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## OUR LADY OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

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*Richard May*

*This article traces the historical development and theological foundations for the title, “Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.” It examines the reasons for the title rooted in St. Augustine’s recognition that “Jesus took his Flesh from the flesh of Mary.” Tracing the connection between the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist through the Patristic era, the Middle Ages, and more recent centuries, various works of art are noted as well the insights of spiritual writers. In particular, the contributions of St. Peter Julian Eymard (1811–1868) are highlighted along with those of Pope St. John Paul II. The article not only examines the theological and historical foundations for Mary as Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and Mother of the Eucharist, it also explores the importance of the Blessed Virgin for Eucharistic devotion.*

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The mystery of the Eucharist is inseparable from the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of Christ and the Church; for the Body of Christ that we receive in communion is the same Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary. It is the same Christ whom we adore in the tabernacle, who became man through Mary, and who now enables us to receive His Flesh and Blood—His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Holy Eucharist. And so, we have the Marian-Eucharistic title, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

It should be noted that this title is similar to other Marian titles that are worthy of exploring. For example, a common one is Mother of the Holy Eucharist. Others have appeared, such as Our Lady of Viaticum and Our Lady of the Tabernacle. Edmond Tenaillon, an early twentieth-century biographer of St. Peter Julian Eymard, contends that Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament

is more expressive, that it comprises them all. The others honor only one phase of Mary's Eucharistic life, recall only one of her relations to the Blessed Sacrament. But the title, *Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament*, embraces them all, comprehends the whole adoring life of the Blessed Virgin. Still more, the title penetrates the very mystery of the Eucharist and well understood manifests to us the most important part granted to Mary in the economy of the Holy Eucharist.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article draws upon material previously published in *Missio Immaculatae* (2017). It is, though, a distinct article.

<sup>2</sup> Edmond Tenaillon, S.S.S., Venerable Pierre Julien Eymard, the Priest of the Eucharist; Founder of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament (New York: Frank Meany, 1914), 61.

Tenaillon adds that, when St. Peter Julien Eymard proposed this title, he stated: “It is the new title of something very ancient, for since the existence of the Eucharist, the relations that bind Mary to her Son have also existed,” and “till the last evening of time it shall go down the ages as one of the brightest jewels of Mary’s crown.”<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that St. Eymard, to whom this title has been attributed, was a major contributor to nineteenth-century French spirituality, and he worked with lay organizations promoting devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Eucharist leading up to the establishment of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in 1856.

How can Eymard’s practices of Eucharistic worship, which are intimately associated with Mary, be applied in today’s parish setting? With attendance often lacking at parish Eucharistic devotions, the significance of this title must be brought to light in contemporary times. As Pope St. John Paul II notes, “Mary can guide us toward this most holy sacrament because she herself has a profound relationship with it.”<sup>4</sup>

## **II. Theological and Historical Foundations for a Marian-Eucharistic Title**

In survey manner, we will now trace the history of the appearance of Marian-Eucharistic titles, as well as establish their theological foundation, an understanding that developed over time. Mary has truly become a Lady of a Thousand Titles. But in Catholic theology titles mean

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 62–63. Tenaillon attributes the latter quote to an unnamed nineteenth-century writer.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), no. 53.

something—that is, they are not merely metaphorical expressions, titles of honor, or symbolic gestures. Mariology has the same pivotal role as the hypostatic union in Christology and must include both a distinction in the order of being and in the order of operation.<sup>5</sup> It is not just *who* Mary is, but what does she do? If she is the Mother of the Holy Eucharist, then she is the Mother of the Church's greatest treasure, the source of all life and holiness. How is Mary so linked to the Eucharist?

### ***A. Scripture***

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, you shall call his name Jesus (Lk 1:31).<sup>6</sup>

Consider first Mary's role in the Redemption while she was on earth as reflected in the Gospel of Luke. After the Annunciation, she carried Christ for nine months in her womb. She carried the Word made Flesh, the same Word that she enfleshed, that at the moment of consecration, comes down from Heaven onto our altars.

### **Mary's Faith at the Annunciation**

Mary's acceptance of God's word in her mind and heart was the indispensable precondition to the conception of His Word in her Womb—that is, the precondition to the conception of Jesus, the living fruit of her womb. So, our

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<sup>5</sup> Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., *Mariology*, vol. 2 (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1955), 11.

<sup>6</sup> All biblical verses not found in quotations from other sources are from the NRV unless otherwise noted.

Eucharistic faith goes directly back to Mary’s own faith at the Annunciation, wherein the Incarnation is inaugurated, along with its manifold fruits—preeminently, the Eucharist.<sup>7</sup>

### **Mary, the First Tabernacle**

The image of Our Lady as the Ark of the Covenant appears in the Litany of Loreto and has a Scriptural basis. In the Old Testament, the Ark of God contained the manna from heaven and the Word of God on stone tablets. In the New Testament, Mary is portrayed as the Ark of the New Covenant, the first tabernacle of the Word made Flesh, in Luke 1:43 and again in Revelation 11:19 and 12:1. Thus, there are Eucharistic components in Scriptures associated with Our Lady.<sup>8</sup> In fact, we can conclude from the Gospel of Luke alone that *because Mary enfleshed Jesus, and since Christ is the Eucharist, she also played a role in enfleshing the Eucharist*. The Virgin of the Annunciation becomes the dwelling place, the first tabernacle, both the womb and sanctuary of God. She is, then, the “bread giver” and *the Mother of the Eucharistic Christ*.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Foley, *Mary and the Eucharist* (Newtownsville, OH: Hope of Saint Monica, 1997), 9, 11–14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–133. Also, Benedict XVI states: “Mary is the Ark of the Covenant because she welcomed Jesus within her; she welcomed within her the living Word, the whole content of God’s will, of God’s truth; she welcomed within her the One who is the new and eternal Covenant, which culminated in the offering of his Body and his Blood: a body and blood received through Mary.” Benedict XVI, Homily on the Solemnity of the Assumption at St. Thomas of Villanova Parish, Castel Gandolfo, on Monday, August 15, 2011, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20110815\\_assunzione.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20110815_assunzione.html). See also John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 55.

<sup>9</sup> How appropriate it is that the word “lady” is derived from the Anglo-Saxon “laef-da,” which means “loaf-giver” or “bread-giver”; perhaps more precise: Old English: *hlāf-dige*. The first part of the word is a mutated form of *hlāf*, “loaf, bread,” also seen in the corresponding *hlāford*, “lord.” The second part is

## Mary, “Adoratrix”

Lastly, in Acts 2:42, we also find: “And they held steadfastly to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.” The “breaking of the bread” refers to the Eucharist. The place where this occurred is the “Cenacle,” traditionally understood as the Upper Room where the last Supper was celebrated and the early Christians in Jerusalem gathered with Our Lady.

### *B. Early Patristic Teaching*

During these early years, Christian theology began to be expressed in Christology. The pre-Nicene Church’s chief concern was to formulate a kerygmatic definition of the person of the Lord and of His earthly mission to include the Resurrection and the events of His birth. It also had to deal with the initial Christological heresies.<sup>10</sup> As such, there was certainly no attention by the Church to the relationship between Mary and the Eucharist along with an appropriate title. Nevertheless, by reviewing these early writings, we can identify the subtle beginnings of a Marian-Eucharistic language. The writings of Tertullian, Athanasius, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, among others, are noteworthy. St. Ephraem the Syrian (306–373), the Harp of the Holy Spirit, is another example.<sup>11</sup> He alludes to Mary as an agent of Christ’s Eucharistic presence making Christ visible and accessible to

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usually taken to be from the root *dig*, “to knead,” seen also in dough; the sense development from bread-kneader, or bread-maker, or bread-shaper. See Mark Hegener, ed., “Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament”, in *The Marian Era*, vol. 7 (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Luigi Gambero, S.M., *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 25–26, 30–31.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

the people of the Church comparable to the way that His birth from His mother Mary made Him physically visible and accessible to the people of His time on earth.<sup>12</sup> Ephraem often uses Eucharistic bread language in his songs.<sup>13</sup>

With St. Augustine (354–430), we find a clear move toward an understanding and appreciation of Mary’s collaborative and co-redemptive role and further justification for an appropriate title. Patristics scholar Fr. Luigi Gambero notes that Augustine’s “intuitions and perspectives on Marian doctrine are singularly profound and anticipate the statements of the Second Vatican Council” by including the two perspectives of Mariology: first, in relation to the mystery of Christ; and second, in relation to the mystery of the Church. Augustine also manifests a proper recognition of the person of and mission of Our Lady.<sup>14</sup> Significantly for our concerns, we also see a more definitive link to Mary’s contribution to the Eucharist. Augustine, as others in this time period do, acknowledges that Christ is born of the flesh, but adds that “Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ.”<sup>15</sup> In Sermon 272, Augustine says:

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<sup>12</sup> Sidney H. Griffith, “‘Spirit in Bread; Fire in the Wine’: The Eucharist as ‘Living Medicine’ in the thought of Ephraem the Syrian,” *Modern Theology* 15, no. 2 (April 1999): 231.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 234. Griffith cites Edmund Beck, *Das heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide* (Louvain: Peeters, 1955), 16:3. Examples are provided in this text.

<sup>14</sup> Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 217.

<sup>15</sup> St. Augustine, *De Sante Virginitate*, 3, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, ed. J-P Migne (Paris, 1844ff) [henceforth PL], 40, 398. English translation from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), no. 506.



For what you see is simply bread and a cup—this is the information your eyes report. But your faith demands far subtler insight: the bread is Christ’s body, the cup is Christ’s blood ... Our Lord Jesus Christ, we know the source of his flesh; he took it from the Virgin Mary.<sup>16</sup>

In Sermon 369, Augustine prays:

Give milk, Mother, to him who is our food, give milk to the bread coming down from heaven.... [G]ive milk to him who made you such that he could be made from you.<sup>17</sup>

As we enter the sixth century, we find Marian-Eucharistic overtones in a piece by St. Eleutherius of Tournai (d. 531): “Virgin, give us not the food for the body, but also the bread of angels come down into your virginal womb.”<sup>18</sup> The Syrian monk St. John of Damascus (d. ca. 749) directly ties Mary to the Eucharist:

The body which is born of the holy Virgin is in truth body united with divinity, not that the body which was received up into the

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<sup>16</sup> Augustine, “On the Day of Pentecost to the Infantes, on the Sacrament,” PL 38, 1247–1248. For English translation, see Scribd, accessed December 14, 2017, <https://www.scribd.com/document/290475705/3-Sermons-Texts-of-St-Augustine-on-the-Eucharist>. See also see also Early Church Texts, [http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/augustine\\_sermon\\_272\\_eucharist.htm](http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/augustine_sermon_272_eucharist.htm).

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, Sermon 369, 1, in PL 39. English translation from Michael O’Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1982), 187.

<sup>18</sup> Eleutherius of Tournai, in *In Praise of Mary, Hymns from the First Millennium of the Eastern and Western Churches*, (Middlegreen Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1981), 58. Eleutherius of Tournai (456–531c.) was probably the first bishop of Tournai, Flanders, and occupied his see during a troubled era following the downfall of Rome and the invasion of the Franks. Neither the numerous anecdotes related in the story of his life nor all the works attributed to him are supported by textual critics.

heavens descends, but that the bread itself and the wine are changed into God's body and blood.<sup>19</sup>

### ***C. The Middle Ages***

Influenced by the Council of Ephesus, the number of Marian feasts increased between the eighth and fifteenth centuries, and Marian piety and affection intensified. While this movement did not abandon the past, it marks a turning point in the doctrinal and spiritual history of the Church; and this included the association of Mary with the Eucharist.<sup>20</sup> Quite early, we find an anonymous, clearly Eucharistic tenth-century Marian prayer that begins:

Blessed spouse of God, fertile earth from which has sprouted without seed the ear of salvation of the world, make me worthy to eat it and to save myself. O Most Holy Altar, bearer of the Bread of Life, who out of compassion descended from heaven and bestowed on the world a new life, make me worthy to taste it and live it... God has taken substance from your Immaculate Blood!<sup>21</sup>

In the Melkite liturgy, Mary was considered the living tabernacle of the Incarnate Word and the mystical altar for the true and living bread from which we draw our nourishment. The Ethiopian liturgy refers to the Eucharistic sacrifice that is offered each day through Mary's

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<sup>19</sup> John Damascene, "An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith," book 4, chap. 13, trans. E.W. Watson and L. Pullan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing, 1899), New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/33044.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> Luigi Gambero, S.M., *Mary in the Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 20.

<sup>21</sup> *In Praise of Mary*, 92–93. By an anonymous author in the tenth century.

intercession.<sup>22</sup> With Peter Damian (1007–1072), we reach an important step in Eucharistic theology that contains Marian content. Perhaps the best example is the following:

Let us consider how much we owe to this most blessed Mother of God... Indeed, the body of Christ that the most blessed Mother bore, fostered in her bosom, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and nurtured with maternal love, that body, I say, and without a doubt not any other, we now receive from the holy altar, and we drink His blood as a sacrament of our redemption. This is what the Catholic believes, this is what the holy Church faithfully teaches.<sup>23</sup>

Another significant benchmark is St. Bonaventure (c. 1221–1274). He adds another dimension to the relationship between the Virgin Mary and the Eucharist—for just as the Body of Christ in the Incarnation was given to us by means of Mary, so too our Eucharistic offering and communion must be given through her hands.<sup>24</sup>

We can examine the hymns and poetry of the thirteenth century. The cult of the Virgin at that time showed signs of unprecedented growth in France. Here too, we find some allusions to the contribution of Mary—for example, in the French hymn *Mauvez arbres ne puet florir*.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Angelo Amato, S.D.B., “Reflections on Ecclesia de Eucharistia - 10” in *L'Osservatore Romano*, available at: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/reflections-on-ecclesia-de-eucharistia--10-3067>

<sup>23</sup> Deyanira Flores, “Discovering Mary in the Middle Ages, Peter Damian, Mother of the Bread of Life,” *Queen of All Hearts* 46, no. 5 (Jan-Feb 1996): 23. Here, Flores cites Sermo XLV, 743 A–B, but her article also contains other quotations of Damien on Mary’s contribution to the Eucharist.

<sup>24</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 209.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel E. O’Sullivan, *Marian Devotion in Thirteenth Century French Lyric* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 3, 141.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) also adds precision to the often used the expression “taking flesh from Mary.” In the *Summa*, Thomas addresses whether the flesh of Christ was conceived of the Virgin’s purest blood. His response:

as Christ came to heal what was corrupt, it was not fitting that He should bring corruption or diminution to the integrity of His Mother. Therefore it was becoming that Christ’s body should be formed not from the flesh or bones of the Virgin, but from her blood, which as yet is not actually a part, but is potentially the whole, as stated in *De Gener. Animal.* i. Hence, He is said to have taken flesh from the Virgin, not that the matter from which His body was formed was actual flesh, but blood, which is flesh potentially.<sup>26</sup>

From this text, one can propose that Mary, through her menstrual blood, is the *instrumental cause* of Christ’s flesh and bones—that is, His sacred humanity.

In the fourteenth century, we encounter the well-known Eucharistic hymn *Ave Verum Corpus*.<sup>27</sup> As James T. O’Connor suggests, the thoughts of this hymn in defense of the Real Presence are far older than the fourteenth century. O’Connor considers the opening line, *Ave verum corpus, natum de Maria Virgine*, as the first true link of Mary to the Eucharist, having provided the flesh for our bread, and Mary’s *fiat* at the Annunciation as the condition that makes

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 2 (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), III, q. 31, a. 5.

<sup>27</sup> For one Latin version, see Rubin Miri, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 56. Variations exist. The Latin in most contemporary hymnals is: “Ave verum Corpus, natum de Maria Virgine; vere passum, immolatum in cruce pro homine: cuius latus perforatum vero fluxit [or: aqua et] sanguine: esto nobis praegustatum in mortis examine. O clemens, O pie, O dulcis Iesu, Fili Mariae [or: O Iesu dulcis, O Iesu pie, O Iesu, fili Mariae. Miserere mei]. Amen.”

our eating possible. *Ave Verum* then points to the truth that the Eucharistic species is the very flesh that God has taken from her and that is now our food, the very Body born of Mary, the one who gave Him our flesh.<sup>28</sup>

Lastly, we close this period with John Gerson (1363–1429), who introduces the first prominent Marian-Eucharistic title, Mother of the Eucharist. In doing so, he recognizes, as others before him have, the contribution of Mary in enfleshing the Eucharistic Christ. She is the Mother of the Eucharist, because she is the Mother of Grace.<sup>29</sup> Gerson writes:

You are the Mother of the Eucharist because you are the Mother of good grace. More than anyone else, after your Son, you were aware of this Mystery hidden from the ages.<sup>30</sup>

And, because of this intimate bond with the Eucharist, he asks Mary for the gift of grace:

We turn to you, then, O glorious Virgin, to beg this grace, since you are the one in whom was created and formed the Bread of Life, the Bread of Angels.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> James T. O'Connor, "Mary and the Eucharist," *Marian Studies* 34 (1983): 52–54.

<sup>29</sup> Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 285–286.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 287.

***D. Post Middle Ages  
(Fifteenth–Eighteenth  
Centuries)***

During the years following the Middle Ages, our Lady’s association with the Eucharist becomes more prominent in artwork and, in an important way, launches a series of new Marian-Eucharistic titles. Two examples are *The Virgin of the Grain* (1470; Figure 1) by the early Renaissance Italian painter Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi (Sandro Botticelli, 1445–1510)<sup>32</sup> and the *Inmaculada Concepción con Eucaristía* (Figure 2) by the seventeenth-century Ecuadorian painter Miguel de Santiago.<sup>33</sup>



*Figure 1. Virgin of the Grain, Sandro Botticelli (c. 1444–1515)*



*Figure 2. Inmaculada Concepción con Eucaristía*

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<sup>32</sup> Alan Chong, “Virgin and Child with an Angel,” in *Eye of the Beholder*, ed. by Alan Chong et al. (Boston: ISGM and Beacon Press, 2003), 58.

<sup>33</sup> Amato, *Reflections*, 15. Cites A. Moreno Proaño, *Tesoros Artísticos* (Guayaquil-Quito: Museo Filanbanco, 1983).



Figure 3. *The Virgin-Monstrance*



Figure 4. *Our Lady of the Sierra*

the world and cross in His hand) also seems likely to have

Then, we have the appearance of a sacred vessel, the *Virgin—Monstrance* (or sometimes, *Virgin in the Monstrance*). Modeled after an already existing twelfth century wooden statue of the *Virgin and Child*, this vessel appears by 1651 in the Cathedral Notre-Dame de la Garde in Marseille (Figure 3).<sup>34</sup> On the *Virgin's* right arm, one might place an ostensory to expose the Holy Sacrament to the view of the worshipers. Even earlier, from 1560, we find *Our Lady of the Sierra* (Figure 4)—to which St. Pascal Bayon had devotion—with the Host above the head of *Our Lady*.<sup>35</sup>

The above-described early statuary of the *Virgin and Child* (Mary often with an olive branch and Jesus with

<sup>34</sup> Information and image provided by Stéphane Odier, Secrétaire Général, Basilique Notre-Dame de la Garde. See also John O'Brien, A.M., *A History of the Mass and its Ceremonies in the Eastern and Western Church*, 8th ed., (New York: Catholic Publication Society, 1881), 79.

<sup>35</sup> Oswald Stanisforth, O.S.F.C., *The Saint of the Eucharist* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1908), 10.



*Figure 5. Our Lady of Peace*



*Figure 6. Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament*

inspired a later representation of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament that appeared during the Eymardian period around 1860 (discussed below) and is still found today. Compare Figure 5 (Our Lady of Peace) and Figure 6 (Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament). The Infant in Figure 6 now holds a chalice in one hand and a Host in the other.

Returning to the writers, we find in sixteenth-century Spain a Marian-Eucharistic reference by St. John of Avila (1499-1569) referring to the Eucharist as “the bread of the



Virgin.”<sup>36</sup> St. Alphonsus Ligouri (1696–1787), writing in Italy, focuses to a significant extent on Our Lady and Eucharistic adoration. From his classic, *The Glories of Mary*:

She is like the merchant’s ship, she bringeth her bread from afar ... the living bread which came down from heaven to give us life eternal.<sup>37</sup>

### ***E. The French School***

The contribution of the French school of spirituality (roughly 1600–1800) to Marian-Eucharistic theology is significant in establishing a theological foundation for these titles. It provides us with a deep insight, not only into the Incarnation and the mysteries of Christ, but also into the role of Mary in the Christian life highlighted by her close union with the Eucharistic Christ as Mother of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>38</sup> This is the school of Cardinal Pierre de Bérulle (1575–1629) and his disciple Fr. Jean-Jacques Olier (1608–1657); it is the school of the Sulpicians and the Eudists. Significant are

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<sup>36</sup> John of Avila, Sermon 39:28, cited in Canon J. Esquerda Bifet, “Marian Spirituality and the Eucharistic Presence of Christ,” *Christ to the World* 44, no. 3 (2004), 267.

<sup>37</sup> Eugene Grimm, *The Glories of Mary* (Brooklyn, NY: Redemptoris Fathers, 1931), chap. 5, sect. 2, no. 168; a similar version is also in sect. 2, no. 188 of an older version translated from the Italian (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1888). These similar versions appear with these biblical citations: “She is like the merchant’s ship, she bringeth her bread from afar” (Facta est quasi navis institoris, de longe portans panem suum; Prv 31:14) and “Mary was this fortunate ship that brought us Jesus Christ from heaven, who is the living bread that comes down from heaven to give us eternal life, as he himself says: I am the living bread, which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever” (Ego sum Panis vivus, qui de coelo descendi; si quis manducaverit ex hoc Pane, vivet in aeternum; Jn 6:51).

<sup>38</sup> Stefano De Fiores, ed., *Jesus Living in Mary, Handbook of the Spirituality of St. Louis Marie de Montfort* (Bay Shore, NY: Montfort Publications, 1994), 381.

Olier's methods for prayer and Eucharistic adoration.<sup>39</sup> In this same tradition, the writings of St. John Eudes (1601–1680)—along with the apparitions of Our Lord to Margaret Mary Alacoque in 1675—became a stimulus to promote the union of the two hearts.<sup>40</sup>

There is no better example of this school than St. Louis de Montfort (1673–1716). For him, Mary gave the Redeemer His flesh and blood; it follows, therefore, that she cannot but be involved in the mysteries that are a unique memorial of the same flesh and blood—that is, the Eucharist.<sup>41</sup> Here are two examples:

She gives them to eat of the most exquisite meats of the table of God; for she gives them to eat of the bread of life, which she herself has formed (*Ecclus.* 24:26).<sup>42</sup>

It was you, Virgin Mary, / Who gave us this body and blood / Which raises our status so high / that it is beyond the reach of the angels. May you be blessed throughout the world / For giving us such a great gift.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>40</sup> John Eudes, *The Admirable Heart of Mary* (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2006), chap. 2. The close union between Mary and the Eucharist, expressed in the French School, is especially important when one examines Our Lady's presence during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. John Paul II makes note of this. Within the context of the Mass, the Blessed Virgin Mary relates to the Eucharist in her capacity as Mother of the Mystical Body of Christ. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 15. Also see O'Connor, "Mary and the Eucharist," 58–59.

<sup>41</sup> De Fiores, *Jesus Living in Mary*, 381.

<sup>42</sup> Louis Marie de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, trans. Frederick William Faber (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1941), 130–131 (no. 208). A slightly different translation of no. 208 is available in an edition published by Montfort Publications, Bayshore, NY, in 1980.

<sup>43</sup> De Fiores, *Jesus Living in Mary*, 382. See Hymn 134:11.

## ***F. The Nineteenth Century***

Additional Marian-Eucharistic titles emerge as we enter the nineteenth century. Prominent is *The Virgin of the Host*, the title of the 1841 painting (Figure 7) by the French artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique

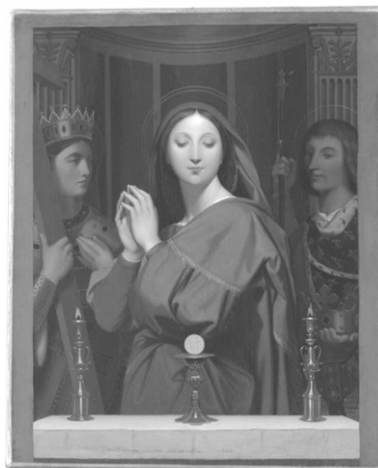
Ingres (1780–1867).

Several later contemporary versions of this painting exist today.<sup>44</sup>

In 1855, we find a significant work, *The Blessed Sacrament, or The Works and Ways of God*,<sup>45</sup> by Fr. Frederick William Faber (1814–1863), an Anglican convert and proponent of John Henry Newman.

Falling short of any title and using a syllogistic approach, he nevertheless enforces the theological foundations for Marian-Eucharistic titles by recognizing the ongoing intimate bond between Mary and her Son in the Eucharist:

The devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is the same as a devotion to the Sacred Infancy. But devotion to the Sacred Infancy is in fact



*Figure 7. The Virgin of the Host, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867)*

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<sup>44</sup> Nicholas J. Santoro, *Mary in our Life, Atlas of the Names and Titles of Mary, The Mother of Jesus, and Their Place in Marian Devotion* (Bloomington, IN: Universe Publishing, 2011), 121. Also see “The Virgin Adoring the Host” The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed January 24, 2017, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/438434>.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick William Faber, *The Blessed Sacrament, or The Works and Ways of God* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 1978).

devotion to our Blessed Lady. Therefore devotion to our Blessed Lady is devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. [And] Who can doubt that there is a close and invariable connection between devotion to our dear Mother and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament? ... [T]he lives of the Saints and the teaching of spiritual books are both full of it.<sup>46</sup>

### III. The Contribution of St. Peter Julian Eymard

In nineteenth-century France, we arrive at the appearance of the title Our Lady of the (Most) Blessed Sacrament. St. Peter Julian Eymard, often called the Priest and Apostle of the Eucharist (Figure 8), enters unto the scene. The accounts of his life have been documented by such notables as Albert Tesnière, Andre



*Figure 8. Father Raymond de Cuers (left) and St. Peter Julian Eymard*

Guillon, Norman Pelletier, Martin Dempsey, and others. Some, such as Laureat Saint-Pierre (1894–1973) and Fr. Donald Cave (1927–2006), were members of the two religious congregations founded by Eymard.<sup>47</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>47</sup> Cave, for example, was an Australian member of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament. He produced more than a dozen studies of Eymard's life.

biographical sketch to follow is primarily from Damien Cash's work, *The Road to Emmaus*.<sup>48</sup>

### ***A. Biographical Background***

Peter Julian was born in the small predominately Catholic mining town of La Mure, France, in 1811. It is clear that he was not only pious and saintly from an early age but also had a growing devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and an intense devotion to Mary, who was close to his heart.<sup>49</sup>

Those influencing the direction he would take included Fr. Jean-Joseph Touche, a member of a small group of missionary priests in Provence led by Fr. (later Bishop) Eugène de Mazenod, who facilitated Eymard's admittance to the diocesan seminary in 1831. Eymard was ordained in 1834. He initially served as a diocesan priest until August 20, 1839, when he entered the Society of Mary novitiate at Lyons.<sup>50</sup>

Now immersed in religious life, Peter Julian trained at the Marist College of Belley and made his profession in the Society in 1840. Apart from his devotion to Mary, he also became acquainted with deeper aspects of Marist spirituality, including the virtues of a hidden and humble life.<sup>51</sup> In 1844, Eymard became the provincial of the Society of Mary and, later, visitor-general.<sup>52</sup> However, on a visit to Paris in January 1849, he encountered groups practicing sustained

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<sup>48</sup> Damien Cash, *The Road to Emmaus: A History of the Blessed Sacrament Congregation in Australia* (Melbourne: Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament in associatn with David Lovell Publishing, 2007), 6–24.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–10.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Eucharistic worship, including members of the Association of Nocturnal Adorers.<sup>53</sup> Notable in these initial groups was a fellow priest, Raymond de Cuers (Figure 8), who would later play a major role not only in the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament's later history but also in the genesis of the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. As Cave and others have argued, Eymard's Eucharistic spirituality had been evolving, but his contact with the Paris group was a catalyst that reaffirmed his desire for the practice of Eucharistic worship. Eymard also was struck by the general lack of devotion of his time to the Eucharist and the sacrileges committed against it.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the seeds were sown for the establishment of a men's group—hopefully within the Marist order—with a Eucharistic mission similar to that of the Paris group to be a source of spiritual nourishment for both priests and laity. But this was not to be. Subsequently, Eymard's relations with the Marists became strained. His desire to establish a separate fraternity for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was not seen as part of the charism of the Marists.<sup>55</sup>

On May 13, 1856, after Eymard separated from the Marists, we come to the founding of the Society of the Most Blessed Sacrament—now known as Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament—which received archdiocesan approbation in Paris later that year. Eymard believed that God had truly placed this idea in his heart.<sup>56</sup> The Society is dedicated to perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament,

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 13.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 13, 14.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 14–16.

preaching the Forty Hours, preparation for first Communion, and offering retreats. Eymard established a common rule for the members of the society and worked toward papal approval. He was granted a writ of praise by Pius IX in 1859.

Despite early difficulties, the Congregation continued to grow.<sup>57</sup> After declining health, Peter Julian Eymard died peacefully on August 1, 1868, at the age of 57 in La Mure. He was beatified by Pius XI in 1925 and canonized by John XXIII on December 9, 1962.<sup>58</sup>

Eymard himself published very little. In 1850, while still a Marist, he published a pamphlet on the Stations and later several versions of the constitutions of the Congregation. He also wrote eight articles between 1864 and 1866 for his newly published *Bulletin of All That Concerns the Eucharist under the Direction of Rev. Fr. Eymard*. Shortly after Eymard's death, Albert Tesnière, a member of the Congregation, began the publication of a series of texts drawn from various sources, notably from Eymard's own notes and jottings and from notes taken by others of his talks, sermons, and conferences.<sup>59</sup>

### ***B. Genesis of Title: Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament***

A tightly organized community of adorers already present in Marseilles became the seed for establishing a second community of Eymard's Congregation. In 1859, after Eymard's first companion, Raymond de Cuers, went to

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–19.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> A complete listing of Eymard sources can be found at “Resources,” Eymard Places, <https://eymardianplaces.com/eymard-a-guide-to-sources/>. Details of the sources of Eymard cited in my essay can be found on this site.

Marseilles to lay the foundations for this second community, Eymard's good friend, Bishop de Mazenod, called Eymard to Marseilles to help inaugurate it.

Eymard's move to Marseilles is significant in the history of the Congregation. First, it was the Congregation's first religious community to be established outside Paris. Then, it was also here where the Congregation's character or model of religious life developed and became a major influence on the later development of their mission and culture.<sup>60</sup> It is also in Marseilles where the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament emerged and has since been credited to St. Eymard. However, as we shall now see, crediting its genesis to Eymard is rather problematic.

### **1. Support for Eymard as the Title's Originator**

We begin with the biographer Norman Pelletier, who would write: "The first public devotion expressed to Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament began here [in Marseilles]." <sup>61</sup> If true, then this would explain the appearance of the title in Eymard's published writings and prayers between 1859 and 1868. Most biographical sketches of Eymard consider 1868 the *official* inaugural use of the title by the saint. For example, biographer André Guitton writes that just before his death, on May 1, 1868, while inaugurating the Month of Mary at the novitiate of Saint-Maurice near Paris, Fr. Eymard invited his sons to honor Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament

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<sup>60</sup> Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 18–19. See also "Marseille," Eymard Places (2017), <https://eymardianplaces.com/marseille/>.

<sup>61</sup> Norman B. Pelletier, S.S.S., *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late* (Canton, OH: Blessed Sacrament Fathers & St. Pauls/Alba House, 2002), 93–94.



as his final testimony of his devotion to Mary.<sup>62</sup> This claim originated with, and was described in more detail by, the early and first biographer Albert Tesnière during the final years of Eymard's life. Tesnière's 1870 work, *The Priest of the Eucharist, A Sketch of His Life*, was published just two years after Eymard's death, but many editions and translations of this work have been since produced as the *source* material for Eymard's biographies.<sup>63</sup> In this work, Tesnière writes:

On the first of May, 1868, being at St. Maurice, a little country house which he had taken, far away from the noise and bustle of Paris, to be, as he expressed it, "a little paradise for such of the members of the Adoration as Our Lord called to a more contemplative life," Father Eymard opened the Exercises for the month of Mary. He wound up a beautiful allocution on our duties toward this good Mother by the following words: "Well, let us honour Mary under the title of 'Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.' Yes, let us say, with confidence and love, 'Our Lady of the Most Holy Sacrament, Mother and Model for all adorers, pray for us who have recourse to you!'"

He continues:

The good father ... felt as if he had been able to thus pay a debt of gratitude to her who had first led him to the tabernacle, and who sustained him and encouraged him with such maternal solicitude in

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. André Guitton, S.S.S., *Peter Julian Eymard: Apostle of the Eucharist*, trans. Conrad Goulet (Ponteranica, Italy: Centro Eucharistico, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> Just one example: Albert Tesnière, *The Priest of the Eucharist, A Sketch of His Life* (London: Burns & Gates, 1881), 47.

the foundation of his society. “Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament—it is only a new name for an ancient truth,” he would say.<sup>64</sup>

Tesnière’s account of Eymard’s 1868 use of the title is widely accepted today; this attribution appears in numerous publications and website biographies.<sup>65</sup>

## 2. The Veracity of the Accounts by Tesnière

Having established the source for crediting the title to Eymard, we need to examine whether Tesnière’s account is credible and whether there is evidence from the hand of Eymard himself. The previously noted biographer, Fr. Donald Cave—who has recently produced numerous scholarly studies on the life and writings of Eymard—is somewhat skeptical of the accuracy of Tesnière’s source materials. Another skeptic is the prominent Fr. Anthony McSweeney.<sup>66</sup> As he noted, the historical analysis by Laureat Saint-Pierre, S.S.S., also disputes Tesnière’s source materials.<sup>67</sup> Tesnière’s work is valuable, but there are some

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 99–100.

<sup>65</sup> Examples showing that Eymard *avored* the title include Stephano Manelli in *Jesus Our Eucharistic Love*, (New Bedford: Academy of the Immaculate, 1996), 108; that Eymard *entitled* or “coined” Our Lady as such include Foley in *Mary and the Eucharist*, 30, 47, 105, 133; and that Eymard did so specifically in the year 1868 include popular Catholic websites such as “Easter, May 13th: Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Fatima,” Catholic Culture, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/calendar/day.cfm?date=2016-05-13>.

<sup>66</sup> Donald Cave, S.S.S., “Eucharistic Myths: A Suggested Means of Illustrating the Differences between Conceptions of the ‘Eucharistic Life’ as Held by Eymard in his Later Years, and Tesnière (de Cuers),” in *The Vow of the Personality*, vol 7 of *Etudes sur les origines de la Congrégation du Saint-Sacrement* (Rome: S.S.S., 2001), 127-136.

<sup>67</sup> Anthony McSweeney, S.S.S., “Our Lady of the Cenacle: Some Reflections Concerning the Feast of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament,” Blessed Sacrament Congregation of Australia,

problems with it. Besides destroying some of the original documents, Tesnière suppressed and rewrote others to present an image of Eymard that conformed to an orthodox, or respectable, image of Eymard appropriate for his times.<sup>68</sup> Tesnière did preserve many of Eymard's documents and accounts of his conversations, but his work at times is seriously flawed.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, Tesnière's claim that the first official use of the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament was in 1868—as quoted from his biography *The Priest of the Eucharist*—must be viewed as questionable. Also questionable is the use of the title in Eymard's published works while in Marseilles.

### 3. Opposing View: Dueling Titles

To resolve this matter, not only do we now have more recent biographical writings such as those of Cave and McSweeney, but we also have the correspondence of Eymard himself during the 1850s as translated and republished by Sr. Catherine Marie Caron, S.S.S.<sup>70</sup> These letters shed more light on the intentions of St. Eymard and the apparent genesis of the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

What surfaces is a distinct difference in the perception of how Eymard viewed the Congregation from that of his first companion, Fr. Raymond de Cuers. After arriving in

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<http://blessedsacrament.org.au/ptrcod/spirituality/tween/pj2.pdf>.

<sup>68</sup> Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 22. See also “Eymard: A Guide to Sources of Information,” Eymardian Places, <https://eymardianplaces.com/eymard-a-guide-to-sources/>.

<sup>69</sup> McSweeney, “Our Lady of the Cenacle.”

<sup>70</sup> See Catherine Marie Caron, S.S.S., ed. and trans., *Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard: Founder Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers, Congregation of the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament and a Eucharistic Association for the Laity*, 6 vols. (Albuquerque: Guynes, 1995).

Marseilles, where there was a nocturnal adoration society already established, de Cuers exhibited great zeal and put his stamp on the community that would enhance the richness of Eucharistic exposition.<sup>71</sup> But with this zeal, there also came views divergent to those of Eymard. While the Marseilles community tended to develop according to de Cuers's preoccupation with prayer and perpetual adoration, it was unlike the model developed by Eymard at Paris, which was more along apostolic lines, especially in the preparation of children for the sacraments.<sup>72</sup> This would lead to a clash between the two—a painful separation, as Mc Sweeney would call it. The open and flexible Eymard emphasized prayer, the gift of self, and concern for the private needs of secular clergy and religious priests and brothers. The approach of de Cuers was a more austere model of Eucharistic life suitable only for priests like himself. He was influenced by his experience in the navy to focus on order and discipline.<sup>73</sup> Eymard viewed de Cuers's approach as “old ideas,” clinging to “immobility as the guarantee of fidelity.”<sup>74</sup>

Both de Cuers and Tesnière would have a significant influence on the Congregation in the years that followed Eymard's death. After Eymard was elected as Superior General in 1865, the apostolic model was to endure for the time being.<sup>75</sup> However, after Eymard's death, and with the biographer Tesnière in de Cuers's camp, the influence of de

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<sup>71</sup> Pelletier, *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, 93–94.

<sup>72</sup> Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 18. Cites Pelletier, *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*, 94–95.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 19–21.

<sup>74</sup> McSweeney, “Our Lady of the Cenacle.”

<sup>75</sup> Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 21.

Cuers survived over time. In terms of history, Tesnière passed on as Eymard's a heritage that was, in fact, more akin to the ideas and practices of de Cuers. These views of de Cuers were eventually accepted by the Congregation as authentic, at least until the ground breaking works of Laureat Saint-Pierre (1968) and Donald Cave (1969).<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Tesnière was principally responsible for the 1874 text on Marian devotion that became part of the order's Constitutions in 1888. As Cave's findings suggest, Tesnière's portrayal of Eymard, endorsed by many others, produces an outcome that is overly simplistic, with an unjustified emphasis placed on piety, duty, and devotion in contrast to the central elements of Eymard's spirituality.<sup>77</sup> McSweeney concludes:

That is exactly what happened in the case of Mary's title. Here it was Tesnière, above all, who made sure that Father de Cuers' ideas [which included the use of this title], attributed to Eymard, should become dominant in the Congregation.... [T]he title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is never found in any of the drafts of the Constitutions from Eymard's hand, although he certainly did use it on occasion and even spoke warmly about it at least once, according once again to Tesnière, a month or two before his death.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> McSweeney, "Our Lady of the Cenacle."

<sup>77</sup> Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 23. See also "Eymard: A Guide to Sources of Information," Eymardian Places, <https://eymardianplaces.com/eymard-a-guide-to-sources/>.

<sup>78</sup> McSweeney, "Our Lady of the Cenacle." He also cites Guitton, from *Apostle of the Eucharist*, 326, when noting: "'We shall honour Mary under the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament!' This declaration was reported two years after Eymard's death by Tesnière. As Cave has documented, Tesnière's Marian piety was the object of criticism for its notable exaggerations even in his own time."

#### 4. Evidence from Eymard's Correspondence

To support the above conclusion, McSweeney notes that it was de Cuers, not St. Eymard, who initially gave the name Religious of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament to his candidates for the women's branch of the Congregation. And, it was de Cuers, not Eymard, who was apparently inspired by the representations of Our Lady as the Virgin-Monstrance that were well known in his Marseilles tradition. Interestingly too, it was not Eymard, but de Cuers, who also dedicated the chapel at Marseilles to Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in 1859.<sup>79</sup>

From Sr. Catherine Marie Caron's work, we find more evidence of the same. In Eymard's letter of May 6, 1859, commenting on the chapel's title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, he called it "a fine idea." Clearly, the title was not his own. As Eymard says in the letter: "May God be praised for the fine idea to have a chapel to Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament! I'm very happy about it."<sup>80</sup> Once introduced to the title, we find that Eymard supported its use. In his letter of April 13, 1861, he refers to a proposed medal with the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament to be struck. The medal was not his idea, but he writes: "They say this idea is new and fine; what do you think of it?"<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> McSweeney, "Our Lady of the Cenacle." Regarding the Virgin-Monstrance (noted above), McSweeney cites Lauréat Saint-Pierre, S.S.S., from *L'heure du cénacle dans la vie et le œuvres de Pierre-Julien Éymard. Étude d'une progression dans l'expérience du mystère eucharistique* (Lyons: Lescuyer, 1968), 225. Regarding the naming of the chapel, McSweeney again cites Guitton, from *Apostle of the Eucharist*, 134. Probable date of the chapel (1859) is from correspondence received from Damien Cash.

<sup>80</sup> Eymard's Letter to Count Jean Raymond de Cuers (Fr. de Cuers) on May 6, 1859; Doc. 823, in Caron, *Life and Letters*, 3:121.

<sup>81</sup> Eymard's Letter to Count Jean Raymond de Cuers on April 13, 1861; Doc.

## 5. Queen of the Cenacle

In 1856, the chapel that Eymard built in Paris was named the Cenacle after the upstairs room that the apostles used in Jerusalem.<sup>82</sup> And in the 1860 draft of Eymard's Constitutions, he wrote of Mary, as he typically did in relation to the Cenacle, under the title of Queen of the Cenacle. Citing the 1968 work of Saint-Pierre, McSweeney notes:

Saint-Pierre's historical work has restored to us Eymard's mature view of the role of Mary in relation to the Eucharistic mystery. In its biblical and theological depth it is a perennially valuable one, provided we understand it as Eymard did, namely, as seeing in Mary a model for those in whom Christ wishes to become incarnate once again through holy communion.<sup>83</sup>

It is interesting that Eymard uses an analogy to the Cenacle. The order of Our Lady of the Cenacle was founded in 1826 at La Louvesc, France, near the tomb of St. John Francis Regis, not far from Lyons, about 60 miles from Eymard's home town. This order honors particularly—and proposes to itself for its model—the retirement of the Blessed Virgin in the Cenacle. The practices of the order included perpetual prayer, the recitation of the Divine Office, and the daily Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Could

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1029, in Caron, *Life and Letters*, 3:341. Note that the medal design (Our Lady holding Jesus who holds both a ciborium and the host) is the template for the statue of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament still replicated to this day, as will be discussed below. This also is similar to the French "Cistercian monstrance" noted above. This representation was perhaps an influencing factor for de Cuers.

<sup>82</sup> Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 16.

<sup>83</sup> McSweeney, "Our Lady of the Cenacle."

this have influenced Eymard?<sup>84</sup> His 1867–1868 reflections on Mary under the title of Queen of the Cenacle similarly stress the interiority of the Cenacle, of the Kingdom of God, and of the growth of Jesus Christ in us. Mary’s role is that of spouse and mother, presented to us as “partakers of the broken bread and as the model of adoration in spirit and in truth.” The Word Incarnate becomes the model of union with God “and in the gift of self, that living without self-ownership, the consequence of the wedding banquet.”<sup>85</sup>

To support this assessment, McSweeney refers to texts by Eymard.<sup>86</sup> First, from March 25, 1867:

Today’s feast is all interior, it is a feast of communion. In communion, we incarnate Jesus Christ in us. Communion is the goal of the Incarnation. By receiving worthily, we enter into God’s plan to complete it. Mary did not want to be alone in carrying Jesus. May the Lord find in us a fitting dwelling as he did in Mary.

And, from March 26, 1868:

And the Word was made ... bread. We receive Jesus Christ. In that way, the Eucharist is the extension of the Incarnation: and he dwelt

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. Rev. Fr. Felix, *Our Lady of the Cenacle or of The Retreat*, trans. Miss Deak (New York: Lafayette Press, 1896). This is the English translation of the original work *Notre Dame Du Cenacle* published in 1885. Several passages are strikingly similar to some text in the works of Eymard. For example: “Where more appropriately than in the Place of the Holy Apostles could this new fire of the apostolic life be kindled? As everywhere else, it commenced there in the most humble manner, and under the roof of a palace, it still recalled Bethlehem and Nazareth. It recalled likewise the high and spacious room which was the first Cenacle. This was for the Society a circumstance of immense importance, for which it was not possible to too much thank the God of all blessings and Our Lady of the Cenacle.... Such are the wishes that, in concluding we form for the future of Our Lady in the Cenacle” (182).

<sup>85</sup> McSweeney, “Our Lady of the Cenacle.”

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*



among us... We need not envy our Blessed Mother. Our Lord gave himself to us to satisfy his love. And if you love our Lord in return, as Mary did, you become like a mother, begetting Jesus in you and able to engender him in others.

Taken in this sense, McSweeney's assessment is that the title Queen of the Cenacle has a richer content that far surpasses the *devotional* character of the approach associated with the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Disagreeing with Tenailon's value of the title noted in the Introduction of this essay, he states:

The image of the Cenacle calls to mind the Last Supper, but also the gathered believers of the first community, about Mary the Lord's Mother, awaiting in prayer the coming of the Spirit. It then brings to mind the Spirit's powerful outpouring upon them with loud wind and enkindled flames, empowering them for mission. Thereafter it will be the place of gathering for the breaking of the bread in community, where the members are refreshed in their faith, deepen their union with Christ and one another, and are empowered once again for their mission.

The title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, by contrast, is purely devotional in nature, simply linking Mary and the Sacrament without any special content. It carries none of the dynamic meaning we have suggested above, being incapable of awakening any of these powerful echoes so important for our understanding of our life and mission as believers. For that reason, the evocation of the Mary in the Cenacle is to be preferred.<sup>87</sup>

Just a sampling of the letters from the hand of Eymard translated by Sr. Caron bears out Eymard's preference for

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

the title Mary, Queen of the Cenacle, significantly expressed already by him at this time to Pius IX. May 1856:

What I desired most was to begin my retreat with the Queen of the Cenacle.<sup>88</sup>

September 24, 1856:

This divine Queen of the Cenacle leads us and directs us there. It's under this beautiful title of Our Lady of the Cenacle that we honor her.<sup>89</sup>

May 24, 1862:

The divine Queen of the Cenacle will be your advisor and guide for this eucharistic life.<sup>90</sup>

## **6. Summary and Conclusion**

So, what can we conclude from all of this? The title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament that appears in Eymard's writings had its origins in 1859, not 1868, and it must be credited to the congregation's co-founder Fr. Raymond de Cuers, not St. Eymard. Eymard expressly desired Queen of the Cenacle, a title that has not gained much traction in the years that followed. Perhaps it is time for its resuscitation.

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<sup>88</sup> Eymard's Letter to Mme. Sauvestre de la Bouraliere, Feast of the Ascension, May 1856; Doc. 566 in Caron, *Life and Letters*, 2:199–200.

<sup>89</sup> Eymard's Letter to Mme. Franchet, September 24, 1856; Doc. 627 in Caron, *Life and Letters*, 2:273.

<sup>90</sup> Eymard's Letter to Fr. Alexander Leroyer, May 24, 1861; Doc. 1128 in Caron, *Life and Letters*, 4:41.

## ***C. A Rich Legacy Left by Eymard***

### **1. Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in his Writings**

Regardless of the authorship, the title appears often in Eymard's published works. For example:

What did the Blessed Virgin do in the Cenacle? She adored. She was the Mother and the Queen of adorers. She was, in a word, our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament.<sup>91</sup>

[I]f we belong to the Son, we belong to the Mother; if we adore the Son, we ought to honor the Mother: therefore we are obliged, in order to continue in the grace of our vocation and participate fully in it, to give very special honor to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament.<sup>92</sup>

### **2. Eymardian Prayers and Hymns**

Numerous prayers to date have now been composed using the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Attributable to Eymard, the ejaculatory prayer, "Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, pray for us," is one of them; it is incorporated into the prayers of the nine-day novena to Our Lady under this title.<sup>93</sup> We also find a useful summation of the theological foundations for Marian-Eucharistic titles in this novena prayer:

O Virgin Immaculate, Mother of Jesus and our tender Mother, we invoke thee under the title of our Lady of the Most Blessed

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<sup>91</sup> Peter Julien Eymard, *Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament* (Cleveland: Eymard League, 1930), 4.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

Sacrament, because thou art the Mother of the Savior who lives in the Eucharist, and because it was from thee that He took the Flesh and Blood with which He there feeds us! We invoke thee under that title because, again, thou art the sovereign dispensatrix of all graces and, consequently, of those contained in the august Eucharist, also, because thou didst first fulfill the duties of the Eucharistic life, teaching us by example how to assist properly at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, how to communicate worthily, and how to visit frequently and piously the Most Blessed Sacrament. Pray for us, O Virgin Immaculate, our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Oh Virgin Mary, our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, the glory of Christians, the joy of the universal Church, and the hope of the world, pray for us. Kindle in all the faithful a lively devotion for the Most Holy Eucharist, so that they may all be made worthy to receive Holy Communion every day. Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, pray for us.<sup>94</sup>

#### **IV. Ecclesial Support**

By the twentieth century, the titles of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and Mother of the Holy Eucharist appear in papal addresses and writings and in devotions and prayers of the faithful. Pius X deserves special attention. His devotion to the Eucharist would eventually lead many to honor him with the title of Pope of the Blessed Sacrament. This devotion is reflected in this 1906 prayer (which had a 500-day indulgence attached):

O Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, glory of the Christian people, joy to the universal Church, salvation for the whole world, pray for us, and awaken in all believers a lively

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 176–178.

devotion toward the Most Holy Eucharist, that so they may be worthy to partake of it daily.<sup>95</sup>

On December 30, 1905, the pope would write the prayer, “Domina nostra Sanctissimi Sacramenti, ora pro nobis” (Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, pray for us), to which he attached a 300-day indulgence for its recitation. He is said to have stated that this title is perhaps the most meaningful of all.<sup>96</sup>

In 1921, under Benedict XV, the Sacred Congregation of Rites authorized the Congregation of the Most Blessed Sacrament to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament on May 13.<sup>97</sup> The title received further papal mention when John XXIII canonized St. Eymard in 1962.<sup>98</sup> John XXIII also writes:

Ah! Let us all do our best, so that no one may ever remove or tear away from the hearts of the people what God in Catholic doctrine and in the history of our land has so wonderfully joined together: the Eucharist and Our Lady.<sup>99</sup>

On September 12, 1963, Paul VI issued a decree with this title: The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Proclaimed the Principal Heavenly

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<sup>95</sup> *Raccolta*, 3rd ed., no. 383.

<sup>96</sup> Commentary, in Eymard, *Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament*, v.

<sup>97</sup> “Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament” *Salve Maria Regina*, vol. 46, no. 143, <http://www.salvemariaregina.info/SalveMariaRegina/SMR-143.html>.

<sup>98</sup> For an account of the canonization, see Cash, *Road to Emmaus*, 24, 243. For an English translation of John XXIII’s homily using the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, see “Homily of John XXIII,” Eymardian Places, accessed January 23, 2017, <https://eymardianplaces.com/homily-of-pope-john-xxiii/>.

<sup>99</sup> John XXIII, *Days of Devotion, Daily Meditations from the Good Shepherd Pope John XXIII* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 98.

Patroness of the Two Congregations of the Fathers and the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>100</sup>

With John Paul II, yet another title, Woman of the Eucharist, is introduced. In several documents, most notably *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, the Marian-Eucharistic relationship suggested by this title is reaffirmed and articulated in a concise manner and applied to us here and now. He writes:

Mary is a “woman of the Eucharist” in her whole life. The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery.<sup>101</sup>

John Paul II also used the title, Mother of the Eucharist. For example, in his address to members of the Almo Collegio Capranica Seminary in 2005, he closes with “May the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Eucharist, and beloved St. Agnes, the mystical bride of the Lamb, sustain you with their intercession and example.”<sup>102</sup>

## **V. Post-Eymardian Title Appearances**

### ***A. Prayer Cards***

Prayer cards of Our Lady with the Eucharist show up in the 1880s and especially at the turn of the century out of Paris

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<sup>100</sup> Paul VI, Proclamation on Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament (September 18, 1963), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_apl\\_19630918\\_nomen-recens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19630918_nomen-recens.html).

<sup>101</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53.

<sup>102</sup> Address of John Paul II to Members of the Almo Collegio Capranica Seminary (January 22, 2005), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2005/january/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20050122\\_collegio-capranica.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2005/january/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20050122_collegio-capranica.html).

(Images 9–13). While some are merely First Communion themes, a significant number incorporate short titles or ejaculations, such as “The Virgin of the Eucharist,” “Our Lady of the Eucharistic Heart, pray for us” (Figure 12), “Our Lady of the Eucharist,” “Virgin Adorer of the Host,” and “Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, pray for us” (Figure 13). This last card, which has a footnote noting Pius X’s 300-day indulgence, is perhaps most significant because it was printed in Paris, probably in 1906 or 1907, immediately following the December 1905 proclamation by Pius X noted above. Others from the early 1900s have invocations such as the following: “He who created me rested in my tabernacle” (Figure 9); “Mary has given us through Jesus heavenly Bread which opens the heavens to us” (Figure 10); “The Virgin of the Eucharist. O Mary, give us your heart so pure to love Jesus” (Figure 11).



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

### **B. Popular Devotionals**

Numerous popular devotionals and prayer manuals today mention various Eucharistic titles. Fr. Robert Fox calls Mary Our Lady of the Holy Eucharist because Jesus lived in her as a tabernacle and He took His human nature solely from her—because “it was her ‘yes’ to



the Will of God that gave us the Flesh and the Blood and the Soul of the God-Man we receive in Holy Communion.” He prays, “O Lady of the Holy Eucharist, obtain for me a great faith and love for your Son Incarnate in the Blessed Sacrament.”<sup>103</sup>

Fr. Richard Foley, in his work *Mary and the Eucharist*, highlights the close association of Mary with the Blessed Sacrament while frequently quoting Eymard. Fr. Foley himself uses both the title of Mother of the Eucharist<sup>104</sup> and the title of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament;<sup>105</sup> and he cites Eymard as the latter title’s originator.<sup>106</sup> In his popular devotional work *Jesus, Our Eucharistic Love*,<sup>107</sup> Fr. Stefano Manelli, F.I., provides numerous quotes from Church Fathers and popes. He, too, attributes the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament to Eymard.

### ***C. Religious Orders***

Besides the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, the Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist also celebrate May 13 as their primary feast day under the title Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration also regard May 13 as equally important.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Fox, *Marian Manual* (New Hope, KY: St. Martin de Porres Dominican Community, 1989), 81, 89.

<sup>104</sup> Foley, *Mary and the Eucharist*, 47, 55, 63, 74, 78, 80, 84, 98, 146, 182, 194.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 30, 47, 105, 133.

<sup>107</sup> Stefano Manelli, F.I., *Jesus Our Eucharistic Love* (New Bedford, MA: Academy of the Immaculate, 1996).

<sup>108</sup> Tom Perna, “‘Mondays with Mary’—Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament,” *Tom Perna* blog (May 13, 2013). The Dominican Sisters of Mary, Mother of the Eucharist was founded in 1997 by four members of the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia. Their motherhouse is in Ann Arbor,

## ***D. Churches, Schools, and Shrines***

Kings will lay their empires at her feet; nations will confide to her their safety; and wherever we find a throne erected to Jesus, there we shall find one dedicated to Mary: Mary's altar is always side by side with that of Jesus.<sup>109</sup>

There is still a close link between Our Lady's Eucharistic titles and a number of shrines and parishes throughout the world where the Eucharist is always the focal point. In a survey taken in the U.S. by the author of this essay, twelve parishes and chapels bear the name of one of these titles. Of these, the older ones were established in the East prior to 1930. Seven academies and schools are also so named.

## ***E. Private Revelations***

Messages from Our Lady's apparitions over the centuries have stressed the importance of the Eucharist in our spiritual life. Marian shrines established at these sites (e.g., Lourdes and Fatima) are primarily Eucharistic, having processions and celebrating Mass regularly.

References to Mary and the Eucharist appear most notably in the private revelations of Fr. Stefano Gobbi of Milan. In 1972, he began receiving inner locutions while praying in the Chapel of the Apparitions in Fatima. This was the beginning of the Marian Movement of Priests. Just as Our Lady called St. Eymard to gather together with her in "a cenacle of prayer," she asks for this same practice from both

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Michigan, in the Diocese of Lansing. "Who We Are," Dominican Sisters of Mary website, <https://www.sistersofmary.org>.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Julien Eymard, *Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament* (Cleveland, OH: Emmanuel Publishing, 1992), 51.

priests and the laity as part of this new movement. In the reported messages to Fr. Gobbi, Mary repeatedly uses the titles Mother of the Eucharist and Mother of the Blessed Sacrament.<sup>110</sup> She also conveys her intentions and concerns for Jesus in the tabernacle, where she says, He is “surrounded by much emptiness, much neglect and much ingratitude ... and the sacrileges which today form, around my Immaculate Heart, a painful crown of thorns.” Here is another reported message related to Mary and the Eucharist:

Just as in the Cenacle of Jerusalem the Apostles, reunited with me in prayer, prepared for the moment of the first Pentecost, so also, in the cenacle of my Immaculate Heart—and consequently in the cenacles where you are gathered in prayer—you apostles of these last times can, with your heavenly Mother, obtain a new effusion of the Holy Spirit (January 28 1984).

In a lengthy message received immediately after the recitation of the Rosary on August 8, 1986, in Vicenza, Italy, Mary says to Fr. Gobbi:

*I am the mother of the most Blessed Sacrament.* I became such by my *yes* because, at the moment of the incarnation, I made it possible for the Word of the Father to place Himself in my virginal womb, and, though I am also truly the Mother of God because Jesus is true God, my collaboration nevertheless took concrete form most of all in giving the Word his human nature....

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<sup>110</sup> See Stefano Gobbi, *The Marian Movement of Priests: To the Priests, Our Lady's Beloved Sons*, 18th ed. (1998), 471–475 (message no. 330). The messages received an Imprimatur in 1998 from Bishop Donald W. Montrose of Stockton, CA. The eighteenth edition covers the messages from 1973–1997.

*I am therefore the Mother of the Eucharist.* And, as mother, I am always at the side of my Son ... and I am still to be found wherever Jesus is present, in every tabernacle on earth.

## VI. Application Today

Let the adorer, united to Mary Adoratrix, apply himself with patience, with constancy, to the virtue of recollection, to the exercise of the contemplation of Jesus Christ.... Oh, happy the soul which penetrates, as Mary did, the sublimity of this mystery of love, who desires it, who asks it without ceasing, who incessantly exercises itself in it! The kingdom of God is within it!<sup>111</sup>

The significance of the title Mother of the Blessed Sacrament must be brought to light in contemporary times. How can this all be applied in today's parish setting?

In Eymard's time, it was the disrespect, lukewarmness, and lack of devotion to the Eucharist that inspired his vocation and laid the foundation for his new religious order. Our Lady told him that she wanted her divine Son honored in the Eucharist.<sup>112</sup> One has to conclude that it is her desire again today to reignite our Eucharistic fervor and devotions, for we again live in a time when attendance at Mass, reception of the Eucharist, belief in the Real Presence, and spending time before the Blessed Sacrament are dwindling.<sup>113</sup> Since Mary's role is to lead us to Christ, then

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<sup>111</sup> Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 151.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 136.

<sup>113</sup> *Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among U.S. Catholics* (February 2008), posted at Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, <http://cara.georgetown.edu/sacraments.html>. See also "5 facts about Communion and American Catholics," Pew Research Center (September 24, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/09/24/5-facts-about-communion-and-american-catholics/>.

certainly she is going to point us to the Eucharist. She is going to point us to her Son, who is present in the Eucharist, whole and entire, God and man, in His Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. It is no accident then that, when there is a decline in Marian devotion, in Marian spirituality, there is also a corresponding decline in our Eucharistic devotions. As we have learned, there is an inseparable bond between Mary and the Eucharist. This essay shows that this is the consistent teaching of the Church.

How do the titles Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and Queen of the Cenacle relate to us in our contemporary society? Eymard says, “*the only true devotion to the Eucharist will be found in souls formed by Mary.*”<sup>114</sup> By this insight, we see that the application of the title here and now can be realized by *applying* the teachings of Eymard. By following his example, we can obtain, through Our Lady, the grace we need to deepen our faith and enter into the riches of the Eucharist through sacramental preparation and sustained Eucharistic Adoration. Toward this end, the following twelve points of reflection—distilled from Eymard’s work—are provided as the choice fruits for restoring our Eucharistic fervor:

*1. Look to Mary to guide us and to foster devotion to the Eucharist.* Beyond the title Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, Eymard assigned Our Lady the additional titles of Most Blessed Virgin Adoratrix, Queen and Mother of Adorers, and Queen of the Cenacle.<sup>115</sup> These relate to the

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<sup>114</sup> Peter Julien Eymard, *In the Light of the Monstrance*, 232.

<sup>115</sup> Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 47.

role Mary plays here and now to inflame our hearts with a great love for the Eucharist. As Eymard says:

Mary's one desire was ... to glorify Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament and to make him known, loved and served by all.<sup>116</sup>

She was consumed with the desire to make Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament known to all, to inflame all hearts with His love, to see them enchained to His loving service.<sup>117</sup>

Our Lady's mission is to form Jesus in us.... It is she that will form a guard of honor for Jesus in the Eucharist; it is she that will train His servants.<sup>118</sup>

2. *Imitate the practices in the early Cenacle.* The Marian-Eucharistic writings of John Paul II in several ways parallel those of Eymard. For example, they both allude to Mary as a model of Eucharistic devotion in terms of the Cenacle, or the Upper Room. John Paul II says:

we know that she was present among the Apostles who prayed "with one accord" (cf. *Acts* 1:14) *in the first community which gathered after the Ascension in expectation of Pentecost.* Certainly Mary must have been present at the Eucharistic celebrations of the first generation of Christians, who were devoted to "the breaking of bread" (*Acts* 2:42).<sup>119</sup>

It is significant that Eymard, like John Paul II, uses this setting to describe what Mary's Eucharistic life was like in

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<sup>116</sup> Peter Julien Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 131.

<sup>117</sup> Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 132–133.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 94–96.

<sup>119</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53.

the Cenacle, and then he applies this to our Marian-Eucharistic devotion for today.

The life of Mary in the cenaculum should be the type of yours. Throw yourself on your knees by her side; adore with her.... A current of grace united the Heart of Jesus in the Host with the heart of Mary the adorer. Two flames mingled in one fire—A fire of glory and of love. God was perfectly adored by His Mother, who was His creation.<sup>120</sup>

[A]mong the mysteries of the life of Mary, there is one that summarizes them all in their sacredness and in their teachings; it is the life of Mary in the Cenacle; honoring the Eucharistic life of Jesus.... Let adorers therefore study the life of Mary in the Cenacle, let them honor and serve Jesus in union with Mary, and they will soon become perfect adorers.<sup>121</sup>

Eymard invokes Mary under the title of Mary Adoratrix because her virtues in the Cenacle reached the highest degree of perfection.<sup>122</sup> This also must be our goal:

Let adorers therefore study the life of Mary in the Cenacle, let them honor and serve Jesus in union with Mary, and they will soon become perfect adorers. In the Cenacle Mary adored the most holy Eucharist unceasingly; she lived the Eucharistic life of Jesus; she

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<sup>120</sup> Tesnière, *A Sketch*, 102.

<sup>121</sup> Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*. 115–116. Eymard was not the first to speculate on the nature of the Eucharistic life of Mary. Prior saints and Christian writers did the same. For example, the Franciscan Fiar Bernadine de Bustis (d. 1550) writes that St. Albert, applying Jn 6:53–58, demonstrated that Mary devoutly received the Eucharist making up for the desolation of her Son's physical absence (Gambero, *Mary in the Middle Ages*, 326–7).

<sup>122</sup> Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 6.

devoted herself to the glory of Jesus and to his Eucharistic kingdom.<sup>123</sup>

And ...

Mary adored Jesus-Hostia with the most lively and perfect faith.... She honored the presence of her Son by the most devout and profound external reverence.... To the homage of a humble and devout faith, Mary added that of a grateful love.... Mary offered her whole self to the service of love to the Eucharistic God.... [And so] In all these homages, let [the adorer] take Mary as model and protector. Let [the adorer] honor and love her as the Queen of the Cenacle and Mother of adorers—titles most dear to her heart and most glorious to Jesus.<sup>124</sup>

### *3. Apply the three aspects of Mary's Eucharistic faith.*

As we move further from principles to practice, from understanding to application, we can apply three aspects of Mary's Eucharistic faith noted by John Paul II in this quotation:

Mary is a "woman of the Eucharist" in her whole life. The Church, which looks to Mary as a model, is also called to imitate her in her relationship with this most holy mystery.<sup>125</sup>

Specifically, we can apply (1) her faith leading to the Incarnation; (2) her life of faith, prayer, adoration, and service to the Eucharistic Christ; and (3) her real and active participation in her Son's sacrifice.<sup>126</sup> Eymard also

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<sup>123</sup> Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 116.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–123.

<sup>125</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53.

<sup>126</sup> Jonathan Fleishmann, "Woman of the Eucharist," *Missio Immacolatae* 11, no. 3 (May-June 2015), 9–12.



identified these same three in terms of Mary's hidden life, her interior life, and her life of sacrifice. About her *hidden life*, Eymard writes:

Jesus leads a hidden life in the most Blessed Sacrament.... Such was the life of Mary after the Ascension of her divine Son. She retired to the Cenacle, on Mount Sion, and she wrapped herself up in obscurity and oblivion ... at the foot of the adorable Eucharist in the habitual exercise of a humble and self-effacing adoration.<sup>127</sup>

Eymard describes Christ's *interior life* as poverty and his life of prayer as obedience. He states, such is the contemplative life of Mary because she honors in herself the everyday virtues of Jesus, making them live anew by imitating them perfectly. And, lastly, Mary's *life of sacrifice* was lived in union with the Eucharistic Christ:

it was in sharing the immolation of Jesus in the most Blessed Sacrament that the strength of Mary's soul and the perfection of her conformity with Jesus were greatest. Mary adored her dear Son on this new Calvary where His love crucified Him. She offered Him to God for the salvation of her new family.... She seemed to see her Jesus crucified once more at Holy Mass, shedding streams of blood in the midst of great suffering and of insults, abandoned by man and by His Father, and dying in the supreme act of His love.<sup>128</sup>

Thus, St. Eymard ties our devotional actions to redemptive suffering. He shows that we can also be a source of consolation to the hearts of both Jesus and Mary and participants in the co-redemption.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 124–125.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>129</sup> Eymard, *Light of the Monstrance*, 230–237.

4. *Practice periods of sustained adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.* Like Mary, we too are called to a lifelong service of prayer and adoration and to partake of the Eucharist as did Mary with the Apostles in the early Church:

In the Cenacle, this august Queen kneels as adoratrix and servant of the most Blessed Sacrament: kneel at your Mother's side and pray with her; and in so doing, you will continue her Eucharistic life on earth.<sup>130</sup>

Knowing that love of Our Lady and the Eucharist must be central to our faith, John Paul II sees the call of the faithful back to Mary's Eucharistic Son as part of the New Evangelization. Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament is not only the means for *guiding* people back,<sup>131</sup> but also the means for *increasing our time before the Blessed Sacrament*. In reflection, we again have recourse to the example of Eymard, who in 1849 became devoted to the practice of *sustained* Eucharistic worship. He cites Mary as the example:

Mary spent days and nights in the presence of the Divine Eucharist. That was her favorite dwelling place.... The twenty-four years she spent in the Cenacle were like the twenty-four hours of the day; she spent them in the habitual exercise of adoration.<sup>132</sup>

5. *Revere the Blessed Sacrament with a childlike love.* In simple terms, Eymard states: "To become good servants of the Eucharist, we must be docile and devout children of Mary.... [We must] render to our Lady of the Most Blessed

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<sup>130</sup> Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 104–105.

<sup>131</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 53.

<sup>132</sup> Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 118.

Sacrament, the reverence, the obedience and the love of a true child.”<sup>133</sup>

6. *Become an image or reflection of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.* Eymard offers these reflections on Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament:

When you receive Holy Communion, clothe yourself with the virtues and merits of Mary, your mother, and you will thus communicate with her faith and with her devotion. O how happy Jesus will be to find you in the image of His lovable and holy Mother!<sup>134</sup>

[I]t is evident to me that there will be no true vocation to the Blessed Sacrament, no real devotion to the Eucharist, except those that have been formed by Mary.<sup>135</sup>

Following the example of Mary, let the adorer kneel down with the deepest respect. In order to adore, let him recollect himself like Mary and, in spirit, take his place by her side. Let him come into our Lord’s presence with that gravity, that interior and exterior recollection which prepares the soul marvelously well for the angelical function of adoration.<sup>136</sup>

Let, then, the souls who wish to live of the Eucharist imitate with Mary the interior virtues of Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament; let them school themselves with constancy to the virtue of recollection by silence, by the neglect of creatures, and by fervent and repeated acts of union with Jesus.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Commentary in, Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 94, 97.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 110. Similar words are found in *Light of the Monstrance*, 232.

<sup>136</sup> Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 236–237.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

7. *Receive and adore Jesus Hand in Hand with Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.* Eymard states that the Blessed Virgin will say to the faithful: “come adore with me.”<sup>138</sup> He continues with these insights:

Mary ... never lost the Eucharistic presence of Jesus.<sup>139</sup>

[L]ike Mary, let us fly to the service of adoration of Jesus in the Eucharist who is waiting for us.<sup>140</sup>

Eymard offers the following advice to the person who wishes to contemplate the Lord:

United to Mary-Adoratrix, let him devote himself with patience and constancy to the practice of contemplation of Jesus Christ.<sup>141</sup>

8. *Assist Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.* Eymard sees Eucharistic adoration as a means of sharing Mary’s mission of prayer:

adorers share Mary’s mission of prayer.... It is the most beautiful of all missions.... It is also the holiest of missions, because it calls for the practice of all virtues ... [and is] most necessary for the Church.<sup>142</sup>

[G]o to communion with her faith and love.... When you, too, are working for the worship of the Eucharist, unite your intention to the joy of your Mother working for her Son in His Sacramental Presence, as formerly she worked for Him as an infant.... [S]he understood,

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>141</sup> Eymard, *Light of the Monstrance*, 237.

<sup>142</sup> Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 132–133.

better than any human or angelic creature, the immensity of the gift of the Eucharist.<sup>143</sup>

9. *Express appreciation for this great Sacrament.* Eymard recommends uniting with Mary in gratitude for the great gift of the Eucharist:

Mary adored in deepest gratitude.... She consented to put off the hour of the reward and to remain on earth to guard and serve the Blessed Eucharist, and teach other Christians to guard, to love, and to adore this Sacrament of Love. What a mother! What a model! Happy were the disciples who could adore beside Mary, and learn from her august mouth how to serve their Saviour Jesus!<sup>144</sup>

Let us make our thanksgiving after Holy Communion very faithfully, in union with Mary.<sup>145</sup>

To her is entrusted the task of showing us how to find our Bread of Life, of making us appreciate and desire that Heavenly Food; it is her mission to form us for adoration.<sup>146</sup>

10. *Share in the life of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.* More than just imitating Mary, Eymard proposes that we share in her Eucharistic life:

Mary realizes in herself the Eucharistic life of Jesus Christ.... [S]uch ought to be the life of the adorer if he wishes to live in the Eucharist.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Tesnière, *A Sketch*, 103.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>145</sup> Commentary, in Eymard, *Most Blessed Sacrament*, 48.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

Modesty is the sovereign virtue of an adorer, since it is the virtue of servants of kings, and the virtue of the Angels in presence of the Divine Majesty.... [It should] regulate our demeanor in the presence of God, when we offer Him the homage of our senses and of our faculties.<sup>148</sup>

Mary lived In the Eucharist. He who truly loves, thinks, desires, acts, rejoices or sorrows in the person loved; he is his natural center. Jesus said: “Where your treasure is, there is thy heart”: and to the Apostles: “Abide in Me.... Abide in My love ... as I abide in My Father’s love.”<sup>149</sup>

*11. Pray for greater devotion to Mary by priests to serve the Eucharistic Christ better.* Eymard believed that priests need to have a greater devotion to Mary in order to serve the Eucharistic Christ. His words on this theme deserve careful attention:

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament also applies to the priesthood as well as all the faithful—to the priest who also has duties to fulfill toward this tender Mother and to set an example for his parishoners. Eymard draws a parallel between the mission and life of the priest and the mission and life of Mary in bringing forth the Word made Flesh, now brought down upon the altar through the priest—to worship—to adore.<sup>150</sup>

Mary lives again in the priest, and through him she continues her mission for souls and for the glory of her Divine Son. The first Incarnation was made in Mary and by Mary. In her the Word was

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 140–141.

made Flesh. In the hands of the priest, and at his word, Jesus Christ becomes our Bread.<sup>151</sup>

[T]o serve Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament, after the example of our Lady of the Cenacle, and as she did—there is the life of the true servant. [A priest's] motto is: all for the service of Jesus-Eucharistic in union with Mary!<sup>152</sup>

*12. Express an Act of Entrustment to Mary with Eymard's own prayer:*

I hope to become a true servant of the Most Blessed Sacrament! My God, behold Thy humble servant! May it be done to me according to Thy merciful goodness and Thy most wondrous love! *Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament, Mother and Model of Adorers, pray for us who have recourse to thee!* <sup>153</sup>

## **VI. Conclusion**

St. Peter Julien Eymard's life was devoted to the Eucharistic Christ through the Blessed Virgin Mary. For him, Mary is the model of the Eucharistic life. His own words make this clear:

Eucharistic souls, who wish to live only for the Blessed Sacrament, who have made the Eucharist your centre and His service your only work, Mary is your model, her life your grace.... O, do not fear, if you are the elect of the Blessed Eucharist; it is to Mary that you owe it. ... Put yourself under her direction; and to become faithful

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 175.

servants of your King, Jesus, be devout children to Mary ... the only perfect imitator of the virtues of her Divine Son.<sup>154</sup>

It is hoped that this study has done more than give a historical and theological account of some Marian-Eucharistic titles. The goal has been to provide an Eymardian template that can help intensify our love and devotion to the Eucharist. Eymard states:

The adorers share Mary's mission of prayer in the presence of the Most Blessed Sacrament. It is the most beautiful of missions and, moreover, is not fraught with dangers. It is also the holiest of missions, for it calls for the practice all the virtues.<sup>155</sup>

His message is especially directed to priests. We not only need more priests; we need more *holy* priests—men of prayer and penance to offset the secularism and anti-Christian sentiments that surround us today. But the Eucharistic message of Eymard likewise applies to all the Catholic faithful:

It is the most necessary for the Church, which has a still greater need of men of prayer than of preachers, of men of penance than men of eloquence. Today more than ever we need men who by self-immolation disarm the wrath of God angered by the ever-increasing crimes of nations; we need souls who by their earnest prayers reopen the treasures of grace which had been closed by general indifference; we need true adorers, that is, men of fire and of sacrifice.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Tesnière, *A Sketch*, 101.

<sup>155</sup> Eymard, *Eucharistic Handbook*, 132–133.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.



And:

When [adorers] multiply around [Our Lady] ... God will again be glorified, Jesus will be loved, society will again become Christian, won to Jesus Christ by the apostolate of Eucharistic prayer.<sup>157</sup>

With these insights, St. Peter Julian Eymard has furnished a roadmap that is certainly needed in today's secular world. We need to join Our Lady in a cenacle of Eucharistic prayer and adoration. Let us conclude with this poem by George Benson Hewetson:

Lady of Ladies, Queen of all the queens  
That have been or shall be; through thee the word  
“Lady,” that from our lips so oft is heard,  
Glow with the glory of the truth it means:  
Truth known to that small band of Nazarenes,  
The first disciples, whose weak wills were stirred  
When He, the Lord of life, on them conferred  
Through bread Himself, on Whom creation leans!

“Lady” means “bread-giver,” – how true of thee,  
“Our Lady” Mother of our joys to be,  
When earth's dominions from their thrones are hurled!  
True “Lady” thou, who gavest birth to Him,  
The food of wonder to the seraphim,  
The Bread of Life unto a dying world.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>158</sup> Lawrence G. Lovasik, S.V.D., *Our Lady in Catholic Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 101.

## **Biographical Note**

A former Air Force pilot, Richard May is a retired aerospace engineer by profession. He has a BA in Pastoral Theology from the University of St. Thomas in Houston and an MA in theology from the Franciscan University in Steubenville Ohio. He has appeared several times on the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) and often on Catholic radio with a live weekly show on Radio Maria. With the approbation from the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, he speaks locally and nationally. He has 30 years of experience teaching catechesis at all levels and has authored several booklets including *The Rosary: A Prayer for All Christians* and *The Rosary: A Prayer for All Native Peoples*.

