angelic Doctor, with his characteristic lucidity, formulates as follows: "That which is better in the effects, is prior in the intention of the agent" (*Contra Gent.* 2, c. 44). If so, Our Blessed Lady, being the masterpiece of creation, must have been willed by God with a logical priority to every other creature. This honor she shares with her divine Son. Both were predestined "in one and the same decree", as Pope Pius IX unequivocally states.

Returning now to our original thought, you will agree that against this background the nexus between Our Lady and the universal law of sin appears in an altogether new light. The very definition of 1854 proclaiming Mary's initial purity takes on an exceedingly interesting meaning which redounds to the greater honor and glory of God's immaculate Mother. And why? Because in this new perspective the old, embarrassing question of the so-called "debt of sin" in Our Lady loses its right to exist; it simply vanishes into thin air.

According to this, the Immaculate Conception means that Our Lady was preserved, not from a sin she *should* have contracted (as we are frequently told), but rather from a sin she *would* have contracted, had God so decided. Since God did not so decide, it follows that any involvement of Mary in the sin of Adam belongs to the realm of pure conjectures, with which Catholic theology is hardly concerned.

Mary, then, had no obligation whatsoever to be in any way affected by the universal law of sin which threatens every child of Adam even before he begins to exist. She was never under any *debitum peccati* of any kind, whether proximate or remote, personal or natural, absolute or conditional. She was, of course, a natural child of Adam. But, on the basis of what we

said above, before she was predestined to be a child of Adam, she was already the object of God's ineffable love and affection.

To be sure, Our Lady was redeemed by Christ. But she was redeemed "in a more sublime way", as Pius IX explained; she was redeemed "in a most perfect manner", as Pius XII recently stressed. It is true that the foreseen merits of the Redeemer preserved Mary from contracting original sin. But does that mean that she *should* have contracted it, had she not been preserved? Does that mean that she was under some necessity or obligation to contract it? Certainly not. If I failed to commit a crime under given circumstances, you may be sure that it was because the grace of God preserved me from doing so. And yet, can anyone say that I *should* have committed the crime, had I not been prevented by the grace of God? In good logic, it does not follow.

Mary's initial purity, then, should be understood in the sense Pius IX understood it. According to his Apostolic Constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, Our Blessed Lady was NEVER subject to the law of sin; she was holier than Eve when the first woman was fashioned by God in paradise; she was always purer than the very Angels. Did Eve come into existence with some debt of sin? Of course not. Well, then, neither did Mary! Were the Angels ever involved in the sin of Adam? Certainly not. Well, then, neither was the Queen of Angels!

Had Our Lady sinned in Adam *de jure*, as they say, she would have sinned also *de facto*. The immutability of God's decrees would have required it. Can anyone imagine Almighty God subjecting His own Mother to the necessity of being involved in the sin of Adam (that's what the *debitum* means), and then at the last minute, as it were, prevent His own previous decree from actually taking effect? The process would involve a metaphysical impossibility!

If Our Lady ever contracted any debt at all, it was not a debt of sin, but rather a debt of grace, in the sense that, at the

very first instant of her existence Almighty God owed it to Himself to endow her with that fullness of grace which He Himself had from all eternity decreed to give her at that particular moment.

This thesis, I admit, is only a probable theological opinion, according to some; although, according to others, it is a solidly established fact. Be that as it may, no one will deny that it opens new horizons of unsuspected grandeur in the field of Mariology. For one thing, it removes Our Blessed Lady from the curse of Adam as much as God's Mother deserves to be removed from that curse. If it did nothing else, this perspective would still have a irresistible appeal. And it is, undoubtedly, for this very reason that an increasing number of theologians have been showing favor to it in recent years.

As an appropriate conclusion, may I be allowed to express the hope that the members of The Mariological Society of America will always be guided by that noble principle which the Franciscan William of Ware formulated many centuries ago, namely: *"If I must fall into error while discussing the Blessed Virgin, I rather err by giving her too much, than by giving her too little."* May these lofty sentiments be reflected in the various undertakings of our Society, as we endeavor to penetrate and expound the singular prerogatives of our heavenly Mother in order to make her better known and loved by all her spiritual children.



# FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE MARIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

**From January 5, 1954, to January 4, 1955**

Balance: January 5, 1954..... \$1,710.84

## *Current Assets:*

Dues, 1953 .....	\$ 35.00	
Dues, 1954 .....	853.00	
Dues, 1955 .....	94.00	
Donations .....	263.00	
MARIAN STUDIES sold .....	995.05	
Advertisements in MARIAN STUDIES.....	830.00	
Registration .....	265.00	
		<hr/> 3,335.05

*Total Current Assets* ..... \$5,045.89

## *Current Liabilities:*

Paulist Press (MARIAN STUDIES).....	\$2,035.53
Paulist Press (membership and dues cards, programs, stationery, and postage).....	129.00
Benart Mail Sales Service.....	15.76
ALMA SOCIA CHRISTI, 12 volumes.....	35.35
Expenses for incorporation of Society.....	25.00
Telegrams for Seminarians' Awards.....	4.00
Office of Secretary .....	91.90
Office of Treasurer .....	30.00
Convention Luncheon .....	250.32

*Total Current Liabilities* ..... \$2,616.86

Balance: January 4, 1955..... \$2,429.03

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