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Marian Mariology

Chapter 7



The veneration of Mary, when properly understood, permeates the entire life of the Church; it is a dimension of dogma and of piety, of Christology and of ecclesiology. This dimension needs to be made explicit today in connection with the problems of humanity. Mariology expresses something fundamental to the Christian life itself, to the Christian experience of the world.

Sound Mariology has always been understood in Christological terms. If the Gospel revealed nothing more than the fact that Jesus Christ, God and man, was born of Mary, this alone would be sufficient for the Church to love her and to draw theological conclusions from pondering this relationship of Mother and Son. We need no other revelations. Mary is a self-evident and essential *datum* and dimension of the Gospel.

Chapter one centers on Catechesis flowing from Byzantine Marian spirituality with commentary by Brother John M. Samaha, S.M. Chapter 2 discusses Mariology today with commentary by Rev. Professor Michael Lapierre, S.J. The remaining chapters are commentaries on various Marian topics by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. (1914– 2000).

Chapter 7

Pope Pius XII and Our Lady

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1939, Pope Pius XII left Vatican City to return to the Church of St. Mary Major, where he celebrated his first Mass on Easter Sunday, forty years before. The allocution which he gave on that occasion is among the most personal revelations that we have of his interior life and union with God. It was the jubilee year of his ordination, he said, "and a sweet memory of this very happy event has always lingered in Our soul." Then he added, "With joy and sincerity of heart, We testify that Our priestly life began with Mary and has always been directed under her motherly eye. If in Our rather long priestly life We have achieved anything good, anything felicitous, anything useful for the Catholic Faith, We do not glory in ourselves, but rather give honor to God and to Our Lady. Because We felt We were under Mary's protection, We have in hours of doubt and anxiety, of which We have had our full share, called on Our beloved Mother. And Our call for her aid has never been in vain; We have always obtained from her the light, protection, and consolation that We asked for." (A.A.S., 31, 707.)

Life-long Devotion to the Mother of God

Biographers of Pius XII record that his devotion to the Blessed Virgin can be traced to the earliest days of his boyhood. He and his brother Francesco attended ginnasio

classes in a private school on the Via de' Ginnasi, near the Jesuit Church of the Gesu in Rome. Next to the tomb of St. Ignatius, on the gospel side, is the chapel of Madonna della Strada, built around the picture of Our Lady to which St. Ignatius was specially devoted.

Before and after school hours, young Pacelli used to go into the Gesu to pour out his heart in prayer before the miraculous image. Sometimes he stayed so long that he was late in coming home. But his mother never worried about him. "I suppose he is with the Madonna della Strada again," she would say. Once she asked him what he was doing in the chapel all the time. "I pray and tell Mary everything," he answered simply.

Eugenio Pacelli was ordained to the priesthood at the age of 23. Frail health prevented him from taking his part in the regular ordination ceremonies at St. John Lateran. Therefore the Patriarch Francesco Paola Cassetta, Auxiliary Bishop of Rome, ordained him in his own private chapel on Easter Sunday, 1899. Next day the young priest offered his first Mass at the Liberian Basilica of Our Lady of the Snows. His reason for the choice, he explained, was that he could offer the Holy Sacrifice at the altar above which hung the picture of Mary, "Salvation of the Roman People," reputedly the oldest picture of Our Lady in existence. From at least the sixth century the Roman people have carried this image in procession whenever the city was in danger, and their prayers have always been answered.

Prophetic also of his future promotion of Mary's honor, the following short prayer appeared on the ordination card which Don Pacelli distributed among his relatives and friends: "Sublime Mother of God, who desires to be called the Salvation of the Roman People, and at whose altar I offered for the first time the Holy Sacrifice to the Eternal Father, remain close to me."

After eighteen years in the priesthood, Pacelli was appointed by Benedict XV to the nunciature at Munich, and entrusted with the delicate mission of mediating a peaceful settlement in the war between Germany and the Allies. At the same time he was chosen Titular Archbishop of Sardes, and consecrated by Pope Benedict himself. The ceremony took place in the Sistine chapel on May 13, 1917.

En route to his new post, Archbishop Pacelli stopped at the shrine of the "Mother of Graces" in Einsiedeln, in the Swiss canton of Schwyz. Originated by St Meinrad in the ninth century, Einsiedeln has attracted pilgrims from all parts of Europe, numbering upwards of 200,000 annually. The miraculous statue of the Blessed Virgin originally set up by St. Meinrad is

the object of their devotion Significantly, the 13th of October, the anniversary of the final apparition at Fatima, is one of the chief pilgrimage days at Einsiedeln. Pacelli wished to begin his episcopate, like the priesthood, under the patronage of Mary.

A final detail should be mentioned: his devotion to the Rosary and frequent sermons on Our Lady. Rated as one of Italy's outstanding orators, as priest, bishop and cardinal, Pacelli was much in demand, particularly for panegyrics and memorial addresses. The Mother of God filled a prominent role in his sermon theme, and was often the main subject of his talks. One of his most famous sermons as cardinal is still remembered, a sermon in the Church of S. Luigi dei Francesi on "Our Lady of a Happy Death." The Rosary was his constant companion During his four weeks' visit in the United States in 1936, he covered something like 8,000 miles, mostly by plane. Later a stewardess declared that she had never seen a passenger who used his typewriter so continually as Cardinal Pacelli. He interrupted His work periodically only to say his beads.

Pius XII and the Queen of Peace

With a Marian background such as this, it is not surprising that Eugenio Pacelli, as Pius XII, has extended the cultus of the Mother of God in a way almost unparalleled in the history of the papacy. Shortly after his election the second world war broke out in Europe. Even before hostilities actually began, the Pope addressed his first of a series of May letters to the Christian world, asking for a union of prayers to the Virgin Mother to restore peace and tranquillity among nations.

"As the month of May approaches," he wrote, "when the faithful are accustomed to raise special prayers to the Holy Virgin, it is close to Our heart. . .that during this period public prayers be offered in the dioceses and parishes in the cause (of world peace.)" He called especially for the prayers of innocent children, asking, "How can the Heavenly Mother fail to heed so many suppliant voices imploring peace for citizens, peoples and nations? How could she fail to heed them if with the prayers of the angels of heaven there be united those of the children, whom we may call angels of this earth?" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, April 21, 1939.)

For the next six years, always shortly before the month of May, the Holy Father repeated his appeal for prayers to the Queen of Peace. And always his letters were detailed in suggesting motives why, after God, the hope of peace among men rests in the hands of Mary. Thus, in 1940, he centered his letter around the famous statement of St. Bernard: "It is the will of God that we should obtain everything through Mary." The following year, he reminded the world that the sufferings of the war were in large measure the punishment of God for men's sins, and mercy was to be obtained through the Mother of God. Next May he emphasized the need for penance, joined to prayers to Mary. In 1943 he exhorted the faithful to offer to the Mother of Mercy the prayers of a more holy life. On April 24, 1944, he repeated the request that children should be specially urged to pray to Our Lady, for "as their souls

On the day following the solemn definition, the Holy Father spoke to the bishops who had come for the ceremony, 554 in all, the largest number assembled in Rome since the Vatican Council in 1870. His address was more of a fervent colloquy than a speech, and began with a personal reflection: "By the decree of Everlasting Wisdom, Whose nature is goodness, We, though unworthy, who from Our earliest youth have been most devoted to the Holy Mother of God, were chosen to declare infallibly that the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, preserved from the stain of original sin, has been assumed into heaven body and soul." (*A.A.S.*, 42, 784.)

He went on to describe the joy which he felt over the proclamation of this new honor to Mary, and the assurance which it gave him that she, on her part, would respond by obtaining for the world the three graces which he believed were most needed at the present time: universal and lasting peace among nations, the return of a spirit of penance to replace the prevalent love of pleasure, and the renewal of family life, stabilized where divorce was common and made fruitful where birth control was practiced. Through generations of war and godlessness, "the world has been shaken to its foundations and torn in its innermost framework"; and, except for the grace of God, which comes through Mary, the foundations of peace will not be established, and the moral structure of society will not be repaired.

End

The Definition of Mary's Assumption

The greatest honor which Pius XII has paid to the Mother of God and, on his own testimony, the crowning achievement of his pontificate was the definition of Our Lady's Assumption. It is not commonly recognized how much this definition was due to the personal interest and initiative of the present Sovereign Pontiff. The so-called "Assumptionist Movement" had been going on for almost a century, since the first petition of Queen Isabella of Spain. Petitions to the number of 8,000,000 from the faithful and 2700 from the bishops of the world had been sent to Rome. But, as Pius X observed when asked to define the doctrine, "It still requires much investigation."

One of Pius XII's first acts after his election, was to commission a group of scholars to assemble and analyze all the petitions for the definition ever received by the Holy See. After five years of research, the results were made public in two volumes, 2171 pages, and the groundwork for the definition was laid. Another group of specialists, the Pope later explained, was appointed "at Our bidding, to study with the greatest diligence all the attestations, indications, and references in the common faith of the Church, regarding the bodily assumption of the Blessed Virgin into heaven." This meant going through practically the whole "teaching of the Church, the Sacred Scriptures, the ancient liturgy, the writings of the Fathers and theologians," down the centuries, to discover whether Our Lady's Assumption into heaven is part of the deposit of faith and therefore able to be defined as revealed doctrine. (A.A.S., 42, 774-5.)

When this work was completed on May 1, 1946, the Pope sent to all the resident bishops in communion with Rome a private letter of inquiry, beginning with the words, "The Virgin Mother of God," in which he proposed two questions:

"We, ask you to inform Us to what extent, according to their faith and piety, the clergy and faithful committed to your care, are devoted to the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin ."

"However, what We especially wish to learn from you, Venerable Brethren, is whether you believe that the bodily Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin can be proposed and defined as a dogma of faith, and whether you personally, together with your clergy and people, desire that such a definition should be made." (*L'Osservatore*, Sept. 16-17, 1950.)

The response was immediate and enthusiastic. About thirteen hundred letters were sent, and close to twelve hundred received. Of these all but two percent replied in unqualified affirmative to the possibility and feasibility of the definition. Such unanimity, said an official commentary, prior to a formal definition, is perhaps unique in the history of the Church, not excepting such doctrines as the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope.

are more resplendent with innocence, so they are more pleasing to God and His Blessed Mother."

Finally in the last year of the war, this time in an encyclical letter, Pius XII warned the faithful that the justice of God had not yet been satisfied and the war continues because petitions for peace have not been joined to a correction of morals. "It is not enough," he said, "that crowds of people come to Mary's altars to offer their presents and prayers." Unless these prayers are united to a "reformation of Christian morals in private and public life," they will not be heard (A.A.S., 37, 98.)

Fatima and the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Fatima owes its present popularity in the Church very largely to the interest and encouragement of Pope Pius XII. Although the bishops of Portugal had authorized the cultus of Our Lady of Fatima in 1930, and Pius XI made an implicit reference to the "extra-ordinary benefits with which the Blessed Virgin recently favored" Portugal, it was Pius XII among the Popes who first explicitly referred to Fatima in a formal papal document. Pleading for more vocations to the missions, he wrote in 1940, "Let the faithful, when reciting the Rosary so strongly recommended by Our Lady of Fatima, not omit to address an invocation to the Blessed Virgin in favor of missionary vocations" (*L'Osservatore*, June 29, 1940). This was so significant that the Portuguese Hierarchy in 1942 were able to say, "We are happy to see the Supreme Authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ evoke thus the testimony of Fatima, and proclaim *Urbi et orbi* the name of Our Lady of Fatima in an Apostolic Letter addressed to the Portuguese Bishops, but published for the whole world" (Da Cruz, *Fatima*, 1949, 99).

On October 31, 1942, the Holy Father associated himself with the closing celebrations of the Jubilee of Fatima, by consecrating the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as Our Lady of Fatima had requested. And in the same year he extended the Office and Mass of the Immaculate Heart to the Universal Church, appointing the 22nd of August as the feast day. More recently Pope Pius XII sent, for the second time, an official delegate to Fatima, to represent, as he said, "Our own person at the shrine of the Virgin of Fatima, to act in Our own name, and to preside with Our authority" (A.A.S., 43, 781). Cardinal Tedeschini, archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, was the papal legate who assisted at the Fatima celebration on October 13, 1951, when more than a million pilgrims came to the Portuguese shrine.

In his own radio message to the pilgrims, the Holy Father emphasized one practical aspect of the message of Fatima which deserves to be better known: the Family Rosary. "The Virgin Mother's insistence on the recitation of the family Rosary," he said, "was meant to teach us that the secret of peace in family life lies in imitating the virtues of the Holy Family" (A.A.S., 43, 801).

Canonization of Marian Saints

Among the twenty-six saints canonized by the present Pontiff to the end of 1951, at least six were among the greatest Marian apostles in modern times: Catherine Labouré, Louis Mary de Montfort, Anthony Mary Claret, Vincent Mary Strambi, Anthony Mary Gianelli, and Francis Mary Bianchi.

In 1947, after the canonization of St. Louis de Montfort, the Pope exhorted the people to imitate the spirit and virtues of the new saint. "The mainspring of his apostolic ministry," he explained, "his great secret of attracting and giving souls to Jesus was his devotion to Mary. All his activity was founded upon her, all his confidence rested in her. In opposition to the joyless austerity, melancholy fear and depressing pride of Jansenism, he promoted the filial, trustful, ardent and expansive love-in-action of a slave of Mary." St. Louis was the author of the classic *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, which the Holy Father felt needed some clarification. He first defined "true devotion to the Blessed Virgin," as "essentially that which tends to a union with Jesus under the guidance of Mary," and added a caution. "The form and practice of this devotion can vary according to time, place and personal inclinations. Within the limits of sound doctrine, the Church allows her children a just margin of liberty in this regard. For she realizes that a true and perfect devotion to the Blessed Virgin is never so bound to any one form as to claim for itself a kind of monopoly." (A.A.S., 39, 413.) [Go to: www.pamphletstoinspire.com/Mary/TotalConsecration for the formula of prayers that may be used]

St. Anthony Claret, who worked as Archbishop of Santiago, Cuba, from 1851 to 1857, is justly credited with having begun the movement which terminated in the solemn definition of Mary's Assumption. In December, 1863, Queen Isabella of Spain acted on the advice of her confessor, Anthony Claret, and requested the Pope to define Our Lady's Assumption. Pius IX was encouraging, but replied that, "I do not consider myself worthy to declare as a dogma of faith also this second mystery of the Madonna." Claret followed up the petition with a book defending the Assumption which he addressed to the bishops of the world, urging them to ask the Holy See to define the doctrine as a part of revelation. In two years the book went into three editions, and in the next eighty years, 2700 bishops followed Queen Isabella's lead. These petitions of the hierarchy literally paved the way for the solemn definition of 1950. Moreover, it is at least worth noting that the first promoter of the Assumption of Our Lady was canonized in the same year in which the dream of his life had come true.

Sanctity and the Apostolate through Mary

Even a cursory study of the reign of Pius XII would show that he is quite unique in the variety and frequency with which he recommends devotion to the Mother of God as the touchstone of sanctity and a successful apostolate. As of 1951, for instance, there were ten Marian Congresses, national and international, which the present Holy Father either personally addressed or to which he sent an official representative. The number of these congresses has grown remarkably since his accession. In 1947 alone there were four: in Canada, Holland, Argentina, and Spain, as compared with four during the sixteen years' pontificate of Pius XI. Addressing the Marian Congress at Ottawa, the Pope pleaded with the young people to place their chastity under Mary's care, "Let growing youth of both sexes know that a loving Mother's eyes are upon them." He concluded: "Vindicate the glory of your Immaculate Mother. In the face of a vicious world prove that young hearts can still be chaste." (A.A.S., 9, 271).

His predecessor has been rightly called "the Pope of Catholic Action." By actual count, twenty-eight of his public documents treat, in whole or in part, of "the cooperation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy." But it was left to Pius XII to declare as official Catholic Action an established form of the lay apostolate, operating in the Church since 1584. In 1948 he published the Apostolic Constitution *Bis Saeculari*, by which he decreed that, "the Sodalities of Our Lady" are "in the fullest sense Catholic Action, under the auspices and inspiration of the Blessed Virgin Mary." The special significance of this decree lies in the fact that of all the forms of Catholic Action in the Church, the Marian Sodalities alone have been not only approved by the Vicar of Christ, but confirmed by an Apostolic Constitution, one of the most authoritative declarations of the Holy See. It was, for example, an Apostolic Constitution by which the Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1917, and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin was defined in 1950.

Again in his Holy Year exhortation to the clergy of the world, Pope Pius XII explicitly and at length recommends that priests should be devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Treating of chastity, he urges them to "trust in the protection of the Virgin Mother of God." On the subject of prayer, "they will every day recite the Holy Rosary." And in the closing four paragraphs of the exhortation, he urges priests to have recourse to their Mother in times of special trial. "When you meet serious difficulties in the path of holiness and the exercise of your ministry, turn to the Mother of the Eternal Priest and therefore to the loving Mother of all Catholic priests." For "Our Lady loves everyone with a most tender love, but she has a particular predilection for priests, because they are the living image of Jesus Christ." (A.A.S., 42, 701.)