The Popular Marian Hymn in Devotion and Liturgy

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There are several reasons that the hymn deserves the attention of religious educators and those interested in Marian devotion. The hymn combines poetry and music, powerful forces for forming attitudes and influencing conduct. The good hymn—one which endures and can be repeated without becoming tedious—is a significant part of our religious identity. It is sung prayer, a way of expressing our relation with God, Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints. It is an effective form of teaching and presenting what we believe—*a locus theologicus*. (The *Lauda Sion* and the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* serve as accessible summaries of doctrine and devotion. In the Wesleyan tradition, the hymnal became the "peoples' *summa*.")

Marian hymns merit the attention of those interested in presenting a sound and attractive Marian devotion. The Marian hymn is a unique vehicle for conveying some of the rich tradition on the Virgin Mary. The Catholic Marian tradition is based on the Scripture and on its deeper and fuller meaning as developed by *sensus fidelium* and the ecclesial magisterium. This Marian doctrine is found in poetic texts and hymns—for example, the *Stabat mater*—which have enriched our liturgy. (In comparison with the Eastern Church's corpus of Marian liturgical hymnody, the Roman liturgy has very few Marian hymns.)

This study will be limited to a survey of popular Marian hymnody in English in the United States during the last fifty years. To understand the fortunes of the Marian hymn, some acquaintance with the place of the hymn outside of and within...
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the Roman liturgy is useful. The study will begin by noting the Church documents which have influenced the development of the hymn. It will then survey Marian hymnody, beginning with nineteenth- and early twentieth-century hymns. In the 1950s, the liturgical movement and a papal encyclical in 1955 stirred new interest. The hymn fared poorly during the conciliar and postconciliar period. The last two decades have witnessed a musical resurgence in American Catholicism; never before have hymnals of such high quality been available. A last section will suggest some directions for Marian hymnody.

1. The Place of the Hymn in the Roman Liturgy

Both before and after Vatican Council II, the hymn has been the "stepchild" of the Roman liturgy. It rarely achieved the recognition of being an official liturgical text. In the Middle Ages, the tropes and the sequences represented some measure of liturgical creativity within the Mass; however, with the exception of the sequences for the major feasts, these compositions were eliminated by the reforms of Trent. Although not a part of the Eucharistic liturgy, the hymn was part of the Divine Office—first, in the religious orders and, from about the eleventh century, in the Church of Rome. 1 After the Reformation, when the vernacular hymn became the hallmark of the Lutheran churches, little encouragement was given to popular religious singing within Catholicism. The hymn is hardly mentioned in the twentieth-century documents on church music. Pius X's Tract Sollicitudine (1903) gives the place of prominence first to Gregorian chant, then to sacred polyphony, and almost reluctantly to "popular religious singing." Vatican II's statement on liturgical music, Sacrosanctum concilium (nos. 112, 114, 116, 117), appears primarily concerned with Gregorian chant and the preservation of the musical tradition of the universal Church, the "treasure of inestimable value." 2 The postconciliar document on

1 The Liturgy of the Hours is the only place where the hymn occupies a prominent position. The General Instruction on the Liturgy of the Hours (1971) states: "In the Office, the hymns are the principal poetic part composed by the Church" (no. 173).

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music, *Musicam Sacram* (1967), is concerned with the levels of participation, translations of the vernacular, the role of sacred music, and melodies for the vernacular texts.

Only during the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958) did the vernacular hymn receive some attention in church documents. The 1947 encyclical on the liturgy, *Mediator Dei*, spoke of the “active and individual participation” (no. 78) at the Eucharist. Among the suggestions for promoting participation was the “singing of hymns suitable to the different parts of the Mass” (no. 105). (This was a practice prevalent in Germany and some other areas—the *Betsingemesse*—in which the responses to the priest were given in Latin while hymns were sung in the vernacular.)

In 1955, Pius XII issued the first and only encyclical on church music, *Musicae sacrae*, a breakthrough for recognizing the value of popular religious songs, especially as an aid to liturgical participation. “[They] can be a powerful aid in keeping the faithful from attending the Holy Sacrifice like dumb and idle spectators” (no. 64). The encyclical also gave criteria for evaluating religious songs. They should be in “full conformity with the doctrine of the Catholic faith . . . and express and explain that doctrine accurately.” They should possess a religious dignity and decorum. Also, they should “use plain language and simple melody and must be free from violent and vain excess of words” (no. 63).

The October 1958 instruction, *Sacrae musicae disciplina*, implemented the provisions of the 1955 encyclical and sanctioned the singing of “popular religious songs” at the *missa lecta* (nos. 13–15). This led to the “four-hymn” pattern of participation: a hymn at the entrance, offertory, communion, and conclusion. (Hardly had this practice taken hold in many places before it was superseded by the type of participation stemming from the liturgical reforms of Vatican II. Rather than singing hymns at or during the Mass [the four-hymn pattern], the Vatican II reforms encouraged singing the actual

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texts of the Mass [acclamations, responses, responsorial psalms, etc.]).

Both the 1955 encyclical on sacred music and the 1958 instruction were embraced by the American liturgical movement and produced significant results in the United States. The vernacular hymn was accepted as part of a liturgical service. Older hymns which were judged deficient were discarded. New collections of hymns appeared.

2. Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century Marian Hymns

Two preliminary observations. First, the survey of Marian hymns which follows is limited to those that were the most popular, those found in parish hymnals and novena booklets. Alongside these hymns were fine compositions with limited circulation sung in schools and religious congregations. There were also great medieval Latin hymns and seasonal anthems which flourished in convents and seminaries (Quem terra, pontus, aestera; O gloriosa virginum; Ave maris stella; Salve mater misericordiae). But these hymns rarely made their way into parish services. Second, until 1955, the vernacular hymn had no place in the official liturgical services (Mass and the Divine Office). All vernacular hymns, including the Marian ones, were written for school groups and sodalities, for use at non-liturgical services—May processions, rosary devotions, and novena services. These services were usually followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, where, since it was a non-liturgical ceremony, singing in the vernacular was permitted.

Catholic hymnody in the United States was as varied as the many immigrant groups which came to this country. The Germans brought a long and well-developed tradition of hymns: some were translated into English, others remained in German. There is a great corpus of Polish and Slovak hymns. The Irish,

5If today some have reservations about hymns at Eucharist, it is in part based on a fear of returning to a pattern of singing texts extraneous to the liturgy.
6In the nineteenth century, religious songs were also sung at home. For example, early editions of the St. Basil Hymnal were for "church, school, and home."
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the most influential group of Catholic immigrants in the United States, did not bring with them a well-developed tradition in church music. The corpus as well as the style of many hymns which American Catholics sang until the 1960s was strongly influenced by the hymns coming from mid-nineteenth-century England. There, recent converts to Catholicism wished to establish for English Catholics devotional styles similar to those of the continent. Principal among the Catholic hymnwriters was Frederick W. Faber (1814–1863), a convert to Catholicism who became an Oratorian. His literary style was direct and filled with emotion, and he was much influenced by the warm Marian piety of southern Italy. 7 This “English son of St. Philip [Neri]” added the zeal of a convert to his native Evangelical leanings and wrote many hymns which were comprehensible and moving statements of the faith. They were intended for the “English poor” and Irish Catholics. 8 Two other significant hymn writers were Edward Caswell (1814–1878), also a convert to Catholicism and an Oratorian, and Edmund Vaughan, C.Ss.R. (1827–1908), known for his translations of hymns.

For Faber, Mary was principally, almost exclusively, “mother”; he frequently referred to her as “Mama” which caused dismay to the “old” Catholics of the more reserved English tradition. His hymns were simple, direct, comprehensible, and strong on emotion. References to the heart, tears, and weeping were frequent. Typical of Father Faber’s hymns was the following:

7 Ronald Chapman, Father Faber (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1961), 148–150. “Some of the old Catholics say I shall fall away and became an Apostate, because I push devotion to our Blessed Lady too far. . . . Surely Mary will never suffer that my love for her should be the cause of my destruction. In truth I do love her with a most fiery enthusiasm . . . ”(pp. 149–150).

8 There is scarcely anything which takes so strong a hold upon people as religion in metre, hymns or poems on doctrinal subjects. Everyone who has had experience among the English poor, knows the influence of Wesley’s hymns and the Olney collection. Less than moderate literary excellence, a very tame versification, indeed often the simple recurrence of a rhyme is sufficient: the spell seems to lie in that . . . ” Frederick William Faber, Hymns (Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1860), xix (Preface to the Edition of 1849).
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O Mother, I could weep for mirth,
Joy fills my heart so fast;
My soul today is heav’n on earth!
Oh! Could the transport last . . . 9

Mary’s intercessory role with Christ was stressed.

O turn to Jesus, Mother! turn,
and call Him by His tenderest names;
Pray for the Holy Souls that burn
This hour amid the cleansing flames.10

In Father Faber’s hymns and others of the period, earth was a place of exile and darkness, and the Church was surrounded by many enemies.

Deep night hath come down on this rough-spoken world,
And the banners of darkness are boldly unfurled:
And the tempest-tost Church—all her eyes are on thee,
They look to thy shining, sweet Star of the Sea!11

The Marian piety of St. Alphonsus Liguori appeared through the translations of Edmund Vaughan:

Look down, O Mother Mary!
From thy bright throne above;
Cast down upon thy children
One only glance of love.
And if a heart so tender with pity flows not o’er,
Then turn away, O Mother, and look on us no more!
See how ingrate and guilty, we stand before thy Son;
His loving heart reproaches us the evil we have done.
And if thou wilt appease Him, speak for us but one word:
Thou only canst obtain us the pardon of our Lord.12

Faber had great influence on all hymnody, Protestant and Catholic, and especially on popular Marian hymnody. The

9Faber, Hymns, 161.
10Faber, Hymns, 204. Found also in the Catholic Youth’s Hymn Book (1871) and the Roman Hymnal (1884).
11Faber, Hymns, 156.
Westminster Hymnal (originally published in 1912 and updated in 1940) included many hymns sung by British Catholics up to the 1960s and had thirty hymns to Our Lady. Of these, ten were translations from hymns of the Breviary; of the remaining twenty, ten were written by Fr. Faber. The hymns of Faber and the other Victorians were sung in the whole English-speaking world, and they also provided models for American hymn-writers.

In the early twentieth century, hymns for the month of May were a significant part of Marian hymnody. These "May hymns," used during processions and at the crowning of statues of Mary, frequently alluded to the beauty of the season and its flowers, to the children who were gathered around the May altar. Among the most popular was "Bring Flowers of the Rarest" (sometimes known as the Crowning Hymn) by Mary E. Walsh; its refrain was "O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels, Queen of the May." Another popular May hymn was "'Tis the Month of Our Mother," with the refrain

All hail to thee, dear Mary,  
the guardian of our way;  
To the fairest of Queens,  
Be the fairest of seasons, sweet May.

The "perpetual" novena services enjoyed great popularity in the United States from the 1930s until the 1950s. Among these novenas were those to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, the Sorrowful Mother, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. The prayers of the novena were usually followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The novena programs, which included the songs, were printed by the religious congregation which promoted the particular devotion (e.g., the Vincentians and Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, the Redemptorists and Our Lady of Perpetual Help, etc.).

Two hymns, although not originally written for novenas, were incorporated into the programs and probably contributed to the popularity of these services. The first, "Mother

13The relaxation of the Eucharistic fast and the introduction of the Evening Mass in the 1950s were in large measure responsible for the waning of the evening novena service.
Dear, Oh Pray for Me," with an attractive waltz-like melody, was written by Isaac Woodburg (a New York music teacher) and published in 1850:

1

Mother dear, O, pray for me
Whilst far from Heaven and Thee,
I wander in a fragile bark
O'er life's tempestuous sea.
O Virgin Mother, from Thy throne,
So bright in bliss above,
Protect Thy child, and cheer my path,
With Thy sweet smile of love.

Chorus:

Mother dear, remember me,
And never cease Thy care,
Till in heaven eternally,
Thy love and bliss I share.

2

Mother dear, O, pray for me,
Should pleasure's siren-lay
E'er tempt Thy child to wander far
From virtue's path away.
When thorns beset life's devious way
And darkling waters flow,
Then, Mary, aid Thy weeping child,
Thyself, a mother show.

14"This hymn and 'Holy God, we praise thy name' were "two of the best known hymns of the late [nineteenth] century" (J. Vincent Higginson, Handbook for American Catholic Hymnals [New York: Hymn Society of America, 1976], 85). Indispensable guides for the study of Catholic hymnody are J. Vincent Higginson's Handbook for American Catholic Hymnals and his History of American Catholic Hymnals (Springfield, OH: Hymn Society of America, 1982).

In 1947, Extension Magazine took a survey of favorite Catholic hymns. Arranged in order of preference they were: 1) "O Lord, I am Not Worthy"; 2) "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name"; 3) "Mother Dear, O Pray for Me"; 4) "Good Night, Sweet Jesus"; 5) "Panis Angelicus" (Caesar Franck); 6) "Ave Maria" (Schubert); 7) "On This Day, O Beautiful Mother"; 8) "Silent Night." (Richard Ginder, "Our Catholic Hit Parade," Priest 3, no. 11 [1947]: 807-816.)
A second hymn, found in virtually all the novena programs, was "Mother Dearest, Mother Fairest." This hymn first appeared in *The Wreath of Mary* (1883), under the title "Our Lady of Help." (The text was suggested by the refrain of Faber's hymn "O Flower of Grace, Divinest Flower.")

Mother dearest, mother fairest,
Help of all who call on thee.
Virgin purest, brightest, rarest,
Help us, help, we cry to thee.\(^{15}\)

A review of the language of all these hymns shows that, with few exceptions, the dominant and almost exclusive image under which Mary is presented in these songs is that of mother; the person making the address is always the child. The other image of Mary, especially in the May songs and in some of the Sodality hymns, is that of Mary as queen. The language is personal and individual. Mary represents light and purity and dwells in the highest realms. The world is dark and hostile. The individual comes before Mary conscious of sin and iniquity. References to Christ are limited to requests that Mary intercede with him on our behalf. Contrary to the practice of an earlier period, these songs do not conclude with a Trinitarian doxology.\(^{16}\)

These hymns were representative of popular piety of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Many were part of the famous (or "infamous" but enormously popular) *St. Basil's Hymnal*, published by the Basilian Fathers (Toronto). This hymnal first appeared in 1889, and by 1953 had undergone forty editions. Each edition saw new additions, while hymns considered objectionable were purged. Writing the preface for *The New Saint Basil's Hymnal* in 1958, Peter E. Sheehan, C.S.P., gave a critical assessment of the previous generation of Catholic hymns. He replied to the question of "What happened

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\(^{15}\)In the novena booklets in the Marian Library collection, this hymn first began appearing in the 1930s.

to the good, old hymns?" by arguing that many of them were neither "good" nor "old."

The majority of them [hymns] were an expression of the popular piety and devotion common in the late Victorian era. In general, its hymns are hyper-sentimental and emotional, individualistic and self-centered, in contrast to the dogmatic, corporate, Christ-centered piety of traditional and true Catholic piety. They are the legacy of the Protestant-secular philosophy of religion which makes religion a private communication of the soul and God, and of the self-centered spirit of Jansenism. The musical settings are chiefly secular and theatrical in character: saccharin melodies in dance and march rhythms, borrowed mainly from profane songs and operas.\[17\]

By the 1950s, many began expressing their dissatisfaction with popular Catholic hymns, because of their piety of individualism and their sentimental florid language. In a positive review of new hymnals striving to change the situation, the Jesuit musicologist, Clement J. McNaspy, expressed the feelings of many when he said, "While still rare for us Catholic Americans to be able to sing together without wincing at the words, the very anguish ... may actually prove a prelude to hope, a hope that may in time lead to a happy result."\[18\]

The severest criticism of popular Marian hymns came from those in the liturgical movement and professional church musicians. At its national liturgical weeks, the American liturgical movement encouraged participation at Mass through singing of hymns, as called for by Mediator Dei (1947) and Musicae Sacrae Disciplina (1955). Speakers at the North American liturgical weeks deplored both the lamentable state of participation and the dearth of acceptable hymns. One speaker at the liturgical conference even asked whether Catholics were capable of participating at Mass by singing hymns. Richard Gin- der's reply was that participation at the popular novenas in honor of the Miraculous Medal, the Sorrowful Mother, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help were proof that Catholics were capable


of participating. However, he noted that the Marian novenas provided, in most cases, "a most undesireable type of hymn, with bad verse and worse tunes." 19

Paul Hume, the controversial music critic, made his contribution to improving hymns with his blunt criticism. One of his readers was offended that Hume had given a bad review to an operatic rendition of a Marian hymn. Concerning this devoted individual, who apparently thought all Marian hymns were beyond criticism, Hume mused: "What, then, would he think if he knew the horrible truth about some of the musical atrocities that really are supposed to be doing honor to the Mother of God?" Some hymns sung in the Catholic Church "are very bad hymns indeed. And it is infinitely regrettable that so many from the absolute bottom of the barrel are hymns about the Blessed Mother." 20

Criticism of Marian hymns also came from the Society of St. Gregory of America, an association of professional Catholic Church musicians, with its publication The Catholic Choirmaster. The Society had its "white list" of recommended composers and compositions and its "black list" of hymns which should be forbidden in church. The four hymns in the latter category were the popular "Good Night, Sweet Jesus" (sometimes sung at the end of novena services) and three Marian hymns: "Mother Dearest, Mother Fairest," "Mother dear, O pray for me," "Mother at your feet is kneeling." 21

19 Richard Ginder, "Singing the Church's Music," in St. Pius X and Social Worship, 1903-1953: National Liturgical Week . . . 1953 (Elsherry, MO: Liturgical Conference, 1953), 58. Part of the solution was a national hymnal for the Catholic Church in the United States, a project which had been proposed in the 1950s, abandoned in the 1970s, and was proposed again in the 1980s.

20 Paul Hume, "Mother Dearest, Save Us," Marianist Magazine 47, no. 3 (March 1956): 8; later reprinted in The Catholic Mind 54 (June 1956): 329-34. The hymns were bad, not only because of the texts but also because of the melodies: "They are anything but simple and easy to sing. Wide, swooping intervals and an unconscionable use of the sixth (or what I always think of as the 'Libestraum leap'), rampant chromaticism (or barber-shop harmony) do not combine to make an easy-to-sing hymn. Nor does the 3/4 time in which many of these hymns are written help. Most of them, remember, come from the era when the waltz rhythm was at its height" (p. 10).

However, at the same time that dissatisfaction was voiced about the quality of hymns, particularly the Marian ones, a new era of Catholic hymnody was being inaugurated. A pioneering effort was Gregory Montini’s *The Saint Gregory Hymnal and Choir Book* (1940) and the *Pius X Hymnal* (1953) from the Pius X School of Liturgical Music (Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart). A true turning-point in the history of Catholic hymnals was the first edition of the *People’s Hymnal* (World Library of Sacred Music) in 1955. The hymnal attempted to implement the suggestion of the recent encyclical by providing hymns for the various parts of the Mass. The significant introduction to the hymnal was written by faculty members and seminarians at Theological College, Catholic University of America. This hymnal was meant “to avoid every meretricious pretense of emotion” and to be “a compilation of hymns meant to arouse a mature, honest and integrally human response.” It included a critique of the sentimentality of many hymns, together with a description of the qualities a good hymn should have.

Precisely because the hymn is an expression of popular religious devotion, it is subject to the less happy turns of human nature. These include affectation, exaggeration, and most commonly, sentimentality. All these devices, irrespective of their outward sincerity, manifest a piety that inwardly is untrue. Catholic devotion, as the Church takes care to emphasize, should represent, not what we would wish to feel, but what we actually do feel.22

3. Renewal of Marian Hymnody and the American Liturgical Movement

The renewal of Marian hymnody first came about through many individuals associated with the American liturgical movement. A hymnal which showed this influence, the *Pius X Hymnal* (1953), contained a new composition, “Mary the Dawn,” characterized by sobriety and originality. The author (who used the pseudonym Paul Cross) was Justin Mulcahy, C.P.

22*People’s Hymnal* (Cincinnati, OH: World Library of Sacred Music, 1955). One of the signers of the introductory document was Omer Westendorf, founder of the World Library of Sacred Music (Cincinnati, OH).
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(1894–1981), teacher at the Passionist Theologate at Dunkirk, New York, a pioneer of the liturgical movement and an associate of the Pius X School of Liturgical Music. This song is composed of six short verses, each containing two statements about Mary (e.g., root, grape) and two corresponding references to Christ (e.g., vine, wine).

Mary the Dawn, Christ the Perfect Day;
Mary the Gate, Christ the Heav’nly Way.

The structure of the melody (from Ambrosian chant—similar to the *Christus vincit*), which includes a statement and a response, illustrates Mary’s total orientation to Christ. The hymn concludes:

Mary the Mother, Christ the Mother’s Son.
Both ever blest while endless ages run. Amen.

The 1955 *People’s Hymnal* contained several original compositions by Michael Gannon, Melvin Farrell, S.S., and Omer Westendorf—all influential in the renewal of hymnody. Two of Michael Gannon’s have survived and become part of our repertoire. The first, “Star upon the Ocean, Maria,” is a paraphrase of the *Ave Maris Stella*, with a noteworthy line referring to Mary’s universal motherhood: “Mother of all races, Queen of heaven’s graces, Maria.” Another of Gannon’s hymns was “O Mary of All Women, You Are the Chosen One,” a hymn suggested for Advent. A line from this hymn anticipates the teaching of *Lumen gentium* (no. 65):

O Mary, you embody all God taught to our race,
For you are first and foremost in fullness of His grace.

Words preached at Fr. Mulcahy’s funeral indicate that the hymns he introduced were a departure from what Catholics were accustomed to hear. He was eulogized as “one of the most effective pedagogues in church music in this country at a time when it was pioneer work to introduce a refined and austere mode of music which was difficult to render and demanded an attentive appreciation of the meaning of the word” (from text of homily delivered at his funeral, February 21, 1981. Text provided by Fr. Morgan P. Hanlon, C.P., the Passionist Historical Archives, Union City, NJ).
A second contributor to the 1955 *People's Hymnal* was Fr. Melvin Farrell, S.S. (1930–1986). In addition to revising several traditional hymns with texts still used today, Fr. Farrell’s original compositions include a hymn for a May-crowning ceremony. The last verse of this hymn speaks of Mary’s influence within the framework of God’s love:

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Queen of mankind, while creation
Speaks the grandeur of God’s love,
Mold our hearts to seek His glory
Till we reach our home above.
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A noteworthy contribution of the 1955 *People’s Hymnal* to Marian hymnody is the “Virgin Born, We Bow before Thee.” Written by Bishop Reginald Herber (1783–1826), an Anglican bishop with Anglo-Catholic sympathies, but “fiercely anti-Roman,” the hymn was originally intended for use in the Anglican Church on the Third Sunday of Lent, to accompany the Gospel of Luke 11:27 (“Blessed the womb that bore you and the breasts that fed you! . . . More blessed still are those who hear the word of God and keep it”). The hymn is centered on Christ, “the Virgin-Born.”

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Virgin born, we bow before Thee,
Blessed was the womb that bore Thee . . .
Blessed was the hand that led Thee;
Blessed was the parent’s eye
That watched Thy slumb’ring infancy . . .
And blessed they, forever blest,
Who love Thee most and serve Thee best.24
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The next edition of the *People’s Hymnal* (1961) contained a hymn from the *Episcopal Hymnal* (1940) which was to become the most ecumenically popular of Marian hymns, “Sing

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24A. M. Allchin, *The joy of All Creation* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1984), 97. Allchin comments: “There is something remarkable about this hymn which for all its apparent simplicity manages to say so much in so small a space.” (The inclusion of hymns from a non-Catholic source was a harbinger of a practice that was to become common in the post-conciliar ecumenical atmosphere—evidence that the musical ecumenism preceded Vatican II.)
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The Popular Marian Hymn of Mary, Pure and Lowly. It was originally written for the feast of the Annunciation by Roland Ford Palmer for the Canadian Book of Common Prayer. The hymn contains a succinct statement on the Incarnation:

Fairest child of fairest mother,
God the Lord who came to earth,
Word made flesh, our very brother,
Takes our nature by his birth.

With admirable simplicity, the hymn describes the relations between Jesus and Mary in the "home at Nazareth":

Toil and labor cannot weary
Love enduring unto death.

The final verse's doxology includes Mary:

Glory be to God the Father,
Glory be to God the Son,
Glory be to God the Spirit,
Glory to the Three in One.
From the heart of blessed Mary,
From all saints the song ascends,
And the Church the strain reechoes
Unto earth's remotest ends.

Another Marian hymn, which first appeared in the 1965 edition of the People's Hymnal and was destined to be part of the repertoire of Marian hymns, was the paraphrase of the Ave Maris Stella by Rev. M. Quinn, O.P.

Praise to Mary, Heaven's Gate,
Guiding Star of Christian's Way.
Mother of our Lord and King,
Light and hope to souls astray.
When you heard the call of God,
Choosing to fulfill his plan,
By your perfect act of love
Hope was born in fallen man.

25See Appendix to this article.
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These six Marian hymns—"Mary, the Dawn," "O Mary of All Women," "Star upon the Ocean, Maria," "Virgin Born We Bow before Thee," "Sing of Mary," and "Praise to Mary, Heaven's Gate"—appeared in Catholic hymnals before Vatican II. They were the first products of a reform of Marian hymnody, undertaken in large measure by individuals involved with the liturgical movement in response to the encyclical Mediator Dei and Musicae Sacrae Disciplina. These six hymns survived the stormy decades of the 1960s and 1970s and provided a basis for a repertoire of Marian hymns.

4. The Marian Hymn and the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II

With the introduction of the vernacular liturgy in the 1960s, musical turmoil occurred in many schools, colleges, and religious communities. Many were caught in the crossfire between those trying to retain a classical or traditional repertoire and those wishing to introduce the sung vernacular texts. Musicae Sacrae (1958), which encouraged the singing of hymns at Mass, was replaced by Musicam sacram (1967), which encouraged the singing of the actual parts of the Mass (the acclamations, responses, responsorial and processional psalms). While not excluded, hymns were to reflect the different parts of the Mass as well as the different liturgical seasons (Musicam sacram, no. 36).

However, the hymn fared poorly in the early stages of the vernacular liturgy. The vernacular vacuum encouraged an "explosion" of new texts and melodies for the liturgy. The hymn—possibly because it was perceived as being too formal, too literary, too doctrinal—was not favored in the new liturgical music styles. The guitar, which replaced the organ in some places, was ill-suited to accompany the hymn. Compositions appeared which loosely paraphrased Scripture, with both melody and text written by the musician. These songs contained few references to doctrine, the Virgin Mary, or the liturgical seasons. The hymn almost disappeared from the collections of music for liturgy.26

26A collection representative of the earliest period of the vernacular liturgy is found in the Hymnal for Young Christians (copyright 1966, and printed four times in 1967).
The paucity and, in some cases, the disappearance of Marian hymns following Vatican II should not be attributed to a conscious anti-Marian sentiment. Pastors and liturgical musicians were simply overwhelmed with the task of providing suitable music for the texts of the liturgy. The preoccupation with providing songs for the fundamental liturgical texts—and the consequent eclipse of the hymn, particularly the Marian hymn—was one of many factors contributing to the "great silence" about Mary which descended upon the Church in the United States in the immediate post-conciliar period. A lessening of attention to the liturgical seasons also contributed to this Marian vacuum.

5. New Age of Catholic Hymnody

In the 1970s, many hastily written materials of the previous decade were left behind. There was an awareness that providing a suitable musical repertoire would be the result of long-
term encouragement of composers and the collaboration of many. In the introduction to the British *New Catholic Hymnal* (1972), Cardinal Heenan wrote: "The period of experiment in liturgical music is likely to be prolonged. Fortunately the ecumenical climate allows us to borrow melodies from those other Christian churches which have always praised God in the English tongue... [while] encouraging modern composers to create new and arrange old music." In 1972, the American Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy issued *Music in Catholic Worship*. In this significant document (which would be reissued ten years later), music was presented as an integral element of liturgical celebrations which are intended "to nourish and strengthen the commitment of faith" (no. 23). The document encouraged the singing of the responses, acclamations, proclamations, and the responsorial psalm. A variety of musical forms was recommended, "including classical hymnody." Ten years later, when this document was reissued with slight revisions, there was a recommendation that music pay greater attention to the seasons of the liturgical year. Hymns are perhaps the principal way of accenting the different seasons of the liturgical year.

New hymnals appeared which raised the standards of American Catholic hymnody. Contrary to the earlier hymnals which were almost always the work of an individual, the hymnals appearing after 1975 were the work of committees of scholars—liturgists, musicians, poets and pastors.

The first significant publication on the American scene was *The Catholic Liturgy Book*, with Ralph Kiefer, Ph.D., as general editor. The preface noted that the collection was not the product of a few months of work, but "the result of a decade of serious search, criticism, scholarship and ultimate concern for an all-inclusive book which will aid the spiritual formation of the people by inculcating a deep and informative sense of tra-
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This hymnal introduced to Catholics another Marian hymn written by an Anglican clergyman, Vincent Stucky Stratton Coles (1845–1929); it is a good example of a Marian hymn with a Christocentric focus:

All who put their faith in Jesus
Sing the wonders that were done
When the love of God the Father
O'er sin the victory won,
When he made the Virgin Mary
Mother of his only Son.

The last verse contains an admirable doxology with a Marian resonance:

Therefore let all faithful people
Tell the honor of her name,
Let the Church in her foreshadowed
Part in her thanksgiving claim;
What Christ's Mother sang in gladness
Let Christ's people sing the same.30

Also in the 1970s, some hymns composed by English Catholics appeared in American collections. From the Stanbrook Abbey Hymnal (1974), there was the (unsigned) composition:

Mary, crowned with living light,
Temple of the Lord,
Place of peace and holiness,
Shelter of the Word.
Mystery of sinless life
In our fallen race,
Free from shadow, you reflect
Plenitude of grace.

Possibly the finest contemporary Catholic hymn writer is the English Jesuit, James Quinn. From *New Hymns for All Seasons* (1970) is his paraphrase of the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*:

Mother of Christ, our hope, our Patroness,
Star of the sea, our beacon in distress,
Guide to the shores of everlasting day
God's holy people on their pilgrim way.
Virgin by vow, but Mother of all grace,
Chosen by God to be his dwelling place,
Blessed are you: God's word you did believe,
Your "Yes" undid the "No" of sinful Eve.

The decade's significant event for hymnody was the publication of the four-volume *Liturgy of the Hours* (1975) and the one-volume *Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours* (1976), to be used for celebration of Morning and Evening Prayer. Hymns are an integral part of the Liturgy of the Hours, and those selected for these publications, since they enjoyed the official approbation of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Apostolic See, could serve as the basis for a national body of hymns. (Although the hymns are not identical in the four-volume and the one-volume editions of the Liturgy of the Hours—published one year apart, the majority of hymns are found in both publications.) There is a good selection of Marian materials: thirteen hymns, four biblical canticles (Lucien Deiss), and the five traditional Marian anthems (antiphons). The following compositions, found in both editions of the Liturgy of the Hours, could constitute a basic corpus of Marian hymns: "Mary, Crowned with Living Light," "Mary, the Dawn," "Mary Immaculate Star of the Morning," "Mother of Christ, Our Hope, Our Patroness," "O Mary, of All Women," "Sing of Mary," and "Virgin Born, We Bow before You."³¹ Both editions also include the biblical canticles of

³¹Cf. Appendix here. An indication of the influence which the World Library of Sacred Music has had on the renewal of Marian hymnody is that it holds the copyright for eight of the Marian hymns contained in these two volumes.

The hymnody section in the British *Liturgy of the Hours* (published by the hierarchies of Australia, England, Wales and Ireland) is much smaller than the American edition. The British edition contains six Marian hymns (all in the Common of the Blessed...
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Lucien Deiss: “Joy to You, O Virgin Mary,” “Rejoice, O Virgin Mary,” and “Mother of Holy Hope.”

The People’s Mass Book of 1984 is the successor of several editions of the People’s Hymnal.32 Dedicated to Omer Westendorf, “in grateful recognition and appreciation of his outstanding contribution to Catholic liturgical music in America,” it contains, in addition to settings of the responsorials for Marian feasts, fourteen Marian hymns. What is surprising is the number of Marian hymns from the first edition, thirty years before, which have successfully passed the test of time. An interesting new composition is the work of Willard E. Jabusch, “She Will Show Us the Promised One,” an account of the principal moments of Mary’s life at Nazareth, Bethlehem, Cana, Golgotha, and Jerusalem (Easter).

Worship: A Hymnal and Service Book for Roman Catholics (3d ed., 1986), edited by Robert Batastini, contains over four hundred hymns, “with texts which are based almost entirely on scriptures.” Collaborating in this publication were hymnologists, musicians, and liturgists. This hymnal is representative of a new standard in American Catholic hymnals: texts and melodies are properly acknowledged (which was not the practice of Catholic hymnals of a generation ago). There are several indexes: first lines, scriptural, liturgical, and a “metrical index of tunes.” Of the four hundred hymns, eighteen are Marian. Included here is a composition of George Timms, “Sing We of the Blessed Mother,” which alludes to the joys and sorrows of Mary. Her greatest joy—the Assumption—came when the “Lord of all creation / Brought her to his heavenly home.” The hymn concludes with the prayer:

Virgin Mother, Mary blessed,  
Raised on high and crowned with grace,  
May your Son, the world’s redeemer,  
Grant us all to see his face.33

Virgin): two translations by Ronald Knox (from Dante Alighieri and Venantius Fortunatus); two contemporary compositions from the Stanbrook Abbey Hymnal; two paraphrases of the Ave Maris Stella (one by Ralph Wright and the other by John Lingard [1771–1851]).

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A composition from this hymnal, new to American Catholics, is Timothy Dudley Smith's hymn paraphrase of the Magnificat in a strophic form:

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord,  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
Tender to me the promise of his word;  
In God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.\(^{34}\)

A companion volume to *Worship* is *Gather* (1988),\(^{35}\) intended as "a collection of contemporary folk style hymns, songs, and psalms that is truly comprehensive. . . . a collection of sophisticated music for worship in a style that is more popular than classical." Among three hundred and fifty compositions, there are only three Marian ones: a setting of the Canticle of Mary; Vincent Stuckey Colles' "All Who Claim the Faith of Jesus" (with melody of Marty Haugen); and "I Sing a Maid [of Tender Years]" by M. D. Ridge, with a lilting melody (tune: "The Flight of the Earls"). That not more were included shows the paucity of acceptable Marian hymns in a contemporary or popular style.

Another comprehensive hymnal is *The Collegeville Hymnal* (1990), edited by Edward J. McKenna, with an introduction by Cardinal Bernardin.\(^{36}\) It is the seventh and updated version of *Our Parish Prays and Sings*, first published at Collegeville in 1959. A national board of experts was responsible for collecting the music and texts. Of the nearly five hundred songs, twenty-nine are Marian. Among the newer compositions is "A Litany of Our Lady," with text by Andrew Greeley and music by Edward McKenna. The litany includes references to nature, the family, human concerns: "Mother of the budding earth . . . Mother of the flourishing field . . . Mother of the ample harvest . . . Mother of the family meal . . . Lady of burning love . . . Lady of the broken heart . . . Lady whom God desired . . . Lady of all of us."

\(^{34}\)Text copyright by the Hope Publishing Co., 1962. This hymn is found in the national hymnal for English-speaking Catholics in Canada, *Catholic Book of Worship II* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1980).


A hymnal intended for communities celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours is *The Hymnal for the Hours* (1989). Several interesting new Marian hymns are found there, among them two by Ralph Wright, O.S.B. One calls upon Mary to assist in our worship:

> Hear our prayer, O gentle Mother,  
> Help us worship as we gather  
> That with you we may give praise  
> To the Father all our days.

Wright’s second Marian hymn speaks of her at the cross:

> Mary, filled with prayerful wonder  
> At the greatness of your Son,  
> You reveal the Father’s glory,  
> Telling all that he has done.37

The 1980s also saw two hymnals composed for minority groups within American Catholicism, one for African-American Catholics and the other for Spanish-speaking Catholics. There is a startling but entirely comprehensible contrast in the Marian hymnody in these two works. *Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc., 1987) contains over five hundred songs. In addition to a basic repertoire of Catholic hymnody from the European tradition, there are traditional and recently composed hymns from the African-American, Gospel, and Baptist traditions. These latter have no tradition of Marian hymnody.38 By contrast, the hymnal for Hispanic Catholics, *Flor y Canto* (Portland: Oregon Catholic Press, 1989), can draw upon a long and well-developed Marian tradition; among the five hundred Spanish hymns in this hymnal, more than fifty honor Mary.

37 *The Hymnal for the Hours* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 1989), 295 and 296. The introduction mentions the difficulty of finding suitable material to celebrate the feasts of the sanctoral cycle. What is said of hymns for the saints is to a degree applicable also to Marian hymns: “The poetry is often weak and the sentiments expressed are rarely grounded in Scripture and are often alien to the insights of contemporary liturgical theology” (p. [4]).

38 *Lead Me, Guide Me* has a setting of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary written in a calypso style by Norbert Farrell, and one African folk hymn, “Salamu Maria, eemama” (a setting of the Hail Mary to an African melody).
A survey of the hymns written from 1953 to the present shows that considerable progress has been made in Marian hymnody. Examination of the texts indicates that much of the emotion and sentimentality of the nineteenth century is gone. The great distance between the Virgin Mary and the world (Mary's high dwelling place in heaven portrayed as being remote and unattainable) has been lessened. The exclusive mother-child relation has yielded to other ways of referring to Mary. Mary's unique election and holiness are alluded to, although the more doctrinal terms have disappeared. The ethereal, almost ahistorical, figure of Mary which appeared in some hymns has given place to a more specific historical person as portrayed in the Scriptures; the Marian canticles of Lucien Deiss even contain Old Testament references with Marian significance. Some hymns contain doxologies that include Mary in praise of the Trinity. Lastly, since some of the Marian hymns were taken from Protestant collections, there would appear to be a degree of ecumenical acceptability.

A last observation deals with the accessibility and acceptability of these new Marian hymns. The degree to which these hymns are known and accepted is another question. Although they are in the Liturgy of the Hours (4-vol. ed., 1977) and the fine Catholic hymnals which have appeared in the past decade, they are not usually found in missalettes and other materials intended for parish participation. Because of copyright restrictions, these hymns probably cannot be gathered together in one source. So, those interested in presenting a full image of Mary in religious education must search out and promote these hymns. It is only the hymns which are known and accepted that find their way into new editions of any hymnal.

As a recent survey indicates, these Marian hymns of the last
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forty years have not made their way into the common repertoire of hymns known and sung by Catholics.41

6. An Agenda for Marian Hymns

This last section continues the assessment of Marian hymns by offering suggestions intended to fill the lacunae in our present corpus. It is also intended as a guide for those wishing to compose or to promote Marian hymns. Hymn writing requires a developed sense of poetry; a deep familiarity with Scripture and with tradition’s images, symbols, and references to the Virgin Mary; and a knowledge of what the Catholic liturgy requires of a hymn. Few hymns will fit all the requirements listed here; nevertheless, many attempts must be made so that at least some survive the test of taste and time. In this regard, Music in Catholic Worship offers this sage advice: “The words of St. Augustine should not be forgotten: ‘Do not allow yourselves to be offended by the imperfect while you strive for the perfect.’”

The greatest need in Marian hymnody is not the music, but suitable texts which can be set to music. During the early stages of the liturgical reform, the concern was that there be accurate and orthodox translations of the official liturgical texts. There was little regard for whether texts were suitable for singing, and no texts were provided for congregational singing. Writers and poets disappeared from the liturgical scene, and musicians filled the vacuum by supplying words for their own melodies. The recent Ten-Year Report for the Milwaukee Symposia of Composers recognized that “musical texts . . . composed with song in mind” must involve “care in the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables, and attention to the sense lines” (no. 50). It also recognized that musicians were not necessarily equipped to write texts: “Composers, trained in the

41A recent survey in Church (Summer, 1994) is entitled “100 Songs Every Parish Should Sing,” by Sheila Browne and Richard M. Gibala. In the final list were “Be Joyful Mary” (Regina Coeli), “Hail Holy Queen” (Salve Regina Coelitum), “Immaculate Mary” (Lourdes Hymn), “Magnificat” (both Gelineau and Chepponis settings recommended). Although these are all beautiful and eminently acceptable, one might hope that in a listing that includes many works from contemporary composers, at least one contemporary Marian hymn might have been included.
craft of musical composition, are not always equally gifted in shaping words for their music" (no. 52).\textsuperscript{42}

The hymn form consists of lines of poetry arranged in stanzas. There is a regular meter, consisting of a number of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line. The rhythmic pattern and rhyme scheme are repeated in each stanza. The stanzas progressively develop the basic theme of the hymn. The rhythmic and rhyme pattern are basic to the hymn, but the quality of the hymn depends upon its precision of language, its imagery, allusions, and the pregnancy of the text. A new melody may be written for the hymn text, or it can also be sung to a known melody of the same meter. (There are "canticle" texts in irregular free verse style. However, because of its rhythm, rhyme, and poetic qualities, the hymn has a greater potential for conveying a message in a way that can be retained and assimilated.)

A second preliminary requirement for hymn writing is a determination of the liturgical use of the hymn. The Marian hymns of previous century were written for evening devotions, processions, novenas. The need for hymns for these services continues, but the greater need is for hymns with Marian references that can be sung at the Eucharist. Since most Catholics have little opportunity for participation in religious services outside of the Eucharist, the hymn at the Eucharist might be for many the only opportunity to hear a message about Mary. However, hymns for the Eucharist must be sensitive both to the needs and moments of the liturgy as well as the role of the Virgin Mary within the liturgy.

Where can hymns, specifically Marian hymns, appear in the liturgy? The fundamental structure of the liturgy—the responses, acclamations, the responsorial psalms, and the ordinary chants—must be respected, and the special roles of the congregation, choir, and cantor should not be confused.\textsuperscript{43} Some moments that provide opportunities for congregational singing are the processional, the recessional, and the thanks-giving song after communion. Each of these moments allows


\textsuperscript{43}See the directives in \textit{Music in Catholic Worship} (1982), nos. 34–37.
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for a great variety of themes, but ideally all should in some way be related to the liturgical action and the season. The processional hymn is intended to prepare the assembly "for listening to the word of God" and "to help people become conscious of themselves as a worshipping community." The communion song should "foster a sense of unity" and express "the joy of unity in the body of Christ." The recessional hymn frequently deals with the mission of the Church.

Hymns are needed which develop the role of the Virgin Mary in liturgy. These hymns, however, need not be exclusively Marian. Hymns with a Christological, Trinitarian, or ecclesial focus could also allude to the Virgin Mary, because of the "indissoluble" bond uniting Mary to the Christ, the Trinity, and the Church. The relation between Mary and the Church at worship is a rich symbol to be explored. At worship, the similarity between the Church and Mary becomes especially apparent. As Mary listened to God's words, so does the Church; as Mary gave birth to Christ and presented him to the world, so the Church, through its sacraments, brings forth and communicates Christ (virgo-ecclesia laudans, audiens, nutriens, pariens, offerens). On its pilgrim journey, the Church looks to Mary as its icon and fulfillment.

Similar to poetry, hymns suggest rather than explain. For that reason, the hymn writer must be imbued with the scriptural images referring to Mary and with the insights and imagery of recent ecclesial documents on Mary: Lumen gentium (1964), Marialis cultus (1974), Redemptoris mater (1987), the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994). One indispensable resource for images that are both scriptural as well as contemporary is the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Collection was developed to help us


The advice of the Milwaukee Symposia of Composers concerning the distinctive style of Catholic worship is germane to Marian hymnody. "In the United States there is a tendency to overemphasize the individual, to the detriment of our collective consciousness. Redemption in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is a collective, not a private, reality. It is also a hard reality. Consequently, overly indulgent, sentimental and personalized texts are to be avoided" (no. 53).
move beyond the threadbare repetition of single-dimensional themes. Its purpose is to promote liturgical "celebrations that are marked by sound doctrine, the rich variety of themes, and the rightful commemoration of the saving deeds that the Lord God has accomplished in the Blessed Virgin in view of the mystery of Christ and the Church."\(^{46}\)

The Collection's two axial principles—both well explained in the General Introduction—can contribute to an enriched Marian hymnody. First, Mary is related to the mystery of Christ commemorated throughout the Church's liturgical year: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany; Lent, Easter and Pentecost; Ordinary Time.\(^{47}\) The second principle is that, through her relation to the mystery of Christ, Mary has become part of all the stages of salvation history: the preparatory stage, the revelation Christ, the age of the Church, the parousia. The Collection abounds with scriptural references and allusions, and with the rich symbolic language of many moments and groups within the Christian tradition. The Collection is an official liturgical book with phrases and images which can greatly enrich and enhance Marian prayer, poetry, and hymns.

Composing texts for Marian hymns requires different skills and sensitivity to diverse disciplines. The hymn must be in accord with the Scriptures and with sound doctrine. It should convey some of the variety of scriptural and liturgical contexts in which Mary is present. It should have a poetic freshness, an attractive melody, and be related to the experience of the congregation. If the requirements appear demanding, the benefits that can be derived from a Marian hymn with acceptable religious, literary, and musical qualities are worth the effort. The Marian hymn is an expression of Marian devotion, a means for conveying to large numbers a message or image of Mary. Good hymns transcend denominational boundaries, and a Marian hymn can be the basis for some common understanding and acceptance of the role of the Virgin Mary. (Ironi-


\(^{47}\)See the three issues of Marian Studies (vols. 42, 43, 44 [1991–93]) devoted to the presence of the Virgin Mary in the various seasons of the liturgical year.
cally, at ecumenical gatherings where, at present, there can be no agreement on a Marian prayer, there is the possibility of using a Marian hymn common to all the denominations.) Lastly, the evangelizing influence of a Marian hymn should not be underestimated.

* * * * * * *

Marian hymnody does not exist in a vacuum. The problems and the progress of Marian hymnody are related to the fortunes and future of hymnody within Catholicism. Marian hymnody can thrive and flourish only within a vital tradition of hymns promoted and encouraged by Church leaders and those in religious education and pastoral ministry. A little-known advocate and admirer of hymns and congregational singing was Pope Paul VI. In an address on liturgical music, he alluded to the great benefit of popular religious songs which encourage popular participation:

Without sacred song, can a parish community be alive, possess a full, beautiful, ecclesial, and baptismal life? The pastoral issue is not just to bring about singing on the part of a small group, the schola of musicians, but of the great mass of people—children, all the women, all the men, the way they do in the Northern countries. When the Germans come to Rome, all the men sing and their voices can be clearly heard. . . . I do not remember ever hearing men in Italy sing with such gusto.

We hope for a new flourishing of songs for the people . . . They have the power to give to our prayer the charism not just of music, but also of poetry, of the enthusiasm that should accompany the expression of prayer and make it sing.48

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APPENDIX

THE FIVE MARIAN HYMNS WHICH APPEAR MOST FREQUENTLY IN CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT HYMNALS

(The numbers beneath each title indicate the collections in which the hymn appears.)

Sing of Mary
-1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,12,13,19,20

Virgin-Born, We Bow before Thee
-1,2,5,11,14,20

Mary the Dawn
-1,2,3,8,20

Tell Out My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord
-5,12,14,16

You Who Put Your Faith in Jesus (All Who Claim the Faith of Jesus)
-1,3,12,20

Hymnals


