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GODFRIED GEENEN, O.P. —
MOTHER OF THE MYSTICAL BODY

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About the study...

The present Marian Library Study is an adaptation of an article that appeared in the December 1950 issue of Cross and Crown. We wish to express our thanks to the editor for permitting us to use the material as part of our series.

Mary’s motherhood of mankind is based first of all on the reality that she is truly the Mother of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and secondly on the important role she played in the actual work of the Redemption itself. The Church’s ordinary teaching on Mary’s spiritual maternity of men, based on these two primary notions, has been held from the earliest ages. Both ancient and modern authors are quoted to demonstrate this constancy of doctrine. The works of Pius, XII, however, are referred to more often than those of any other writer. In thus tracing the idea through the witness of a unanimous tradition we can see that there is a firm basis for the Catholic’s almost instinctive belief that Mary is in very truth his own mother.

Father Godfried Geenen, O.P., a native of Belgium, made his studies at the University of Louvain, where he specialized in Mariology. His numerous articles on the Blessed Virgin, many of them dealing with the historical developments of certain questions, have been published in several languages. He has also spoken at a number of the important Mariological congresses that have taken place in recent years. At the international congress of 1950 he presented a study of Mary’s continuing triumph over heresy. During the Marian Year congress he spoke on Eadmer, the first theologian of the Immaculate Conception. The following year, 1955, he prepared for the Belgian Mariological Society a survey on Mary’s Queenship in the teaching of the Church from the time of Benedict XIV up to the reign of Pius XII. Father Geenen is stationed at the Angelicum, the Dominican house of studies in Rome, where he has conducted classes in the history of dogma and theological methodology.
In September, 1944, when the German and Allied armies were engaged in a bitter struggle on the banks of the Albert Canal in the Kempen region of Belgium, the distressed people of this enemy-occupied zone made frequent visits to a statue of Our Lady which stood at a distance of two miles from the canal. Since my childhood I had known this rural Bosch chapel and its statue of Our Lady which dates back to the fourteenth or fifteenth century. But it was not until maturity that my eyes and my heart were forcibly impressed by the very old inscription at the base of the statue. It was a Flemist text: Christnen naar Uwe Moeder (Christians, behold your Mother). During the past four centuries as during the war the people of the countryside had been honoring the Mother of God as their mother, as the mother of all Christians, as the mother of all men. But the realization of why our Belgian mothers brought up their children with such a deep and lively love for the Mother “of whom was born Jesus” burst upon me suddenly.

The Mother of the God-man is also the mother of men. It is natural for us to say that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, is our Mother also. It is certain that such terminology was used during the lifetime of St. Anselm of Canterbury, but it seems that the actual phrases were uncommon in the earlier centuries of Christianity. Yet the doctrine taught and indicated by the phrase, Mary our Mother, was known from the earliest days. The first Christians honored the Mother of God as we honor her today. We use the form that they used when, for example, we say the Sub tuum praesidium, which dates from the end of the third century.

In spite of the fact that Mary has always been honored as our mother since the early days of Christianity, we find some Christians even in our own day who are afraid to say that Mary, the Mother of God, is also our mother, poor and wretched sinners that we are. Although they do not realize it, this is a Catholic doctrine which cannot be cast aside without taking from Catholicism one of its sublime attributes. The elimination of this doctrine would negate a devotion on which depends not only the salvation of men but the peace of the present-day world as well. Such people think that the Church uses the expression “Mother of men” hyperbolically and metaphorically. It is because of the existence of this error among men and the honor due our Blessed Mother, that we set forth in this article the depth and the meaning of this doctrine and its expression which is so dear to the Church.

If this expression, “Mary our Mother,” did not embody a truly Catholic sense, the teaching office of the Church would long since have forbidden its usage, for the Church not only abhors but formally forbids any new devotions which might endanger the faith of her children. It is natural
for her to do this. The Church received from her Founder the mission of
preserving intact the doctrine revealed by God. Our Lord said that His
Church would never be guilty of failure in her mission of preaching the
truth. To assist her in her office of guardian and interpreter of revealed
document throughout the centuries until the end of the world, He prom­
ised to her and He gave to her the Holy Ghost.

To standardize our devotions, Pope Pius XII recalled in his encyclical
Mediator Dei (December 18, 1947) the Catholic and historical principle
lex credendi legem statuat supplicandi (the faith that we profess must be
the norm of our supplications. Exaggerations appear, and it is possible
that certain religious manifestations are dangerous for Catholic life and
faith. Because of these errors and exaggerations in devotions, some of
our separated brethren condemn Catholicism. We know that in this con­
demnation they are wrong, for “the Church is not responsible for the
weaknesses, sins, and abuses of Catholics,” as Pope Pius XI said. Criti­
cism of this kind cannot logically touch the Church herself, but rather it
belongs to certain Catholics who either do not understand or do not
state correctly the doctrine taught by the Church.

Of course, people outside the faith pray, and often with great fervor
and devotion. How sad it is that these devout souls do not honor the
Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, as we honor her! Since this
lack of devotion to the Blessed Virgin is due to ignorance, we must ex­
cuse them. They are afraid of offending God or of taking something away
from the glory of Christ if they should honor Mary. Hence they some­
times accuse the Catholic Church of being extravagant in its devotion to
Mary. The very opposite is true. The Catholic Church always rejects and
condemns devotions not based upon revealed dogmas, but at the same
time she approves with all her authority and with the assistance of the
Holy Ghost, the ever-growing devotion to the Mother of God, precisely
because Mary is also the mother of men.

The Church teaches that we do not render to Christ the worship due
Him if we stubbornly refuse to venerate Mary as our Mother, since it is
through her that He willed to come to us, and it is thanks to her consent
that the Son of God became man; it is thanks to her that He became “our
Redeemer.” That is why, in a certain sense, we must say that she is,
with Him and by the will of God, “the cause of our salvation.” In our
litanies of the Virgin we address her as “Holy Mother of God,” “Mother
of Christ,” “Mother of our Savior.” Now, it is because she is the Mother
of God, our Savior, that she is our Mother, too. This teaching is first evi­
denced by St. Irenaeus, and for centuries the Sovereign Pontiffs, the
successors of St. Peter and the vicars of Christ, have never ceased to
emphasize this doctrine.

That is why in the pages which follow we shall try to present the
Catholic doctrine of Mary, the Mother of mankind. We hope that Catho-
lics will find therein motives for honoring the Blessed Virgin in a still more fervent manner, and that our separated brethren will find reasons therein for overcoming their ignorance of the veneration of the Mother of God, our Mother, and for abandoning their opposition to that Catholic practice.

We will explain successively:

1. In what the human maternity of Mary consists.
2. The doctrine of the Church with regard to the human maternity of Mary.
3. The nature and the doctrinal foundations of this maternity.
4. The consequences entailed by this doctrine in regard to our attitude toward our heavenly Mother.

I. In what does the human maternity consist?

Before speaking of a belief or before criticizing it, and especially before putting into practice the consequence that result from that belief, we need to know its essence. St. Paul tells us that our worship of God must be a “reasonable service.” It must be worthy of God. St. Peter exhorts us to be “ready always to satisfy everyone that asketh you a reason of that hope which is in you.” We hope for great things from God, and we hope to obtain these things from Him through the intercession and mediation of Mary, the Mother of the only-begotten Son of God. It is in God’s Son that God has given her to us. However, the Mother of God and therefore God Himself (since we honor the Mother for and on behalf of the Son) is not well served or duly honored if we venerate her for motives which are not founded on the beauty and loftiness of her nature. St. Bernard writes: “The honor that we render our Queen must be given to her with discretion and circumspection. The Virgin has so many incontrovertible titles, she is so lofty, so sublime in dignity that she has no need of any false claims to win our veneration.” “Mary has no need of falsehood, she is absolutely full of truth,” says St. Bonaventure. It is, therefore, with good reason that Cardinal Cajetan wrote: “Intelligent man, devotee of Mary, limit yourself to authentic praises.”

Warnings on this point that the doctors and the theologians of the Church have repeated throughout the centuries are always the same. These churchmen are circumspect and prudent, even exacting; they are on guard lest devotion to the Blessed Virgin degenerate into a purely sentimental feeling or a pernicious idolatry. This would ruin the Catholic faith itself.

If, therefore, we wish to know how and why we are to honor Mary, we must go to the teaching of the Church. This teaching has been given to us by popes and bishops, saints and doctors, by approved theologians.
At the Council of Ephesus in 431, the Church solemnly proclaimed as dogma, in opposition to heretics, that the Blessed Virgin is the Mother of God. This dogma necessitates the recognition by Catholics of the "divine maternity" of the Virgin. For centuries Holy Church has taught that we must recognize her "human maternity" as well. It is indeed true that this teaching has not been explicitly and solemnly proclaimed as a dogma of faith, but that fact in no way diminishes the truth of the teaching. Moreover, the doctrine about the human maternity is a natural outgrowth of the doctrine of the divine maternity, as we shall show later.

We must understand the phrases "divine maternity" and "human maternity." In virtue of the "divine maternity" we affirm that the Son of God was born of Mary according to His human nature, that He assumed in her His body and soul under the miraculous action of the Holy Ghost. Mary is the true Mother of God by a physical maternity.

In virtue of the "human maternity" of the Blessed Virgin, we profess that Mary is the spiritual mother of men, especially of Christians, and consequently of the mystical body of Christ. The Church does not teach that men are physically born (according to their human nature) of Mary, for this has been reserved for the only-begotten Son of God. To state the contrary would be to fall into another heresy, for we affirm that Mary possessed a perpetual virginity, that she never had human intercourse. Jesus is her only Son according to the flesh. So Mary is also our mother according to the life of grace. Do not the litanies of the Virgin say that Mary is Mater divinae gratiae (mother of divine grace)?

II. The doctrine of the Church with regard to the human maternity of Mary

We will show that the doctrine of Mary's maternity is truly and substantially a Catholic doctrine and a teaching of the Church. In the formula of the consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, which took place December 8, 1942, His Holiness, Pope Pius XII, said: "We consecrate ourselves to you forever, to your Immaculate Heart, O Mother, Queen of the World."5 A few months after this consecration to Mary, at the conclusion of the encyclical Mystici Corporis Christi (June 29, 1943), Pope Pius XII, in a remarkable passage, summarized Catholic Marian doctrine. He said expressly:

Within her virginal womb Christ our Lord already bore the exalted title of Head of the Church; in a marvelous birth she brought Him forth as a source of all supernatural life. . . . Free from all sin, original and personal, always most intimately united with her Son, as another Eve she offered Him on Golgotha to the Eternal Father for all the children of Adam sin-stained by his fall, and her mother's rights and mother's love were included in the holocaust.
Thus she who corporally was the mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became spiritually the mother of all His members . . . and she continued to show for the mystical body of Christ, born from the pierced heart of the Savior, the same mother's care and ardent love with which she clasped the infant Jesus to her warm and nourishing breast. May she, then, most holy Mother of all Christ's members, to whose Immaculate Heart We have trustingly consecrated all men, her body and soul refulgent with the glory of heaven where she reigns with her Son, may she never cease to beg from Him that a continuous, copious flow of graces may pass from its glorious Head into all the members of the mystical body.6

Later in his encyclical Mediator Dei we read:

For her, therefore, who is "the Mother of mercy, our life, our sweetness, and our hope," to her do we cry, all of us "mourning and weeping in this valley of tears."7 and we all entrust ourselves and everything that we have to her protection. She became our Mother when the divine Redeemer was accomplishing this sacrifice of Himself; and thus, under this title also, we are her children.8

The same teaching was repeated in his broadcast to the Marian Congress at Ottawa, June 19, 1947:

But when the little maid of Nazareth uttered her Fiat to the messages of the angel and the Word was made flesh in her womb, she became not only the Mother of God in the physical order of nature, but also in the supernatural order of grace she became the mother of all, who through the Holy Spirit would be made one under the Headship of her divine Son. The Mother of the Vine would be the mother of the branches.9

The doctrinal teaching of the Church concerning the spiritual maternity of Mary as enunciated by Pius XII is irrefutable. Because he wished to impress its truth upon the faithful, the Pope for the first time in history applied to Mary a word which until that time had been reserved in the liturgy and in pontifical documents to express the divine (physical) maternity of our beloved Mother. The Pope named her the "genitrix of all the members of the mystical body of Christ." It is the doctrine of the mystical body enunciated by this Pope which inspired a new use of an old word; it is a new manner of expressing an ancient idea.

The same teaching can be found in the encyclicals and other documents of Pius XI, Benedict XV, Pius X, Leo XIII, Pius IX, Pius VIII, Gregory XVI, Pius VII, and Benedict XIV. A reading of these makes it evident that the teaching of the maternity of Mary is not new in the
Church as some ignorant people and certain enemies of the Church claimed at the beginning of this century.

In stating this teaching the popes have not innovated or invented a doctrine. The Church teaches, sometimes with new words, the one doctrine she received from her Founder, Christ Jesus. There is in the Catholic Church provision for the statement in every age of dogma which traverses the centuries. This quality shows that the teaching of the Church is a living teaching: a teaching which, although unchangeable and ever-constant, can be expressed in a language adapted to the changing circumstances of men. Faith is in its nature a deeply considered comprehension of revealed truth. The wisdom of divine Providence and the light of the Holy Ghost, the guides of the Church, will always suggest to the shepherds of Christ's flock at the right moment the manner of enunciating the doctrine which has the Church as its eternal and universal guardian. To prove the historical continuity and the intrinsic immutability of Catholic doctrine, the popes often cite texts of ancient authors who likewise have spoken in the same manner of the same things in language adapted to the men of their era. It would be a simple matter to draw up a long list of plausible testimony to show from the mere point of history that the doctrine of the human maternity of the Blessed Virgin dates from the first days of Christianity. We have already done this. Therefore we shall content ourselves with a single text, that of Origen (who died c. 253). Speaking of the beauty of Sacred Scripture, this author wrote: "The flower of the Gospels is that of St. John; and no man would be able fully to understand its meaning if he has not rested (with St. John) on the breast of Jesus and received from Jesus, Mary, who had become his mother.""11

III. The nature and the doctrinal foundation of this maternity

After all the foregoing material, the question presents itself: What is the nature of this human maternity? And what are the motives, that is, what are the doctrinal foundations on which it is based? The word "mother," as we know, has received in human language several meanings according to the different manifestations of the goodness that a mother's heart connotes.

When at school a teacher or a principal displays toward the pupils or other charges all the solicitude and the treasures of a mother's heart, we are quick to say that this woman is "like a mother" to her children and to her other charges. We all understand that this is only a fashion of speaking. It is a metaphorical and hyperbolical language; for the pupils and charges of such a devoted woman are not really her children, and toward them she has not the rights or the duties of a real mother.

Likewise when someone adopts a foundling, we freely say that the man and woman who adopt him "become the father and mother" of their
adopted child. Civil law sometimes actually gives them the rights and honors that their duties as foster parents entail. But even in this case these parents are not really the father and mother of the child. They are considered like the authors of the life of their protégé because they have bound themselves in the eyes of the civil law to watch over the health and life of their foster child. This is a juridical, legal, and civil adoption.

But when we say that the Blessed Virgin is our spiritual mother, we affirm and mean far more than either of these. Catholic doctrine teaches that Mary is truly our mother, in the exact sense of the word. Of course, as Pope Pius XII recalled in the texts cited above, here we are dealing with the supernatural and spiritual order rather than with the natural. We are truly born spiritually of the Blessed Virgin Mary, for we partake of the spiritual life of grace only through her.

Thus we see that here we are not concerned with a metaphorical maternity or a juridical adoption, purely and simply, but, on the contrary, with a true mystical maternity. In saying and affirming this, we say that through her and in her and by her we are born to the same life of grace as flows from our Head and Savior, Jesus Christ, in all the members of His mystical body. Just as we are the true adopted sons of God by grace—"partakers of divine nature" wrote St. Peter, and St. John said: we are "called children of God; and such we are"—just so are we the true sons of Mary by grace because we are members of the mystical body attached to our Head, Christ Jesus, and He it is who was born physically, according to His human nature, from the chaste womb of Mary. "The Blessed Virgin is not only our mother, because, as is commonly and erroneously believed, she adopted us as her children," wrote Father Chaminade whose cause for beatification is now in process in Rome, "but she is actually our mother because she brought us forth spiritually just as she brought Jesus forth physically." Pope Leo XIII reiterated this idea in his encyclical Quamquam pluripes (August 15, 1889), when he wrote: "Jesus Christ is as the first-born of Christians."

We will understand more fully in what this mystical maternity of Mary consists if we consider the doctrinal foundation on which it is based. There is a twofold basis: the divine maternity of Mary, and her co-redemption of humankind.

A. The divine maternity

In order to show how and why the maternity of Mary brings about her mystical maternity (human), we have only to reflect on the beautiful text of Pope Pius X in his encyclical Ad Diem illum:14

For is not Mary the Mother of Christ? Then she is our Mother also. And we must in truth hold that Christ, the Word made flesh, is
also the savior of mankind. He had a material body like that of any other man; and as Savior of the human family, He had a spiritual and mystical body, the society, namely, of those who believe in Christ. "We are many, but one sole body in Christ." Now the Blessed Virgin did not conceive the eternal Son of God merely in order that He might be made man, taking His human nature from her, but also in order that by means of the nature assumed from her He might be the Redeemer of men . . . . Christ took to Himself the spiritual body formed by those who were to believe in Him. Hence Mary, carrying the Savior within her, may be said to have also carried all those whose life was contained in the life of the Savior. Therefore all we who are united to Christ, and as the Apostle says, are "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones," have issued from the womb of Mary like a body united to its head. Hence in a spiritual and mystical fashion, we are all children of Mary, and she is Mother of us all; "the Mother, spiritually indeed, but truly the Mother of the members of Christ, who we are." If then, the most Blessed Virgin is the Mother at once of God and men, who can doubt that she will endeavor with all diligence to procure that Christ, "the Head of the body of the Church," may transfuse His gifts into us, His members, and above all know Him and "live by Him"?

It is in referring explicitly to this passage of Pius X that Pius XII in his encyclical Mystici Corporis used the expression, "She (Mary) . . . the most holy Mother of all Christ's members." We have already emphasized the sublime and new depth of meaning of this expression. Let us also reread the passage cited above taken from the radio address of Pius XII to the Marian Congress in Ottawa. On the same subject, Father Chaminade had already written in the preceding century:

The Blessed Virgin is truly our mother; all of us have our life in Jesus Christ. But we know that Jesus Christ assumes His life in Mary's womb. As we are united to Jesus, we consequently receive our spiritual life in Mary . . . . Thus, in accepting the honor of the divine maternity Mary consents to the twofold meaning of the titles of Mother of Jesus Christ, Mother first of all of the God-man, and secondly Mother of Christ considered in the fullness of His body, the Church. . . . In physically conceiving the Savior in her virginal womb, she has at the same time spiritually conceived in her soul by her love and by her faith, all Christians, members of the Church, and consequently members of Jesus Christ.

This, then, is the first and principal basis for the Catholic doctrine of the human maternity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. There is another which serves as a complement to the first basis.
B. The co-redemption of Mary

In this connection we have only to recall the words of the Sovereign Pontif. Let us reread the texts cited above from the encyclical of Pius XII. After recalling in his Mystici Corporis that Christ, the source of all supernatural life, was conceived, already full of His dignity as Head of the Church, in the virginal womb of Mary, His Holiness continues; "Always most intimately united with her Son, as another Eve she offered Him on Golgotha to the eternal Father for all the children of Adam, stained by his fall, and her mother's rights and mother's love were included in the holocaust. Thus she who corporally was the mother of our Head, through the added title of pain and glory became spiritually the mother of all His members." And in his encyclical Mediator Dei he says: "She became our Mother when the divine Redeemer was accomplishing His sacrifice of Himself; and under this title also, we are her children."

It is clear, then that Mary is our Mother by a mystical maternity, founded first of all on the fact that she is the mother of God, but founded also on the fact that she was intimately associated with the sacrifice of the cross, by means of the complete holocaust of her maternal rights in behalf of the salvation of all mankind. It is in virtue of this twofold basis that she has maternal rights over us as well as maternal responsibilities toward us. And it is also in virtue of this twofold title that we have toward her the duties and rights of children toward their mother. It is of this filial attitude that we are to speak in the following pages.

IV. Our attitude toward our heavenly Mother

We like to honor Mary as our Queen of heaven and of earth. But "she is more Mother than Queen," as the great saint of spiritual childhood, St. Theresa of Liseux, has written. Indeed the Blessed Virgin is Queen and Sovereign precisely because she is the Mother of God and the co-redemptrix of mankind. She is our Queen because she is our Mother. This truth is quite evident. She is our heavenly Mother, for she is in heaven in soul and body, and it is in heaven that in all the splendors of her divine and human maternity she shares in the reign of her son, Jesus.

She is the Mother of God "who touches the very horizon of the Deity," as Cardinal Cajetan wrote. St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that along with the humanity of Christ she has, as Mother of God, a dignity in some manner infinite. Justly St. John Chrysostom exclaimed in a sermon attributed to him: "Magnus revere miraculum fuit beata semper virgo Maria," and St. Bernard wrote in similar vein: "Tota unum miraculum." She is truly a miracle of God, as His Holiness Pope Pius IX wrote in the bull Ineffabilis Deus.
All the foregoing is true. But it is all so sublime and so incomprehensible for us that we might hesitate to approach her or address ourselves to her. And yet that is precisely what she wishes us to do. She is our mother that we may go to her with a love and confidence without limit and without reserve. Since she is our mother, we must render to her a veneration worthy of her, a veneration worthy of us because we are her children. This is God's will. In reality we can say that in a certain sense she exists only for us, since the Son of God became incarnate of her in order to save us from sin. She is His mother only because He wished to dwell among men; and it is therefore through her that the Unigenitus Patris who is the filius unicus Mariae and her filius primogenitus became the primogenitus in multis fratribus. The first born and only begotten son of Mary according to human nature, thus became our elder Brother according to the spiritual life. For in God's plan He and we are through her one single entity, as the members attached to their Head in the same mystical body. Mary's maternal heart belongs to us as well as to Him. It is the same heart of a Mother who loves us in Him and Him in us. All this is true. Moreover, it is in union with her divine Son, quasi uno corde, "as though with the same heart," as St. Bridget of Sweden said, that Mary is our Co-redemptrix, and that after Him she merited the grace which makes us like to His image. Therefore, in union with her Son she disposes infinite treasures of divine mercy, and she does this with a mother's heart.

That means that we must ever more and more be what we are truly meant to be: cherished children of Mary. In truth, through the holy will of God at each instant of our life and for all of eternity she is our Blessed Mother. All of this we believe, and we are thoroughly convinced of it. But we must put into practice what the Church teaches us about it.

First of all, we must be, and we must wish to be, consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. We belong to her; we are already hers, for she is our Mother and Co-redemptrix. A child is by the very nature of things devoted to his mother. This is so true that he usually takes it for granted and does not speak of his devotion. Well, let us often speak of our love to our heavenly Mother. Let us at least say it by our actions, by our convictions, by our veneration. Monsignor Lebon wrote: "Delivered, redeemed by the Redeemer and the Co-redemptrix, we are entirely theirs. We no longer belong to ourselves. But such is the delicacy of the love of Jesus and Mary that it desires and accepts freely what we offer in any way, as if we were the masters of our offering which they can claim from us with titles so incontestable and undeniable: our bodies and our souls, our thoughts, our judgments, our actions, all our activity, and our life itself."

Entire submission and a total giving of ourselves is fitting. For "such is the will of God that He has desired that we receive everything through Mary," said St. Bernard. And the will of God is changeless.
Next, we must love Mary "not in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth." 25 "The measure of love," as a great Marian doctor once said, "is to be without measure." And when we have manifested our love to her, we will have manifested to her all that we are capable of and all that we are; for love is the total gift of oneself. He who does not give himself entirely is of divided purpose and will give only grudgingly. Let us glorify our Mother, let us meditate on the glories and the privileges she has received from God, for a child honors his mother by rejoicing in her splendors and in thanking God for the great marvels He has effected in her. Let us love her for herself. Certainly, we hope for all things from her, because God has made her refugium peccatorum, consolatrix afflictorum, auxilium Christianorum. Let us have confidence in her who is Advocata nostra, for she will turn her eyes toward us, "those eyes so full of mercy" (Salve Regina). But before all things and above all things let us love her. St. Grignon de Montfort wrote: "A true devotee of Mary does not serve this august Queen through a spirit of profit and interest, nor for his temporal or eternal welfare, his bodily or spiritual well-being, but only because she merits being served, and God served in her. He does not love Mary merely because she does him good, or because he hopes for all things from her, but because she is all lovable." 26 Is not love then the first gift of oneself, and is it not the most perfect gift?

And lastly, since we love her and since we wish to love her with the heart of a child, let us have no fear of loving her too much. Fear is a bad counselor. Fear comes from the devil who is an evil spirit. Even our sins, our imperfections, our weaknesses, and our miseries cannot destroy our love. They cannot make us fear that she will not look at us, or that she will not help us, or that she will not feel herself to be loved by us. For she is our Mother for the sole purpose of helping us in our infirmities. Nor let us be afraid of taking away from God the honor or the worship due to Him, by loving the Blessed Virgin and by having recourse to her. It is the contrary which is true. God wishes that we love her with all our hearts. God Himself will feel honored and loved if we love her whom He wished to establish as His Mother and Co-redemptrix that she might be our mother also. For He associated her with Himself — mystery of His infinite mercy toward us — in His incarnation and in His sorrows that we also might associate His Mother in our praises of His gifts. It is because the devil was conquered by Mary and because he bears for her an implacable hatred that he inspires in certain of our separated brethren the fear of honoring Mary under the pretext of dishonoring God. With her help we must overcome this diabolical hatred by loving our Mother with a confidence and a love without reserve and without fear. She will lead us to the glory of our heavenly Father. Certainly, it will not be pleasing to God to invoke Him as our Father if we do not also venerate Mary as our mother.

Let us summarize: the Blessed Mother of God is also our Mother. She
is the mother of the entire mystical body of Christ. This is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, expressed in that simple exhortation in the rural Bosch chapel: “Christians, look at your Mother.” For Mary is truly our spiritual Mother, and her maternity of us is founded on her divine maternity and upon her co-redemption of all mankind.

The church itself with all its authority urges us to render a truly filial veneration to her who after the Savior is the person most blessed by God and the most sublime gift of His grace. Let us listen to this incessant appeal that on every occasion the Church addresses to us. In the words of Pius XII, the great Marian Pope of the middle of the twentieth century, it is Mary herself who “prophesied” that “all generations would call her blessed because the Lord had done great things in her.” So Pius XII could say to the Virgin: Rejoice, O most pure one, Mother of God, in the holy desires and resolutions of thy dear children. . . . They are thine. They wish to cling ever to thy guiding hand. Protect them under the wings of thy affection and mercy. Defend them against the peril that threatens the human family and menaces especially those who wish to be faithful to thy son and His Church.”

If we look at the maternal heart of Mary, with a confidence without reserve and a filial love, our eyes and our every look will behold and will imitate Jesus, the blessed fruit of her womb. She has had the signal dignity of being His Mother because He wished her to be our mother also.
NOTES

4. St. Bernard, Epist. 174, 2; PL, 182, 333; St. Bonaventure, In III Sent., d. 3, p. 1, a. 1, q. 2 ad 3; Cajetan, Com. in Summa theol., IIIa, q. 7, a. 10 ad 3.
5. AAS, XXXIV (1942), 346.
7. Sake Regina.
8. AAS, XXXIX (1947), 582 (Paulist Press translation, 202).
9. Ibid., 271.
11. Com. in Joan., I, Preface, n. 6; PG, 14, 32.
15. Rom. 12:5.
20. AAS, XXXIX (1947), 582 (Paulist Press translation, 202).
22. Summa theol. Ia, q. 25, a. 6 ad 4.
23. Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7; Rom. 8:29. In this sense St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that the Blessed Virgin gave her consent to the Incarnation by the fiat “in place of the entire human race” (Summa theol., IIIa, q. 30, a. 1). This idea of St. Thomas was explicitly reiterated by Leo XIII in his encyclicals Fidentem piemque and Octobri mense, and by Pius XII in his encyclical Mystici corporis Christi, AAS XXV (1943), 297.
28. AAS, XXXIX (1947), 271 f.