Integrating Marian Devotion in Catholic Spirituality

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INTEGRATING MARIAN DEVOTION IN CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY

The renowned Father Faber, writing the Preface to an English translation of St. Louis Mary De Montfort's *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, makes the following observation:

Here in England Mary is not half enough preached. Devotion to her is low and thin and poor. It is frightened out of its wits by the sneers of heresy. It is always wishing to make Mary so little of a Mary that Protestants may feel at ease about her. Its ignorance of theology makes it unsubstantial and unworthy. It is not the prominent characteristic of our religion which it ought to be. It has no faith in itself. Hence it is that Jesus is not loved.¹

Those words were written in 1862. In 1963, during the second session of Vatican Council II, some of the bishops explicitly requested that the schema on Mary be presented and discussed in such a way that it will not offend our separated brothers and thus become an obstacle to possible union. This does not mean, as all should know, that any of the bishops love Mary less, but they realize that whereas many Protestants have an appreciation of Mary's lofty dignity as Mother of Christ, those same Protestants may be unwilling to include devotion to Mary in their practices of piety. The division that exists is not because of Mary, but because of devotion to Mary.

Father Faber’s lament has little significance for modern Catholics. No one could say that Mary is not preached or that devotion to her is low and thin and poor. Neither could one say that the theology of Mary is deficient, especially when it received such an impetus from such great Pontiffs as Pius X, ¹St. Louis Mary de Montfort, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, translated by Frederick William Faber, D.D. (revised edition, Bay Shore, N.Y., 1949) xi–xii.
Leo XIII, Pius XI and Pius XII. Indeed, it would be easy to find some persons who would express a fear of excessive devotion to Mary, or at least a devotion that is too subjective and personal. Thus, a contemporary French theologian makes the following evaluation of Marian devotion:

Devotion to Mary touches our affective life too profoundly not to need to be protected against an egoistic perversion. . . . Does not this spontaneous love often become a form of self-seeking right from the start? We believe that we are giving veneration to Mary, but are we not, rather, anxious for our own satisfaction and appeasement? The child who is afraid of life cuddles up in his mother's arms; he wants to be protected, defended and preserved from rough contacts or brutal shocks. Raised to a spiritual level, is not that the attitude of many clients of our Lady? . . . Whence the need of critical reflection in order to purify our love of our Lady by eliminating the latent egoism and the excessively sentimental elements. One speaks willingly of exaggerations and deviations in the Marian cult; and one is not wrong to be on guard against that devout deformation of the principle which is thoughtlessly bandied about: De Maria nunquam satis. But these exaggerations occur only because they find a reception in a sensitivity which is more anxious for sentimental feeling than for that strong and courageous love which the sad history of our redemption attaches to Mary.  

There can be no doubt that there is always danger of exaggeration in devotion to Mary, and even in devotion to the sacred humanity of Christ. We have evidence of this in the fact that the Church has found it necessary from time to time to impose restrictions on certain devotions or to forbid certain titles and artistic representations of Christ and of Mary. The danger makes it all the more imperative that we have a sound and orthodox theology of Mary and that devotion to Mary does not outrun the doctrinal basis of that devotion. When this happens, the fervent client of Mary may readily become the greatest obstacle to true Marian devotion.

Theological Basis of Marian Devotion

All the sanctity, dignity and glory of Mary stem from the fact that she is the Mother of God. Her Immaculate Conception and her concomitant plenitude of grace were bestowed on her in view of the divine maternity for which God has chosen her. In explaining why the divine maternity is the reason for Mary's plenitude of grace, St. Thomas states a principle which has served all theologians of Mary as a basis for assigning to her a long series of offices and titles which run parallel to those which belong to Christ. Then St. Thomas proceeds further and intimates that the Mother of God is likewise the Mother of men:

The more closely a thing is related to its principle, the more it shares in the effect of that principle. . . . But Christ is the principle of grace, authoritatively as regards His divinity and instrumentally as regards His humanity. . . . But the Blessed Virgin was closest to Christ as regards His humanity because He received His human nature from her, and therefore it was due to her to receive a greater fullness of grace than others. . . . The Blessed Virgin received such a plenitude of grace so that she would be closest to the author of grace, in order that she might receive into herself Him who is full of all grace and, in giving birth to Him, she might in some way dispense grace to all.

So great is the dignity of the divine maternity that, after God, nothing greater can be imagined. Thus, St. Ambrose asks: "What is more noble than the Mother of God?" and St. Anselm says that nothing is equal to Mary and nothing is greater than Mary, save God alone. Since she is the Mother of God, Mary pertains to the same order as the hypostatic union, not by efficient or instrumental causality, but by her concursus in

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3 Cf. Summa theologica, III, 7, 10, ad 1.
4 Summa theologica, III, 27, 5, corpus and ad 1. Cf. also R. Bernard, O.P., The Mystery of Mary (St. Louis, 1960) 3-34.
5 Cf. St. Ambrose, De virg., 2; PL 16, 209.
6 St. Anselm, Or. 52 ad S.V.M.; PL 158, 451.
the generation of Christ. She likewise enjoys a real and true affinity with God as subsistent in His divinity because of Christ's hypostatic union. Finally, because of her relationship to the hypostatic union and the resulting spiritual affinity with God is subsisting in His divinity, Mary is united by special relations to the Trinity and to each Person in the Trinity. As regards the Father, she is the first of all the adopted children; as regards the Son, she is His Mother; as regards the Holy Spirit, she is in a special way His temple and His spouse. In view of the foregoing, the divine maternity is considered by the majority of theologians to surpass in excellence the grace of adoption, sanctifying grace, the beatific vision and the priesthood of the New Law.

We know and define her to be truly the Mother of God and to be so closely related to the Son of God made man as to belong to the order of the Incarnation. It would be idolatry to adore her, and no Christian would think of doing it. And yet to fail to give her a worship that is in a class by itself would amount to misjudging what she really is. Now Mary's greatness was not created by our devotion. The facts thrust her greatness upon us. Hence the Catholic Church knows that she has every right to repeat unendingly: "Holy Mary, Mother of God. . . ." Evidently, this dignity does not make Mary God, nor does it lift her in any way above the rank of creatures. But this dignity is not purely honorary either, without repercussions or effects in the realm of reality. Among the degrees of union with God, it ranks, as theologians have taken care to point out, immediately after the hypostatic union, far above union with God through sanctifying grace or even through the beatific vision. She receives from her divine maternity . . . the sublime investiture that places her in the same order as Christ, on an equal footing with Him in a certain respect, and sets her by His side above all other persons and things.

7 Cf. Gregory Alastruey, The Blessed Virgin Mary, I (St. Louis, 1963) 66-68.
8 See ibid., I, 68-69.
9 Cf. ibid., I, 69-76.
To be the Mother of God would in itself suffice to place Mary in an exalted position of eminence which surpasses that of all other creatures on earth or in glory. That title alone makes her deserving of the cult or veneration of all the faithful. But, unlike other mothers, Mary’s vocation demanded of her that she accompany her Son in a most intimate manner through all the phases of His life and, at the end, should share with Him that tragic suffering by which He redeemed the world. And thus, that which was the high point in the life of Christ, namely, the passion and death for which He came into this world, likewise was for His Mother, by her association with Him, the most sublime manifestation of her love. Mary’s compassion is the crowning act of her mission on earth; it is also the root of many of her titles and offices.

Mary’s cooperation in the redemption of the human race presupposes a Redeemer who could die to pay the price of our ransom, and therefore, by the same consent which she gave for the Incarnation, she consented also to be a consort in redemption. So Pope Leo XIII teaches:

When she professed herself the handmaid of the Lord for the mother’s office, and when, in the Temple, she offered her whole self with her Child Jesus, she was established as His consort in the painful expiation offered by her Son for the sins of the world.\(^{11}\)

It is not necessary to remark that we may in no sense speak of an absolute necessity for Mary’s cooperation in redemption, for God could have redeemed man without Mary’s intervention. Indeed, He could even have given us the Redeemer in another way than through Mary.\(^{12}\) Therefore, Mary’s cooperation must always presuppose God’s free ordinance by which He decreed

\(^{12}\) Cf. St. Pius X, *Ad diem illum* (1904). Father Bernard exclaims: “O Protestant brothers, how can we fail to notice this Woman by the side of the dying Jesus, and how can we want to take her away from Him? Is it not evident that He cannot and will not do without her... Far from taking anything away from the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ, Mary’s mediation at that place and moment merely added to it” (op. cit., 159).
that the Blessed Virgin should concur in the redemptive work of Christ. This she did remotely, by giving her consent to the Incarnation, and proximately, by her personal association with the passion and death of her Son.

If we consider Mary's cooperation in objective redemption, we are considering her under the title of coredemptrix, and her role in that capacity may in turn be considered under a twofold aspect: that of satisfaction and that of merit. Mary's cooperation was truly satisfactory and it neither lessens nor opposes that of Christ, but neither could it increase the value of Christ's satisfaction. It was something added to the satisfaction of Christ, and the majority of theologians maintain that it was a congruous and not a condign satisfaction.¹⁹

As regards the meritorious aspect of Mary's cooperation in the work of redemption, Pope Leo XIII referred to "the singular merits by which Mary shared with her Son in human redemption . . . at which mysteries she was not only present, but she intervened in them."²⁴ St. Pius X has given us a statement which has since become one of the basic principles in orthodox Mariology:

Since Mary surpassed all in holiness and union with Christ and was associated with Him in the work of human salvation, she merits for us de congruo, as they say, all that Christ merits de condigno.¹⁵

It is clear that the Pope was referring to Mary's compassion:

From this communion of sufferings and wills between Christ and Mary she merited to become the most worthy reparatrix of the fallen

¹⁸ Among those who hold for Mary's condign satisfaction are Vega, Cuervo, Llamera and Aldama. Fuller references in J. B. Carol, O.F.M., Our Lady's Coredemption, in Mariology (ed. Carol), 2 (Milwaukee, 1957) 403-404.


world and therefore the dispensatrix of all the gifts that Jesus acquired by His death and His blood.¹⁶

What did Mary merit by her cooperation in objective redemption? Note that we are speaking of the graces she merited for others;¹⁷ we are not here treating of the application or dispensing of graces. In general, Mary merited for us de congruo whatever Christ merited for us de condigno. In particular, she merited for us the remission of sins, sanctifying grace and glory, the assistance by which a man disposes himself for justification, all the graces conferred after justification, and predestination. Thus, according to the entire economy of redemption, God decreed to save men through the condign merits of Christ and the congruous merits of Mary.¹⁸

We come now to consider Mary's cooperation in subjective redemption, which signifies the application of the graces merited for men through the passion and death of Christ. We are asking what is Mary's personal, immediate and actual cooperation in the distribution of the graces of redemption.

Jesus Christ is our only Mediator, as proved by the words of St. Pius X: "It cannot, of course, be denied that the dispensing of these treasures is the particular and supreme right of Jesus Christ, for they are the exclusive fruit of His death, who by His nature is the Mediator between God and man."

It is hardly necessary to remark that it is not a matter of Mary's cooperation in the distribution of graces in the sense that such a prerogative belongs to her ex ipsa natura rei, in such a way that God, absolutely speaking, could not bestow any grace without Mary's mediation, but insofar as it pertains to her ex positivo et libero Dei decreto (by a positive and free decree of God), who in the present

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*
¹⁷ Mary merited for herself condignly whatever graces any other person can so merit for himself. She could not merit any graces which Christ merited for Himself, the first grace given to herself or any grace which Christ merited for her exclusively. Cf. Alastruey, *op. cit.*, II, 49.
¹⁸ For a more detailed treatment of Mary as coredemptrix, see Gregory Alastruey, *The Blessed Virgin Mary*, II (St. Louis, 1964) 138-146.
economy has determined and willed not to bestow any redemptive grace without the mediation of the Blessed Virgin. Once this disposition of the divine will is admitted, Mary's cooperation in the distribution of graces is hypothetically necessary. Therefore, by reason of a "consequent impotence," God could not bestow any grace without Mary's intervention because He cannot contradict His own decree. This cooperation of Mary in the distribution of graces must be understood as applying numerically to all the redemptive graces bestowed on mankind since original sin, although her intervention in graces granted under the Old Law must be understood in a different manner. The universality of her mediation extends to all graces, internal and external, habitual and actual, gratum facientes and gratis datae, sacramental and extra-sacramental, ordinary and extraordinary, petitioned and non-petitioned, those impetrated by the Virgin Mary and those impetrated by Christ or the saints. In a word, all graces bestowed in the present economy. Excluded from this mediation are the gifts of grace bestowed on Christ and Mary.

The doctrine of Mary's mediation and distribution of graces is not a dogma of faith nor is it uniformly classified by theologians. However, if we consider the ordinary magisterium of the Church, the tradition of the Church's teaching, the consensus of modern theologians and the piety of the faithful, we may safely state that the doctrine of Mary's universal mediation in the distribution of graces in proxima fidei. The following statements by various popes substantiate the doctrine:


20 Henri Holstein, S.J., art. cit.: "Sur la nature exacte de la participation de Marie à l'oeuvre rédemptrice, et de sa causalité dans la communication de la grâce, l'Englise, on le sait, n'a pas encore officiellement pris position; elle laisse ses théologiens discuter, et s'accorder, non sans peine, sur un vocabulaire assez flottant encore. Sans entrer dans leurs discussions, contentons-nous d'évoquer l'incidence d'une représentation trop sentimentale du rôle de la Vierge—Marie 'intermédiaire' nécessaire entre le Christ et nous—sur la piété et la vie spirituelle.

"Le Père Congar a souligné l'équivoque du 'thème d'un Christ tellement Dieu, tellement élevé qu'il apparaît comme lointain, et qu'entre nous et lui aurions besoin d'une médiation de Marie.'"
God has committed to Mary the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary.²¹

With equal truth it may also be affirmed that, by the will of God, Mary is the intermediary through whom is distributed unto us this immense treasure of God's mercies; "for grace and truth come by Jesus Christ." Thus, as no man goes to the Father but by the Son, so no one goes to Christ except through His Mother.²²

From her heavenly abode she began, by God's decree, to watch over the Church, to assist and befriend us as our Mother; so that she who was so intimately associated with the mystery of human salvation is just as closely associated with the distribution of the graces which for all time will flow from the Redemption.²³

It cannot, of course, be denied that the dispensing of these treasures is the particular and supreme right of Jesus Christ, for they are the exclusive fruit of His death, who by His nature is the Mediator between God and man. Nevertheless, by this union of sorrow and suffering, as we have said existed between the Mother and the Son, it has been allowed to the august Virgin "to be the most powerful mediatrix and advocate of the whole world with her Divine Son." The source, then, is Jesus Christ, "of whose fullness we have all received ...." But Mary, as St. Bernard justly remarks, is the "channel" or, if you will, that connecting portion by which the body is joined to the head and by which the head exerts its power and its virtue.²⁴

²¹ Pope Pius IX, Ubi primum (1849), in Acta Pii IX, 1, 162.
²² Pope Leo XIII, Octobri mense (1897), in Lettres apost. de S.S. Leon XIII, 3 (Paris, n.d.) 98.
²³ Pope Leo XIII, Adjutricem populi (1895), in Lettres ... 4, 238-240.
²⁴ St. Pius X, Ad diem illum, in A.S.S 36 (1903-1904) 453-454. St. Bernard writes as follows on the necessity of Mary's mediation between ourselves and Christ: "A truly faithful and powerful 'Mediator of God and men is the Man Christ Jesus' (I Tim. 2:5); but the Majesty of His Godhead inspires mortals with fear. His Manhood seems to be swallowed up in His Divinity, not that there is any real confusion of the Natures, but because His human affections are in a manner deified. . . . Not without cause, therefore, does the sinner fear to approach Him. . . . So great a Mediator is Christ that we have need of another to mediate between Him and us, and for this we can find none so well qualified as Mary" (31.
If we seek the theological reasons for attributing the power of mediation and distribution of graces to Mary, we can find four reasons: her divine maternity, her cooperation in redemption, her spiritual maternity, and her queenship. As Mother of Christ she belongs in a certain way to the hypostatic order and hence has the capacity to receive the power of dispensing grace to others. By reason of her compassion she merited *de congruo* whatever Christ merited *de condigno*. As spiritual Mother of all men, it is due to her to generate her spiritual children and to bring them to spiritual maturity through grace. As Queen she would be unable to exercise her regal office if she did not in some way intervene in the dispensing of graces.

Actually, Mary's full exercise of the office of dispenser of graces began on the day of her glorious assumption into heaven. Since that time she intervenes in the distribution of every grace to each soul because, illumined by the light of glory, she knows the spiritual needs of men, intercedes for them and distributes the graces they need.25

Having made a rapid and brief survey of the basic principles of the theology of Mary, we are logically led to the question of the veneration of Mary and the practice of Marian devotion. The first thought that comes to mind is that if we are encouraged to venerate the saints, we are surely encouraged for even greater reason to venerate the Queen of all saints. We shall not, therefore, pause here to give arguments in defense of the veneration of the Blessed Virgin or even to specify the type of cult which we should give to her. Rather, we shall ask about the necessity of devotion to Mary, and especially as regards salvation.


25 Cf. G. Alastruey, *op. cit.*, II, 84. Mary cooperates with Christ in the distribution of graces by way of merit (her compassion) and by way of intercession (especially now in glory). God alone is the physical principal cause of grace; Christ is the principal moral cause; Mary is a moral co-agent or inferior principal moral cause.
The first fact that should be stated is that devotion to Mary is not absolutely necessary. Even the Incarnation and the existence of Mary were not absolutely necessary. Likewise, the cult of the Blessed Virgin is not simply necessary for human salvation, as is the state of sanctifying grace, for although Mary is universal mediatrix of grace, those who do not practice devotion to Mary will not necessarily by that fact alone be deprived of grace. We conclude, therefore, that the cult of Mary is morally necessary for salvation, so that without devotion to Mary it is very difficult to attain salvation, except in cases of invincible ignorance.

In conformity with the moral necessity of devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the fact that there is no positive precept of the Church which obliges us to invoke or honor the Blessed Virgin in any special way. The Church requires that we do not reject devotion to Mary, a thing which could scarcely be done without erring against faith. It also requires that we observe Mary's feasts and it asserts in many ways the utility and necessity of recourse to her, through whose hands so many and so great helps to salvation come to us.

Neither is there a divine positive precept concerning the cult of the Blessed Virgin, although in Sacred Scripture and in Christian tradition there are many statements which promote and advise it.

For that reason, the necessity of devotion to Mary is based simply on natural law, not direct and explicit, but indirect and implicit, because natural law requires us to seek the means proportionate to the attainment of the end.

Now, by the will of God, devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a moral necessity, and neglect of it is no small obstacle. For, although Mary, the consort in human redemption, our most benign Mother, dispensatrix of all graces and universal advocate of the human race, sometimes assists men even without their praying to her, she gives the most efficacious help to her clients when they piously invoke her.26

The Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, addressed the following words to a group of pilgrims on August 15, 1963:

Among the graces which we wish for you, and for which you hope from this meeting with the humble Vicar of Christ, may this one be granted: that you understand well and practice well the cult of our Lady.

The cult of our Lady, as you know, is both an introduction to and a consequence of the unique worship of Jesus Christ, our Lord. It is the guarantee of our faith in His mysteries and in His mission. It is an expression of our loyalty to the Church, which has in Mary its holiest and loveliest daughter and which finds in her, as St. Ambrose wrote, its ideal image. The cult of our Lady fills us with joy and hope and it teaches us to imitate her virtues, so sublime and yet so human; it bids us imitate her faith especially, in acceptance of the word of God, which is the commencement of the life of Christ in our souls.²⁷

Theology of Christian Perfection

At first glance it may seem strange to raise the question of integrating Marian devotion in Christian spirituality; to pose it as a problem is even more strange. Nevertheless, if one were to leaf through the numerous books which treat of the theology of Christian perfection, he would begin to wonder why this question has not been raised before. Many of these books do not mention Marian devotion at all; others mention it only in passing, as if the author feared lest he would offend Mary by not referring to her. No theologian would deny the lofty excellence of Mary or deliberately undermine Marian cult; but perhaps a good number of them feel that devotion to Mary is basically a private and individual matter and as such, does not necessarily enter into the framework of the theology of Christian perfection.

Before we can hope to solve the question, it will be necessary to review the theological teaching on Christian perfection.

The philosophers tell us that the end or goal is the first thing in intention and the last thing in execution; hence we

shall begin with a consideration of the final cause of the Christian life.

Two ends are proposed for the Christian life, and each one is an ultimate end in its own order. The *absolute* end of the Christian life cannot be anything else but the glory of God. All creation, every creature, and even the Incarnation and Redemption, have the glory of God as their ultimate end. Jesus repeatedly stated during His life on earth that He had come to do the will of His Father, that He sought only to glorify His Father. At the end of His earthly life he could testify that He had done just that.28

After the glory of God, and perfectly subordinated to it, the Christian has as a proximate ultimate goal his own perfection and perfect happiness. But since perfect happiness cannot consist in any natural good, it must consist in some kind of union with God; and since union with God in this life will always be capable of further increase, perfect happiness will be realized completely and definitively only in the life to come.

We therefore make a distinction when we talk about man's perfection, because of man's double condition: in glory and on earth or *in via*. Perfection in glory constitutes man's ultimate perfection.29 If, therefore, we wish to know the essential elements of Christian perfection *in via*, we need only consider the elements of perfection in glory, looking for those elements which are common to the just soul on earth and the blessed in heaven.

St. Thomas states that beatitude or perfection in glory requires two things: the total perfection of the one who is beatified and a knowledge of the good possessed.30 The soul in glory possesses total perfection because it possesses the fullness of grace, according to God's decree and its own obediential capacity, and it loves God actually with all its power.31 It like-

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28 Cf. *John* 17:4-5.
29 See *Summa theologiae*, I, II, 3, 2 ad 4.
30 Cf. *ibid.*, I, 26, 1.
31 See *ibid.*, II II, 24, a. 8; *Suppl.*, 93, 3.
wise has a knowledge of the good it possesses because of the beatific vision, which is a face-to-face vision of the one and triune God as He is in Himself, with no created thing as a medium of vision but with the divine essence manifesting itself immediately. It is important to notice that the precise object of the beatific vision is "the one and triune God" because it will help us to understand why the theologians of Christian perfection state that the indwelling of the Trinity is the basic dogma upon which rests the entire structure of spiritual theology.

The essential elements of perfection in glory are sanctifying grace, charity and the light of glory (lumen gloriae). If now we ask what are the essential elements of perfection in via, we need only seek those elements which are common to man in the state of glory and on earth. The light of glory is proper to the beatific vision; therefore, man's perfection as a wayfarer consists in sanctifying grace and charity. But immediately another precision is necessary. Sanctifying grace is the principle from which all our supernatural operations flow and the minimum degree of grace suffices for salvation, but sanctifying grace is not a dynamic, but a static principle; it gives us the power (actus primus) but does not act as an operative habit. That is why sanctifying grace is called perfectio prima, substantial or radical perfection, but not formal perfection.

If the lumen gloriae cannot be an element of Christian perfection in via, and if sanctifying grace does not suffice for perfection in operatione or in assecutione finis, then the perfection of the wayfarer consists especially in charity (perfectio secunda, perfectio in operatione, perfectio in assecutione finis). There is ample testimony from Sacred Scripture to justify this

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82 Cf. DB 530; 693.
84 Cf. ibid., 22-30.
85 See ibid., 124-134.
teaching and it has also been approved by the magisterium of the Church.36

To summarize what we have stated, Christian perfection consists simply in this, that God should transform us completely so that our being and our operations become divinized. This begins with the soul’s participation in divine life through the gift of sanctifying grace. It reaches its apex in the fullest possible actuation of charity, perfected by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which work in a divine mode. In this life we possess God through love and we have fruition or awareness of Him through the activity of faith and charity in the indwelling of the Trinity. Hence, as in the beatific vision in glory, so also in the state of perfection in via, the focal point of the soul’s operations is the Trinity. The perfection of the Christian life is therefore eminently Trinitarian. The selfsame object of the beatific vision is the object of mystical activity, the activity of the perfect Christian. The mode of operation differs, however, because in glory the soul is strengthened by the lumen gloriae; in the mystical operation in via the gifts of the Holy Spirit are the faculties of operation. This is one of the reasons why spiritual writers stress the contemplative aspects of the mystical state, but we should beware of equating the contemplative aspect with the contemplative state or contemplative prayer.37

The quintessence of the Christian life can be summarized in the following statement: the glory of God as the ultimate end, our sanctification as the proximate end to which we should tend con-


37 For the role of the Trinity in mystical acts, see St. John of the Cross, The Living Flame, stanza 1, n. 3; stanza 2, n. 19; St. Teresa of Avila, Interior Castle, seventh mansion, chap. 1; M. M. Phillipon, O.P., The Spiritual Doctrine of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity (Westminster, Md., 1947).
tinually, and incorporation in Christ as the only possible way of 
attaining both ends. 88

St. Paul is the outstanding teacher of our sanctification in 
and through Christ, to the extent that he had to coin new ex-
pressions to convey the sublime truths of our incorporation in 
Christ and our transformation in Christ. Notice the significant 
expressions which he uses: "we have died with Him (con-
mortui) (2 Tim. 2:11); we were buried with Him (conse-
puliti) (Rom. 6:4); but God ... raised us up together (con-
resuscitati) (Eph. 2:6); brought us to life together with Christ 
(conviviscavit nos) (Eph. 2:6); we shall also live with Him 
(convivemus) (2 Tim. 2:11); God seated us together in heav-
en in Christ Jesus” (consedit) (Eph. 2:6).

We cannot be sanctified or attain full perfection without 
Christ and for that reason we may rightly say that there is no 
supernatural perfection except Christian perfection. St. Paul 
again is our teacher when he writes to the Ephesians:

Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, 
that we should be holy and without blemish in His sight in love. 
He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ as His sons, 
according to the purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory 
of His grace, with which He has favored us in His beloved Son. 89

Dom Marmion is one of the outstanding exponents of this 
doctrine among modern theologians, and he has contributed 
in no small measure to the contemporary revival of an aware-
ness of the role of Christ in the spiritual life.

We must understand that we can only be saints according to the 
measure in which the life of Jesus Christ is in us: that is the only 
holiness God asks of us; there is no other. We can only be holy 
in Jesus Christ, otherwise we cannot be so at all. 40

89 Eph. 1:4-6.
40 Dom Columba Marmion, Christ, the Life of the Soul (St. Louis, 
1925) 9.
It is evident, therefore, that the dogmatic treaties of Christology constitute the second foundation stone upon which the theology of Christian perfection rests. As a living instrument conjoined to divinity by the hypostatic union, Christ communicates to us all the graces which He merited for us through His passion and death and He is for all time our unique Mediator before His heavenly Father. St. Teresa of Avila warns that we should not neglect the sacred humanity of Christ; St. Catherine of Siena is an outstanding mystic of the Incarnate Word and His precious blood; St. Magdalen of Pazzi states that the Incarnate Word is the key to the entire supernatural order.

To ask what is the role of Christ in our superatural life and perfection is to ask for an explanation of the entire process of sanctification, for to attain perfection is to be converted into another Christ. "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me." Christ therefore enters into the formal cause of our sanctification and perfection. By reason of his natural filiation, He is the exemplary cause of our adopted filiation, and by His life and works and doctrine He is likewise our exemplar. He is the meritorious cause of all the graces communicated to us because He redeemed us; He is the principal efficient cause of our supernatural life because He is God and Head of the Mystical Body; He is the principal moral cause by way of intercession because He is the Mediator for us with the Father; and even if we consider the sacraments, our own personal meritorious works or our impetration to God through prayer, all receive their value through Jesus Christ.

The glory of the Trinity is the absolute end of the creation of the human race. But in the actual economy of divine providence, the glory of the Trinity is realized through Christ, with Christ and in Christ. Hence anything that man would use for giving glory to God apart from Christ would be completely inept for the purpose. Everything in the Christian life must be reduced to doing all things.

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41 Cf. Summa theologica, III, 8, 1, ad 1.
42 See I Tim. 2:5.
through Christ, with Christ and in Christ, under the impulse of the Holy Ghost, for the glory of the Father.\textsuperscript{48}

\textit{Mary's Role in Our Spiritual Life}

Perhaps no other spiritual writers has done more than St. Louis Mary De Montfort to make Mary loved. It is therefore fitting that we should quote from his writings to make the transition from Christ to the question of Mary's role in our spiritual life.

What I say absolutely of Jesus Christ, I say relatively of our Lady. Since Jesus Christ chose her for the inseparable companion of His life, of His death, of His glory, and of His power in heaven and upon earth, He gave her by grace, relatively to His majesty, all the same rights and privileges which He possesses by nature.\textsuperscript{44}

If then we establish solid devotion to our Blessed Lady, it is only to establish more perfectly devotion to Jesus Christ.\ldots If devotion to our Lady removed us from Jesus Christ, we should have to reject it as an illusion of the devil.\textsuperscript{46}

We should always be more concerned to protect the prerogatives of Christ than those of Mary, and while we insist that we can do nothing without Mary, we should also insist that Mary can no nothing without Christ. "Every Christian," says Father Bernard, "is a member of Christ\ldots and the reason every Christian is a child of Mary is because he is one with Christ."\textsuperscript{46}

We make these observations because, as we have already stated, it is quite easy for devotion to Mary to take on an excessively individualistic tinge. This, in turn, may easily overshadow the universal aspect which flows from Mary's close relationship to the entire Mystical Body. Devotion to Mary must be both ecclesial and personal, for she is both the Mother

\textsuperscript{44} St. Louis Mary de Montfort, \textit{True Devotion}, 74.
\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, 62.
\textsuperscript{46} Cf. R. Bernard, O.P., \textit{The Mystery of Mary}, 31.
of the Church and spiritual Mother of individual men. Marian devotion must not be a devotion of shrines or particular pious exercises; rather, it should be a devotion that leads us to Christ. Mary would say to her clients what she said at the wedding at Cana: "Do whatever He tells you." This means that we should expect devotion to Mary to result in greater generosity with God, greater fidelity to the duties of one's state, more extensive fraternal charity and a more faithful practice of prayer.

We should also avoid looking at Mary in a purely historical perspective, as a Jewish maid who gave birth to the Redeemer, suffered in union with Him at Calvary, and was finally assumed into heaven. To consider either Christ or Mary simply and solely in the scenes of their life on earth is to think of them as we do our loved ones who are now dead and live only in our memory.

We must situate the role of Mary in its present reality, which is eternal and heavenly. In all that concerns our divine Mother in Christ Jesus, let us seek her where she is. Above all, let us not seek among the dead one who is so very much alive. Let us be thoroughly convinced that her motherhood with regard to us is inadmissible, and that in passing from this world into the next it simply assumed its definitive stature and proportions. The mystery of Mary is consummated in a crowning of glory.47

We have stated, in conformity with the common teaching of theologians, that all of Mary's glories and offices and titles flow in some way from her divine maternity. Whatever we say of Mary, it is always because she is the Mother of God. In like manner, we may assert that whatever her role in our spiritual life and whatever the place of Marian devotion in Christian spirituality, it will be a maternal role. All that she does for us, she will do as our Mother and because she is our Mother. Not only will she give birth to her spiritual children,

47 Cf. ibid., 215.
but she will nurture them and strive to bring them to the maturity of perfection. 48

Before we proceed to examine the precise way in which Mary exercises her maternal care for us in our spiritual life, let us be assured by the teaching authority of the Church concerning her great influence and power:

The immaculate Virgin, chosen to be the Mother of God and thereby associated with Him in the work of man's salvation, has a favor and power with her Son greater than any human or angelic creature has ever obtained or can ever gain. 49

No single individual can even be imagined who has ever contributed or ever will contribute so much toward reconciling man with God. 50

Since the role of our spiritual Mother is to bring forth her children to the supernatural life and then to nurture them and lead them to spiritual maturity, it is evident that Mary performs a function of extraordinary importance in our pursuit of perfection. We have already considered her exalted dignity and her cooperation in objective redemption. At the Incarnation she initially became the spiritual Mother of mankind by conceiving Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, but it was by her association in the work of redemption, through her compassion and as coredemptrix, that she effectively became our spiritual Mother. The words addressed to her and to St. John have always been understood as a ratification of her spiritual maternity of the Church and of individual Christians. Therefore, Mary engendered us spiritually on Calvary. 51

However, when we treat of her continuing maternal care of us after our rebirth to the supernatural life, we are speaking of subjective redemption and of Mary in the state of glory. It

48 See ibid., 210.
49 Cf. Pope Leo XIII, Supremi apostol. (1883), in Lettres..., 1, 216.
51 G. Alastruey, The Blessed Virgin Mary, II, 146: "The spiritual motherhood of Mary is situated between her office as coredemptrix and that of advocate, which she discharges in the distribution of graces."
is not the Mary of history but our heavenly Mother who nurtures us and leads us to the fullness of the spiritual life. But Mary's intervention in our spiritual life through her spiritual motherhood is restricted to some kind of efficient causality, while her dignity and excellence of the gifts of grace enable her to exercise an influence by way of exemplary causality. Consequently, Mary's role in the spiritual life of the faithful will be contained under her titles of spiritual Mother, mediatrix and advocate of the human race.

Just as Christ is Redeemer by objective redemption, and Advocate by subjective redemption, and by both offices is constituted Mediator, so likewise the Blessed Virgin is coredemptrix in virtue of her cooperation in objective redemption, she is advocate and dispenser of all graces through her cooperation in subjective redemption, and from this twofold cooperation results the office of mediatrix in its two stages, namely, coredemption on earth and intercession now in heaven.52

A mediator is a person who intervenes between two other persons in order to reconcile them in some way. Christ is Mediator in the ontological sense, for He has something in common with the two between whom He mediates, since He has both a divine and a human nature. St. Augustine says that a mere man could not be a mediator between God and men, and neither could a mere God.53 Christ is also Mediator in a moral sense because He merited for us and assisted us by His works, especially by His passion and death. Nor did Christ's mediation end with His death on the Cross, for St. Paul says: "He lives always to make intercession for us."54

Mary is the consort of Christ in the redemption of the world and since Christ effects His mediation by the same operations with which He effected redemption, Mary effected her objective mediation by her compassion. By means of that cooperation

52 Cf. G. Alastruey, op. cit., 144.
53 Cf. St. Augustine, Serm. 47, c. 12, n. 21.
54 Heb. 7:25.
in the passion and death of her son, she merited to cooperate with Him likewise in subjective mediation and subjective redemption, which is the distribution and application of the graces merited. Because of the satisfaction which she made with her Son on earth and because of her office as advocate now in heaven, she deserves the name of mediatrix.\textsuperscript{55}

It is especially in her role as advocate and patroness of the human race that Mary intervenes in our spiritual life. Again, by reason of her divine maternity and by reason of her cooperation in objective redemption through her compassion, Mary rightly claims the powerful intercession that is hers. Her merit is unlimited because conjoined to the merit of Christ; her intercession is omnipotent for the same reason.

And how does Mary function as our advocate and patroness? As our Mother she has a special interest in each of her children, and her intercession flows from a particular knowledge of our individual needs. And because she is the Mother and consort of the Redeemer, her prayer is omnipotent. So much so, that it is said that what God accomplishes by His will Mary accomplishes by her prayer. St. Louis Mary De Montfort beautifully describes Mary's diffusion of graces as follows:

The Holy Spirit communicated His ineffable gifts to Mary His faithful spouse, and He chose her to be the dispenser of all His possessions. Consequently, she distributes all those gifts and graces to whomsoever she wills, in the measure she wills, as she wills and as long as she wills; and there is no heavenly gift that does not pass through her virginal hands. For such is the will of God, who willed that we should receive everything through Mary.\textsuperscript{56}

To summarize, let us recall that the nucleus of the Christian life is the Trinity, which is the basis and source of all the other

\textsuperscript{55} As mediatrix between God and men, Mary mediates \textit{with} Christ by a suppliant intercession and by her co-satisfaction and co-merit on Calvary; as mediatrix between Christ and men, she influences Christ as His Mother and as Queen and Lady of the universe.

\textsuperscript{56} St. Louis Mary de Montfort, \textit{op. cit.}, Part I, chap. 1.
mysteries of Christianity. Everything is done through and for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And in particular, the just man has received into himself the mystery of sanctifying grace, the seed of glory, which brings with it the indwelling of the Trinity. Therefore, to live the Christian life is to live a Trinitarian life.

The mystery of Christ is second in dignity and it is also the mystery which has made the most profound impact on contemporary spirituality not only in His sacred humanity, but also in His Mystical Body and in His sacramental presence in the Eucharist.

The third mystery is the mystery of Mary, who has so permeated contemporary piety that our epoch, situated as it is in the days of the great dogmatic definitions of her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption, may rightly be called an Age of Mary. Inspired by the piety of the pilgrims at Lourdes and at Fatima, and instructed by the marvelous advances in Mariological studies, the modern Christian lives in a Marian atmosphere. And if we consider our regeneration into the life of grace, we owe it in no small measure to the Mother of God, our mediatrix and coredemptrix, who was Christ's associate in objective redemption. If we consider our growth in holiness, again it is to her, the advocate and patroness, the dispenser of all graces, to whom we are indebted, under Christ. And lastly, if we look upon her as our spiritual Mother, we see her not only as Mother of all men but also Mother of the Church because she engendered Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body.

A modern poet provides us with a beautiful tribute to our Mother and an invitation to seek her unfailing help in our spiritual progress:

St. Marcellus, St. Germain, St. Genevieve, and even St. Peter,
Our great saints, our great patrons, our great friends.
There are days when neither great friendships, nor great patronages,
not the greatest holiness suffice...
And when we must climb, climb some more, climb higher, always higher, and go on.
Upward to the ultimate holiness, the ultimate purity, the ultimate beauty, the ultimate patronage.
When we must address ourselves directly to her who is above everything... to the infinitely beautiful one.
To the one who intercedes.
The only one who can speak with the authority of a mother.
We must go up
To the Woman who is most imposing,
Because she is also the most motherly.⁸⁷

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⁸⁷ Charles Péguy, Le porche de la deuxième vertu, 72-75.