

## PART II: THE PERFECT DEVOTION TO OUR LADY

### CHAPTER THREE - THE PERFECT CONSECRATION TO JESUS CHRIST

#### A complete consecration to Mary

120. As all perfection consists in our being conformed, united and consecrated to Jesus it naturally follows that the most perfect of all devotions is that which conforms, unites, and consecrates us most completely to Jesus. Now of all God's creatures Mary is the most conformed to Jesus. It therefore follows that, of all devotions, devotion to her makes for the most effective consecration and conformity to him. The more one is consecrated to Mary, the more one is consecrated to Jesus.

That is why perfect consecration to Jesus is but a perfect and complete consecration of oneself to the Blessed Virgin, which is the devotion I teach; or in other words, it is the perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism.

121. This devotion consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary in order to belong entirely to Jesus through her. It requires us to give:

- (1) Our body with its senses and members;
- (2) Our soul with its faculties;
- (3) Our present material possessions and all we shall acquire in the future;
- (4) Our interior and spiritual possessions, that is, our merits, virtues and good actions of the past, the present and the future.

In other words, we give her all that we possess both in our natural life and in our spiritual life as well as everything we shall acquire in the future in the order of nature, of grace, and of glory in heaven. This we do without any reservation, not even of a penny, a hair, or the smallest good deed. And we give for all eternity without claiming or expecting, in return for our offering and our service, any other reward than the honor of belonging to our Lord through Mary and in Mary, even though our Mother were not - as in fact she always is - the most generous and appreciative of all God's creatures.

122. Note here that two things must be considered regarding our good works, namely, satisfaction and merit or, in other words, their satisfactory or prayer value and their meritorious value. The satisfactory or prayer value of a good work is the good action in so far as it makes condign atonement for the punishment due to sin or obtains some new grace. The meritorious value or merit is the good action in so far as it merits grace and eternal glory. Now by this consecration of

ourselves to the Blessed Virgin we give her all satisfactory and prayer value as well as the meritorious value of our good works, in other words, all the satisfactions and the merits. We give her our merits, graces and virtues, not that she might give them to others, for they are, strictly speaking, not transferable, because Jesus alone, in making himself our surety with his Father, had the power to impart his merits to us. But we give them to her that she may keep, increase and embellish them for us, as we shall explain later, and we give her our acts of atonement that she may apply them where she pleases for God's greater glory.

123. (1) It follows then: that by this devotion we give to Jesus all we can possibly give him, and in the most perfect manner, that is, through Mary's hands. Indeed we give him far more than we do by other devotions which require us to give only part of our time, some of our good works or acts of atonement and penances. In this devotion everything is given and consecrated, even the right to dispose freely of one's spiritual goods and the satisfactions earned by daily good works. This is not done even in religious orders. Members of religious orders give God their earthly goods by the vow of poverty, the goods of the body by the vow of chastity, their free will by the vow of obedience, and sometimes their freedom of movement by the vow of enclosure. But they do not give him by these vows the liberty and right to dispose of the value of their good works. They do not despoil themselves of what a Christian considers most precious and most dear - his merits and satisfactions.

124. (2) It follows then that anyone who in this way consecrates and sacrifices himself voluntarily to Jesus through Mary may no longer dispose of the value of any of his good actions. All his sufferings, all his thoughts, words, and deeds belong to Mary. She can then dispose of them in accordance with the will of her Son and for his greater glory. This dependence, however, is without detriment to the duties of a person's present and future state of life. One such duty, for example, would be that of a priest who, by virtue of his office or otherwise, must apply the satisfactory or prayer value of the Holy Mass to a particular person. For this consecration can only be made in accordance with the order established by God and in keeping with the duties of one's state of life.

125. (3) It follows that we consecrate ourselves at one and the same time to Mary and to Jesus. We give ourselves to Mary because Jesus chose her as the perfect means to unite himself to us and unite us to him. We give ourselves to Jesus because he is our last end. Since he is our Redeemer and our God we are indebted to him for all that we are.

#### A perfect renewal of baptismal promises

126. I have said that this devotion could rightly be called a perfect renewal of the vows and promises of holy baptism. Before baptism every Christian was a slave of the devil because he belonged to him. At baptism he has either personally or

through his sponsors solemnly renounced Satan, his seductions and his works. He has chosen Jesus as his Master and sovereign Lord and undertaken to depend upon him as a slave of love. This is what is done in the devotion I am presenting to you. We renounce the devil, the world, sin and self, as expressed in the act of consecration, and we give ourselves entirely to Jesus through Mary. We even do something more than at baptism, when ordinarily our god-parents speak for us and we are given to Jesus only by proxy. In this devotion we give ourselves personally and freely and we are fully aware of what we are doing.

In holy baptism we do not give ourselves to Jesus explicitly through Mary, nor do we give him the value of our good actions. After baptism we remain entirely free either to apply that value to anyone we wish or keep it for ourselves. But by this consecration we give ourselves explicitly to Jesus through Mary's hands and we include in our consecration the value of all our actions.

127. "Men" says St. Thomas, "vow in baptism to renounce the devil and all his seductions." "This vow," says St. Augustine, "is the greatest and the most indispensable of all vows." Canon Law experts say the same thing: "The vow we make at baptism is the most important of all vows." But does anyone keep this great vow? Does anyone fulfill the promises of baptism faithfully? Is it not true that nearly all Christians prove unfaithful to the promises made to Jesus in baptism? Where does this universal failure come from, if not from man's habitual forgetfulness of the promises and responsibilities of baptism and from the fact that scarcely anyone makes a personal ratification of the contract made with God through his sponsors?

128. This is so true that the Council of Sens, convened by order of the Emperor Louis the Debonair to remedy the grave disorders of Christendom, came to the conclusion that the main cause of this moral breakdown was man's forgetfulness of his baptismal obligations and his disregard for them. It could suggest no better way of remedying this great evil than to encourage all Christians to renew the promises and vows of baptism.

129. The Catechism of the Council of Trent, faithful interpreter of that holy Council, exhorts priests to do the same and to encourage the faithful to remember and hold fast to the belief that they are bound and consecrated as slaves to Jesus, their Redeemer and Lord. "The parish priest shall exhort the faithful never to lose sight of the fact that they are bound in conscience to dedicate and consecrate themselves for ever to their Lord and Redeemer as his slaves."

130. Now the Councils, the Fathers of the Church and experience itself, all indicate that the best remedy for the frequent lapses of Christians is to remind them of the responsibilities of their baptism and have them renew the vows they made at that time. Is it not reasonable therefore to do this in our day and in a perfect manner by adopting this devotion with its consecration to our Lord

through his Blessed Mother? I say "in a perfect manner", for in making this consecration to Jesus they are adopting the perfect means of giving themselves to him, which is the most Blessed Virgin Mary.

131. No one can object that this devotion is novel or of no value. It is not new, since the Councils, the Fathers of the Church, and many authors both past and present, speak of consecration to our Lord or renewal of baptismal vows as something going back to ancient times and recommended to all the faithful. Nor is it valueless, since the chief source of moral disorders and the consequent eternal loss of Christians spring from the forgetfulness of this practice and indifference to it.

132. Some may object that this devotion makes us powerless to help the souls of our relatives, friends and benefactors, since it requires us to give our Lord, through Mary, the value of our good works, prayers, penances, and alms-giving.

To them I reply:

(1) It is inconceivable that our friends, relatives and benefactors should suffer any loss because we have dedicated and consecrated ourselves unconditionally to the service of Jesus and Mary; it would be an affront to the power and goodness of Jesus and Mary who will surely come to the aid of our relatives, friends and benefactors whether from our meager spiritual assets or from other sources.

(2) This devotion does not prevent us from praying for others, both the living and the dead, even though the application of our good works depends on the will of our Blessed Lady. On the contrary, it will make us pray with even greater confidence. Imagine a rich man, who, wanting to show his esteem for a great prince, gives his entire fortune to him. Would not that man have greater confidence in asking the prince to help one of his friends who needed assistance? Indeed the prince would only be too happy to have such an opportunity of proving his gratitude to one who had sacrificed all that he possessed to enrich him, thereby impoverishing himself to do him honor. The same must be said of our Lord and our Lady. They will never allow themselves to be outdone in gratitude.

133. Some may say, perhaps, if I give our Lady the full value of my actions to apply it to whom she wills, I may have to suffer a long time in purgatory. This objection, which arises from self-love and from an unawareness of the generosity of God and his holy Mother, refutes itself.

Take a fervent and generous soul who values God's interests more than his own. He gives God all he has without reserve till he can give no more. He desires only that the glory and the kingdom of Jesus may come through his Mother, and he does all he can to bring this about. Will this generous and unselfish soul, I ask,

be punished more in the next world for having been more generous and unselfish than other people? Far from it! For we shall see later that our Lord and his Mother will prove most generous to such a soul with gifts of nature, grace and glory in this life and in the next.

134. We must now consider as briefly as possible: (1) The motives which commend this devotion to us, (2) the wonderful effects it produces in faithful souls, and (3) the practices of this devotion.

## CHAPTER FOUR - MOTIVES WHICH RECOMMEND THIS DEVOTION

By it we give ourselves completely to God

135. This first motive shows us the excellence of the consecration of ourselves to Jesus through Mary.

We can conceive of no higher calling than that of being in the service of God and we believe that the least of God's servants is richer, stronger, and nobler than any earthly monarch who does not serve God. How rich and strong and noble then must the good and faithful servant be, who serves God as unreservedly and as completely as he possibly can! Just such a person is the faithful and loving slave of Jesus in Mary. He has indeed surrendered himself entirely to the service of the King of kings through Mary, his Mother, keeping nothing for himself. All the gold of the world and the beauties of the heavens could not recompense him for what he has done.

136. Other congregations, associations, and confraternities set up in honor of our Lord and our Blessed Lady, which do so much good in the Church, do not require their members to give up absolutely everything. They simply prescribe for them the performance of certain acts and practices in fulfillment of their obligations. They leave them free to dispose of the rest of their actions as well as their time. But this devotion makes us give Jesus and Mary all our thoughts, words, actions, and sufferings and every moment of our lives without exception. Thus, whatever we do, whether we are awake or asleep, whether we eat or drink, whether we do important or unimportant work, it will always be true to say that everything is done for Jesus and Mary. Our offering always holds good, whether we think of it or not, unless we explicitly retract it. How consoling this is!

137. Moreover, as I have said before, no other act of devotion enables us to rid ourselves so easily of the possessiveness which slips unnoticed even into our best actions. This is a remarkable grace which our dear Lord grants us in return for the heroic and selfless surrender to him through Mary of the entire value of our good works. If even in this life he gives a hundredfold reward to those who renounce all material, temporal and perishable things out of love for him, how generously will he reward those who give up even interior and spiritual goods for his sake!

138. Jesus, our dearest friend, gave himself to us without reserve, body and soul, grace and merits. As St. Bernard says, "He won me over entirely by giving himself entirely to me." Does not simple justice as well as gratitude require that we give him all we possibly can? He was generous with us first, so let us be generous to him in return and he will prove still more generous during life, at the hour of death, and throughout eternity. "He will be generous towards the generous."

## It helps us to imitate Christ

139. Our good Master stooped to enclose himself in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, a captive but loving slave, and to make himself subject to her for thirty years. As I said earlier, the human mind is bewildered when it reflects seriously upon this conduct of Incarnate Wisdom. He did not choose to give himself in a direct manner to the human race though he could easily have done so. He chose to come through the Virgin Mary. Thus he did not come into the world independently of others in the flower of his manhood, but he came as a frail little child dependent on the care and attention of his Mother. Consumed with the desire to give glory to God, his Father, and save the human race, he saw no better or shorter way to do so than by submitting completely to Mary.

He did this not just for the first eight, ten or fifteen years of his life like other children, but for thirty years. He gave more glory to God, his Father, during all those years of submission and dependence than he would have given by spending them working miracles, preaching far and wide, and converting all mankind. Otherwise he would have done all these things.

What immeasurable glory then do we give to God when, following the example of Jesus, we submit to Mary! With such a convincing and well-known example before us, can we be so foolish as to believe that there is a better and shorter way of giving God glory than by submitting ourselves to Mary, as Jesus did?

140. Let me remind you again of the dependence shown by the three divine Persons on our Blessed Lady. Theirs is the example which fully justifies our dependence on her. The Father gave and still gives his Son only through her. He raises children for himself only through her. He dispenses his graces to us only through her. God the Son was prepared for mankind in general by her alone. Mary, in union with the Holy Spirit, still conceives him and brings him forth daily. It is through her alone that the Son distributes his merits and virtues. The Holy Spirit formed Jesus only through her, and he forms the members of the Mystical Body and dispenses his gifts and his favors through her.

With such a compelling example of the three divine Persons before us, we would be extremely perverse to ignore her and not consecrate ourselves to her. Indeed we would be blind if we did not see the need for Mary in approaching God and making our total offering to him.

141. Here are a few passages from the Fathers of the Church which I have chosen to prove what I have just said: "Mary has two sons, the one a God-man, the other, mere man. She is Mother of the first corporally and of the second spiritually" (St. Bonaventure and Origen).

"This is the will of God who willed that we should have all things through Mary. If then, we possess any hope or grace or gift of salvation, let us acknowledge that it comes to us through her" (St. Bernard).

"All the gifts, graces, virtues of the Holy Spirit are distributed by the hands of Mary, to whom she wills, when she wills, as she wills, and in the measure she wills" (St. Bernardine).

"As you were not worthy that anything divine should be given to you, all graces were given to Mary so that you might receive through her all graces you would not otherwise receive" (St. Bernard).

142. St. Bernard tells us that God, seeing that we are unworthy to receive his graces directly from him, gives them to Mary so that we might receive from her all that he decides to give us. His glory is achieved when he receives through Mary the gratitude, respect and love we owe him in return for his gifts to us. It is only right then that we should imitate his conduct, "in order", as St. Bernard again says, "that grace might return to its author by the same channel through which it came to us".

This is what we do by this devotion. We offer and consecrate all we are and all we possess to the Blessed Virgin in order that our Lord may receive through her as intermediary the glory and gratitude that we owe to him. We deem ourselves unworthy and unfit to approach his infinite majesty on our own, and so we avail ourselves of Mary's intercession.

143. Moreover, this devotion is an expression of great humility, a virtue which God loves above all others. A person who exalts himself debases God, and a person who humbles himself exalts God. "God opposes the proud, but gives his graces to the humble." If you humble yourself, convinced that you are unworthy to appear before him, or even to approach him, he condescends to come down to you. He is pleased to be with you and exalts you in spite of yourself. But, on the other hand, if you venture to go towards God blindly without a mediator, he vanishes and is nowhere to be found. How dearly he loves the humble of heart! It is to such humility that this devotion leads us, for it teaches us never to go alone directly to our Lord, however gentle and merciful though he may be, but always to use Mary's power of intercession, whether we want to enter his presence, speak to him, be near him, offer him something, seek union with him or consecrate ourselves to him.

It obtains many blessings from our Lady

144. The Blessed Virgin, mother of gentleness and mercy, never allows herself to be surpassed in love and generosity. When she sees someone giving himself entirely to her in order to honor and serve her, and depriving himself of what he prizes most in order to adorn her, she gives herself completely in a wondrous

manner to him. She engulfs him in the ocean of her graces, adorns him with her merits, supports him with her power, enlightens him with her light, and fills him with her love. She shares her virtues with him - her humility, faith, purity, etc. She makes up for his failings and becomes his representative with Jesus. Just as one who is consecrated belongs entirely to Mary, so Mary belongs entirely to him. We can truthfully say of this perfect servant and child of Mary what St. John in his gospel says of himself, "He took her for his own."

145. This produces in his soul, if he is persevering, a great distrust, contempt, and hatred of self, and a great confidence in Mary with complete self-abandonment to her. He no longer relies on his own dispositions, intentions, merits, virtues and good works, since he has sacrificed them completely to Jesus through his loving Mother. He has now only one treasury, where all his wealth is stored. That treasury is not within himself: it is Mary. That is why he can now go to our Lord without any servile or scrupulous fear and pray to him with great confidence. He can also share the sentiments of the devout and learned Abbot Rupert, who, referring to the victory which Jacob won over an angel, addressed our Lady in these words, "O Mary, my Queen, Immaculate Mother of the God-man, Jesus Christ, I desire to wrestle with this man, the Divine Word, armed with your merits and not my own."

How much stronger and more powerful are we in approaching our Lord when we are armed with the merits and prayers of the worthy Mother of God, who, as St. Augustine says, has conquered the Almighty by her love!

146. Since by this devotion we give to our Lord, through the hands of his holy Mother, all our good works, she purifies them, making them beautiful and acceptable to her Son.

(1) She purifies them of every taint of self-love and of that unconscious attachment to creatures which slips unnoticed into our best actions. Her hands have never been known to be idle or uncreative. They purify everything they touch. As soon as the Blessed Virgin receives our good works, she removes any blemish or imperfection she may find in them.

147. (2) She enriches our good works by adorning them with her own merits and virtues. It is as if a poor peasant, wishing to win the friendship and favor of the king, were to go the queen and give her an apple - his only possession - for her to offer it to the king. The queen, accepting the peasant's humble gift, puts it on a beautiful golden dish and presents it to the king on behalf of the peasant. The apple in itself would not be a gift worthy of a king, but presented by the queen in person on a dish of gold, it becomes fit for any king.

148. (3) Mary presents our good works to Jesus. She does not keep anything we offer for herself, as if she were our last end, but unflinchingly gives everything to Jesus. So by the very fact we give anything to her, we are giving it to Jesus.

Whenever we praise and glorify her, she sings today as she did on the day Elizabeth praised her, "My soul glorifies the Lord."

149. At Mary's request, Jesus accepts the gift of our good works, no matter how poor and insignificant they may be for one who is the King of kings, the Holiest of the holy. When we present anything to Jesus by ourselves, relying on our own dispositions and efforts, he examines our gift and often rejects it because it is stained with self-love, just as he once rejected the sacrifices of the Jews because they were imbued with selfish motives.

But when we present something to him by the pure, virginal hands of his beloved Mother, we take him by his weak side, in a manner of speaking. He does not consider so much the present itself as the person who offers it. Thus Mary, who is never slighted by her Son but is always well received, prevails upon him to accept with pleasure everything she offers him, regardless of its value. Mary has only to present the gift for Jesus graciously to accept it. This is what St. Bernard strongly recommended to all those he was guiding along the pathway to perfection. "When you want to offer something to God, to be welcomed by him be sure to offer it through the worthy Mother of God, if you do not wish to see it rejected."

150. Does not human nature itself, as we have seen, suggest this mode of procedure to the less important people of this world with regard to the great? Why should grace not inspire us to do likewise with regard to God? He is infinitely exalted above us. We are less than atoms in his sight. But we have an advocate so powerful that she is never refused anything. She is so resourceful that she knows every secret way to win the heart of God. She is so good and kind that she never passes over anyone no matter how lonely and sinful.

Further on, I shall relate the story of Jacob and Rebecca which exemplifies the truths I have been setting before you.

It is an excellent means of giving glory to God

151. This devotion, when faithfully undertaken, is a perfect means of ensuring that the value of all our good works is being used for the greater glory of God. Scarcely anyone works for that noble end, in spite of the obligation to do so, either because men do not know where God's greatest glory is to be found or because they do not desire it. Now Mary, to whom we surrender the value and merit of our good actions, knows perfectly well where God's greatest glory lies and she works only to promote that glory. The devout servant of our Lady, having entirely consecrated himself to her as I have described above, can boldly claim that the value of all his actions, words and thoughts is used for the greatest glory of God, unless he has explicitly retracted his offering. For one who loves God with a pure and unselfish love and prizes God's glory and interests far above his own, could anything be more consoling?

It leads to union with our Lord

152. This devotion is a smooth, short, perfect and sure way of attaining union with our Lord, in which Christian perfection consists.

(a) This devotion is a smooth way. It is the path which Jesus Christ opened up in coming to us and in which there is no obstruction to prevent us reaching him. It is quite true that we can attain to divine union by other roads, but these involve many more crosses and exceptional setbacks and many difficulties that we cannot easily overcome. We would have to pass through spiritual darkness, engage in struggles for which we are not prepared, endure bitter agonies, scale precipitous mountains, tread upon painful thorns, and cross frightful deserts. But when we take the path of Mary, we walk smoothly and calmly.

It is true that on our way we have hard battles to fight and serious obstacles to overcome, but Mary, our Mother and Queen, stays close to her faithful servants. She is always at hand to brighten their darkness, clear away their doubts, strengthen them in their fears, sustain them in their combats and trials. Truly, in comparison with other ways, this virgin road to Jesus is a path of roses and sweet delights. There have been some saints, not very many, such as St. Ephrem, St. John Damascene, St. Bernard, St. Bernardine, St. Bonaventure, and St. Francis de Sales, who have taken this smooth path to Jesus Christ, because the Holy Spirit, the faithful Spouse of Mary, made it known to them by a special grace. The other saints, who are the greater number, while having a devotion to Mary, either did not enter or did not go very far along this path. That is why they had to undergo harder and more dangerous trials.

153. Why is it then, a servant of Mary might ask, that devoted servants of this good Mother are called upon to suffer much more than those who serve her less generously? They are opposed, persecuted, slandered, and treated with intolerance. They may also have to walk in interior darkness and through spiritual deserts without being given from heaven a single drop of the dew of consolation. If this devotion to the Blessed Virgin makes the path to Jesus smoother, how can we explain why Mary's loyal servants are so ill-treated?

154. I reply that it is quite true that the most faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin, being her greatest favorites, receive from her the best graces and favors from heaven, which are crosses. But I maintain too that these servants of Mary bear their crosses with greater ease and gain more merit and glory. What could check another's progress a thousand times over, or possibly bring about his downfall, does not balk them at all, but even helps them on their way. For this good Mother, filled with the grace and unction of the Holy Spirit, dips all the crosses she prepares for them in the honey of her maternal sweetness and the unction of pure love. They then readily swallow them as they would sugared almonds, though the crosses may be very bitter. I believe that anyone who

wishes to be devout and live piously in Jesus will suffer persecution and will have a daily cross to carry. But he will never manage to carry a heavy cross, or carry it joyfully and perseveringly, without a trusting devotion to our Lady, who is the very sweetness of the cross. It is obvious that a person could not keep on eating without great effort unripe fruit which has not been sweetened.

155. (b) This devotion is a short way to discover Jesus, either because it is a road we do not wander from, or because, as we have just said, we walk along this road with greater ease and joy, and consequently with greater speed. We advance more in a brief period of submission to Mary and dependence on her than in whole years of self-will and self-reliance. A man who is obedient and submissive to Mary will sing of glorious victories over his enemies. It is true, his enemies will try to impede his progress, force him to retreat or try to make him fall. But with Mary's help, support and guidance, he will go forward towards our Lord. Without falling, retreating and even without being delayed, he will advance with giant strides towards Jesus along the same road which, as it is written, Jesus took to come to us with giant strides and in a short time.

156. Why do you think our Lord spent only a few years here on earth and nearly all of them in submission and obedience to his Mother? The reason is that "attaining perfection in a short time, he lived a long time", even longer than Adam, whose losses he had come to make good. Yet Adam lived more than nine hundred years!

Jesus lived a long time, because he lived in complete submission to his Mother and in union with her, which obedience to his Father required. The Holy Spirit tells us that the man who honors his mother is like a man who stores up a treasure. In other words, the man who honors Mary, his Mother, to the extent of subjecting himself to her and obeying her in all things will soon become very rich, because he is amassing riches every day through Mary who has become his secret philosopher's stone.

There is another quotation from Holy Scripture, "My old age will be found in the mercy of the bosom". According to the mystical interpretation of these words it is in the bosom of Mary that people who are young grow mature in enlightenment, in holiness, in experience and in wisdom, and in a short time reach the fullness of the age of Christ. For it was Mary's womb which encompassed and produced a perfect man. That same womb held the one whom the whole universe can neither encompass nor contain.

157. (c) This devotion is a perfect way to reach our Lord and be united to him, for Mary is the most perfect and the most holy of all creatures, and Jesus, who came to us in a perfect manner, chose no other road for his great and wonderful journey. The Most High, the Incomprehensible One, the Inaccessible One, He who is, deigned to come down to us poor earthly creatures who are nothing at all. How was this done?

The Most High God came down to us in a perfect way through the humble Virgin Mary, without losing anything of his divinity or holiness. It is likewise through Mary that we poor creatures must ascend to almighty God in a perfect manner without having anything to fear.

God the Incomprehensible, allowed himself to be perfectly comprehended and contained by the humble Virgin Mary without losing anything of his immensity. So we must let ourselves be perfectly contained and led by the humble Virgin without any reserve on our part.

God, the Inaccessible, drew near to us and united himself closely, perfectly and even personally to our humanity through Mary without losing anything of his majesty. So it is also through Mary that we must draw near to God and unite ourselves to him perfectly, intimately, and without fear of being rejected.

Lastly, He who is deigned to come down to us who are not and turned our nothingness into God, or He who is. He did this perfectly by giving and submitting himself entirely to the young Virgin Mary, without ceasing to be in time He who is from all eternity. Likewise it is through Mary that we, who are nothing, may become like God by grace and glory. We accomplish this by giving ourselves to her so perfectly and so completely as to remain nothing, as far as self is concerned, and to be everything in her, without any fear of illusion.

158. Show me a new road to our Lord, pave it with all the merits of the saints, adorn it with their heroic virtues, illuminate and enhance it with the splendor and beauty of the angels, have all the angels and saints there to guide and protect those who wish to follow it. Give me such a road and truly, truly, I boldly say - and I am telling the truth - that instead of this road, perfect though it be, I would still choose the immaculate way of Mary. It is a way, a road without stain or spot, without original sin or actual sin, without shadow or darkness,. When our loving Jesus comes in glory once again to reign upon earth - as he certainly will - he will choose no other way than the Blessed Virgin, by whom he came so surely and so perfectly the first time. The difference between his first and his second coming is that the first was secret and hidden, but the second will be glorious and resplendent. Both are perfect because both are through Mary. Alas, this is a mystery which we cannot understand, "Here let every tongue be silent."

159. (d) This devotion to our Lady is a sure way to go to Jesus and to acquire holiness through union with him.

(1) The devotion which I teach is not new. Its history goes back so far that the time of its origin cannot be ascertained with any precision, as Fr. Boudon, who died a holy death a short time ago, states in a book which he wrote on this devotion. It is however certain that for more than seven hundred years we find traces of it in the Church.

St. Odilo, abbot of Cluny, who lived about the year 1040, was one of the first to practice it publicly in France as is told in his life.

Cardinal Peter Damian relates that in the year 1076 his brother, Blessed Marino, made himself the slave of the Blessed Virgin in the presence of his spiritual director in a most edifying manner. He placed a rope around his neck, scourged himself and placed on the altar a sum of money as a token of his devotion and consecration to our Lady. He remained so faithful to this consecration all his life that he merited to be visited and consoled on his death-bed by his dear Queen and hear from her lips the promise of paradise in reward for his service.

Caesarius Bollandus mentions a famous knight, Vautier de Birback, a close relative of the Dukes of Louvain, who about the year 1300 consecrated himself to the Blessed Virgin.

This devotion was also practiced privately by many people up to the seventeenth century, when it became publicly known.

160. Father Simon de Rojas of the Order of the Holy Trinity for the Redemption of Captives, court preacher to Philip III, made this devotion popular throughout Spain and Germany. Through the intervention of Philip III, he obtained from Gregory XV valuable indulgences for those who practiced it.

Father de los Rios, of the Order of St. Augustine, together with his intimate friend, Father de Roias, worked hard, propagating it throughout Spain and Germany by preaching and writing. He composed a large volume entitled "Hierarchia Mariana", where he treats of the antiquity, the excellence and the soundness of this devotion, with as much devotion as learning.

The Theatine Fathers in the seventeenth century established this devotion in Italy and Savoy.

161. Father Stanislaus Phalacius of the Society of Jesus spread this devotion widely in Poland.

Father de los Rios in the book quoted above mentions the names of princes and princesses, bishops and cardinals of different countries who embraced this devotion.

Father Cornelius a Lapide, noted both for holiness and profound learning, was commissioned by several bishops and theologians to examine it. The praise he gave it after mature examination, is a worthy tribute to his own holiness. Many other eminent men followed his example.

The Jesuit Fathers, ever zealous in the service of our Blessed Lady, presented on behalf of the sodalities of Cologne to Duke Ferdinand of Bavaria, the then archbishop of Cologne, a little treatise on the devotion, and he gave it his approval and granted permission to have it printed. He exhorted all priests and religious of his diocese to do their utmost to spread this solid devotion.

162. Cardinal de B,ulle, whose memory is venerated throughout France, was outstandingly zealous in furthering the devotion in France, despite the calumnies and persecutions he suffered at the hands of critics and evil men. They accused him of introducing novelty and superstition. They composed and published a libelous tract against him and they - rather the devil in them - used a thousand stratagems to prevent him from spreading the devotion in France. But this eminent and saintly man responded to their calumnies with calm patience. He wrote a little book in reply and forcefully refuted the objections contained in it. He pointed out that this devotion is founded on the example given by Jesus Christ, on the obligations we have towards him and on the promises we made in holy baptism. It was mainly this last reason which silenced his enemies. He made clear to them that this consecration to the Blessed Virgin, and through her to Jesus, is nothing less than a perfect renewal of the promises and vows of baptism. He said many beautiful things concerning this devotion which can be read in his works.

163. In Fr. Boudon's book we read of different popes who gave their approval to this devotion, the theologians who examined it, the hostility it encountered and overcame, the thousands who made it their own without censure from any pope. Indeed it could not be condemned without overthrowing the foundations of Christianity. It is obvious then that this devotion is not new. If it is not commonly practiced, the reason is that it is too sublime to be appreciated and undertaken by everyone.

164. (2) This devotion is a safe means of going to Jesus Christ, because it is Mary's role to lead us safely to her Son; just as it is the role of our Lord to lead us to the eternal Father. Those who are spiritually-minded should not fall into the error of thinking that Mary hinders our union with God. How could this possibly happen? How could Mary, who found grace with God for everyone in general and each one in particular, prevent a soul from obtaining the supreme grace of union with him? Is it possible that she who was so completely filled with grace to overflowing, so united to Christ and transformed in God that it became necessary for him to be made flesh in her, should prevent a soul from being perfectly united to him?

It is quite true that the example of other people, no matter how holy, can sometimes impair union with God, but not so our Blessed Lady, as I have said and shall never weary of repeating. One reason why so few souls come to the fullness of the age of Jesus is that Mary who is still as much as ever his Mother and the fruitful spouse of the Holy Spirit is not formed well enough in their hearts.

If we desire a ripe and perfectly formed fruit, we must possess the tree that bears it. If we desire the fruit of life, Jesus Christ, we must possess the tree of life which is Mary. If we desire to have the Holy Spirit working within us, we must possess his faithful and inseparable spouse, Mary the divinely- favored one whom, as I have said elsewhere, he can make fruitful.

165. Rest assured that the more you turn to Mary in your prayers, meditations, actions and sufferings, seeing her if not perhaps clearly and distinctly, at least in a general and indistinct way, the more surely you will discover Jesus. For he is always greater, more powerful, more active, and more mysterious when acting through Mary than he is in any other creature in the universe, or even in heaven. Thus Mary, so divinely-favored and so lost in God, is far from being an obstacle to good people who are striving for union with him. There has never been and there never will be a creature so ready to help us in achieving that union more effectively, for she will dispense to us all the graces to attain that end. As a saint once remarked, "Only Mary knows how to fill our minds with the thought of God." Moreover, Mary will safeguard us against the deception and cunning of the evil one.

166. Where Mary is present, the evil one is absent. One of the unmistakable signs that a person is led by the Spirit of God is the devotion he has to Mary, and his habit of thinking and speaking of her. This is the opinion of a saint, who goes on to say that just as breathing is a proof that the body is not dead, so the habitual thought of Mary and loving converse with her is a proof that the soul is not spiritually dead in sin.

167. Since Mary alone has crushed all heresies, as we are told by the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Office of B.V.M.), a devoted servant of hers will never fall into formal heresy or error, though critics may contest this. He may very well err materially, mistaking lies for truth or an evil spirit for a good one, but he will be less likely to do this than others. Sooner or later he will discover his error and will not go on stubbornly believing and maintaining what he mistakenly thought was the truth.

168. Whoever then wishes to advance along the road to holiness and be sure of encountering the true Christ, without fear of the illusions which afflict many devout people, should take up with valiant heart and willing spirit this devotion to Mary which perhaps he had not previously heard about. Even if it is new to him, let him enter upon this excellent way which I am now revealing to him. "I will show you a more excellent way."

It was opened up by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom. He is our one and only Head, and we, his members, cannot go wrong in following him. It is a smooth way made easy by the fullness of grace, the unction of the Holy Spirit. In our progress along this road, we do not weaken or turn back. It is a quick way and leads us to Jesus in a short time. It is a perfect way without mud or dust or any

vileness of sin. Finally, it is a reliable way, for it is direct and sure, having no turnings to right or left but leading us straight to Jesus and to life eternal.

Let us then take this road and travel along it night and day until we arrive at the fullness of the age of Jesus Christ.

It gives great liberty of spirit

169. It gives great liberty of spirit - the freedom of the children of God - to those who faithfully practice it. Through this devotion we make ourselves slaves of Jesus by consecrating ourselves entirely to him. To reward us for this enslavement of love, our Lord frees us from every scruple and servile fear which might restrict, imprison or confuse us; he opens our hearts and fills them with holy confidence in God, helping us to regard God as our Father; he inspires us with a generous and filial love.

170. Without stopping to prove this truth, I shall simply relate an incident which I read in the life of Mother Agnes of Jesus, a Dominican nun of the convent of Langeac in Auvergne, who died a holy death there in 1634.

When she was only seven years old and was suffering great spiritual anguish, she heard a voice telling her that if she wished to be delivered from her anguish and protected against all her enemies, she should make herself the slave of our Lord and his Blessed Mother as soon as possible. No sooner had she returned home than she gave herself completely to Jesus and Mary as their slave, although she had never known anything about this devotion before. She found an iron chain, put it round her waist and wore it till the day she died. After this, all her sufferings and scruples disappeared and she found great peace of soul.

This led her to teach this devotion to many others who made rapid progress in it - among them, Father Olier, the founder of the Seminary of Saint-Sulpice, and several other priests and students from the same seminary. One day the Blessed Virgin appeared to Mother Agnes and put a gold chain around her neck to show her how happy she was that Mother Agnes had become the slave of both her and her Son. And St. Cecilia, who accompanied our Lady, said to her, "Happy are the faithful slaves of the Queen of heaven, for they will enjoy true freedom." *Tibi servire libertas.*

It is of great benefit to our neighbor

171. It is of great benefit to our neighbor, for by it we show love for our neighbor in an outstanding way since we give him through Mary's hands all that we prize most highly - that is, the satisfactory and prayer value of all our good works, down to the least good thought and the least little suffering. We give our consent that all we have already acquired or will acquire until death should be used in

accordance with our Lady's will for the conversion of sinners or the deliverance of souls from Purgatory.

Is this not perfect love of our neighbor? Is this not being a true disciple of our Lord, one who should always be recognized by his love? Is this not the way to convert sinners without any danger of vainglory, and deliver souls from Purgatory by doing hardly anything more than what we are obliged to do by our state of life?

172. To appreciate the excellence of this motive we must understand what a wonderful thing it is to convert a sinner or to deliver a soul from Purgatory. It is an infinite good, greater than the creation of heaven and earth, since it gives a soul the possession of God. If by this devotion we secured the release of only soul from Purgatory or converted only one sinner in our whole lifetime, would that not be enough to induce any person who really loves his neighbor to practice this devotion?

It must be noted that our good works, passing through Mary's hands, are progressively purified. Consequently, their merit and their satisfactory and prayer value are also increased. That is why they become much more effective in relieving the souls in Purgatory and in converting sinners than if they did not pass through the virginal and liberal hands of Mary. Stripped of self-will and clothed with disinterested love, the little that we give to the Blessed Virgin is truly powerful enough to appease the anger of God and draw down his mercy. It may well be that at the hour of death a person who has been faithful to this devotion will find that he has freed many souls from Purgatory and converted many sinners, even though he performed only the ordinary actions of his state of life. Great will be his joy at the judgment. Great will be his glory throughout eternity.

It is a wonderful means of perseverance

173. Finally, what draws us in a sense more compellingly to take up this devotion to the most Blessed Virgin is the fact that it is a wonderful means of persevering in the practice of virtue and of remaining steadfast.

Why is it that most conversions of sinners are not lasting? Why do they relapse so easily into sin? Why is it that most of the faithful, instead of making progress in one virtue after another and so acquiring new graces, often lose the little grace and virtue they have? This misfortune arises, as I have already shown, from the fact that man, so prone to evil, so weak and changeable, trusts himself too much, relies on his own strength, and wrongly presumes he is able to safeguard his precious graces, virtues and merits.

By this devotion we entrust all we possess to Mary, the faithful Virgin. We choose her as the guardian of all our possessions in the natural and supernatural sphere. We trust her because she is faithful, we rely on her strength, we count on her

mercy and charity to preserve and increase our virtues and merits in spite of the efforts of the devil, the world, and the flesh to rob us of them. We say to her as a good child would say to its mother or a faithful servant to the mistress of the house, "My dear Mother and Mistress, I realize that up to now I have received from God through your intercession more graces than I deserve. But bitter experience has taught me that I carry these riches in a very fragile vessel and that I am too weak and sinful to guard them by myself. Please accept in trust everything I possess, and in your faithfulness and power keep it for me. If you watch over me, I shall lose nothing. If you support me, I shall not fail. If you protect me, I shall be safe from my enemies."

174. This is exactly what St. Bernard clearly pointed out to encourage us to take up this devotion, "When Mary supports you, you will not fail. With her as your protector, you will have nothing to fear. With her as your guide, you will not grow weary. When you win her favor, you will reach the port of heaven." St. Bonaventure seems to say the same thing in even more explicit terms, "The Blessed Virgin," he says, "not only preserves the fullness enjoyed by the saints, but she maintains the saints in their fullness so that it does not diminish. She prevents their virtues from fading away, their merits from being wasted and their graces from being lost. She prevents the devils from doing them harm and she so influences them that her divine Son has no need to punish them when they sin."

175. Mary is the Virgin most faithful who by her fidelity to God makes good the losses caused by Eve's unfaithfulness. She obtains fidelity to God and final perseverance for those who commit themselves to her. For this reason St. John Damascene compared her to a firm anchor which holds them fast and saves them from shipwreck in the raging seas of the world where so many people perish through lack of such a firm anchor. "We fasten souls," he said, "to Mary, our hope, as to a firm anchor." It was to Mary that the saints who attained salvation most firmly anchored themselves as did others who wanted to ensure their perseverance in holiness.

Blessed, indeed, are those Christians who bind themselves faithfully and completely to her as to a secure anchor! The violent storms of the world will not make them founder or carry away their heavenly riches. Blessed are those who enter into her as into another Noah's ark! The flood waters of sin which engulf so many will not harm them because, as the Church makes Mary say in the words of divine Wisdom, "Those who work with my help - for their salvation - shall not sin." Blessed are the unfaithful children of unhappy Eve who commit themselves to Mary, the ever-faithful Virgin and Mother who never wavers in her fidelity and never goes back on her trust. She always loves those who love her, not only with deep affection, but with a love that is active and generous. By an abundant outpouring of grace she keeps them from relaxing their effort in the practice of virtue or falling by the wayside through loss of divine grace.

176. Moved by pure love, this good Mother always accepts whatever is given her in trust, and, once she accepts something, she binds herself in justice by a contract of trusteeship to keep it safe. Is not someone to whom I entrust the sum of a thousand francs obliged to keep it safe for me so that if it were lost through his negligence he would be responsible for it in strict justice? But nothing we entrust to the faithful Virgin will ever be lost through her negligence. Heaven and earth would pass away sooner than Mary would neglect or betray those who trusted in her.

177. Poor children of Mary, you are extremely weak and changeable. Your human nature is deeply impaired. It is sadly true that you have been fashioned from the same corrupted nature as the other children of Adam and Eve. But do not let that discourage you. Rejoice and be glad! Here is a secret which I am revealing to you, a secret unknown to most Christians, even the most devout.

Do not leave your gold and silver in your own safes which have already been broken into and rifled many times by the evil one. They are too small, too flimsy and too old to contain such great and priceless possessions. Do not put pure and clear water from the spring into vessels fouled and infected by sin. Even if sin is no longer there, its odor persists and the water would be contaminated. You do not put choice wine into old casks that have contained sour wine. You would spoil the good wine and run the risk of losing it.

178. Chosen souls, although you may already understand me, I shall express myself still more clearly. Do not commit the gold of your charity, the silver of your purity to a threadbare sack or a battered old chest, or the waters of heavenly grace or the wines of your merits and virtues to a tainted and fetid cask, such as you are. Otherwise you will be robbed by thieving devils who are on the look-out day and night waiting for a favorable opportunity to plunder. If you do so all those pure gifts from God will be spoiled by the unwholesome presence of self-love, inordinate self-reliance, and self-will.

Pour into the bosom and heart of Mary all your precious possessions, all your graces and virtues. She is a spiritual vessel, a vessel of honor, a singular vessel of devotion. Ever since God personally hid himself with all his perfections in this vessel, it has become completely spiritual, and the spiritual abode of all spiritual souls. It has become honorable and has been the throne of honor for the greatest saints in heaven. It has become outstanding in devotion and the home of those renowned for gentleness, grace and virtue. Moreover, it has become as rich as a house of gold, as strong as a tower of David and as pure as a tower of ivory.

179. Blessed is the man who has given everything to Mary, who at all times and in all things trusts in her, and loses himself in her. He belongs to Mary and Mary belongs to him. With David he can boldly say, "She was created for me", or with the beloved disciple, "I have taken her for my own", or with our Lord himself, "All that is mine is yours and all that is yours is mine."

180. If any critic reading this should imagine that I am exaggerating or speaking from an excess of devotion, he has not, alas, understood what I have said. Either he is a carnal man who has no taste for the spiritual; or he is a worldly man who has cut himself off from the Holy Spirit; or he is a proud and critical man who ridicules and condemns anything he does not understand. But those who are born not of blood, nor of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God and Mary, understand and appreciate what I have to say. It is for them that I am writing.

181. Nevertheless, after this digression, I say to both the critics and the devout that the Blessed Virgin, the most reliable and generous of all God's creatures, never lets herself be surpassed by anyone in love and generosity. For the little that is given to her, she gives generously of what she has received from God. Consequently, if a person gives himself to her without reserve, she gives herself also without reserve to that person provided his confidence in her is not presumptuous and he does his best to practice virtue and curb his passions.

182. So the faithful servants of the Blessed Virgin may confidently say with St. John Damascene, "If I confide in you, Mother of God, I shall be saved. Under your protection I shall fear nothing. With your help I shall rout all my enemies. For devotion to you is a weapon of salvation which God gives to those he wishes to save."