Denis the Carthusian

ON THE DIGNITY AND PRAISES OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

De dignitate et laudibus B. V. Mariae

From the Latin of the Tournai edition of his works (1908)

English translation

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this translation · 6

Book I: On the Praises that Chiefly Concern the Most Sacred Body of the Most Glorious Virgin

Prooemium · 7
Article I: On the intention, plan and title of this little work · 8
Article II: What kind of person the one who contemplates and praises the most excellent Virgin ought to be · 9
Article III: With what fear and reverence, with what love and gladness we ought always to go forward to contemplate, praise and invoke the most sacred Virgin Mary · 10
Article IV: That one must go forward in a godlike way to contemplate the glorious and incomparable Mary · 11
Article V: That the most lovable Virgin Mary is highly commended even by unbelievers · 12
Article VI: On the illustrious lineage and descent of Mary, who is to be glorified and loved above all, from the seed of Patriarchs, Prophets and kings, and indeed of priests · 13
Article VII: On the full nobility of the glorious and blessed Mary in soul and body; and what nobility of the flesh is · 15
Article VIII: Whether the God-bearing Virgin Mary, to be glorified and blessed, was conceived after an angelic announcement and miraculously; and what truth is contained in that book reputed apocryphal, entitled On the Birth and Life of Mary · 16
Article IX: On the nativity of the most illustrious Virgin, and the glorious joy that there was then in the world · 18
Article X: On the comparison of the supreme Virgin with the parents of Saint John the Baptist · 19
Article XI: That the most serene and most sweet Virgin Mary was foreshown and prophesied from the ages in many ways · 19
Article XII: On the offering of the blessed Virgin in the temple and her dwelling there · 21
Article XIII: Why the Son of God did not choose to be born of a virgin who was wealthy, powerful and reigning in temporal things · 22
Article XIV: That the most blessed and most wonderful Virgin Mary was most truly made, and is, the Mother of the true God · 23
Article XV: That the dignity and grace, the purity and excellence of the most sweet Mary is in some way infinite · 24
Article XVI: That through the inviolate and most divine Mary the sun and moon, indeed all the heavenly bodies, and the elements and lower things, have obtained a special dignity · 25
Article XVII: On the supernatural dignity and wonderful purity of the body of the most sacred Virgin; and that through it the bodies of all of us have been dignified · 26
Article XVIII: On the dignity and holiness of each of the members of the virgin Mother; and on her abundant joy in the presence of her Only-begotten, in handling and kissing Him · 27
Article XIX: That with the aforesaid joy of the blessed virgin Mother there was often mingled sorrow and grief, manifold and bitter · 29
Article XX: The commendation of the virginal and motherly womb · 30
Article XXI: On the fruitfulness of the glorious and noble Mary · 31
Article XXII: How specially and ineffably God loved and loved beforehand, chose and chose beforehand, this Virgin · 32
Article XXIII: The commendation of the most sacred breasts of the glorious Virgin · 33
Article XXIV: On the Lord’s annunciation made to the glorious Virgin · 35
Article XXV: In what act, in what place and in what posture the glorious and most illustrious Virgin Mary was when the annunciation of the conception of the Son of God was made to her · 37
Article XXVI: By what virtue the most chosen Virgin Mary was chiefly disposed to become the Mother of God · 38
Article XXVII: On the nativity of the Holy of Holies from the most sweet and sublime Mary · 39
Article XXVIII: On the wonders of God accomplished in the most sweet and most loving Mary · 41
Article XXIX: Further on the wonderful excellence of the blessed Mary, who is to be glorified; also the testimony of a certain astrologer concerning her; and how, while she was still living in mortal flesh, holy men of deep understanding longed and hastened to see her · 42
Article XXX: On the most sweet, familiar and holy life together of Christ and His virgin Mother in this world · 44
Article XXXI: On the beatitude of the most sweet Mary in this life · 45

Article XXXII: On the flowery little bed of the heavenly Bridegroom and of His singular spouse, the virgin Mother · 47
Article XXXIII: On the joyful table of the King Messiah and of His virgin Mother · 48
Article XXXIV: On the bodily beauty of the blessed and glorious Mary · 48
Article XXXV: On the special excellence of the harmony and constitution of the most worthy Mary · 49
Article XXXVI: Whether any supernatural and sensible radiance appeared in the face of the most blessed Mary, and a sweet fragrance in her most sacred body · 50
Article XXXVII: At what age the most gracious Virgin conceived Christ · 51
Article XXXVIII: That what we assert concerning the incarnation of the Son of God and the excellence of the most holy Mary does not detract from the Godhead · 52

Book II: On the Excellence of the Wisdom, Knowledge and Prudence of the Most Holy Soul of the Virgin Mary

Prooemium · 54
Article II: How the fullness of grace was in the glorious Virgin · 57
Article III: On the excellence of the gift of wisdom of the most glorious virgin Mary · 59
Article IV: On the excellence of Mary, who is to be glorified, in the wisdom which is a gift of grace freely given · 60
Article V: Whether the God-bearing virgin Mary also had the use and ministry of the aforesaid wisdom and knowledge, in instructing others · 62
Article VI: On the natural wisdom and knowledge of Mary, who is to be glorified · 63
Article VII: That the life of the most sacred Mary was supremely contemplative · 64
Article VIII: That the most meek and most sweet virgin Mary, beyond all the Saints after Christ, shone in this life with the splendour of the highest contemplations · 65
Article IX: On the species of contemplation, and how gloriously the virginal Mother was pre-eminent in them · 67
Article X: That the most affectionate and most meek Virgin attained excellently, beyond all wayfarers, to the perfection of mystical theology · 69
Article XI: On the excellence of the contemplation of the most pure Mary in comparison with the contemplation of others · 71
Article XII: Whether the virgin Mary, who is most to be glorified, saw God by sight in this life · 72
Article XIII: An objection against what has been said, and its solution · 74
Article XIV: That it is to be piously believed that the most meek and most tranquil virgin Mary asked many things of her Only-begotten, who dwelt with her, and learned many things from Him · 75
Article XV: On the giftedness and inborn goodness of the most sweet Mary · 76
Article XVI: That the most praiseworthy virgin Mary heard the sermons of her Son more eagerly than all others, understood them more clearly, and profited more by them · 76
Article XVII: Whether the most blessed virgin Mary knew the trinity of Persons in God before she conceived the Son of God · 77
Article XVIII: That the blessed virgin Mary was adorned with the gift of prophecy · 78
Article XIX: Whether the blessed and glorious virgin Mary had the other gifts of grace freely given, namely the grace of healings, the working of powers, that is, of miracles, the discerning of spirits, the interpretation of speeches, and kinds of tongues (1 Cor. 12:9–10) · 80
Article XX: That in the gifts of understanding and counsel the most excellent virgin Mary was the most perfect after Christ · 82
Article XXI: How gloriously prudent the most sweet and most divine virgin Mary was · 82
Article XXII: On the perfection of the knowledge and understanding of the most high and blessed Mary, according to Albert · 83
Article XXIII: How the most kind virgin Mary is called the saviour of the world, and to have co-operated with her Son in the redemption of the world · 84
Article XXIV: How fittingly the most worthy Mary is called the illuminatrix of the world; and on the benefits conferred on us through her · 85
Article XXV: That the most divine virgin Mary knew most certainly beforehand that her Son was to suffer · 86
Article XXVI: On the most excellent increase of the most pure Mary in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, at the sending and infusion of that same Paraclete · 86
Article XXVII: On the theoretical advance of constant contemplation, and on the most vehement daily advance of the most merciful and most tranquil virgin Mary after the ascension of her Son · 88

Book III: On the Virtues of the Most Glorious Virgin Mary

Prooemium · 89
Article I: On the clarity and certainty of the faith of Mary, who is to be loved above all and glorified · 89
Article II: On the perfection and excellence of hope in the deiform and most serene virgin Mary · 91
Article III: On the most ardent and most pure charity of the divine and gracious Mary towards God · 93
Article IV: On the natural love of the most illustrious Mary for her only-begotten Son, according to His assumed nature · 95
Article V: On the most fervent charity towards her neighbours and the most burning zeal for souls of the most holy Mary · 96
Article VI: How fully and eminently the virgin Mary, best of all and to be glorified, fulfilled the two precepts of charity in this life · 97
Article VII: On the loving and fiery affections of the most blessed Mother and Lady, with which she burned in visiting the holy places of her Son after His ascension · 99
Article VIII: That the most illustrious virgin Mary was most gloriously brought to the perfection and eminence of original justice · 100
Article IX: How excellently the moral and cardinal virtues were present and shone forth in her · 101
Article X: On the temperance, honour, chastity, modesty and shamefastness of the most pure Virgin, the glorious Mary · 102
Article XI: On the fortitude, constancy and stability of the most unconquered, most victorious and most glorious Mary · 103
Article XII: On the justice of the most upright Mary · 104
Article XIII: On the mercy and loving-kindness of the glorious Mary · 105
Article XIV: On the greatness of the loving-kindness and mercy of the admirable and heavenly Mary, from the words of the holy Fathers · 107
Article XV: On the religion and devotion of the most kind and sublime Mary · 108
Article XVI: On the meekness and patience of the most excellent virgin Mary · 110
Article XVII: On the ineffable and most profound humility of the most high Mary · 111
Article XVIII: On the obedience and diligence, and on the daily, nay, constant and unceasing progress of the most wise and deiform Mary · 113
Article XIX: On the true, spiritual, abundant and unfailing riches of the glorious Mary · 114
Article XX: How much the virginal Mother of salvation is to be loved and venerated by us; and how many and how great are the benefits conferred on us from above through her · 115
Article XXI: On the sweetness of the glorious Virgin · 117
Article XXII: On the supernatural and full beauty of the most worthy Mary · 118
Article XXIII: On the perpetual virginity of the most holy Mary, and on her freedom from all sin · 119
Article XXIV: On the most vehement compassion of the most affectionate Mary in the passion of her Son · 120
Article XXV: Whether the glorious and blessed virgin Mary, while her Son hung on the cross, had joy from the consideration of the fruit of the Lord’s passion · 122
Article XXVI: Why Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, willed His most beloved Mother to be present at His passion · 123
Article XXVII: Whether the most sacred virgin Mary was baptized · 124
Article XXVIII: Whether the most excellent virgin Mary also received the other sacraments of the law of the Gospel; and specially whether she went to confession · 124
Article XXIX: On the twelve privileges of the most meek and most holy Virgin · 125
Article XXX: On the power and efficacy of this name, Mary · 126

Book IV: On the Beatitude of the Most Happy Virgin Mary in Soul and Body

Prooemium · 129
Article I: That, Christ having been glorified through His resurrection and ascension, the most blessed virgin Mary was glorified in a heavenly manner even in this life · 129
Article II: That the most worthy virgin Mary, the course of this life being completed, truly died; and on the special graces granted to her at her death · 130
Article III: On the first four of these graces · 130
Article IV: On the fifth grace conferred on the blessed virgin Mary at her death, namely that she was glorified in body and soul and most gloriously taken up into heaven · 132

Article V: Whether it can be proved from the words of the great and holy Dionysius that the most sacred and most sweet Mary was taken up in body and soul · 134
Article VI: How long the most pure virgin Mary lived in this world after the ascension of Christ · 135
Article VII: From the Revelations of St Bridget, on the manner and time of the assumption of the most excellent Virgin · 136
Article VIII: Presentation of the testimony of John Damascene on the full assumption of the most loving Mary · 137
Article IX: How the super-most-glorious Trinity came to meet the most chosen Virgin as she came to heaven, and how incomparably gloriously It received and glorified her · 138
Article X: On the supreme and ineffable happiness and glory of Mary, most beloved of God · 141
Article XI: On that most solemn procession in which God incarnate led His most excellent Mother, departing from the body, with the whole heavenly host to the highest heaven · 142
Article XII: Further on the same matter, and that the most sincere virgin Mary is raised above all the choirs of angels, speaking to Christ mouth to mouth and beholding Him eye to eye · 144
Article XIII: On the ineffable joy which the most blessed virgin Mary has in the bodily and inward vision of the humanity of her Son · 145
Article XIV: On the honour and glory which God incarnate unceasingly renders to His most beloved Mother before all the Blessed in the Church triumphant · 147
Article XV: On the love and veneration which the whole Church triumphant renders to the Queen of heaven · 147
Article XVI: On the joy and glory which the best virgin Mary has in all the elect and Blessed · 149
Article XVII: On the endowments of the most glorified body of the most happy Virgin · 150
Article XVIII: Whether the most excellent virgin Mary is adorned in glory with a threefold aureole and a threefold fruit · 152

About this translation

Translated from *De dignitate et laudibus beatae Virginis Mariae*, in four books, in *Doctoris ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera omnia*, tome 36 (Opera minora IV; Tournai, 1908), pp. 17–174, which follows the Cologne edition of Johann Soter (1532). It is a different work from Denis's *De praeconio et dignitate Mariae*. The first book treats of the praises that chiefly concern the Virgin's most sacred body; the second of the wisdom, knowledge and prudence of her soul; the third of her virtues; the fourth of her death, her assumption and her glory in body and soul.

The page numbers of that edition are given in the text as (p. N). Scripture is cited as Denis quotes it, from the Vulgate, with the references printed in the edition's margins, given in modern form; the psalms follow the Vulgate numbering. The notes identify Denis's sources.

Book I: On the Praises that Chiefly Concern the Most Sacred Body of the Most Glorious Virgin

Prooemium

(p. 17) Who is she that comes forth like the rising dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array? (Song 6:9).[1]

The God of immense majesty is incomprehensible to us in this life, not only as He subsists eternally and unchangeably in Himself, but also in His works; for He is so glorious and so illustrious in them that we can neither sufficiently marvel at nor comprehend the excellence of His wisdom and omnipotence in them, nor fully understand or sufficiently wonder at His works and creatures themselves. Therefore Solomon said: *All things are hard; man cannot explain them by word* (Eccl. 1:8); and again: *God has delivered the world to the disputation of men, so that man cannot find out the work which God has made from the beginning to the end* (Eccl. 3:11). Hence Scripture says: *Hardly do we guess aright at the things that are upon earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us: but the things that are in heaven, who shall search out?* (Wis. 9:16). Since this is so with the works of nature, how much more is it so with the works of grace, and above all with the works of glory?

Now among all the works of grace the most excellent is this, which God, the Most High and the Holy, has wrought in the most glorious Virgin: in her the very Author of nature, the Fountain of grace and the Dispenser of glory, assumed human nature and united it immediately to His own uncreated, eternal and uncircumscribed personal being, by a union that is hypostatic and incomprehensible to every created mind. This is the supreme mystery, most worthy of all wonder, of unceasing thanksgiving and of the most ardent love, accomplished in the altogether most pure womb of the most chosen and most sacred Virgin.

Further, after the most surpassing and most excellent gifts and works of grace conferred by the eternal and adorable Word upon the humanity He assumed, the first rank of excellence fell to the gifts of graces bestowed from above upon the most holy Virgin. These, both in the gifts of grace freely given (*gratia gratis data*) and in the gifts, habits and works of sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*), and in the gifts also of glory *(p. 18)* and of eternal salvation, shine forth gloriously and ineffably after those of her only-begotten Son. For just as it was most fitting that the nature which the sublime and infinite Creator willed to unite immediately to His Person and Godhead by personal union should be adorned by Him supremely and incomparably, in the very instant in which He assumed it, with every charism of grace and glory, with every perfect virtue and gift of the Holy Spirit; so it was altogether fitting that the Virgin whom He chose from eternity to be His Mother, from whose substance and most pure blood He decreed to take human nature, should be adorned by Him, after the assumed humanity itself, with all the charisms of grace and glory in an unspeakably more excellent and more bountiful way than others, as much as it doubtless befitted the Mother of God to be adorned, exalted and deified above the servants. For just as it was not fitting that human nature should be assumed by the eternal Word and united immediately to the divine and uncreated nature unless it had been most beautifully and incomparably adorned in the manner just described, so it was in no way fitting that a human person should be made the Mother of God, and should carry and nourish God incarnate within herself, unless she had been adorned in the aforesaid manner most beautifully, most graciously and most gloriously.

Hence the Holy Spirit, in the divine Scriptures, has spoken many and great things, wonderful and sublime things, indeed things most lofty and incomprehensible, concerning the inestimable excellence of this most blessed Virgin; and long before she was born He spoke of her beforehand in the Prophets, the Psalms and the Canticles, above all in the Song of Songs. Among these sayings is the one which has now been brought forward as our theme: *Who* (it says) *is she that comes forth like the rising dawn, fair as the moon, bright as*

the sun? and so on (Song 6:9).

Indeed this most sacred Maiden, having come forth from the womb of her venerable and holy mother, as soon as she began to use her reason, rose up like a most beautiful dawn from the lowest things to the highest, and went a little before Christ, who is the most radiant day of faithful souls. And so she came forth along the way to the homeland, from faith to sight, from infancy to youth and to marriageable age, advancing most swiftly and incomparably in all wisdom and virtue, in all supernatural charity, in interior illumination and in divine kindling.

"Fair as the moon": and certainly incomparably fairer in mind than the bodily moon shining in its sphere; nevertheless in some manner fair as that moon. For just as the moon rules and shines upon the night, and after the sun shines most brightly in the sky (Gen. 1:16), so the most illustrious Virgin, after the Sun of Justice, the Lord Jesus Christ, shines more eminently in the whole Church militant and triumphant; and over the Church militant, which in comparison with the Church triumphant is likened to the night and sits in darkness, she presides in a special way. Moreover, she is fair as the moon, that is, as the Church: for the diverse graces and virtues which were scattered here and there, and imperfectly, in the various members of the Church, were and are gathered together in her, and that most perfectly.

"Bright as the sun" (*electa ut sol*, literally "chosen as the sun"): because after Christ, the Sun of understanding, she is proved most excellent and is judged to be the most chosen; and so she is shown to be most like the supremely radiant Saviour. And as the sun surpasses all the stars and planets in size, in brightness and in causal power, so the most divine Virgin, after the one fruit of her blessed womb, transcends all the Saints in every perfection, wisdom, beauty and fruitfulness, since she is the Mother of the true God, the saviour of the world, and the restorer of countless souls utterly lost, who leads them back to grace and salvation. Hence it is rightly said, "terrible as an army set in array": terrible, I say, to the adverse powers and the evil spirits, as will be shown more clearly below.

[1] Song 6:9 in the Vulgate numbering (6:10 in many modern Bibles).

Article I: On the intention, plan and title of this little work

They that explain me shall have life everlasting (Ecclus. 24:31). If we are commanded to praise the most high and glorious God in His Saints, *(p. 19)* according to the Psalm, *Praise the Lord in His Saints* (Ps. 150:1), how much more ought we to praise God in this Holy of Holy Ones, the most holy of all the Saints, our Lady and Queen? And if the praise of His servants, by which they are praised by us in this exile, is acceptable to the most loving Creator, how much more does the commendation of His most excellent Mother, offered by devout servants and handmaids, please Him?

Moreover, since Scripture exhorts us, and the Wise Man says, *Let us praise men of renown, and our fathers* (Ecclus. 44:1), much more is it fitting for us to praise and glorify this most glorious one, the most kind and most excellent spiritual Mother of us all. Certainly we are not ignorant how gladly good sons hear their parents praised: how much more does that supremely good and best only-begotten Son of the eternal Father and of the Virgin Mother delight in the praises of His most beloved Mother offered devoutly and humbly?

Further, the better, the holier and the more honourable this incomparable and most inviolate Virgin is in herself, the more just and fitting it is to dwell upon her praises. Again, the greater and the more numerous the benefits we have received through her and from her, and trust and hope to obtain, the more often and the more ardently we ought to be intent upon her praises. Again, the more we need her unceasing and most gracious help, the more affectionately we must cling to the commendation of her, and invoke, venerate and extol her. Likewise, the more fruitful and wholesome it is for us to praise her continually with all reverence, the more earnestly let us persevere in her praises.

Hence, therefore, I, however defective, unworthy and vile, desire with all my heart to praise, extol and contemplate this most lovable Virgin, this most illustrious Lady, the God-bearing Mother, and to venerate her with all my strength, and also to stir up others to these same things. Hence I think this little work should be entitled *On the Dignity and Praises of the Glorious Virgin*; and to the glory and honour of the superblessed Trinity I shall divide it into four parts. In the first of these will be touched upon the praises that in their own way specially concern the most worthy body of the most illustrious Virgin; in the second, mention will be made of the wisdom, knowledge and prudence of her most holy soul; in the third, of her virtues; in the fourth there will be a treatise on her beatitude in soul and body.

Let us praise, then, this most beloved one of God, who bore for us the Restorer of our whole being and the cause of our salvation, through whom we have been snatched from the yoke of sin, from the slavery of the devil and from everlasting damnation. Let us glorify this most blessed creature, in whose hand is our salvation,[1] through whom we are led back to the fountain of eternal beatitude and brought to the light of God's mercies; who is most powerful to reconcile and unite us to her most beloved and only Son, true God, our Lord and Judge, our Saviour and Creator, and always to keep us safe in Him.

[1] An echo of Gen. 47:25 (*salus nostra in manu tua est*).

Article II: What kind of person the one who contemplates and praises the most excellent Virgin ought to be

If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned (Heb. 12:20; Exod. 19:12–13). And this is written to the Hebrews. The carnal, unclean beast is the man who follows the brutish part and lives like a beast; who, as even Aristotle testifies, is ten thousand times worse and viler than the brutes. Now the mountain is the most high Virgin, who is as much more sublime than all as she is humbler. If, then, a beastly man foolishly presumes to gaze upon her, to praise her, to approach and to touch her, does he not deserve to be despised and repulsed rather than accepted and heard, especially since *praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner* (Ecclus. 15:9)?

Again, this most pure Virgin, the image of all holiness and the form of all cleanness, the rule of justice, the pattern of honour and sincerity, is to be contemplated and praised with a purified eye of the mind, every unclean imagination being shut out, and every foul and unbecoming thought and affection, *(p. 20)* movement and occupation being driven away. For knowledge comes about through a certain assimilation. He also who praises and contemplates is in some way joined to what he praises and contemplates. But a joining of things altogether unlike is recognized to be unfitting; for this reason there must be a proportion between those who are united.

You, then, who desire to unite yourself to the most pure Virgin, the most holy Mother, the most divine Empress, through contemplation and praise, who try to draw near to her and strive to cling to her, purify your mind, abhor carnality, be zealous for purity and chastity; blush to appear with an unclean mind before the Mother and Lady of such purity. And if you are not yet of purified heart, groan in penitence over your carnality, and beg the Queen of mercy heartily and constantly for the grace of amendment and the virtue of chastity. If you do not yet approach her with formed faith and spiritual charity, lying as you do in mortal sin, at least approach and call upon her with unformed faith and natural love, with the purpose of amendment and hatred of your foulness. For so great is her goodness and purity, so inestimably great her honour and uprightness, that even the unclean and vicious are kindled with love for her. Moreover, so ineffable is the loving-kindness and mercy, the humility and condescension of the most blessed Virgin, that she does not utterly spurn or abandon anyone who calls upon her and praises her, however filthy and wicked he may be, provided that he grieves over his foulness, purposes amendment, and earnestly begs to obtain the help of heavenly loving-kindness through this most merciful advocate.

Meanwhile let us consider how the illustrious princesses, queens and ladies of this world allow none but noble, comely and well-mannered pages and attendants, finely dressed, to stand before them and serve them. How much more is it judged just and fitting that the Queen of heaven, the Lady of the angels, the Mother of the Most High and the Lady of all ages should be contemplated, praised and honoured only by the clean, by those truly noble through virtues, fragrant with chastity and supported by uprightness of life? Nevertheless, let not the unclean and the wicked cease from praising and honouring her, since their praise and honour offered to the most kind Virgin dispose them in some way to obtain her mercy. For just as the supremely merciful God leaves no good unrewarded, even if it was done outside charity, so the godlike Lady, the most loving Virgin Mary, leaves no service done to her without its reward.

Article III: With what fear and reverence, with what love and gladness we ought always to go forward to contemplate, praise and invoke the most sacred Virgin Mary

With all your soul come to her, and keep her ways with all your power; and when you have got hold of her, let her not go: for in the end you shall find rest in her, and she shall be turned to your delight (Ecclus. 6:27–29). If we rightly look at our defects, impurities and vices, and also at the excellences of the glorious Virgin in all dignity, holiness and glory, we shall not go forward to her praise, service and invocation without great shame, humility, reverence and fear, acknowledging our unworthiness and blushing to appear in her presence with such great foulness and sins. But if we rightly weigh the most tender loving-kindness of the most blessed Virgin, her motherly sweetness and her most clement charity, we shall open our hearts and our mouths to her praise and to calling upon her with all affection and gladness and with great confidence.

Therefore, so that we may praise and entreat her in all these ways, let us wisely consider the whole sublimity of our most happy Lady in all authority, power, holiness, justice, spirituality *(p. 21)* and glory, and also our own dregs, depravities and filth; and so let us approach her service with fear, humbly, modestly and reverently. Let us consider with what kind and how great reverence we must serve the Mother of the uncircumscribable and supremely worthy God, the Queen and Empress of the whole world. Again, lest the consideration of these things draw us back from her praise and service, let us weigh attentively how inestimable is her goodness, loving-kindness and charity. And the greater her dignity and height, the greater is her condescension toward the wretched and the weak below her. And so let us rise to her praises and honours with all charity, readiness and joy, glorying from the depths of our hearts in grasping and contemplating so good, so most lovable, so most beautiful and most kind a Mother and Lady; for joy arises from the union of a power with its fitting object.

But perhaps for this reason we are less afraid to praise and entreat this most blessed one, because she, being all most loving, is most ready to forgive and is not accustomed to avenge her injuries harshly. But let whoever thinks this consider the justice of her Son, the supreme Judge, who is zealous for His Mother; who takes the injuries and offences done to His most loving Mother the more grievously, and avenges them the more severely, the kinder she is. Do we not see how hard good sons find it to bear injuries done to their parents, and how they avenge them?

From the consideration of these things holy men also praised the most divine Virgin with great fear. Hence in the sermon on the Assumption of the blessed Virgin, blessed Jerome says: “I confess that I am unworthy to praise so great and such a Virgin, and I fear that as I am unworthy, so I may be found a reprobate praiser; hence I am greatly afraid to set forth her praises.”[1] Saint Bernard also says: “There is nothing that so terrifies me, and nothing that so delights me, as to speak of the most blessed Virgin. My own unworthiness, I say, terrifies me; but the praise of the holy Virgin and her excellence delights me.” If, then, men so holy feared so vehemently to praise the most glorious Virgin, how much must we little and defective ones fear, and with all the reverence possible to us commend the most worthy Mary, irreverence toward whom is an injury to God,

who considers an injury to Himself more tolerable than an offence against His most sweet Mother!

With all our strength, therefore, let us praise and venerate, love and revere the most excellent Mother of God. And when we have done this, let us acknowledge that we have done nothing worthy, and that we cannot make a fitting return for her benefits, saying with Saint Augustine: “What can we so little ones, we so puny in action, set forth in her praises, when, even if all our members were turned into tongues, none of us would suffice to praise her?”

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[1] The sermon on the Assumption then ascribed to St. Jerome (the letter *Cogitis me*) is now attributed to Paschasius Radbertus. The sayings ascribed here to Bernard and Augustine are likewise given as Denis cites them.

Article IV: That one must go forward in a godlike way to contemplate the glorious and incomparable Mary

As the sun when it rises to the world in the high places of God, so is the beauty of a good wife for the ornament of her house (Ecclus. 26:21). The house of the good woman is the holy Church, both the Church militant, entrusted to the glorious Virgin, and the Church triumphant, made up of angels and men. Therefore, just as the material sun by its splendour illuminates and adorns our whole hemisphere, so the most happy Virgin, the best of all women, adorns, illumines and gladdens the whole Church militant and triumphant.

Indeed so great is the excellence of the perfection of the God-bearing Virgin that, just as one must go forward from the knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of the Creator, so one must rise from the consideration of women to the contemplation of the most blessed Mary. Therefore, just as from creatures one ascends to the knowledge *(p. 22)* of the Creator, first by the way of affirmation, as the divine Dionysius teaches (*Mystical Theology* ch. 1), namely by attributing the perfections of all created things to God as the fontal and exemplary principle of all things (for whatever perfection is in things caused proceeds from their causes and belongs to the causes principally); so it is in no way doubtful that whatever perfection, graciousness, lovableness, sweetness, virtue and glory is found in women, all of it belongs to Mary and is in her, and that she holds the first place in all of them, and no woman is found equal to her. Indeed, in every theological, intellectual and moral virtue, in every gift, fruit and beatitude, she was most excellent.

Thus in certain women and maidens virginity is commended. And this was most eminently in the blessed and sweet Mary, who is called by antonomasia the Virgin of virgins. In certain women fruitfulness is praised. And this too shines forth incomparably in glorious Mary, through whose childbearing all mothers with their offspring are saved, since she bore Him from whom all causality proceeds and all fruitfulness is derived. Further, in certain women the virginal integrity preserved within marriage itself is commended, which is a mark of exceptional virtue and most worthy of admiration. This was certainly found first and most illustriously in Mary, and was imitated by certain most chosen souls after her example. Besides, in some women widowed chastity is praised, by which after their first marriage they led a celibate life, as did the venerable Judith (Judith 16:26). And this purity too the most glorious of women, the honour and glory of all women, the most sweet Virgin Mary possessed in a surpassing degree: for when her first spouse had died, she took no other.

Moreover, when the perfections of created things are attributed to the first causal principle of the universe, they are ascribed to Him by way of supereminence, namely by removing from them whatever imperfection is joined to them, and indeed in a manner infinitely and incomprehensibly higher than they belong to created things. So the perfections of virgins and women are to be attributed to the supreme and most lovable Mary with great excellence, every culpable imperfection being excluded, and indeed in some way every lesser perfection being removed. There are indeed certain persons of both sexes adorned with virtues, yet not as much as they ought to have been, so that the diminution or imperfection of their virtue has the character of venial fault. But this was far from the most excellent Mary, who was most virtuous at the very limit of

excellence, without the admixture of any mortal or venial fault.

Further, in some maidens and women virginity is found, but unfruitful and barren; in others there is fruitfulness, but subject to corruption or mingled with lust. But in this most sweet Mary alone there was virginal fruitfulness and fruitful virginity; and not only this, but an incomparable fruitfulness and a certain most blessed motherhood, transcending with ineffable dignity all the virginity and fruitfulness of other women, are and shine forth in her, who shares parenthood with the eternal Father, having the same Son with Him: which is a dignity in some way infinite.[1] Therefore, just as the omnipotent Creator is the productive cause of all things, so the good and deified Mary is the restoring cause of all, and the mother of all the faithful. Hence, just as every perfection of created things is proved to belong in the most excellent way to the superessential and incomprehensible God by reason of His causality, so all the virtue, perfection, wisdom and honour of women and virgins is shown to be in the most worthy Mary in so eminent a manner that, in comparison with her, all other virgins and women, however virtuous, holy and perfect, stand imperfect and seem to sink and fail. As Saint Jerome said: just as in comparison with God no one is good, so in comparison with the Mother of God no woman is found perfect, however outstanding she is proved to be.

(p. 23) Finally, it is no secret what and how great are the defects and imperfections of persons of the female sex. Not only are all of these to be wholly removed from the most divine Virgin, but the perfections and excellences contrary to them are to be ascribed to her with ineffable excellence. O how most illustriously there befits the most renowned and most holy Mary what that devout Sara declares: *Never have I joined myself with them that play, neither have I made myself partaker with them that walk in lightness* (Tob. 3:17); and likewise what holy Jeremiah asserts: *I sat not in the assembly of jesters, and I have not desired the day of man* (Jer. 15:17; 17:16)! If that saying of Ecclesiasticus is true, *A holy and shamefaced woman is grace upon grace,* and a silent woman likewise (Ecclus. 26:19, 18), how most gracious and most precious is this person, this most blessed Virgin, this most virtuous Mary, the Holy of holy women, indeed the mother of all the Saints, who never had an unbecoming movement, never experienced an immodest stirring, never spoke an unlawful word?

[1] "In some way infinite" is the scholastic phrase of St. Thomas, *ST* I q. 25 a. 6 ad 4.

Article V: That the most lovable Virgin Mary is highly commended even by unbelievers

All generations shall call me blessed (Luke 1:48). The Apostle rightly said: *We have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God, that we may know the things that are given us from God* (1 Cor. 2:12). Hence this Mary, most to be loved and most to be honoured, the more abundantly and graciously she received the Holy Spirit, the more clearly and certainly she knew the supernatural charisms imparted to her by God; and because of them she foresaw that she was to be called blessed by all generations, indeed to be accounted most blessed and to be called blessed in a very exalted way, as the most chosen Mother of the Fountain of all grace, glory and salvation. This she foretold, filled with the prophetic spirit, saying: *All generations shall call me blessed* (Luke 1:48). And why? *Because* (she says) *He that is mighty has done great things for me* (Luke 1:49).

This was foretold through Solomon thus: *Her children rose up and called her most blessed* (Prov. 31:28). For her children are all the faithful, who, when they stretch out their minds to contemplate the excellence of most holy Mary, confess with great devotion that she is most blessed. Indeed so great is her beatitude and excellence that she is called blessed not only by the generation of the just and the elect, but also by the generation of the wicked and the reprobate; and not only by the generation of the faithful and of Christians, but she is commended in no small measure even by the faithless and unjust Saracens.

Thus in the fifth chapter of the Koran it is related:[1] "The angels, addressing Mary, said: O Mary, more radiant, more pure and more delightful than all men and women, there is sent to you from the Creator of the universe the joy of the highest message, with the Word of God, whose name is Jesus Christ, who is the face of all nations in this world and in the world to come, wise, the best of men. She answered: O God, since I have not touched a man, how shall I conceive a son? But the angels said: To God nothing is impossible; He works all things as He wills. He will teach your son, who comes with divine power, the book of the law, skill in all teaching, the Testament and the Gospel." Moreover, in the same chapter it is said: "The wife of Joachim (that is, Anne), perceiving that she was with child, said: To You, O God the Creator, I vow the conceiving of my womb, and I devoutly beg that You will deign to receive it as one serving You alone. And when she had borne a daughter and had given her the name of Mary, she said: My daughter and her offspring, wholly devoted to Your service, O God, protect from the temptations and snares of the devil. Zachary took her, that is, Mary, into his care; and as often as he went to the altar to pour out his prayers, he found the best fruits out of season beside her. And when he asked her whence she had them, she said: From God, who gives countless gifts to whom He wills."

See how, by the providence of the Most High, who honours *(p. 24)* His most beloved Mother, the most blessed Virgin herself is highly praised even by unbelievers. Indeed, if anyone in the presence of the Saracens were to contradict these things and to deny that the most happy Lady is a virgin, he would at once be killed by them. For the Saracens believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah promised in the law by the Prophets, and that His most glorious Mother is a virgin, and they would slaughter anyone who contradicted this. Yet they deny the divinity of Christ, asserting that He is a mere man and only a creature, not God; and so they intolerably detract from the honour of the godlike Mary.

[1] Denis cites the medieval Latin version of the Koran (that of Robert of Ketton, 1143), whose chapter divisions differ from the modern ones. The passages correspond to Sura 3:42–49 and 3:35–37 (Sura 3 is "The Family of Imran"). The wording is that of the Latin version, translated here as Denis gives it.

Article VI: On the illustrious lineage and descent of Mary, who is to be glorified and loved above all, from the seed of Patriarchs, Prophets and kings, and indeed of priests

Fine linen and purple is her clothing. Her husband is honourable in the gates, when he sits among the senators of the land (Prov. 31:22–23). It was fitting that the Only-begotten of God, the eternal Word, born according to the divine nature from a Father of infinite nobility and holiness, should be made flesh and born of a most noble and most holy mother also, and of an illustrious stock of Patriarchs, Prophets, kings, priests and prelates. According to the humanity He assumed, He is also the King Messiah and the High Priest, a Prophet and the Lord of the Prophets, a Patriarch and the Prince of the Patriarchs, our Lawgiver, the Leader of Israel and the Ruler of the Christian people. Of Him Zechariah foretold: *He shall be a priest upon His throne* (Zech. 6:13); and the Psalmist: *You are a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek* (Ps. 109:4). Of Him it is said also in Isaiah: *The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King: He will come and save us* (Isa. 33:22).

Hence the evangelist Matthew, at the beginning of his Gospel, teaches that Christ was begotten of a royal stock (Matt. 1:1 ff.), while Luke describes Him as born of a priestly line (Luke 3:23 ff.). For these tribes, as being more eminent than the others, were commonly joined together in marriage. Hence Hilary says, and Ambrose affirms the same, that the evangelist Luke describes the genealogy of Christ according to the degree of priestly origin, but Matthew according to the succession of the royal line. Indeed, as Hilary mentions, David contracted marriage with a woman of the priestly tribe. Hence Augustine asserts, commenting on John, that the most blessed Virgin Mary came of a royal and a priestly tribe. And so Elizabeth, who was born of the daughters of Aaron (Luke 1:5), is said to have been her kinswoman (Luke 1:36).

On this matter Damascene writes in his fourth book:[1] "David, among his other sons, had two, Solomon and Nathan. Of the chain and seed of Nathan, Levi begot Melchi and Panther; Panther begot Barpanther, who begot Joachim, the father of the sublime and most holy Mary. Of the chain of Solomon, Matthan, descending from him, had a wife, of whom he begot Jacob. When Matthan died, Melchi married his widow, that is, the mother of this Jacob, and of her begot Heli, the brother on the mother's side of the aforesaid Jacob. When this Heli died without sons, his brother Jacob married his wife, and of her begot Joseph, the spouse of Mary: so that Joseph was the legal son of the aforesaid Heli, and the natural son of the aforementioned Jacob."

But concerning these things a twofold question arises. The first is, which Nathan these words of Damascene are to be understood of. The second, whether Christ truly descended according to the flesh from Solomon. For it seems that He did not, because He was really born of the seed of Nathan, the brother of Solomon; and the same person is not born of two brothers. To the first of these questions some have answered that they are to be understood of Nathan the prophet, whom they say David adopted as a son. This cannot stand. For in that case Christ would have descended really from the seed of Nathan the prophet, not of David, unless perhaps through a marriage entered into between the descendants of David and of Nathan. Moreover, in the first book of Paralipomenon it is plainly related that four sons were born to King David in Jerusalem of Bethsabee *(p. 25)* (1 Chron. 3:5), one of whom is there called Nathan. I have written of this more fully on Matthew. Ambrose also, on Luke, declares that Christ according to the flesh was truly born of the seed of Nathan, the son of David.[2]

But then the question remains how it can be upheld that Christ is said to have been born of the seed of Solomon and of the kings who succeeded him. To this, in keeping with what was said above, it can be answered that a marriage was contracted between the descendants of Solomon and of Nathan, from which the most sacred Mary sprang, and Christ.

Further, just as the Only-begotten of God willed to be born of a most pure virgin, so He willed that His most chosen Mother should be begotten of a most honourable marriage, so that the parents of the most blessed Mary were persons of outstanding holiness. For if God willed that His Baptist and forerunner, His servant and the friend of the Bridegroom, should be begotten of holy parents, as is described in Luke (Luke 1:5–6), how much more His incomparable and most dear Mother?

Hence in the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta we read that the glorious and sweet Mary said to Birgitta: "I tell you how sweetly my Son loved my body and my soul, and how much He honoured me. He joined the marriage of my parents in such chastity that at that time no more chaste marriage was to be found in this world; and they never wished to come together except according to the law, solely from the desire of offspring to be brought up for the service of God. And when it had been announced to them by an angel that they would bring forth a virgin from whom the salvation of the world would proceed, they would rather have died than come together with carnal love; and pleasure was dead in them, so that they neither sought nor aimed at it. Yet I tell you for certain that they came together in the flesh out of divine charity and at the word of the angel who announced it, not out of the desire of pleasure but out of divine love; and so from their seed my flesh was framed by divine charity. When my body had been formed, God created my soul and infused it into my body, and at once my soul was sanctified together with its body; and the holy angels guarded and kept it day and night. And when my soul was sanctified and joined to its body, such joy came to my soul that it is impossible to express."

Moreover, what Honorius the anchorite writes in his book *On the Ornaments of the Glory of Holy Mary* agrees with the foregoing:[3] "From the blessed seed of the Patriarchs," he says, "and from the illustrious offshoot of the Prophets, and from the sacred priestly stock, and from the noble royal line, there came forth this renowned rod of the power of God, the illustrious and commanding Virgin Mary; who rightly had to shine forth with every kind of nobility, since she merited to bring forth the most principal and most singular Fountain and Flower of all nobility, namely Him who is *beautiful above the sons of men* (Ps. 44:3). For so it

befitted Christ the King and Lord, who was to be born of her, to make her the most excellent of all in grace and merits, in honour and glory; because divine, wonderful and mighty things had to be done in her, when the venerable exchanges of our salvation merited to be consecrated and accomplished in her virginal womb."

[1] St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* IV, 14. The names follow the medieval Latin version.

[2] Denis refers to his own commentary on Matthew 1 and to Ambrose's *Exposition of Luke*; the margin cites Denis's commentary in t. 11, p. 13 ff.

[3] Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, or a work ascribed to him under this title.

Article VII: On the full nobility of the glorious and blessed Mary in soul and body; and what nobility of the flesh is

In every people and in every nation I have had the chief rule (Ecclus. 24:10). It was fitting that the human nature to be assumed by the only-begotten Son of God should be adorned on every side and truly ennobled, both in itself and in its origin; therefore it was becoming that the Word of God should be made flesh of a most noble virgin. Nor does it stand in the way that the most sacred Virgin was not the immediate daughter of a king or a prelate, nor placed in riches or raised up by temporal lordship. For although, according to the Philosopher, nobility of the flesh seems to be ancient wealth, because it is through wealth that men begin to be ennobled, exalted and to hold office (for, as Scripture says, *(p. 26) the friends of the rich are many* (Prov. 14:20); and so through riches a certain power is acquired from the multitude of friends and servants, and the powerful and wealthy are promoted to dignities, presidencies and offices, and so are ennobled); yet many things concur in, and are required for, the true and full nobility of a person: namely, wealth in oneself or in one's forebears, a good bodily constitution, a free condition, uprightness of conduct, an inborn disposition to illustrious deeds, and also the dignity of origin contracted from one's mediate and immediate parents.

Moreover, according to Albert, in the book *On the Praises of the Most Gracious Virgin* (*Mariale*, q. 25), nobility consists in and is considered in three things, namely in its cause, in its substance and in its effectiveness: in its cause, that is, in the dignity and eminence of one's forebears or parents; in its substance, that is, in the possession of the gifts of nature and of grace, or also of the goods of fortune and of praiseworthy properties; in its effectiveness, that is, in illustrious effects. And these three existed most excellently in the gracious and glorious Mary: because, as was plain in the preceding article, she sprang from the seed of the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, of kings and of high priests. In her natural endowments also she was the most graceful of all women, as will be said below. Likewise in the charisms of grace she holds the first place after her Only-begotten, not only among women but also among men. She also came of parents who were sufficiently rich. Further, the splendour and excellence of her works cannot be expressed. For in these she incomparably and incomprehensibly transcends every mere creature: for she conceived, bore, handled, suckled and nourished the Only-begotten of the eternal Father, true God; she cooperated most excellently, after her only Son, in the redemption of the whole world; she was most illustriously heroic and divine in every virtue and gift of the Holy Spirit, and she carried out the acts of the virtues and gifts most praiseworthily, at the very limit of excellence.

Therefore she was most free from every unworthy servitude and servility, she through whom the whole human race has been set free from the slavery of sin, from the yoke and subjection of the devil, from the corruptions that followed upon original sin, and from the bond of eternal damnation. Indeed, if those are truly free whom the Son has set free (John 8:36), as the Son of God and of the Virgin Himself testifies, how much more truly free is she who is the Mother of so great a Liberator? Is it not she through whom every creature has been delivered from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21), and will at last obtain in full the manifold effect of this deliverance in the liberty of the glory of the children of God? There, when the judgment is completed, every rule of creature over creature will cease; there the servant also is free from his created lord, though not from the uncreated Lord, to serve and be subject to whom is shown to be the highest nobility.

It is clear, then, from what has been said, that nobility according to the flesh includes many things. For when a man of low birth begins to abound in riches, he uses more delicate foods and drinks, from which better blood is generated and his constitution is ennobled, and his mind also is sharpened more for the exercises of reason. So at length, his constitution ennobled and his mind better disposed, the man begins to be occupied with more honourable pursuits, to become magnanimous, to care less about small adversities and losses, to pay less attention to small and mean things, to desire small gains less, to fear adversaries less, to seek little presents less, to aspire more to liberty, to gain the company of his betters, to contract marriages with persons of distinction, and to imitate their qualities, manners, vigour and deeds. And so a nature at first ignoble and servile, being well overcome by custom, is changed into its contrary. Indeed, the more remote and the longer the root from which this is handed down to the branches, the more the inclination of nature is strengthened and made more inseparable, so that in the offspring, as far as nature is concerned, there is found a natural inclination to things like those of their parents. And this is called nobility of the flesh, which, as far as its own nature is concerned, always inclines *(p. 27)* to what is honourable and becoming rather than to what is base, unless perhaps freedom of choice, bad habit or some other external cause works and brings about the contrary.

It is evident, therefore, that nobility does not come only from the quality of the bodily constitution, since a king or another illustrious person, though of melancholic or phlegmatic constitution, is commonly bolder, more magnanimous and more generous than a peasant of sanguine or choleric constitution. Moreover, although the rational soul comes immediately from God by creation, not by transmission from the parents or by being drawn out of matter, yet it commonly acts according to the disposition of the flesh into which it is infused; and according as it is inclined more or less to something by the properties of its body, so it is commonly accustomed to be affected and to act.

Lastly, the Philosopher treats of the properties of nobles in the books of the *Politics*, and says that nobles have four properties or praiseworthy ways. First, they are commonly magnanimous and aim at great things. Secondly, they are usually magnificent, that is, doers of great things and inclined beyond others to great expenditure. Thirdly, they are usually industrious and teachable, or very capable, since from infancy they have lived among nobles, well-mannered and experienced people, by whom they have been accustomed to be instructed and corrected. Fourthly, they are usually courteous and affable. In speaking, eating and their other behaviour also they are commonly more refined and more seemly. They also have some blameworthy ways, especially two, according to the Philosopher: for they are too eager for excellence and honour; and they are apt to despise their forebears, than whom they consider themselves nobler, since they draw nobility from both parents. Indeed, since nobles are commonly rich, and all the ways of the rich, according to the Philosopher, are blameworthy, one property excepted, therefore the ways of nobles, insofar as they are rich, are almost all bad.[1]

On this matter, and on what nobility of the flesh is, I have written more fully in the book *On the Life and Rule of Princes* (Book II, art. 14; Book III, arts. 12–13). And although nobility of the flesh has little of praise, yet when nobility of the flesh and nobility of heart meet in the same person, they adorn each other.

[1] Denis is drawing on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* II, 15–16 (on the character of the well-born and the wealthy), which he cites here under the *Politics*.

Article VIII: Whether the God-bearing Virgin Mary, to be glorified and blessed, was conceived after an angelic announcement and miraculously; and what truth is contained in that book reputed apocryphal, entitled On the Birth and Life of Mary

One is my dove, my perfect one (Song 6:8). As Fulbert, Bishop of Chartres, says, the little book entitled *On the Birth and Life of Holy Mary* would be read on the solemnity of the Nativity of the most sacred Virgin, were it not reckoned among the apocrypha by wise men and the Fathers.[1] Nevertheless many things are contained in that little book which are judged probably true, because they are reported as true by holy and learned men: for instance, that Joachim, the father of the glorious Virgin, and Anne, her mother and Joachim's wife, were of the tribe of Judah, Joachim being a native of Nazareth and Anne of Bethlehem. Moreover, it is said there that they lived together for many years without bringing forth offspring; therefore they continually begged the Lord to grant them a child, and vowed that if He deigned to do so they would give it over to the divine service. And so at length an angel announced to each of them separately that they would beget a daughter who in her time would bear the King Messiah, and that they should offer this daughter to God to serve Him in the temple.

And these things seem true. For if (as Bishop Maximus says in his sermon on the most blessed John the Baptist) it was most fitting that John himself, the forerunner of Christ, should be born miraculously of a barren mother (Luke 1:7), so that, being born wonderfully, he might by his own beginning signify the Lord Christ who was to be born more wonderfully still; so it seems to have been most fitting that the pre-elected Mother of Christ should be begotten of barren parents, so that, being born wonderfully, *(p. 28)* she might conceive and bear the Lord Saviour more wonderfully still, and by the miraculousness of her own birth might be foreshown as the one who would most miraculously conceive and bear the Author of all nature, the Only-begotten of God, born incomprehensibly both from the Father and from the Mother.

Moreover, in the Old Testament we read that certain eminent men were born of barren mothers, to suggest that they were to be sons of grace rather than of nature: as is evident of Isaac, Samson and Samuel (Gen. 11:30; Judg. 13:3; 1 Sam. 1). Therefore it is likely that this also befitted the most gracious Mary, who was to conceive the Fountain of grace and the Restorer of nature; who (as Damascene asserts) is surpassed by none of the illustrious, indeed was ineffably more illustrious than all the illustrious Saints, so that the privileges of dignities and the ornaments of graces granted to the other illustrious Saints were granted to her in a more exalted way. Damascene also plainly declares these things: "Joachim," he says, "took in marriage Anne, an honourable woman worthy of praise. But just as the womb of the former Anne, namely the wife of Elkanah, being barren, bore Samuel through a vow and a promise (1 Sam. 1), so this Anne also, through prayers and the divine promise, brought forth the Mother of God."

Moreover, the nearer certain saints of the Old Testament were to Christ, the greater and the more wonderful was their conception and sanctification, as is plain of the most blessed John and Jeremiah (Luke 1:15; Jer. 1:5). Since, then, the only and most chosen Virgin Mary was most excellently nearer to God her Son, it is judged that one must hold that her conception was foretold by an angel, divinely promised and miraculously fulfilled. And she too, as soon as she was conceived, was holy far more excellently than Jeremiah and the glorious John, and was filled with the Holy Spirit in her mother's womb.

Further, the figures of this blessed, supreme and altogether most sweet Mary were displayed supernaturally and shown miraculously: as is evident of the bush burning without harm (Exod. 3:2), of the rod of Aaron bearing fruit (Num. 17:8), of the sapphire throne above the firmament shown to Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:26), and of the closed gate shown to him (Ezek. 44:2), of Gideon's fleece (Judg. 6:37–40), and of many like things. But the thing figured is known to be far more excellent than its figures and signs. The most worthy Mary, therefore, was conceived and born holy supernaturally, after an angelic announcement and a divine promise; especially since her conception and nativity are celebrated by the Church so solemnly, as is fitting. This too, as was cited above (Art. 6), the most happy Virgin Mary is read to have revealed to Saint Birgitta.[2]

Hence Saint Bernard says: "I think that a more abundant blessing of sanctification descended upon the most sacred Mary, which not only sanctified her birth, but also thereafter kept her life free from all sin; which is believed to have been granted to no other among those born of women."[3]

[1] Fulbert of Chartres, *Sermon 4, on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin*. The apocryphal work is the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* (*De ortu beatae Mariae*), derived from the *Protevangelium of James*.

[2] The margin reads “art. v”, but the revelation is quoted in Article 6 above.

[3] St. Bernard, *Letter 174* (to the canons of Lyons).

Article IX: On the nativity of the most illustrious Virgin, and the glorious joy that there was then in the world

And many shall rejoice in his nativity (Luke 1:14). As the dawn is nearer to the day than the morning star, so the most wise Virgin Mary was nearer and more like to Christ than the glorious John the Baptist. Since, then, of this holy Baptist it was foretold from above to his father by the holy angel, *Your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall have joy and gladness, and many shall rejoice in his nativity* (Luke 1:13–14) (and this as a sign that the happy Forerunner was to announce and openly proclaim that the Saviour of the world, the Son of God, had come in the flesh; and as a sign of the joy which the holy angels had within themselves when Christ was born, and showed outwardly by praising God, as one angel intimated to the shepherds, saying, *I bring you good tidings of great joy, for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord* (Luke 2:10–11)); *(p. 29)* it therefore seems piously to be believed that at the nativity of the most glorious and most sweet Virgin Mary there was a special joy, by the inspiration of the Almighty, not only for her parents but for her neighbours and kinsfolk; indeed also for the angelic spirits, and for many elect persons then living in the world, who were then flooded by a secret inspiration with an unwonted joy; and also for the saints held in limbo.

Hence in the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta it is related that Mary, ever virgin, most to be loved and most to be honoured, spoke to Birgitta herself: “The time in which I was conceived may well be called a precious and golden hour. For then the beginning of all things began, and the darkness hastened, as it were, to be turned into light. For God willed to do by His work in me something singular and hidden from the ages, as He did in the dry rod that blossomed (Num. 17:8). Further, when I was born, the friends of God who had been held in long expectation said, as God inspired them: Why do we grieve any longer? We ought rather to rejoice, for the light is born by which our darkness will be illumined and our desire fulfilled. And the angels rejoiced, saying: There is born on earth a certain desirable good, a special friend of God, through whom true peace will be restored in heaven and on earth, and our ruins will be repaired. Truly, my daughter, I tell you that my nativity was the beginning of true joys, for then came forth the little rod from which proceeded that flower which kings and Prophets desired to see (Luke 10:24). Nor was my nativity hidden from the demons, but they said: Behold, a certain virgin is born; what shall we do? For something wonderful is seen to be coming in her. If we set all the nets of our malice against her, she will break them like tow.”

Moreover, that illustrious man Honorius the anchorite speaks of these things: “When blessed Mary was born, all things were illumined. Indeed, when the most sacred Virgin was born, the pre-elected and eternally blessed holy Virgin Mary, then the ineffable divine grace said by words and by deeds: Behold, I am here. For then the luminous window of heavenly grace began to open along the straight path of the east, which by the abundance of its light flooded all things heavenly and earthly together, and through which God began to look upon us with mercy beyond His wont. Through you, O most lovable and most sweet Virgin Mary, the dawn of the true Sun comes forth, the unfailing Sun of justice rises, the darkness of death is put to flight, the children of light are restored, the way of salvation is shown, truth is illumined, life is found, God is known face to face by grace, and the King of glory is seen in His beauty (Isa. 33:17), eye to eye, gloriously and longingly.” So far Honorius.

From what has been brought forward it is therefore gathered that, just as the most serene Virgin Mary stands midway between Christ and His forerunner, as being holier and more wholesome for the whole world than John himself, but less holy than Christ, so the joy that there was at her nativity stood midway between the joy

that was at the nativity of the holy and great John and the joy that there was at the nativity of the Saviour; so that there was a greater and more general gladness at the nativity of the most pure Mary than at that of Saint John the Baptist.

Article X: On the comparison of the supreme Virgin with the parents of Saint John the Baptist

Women will call me blessed (Gen. 30:13). When Leah, the wife of the patriarch Jacob, had borne four sons, and through her handmaid, whom she had given to her husband as a wife, had gained two sons more, she rejoiced exceedingly: *Women,* she said, *will call me blessed.* How much more could Saint Anne, knowing that she had begotten a daughter who would be the mother of the King Messiah, say, *Women will call me blessed*? We see that sons and daughters love their grandfathers and grandmothers very specially and naturally, and the reverse. It is to be believed, *(p. 30)* therefore, that Christ conferred no small charisms of graces and virtues upon the parents of His most beloved Mother, by whom He also was so very tenderly loved, even if they are said to have died before His incarnation.

Hence what is related in the apocryphal book *On the Birth of the Supreme and Blessed Mary* appears true, where it is said: “The life of Joachim and of Anne his wife was simple, upright and devout; and they divided all their substance in three, assigning one part to the temple and the ministers of the temple, another to the poor and to pilgrims, and the third to themselves and their household.” And some in the law of the Gospel are also read to have done the same afterwards. And so what the evangelist Luke relates of the parents of blessed John the Baptist is believed to apply excellently to the parents of the most glorious Mary as well, where it is said: *They were both just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame* (Luke 1:6). So Joachim was like blessed Job, of whom Scripture says: *Job was a simple and upright man, and one that feared God and avoided evil* (Job 1:1).

Hence Honorius the anchorite says: “Blessed Anne, out of reverence for her glorious daughter, is to be called truly blessed and blessed among all mothers and women; in her, by the overflowing grace of her name (for Anne is interpreted ‘grace’), the sacred mysteries of the ancient divine counsel were hastened, since in her most sacred daughter all the sacred seals of the heavenly sacrament began to be opened, which had been closed and sealed from the ages. For the beatitude of all beatitudes and the blessing of all blessings overflowed most abundantly, in the fullness of divine charity, into the most blessed Virgin, from whom the living fountain of eternal blessing has flowed most generously and most sweetly upon the human race in the drops of abundant grace. Blessed for ever is the honourable merit of blessed Joachim, the father of the most pure Virgin, well-pleasing and acceptable to almighty God with great condescension; whose most high glory deserves to be in the eternal memory of illustrious praise.”

Article XI: That the most serene and most sweet Virgin Mary was foreshown and prophesied from the ages in many ways

Let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Saviour (Isa. 45:8). So great is the excellence of Christ, and so great the dignity of His mysteries, that not only did He and His mysteries begin from the beginning of the world to be foreshown, foretold and praised in the law of nature, and to be prefigured more clearly and described more abundantly in the written law and in the Prophets, but persons belonging to Him more eminently and more closely are also read to have been prefigured and foretold. Hence Isaiah and Malachi, and the Psalmist also, are known to have prophesied of the most blessed Forerunner of Christ (Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1). But since the most excellent and most divine Mother of Christ belongs to Him ineffably more excellently and more closely than the rest, it was most fitting that, concerning her, both in the law of nature and in the written law, there should go before various and illustrious oracles, signs, prophecies and wonderful deeds, and also supernatural mysteries.

Indeed we see that great and provident kings and princes, when they are about to accomplish mighty things and to show their power, munificence or excellence, do not do so without announcing it beforehand; they send heralds ahead, they proclaim the place and the time, and they go before the lofty work they intend with fitting preliminaries, so that meanwhile others may be prepared and flock together to see it. So the Lord of immense majesty, the Father of glory, establishing and disposing from eternity that His supremely beloved Only-begotten should become man in the fullness of time and at the end of the ages, began from the beginning of the world to reveal this, to foreshow it, to foretell it, and to prepare, instruct and kindle the hearts of men to believe and embrace so great a mystery and benefit of His. This is what the just Zachary confessed in his canticle. For speaking of God he said: *He has raised up a horn of salvation for us* (p. 31) *in the house of David His servant, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy Prophets, who are from the beginning* (Luke 1:69–70). Hence the glorious prince of the Apostles says: *All the Prophets from Samuel and afterwards have told of these days* (Acts 3:24). And so the Lord and Saviour Himself said in the Gospel: *All things must be fulfilled which are written in the law and in the Psalms and in the Prophets concerning Me* (Luke 24:44).

Therefore concerning this most pre-elect and most holy Virgin, in whom, from whom and through whom the most excellent mysteries of Christ were to be fulfilled; whom the eternal Father chose beforehand for Himself as His singular spouse, as one sharing parenthood with Him, as the true mother of His only and coequal Son; whom also the eternal Word chose for Himself as His most loving Mother; whom the Holy Spirit chose for Himself as His supreme sanctuary and most pure temple, and as the parent of Him from whom He Himself proceeds eternally and incomprehensibly: concerning her, I say, so great and such a one, it befitted the whole superglorious Trinity to speak beforehand through Patriarchs and Prophets, to send signs and figures ahead, and to intimate supernatural things.

Of her, the strongest and most victorious of all women, the purest of virgins, the most fruitful of mothers, God said at the beginning of the world to the devil under the figure of the serpent: *I will put enmities between you and the woman; she shall crush your head, and you shall lie in wait for her heel* (Gen. 3:15).[1] Of her also and of her adorable Son Balaam spoke: *A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a rod* (and, as another translation has it, *a Virgin*) *shall spring up from Israel* (Num. 24:17). Moreover, to signify that the almighty Son of God was to be drawn by the purity of this incomparable Virgin, overcome by her holy love and laid to rest in her bosom, Balaam compared the supremely mighty Creator to the strength of the unicorn, saying: *The Lord God has brought him out of Egypt, whose strength is like the rhinoceros* (Num. 23:22).[2]

Of this his most desired daughter and most worthy Lady, David said many things in the Psalms: *The queen stood at your right hand in gilded clothing* (Ps. 44:10); and likewise: *Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear; and the king shall greatly desire your beauty, for He is the Lord your God* (Ps. 44:11–12); and again: *Truth is sprung out of the earth* (Ps. 84:12); and again: *A man is born in her, and the Most High Himself has founded her* (Ps. 86:5).

Of this best and most delightful Mary holy and renowned Isaiah prophesied very many things: *Behold,* he says, *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son* (Isa. 7:14); and, *There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root* (Isa. 11:1); and again: *Drop down dew, you heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One; let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Saviour* (Isa. 45:8). Moreover, speaking in the person of God, he says: *I went to the prophetess, and she conceived* (Isa. 8:3); and likewise: *Before she was in labour, she brought forth* (Isa. 66:7). Hence Jeremiah, sanctified in the womb, foretold: *The Lord shall create a new thing upon the earth: a woman shall encompass a man* (Jer. 31:22). Of her also Solomon prophesied in the Canticles more fully than the others; and in Proverbs he is read to have asked concerning her: *Who shall find a valiant woman?* (Prov. 31:10).

Further, this most illustrious Mary, of all creatures altogether the most worthy, was foreshown by that light, or bright little cloud, made at the beginning (1 Kings 18:44), from which on the fourth day the sun is read to

have been formed:[3] so from the Virgin, who is to be venerated above others, Christ was born. This Lady of all ages, without whom no one is saved, was prefigured by the ark, outside of which no one escaped the flood (Gen. 7). She was signified by the tabernacle of Moses, by the ark of the covenant, by the propitiatory and the veil (Exod. 25:8 ff.). For in her the God of the law deigned most truly to dwell and to be circumscribed in the nature He assumed; she contained within herself the heavenly manna, the bread of life which came down from heaven (John 6); through her we are reconciled to the Most High. She was foreshown by the candlestick of the temple, by the throne of Solomon (1 Kings 10), by the fleece of Gideon, by the closed gate shown to Ezekiel, through which the God of Israel entered and which remained closed to the prince (Ezek. 44:2); by the rod of Aaron also, which flowered and bore fruit, neither rooted in the earth nor watered by anyone (Num. 17:8); and by the bush that burned and was not harmed (Exod. 3:2). She was prefigured in name and in effect *(p. 32)* by Mary the sister of Moses, the prophetess, and by Jael, Deborah, Sarah, Esther, Judith and Bathsheba.

Indeed, countless and illustrious things could be brought forward about these prefigurations; let it suffice to have touched on these few. Nor is it unfitting that the most gracious and incomparable Mary should be figured through such diverse persons, and through married women and widows. For so great is her excellence, so many her commendable properties, so many her most illustrious effects, that she could not be sufficiently prefigured and designated through a few; indeed, all the figures mentioned and omitted, taken together, fall ineffably short of a full and worthy signification and foreshowing of her.

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[1] Denis follows the Vulgate reading *ipsa* (“she”); the Hebrew and Greek read “he” or “it”, that is, the offspring.

[2] The Vulgate renders the Hebrew *re’em* (wild ox) variously as *unicornis* and *rhinoceros*; medieval writers took the legend of the unicorn tamed by a virgin as a figure of the Incarnation.

[3] The margin cites 1 Kings 18:44 (the little cloud seen by Elijah’s servant) and a page reference in another volume. The “light made at the beginning” from which the sun was formed is a patristic reading of Gen. 1:3 and 1:14–16.

Article XII: On the offering of the blessed Virgin in the temple and her dwelling there

We have received Your mercy, O God, in the midst of Your temple (Ps. 47:10). As is known from what has been said before (Art. 8), the most devout parents of the most sweet and incomparable Virgin, whom they received after an angelic announcement and a divine promise, vowed to offer her to God and to give her over to His service; and this they faithfully fulfilled. For when the most holy and most gracious little child had been weaned, they brought her to the temple; and (as is read not only in the apocryphal book *On her Birth*, but is related also by certain holy Fathers, Epiphanius and others) they set the glorious little Virgin, about three years old, on the lowest of the fifteen steps by which one went up into the temple, which was set on a mountain. When this was done, the most holy Maiden by herself, without the help of anyone leading or lifting her, went up all those steps, not without great wonder on the part of those who watched, as if she had been of full age.

Nor should this seem incredible, since even in certain little children still sucking at their mother’s breasts signs and works of special devotion have been seen: as in the holy and great prelate of Christ, Servatius, who in his infancy, while still being suckled, often abstained from sucking at the breast for two or three days, and in the arms of the nurse who suckled him often raised his eyes to heaven. So too Nicholas, the chosen bishop of God, when he was baptized as a little infant, stood upright; and on Wednesdays and Fridays he sucked the breast only once. If the servants of the Saviour were so graciously forestalled, enlightened, strengthened and moved, to foreshow the excellence of their future devotion and holiness, what are we to think of the most chosen Mother of the Almighty, who was working with incomprehensible and incomparable graciousness in that most holy little Virgin, soon to be His mother, and who governed and strengthened her mind and body supernaturally and in a most special way?

And if the glorious John the Baptist, while still in his mother's womb, knew Christ and leapt for joy at His presence (Luke 1:41), being miraculously forestalled with the use of reason, why should not the most beloved one of God, who is surpassed by none of the illustrious, and indeed surpasses them all, be believed to have often been forestalled with the use of reason by a supernatural illumination before the usual time, and to have obtained a constant and complete use of reason before her companions of the same age?

Lastly, it was most fitting that she who was pre-elected to conceive the Lord of the temple should be consecrated in that very temple and should serve the Lord, and should spend her childhood in sacred exercises, and should there be instructed in the sacred writings.

Article XIII: Why the Son of God did not choose to be born of a virgin who was wealthy, powerful and reigning in temporal things

The weak things and the base things of the world God has chosen (1 Cor. 1:27–28). It has been said (Art. 6) that it befitted the Only-begotten of God, the fountain of all nobility, the King of kings, the supreme Prelate, the Lord Jesus Christ, to be born of an illustrious and royal, patriarchal and pontifical stock. Hence it seems that it would have been fitting for Him to be born of the immediate *(p. 33)* daughter of a king, of a powerful queen, presiding in temporal things and rich. Why, then, did He will to be begotten of a girl betrothed to a carpenter? And it must be answered that the Wisdom of God, the eternal Word, the Only-begotten of the Father, who disposes all things wisely and does all things most fittingly, and orders all things in number, weight and measure (Wis. 11:21), chose to be born of a most illustrious young maiden in such a way that her nearest relatives and kinsfolk should not be eminently powerful, rich or noble according to human reckoning, or according to the course of this world. Reasonable causes are assigned for this.

The first is, lest the promulgation of the law of the Gospel could be ascribed to the power, nobility or wealth of the Mother of Christ, or of her relatives and kinsfolk. For the same reason He did not will to be begotten in the metropolis of Jerusalem, but to be conceived in Nazareth, a small little town, and to be born in Bethlehem, a small city. Hence also He chose and appointed as apostles unlettered men, common people, men without power and poor, lest the conversion of the world to the most arduous law and the incomprehensible Catholic faith, more wonderful than any miracle, should be ascribed to the wisdom, eloquence, cleverness, power or dignity of the preachers of the Christian law and faith; but that in all things the Godhead might be recognized as having worked, which, not through any of the things mentioned, but through signs, prodigies, miracles and various charisms of the Holy Spirit, subjected to the law and faith of Christ not only the ignoble crowd, but philosophers also and orators, kings and princes, scribes and priests of the Mosaic law.

A second reason for this is assigned: because the Son of God came down into this world in order to show by word and example that all the great things of this world, nobility, power, riches, delights and honours, are to be held of little account and to be left behind out of desire for the future, heavenly and everlasting happiness. For this reason He lived in this world in the greatest poverty, humility and abjection, and in all things chose what is more burdensome to the flesh, so that those who truly desire to be called Christians and to be saved by the grace of Christ might imitate Him effectively in such things.

The third cause is that the first coming of Christ was foretold as to take place in all poverty and humility, according to that saying of Zechariah: *Behold your King will come to you, the Just and Saviour: He is poor, and riding upon an ass* (Zech. 9:9).

The fourth, lest the Son of God should seem to call worldly prosperity blessed, and to prefer the great ones of this world to the poor and humble. Hence the Apostle says: *See your vocation, brethren, that not many are wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble among you* (1 Cor. 1:26). Hence Ambrose says on Luke (on the words, *The angel said to the shepherds* (Luke 2:10)): "Not the schools, not the rhetoricians

are chosen, but God took simple common folk, who did not know how to embellish what they had heard."

The fifth, that by the merit of Christ's poverty and humility we might be made rich spiritually through the gifts of grace, and made happy eternally through the gifts of glory. Hence the Apostle says of Christ: *For our sakes He became poor, that through His poverty we might be rich* (2 Cor. 8:9).

Article XIV: That the most blessed and most wonderful Virgin Mary was most truly made, and is, the Mother of the true God

A Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). This is the sum of Christian wisdom, this the fullness of theological truth: that the eternal and true God is so truly one and simple in the essence of the Godhead that He is nevertheless truly three in Persons; and that the Only-begotten of God the Father, consubstantial, coequal and coeternal with the adorable Father, truly became man by assuming human nature from the inviolate and most serene Mary; that is, by forming for Himself a human body from her most pure blood, not by the formative power of a man, a human power, but by the omnipotent, divine power, to which it belongs to act in an instant when *(p. 34)* it wills.

And so into that body, formed and organized instantly and supernaturally, He infused in an instant, by creation, a rational soul; and in that same instant He filled, flooded and most beautifully adorned this soul with such fullness of grace and of the virtues, such beauty of the gifts and fruits, such splendour and eminence of wisdom and of divine charisms, such clarity of the beatific vision of the divine essence, such delight and sweetness in the glorious fruition of the uncreated Goodness, such perfection of all holiness, and with the gifts also of grace freely given, as much as that soul was capable of and could receive, so that its whole capacity was then filled. In that same instant also He joined that altogether most beautiful soul and the flesh animated by it, that is, the perfect humanity, immediately to His Godhead, and made it subsist in Himself and in His uncreated personal being: so that He truly became man at the moment and in the manner which He had preordained from eternity, without change in Himself, the natural property of each nature remaining inviolate.[1]

In this incarnation of the eternal Word there appeared, and there shines forth supremely, most excellently and incomprehensibly, the ineffable charity of God toward us, and also His inestimable condescension and infinite loving-kindness in our regard, and also His most abundant liberality. And all these appeared first and chiefly in the human nature itself, which He thus united to Himself; next, in the most illustrious and most worthy Virgin Mary, from whom He received and assumed it, so that He made that most venerable and most holy Mary His own mother; and then in all of us, whose nature He so exalted, to whom He became so like in the most specific species, and whose sister He made His own Mother.

Moreover, it was not without reason, not without most profound counsel, not without manifold cause, not without most abundant fruit that the most wise One thus became man. For this was done not only to show His charity, condescension, loving-kindness and munificence toward the human race, and especially toward His elect and His most pre-elect creatures, namely the humanity of Christ and the most sweet Mary, but also to come to the help of the needs and necessities, the losses and dangers of the whole human race, which could not be restored, redeemed and saved more fittingly or more wholesomely than through the incarnation and passion of the only-begotten Son of God. For no mere creature was fit and worthy to cleanse the whole human race from original guilt and its other sins, to free it from the power of the demons, to snatch it from eternal damnation, to merit for it the grace of renewal, to make satisfaction for all in common, and to recover eternal beatitude for all. Indeed, for accomplishing all these things it was most fitting that the very Son of God, true God, should become man: who, on the part of the nature He assumed, was able to make satisfaction and to merit; and from the Godhead united to it, and from the immediate and hypostatic union with the

eternal Word, there belonged to the incarnate Word made man an immense efficacy and fitness for so succouring, healing and saving, as has been shown more fully in other little works.[2]

Lastly, just as it did not befit the Only-begotten of God to assume human nature to personal union with Himself unless it were adorned with such a fullness of divine charisms that it was not capable of greater adornment and interior beauty, so it did not befit the only Son of God the Father to assume humanity except from a virgin of such perfection and purity that it did not befit a greater to be conferred upon a mere creature subsisting in created being.

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[1] The language follows the Council of Chalcedon (451): one Person in two natures, "the property of each nature being preserved".

[2] The margin refers to t. 31, p. 196 and p. 453, and t. 30, pp. 296 and 302 ff.

Article XV: That the dignity and grace, the purity and excellence of the most sweet Mary is in some way infinite

The queen stood at your right hand in gilded clothing, surrounded with variety (Ps. 44:10). The dignity of a creature is to be made like *(p. 35)* its Creator as far as it can; and the more excellently it is conformed to the Creator, the more godlike and the worthier it is made. Since, then, the most blessed Virgin Mary conceived and bore, and unfailingly has, the same Son as the eternal Father, it is evident that she shares parenthood with Him and is most like Him. Indeed, Him whom the Father begot from eternity without a mother, the best of Virgins begot in time without a father, that is, without a man concurring in her conception. O how incomprehensible is this dignity and excellence: to have as Son Him whom the whole sublimity of the angelic spirits and the whole army of the citizens on high adore without ceasing; before whom sky, earth and sea tremble, and before whom the very powers of heaven are in dread; on whom the whole universe unceasingly depends!

Consider as far as you can how great is the authority and power, the excellence and dignity of this most glorious Mary, who is His mother and has a mother's authority over Him from whom all power has flowed and all authority and all dignity has proceeded; indeed, in comparison with whom the whole world is as a little dust (Isa. 40:15), and who is held to be wholly infinitely and altogether incomparably greater, more perfect, worthier and happier than all things and each of them. O how inestimable is the honourableness of this Mother, how incomparable the excellence of this most happy Mother of God!

Further, according to the teachings of philosophy, those things are nobler which are of greater and higher fruitfulness and causality; indeed, according to the Philosopher, each thing is said to be perfect in its species and nature when it can beget its like. Is not she, then, rightly declared most noble and most perfect, and proved to be of an excellence in some way infinite, who conceived and bore the God of gods, the offspring of a majesty altogether immense; who is the mother and cause of Him from whom all causality comes; whose fruit and Son transcends every effect and fruit and son with an excellence simply infinite?

Moreover, as the virgin Mother is nearest to God the Son born of her, so she is also most like Him. Since, then, the Holy Spirit and all His grace were not given by measure to the Son of the Virgin according to His human nature (John 3:34), it is clear that the graciousness and purity of the most holy Mary approaches most closely, before all others, to the fullness, and in its own way the infinity, of Christ's grace and interior cleanness. Further, as the Philosopher says, an equivalent cannot be repaid to the gods, to teachers and to parents. Although He is excepted from this law and rule who created His own Mother, and conferred on her far more than He received from her, nonetheless it is certain that He conferred and repaid to His Mother as much as it befitted such and so great a Son to bestow on such a mother, so most faithful, most affectionate, most obedient and most humble. But what mind could conceive, what tongue express, what and how much it befitted the Son of immense goodness and majesty, of infinite charity and munificence and of most

superabundant liberality, to give and repay to His so most beloved and most loving Mother? Especially since He gives to all abundantly and does not upbraid (Jas. 1:5); indeed, since He seeks occasion to bestow, to show mercy and to share His infinite and unfailing riches; to whom it is general and proper, delightful and inborn, to communicate Himself, to pour out His immense wealth overflowingly on every side, to impart the charisms of graces, to help, to heal, to save and to show mercy continually.

Lastly, although the motherhood of God, taken in itself, is called a gift of grace freely given (for which reason Augustine rightly said that the most excellent Virgin Mary was happier in conceiving Christ by faith in her mind than in conceiving Him bodily in her womb), yet, because this motherhood was in the blessed and most beloved Mary in the way that befitted it, namely with a proportioned and corresponding fullness of the virtues and gifts of sanctifying *(p. 36)* grace, it is plain that she is most worthy both on the part of the gifts of grace freely given and on the part of sanctifying grace. And from this dignity and excellence by which she is the Mother of God, very many other prerogatives, excellences and privileges are in her and belong to her, of which we must speak below.

Article XVI: That through the inviolate and most divine Mary the sun and moon, indeed all the heavenly bodies, and the elements and lower things, have obtained a special dignity

God, who made the world and all things therein, is not served with men's hands, as though He needed anything (Acts 17:24–25). Not for His own need, advantage or profit did the perfect and unchangeable God make anything; He created all things for the benefit of creatures. And the more graciously and the more closely the omnipotent Creator inclines and applies Himself to His creatures, the more sublimely are the creatures exalted and the more they are dignified; and, as Pope Leo asserts, His bending down to the lowest is our advancement to the highest. Further, every creature shares in something of the divine goodness, and by this is in some way made like its Creator: not that anything belongs univocally to the Creator and the creature, or that the same nature exists in both.

Since, then, from you, O truly most blessed and most venerable Virgin Mary, the eternal Creator assumed created nature, and made it subsist in His own uncreated and personal being, becoming truly man, it is evident that first in you and through you the Lord of all things inclined Himself most greatly and most profoundly to created things, and applied Himself most closely to them: so much so that He who made all things became something of all things; and He who transcends all His works by an infinite and altogether incomparable dignity and excellence became of the same species with some of them, and indeed like all of them in genus. For the humanity He assumed is of the same nature and species as the humanity of other men, and through it He agrees with every created substance, at least in genus. And so by this He most of all exalted, honoured and dignified created things, especially those whose nature He assumed.

Moreover, because God the Creator became man from the most radiant and most deified Virgin Mary and lived in the world (John 1:10; Bar. 3:38), He made use in His own Person of the services of His creatures: treading the earth, drawing in the air, washing Himself with water, sitting by the fire, eating food and drink, and indeed taking a body compounded of the elements. And this is the special dignifying of creatures, that they thus ministered to their Creator in His own Person. So, from this, that land of promise, once defiled by the crimes of the Amorites, was made the holy land, because its Creator chose and deigned to live, to dwell and to walk in it. The sun also and the moon and the stars, created for the service of all nations (Deut. 4:19), obtained a great dignity from this, that they are known to have shone for their supremely worthy Creator and to have served Him; likewise the heavenly spheres, which contained and enclosed within themselves their uncircumscribable Creator made man; in like manner the holy angels, who ascended and descended upon the Son of Man Himself (John 1:51) and ministered to Him in the desert (Matt. 4:11).

Further, the heavenly spheres, the stars and planets, the elements and compound bodies seem to have incurred and suffered a certain unseemliness and ignobility by having served unworthy and vicious men and idolaters. But through the most kind and most excellent Mary, conversely, they are seen to have recovered and obtained a far greater seemliness and nobility, when they paid service to their own Creator in His own Person. O, if they had had knowledge of so great an honour, how gladly they would have done it! Further, the whole condition of the creature was once infinitely distant from the excellence of the Creator. *(p. 37)* But through the blessed and most sweet Mary, and in the midst of her most chaste womb, there came about the immediate union of Creator and creature, and God and man, uncreated and created nature, came together in one Person.

See how much every creature and the whole universe is bound in its own way to honour and love the God-bearing Mary. Rightly is the most glorious Virgin set above all creatures, she through whom all created nature obtained so great a dignity. See how much craftsmen rejoice, how greatly they think themselves honoured, if a prince or king of their land deigns to wear a garment of theirs bearing the sign of their craft. Greatly, then, has every creature been exalted, when the omnipotent Creator clothed Himself with created nature from the blessed and supreme Mary.

Article XVII: On the supernatural dignity and wonderful purity of the body of the most sacred Virgin; and that through it the bodies of all of us have been dignified

Glorify and bear God in your body (1 Cor. 6:20). Although the human body is in its nature defective in many ways, frail, needy and mortal, yet, just as the rational soul is of great dignity above the other substantial forms, so its body is worthier than the other compound bodies and of a nobler constitution, and has been brought to a fuller tempering and balance of the elemental qualities. But through the transgression of our first parents it has been infected with the tinder of sin (*fomes*), become prone to vices and rebellious against the soul; hence it has incurred the necessity of dying. But through the saving childbearing of the most holy and glorious Mary and the saving fruit of her virginal womb, our body has been set free and reformed in hope, to be reformed in reality by the merit of Christ and glorified in the future resurrection. It has also been cleansed from the guilt of the tinder in Baptism.

Moreover, just as the human body is greatly debased by resisting the soul, serving concupiscences and vices, and clinging, to the injury of the Creator, to the vilest and foulest crimes of gluttony and lust, whereby it becomes a most foul sewer, a mass of harlotry, a wallowing-place of demons, the filth and rottenness of iniquities; so that same body is illustriously ennobled by obeying reason, persevering in virtuous acts, giving itself to holy sobriety and most fragrant chastity, and so offering itself as an instrument for the worship and honour of God in every virtuous exercise. How pleasing and acceptable this is to the omnipotent King He often and plainly shows in the bodies of the Saints, which after their separation from their souls He has preserved in their tombs through very many years from dissolution, putrefaction and stench; indeed, He has often honoured them with a most fragrant odour, and has made them wonderful by illustrious and countless miracles, so much so that through contact with them the dead have come back to life, lepers have been cleansed and the possessed set free. With how many miracles He has honoured the bodies of the most blessed martyrs, both in their martyrdoms and afterwards, would take long to recount. We see also in how great honour the relics of the Saints are held, and even materials in themselves of little worth which touched the bodies of the Saints and belonged to them in some way, such as their garments, staffs and hair.

So it is plain that the more the most sacred body of the incomparable Virgin was free from every stain of sin, even venial; the more subject to reason and to the divine law; the more adorned with most excellent chastity, in which there was never even the least disordered movement or stirring; and the more unceasingly and eminently it was exercised in the highest sobriety and every holy exercise, the nobler and worthier it was

made. And it is certain that in all these things the body of the most renowned and *(p. 38)* eternally blessed Mary was of ineffable excellence. Therefore it was most acceptable to the Creator; and the more it was inclined downward by nature, the more sublime, worthier and nobler it was made by grace and the virtues.

Moreover, the most excellent body of the most loving Mary was inestimably dignified on other grounds. First, from the fact that from its portion and substance was taken and formed that deifying body which the eternal Word assumed to Himself in unity of Person. O altogether incomparable Lady, most precious Virgin Mary, a small portion of whom, assumed by the eternal Word, was fit to redeem the whole human race! Secondly, because in her most chaste womb the Only-begotten of God, made man and nourished by her pure blood, rested and dwelt for nine months. If power went out from Christ while He lived among men and healed all (Luke 6:19), how great a power flowed out from Him during so many months into that most pure vessel in which He Himself thus dwelt in Person? If anyone holds in his hand for an hour something fragrant, precious and sweet, does not his hand take from it fragrance and virtue? How great a sweetness, then, how great a dignity and cleanness did the most immaculate womb of blessed Mary take from the so long-continued presence of Him who dwelt in her, of Him, namely, who is essentially, uncircumscribably and most superabundantly holy, worthy, sweet and full of power? Thirdly, because this best and most kind Virgin Mary daily, with the highest charity, reverence and humility, honoured, fed, suckled, carried about, embraced, kissed and handled with her most happy body the true God truly and bodily born of her, rendering to the adorable little Child what mothers are wont to render to infants.

Who, considering these things, could wonder enough, and not wholly faint away? Who could grasp the dignity of the most chosen Virgin? Who would not with all his heart rejoice with her in such a dignity, excellence and beatitude, so altogether singular? Certainly, O most lovable Virgin, your most illustrious flesh has been so dignified by the things mentioned that the body of no mere creature, neither of the heavens, nor of the planets, nor of the stars, can be equalled to it in nobility and dignity.

Article XVIII: On the dignity and holiness of each of the members of the virgin Mother; and on her abundant joy in the presence of her Only-begotten, in handling and kissing Him

Blessed is the womb that bore You, O Christ, *and the breasts that You sucked* (Luke 11:27). When the Lord and Saviour was pouring out the streams of heavenly doctrine in preaching the Gospel, one of the women, intent with her whole heart on His sacred preaching and greatly marvelling at His eloquence and wisdom, uttered from the abundance within her the most sweet word already cited.

Further, how truly and eminently, how singularly and supernaturally all the members of the most fruitful Virgin were dignified, beatified and (if I may so speak) deified, we are taught by the words of Christ which He spoke to His disciples: *Blessed are the eyes that see the things which you see, and the ears that hear the things which you hear; for I say to you that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you see, and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear, and have not heard them* (Luke 10:23–24; Matt. 13:16–17). If, then, the eyes and ears that saw and heard Him are commended and called blessed by Christ, and if it was so great and so wholesome a thing to see and hear the Saviour in the flesh that holy prophets and kings desired it most eagerly, how great, how most wholesome and most desirable a thing was it to conceive the only Son of God the Father in a most chaste womb, to carry Him, to nourish Him, to bring Him forth, to handle Him; and not only to see Him with inward and outward sight as Lord God and Saviour, and to hear Him as master and preacher, but also to gaze upon Him and hear Him daily, *(p. 39)* at will, through so many years, as her only and most loving son, indeed as one most condescendingly subject to her, as her heavenly, spiritual and most special spouse, as one living with her in the house most familiarly and most lovingly!

Most blessed, then, are the eyes of the supreme, most sweet and eternally blessed Mary, which saw God incarnate in this way; most blessed her ears, which heard Christ thus; most blessed her touch, which handled Him constantly, as a mother, bodily; most blessed her taste, which daily ate and drank with the King of heaven; most blessed her sense of smell, which was often touched by the sweet fragrance of the Saviour. Most sacred and most sweet are her breasts, which were chosen to give nourishment to the Maker of the universe. Most happy the mouth and the lips of the altogether most venerable and most illustrious Mary, which so often kissed the God born of her as a little child, with so most affectionate and most pure an affection. Most blessed the hands of Mary, who is to be glorified, which so often held the Son of God and her own Son, carried Him about, led Him, and rendered Him the services due to infants; most blessed her breast and arms, upon which and between which the Son of God is piously believed to have rested so often in His infancy; most blessed her neck, toward which the boy Jesus, sucking at the virginal breasts, so often stretched out His little arms; most blessed her feet and legs, by which she went about the services of Christ mentioned above, and carried Him, both within her when He was not yet born and outside her when He was already born; most blessed and most radiant her womb, in which the omnipotent Power, the uncreated and incarnate Wisdom, rested for so many months. So too her other members are rightly proclaimed most blessed; and whatever might seem less honourable in her is recognized to have been made honourable in her from above with a more singular honour, chastity and grace. These things are to be contemplated with a clean eye.

And so devout men, enlightened from heaven, have spoken of these things sincerely and devoutly: “O most blessed Mother and most pure Virgin, what holy, sweet and pure kisses you gladly and most reverently pressed upon the tender cheeks and lips and the most bright eyes of the infant Christ! O happy and most pure embraces, in which the Holy of Holies, immense holiness itself, and the Mother of holiness and of fair love embraced each other! Who will be able to open to us the secrets of your heart, O best and most lovable Virgin Mary? How did you turn your thought to both, when, holding in your hands the one and the same Son of God and your own, you now adored Him as the most high God, now kissed Him as your little boy? What gladness did you have in your mind when you suckled such and so great a Son at your sacred breasts, and carried Him about in your holy arms, when you cherished Him in your lap, laid Him down in the cradle and the bed, and kissed Him with serene lips! O how great, how incomparably great, how uniquely and most wholesomely singular are these things, O blessed and most divine Virgin Mary! How greatly almighty God loved you, and how He chose you before all! How greatly He honoured you! How most familiarly and most graciously He dealt with you! How much you are bound to love Him, and how to thank Him! O most delightful Lady, O wonderful and most happy creature, how truly you said, *Because He that is mighty has done great things for me!* (Luke 1:49). With how grateful and humble a mind you sang, *My soul magnifies the Lord!* How sincerely you confessed, *My spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour!* (Luke 1:46–47). Behold, that venerable and great patriarch Abraham, your father, or rather your servant and your son, rejoiced that he might see the day of Christ your Son; he saw it and was glad (John 8:56); yet he saw your Son only in spirit or in figure. And if so great a man so rejoiced at an imaginative, spiritual or typical vision of the Christ who was to come, and desired with so great an affection to see Him, how from the depths of your heart did you, most happy soul, Mary ever most worthy of praise, rejoice in the presence and the sight of Christ Himself, your Son? Certainly the more so, the more *(p. 40)* you loved Him, the more clearly you knew Him, the more familiarly you lived with Him, the more freely you handled Him.

“Lastly, that just and God-fearing Simeon (Luke 2:25–29), when he saw your Son, for whom he had waited so long and so fervently, rejoiced exceedingly, indeed ineffably, and took the boy Jesus into his arms, and blessed God the Father, and said: *Now You dismiss Your servant, O Lord, according to Your word, in peace.* But that holy and wise old man wisely forewarned you, O glorious Mary, O most affectionate Mother, and fittingly fortified you against your future sorrows, admonishing you so to glory in the majesty and presence of your Son that you should nonetheless know that you would suffer much with Him and because of Him. Hence he said to you of your Son: *Behold, this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in*

Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted; and your own soul a sword shall pierce (Luke 2:34–35)."

Article XIX: That with the aforesaid joy of the blessed virgin Mother there was often mingled sorrow and grief, manifold and bitter

The sons of my mother have fought against me (Song 1:5). The sons of the mother of the most blessed Virgin were the Jews, the sons of the Synagogue, who by persecuting Christ also grievously afflicted His Mother. And so the holy and glorious Virgin Mary was not exempted from that common law and rule: *Many are the afflictions of the just* (Ps. 33:20). Indeed, the juster, the more perfect and the more fervent she was in the love of God and of her neighbours, the more numerous and the more bitter were the afflictions she had in this life.

First, she was afflicted with loving compassion when, as soon as Christ was born of her, she saw Him suffer from the cold (Luke 2:7), heard Him wail and cry, and when she laid Him in the hard manger. Secondly, she grieved with Him more heavily when the holy Child was circumcised (Luke 2:21), [which was] not without severe pain, since He was of a most tender constitution and had the full use of reason. Thirdly, when she heard the prophecy of the just Simeon, saying: *Behold, this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted; and your own soul a sword shall pierce* (Luke 2:34–35). From these words she considered that her most beloved Son was to be spurned and crucified by many of the Jews; and this she had known before. Fourthly, when she perceived that her Son was to be taken into Egypt to flee the persecution of Herod (Matt. 2:13–14), and that that wicked man would seek out the most innocent Child to kill Him. Fifthly, when she heard that, on account of her Son, very many innocent boys had been slaughtered by that cruel and most ambitious tyrant (Matt. 2:16); with whose parents and friends, especially their mothers, the most loving Virgin grieved exceedingly.

Sixthly, when, wrapping her only and most dear newborn Son in swaddling clothes, and afterwards constantly gazing on Him, hearing Him and setting Him beside her, she meditated how cruelly He was to be crucified, pierced and slain by the wicked. From this meditation there arose in the most sacred, most gentle and most affectionate Mother, altogether most tender and most loving, a frequent and exceedingly bitter compassion, affliction and anguish, at times almost to the point of ecstasy and fainting. Yet by the disposition of the Holy Spirit such consideration and affliction in the most blessed Mother were held in measure, and from beholding the most abundant and most wholesome fruit of the Lord's passion they obtained relief and consolation. Seventhly, when she sought Him and, after three days of seeking, found Him in the temple (Luke 2:46). Eighthly, when she noticed how the unbelieving and ungrateful Jews persecuted Christ by detraction, murmuring, mockery, blasphemy and spying on Him; and when they led Him out to cast Him down headlong (Luke 4:29), and when they wished to stone Him (John 8:59). Ninthly, when she heard Him foretell *(p. 41)* His passion, especially in the house of Simon the leper, when the precious ointment had been poured upon Him (Mark 14:3 ff.), and afterwards most clearly in the house of Martha (John 12:1 ff.). Tenthly, when on the day of the Supper He went away from her, she knowing that He was to be crucified the following day. Eleventhly, when she heard that He had now been taken. Twelfthly, when she first saw Him in the hands of His enemies, lamentably changed; and from then on, throughout the whole passion of her Son, she suffered with Him most faithfully, unceasingly and most vehemently. She remained also in the most grievous sorrow until her Son, rising from death, is to be believed to have appeared to her first; and He spoke to her and consoled her the more sweetly, the more He knew that she had grieved with Him more heartily than the rest. Yet, when Christ had been buried, the most kind Virgin had a certain consoling relief from considering the glory of her Son in His resurrection, soon to come, and from contemplating the manifold fruit of Christ's passion. Thirteenthly, when she visited the places of her Son's sufferings: for then she most diligently called to mind the things that Christ had endured in those places. Fourteenthly, when she paid heed to the things the faithful endured for Christ, with whom the most loving Lady grieved: as it is also related in the Acts that the God-fearing men who buried Stephen made great

mourning over him (Acts 8:2).

Moreover, the most sacred Virgin Mary, most full of all spiritual love, was most greatly saddened by the blinding, the hardening, the ingratitude and the damnation of the unbelieving Jews: just as we read in Mark that Jesus was grieved at the blindness of their heart (Mark 3:5). Hence she could most truly say that word of the Apostle Paul: *I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart* for the Jews (Rom. 9:2).

Finally, with these things agree those related in the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta. In one of them we read that the most excellent Virgin told Saint Birgitta: "When I considered in the hands and feet of my Son the places in which He was to be pierced with nails, whom I knew from the Prophets was to be crucified, then my eyes were filled with tears and my heart was as it were torn with sadness; and when my Son looked upon my weeping eyes, He grieved with me and was sad as it were unto death. But when I considered the power of His Godhead, I was consoled again, knowing that He willed it so and that so it was expedient; therefore I conformed my whole will to His will, and so my joy was always mingled with sorrow." In another revelation also the most sweet Virgin Mary says to Birgitta: "Although by divine inspiration I knew that my Son was to suffer, yet from the words of Simeon, in which he said that a sword would pierce my soul and that my Son was set for a sign which would be contradicted (Luke 2:34–35), this sorrow pierced my heart more heavily; and until I was assumed in body and soul it was not absent from my heart, although it was tempered by the consolation of the Holy Spirit. For as often as I looked upon my Son, as often as I wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, as often as I looked at His hands and feet, so often my mind was as it were swallowed up in new sorrow, because I thought how He would be crucified. Moreover, as often as I heard the reproaches against my Son, and the lies uttered against Him and the snares laid for Him, so often my mind was moved with sorrow, so that it could scarcely contain itself; but by the power of God my sorrow kept measure and seemliness, so that no levity or impatience might be noticed in me. I suffered sorrow also from the tribulation of the Apostles and the other disciples. Therefore let not this sorrow depart from your soul, for if there were no tribulations very few would be saved. Once, when I was thinking of the passion of my Son and He saw me most sorrowful, He said: Do you not believe, Mother, that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? (John 14:11). Were you defiled at My coming in, or troubled at My going out? Why are you drawn together with grief? (Mic. 4:9). For it is the will of My Father that I suffer death (John 18:11; Matt. 26:42); indeed My will is one with the Father's. What I have from the *(p. 42)* Father cannot suffer; but the flesh which I took from you will suffer, that the flesh of others may be redeemed and their spirits saved."

Article XX: The commendation of the virginal and motherly womb

Blessed is the fruit of your womb (Luke 1:42). How excellently, supernaturally and singularly almighty God has honoured the blessed Virgin, how inestimably He has exalted the most sweet, wonderful and most divine Mary, no mind can penetrate, no tongue can tell. Certainly in this most lovable and exceedingly good Mary He has most abundantly fulfilled what is said in the first book of Kings: *Whoever shall glorify Me, him will I glorify* (1 Sam. 2:30). For since the most blessed and eternally most venerable Virgin Mary honoured her Creator with all her strength, the adorable Creator also, the God of uncircumscribable majesty, exalted her with so great an honour even in this life that no greater honour and dignity could be shown to a created person: making her His own most true Mother, and also adorning and filling her here to overflowing with such a fullness of grace and virtues, of gifts and fruits, of beatitudes and merits, that it did not befit more to be conferred upon a mere creature subsisting in created being.

Further, is not this a dignity of the most serene Virgin almost immense, that He who is the eternal Word, the natural, uncircumscribed and adorable Son of God the Father, is called and is the fruit of the womb of this most excellent Virgin? O most glorious Lady, exalted above all, Mary, how great is this excellence, that the Fruit and only Offspring of the Father's mind, of the most high and immense Begetter, has been made, and deigns to be called, the fruit of your womb! Behold, the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father

(John 1:18), who eternally abides and rests in the light of the Father's mind, came down, O gracious Lady, O most worthy Queen, into your womb through the mystery of the Incarnation, and shut Himself up in it, making Himself your son and the fruit of your most pure womb.

Not without reason did your devoted Bernard say: "O womb wider than the heavens, more capacious than the whole round of the earth!" Was not that little chamber of the virginal womb, in which He was contained and circumscribed in His assumed nature whom the fabric of the universe can neither contain nor circumscribe, made by this effect wider than heaven and more capacious than the whole world? O Mary, most honoured from above and ineffably pre-elected, whom wholly, and each of whose members, and especially the altogether most chaste womb, the Most High has so honoured and dignified! Indeed your womb, consecrated to the Son of God, was made so truly and eminently the throne of God that neither any of the angels, nor any of the heavenly spheres, nor the empyrean heaven, nor any soul of the just is so properly and truly called the throne of God as your most sacred womb. For in none of these did the God of uncircumscribed majesty ever dwell, sit or rest by real commensuration, by circumscribed enclosure, by a son's being contained; but only in you, and in the midst of your most worthy womb, did the Son of God, true God, so dwell, sit and rest, O supreme and blessed Mary, most pure Virgin.

Finally, from this privilege of yours the most worthy titles belong to your sacred womb, O honour and ornament of all creatures. For hence you yourself and your virginal and most fruitful womb are most truly commended and called the bridal chamber of God, the chamber of the heavenly Bridegroom, the house and dwelling of the Creator, the tabernacle of the Saviour, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the Most High, the garden of delights, the paradise of heavenly joys, the secret chamber of the mystical nuptials in which human nature, and the Church herself, was united to the eternal Word. O how fittingly, how devoutly your faithful Bernard spoke to you! "Now therefore let the whole world venerate your womb as the most sacred *(p. 43)* temple of God, because in it the salvation of the world began. There the Son of God put on beauty, and, comely in a white robe, went forth rejoicing to meet His pre-elect Church, offering the long-desired kiss and espousing the Church to Himself. Your most sacred womb, Mary, is a garden of delights for us, because from it we gather the flowers of manifold joy, as often as we recall in mind how great a multitude of sweetness has flowed from it upon the whole world."[1]

[1] These passages circulated under St. Bernard's name; the second is from the *Sermo de Nativitate B.V.M.* ascribed to him in the Middle Ages.

Article XXI: On the fruitfulness of the glorious and noble Mary

I, as a fruitful olive tree in the house of God (Ps. 51:10). Since the good is communicative and diffusive of itself, that which produces a better offspring is judged to be better. How great, then, is the goodness of the virgin Mother, who bore a Son of immense goodness, namely the true God? How great is the fruitfulness of her who shares parenthood with the eternal Father, who bore the Maker of the universe, and begot her own uncreated Artificer? And although she is not His mother with respect to the nature by which He is of immense goodness, and by which creative power belongs to Him, nevertheless she is truly His mother. And had she not been dignified and made fit by the gifts of most excellent grace to conceive and beget so great a Son, she certainly would not have conceived Him.

So, as with her goodness, so the causality and fruitfulness of the most lovable Virgin, the most holy Mary, transcends the goodness, causality and fruitfulness of all creatures: for she bore Him from whom descends not only all the being of nature, but also all the being of grace and salvation, and all the being of glory. Further, the greatest philosophers posited four universal causes, namely God, the intelligence, the noble soul (which they supposed to be the form of the heavenly body), and universal nature, that is, the causal power implanted in the substances of the heavenly bodies. And granted that the heavenly bodies were animated,

according to their opinion, yet none of the aforesaid causes after God, nor indeed all three together, could be equalled to the causality and fruitfulness of Mary: since the Fruit and Son of Mary, who is to be glorified, transcends all those causes and their effects in goodness and dignity infinitely as regards the nature of His Godhead, and ineffably also as regards the assumed nature, as united immediately to the eternal Word, perfected with so great a fullness of graces and filled with so inestimable a beatitude. Moreover, granted that one intelligence had produced another, as certain philosophers have written, yet their fruitfulness could not be judged equal to the fruitfulness of the most sacred Mary, since she bore the primary and supreme cause of all intelligences, which in every effect has more influence than any secondary cause whatever.

Moreover, in the redemption, restoration and salvation of the whole human race the most illustrious Virgin seems to have cooperated so excellently that no natural causality, fruitfulness or power of created causes can be equalled to her: just as the gifts of nature cannot be held comparable in dignity to the gifts of grace or of glory. It is evident besides that the most beloved one of God is so powerful with her omnipotent Son in obtaining the charisms of graces for all who call upon her, that no creature's power, nor any natural power, can be compared with her power in this. Lastly, in the supernatural power of working miracles, in the power of restraining the powers of the air, in the power of governing and defending the whole Church, in the power of commanding every rational and intellectual creature, there is no person after God to be compared with the most excellent Virgin; but this most blessed and most divine creature has obtained the first place in all these. Therefore she is said to be terrible to the adverse powers *as an army set in array* (Song 6:9). *(p. 44)* Of her again we read in the Canticles: *What shall you see in the Shulamite, but companies of camps?* (Song 7:1).

But the incomparable Virgin received the aforesaid supernatural fruitfulness not from a man but from the Holy Spirit, who in the deiform, Christ-bearing Virgin Mary accomplished instantly and miraculously the whole of what in other mothers is done by the man and the seminal power, by the higher and the lower nature. This is the most illustrious Virgin: for as the mind of God the Father begot from eternity the eternal Word, through whom all things were made (John 1:3), who is the Creator of all things, so the womb of the Virgin bore the same adorable Word incarnate from her, through whom all things were restored, who is the Saviour of all. From the fountain of the Father's mind flowed the eternal Wisdom, the salvation and glory of all; and this same Wisdom, incarnate, flowed forth from the fountain of the virgin Mother.

Article XXII: How specially and ineffably God loved and loved beforehand, chose and chose beforehand, this Virgin

I am my Beloved's, and His turning is toward me (Song 7:10). To love is to will good to someone. That one, therefore, God loves more to whom He gives a greater good. So that we may see, then, how much and in what way almighty God loved the glorious and best Mary from eternity, let us weigh what He conferred on her. Did not the eternal Father send and give to the glorious Virgin, as her true son, His consubstantial and only Son, whom He certainly loves as infinitely as Himself? Did He not make her His singular spouse, sharing parenthood with Him, and honour and exalt her above every creature subsisting in created being, so that all the citizens of the Church triumphant also rightly confess her their lady, queen and empress, as the mother of their God and Creator?

Moreover, union proceeds from love. So the adorable God loved and chose Mary beforehand the more specially and eminently, the more intimately, closely and familiarly He united Himself to her. But to this most glorious Mary God joined Himself not only through the charisms of graces, through illumination, love or external adherence, but also through a certain natural and real identity: for He became something of hers, in the way in which offspring is something of its parent. For He assumed something of the substance of the sacred Virgin and united it to Himself hypostatically and really, and dwelt in her midst. Further, He joined to Himself the mind of this most blessed and most gracious Mary so inseparably, even in her mother's womb, that thereafter she could never sin or be separated from God. And when this unique friend of God had begun

to use her reason, at once the sublime God without ceasing joined her mind more and more to Himself, making her advance unceasingly in all charity, truth and grace, and so constantly enriching her spiritually, filling her most generously and filling her to overflowing most lovingly. From this it is plain how most specially He loved her.

Further, it is the mark of friends to will and not to will the same things. Therefore God loves a created mind the more, the more perfectly He conforms it to His divine and uncreated will. Since, then, the God of infinite majesty and glory conformed the mind of the most sweet Mary to Himself so most perfectly that the most blessed Virgin never willed, desired, did or omitted anything displeasing or contrary to God, or otherwise than God willed her to will, desire, do or omit, but in all these things was with her whole heart in harmony with God, conformed to Him and pleasing to Him, it is evident that He loved her most specially and ineffably.

Moreover, it is the mark of friends to open their secrets to one another. Therefore the blessed Creator loved the most sacred Mary the more excellently, the more familiarly, clearly and solemnly, from the beginning of man's redemption, He revealed to her the uncertain and hidden things of His wisdom (Ps. 50:8) and the decrees of His counsel concerning the salvation of the human *(p. 45)* race through the incarnation and passion of the eternal Word. Of this He informed the most gracious young maiden through the archangel Gabriel (Luke 1:31–35) and made her certain of it, affirming that so great a mystery of human salvation was to be accomplished from her, in her and through her.

Lastly, as was partly plain from what has been brought forward (in the Prooemium and Arts. 15 and 20), and as will shine out more clearly below, the God of infinite munificence filled His most beloved Mary with the riches of His grace on the way, and with the riches of His glory in the homeland, so most munificently, as much as a mere creature could receive without personal union, or as it was fitting should be given her from above. Let us therefore praise and constantly glorify the almighty, eternal and immense God in this His most illustrious creature, His singular and most dear spouse, because He has shown so surpassingly in her the immensity of His goodness, loving-kindness and charity, the boundlessness of His liberality, the depth of His wisdom and the might of His omnipotence, not only for the salvation, honour and praise of the most happy Mary herself, but also for the help, advancement and glory of all of us: since through her, His one friend, He decreed to come abundantly to the help of all of us, filling her with so wonderful and most liberal a fullness of His wealth that we might all receive of her fullness.[1] Therefore, if we truly love this most serene and most lovable Mary, than whom no created person after God is more lovable, let us rejoice with her with all our heart over all this excellence and pre-election of hers, and because she was thus forestalled by divine love; and for these things let us give thanks to the Most High with all eagerness of mind.

[1] The phrase echoes John 1:16, said of Christ.

Article XXIII: The commendation of the most sacred breasts of the glorious Virgin

Your breasts are better than wine, fragrant with the best ointments (Song 1:1–2). Just as the womb of the most beautiful Virgin is to be specially honoured by all of us, sincerely and fervently loved and most devoutly commended, because the Son of the eternal Father became the fruit and son of her womb, and the virginal womb itself became the throne and bridal chamber of the Only-begotten of God the Father; so, after this most pure virginal womb, the breasts of the most divine Mary are to be loved most sincerely, praised most reverently and contemplated with a pure gaze of the mind.

Let us consider as far as we can how greatly those virginal breasts were deified, which God incarnate so often sucked with His own most holy mouth, and so frequently grasped, touched and handled with His

childish and tender little hands. O how ineffably those breasts were dignified by so loving, immediate and constant a contact with the only-begotten Son of God! and still more by His sucking, being suckled and being reared from them. O most happy fruitfulness of those breasts, which fed the Shepherd and Provider of all things; which gave nourishment to Him on whom the eyes of all hope, and who gives them meat in due season, who opens His hand and fills every living creature with blessing (Ps. 144:15–16), who also refreshes the angelic minds, without whose providence every creature would at once wither and fail! Is it not He, O most blessed and altogether most lovable Virgin Mother, Lady and Saviour, is it not He who covers the heaven with clouds and prepares rain for the earth (Ps. 146:8), which if He withdrew, all these things would perish with hunger? He, such and so great, the eternal God, immense and needing nothing, became from you, O most illustrious Mary, an infant of one day, and was nourished at your most holy breasts. O most sweet and supremely worthy virginal breasts, chosen to sustain Him without whose preserving no creature could subsist for a moment!

Well does the Bridegroom of cleanness say to you in the Canticles: *How beautiful are your breasts, my sister, my spouse!* (Song 4:10). Certainly *your breasts are better than wine, fragrant with the best ointments* (Song 1:1–2): for they were most free *(p. 46)* from all earthly and sensual concupiscence, stain and contact, and they refreshed the Author of all sweetness. And just as the overflowing of the interior radiance of the most sacred Mother is said to have shone out in some way in her most lovely face, because the Sun of wisdom abode in her most pure heart and womb, so her blessed breasts can piously be believed to have been fragrant with a sweet odour, from the fullness of her interior sweetness and from the constant contact of the mouth and hands of her divine and adorable Child.

O wonderful and illustrious and most delightful spectacle, to behold with the eyes of faith Christ the Lord, the King Messiah, the glorious little Infant, the only-begotten Son of God, set at the breasts of His virgin Mother and sucking them with His most tender infant hands upon them![1] What thoughts, what glory were yours then, O most chaste turtledove, O most devout and most beautiful Virgin, when with those virginal and motherly eyes of yours, dovelike and most clement, you saw that little boy *beautiful above the sons of men* (Ps. 44:3), *white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands* (Song 5:10), indeed the Creator of all things, thus hanging at your breasts? I think, O Lady, that He did not draw so many drops of motherly and virginal milk from the sacred fountains of your breasts as the darts of charity and the ardours of holy love with which He inflamed and wounded your most blessed soul: unless (which God forbid) He who gives to all abundantly (Jas. 1:5) was sparing toward you alone. How greatly, O delightful and slender Mary, the most free God, bound to no one at all, bound Himself to you, whose flesh He put on, whose breasts He sucked!

Let us behold with the eyes of faith and devotion the boy Jesus, now stretching out His delicate little arms to His Mother's neck, now with a coaxing nod asking for His Mother's breasts, now offering His Mother the sweetest kisses. Let us contemplate the Mother, holding up her Son with joy in her virginal arms, now pressing a kiss upon the starry eyes of Christ, now upon His rosy cheeks, now upon His rosy lips, now upon His snowy brow, now upon His milk-white neck. What mother, what virgin in this world ever enjoyed such a solace, such a spectacle and such an object?

Hence a certain devout man fittingly said: "O virginal eyes of Mary, sparkling with exceeding brightness; O blushing cheeks; O tresses shining with golden splendour! Most happy are your lips, deified by the frequent kisses of the Son of God. And although everything that is in you was most prudently formed and most fittingly adorned by the compass of divine wisdom, yet to us wretched ones your breasts, which suckled the Lord King, taste singularly sweeter, since from their richness and most rich fruitfulness the dwellers of heaven and the dwellers of earth are gladdened and refreshed by their sweet fruits. These are *like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies* (Song 4:5). Behold, the Maker of the world adorned the heavens with stars, the elements with various living things, the woods with leaves, the meadows with flowers; but above all these He adorned your body with most holy breasts. These are the two beautiful olive

trees, most richly pouring out to those below the liquor of grace, of milk and of honey; snow-white fruits, which, made fruitful by the Holy Spirit, when tasted confer immortality. These are the golden pomegranates, the little globes and the lilies adorning the temple of the true Solomon (1 Kings 7). In them there is the full extinction of carnal concupiscence, and a heavenly and supernatural delight. He who has tasted knows how very quickly and how perfectly all carnal affection and pleasure vanishes when one has tasted of the milk of her graces."

[1] Several words on p. 46 (right-hand column) are damaged in the copy of the edition; this paragraph and the last lines of the article are rendered according to the evident sense of the surviving words.

Article XXIV: On the Lord's annunciation made to the glorious Virgin

The angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin (Luke 1:26–27). When the Almighty was about to bring forth certain chosen and eminent men, He foretold through holy angels their conception, name, office, grace and life: as is plain in the Old Testament of Isaac, Samson *(p. 47)* and Josiah (Gen. 18; Judg. 13; 1 Kings 13:2), and in the New Testament also of the most blessed John the Baptist (Luke 1). How much more was it fitting that the incarnation, conception and nativity of the only-begotten Son of God from the pre-elected Virgin should be announced to her beforehand by a holy angel? Especially because in this incarnation of the only Son of God the most illustrious Virgin Mary was to be taken as the spouse of the eternal Father, to conceive and bear His only Son; and in betrothal and marriage the consent of the person to be taken is required.

So the friend of the Bridegroom came, sent from above, and first of all won the goodwill of the most glorious young maiden, greeting her with a most renowned salutation, indeed one unheard of before: *Hail,* he said, *full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women* (Luke 1:28); that is, filled beyond all persons of the female sex with gratuitous gifts, infused virtues and sanctifying grace. Yet in all these the most gracious Virgin was not yet so full that she did not advance in them daily, at least as regards their act, as long as she was a pilgrim in the world.

Then, having heard this most solemn salutation, the most humble Virgin, who was least in her own eyes and humbled herself beneath every woman, *was troubled* (Luke 1:29), that is, marvelled greatly. And the Evangelist fittingly reported that she was troubled at this saying of the angel, not at his appearing, as he related of Zachary that he was troubled on seeing the angel (Luke 1:12). For it is believed that the most holy Maiden was accustomed to seeing angels, and likewise that she had the discernment of spirits.

Further, the angel, knowing most certainly that the most gracious Virgin would acquiesce and consent to his announcement and to the divine betrothal, foretells to her, certainly by way of assertion, that she is to conceive the Son of the heavenly Bridegroom and eternal Father: *Behold,* he says, *you shall conceive and bear a son, and He shall be called the Son of the Most High* (Luke 1:31–32). The most prudent Maiden, learned in the law and the Prophets, perceiving that this was to be understood of the King Messiah promised and foretold in the law and the Prophets, at once asked: *How shall [this be done, because I know not man?]* (Luke 1:34); as if to say: I rightly ask how this will come about, since I purpose altogether, as far as lies in me, as I have also vowed, not to know man.

Here it is rightly asked why the most blessed one asked this, since (as Ambrose testifies) she had learned from Isaiah: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive* (Isa. 7:14). Ambrose answers: "She had read, *Behold, a virgin shall conceive*; but how it would come about, she had not read. For how it would come about had not been revealed even to so great a Prophet." But this seems to be contradicted, since Isaiah, by the very fact that he knew by divine revelation that the virgin would not conceive of human seed, was certain that this would come about in a supernatural manner and by divine power. Hence, prophesying again of such a nativity of Christ, he says: *He shall grow up as a tender plant before Him, and as a root out of a thirsty ground* (Isa.

53:2). And the sense is that, just as a tender plant springs from unsown earth and a root from unwatered ground, so Christ would be born of a virgin not made fruitful by a man. For the same reason the Christ-bearing Mary knew this very thing. And it must be answered that certainly, in general, both the most sacred Virgin and Isaiah knew that Christ would be born by divine power of an untouched virgin; in particular, however, they did not know it as distinctly as the angel expressed it to the glorious Mary.

Then, having heard the Archangel's instruction, the most enlightened and most teachable Virgin at once believed and consented: *Behold,* she said, *the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word* (Luke 1:38). O most sweet Mary, how ineffably you were honoured in this annunciation of the Lord made by the angel, in which the Father of infinite excellence offers Himself to take you as His singular and only spouse, that He may have you as one sharing parenthood with Him, and as His most familiar friend and companion! He offers you, O most blessed of all creatures, His only-begotten Son, eternally born of His substance, to be yours, not only in the way in which He belongs to all who fear Him and love His name, whose He is by grace and love, but in a most special way, *(p. 48)* by birth from your substance: in which way He is certainly no one's, after the eternal Father, but yours alone. This His Only-begotten, lovable and loved by Him with infinite love, He announces, offers, sends, entrusts and gives to you, O most sacred Mary, as a son. See what He thinks of you, how worthy and venerable He judges you, who deigns to have you so familiar, so like and so near to Him.

So at God's command the angel, about to carry the most joyful and most wholesome tidings from heaven into the world, at once came down, greeted the most chaste little Virgin, and honoured the most honourable Maiden with a most delightful praise. And she, having heard the manner in which she would soon be the Mother of the Son of God, as the Archangel said, *The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; and therefore the Holy One that shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God* (Luke 1:35), and having learned also of the pregnancy of her happy kinswoman Elizabeth (Luke 1:36), rejoiced exceedingly. And taking up a holy magnanimity, the most mighty ardour of most holy charity prevailing in her, and the zeal also for the salvation of her brethren and the common redemption of the whole human race, she desired with all her affection to become the Mother of God and to conceive the Saviour of the world; and she gave the most modest and most humble answer, saying: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word* (Luke 1:38). And so she then said, in effect: *Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth* (Song 1:1); that is: let Him who of old spoke at sundry times and in divers manners to the fathers by the Prophets (Heb. 1:1), indeed to the fathers and Prophets through the holy angels, now that the fullness of time is at hand, come down to me in His own Person, and through the mystery of His incarnation be joined to me immediately, embrace me and be encompassed by my womb, and at length, born of me, kiss me also in the body.

When the most holy young maiden had uttered the words mentioned, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord,* and so on, God the Father at once took her to Himself as His chief spouse, and made her fruitful by the mystical breath of the Spirit, clothing His Only-begotten with the substance of the flesh of the blessed Virgin, who then in an instant conceived God, the Son of God, true God. O happy and most longed-for hour, the hour preordained from eternity, promised to the Patriarchs and Prophets in the law of nature and the written law, in which God sent His Son upon earth to make men sons of God! (Gal. 4:4–5).

Moreover, with what has been brought forward agree the things related in the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta. In one of these we read that the most loving Mary spoke to Birgitta: "When I had heard that the God of the law was to redeem the world and be born of a virgin, I was affected with such charity toward Him that I thought of and willed nothing but Him, and I constantly longed to live until the time of His nativity, if perhaps I, unworthy, might merit to become the handmaid of His mother. And once, when I was anxiously thinking what and how great was the ineffable and endless glory of God, and was marvelling at His beatitude, I saw three wonderful things. I saw a star, but not such as shines in the sky; I saw a light, but not

such as gives light in the world; I perceived a fragrance, but not as of herbs or the like, but truly ineffable and most sweet, with which I was wholly filled, and I leapt for joy. Then at once I heard a voice, but not from a human mouth; and on hearing it I was afraid that it might perhaps be an illusion. And at once there appeared before me an angel of God in the form of a most beautiful man, saying: *Hail, full of grace* (Luke 1:28 ff.). On hearing this I wondered why he greeted me so, for I considered myself unworthy of such a salutation. And when I had heard from the angel how I should conceive the Son of God, I had a most fervent desire to be the Mother of God, and out of love I then said: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord,* and so on. At that word the Son of God was conceived in my womb with ineffable exultation of my soul and of all the members of my body; and I carried Him in my womb without pain, heaviness or weariness; I humbled myself also in all things, knowing that He whom I carried was the Almighty."

Article XXV: In what act, in what place and in what posture the glorious and most illustrious Virgin Mary was when the annunciation of the conception of the Son of God was made to her

(p. 49) Mary has chosen the best part (Luke 10:42). These words, spoken literally by Christ of the chosen and holy Mary Magdalene, can be said far more excellently of the most happy, Christ-bearing Virgin Mary. For she, ineffably beyond all others, led a contemplative, most quiet and most interior life, even in her holy marriage, and no less in the house where she lived in Nazareth than in the temple at Jerusalem. Indeed she advanced constantly in the exercises of the contemplative life, and was of such perfection that she was not hindered from the exercises of the contemplative life by the exercises of the active life; and if perhaps at times the act of contemplation in her was suspended for a short while by an exercise of the active life, she at once returned to contemplation with greater fervour.

Therefore it is piously and commonly believed that the most worthy Virgin was at that time in sublime contemplation and in a secret place. Nor is it against this that some piously think she was then in the act of prayer; and this too is judged quite credible. Indeed some think that she was then praying to God most devoutly and most affectionately for the common salvation of the human race and for the coming of the King Messiah; and this I think true. And this came about by divine ordering and inspiration: for by such acts she was especially disposed and made fit to receive that revelation, appearing and annunciation of the Lord concerning Christ's conception and incarnation from her. Such prayer of the blessed and most sweet Virgin included contemplation and the praise of God, since prayer is called the ascent of the mind to God, which certainly belongs to contemplation also. For one who prays perfectly is lifted up with his whole mind into God, and sets forth and confesses His excellence, according to what the holy man says: *Praising I will call upon the Lord* (Ps. 17:4).

Moreover, to those who pray earnestly and fervently for the common salvation, visions and divine consolations are wont to be given. Hence the prophet Daniel says: *I set my face to the Lord my God, to pray and make supplication. And while I was yet speaking and praying, and presenting my supplications in the sight of my God for the holy mountain of my God, behold, Gabriel, flying swiftly, touched me, and said: Now I am come forth to teach you, and that you might understand; for you are a man of desires* (Dan. 9:3, 20–23). Commonly also divine revelations have been made to the Saints of God when they were withdrawn from others and occupied with divine and spiritual things.

Hence the Fathers commonly say that the most lovable and most modest Virgin Mary was then in the secrecy of her chamber; and perhaps she prayed on bended knees, and humbly showed reverence to the holy angel when he appeared, by rising before him or in some other way. And although the angel appeared in an assumed body, it was yet very easy for him to enter the closed chamber, since we read in the fifth chapter of Acts that an angel brought the Apostles out of prison while the prison remained closed (Acts 5:19–23). For the officers sent to bring the Apostles before the council of the Jews, returning, said: *The prison indeed we*

found shut with all diligence, and the keepers standing before the doors; but opening it, we found no man within. For by divine power a penetration of dimensions takes place.

Lastly, if it be asked why the Incarnation of the Most High was not announced to the most loving Mary by an angel of the highest choir, or indeed by many thousands of the spirits on high, but by the archangel Gabriel, who also appeared to Daniel in the Old Testament (Dan. 9:21) and announced to Zachary the nativity of Saint John the Baptist (Luke 1:11), especially since Isaiah asserts, *One of the Seraphim flew to me* (Isa. 6:6), it must be answered that the Son of God in His first coming came into this world in all humility and poverty, to give us examples of humility and poverty. Therefore to announce His conception *(p. 50)* from the most sweet Mary He was content with an ordinary and customary envoy, who, as Saint Bernard says, went in to the most serene Virgin into the secret of her chamber, where she was praying to the Father in secret (Matt. 6:6).

Article XXVI: By what virtue the most chosen Virgin Mary was chiefly disposed to become the Mother of God

He that is mighty has done great things for me (Luke 1:49). Truly, most sacred and most sweet Virgin Mary, truly the Lord of all things has done great, indeed the greatest things for you: for He has conferred on you most illustrious benefits, and, after the human nature of your Son, He has adorned, filled and enriched you, both in the gifts of sanctifying grace and in the gifts of grace freely given, so excellently beyond every rational and intellectual creature that it cannot be expressed. For in your mother's womb He sanctified you abundantly beyond all others, and preserved you unceasingly from all fault; and He made you His own Mother, by which He set you above every mere creature subsisting in created being; and He made you so pleasing to Himself, so lovable, so desirable, so beautiful, that He desired your beauty and comeliness (Ps. 44:12), and you drew Him, as it were, from heaven to earth and into the midst of your womb, so that from you He put on and assumed your nature and the nature of all of us; and so your God and Creator became your son and the Saviour of us all. Are these small things? Are they not so great, so supreme and singular that greater cannot be given to a mere creature short of personal union with the eternal Word?

Meanwhile it may be asked by what virtue chiefly this most happy young maiden, in the days of her youth, so pleased the Creator that He willed to become her son. And it seems that it was in the act and merit of her faith, since holy Elizabeth said to her: *Blessed are you that have believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to you by the Lord* (Luke 1:45). On the other hand it appears that it was by the merit of her humility, as she herself confesses: *He has regarded the humility of His handmaid* (Luke 1:48). That it was by the beauty of her mind appears from the words of the Psalmist saying to her: *The King shall greatly desire your beauty* (Ps. 44:12). That it was by her most pure chastity seems to follow from what we read in Ecclesiasticus: *No price is worthy of a continent soul* (Ecclus. 26:20); and in the sixth chapter of Wisdom: *Incorruption brings near to God* (Wis. 6:20). Further, that it was through the act of the gift of wisdom, namely through contemplation and devout prayer, which is an act of *latria*, seems to follow from the preceding article, and because, as Scripture testifies, *all the things that are desired are not to be compared with wisdom* (Prov. 8:11). That she was chiefly disposed and made fit for the motherhood of God by charity is proved from this, that charity is the highest virtue, the form, end, life and mover of the other virtues, without which no virtue is meritorious or pleasing to God. Charity also most of all unites the created mind with God, who is said to be as it were bound and held by the bonds of charity, indeed in a certain way overcome. For this reason Isaiah asserted with grief: *There is none that rises up and takes hold of You* (Isa. 64:7); and the Lord Himself said to a fervent lover: *Let Me alone, that My wrath may be kindled against them* (Exod. 32:10).

To these things I think it must be answered that that most fervent interior act of most sincere charity, by which the glorious and best Virgin Mary desired that her Creator should be acknowledged, loved, praised

and duly worshipped by all men, and that all men should be redeemed and saved by the coming of the Son of God, chiefly, immediately and in a consummating way disposed, dignified and made fit the most affectionate and most sweet Mary for the motherhood of God. The other virtues and gifts with their acts cooperated and disposed to this in their own ways and as means: namely, faith, as the base and beginning of meriting; humility, as the winner, procurer and guardian of graces, and as removing the first obstacle to all good, namely pride; chastity or *(p. 51)* virginity, as especially fitting the very flesh of this woman for union with the Word of infinite cleanness; wisdom, as raising her directly and intuitively from created things to that uncreated object. Further, by the beauty or comeliness of the blessed Virgin can be understood the gathering together and adornment, the connection and completion of all the virtues, gifts and merits of the most gracious Mary, through all of which taken together she most pleased God and was taken up to be His Mother.

Wherefore it must be weighed that in the incarnation and conception of the Son of God many things are considered. The first is the supernatural and incomprehensible arduousness or sublimity of so great a mystery. Therefore to believe that this was soon to be fulfilled from her was especially meritorious; and so the faith of the most serene Mary, who is to be glorified, specially prepared her for the conception of the eternal Word. For this reason it was said to her: *Blessed are you that have believed, because those things shall be accomplished in you that were spoken to you by the Lord* (Luke 1:45). Secondly, there is considered in the incarnation and conception of the Son of God the supreme love of God for the human race, by which He so immediately and closely united to Himself human nature in the male sex by hypostatic union, and also a human person in the female sex, making her His own Mother, so that through these He might save and unite to Himself the whole human race, in the present by grace and in the future by glory. Therefore the Apostle says: *For His exceeding charity with which God loved us* (Eph. 2:4), He *sent His Son* (Gal. 4:4). And in the third chapter of John it is said: *God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son* (John 3:16). Thirdly, there is considered in the conception of the Son of God the very great dignity and power of the Virgin who conceives, who by this was made of a dignity in some way infinite, and lady and queen of the whole world. And so the humility of the most blessed Mary especially fitted her for the motherhood of God, according to what we read: *He that humbles himself shall be exalted* (Luke 14:11). Fourthly, there is the very great familiarity with, and the providing of, the flesh united to the eternal Word; and thus the virginal chastity of the most pure Mary especially fitted her for the conception of the Son of God.

Therefore it can be said that the supreme and most lovable Virgin, as regards her higher appetitive power, was most disposed to the conception and motherhood of God through the actual and most fervent love of God and of her neighbours; as regards her rational power, through most certain faith and the gift of wisdom in a perfect degree; as regards her irascible power, through most profound humility; and as regards her concupiscible power and her generative power, through consummate and most fragrant chastity. And so she offered herself wholly to the Creator and obeyed Him most perfectly. Hence almighty God also, who is accustomed in a certain way to obey those who obey Him fully, that is, after the manner of one who obeys, to fulfil their prayers and desires swiftly, became obedient to this most obedient, most humble and most lovable handmaid of His, and made her His Mother and a sharer in His kingdom.

Article XXVII: On the nativity of the Holy of Holies from the most sweet and sublime Mary

I bring you good tidings of great joy: for this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David (Luke 2:10–11). All things in the glorious Virgin, in conceiving and in bringing forth, were supernatural and divine. For it did not befit the Author of nature, the Creator of all things, to be subject to the common laws, or to be confined by the accustomed course of nature, or that the order should be kept in the Lord which He Himself imposed on the creatures subject to Him; but the King Himself, the Lord of immense majesty, willed to be born of the most pure and most holy Virgin above the course and order of nature, as He

had also been conceived of her.

So, when the Virgin's childbearing was at hand, she went up with her minister blessed Joseph from her city of Nazareth to the city of Bethlehem (Luke 2:4–7), *(p. 52)* where, turning aside into a certain lodging, that very night she bore the Son of God without pain and without corruption. Indeed, when the hour of bringing forth was at hand, she was wholly flooded most joyfully and most abundantly with a supernatural illumination and raised up into high contemplation; and as she had conceived in an instant, so she brought forth instantaneously, the adorable Child coming forth from her womb with a penetration of dimensions, the womb itself remaining closed; and so He went out by the customary way in such a manner that the virginal seal remained most entire and wholly unharmed. Nor was there any impurity there, any unseemliness or indecency, as most foul heretics imagine and reprobate unbelievers object.

Then that heavenly Mother, purer than all the angelic minds, seeing the little Infant born of her, the true God, at once adored Him. She saw Him lying on the ground before her eyes, surrounded by a most radiant light, but, in the human manner, wailing and affected by the winter cold, not by necessity but rather by voluntary ordering; and at once, with motherly charity and loving compassion and with the highest reverence, she lifted the little Infant, pressed Him to her breast and face, warmed Him, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and at length laid Him in the manger, upon hay (as is believed).

Of these things it is related quite credibly in the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta, where the blessed Virgin speaks to Birgitta in a vision: "Know most certainly that I gave birth on bended knees, praying, alone in the stable, with such exultation and gladness that I felt no burden when the Child came forth from my body; but at once I wrapped Him in clean little cloths, which I had long prepared and had purposely brought with me to Bethlehem, since I knew that I would give birth in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). And Joseph, seeing that I had given birth without help, marvelled with great gladness." Hence Saint Birgitta relates what can be accepted piously and credibly: "When I was in Bethlehem at the Lord's manger," she says, "I saw in a vision a certain virgin with child, exceedingly beautiful, clothed in a white mantle and a fine tunic, through which I clearly saw from outside her virginal flesh; her womb was full and much swollen, since she was now ready to give birth. With her was a most honourable old man, who fixed a lighted candle to the wall and went out, so as not to be present at the birth. Then the virgin took off her shoes, laid aside her mantle, took the veil from her head and laid it beside her, remaining in her tunic alone. She then took out two linen cloths and two woollen ones, most clean and fine, which she had brought with her to wrap the child who was to be born, and two other small linen cloths to cover and bind the little child's head. When these were ready, the virgin knelt down, setting herself with great reverence to pray; and with her hands raised and her eyes fixed on heaven she remained as if suspended in an ecstasy of contemplation and inebriated with divine sweetness. While she was so, I saw the little one moving in her womb; and immediately, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, she bore a son, from whom there went out so great and so ineffable a light that the light of the sun could not be compared to it, and the candle fixed there seemed to give no light. Indeed that manner of giving birth was so sudden and momentary that I could not perceive or discern how, or by what member, the virgin gave birth. But at once I saw that glorious infant lying naked on the ground, with a most shining little body, free from all filth and uncleanness. I saw also the afterbirth lying near Him, wrapped up and clean. And when the virgin perceived that she had given birth, at once, bowing her head and joining her hands together, she adored the child with great reverence, saying: Welcome, my God, my Lord and my son. Then the child, crying and trembling from the cold and the hardness of the floor on which He lay, turned Himself a little and stretched out His limbs, seeking warmth and His mother's comfort. She then took Him into her hands and pressed Him to her breast, and with her cheek and breast warmed Him with great gladness and *(p. 53)* tender motherly compassion; and sitting down, she put the child in her lap, wrapping Him in the little cloths in the usual way. When this was done the old man came in, and prostrating himself, adored the child on bended knees, weeping for joy." So far in the place cited.

O Bethlehem, city of the most high God, how greatly you have been exalted, when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born in you! (Mic. 5:2). O most glorious Virgin, O most sweet and eternally most blessed Virgin Mary, what shall man render to you, what the fabric of the world, what the whole of creation, for all the good that has been given to the world through you, and especially to the human race once lost? For from you, O only and most pre-elect spouse of God, there has risen upon the world the eternal light, everlasting salvation, the perfect Saviour, immense honour. From you and through you has been born and given to us the Only-begotten of God (Isa. 9:6), the Angel of great counsel, Wonderful, Counsellor, God, the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace, God strong and mighty, the King of glory (Ps. 23:8), the conqueror of the devil, the restorer of fallen man, the fountain of grace, the giver of the virtues: through whom, redeemed from the power of the demons and the slavery of the vices, we have been made children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16–17) and citizens of the heavenly kingdom (Eph. 2:19), now indeed in hope, and destined to obtain so many good things in reality, if we are grateful to our most loving Redeemer.

O best and most excellent Virgin Mary, who showed the world its Maker, from whom the eternal God became an infant of one day, with how great a joy you gladdened heaven and earth when you bore the Son of God! Then indeed a holy angel at once appeared with a most radiant light to the shepherds (Luke 2:9–14): *Behold,* he said, *I bring you good tidings of great joy.* And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army, that is, an assembly of countless angels, praising God and saying: *Glory to God in the highest.* O how great was the joy then in the whole homeland of the Blessed, in the kingdom of heaven, in all the orders of angels, who rejoiced altogether ineffably and gave most devout thanks to the most high God for the redemption of men, for the repairing of their own diminution, for the fulfilment of the divine mysteries, for the glory and honour of the most blessed Virgin, for the exaltation of Christ's humanity! For if they rejoice over one sinner doing penance (Luke 15:10), how they gloried over all the things just mentioned! Lastly, a great consolation was then given to the holy fathers in limbo.

Article XXVIII: On the wonders of God accomplished in the most sweet and most loving Mary

The Lord has created a new thing upon the earth: a woman shall encompass a man (Jer. 31:22). Although almighty God is known to have wrought many and great wonders from the beginning of the ages, in the creation, distinction and adornment of all things, in the universal flood, in bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt, in leading them through the desert, in bringing them into the promised land, in the governance of the whole universe, and through holy men, through whom in the written law and in the law of the Gospel He worked countless signs, portents and miracles; yet all these, in comparison with the wonderful and incomprehensible things which He accomplished in His most glorious and most beloved Mary, seem small and of little splendour.

For in her and through her, indeed from her substance, one Person was constituted of an eternal and uncreated reality and of created human nature. She conceived and bore a pre-existent, eternal and unchangeable Person; and He whom the whole world does not contain and cannot circumscribe was enclosed, bounded and circumscribed in the womb of the most blessed Virgin. She conceived and encompassed in her womb a boy who on the first day of His conception was a perfect man: a man, I say, not by bodily size or age, but by perfection of mind and every virtue; who in the same instant in which He began to be in the assumed nature was made a possessor of the Godhead (*comprehensor*), blessed in the higher part of His soul. In the most illustrious womb *(p. 54)* of Mary were celebrated the personal nuptials between the eternal Word and the humanity assumed by Him; and things infinitely distant were united immediately and hypostatically in her most sacred womb. And so the eternal and the temporal, the unchangeable and the changeable, the nature of God and the form of a servant came together in one Person; and so too the most excellent and incomparable Virgin was made a sharer of parenthood with the eternal Father.

Moreover, she was made fruitful supernaturally by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35); in her motherhood and virginity met together; from her womb, remaining closed and entire, the Son of God came forth and was born, coming forth *as a bridegroom from His chamber* (Ps. 18:6). She conceived without carnal pleasure, with spiritual exultation; she carried without heaviness, she brought forth without pain or sadness. In her the frailty of human nature, the instability of the human heart, the weakness of the female sex was forestalled by such a fullness of graces, strengthened by such a perfection of virtues, filled with so many and such great divine charisms, fortified by such progress, that she never sinned; that she never suffered distraction of mind from God; that she never fell into any negligence; that she never suffered a disordered movement of the flesh or of the tinder of sin; that neither in food, drink, sleep, word, thought, affection or sense was she ever culpable, even venially. How supernatural these things are is known to those who know the nature, the properties, the defectiveness and the proneness to every evil of the human condition.

This is the most sweet and most serene Lady, who carried her Maker within herself, who bore the Creator of all; in whom and through whom God and man were reconciled; who crushed the head of the infernal serpent (Gen. 3:15); through whom every creature has been dignified and honoured; to whom all created nature is subject; through whom the most high God has worked countless and altogether most illustrious miracles; who by her merits and prayers has obtained the grace of conversion for countless sinners, even hardened and malicious ones; indeed, she has obtained that many who had died, dead in mortal sins, were brought back to the body and did wholesome penance in the body they had put on again.

See how the almighty, most free and supremely glorious God has shown His omnipotence, charity, loving-kindness, munificence, wealth and freedom in the most illustrious Mary. All these we shall be able to contemplate in her: because, after the humanity assumed by the eternal Word, there is in the whole fabric of the world, in the whole order of things, no object so illustrious and evident, so gracious, glorious and wonderful for contemplating God in His effects as the most happy Virgin Mary.

Article XXIX: Further on the wonderful excellence of the blessed Mary, who is to be glorified; also the testimony of a certain astrologer concerning her; and how, while she was still living in mortal flesh, holy men of deep understanding longed and hastened to see her

No defiled thing comes into her (Wis. 7:25). Saint Jerome says of Aristotle in the *Rule*: “Hear, you too, prince of fools, although you were doubtless a great miracle in all nature, since whatever can be known naturally seems to have been infused into you.”[1] If, then, Aristotle is called a great miracle for the eminence of his natural knowledge, how much more eminently is the most holy Mary to be called a great miracle, the supreme prodigy and the most illustrious effect of God, she who conceived and bore, and carried in mind and body, the Fountain of all supernatural and natural wisdom and knowledge, the uncreated Wisdom, the Son of the eternal Father, essentially and uncircumscribably wise; and who abounded incomparably more in infused supernatural wisdom than Aristotle in natural knowledge?

Indeed so many and such great supernatural, wonderful, incomprehensible *(p. 55)* and divine things were done in this most pure and unique Mary, and she was raised so eminently above all nature, course, law and natural order of beings, as has been shown in the preceding article and often before (Arts. 4, 8, 14 ff.), that she can most illustriously be called a great miracle. Moreover, Augustine asserts in the book *On the City of God*: “The world itself is a greater miracle than any miracle that can be done in the world.” And again he says: “Man himself is a greater miracle than any miracle that can be done through man.” This seems to be said because of the wonderful and incomprehensible things that are noticed about the production, the stability, the order and the arrangement of the world, and like things that belong to it naturally; and it is judged that it must be understood in a similar way of man. How much more is the most serene and most illustrious Virgin herself a more wonderful and more excellent miracle than any miracle accomplished in

creatures through the glorious and most lovable Mary, she in whom and through whom such incomparably sublime, supernatural and divine things were done, and came together and were joined, as was touched on in the preceding article?

Hence every tongue fails in her praises, not of men only but also of angels: for neither can they marvel enough at and penetrate how great is this dignity, to be the Mother of the true God and to share parenthood with the eternal Father, and how great is her excellence. Hence all the Saints in heaven are moved with inestimable reverence toward her.

Further, certain most illustrious men in the primitive Church, converted from Judaism or paganism, while the most blessed Mary was still living in this world, considered all this as deeply as they could, and in a wonderful way regarded, marvelled at, loved and venerated her excellence; and they desired, strove and set out to see so sublime a person bodily and in her presence. So it is related of that great and divine Dionysius that he went from Greece into Judea and approached Saint John the Evangelist, so that he might show him the most blessed Mary. When John agreed, he saw her in such beauty, excellence and comeliness that, weeping abundantly for wonder and vehement joy, he fell down as if dead; and coming to himself he said that, if he had not known by reason and faith that there is another Godhead, he would not believe that anything was higher than so great a virgin, and that he could hardly think of anything more delightful than she for the rest of his life; adding that not just anyone ought to see her, because of her venerableness.

Moreover, the illustrious Ignatius, martyr and precious bishop, in a certain letter sent to the glorious apostle John, writes among other things:[2] “There are many of our women here who desire to see Mary of Jesus, and who wish to run off to you every day, to touch her and to handle her breasts, which suckled the Lord Jesus, and also to inquire about certain more secret things of hers. And as we are told by those worthy of belief, in Mary of Jesus the excellence of human nature is joined with angelic holiness. And these things have stirred up my desires, and compel me greatly to desire the sight of this (if it is lawful so to speak) prodigy and most holy marvel.” In another letter also he says: “To holy John, his Ignatius. If it is permitted me by you, I wish to go up to the region of Jerusalem and see the holy faithful who are there, especially Mary of Jesus, whom they say is to be wondered at by all and desired by all. For whom would it not delight to see her and to speak with her who bore the God of gods, if he be a friend of our religion? Alas, why do I delay? Why am I held back? Good master, bid me hasten.” Moreover, how heartily the converts to the faith desired to be consoled, taught and strengthened by the sight and the speech of the most blessed and most divine Mary shines out from the letter of Saint Ignatius to the Lady of the world, in which he says: “To Mary, Bearer of Christ, her Ignatius. You ought to have consoled and strengthened me, a neophyte and a disciple of your John: for I have heard of your Jesus things wonderful to tell, and I am astonished at what I have heard. *(p. 56)* From you, who were always joined to Him more familiarly and knew His secrets, I desire from my heart to be made more certain of what I have heard. Farewell; and may the neophytes who are with me be strengthened from you, through you and in you.”

Further, in that notable letter on the martyrdom of the holy apostles Peter and Paul which is ascribed to Saint Dionysius, it is related among other things how the converts to the faith were accustomed to say among themselves: “Let us go to Rome to see our masters and princes, Peter and Paul.” How much more are the deeper among them to be believed often to have said to one another: “Let us go into Judea to see the most glorious Mother of our God and Saviour”? Indeed Paul himself, the vessel of election, says of himself: *I went to Jerusalem to see Peter, and I tarried with him fifteen days* (Gal. 1:18). If the arch-apostle Peter was of such repute and eminence that his fellow apostle Paul came from distant places to Jerusalem out of desire to see so great a vicar of Christ, how much more is it to be believed that both the apostle Paul and very many other holy and contemplative persons of both sexes came many times to the place where the blessed Virgin was present, out of desire to behold her?

Lastly, it belongs to the praise of the most blessed and most beloved Mary that Ptolemy in the seventh book of the *Almagest*, and the astrologer Albumasar also in the *Greater Introduction*, book six, testify (and the Egyptian and Chaldean astronomers have commonly said the same) that in the first face of the sign of the Virgin there rises upon the earth a clean virgin, a maiden immaculate, beautiful in body, lovely in face and modest in bearing, with long hair, holding ears of corn in her hand; and she sits upon a spread seat, nourishing a boy and feeding him in the land of Judea. And certain of the nations call the boy Jesus, whom we Greeks (says Albumasar) call Christ.[3] Yet many difficult points could be raised about these words, which have no place here.

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[1] The *Regula monachorum* ascribed to St. Jerome is a later compilation.

[2] These letters (Ignatius to John, and to Mary) are medieval Latin forgeries, widely believed authentic in Denis's day; the story of Dionysius's visit likewise comes from late legend.

[3] Albumasar (Abu Ma'shar, d. 886), whose *Introductorium maius* was much quoted in the Middle Ages on this "virgin with the child" in the decan of Virgo.

Article XXX: On the most sweet, familiar and holy life together of Christ and His virgin Mother in this world

When I go into my house, I shall repose myself with her: for her conversation has no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness (Wis. 8:16). Let each one think how sweet, how consoling, how desirable it would be to him to see Jesus for one hour in the bearing, attire and grave manner in which He went about and lived every day in the presence of His most worthy Mother, both in His infancy and in His boyhood, youth and young manhood. How delightful it was to look upon that Boy *beautiful above the sons of men* (Ps. 44:3), most adorned with every moral grace, bearing Himself in all things in a most ordered way! And certainly, the more the most excellent Virgin Mary loved her only Son most fervently above all, both with natural and with infused spiritual love, and the more clearly she knew the excellence of her adorable Son and the more sincerely and deeply she contemplated it, the more heartily she delighted in His presence and sight, in His conversation and company, in His example and holiness; and because she knew herself so chosen beforehand, so loved beforehand, so forestalled, filled with so many and such great benefits, indeed incomparably exalted and dignified, and soon to be raised up and glorified by Him far more illustriously.

Further, the Son of the Virgin, meek and humble, seeing all things and knowing most certainly the dignity, the virtue, the most fervent charity, and also the very great and most humble reverence toward Himself of His most chosen and most pure Mother, repaid her in turn, and bore Himself toward her lovingly, familiarly and most benevolently; for never did anything happen between them by which one displeased the other or offended the other's eyes, but they constantly had a mutual and very great delight in each other and in each other's acts.

(p. 57) The blessed and most illustrious Clement relates that when the glorious prince of the Apostles, Peter, after the resurrection of Christ, recalled the most sweet conversation of Christ that he had had with Him, he could not hold back his tears.[1] If Christ lived so sweetly with the Apostles in His manhood, how most sweetly did He live with His most beloved Mother, especially in His boyhood? For, as Isaiah foretold, *He shall not be sad, nor troublesome* (Isa. 42:4). He was most eloquent and adorned with the sweetest eloquence, and delightful in speech; nor could His most kind Mother be satisfied with the wise sweetness of His words. Moreover, He was most readily subject both to His best Mother and to her minister (Luke 2:51). It is likely too that the studious and most teachable Virgin, knowing the wisdom of her Son, in whom she knew all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge to be hidden (Col. 2:3), indeed whom she knew to be essentially wise and Wisdom itself, questioned Him about many things and received instruction from Him. He dwelt until about His thirtieth year with His most tranquil Mother, to whom all the ways, the gait, the

speech, the looks and the acts of her most dear Son were supremely acceptable, pleasing and delightful; although (as was touched on above, Art. 19) the most affectionate and most loving Virgin was in turn afflicted and very greatly saddened in looking at her Son, from the consideration of His future passion; yet with that sorrow consolation was again mingled, from the consideration of her Son's resurrection and of the most abundant fruit of His saving passion. O Mary, incomparable and most pre-elect from eternity, preordained to this most familiar, most sweet, most wholesome, long, most loving and motherly dwelling with God incarnate!

Hence in the *Revelations* of Saint Birgitta the most happy Virgin Mary is said to have spoken to Birgitta herself: "Now you may ask what my Son did in the whole time of His life before He suffered. I answer that, as the Gospel says, He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51). Nor were wonders lacking to His boyhood: when creatures served Him as their Creator; when the idols fell silent and very many fell down at His coming into Egypt; when the Magi foretold that my Son would be the sign of great things to come; when also the ministries of angels appeared over Him; when no uncleanness came upon Him, nor did any tangle appear in His hair. Further, when He came to greater age, He was in continual prayer, and obediently went up with us to Jerusalem for the appointed feasts (Luke 2:42). His look and His speech were so wonderful that many who were troubled said among themselves: Let us go to Jesus, the son of Mary, by whom we can be consoled. And growing in age and in wisdom (Luke 2:52), of which He was full from the beginning, He worked with His hands at times at such things as were becoming; and He spoke to us apart words of consolation and words of the Godhead, so that we were filled with unspeakable joy. And when we were in poverty, fears and difficulties, He did not make gold and silver for us, but exhorted us to patience, and we were wonderfully preserved from those who envied us. Necessities came to us from the compassion of devout souls, sometimes from our own labour. After these things my Son would confer familiarly in the house with friends who came, about the law and its meanings and figures. He also disputed sometimes with the wise in public, so that they marvelled, saying: Behold, the son of Joseph teaches the masters; some great spirit speaks in him. Moreover, He was so obedient that when Joseph happened to say to Him, Do this or that, He did it at once: for He so hid the power of His Godhead that it could not be known except by me and sometimes by Joseph. We saw a wonderful light shining around Him many times, and we heard angelic voices singing over Him. We saw also that unclean spirits which could not be cast out by the approved exorcists of our law went out at the presence of my Son." So far there.

Moreover, what has just been touched on in this revelation, that when Christ had come to greater *(p. 58)* age He was in continual prayer, is not to be understood as if before this and in His infancy He did not pray for the salvation of the world: for from the beginning of the Incarnation He was in the full use and exercise of reason, and prayed for His own, at least mentally and secretly. And that He is said to have grown in wisdom is to be understood as regards its manifestation. Lastly, that He is said to have conferred with friends who came about the law, and to have disputed with the wise, seems credible, because the evangelist Luke says that He advanced in age and grace and wisdom before God and men (Luke 2:52), even when He was twelve years old (which is understood of wisdom and grace as regards their manifestation); and again, because he writes that at twelve years old He remained in Jerusalem, and was found in the midst of the doctors, hearing them and asking them questions, so that all were astonished at His prudence and His answers (Luke 2:42–47).

[1] From the *Clementine Recognitions*, a work of the third or fourth century wrongly ascribed to Pope St. Clement.

Article XXXI: On the beatitude of the most sweet Mary in this life

Sing praise and rejoice, O daughter of Sion: for behold, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of you (Zech. 2:10). Of the virtues, gifts, perfection and happiness of the most lovable and most serene Mary, especially as

regards her soul, we shall speak in what follows; therefore what I now wish to touch upon concerning the beatitude of the most blessed Virgin I understand of the beatitude that belongs in some way to her outward self, or to her body.

We consider it a great thing that God spoke with Moses face to face, as a man is wont to speak to his friend (Exod. 33:11); yet that speaking was through a subordinate creature, that is, through a holy angel appearing and speaking in the person of God. We think it great also that King David and certain others received divine oracles and answers almost at will (1 Sam. 23:2; 30:8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19, 23). How much more illustrious was it that the incomparable Virgin Mary had, not an angel only or an envoy, but the very Lord of the angels, the true, almighty and immense God, living with her, speaking with her, counselling, consoling and teaching her? And she had Him joined to her not only as God and Lord, but also as son and friend.

Further, if (as Scripture says) *blessed are they that saw Elijah, and were honoured with his friendship* (Ecclus. 48:11), how much more blessed, more blessed still and most blessed is this Mary, who saw the God of Elijah constantly and clearly before her eyes, indeed joyfully with the eyes of mind and body, and had with Him a mutual friendship most singular, most intense and altogether most familiar? Moreover, not without reason do we call blessed Martha, whom Christ chose as His hostess, and Mary her sister, whom He chose as His most devout hearer, and Lazarus also their brother, whom He chose as His friend (Luke 10:38–39; John 11:5). Is not this supreme and unique Mary, then, to be called incomparably more blessed, whom God eternally chose beforehand as His most loving mother, as His constant and long-time companion in the home, as His daily and most intimate hearer, as His most special and most fervent friend, and as His singular and most spiritual spouse? Further, we rightly commend those excellent women, Joanna, Susanna and the like, who are read in the Gospel to have followed Christ in mind and body and to have ministered to Him of their substance (Luke 8:3). How most commendable, then, is this best and most sweet Virgin Mary, who not only provided by her labours what was necessary for the sustenance of herself and of God her Son, but also gave Him from her most pure blood the matter of His incarnation, and reared Him with the virginal milk of her most sacred breasts?

Moreover, in the palaces of emperors and kings those are held in no small esteem who stand at the side of the emperor or king himself, who share his secrets and are occupied about his person. How, then, shall we be able sufficiently or worthily to call blessed, or to marvel at, the most divine and most excellent *(p. 59)* Mary, who stood inseparably and nearest of all beside the King of heaven, the Master of the angelic spirits, the Ruler of all things, with motherly authority, supreme and inviolable familiarity, most pleasing service and most perfect charity, as the Psalmist foretold: *The queen stood at your right hand in gilded clothing* (Ps. 44:10), that is, in a spiritual garment adorned with the fervour of charity! Again, the queen of Sheba, having seen the wisdom of Solomon and his excellences, said to him: *Blessed are your men, and blessed are your servants, who stand before you always and hear your wisdom* (1 Kings 10:8). How much more blessed is the most glorious Mary, who stood constantly before the eternal Wisdom itself, truly made flesh from the Virgin herself, and heard His most wise words continually!

Moreover, since joy is the expansion of the soul in the conception of a good, and arises from the union of a power with a fitting object, who will be able to conceive, to tell or to describe how greatly you rejoiced, O most pure and most affectionate Mary, when you saw daily walking, standing and sitting before you your only-begotten Son, who according to His Godhead is of wholly infinite goodness, and according to the nature He assumed is better than every creature; and when you saw His ways and gestures and heard His words, He who was so well known to you, so dear, so munificent, so most familiar, by whom you knew yourself so chosen beforehand, so supremely loved, so honoured and to be honoured with incomparable benefits? Lastly, since the beatitude of a creature is its union with the Creator, how wonderful and most special, O best Mary, was your beatitude and glory even in this life, in which you were so incomparably joined to your Son, true God, and made one with Him, and lived with Him so most familiarly! How acceptable and joyful to you was

the presence, the life together and the communion of your so beloved and only, so beautiful and so virtuous Son; whom, the more you loved Him, the more you rejoiced in His beauty, His goodness and your union with Him!

Indeed, if (as Scripture says) *a wise son is the glory of his father* (Prov. 10:1), how greatly you, best of parents, gloried in your Son, essentially wise, who is infinite Wisdom as God, and according to the nature He assumed was filled with such wisdom that the whole capacity of His created intellect was entirely filled! We see that parents rejoice greatly in offspring well disposed in natural gifts and of good character, hoping that they will be brought or promoted to great things; and if a parent of modest station learns that his son is to be promoted to be a bishop, he glories not a little in him. You, therefore, O happiest of all mothers, rejoiced most vehemently in your Son, who was most beautifully adorned with all the gifts of nature and grace at the very limit of excellence; whom, while He lived with you so humbly, so reverently, obediently, lovingly and familiarly, you knew most certainly was to be held in the highest honour throughout the whole world and was to rule in heaven and on earth, indeed already had all power in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18). O how consoling and delightful it was for you to be, to live, to share and to dwell with Him whom you saw bearing Himself toward you so lovingly and sweetly, so most humbly, as a son and obediently, He who is the happiness of the angels, the Power and Wisdom of God the Father (1 Cor. 1:24), God, your Creator, Lord and Saviour, O most renowned Lady, O most beautiful Virgin, O most loving Mother! Did ever father or mother in this world have such consolation and delight in their offspring as you, blessed Mary, in your only and so illustrious Child?

Article XXXII: On the flowery little bed of the heavenly Bridegroom and of His singular spouse, the virgin Mother

Our little bed is flourishing (Song 1:15). Christ in His infancy behaved in many things like other infants, especially in receiving *(p. 60)* from His virgin Mother motherly services, milk for His nourishment, and the things that loving and affectionate mothers are wont to give to their beloved little ones. Further, Christ, when He had come to man's estate, was accustomed to receive His disciples who came to Him with a holy kiss. Much more is it to be believed that in His infancy and boyhood He often kissed His most sweet, most beloved and most holy Mother, who was still a young girl and a young woman. That most affectionate Mother and most chaste Virgin also, at the fitting time, laid the only pledge of her womb beside her in her little bed, and then, out of most sincere love, embraced and kissed Him with the utmost reverence and seemliness; and Him whom she now embraced as her son she now adored as true God. O how flowery that little bed, in which Holiness itself, the Holy of Holies, the fountain of all cleanness, and His most spiritual Mother rested together! Was not one such night better, more desirable and spiritually more delightful than thousands of the nights which other women spend with their husbands? Who would not wish to go without all the delights of the world and of the flesh for ever for one night of this kind?

We know, O best and most perfect Virgin Mary, that you did not love the flesh of your Son with sensual love nor carnally, but altogether most purely; and yet you loved it intensely with natural and spiritual love. Hence from the bodily contact, the kissing and the embracing of your most beloved Son you were kindled with spiritual affections, and your mind was raised to the contemplation of your Son's Godhead; you most wisely called to mind the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God accomplished from you, and you considered the benefits shown you from above; and so, from the recollection of these things, you gave and offered most heartfelt thanks to the Almighty born of you, indeed to the whole superblessed Trinity. So in you, O most divine and most purified Mother, there was no place for what your Only-begotten said to His disciples, who were still held and affected by a somewhat sensual love toward Him: *If I go not, the Paraclete will not come to you* (John 16:7).

O most lovable and most happy Virgin Mary, with what devotion, with how great tranquillity and spiritual joy you went to your little bed, to embrace and kiss in it, not Joseph the carpenter, but the adorable boy Jesus, the Maker of the whole world, whose touch delighted you spiritually, intensely and most purely! So those excellently heroic men Paul and Antony, Barlaam and Josaphat, and the patriarch Jacob also and his son Joseph (Gen. 46:29), embracing one another, kissed each other, and could scarcely have their fill of the spiritual embraces they longed for. O blessed and most lovable Mary, with how little sleep you were content! With what lofty considerations, what fiery affections, what interior and divine exercises you occupied yourself in your little bed, and most purely exulted in your little Child present with you, a most delightful and most beautiful object!

Article XXXIII: On the joyful table of the King Messiah and of His virgin Mother

Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat the fruit of His apple trees (Song 5:1). Of the primitive holy Church gathered together in Jerusalem it is written how, when they had received the Holy Spirit, those faithful *took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God* (Acts 2:46–47). How much more is it to be believed that the most blessed Mary, most full of the Holy Spirit, with her Only-begotten, once weaned from milk and taken from the breast, took her food most soberly with spiritual joy and dovelike simplicity? Was it not a delightful spectacle to sit at the meal with the Only-begotten of God and her own, and to take food and drink with Him from the same little dish? And it seems piously to be believed that that most humble and most obedient Son often *(p. 61)* prepared the table for His most worthy Mother, set on it what was to be set, and cleared away what was to be cleared, as He also said afterwards: *I am in the midst of you as one that serves* (Luke 22:27). And just as after His last supper He offered a hymn and thanksgiving (Matt. 26:30), so He is believed daily at table to have given the blessing and returned thanks. O great Lady, O Queen of heaven, with whom, as she eats, the King of kings and God of gods eats and whom He serves!

Article XXXIV: On the bodily beauty of the blessed and glorious Mary

How beautiful you are, my love, how beautiful you are! (Song 4:1). It is to be believed that the most holy Mary was such, and so beautiful, as the greatest astronomers write that a virgin is born in the first face of the sign of the Virgin: namely, that she was a clean virgin, a maiden immaculate, beautiful in body, lovely in face and modest in bearing, as is plain from what was said above in the twenty-ninth article. Further, just as it befitted the Author of nature, the fountain of all beauty, the restorer of the corrupted and the reformer of the deformed, to be born of an inviolate virgin, wholly incorrupt, so it befitted Him to be born of a beautiful one, altogether immaculate.

Further, in the Scriptures persons of both sexes are commended for bodily beauty, who used it well and virtuously, especially since it is written of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: *Beautiful in form above the sons of men* (Ps. 44:3). Rebecca also, Rachel, Judith and Esther are praised in the Scriptures for their exceptional beauty (Gen. 24:16; 29:17; Judith 10:4, 14; 11:19; Esther 2:7, 15). Likewise the most sacred virgins Catherine, Ursula, Agatha, Agnes, Barbara, Dorothy, Margaret and many others are praised in their *Legends* for bodily beauty. Hence it is judged that one should believe that this most excellent Mary was, and is, more beautiful even in body than all those virgins.

Moreover, each one is the more commended for contempt of the world and for virginity preserved, the more fit he seems, by natural disposition, for the things of the world, and the more desirable for the delights of the flesh. In order, then, that the most serene Virgin Mary might be the more commendable for her contempt of all worldly things, and likewise for her most pure chastity, it was fitting that she should be altogether most beautiful and in all natural things best disposed in her kind. For just as incontinence is more blameworthy in the ill-favoured, so continence is more praiseworthy in the beautiful. For beauty is a fitting but rare

companion of modesty.

Further, Albert writes on this matter (*Mariale,* q. 15): “There is an order in natural things and in human bodies. For nature makes something beautiful, something more beautiful. Therefore something will be most beautiful according to nature. For nature has a limit as far as which it can go, and not beyond. Either, then, it will reach that limit somewhere, or nowhere. If nowhere, then it will fall short in respect of its operations, which is against the Philosopher, who says: Nature does not abound in superfluities, nor fail in necessities. Therefore nature has its highest somewhere. Now a natural body is sometimes formed by a natural cause and body, nature itself working naturally, immediately and of itself; but sometimes a body is formed by God working supernaturally. Therefore there is a highest in the human body somewhere, God working; and a highest somewhere, nature working. And as nature working is immediately under God working, likewise the highest of nature working is immediately under the highest of God acting. Just as, therefore, the body of Christ, which God formed supernaturally by Himself, is the most perfect and most beautiful in nature that could be made according to the state of the way, so the body of the most blessed Virgin, ordained immediately to this, was the most beautiful according to the state of the way that nature working of itself can make. Therefore we say that, just as our Lord Jesus Christ was *beautiful in form above the* (p. 62) *sons of men* (Ps. 44:3), so the most glorious Virgin was most beautiful and fairest among the daughters of men, and that she had the highest and most perfect in beauty that could be in a mortal female body according to the state of the way, nature working.” So far Albert.

From these things it follows that the most sacred Virgin Mary was more beautiful in body than Esther herself, of whom we read: *Esther was exceedingly fair, and her incredible beauty made her appear agreeable and amiable in the eyes of all* (Esther 2:15); likewise that she was more beautiful than Judith, of whom it is said in her book: *She was exceedingly beautiful to behold, and they considered her face, and were amazed, and said: There is not such another woman upon the earth in look, in beauty, and in sense of words* (Judith 8:7; 11:19); and likewise that she was more beautiful than the daughters of blessed Job, of whom it is related: *There were not found in all the earth women so beautiful as the daughters of Job* (Job 42:15).

Moreover, according to the teaching of the Philosopher, the beauty of the body consists in three things, namely in an elegant size of body, in a fitting arrangement and proportion of the members to one another, and in a lively and lovely colour spread over it. Therefore in these the most worthy Virgin Mary excelled after her Son. For as a rule like begets like, and great begets great, unless error or impotence hinders it, or it happens otherwise by way of accident. And the best colour is mingled of white and red.

Further, it must be noted that the bodily beauty of the best Mary was wonderfully enhanced by moral beauty, which consists in the composure and graciousness of manners and acts, in the bearing of the face and in outward gravity: in all of which the most divine, most upright and most grave Virgin Mary shone forth most greatly. The interior beauty also of her mind, gratuitous and supernatural, was so overflowing that in a wonderful way it shone out in her face, her gait, her action and her outward manners. Hence Honorius the anchorite discoursed: “The whole body of this blessed Virgin is rightly venerable, always lovable to the supreme Creator by a singular prerogative, and unceasingly honourable to all angels and men. For the whole body of the virgin Mother was beautiful with an incomparable beauty, gracious with an inestimable sweetness, and in its whole disposition fittingly and wonderfully glorious in the good pleasure of God. For she was all fair, and there was never any stain in her (Song 4:7). All her vigour, all her understanding and sense was ruled by the Holy Spirit, by whom she was filled, not with a divided but with an entire grace.”

Article XXXV: On the special excellence of the harmony and constitution of the most worthy Mary

Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved? (Song 8:5). From what has been said it is evident that, as the most blessed Virgin Mary was most beautiful in body, so she was also of a most noble and most delicate constitution. Indeed it was most fitting that she should be of the best constitution, from whose substance and most pure blood was to be taken and formed the body that was to be united hypostatically to the Author of nature and the Lord of all creation; just as that body too had to be illustrious and best in every disposition and constitution. Moreover, those who are soft and delicate of flesh are apt of mind and of good character; and goodness of constitution disposes to knowledge and the virtues. And it was fitting that the most chosen Virgin, the Mother of eternal Wisdom, should be quick of mind, teachable, of an illustrious character, and most apt for the perfection of all the virtues. Therefore after Christ she was of the most illustrious constitution, and by natural disposition quiet, modest, gentle, chaste and silent.

Further, since likeness is a cause of love, between those who are very alike in constitution and manners there is usually a greater *(p. 63)* and more natural love. Therefore it was fitting that between Christ and His virgin Mother there should be a most similar constitution, just as there was love not only infused but also natural and special. Moreover, the life together and the conversation of those who share more in goodness of constitution and in the excellence of their inborn character is sweeter and more harmonious. And the life together and conversation of the Son of God and His most excellent Mother in this world had to be most sweet and most harmonious. Therefore in the balance of her humours the blessed and most serene Virgin Mary was most like her Son.

Further, as the constitution of Christ was most noble, so it was fitting that He should be nourished in His infancy with a proportioned milk. The milk of the virginal breasts of the God-bearing Mother, therefore, was of the best disposition; and this requires eminence of good constitution. Therefore this unique Virgin, through whom all things were restored and reformed, who conceived the God of nature, was to be adorned sublimely in her sex with every natural perfection. Nor was it fitting that the infant and boy Jesus, most delicate and of most noble constitution, should be handled and reared, embraced, kissed and held close except by a virgin mother most elegantly adorned in the gifts of nature and of grace; of whom He Himself testifies most truly in the Canticles: *You are all fair, my love, and there is no stain in you* (Song 4:7). For from the sole of her foot to the crown of her head there was nothing at all in her, either in soul or in body, unbecoming, reprehensible or unseemly; but all was formed by the compass of divine wisdom, most beautifully trimmed of every superfluity, wrought most fully and most beautifully. For as it was fitting that the humanity of Christ, because of its personal union with God, should shine forth with every perfection of nature and grace at the very limit of excellence, so the person of His Mother had, after the humanity of her Only-begotten, to be so adorned in all things; since after the hypostatic union with God there is no other union so near to God as the union of the Mother of God with God her Son.

Article XXXVI: Whether any supernatural and sensible radiance appeared in the face of the most blessed Mary, and a sweet fragrance in her most sacred body

You are beautiful, my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem (Song 6:3). In the apocryphal little book *On the Birth and Life of the Blessed Mary* it is related that when she was three years old she walked with so grave a step and spoke so perfectly that it was as if she were thirty years old; she was so given to prayer, and her face so shone, that scarcely anyone could look into her face. But these things are reckoned apocryphal; although, as was touched on above (Art. 12), it is judged credible that the use of reason was anticipated in her, and that she was strengthened supernaturally in body and soul for divine service.

Further, the disposition of the heart is wont to shine out in the face, especially in the eyes. For this reason Solomon declares in the Proverbs: *As the faces of them that look therein shine in the water, so the hearts of*

men are laid open to the wise (Prov. 27:19). In Ecclesiasticus also we read: *A man is known by his look, and a wise man, when you meet him, is known by his countenance* (Ecclus. 19:26). Hence in Ecclesiastes we have: *The wisdom of a man shines in his face* (Eccl. 8:1). Therefore, the more abundant the infusions of divine charisms with which the most lovable and most gracious Virgin Mary was forestalled while still a little child and a young girl, the more this very abundance shone out in her face and look; and the more excellently and abundantly she advanced daily in all grace and virtue, in all the light of speculative contemplation, in the splendour of mystical theology, in interior purity and angelic holiness, the more evidently that interior, heavenly and divine luminous sincerity appeared *(p. 64)* in the face of the most sacred Mary, and (as certain great doctors also say) visibly shone forth. Yet I think that a radiance of this kind was tempered by divine moderation, so that it might be bearable in dealing with men, and so that her excellence might not be revealed too much before the fitting time.

Further, we read of many holy Fathers that they bore and showed an angelic face, and were adorned with a certain radiant loveliness in their countenance, by which they were recognized as saints by those who saw them; and they in turn were seen to bear a fiery, light-streaming face; and when they came out into public from the secrecy of their contemplations and the fervour of their prayers they seemed to be flooded with a certain rosy colour and a divine light. Why should it not be permitted to suppose such things far more excellently of the most holy, most enlightened and most gracious Mary, who beyond all others was often rapt into the riches of the glory of God and swallowed up in the abyss of the supremely radiant Godhead?

Moreover, certain of the holy Fathers are read to have lived so most abstinently and most soberly that their holy little bodies, while still animated and living on earth, gave out a sweet odour. Likewise the fragrance of perfect chastity can overflow into the body. Why, then, should it not be thought credible that the most pure, virginal and supremely chaste flesh of the most virtuous Virgin, which never exceeded in food or drink (which cannot be said of the Fathers, however holy), obtained a sweet odour, especially since she was of the best constitution and always lived most orderly and very naturally? Moreover, from the constant contact of the divine Child and from carrying Him in her womb she was greatly deified; and she who carried in her womb for so many months the Fountain, Giver and Cause of all sweetness, and for so many years handled, cherished and embraced Him, could certainly draw from this no small sweetness of mind and body, and the interior sweetness could overflow and give fragrance in the body. For, as Ambrose said excellently, the incomprehensible Son worked incomprehensibly in His Mother.

Further, I think that this luminousness and fragrance of the virginal flesh of the glorious Mary, of which we have spoken, increased after her Son's ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit: so that, the Son having been fully glorified in heaven, the Mother of cleanness also might gradually obtain a certain glorification on earth, and the sublimity of her holiness might become known to all who looked upon her, for the honour of the Almighty and the edification of those who saw her. Hence it is rightly believed that from the mere sight of the most holy Mary very many Jews and gentiles were pierced with compunction, astonished and converted.

Article XXXVII: At what age the most gracious Virgin conceived Christ

Our sister is little, and has no breasts: what shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to? (Song 8:8). Very many, even learned men, have said that the most sacred Mary conceived the Son of God about the fifteenth year of her age. But Albert argues about this (*Mariale*, q. 14), and holds as truer, that she conceived at the age at which she was perfect in bodily stature and size, and that she was betrothed at about that same age. And among other things he argues thus: "From the body of the most blessed Virgin was formed the body of Christ, most perfect according to nature: because from such a body such a body is formed, and from one more such, one more such. But a body is not most perfect according to nature before the age of twenty-five years; therefore the body of the most blessed Virgin had to be at least twenty-five

years old when she conceived Christ. So, supposing that in the most blessed Virgin there was every fitness, both on the part of nature and on the part of grace, for her becoming the Mother of God, we believe that she conceived God at such an age that she was perfect in bodily stature *(p. 65)* and size, and that she was betrothed at about the same measure of age, less as much time as betrothal usually precedes marriage, namely two months." So far Albert.

Notwithstanding his words, I think it truer that the most worthy Virgin conceived about her fifteenth year. Nor is the argument brought forward for the opposite view conclusive, since experience teaches that great and very strong men are often born of young women not yet sixteen years old. And granted that this would happen according to nature, yet in the glorious and most blessed Virgin Mary it could happen otherwise, and it was fitting that it should: because in her all was above nature, and she received the power of conceiving and begetting from the Holy Spirit. Further, the Jews were not accustomed to put off the marriages of their daughters so long; and (as was touched on above, Art. 12) the most sweet and most loving Virgin Mary was offered in the temple, and when the time was fulfilled at which the virgins serving in the temple were wont to be betrothed, the most happy Virgin was sent home from the temple with the others and was betrothed. This also agrees with certain expositors, who say on that verse of the Canticles, *Our sister is little, and has no breasts*, that the most chosen Virgin Mary conceived the Son of God at a tender age.

Article XXXVIII: That what we assert concerning the incarnation of the Son of God and the excellence of the most holy Mary does not detract from the Godhead

God, who is rich in mercy, for His exceeding charity with which He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together in Christ, by whose grace you are saved (Eph. 2:4–5). To the children of this world, to faithless heretics, Jews, Saracens and the other children of perdition estranged from the light of faith, it has seemed injurious to God, and a detraction from His excellence, perfection and glory, that we say that the Only-begotten of God, true God, conceived and born in time of a woman, lay in a womb not free from natural impurities, was circumcised, suffered and was crucified, received such lowly names, and came forth through the gate of His mother's womb. Hence certain heretics, such as Ebion and Helvidius, denied that she was a virgin. Others, such as Cerinthus, Photinus and Dioscorus, asserted that she bore not God but a mere man.[1] Others imagined that she bore a god indeed, but not the true God, as did Arius and Eunomius, affirming that Christ is a mere creature and yet the Creator of heaven and earth. Others falsely said that she gave birth not to a true man but to a phantom, as did Manes. Others, blaspheming, said that the Son of God took nothing from her, but only passed through her as through a conduit, as did Valentinus.

But the Catholic faith condemns all these. And certainly they were blinded by the darkness of vice, not looking sincerely at what God abhors and what He loves. Is He not truly present everywhere? Does He not penetrate all things and enter into the very essences of things, and is He not more inward and nearer to all things than an essential part is to its whole? It is not, then, natural impurities or material uncleanness that He abhors, but the impurities of the vices and the spiritual stains contrary to grace and virtue. Further, human flesh obedient to reason, adorned with chastity, the instrument of virtuous acts, He accepts as a holy victim and inhabits as His temple, as the Apostle says: *Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit?* (1 Cor. 6:19). And likewise: *Glorify and bear God in your body* (1 Cor. 6:20). We see with how many miracles He makes wonderful and honours the relics of the Saints. If He so honours dead bodies, how much does He love and esteem them while they are still animated and given to holy exercises! The things that we have from natural institution and divine ordering He does not spurn; and things purely natural, or unclean only in a bodily sense, He does not *(p. 66)* detest. Indeed, the frailer a woman is in sex and the weaker in nature, the more glorious she is before God, the more victorious and the more acceptable to the heavenly Bridegroom, if she has lived holily, chastely and spiritually.

These things, then, are to be looked at with a clean eye of the mind; and let us contemplate the most sacred and most spiritual Mary with due reverence and cleanness, and the mysteries of Christ likewise. For truly the Apostle said: *All things are clean to the clean; but to them that are defiled and to unbelievers nothing is clean, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess that they know God, but in their works they deny Him* (Titus 1:15–16).

Moreover, we so believe God to have been made flesh, born of the Virgin and circumscribed in the humanity He assumed, that we confess His Godhead or divine nature to be eternally unchangeable and unchanged, unlimited, impassible and immortal. Hence to be born of a virgin, to be brought up, to grow, to suffer, to be crucified, to be buried, to be circumscribed and the like belong to Him by reason of the nature He assumed, without injury or detraction, change or harm to His own Godhead and to the assuming Person in His own nature. Indeed, in the blessed incarnation of the eternal Word, in His most pure nativity from the most unblemished and most holy Virgin, in His saving passion, His infinite goodness, loving-kindness, charity, condescension, liberality, omnipotence, wisdom and justice are ineffably, most beautifully, most profoundly and most evidently represented, shine forth and are commended, and can be contemplated, as was touched on above (Art. 15) and shown more clearly elsewhere (t. 36, p. 34C). To the praise and glory of the Almighty, who is God sublime and blessed above all things. Amen.

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[1] Denis gives the medieval list of heresies. Dioscorus of Alexandria was in fact a Monophysite, the opposite error to the one named here; Denis's grouping is that of his sources.

Book II: On the Excellence of the Wisdom, Knowledge and Prudence of the Most Holy Soul of the Virgin Mary

Prooemium

(p. 67) But where is wisdom to be found, and where is the place of understanding? (Job 28:12). That wisdom is something most noble is clear from this, that God Himself is frequently called Wisdom in the Scriptures. For He is the uncreated, eternal and immeasurable Wisdom, from whom, as from a fountain, flows all wisdom, all knowledge and all truth that is not He Himself. Again, that wisdom is something most worthy appears from this, that Christ the Lord, the Wisdom of God the Father (1 Cor. 1:24), taught that our beatitude consists in the act of wisdom, nay, that the act of wisdom is our beatitude, when He spoke to the Father: *Now this is eternal life: that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent* (John 17:3). And since likeness is the cause of love, the most high God, the fountain of wisdom, loves no one, cherishes and approves no one except the wise man, that is, the one who has saving wisdom (which is a gift of the Holy Spirit), according to that word of the book of Wisdom: *For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom* (Wis. 7:28). Hence it is written of those who lack the light of this wisdom: *And because they had not wisdom, they perished through their folly* (Bar. 3:28).

For this reason the only-begotten Son of God came into this world, that He might communicate this wisdom to us and lead us into its act, that is, to the saving knowledge of the Godhead, as the holy apostle John declares in his first canonical Epistle: *And we know*, he says, *that the Son of God is come: and He hath given us understanding that we may know the true God* (1 John 5:20). Finally, this is what He Himself, the Judge of all, said at the time of His passion, standing before a man as judge: *For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth* (John 18:37). Hence Gregory says: The Lord made the nature of angels and of men in order that they might know Him. He willed, indeed, that we should be partakers of His beatitude. But what else is His immense and eternal beatitude than the full, perfect and comprehensive knowledge of Himself, which He created us to share? By the sharing of it the rational and intellectual creature is most excellently likened to Him, as the holy John testifies in his first Epistle: *Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God; and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He shall appear,* (p. 68) *we shall be like to Him: because we shall see Him as He is* (1 John 3:2).

Therefore the Creator of all things has commanded that we strive to be conformed to Him in the present life through wisdom and the virtues, so that, when the course of this life is finished, we may be brought to that full and beatifying conformity with Him. To recover this beatitude, to merit it and to give it to us, the eternal, uncreated and unbegotten Wisdom of God the Father, the eternal Word, the Only-begotten of God, deigned to become man and the son of a virgin, and to dwell among men (John 1:14; Bar. 3:38), so that through the humanity taken from the blessed and most glorious Virgin He might instruct us, redeem us and save us. He instructed her, chiefly and first of all, concerning His mysteries and His Godhead, and most graciously filled with saving wisdom her whom from eternity He had chosen beforehand for His Mother.

Concerning the praises of this most illustrious Virgin, eternally most sweet, the first little book has treated of the things that chiefly concern the most sacred and deified little body of so great a Virgin. Now it remains, in this second treatise, to discourse on the praises of the same Virgin, who is to be glorified, that belong to her most sincere and most pure mind: that is, on her wisdom and knowledge, on her prudence, skill and diligence, on the height of her contemplations, and on her daily progress in all these things. And first of all something must be set down concerning the eminence of her purity and the fullness of her grace.

Article I: How the saying of St Anselm is to be understood, which says that the most excellent and most loving Mary shone with so great a purity that no

greater can be conceived under God

And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty (Ps. 44:12). It is altogether certain that it was most fitting that the God of immeasurable purity, who is essentially and uncircumscribably holy and is infinite holiness, should be born of none but a most pure virgin. And just as it was fitting that the humanity to be hypostatically assumed by the eternal Word should be adorned and filled with such fullness of grace, wisdom, virtues and gifts, nay, even of the beatific vision, that the capacity of a rational creature could receive no more; so too it was fitting that that most happy Maiden, who was chosen beforehand and taken up by the eternal and adorable Word to be His true mother, should shine and be adorned with such purity that, after the humanity of Christ, no greater purity can belong to, be present in, or be granted to any rational or intellectual creature.

But from this it seems that the saying of Anselm cannot be upheld. For if, or rather since, the purity of Christ's humanity was greater, and ineffably greater, than the purity of the blessed Virgin, she did not shine with so great a purity that no greater can be conceived under God, since a greater than hers exists under God, and is known to exist, in the humanity of Christ. For the same reason it seems not to be true, as Albert says, that the purity of the most sacred Virgin was so great that a pure creature could not be capable of a greater purity; for the humanity of Christ is a pure creature, whose flesh was and is purer and holier than the flesh of the most sweet Virgin, and His soul also is purer and holier than the soul of the most excellent Virgin.

Furthermore, the most excellent virgin Mary was a wayfarer, and as long as she lived here in the body she advanced daily; therefore, when she conceived and brought forth the Son of God, she did not shine with as great a purity as afterwards. Moreover, on the holy day of Pentecost she received the Holy Spirit together with the glorious Apostles, and there is no doubt that she received Him more abundantly than any of them; therefore she then grew mightily in purity and in all wisdom and virtue. Furthermore, the purity of the Mother of all cleanness became greater and more glorious when she was led from the way and from faith to the homeland and to sight, that is, to the beatific vision; for from that time she contemplated the most blessed and super-*(p. 69)*blessed Trinity ineffably more clearly. Therefore in this life she did not shine with so great a purity that no greater can be conceived under God.

Besides, according to the teachings of the divine Dionysius (*On the Divine Names*, ch. 7), the highest member of a lower order has a great agreement with the lowest member of a higher order, yet it does not attain to its perfection or dignity. Since, then, the most glorious virgin Mary was a wayfarer in this world, although the highest of all, it seems that while she was on earth she did not reach the purity of the lowest angel, especially since the Saints in the homeland are united more nearly and more clearly to the uncreated light and fountain of cleanness than are wayfarers. Further, since the purity of the Creator is infinitely greater than all created purity, innumerable degrees of purity can be imagined or understood between the purity of God and the purity of the most blessed Virgin. God also, since He is of unlimited and altogether infinite power, can produce something more perfect than any created form. He could likewise have prolonged the life of the most glorious Mary in this world; and had this been done, she would have advanced in purity. He could also have added to her as much purity as Peter or Paul had. Therefore it does not seem that she reached the highest degree of purity under God.

Many objections of this kind can be raised, and they chiefly require that it be explained how the saying of Anselm quoted above is to be understood. Accordingly it must be considered that this authority of Anselm is explained by different people in various ways. For some explain it by saying that no greater purity or sanctification than Mary's can be conceived under God, and under Christ, who is God; because Christ was conceived without original sin, and the blessed Virgin, although according to these people she was conceived in original sin, was nevertheless soon cleansed from it, not indeed in the same instant in which her soul was created, but soon after. This answer, however, seems superficial, and it especially displeases those who affirm, and rightly, that the most blessed Virgin was not conceived in original sin.

Others speak more fully, saying that the most sacred Mary was sanctified in the womb by a singular grace, which removed and took away original guilt and the proneness to sin, not only mortally but also venially. And they add that there were three sanctifications of the Mother who bore Christ. Her first sanctification was in her mother's womb, and it had three effects: namely, the expiation of original guilt, the infusion of grace, and such a restraint of the *fomes* that she could not be led into any sin, although the *fomes* remained according to its essence. The second sanctification of the glorious Virgin was in the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit and in the conception of the Son of God; and this added two effects to the three already named, namely the complete extinction of the *fomes* and confirmation in good. Thus, whereas before she was able only not to sin, now she could not sin. Her third sanctification was in the indwelling of the Son of God, who remained nine months in the Virgin's womb; and this sanctification added two effects to all those already mentioned. One was that it took away all the dispositions of the *fomes*: just as sometimes a disease has been cured, and yet some remnants of it still remain to be cured. The second was the consecration or dedication of the most holy Virgin precisely to divine things, so that it was impossible for her to be fitted even for human or worldly uses that are lawful, for example those of marriage; for then not only her mind but her body also shone with the light of the Godhead.

So, by the first sanctification, the most blessed virgin Mary excelled in purity all the baptized, in whom the *fomes* is not so far restrained that there does not remain in them a proneness to sin mortally and venially. By the second sanctification she excelled the purity that Adam had before the fall, because in the state of innocence he was not confirmed in good. By that confirmation she also excelled the angels, who, although they are confirmed in good, yet can neither increase in their substantial reward, *(p. 70)* nor decrease; but the most blessed Mary could advance, and could not fall away. Finally, in the purity of sanctification which she received from the coming upon her of the Holy Spirit and from the presence of God, she excels every creature. For since to be the Mother of God is the highest dignity that can be communicated to a pure creature, the grace disposing her for this must be greater than every grace granted to a pure creature.

Let these things be touched upon according to the position of these authors; which position likewise displeases those who affirm that God's most beloved one was not conceived in original sin. There are also some things contained in their position which I have passed over, because they lack either truth or certainty; nay, even some of the things that have been said according to them are open to objection.

Albert, moreover, in his book *On the Praises of the Most Happy Virgin*, speaks on these matters as follows (*Mariale*, q. 139): This purity of our Lady is, I do not say a distance from original sin, but a separation from it, and a deiform approach to the first and uncreated light, as far as is possible for a pure creature. Hence, in reality, this purity is nothing else than the blotting out of original sin, the extinction of the *fomes*, and the ultimate perfecting of the gratuitous virtues, that is, their highest and ultimate perfection. We grant also that in the most blessed Virgin, according to the state of the way, grace was more deiform than in the angels; and I say this as to the substance, that is, the essence of grace, not as to its act or operation, just as must be said also of her charity. We say likewise that the blessed Virgin ascended to this purity in its highest degree by four steps. For she was purified first through her sanctification in the womb; secondly, in the exercise of the virtues; thirdly, in the coming upon her of the Holy Spirit; fourthly, in the conception of the Son of God. Thus far Albert. In these words he also presupposes that the most worthy Mary was conceived in original sin. On this matter I refrain from speaking, for a reasonable cause.

Now, in answer to the principal question, I think it must be said that the purity granted to the most blessed Mary in this world was so great that to no pure creature subsisting in created being has a greater been granted, nay, not even an equal. By this is solved the objection made concerning the humanity or soul of Christ. For that humanity, although in itself it was a pure creature, was nevertheless never subsisting in created being; but in the same moment it was produced and assumed into the hypostatic being of the eternal Word, and was made to subsist in Him. Moreover, considering on the one side the infinite dignity and

excellence of Christ according to His Godhead, and on the other the lowliness and nothingness of the most blessed Virgin, which she had of herself as a creature made out of nothing, her purity and holiness were such and so great that it was not fitting that a greater, or an equal, should be given to a pure creature subsisting in created being. Nay, her purity and holiness exceeded the purity and holiness of all other rational and intellectual creatures, especially as regards the habit, the essence and the reception of purity and grace, of wisdom, virtues and gifts, so far as it was fitting in these things that the Mother of the true God should be preferred to His ministers.

Nevertheless, actual contemplation and the actual fervour of love were not in her so excellently, at least not continuously, as in the Blessed who enjoy God unceasingly. None the less, the contemplation and love with which the most holy Mary contemplated and loved God in this life were so acceptable to God, and so efficacious, virtuous, precious and meritorious, that by them she merited to be raised in the homeland to a more eminent and clearer contemplation of the Godhead, and to a more ardent and more perfect love and enjoyment of Him, than any of the Saints or the Blessed has in that heavenly kingdom. And by these things the solution of all the objections is clear. Of the daily and unceasing progress of the most sweet Mary in every grace, virtue and gift, it will be spoken below.

Article II: How the fullness of grace was in the glorious Virgin

(p. 71) Hail, full of grace (Luke 1:28), the angel said to Mary. Many theologians teach that gratifying grace, or the grace that makes one pleasing, is really distinct from charity and from every other virtue. And according to their teaching it must be said that the most sweet virgin Mary was full of habitual gratifying grace, which perfected the essence of her soul and placed it in a supernatural and deiform being, fit for meriting. But there are diverse and manifold degrees of fullness. For the holy Gabriel foretold of the blessed and great John, while he was not yet born from the womb: *And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb* (Luke 1:15). Of him it is certain that afterwards he was made much fuller of grace, and that he grew in grace until the last day of his life in this world. Likewise it is written of the Apostles: *And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost* (Acts 2:4). Of them it is clear that from the day of that filling they advanced daily in charity and grace, in the gifts and in the other virtues.

So, then, the most chosen virgin Mary was filled with the Holy Spirit and with grace in her mother's womb much more abundantly than St John the Baptist. And from the time when she began to use her reason, she grew constantly, daily, in grace, wisdom and virtue; and so, by continual interior exercise, she had been made full of immense grace when the angel Gabriel, sent to her, said: *Hail, full of grace* (Luke 1:28). Yet even then she was not so full of grace that she was not soon to be filled again with an ineffably more ample grace, a greater charity, and a more abounding measure of every virtue and gift, through the increase, growth or advance and the completion of these, and through the addition or bestowal of certain divine supernatural charisms. Hence the angel said to her: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee* (Luke 1:35).

Furthermore, in that angelic salutation, "grace" can be understood as the whole assemblage of all the infused and gratuitous virtues and of the seven gifts, together with sanctifying grace, the eight beatitudes and the twelve fruits of the Spirit: with all of which the most loving Mary was then full, so far as concerned her state. But at the coming upon her of the Holy Spirit and at the conception of the Son of God, all these heavenly charisms were mightily increased in her; then in the long bearing of her divine and adorable Child in her womb; and afterwards also daily until the hour of her most happy assumption, especially on the most solemn day of Pentecost, when, with the others gathered in the upper room, she received the Holy Spirit most abundantly, beyond them all, as will be explained more fully below.

Of this fullness of grace of the most worthy Mary, Henry of Hesse writes: Hail, Mary, full of grace: full totally, full permanently, full superabundantly; full, I say, with the grace of the fullness of all the virtues,

with the certainty of all the truths to be believed, with the grace of prophetic illumination and of most excellent contemplation, with the grace of the best natural constitution, of most singular bodily beauty, and of most becoming moral bearing. For God, the artificer of all things, concurring supernaturally in her formation in the womb, since He was about to fashion a worthy dwelling for His Son, adorned her inwardly with the fullness of all gratifying charisms and ennobling habits, so that the divine grace shone so abundantly and efficaciously even in her outward appearance that the sight of her extinguished the heats of the carnal, pierced the hearts of sinners, raised the desires of worldly men to heavenly things, and stood as a mirror of cleanness to all against sins. God filled her: in her womb, with the presence of the indwelling Godhead; in her heart, with the grace of charity; in her mouth, with the grace of affability; in her hands, with the grace of mercy and liberality; *(p. 72)* in her walk, with a most gracious maturity; in her countenance, with most chaste purity; in her intellect, with prudence; in her thought, with cleanness; in her hearing, with modesty; in her affection, with temperance; in her glance, with shamefastness; and in every sense and bodily gesture, with an outstanding reflection of the virtues. Thus far Henry.

Moreover, in order to understand more clearly how fullness belongs in one way to Christ and in another way to the blessed Virgin, we must consider what St Thomas writes in the third part of his *Summa* (III, q. 7, a. 10): The fullness of grace, he says, can be considered in two ways: in one way on the side of grace itself, in another way on the side of the one who has grace. On the side of grace there is said to be fullness when someone reaches the highest degree of grace, both as to its essence and as to its power, namely because he has grace both in the greatest excellence in which it can be had and in the greatest extension to all the effects of grace; and such fullness of grace is proper to Christ. Secondly, fullness of grace is considered on the side of the subject, when someone has grace fully according to his condition: whether according to intensity, inasmuch as grace is intense in him up to the limit fixed for him by God, according to that saying, *But to every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the giving of Christ* (Eph. 4:7); or according to power, inasmuch as he has the faculty of grace for all that belongs to his state or office. And such fullness of grace is not proper to Christ, but is communicated to others. And so the blessed Virgin is called full of grace not on the side of grace, because she did not have grace in the highest excellence in which it can be had, nor for all the effects of grace, since both of these are proper to Christ; but she is called full of grace because she had grace sufficient for the state to which she had been chosen by God, namely that she should be the Mother of God.

Furthermore, in the same *Summa*, question twenty-seven (III, q. 27, a. 5), he testifies: Those whom God chooses for something He so prepares and disposes that they are found fit for that for which they are chosen. Therefore He adorned Mary with such fullness of grace as it was fitting that she should be adorned with for this, according to the measure of wisdom; and as the blessed Virgin was nearer to Christ than the others, so she approached more nearly to the fullness of the grace of Christ. And there was a threefold perfection of grace in her: one, as it were, disposing her to become the Mother of God; another from the presence of the Son of God incarnate in her womb, and this was greater than the first; the third was in her glorification, when she was joined to the last end through consummated grace.

Moreover, Albert writes of the fullness of grace of the most venerable Virgin in his book *On her Praises* (*Mariale*, q. 37): The most blessed Virgin was full of grace: first, because she had in the highest degree all the general and special graces of all creatures; secondly, because she had those graces also of which every creature was empty; thirdly, because her grace was so great that a pure creature was not capable of greater grace; fourthly, because she contained within herself the whole of the uncreated grace which is God. Albert explains these things at length, and they must be soundly understood, since it is certain that the capacity of Christ's soul received a greater grace than was the grace of the most worthy Mary. But, as has been touched upon (in the preceding article), it was not fitting that a greater grace should be conferred on a pure creature subsisting in created being than on the Virgin chosen to be the Mother of God; nay, not even a grace equal to

hers, but one much less.

Finally, just as one speaks of *natura naturans*, namely God the author of nature, and of *natura naturata*, that is, nature instituted and made by God, so, according to the words of Albert quoted above, there is uncreated grace, as it were "gracing grace" (*gratia gratians*), that is, grace producing all created grace, and this is the very loving-kindness or mercy of the Creator. Of this grace it can be understood that the fullness of grace is said to have poured itself wholly and totally into the most sweet Mary, namely the Son of God descending into her womb and taking flesh from her. The other is called "graced grace" (*gratia gratiata*), that is, grace produced, caused and infused.

Article III: On the excellence of the gift of wisdom of the most glorious virgin Mary

(p. 73) And through nations she conveyeth herself into holy souls (Wis. 7:27). It is the teaching of the holy Fathers and of the Catholic doctors that the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are inseparably joined to charity; and the more perfect anyone is in divine charity, the more eminent he is judged to be in the gift of wisdom. Therefore, just as the most sweet virgin Mary was inestimably fervent in the love of God beyond all the other Saints and all wayfarers, so she was most excellent above all in the wisdom which is a gift.

Now the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural infused habits, by which the created mind becomes promptly docile, movable and directable by the Holy Spirit; and these gifts perfect the three theological virtues themselves, freeing them, enabling them and making them prompt to go forth into their acts. So by the gift of wisdom the mind knows and contemplates God and the things of God with an inward relish, and distinguishes them from other things, and judges rightly concerning them, with a conformity and connaturality of affection towards them: for example, that one must cleave to God alone, supremely, purely and as to one's last end, and that spiritual, divine and eternal things are to be preferred incomparably to all created, vain, sensible and perishable things. So in those who have the gift of wisdom, the knowledge and the affection of the mind concerning divine things are connected and agree. And just as three degrees of charity are assigned, so there are also three degrees of this wisdom, in such a way that the third degree of charity and of wisdom is found in the perfect, and belongs to heroic persons.

This third degree of the gift of wisdom also has a great breadth, and various special degrees, and a manifold distinction and order of perfection, according as one saint is holier than another, according to innumerable distinctions, degrees and differences of perfection and holiness. From this it is inferred that, just as the most loving Mary was ineffably holier than all the Saints after Christ, so she was also greater, more perfect and more resplendent in the gift of wisdom. Therefore beyond all others she tasted, experienced and savoured, inestimably, most secretly, most sweetly, most frequently and most abundantly, with the full mouth of the mind, *how sweet the Lord is* (1 Pet. 2:3); *how good is God to Israel, to them that are of a right heart* (Ps. 72:1); *how good the Lord is to them that hope in Him, to the soul that seeketh Him* (Lam. 3:25); *how great is the multitude of His sweetness* (Ps. 30:20); how truly He is *a hidden God* (Isa. 45:15), more secret than every secret thing, shining most brightly within, and disclosing Himself graciously, mercifully and abundantly to the purified mind, to be gazed upon and tasted.

Furthermore, in the eleventh chapter of Proverbs Scripture says: *Where humility is, there also is wisdom* (Prov. 11:2). This is understood chiefly of that wisdom which is a gift. For humility subjects the mind directly to God and lays it low before Him, so that it may receive from Him the light and the rays of saving wisdom. Therefore, just as the most lovable virgin Mary was inestimably more humble than all others, nay, deeper and altogether more constant in the abyss of all humility, so she was most radiant and most resplendent in the gift of wisdom, standing in the nearest contact with the uncreated Wisdom, so as to receive unceasingly and most liberally from that same Wisdom streams and fresh illuminations, constant, most

luminous and fervent, by which the most kind and most humble mind of the God-bearing Virgin and virgin Mother was unceasingly refreshed and restored, and overflowed.

Moreover, in the last chapter of Isaiah, according to the old translation, the eternal Father says: *Upon whom shall My Spirit rest, but upon him that is quiet and humble?* (Isa. 66:2).[1] And just as the most divine Mary was most humble, so without doubt she was most quiet in mind, and in body also, as far as was possible to her, loving solitary places like a most chaste turtle-dove, and never going out of doors without weighty cause. In mind, moreover, she was most quiet, *(p. 74)* since in her there was never any disquiet of disturbing passions, no din of fault, no disordered tumult of tumultuous thoughts or of wavering desires, but a perpetual tranquillity, and in every event a stable and inward peace. Therefore the Holy Spirit with His seven most glorious gifts rested incessantly, with an unspeakable fullness, in the heart of the most serene Mary, and adorned her most beautifully, nay, incomparably, in the gift of wisdom.

Further, purity of heart disposes in the highest degree to the increase and completion of wisdom. For *wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins* (Wis. 1:4); but, as was alleged above, wisdom *conveyeth herself into holy souls* (Wis. 7:27). Since, therefore, as has been explained (Art. 1), the most beautiful virgin Mary shone with such purity and holiness that no greater can be conceived under God, it is clear that the uncreated, super-munificent and super-opulent Wisdom transferred and poured itself most abundantly into the soul of the blessed Mary, and that the gift of wisdom advanced so unspeakably in her that, beyond every pure creature subsisting in created being, this most excellent Mother of Wisdom shines forth in an incomparable manner in the gift of wisdom.

Further still, it is said in the twenty-eighth chapter of Isaiah: *Whom shall He teach knowledge? and whom shall He make to understand the hearing? them that are weaned from the milk, that are drawn away from the breasts* (Isa. 28:9); that is, those who abstain from carnal delights. Hence it is also asserted in Job: *Wisdom is not found in the land of them that live in delights* (Job 28:13). Therefore, just as the best of virgins, the most spiritual Mary, was most free from all carnal softness and from all sensual delight, and most dead to the world and to the flesh, so she was most illuminated in the gift of wisdom.

Moreover, whatever is nearer to the fountain of wisdom (Ecclus. 1:5), and to the first and highest causal principle of all wisdom, is certainly illuminated and filled by it more abundantly. Therefore, the nearer the virgin Mother of God incarnate is to Him beyond all others, the fuller she was of the gift of wisdom; and there is no doubt that the Mother is as much nearer to the Only-begotten of God incarnate of her as a mother is held to be nearer to her child than servants are.

Lastly, the dearer and the more like to her Creator, who was incarnate and born of her, the most sacred and most pure virgin Mary was, the more abundantly the adorable Creator communicated to her the riches of His grace, the streams of wisdom and the heavenly charisms; and He made her most like to Himself in all wisdom, holiness and honour, because by this their mutual converse in this world was also sweeter, more fitting, more familiar and more loving. For likeness is the cause of love, and the union of like things is recognized as more connatural; therefore the mutual converse of the wise, in whom there is no immoderation of the passions and no offence of sin, is sweeter.

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[1] The “old translation” is a pre-Vulgate Latin reading of Isa. 66:2; the Vulgate has “to whom shall I have respect, but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite spirit.”

Article IV: On the excellence of Mary, who is to be glorified, in the wisdom which is a gift of grace freely given

To one indeed, by the Spirit, is given the word of wisdom: and to another, the word of knowledge (1 Cor. 12:8). These words of the Apostle are understood of the wisdom which is a gift of grace freely given. This

wisdom is the knowledge of divine things and the understanding of the Scriptures, by which one knows how to declare, defend and persuade the things of faith, so that he knows the reasons and arguments for the things to be believed, by which he is able to resist the adversaries of the faith; and this wisdom belongs chiefly to doctors and prelates. And this wisdom can be had by bad men as well as by good, like the other gifts of grace freely given; it can also be obtained both by divine and supernatural infusion and by human instruction or study.

Now in this wisdom the most renowned and most pure virgin Mary is believed to have been most excellent and most illuminated beyond *(p. 75)* all the doctors and prelates of the Church, beyond all the Apostles and Prophets, beyond the Evangelists and Patriarchs; and to have understood the Scriptures themselves more deeply, and to have recognized more clearly the order and connection, the harmony and reasonableness of the things to be believed, so much so that the glorious Apostles themselves had recourse to her and received illumination from her. For just as the divine Scriptures, as to their principal intent, were more excellently fulfilled in her and through her, so it was given to her to penetrate them more clearly, and it was fitting that she should be taught more clearly and enlightened more graciously by the Holy Spirit concerning their mysteries. For since the apostle Paul truly says, *Now we have received not the spirit of this world, but the Spirit that is of God; that we may know the things that are given us from God* (1 Cor. 2:12), how much more did the most excellent and most illuminated God-bearing Virgin, from the anointing and irradiation of the Holy Spirit, know the gifts imparted to her from above, and how in her and through her were fulfilled the writings of the Prophets, all of whom, as even the doctors of the Hebrews admit, spoke only of the days of the Messiah, that is, of the coming of Christ and of the signal mysteries of Him whom the most chosen and most honourable virgin Mary conceived and brought forth?

Finally, she was with all her powers most grateful to God for the benefits bestowed on her from above. Therefore she understood these very benefits, and their dignity and eminence, most clearly and most deeply, as far as was possible for a pure creature who was a wayfarer: for example, how great a dignity it is to be the Mother of God; how great was the charity, the loving-kindness, the wisdom, the justice and the omnipotence of God, in that He redeemed the human race through the incarnation and death of the eternal Word; how supremely fitting it was that the world should be saved through the incarnation and passion of the Son of God.

Moreover, the most happy Mary, just as she was most beautiful in body and of the best constitution, so she was most gifted in mind, very studious and docile; therefore she was most apt to receive the most abundant illuminations from the Holy Spirit. Nor is there any doubt that He enlightened her daily most abundantly, she who conceived and bore, suckled and nourished Him from whom He Himself truly and eternally proceeds. Further, as was said before (in the preceding article), purity of mind makes a man capable of divine illumination, and the purer the intellect is, the better disposed and the worthier it is for the illumination of wisdom. Therefore, just as the most excellent virgin Mary was adorned after Christ with the highest and incomparable purity, so she must be believed to have been most excellent also in this wisdom and in the knowledge of the Scriptures, and in every heavenly illumination.

Further still, as the Evangelist testifies, the blessed virgin Mary *kept* in her heart, doubtless with the greatest diligence, *all these words* (Luke 2:19) that were spoken of Christ, which she heard from the shepherds, from Elizabeth, from the Magi, from Simeon, from Anna, and especially from the holy angel; and she pondered them in her heart. Finally, it is most certain that she listened most diligently to the words uttered by the mouth of her Only-begotten in His preaching, and understood them most wisely beyond all others. And so, through this constant, earnest and fervent keeping, turning over and pondering of the divine utterances, she advanced supremely in the wise understanding of the Scriptures: partly from the sharpness of her natural mind, partly from the light of supernatural grace, partly from the habits of wisdom and knowledge, both acquired and infused, but above all from the most frequent, most gracious and altogether most full

illumination of the eternal and uncreated Wisdom, which she conceived, brought forth and nourished.

Furthermore, in every genus the principle is the greatest and the most powerful in its order, and whatever is nearer to it is more like to it. Now Christ, *the fountain of wisdom* on high (Ecclus. 1:5), is the head and summit of the whole company of the faithful, of the wise and of lawgivers, the cause and universal giver of all illumination. Hence His most deified Mother, after Him, shone forth beyond all others in the whole Church in *(p. 76)* all wisdom, knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures.

Finally, as Cassian relates, the holy Fathers taught that one who desires to grow in the true, deep and saving knowledge of holy Scripture has no need to turn over many books, but to apply himself to interior purity; and the more he grows in it, the more abundantly will he be flooded from above with the ray of divine illumination. Therefore, the more the most sweet Mary shone, abounded and glowed beyond all others in all interior exercise, in virtuous occupation and in resplendent purity, the more abundantly and clearly was she taught by God to understand the sacred utterances, the divine mysteries and the hidden things of the Scriptures.

Next let us consider what the apostle James exhorts and affirms: *But if any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering* (Jas. 1:5–6). Hence the Psalmist also says: *Come ye to Him and be enlightened* (Ps. 33:6). So the more fervently, frequently, faithfully and confidently the incomparable Lady besought the Lord for wisdom and virtue, the more quickly and abundantly was she heard and filled by Him. Hence the most chosen virgin Mary was most ready and supremely fit *to satisfy every one that asketh* her *a reason of that hope* (1 Pet. 3:15) and faith, and of all the doctrine and preaching of the evangelical law.

Article V: Whether the God-bearing virgin Mary also had the use and ministry of the aforesaid wisdom and knowledge, in instructing others

She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue (Prov. 31:26). Certain doctors seem to hold that the most kind virgin Mary did not use wisdom and knowledge, as they are gifts of grace freely given, for the ministry, instruction and profit of others, because it does not belong to women to preach the Gospel, as the Apostle says: *But I suffer not a woman to teach, but to be in silence* (1 Tim. 2:12). Hence in the third part of his *Summa*, question twenty-seven (III, q. 27, a. 5, ad 3), Thomas asserts: The blessed Virgin had the use of wisdom in contemplating, but not in teaching, because this was not becoming to the female sex. Albert also, in his book *On the Praises of the Most Blessed Virgin* (*Mariale*): Certain gifts of grace freely given, he says, are given for one's own profit and not for that of others, as the gifts of instruction of the most blessed Lady.

But against these seems to stand the fact that on the words quoted above, *Mary kept all these words* (Luke 2:19), some expositors say that she held those words in memory for this reason, that afterwards, at a fitting time, she might explain them and teach them to others; nay, according to Bede and others, the evangelist Luke is believed to have been specially instructed by the most happy and most serene Mary concerning those things which he alone wrote of her and of the mysteries of her Son. Hence Lyra also asserts on the words just quoted: Mary prudently attended to how the prophecies were fulfilled in the Child who had been born. And this pondering was very delightful to her, and most useful to the whole Church: because, according to Jerome in his sermon on the assumption of the blessed Virgin, after the ascension of her Son she remained for a time on earth with the holy Apostles, in order to instruct them more fully about the incarnate Word, of whom she had been more fully taught by the Holy Spirit; and she had seen and handled all things more familiarly, and therefore could express them better, according to what Jerome says: What we know better, we also set forth better. Thus far Lyra.[1]

Moreover, a chosen multitude of holy virgins is read to have dwelt with the most pure Virgin after the ascension of Christ; and the most wise and most fervent Virgin is believed to have instructed them at suitable times. Lastly, it was proved above from the epistles of St Ignatius how many excellent persons, converted to Christ from paganism at the beginning of the primitive Church, greatly desired to see the most worthy Mary, to hear her, and to be more fully informed by her about particular matters; and the most merciful Lady sweetly and most *(p. 77)* profitably acceded to their pious desires. And I judge these things to be true. As for the words of Thomas and Albert, it can be said that they are to be understood of public preaching and teaching to the people, not of private instruction.

[1] The sermon on the Assumption that Denis, following Lyra, cites as Jerome's is the letter *Cogitis me*, now attributed to Paschasius Radbertus. The letters of St Ignatius to the Virgin, mentioned next, are likewise medieval compositions.

Article VI: On the natural wisdom and knowledge of Mary, who is to be glorified

And you have no need that any man teach you; but as His unction teacheth you of all things (1 John 2:27). As St Epiphanius and Damascene declare, the most excellent virgin Mary, while still a young girl, was brought up in the temple, where virgins were taught; and there is no doubt that, prevented by the Holy Spirit, she was most studious of the Scriptures, and bore herself towards them with all reverence. Hence St Jerome testifies that she read in Isaiah: *Behold a virgin shall conceive* (Isa. 7:14). Now scholastic instruction takes its beginning from grammar. Further, it is related of Susanna that *her parents, being just, had instructed their daughter according to the law of Moses* (Dan. 13:3). In conformity with this it must be believed that the parents of the most sacred Mary, who (according to what was said before, Book I, Art. 10) were excellently just, had her taught in the temple in the scriptures of the Law and of the Prophets. In these many things are contained concerning the production, distinction, adornment, properties and order of things, the disposition of the world, the course and influence of the heavens, of the planets and of the stars, which belong to natural philosophy, and which can be known and learned both from natural light and from human instruction, and also from supernatural teaching.

For in every creature, and especially in the whole fabric of the world, in the position, alteration and subsistence of the elements, in the ordering and government of the world, in the angelic spirits and their orders, in the rational soul and in the whole man, there shine forth and are known the omnipotence, the wisdom and the goodness of the super-most-glorious Founder, who exhorted us through Isaiah: *Lift up your eyes on high, and see who hath created these things* (Isa. 40:26). Hence the Apostle wrote to the Romans: *For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made; His eternal power also, and divinity: so that they are inexcusable* (Rom. 1:20), namely those who did not know the true God, or, knowing Him, did not worship Him as they ought; since the cause shines forth in its effect, and the knowledge of the Creator, as to the fact that He is, can very easily be gathered from the knowledge of creatures. On this account it is said: *But all men are vain, in whom there is not the knowledge of God: and who by these good things that are seen, could not understand Him that is. For by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the Creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby* (Wis. 13:1, 5). Hence the holy father Anthony said that the nature of things itself had been the book of his study, from which he came to so great a knowledge.

Above all, those who are learned in the Scriptures, and beyond this are eminently filled with the gift of wisdom and knowledge, and are exercised in holy devotion and in the fervour of charity, are raised from the consideration of natural things to the contemplation of the adorable Creator suddenly and most easily, joyfully and fervently, keenly and very often; sometimes even with wonder and sweet weeping, from looking at little things, such as flowers and grasses. Finally, subtlety of mind, purity of heart, tranquillity of life and

constancy in interior exercise contribute most of all to this natural wisdom concerning divine things and to the scholastic knowledge of creatures; and in all of these the most excellent virgin Mary shone ineffably, as she did also in the gratuitous goods touched upon above (Art. 4). Therefore she was in every respect most apt for such natural wisdom and knowledge. These she possessed partly from her own study and natural light, partly from scholastic instruction, and above all from divine and angelic illumination; and from charity and grace, from faith and from the gift of infused wisdom, she formed, began and produced the acts of that wisdom and knowledge, and so those acts were meritorious.

(p. 78) O how subtly and deeply the most illuminated Virgin attended to the order of the universe! How she weighed the magnitude, beauty and causality of the heavenly bodies; considered the natures, powers, actions and excellences of the angelic spirits in natural and gratuitous gifts; noted also the works of the six days, their distinctions and their adornments: so that from the consideration of all these things she might ponder the more the dignity, the perfection and the immense excellence of the Only-begotten of God incarnate of her and born of her, and through this might weigh more evidently the ineffable greatness of the divine condescension and of the benefits shown to her from above and bestowed through her on the whole human race, and might render greater thanksgiving to the Giver! O how most swiftly and subtly she carried over her most sincere, most luminous and most wise mind from creatures to the Creator, from visible things to invisible, from bodily things to incorporeal, from temporal and perishable things to eternal and divine!

Article VII: That the life of the most sacred Mary was supremely contemplative

When I go into my house, I shall repose myself with her: for her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness (Wis. 8:16). What wonder is it if the beauty and ornament of all creation, the most sweet and most worthy virgin Mary, avoided public places as far as she could, loved retirement, and more gladly stayed at home, she who had the Creator and Lord of all things, the uncreated, eternal and immeasurable Wisdom, dwelling with her bodily and familiarly, nay, obediently and most lovingly, in her material house, and spiritually and most graciously in her interior house, that is, in her own mind? Of this house it is said in Ecclesiasticus: *Unless thou hold thyself diligently in the fear of the Lord, thy house shall quickly be overthrown* (Ecclus. 27:4).

Further, the contemplative life, as Gregory says, is to hold fervently and sincerely to the charity of God and of one’s neighbour, and to cleave to the desire of the Creator alone, so that it pleases one now to have nothing earthly, but, having trodden all outward cares underfoot, the soul burns to see the face of the Creator clearly by sight. So, the more excellently these things were present in the most glorious and incomparable Mary, the more sublimely contemplative was her life. And what is more certain than that the blessed Mary was ineffably more ardent than all others in the most sincere charity of God and of her neighbours? as will be shown below in many ways. And the most blessed Virgin was, either unceasingly or almost unceasingly, always actually united to God through charity, burning with holy desires, tirelessly longing, sighing and hastening towards the full and beatific vision of the divine countenance; and never inordinately anxious about temporal things, as being altogether most certain of the most fatherly and most singular providence of the Almighty towards her.

Meanwhile, this supreme virgin Mary was of such perfection that she was not hindered from the exercises of the contemplative life by the exercises of the active life, by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, by outward occupations and human actions, by conversations and walks; and if perhaps those contemplative exercises sometimes suffered an interruption for a short while through the exercises of the active life, she soon returned to them with a more vehement fervour. Furthermore, the most serene virgin Mary was inestimably converted, transformed and absorbed into the affection of most sincere and most ardent charity, entirely free from all disquiet and disorder of the passions, supremely perfect in every moral virtue, and filled most splendidly with the gift of wisdom at the limit of excellence; therefore she was supremely established

and fervent in the contemplative life.

Further, we find by experience that use is, as it were, a second nature, making one act most promptly, and *(p. 79)* dwell steadily on the thing and the action to which one is accustomed. Now the most illustrious and most holy virgin Mary, from the hour when she began constantly to use her reason, exercised herself very steadfastly, most frequently, most affectionately and purely in the exercises of the contemplative life mentioned above, in fervent prayers, in pure meditations, in most devout praises of God and in spiritual canticles; and in all these she advanced daily, wonderfully and incomparably. Therefore, as time went on, her life became most contemplative, nay, more eminently contemplative than the life of Adam in the state of innocence, just as she was much more perfect than he in charity, wisdom, worship and every virtue and gift; and she held herself especially in a middle place between the life of the Blessed and that of wayfarers, approaching in an unspeakable manner, beyond all wayfarers, to the life of the Blessed, and next to the angelic life.

For the Incomprehensible worked incomprehensibly and most liberally in the soul of His most beloved Mother: He irradiated, communicated, warmed, admonished, aroused, perfected and united; and she was so most abundantly filled, flooded and accustomed with the light of wisdom, the fervour of charity and interior exercise, that she could in no way forget her Beloved, nor refrain from His most intimate and most secret embraces, but burned unceasingly towards Him. And indeed so many and so great, nay, such incomparable benefits were conferred on her, so many supernatural and most magnificent works of God did she experience in herself, so many and such great heavenly and divine words did she hear from the holy angel, from Elizabeth and Zachary, from the shepherds, from Simeon and Anna, from the Magi, and then from her own Son, who conversed with her most condescendingly, that she could in no way forget them; but a continual remembrance, pondering, contemplation and wonder at them was present to her mind. And she is believed to have fulfilled most excellently that word of Deuteronomy: *And these words shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt meditate upon them sitting in thy house, and walking on thy journey, sleeping and rising* (Deut. 6:6–7).

Lastly, the incomparably happy and sweet Mary herself had with her, present and living with her and dwelling with her at home for so many years, the object of all contemplation, the fountain of wisdom, the eternal truth, God incarnate, the only Son of God the Father and her own; on whom she gazed with the eyes of the body as well as with those of the spirit, most sincerely, most reverently and most affectionately. And from so long, daily, constant and most fervent a beholding of Him, the most quiet and most tranquil Virgin grew unspeakably in all perfection, stability and fullness of the contemplative life; and resting thus, she was most prudent.

Article VIII: That the most meek and most sweet virgin Mary, beyond all the Saints after Christ, shone in this life with the splendour of the highest contemplations

Wisdom is drawn out of secret places … It is hid from the eyes of all living (Job 28:18, 21). Contemplation, which is a loving and savoury knowledge of God, is an act of the wisdom which is a gift; and just as, according to what was said before (Art. 3), the most sacred virgin Mary was incomparably adorned, most splendidly beautified and ineffably filled with the gift of wisdom beyond all wayfarers, so beyond all wayfarers she contemplated God more clearly and more deeply in this life, and understood divine, heavenly and eternal things. Nay, as far as was ever possible for a pure creature subsisting in created being, she was steadily, purely, fervently and almost continuously intent on the contemplation of divine things, and a diligent and most devout meditator on the mysteries of Christ: fixing the gaze of her most pure and most fervent mind most clearly on the uncreated light of the most simple Godhead and of the super-most-blessed Trinity, and plunging it therein most lovingly and delightfully; contemplating more deeply also the abyss of His incomprehensible judgements, and *(p. 80)* penetrating more sublimely His super-wise and secret counsel

concerning the manner of saving the human race; and understanding the mysteries of the incarnation and nativity of Christ the more evidently, the more singularly it was given to her to experience them most happily in herself, and to have them fulfilled in her and through her.

Moreover, according to what was touched upon above (Art. 3), through the third and highest degree of the gift of wisdom a man becomes, as it were, a confidant and counsellor of God. Therefore, the more the most excellent virgin Mary was ineffably more perfect than all others in this highest gift of wisdom, the more eminently and familiarly was she, beyond all others, a counsellor and confidant of the Almighty; and from divine revelation and vision she knew more secrets and more secret mysteries, and more clearly too, than the other Saints, so that with a most grateful mind she could most excellently say to the Creator: *The uncertain and hidden things of Thy wisdom Thou hast made manifest to me* (Ps. 50:8).

Furthermore, it is above all through charity that the created mind is joined to God; and the more sincere, the more fervent and the more perfect it is in charity, the more intimately and familiarly it is united to God, and the more abundantly it is also enlightened, taught and anointed by Him. For the adorable God, who is essentially good and is substantially charity itself, discloses His secrets to His chief elect, as He says in Genesis: *Can I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?* (Gen. 18:17). Hence the prophet Amos also said: *For the Lord God doth nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets* (Amos 3:7). Therefore to His most chosen and most beloved spouse, nay, to His most dear Mother, He granted a most excellent vision of divine things.

Further, purity of mind is an excellent and proximate disposition for contemplating, according to what the Saviour says: *Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God* (Matt. 5:8). Hence, as was touched upon above (Art. 3), we read in the seventh chapter of Wisdom: *Wisdom conveyeth herself into holy souls* (Wis. 7:27). Therefore, the more the most merciful virgin Mary was more glorious in purity than all the Saints, the more sublime was she also in the keenness and fervour of contemplation.

Furthermore, as the doctors teach, the *fomes* and every inclination to sin, nay, even the possibility of sinning, had been taken away from the most pure Mary, so that her body did not draw her mind downwards, nor did any inordinate affection, distraction or frailty ever call her most virtuous mind away from the light of contemplation, nor any outward occupation; nay, everything she did outwardly she constantly referred to the honour of God and to true salvation. No idleness either, no omission or negligence, ever had place in her. Therefore she was unceasingly, continuously, or most constantly mindful of God, thought saving thoughts, contemplated divine things, and most perfectly fulfilled that word of the Apostle: *All whatsoever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him* (Col. 3:17); and what the Psalmist said: *I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall be always in my mouth* (Ps. 33:2).

Finally, these three hierarchical effects, to be purified, to be illuminated and to be perfected, are connected with one another, so that upon a greater purification follows a greater illumination, and upon a greater illumination a greater perfection. Therefore, just as the unique virgin Mary was incomparably more purified and more perfect than all others, so also beyond all the Saints she was ineffably the most illuminated and the most contemplative.

Now concerning the eminence of the knowledge of the most high Mary, St Bernard says: Who, except perhaps her who alone merited to experience this in herself, could grasp with the understanding or discern with reason how that inaccessible splendour poured itself into the virginal womb? For assuredly the thing was in a mystery; and what the Trinity alone willed to work by Itself in the Virgin alone and with the Virgin alone, it was given to her alone to know, to whom it was given most happily to experience it. Let it then be said: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee*, who will certainly make thee fruitful by His power; *and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee* (Luke 1:35), that is, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom

of God (1 Cor. 1:24), *(p. 81)* will so cover in His most secret counsel that manner in which thou shalt conceive of the Holy Spirit, that what is known to the Father may be known to thee. As if the angel answered the Virgin: Why do you ask of me what you will soon experience in yourself? You shall know, you shall know, and you shall know happily; but with Him as your teacher who is also the doer; nor can it be taught except by the giver, nor learned except by the receiver.

Further still, since the Lord says, *Man shall not see Me and live* (Exod. 33:20), it is said that the more perfectly anyone dies to the present life, and to all private love and carnality, and to every inordinate affection and every fault, the more apt is he for contemplation, nay, the more fit for contemplating at the highest. Now the most blessed Lady and Queen of heaven was most fully dead to the carnal, worldly and present life, and to every fault, disorder and private love; and she could say with the Apostle, nay, more excellently than the Apostle: *And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me* (Gal. 2:20). Therefore she was glorious in an ineffable manner in the height, clarity, stability and perfection of contemplation; since beyond all wayfarers she was wholly dead to the world and the flesh, and the life of sin, the *fomes* being now extinguished, was dead in her beyond recall.

Therefore the most sacred virgin Mary fulfilled most perfectly beyond all others what the Apostle exhorts in the Epistle to the Colossians: *Seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth. For you are dead; and your life is hid with Christ in God* (Col. 3:1–3). O how most gloriously the life of the most spiritual and heavenly Virgin was hidden with Christ in God, as being supremely interior and angelic! Hence her *conversation* also was chiefly *in heaven* (Phil. 3:20); and so, having entered the sanctuary of God, she dwelt within the Holy of Holies, and by a heaven-like contemplation she was present to the heavenly court, raised continually above herself, and standing unceasingly in contact with the Sun of Justice, by whom she was constantly illumined, and altogether most liberally.

With these things agrees that saying of blessed Gregory: The brightness of God can be seen by the keenness of contemplation by any who live in this flesh but grow in inestimable virtue, provided they die utterly to this life. And it is certain that no pure creature was ever so purely and wholly dead to this life as the blessed and most venerable Mary; therefore she, beyond all others, contemplated the brightness of God most clearly in this life.

Lastly, the beatitude and perfection of this life is a certain beginning and foretaste of the heavenly happiness, and that heavenly beatitude corresponds to the beatitude of the way, as the end to the means and the reward to merit. Therefore, just as God's most beloved one is incomparably greater in consummated beatitude and in the vision by sight, so in this life, in inchoate beatitude and in contemplation by the anagogical light, she shone forth beyond all others.

Article IX: On the species of contemplation, and how gloriously the virginal Mother was pre-eminent in them

But you are come to mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels, and to the church of the firstborn, who are written in the heavens, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect (Heb. 12:22–23). This approach of the faithful of Christ to the Church militant and triumphant, to the ranks of the angels, to God the judge, and to the Holy Spirit, the sanctifier and indweller of the just and the perfect, is spiritual, through faith and charity and the grace of contemplation. Of this approach the Psalmist says: *Come ye to Him and be enlightened* (Ps. 33:6); and the Apostle: *Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace* (Heb. 4:16).

In the authority of the Apostle quoted above, various *(p. 82)* objects of contemplation are also touched upon, according to which some assign certain species of contemplation. St Bernard, moreover, assigns four species

of contemplation. The first of these is wonder at the majesty, that is, the beholding of the incomprehensible Godhead with immense wonder at its infinite excellence and incomprehensibility, so that a man intent on this species of contemplation can say that word of Job: *We cannot find Him worthily … and He cannot be told. Therefore all that seem to themselves to be wise shall not dare to behold Him* (Job 37:23–24). The second species of contemplation is the consideration of the judgements of the Most High; in considering and searching into them the contemplative, failing, can say: *O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgements, and how unsearchable His ways!* (Rom. 11:33). The third is the beholding of the benefits of God, at the sight of which it is fitting for the contemplative to say: *What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He hath rendered to me?* (Ps. 115:12); and likewise: *Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He hath done for thee* (Ps. 102:2); and again with Isaiah: *I will remember the tender mercies of the Lord, the praise of the Lord for all the things that the Lord hath bestowed upon us … which He hath given them according to His kindness* (Isa. 63:7). The fourth is attention to the divine promises, which (as the Apostle testifies) *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man* (1 Cor. 2:9): these are the goods of glory which the Lord has prepared for His elect.

In these species of contemplation the most glorious Mary was most high. For indeed, the humbler she was in herself, the more deeply she understood her own nothingness, and the more frequently and keenly she pondered those things from the consideration of which she humbled herself most deeply, the more vehemently did she wonder that the God of immeasurable majesty had dealt with her so most graciously, condescendingly and munificently: that that altogether unlimited sublimity had so incomprehensibly emptied Itself, and had behaved towards her so super-lovingly and so humbly, and conversed with her in such a way. Furthermore, the humbler and purer the most sacred virgin Mary was in herself, the wiser and the more illuminated, and the nearer and more familiarly united to the uncircumscribable majesty through more sublime charisms, the more clearly did the infinite excellence of God shine upon her, and the more did she wonder at the infinity of His majesty, the fullness of His glory and the all-embracing immensity of His perfection. And sitting she was astonished, and fainted for wonder; and from comparison with the incomprehensible God born of her and dwelling with her, she humbled herself in an ineffable manner, and in respect of the majesty and the humility of her Son, so great as they were, she reckoned herself and all her dignity and humility as nothing.

Moreover, the most holy Mary contemplated with a God-fearing and sober mind how inscrutable, secret and just are the judgements of God: how from the beginning He distinguishes between the elect and the reprobate; how the elect have always been few; how He chose the patriarch Abraham and his posterity through Isaac, and left the gentiles until the preaching of the Law; and how thereafter He was to leave the Jews and to save the gentiles. This is shown also in her canticle: *He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble* (Luke 1:51–52).

Further, as is clear from what was said before (Book I, Arts. 14, 27; Book II, Art. 4), she understood the benefits of God, both general and special, bestowed on her, and likewise the singular ones bestowed on her alone, the more clearly the more grateful she was, beyond the others, to God the giver of all benefits; and the more certain general and special benefits were given to men through her; and the more nearly she was united to the fountain of all goods, and the more supernaturally and eminently she was likened to it and made its partner. For indeed from her and through her our God was made our brother, our Creator was made our Saviour, our Judge was made our advocate, and the Lord of knowledge was made *(p. 83)* our master and lawgiver, and the Lord of the angels deigned to dwell among men. How great these things are the most pure Virgin understood more deeply than other wayfarers, as a co-cause and in her own manner the origin of them.

In like manner, how great is the dignity and excellence of the promises of the Most High, of the gifts of glory and of all eternal happiness, she beheld much more splendidly than all wayfarers, because, in order that these might be recovered for men, the Only-begotten of God the Father became her son, and did and suffered so many and such great things. For the greatness of a cause is commonly weighed from the dignity of the envoy. In like manner, the preciousness of a good bought and obtained is weighed from the value and eminence of the price. The most wise virgin Mary therefore contemplated with wonderful perspicacity how man was made for equality with the angelic beatitude and for its truth, and how most precious are the goods prepared for us in heaven; and she prayed constantly, nay, most burningly, that men might be brought to them; but she also grieved vehemently that so many despise them thus and lose them.

Finally, the species of contemplation are also distinguished and assigned in yet another way: so that the first is called the supernatural contemplation of the adorable Trinity; the second the natural speculation of the most simple Godhead; the third the consideration of the assumed humanity; the fourth the beholding of natural effects; the fifth the inspection of supernatural works, for example the gifts of grace and glory. Of this distinction of the species of contemplation I have treated in the little work *On Contemplation*. So in these species of contemplation the most illuminated and most resplendent virgin Mary was inestimably more perfect than all others.

For since the super-most-blessed Trinity chose her to be Its highest partner and most familiar friend, to be co-parent with God the Father, the true mother of His Son, the mother of Him from whom the Holy Spirit truly proceeds, and the most excellent shrine of the adorable Paraclete, no doubt remains that It conferred a far more pre-eminent knowledge of Itself on so most chosen and incomparable a Virgin, so that she too, by contemplating so great a grace more clearly, might be more grateful to the Giver. In like manner, since God willed to become incarnate of her, He granted her a more perspicacious contemplation of His Godhead. She knew also the humanity of the Word incarnate of her, and its mysteries, the more familiarly and clearly, the more certainly and experimentally she knew how the eternal Word was incarnate in her and of her and born, was brought up and handled by her, dwelt and conversed with her, and in her presence preached and worked signs and wonders. Lastly, she contemplated the gifts of nature, of grace and of glory the more wisely, the more eminently it was fitting that the mother of the author of all these things should be enlightened and taught concerning the knowledge of them all by her Only-begotten Himself, who placed, increased and perfected His gifts more specially and more munificently in His own most beloved, most loving and most pure Mother.

Article X: That the most affectionate and most meek Virgin attained excellently, beyond all wayfarers, to the perfection of mystical theology

Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me: it is high, and I cannot reach to it (Ps. 138:6). Not only the divine Dionysius (*On the Celestial Hierarchy*, ch. 2; *On the Divine Names*, ch. 7; *On Mystical Theology*, ch. 2) and the theologians who follow him, but also the subtler philosophers have testified with one accord that the most perfect knowledge of God that we have in this life is by negation, that is, by the removal and denial of all things from Him. For we know God in this life in two ways. First, by affirmation, attributing to Him whatever perfection is found in created things, as to the fountain-like, causal and exemplary principle of all things, with infinite excellence, all imperfection *(p. 84)* being excluded. Secondly, by negation, denying all things and each thing of Him, as of the super-essential and incomprehensible Creator of all things, who has nothing common or univocal with creatures, but transcends all things with infinite excellence; eternal, not knowable by demonstration, inasmuch as He has no cause (since to know scientifically is to know a thing through its cause); of whom, as to what He is, we are wholly ignorant; whom in the present life we know the more perfectly, the more clearly we see that we cannot know Him as to what He is, nay, that we fall infinitely short of a clear knowledge of this kind.

And in this way we know God through mystical theology. Not that every such knowledge of God is mystical theology; rather, mystical theology is the most perfect action and contemplation of the gift of wisdom according to its highest degree, when the mind is fixed upon God and united to Him through a most ardent affection of charity, passing beyond and leaving behind all sensible and intelligible things, all created things, and itself and its own action, so that, wholly transformed into God, rapt and absorbed, it adverts to none of these things, but is purely and wholly joined to the incomprehensible God alone, as to one altogether unknown as to what He is, and is utterly plunged into Him. This union takes place at the summit of the mind and the apex of the will, through most ardent charity and through abstraction from every created being; and for it there are required the reform of the passions, the extinction of the vices, and the recollection and calming of the heart. Sometimes, however, the mind is suddenly rapt into God, prevented by the Holy Spirit, its own freedom being, as it were, lulled to sleep, without its own disposition, effort and deliberation, by the irradiation, inflaming and drawing of the Almighty, so that the mind is so vehemently intent upon God, and so suspended in wonder at Him and love of Him, that it forgets all other things.

This is mystical theology: the most secret, most affectionate and immediate converse of the mind with God, and the beholding of Him which is the entering and the gazing into the darkness, that is, [it is] the acknowledgement, as far as possible, of the divine, eternal, immense, incomprehensible and invisible light, by which the mind most certainly discerns that God exists altogether super-substantial, incomprehensible and beyond all knowing. Finally, six things are said to concur and to be required for this mystical theology, namely: true peace, inward silence, loving adherence, the rest of the summit of the intellect in God and the falling asleep in Him, and the very beholding of the darkness.

So, the more excellently all these things were in the most glorious virgin Mary, the more gloriously was she brought, beyond every wayfarer, to the fullness of mystical theology. There was plainly in her an incomparable purity of heart and a most tranquil peace of breast; an inward silence from every din of tumultuous thoughts and wavering desires, nay, from every distraction and disorder of the soul; a most loving adherence, inseparable, full and entire; a most sweet rest also in God, in whom all her intention, affection and occupation were immovably and unswervingly fixed; and a falling asleep in Him, through which, flowing away from herself, she flowed wholly into Him, not with her substance changed, but with her action altogether simplified in God; and the beholding of the darkness, which is essentially mystical theology itself.

So, just as the moral virtues that moderate the passions, the intellectual and theological virtues, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit themselves, were in the blessed and incomparable Mary in the greatest perfection and at the limit of excellence, ineffably beyond every pure creature who was a wayfarer, so too mystical theology was in her at the limit of excellence; and especially inasmuch as the contemplation of mystical theology is caused by divine prevention, proceeding from God’s love for man: for whom He loves more, Him He is wont to draw more into Himself. Therefore, just as He loved the best and most lovable Mary with an inestimable preference beyond every pure creature subsisting in created being, so He raised her abundantly and most graciously to the highest contemplations of mystical theology, by grace alone *(p. 85)* going before.

Further, the more the most happy Mary was exercised in the exercises of the contemplative life and in the gifts of wisdom, and the more stable in the pure and most fervent actual love of God, the more apt was she for constant and most perfect visions of mystical theology. Lastly, she is believed to have had such sublime and most fervent contemplations more frequently without alienation from every outward sense, and without the stupor, weakening and immobility of the body which are seen in others who are rapt. And this was from the governance and dispensation of the Almighty, who willed it to be so in the blessed Virgin; and because the most pure and most illuminated mind of the glorious and supremely deified Mary was more proportioned and strengthened for the divine light and irradiation that raises one to the visions of mystical theology.

Article XI: On the excellence of the contemplation of the most pure Mary in comparison with the contemplation of others

Who are these, that fly as clouds, and as doves to their windows? (Isa. 60:8). In these words the holy Prophet wonders at the height of the contemplation of the Saints, who, like a cloud, rise from the earth to the things above, and lift themselves up, by the guidance of their eyes, to seek the dwelling of the heavenly homeland. Such persons have existed without number under the law of the Gospel, and first of all the holy Apostles, nay, very many of both sexes; among all of whom, and above all of whom, the most humble virgin Mary holds the primacy, as is clear from the preceding article. But since in moral and human matters an exposition by examples instructs more, in order that the excellence of the deiform contemplation of Mary may become more fully known, I shall touch on something of the contemplation of the lesser Saints, so that the point proposed may shine out in respect of them, by their example and by comparison with them.

And first of all it is clear of the blessed apostle Paul that he was *caught up to the third heaven*, [and] *heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter* (2 Cor. 12:2–4). Hence he also said: *And lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt me*, etc. (2 Cor. 12:7). Then concerning the height of the visions and contemplations of St John the apostle, very many things are contained in the Apocalypse and in the prologue of that book. Further, the history testifies of the glorious Mary Magdalene that, while she dwelt in a most desolate wilderness, she was lifted up into the air seven times daily by the ministry of angels, and heard, even with her bodily ears, the heavenly melody and the voices of angels.[1] So too a truthful history relates of that holy Mary of Egypt that in praying and contemplating she was lifted up into the air. Of the great father Anthony also we read that he often stood watching whole nights in prayer and contemplation until the morning sun shone upon his face. So too the abbot Arsenius was sometimes found standing with uplifted hands in contemplation, rapture and ecstasy; and in sign of his inward fervour and light his ten fingers were seen shining and burning like ten bright lamps.

The abbot Silvanus also, returning to himself after a wonderful rapture, testified truly: Until now I was caught up before the throne of the glory of God, and I stood there seeing His glory, and only now have I been let go. Furthermore, the abbot Doulas related of his abbot St Bessarion that he stood for fourteen days in continuous contemplation and rapture. So too that wonderful man of innocence, the abbot Sisoes, when he stretched out his hands in prayer, at once drew them back, lest he be rapt. Of these sublime contemplations the divine and great Dionysius was the master craftsman, teacher and preacher. And indeed the holy doctor Jerome, in his Rule to Eustochium, truthfully relates of himself, to the glory of God and the edification of us all, that he was often rapt for whole weeks, feeling nothing bodily, present to the angelic court, contemplating the super-most-blessed Trinity, and having there an ineffable glory.[2]

(p. 86) And that seraphic Francis, who in his contemplations was often lifted up into the air, and sometimes so high that he could scarcely be seen, was he not a sublime contemplative? Likewise Brother Giles, of whom Bonaventure relates that he saw him rapt into divine things so many times even in one day that he seemed to lead an angelic life on earth. And now what shall I worthily relate of the holy and innocent virgin Elizabeth of Spalbeek, who seven times daily was so rapt into God that her whole little body lay rigid like a stone? Similarly the holy and innocent virgin Catherine of Siena was a most high contemplative, who in her daily contemplations was so far estranged from all sense and motion that even if her hands or feet had been cut off while the rapture lasted, she would not have felt it at all. Of the visions and contemplations of St Bridget the widow, too, wonderful and great things are read.

I touch on these few of many by way of example, so that the things that have been set forth concerning the incomparable eminence of the contemplation of the most blessed virgin Mary may be better weighed. For not only is she surpassed by none of these illustrious persons, but she incomparably surpasses all illustrious, contemplative and heroic persons. Therefore her contemplation, vision and revelation gloriously surpassed

the contemplations, visions and revelations of all those mentioned; although one need not suppose that her contemplations took place with such alienation, ecstasy and rigidity of the body as has been said of the aforesaid Saints, as was shown in the preceding article.

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[1] This is the medieval Provençal legend of St Mary Magdalene at La Sainte-Baume, as told in the *Golden Legend*; Denis treats it as history, as his age generally did.

[2] Denis cites the so-called *Regula monacharum* ascribed to St Jerome, a later compilation; the experience described is not found in Jerome's authentic letters to Eustochium.

Article XII: Whether the virgin Mary, who is most to be glorified, saw God by sight in this life

Shew me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears (Cant. 2:14). Many things have already been set forth concerning the excellence of the wisdom and contemplation of Mary, who is to be admired and loved above all, and how she surpassed and transcended all illustrious persons in these and the other charisms (Arts. 3 and 6 ff.), as far, certainly, as it was fitting that the true Mother of God should shine out beyond the ministers of God. Now the doctors commonly say that Moses, the lawgiver of the Hebrews, and Paul, the teacher of the gentiles, saw God by sight in this life, at least once and for a determined time. For indeed the Lord says of Moses: *[My servant] Moses … is most faithful in all My house: for I speak to him mouth to mouth: and plainly, and not by riddles and figures doth he see the Lord* (Num. 12:7–8). And so for that time there was granted to Moses what had before been denied him, according to what we read: *And the Lord said to Moses: … thou hast found grace before Me, and thee I have known by name. And he said: Shew me Thy glory*; and [he had said before]: *If therefore I have found favour in Thy sight, shew me Thy face, that I may know Thee*. The Lord answered: *I will shew thee all good, and … I will have mercy on whom I will, and I will be merciful to whom it shall please Me. … Thou canst not see My face: for man shall not see Me and live* (Exod. 33:17–20, 13).

Paul, moreover, speaking of himself to the Corinthians, says: *I know a man in Christ … (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I know not: God knoweth): that he was caught up into paradise, and heard secret words, which it is not granted to man to utter* (2 Cor. 12:2–4). Albert says that John the apostle also had a vision of this kind in this life. If, then, the God of immeasurable goodness showed Himself so graciously and clearly to His servants in the present life, how much more to His most beloved Mother? Nay, it seems we should piously believe that He showed the essence of His Godhead by sight in this life to His most worthy and most pure Mother so much the more frequently, clearly and lastingly, as it was fitting that the Mother of God should be honoured and should excel beyond others in this grace.

(p. 87) Further, that the almighty God, the most free agent, *who worketh all things according to the counsel of His will* (Eph. 1:11), grants a greater grace and a clearer knowledge to one than to another, can come about from two things, or from a twofold cause. First, from His side: for those whom He has chosen for a more sublime happiness He prevents with greater graces, and some, by preventing them most mercifully, He touches, inspires, converts, illuminates and inflames. Hence He said in the Gospel: *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will? I will also give to this last even as to thee* (Matt. 20:14–15). Secondly, from the side of the recipient, who, the greater his capacity and dignity, receives the more grace from above, according to that word: *He gave … to every one according to his proper ability* (Matt. 25:15). Now that someone obtains a more abundant grace from God in the first way is judged to come from God's greater charity towards the recipient; but that someone receives more in the second way is caused by his greater preparation, though principally by God's preordaining and bestowing. So, the more the most sacred virgin Mary was loved by God, and the more sublimely receptive she was of the aforesaid vision of God by sight, as being adorned

with greater purity and charity, the more excellently and frequently, beyond others, does it seem that she was raised to it.

Moreover, she was more like and nearer than others to her Only-begotten in all wisdom, perfection and grace; nay, she held herself in a middle place between Christ and the other wayfarers. Now Christ, according to the higher part of His soul, namely the intellective part, was a comprehensor, beholding the Godhead clearly by sight from the first instant of the creation of His soul. It was therefore fitting that His most excellent and most capacious Mother should be raised in this life to a vision of this kind, at least sometimes, and perhaps often, more clearly and more graciously, nay, more gloriously, than others.

Further still, the more fully a wayfarer devotes himself to the worship of the Creator, and the more wholly he offers himself to God and the more fervently cleaves to Him, the more graciously and abundantly does the adorable God, whose loving-kindness, charity and liberality are immense, repay such a man with Himself and with His holy charisms, and the more clearly does He manifest Himself to him. And it is plain that the most meek and most devout Mary subjected, devoted and offered herself to God beyond all holy wayfarers, incomparably, most fully and most entirely; nay, she ministered to Him the substance of her flesh as the matter of the incarnation, and nourished Him, suckled Him, and handled Him maternally and most reverently. Therefore the super-good and most munificent Son Himself visited, filled and illuminated such a Mother of His most graciously and most fully beyond all others, and showed Himself to her as He is, more splendidly and more frequently.

And indeed love proceeds from knowledge; therefore, just as the most reverend and most illustrious virgin Mary burned beyond others in the holy love of the Godhead, and was ineffably more perfect and more unceasing in it, so beyond others she saw God more splendidly. And although the fervour of divine love conceived from the vision of God by sight does not remain in its vigour when such vision ceases, yet a person who has thus beheld God afterwards remembers so most splendid, most desirable and most delightful a vision; and so aspires to it the more, and pines away more strongly with holy love, remembering in what beauty and glory, sweetness, loveliness and excellence he has seen God. Therefore, just as the best and most divine Virgin was more ardent in divine love than Moses and Paul, so she must piously be believed to have seen God beyond them in greater graciousness, beauty and glory. Again, just as the deiform virgin Mary was most ardent in divine charity beyond Moses, so beyond him she is believed to have aspired more to the clear vision of the divine countenance, and to have asked for it, and to have been heard *for her reverence* (Heb. 5:7).

Lastly, we must weigh what St Bernard says: Whatever of the vision and knowledge of God is imparted here to the faithful is a mirror and an enigma, as far distant from the future vision and knowledge as faith *(p. 88)* is distant from truth and time from eternity; except when sometimes there comes to pass what is read of God in the book of Job: *In His hands He hideth the light, and commandeth it to come again. He sheweth His friend concerning it, that it is his possession, and that he may ascend to it* (Job 36:32–33). For to the elect and beloved of God there is sometimes shown in turn a certain light of God's countenance (like a light shut in the hands, which is hidden and revealed at the will of the one who holds it), so that by what he is allowed to see, as it were in passing or in an instant, the soul may be kindled to the full possession of the eternal light. And in order that he may in some measure know what he lacks, grace, as it were passing by, sometimes dazzles the sense of the lover, and snatches him from himself, and carries him away into the day that is, from the tumult of things to the joys of silence; and according to his small measure, for a moment, for an instant, it shows him That Itself to be seen as It is; and meanwhile it also makes him into That Itself, so that he too, according to his small measure, may be as That is. And when there he has learned what difference there is between the clean and the unclean, he is given back to himself and sent back to cleanse his heart for the vision, so that if at some time he is admitted again, he may be purer for seeing and more stable for enjoying. For nowhere does the measure of human imperfection discover itself better than in the light of God's countenance and in

the mirror of the divine vision.

Behold, in these words the holy father Bernard seems to suggest that to certain chief elect and beloved ones of God, God sometimes shows Himself for an instant to be seen as He is: how much more is God, the Son of God, to be believed to have granted this sometimes, or more often, to His most chosen and most beloved spouse and Mother?

Article XIII: An objection against what has been said, and its solution

We see now through a glass in a dark manner; but then face to face (1 Cor. 13:12); *because while we are in the body, we are absent from the Lord* (2 Cor. 5:6). Many things have now been touched upon concerning the pre-excellent wisdom of the glorious and blessed Mary. Against them perhaps it will seem to someone that there stands what is found in the second chapter of Luke, where the Evangelist relates that when Jesus, still a little boy, was found by His virginal Mother in the temple, and she had said confidently, *Son, why hast Thou done so to us? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing*, Jesus answered: *How is it that you sought Me? did you not know, that I must be about My Father's business?* To these words the Evangelist added: *And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them* (Luke 2:48–50). If, then, the most blessed Virgin and Joseph did not understand that answer, it does not seem that the Mother and Virgin was of so eminent a wisdom as has been said.

And it must be answered that without doubt the happy and glorious Mary knew most certainly that her Only-begotten meant the eternal Father by "His Father"; likewise that by "the things that are His Father's" He meant the divine worship; and that He must always be intent, according to the nature He had assumed, on the worship of the heavenly Father. But the circumstances of place and time, and the manner of occupying Himself in the things that are His Father's, she did not yet know. Just as she also sought her Son with sorrow, not because she thought He had gone astray, perished or been lost, but, impatient of separation from her Beloved, she feared lest perhaps He had purposely turned aside or departed to other things; or, as Origen explains, lest perhaps He had returned to heaven, to come back from there when it pleased Him. Furthermore, it can be said that the most loving Mary and Joseph are said not to have understood the aforesaid words because Joseph did not understand them: according to the figure of speech and custom of Scripture, by which something is ascribed to a community, or to two or three, because it belongs to a part of it or to one of them.

Moreover, against what has been said, that certain Saints saw God by sight in this life, it can be objected that the Lord said to Moses: *Thou canst not see My face: for man shall not see Me and live* (Exod. 33:20); and that John says: *No man hath seen God at any time* (John 1:18). Hence in the same Evangelist the Son *(p. 89)* declares: *Not that any man hath seen the Father; but He who is of God, He hath seen the Father* (John 6:46). Hence too the Apostle says to Timothy: *The Blessed and only Mighty, the King of kings … who only hath immortality, and inhabiteth light inaccessible, whom no man hath seen, nor can see* (1 Tim. 6:15–16). For this reason the divine Dionysius taught that this is the most perfect knowledge of God in this life: to be joined to Him as to one altogether unknown, and to know Him by negation, as was shown a little before (Art. 10).

But to all these and similar texts there is one answer: that by the common law no one in this present life can behold God by sight, but by privilege one can. Another answer also is that no one living the sensible and human life can see God in this world by sight. But the Saints who in this world saw God clearly in His essence were not at that time living the sensible and human life, but an intellectual and deiform life, as being wholly plunged into God and transformed. Dionysius, however, speaks of the contemplation of God through a created species, which falls infinitely short of a full representation of the divine essence. Furthermore, it can be answered that the authorities cited are to be explained of bodily vision, by which it is certain that the most simple God cannot be seen in His own nature. Again, they can be explained of the vision of perfect comprehension, by which something is known as perfectly as it is knowable from its nature; and thus God

alone knows and sees Himself, who, as He is of infinite actuality, so also is of infinite intelligibility, and is incomprehensible to every created mind.

Article XIV: That it is to be piously believed that the most meek and most tranquil virgin Mary asked many things of her Only-begotten, who dwelt with her, and learned many things from Him

I will take hold of thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that bore me: there thou shalt teach me (Cant. 8:2; 3:4). Since the whole perfection of man consists in the act of wisdom and of divine love, it may not be doubted that the most fruitful and most virtuous virgin Mary advanced daily especially in these two. And since she held the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament in the greatest reverence, she was certainly eager for a full and clear understanding of them. And since she recognized that in her most loving Son, who was obedient and subject to her and dwelt with her most familiarly, *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge* were *hidden* (Col. 2:3), and that nothing would be denied her by Him, she asked of Him instruction in doubtful and secret matters, and fuller elucidation in things already known, with all humility plainly, with reverence and affection. And He who from the beginning instructed the Patriarchs and Prophets concerning His mysteries, judgements, counsels and secrets, taught His most beloved, most docile and most capacious Mother concerning these same things in a singular and most eminent manner.

Moreover, since this is the property of familiar friends who love one another from the heart, to communicate and reveal their secrets to one another, and gladly to speak of, inquire about and be instructed in what concerns the beloved, it seems certain that, just as between the Lord Jesus and His virginal Mother there was the highest familiarity, the greatest mutual love, perfect faithfulness and consummate munificence, so the most holy Mother inquired most diligently of her most wise Son concerning the mysteries that pertained to Him, the hidden things of the Scriptures, the agreement of the Mosaic and the evangelical law, the reason and explanation of the things she had heard of Him from the angels, from the shepherds, from the Magi, from Zachary and Elizabeth, from Simeon and Anna, and what the fall of the idols of Egypt signified when they entered it.[1] Furthermore, she conferred with her Son concerning the nature of the Godhead, the glory of the Trinity, and why it was the Son above all who assumed human nature; concerning the state of souls after death, the beatitude of the elect and the punishments of the reprobate; and she rejoiced from her heart in His answers and instructions.

(p. 90) On this matter it is contained in the *Revelations* of St Bridget how the most kind virgin Mary said to Bridget in a vision: My Son used to speak to me and to Joseph, apart, words of consolation and words of the Godhead, so that we were filled with unspeakable joy. He also conferred familiarly at home with friends who came, about the Law and its meanings and figures. He disputed also with the wise, so that they wondered, saying: Behold, the son of Joseph teaches the masters; some great spirit speaks in him.

Further, the elect and the saints, both in the Old and in the New Testament, prayed so anxiously for the illumination of the uncreated and eternal Wisdom; and we daily and unceasingly beseech the Lord Jesus Christ to deign to enlighten and teach us. Since, then, the most renowned and most diligent virgin Mary knew most certainly that this very Wisdom was incarnate of her, begotten of her, and dwelling bodily with her, it is evident, I think, that she constantly asked and received illumination and instruction from It. And the Son of God, who *giveth to all men abundantly* (Jas. 1:5), and as they are capable and dispose themselves, poured into His most dear Mother an illumination, wisdom and teaching so much the fuller, the more capable, the more worthy, the purer, the more diligent and the more fervent she was beyond all others for receiving it. For the excellent Lady was by nature very gifted, eager for wisdom, of most noble disposition, of most strong *synderesis*, and greatly inclined to understanding divine things, both from natural disposition and from the inspiration of grace.

Lastly, her Son, whose *delights were to be with the children of men* (Prov. 8:31), to whom it was the more delightful to be with His Virgin Mother the more heartily He loved her above every creature, not only because she was His mother, but chiefly because she was most like Him in all holiness and perfection: He, I say, her Son, imparted munificently and with delight to His so most pure and most affectionate Mother the riches of His wisdom and knowledge, with which He was most full, and that much more even than she asked.

[1] An apocryphal tradition (Pseudo-Matthew 22–23) relates that the idols of Egypt fell when the Holy Family entered the country.

Article XV: On the giftedness and inborn goodness of the most sweet Mary

And I was a witty child, and had received a good soul (Wis. 8:19). Of the excellence of the most glorious Virgin something was said in the first little book (Book I, Art. 8). And since, as the Philosopher testifies, those who are soft or tender of flesh are apt of mind, it is clear that the most happy virgin Mary was, after her Son, of the noblest, most tender and most even constitution. So, from natural disposition, she was most gifted, and by nature most disposed and greatly inclined to wisdom, knowledge and the virtues; especially because, by a singular gift of the Most High, there was in her no fault or passion drawing her back from this inclination of nature. She therefore could say most excellently: I was a gifted girl, and had received a good soul.

Was it not fitting that the Author of nature should have a mother adorned with every natural elegance? So too it was fitting that He who is *the brightness of* the Father's *glory, and the figure of His substance* (Heb. 1:3), *the brightness of eternal light* (Wis. 7:26), the fountain of all wisdom (Ecclus. 1:5), the Word and Wisdom of God the Father (1 Cor. 1:24), should have a mother shining with subtlety of mind, adorned with splendour of intellect, and eminently marked with a likeness to the Godhead.

Further, it is related of many elect and saints of both sexes that there was in them a certain rivalry between the gratuitous and the natural gifts, which helped one another, the gifts of grace perfecting the gifts of nature; and it was hard to weigh in which gifts they excelled the more; and such persons were pleasing, lovable and acceptable both to God and to men. So among the holy virgins were Catherine, Ursula, Barbara, Agnes, Agatha, Margaret and many others. Among all of these the most illustrious and most perfect virgin Mary shines with a primacy as great as befits the Mother of the Fountain and cause of all grace *(p. 91)* and nature to shine out beyond His handmaids.

Hence in the years of her girlhood, while she still lived and was taught in the temple, she advanced in all things in a wonderful manner beyond her companions of the same age, and was subtly instructed in the Scriptures. Hence also her full conversion to God and her contempt of the whole world, by which, out of regard for God and love of Him, she despised worldly things in every way, were the more acceptable to God and the more meritorious, the more that most elegant young girl, by her eminence in natural gifts of both body and soul, could have been held more apt for the world and more acceptable to it. Hence it was fitting for this reason too that she should be so glorious in every natural gift, so that from this her conversion to God might be the more praiseworthy. For it is reckoned less commendable when those leave the world who are less apt for the world.

Article XVI: That the most praiseworthy virgin Mary heard the sermons of her Son more eagerly than all others, understood them more clearly, and profited more by them

A good ear will hear wisdom with all desire (Ecclus. 3:31). The more clearly and certainly the most sacred and most blessed virgin Mary knew beyond others that her Son was true God, the power and Wisdom and Only-begotten of the eternal Father, the more diligently did she listen to His discourses and to all His words

and teachings, and the more fervently and gladly did she hear them. And because she knew this most certainly, she attended to Him as He spoke with an inestimable and most fervent diligence; and she delighted vehemently in His sermons, especially because she understood them deeply; and she profited by them beyond all others. Yet when she heard Him foretell His passion (Matt. 20:18–19), and rebuke the Scribes and Pharisees most sharply (Matt. 23:13 ff.), in one respect she grieved with Him and was afraid, being certain that they, as obstinate men, would be roused more vehemently by such words of her Son to persecute Him and to kill Him.

Moreover, the more ardently the most devout and most serene virgin Mary loved her Son beyond all others, the greater the eagerness with which she attended to Him as He preached. Again, since her Son testified, *He that is of God, heareth the words of God* (John 8:47), the more excellently the God-bearing Mary was predestined, and made divine by God through grace, and the dearer to God, the more like and the nearer, nay, the more familiar, she was, the more earnestly and gladly did she hear God, the Son of God, speaking of God the Father; and the more diligently did she consider His words, the more tenaciously retain them, and the more perfectly fulfil them.

Further, she attended with great diligence to the words of others who spoke of her Son, for example of the angels, the shepherds, the Magi, Zachary, Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna; she held them in memory, and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19, 51): how much more did she hear her Son Himself, the true God, with incomparable diligence and fervour? Further, the more she desired the conversion and salvation of the hearers, the more gladly did she hear her Son discoursing to them, hoping for their conversion, and knowing the efficacy of her Son in preaching.

Further still, if Mary Magdalene was so eagerly and sweetly intent on the words of Christ that she could not be turned away even by her sister Martha, who complained of her and appealed to the Lord (Luke 10:39–40), how much more was the most pure and most fervent mind of Mary the Christ-bearer most intent on the word of God, as being incomparably contemplative, she who chose *the best part* (Luke 10:42) most entirely, and cleaved most perfectly and unswervingly to that *one thing* which alone *is necessary*? For indeed the words of Christ speaking of His Godhead, namely, *Before Abraham was made, I am* (John 8:58); *I and the Father are one* (John 10:30); *What things soever the Father doth, these the Son also doth in like manner* (John 5:19), and the like, the most sincere and most illuminated virgin Mary understood wisely, and exulted from her heart in the contemplation of the Godhead of her Son.

Let us consider how delightful it would be to us now to hear the apostle Paul, or a wayfarer altogether equal to him in all things, *(p. 92)* preaching, and confirming the words of his preaching with abundant and great signs and miracles; and from this let us consider how delicious it was for the most affectionate Mother to hear Him speaking whom she most certainly knew to be the true God, the creator, filler and instructor of the angels, the Patriarchs, the Prophets and all the Apostles; and to see also the most glorious and innumerable signs and miracles which He did by command and at will, in which the manner of acting was often more wonderful than the work itself.

Article XVII: Whether the most blessed virgin Mary knew the trinity of Persons in God before she conceived the Son of God

For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us … and His name shall be called … God the Mighty (Isa. 9:6). That the trinity of Persons in God is intimated in the Law and the Prophets the doctors and expositors of Scripture prove in many ways, and also the Master of the Sentences, in the first book (dist. 2); and I have shown this in various little works, especially in the dialogue *On the Catholic Faith*. And certainly the Holy Spirit gave knowledge of Himself to those Saints whom He filled for prophesying; and that the Son of God was to become incarnate was foretold long before. Now the most venerable and altogether most excellent

virgin Mary was illuminated and perfected in faith no less than the holy Prophets, nay, as is clear from what was said before (Art. 14), much more than the Prophets, having an explicit, or rather a most explicit, faith in the things necessary and pertaining to salvation; therefore the mystery of the super-most-glorious Trinity was gloriously known to her. Further, she was instructed in the Scriptures; and there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit, the author of all sacred Scripture, conferred on her a true and clear understanding of the Scriptures; therefore she knew from the Scriptures that God is three in Persons, as truly as the Scripture of the Old Testament teaches this very thing.

Further, that most blessed and ineffably pre-elected Maiden, who was to be taken up into fellowship with the whole adorable and super-essential Trinity, had to be excellently adorned with a faithful knowledge of that same super-most-happy Trinity. Nor did the eternal Father leave without knowledge of Himself her whom He had pre-elected and decreed to promote, and willed to take up as co-parent. The Son also revealed Himself splendidly to her, of whom He chose to be incarnate, conceived, born and brought up. So too the Holy Spirit manifested Himself specially to her, through faith and through a faithful and wise contemplation, she whom He chose for His temple and shrine, and to be the most happy mother of Him from whom He Himself truly and eternally proceeds; nor did He leave her without a faithful and distinct knowledge of Himself, through her whom He willed to fulfil the oracles of the Prophets.

Hence Ambrose declares: *My soul doth magnify the Lord* (Luke 1:46): because, devoted to the Father and the Son, the soul of Mary venerates with loving affection one God, from whom are all things, and one Lord, through whom are all things. For the same reason she was without doubt truly devoted to the Holy Spirit also, from whom all grace flows. And devotion presupposes faith. So, the more glorious it was to have the mysteries of Christ fulfilled and verified in oneself and through oneself, which took place in the most worthy Mary, than to foretell them, which the Prophets did, the more sublime was the knowledge of the super-most-excellent Trinity infused into the most serene Virgin than into the holy Seers.

Lastly, the truth of all these things is clearly proved from the Gospel. For indeed, when the most wise and most chaste young girl had learned from the Archangel that she was to conceive the King Messiah, the Son of God, she inquired about the manner of this supernatural, most arduous and incomprehensible effect: *How shall this be done*, she said, *because I know not man?* (Luke 1:34), that is, I by no means intend to know one. And this she had promised, either absolutely or under a most honourable condition, namely, unless almighty God should dispose otherwise with her. To this the holy angel answered: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.* (p. 93) *And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God* (Luke 1:35). In this answer the super-blessed Trinity is certainly designated. If, then, the most chosen spouse and daughter of God had not known the mystery of the Trinity before, she would not have understood this very answer, namely what was intimated by the Holy Spirit and what by the Father of the Son of God; nor would she have known whether the Son of God whom she was to conceive was a natural son, co-equal with the Father, or rather an adopted one; and so she would first have had to be instructed about all these things. Nay, just as in the Acts of the Apostles we read that certain men, being asked by Paul, *Have you received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?* at once answered, *We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Ghost* (Acts 19:2); so the most holy Virgin, unless she had already had knowledge of the Trinity, would have had to ask the angel: What do you mean by the Holy Spirit, what by the power of the Most High, what by the Son of God?

Article XVIII: That the blessed virgin Mary was adorned with the gift of prophecy

And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived (Isa. 8:3). The greater the purity of the human mind and its familiarity and friendship with God, the more abundantly it is enlightened by Him, and the more and greater secrets are wont to be revealed to it from above. Hence, as was alleged before, we read in the book of

Wisdom of the uncreated Wisdom that she *conveyeth herself into holy souls*, making *the friends of God and prophets* (Wis. 7:27). Therefore, just as the most blessed virgin Mary was adorned with an incomparable purity, and was supremely and inestimably most familiar and most dear to the almighty Lord, and altogether His most heartfelt friend, so (as I believe) she was most excellently filled, beyond all wayfarers, with the knowledge of mysteries, the knowledge of things to come and the beholding of secrets.

Further, to exalted persons who have the care of a community, things to come and secret things that concern the common good are wont to be shown, as is clear of King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel (Dan. 2:28) and of Pharaoh in Genesis (Gen. 41:25). Since, then, the most sacred Lady was constituted by her adorable Son mother and advocate, queen and guardian, protectress and helper of the whole Church militant, it was fitting that very many things should be revealed to her concerning the state, progress and outcome of the Church militant, so that from foreknowledge of them she might the more provide for and protect the good of the Church. Therefore, although it is sung of St John the apostle that never did a pure man see so many secrets more purely, yet this should be understood with the exception of the most blessed Mother of God, who is pre-eminent over all and shines with singular and very great privileges.

Further, to those who are more sincerely and vehemently solicitous for the common good of the Church, and who pray for it more fervently and frequently, certain more secret things, and things to come concerning the state of the Church, are abundantly revealed, for their consolation, or so that they may pray more earnestly for it. And just as the most affectionate and most holy virgin Mary was incomparably fervent and continually perfect in the charity of Christ and of her neighbours, so she was most vehemently solicitous for the common good of the Church, for all the progress and salvation of the faithful, for the increase of believers and the full constancy of those converted to the faith, praying unceasingly and most fervently; therefore it was most fitting that more and greater things concerning the Church should be revealed to her from above.

Moreover, she foresaw most clearly in spirit how far and wide the evangelical law was to be promulgated and accepted by all nations, when she sang prophetically: *All generations shall call me blessed* (Luke 1:48). Then she saw most certainly how magnificently she was to be praised, how devoutly honoured, how reverently and intimately loved by all the faithful throughout the whole world. You knew, O most sweet Mother, O most venerable Lady, that it had been prophesied of you: *All the rich among the people shall entreat thy countenance* (Ps. 44:13); and likewise: *Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son* (Isa. 7:14). You knew it had been foretold of your Son: *From the ends of the earth* (p. 94) *we have heard praises, the glory of the just one* (Isa. 24:16); and again: *In Him shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed: all nations shall magnify Him* (Ps. 71:17). Therefore you said: *All generations shall call me blessed* (Luke 1:48).

Further, it is said in Job: *The inspiration of the Almighty giveth understanding* (Job 32:8). Since, then, the most serene Virgin had an unceasing and most abundant inspiration of the Holy Spirit, she came to know from it many and very great hidden things and things to come. Christ also said to the Apostles after the supper: *I have yet many things to say to you: but you cannot bear them now* (John 16:12). Since, then, the most wise and most perfect virgin Mary was most apt to receive, understand and bear those things, it does not seem doubtful that her Only-begotten taught her about such things apart, mouth to mouth, and by the inward irradiation of His Godhead into the mind of His most loving and most familiar Mother.

Moreover, it is written of Caiphas, notwithstanding his malice: *Being the high priest of that year, he prophesied* (John 11:51). How much more did it belong to the most excellent Mary, the advocate, empress, guardian, nurse and mother of the whole Church, to foreknow and foretell things to come concerning the Church? Furthermore, it is asserted of the great and holy John the Baptist that he was *a prophet … and more than a prophet* (Matt. 11:9), because Him whom he foretold as coming he pointed out as present. How much more was the most sweet Mary more than a prophetess, because Christ, of whom she prophesied many things in her canticle while He was not yet born from the womb, she not only pointed out as present to the shepherds, to the Magi, to Simeon and Anna and to many others, but brought Him forth for the whole world

and showed Him present?

Lastly, not only the glorious Apostles but very many other Saints of the evangelical law shone sublimely with the gift of prophecy: such as Dionysius, as is clear from his epistle to John the apostle (Ep. 10), Servatius, Martin, Benedict, Bernard and Francis; all of whom the most lovable and unique virgin Mary without doubt surpassed inestimably in this gift.

Article XIX: Whether the blessed and glorious virgin Mary had the other gifts of grace freely given, namely the grace of healings, the working of powers, that is, of miracles, the discerning of spirits, the interpretation of speeches, and kinds of tongues (1 Cor. 12:9–10)

Blessed art thou among women (Luke 1:28). The blessing of God is the conferring of His benefits and gifts and the multiplying of them, and above all of the spiritual gifts of grace and glory. So upon the most chosen and incomparable Mary, in women, among women, above women and beyond all women, there were most excellently conferred both the gifts of sanctifying grace and the gifts of grace freely given, which were granted to other women separately and in parts. Now to many women, that is, to persons of the female sex, the gifts of grace freely given touched upon in the title have been granted, as is clear from the Chronicles and the Legends of the Saints; therefore all these were given together and most eminently to the most worthy Mary, who is surpassed by none of the illustrious.

Indeed, she had the discerning of spirits before the Lord's annunciation. For from her infancy, when she began constantly to use her reason, she is believed to have been accustomed to angelic apparitions. And when she saw and heard the archangel Gabriel, *she was troubled at his saying* (Luke 1:29), not at his appearance, being certain that he was a holy angel. But by what means a good spirit is distinguished from an evil one, and concerning the testing of spirits, is a difficult and subtle matter, on which I have lately, with God's help, published a little work.[1]

The interpretation of speeches, that is, the elucidation of the Scriptures, namely a clear understanding of them and also the faculty of expounding it, she had before the sending of the Paraclete, nay, even before the conception of the Son of God; yet in such a way that at the conception of the Only-begotten of the most high Father, and then daily, but most of all on the holy day of Pentecost, when she received the Holy Spirit with the glorious Apostles (Acts 2:1–4), *(p. 95)* she advanced greatly in the clear understanding of the holy Scriptures, understanding more clearly the truths contained in them, the full knowledge of which, for the most part, is had only in the homeland, or in the vision of the Godhead by sight. Kinds of tongues she received with the blessed Apostles in the aforesaid reception of the Holy Spirit. The grace and power of working wonders she is believed to have had, at least from the time when the most wonderful, most incomprehensible and most supernatural work of all wonderful, incomprehensible and supernatural works, namely the incarnation of the eternal Word, was accomplished in her and through her; although the most glorious Lady is not read to have worked miracles publicly while she remained in this life, any more than St John the Baptist. But whether the God-bearing Mother in this life used the gift of tongues, and the wisdom which is a gift of grace freely given, in instructing others, has partly been treated before (Art. 5).

Further, on this matter Albert writes in his book *On the Praises of the Glorious Virgin* (*Mariale*, q. 133): Of the gifts that are freely given and do not make one pleasing, some are given for ministry and not for one's own profit, as the prophecy of Balaam and of Caiphas (Num. 23–24; John 11:49–52); some for one's own profit and also for ministry or the advantage of others, as the gifts of discerning of spirits and of tongues, and the knowledge given to the Apostles; and some for one's own profit and not for that of others, as the gifts of instruction of the most blessed Lady. And of these, some are given to supply a need, some to adorn a power, and some to ennoble the nature and honour the person; and in this way the most blessed Virgin had gifts of

this kind, not for ministry, but for the heaping up of her adornment, for the increase of her perfection and delight, as matter for praise and for the increase of honour, and for the completion of all spiritual goods.

These words of Albert seem to be said with probability, except that he says that the most blessed Virgin did not receive the gifts of instruction for the profit of others: because, as was shown above (Art. 5), the evangelist Luke is believed to have been instructed by her in many things. St Ignatius also, and many other neophytes, sought and received instruction from her, as was shown above from the epistle of St Ignatius. And the company of holy virgins who dwelt with the most glorious Lady after the ascension of Christ was constantly instructed by her, and many other devout women, who constantly took refuge with her and came to her.

Moreover, just as (according to the teachings of the divine Dionysius, *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, ch. 1) all the choirs and orders of the angels receive purification, illumination and perfection in the Church triumphant not only from Christ according to His assumed nature but also from the most excellent Mary, so in the Church militant even the highest in the primitive Church, namely the Apostles, received purification, illumination and perfection from her, and in doubtful and difficult matters had recourse to her as to the wisest of all and the most excellent Mother of God, and their Lady; as was shown above also from the words of Jerome (Art. 5).[2] Further, as was said before, many exalted persons converted from paganism in the primitive Church, knowing that the most glorious and incomparable Mary, the Mother of God, was still living in mortal flesh, wondered most vehemently at her holiness and excellence, and with the desire of seeing and hearing her came to her from remote and various places, as was shown before (Book I, Art. 29) from the epistles of St Ignatius, and related of the divine Dionysius. Nor is there any doubt that the most meek, most humble and most affectionate virgin Mary, out of ineffable charity, loving-kindness and humility, allowed herself to be seen by them, and strengthened them in the faith by her appearance, her speech and her example; and also innumerable persons converted to Christ from Judaism, as is also contained in the *Revelations* of St Bridget and will be touched upon below.

Hence I think that the most sweet Virgin sometimes used the gift of tongues too towards the converted gentiles, *(p. 96)* especially because (as was related above from her epistle to St Ignatius) the most loving Mary herself wrote to Ignatius that she would come to him and to those with him who had been converted from heathenism, for their confirmation, consolation and instruction.

Lastly, on this matter Thomas writes in the third part of his *Summa*, question twenty-seven (III, q. 27, a. 5, ad 3): There is no doubt that the blessed Virgin received excellently the gift of wisdom, the grace of powers, and also the grace of prophecy. Yet she did not so receive them as to have the use of these and similar graces as Christ had, but according as it befitted her condition. For she had the use of wisdom in contemplating, but not for teaching, because this did not befit the female sex, according to that saying of the Apostle: *I suffer not a woman to teach* (1 Tim. 2:12). The use or act of miracles also did not befit her while she lived here, because at that time the teaching of Christ had to be confirmed by miracles; and therefore it befitted Christ alone and His disciples, who were the bearers of Christ's teaching, to work miracles. Thus far Thomas.

His words are uncertain, and perhaps not even true. For it has already been shown that the most sacred virgin Mary taught many. Nor did Paul forbid to women such private teaching, which is also an act of the wisdom which is a gift of grace freely given; and even if he had forbidden it to them, that prohibition would not have fallen upon the most excellent Mother of God, over whom Paul had no jurisdiction, and who is above all rather than one among all.

Lastly, what Thomas asserts, that it befitted only the disciples of Christ, the bearers of His teaching, to work miracles, does not appear to be so. First, because God worked many wonders through Mary Magdalene, who by praying obtained fruitfulness for a barren princess, as is clear from her Legend; secondly, because her sister, blessed Martha, among other things raised a dead man, and subdued a horrible dragon, bound it and

delivered it to death. And these women lived in the times of the Apostles, and were their disciples, nay, Christ's. In like manner the Lord worked many miracles through St Thecla, the disciple of the apostle Paul; all of which are set out in the *Golden Legend* of the Saints.[3]

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[1] Denis's *De discretione et examinatione spirituum*.

[2] This and the "epistles of St Ignatius" to and from the Virgin rest on medieval apocrypha, on which see the note to Article 5.

[3] The miracles of Martha and of the Magdalene in Provence come from the *Golden Legend* and related medieval sources, which Denis accepts as history.

Article XX: That in the gifts of understanding and counsel the most excellent virgin Mary was the most perfect after Christ

For who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord, and hath seen and heard His word? (Jer. 23:18). The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are supernatural, created, infused and formed habits, inseparably joined to charity, making the intellectual creature promptly movable by the Holy Spirit. Now understanding, as a gift, is a habit of this kind enlightening the mind, by which the things of faith are in some manner seen through and penetrated, in that the reasons or arguments for the things to be believed and for the faith are known. Since, then, the most kind and most wise virgin Mary had faith together with the reasons for the things to be believed and with the understanding of a purified mind, in the highest degree among pure wayfarers, it is clear that she penetrated the things of faith most clearly, as far as was possible to a wayfaring mind, and knew the truths of faith through most certain signs, nay, through abundant experience: for example, that a virgin had conceived, that God had been made man, that the King Messiah had come, that God is three in Persons and one in essence, that the Son of God is God and man in unity of Person. The best of virgins knew most clearly the arguments of faith: how they are proved through the Scriptures of the Old Testament, through the final abandonment of the Jews, through divine miracles possible to God alone, through the evidence of the divine charisms, through heavenly revelations and apparitions, and in other ways.

Now counsel, as it is a gift, is not an act of prudence, but a habit by which the mind is directed by the Holy Spirit to see *(p. 97)* what is to be done or avoided in difficult and doubtful matters, in which human foresight does not suffice without supernatural divine direction. With this gift of counsel the most chosen virgin Mary was so full that in all such matters she was directed unswervingly by the Holy Spirit, and was instructed by His anointing and inspiration as to what was to be done or left undone. Nor did that word of the Wise Man have place in her: *Our providence is uncertain* (Wis. 9:14); but she most fully fulfilled what Scripture says: *Before every action let steadfast counsel go before thee* (Ecclus. 37:20).

So, through the most splendid gift of understanding, the most serene virgin Mary was most apt and most prompt to behold the things of faith most subtly; to contemplate with delight the connection and order, the harmony and reasonableness of the things to be believed when all are brought together; to consider also her own dignity and the eminence of her graces, and on account of these to render most devout thanks to God. And through the gift of counsel she was most familiarly and most specially accustomed to be moved by the Holy Spirit in every matter requiring counsel, so much so that the unique Virgin herself was supremely fit to give most wholesome counsel to others as well.

Article XXI: How gloriously prudent the most sweet and most divine virgin Mary was

Say to wisdom: Thou art my sister: and call prudence thy friend (Prov. 7:4). Prudence is called right reason about things to be done, that is, the intellectual virtue that teaches what is to be done and what is to be avoided, and inclines to what is to be done and shrinks from what is to be avoided. Prudence is also often taken for discretion. Just as wisdom, then, is concerned with divine things, so prudence is concerned with

human things; and it is the director of human acts, providing and disposing concerning the means suited to obtaining the end intended.

Who, then, can now sufficiently wonder at or worthily praise the prudence of the most sacred virgin Mary, since the incomparable Lady herself, in all her conduct, in all the ruling of her house, in all her choices, never exceeded nor erred, but in all things bore herself irreproachably and in order, walking continually by the royal road and never turning aside to the right hand or to the left, fulfilling supremely that word of the Apostle: *Let all things be done decently, and according to order* among you (1 Cor. 14:40)? Truly most prudent altogether was Mary, who was so most fervent that she was none the less most discreet in all things, offering to God unceasingly a most *reasonable service* (Rom. 12:1); who never sinned even venially, whether in food, drink, sleep, clothing, word, act, arrangement, or in any course of her life. O how superhuman, how wonderful, how most gracious this was! How most mercifully, paternally and unceasingly almighty God guarded, directed and protected in all things His most beloved spouse, Mother and daughter!

This prudence of the supremely blessed Mary preserved her from all precipitation, inconsiderateness, inconstancy, negligence and torpor, and made her advance ineffably every day. For indeed, as the great Anthony says, no virtue brings a man to perfection so quickly and readily as discretion, which is an act of prudence. Therefore the most discreet Virgin advanced most swiftly. Further, through this consummate prudence the God-bearing Mary governed most excellently, and always directed in perfect order, that most sacred company of happy virgins, one hundred and twenty (as it is said), who were devoted to her service; she ordered bodily things most rightly to spiritual things; she was supremely watchful and diligent in all things, having a consummate remembrance of the past, understanding of the present and foresight of the future; watchful on every side, circumspect in each thing, and supremely modest, skilful and docile in all, as the image and pattern of all *(p. 98)* virtue. Therefore she was most like to the *wise man* (Matt. 7:24), the Lord Jesus Christ, building the house of her mind and the structure of her virtues upon the rock of most solid humility, of most firm filial fear, and of the inward guard of the heart.

Article XXII: On the perfection of the knowledge and understanding of the most high and blessed Mary, according to Albert

Therefore the desire of wisdom bringeth to the everlasting kingdom (Wis. 6:21). Many things have been set forth concerning the manifold wisdom and knowledge of the most worthy Mary, and concerning her incomparable excellence in them. Hence Albert writes in his book *On the Praises of the Most Blessed Virgin* (*Mariale*, q. 111): The most blessed Virgin had many privileges in her knowledge. The first is the perfect knowledge of the Trinity of God without a medium, which she had on the way by a most special grace. The second is the perfect knowledge of the mystery of the Incarnation, and this she had by grace and by a singular experience. The third is the knowledge of her own predestination, which she had by revelation and through its cause. The fourth is the knowledge of her own soul and of spirits through their proper species, which she had dispositively by nature and completively by grace; and according to this she saw angels, souls and demons. The fifth is the perfect knowledge of all things pertaining to the state of the way, which she had by the infusion and inspiration of grace; and this includes the perfect knowledge of the Scriptures, and of things to be done and to be contemplated. The sixth is the knowledge of all things to come concerning herself, which she had by revelation and in the mirror of the readings. The seventh is the knowledge of all things pertaining to the state of the homeland, which she had by the revelation of contemplation. The eighth is the knowledge of the states of all creatures, which she had by nature, by grace and by contemplation. The ninth is that she had morning and evening knowledge: morning knowledge by grace; evening knowledge by nature and by grace.[1] The tenth is the conclusion from the foregoing, that, properly speaking, she was ignorant of nothing; so that the most blessed Virgin was sufficiently perfected by the habit of nature and of grace to go forth into operations and to attain the end of every science; and this knowledge went forth into act and

operation when, where, how and as much as was ordained for her beatitude and for the salvation of others. For she had perfect knowledge of all things pertaining to her beatitude according to the state of the way, and of nothing useless or irrelevant to grace, but she was wholly full of grace. Hence all things that were in her soul, whether natural or acquired, were so informed by grace or joined with grace that now all were gratuitous: hence all her knowledge was gratuitous, all her love gratuitous, all her operation gratuitous, so that without any restriction, by the widest and truest interpretation, she was in every way full of grace. Thus far Albert.

His words I have set forth by way of report rather than of assertion; and they seem rather obscure. For although the most blessed virgin Mary is believed to have contemplated God by sight sometimes in this life, yet it does not appear that she had a perfect knowledge of the Trinity without a medium, since all knowledge takes place through an intelligible form as through a medium. Yet in the vision in which God, or the adorable Trinity, is seen face to face, that medium or intelligible species does not differ really from the object; for indeed God cannot be seen thus through a created form. But since I by no means desire to diminish or to narrow the ineffable eminence of the knowledge and understanding of the most holy Mary, but rather to extol it, I therefore pass over the aforesaid words of Albert; nor do I wish to argue curiously against them, for I believe they were uttered with a good intention.

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[1] "Morning" and "evening" knowledge is Augustine's distinction (*De Genesi ad litteram* IV): knowledge of things in the Word of God, and knowledge of things in their own nature.

Article XXIII: How the most kind virgin Mary is called the saviour of the world, and to have co-operated with her Son in the redemption of the world

(p. 99) And thou shalt call His name Jesus. For He shall save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). The Only-begotten of God alone is called and is the Saviour of the world, that is, the redeemer and liberator of the human race, as the One who paid the price for the redemption of the captives, handing Himself over to death for them and pouring out His blood; in such a way that the power and fitness belonged to His humanity from the Godhead united to it, while the satisfaction itself, the merit and the payment, belonged to the assumed humanity. And thus the passion of Christ, by way of instrumental and meritorious cause, is the cause of our redemption and salvation.

Yet, just as our ruin came about at the suggestion and with the co-operation of a woman, who led the man to eat of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6), so our redemption was brought about through a woman. For the most pure Virgin brought forth the Redeemer for us; nay, by the merit of her holiness she also merited for us *de congruo* the coming of the Redeemer. And what is the cause of a cause is said to be the cause of what is caused. And although the Son of the Virgin is also the creator of the world, yet she is not on that account called the creatress of the world: because to create belongs to Christ from His Godhead, which He did not take nor has from His Mother; but to redeem and to save, in the manner just mentioned, is ascribed to Christ from His humanity. Yet to save by way of principal and efficient cause, for example by forgiving sins, infusing grace and granting true salvation, belongs to Christ from the nature of the Godhead, as also to the whole super-most-blessed Trinity and to each divine Person, according to that word of Isaiah: *There is no God else besides Me, a just God and a saviour, there is none besides Me* (Isa. 45:21); and according to that of Hosea: *But I am the Lord thy God … and there is no saviour beside Me* (Hos. 13:4).

Furthermore, God's most beloved Virgin, the Christ-bearer, can be called the saviour of the world on account of the eminence, the virtue and the merit of her compassion, by which, suffering with her suffering Son most faithfully and most bitterly, she excellently merited that through her, that is, through her prayers and merits, the power and merit of the passion of Christ should be communicated to men. She also procures it again for those who have fallen from the grace of Christ, and the kingdom of mercy has been committed to her. Hence

she is the singular and most powerful refuge of the lost, the hope of the wretched, the advocate and reconciler of all the wicked who take refuge with her.

Finally, so great is the fullness and abundance of the merits of the most loving Virgin that by virtue of them almighty God has mercy on all of us and comes to our aid; and she could most excellently declare that word of the Apostle: *I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for His body, which is the Church* (Col. 1:24); and likewise: *I rejoice in my sufferings for you* (ibid.). Further, if it was lawful for Paul, the minister of Christ, to say of the Jews, *that I may save some of them* (Rom. 11:14), how much more is it ascribed to the most powerful Mother of Christ that she is the saviour of those whom she unceasingly helps, for whose salvation she is solicitous, whose most faithful advocate she is, their most affectionate mother, their most loving reconciler, their constant helper and protectress?

Article XXIV: How fittingly the most worthy Mary is called the illuminatrix of the world; and on the benefits conferred on us through her

I am the root and stock of David, the bright and morning star (Apoc. 22:16). Among the privileges granted to the virgin Mother is this, that she is the star of the sea, that is, of this stormy and restless world, namely of the human race, which in this world is on pilgrimage, in peril and going astray. For just as in the firmament that star which is called the star of the sea is lofty in position and, as it were, immovable, directing sailors and attracting iron, and the heavens turn about it, so the best *(p. 100)* and incomparable Mary was in the Church militant, and now is in the Church triumphant, supreme and most constant, directing the exiles, showing the way of salvation, softening the hardened; and the world turns about her.

Moreover, the Lord and Saviour communicated to His most beloved, most chosen and most excellent Mother that she should be the restorer, the illuminatrix and the saviour of the world, in the fourfold genus of cause. For first, she was made the efficient cause of our restoration and illumination: because she conceived and brought forth for us the restorer and illuminator of us all; and again, because by her prayers and merits she procures for us pardon, grace and salvation. She was also made the material cause of our restoration, because the body of the Saviour was taken and formed from her most pure blood; and also the formal and exemplary cause, because by the light of her grace, by the splendour of her virtues and by the example of her most holy life, she offers to all of us a form of living and a way of returning from darkness to salvation. She is also the final cause of our restoration, because our salvation is ordained principally to the glory of Christ, and then in some manner to the glory of His Mother; just as the progress and salvation of good subjects is ordained to the glory of their prelates, as the Apostle writes to the Thessalonians: *For what is our hope, or our joy, or crown of glory? Are not you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?* (1 Thess. 2:19).

From these things the multitude and greatness of the benefits granted to us from above through the most sweet Mary become known. For indeed from her and through her our God was made our brother, our Lord was made our minister, our Creator was made our Saviour, our Judge was made our mediator, reconciler and advocate. We who were *children of wrath* (Eph. 2:3) have been made children of grace through her fruit and help; whatever goodness and grace we obtain from God, we acquire through her; through her we have been snatched from the yoke of sin and from the pains of hell, and have gained the hope and merit of eternal salvation.

O how most glorious and most renowned you are, virgin Mary, most ardent and most shining lamp, most luminous torch kindled with divine fire, made pregnant with eternal light! You bore within your virginal womb the uncircumscribed Light abiding within the little body taken from you, and you shone within with exceedingly abundant rays of so great a light. You truly and abundantly enlightened the world, when you brought forth this light *to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death* (Luke 1:79), and showed men their Creator, and brought forth for those held in limbo their most longed-for deliverer. From you and

through you we have received Him through whom *grace and truth came* (John 1:17), who is the teacher of justice, the perfect lawgiver, the fountain of wisdom (Ecclus. 1:5), the brightness of eternal light, the mirror of the divine majesty (Wis. 7:26). Because we could not grasp Him in His purity, nor behold Him in His infinite brightness, He took our nature from you, and so made Himself visible, audible and tangible to us. In you and through you we have help in every necessity, solace in every sorrow, relief in every temptation, aid in every want. For so many and such great benefits conferred on us from above from you and through you, we are in no way able to give worthy thanks to God.

Article XXV: That the most divine virgin Mary knew most certainly beforehand that her Son was to suffer

He hath received Israel His servant, being mindful of His mercy: as He spoke to our fathers (Luke 1:54–55). In the words of her most sweet canticle the most blessed virgin Mary intimated that she knew how of old *God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke … to the fathers by the prophets* (Heb. 1:1) concerning the coming of His Son to redeem the human race. Nor was the most illuminated virgin Mary of the number of the carnal Jews, who thought that Christ would come in power and *(p. 101)* glory at His first coming, to redeem the Jews from a temporal, human captivity, and to reign mightily in this world, and to subject the gentiles to the dominion of the Jews, as the carnal, blinded and obstinate Jews think even to the present day. But the most wise Virgin was of the list of the spiritual Israelites, knowing that the Prophets spoke of a twofold coming of Christ: of the first, in humility, poverty and hiddenness, that He might be judged and suffer; and of the second, in majesty and glory, that He might judge all; and likewise that He would come first to redeem not only the people of Israel but the whole human race from the spiritual captivity of the devil and the yoke of sin. These things the most beautiful and most well-mannered Virgin knew; therefore she longed with most ardent devotion for the coming of Christ.

Further, what was plain to all the Prophets was not hidden from the most illuminated Lady, as the prince of the apostolic order says in the Acts: *But those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled* (Acts 3:18). The Lady of the Prophets, the most anointed virgin Mary, also knew (unless I am mistaken) what Daniel had foretold about the time of the coming of Christ (Dan. 9:25), and the patriarch Jacob in Genesis, saying: *The sceptre shall not be taken away from Juda … till He come that is to be sent* (Gen. 49:10); which the best of virgins saw taken away. Indeed Christ rebuked ignorance of these things in the Pharisees, saying: *When it is evening, you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red. And in the morning: Today there will be a storm, for the sky is red and lowering. You know then how to discern the face of the sky: and can you not know the signs of the times?* (Matt. 16:2–3). This ignorance, then, must be believed to have been far from the most wise mind of Mary.

Therefore, just as (as Ambrose testifies) she read in Isaiah: *Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son* (Isa. 7:14), so she read in the same Prophet: *He hath delivered His soul unto death, and was reputed with the wicked … He was wounded for our iniquities … and by His bruises we are healed* (Isa. 53:12, 5). She knew these things also both from the private declaration of her Beloved and from His public preaching. Nor was she ignorant that He would rise again on the third day.

Article XXVI: On the most excellent increase of the most pure Mary in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, at the sending and infusion of that same Paraclete

But when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth (John 16:13). As the evangelist Luke teaches in the Acts, when Christ had ascended into heaven from Mount Olivet in the sight of the disciples, they returned from there to Jerusalem and went up into the upper room, where Christ had then held the last supper with them. And there they persevered with one mind in prayer, with the most blessed Mother and Virgin and other holy women (Acts 1:9–14), fulfilling what Christ is read in Luke to have commanded them:

And I send the promise of My Father upon you: but stay you in the city till you be endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49). So, from the day of the ascension until the hour of the day of Pentecost in which it received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–4), that most sacred company applied itself most devoutly to prayers and fasts, preparing itself by these and similar holy interior exercises for the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Now the Holy Spirit, coming, filled each of them the more abundantly, the more capable and worthy each was and the more devoutly each had prepared himself. Therefore, just as the most serene virgin Mary alone was more excellent, more capable and more excellently disposed than all those others, so she alone received more of the heavenly charisms then conferred by the Holy Spirit, and advanced ineffably beyond them all in the ardour of charity, in the light of wisdom, in the knowledge of the Scriptures and in every virtue. In the gift of tongues also and in prophetic grace, in the discerning of spirits and the interpretation of speeches, that is, the faculty of expounding the words of the sacred Utterance, and in the other gifts of grace freely given touched upon above (Arts. 4, 19), she then grew beyond all others.

(p. 102) Moreover, the fervent affection of charity is the most powerful and the nearest disposition for receiving the better charisms, a more abundant influx of the Holy Spirit, increase of grace and the advance of all the virtues. For the intense affection of love opens the mind and makes it abundantly capable of its beloved. Hence, just as the most happy of creatures, the incomparable virgin Mary, was ineffably more perfect than all and each of them in the fervour of most sincere charity, so she received the charisms of the Paraclete most abundantly beyond them all. For indeed, since she was most wonderfully burning in the charity of God and of her neighbours, and most affectionately desired the fruit of the passion of her Only-begotten, that is, the conversion of men, nay, longed supremely for the honour of the divine majesty, there is no doubt that during that time she prayed most ardently and most earnestly for that most gracious coming of the Holy Spirit, without whose influx, help and grace she knew that none of these things could be fulfilled. Therefore through those supremely fiery, divine and most pure desires she was being disposed for a most abundant and incomparable reception of the Holy Spirit.

Further, the Holy Spirit, of whose opulence and munificence there is no end, visited most singularly, filled most graciously and, beyond all, most liberally filled to overflowing that most chosen vessel and His most familiar shrine: the most excellent Mother of Him from whom He Himself eternally flows forth and receives the whole fullness of the Godhead; His altogether most dear spouse and daughter, in whom He was chiefly well pleased. Further, since humility is the chief preparation for a more abundant filling with the Holy Spirit, it is altogether certain that, just as the most sacred Mary was then adorned with the deepest humility incomparably beyond all others, so she was most disposed for a most abundant reception of the Paraclete, and was inestimably filled with Him beyond all; as it was fitting that the most loving Mother of the true God should be visited most munificently beyond His ministers, and because all, even the holy Apostles, were to have recourse to her, and to behold the Lord Himself in her as in a most pure mirror.

Further still, as the Truth testifies, *to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound* (Luke 19:26; Matt. 25:29); which is verified of the possession of spiritual riches. For progress springs from progress, and merits make increase upon merits; and just as one vice draws to another, so one virtuous action entices to another; and the more perfect anyone is in any virtue or gift, the stronger he is to advance in them by exercising himself in them. Therefore, the purer the most blessed and most sweet virgin Mary was before that sending of the Paraclete in all holiness beyond all others, the more resplendent in all wisdom, the more fervent in the most sincere charity of God and of her neighbours, and the more perfect in every virtue and gift, so much the more did she receive incomparable increases in all these, beyond the others, in that most full infusion of the Holy Spirit. And so, from then on, by the incomparable efficacy and fervour of her prayers, by the most powerful and constant vigour of her most holy desires, and by the most abundant merits of her most virtuous life, she merited every day for innumerable sinners the grace of conversion, for the converted progress, for those advancing perfection; and she was the most faithful and most efficacious

guardian of the whole Church.

Article XXVII: On the theoretical advance of constant contemplation, and on the most vehement daily advance of the most merciful and most tranquil virgin Mary after the ascension of her Son

A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me, he shall abide between my breasts (Cant. 1:12). When God and Saviour was about to ascend into heaven, He said to the Apostles: *Behold I am with you all days* (Matt. 28:20); and a little before: *I will not leave you orphans* (John 14:18); and again: *Your* (p. 103) *sorrow shall be turned into joy* (John 16:20). With this spiritual and consoling presence Christ remained above all with His most worthy and most beloved Mother, whom He cherished with inward consolations the more frequently, the more she longed for His presence face to face. Further, the more she despised all earthly consolations, the worthier she was of divine and heavenly consolations.

This also we can note, that as long as the most blessed virginal Mother had her Son present on earth, she could endure with equanimity the sojourn of this exile and the delay of glory. But now that her Son had ascended to the heights of the heavens, the most sweet heart of His Mother had ascended together with Him; and with her Son seated in the height of the empyrean heaven, the mind of His most affectionate Mother was immovably fixed on Him and intent on Him unceasingly and fervently, nor could she think of or behold anything but her Beloved, and other things in her Beloved. Therefore she was fixed more than usual in the contemplation of divine things, nor did any occupation with the persecutions and afflictions of her Son, who was to die, now draw her away from contemplation.

Moreover, if it was lawful for Paul to say, *Our conversation is in heaven* (Phil. 3:20), and likewise, *And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me* (Gal. 2:20), how much more was the conversation of the most meek and most spiritual Virgin now wholly in heaven, and she most purified from all private love, living in all things according to the will, the precept, the counsel and the teaching of God, for His glory and honour? And so the contemplation and love, the prayer, the praise and the whole occupation of the most excellent Mother daily, nay, constantly, approached more and more to the brightness of the beatific vision, to the fervour of the charity of the citizens above, to the canticles and affections of the Blessed and to the life of the heavenly paradise; was conformed to them, cleaved to them, and shone with them.

Furthermore, it was most fitting that, just as she was always supremely and most faithfully suffering with her Son when He suffered, so, now that He was glorified, she should rejoice more than usual in a share of the beatitude to come, be refreshed by a foretaste of it, be sustained by contemplations, and now in some manner begin to be glorified on earth, and bear an angelic appearance in her countenance, to show forth the heaven-like cleanness and the deiform holiness of her mind. The wise splendour, the perfect sincerity, the divine tranquillity and the most abundant virtue and grace of that mind so shone forth outwardly in all your bearing, speech, gait and face, O most glorious virgin Mary, most to be glorified, that these very things were to those who beheld you sincerely a sufficient argument for the truth of the Christian faith; and from the sight of you, from hearing your words, and from the contemplation of your whole life, the truth of the evangelical law was evidently plain to those who beheld it. To the praise and glory of the Almighty, who is God most high and blessed above all things. Amen.

Book III: On the Virtues of the Most Glorious Virgin Mary

Prooemium

(p. 105) One is my dove, my perfect one (Cant. 6:8). As St Jerome most excellently affirms, just as in comparison with God no one is good, however virtuous, so in respect of the most holy Mary no woman is perfect, however endowed with virtues. Nay, just as the moon, the stars and the planets, beautiful and bright in themselves, set and do not appear in comparison with the sun, so there have been many virgins and women of outstanding holiness, who even to the beatitude of martyrdom acted victoriously and manfully, and yet in respect of the most chosen Mother of God they stand imperfect. Hence, to intimate the most glorious excellence of the most blessed virgin Mary, the heavenly Bridegroom put before the words already quoted from the Canticle: *There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and young maidens without number* (Cant. 6:7).

In these words (as I have written more fully on the Canticle), by the queens are understood souls that are virtuous, holy and perfect: which stand out above the others as queens above handmaids, and are brought into the constant and most pure embraces of the supreme King; on which account they are not undeservedly called queens; and likewise because they rule the flesh, the concupiscences and the passions so fully that they are rightly called queens. Nevertheless there is an order among them, according as one is holier than another. And the most glorious virgin Mary is the queen, empress and incomparable lady of them all, and the others are, as it were, her attendants, as the Psalmist says: *After her shall virgins be brought to the king* (Ps. 44:15).

By the concubines, moreover, are understood the souls of those who are advancing: which have not yet been made so familiar with the heavenly Bridegroom, nor so pure, as to be called queens, but, like concubines, are less principal; nor do they enjoy the longed-for and pure embraces as constantly as the queens. For in the Scriptures concubines are spoken of not only as fornicating and unlawful bedfellows, but also as secondary and less principal wives: as in Genesis Bala and Zelpha are sometimes called wives, sometimes concubines, of the blessed patriarch Jacob (Gen. 30:4, 9; 35:22); and likewise Agar and Cetura are named in Genesis now wives, sometimes concubines, of holy Abraham (Gen. 16:3; 25:1, 6).

(p. 106) And by the young maidens are signified the souls of beginners: which, like young girls, still suffer the stirrings of wantonness, and are light, not yet spiritual; yet they are joined to the Bridegroom above through faith, the grace of Baptism and the keeping of the Decalogue. Their number is greater, just as the number of those advancing is greater than that of the perfect. For the more perfect and eminent things are, the fewer they are in this life. And just as in the whole Church militant there is one supreme Pontiff, in whom alone is the fullness of ecclesiastical power, in respect of whom other prelates, however excellent, are subjects and of little power or authority; so in the whole Church triumphant, nay, in the whole company of the elect, among the elect creatures subsisting in created being, one alone is perfect and supreme, most dear to God, incomparably great, raised above the heights of all the angelic orders, and nearest to the heavenly Bridegroom.

This is the most loving, most pure, most sweet virgin Mary, co-parent with the eternal Father, Mother of the Only-begotten of God, the most chosen, most pure and most resplendent temple of the adorable Paraclete, the Holy Spirit. Of her virtues I desire to speak in this third part of this little work, though altogether most unworthy, trusting in her ineffable motherly loving-kindness and in her most merciful help from above.

Article I: On the clarity and certainty of the faith of Mary, who is to be loved above all and glorified

Blessed art thou that hast believed (Luke 1:45). The knowledge of wayfarers in the most blessed virgin Mary approached and was likened to the vision of the Blessed and the comprehensors as far as can be done, or is

fitting, in a created person who is a wayfarer. And just as the most sweet virgin Mary was incomparably more like than all others to the soul of Christ in holiness, so also in the purity of her knowledge. Now the soul of Christ from the beginning of its creation saw the adorable Godhead clearly by sight. And it was shown in the preceding little book (Book II, Art. 12) that the most worthy virgin Mary not only saw God by sight in this life as Paul and Moses did (2 Cor. 12:2–4; Exod. 33:11, 18 ff.), but also more clearly, and (as is more probable) also more frequently. And such a vision most vehemently strengthens faith. For even in wayfarers who see God in this way faith remains as to its habit; and when such vision ceases, faith retains from it a wonderful and ineffable clarification and certainty, so that a man cannot doubt that the faith and the law, by whose tenor and merit he has been raised to so supernatural a vision, are truly divine and acceptable to the Almighty.

Moreover, faith is the foundation of the whole spiritual structure and of all the virtues and virtuous and meritorious acts in this life; without it nothing is meritorious, and without it *it is impossible to please God* (Heb. 11:6), or to approach Him, or to live spiritually, as the Apostle says: *He that cometh to God must believe* (ibid.); and likewise: *The just man liveth by faith* (Rom. 1:17). Therefore the Most High, willing to build in His most chosen virginal Mother the most perfect fabric of all the virtues, laid in her the most firm foundation of faith, ineffably strengthened with all certainty and clarity. Therefore, as was touched upon in the preceding little book (Book II, Art. 20), the most sweet Mary had faith together with the reasons for the things to be believed and with the understanding of a most purified mind, in the highest degree.

Further, it was shown before (Book II, Arts. 3, 8 ff.) that in the gift of wisdom, in the sublimity and purity of contemplation and in the splendour of mystical theology the most glorious virgin Mary incomparably overcame and transcended all wayfarers. And from such things a man is immovably rooted and enlightened in faith, so much so that even though the whole world should fall from the faith, he could not doubt of the truth of the faith; and supposing that from fear or bitterness of punishments he should deny the faith with his mouth, he still could not deny it with his heart while he weighed within himself the arguments of his faith.

(p. 107) Meanwhile, although the most sacred virgin Mary is said to have had faith continually in this life, so that through faith she directed and ordered her acts to the supernatural end, and believed many supernatural and incomprehensible things to be true which human reason does not comprehend; nevertheless she had many cognitions of divine things not elicited immediately from faith, but from the most perfect gift of wisdom and the gift of understanding, and sometimes, for an hour, from the light of glory, and also from a singular, supernatural and most gracious experience, and from a most sweet foretaste of the happiness to come, of which happiness she obtained in the present life a pledge and earnest and a very special share. And these cognitions of the most excellent Virgin were higher than the knowledge of faith, and beyond it; nay, higher than the knowledge of rapture and ecstasy, and than the knowledge of Adam before the fall.

You, therefore, most excellent and incomparable Mary, overcame and surpassed in faith the holy father Abraham the patriarch; who, although he is specially commended for the firmness of his faith, since *against hope he believed in hope* (Rom. 4:18), and is called the father of believers (Rom. 4:11), yet, when he heard the promise made to him from above of a son to be born to him of his barren wife (Gen. 17:16), spoke, as if wavering, to God, who made the promise to him through an angel: *O that Ismael may live before Thee* (Gen. 17:18). So too, when the promise was made to him of possessing the land of Chanaan, he said: *Lord God, whereby may I know that I shall possess it?* (Gen. 15:7–8). But you, most chosen one of God, when you had heard the angelic annunciation (Luke 1:31) of the incomprehensible and super-most-arduous mystery to be accomplished in you, namely of the Son of God, true God, to be incarnate in you and of you and to be born, did not answer: Whereby shall I know this? or: What shall be the sign for me? But looking wisely to the omnipotence and truth of God, you said with a most faithful mind: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word* (Luke 1:38). In that wonderful, most wise and most sober answer your humility, your constancy, your discretion and your magnanimity shone forth gloriously.

Further, it is established that Moses the lawgiver, Aaron the first high priest (Num. 20:7–12), and Gideon the strongest of men (Judg. 6:12 ff.) doubted at times in faith; likewise Zachary, the father of the holy Forerunner (Luke 1:18). How great, then, O most blessed virgin Mary, are your praises! You who overcame such and so great men in faith; who were found more constant than the lawgiver, more prudent than the first high priest, stronger than the judge of Israel, more excellent than the priest. You who grew, advanced and were made supremely perfect in faith from the angelic apparition, from the experience of the incarnation of the Son of God, from the proofs of your own fruitfulness and integrity, from the words and deeds of the shepherds and the Magi, from the prophecy of Zachary and the words of Elizabeth, from the prophecy of Simeon and the sayings of Anna, and from other things almost innumerable, already partly touched upon, but especially from the most abundant and most frequent illuminations, visitations, inflammations and consolations of the Holy Spirit (Book II, Arts. 3, 4, 6 ff.). You who, by the strength of your faith, saying, *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word* (Luke 1:38), made that most high mountain, the mountain of all mountains, the eternal Word, descend from the highest heaven and from the bosom of the eternal Father into this sea, and come at once into your most pure womb through the mystery of the Incarnation.

Article II: On the perfection and excellence of hope in the deiform and most serene virgin Mary

Hope in thy God always (Hos. 12:6). Hope is defined as the certain expectation of future beatitude, proceeding from the grace of God and from the merits of the one who hopes: this description is given of formed hope, that is, hope adorned with virtuous acts, and of the act of such hope. But hope as it is called a theological virtue and an infused habit can be described thus: Hope is the virtue by which we await eternal salvation with certainty, from the loving-kindness of God and from our own merits. For to wish to attain future happiness without meritorious acts, *(p. 108)* or to think that one can acquire it so, is folly and presumption. So hope rests on two things, namely, first and principally on loving-kindness and grace, and then on merits.

And from the first of these two hope has certainty: for it is certain that on the side of the divine mercy there will be no failure of our salvation. But from the second, hope has fear joined to it: first, because without revelation we cannot know that we have formed hope, which cannot exist formed without charity, since without charity nothing is reckoned meritorious; secondly, because even if it is established for us, either with probability or with certainty, that charity and the merit of eternal life are in us, yet we do not know whether we shall remain to the end and die in charity and in the merits of true salvation, unless we are made certain of this also from above. For this reason the Apostle exhorts: *He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall* (1 Cor. 10:12). So the certainty of our hope is said to be conditional: namely, that we shall be saved if we remain in charity and in virtuous acts. The certainty of our hope is also conjectural and probable, not absolute; for by the same signs by which we can know with probability that we are in charity, we can also recognize that we have formed hope and meritorious works.

Now the Apostles, especially after receiving the first-fruits of the Holy Spirit, were certain that they were in charity and must persevere in it; nay, that they were the chief ones in the Church militant, and would be such proportionally in the Church triumphant too. Hence the apostle John writes many things in the Apocalypse concerning the eminence of the dignity, merit and reward of the Apostles (Apoc. 21:14). In their person also Paul speaks: *For I am sure that neither death, nor life … nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom. 8:38–39). But although the Apostles and certain other Saints knew these things of themselves by a special grace and a gracious revelation, yet we need not suppose that they knew with certainty that they were more elect and holier than all those than whom they were in fact more elect and holier. And so, although the happy archapostle Peter knew most certainly that he was greater than the other Apostles in ecclesiastical power, yet we need not affirm that he knew than which

Apostles he was more elect and holier, and would be more glorious in heaven; although perhaps he knew with probability that he was holier and more elect than some of them.

But the most glorious and unique virgin Mary knew most certainly, by a most special revelation and grace, that she was the most elect and the holiest of all human beings after her Only-begotten, and that she was to be exalted above all the orders of angels, from this, that she knew herself to be the Mother of the true and adorable God, and chosen beyond every pure creature subsisting in created being. Therefore the certainty of her hope was absolute and the greatest, supremely consoling also and joyful, because she knew most certainly that she was to be brought to so supreme and ineffable a beatitude. For that word of the Apostle, *We glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God* (Rom. 5:2), she could say most of all and most joyfully, as being so made certain of these things, and the true mother of the fountain of all salvation and of the Saviour of all.

Further, since hope proceeds from grace and merits, just as the grace of God and abundant merits abounded incomparably in the most sweet Mary, and as she knew this most certainly, so plainly her hope was incomparably great, perfect, certain and consoling. And just as the clarity of her knowledge was ineffably superior to the knowledge of faith according to the common course, so the certainty of her expectation was proportionally greater than the certainty of the expectation of hope in other wayfarers.

Moreover, hope rests especially on the divine loving-kindness; and the more clearly anyone knows his own defectiveness and insufficiency, and the more clearly he contemplates the immensity of God's mercy, the more he takes refuge in God and withdraws from all *(p. 109)* presumption in his own powers. So, just as a most wholesome and most clear recognition of both of these was conferred on the most excellent Virgin with incomparable eminence, so she had a most perfect hope in God, and fixed all her confidence in Him most firmly and immovably; to Him, as to the principal cause, she attributed all her merits, and she flowed back purely into the fountain of all goods.

Further, there are many things that beget, increase and preserve the confidence of one person in another: for example, certainty of the goodness and constancy of the one in whom one trusts, an experienced familiarity of his towards oneself, the experience of his charity, the communication of his benefits and the tasting of his sweetness. In all of these the most renowned and most divine virgin Mary abounded supremely in respect of the most high God. For indeed (as has been shown, Book II, Arts. 8 and 3) she was a most profound contemplative of God and of His attributes. She was also most familiar with Him: with her Only-begotten, as born of her; with God the Father, as His co-parent; and with the Holy Spirit, as the most sweet and unceasing indweller of her mind. In like manner she experienced most eminently and most frequently the charity of God towards her, since He united Himself with her so most nearly and so most condescendingly that He became her son. So too she knew that she had received His benefits most munificently, and she tasted most abundantly *how sweet the Lord is* (1 Pet. 2:3), how infinite is *the multitude* and abundance *of His sweetness* (Ps. 30:20). Therefore from all these things she had a super-perfect and super-full hope in God.

Nevertheless she bore herself towards Him with the highest reverence; nor did that familiarity beget contempt or slight esteem, or any loss of reverence; nay, it increased her love, wonder, humility and veneration towards the immense majesty and loving-kindness of Him who bore Himself so familiarly and so condescendingly towards her. Hence, when at the marriage she had said to her Beloved, *They have no wine*, and He had answered somewhat hardly, as it were, *Woman, what is that to Me and to thee?* she nevertheless, certain of the goodness of her Son, that He would without doubt fulfil her request, said to the waiters: *Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye* (John 2:3–5). For if it was lawful for holy Job to say, *Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him* (Job 13:15), how much more did the most meek Christ-bearing Virgin trust in Him immovably in every event?

Article III: On the most ardent and most pure charity of the divine and gracious Mary towards God

Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love (Cant. 2:5). Although charity is an infused virtue, yet its interior act, namely the actual love of God, proceeds from many things, and from many things grows, is perfected, aroused, fostered and inflamed. For sometimes it is asserted that the goodness of the thing loved is the cause of love; sometimes knowledge; at times likeness; at times nearness; now and then beneficence; frequently the disposition of the affective power; likewise beauty, uprightness, vigour in action, gentleness, companionship, humility; which, however, can be reduced to the ones mentioned before.

So the goodness of the thing loved is the cause of love as the matter about which it is concerned and as its object; and likewise beauty, uprightness, vigour, gentleness, humility, wisdom, knowledge and giftedness: all of which, and things like them, move and arouse the will to love. Knowledge, moreover, is the cause of love as the way to it, and as showing that the thing is lovable. Nearness also, likeness and beneficence are incentives to love; likewise the affection which the lover has and feels for the beloved. On the side of the lover also the causes of love are goodness and an intense affective power, recollection of heart, purity, quiet, reform and imperturbability of mind. Therefore where these things more fully concur, are present and abound, there love is greater, more fervent, purer and more perfect.

(p. 110) Now, then, let us consider as far as we can, and as far as the Lord shall grant, how these things stood between God and the most blessed Mary. And it is clear first of all that the goodness of God is pure, incomparable and altogether infinite, infinitely more lovable than a pure creature can be loved. Next, from what was set forth in the second little book (Book II, Arts. 3, 4, 6 ff.), it is evident that the most serene and most lovable virgin Mary knew God most gloriously in this life: sometimes indeed by sight, at times by the most excellent gift of wisdom, at times by the most profound vision of mystical theology, and in other ways; nay, by the constant and most splendid illumination of the Holy Spirit, by the familiar instruction of the eternal Word, true God born of her, who dwelt with her; likewise by a faith most clearly adorned with the reasons for the things to be believed and with the understanding of a purified mind; by the gift of understanding, which most keenly penetrates and sees through the things of faith; by the wisdom which is a gift of grace freely given; and by natural scholastic wisdom acquired by study: both of which wisdoms were formed in that most sincere soul by charity, by the wisdom which is a gift, and by sanctifying grace, and were made meritorious in their acts.

Furthermore, the likeness of the mind of the most sacred Mary to God, through gratuitous gifts and abundant merits, through the acts of the virtues and through imitation of His life, was the greater and the more resplendent, the more incomparably excellent the infused virtues, grace and the gifts with their acts were in her, and the purer, holier and more deiform (that is, more contemplative) her life, and especially her interior exercise, had been. Finally, the nearness between the most blessed Mary and the most high God was made so great that He became her only-begotten son, and she His only mother.

The beneficence of God towards the most worthy Mary no one can express. For the Almighty Himself prevented her most graciously and altogether most liberally with every blessing of virtue, of grace and of His sweetness, and sanctified her abundantly in the womb before she had the use of reason; and at last He gave Himself to her as her son, and so placed her most gloriously at the summit of dignity possible to a pure creature, that is, in the state of motherhood of the true God, through which she was made co-parent with God the Father: which is a dignity in some way infinite, as was explained more fully in the first little book. Further, the beauty, the uprightness, the vigour of the works of God, or of Christ born of the best of virgins, His gentleness, humility, wisdom, giftedness and companionship with her, can neither be fully understood nor worthily praised by us; and yet in some fashion they become known to our hearts.

Meanwhile, the heart of the most pure and admirable Mary was most apt for loving sincerely, as being endowed with a most intense affective power, most free from all disquiet of passions and vices, most purified from the *fomes*, wholly a stranger to every distraction and disorder, nay, incomparably full of the fullness of gratuitous gifts. Now, then, from these things it shines out how incomparably and altogether ineffably the most meek and truly most sweet virgin Mary shone and burned, abounded, overflowed, boiled up, bubbled over and grew warm in the most sincere love of the Godhead and of the super-essential Trinity, and especially in the love of the Son of God and her own Son, according to both His natures, and chiefly according to the divine.

For the most happy Virgin herself, the most pure Mother, understood, beheld and weighed most clearly beyond all others (as has been touched upon) the goodness and beauty, and all the perfection, wisdom and excellence, of the Godhead; and also all the virtue, wisdom, gentleness, humility, comeliness, condescension, familiarity and companionship with her of her Son according to His assumed nature. And His most vigorous works according to both His natures she knew more gloriously, considered more diligently and subtly, and attended to more frequently and almost unceasingly. She beheld herself taken up by Him *(p. 111)* to be His most loving mother, His singular spouse, His most glorious daughter, His highest friend, His household and most familiar companion, His most affectionate nurse, His most faithful confidant, His most wise and unique disciple.

Who now could conceive even the least part of how much, from the constant and unceasing, most diligent and most profound contemplation of all these things, you, O virginal and divine Mother, O heavenly Queen, O consort of the super-most-glorious Trinity, O most venerable and most holy virgin Mary, were kindled with most pure and most fervent love; how from these things you grew and continually advanced in holy and heaven-like love? Were you not, as it were, wholly transformed into the affection of most divine charity, and turned into the very heart of holy and pure love? Certainly you became most excellently one spirit with your Beloved, one mind, one will, through the cleaving of love and through a special conformity of life.

O most chosen and most blessed of all creatures, how, from that hour in which you saw the Son of the eternal Father born of you, a most inviolate and most entire mother, and began to handle Him as a mother, to suckle Him, embrace Him, kiss Him and carry Him, were you kindled and did you advance in His love? Then, when He began to walk before you, to eat with you and to serve you; when you beheld His most innocent and most holy life; when every hour you looked with the eyes of the body and of the mind upon His modesty and comeliness, His gentleness, humility and uprightness; when afterwards you saw His miracles and heard His teaching: certainly in all these things you, most pure and most apt for loving, advanced inestimably and altogether unspeakably in the ardours of holy charity, grew in pure and undivided love, and in the very perfection of love were constantly made more perfect.

For indeed, which of us, however hard, defective and unreformed, would not be vehemently softened and grow in love, advance in virtue and delight in the Lord, if even for one day he were to see Christ, or an angel in the person of Christ, walking and conversing before him in that appearance and bearing and uprightness of manners in which you saw Him daily walking and conversing before you in His boyhood? O most glorious, most renowned and most beautiful Virgin, how much, then, did you, most tranquil, most affectionate and most virtuous Lady, advance continually from the daily sight of the Son of God, born of you and made your child, dwelling and living with you! On the consideration and contemplation of these things we ought to dwell rather than on recounting and explaining them; and yet affection drives us again to speak of them. Were you not, O Virgin, O Mother, O Lady, O our Saviour, our Merciful One and our Consoler, were you not wholly inflamed with love, and as it were burned up with the fire of divine love, when you saw your God, born of you, so conversing with you, speaking to you most sweetly, serving you most humbly? And now affection breaks off our words, and wonder enjoins silence.

Article IV: On the natural love of the most illustrious Mary for her only-begotten Son, according to His assumed nature

He set in order charity in me (Cant. 2:4). Although the most ordered and most wise virgin Mary loved her Only-begotten incomparably more as He is God than as He is man, nevertheless she loved Him most vehemently with natural love according to His assumed nature. First, because He was her son. Now the love of a mother's heart for her son, especially an only son, is intense and very vehement; and this is wont to be so above all in a widowed mother. On this account David, bewailing Jonathan, said: *As the mother loveth her only son,* (p. 112) *so did I love thee* (2 Kings 1:26).[1] Further, this love is the fuller, and becomes the greater from day to day, the more the son agrees in all things with the will of the parent, pleases, and is a consolation. And it is certain that the will of Jesus Christ and His whole life were in all things most in agreement with the will of His Mother and most pleasing to it, and in many things very consoling. In some things indeed she had a good sadness through the action of her most beloved Son: as when, having become twelve years old, He remained in Jerusalem without her knowing (Luke 2:42 ff.); and when she saw Him watched, mocked and blasphemed by the Scribes and Pharisees. And in short, between that most pure Mother and most holy Son there was also a most ardent natural love: who never offended one another in anything, and each of whom knew and experienced that he was loved by the other supremely and most sincerely.

Moreover, the more alike parent and child are in constitution, the more fervent is the natural love between them. And it is certain from what was declared in the first little book (Book I, Art. 35) that after Christ, who was of the most excellent and best constitution, the most chosen Virgin was of the noblest and most tender constitution, and most like to the constitution of her Son; therefore on this side too they were naturally most affected towards one another. Furthermore, the more conformed some are in manners, the dearer they are to one another. And it is clear that beyond all men God incarnate and His irreproachable and most well-mannered Mother were sublime in all uprightness of manners, since in them alone there was never anything contrary to the honour of good manners. Further, in those in whom nature is livelier, and the affective power is naturally greater and better, the natural and mutual love is greater; and there is no doubt that in Christ and in His virginal Mother nature was most lively and most fresh, and the affective power most strong and altogether most aptly disposed: therefore without doubt the natural love between them was the greatest.

Further still, the more a loving mother sees that her child is of better disposition, wiser, more beautiful and more obedient to her, the more strongly she is drawn to it. And it is manifest that the most happy virgin Mary knew most certainly that her only Son was most excellent in all these things, even according to His assumed nature: of whom she knew that it was written, and saw fulfilled, that word of the Psalmist: *Thou art beautiful above the sons of men* (Ps. 44:3); and whom she knew to be a comprehensor according to the higher part of His soul. Hence she loved Him most vehemently with natural love too, according to the nature in which He was also her son. Nor is it doubtful that she loved His Godhead also with natural love, even more than herself; especially because all her natural love was perfectly and continually formed by charity and supernatural love.

Again, since a parent naturally desires the progress, prosperity and advancement of his child, the most blessed Virgin loved her Son the more fervently, the greater the things to which she knew He was to be raised, whether as to existence, or at least as to manifestation. And she knew that He who lived with her in such humility and poverty was to be worshipped throughout the whole world as true God, which He was; was to be glorified in His body and lower powers; was to judge the living and the dead; and was to reign in the whole Church militant and triumphant. Furthermore, we see that when an exalted person converses familiarly and condescendingly with an upright and discreet inferior, the inferior is the more heartily inflamed with love of that superior. Therefore Mary, altogether most humble, most upright, most discreet, least in her own eyes, beholding the Son of the Most High, co-most-high with God the Father, conversing

with her so super-humbly, so most familiarly and so most condescendingly, grew ineffably in His love, and grew inestimably warm in it.

Moreover, in every natural perfection *(p. 113)* the God-man and His most worthy Mother outshone all others. Now how great and how truly wonderful, strong and singular was the love, natural love too, between Amelius and Amicus, their Legend relates;[2] and yet between Christ and His incomparable Mother natural love was greater and stronger. Lastly, how much our first parents loved innocent Abel, Abraham Isaac (Gen. 22:2), Jacob his son Joseph (Gen. 37:3), and David Jonathan (1 Kings 18:1, 3), sacred Scripture teaches. Yet the mutual natural love of Christ and His most pure Mother unspeakably surpassed the mutual love of all these. And their mutual supernatural and infused charity was altogether much greater and stronger; which that mutual natural love also most vehemently fostered, increased and perfected in the most blessed Virgin as to its act. The charity of the soul of Christ, however, was equally perfect from its infusion, and did not grow except as to manifestation and works.

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[1] 2 Kings in the Vulgate numbering, i.e. 2 Samuel 1:26. Similarly "1 Kings" below is 1 Samuel.

[2] The medieval romance of the two friends Amicus and Amelius (Amis and Amiles), told in Vincent of Beauvais and elsewhere.

Article V: On the most fervent charity towards her neighbours and the most burning zeal for souls of the most holy Mary

Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see King Solomon in the diadem, wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the joy of his heart (Cant. 3:11). The most illuminated virgin Mary knew, and most wisely and most frequently considered, that the Only-begotten of God the Father had been made man for this purpose: that by the mystery of His incarnation He might deify men, and by the merit of His death and the price of His blood might free the human race from the power of the devil, from the yoke of sin and from the pains of hell, and might merit for it the crown of heavenly beatitude. To accomplish these things, to save the world, to convert Jews and pagans, to make of all *one fold* (John 10:16) and one Church, she knew, according to the oracles of the Prophets, that her Son had come, and that the Son of God had been made her son. And so she knew that she had been taken up to such excellence, to the motherhood of God, for the restoration of the lost; and that from this she was bound by a certain debt (at least of fittingness) to have mercy on sinners, and to desire and procure their salvation.

Hence continually, and especially from the hour in which she conceived the Son of God, she was most vehemently kindled with zeal for the salvation of her neighbours. Hence there is between the most blessed Mary and us a very great cause of mutual love: for she on her part recognizes that in her own manner she owes it to sinners that she was made the Mother of God; and we for our part know that we have been redeemed through her saving fruit, nay, that she herself in some manner merited *de congruo* the coming of the Saviour.

Moreover, the more ardently and purely she loved the one and triune God, the more strongly did she long for His honour and worship, namely that He should be duly honoured and worshipped by all rational creatures: which was nothing else than to burn with zeal for human salvation out of holy charity. Further, the more ardently she loved her Only-begotten according to the nature taken from her, the more vehemently did she desire that the fruit of His passion and the shedding of His blood and its merit should work and spread, and attain its intended end in the conversion of men and their final salvation: which was truly a principal action of both divine and human love. Hence she was most ardent and most perfect in the charity of her neighbours, and in it and in zeal for the divine honour and human salvation she exceeded and surpassed in a wonderful and ineffable manner even Moses, Elijah and Paul.

Therefore she grieved most vehemently over the blindness, ingratitude and perversity of the Jews; and when she saw them resisting her Son, who preached the Gospel to them and sought their salvation, and returning evil for good, she was most grievously saddened, and grieved vehemently for them. And now, that we may know more clearly the flaming love of the most sacred Mary towards men, let us behold how much *(p. 114)* and in what way the holy men mentioned above burned with the charity of their neighbours and with zeal for the divine honour. Did not holy Moses beseech the Lord for a most stiff-necked people, for an unbelieving nation, for the rebellious and ungrateful: *Either forgive them this trespass, or … strike me out of the book that Thou hast written* (Exod. 32:31–32)? O how great an ardour of true love! With the same affection Paul, the vessel of eternal election (Acts 9:15), spoke: *For I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ, for my brethren* the Jews (Rom. 9:3).

So the most blessed virgin Mary fulfilled ineffably and excellently beyond all the precept of the charity of God and of her neighbour; for she never felt or had in herself any motion, act or inclination drawing her back from the fullness of charity or hindering it. Furthermore, she knew that she had been constituted from above as mediatrix between God and men, mother of the faithful, advocate of the Church, refuge of the wretched and queen of mercy. Therefore with motherly charity she fulfilled her office continually, most affectionately and most faithfully, procuring the conversion of men; and she is formed by love as the most loving nurse and mother of all. And as in the other virtues, so in the charity of God and of her neighbours she is most like to Christ and highest after Him, and as much more perfect than others as it was fitting that the most excellent Mother of God should be more perfect than His ministers.

Lastly, since the Saviour says, *Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13), this too she fulfilled with full affection; and if it had been possible, or pleasing to God, she would most gladly have endured a most bitter death together with her Son, and likewise for her Son, that is, to rescue Him from death. And in a certain manner she even delivered up to death the life of her Son, which she loved more than her own. For although by natural affection and the sensitive appetite, and conditionally, she desired that her Son should not suffer, as did the Son Himself, saying, *My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me* (Matt. 26:39); nevertheless, by deliberate reason and by her higher and absolute will, she willed Him to die for the salvation of the world, inasmuch as God had so preordained and willed; and she preferred that her most beloved should suffer in time and be killed in body, rather than that the elect should be deprived of eternal happiness, and the super-most-blessed Trinity of the honour and worship which It was to have from the passion of Christ. Nevertheless in another respect she was most vehemently saddened by the passion of her Son, as will be treated more below.

And to this belongs what was brought forward from the theme at the beginning of this article (Cant. 3:11), in which the most wise and most fervent virgin Mary exhorts the daughters of Sion, that is, the souls of the faithful and of contemplatives, to *go forth* from the mire of the dregs, from the birdlime and the acts of carnality, and through faith, charity, compassion and imitation to contemplate “King Solomon”, namely Christ, the true and supreme Peacemaker, “in the diadem wherewith His mother crowned Him”, that is, in the assumed humanity and in its most bitter passion; with which humanity His blessed Mother crowned, clothed and adorned Him “in the day of His espousals”, that is, in the hour of the incarnation and conception in which she conceived Him undefiled, in which her Son espoused to Himself the Church, nay, the very nature He assumed, which He joined intimately to Himself and made most fully fruitful: which was done “in the day of the joy of His heart”, because then He *rejoiced as a giant to run the way* (Ps. 18:6), and His *delights* then *were to be* (Prov. 8:31) and to dwell in the midst of His singular and most loving spouse and most pure Mother.

Article VI: How fully and eminently the virgin Mary, best of all and to be glorified, fulfilled the two precepts of charity in this life

And Jesus answered him: The first commandment of all is … Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength. … And the second is like to it: (p. 115) *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself* (Mark 12:29–31). This first precept of divine charity is explained in three ways, and is fulfilled in three ways. For first it is explained thus: that we should love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength in such a way that we love nothing more than Him and His spiritual love, nor prefer anything to Him, nor admit anything contrary to charity. And this is necessary for all for salvation; and in this way this precept is fulfilled by all who observe the divine and ecclesiastical commandments.

Secondly it is explained thus: that we should not only love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and powers in such a way as to avoid what is contrary to divine charity, but should also cast off and leave those things which, although they are not unlawful in themselves, yet commonly have many evils joined to them, are near to ruin, and are wont especially to hinder the increase and perfection of divine charity: such as a wife and her embraces, temporal riches, kinsfolk, and also one's own will. Therefore the Wisdom of God the Father did not command but counselled the faithful to leave these things for God's sake, so that they might be free for the Creator more purely, serve Him more freely, and advance more fully in His love; and in this way the precept of charity is fulfilled by true religious, whose part it is not merely to languish in common things, but to tend daily towards perfection.

Thirdly this precept is explained thus: that with our whole heart, mind, soul and strength we should be borne unceasingly and actually by charity towards God, according to the utmost and greatest of our power: which according to the common course cannot be done in this life, nor is it possible for pure wayfarers; but in the homeland this precept is so fulfilled by the Blessed.

Now to that perfect fulfilment of this precept our most renowned and incomparable Lady and Queen approached in this life incomparably beyond all pure wayfarers, and dipped herself in it most excellently. Nay, at times, for an hour, she was brought to it perfectly and excellently, namely when she saw God by sight; and when that vision was withdrawn, the most glorious and most divine Virgin remained supremely free for exalted and fervent contemplations and delights of the Godhead, altogether constant or continuous, as being entirely confirmed in grace; in her no impediment to charity, nor anything hindering the increase or perfection of divine love, had any place. Nay, she most fully renounced the riches, delights and honours of this world, and was altogether free from all sensual and carnal love; and her will was unswervingly, unalterably and perfectly subject, obedient and conformed to the divine will. And so she gloriously fulfilled what her holy father David, prophet and patriarch, admonished her in spirit: *Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father's house* (Ps. 44:11).

Yet, because love follows knowledge, and proceeds and arises from it, as long as Mary, the most chosen and most beloved Mother of God, did not see God clearly in Himself by sight, she could not be borne towards Him without interruption and according to the utmost of her power, as the Blessed are. Nevertheless, from the fullness of her grace, from her most fervent charity, from the constancy, duration and clarity of the contemplations of her wisdom, from her continual progress, from heavenly illumination and from interior exercise and inflaming, she was borne towards God as often and as perfectly, purely and fervently as was possible to a wayfaring mind and to a pure creature still on pilgrimage from the Lord and journeying in this valley of tears. For indeed charity is a fire, and a charity so perfect, so supreme and so fervent does not cease constantly to move upwards, to ascend, to aspire, and to unite the lover to the beloved; and if it is interrupted a little, it soon returns stronger and grows hotter more vehemently, as being impatient of separation. And so, between the perfection of the soul of Christ, who was a comprehensor, and other perfect wayfarers *(p. 116)* and saints, the most holy Mary held herself in a middle place in contemplating and loving.

Article VII: On the loving and fiery affections of the most blessed Mother and Lady, with which she burned in visiting the holy places of her Son after His ascension

And in my meditation a fire shall flame out (Ps. 38:4). The object of the will is the good apprehended and known by the intellect. Therefore, the more excellent the constant object of the considerations and affections of the most glorious Mary was, namely the Son of God incarnate, and the more deeply she contemplated Him and the more clearly she knew Him, the more strongly was she inflamed, the more ardently did she burn, and the more frequently did she sigh, from the consideration of so supreme and most lovable a good, nay, of so most beloved and most worthy a Son, and of His mysteries and benefits: especially after the glorious and joyful ascension of her Beloved, and most of all when she visited and looked upon His holy places, in which He accomplished the mysteries of our salvation.

In them He preached and endured persecutions; in them, praying three times and sweating blood, He was in anguish, shuddering, and, reasonably and willingly, most painfully *sorrowful even unto death*; He was taken, bound, spat upon, scourged, mocked and blasphemed, dragged most ignominiously from judge to judge, crowned with thorns, most falsely accused and condemned, and, carrying His cross on His own shoulders, led most shamefully to the place of punishment; pierced with nails, most violently stretched out on the cross, given vinegar and gall to drink, derided and killed. O with what loving affections of compassion was she afflicted in the remembrance of these things! How many tears she shed! How she sacrificed and immolated herself to God as a victim altogether acceptable! And in pondering these things she was no less consoled and rejoiced in the Lord over the most abundant fruit of her Son’s passion, and over every most saving effect of His mysteries.

Then, beholding, remembering and weighing these things, how most ardently do you think she desired the fruit of all those things which her Son took upon Himself, did and suffered for men, that is, the conversion and salvation of men, of Jews as well as pagans? How often and how most affectionately, how humbly and tearfully did she pray for them? I think that out of inestimable devotion and loving-kindness she often kissed the holy places, watered them with tears, and interceded for the salvation of the world with unspeakable groanings; especially since we read that certain persons, after visiting the holy places on Mount Calvary, were kindled with such devotion and such fervour, and shaken with such compassion, that they came not only to ecstasy and failing of their strength, but even to the bursting of the heart, and were carried away dead.

Then, when you, most innocent and most affectionate, most illuminated virgin Mary, most to be venerated and celebrated by the whole world, visited the place of the ascension of your most loving Son, and recalled how He had ascended, with what an army of holy angels and blessed souls, with what joy and triumph, and how the glorious angels then said to the Apostles, *Ye men of Galilee*, etc. (Acts 1:11), you gloried vehemently, and congratulated your most glorified Son; yet in such a way that sadness was mingled with this joy too. Just as throughout your whole life in this world loving sadnesses and various inward afflictions were constantly mingled with your consolations and spiritual joys, so much so that your whole life in this world was, as it were, a kind of continual martyrdom; with which nevertheless inward joys were abundantly mixed, so that you could most truly sing: *According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul* (Ps. 93:19); and likewise: *For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us: so also by* (p. 117) *Christ doth our comfort abound* (2 Cor. 1:5).

For indeed, in recalling the glorious ascension of Christ, you sighed for His presence, and that delay, ordained by His dispensation, was burdensome to you, His most loving mother. You contemplated then all the beatitude of your Son, and rejoiced with Him most vehemently that after the scourges, the spittle, the lashes, the insults, the thorns and the cross, He was seated at the right hand of the Father; and you longed to behold in such beauty the King Himself, born of you, most blessed one; and to your most ardent charity the

separation, the waiting and the sojourn of this exile were afflicting. Then, O best and most sweet virgin Mary, from conviction, from happy experience and from the vehemence of charity, you could say: *As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after Thee, O God. My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?* (Ps. 41:2–3).

Certainly from these things it becomes known how fittingly Jerome said: Consider more attentively with what ardours this Virgin was affected when she turned over in her mind all the things she had heard, seen and known; with what fires of holy affections she was then burned. For, being wholly a stranger to all earthly care, to evil disquiet, to every fault and distraction, she was altogether most apt for the excesses of charity, for the flights of contemplation and for unceasing inflamings. And the most noble and most perfect Virgin, in whose womb He had rested so many months, nay, in whose heart He had dwelt so many years who is essentially charity, the Son of the Father's love, God of immeasurable goodness and infinite love, was almost wholly turned into the heart of holy love, into the affections of loving devotion, into the fire of heavenly affection.

Lastly, if it was lawful for John Chrysostom to say of the apostle Paul: As iron cast into the fire becomes, as it were, wholly fire, so Paul, kindled with charity, became as it were wholly charity; and likewise: Paul laboured for the salvation of all as if he had begotten the whole world; and: As a most indulgent father is affected towards a frenzied son, whom the more he is struck by his insults and blows, the more he bewails him and pities his madness, so Paul was affected towards the unbelieving and ungrateful, and returned good for evil: how much more are these things to be said of the incomparable and most holy Mary, who without doubt was ineffably more kindled than Paul with the charity of God and of her neighbours, and was unceasingly solicitous, anxious, eager and most fervent for the conversion of the world, for the salvation of all, and for the full spreading of the evangelical law; by whose holiness, prayers and merits the Holy Spirit touched the hearts of innumerable men and converted innumerable souls?

Article VIII: That the most illustrious virgin Mary was most gloriously brought to the perfection and eminence of original justice

God made man right (Eccles. 7:30). The almighty Creator, infinitely good, rich and liberal, did not create our first parents in purely natural endowments, but (as Scripture teaches, Eph. 4:24) created original justice together with them, through which the flesh was in all things promptly and readily obedient to the spirit, the sensitive part to reason, and reason and will to God. Nor did any motion contrary to reason rise up in the flesh or in the sensitive part, nor any penalty, as long as reason remained subject to the Creator and the will to the divine command. And it is the probable opinion of many that the first-formed human beings were also produced in sanctifying grace and in the virtues and gifts joined to it.

Since, then, in God's most chosen one, the glorious Mary, through an exceeding prevention of grace, the flesh never lusted against the spirit, no culpable motion rose up in her, the sensitive part was never resistant to reason in her, and reason and will in *(p. 118)* her were fully and unalterably subject to God and most promptly obedient, it is clear how eminently she attained to conformity with original justice. And although in the most excellent Virgin, the incomparably lovable and most sweet Mary, there were pain, labour, weariness, grief, fear and affliction, which could not be in our first parents before the fall; nevertheless the God-bearing Virgin, by unceasing progress, came swiftly to such a perfection and eminence of the moral, intellectual and theological virtues, and of the gifts and fruits, that in these she far transcended our first parents, even as to their acts. And so she not only ascended to that original innocence and justice, but also obtained a much more sublime virtue, excellence and confirmation in good, so much so that she was not even able to sin. O incomparable and unique Virgin, who kept the robe of innocence so unstained, nay, showed it to God every day and every hour purer, more resplendent and more heavenly!

Article IX: How excellently the moral and cardinal virtues were present and shone forth in her

Who shall find a valiant woman? (Prov. 31:10). Solomon knew that, just as through a woman deceived and made foolish the world perished, so the salvation of the world would in some manner depend on a woman wise and invincible. Again, he knew that God at the beginning of the ages had said of this same woman to the hellish serpent: *She shall crush thy head* (Gen. 3:15).[1] So the most wise Solomon, seeing that the human race was not to be freed without this woman, and that the King Messiah would not come before her birth, perfection and strength of virtue, but rather was to be born of her, spoke with an affectionate and sighing heart: *Who shall find a valiant woman?* For that wise man, weighing the weakness, inconstancy, defectiveness and softness of the female sex, and that for the conception of the Son of God there was required a woman virtuous, constant, perfect, the full conqueror of all feminine levity, softness and imperfection, began thus: *Who shall find a valiant woman?* as if to say: She will be found rarely and with difficulty, unless she be provided, sent and given to the world from above. Hence, knowing that she would be so granted, speaking of the future in the manner of the past, he says: *She hath girded her loins with strength, and hath strengthened her arm* (Prov. 31:17). Of her again in the Canticle he asks in wonder: *Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?* (Cant. 6:9). O truly the strongest of all women, who trampled on the author of human ruin and brought forth the restorer of lost beatitude! She was supremely adorned and invincibly armed with every moral virtue.

For those virtues are called moral which are concerned with the passions, restraining, reforming and moderating them. Yet one of them, namely prudence, is directive of reason, and resides in reason as in its subject, and moderates and directs the acts of the other moral virtues. Another is intent upon operations, namely justice, rendering to each his own; and it inheres in the will. The others are said by some to be in the sensitive appetite; and certainly they are in it, either by essence or by a certain impression. Since, then, in the most sacred virgin Mary the lower sensitive appetite, whose natural motions and inclinations are called passions, was inviolably subject to reason and will, unswervingly obedient, and altogether most promptly serving, it is clear that the moral virtues were in the blessed and supernatural Mary as they are called the virtues of the purified soul, and in a heroic and perfect manner.

Of these there are four cardinal virtues, namely prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. And so it belongs to prudence, *(p. 119)* according to Macrobius, to despise all worldly things by the contemplation of divine things, and, as if there were nothing else, to fix every thought on things above and to know divine things alone; to fortitude, no longer to know or feel the passions now conquered; to temperance, to forget henceforth earthly desires and the allurements of the flesh now repressed; and to justice, to be so joined to God in good things as to keep a perpetual covenant with Him. If, then, these virtues, according to philosophers and theologians, belong to heroic and perfect men, how much more to the incomparably perfect and divine Virgin, the mother and lady of all the perfect and the holy! She most truly did not know the passions, that is, she never felt or had in herself any immoderation of the passions, and she was unalterably united and conformed to the divine mind.

Nevertheless she had these and the other moral virtues as a man by them bears himself well and becomingly in social, human and domestic life towards those among whom he lives: for the higher degree of the virtues includes the perfection of the lower degree, and adds some perfection to it. So the most worthy virgin Mary through prudence bore herself in the most perfect order among others, and disposed her means to the intended end irreproachably, doing all things most discreetly. Through temperance also she bore herself so most moderately in the use of food, and so fasted and abstained, that she never exceeded in these things in the least. Through fortitude also she was constant in adversities and hardships, and overcame the passion of fear most victoriously, most ready to die for God, for the truth of the faith and for the defence of justice; nor did she ever succumb to feminine timidity. Through justice, moreover, she not only gave to each what she

owed him, but gave very much over and above to all, edifying, helping and consoling all; and just as she received all that she was and had from the adorable and supreme Creator, so she devoted, offered and returned herself wholly and all that she had, most entirely, to the Almighty and to His worship and love; as will be touched upon more fully below.

[1] Denis reads the Vulgate *ipsa* ("she"); the Hebrew has "he" or "it" (the woman's offspring).

Article X: On the temperance, honour, chastity, modesty and shamefastness of the most pure Virgin, the glorious Mary

And make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences (Rom. 13:14). Contraries are said to be cured by contraries. Hence the infinite wisdom of God ordained that, just as the first woman fell through intemperance, so this woman, the saviour and restorer, should shine forth most excellently in all temperance. For of that woman who brought ruin it is written: *And the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, and fair to the eyes, and delightful to behold: and she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave to her husband, who did eat* (Gen. 3:6). But this saving woman could say that word of the second book of Kings: *Can I … delight in meat or drink?* (2 Kings 19:35); and also what holy Esther, her figure, said: *Thy handmaid … never rejoiced, but in Thee, O Lord the God of Abraham* (Esther 14:18).

For the most spiritual and most delicate virgin Mary, most accustomed to spiritual delights and most filled with divine and heavenly consolations, that is, inebriated with inward savours, and as it were refreshed *with marrow and fatness* (Ps. 62:6) and fattened with heavenly nourishment, with *the bread of life and understanding* and *the water of wholesome wisdom* (Ecclus. 15:3), with the supersubstantial bread and every graciously life-giving action, was in no way inordinately affected towards bodily food or drink, nor could she delight in them sensually, nor was she hindered by the use of such things from her inward spiritual exercises. Further, we read that spiritual and holy men often came to bodily refreshment as to a prison, and frequently at table itself, drawn away from the bodily senses, were rapt to the Lord. How much more excellently was every such perfection in the most holy Mary, *(p. 120)* although without outward signs of this kind!

Further, taste and touch are more vehemently infected in men, and are cured with more difficulty. Therefore with the virtues by which the delights and acts of taste and touch are restrained and moderated, namely sobriety and chastity, which are parts of temperance, the most glorious virgin Mary, the saving woman and mistress of all spirituality, had to be more specially and more gloriously adorned; since she was pre-elected to conceive, bear, suckle, handle, embrace, kiss and nourish the Fountain of all cleanness, the eternal light, the origin of all holiness. O supernatural and ineffable praise of Mary, O most abounding fullness of grace, O inviolable and most ordered discretion in living, that the most happy creature never exceeded in those daily things, acts and necessities, nor slipped in the least; never in food, drink, sleep, word, thought or omission departed from the mean!

Hence she was altogether of a most honourable life; and her *modesty* was *known to all men* (Phil. 4:4), *and there was none that spoke an ill word of her* (Judith 8:8). And she was adorned in the highest degree with a wise shame, detesting with her whole heart everything that derogates from uprightness and is offensive to the divine presence. For "honourable" (*honestum*) is so called as if it were a state of honour; and honour is due to virtue: therefore, just as the most chosen virgin Mary was most virtuous, so she is held to have been most honourable. Yet honour is asserted to belong specially to temperance: because, just as in the vices and delights of touch and taste there is the greatest dishonour, foulness and brutishness, so in the virtue and acts of temperance a special honour consists. Hence the chaste and the sober are specially called honourable.

Moreover, shamefastness, taken properly, is called a praiseworthy passion, and not a virtue, but a disposition to the virtues, drawing one back from sins. And, according to the Philosopher, it is to be praised in the young

rather than in the old. For shamefastness is the fear of disgrace, according to the Philosopher, that is, the fear of incurring something deserving of confusion; and, as Damascene asserts, it is fear concerning a base act, as of something difficult to avoid. Now the young are commonly imperfect and prone to the evils of fault, which are base, and which are hard for them to avoid; therefore it is commendable in them to be shamefast. But the old ought to be established in the virtues, and able easily to overcome and avoid base things. Therefore this shamefastness is not commended in them; yet even in them it is much more commendable than to sin without shame, as there are many, even old men, in whom the affection for the honourable good is almost asleep, and who prefer to the honourable good the useful and the delightful good, that is, their own advantages and comforts, although contrary to virtue.

But those who are exercised in the virtues and perfect can easily resist dishonourable and base things. Therefore shamefastness has no place in them, according to this manner of speaking and according to the Philosopher, because they do not apprehend dishonourable and base things as difficult to avoid. Nevertheless they are habitually so disposed that, if base things should befall, they would at once be ashamed. Hence too, as the apostle John testifies, *perfect charity casteth out fear* (1 John 4:18). So, since the most blessed virgin Mary came most swiftly to the perfection of the virtues, it does not seem that shamefastness, properly speaking, belonged to her from that time, especially since she knew that she was confirmed in grace. Sometimes, however, shamefastness is taken for a virtue, or for good modesty, and in this sense it is truly ascribed to the glorious Mary.

Lastly, because according to the teachings of theology *we walk in the midst of snares* (Ecclus. 9:20), *a just man shall fall seven times* a day (Prov. 24:16), and *in many things we all offend* (Jas. 3:2), nor can we escape sins without the continual help of the grace of God, we ought continually to be ashamed before God of our so great defects and faults, and to be adorned unceasingly with a special modesty, lest we bear ourselves dishonourably in the sight of the divine countenance.

Article XI: On the fortitude, constancy and stability of the most unconquered, most victorious and most glorious Mary

(p. 121) But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength (Isa. 40:31). Virtue is the strength of the mind; therefore, had not the most excellent virgin Mary been most vehemently strengthened with the ineffable strength of all the virtues, she would never have so escaped the ruin, not only of all mortal sins, but of all venial sins as well. She, then, who in the field of this world, in the race-course of this pilgrimage, in the humble sex, in frail flesh, *in the midst of a* most *perverse generation* (Phil. 2:15), stood immovable, always unconquered, always victorious against the battle-line of the vices, against the throngs of invisible enemies, against the persecutions brought upon her Son and upon herself, was altogether most virtuous, utterly most strong, tranquil and constant in every event. For what brings instability, inconstancy, wavering and infirmity upon the mind but passions and vices? Since the most renowned Virgin was most free from these, it is clear that she was complete in all constancy, stability and firmness of soul.

For indeed, as Solomon said, *the just is as an everlasting foundation* (Prov. 10:25). And of the obedient the Saviour says thus: *Every one therefore that heareth these My words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock, and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock* (Matt. 7:24–25). The most blessed Virgin, therefore, who was most obedient to the Creator in all things, was immovable in Him, nor could she be bent from the royal road by the occurrence of any adversities, tribulations, temptations or changes whatever. The same thing becomes known if what was set forth in the second little book (Book II, Arts. 3–6) concerning the fullness of her wisdom is weighed. For, as Scripture testifies, *a holy man continueth in wisdom as the sun: but a fool is changed as the moon* (Ecclus. 27:12). Therefore no temptation, grief or change could so overwhelm the fullness of her wisdom and the most resplendent light of her understanding

that she should become doubtful or wavering about truth and equity.

Such it befitted the most happy Mother of Him to be who is the power and wisdom of the Father (1 Cor. 1:24), *the Lord who is strong and mighty … the Lord of hosts … the King of Glory* (Ps. 23:8, 10); through whom the prince of this world was to be overcome; who had to be the exemplar of all the virtues and the form of life. Was it not fitting that the Almighty should so strengthen the Virgin whom He chose for His mother? Of whom Jerome fittingly said: It was fitting that the Virgin should be pledged with such gifts that she should be full of grace, who gave glory to the heavens, and poured forth God and peace to the earth, faith to the gentiles, an end to vices, order to life and discipline to morals. Of her excellence and powerful grace, and of the wonders accomplished through her and in her, St Jerome declares again: What nature did not have, use did not know, reason was ignorant of, the human mind does not grasp, heaven trembles at, earth is astonished at, and every creature, even the heavenly, wonders at: all this is what is announced to Mary by God through Gabriel and fulfilled through Christ.[1]

Furthermore, since the Apostle says, *It is best that the heart be established with grace* (Heb. 13:9), it is certain that nature is established through grace, and the mind is fixed by the virtues. She, then, was of incomparable stability and firmness, on whom so most excellent a fullness of grace and a consummation of the virtues had been impressed. We read also in the first book of Kings of Anna that *her countenance was no more changed* (1 Kings 1:18). And of St Martin Severus wrote: No one ever saw him angry, no one sad, no one laughing; but remaining continually one and the same in countenance, he showed the appearance of an angelic countenance. Solomon also says: *Whatsoever shall befall the just man, it shall not make him sad* (Prov. 12:21). If these things and the like have been truly written of Saints of both sexes, how much more can these things, and greater than these, *(p. 122)* most truly be affirmed of the Holy One of holy women, of the most glorious Mother of the Holy of Holies, and plainly of the incomparable Mother of the God of gods? Her indeed that Son of altogether infinite opulence and munificence filled with the virtues incomparably beyond all, and bestowed on her a deiform uniformity.

[1] Both quotations come from the letter *Cogitis me* on the Assumption, which circulated under Jerome's name; see the note to Book II, Article 5.

Article XII: On the justice of the most upright Mary

The righteous love thee (Cant. 1:3). That is upright (*rectum*) which is distorted by no crookedness and turned aside by no obliquity, as among bodily things we see first in a straight line. Therefore that created mind is upright which tends towards God in a straight line and returns to its principle, and is fixed and rests in Him as in its last end; that is, whose whole intention is sincere, whose whole affection is pure, whose whole life is virtuous; which neither in thought, nor in word, nor in deed is at variance with, turns away from or departs from the good pleasure of the divine will. This belongs gloriously to Mary beyond all pure wayfarers: whose life was liable to no fault; whose highest and whole intention was the honour of the Creator; whose every affection was the love of God, or was well and sincerely referred to the love of God; whose whole life, action and suffering was placed irreproachably under the order of divine love, so that whatever she did or suffered she ordered most briefly and most excellently to the love and honour of God, and to advancing through it in holy love. Therefore there was nothing of injustice in her.

Further, as St Hilary declares, we are bound to God above all in this, that all our sense, all our power, life and action should speak of Him and venerate Him: so that, just as whatever we are, can do and have we have received from above (as the Apostle says: *What hast thou that thou hast not received?* 1 Cor. 4:7), so we should refer it all to God, and convert all of it entirely to His love and worship, and keep nothing of ours for ourselves, but devote it all wholly to the love and honour of the Founder and Saviour with all our powers. That no mortal has fulfilled this so gloriously as the most lovable and most to be glorified Mary is most

certain: since she, with all agility and alacrity, all sloth being excluded, was unceasingly and (as far as was possible) always actually intent on the contemplation, the love and the service of the Creator. So, what she owed to God she rendered to Him according to her powers; although she could not render to God an equivalent in strict justice, especially for His supernatural benefits, and most of all for His having taken her as His mother.

Moreover, although the other Saints have rendered to God, through thanksgiving, worship and action, themselves and whatever they received from God, as far as was possible to their weakness, yet no rational person has so rendered to God what he received from Him that what belongs to his substance should become and be something of God and of His substance or nature; nor so that what emanates from his substance should be converted into the nature and substance of God; nor has anyone so served God as though He needed the service of a creature. But these three things you, O most blessed virgin Mary, truly rendered to the most high God. For indeed He was born of your substance, and a portion of your flesh became His flesh, and so you furnished Him with the matter of the incarnation and the nature of flesh. Next, you nourished Him in the womb, and when He was born from your womb you suckled Him and brought Him up with the virginal milk of your most pure breasts; and daily you ministered to Him in His own person, and constantly prepared for Him the food of life. All these things the Person of God, and God Himself, received from you, and so far bound Himself to you, by condescension, not by necessity.

For the conversion of others also, and for leading them to love and honour their own Creator, you did what was yours to do, and edified your neighbours supremely, came to their aid most of all in spiritual things, and abundantly communicated to them the grace most fully imparted to you; and so you most perfectly fulfilled that precept of the natural law, *What thou wouldst have done to thee, do to another* (cf. Matt. 7:12; Tob. 4:16), and you were just in all things towards your neighbours. *(p. 123)* Lastly, what you owed to yourself, you rendered to yourself most moderately. For a man owes his body sustenance, direction and government, so as to make it serve the spirit; he owes his soul also, by reason, guarding, and himself direction towards true salvation; as it is said in Ecclesiasticus: *God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel. He added His commandments and precepts … He hath set water and fire before thee: stretch forth thy hand to which thou wilt* (Ecclus. 15:14–17). That the most gracious Mary rendered these things most perfectly to her body, her heart and her person need not be proved, since in the upbringing of her most excellent and most pure body she never departed from the royal road, towards more or less; her most holy heart also she guarded continually from every stain; and whatever was hers to do she did vigorously for her salvation, co-operating with grace.

O most glorious virgin Mary, how greatly your soul shone in the virtue of justice, and how greatly through it you pleased the Most High! For likeness is the reason of love; and of Him Scripture says: *For the Lord is just, and hath loved justice: His countenance hath beheld righteousness* (Ps. 10:8). For, as even the wise of this world have testified, justice is the most glorious virtue, and neither the evening star nor the morning star is so wonderful; for in it the splendour of virtue is greatest.[1] Nor does the sun shine so beautifully in the sky as justice shone in your soul: which nevertheless, towards your neighbours, was in all things tempered with mercy, according to the judgement of the truly prudent.

[1] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* V.1 (1129b28–29).

Article XIII: On the mercy and loving-kindness of the glorious Mary

For from my infancy mercy grew up with me (Job 31:18). Mercy is the virtue by which we suffer with our neighbours in their miseries and come to their aid as far as we can. This virtue is founded in charity and proceeds from love. Therefore, just as the most kind virgin Mary overflows, is filled and superabounds beyond all with the bowels of charity, so she is proved to be the most merciful of all. Furthermore,

loving-kindness emanates from goodness: for good is communicative and diffusive of itself. Therefore, just as the Fountain of infinite and incomprehensible goodness filled His most beloved Mother with a most liberal share of His immense goodness, so He filled her with a deiform loving-kindness. Therefore she is altogether most loving. And just as it is proper to God, who is essentially and uncircumscribably good and loving, always to have mercy and to spare, since this belongs to Him from Himself, while to be angry and to take vengeance, to punish and to condemn, belongs to Him from the perversity of others; so it is proper to the most excellent Virgin to have mercy, to come to the aid of others, to be indulgent and to spare. She fulfilled excellently what the Apostle exhorts: *Be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children* (Eph. 5:1). And so she, as a truly most dear daughter, imitated God in this most worthy property, in all loving-kindness and mercy.

Further, nothing is more like and nothing nearer to the God of immeasurable majesty than His most chosen Mother Mary. Therefore in loving-kindness and mercy she is incomparably more conformed to God than all others. And just as it is connatural and delightful to each to do what is proper to him, and for which he has a connatural or inborn inclination, so to the most serene and best virginal Mother it is connatural and joyful to come to the aid of the wretched, to suffer with the poorest, and to show mercy to all who take refuge with her.

Moreover, the most wise God pours into and bestows on each the gifts by which he is fit to carry out the office to which he has been ordained and appointed by God: for if nature does not fail in necessary things, much less certainly does grace. Now the blessed and most sincere Mary almighty God chose from eternity for mother and advocate, for guardian *(p. 124)* and mediatrix of all the faithful and of the whole Church. And loving-kindness and mercy above all befit a mother and advocate, a guardian and mediatrix, and that the more abundantly the greater are the dangers of the wretched, the greater their need, and the more numerous the needy and the wretched. Therefore it was necessary that the most worthy Mary, mother and advocate of so many innumerable thousands of the wretched, nay, of the most wretched and most needy, should be in every way most merciful and most loving: especially since these wretched exiles, of whom she has been constituted mother and advocate by God, are exposed to the most grievous, ineffable, irretrievable and eternal dangers of perpetual damnation, surrounded by most cruel, most strong and most cunning enemies, and filled with every frailty, want and calamity. That most clement and most wise Mary, then, beholding these dangers most clearly and diligently, much more than the wretched themselves, suffers most vehemently with them, and is most ready to have mercy, to help, and to stand by them and assist them to the end.

Furthermore, to the ungrateful, hard and unmerciful servant the Lord says in the Gospel: *Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all the debt, because thou besoughtest me: shouldst not thou then have had compassion also on thy fellow servant, even as I had compassion on thee?* (Matt. 18:32–33). By this it is established that each person ought to be the more merciful, the greater the mercy he has received from above. And the most loving virgin Mary, beyond every created person, has obtained the highest, an incomparable and altogether ineffable mercy and loving-kindness, as being wholly prevented with the most abundant blessing of the divine sweetness, sanctified in the womb and filled with the Holy Spirit, then most mercifully preserved from every fault, even venial, made mother of her Creator and Saviour, and brought to an incomparable excellence and fullness of grace and glory. Nor does the mercy of God consist only in the remission of faults, but also in the bestowing and preventing of graces.

Further still, each thing is wont to take on the properties and qualities of that to which it is more united, to which it is more nearly joined, and within which it is contained, dwells and long rests. Was not, then, the most venerable virgin Mary almost wholly turned into the bowels of mercy and loving-kindness, and filled most abundantly and most overflowingly with all loving-kindness and mercy, she who was so most nearly and most familiarly united to the Fountain of all loving-kindness and mercy, who truly conceived Him, and carried Him within her for so many months, incarnate of her, and, when He was born of her, handled Him for

so many years, cherished Him and had Him dwelling with her? With how great a fragrance of loving-kindness was she then imbued! With how great a largess of mercy was she filled from Him! With how great an abundance of all kindness was she sprinkled from it! If someone holds in his hand for a short while a fragrant herb or a sweet-smelling apple, does not his hand take a sweet odour from it? Nay, even when those things have been removed, the sweetness of the odour still remains in the hand. How much more is the most divine virgin Mary held to have been changed into a most sweet affection of all loving-kindness and mercy by so familiar and intimate a union with Him who is substantially and endlessly loving and merciful?

And she is truly declared most loving, so much so that she is rightly called the Mother of grace, the Queen of mercy, the Empress of clemency: whom God the Trinity took as partner of His kingdom, and, keeping the kingdom of justice for Himself, committed to her the kingdom of mercy; nor does He condemn those who take refuge at the throne of the merciful and most loving Mother, to whose merits and prayers He has decreed that nothing is to be denied. Lastly, it was for the relief of the wretched that so great a fullness of grace was so most mercifully given to Mary, who is to be glorified. It is most fitting, therefore, that she should communicate of the fullness of her mercy to the wretched, especially since the prince of the Apostles also says: *As every man hath received grace, ministering the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God* (1 Pet. 4:10). It has also been touched upon, and it is certain (Arts. 5, 7), that *(p. 125)* the more the most happy virgin Mary desires the fruit of the passion and blood of her Son, the readier she is to come to the aid of the wretched until they are saved.

Furthermore, mercy belongs above all to rulers and princes, to kings and emperors, as Solomon says: *His throne is strengthened by clemency* (Prov. 20:28). As a sign of this the king of the bees lacks a sting. Tully also, in his praises of the emperor Julius, says: No virtue makes you so commendable as your mercy. Hence King Assuerus too says: *Whereas I reigned over many nations … I was willing not to abuse the greatness of my power, but to govern my subjects with clemency and mildness* (Esther 13:2). Hence, the greater, the wider and the more universal the authority and power, the kingdom and the dominion of the most blessed God-bearing Mother, who by the right of the motherhood of God, and because she is co-parent with the eternal Father, is most truly believed to be, and is called, the Empress of angels and men, the Queen of heaven, the Lady of the world, the fuller and the more abundant is her loving-kindness and mercy. Lastly, the sweetness of clemency and the gentleness of loving-kindness especially befit the female sex; and the greater and more powerful a person of this sex is, the more fitting it is that she be loving and clement.

Article XIV: On the greatness of the loving-kindness and mercy of the admirable and heavenly Mary, from the words of the holy Fathers

According to thy ability be merciful. If thou have much give abundantly (Tob. 4:8–9). O how most gloriously the most worthy Mary fulfilled this teaching! For just as she was and is most abundant in spiritual wealth, in the fullness of grace and in every heavenly blessing, so she always comes most abundantly to the aid of those who call upon her, and extends herself to all through all times, as the devout father Bernard says: Who, O blessed one, could search out the length and breadth, the height and the depth of your mercy? For its length comes to the aid of all who call upon it until the last day; its breadth fills the whole world, so that the whole earth is full of your mercy too (cf. Ps. 32:5); so also its height has brought about the restoration of the city above; and its depth has obtained redemption *for them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death* (Luke 1:79).

Further, so rich is the grace and mercy of the most sacred Virgin that she communicates herself to all, and seems to increase the glory of the Creator. Hence Bernard testifies again: Mary opens the bosom of mercy to all, that all may receive of her fullness: the captive redemption, the sick healing, the sad consolation, sinners pardon, the just grace, the angels joy, the whole Trinity glory, the Person of the Son the substance of human flesh. For indeed, as Bernard discoursed again, just as the sun rises without distinction upon the good and the

bad, so Mary does not examine past merits, but shows herself open to entreaty by all, most clement to all, and has pity on the needs of all with a most ample affection. For just as a vessel full of liquid, if it is moved in any way, easily pours out the liquid, so the most blessed Virgin, if she is moved by prayers, will at once pour out grace. Therefore I say to you, dearly beloved, if she is knocked at by you devoutly, she will not fail your need, because she is merciful and the mother of mercy. For if she had compassion on the want and the embarrassment of those by whom she had been invited to the wedding, much more will she have compassion on you if she is devoutly called upon.

Hence again Bernard discoursed: O most loving Mary, you do not shudder at nor despise the sinner, however foul; but if he sighs to you and asks your intercession with a penitent heart, you draw him back with your loving hand from the abyss of damnation, and him who is despised by the whole world you embrace with motherly affection, cherish, and do not forsake, until you reconcile the wretch to the dread Judge. Let him then be silent about your mercy, if anyone *(p. 126)* remembers that you failed him when called upon in his needs. For when could the Mother of the Almighty be unable to have mercy? when would the Mother of mercy be unwilling to have mercy? In your hands, O most blessed one, are laid up all the treasures of the mercies of God. Far be it, then, that your hand should cease from giving.

Hence also Anselm said: O woman wonderfully singular and singularly wonderful, through whom men are saved, souls are freed from purgatory, angels are made glad! O woman full and more than full of grace, sprinkled with the abundance of whose fullness every human creature revives! O blessed Virgin, through whose blessing not only is every creature blessed by the Creator, but the Creator also by the creatures! With these agrees the word of Bernard, who says: O Mary, rightly do the eyes of every creature look to you, since in you, from you and through you the kindly hand of the Almighty re-created whatever it had created. In you the angels have found joy, the just grace, sinners mercy: and so you have brought forth grace for all generations, when you brought forth the Creator of all for the whole world.

Article XV: On the religion and devotion of the most kind and sublime Mary

I will sing to my God as long as I have my being (Ps. 103:33). Religion, or *latria*, is a moral virtue and a part of justice, offering worship and ceremony to God. Its acts are: to pray, to adore, to praise the Most High, to make vows and offer sacrifice to Him, and to pay tithes and first-fruits to His ministers. The interior and elicited act of *latria* is the promptness of the will for the things of God; and this promptness of will is called devotion. Devotion is also sometimes called the fervour of good will in worshipping the Most High, which comes to the same thing. Or devotion is called such fervour because devotion proceeds by inspiration from the fervour of charity; and so that description of devotion is a predication through its cause. Thirdly, devotion is described as a certain tenderness of heart, by which one is easily dissolved into weeping from the conception and affection of good: which is a description and predication through its effect.

Further, since devotion is a promptness, a fervour and an act of the will, it is certain that it arises from a prior apprehension, meditation or contemplation of the intellective power, yet more immediately from charity, which makes the mind prompt and ready for the acts of divine worship. So, the more fervent the most happy and incomparable virgin Mary was in divine love, and the deeper in the contemplation of divine things, the more devout certainly she was, that is, the more prompt and eager for every act of divine worship, for praying, singing psalms and praising her Creator and Saviour. Now how most ardent, how incomparably stable and perfect she was in divine charity and in saving wisdom has been shown above (Arts. 3, 5). Hence it is most certain that the divine and most chosen virgin Mary was ineffably prompt and fervent beyond all the Saints for the divine acts mentioned, and most stable in them, and continually intent on altogether most pure prayers, on most devout praises of God, on psalms and hymns, and on the most reverent adoration of the Almighty.

And although at times, occupied with outward things or speaking with people, she ceased from vocal prayer and the praise of God, yet she did not cease from inward and most devout mental prayers and praises of God, any more than from contemplations, meditations and divine affections; for she was of such perfection, of such fullness, and of so constant an illumination and inflaming by the Holy Spirit, that she was not hindered from inward things by outward ones.

Moreover, since, according to what was said before, devotion emanates from consideration and from the affection of charity, therefore those things whose consideration is more divine, and which by their nature are more fit to kindle charity, as being better, can cause greater *(p. 127)* devotion in the mind, and in them a greater and higher devotion consists, such as the Godhead of Christ and the adorable Trinity. Yet on the side of our imperfection it often happens that the consideration of the humanity of Christ, and of His passion and His other mysteries and acts, or even the Legends of the Saints, stir us more to devotion and compunction; because we are raised from sensible and human things to the knowledge and love of divine things. But the perfect are stirred to devotion above all by contemplation and by the fervent love of divine things, by the consideration of the infinite goodness, honourableness and excellence of God, by beholding the super-most-blessed Trinity, and by considering Its communication and emanation within Itself, and Its mutual beholding, love, complacency and enjoyment.

Now the most glorious virgin Mary was most perfect both in the devotion born of the consideration of the humanity and mysteries of Christ and in the devotion that arises from the contemplation of the Godhead of her Son and of the super-blessed Trinity, as she was also in both those kinds of knowledge and love. Further, that most chosen and altogether most worthy Virgin of all creatures occupied herself wholly, most devoutly, most reverently and constantly, in the service of her Son according to His humanity, rendering Him a mother's ministry in all things; and in doing this very thing she contemplated most clearly His Godhead and the charity, loving-kindness and munificence of the super-essential Trinity; from which contemplation she was moved to an inestimable devotion, and offered her whole self to God continually as a holocaust out of the highest devotion.

Further, religion, whose act is devotion, is named from "relegating" (*relegare*), because it relegates the mind from vain and perishable things and makes it cleave to God. Therefore those are called religious who, estranging and separating themselves from sensible and earthly things, are intent on God with a free and sincere mind.[1] Hence the most sweet Mary was the more religious and devout, the further and the more purely her mind had been relegated from every affection and act that hinders from Christ and from beholding and loving Him. Hence also in her youth, before she conceived the Son of God, in order that she might serve the Almighty and be free for Him more perfectly with a cleaner body and a purer mind, she promised her virginity to God, either absolutely or under a most honourable condition, namely unless God should dispose otherwise with her; otherwise, when the Archangel announced the conception to her, since she was espoused (Matt. 1:18), she would not so constantly have answered and asked: *How shall this be done, because I know not man?* (Luke 1:34).

Lastly, the more eager and fervent devotion is, and the more perfect the devout person, the greater is the spiritual joy commonly joined to it. For it is delightful to each to do those things to which he is vehemently drawn. Therefore, the more perfect the blessed and glorious virgin Mary was in every virtue, especially in the acts of charity and wisdom, the more fervently, joyfully and steadily was she intent on the acts of devotion; although with her consolation and eagerness there was often mingled a certain loving sadness from the absence of her Beloved and on account of the sins of the world, and an inward compassion from the consideration of the passion of her Only-begotten, as has been shown more at length (Book I, Art. 19). So in every act of devotion, namely of heart, mouth and work, the most sacred Lady was incomparably the most devout: in all promptness and inward affection, in all vocal prayer, praise and adoration, in every prostration, genuflection and bow, in offering and sacrifice; she in whose heart and body, as in a most chosen temple, the

Son of God incarnate dwelt.

[1] Cicero derived *religio* from *relegere* (“to go over again”), Lactantius from *religare* (“to bind”); Denis follows a medieval form of the etymology.

Article XVI: On the meekness and patience of the most excellent virgin Mary

I am black but beautiful, O ye daughters of Jerusalem (Cant. 1:4). To her Only-begotten, God, the Son of God incarnate, His most pre-elected virginal Mother *(p. 128)* was nearest and most like in all the gifts of grace. For in every genus and order of things the first is the greatest and the most perfect in that genus and order, as in the whole company of sensibly luminous things the sun is the most luminous. And that first is, in its order and genus, the measure and rule of what comes second. So, the nearer something is to it, the more perfect it is in that order. Just as, then, God’s most beloved one was incomparably more conformed to Christ than all wayfarers in all perfection of charity and wisdom, and of the other virtues and gifts, so she is held to have been more like Him also in the most patient and most tranquil endurance of adversities: so much so that neither against Herod, who persecuted Christ while still a little child (Matt. 2:16), nor against the Scribes and Pharisees and priests, who persecuted her most beloved Son cruelly and in many ways even to a most bitter and most ignominious death, did she ever conceive indignation, impatience, anger, murmuring or aversion; but rather she grieved over their perversity and prayed for them.

During the most bitter passion of Christ also, when she saw the only fruit of her virginal womb handled so most savagely, and heard so many blasphemies and crimes cast at Him, and beheld Him pierced and fixed on the cross and most pitiably stretched out, she was in no way moved against those most savage murderers, nay, deicides, nor stirred by an indiscreet zeal, but kept an inestimable meekness and patience. Nor could there flow from that most sweet, most tranquil, most meek and most patient motherly heart of the God-bearing Virgin a word of impatience, bitterness, a grim look, harsh indignation, the smoke of anger, murmuring or contention: since it had been wholly turned and immovably changed into the bowels of charity and loving-kindness, into an abyss of mildness and patience, into the affection of humility and goodness.

Further, outstanding men are commended for special mildness and great patience. Did not holy Moses write of himself in Numbers, as of another: *For Moses was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwelt upon earth* (Num. 12:3)? So too David, speaking of himself: *O Lord*, he says, *remember David, and all his meekness* (Ps. 131:1). And that blessed Job is specially praised for patience his book declares (Job 1–2). But what is the meekness and patience of these and the like compared with your patience and mildness, O most lovable and most sweet virgin Mary? Did not that lawgiver Moses, exasperated by the wickedness of the rebellious, beseech the Lord, *Respect not their sacrifices*, and soon they were horribly stricken (Num. 16:15, 31–35)? He also rigorously slew the Egyptian (Exod. 2:12), and commanded many thousands of idolaters to be put to death (Exod. 32:27–28). So too David, moved by the insolence of Nabal, swore that he would kill him (1 Kings 25:22); and over his enemies the Ammonites he drove iron chariots, and cut them with knives (2 Kings 12:31). Joseph, again, took revenge on his brothers and afflicted them at his pleasure (Gen. 42). And Job, disputing against his friends, spoke many hard and reproachful words to them (Job 13 ff.). But did the most meek and most patient Lady ever speak any such thing to her persecutors or to those of her Son?

To Christ, as Judge, the rigour of justice and judicial censure are also attributed. And although the most virtuous Virgin was adorned with all the beauty of justice too, yet, having been made the mother, advocate and mediatrix of all, she chose to exercise mercy and compassion in all things, showed meekness, and embraced patience. For patience is the proof of all the virtues, and *charity is patient* (1 Cor. 13:4). Meekness also makes a man very lovable, and capable of divine illumination and heavenly consolation, as Scripture says: *My son, do thy works in meekness, and thou shalt be beloved above the glory of men* (Ecclus. 3:19); and again: *But the meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight in abundance of peace* (Ps. 36:11). Hence the

highest and an incomparable meekness and patience befitted the incomparably perfect *(p. 129)* and holy Mary, wise and accustomed to heavenly consolations.

On this account Bernard says: Turn over more diligently the whole course of the Gospel history, and if perhaps anything reproachful, anything harsh, or finally any sign even of slight indignation is met with in Mary, hold her suspect henceforth and be afraid to approach her. But if you find all the things that belong to her rather full of loving-kindness and grace, full of meekness and mercy, give thanks to Him who in His most kind compassion has provided you with such a mediatrix, in whom there can be nothing to suspect.

Article XVII: On the ineffable and most profound humility of the most high Mary

Because He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid (Luke 1:48). Although the most blessed and most admirable virgin Mary was incomparably full of all the virtues at the limit of excellence beyond all wayfarers, yet she asserts that it was her humility that God mercifully regarded by approving and accepting it, because (as was said more fully above, in the first book, Art. 17) the most blessed Virgin was disposed especially through humility for so supernatural an elevation of herself, by which she was made the Mother of the most high God, since the Saviour says: *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted* (Luke 14:11). Therefore also she said, *He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid*, to intimate that she had not been so incomparably raised to be the Mother of God by her own merits in strict justice, but that almighty God had approved in her that lowering of herself before God by which she prostrated herself most lowly before the divine majesty, and in comparison with it esteemed herself most vehemently as little and reckoned herself altogether most unworthy that so great a mystery should be accomplished in her, from her and through her.

Further, when God willed to raise her above every pure creature subsisting in created being, both in the gifts of sanctifying grace and in the gifts of grace freely given, He gave her first of all a most perfect and most profound humility: because humility disposes for the reception, the progress and the perfection of all divine charisms; and the more anyone grows in holy humility, the more apt he becomes to advance in every completion of the other virtues and gifts. For indeed (as is evident), just as the streams of rain flow together into the hollows of the valleys, and the deeper the valleys are, the more showers they can receive, and the more abundant are the waters collected in them; so the humbler the heart is, the more abundantly is grace poured into it, according to what Scripture says: *God resisteth the proud, but to the humble He giveth grace* (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Hence the God of hosts, the King of glory, willing to fill that unique, most sacred and most singular virgin Mary, whom He had pre-elected from eternity to be His mother, with an incomparable fullness of graces in this life, and to exalt her with incomparable happiness, honour and glory in the heavenly homeland, filled her first of all with the highest and most profound humility on the way.

Further, perfect humbling of oneself depends on a twofold knowledge, namely of the Creator and of oneself. For the more clearly a well-disposed intellectual creature contemplates the majesty, the perfection and the immense excellence of its Creator, the more deeply it lowers itself in comparison with Him, the more vehemently it esteems itself as little, and the more heartily it is known to humble itself. Hence Abraham, speaking with God and weighing His eminence, says: *I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes* (Gen. 18:27). Again, the more clearly anyone knows himself, namely all his defectiveness, his condition, his need, his nothingness and his unceasing dependence on God, the more deeply he humbles himself. Now how incomparably clearly and wisely the most loving virgin Mary contemplated God in this life, *(p. 130)* and how most truly she knew herself and all her condition, is plain from what was set forth in the second little book (Book II, Arts. 6 ff.). Therefore it becomes known that on the side of both these kinds of knowledge she was in all humility ineffably the highest and incomparably perfect; and so fixed at the bottom of all humility and plunged in its ocean that, when the crowds applauded her Son and said, *He hath done all things well* (Mark 7:37), and, *Never was the like seen in Israel* (Matt. 9:33), and, *A great prophet is risen up among us* (Luke

7:16), and, *This is of a truth the prophet, that is to come into the world* (John 6:14), and again, *Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest* (Matt. 21:9; Luke 19:38), she never rejoiced vainly, nor was moved by spiritual elation on that account.

Further, after the sending of the Paraclete, when she was believed by all the faithful to be the true Mother of God, and was held in the highest admiration and veneration after God, and was honoured with the worship of *hyperdulia*, when many excellent persons came together from various parts of the world to see her, and her fame was spread abroad on every side, she was never assailed by any vanity or pride from such great honours and praises, but remained immovable in the deepest humility. Nay, the more she was esteemed, honoured and praised by all, the more she humbled herself: continually and in all things attributing all her good to God with most heartfelt thanksgiving and most pure humility, and subjecting herself to Him in all obedience the more perfectly, the more and the more eminent the benefits she had received from Him; most fully fulfilling what Scripture says: *The greater thou art, the more humble thyself in all things* (Ecclus. 3:20).

For two books were always open to her, that is, two inward illuminations. One was the book of wisdom, in which she contemplated most clearly and deeply the things of God and all His excellence. The other was the book of knowledge, in which she beheld most clearly herself and the things that were hers. And so with wonder and the highest reverence she said: O my God, what art Thou, and what am I? Hence, the more graciously and condescendingly she saw that God had dealt with her, the more vehemently she wondered, gave thanks, and humbled herself utterly. And the more clearly she knew her littleness and condition in comparison with the infinite excellence of God, and reckoned it as nothing, the deeper the humbling of herself which she conceived.

Further still, since she was a most docile and most obedient disciple of Christ, she learned most perfectly from Him what He said: *Learn of Me, because I am meek, and humble of heart* (Matt. 11:29); especially because she saw Him, whose immense majesty she knew so well, conversing daily so most humbly and obediently with her and before her; by whose example and virtue she was ineffably edified and unceasingly kindled. Furthermore, it is described in the Acts of the Apostles how, after the Paraclete had been sent and poured out, the seven deacons were appointed (Acts 6:5), and a little before Matthias in place of Judas (Acts 1:26); and many other deeds are recounted there. Yet in that whole book nothing is read that the most worthy virgin Mary did, said or ordained, or that she attempted in any way by her motherly authority, or that she interfered in anything.

O how immense, how incomparable the humility of the most high and glorious Mary! How much it confounds our most foolish and most damnable pride! For, notwithstanding that we are filled with every frailty, defect and fault, surrounded by most grievous and almost innumerable dangers, and uncertain whether we are elect or reprobate, *whether* we are *worthy of love, or hatred* (Eccles. 9:1), yet to our other miseries and vices we add this impiety, madness and perversity too, that we extol ourselves and prefer ourselves to others, not fearing the secret and fearful judgements of God, who *resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble* (Jas. 4:6), and (as the mistress of all humility declares) *hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart* (Luke 1:51).

O truly *(p. 131)* the humility of the most blessed Virgin who is to be glorified, so fruitful, so worthy and so most pleasing to God the Father, that it brought forth a Saviour for the lost world; that it bore for the blinded and the unlearned the eternal light and the uncreated Wisdom; that it begot for men God and the Lord of all things, the way for those who stray, the truth for the deceived, life for mortals, nay, for the dead; which by its fruitfulness repaired the ruin of the angels and brought those held in limbo to glory! O most lovable and most delightful, most pure virgin Mary, how strong and invincible, how perfect and immovable was your humility, which could not be bent by any praise, any promotion, any honouring of yourself, nor assailed by any vanity or elation or vain complacency! You see the Archangel appearing to you; you hear him greeting you most excellently, preferring you to all women, promising you incomparably great things, announcing that you are

to conceive the Only-begotten of God. You hear him saying and promising to you what no rational creature, not even an angelic one, ever heard said or promised to itself, namely: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God* (Luke 1:35). By that promise you perceive that you are soon to be the queen and lady of all creatures. And yet by such great praises, such great prerogatives, such great honours your mind is not lifted up, nor touched by any vanity, but you answer most humbly: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word* (Luke 1:38).

Hence Bernard aptly says: It is no great thing to be humble in abjection; but humility honoured is altogether a great and rare virtue. If the Church, deceived by my pretences, has raised me, a wretched little man, to some even moderate honour, God surely permitting it either for my sins or for those of my subjects, do I not at once forget who I was, and reckon myself to be such as I am reckoned by men, who do not see the heart? I believe the report, because I do not attend to my conscience; and the higher I see myself, the holier I esteem myself. But she who was being chosen as Mother of God did not forget humility. And again: O most worthy Mary, you crushed the spirit of pride by that virtue of humility which the Lord so regarded in you that by its merit He judged you worthy to be raised above all the choirs of angels. For you would never have ascended, raised above all the orders of angels, had you not first descended, humbled below all men. O sublime Virgin, to what a height you lift your head! Certainly even to the throne of majesty, because you sent down the roots of humility into the deepest depth.

Lastly, just as in the Church triumphant each of the angelic spirits is the humbler the more exalted it is, not that the higher reckons itself viler than the lower, but that it subjects itself to God the more humbly and reverently, the more clearly it beholds both His majesty and its own condition; in the same way the most blessed virgin Mary, and also the soul of Christ, are said to have been most humble and to have humbled themselves below every man, although they knew that they were the most chosen and most worthy of all creatures.

Article XVIII: On the obedience and diligence, and on the daily, nay, constant and unceasing progress of the most wise and deiform Mary

The things that God hath commanded thee, think on them always (Ecclus. 3:22). Scripture so commends obedience that almighty God, who stands above every law, nature and order, is said to obey those who obey Him: because the more entirely and promptly anyone has subjected his will to the command of the divine will, the more quickly and abundantly does the Most High assent to his will and prayers, so that He is seen to bear Himself in the manner of one who obeys. Hence it is written in the book *(p. 132)* of Josue: *Then Josue spoke to the Lord … Move not, O sun, toward Gabaon … So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space of one day … the Lord obeying the voice of a man* (Josh. 10:12–14). For that Josue was eminently and perfectly obedient to God, as we read in his book: *Josue … left not one thing undone of all the commandments which the Lord had commanded* (Josh. 11:15).

Yet, as in the other virtues, so in holy obedience the most chosen and most singular virgin Mary incomparably surpassed Josue himself, and fulfilled the precepts of charity most gloriously beyond all; and in like manner she accomplished the precepts of the other virtues so most fully, most devoutly, most fervently and most humbly, and subjected her whole self to the Creator so most entirely, that the adorable God, out of His exceeding complacency, came down to her, into her, and dwelt in the midst of her virginal womb, made man of her, and truly born of her. And so in His own Person He subjected Himself to her as to His most worthy and altogether most dear Mother; and thus, according to the desire of the most happy Mother, not the sun but the creator of the sun, the Sun of wisdom and justice, stood in the midst of heaven, that is, of the Church militant, which in the Gospel and the Apocalypse is often called the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 13; Apoc. 1:6; 5:10); and as she willed, *He went down with* her, *and was subject to* her (Luke 2:51).

Further, she could say excellently with her Son: *I do always the things that please* the Father (John 8:29). For by every act, motion and suffering of hers she honoured God, merited and advanced; and so she gloriously fulfilled that word of the Psalm: *His will is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he shall meditate day and night* (Ps. 1:2). Rightly and deservedly, O most excellent and most beautiful Lady, every creature, heavenly, earthly and in between, is subject to you and obeys you, since God, the founder of all things, was subject to you as to His Mother. The evangelical counsels too, O most dear spouse of God, you graciously fulfilled.

Hence in the *Revelations* of St Bridget the most serene and most honourable virgin Mary says to her: From the beginning, when I heard and understood that God existed, I was always solicitous and fearful for my salvation and observance. And when I had heard more fully that God Himself was my creator and the judge of all my actions, I loved Him inwardly, and every hour I feared and took thought lest I should offend Him by word or deed. Then, when I had heard that He had given the law and the commandments to the people of Israel, and had worked so many and such great wonders with them, I firmly resolved in my mind to love nothing but Him, and all worldly things were exceedingly bitter to me. After this, having heard that He was to be born of a virgin and to redeem the human race, I was moved with such love for Him that I thought of and willed nothing but God. I withdrew myself, as far as I could, from the company and conversation of my parents and friends. All that I could have I gave to the needy, keeping for myself nothing but scanty food and clothing; and nothing pleased me but God, to whom I committed and subjected my whole will; and every day I was inflamed with new ardours and desires of love. Hence it is clear that the highest and best virgin Mary was filled with filial love.

Article XIX: On the true, spiritual, abundant and unfailing riches of the glorious Mary

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory (Eph. 3:16). The true riches of a rational creature are those which cannot be taken from it against its will, such as the inward charisms of the Holy Spirit, sanctifying grace, the virtues and gifts, the beatitudes and fruits, and virtuous acts and merits. With these sacred riches, as is clear from what was said before (Book II, Arts. 2, 3, 14; Book III, Arts. 3 ff.), the most blessed virgin Mary was filled beyond all the Saints, as it befitted the most chosen Mother of God to be filled, enriched, overflowing and adorned, beyond His ministers, by her only-begotten Son, the fountain of infinite munificence and altogether immense opulence. Further, since she has been constituted from above mother of grace, mother of mercy, *(p. 133)* refuge of the poor, queen of clemency, mother and comforter of all the faithful, it was fitting that she should be filled with such fullness of spiritual riches that she could communicate of her fullness to all, come to the aid of all the wretched, enlighten the whole world, and enrich the needs of all. Hence she was spiritually altogether most rich, most abounding in all wisdom, charity and grace, and in every deiform abundance. For what would the Almighty not give to His most chosen Mother? For God too is declared rich, not in money but in omnipotence (2 Cor. 8:9; Eph. 2:4). Hence, just as the most blessed virgin Mary was most liberal in giving, so she was most powerful in following up and succouring. And as the kingdom of mercy has been committed to her, so the riches of graces have been conferred on her most abundantly by Him *who giveth to all men abundantly* (Jas. 1:5).

Moreover, she was so rich that she bore, poured forth and showed to us the very Fountain, cause and author of all riches, full in Himself of infinite riches. And so the fountain came forth from the stream, and the virginal Mother became the fountain of the glorious river (Gen. 2:6) that waters and floods all the earth, that is, the whole Church. O most blessed and most lovable virgin Mary, *glorious things are said of thee* (Ps. 86:3)! Truly your *abode is in the full assembly of the saints* (Ecclus. 24:16): you who overcame all the Patriarchs in faith, transcended the Prophets in light and the spirit of prophecy, surpassed the Apostles also in zeal for the divine honour and for the salvation of your brethren, the martyrs in fortitude, the confessors in devotion, the virgins in chastity, the married in fruitfulness, and the angels in purity and holiness. For that

most opulent and most precious balsam of the Godhead, that most abounding wave of grace and virtue, the fountain of immense goodness, flowed into you and poured Himself into you with such liberality and fullness that He flows out most abundantly on every side. Plainly you are worthily called full of grace, who alone obtained this grace which no other merited, to be filled with the author of all grace.

Rightly did your most devout child Bernard say of you: O Mary, rich towards all and above all, a small part of whose substance, taken up, sufficed to pay for the sins of the whole world, nay, to recover the charisms of graces and to merit for us everlasting joys! O faithful Mary, who gave the antidote of salvation to men and women to drink! *Of thy fullness we have all received* (cf. John 1:16). *All that* your Son *giveth* you *shall come to* you; *and him that cometh to* you, you do *not cast out* (cf. John 6:37); nor do you allow any of them to perish whom the Most High has given you, whom He has decreed to save through you by a special loving-kindness and gift.[1]

[1] Here words of Christ about Himself (John 1:16; 6:37) are applied by accommodation to Mary, as was common in medieval devotion.

Article XX: How much the virginal Mother of salvation is to be loved and venerated by us; and how many and how great are the benefits conferred on us from above through her

Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, thou hast wounded my heart (Cant. 4:9). Each thing has as much lovableness as it has goodness, since the good is the object of the appetite. A thing is also lovable to us not only because it is good in itself, but also because it is good to us, that is, useful and necessary, delightful and beneficent. Furthermore, it is natural to man to be drawn to things that are beautiful, sweet and kind. Nor is anything more natural than to love one who shares our nature. From these things let us consider how much to be loved and venerated, nay, how most lovable and most venerable to us is the most high and most blessed virgin Mary.

For first, she is lovable to us on account of her likeness with us in species, and because in natural things she was of the best disposition, namely of an excellent constitution, altogether most beautiful in body, supremely graceful in manners, most gifted and of the best inclination. Next, because she was most excellently adorned with acquired virtues and knowledge, as has been declared in the second little book (Book II, Arts. 6, 15, 21). *(p. 134)* Thirdly and chiefly, because in the gifts of sanctifying grace, that is, in every infused virtue, in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the eight beatitudes, in the twelve fruits, in every merit and progress, she was, after the humanity of Christ, ineffably and incomparably perfect. Fourthly, because she never sinned, being altogether most innocent; she was and is adorned above all with those virtues that make a man more lovable to man, namely with all loving-kindness and mercy, all liberality and charity, all innocence and holy simplicity, and a wholly dove-like sincerity. With all these she was most full at the limit of excellence.

Fifthly, on account of her excellence in the gifts of grace freely given, and most of all because she is the Mother of the true God, which is the highest dignity communicable to a pure creature subsisting in created being: on account of which she is also to be venerated and honoured by every intellectual and rational creature with the honour of *hyperdulia*. For *dulia* is the virtue by which due reverence is shown to rational creatures; but *hyperdulia* is that by which we show due and fitting honour to the most excellent creatures, such as the humanity of Christ and the glorious Virgin. Sixthly, on account of her inestimable eminence in all eternal happiness and glory, in all glorification and most glorious beauty, and her supernatural goodness and sweetness: of which the following little book will treat. Seventhly, on account of her charity, loving-kindness and all her benevolence and mercy towards us: because she first loved us, and is most mercifully and most lovingly affected towards us, and desires supremely our progress and salvation. Therefore what the apostle John says, *Dearly beloved, let us love God, because He first hath loved us* (1 John 4:10, 19), can also be applied proportionally to His Mother, by saying: Dearly beloved, let us love Mary, because she first loved us,

and after God loves us most.

Eighthly, on account of the benefits we have obtained through her, and on account of the most excellent and supernatural goods which she, or God through her, has conferred on us. For indeed through her, and through the blessed fruit of her virginal womb, God our creator and judge was made our brother, our saviour and our advocate. Through her and through her adorable and most worthy Child we have been freed from the pains of hell, from the yoke of sin, from the power, nay, the tyranny and slavery, of the devil, from original infection and from manifold calamity; and we have been reconciled to the Most High, made servants and sons of God, constituted heirs of grace and glory, made Christ-like and God-like. Nay, our God was made like us in nature, grace and glory, and our nature has been exalted above all angelic dignity and glory; and so we have been eternally recovered and saved through her. Ninthly, because she has been constituted our most faithful, most powerful and most loving mother and advocate, protectress, lady and queen, and mediatrix. If, then, we love and venerate our parents according to the flesh, how much more ought we to love and honour this our Mother according to grace and glory?

Tenthly, on account of her daily, constant and unceasing benefits: because she continually prays for us; and when we take refuge with her and call upon her, she receives us and hears us most mercifully; she reconciles us to Christ, procures grace and progress for us, protects us, and never wholly forsakes us; and the adversaries of our salvation, the most cruel and most cunning demons, she represses, checks, curbs, drives away and tramples underfoot. Eleventhly, because through her, through her merits and prayers, through her direction and help, we hope, and (as far as depends on her) shall without doubt obtain, eternal happiness; and in death we shall be protected by her, and at the judgement immediately after death she will stand by us; and the pains of purgatory too, if we fall into it, the most merciful Mother and Lady will most lovingly lessen for us.

Behold how abundant, great and manifold *(p. 135)* is the cause and reason for us to love most ardently, to call upon most confidently and to honour most sincerely the most excellent and most sweet Mary, so good and beautiful in herself, and to us so charitable, loving, necessary, useful, beneficent and consoling. Certainly after God we ought to love, venerate, praise and honour her uniquely, especially and most devoutly, and to gather into one and weigh together all the motives and incentives for loving and venerating her: so that, from the consideration of them, we may love that most lovable and most venerable one more fervently and purely, and honour her more perfectly; and so say to her truly from the heart: *Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse* (Cant. 4:9). My sister, I say, by communion of nature; the singular and most loving spouse of the heavenly Bridegroom: you who are worthy not only to be and to be called the spouse of that supreme and super-noble, super-beautiful, super-rich, most wise and almighty Bridegroom, but also, out of your inestimable loving-kindness and grace, do not disdain to be and to be called the spouse of all who love you sincerely, though they are still defective and poor, weak and every day guilty in many things.

Let my heart be kindled with your holy love, O most lovable Mother, O most pure Virgin, O supreme Lady, so that for love of you I may detest all carnality, and continually abhor and avoid whatever is offensive to your holiness. Let my soul be enlightened with the splendour of the contemplation of your most excellent dignity and purity, so that I may always contemplate you purely and venerate you most diligently. Let my mind and my mouth be filled unceasingly with your holy and glorious praises, O beauty, ornament and glory of all creatures, Empress of all the angelic spirits, most powerful conqueror and restrainer of all evil spirits. Let me love you, my Mother and Lady, whose condescension is the more abundant and whose loving-kindness is the more heartfelt, the greater your dignity and majesty.

Therefore, although wholly most unworthy, vile, foul and contemptible, yet I approach you confidently, O Queen of mercy; to you I sigh, to you I lift up my soul, to you my spirit groans, to you my eye weeps. Beholding you I am kindled, loving you I melt, laying hold of you my soul is consoled, gladdened and melted. *I will pour out my heart like water* before you, O Lady (Lam. 2:19); I will open to you and confess

before the face of your clemency my miseries, my faults and negligences, the dangers to which I am exposed, the needs in which I am entangled. O wholly most meek, most sweet and most merciful virgin Mary, Mother of the Son of God, co-parent with the eternal Father, temple and shrine of the Holy Spirit, I will praise you and call upon you constantly. My heart shall exult in praising you; I will exalt and magnify you for ever, mother of life, obtainer of pardon and recoverer of grace, who have never taken away your mercy from me, nor forsaken me when straying, turned away and ungrateful; nay, while I was still a youth, or rather a little boy, not yet able to discern between good and evil, by a most sweet prevenient loving-kindness you gave me affection for your name and love of yourself. This mercy of yours, I pray, O best of Ladies, deign to continue and preserve in me to the end.

O how well Bernard says: Behold more deeply with what affection of devotion He willed Mary to be honoured by us who placed the fullness of all good in her, so that henceforth, if there is any hope in us, any grace, any salvation, we may know that it overflows from her! And again: Whatever was done in Mary was wholly purity and simplicity, wholly grace and truth, wholly mercy and the justice that *hath looked down from heaven* (Ps. 84:12). Anselm too rightly discoursed: O holy Mary, and among the Saints after God singularly holy, Mother of admirable virginity, Virgin of lovable fruitfulness, who bore the Son of the Most High, who brought forth a Saviour for the lost human race; Lady shining with such holiness, pre-eminent with such *(p. 136)* dignity, whom it is certainly sure is endowed with no less power and loving-kindness!

Hence Augustine says: Mary helps man in life and in death. How? Listen, O Christian. In Baptism the soul is espoused through faith to Christ, the true Bridegroom, and dowered by the Holy Spirit, and appointed an heir of God with the angels. But when it is infected with sins, it at once casts off Christ the Bridegroom, joins itself to the devil and becomes his adulteress; and so it is justly deprived of God and of the heavenly kingdom. O sad and foolish exchange, to cast off Christ the Bridegroom for a vile pleasure and fault, and to subject oneself to the worst enemy! But Mary, the mother of grace, since she is the Mother of God and the helper of sinners, shows her Son her breast and the breasts that nursed Him, and so begs pardon for the guilty. The Son, seeing this, shows the Father His side and His wounds, and so obtains mercy from Him. So, then, Mary helps the sinner in life, in that through her help and grace the soul of the sinner becomes again a temple of the Holy Spirit, a spouse of Christ, a daughter of the eternal King, an heir of the kingdom of God.

Next, Mary helps in death. How and why? Listen, Christian. Mary was made mother of the King of heaven on account of the need of sinners; and she has been so exalted that she has been placed at the right hand of her Son above the choirs of angels; and this gracious Virgin, this honourable and discreet Virgin, notices and acknowledges it. And since she received so great an honour on account of sinners, she does not cease to help them and to plead for them before God. Nor does she forsake them, if they are penitent, in death, but protects them from the devil, raises them from fault, snatches them from punishment, and leads them into glory. On account of all these so welcome benefits, Mary the blessed virgin is justly and beautifully called mediatrix, helper, recoverer, illuminatrix and aid.[1]

[1] The passage is from a sermon falsely ascribed to Augustine.

Article XXI: On the sweetness of the glorious Virgin

Thou art beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely as Jerusalem (Cant. 6:3). The Fountain of infinite beauty, God, essentially, incomparably and endlessly sweet, from whom all created sweetness has flowed and from whom it is infinitely distant and falls short, communicated and impressed the immensity of His sweetness most abundantly on His most chosen Mother, and made her so sweet in herself and to all of us that we cannot recall her without a certain sensible sweetness; nor can she enter the gate of loving memory without sprinkling it with the fragrance of the most abounding sweetness implanted in her.

O sweet, delightful and lovely one, O most fragrant and most lovable Mary, most full in yourself of all tranquillity, goodness, loving-kindness, charity and joy! Rightly are you called sweet, who are in yourself so gentle and joyful, and taste so sweetly and consolingly to every well-disposed mind; who gladden the desolate, cherish the wretched, anoint souls, nay, who magnificently and clemently refresh, gladden and flood the whole Church triumphant and militant with your wonderful and great sweetness. Sweet is the Lord, sweet is the Lady: for He is my Lord, *my mercy* (Ps. 143:2; 58:18); she is my Lady, the gate of mercy. He willed that we should have nothing of grace and virtue, nothing of spiritual joy and inward consolation, and decreed to give nothing, except through the hands of Mary,[1] in whom there was never anything distorted, nothing indignant, nothing mixed with reprehensible bitterness.

You, most sweet Virgin, are the mother of the flower of mercy, the mother of the Sun of justice, the mother of the Fountain of wisdom, the mother of the King of glory, the mother of supreme sweetness and of all gentleness. Hence you are filled with all loving-kindness, equity, wisdom, happiness, sweetness and glory, to the highest degree and as much as you could receive, and altogether most full. To you your devout child Bernard spoke sincerely: Your most sacred womb, O Mary, is for us a garden of delights, because from it we gather the flowers of manifold joy as often as we recall in mind how great a multitude of sweetness flowed out from it upon the whole world. O fountain of deifying delight, virginal womb, from which was born that Fruit *(p. 137)* and Son who is eternally begotten from the mind of God the Father! What should I call it but delights: the beauty of virginity with the gift of fruitfulness, nay, with the fruit of a divine Child; the badge of humility dripping the honeycomb of charity; the bowels of mercy, the fullness of grace, the prerogative of singular glory! Therefore, whoever you are that are weighed down with grief, afflicted with desolation, burdened with adversities, approach this most loving and altogether most sweet Mary, implore her, contemplate her, and quickly you will feel her help; persevere in calling upon her mercy, and swiftly you will experience consolation of mind.

[1] A saying in the tradition of St Bernard (*Sermo de aquaeductu*: “God willed that we should have everything through Mary”).

Article XXII: On the supernatural and full beauty of the most worthy Mary

And the king shall greatly desire thy beauty (Ps. 44:12). The beautiful inclines and draws the one who beholds it to love of itself. And just as the good and the desirable are so called by comparison with the appetitive power, so the true and the beautiful are so called with respect to the intellective power. Beauty also follows the form of a thing. And just as form is the ornament of matter, so grace is the ornament of nature and the comeliness of the soul. Now of the natural and bodily beauty of the blessed Virgin it was spoken in the first little book (Book I, Art. 34). Of the excellence of the beauty that was in her intellect from the fullness of her manifold wisdom, knowledge and prudence, and of the other habits and acts with which the intellective power of the most excellent Virgin was ineffably adorned, being a stranger to all error and ignorance, it is plain from what was set forth in the second little book.

Now also, from what has been said in this third little book, the beauty of the affective power, or will, of the divine and most glorious Mother can in some measure be made plain. For in every virtue, and especially in charity, which beautifies, perfects and ennobles this power, God’s most beloved one was perfectly full and fully perfect, as far as could be conferred on or befitted a pure creature. Hence she is most truly praised as *all fair* (Cant. 4:7), in whom there was never any stain of fault, but the most resplendent brightness of grace, the splendour of all the virtues and the clarity of the gifts in the highest degree, the most ardent fervour of divine love, the most abundant zeal for the divine honour and for the salvation of her brethren, an abundance of merits and of all inward adornments; in whom each power, in the ways befitting it, was adorned in a heavenly and Christ-like manner with the aforesaid charisms of graces at the limit of excellence.

What wonder if the supreme King, the prince of heaven, the Lord of glory, greatly desired the beauty of so most beautiful a girl, so most honourable a virgin, so perfect a young maiden, and did not cease until He became her son, and dwelt in her midst, and afterwards conversed with her on earth, and they embraced, kissed and handled one another most purely? Certainly it was not fitting for a virgin, especially such a virgin, to have any other son than God; nor was it fitting for God to have any other mother than so glorious a virgin. You, O most sacred virgin Mary, the most high God made so lovable, so desirable to Himself, so supremely and singularly, so fully and wholly pleasing: God the Father, who willed to have you as co-parent; God the Son, who chose you for His mother; God the Holy Spirit, who prepared you for Himself as His most beautiful temple, most famous throughout the world, and as the most excellent mother of Him from whom He Himself truly proceeds by an eternal emanation within.

Your beauty and comeliness, O most happy Lady and heavenly Queen, not only the sun and moon, but all the elect and the citizens above admire, and in admiring behold, and in beholding are inflamed; and so they delight vehemently, nay, ineffably, in you and concerning you. You, most loving Lady, sanctified in your mother's womb, came forth beautiful; and as soon as you had the use of reason, *(p. 138)* you advanced every day so far in that inward beauty, and put on within so great a comeliness, so great a holiness and perfection, that you drew upon yourself the gaze of all the citizens above, and finally inclined towards you the heart of the King and Creator of all things Himself, and drew the God of gods from the highest heaven to earth, from the bosom of the Father into the midst of your most chaste womb. O altogether most pure Virgin, in whose lap that almighty rhinoceros laid down His head and His crown (Num. 23:22; 24:8), and allowed Himself to be captured by you, O most powerful one! Behold how your inward beauty drew Him.[1]

Lastly, just as bodily beauty results from an elegant stature, from a proportioned relation of the limbs and from a certain lively colour spread over them, so the inward beauty mentioned above seems to result from the completeness of perfection, as from a spiritual elegant stature; and from the apt connection and tempering together of virtuous habits and their acts; and likewise from discreet direction, or right intention. Therefore, just as all these things existed and shone forth incomparably in the blessed Virgin, so her inward beauty was incomparably great, joyful, delightful and attractive.

[1] The Vulgate's *rhinoceros* (Num. 23:22; 24:8) was identified in medieval lore with the unicorn, which could be captured only in the lap of a virgin, a common figure of the Incarnation.

Article XXIII: On the perpetual virginity of the most holy Mary, and on her freedom from all sin

And incorruption bringeth near to God (Wis. 6:20). It was fitting that the eternal and unchangeable Word, the Only-begotten of the supreme Father, should be born of a most entire virgin. And just as He had a Father without a mother in heaven, so it was most fitting that He should have a mother without a father on earth; nor was it fitting that the Only-begotten of God should have two immediate fathers. Again, just as His eternal generation is most pure, so His temporal and maternal generation had to be, as far as possible, most pure. A special, nay, a most singular birth from a pure virgin also befitted the Son of God, so excellent and equal to the eternal Father. Nor was it fitting that the Mother of so great a Son should afterwards give herself to carnal generation. Therefore, just as by the omnipotence of His Godhead Christ rose from the closed sepulchre, so by the same power He came forth from the closed womb of the Virgin, *as a bridegroom coming out of His bride chamber* (Ps. 18:6). Nor was it ever lawful for the co-parent of God the Father, and His singular and only spouse, especially after the incarnation of the Word in her, to have intercourse with a man.

In like manner it was in no way fitting that the Mother of God should ever be darkened by any fault; and it was not fitting that she through whom the others were saved, and through whom the corrupt and lost and those liable to sin were restored, recovered and cleansed, should ever be subject to any corruption, perdition

or fault however slight, or displease God in anything; but rather, as was said before (Book II, Art. 1), that she should excel with such purity that no greater can be conceived under God. Hence the most impious, most wretched and most hateful heretics Ebion, Cerinthus and Helvidius, who contradicted these things, are eternally confounded, condemned and reprobated. Far be it, far be it, that it should ever be said that there was in the most loving, most spiritual and most divine spouse and Mother of God any carnal lust, or any motion of sensuality: nay, this very thing would have redounded to the dishonour of her Son.

Moreover, if against these things it should be objected that Augustine says she doubted at the passion of her Son: for in the *Questions on the New and Old Testament*, explaining that word of the second chapter of Luke, *And thy own soul a sword shall pierce* (Luke 2:35), he says that by that sword is understood the doubt of Mary, by which at the death of Christ she doubted with a kind of stupor.[1] With this seems to agree what Basil says: The most blessed Virgin, standing by the cross and seeing each thing, after the testimony of Gabriel, after the ineffable knowledge of the divine conception, after the immense display of miracles, wavered in mind: seeing on the one hand *(p. 139)* Him suffering abject things, and on the other considering His wonderful deeds.

It must be answered that the most wise and most constant Virgin, who foreknew the passion of her Son and the manner of the passion clearly and distinctly, more than David, Isaiah, Daniel or any of the Prophets, in no way doubted at His passion, but remained most faithful. Therefore the words of Augustine and Basil are explained not of the doubt of unbelief, but of that of wonder and natural loving-kindness, by which someone who is altogether most certain of some truth wonders, and, in the manner of one doubting, is astonished, or inquires how the thing can be so, when he sees those things happening to it that seem to him most unfitting: just as so most bitter and most ignominious a passion in no way befitted, and was most unfitting for, the most innocent and most high Son of God, with respect to His dignity, innocence, virtues and merits.

[1] The *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* are now attributed to "Ambrosiaster", not to Augustine.

Article XXIV: On the most vehement compassion of the most affectionate Mary in the passion of her Son

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus, His mother (John 19:25). How most heartfeltly and most bitterly the most loving, most faithful and most kind virgin mother Mary suffered with her Only-begotten in His passion can be weighed from many things. First and chiefly, from the incomparable and ineffable love which she had for her most beloved and only-begotten Son: the more heartfelt and intense it was, the more bitter the compassion it produced in the heart of the most loving Mother. Further, the love of that Mother for her Son was threefold, namely natural, acquired and gratuitous; each of which was most intense in her, as is plain from what was said before (Art. 4). Therefore that motherly compassion, emanating from all those loves, was unspeakably painful, sorrowful and piercing, heavier than bodily martyrdom and more bitter than death itself. Nay, just as in the suffering Christ the sorrow of compassion, with which He grieved for the ungrateful and those who would perish, especially for the peculiar people to whom He had been sent, exceeded and surpassed the sorrow of His bodily passion, so also in the most blessed Mother the sorrow of compassion transcended the sorrow of bodily suffering.

Secondly, this can be weighed from the fact that the most meek and altogether most affectionate Virgin knew most clearly beyond all others the constitution of her Son in body and soul. For she knew that in body He was of the noblest and altogether most tender, most fresh and most lively constitution; hence she weighed that those torments inflicted on His body were ineffably painful for Him to endure, and that that separation of His most worthy body from His most holy soul was most violent. Her most sweet motherly mind knew also the inestimable innocence of her Son, and all His charity, loving-kindness and gentleness. Therefore she suffered with Him inestimably, especially because He was treated so most irreverently and most

unmercifully by those most cruel and most impious ruffians; for she knew most certainly the immense dignity of her Son according to His divine nature, and His unspeakable dignity according to His assumed humanity as well.

Thirdly, the same is weighed from the disposition of the compassionate Mother herself, who was wholly most loving, most meek and most merciful, even from her inborn disposition, and therefore supremely disposed to suffer with Him intensely. Fourthly, because she knew that He bore all things not for Himself, but for all others, nay, for the salvation of the Mother herself who stood by. Fifthly, this is weighed from the multitude of the pains of her Son which she beheld, and from the length of His affliction. From all these things the compassion of the most loving Mother was continually increased. This could be proved at length by running through the whole history of the passion; but, avoiding prolixity, it can be touched upon briefly.

First, then, the most loving Lady *(p. 140)* grieved most grievously when on the day of the Supper she parted from her Son as the hour of the Supper drew near, certain that she would not see Him again except in the hands of His enemies, since she knew that He was to be taken that night, as He Himself had clearly foretold (Matt. 26:31 ff.). Therefore from that hour she was inestimably anxious, solicitous and sorrowful. Secondly, her sorrow, anguish and compassion were most vehemently increased when she first heard that her most dear Son had now been taken and was cruelly held; for then she is believed to have fallen at once to the ground for sorrow. Thirdly, when she saw Him led bound to Pilate (Matt. 27:1 ff.), pitiably changed, spat upon, beaten, afflicted, sorrowing and sad. Fourthly, when she heard the Holy of Holies, her most beloved Son, accused and blasphemed in many ways and most falsely. Fifthly, when she saw Him mocked by Herod, despised and reckoned a fool, and sent back to Pilate (Luke 23:7 ff.). Sixthly, when she saw Him most inhumanly scourged (John 19:1 ff.). Seventhly, when she saw Him, thus scourged, crowned with thorns and clothed in a purple garment, led out by Pilate and presented to the people: which was truly an intolerable and most painful spectacle for the most tender and most affectionate Mother. Eighthly, when she heard the implacable and most envious Jews crying out: *Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him* (John 19:15).

Ninthly, when she saw that they chose a robber rather than Jesus to be released to them. Tenthly, when she perceived that He had been condemned to death. Eleventhly, when she beheld Him carrying His cross on His own shoulders and being led to death. Twelfthly, when she saw Him fastened to the cross: which was more painful than all else to behold. Thirteenthly, when she saw Him, now crucified, derided by the most wicked, blasphemed, and given vinegar and gall to drink. Fourteenthly, when she heard Him speaking to her, His Mother, and saying: *Woman, behold thy son*; then to the disciple: *Behold thy mother* (John 19:26–27). The mere remembrance of that word rends our hearts, hard and stony though they are: how much more did the real hearing of it pierce, rend and prick your most kind mind, O most sweet Mother?

Fifteenthly, when you heard Him saying, *I thirst* (John 19:28); and even before, when He said: *Father, forgive them* (Luke 23:34). Sixteenthly, when you heard Him crying out for intolerable pain: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* (Matt. 27:46). All these words pierced your inmost being, most loving Lady. Seventeenthly, when you saw Him, set in such great torments, disposing Himself to breathe His last, and now wholly exhausted, dried up and wasted, hanging so pitiably and painfully that never was a man seen in the world to be in so lamentable a state or condition. Eighteenthly, when you heard Him cry out with a loud voice: *Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit* (Luke 23:46); and so, His head bowed towards you, He gave up the spirit. Nineteenthly, when you first considered Him now dead, whom you knew to be the life and Redeemer of all. Twentiethly, when you saw His side pierced with the soldier's lance (John 19:34), and so an unheard-of cruelty exercised on the dead. Twenty-first, when you received Him taken down from the cross into your arms and held Him in your lap. Twenty-second, when they tore Him from your breast and buried Him (John 19:42), and withdrew Him from your sight.

Certainly, most venerable Virgin and most worthy Mother, in seeing, hearing and being present at these things, the sorrow of those in childbirth was doubled in you. But when your most beloved Son was dead and

buried, your most pure mind was in some measure consoled by the consideration of the fruit of His most holy passion, and by the certain knowledge of His resurrection soon to come.[1]

[1] Some of the scenes listed (her fall at the news of the arrest, receiving the body into her lap) come from devotional tradition rather than the Gospels.

Article XXV: Whether the glorious and blessed virgin Mary, while her Son hung on the cross, had joy from the consideration of the fruit of the Lord's passion

Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm (Cant. 8:6). The question is whether, while Christ *(p. 141)* was suffering, the most blessed Virgin had at the same time the sorrow of compassion and the joy of congratulation, just as Christ Himself then had the highest joy and the greatest sorrow. And it seems that she did not: because the most sacred Virgin was then wholly absorbed in sorrow, and does not seem to have actually considered the fruit of her Son's passion at that time. For a soul most vehemently intent on one thing is hindered from considering others, and greater motions drive out and hinder lesser ones. Furthermore, sorrow and joy seem to be contrary, and unable to be present in the same subject at the same time. Moreover, joy is caused by the apprehension of a fitting good and by the union of the power with the fitting object; but sorrow or sadness by the apprehension and perception of evil and by union with it. And it does not seem possible for the soul to be turned at the same time to different things as to its terms.

But the opposite of this appears: for the most worthy Virgin was most wise and a most illuminated contemplative of the mysteries of her Son; and she knew very well that His passion was supremely honouring to God the Father and redemptive of the whole human race. Since, then, the most happy Mary herself was supremely perfect in the love of God and of her neighbours, and supremely zealous for and desirous of the honour of God and the redemption of her neighbours, both of which she knew were procured through the passion of her Son, she therefore rejoiced supremely over the passion of her Son as so fruitful, according to the higher part of her soul.

For the solution of this doubt, it must be considered that we ought to consider the passion of Christ in many ways. First, in order to remember it, lest we be unmindful of so great a benefit: for the greatest part of ingratitude is forgetfulness of a benefit bestowed. Secondly, in order to suffer with Him, inasmuch as the most innocent Lamb of God endured so many and such great things without any demerit of His own. Thirdly, in order to imitate the footsteps of Christ: that we may crucify our bodies *with the vices and concupiscences* (Gal. 5:24), and imitate the charity, loving-kindness, patience, fortitude, gentleness and the other virtues which Christ showed and taught us in His passion. Fourthly, in order to give thanks with joy, inasmuch as the passion of Christ was so fruitful. Fifthly, in order to wonder that the Only-begotten of God endured so many and such great things for our redemption. Sixthly, in order to give thanks for such great benefits. Seventhly, in order to be inflamed: that from the consideration of the Lord's passion, and of its charity and fruits, we may be kindled with divine love. Eighthly, in order to contemplate: because in the passion of Christ we can and ought to contemplate the wisdom, mercy and justice of God the Father, nay, of the super-most-glorious Trinity, and also His charity towards the human race.

According to this manner, some have held that the most serene virgin Mary, during the passion of her Son, not only grieved and suffered with Him most vehemently over that passion, inasmuch as it was so injurious and afflicting, but also gloried most vehemently, inasmuch as that passion was so most saving and most fruitful, as has been touched upon. On this Albert writes thus (*Mariale*, q. 150): This privilege, which is the sharing in the passion of Christ, implies two things. The first is actual faith in the crucified God and man; the second is a suffering in herself from compassion with the one suffering. And there was a fourfold diversity with respect to the Lord's passion. For some had neither faith nor compassion: as the crucifiers and those

who consented with them, blasphemed and mocked. Some had compassion, not faith: as the Apostles, and the women to whom the Lord said: *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not over Me* (Luke 23:28). Some had the knowledge of faith, but not compassion: as the angels and others placed outside the state of the way, and the chosen thief, who had faith, but not compassion in himself, because he was surrounded by the suffering of his own death (Luke 23:40–41). But the most blessed Virgin alone then had faith and compassion for the crucified God and man, and a suffering in herself from compassion with the one suffering. We grant *(p. 142)* also that, just as the Lord Jesus Christ had at the same time the highest joy and the highest sorrow, so our Lady had at the same time the highest compassion and the highest congratulation; the compassion existing in nature and at the same time in reason as nature, but the congratulation in reason as reason. Or let it be said that the highest object of sadness in such a genus can be taken in two ways: in one way as supremely contrary to the appetite, and thus it brings the highest sorrow; in another way as the way and means to the highest object of delight, and thus it brings the highest joy. And so the soul of the most blessed Virgin apprehended the death of her Son as supremely contrary to her natural appetite, and thus it brought her the highest sorrow; and as the means to the redemption of the human race, and thus it caused in her the highest delight. And these can be together, because the one is matter for the other, or, in another manner, the way to the other and the means to it. Thus far Albert.

With these seems to agree what Ambrose says: Mary stood by the cross (John 19:25), not to see the passion of her Son, but to await the redemption of the world. Others, however, rather think that the most chosen virgin Mary, while her Son was suffering, was so absorbed in compassion, sorrow and grief that she did not attend to the fruit of the Lord's passion, nor was she consoled by the resurrection soon to come; and although she knew these things habitually, yet she did not attend to them actually, or weighed them only slightly. Hence St Paulinus, in his letter to Augustine, testifies that the death or passion of Christ, set before the eyes of His Mother as she stood by, blinded her faith in the resurrection, that is, hindered it from its act. With this seem to agree the words of Augustine and Basil, who say that Mary then doubted: which, as is had from the twenty-third article, is to be taken of the doubt of wonder, according to Thomas in the third part of his *Summa* (III, q. 27, a. 4, ad 2), or of natural loving-kindness, according to Alexander of Hales on the third book of the *Sentences*.

Article XXVI: Why Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, willed His most beloved Mother to be present at His passion

Let us go forth therefore to Him without the camp, bearing His reproach (Heb. 13:13). It may seem a wonder why the Lord and Saviour, without whose providence nothing comes to pass and without whose nod not even a leaf falls from a tree, willed His most innocent and most loving Mother to be present at His passion and to be tormented with so most grievous an affliction. To this I think it must be answered that He willed and permitted it not without lofty counsel, nor without manifold and most reasonable cause. First, because He willed His most excellent Mother to be the chief co-worker in our salvation. Therefore He willed that by her most faithful, most vehement and motherly compassion she should merit to be abundantly heard on behalf of many, and to obtain the fruit of the Lord's passion for those who had become ungrateful to that same passion. And likewise, that the incomparable Lady might show her charity, fidelity, constancy, nay, her faith towards her Son, by standing by Him and grieving with Him to the end.

Furthermore, that through this the most happy Mother might merit for herself inestimable glory and a crown: because, as the Apostle says, *if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him* (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). Therefore, just as the most loving and most illustrious virgin Mary suffered with her suffering Son incomparably and most bitterly beyond all, so she has been glorified with Him beyond all most blessedly and most sweetly, and is most like Him in all happiness. Moreover, that we might continually suffer with, not only Christ in His suffering, but also His Mother in her suffering with Him, and through this merit more

fully, and through the Mother have access to the Son. Hence Albert writes: That Christ might give a reward to His Mother, He willed to share with her the merit of the passion; and that He might make her a partaker of the benefit of redemption, He willed her to be a partaker also of the pain of the passion: *(p. 143)* so that, as she was the helper of the Redeemer through compassion, so she might become the mother of all through re-creation; and as the whole world is bound to God because of His passion, so also it might be bound to the most blessed Lady because of her compassion.

Article XXVII: Whether the most sacred virgin Mary was baptized

Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (John 3:5). Baptism, according to the teaching of the Saints, is the gate of the sacraments and a sacrament of necessity, so that all in the time of the promulgated Gospel are bound to it, provided the opportunity is at hand. And just as those sanctified in the womb in the time of the Mosaic law received circumcision, as is plain concerning the most blessed John the Baptist (Luke 1:15, 59) and Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5), so also if any were sanctified in the womb under the law of the Gospel, they would still have to receive Baptism: both because of the command of Christ; and in order to receive the character by which the baptized person is inwardly conformed to Christ and numbered among His people; and for the increase of grace; and that through bodily baptism they may be configured even bodily to Christ, who suffered and was buried. Hence also the Apostles, cleansed from original guilt in circumcision, are believed to have been baptized by Christ, as the doctors write more fully on this matter on the fourth book of the *Sentences* and in their *Summae*. For although circumcision in the written law, and Baptism in the law of the Gospel, were instituted against original sin according to the common course, yet they had, and Baptism still has, other saving effects, on account of which they can befit even those sanctified in the womb.

Hence the most immaculate and best virgin Mary is said to have been baptized with the Baptism of Christ: she who also submitted herself to the law of purification out of obedience and humility. And likewise in order to avoid singularity, lest by avoiding Baptism she should seem to boast of her innocence: especially since her most innocent and most holy Son Christ also received the baptism of St John (Matt. 3:13–16). Likewise, in order to avoid scandal and to set an example, lest any person, however eminent, should refuse the Baptism of the Saviour; and for the increase of grace and virtues and the superabundance of her merits; and in order to receive the impression of the character; and for her fuller exaltation and everlasting glory: because the more amply and deeply she humbled herself, the more gloriously she merited to be exalted.

Article XXVIII: Whether the most excellent virgin Mary also received the other sacraments of the law of the Gospel; and specially whether she went to confession

Be among them as one of them (Ecclus. 32:1). The mistress of all humility and most perfect disciple of Christ followed the footsteps of her Son most perfectly, so much so that, for the motives touched upon in the preceding article, she is said not to have avoided the sacrament of Penance, but to have gone to confession: especially to John the apostle, to whom she had been entrusted, when she could conveniently have his presence; otherwise to James, bishop of Jerusalem, or perhaps to the most blessed Peter, the highest of all. Not that she said directly that she had sinned, but that she was not fully grateful for the graces and benefits of God who had become incarnate from her, nor could render worthy thanks to God, nor love God as He deserves. And so she bore herself rather in the manner of a penitent and one confessing than as one truly penitent or confessing, in the sense in which to repent is to weep for sins and to grieve over one’s own faults.

The sacrament of Order, however, does not befit the female sex. But the sacrament of Confirmation could rather belong to her, which is given to the baptized *(p. 144)* for strength, for the exercises of the Christian warfare: in which she herself was most valiant, most victoriously crushing the head of the enemy, and most

promptly and altogether invincibly storming and conquering every battle line of vices and temptations. Concerning the sacrament of Matrimony, too, no question remains. But whether she received the sacrament of Extreme Unction is more doubtful, since she departed without pain, whereas that anointing was established for the sick. The sacrament of the Eucharist, moreover, she is believed beyond doubt to have received.

Hence Albert writes (*Mariale*, q. 143): We say that the most blessed Virgin received all the sacraments of the Church which in her time had been instituted generally for all men and promulgated to be observed by all: for the greater humbling of herself; for the avoidance of scandal; for the fulfilment of the command; for the superabundance of merits; for the confutation of the heretics who say that she was an angel, not a human being; for the instruction of the perfect, that *he that is holy, let him be sanctified still* (Apoc. 22:11); and for the reproof of sinners. Through Baptism, therefore, she received the impression of the character, the exercise of the virtues, an increase in merits. In the sacrament of Confirmation she received the impression of another character, a fuller increase of merits, and also a more perfect exercise and manifestation of the virtues. In the Sacrament of the altar she received the commemoration of the Lord's passion, the exercise of actual devotion, and consolation for the bodily absence of the Saviour. From the sacrament of Penance she received grace in an equivalent excellence, namely: in place of contrition, the preservation of innocence; in place of confession, thanksgiving; in place of satisfaction, superabundance. But if she received Extreme Unction, she perceived in it the signification of a complete victory already won and of full glory to come; and, in place of the remission of venial sins, immunity from all the pain of death; in place of the alleviation of sickness, the glorification of her whole body. Thus far Albert.

Article XXIX: On the twelve privileges of the most meek and most holy Virgin

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars (Apoc. 12:1). Truly a great miracle, a great sign, a divine and most illustrious wonder is the most glorious and most lovable virgin Mary. As was shown in the first book (Arts. 3, 19), this most blessed one is clothed with the Sun of justice, the Sun of infinite wisdom, the eternal Word, of whom the Apostle says: *Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 13:14); and again: *As many of you as have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). With this Sun the incomparable Virgin is spiritually clothed, vested and surrounded, whose mind the Sun of infinite light has filled, surrounded, adorned, clothed and fortified with every divine charism and with Himself. For *the Lord is round about* her (Ps. 124:2), *the Lord is in His holy temple* (Ps. 10:5); the Lord is her strength, her might, her protection and her beauty (Ps. 92:1). She too surrounded and clothed this Sun, furnishing Him with the substance of human flesh, as the garment and habit of the Godhead.

Further, under the feet of the blessed Mary lies the moon, as if prostrate before the Queen of heaven: that is, the Church militant, whose advocate is the most chosen virgin Mary, through whom the Church is enlightened by the Sun of justice by drawing near to that Sun of justice, and suffers a lessening of light through going far from Him.

Moreover, by the crown of twelve stars with which the head, the crown and the mind of the most happy Virgin are adorned, are understood her twelve prerogatives: of which four are heavenly, four concern her body, and four also her mind. The four heavenly prerogatives are: the heavenly promise or foretelling of her birth; that most celebrated angelic salutation; the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit; the ineffable conception of the Son of God. The prerogatives of the flesh *(p. 145)* are that she was the first in rank of virginity, fruitful without corruption, with child without burden, and bringing forth without pain. The prerogatives of her heart are: the gentleness of modesty, the devotion of humility, the magnanimity of belief, the martyrdom of the heart. Of these prerogatives St Bernard speaks more fully in a certain sermon on the Assumption of the most excellent Virgin.[1]

Albert, however, sets down fourteen privileges of the virgin Mother (*Mariale*, q. 150 ff.). The first is that she never sinned; the second, that she could not sin; the third, that she is virgin and mother; the fourth, that she is Mother of God; the fifth, that she is the Virgin of virgins; the sixth, that she had no ignorance, properly speaking, of anything; the seventh, that she had purity in the highest degree after God; the eighth, that she is the mother of all; the ninth, that she merited by every motion of hers, that is, by every motion, action and passion of her free will; the tenth, that she is the star of the sea; the eleventh, that she is the gate of heaven; the twelfth, the sharing in the Lord's passion, in the sense expressed a little before (Art. 25); the thirteenth, her exaltation above every pure creature; the fourteenth, that she is the queen of mercy. Nevertheless these fourteen privileges can be reduced to twelve: because to the highest purity of the most illustrious Mary after God are reduced her freedom from sin (that is, that she did not sin) and the impossibility of sinning (to which likewise is reduced, or in which rather is included, the extinction of the tinder of sin). Thus far Albert.

Furthermore, by the twelve stars can be understood the twelve moral virtues, which shone at the summit and limit of excellence in the mind of the most exalted Virgin. So too the twelve fruits of the Spirit, which existed most eminently in her, can be signified by the twelve stars. Nothing forbids, too, that the eight beatitudes and the four cardinal virtues be taken for the twelve stars. But also, like stars, there sparkled in the heart of the most sweet Mary the three theological virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the promise of virginity, and the fulfilment of the evangelical counsels so far as it pertained to her.

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[1] The *Sermo de duodecim praerogativis B.V.M.* (Sunday within the octave of the Assumption), on Apoc. 12:1.

Article XXX: On the power and efficacy of this name, Mary

Holy and terrible is His name (Ps. 110:9). The God of glory, the King of heaven, the Only-begotten of the Father, the almighty Word of the most high Begetter, conformed to Himself wonderfully and most graciously that one woman whom He chose beforehand and took for His mother: so that, just as His name is most efficacious, most powerful, terrible to the wicked, sweet to the just, saving, consoling, to be continually remembered, to be pronounced reverently and devoutly, to be called upon unceasingly, so also is the name of His most sweet Mother. This name, then, Mary, is ineffably powerful, directing, gladdening, most sweet, most terrible, and to be extolled with every praise: not that the name of itself, as a kind of utterance, or as consisting of letters and syllables, has these things, since many vicious and reprobate persons too are called by such a name; but from the power of that singular reality signified by it, namely the virgin Mother of God. For the honour, holiness and glory of this most blessed God-bearing Mother, almighty God made and established this name, Mary, as it is her proper name, to be so honourable, efficacious and powerful.

Of which Bernard fittingly says: Where and while the name of Mary is uttered, the powers of the demons are put to flight. Visible enemies do not so fear any copious multitude of encampments as the powers of the air fear the name, the patronage and the example of Mary. They melt and perish *like wax before the fire* (Ps. 67:3) wherever they find frequent remembrance of this name, devout invocation and careful imitation. Therefore it well befits her: *Thou hast broken the heads of the dragon* (Ps. 73:13–14), that is, you have taken away the powers of the demons. O great, O loving, O much lovable and sweet Mary, *(p. 146)* you cannot be named without kindling, nor thought of without refreshing, the affections of those who love you; you never enter the gate of a loving memory without sprinkling it with the sweetness implanted in you. O most pure Virgin, O God-bearing Mother, most sweet Mary, how sweet is your memory! To think of you is a great refreshment of the heart; to speak of you is a great consolation; to call upon you is a great help in every necessity, temptation and adversity; to follow you is to set out rightly and most savingly for eternal beatitude.

Further, holy Church out of devotion added this name, Mary, in the angelic Salutation: for there is no name after Jesus in heaven or on earth which so kindles devotion, stirs up compunction, brings consolation and gives defence against enemies, as this name, Mary. Therefore it is well said to her in the Canticles: *Thy name*

is as oil poured out (Cant. 1:2). For oil floats above liquids: so this name, Mary, stands out above all names after Christ. Hence Mary is interpreted "sea", because just as no one can number the drops of the sea, so no one can express the mercy, grace, excellence and glory of Mary. Hence also Gilbert says: As the morning mist is dissolved by the heat of the noonday glow, and as wax melts and wastes away before the fire, so all vices, and all demons and their temptations, are put to flight and perish by the might and power of the name of Mary, the most sacred virgin.

Hence on that text, *And the virgin's name was Mary* (Luke 1:27), Albert says (*Mariale*, q. 29): This name is most fittingly applied to the most blessed Virgin, both because of the perfection of the reality denoted in this name, and to express the property of the conception which is here announced, and to designate the state of mediation of the most blessed Virgin, by whose mediation the human race is called back through the sea of this world to the harbour of heaven by her example, intercession and merit. Hence Bernard: Let us speak a little of this name, which is interpreted "star of the sea" and is very fittingly applied to the Virgin Mother: because as a star sends forth its ray without harm to itself, so the Virgin brought forth her Son without corruption of herself; nor does the ray lessen the star's brightness, nor the Son the Virgin's integrity. She is that most noble star risen out of Jacob (Num. 24:17), whose ray illuminates the whole world, whose splendour shines forth on high and penetrates the depths, traversing the earth too, and, warming minds more than bodies, fosters virtues and burns out vices.

O whoever you are who toss about in this world, turn not away your eyes from the brightness of this star, if you do not wish to be overwhelmed by storms. If the winds of temptations rise, if you run upon the rocks of tribulations, look at the star, call upon Mary. If avarice, if anger or the allurement of the flesh has shaken the little boat of your mind, look to Mary. If, troubled by the enormity of your crimes, confounded by the foulness of your conscience, terrified by the dread of judgement, you begin to be swallowed up in the gulf of sadness and the abyss of despair, think of Mary. In dangers, in straits, in doubts, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let her not depart from your mouth, let her not depart from your heart; and that you may obtain the help of her prayer, do not forsake the example of her life. Following her, you do not stray; thinking of her, you do not err. While she holds you, you do not fall; while she protects you, you do not fear; with her as guide, you arrive. Thus far Bernard.[1]

Moreover, in the *Revelations* of St Bridget it is related on this matter that the most glorious Virgin said to Bridget: Hear how much my Son has honoured my name. My name is Mary. When the angels hear this name, they rejoice and give thanks to God, who through me and with me has done such grace, and because they see the humanity of my Son glorified in the Godhead. Those who are in purgatory rejoice when my name is heard, as a sick man lying in bed rejoices when he hears a word of comfort. The good angels also, when this name is heard, draw nearer to the just to whose guarding they are appointed, and rejoice at their progress. All the demons too fear this name, Mary, and *(p. 147)* when they hear it they flee. For as a bird that has fixed its claws and beak in its prey, if it hears a sound, leaves the prey, and when it sees that no deed follows, returns to it; so the demons, when they hear my name, at once leave the soul as though terrified, but return again and fly back to it like a most swift arrow, unless amendment follows. Finally, there is no one in this life so cold towards divine love that, if he calls upon my name with an entire purpose of repenting, the devil does not at once withdraw from him. Nor is anyone so damned in hell, nor so grievously punished in purgatory, that his punishment is not less because of me.

Lastly, in the apparition of a certain good man departed, long and most dreadfully tormented in purgatory, it is described that this departed man said to a faithful man, to whom he appeared long and often, that he was dreadfully punished in purgatory for certain faults over which his conscience had not given him remorse in his confessions: one of which was that on hearing this name, Jesus, or that name, Mary, he did not bow reverently with his head. From which it is clear that every faithful person ought so to bow when he hears these names, Jesus, Mary.

I know likewise by certain experience that, for repelling the terrors which, by the devil's contriving, sometimes happen in sleep, and even awaken the sleeper, it avails most of all that, on waking, he should at once say from the heart, *Hail Mary, full of grace*, and so on, to the end, and repeat it often: for thus the devil is put to flight, the angel draws near, and our Lady lends her aid. And this same thing is to be done in every temptation, and so it turns out.

Hence Honorius the anchorite says: This name, Mary, is full of all divine sweetness and delight, worthy of eternal memory, to be celebrated, called upon and glorified by the mouth and heart of all alike. To the praise and glory of the Almighty, who is God sublime and blessed above all. Amen.

(p. 148)

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[1] St Bernard, *Homily 2 on "Missus est"*, 17. The derivation "star of the sea" (from Jerome's *stilla maris*) is traditional rather than philological.

Book IV: On the Beatitude of the Most Happy Virgin Mary in Soul and Body

Prooemium

(p. 149) A throne was set for the king's mother, and she sat on his right hand (3 Kings 2:19). The God of glory, the giver of infinite munificence, whose wealth is in itself wholly immense, undiminishable, unfailing, supremely diffusive of itself and none the less abiding in itself unchangeable and perfect, in whom is the inexhaustible, superabundant and superblessed possession of all good and beautiful things and of all things desirable: He, the creator and king of all things, the possessor of heaven and earth, rewards the just beyond their desert and punishes the wicked short of their desert, because *His tender mercies are over all His works* (Ps. 144:9). This super-most-glorious God *loves them that love* Him (Prov. 8:17); nay, He goes before them in love (1 John 4:10), and the very fact that they love Him He kindly bestows on them. He also glorifies those who glorify Him (1 Kings 2:30); and the more heartfelt and reverent the affection with which anyone honours Him, the more brightly and happily does He exalt that person in the heavenly kingdom. Further, the more fervently and sincerely anyone loves God, and desires to be united to Him and to behold Him, the more clearly, joyfully and gloriously does He show Himself to that person in the fatherland of eternal brightness.

Now, how incomparably the most excellent and most divine virgin Mary loved and venerated her only-begotten Son, true God, according to each of His natures, in this world, has been set forth in some measure and to the best of our powers in the preceding little books (Book I, Art. 30; Book II, Arts. 13, 17; Book III, Arts. 3, 4, 5, 7). Hence it is most certainly established that she too has been incomparably exalted, glorified and rewarded in heaven by her Only-begotten, the supreme judge of all. Therefore, since in the first little book we treated of the excellences and praises of the most incomparable virgin Mary that concern especially her virginal body; in the second little book, of the excellence of her wisdom, knowledge and prudence; and in the third, of her virtues, holiness and merits, which pertain especially to her appetitive power: it remains now to treat of her happiness, glory and rewards, as far as she herself shall grant and as shall be bestowed through her merits.

Article I: That, Christ having been glorified through His resurrection and ascension, the most blessed virgin Mary was glorified in a heavenly manner even in this life

(p. 150) For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ doth our comfort abound (2 Cor. 1:5). While our Lord Jesus Christ was living and preaching on earth among men, His most excellent and most beloved Mother walked with Him in mind and body, and was supremely intent on His sermons, signs, mighty works and deeds. In the tribulations and persecutions of her only and adorable Son, too, she grieved with Him singularly and most heartfeltly. But when her Son had been taken up into heaven, glorified and enthroned, the heart of His most chosen and most spiritual Mother at once ascended together with her Son, rested and dwelt in heaven; and that word of the Apostle, *Our conversation is in heaven* (Phil. 3:20), she could say most excellently. For if, as Augustine asserts, the soul is more truly where it loves than where it gives life, it follows that the soul of the most sacred virgin Mary was so much more truly with her Son in heaven than in her own body on earth as she loved her Son beyond all, nay, more than herself; especially since her Son too, the supreme Truth, testifies: *Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also* (Matt. 6:21). And what was the treasure of the blessed and glorious Mary but her only and most loving Son? Hence it is said: Where love is, there the eye is; because the inner and outer eye is wont to be directed to the one who is more loved, and to whom love is borne, and in whom affection rests.

At that time, therefore, the most serene virgin Mary was altogether continually, or wholly assiduously, intent on the contemplation of the glory of her Son, not without inward consolation. Nay, the more vehemently she had suffered with her most illustrious Son, the more fitting it was that, now that He was glorified, she too should daily, beyond her wont, be consoled from above, gladdened and exult in the Holy Spirit, so that she could say most eminently to God: *According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul* (Ps. 93:19). Hence, the more vehemently she had been saddened, afflicted and compassionate over the passion of Christ, the more heartily did she rejoice in the Lord over the fruit of His passion after the sending of the Holy Spirit, seeing daily so many thousands everywhere converted to the faith, first among the people of the Jews, then among the Gentiles. And although she lovingly grieved with the faithful who continually suffered very many adversities and most bitter deaths for Christ, yet over their constancy, patience, merits and rewards she gloried far more abundantly and gave thanks to the Most High.

And now she was wholly suspended in mind in heaven, loving and embracing quiet, silence and solitude as far as charity towards her neighbours permitted; for whose consolation, edification and instruction she showed herself, at opportune times, altogether most graciously affable and present. For it was a sweet and consoling sight to all the faithful, nay, even to the holy Apostles, to see her, hear her and follow her, whom they knew most certainly to be the true Mother of the God of gods, already placed above every order of angels in merits and soon to be preferred to them in rewards, and by the dignity of the motherhood of God ineffably set above every pure creature subsisting in created being.

Article II: That the most worthy virgin Mary, the course of this life being completed, truly died; and on the special graces granted to her at her death

Who is the man that shall live, and not see death? (Ps. 88:49). As the Apostle affirms to the Hebrews, *it is appointed unto men once to die* (Heb. 9:27). So the most blessed Lady, the virgin Mary, departed from this world *(p. 151)* through bodily death, and her most holy soul was separated by death from her most sacred body, so that she was not taken up into heaven together with body and soul without a preceding death.[1] Yet, as Jerome writes in the sermon on the Assumption of the most sweet Mary, some of the faithful were in doubt whether she was taken up together with body and soul without death, or whether, leaving her body, her soul first departed to the Lord.

Wherefore Jerome relates how the sepulchre of the most pure Virgin is shown in the midst of the valley of Josaphat, where a most beautiful church was built in her honour, in the midst of which her tomb is seen. And that valley is situated between the city of Jerusalem and Mount Sion. And she is believed, according to Jerome, to have lived near that same place after the ascension of Christ, because that place is so situated that from it she could easily visit the sacred places of the Lord's passion, burial and ascension. And so it remains for certain that she died and was buried, as she was truly mortal.

Moreover, at the death of the most blessed Virgin a fivefold grace was granted her: the first, that she knew the day of her death by divine revelation; the second, that, when about to die, she was invited to glory by her adorable Son; the third, that she died without pain; the fourth, that she flew away at once; the fifth, that shortly after she rose again and ascended into heaven with body and soul: as will be shown more clearly below.

[1] The sermon attributed to Jerome is the *Cogitis me*, now assigned to Paschasius Radbertus.

Article III: On the first four of these graces

I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse (Cant. 5:1). This is the only and most beloved one of God, who is surpassed by none of the illustrious, in whom the graces of the Creator were gathered together and

superabundant, so that the gifts of heavenly charisms conferred on others in parts and separately were given to her all together and fully. What wonder, then, if the Lord of all things, who foretold the day of their death to the holy apostles Peter and John and to many others, nay, also to Cyprian, Antony, Martin, Benedict and like Saints of both sexes, announced beforehand to His most dearly beloved, most worthy and incomparably holy Mother the day of her departure, as a sign of His special love for her and by the merit of her holiness? Moreover, Christ, appearing to the apostle John together with the other Apostles, invited him to the table and to the banquet of the heavenly paradise, saying: Come, My beloved, to feast with your brethren. In like manner He invited to the heavenly nuptials the sacred and victorious virgins set in their martyrdoms, Catherine, Barbara, Agatha; nay, He appeared to many martyrs of both sexes in prisons and torments, as to Mark, Dionysius, Theodore, and, strengthening them, invited them to the delights of eternal happiness. Much more is it to be believed that He invited His incomparably dearly beloved, most virtuous and most sacred Mother to the sweetness of heavenly beatitude, with the most affectionate and most sweet words, surely, which are expressed in the Canticles and were there foretold.

Furthermore, that the most wise and most contemplative virgin Mary died without pain appears from this: that in the passion of her Son, through the bitterness of compassion, she was more than a martyr, and unless she had been divinely sustained and preserved from death, she would have breathed out her spirit. Then too she was pierced with the sword (Luke 2:35), and she is said to have merited the aureole of martyrdom. Therefore it was fitting that in death she should be free from pain. Moreover, she aspired with inestimable and incomparable ardour to the embraces of the heavenly Bridegroom and to the face-to-face vision of her Beloved. She was also then most profoundly and most limpidly intent on the contemplation of divine and heavenly things. Therefore, through the most abundant experience of spiritual sweetness and through most fervent love, [her soul] was separated without pain from her body: especially since many martyrs of both sexes, in their most *(p. 152)* atrocious martyrdoms, through the excessive overflowing and abundance of inward spiritual consolation and joy, scarcely felt their torments, and gloried in them as in all delights, as is plain from SS. Lawrence, Vincent and Agatha.

Further, it is said of St John the apostle that, having made his prayer, he was gathered to his brethren, as free from the pain of death as he was immune from the corruption of the flesh. But the most worthy Virgin was incomparably more free from the corruption of the flesh, and holier and worthier than John himself; therefore she was to be honoured more illustriously with the privilege of this grace. Moreover, a man vehemently intent on the acts of one power either feels less, or does not feel at all, the actions and passions of the other powers. Because of this Moses and Elijah, and many Saints of the law of the Gospel, performed long and wonderful fasts and abstinences without failing. Since, then, the most blessed virgin Mary at the time of her death was most vehemently and most joyfully occupied with the acts of the higher part of her soul, her soul could be separated from her most sacred body without sensible pain, with immense joy.

To prove this, what the Apostle confesses of himself also helps: *I know a man caught up, whether in the body or out of the body, I know not, God knoweth* (2 Cor. 12:2). From which it is drawn that the soul can be separated and go out from the body without the man knowing or feeling it: which is believed to have been fulfilled in the highest degree in Mary, supremely contemplative and most divine. Some catholic men also have confessed that at times they were filled with such spiritual joy from hearing angelic harmony and heavenly melody, or from a foretaste of divine things, that it seemed to them that their souls were leaping out of their bodies.

Hence also in the *Lives of the Fathers* it is recounted of a certain devout and holy beggar dying in the streets, that Michael and Gabriel came down to him and urged his soul to go out of the body. When it was unwilling to leave its body, St Gabriel said to the most blessed Michael: Take this soul now, that we may go. And Michael answered: It cannot be done so, since the Lord has commanded that it be put out of the body willingly and without pain. Then the Lord said: Behold, I send David with his harp, and all the singers of

Jerusalem. And when they came and sang, that soul leapt out of the body for joy and sat in the hands of Michael. If this or something like it was granted to the servants and handmaids of God, how much more to the most innocent Virgin, who was never liable to any fault and suffered so much in this life!

Lastly, histories worthy of belief narrate of many persons of both sexes of outstanding holiness that they departed from the body by a most gentle death, falling sweetly asleep in the Lord, as if dissolved into a sudden slumber: as is plain of the sacred Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt, who nevertheless had at one time been great sinners. Is it not then altogether to be believed, and lovingly held, of the incomparable and most sacred virgin Mary, the God-bearing mother, that she died without pain, since some in this world are sometimes so caught up to the Lord that, while such a rapture lasted, they would not feel it even if their hands and feet were cut off?

Article IV: On the fifth grace conferred on the blessed virgin Mary at her death, namely that she was glorified in body and soul and most gloriously taken up into heaven

Come from Libanus, my spouse; come from Libanus, come (Cant. 4:8). Of the most splendid, best and most glorious virgin Mary the holy Apostles and Evangelists seem to have written little, except that St Luke wrote more of her than the others. Moreover, the last thing narrated of her in the Evangelists is that she was present at the passion of her only-begotten Son, and was there addressed by her Son and commended to John the apostle (John 19:26–27). In the Acts of the Apostles this alone, and last, is recounted of her: that the Apostles, having returned after the ascension of Christ from Mount Olivet, remained in the upper room *(p. 153)* with the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus and His brethren (Acts 1:12–14).

But although the Apostles and Evangelists left us little about her in writing, yet by the very fact that they taught and wrote that she is the virgin Mother of the true God, namely of Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, they praised her most excellently, extolled her and preferred her to every pure creature, and left us a most copious and as it were immense matter, incentives and causes for praising, magnifying and glorifying her: so that we should ascribe to the most blessed Mary all those things which it befits to ascribe to the Mother of the true God. To which belongs first of all that we should say confidently and without doubting that she was honoured, filled and glorified by her almighty and supremely good Son beyond every pure creature; and likewise, that He associated His most beloved Mother with Himself in heaven most fully, integrally and totally, that is, in soul and body.

Further, almighty God honours and preserves in being His material and inanimate temples, and is not wont to permit that they be destroyed except for the sins of the people; and when they have begun to decay from natural causes, He stirs up the minds of the faithful to restore them. How then is it to be thought that He permitted the most worthy body of His most loving Mother, deified by His own real indwelling and made most properly His temple, tabernacle, resting place, ark and bridal chamber, living, animate and holy, to be dissolved by the common law, turned to ashes, to rot and be scattered, and did not rather restore it at once after the ruin of death, uniting it again to her soul, and rewarding and exalting it with just rewards?

Moreover, the offspring is something of its mother, especially as regards its bodily substance, as being born of the substance of the mother: for the mother in generation furnishes the matter to the offspring. Therefore it was altogether fitting that that most chosen and most sacred virginal body, from which and in which the eternal Word of God the Father was made flesh, should be associated with the body of Christ as the whole with the part. Further, just as the incomparable and most delightful virgin Mary uniquely and most singularly honoured God the Son born of her with her most pure flesh, carrying Him within herself most affectionately, most reverently and most humbly, nourishing Him and thereafter bringing Him forth, and, when He was born of her, handling Him with inestimable reverence, with the ardour of charity and with the most profound

humility, suckling Him, and rendering most faithfully and most diligently every service of motherhood; so she too merited to be uniquely and singularly honoured and rewarded by that same Son of hers in body and soul. Therefore her Son so honoured and glorified her in body and soul, not deferring the resurrection and glorification of His Mother's most excellent body until the end of the world, according to the common law, but privileging her by a full and swift resurrection and glorification in her holy soul and blessed body.

Furthermore, that body, ineffably dignified by the conception, incarnation, indwelling, upbringing and handling of God, ought not to remain on earth, nor be hidden in it and left in it without honour, since the bodies of lesser Saints are so sublimely made manifest and honoured by God, and are visited and honoured by the faithful. Moreover, it did not befit so most chosen, most excellent and most holy a Mother of God to be subjected to the common law, the wretched condition, the usual dissolution of servants and handmaids, but to be joined to the body of her Son and to sit with Him: just as we see a king and queen, and also a queen and her son, placed at the same table and seated on neighbouring thrones.

Yet further, Christ the Lord and saviour, God, judge and ruler of all, not only most wise but Wisdom itself, eternal, uncreated, immense, was incomparably more upright, more munificent and more grateful than Solomon. But Solomon bowed down to his mother as she came to him, and made her sit first on his own throne, then on a throne *(p. 154)* beside him (3 Kings 2:19). Much more did Christ associate His Mother with Himself totally and singularly, nay, most closely, in the kingdom of glory. Moreover, the more fervently a good and powerful, rich and wise son loves his mother, the more he strives and hastens to reward her, to exalt her with the honour and reward which she has merited from him, as far as can reasonably be done. Since, then, the most serene virgin Mary merited to be most illustriously glorified by her Son in body and soul, and her Son loves her incomparably beyond all creatures, it is established that after her death He swiftly exalted her in soul and body; especially because this befitted Him, and He was able to do it: nay, it belongs to His own praise and honour that He anticipated thus to glorify His most humble Mother.

Further, just as in this life He exalted her singularly by the gifts of grace, and filled her ineffably and most mercifully in mind and body, dwelling in her womb materially and in her mind spiritually, so it seems to have been most fitting that after this life He should exalt her singularly and fully by the gifts of glory. Again, as the Philosopher says, an equivalent cannot be repaid to the gods, to parents and to teachers. And although this admits of an exception in Christ and His virgin Mother, none the less it belonged to the gratitude, uprightness, liberality and love of God incarnate that He should at once honour His most affectionate and most faithful, most obedient and most virtuous Mother with as great a reward and glory as she had merited, nay, even beyond, as far as she was capable and as was fitting. Now she merited to be most fully glorified in soul and body: therefore her adorable Son soon glorified her so.

To prove this many similar reasons could be brought forward. For St Augustine too persuades this very thing with reasons, whose arguments are well enough known (cf. PL 40, 1141 ff.).[1] The same is confessed and asserted by Bernard, the most devout worshipper and child of Mary, by the most learned theologian John Damascene, and by St Germanus, bishop of Constantinople, nay, also by St Cosmas, close to the times of the Apostles. The same has been shown by divers revelations. This too Honorius the anchorite confesses in his book on the Praises of the most blessed Virgin, of whose praises he wrote twelve books. Albert also, in his book on the Praises of the most sacred Virgin, proves and affirms this in many ways. All of which it is too long to recount; some of them, however, will be touched on below.

And it is certain that the soul has a natural inclination to its body; the glorified soul also has an inclination to its body to be glorified, which it desires to be glorified with it; nor is it perfectly glorified without its glorification, nor clothed *with double garments* (Prov. 31:21). It was fitting, then, that Christ should at once fulfil in this the natural inclination of His most obedient and most sincere Mother, and make her fully happy in soul and body: about which, even if I wished to doubt, I could not.

Why, then, does Jerome leave this in doubt in his sermon? Albert answers that he does so because he speaks as an interpreter of Scripture: for which reason he would not affirm anything except what is expressed in the Bible. But Augustine, whose authority is no less than Jerome's, speaks as an investigator and expositor of Scripture: therefore he asserted this too, which follows from the Scriptures, with no reason or authority opposing it. The Church also has not determined that this is to be left in doubt: therefore she does not forbid asserting it.

[1] The treatise *De assumptione B.M.V.*, printed among Augustine's works, is by a later writer (12th century, "Pseudo-Augustine").

Article V: Whether it can be proved from the words of the great and holy Dionysius that the most sacred and most sweet Mary was taken up in body and soul

Hath not the Lord made the saints to declare all His wonderful works, which the Lord Almighty hath firmly settled to be established for His glory? (Ecclus. 42:17). In the *Golden Legend* of the Saints, *(p. 155)* to prove that the Apostles came together at the passing and assumption of the most excellent Virgin, the divine Dionysius is cited, speaking to Timothy in the third chapter of *On the Divine Names*: We, as you know, and you, and many of our brethren, came together for the sight of the body of the prince of life, which received God; and there were present James the brother of the Lord (Gal. 1:19), and Peter, the eminent and highest summit of theologians. Then it pleased that, after the sight, all the high priests should hymn, each according as he was fit, the immense goodness of power of the life-giving weakness.[1]

This authority Albert also cites to persuade that the most worthy Mary was taken up in body and soul, using this translation: We, as you know, and you yourself, and many of our holy brethren, came together for the sight, or visitation, of the body of the prince of life, which received God; and there was present also the brother of the Lord, James, and Peter, the highest and most advanced summit of theologians. On which words, as Albert adds, the Gloss holds especially that the aforesaid Apostles were at the falling asleep of our Lady, and blessed Dionysius and his master Hierotheus. And after the assumption of the body they held a conference, and Hierotheus was rapt. And so this text of Dionysius with its glosses seems to approve what is read of the bodily assumption of the glorious Virgin. Thus far Albert.

Furthermore, a third translation has: We, as is thought, and you, and many of our holy brethren, came together for the sight of the body that began life and received God; and there was present also James, the brother of God, and Peter, the crown and most honourable summit of theologians. Then it pleased, after the sight, that all the high priests together should praise, as each was fit, the most powerful goodness of the divine weakness.

These words of the most theological Dionysius are obscure; and I confess that they can be applied to the sense mentioned above. Nevertheless they are expounded otherwise by others, who by the body of the prince of life understand the body of Christ, which began the life of grace and received God, because it was the temple of the Godhead, being assumed by personal union into the person of the eternal Word. Hence the abbot of Vercelli, who testifies that he had been most studious in the books of the divine Dionysius for twenty years, and who translated them, not, like other translators, in a difficult style, but into a most easy style, interpreted this passage thus: St Dionysius intimates the perfection of Hierotheus from the surpassing and ecstatic praise of the divine goodness assuming human weakness, in the city of Jerusalem beside the sepulchre of the Lord, in the presence of the holy apostles Peter, James and John, of Dionysius, Timothy and other spiritual men, who had come together to treat of the mystery of the Lord's incarnation. At which disputation blessed Paul is also shown to have been present. Thus far the abbot of Vercelli.[2]

I have brought forward these words of the great and seraphic Dionysius so diligently and in so many forms that their meaning may become more clearly known. Truly, if it were established that the most divine man Dionysius, most worthy of all belief, had claimed to have been present with the holy Apostles and other disciples at the falling asleep and assumption of the most excellent Mary, scarcely any Catholic, I think, would hold otherwise than what Dionysius wrote. Moreover, I confess that I do not know for certain which of the two senses St Dionysius more intended.

Further, it was touched on above, in the first book (Art. 29), how that great Dionysius is read to have come from Greece to Jerusalem to see with bodily sight the most blessed Virgin while she was still living in the flesh. This Ubertino testifies and recounts more fully in the fourth book of the *Life of the Saviour*, saying: When Dionysius had been brought in to see Mary, the most holy virgin, he saw such splendour and an innumerable multitude of angels about her, and the Virgin herself shining with such light, that he is related to have said that he would have adored her for the greatness of the glory in which he saw her, *(p. 156)* had he not been made certain by the Gospel faith of another Godhead. Thus far the devout man and doctor of the faculty of theology, Ubertino.

From these things, unless I am mistaken, one might suspect that in the words cited above the great theologian Dionysius himself spoke of this coming of his to Jerusalem, and that this took place at the time of which the apostle Paul writes: *Then, after three years, I went to Jerusalem to see Peter, and I tarried with him fifteen days; but other of the Apostles I saw none, saving James* (Gal. 1:18–19) and John. It could indeed be that the Vessel of election (Acts 9:15) then brought with him his most illustrious disciples, Dionysius, Timothy, and perhaps Hierotheus, desiring to behold in the flesh that most excellent woman whom they believed to have conceived and borne the true God. What could be objected to these things will be resolved in the following article. But whatever be said on this matter, I hold firmly and most undoubtingly that the divine, deiform and deified Mary, the super-most-worthy Virgin, was taken up in body and soul and most fully glorified.

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[1] Pseudo-Dionysius, *De divinis nominibus* 3, 2. The author, whom the Middle Ages took for St Paul's convert (Acts 17:34), is now dated to about A.D. 500; the passage's reference to Mary's Dormition was a medieval reading.

[2] Thomas Gallus (d. 1246), abbot of Sant'Andrea at Vercelli, whose *Extractio* paraphrased the Dionysian corpus.

Article VI: How long the most pure virgin Mary lived in this world after the ascension of Christ

Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight (Wis. 11:21). Concerning the length of time and the number of years that the most meek Virgin, the most sweet Mary, lived in mortal flesh after the ascension of her Son, there is no full certainty, because faithful and virtuous persons of both sexes are read to have held and written diversely about it. Thus in the *Revelations* of Elisabeth the blessed Virgin is said to have said that after the ascension of her Son she lived in this world one year, and as many days as there are from the day of the Ascension to the feast of the Assumption; and that the most blessed Virgin rose again on the fortieth day after her death, and was glorified and taken up in body.[1] Others are of opinion, as is also found in the *Passional of the Saints*, that she lived twelve years after the ascension of Christ. Epiphanius, moreover, declares that she lived twenty-four years after the ascension of the Saviour, and that she bore the Lord in the fifteenth year of her life; and so in all she lived seventy-two years in this exile.

But St Bridget in her *Revelations* affirms that the Christ-bearing Mother lived fifteen years in this world after the ascension of Christ. From which it is drawn that, if she bore the Redeemer in the fifteenth or sixteenth year of her life, and He lived in this world thirty-three years and as much more as there is from His Nativity to the day of Preparation on which He was crucified, and she herself lived fifteen years after the ascension of her Son, then in all she lived on earth sixty-two years or about that: which is judged more true.

Moreover, that the account of Elisabeth does not stand appears from many things, which were partly touched on in the preceding article. For before the conversion of blessed Dionysius by the apostle Paul many years had passed from the ascension of Christ, as can be gathered from the Epistles of Paul and the Acts of the Apostles. Furthermore, it was set forth in the first book (Art. 29) how the holy martyr and bishop Ignatius at times wrote to the most blessed Mary. And this Ignatius was converted by John the apostle several years (as is believed) after the ascension of the Lord and Saviour. That blessed Ignatius wrote to the most glorious Mary at times, nay, frequently, St Bernard testifies in the seventh sermon on the psalm *Qui habitat* (Ps. 90), saying: That great Ignatius, the hearer of the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:20), our martyr, with whose relics our poverty has been enriched, in several letters which he wrote to her salutes the most holy Mary as Christ-bearer. An excellent title plainly, and a commendation of immense honour: for to carry Him whom to serve is to reign is not to be burdened, *(p. 157)* but to be adorned.[2]

It is therefore judged more credible that the most glorious Virgin survived about fifteen years after the ascension of the most high Redeemer, because the Apostles too are said to have preached in Judaea and its surroundings for so many years, or about so many, before their dispersal.

Lastly, from what has been touched on it is drawn that great caution is to be used about the revelations of faithful persons, especially of simple persons and of the female sex, lest deception occur and falsehood be mixed in. For the aforesaid revelations of Elisabeth and Bridget do not seem able to be reconciled on this matter. And since falsehood cannot underlie a divine revelation, one of them cannot be upheld.

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[1] St Elisabeth of Schönau (d. 1164), *Visions*, II, 31.

[2] The correspondence of Ignatius with the Virgin is a medieval Latin forgery, as are the other letters Denis cites in Book I.

Article VII: From the Revelations of St Bridget, on the manner and time of the assumption of the most excellent Virgin

I dwelt in the highest places, and my throne is in a pillar of a cloud (Ecclus. 24:7). In the sixth book of the *Revelations* of St Bridget the most distinguished virgin Mary is recounted to have said to Bridget: I suffered from a vehement desire of coming to my Son after He ascended into heaven, because the long delay which I had in the world after His ascension increased my sorrow. In the same book the most worthy Mary is said to have revealed to Bridget: After the ascension of my Son I lived a long time in the world, and God willed this so that, seeing my patience and my ways, more souls might be converted to Him, and the Apostles and other chosen ones might be strengthened. And also the natural disposition of my body required that I should live longer, that my crown might be increased. Moreover, that my assumption was not known to many, nor preached by many, God my Son willed this so that belief in His ascension might first be fixed in the hearts of men, because human hearts were slow and hard to believe His ascension: how much more, if my assumption had been preached at once at the beginning of the faith?

Furthermore, the most kind virgin Mary speaks to Bridget in the same book: When one day I was greatly anxious with the desire of reaching my Son, I saw a shining angel, who said to me: Our God and Lord, your Son, has sent me to announce to you that the time has now come when you will come to Him bodily; and the friends of your Son will come, who will bury your body. Having said this, the angel disappeared. And I prepared myself for my departure, going round all the places in which my Son had suffered. And when one day my mind was suspended in wonder at the divine charity, my soul, in that very contemplation of His charity, was filled with such exultation that it could scarcely contain itself, and in that very consideration it was loosed from the body. But what things, and how magnificent, my soul then saw, and with what honour the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit honoured it, and by what kind and how great a multitude of angels it was lifted up, you could neither grasp, nor do I wish to tell you in this life. Moreover, those who were then with me in the house when I gave up my spirit knew well, from the unwonted light, what divine

things were then being done with me.

After this, the friends of my Son, sent by God, buried my body in the valley of Josaphat; with whom there were angels without number, like the motes in the sunlight; but the evil spirits did not dare to approach. And for fifteen days my body lay buried in the earth; then it was taken up into heaven with a multitude of angels. And this time is by no means without a very great mystery: for in the seventh hour there will be the resurrection of bodies, and in the eighth the beatitude of souls and bodies will be completed.

Lastly, in the seventh book of her *Revelations* St Bridget asserts: When I was in the valley of Josaphat, praying at the sepulchre of the most blessed virgin Mary, she appeared to me with exceeding splendour, saying: Attend, daughter. After my Son ascended *(p. 158)* into heaven, I lived in the world for fifteen years, and as much longer as there is from the feast of my Son's Ascension to the day of my death; and then I lay dead in this sepulchre for fifteen days. Then I was taken up with my body into heaven, with infinite joy and honour. Know also that there is no human body in heaven except the blessed body of my Son and my body. Thus in the place cited.

But concerning the last word said here, namely that there is no human body in the empyrean heaven except the body of Christ and of the blessed Virgin, it is to be considered that, as Jerome touches in his sermon, many ancient doctors before him said that those who rose with Christ (Matt. 27:52–53) did not afterwards die, but were glorified in body and soul with the Lord and Saviour: since otherwise they would not be true witnesses of His resurrection in a body never to die again. This Albert the Great, Ulrich and certain others also defend. And as St Jerome relates, some said this very thing of David, king, prophet and patriarch, because the apostle Peter says of him, *His sepulchre is with us* (Acts 2:29); and he did not say, His body or bones are with us. Some said the same of the happy John the evangelist, because nothing but manna was found in his sepulchre. Jerome also discussed, on Isaiah, that the patriarch Jacob and Joseph and the other sons of Jacob wished to be buried in the Holy Land (Gen. 49:29; 50:24), according to some, because they knew that the Son of God would die and rise again in that land, so that they might rise there together with Him. But, as Jerome says, all this is more safely committed to God.

Lastly, in the aforesaid sixth book the most merciful virgin Mary is recounted to have spoken to Bridget: Jerome did not doubt of my assumption into heaven with the body; but since God had not openly revealed the truth of this matter up to Jerome's time, he therefore preferred lovingly to believe so rather than to define what had not been shown by God.[1]

[1] St Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373), *Revelationes* VI, 57, 61–62; VII, 26.

Article VIII: Presentation of the testimony of John Damascene on the full assumption of the most loving Mary

For she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars: being compared with the light, she is found before it (Wis. 7:29). John Damascene, a virgin and an outstanding doctor, an illustrious philosopher and a profound theologian, whose cut-off hand the most powerful virgin Mary is read to have restored, and who was much devoted to this most excellent virgin Mary, speaking of her most glorious and entire assumption, says:[1] Today the most sacred virgin Mary is offered in the heavenly temple; today the sacred and living ark, which bore its Maker within itself, is laid up in the temple not made with hands; today the most sacred dove, the simple and innocent soul, flying out of the ark, that is, out of its body which received God, has found rest for its feet; today the most immaculate Virgin, a stranger to earthly passions, nay, instructed by heavenly intelligences, has not gone into the earth, but, being truly called a living heaven, dwells in the heavenly tabernacles.

For although by nature your most blessed and most sacred soul is separated from your glorious body, and your body is given over to burial, yet your most worthy body does not remain in death, nor is it dissolved by corruption. For she whose virginity remained inviolate in giving birth, her body too, in departing, perseveres undissolved in all things, and is carried over to a better and holier life, not loosed by death, but to abide for the eternal ages. For as this light-streaming sun, hidden for a little while under the body of the moon, seems in a manner to fail, though it is not deprived of its light, so you, the fountain of true and unfailing light and the unconsumed treasure, although for a brief interval of time you are given over to death, yet abundantly pour into us the brightness of perpetual light. *(p. 159)* Hence your sacred falling asleep is to be called not so much a death as a passing over and an arrival. For departing from the body, you arrive in heaven; Angels and Archangels come to meet you; the unclean spirits shudder at your ascent.

You did not go into heaven, most blessed Virgin, as Elijah did (4 Kings 2:11), nor did you ascend into the third heaven as Paul did (2 Cor. 12:2–4); but you reached even to the royal throne of your Son. The death of other Saints is blessed because it shows them to be blessed. But in you this has no such place. For your death is not your beatitude, nor is your passing over your perfection, nor does your departure bestow on you the security of beatitude. For of all goods which exceed the human mind you are the beginning, you the middle and the end. Your security and your perfection is the conception of Christ and the divine indwelling. Hence you said truly that not from death, but from the conception itself, you would be called blessed by all generations (Luke 1:48). Hence death did not make you blessed, but rather you made death glorious, loosing its sorrow and turning death into joy. How should corruption dare anything against your body, which carried Life itself?

Moreover, the Apostles, who, dispersed in every part of the earth, were occupied in fishing for men, the divine command, like a kind of net or cloud, brought to Jerusalem, gathering them more swiftly than eagles. Then our first parents Adam and Eve cried out: Come to us, O sacred and saving storehouse of Christ, who have fulfilled our desire. On the other hand the saints who were present, still living in mortal flesh, said: Stay with us, our consolation. Do not leave us orphans, you whom we have as the solace of our labours and the refreshment of our sweat. To live with you living, to die with you dying, is glorious. For how will this life be life for us, deprived of your presence? These and like things, as I think, the Apostles with the rest of the fullness of the Church put forward, with frequent sobs interrupting their laments.

But she, turning to her Son, said: Be the consoler of Your beloved sons, whom it has pleased You to call brethren (Heb. 2:11–12), as they grieve at my departure; and through the laying on of my hands put blessing upon their blessing. Then, stretching out her hand, she blessed the company of the faithful, and added: *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit* (Ps. 30:6; Luke 23:46). Receive my soul, dear to You, which You have kept blameless. To You, and not to the earth, I commend my body. Keep it whole, which it pleased You to inhabit. Bring me over to You, so that where You are, offspring of my womb, I too may be dwelling with You. Then such words as these were heard there: *Arise, My beloved, beautiful among women; thou art all fair, My love, and there is not a spot in thee* (Cant. 2:10; 4:7). Hearing these words, the most blessed Virgin commends her spirit into the hands of her Son, and departs with Him into heaven, to reign for ever. And the holy Apostles, bathed in tears, press kisses on the tabernacle of the Lord, filled with blessing and holiness from contact with the most sacred body. Thus far Damascene.

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[1] St John Damascene, *Homilies on the Dormition* (esp. I, 10–12; II, 2–3), here in a free Latin version. The legend of his severed hand restored by Our Lady is told in his medieval *Life*.

Article IX: How the super-most-glorious Trinity came to meet the most chosen Virgin as she came to heaven, and how incomparably gloriously It received and glorified her

One is My dove, My undefiled, My perfect one (Cant. 6:8). The loving and just God receives each saint coming to Him out of this world the more lovingly, embraces him the more joyfully, kisses him the more sweetly, makes him happy the more sublimely, shows Himself to him the more clearly, and joins him to Himself the more closely, the more ardently and sincerely He was loved and desired by him in this world, and the more purely and perfectly He was honoured by him. And the more totally, promptly and reverently the rational creature in the present life shows, offers and gives itself over to the Creator and to His love and worship, the more liberally and gloriously in that heavenly fatherland does the almighty Creator repay Himself, *(p. 160)* and give Himself to it as its reward, its portion and its eternal possession.

If, therefore, according to what was said before (Book I, Art. 30; Book II, Arts. 7–10; Book III, Arts. 3–7), we rightly weigh and duly consider how supremely and incomparably, how purely and totally, how perfectly and with what inestimable reverence the most kind and incomparable virgin Mary burned with the charity of her Creator and Saviour, shone in His worship, excelled in His service, and rested unceasingly, was occupied and intent, in contemplating Him, cleaving to Him and honouring Him: we shall be able to understand in some measure, as far as we can, how incomparably gloriously, reverently and joyfully she was received by the super-blessed Trinity, embraced, kissed and filled with the light of glory, rewarded with the beatific vision, flooded and over-filled with the most sweet fruition of the Godhead, and raised into the fellowship of the whole superessential and super-holy Trinity; and ineffably, excellently taken up to taste most fully and to see most clearly how infinitely sweet and beautiful God is, and what, of what kind and how great is the beatitude and glory of the super-most-high Trinity: how the three super-most-happy and super-most-excellent Persons eternally behold one another most super-clearly, love one another most super-fervently, and enjoy one another most super-sweetly; how the Son is produced by the Father by an inward emanation and eternal generation, and the Holy Spirit flows forth eternally and most super-delightfully from both; how great is the mutual complacency of this super-most-venerable Trinity, how super-infinite Its joy; how immense is the abyss of Its wisdom, how great the depth of Its judgements, how great the incomprehensibility of Its majesty, how altogether immense Its excellence.

Behold, in all these things the most pre-elect virgin Mary, beyond every created mind subsisting in created being, is so incomparably supremely, perfectly and most closely immersed in the light of the Godhead, absorbed in the abyss of the Trinity, made the confidante of every secret, made the partaker of all glory, as far as could be given to or befitted a creature without hypostatic union and under personal conjunction. And just as the truly and altogether most happy Virgin was in this life most intimate with the adorable Trinity beyond all, as being the co-parent of God the Father and His singular and only spouse, and the true Mother of the Only-begotten of God, and the sanctuary, bridal chamber, throne and banqueting hall of the Holy Spirit; so in the heavenly kingdom she is joined most intimately and most secretly to the super-sublime Trinity, and made Its most clear-sighted, most profound and most delighted contemplative. Further, as beyond all she was in this valley of tears full of grace and abounding in merits, and suffered with Christ, and served Him in her own person bodily and spiritually, so in the heavenly paradise she is incomparably full of glory, rich in rewards, glorified with Christ and most closely joined to Him.

And so God the Father went to meet His singular, most dear, most faithful, most beautiful and most holy spouse and co-parent, as she ascended from the miseries of this life to the heavenly bridal chamber, most joyfully and most graciously, offering and impressing on her the embrace and kiss of inestimable condescension, sweetness and peace. And the Only-begotten Son of God, with a like meeting, kiss and embrace, honoured, received and held close His most worthy Mother. So too the Holy Spirit, embracing His most beloved and most pure vessel with an equal meeting, filled it as supremely and singularly with all happiness and with the gifts and endowments of glory as eminently as He had before filled it with every gift of grace and of the virtues.

Therefore Augustine rightly discoursed: You, O Mary, the King of kings Himself (Apoc. 19:16), loving you beyond all as His true Mother and comely spouse, associates with Himself in the embrace of love; and likewise: Nor is it a wonder, O Mary, that God reigning in heaven should deign to rejoice with you, whom, as a little child born of you as man, you so often kissed on earth. Hence Bernard too testifies excellently: Mary penetrated the abyss of divine wisdom more deeply than can be believed, so that, as far as the condition of a creature allows without personal *(p. 161)* union, she seems to be immersed in that inaccessible light.

Of this matter Ubertino speaks: Not only Jesus, God and man, crowned with laurel in His glorified body, but the King Himself, God the Trinity, went triumphantly to meet the most holy Virgin, not by local motion, but by the complacency of favour, by divine glorification and by principal influence. For the Father, by a certain appropriation, went to meet and embraced the spouse of most chaste love, of most singular fruitfulness and of most careful upbringing of His only-begotten Son. Her the Father most sweetly embraces before the heavenly court and acknowledges to be the most worthy mother of His only Son: whence the most blessed Virgin received a fountainlike fruitfulness for begetting all the elect, and also the holy angels, in a certain taste and degree of experience of divine things; and from this she has from the Father the ground of power and of imperial sublimity, after her Son, over all created nature.

Her Son also came to meet her, showing to all that this was His most true Mother, who conceived Him, bore Him, nourished Him and most faithfully accompanied Him in the human nature He had assumed. Therefore He is said to have adored her with filial reverence as His most worthy mother. O good Jesus, almighty, eternal God, what is this, that You adore a woman? I adore, He says, by dulia, because two things make her worthy to be adored, namely the ground of motherhood and the merit of humility. For her motherhood was singular, her humility incomparable. Jesus therefore adores His mother: not a mother of any kind, but a mother of singular sufficiency, of singular magnificence and of singular diligence. Of singular sufficiency, I say, because she conceived without the seed of man, of the Holy Spirit alone; of singular magnificence, because none but she bore God, none but she remained a virgin after childbirth; of singular diligence, because no mother ever loved and was solicitous for her son so much, nay, not all the others taken together, as to the substance of love and solicitude. As, then, in the conception of the Son of God she had no companion, so in this honour she has no equal. The merit of her abyssal humility also requires this honour in the Virgin. For *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted* (Luke 14:11). And because in humility she had no pure creature as her equal, in exaltation she has no partner.

Further, a threefold mode of rewarding the virtues is set down. The first, by making void: as in faith and hope, which being made void, there succeeds to faith clear vision, and to hope glorious possession. The second, by completion: as in charity and in many of the cardinal virtues, to which in the fatherland completion without defect will be added. The third, by opposition: as in poverty, hunger, mourning and humility, to which God promises the kingdom, satiety, consolation and exaltation (Matt. 5:3–5). See, therefore, how in the blessed Virgin and Queen her most profound humility and the goodness of God seem to contend: Mary humbling herself, and God exalting her; nay, Mary not only humbling herself, but in humility sinking herself as into an abyss below every creature; and God not only exalting her, but magnifying her above every angelic creature. And so the sublime God reverently, as man, adores her as His most true mother, and bows Himself to her bodily and as a son with inestimable honour. O stupendous privilege, and summit of unheard-of dignity, that the Son of God should be seen to acknowledge that He has His human being from this virgin Mother! What ought He not to grant to the Virgin Mother, whom He willed to honour thus! Certainly the Son of God would not regard with this regard of honour a thousand times a thousand thousands of Seraphim, nor infinitely infinite ones, because they cannot love God as a son, nor enjoy Him as the fruit of their womb.

In this assumption the most blessed Mother of God, like another Esther (Esther 2:16–17), was brought from the house of the women, that is, from the Church militant, through the whole host of the heavenly army to the

chamber of the heavenly Bridegroom, God the Father: for all the heavenly hierarchies saw her ascending, *(p. 162) flowing with* the *delights* of divine embraces, *leaning upon her beloved* (Cant. 8:5). Certainly for her alone and for her Son the delights of mutual embraces were born in fullness, since she has the same one as spouse and son.

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit then came to meet the most sacred Virgin, acknowledging her to be the furnace of His love and the excellent workshop of His wonderful operation, in which and from which the most pure body was formed for the Son of God and the highest created soul, that of Christ, was created. And the Holy Spirit showed to all the Blessed that in this workshop and through it He fashioned whatever wonderful thing He works in grace, and that in her He enclosed the whole fire of virtuous operation, and whatever He ever disposed to give to a creature. Thus, then, the whole adorable Trinity, with uniform and concordant will and charity, showed the inestimable Virgin to be Its spouse of incommunicable charity, the queen of heaven of unattainable dignity, the lady of the world of unshared power, the mother of all the elect of inexhaustible kindness, the most triumphant tramper-down of all the enemies of God of insuperable valour, the bountiful dispenser of all the heavenly treasures according to the good pleasure of her will. Thus far Ubertino.

Article X: On the supreme and ineffable happiness and glory of Mary, most beloved of God

Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come: for winter is now past, the rain is over (Cant. 2:10–11). The essential reward of the Blessed is the beatific vision of the Godhead, that is, the face-to-face, clear, immediate and fruitive contemplation of the true God, one and three: who, as He is truly one and simple in essence, so is truly three in Persons. Moreover, this glorious vision corresponds to the perfection of charity, so that the more fervent and perfect anyone has been in the love of God, the more clearly will he see God and the more delightfully will he enjoy Him.

Since, then, according to what was said before (Book III, Arts. 3–5), the most worthy Virgin was in this life supremely and incomparably perfect in the charity of God, that is, in the substance and habit of charity, and also in the act of charity beyond every pure wayfarer, nay, even in an act of charity so meritorious that by it she merited to behold God most clearly in heaven beyond every angelic intellect and heavenly spirit (for it is indeed to be believed that the most sacred virgin Mary very often had in this life more perfect, more fervent and purer affections and turnings of mind towards God than any of the angelic spirits before their confirmation and beatific vision, which they merited by freely turning to the Creator through the union of love; while all the blessed angels, of whatever order they are, merited their confirmation and beatitude by one turning to God): since, then, the most sweet Mary in all her life in this world was, and progressed, nay, was most perfect beyond every pure creature in continual, or at least assiduous, affections, ardours, aspirations and desires of holy charity, and in loving and most pure contemplative transports, flaming, ecstatic, deiform and divine; it is established that beyond all angelic minds, even the seraphic, she merited incomparably to draw near to God, to be united to Him and immersed in Him, through a most profound and most clear vision, fruition and embrace of the super-blessed Trinity. Therefore she is ineffably filled with all joy, happiness and glory.

And now, seeing most limpidly face to face how most mercifully, most graciously, most lovingly, and incomparably most munificently, most intimately and magnificently the whole adorable Trinity dealt with her, so that God the Father made her His co-parent, and the Son of God became her son, and the Holy Spirit took her as His highest and only temple, throne and banqueting hall, nay, as His highest spouse and most dear friend, *(p. 163)* confidante, counsellor, daughter and consort: here, I say, beholding in God all the grace, glory, excellence, praise, honour and power conferred on her, she delights in Him super-ineffably, and loves Him most super-fervently, and with unthinkable ardour, thanksgiving, praise and joy gazes on Him unceasingly and without turning away, and sees the whole Church, not only militant but also triumphant,

subject to her and serving her, and herself made eternally and most fully secure of so immense a happiness and glory.

Moreover, Ubertino speaks at length of so great a beatitude of the most worthy Mary, saying among other things: If what has been said of the meeting of the most glorious Trinity at the ascension of Mary is considered, it clearly appears that she by herself shares inestimably more of the glory of the blessed Trinity than every other pure creature taken together. Which I prove evidently from this: the Church firmly holds that she is raised above all the orders of the angels. Therefore another than she, and lower than she, will be taken up to the seat of Lucifer, since the ruin of all the angels will be made good from among men. But no catholic and devout person doubts that the blessed Virgin, at the hour in which she was made Mother of God, had more of the substance of grace than any pure creature; or at the least, he is out of his mind who would not make her equal to the greatest of any. But what did the fullness from the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit add to this, and the motherly generation, and her inestimable love? And as much as was added in grace in this life, so much is added in glory in the life to come. There is nothing, then, of grace or glory in all lower creation taken together which is not far more excellently in Mary, according to the teaching of Dionysius, who says that all the gifts of the lower angels are possessed more excellently by the higher angels. And as much as the degree of motherly love and motherly dignity requires, so much beyond all and above all does she share in the glory of God and in the inestimable fruition of the Trinity. From which it follows that the most blessed virgin Mary is placed beyond all proportion above all the orders of angels and of blessed men taken together. Thus far Ubertino.

Wherefore it is to be considered that this greatness of glory could be understood in two ways. First, as regards a specific dignity, or a greater perfection in degree or species: in which way a little gold is incomparably more worthy than any mass of silver, and the sensitive than the vegetative. Secondly, as regards a certain gradual addition. And Ubertino understands it in the first way. For he adds: Do not here consider the copious multitude of the others, because this does nothing to the substantial reality of greatness of glory: since in spiritual things the same is greater and better. Further, grace and glory are certain potestative wholes; and in potestative wholes the highest part contains more of the perfection of its genus than all the rest. So in the glorification of Mary there was made the highest and final unlocking of the fountainlike Godhead, so that never should so much be unlocked to any creature as was unlocked to the most holy Mary: because she received as much of the glory of God as is givable to a pure creature for ever.

Article XI: On that most solemn procession in which God incarnate led His most excellent Mother, departing from the body, with the whole heavenly host to the highest heaven

Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved? (Cant. 8:5). As Jerome says in the sermon on the Assumption of the most blessed Mary, at the funeral rites of the most glorious Virgin the holy angels served, and all the courts of heaven rejoiced with her. Nor is it a wonder, since the honour of the Mother is the honour of Him who deigned to be born of her, whom every order *(p. 164)* of the heavens venerates and adores, exalted above itself with the Father.

Consequently Jerome proves this by an argument from the greater, adding: We frequently read that at the funerals of certain Saints the holy angels came and rendered services at their funeral rites, and so carried the souls of the Saints to heaven with hymns and canticles and praises; where choirs of both sexes are also recorded to have been heard, and to have sung praises on earth; and, what is more evident, that these same Saints sometimes shone with much light; and moreover, that those still living in the flesh perceived there the fragrance of a wonderful odour. If at times, to refresh and strengthen the hope of those standing by, our Saviour, in order to prove and declare more fully the merits of His elect, deigned to show such great things and such things about the dying, how much more is it to be believed that on the day of His Mother’s death

the host of heaven with its ranks came festively to meet her, and surrounded her with immense light, and led her with praises and spiritual canticles even to the throne prepared for her long ago, before the foundation of the world? No one doubts that that whole heavenly Jerusalem then exulted with ineffable joy, and was then gladdened with inestimable charity. Nor without cause. For it is believed that the Saviour of all Himself in person came wholly festive to meet her, and with joy placed her with Himself on the throne of glory. Otherwise, how would He have fulfilled what He commanded in the law, *Honour thy father and thy mother* (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; Matt. 15:4, etc.)? Thus far Jerome.

Hence Bernard says: Who can suffice to think how gloriously on that day the Queen of the world went forth, and with what affection of devotion the whole multitude of the heavenly legions came forth to meet her, with what canticles she was led to the throne of glory, with how placid a countenance, how serene a face, with what divine embraces she was received by her Son and exalted above every creature with that honour with which it befitted so great a Mother to be exalted and honoured by so great a Son! Hence again Bernard says: O how glorious appears the virgin Mary in her ascent, the dignity and glory of whose ascending her offspring and Son Himself admires! Hence, as Christ comes to meet His most blessed Mother, the whole Trinity goes forth to meet her in the Son. And if the Lord of the angels goes forth to meet her, all full of thanksgiving and rejoicing with her, which of the angels, do you think, lagged behind and did not leap forth, running with haste and joy to meet his Queen and the Mother of the eternal King?

Such a procession was never made from the beginning, except when Christ ascended into heaven. The virgins go forth to meet the Mother of God, the Cherubim and Seraphim, with the Thrones and Dominations and the other angelic choirs, and honour the Queen, taken up and raised above them, with splendid services. And as the most serene virgin Mary is led into heaven, the heavenly courts, for excessive exultation, sing glory to God with jubilation and resounding instruments. Angels and Archangels, Principalities and Powers, for the reception of so great a mother and virgin, lead choirs before her with divine harmonies. Among whom the archangel Gabriel, most intimate with the most happy Mary, as being her paranymph, comes to meet her, surely, next after Christ, and, as a cantor calling the others to sing, intoning that most sweet canticle of the glorious Mary, says: *Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee* (Luke 1:28), and so on. And while this chant is repeated by the others with modulated voices and varying organ, the Virgin Mother is led on in jubilation.

Hence again Bernard says: Happy altogether were the kisses impressed on the lips of the suckling Christ by His virgin Mother, when the most loving Mother caressed Him in her virginal lap. But shall we not judge more happy those kisses which the glorious Mary received this day from the mouth of Him who sits on the throne and at the right hand of the Father, when she ascended the throne of glory singing a nuptial song and saying, *Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth* (Cant. 1:1)? Further, *who shall declare* the generation of Christ (Isa. 53:8; Acts 8:33) and the assumption of Mary? For as much grace as she obtained on earth beyond the others, so much singular glory too does she hold *(p. 165)* in heaven. And if *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him* (1 Cor. 2:9), what has He prepared for her who gave Him birth and, as is certain to all, loved Him beyond all?

With these agrees what Jerome writes: The more Mary is lifted up to the sublimer things by the power of the Most High, the brighter she shines forth in glory. For full of God, full of grace, full of virtues, she cannot but fully possess the glory of eternal brightness, which indeed she received most fully. So *the daughters of Sion saw* her *and declared her most blessed, and the queens praised her* (Cant. 6:8): nay, they saw her so great as no mortal can unfold.

Of this most celebrated procession Ubertino speaks: O who will suffice to express the solemnity of the heavenly court when Jesus the King arose, festive and glad and crowned with royal beauty, and stirred the whole city above, that all the citizens of heaven should run to meet the virgin Mother as she ascended? Then was fulfilled what is narrated in the books of Kings: *David brought the ark of God with joy, and there were*

with him seven choirs of singers (2 Kings 6:12). For so Christ led His most dear Mother with supreme jubilation, and there were with Him the throngs of the heavenly spirits, of the Patriarchs, of the Prophets, of the Apostles who had then died, of martyrs, confessors and virgins. O imperial solemnity! O inexpressible jubilation, which can neither be fully expressed nor kept silent! For, saving the reverence due to the ascension of Christ, this assumption of the blessed Virgin, and the procession of her assumption, had something more excellent than the ascension of Christ as regards the triumphal meeting: for only angels could come to meet Him as He ascended; but her Son, coming to meet His Mother as she ascended, with the whole court both of angels and of blessed souls, solemnly bore her up to the most blessed consistory of her seat.

Hence once more the most devout Bernard declares: Sublime is this day and shining more brightly than the sun, on which the royal Virgin is borne up to the throne of God the Father, and, set on the throne of the highest Trinity, draws even the angelic nature to behold her. The whole throng of the angels gathers together to see the Queen sitting *on the right hand* of the Lord of hosts *in gilded clothing* (Ps. 44:10), in an immaculate body, *surrounded with variety*, adorned with a multitude of virtues. This is that day which heaped the workshops of heaven with sublimer joy: yearly to the world, continual to the angels, joining men to the holy angels and uniting angels to men in a happy covenant.

This most solemn procession, O best Lady, you merited and received in return for that most sorrowful and most mournful procession in which you went most painfully with your most beloved Son to the place of His crucifixion.

Article XII: Further on the same matter, and that the most sincere virgin Mary is raised above all the choirs of angels, speaking to Christ mouth to mouth and beholding Him eye to eye

I saw her beautiful as a dove, ascending above the streams of waters, whose inestimable fragrance was exceedingly great in her garments; and as the days of spring the flowers of roses and the lilies of the valleys surrounded her (cf. Cant. 5:12; 2:1).[1] These words are rightly expounded here of that most innocent and most simple dove and most chaste turtle-dove, the glorious Mary: who was beautiful like a dove, because, according to Jerome, she foreshowed the form and simplicity of that dove which came upon the Lord and taught John (John 1:32–33). “Whose inestimable fragrance was exceedingly great in her garments”, that is, in her virtues and merits. To the fragrance of this odour, surely, the whole of that heavenly Jerusalem ran down rejoicing. “And the flowers of roses and the lilies of the valleys surrounded her”, because all the souls reddened by martyrdom embrace her with the arms of perpetual *(p. 166)* love. In like manner the souls made white by the splendour of virginity, and nourished in the valley of humility, surround her and serve her most devoutly, who is commended by a singular privilege and enriched with an immense treasure. For as in comparison with God no one is good, so in comparison with the Mother of God no woman is perfect, however excellent she may be proved. For as the incomparable Virgin is incomparably worthier and holier than the other virgins, so the solemnity of her Assumption too is incomparable among the other solemnities of the Saints, and to be admired by the angelic spirits themselves. For on that day the most blessed Virgin, while the hymn-singing choirs of angels sang in alternation, happily entered the pastures of eternal greenness, and came even to the height of the throne, and sat down in glory, first after Christ. Hence the Church confidently sings of her what it is not lawful to say of any of the others: namely, that she passed beyond the merits and orders of the angels, when she was raised to the palace of heaven at the right hand of the Father.

Hence finally Bernard, who seems to have spoken of the most blessed Virgin more graciously and more devoutly than the others, says: I confess my unskilfulness, and I do not hide my own faint-heartedness. There is nothing that delights me more, but neither is there anything that terrifies me more, than to make and hold

discourse on the glory of the Virgin Mother. For human mortality ought not to cease from her praises, since in the Virgin the nature of man alone is exalted above the immortal spirits: of whose praise and glory devotion does not suffer us to be silent, nor can thought conceive anything worthy, nor untaught speech bring it forth. For the princes of the heavenly court themselves, in considering so great a novelty, cry out not without wonder: *Who is this that cometh up from the desert* (Cant. 3:6; 8:5), that is, from under the sun, where there is nothing but labour and *vexation of spirit* (Eccles. 1:14)? She comes up, I say, flowing with spiritual delights. What should I call delights but the beauty of virginity with the gift of fruitfulness, the badge of humility dripping the honeycomb of charity, the bowels of mercy, the fullness of grace, the prerogative of singular glory? Ascending, then, as beautiful, she has become sweet even to the holy angels. Thus far Bernard.

Furthermore, that the most blessed Lady is raised above the heights of all the angelic orders, and placed beside the throne of her Son, is proved in many ways. First, because the king and the queen are named from the same principality, kingdom and dignity: as the king of France and the queen of France take the names of their presiding office from the same kingdom. But as Christ is called the king of heaven, so the blessed virgin Mary is declared the queen of heaven. Now the dignity of Christ, and His kingdom and principality, is incomparably above the dignities of all the angelic spirits: therefore so also are the dignity, kingdom and power of the most sacred Virgin. Further, the most divine virgin Mary surpasses the Seraphim more than the Seraphim surpass the Cherubim. But the excellence of the Seraphim over the Cherubim is so great that they belong to different choirs. Therefore the most illustrious Lady has been advanced above the Seraphim, and made higher than the seraphic order.

Further, all the angelic spirits are servants of the Creator, and are related to the supreme Virgin as servants to their lady: therefore she has been exalted above all their orders, the more sublimely as it was fitting that the most virtuous Mother of the King and Creator of all should be set over, and borne above, the mansions of the ministers and the orders of the holy angels, placed at the right hand of her Son. Again, men can attain to the glory of the Seraphim, but not to the degree, dignity and glory of the blessed Virgin: who, being the true Mother of God, by the right, title and privilege of that motherhood is set over every created person, queen, empress and lady of the angels. Lastly, it was most fitting that Christ, *the power of God and the wisdom of God* (1 Cor. 1:24), should *(p. 167)* prefer His own Mother, in the gifts of grace and the riches of glory, both in the gifts of sanctifying grace and in the gifts of grace freely given, to all His ministers; nay, that He should place, exalt and honour her incomparably beyond them.

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[1] The text is that of a responsory of the Assumption office, woven from phrases of the Canticle.

Article XIII: On the ineffable joy which the most blessed virgin Mary has in the bodily and inward vision of the humanity of her Son

Go forth, ye daughters of Sion, and see king Solomon in the diadem wherewith his mother crowned him (Cant. 3:11). As the almighty Creator *rejoices in His works* (Ps. 103:31), so created minds too are gladdened in the effects of their Creator. For *full of the glory of the Lord is His work* (Ecclus. 42:16). Therefore the Psalmist said: *Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in Thy doings, and in the works of Thy hands I shall rejoice* (Ps. 91:5). And as the essential reward of the Blessed consists in the vision of the divine essence, so their accidental reward consists in the beholding of creatures, through their relation to the Creator. For such knowledge is delightful to them inasmuch as they behold the magnificence, omnipotence, perfection and wisdom of the Maker in His effects. Further, the more perfect, the more deiform, the more beautiful and the more beloved any creature has been, and also the nearer to God, the more the Blessed delight in beholding it, and bless God in His works.

Now it is certain that the humanity of Christ alone is dearer to God, more beautiful and more perfect than all the rest of created being, since it has been assumed into the uncreated and hypostatic being of the eternal Word and is supposited in Him, and its whole capacity has been most fully filled with every gift of grace and also with every gift of glory. All the Blessed in the fatherland also love it beyond every creature. Therefore, after God, they glory most of all in knowing it: nay, they rejoice together more in beholding it than in contemplating all the rest; nor can all the delights and joys of the present life, even taken together, equal the delight which they have in the sight of the humanity of Christ.

Moreover, in the contemplation of that humanity they exult not only because it is in itself so good, so sweet, so lovable and so comely, but also because of its benefits, that is, because of the goods which they have obtained through it: for through it the ruin of the heavenly Jerusalem has been repaired; and in that very humanity assumed by the eternal Word they behold the omnipotence, goodness, charity, loving-kindness, mercy, justice, wisdom and munificence of the Creator more clearly than in all the rest of creation. And the holy souls now blessed glory more especially in beholding the assumed humanity; and after the resurrection of their bodies, predestined men will glory especially in seeing it outwardly and inwardly.

But now you, O most pure and most excellent virgin Mary, glory most singularly, most heartfeltly and most abundantly in the most clear contemplation, sensible and intellectual, of the most glorified humanity of your most dearly beloved and only Son. And the more clearly you contemplate your most worthy Son beyond all others according to each of His natures, and the more fervently you love Him, the more ineffably you rejoice in every sight of Him and in the perfect inward and outward beholding of His humanity, and with inestimable joy you gaze unceasingly on His altogether most beautiful humanity. Further, the more and greater goods you have obtained and gained through the incarnation of Christ, the more you love His humanity, and the more delightfully and affectionately you look upon it. And it is certain that through the incarnation of Christ you have been made the Mother of God, the lady of the world, the queen of the angels and the mother of the whole Church militant and triumphant. Therefore in the contemplation of the humanity of your Son there is for you, most kind Mother, unthinkable glory and sweetness.

Again, the more intimately and lovingly you lived with your Only-begotten in this life, and the more faithfully and heartily you grieved with Him and stood by Him *(p. 168)* in His every persecution, adversity, labour, anguish, mockery, blasphemy, passion and death, the more gloriously, surely, do you now rejoice, feast and dance in all the honour, exaltation, glorification, prosperity, beauty and glory of your Son's humanity; and your eyes *see the King in His beauty* (Isa. 33:17), your tongue speaks to Him, your mouth kisses Him, your arms embrace Him, your breast clasps Him to itself, your most worthy hands handle Him, and according to all your desire and good pleasure you enjoy Him most purely and most sweetly for ever. Lastly, O most dear and best Lady, the nearer He is to you, and the more you are one with Him, and the greater the mutual communion between you and Him, the more happily do you rejoice in the sight of His humanity. Moreover, He is the only fruit of your womb, your singular spouse, your highest friend, your Lord and Saviour: therefore in the sight of His humanity you glory unspeakably.

Now, then, O most venerable and most dearly beloved Virgin Mother and Lady, now with all joy and glory see and behold, and eternally without interruption gaze upon your Only-begotten in the highest heaven, sitting most happily on the most high throne (Heb. 1:8–9), presiding most imperiously over heaven and earth and every creature, incomparably beautiful and radiant beyond all the elect, crowned with glory and honour, *clothed with light as with a garment* (Ps. 103:2); at whose name *every knee bows, of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth* (Phil. 2:10); whose adversaries are confounded, whose persecutors are eternally condemned; whom once you saw hanging on the cross, stretched out, mocked, blasphemed, made *the reproach of men* (Ps. 21:7), disfigured *as a leper* (Isa. 53:4), and slain by a most bitter and most ignominious death, and suffering most vehemently with you also. Behold, now *the morning stars praise* Him, *and all the sons of God make a joyful melody* to Him (Job 38:7); and He delights in you, and rejoices in the sight of you,

and rejoices with you in all your happiness and glory.

Article XIV: On the honour and glory which God incarnate unceasingly renders to His most beloved Mother before all the Blessed in the Church triumphant

Show me thy face, let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely (Cant. 2:14). If it is true what You, Lord Jesus Christ, declare in the Gospel of Yourself and of Your elect, *Amen I say to you, that He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing will minister unto them* (Luke 12:37): if, I say, You so honour Your elect in Your heavenly palace, how do You eternally venerate Your most loving Mother? How do You refresh her? For You said at the last supper to the Apostles: *You are they who have continued with Me in My temptations; and I dispose to you a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom* (Luke 22:28–30). Yet those to whom You said this fled from You a little after, and forsook You in Your last persecution and most bitter passion (Matt. 26:56). Have You not then prepared and shown, and do You not unceasingly show, a most delicate and most singular refreshment to Your most faithful and most constant Mother, who never forsook You and never offended You?

Further, she continually honoured You with all her powers, obeyed Your teachings most promptly, ministered to You in all things most reverently, most humbly and most lovingly: therefore she merited to be most illustriously honoured by You in the heavenly paradise. And she whom You venerated on earth while living among men, You now most fittingly venerate in heaven while reigning among the Blessed. For You have commanded the whole heavenly host, all the ranks of the angels and all the Blessed, to obey Your blessed Mother in all things as they obey You, and to honour her with the worship of hyperdulia, as they honour You also according to the humanity You assumed.

Moreover, You said: *Whosoever shall confess Me before men,* (p. 169) *I will also confess him before My Father* (Matt. 10:32). Therefore Your most excellent Mother, who not only was never ashamed of You, nor ever withdrew from You at the time of Your most ignominious passion, but always bore herself most reverently towards You, and through exceeding humility, from considering Your excellence, scarcely dared to call herself Your mother, and preferred to call herself Your handmaid (Luke 1:38, 48): her, I say, You now confess, honour and commend before the heavenly Father, before the super-most-blessed Trinity, before the whole Church triumphant, testifying, disclosing and announcing to all that she is Your most worthy and most dear Mother, to whom You deny nothing, whose face You never put to confusion, from whom You never turn away Your countenance.

And the more deeply that most loving Virgin Mother and Lady humbled herself on earth, and humbles herself even now in heaven, the more, in turn, You, God of Sabaoth, King of glory, most just Judge, and most wise governor and ordainer of all things, have exalted and honoured her, and exalt and honour her, more and more; and out of reverence for her, for her merits and prayers, You have mercy on the whole world, spare it and help it. Lastly, in the Church militant, by illustrious miracles, by innumerable signs, by the building of basilicas, by the devout cults of the faithful, You have most abundantly honoured Your most worthy Mother, as is fitting, from the beginning of the primitive Church, and especially from the time of her assumption.

Article XV: On the love and veneration which the whole Church triumphant renders to the Queen of heaven

Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people: for thou hast done manfully, and hast succoured the ruin of thy people (Judith 15:10–11; 13:25). It was shown a little before (Art. 13) how the accidental reward and secondary joy of all the Blessed consist in the vision of the humanity of Christ. Next, indeed, all the citizens of heaven glory and delight most of all in the contemplation

of the God-bearing Mother, the supreme and glorious Mary; and they love her most and most sweetly, venerate her most reverently, praise her most devoutly, and supremely magnify, admire and extol her: because after the humanity of Christ she is of the greatest goodness, of the highest perfection, of the loftiest dignity, of the most splendid beauty, of the sweetest loving-kindness, of the most sublime power, of the most eminent wisdom, of the fullest munificence, and also of the most saving fruitfulness. For through her the human race has been repaired and the heavenly palace restored: since this most sacred Virgin conceived and bore, suckled and nourished the Saviour of all. And she merited so great a prerogative and excellence at least by congruity.

Moreover, the blessed souls love, venerate, worship and praise her the more specially, fervently and honourably, the nearer they are to her in kind, and the greater and more numerous the goods which they have obtained through her, and the more graciously they have been helped by her to escape the snares and torments of eternal damnation, and likewise to obtain the charisms of graces on the way and the gifts of glory in the fatherland; and those who have been more mercifully helped by her in these things love, praise and glorify her the more eternally on this account, and give her more heartfelt thanks.

O how great is the beatitude, charity and concord of the citizens above, how great their order, goodness and confirmation, how great their subjection and obedience under the almighty Creator, where none of those heavenly angelic spirits, immaterial substances, most noble creatures, deiform minds, most simple incorporeal intelligences, envies a woman set so eminently over them, exalted so incomparably above them, nor disdains to be subject to her! They do not despise in her the lowliness of her sex, the condition of the flesh or the inferiority of her nature: nay, they heartily favour her in all her excellence, and *(p. 170)* rejoice inwardly with her in all her exaltation and glory, and all and each of them magnificently venerate and humbly praise her, the supreme and most humble Queen.

Moreover, what wonder if they so extol her, and willingly subject themselves to her, whom they see so pre-elected and so dearly loved by God their creator; in whom and from whom they see God made man; to whom they see that the very Maker of the universe, the King of heaven, the God of gods, was obedient and subject, nay, still and for ever shows and renders her a special honour as His own Mother; through whom, furthermore, they behold the happiness and glory of all the citizens above so ineffably increased? In her, then, after Christ, they rejoice most vehemently, because after the humanity of Christ the most sacred virgin Mary is the most illustrious and most splendid image for contemplating the Most High: in which image, plainly, they contemplate most limpidly and most joyfully the goodness, loving-kindness, charity, omnipotence, wisdom, liberality, mercy and equity of the adorable Trinity; and they praise God in her, and her in God, who communicated and gave Himself so charitably and most liberally to so great a virgin, and through her restored all things so wisely and clemently, as through the first woman all things had been deformed. Nay, through her He has profited far more than the other had harmed: for through her He confers whatever grace He has decreed to give, as was shown above.

Hence Jerome fittingly said (cf. Book III, Art. 21): This is the Virgin who alone destroys all heretical depravity, who alone after God strengthens us in all truth, and by her merits commends us to God, and helps us continually by her prayers. For, as Bernard testifies, she is our most faithful mediatrix and advocate, showing her breast and paps to her Son the judge, and interceding unceasingly for the wretched, for those in peril on this stormy sea, for those perishing in this unclean world.

O how unspeakably all the Blessed rejoice in her: in so most beautiful a lady; in so most fruitful, most pure, most saving and most divine a mother; in so most holy and most humble an empress; in so most kind a helper! Through whom they have obtained so many benefits; of whose fullness all receive; who is so most beautiful an ornament of the court of the citizens above, the Blessed of the fatherland; so most graceful and most beautiful a flower of the heavenly paradise; so most loving a lover of all; through whom God our Maker has become our saviour and brother; in whom what is lower by nature has been more richly beautified and

honoured by singular grace and by incomparable glory. Hence the chosen Bernard said excellently that on earth there was no worthier place than the virginal womb and her virginal little cell where she received God, made Him flesh, carried Him and nourished Him; nor after the throne of Christ is there a higher place in heaven than where Christ placed His Mother.

It is also made known from what has been set forth how truly the same Saint discoursed: The highest glory, O Mary, is after the Lord to see you, to cleave to you, and to dwell in the fortress of your protection. This is that most blessed one in whom, as that Saint confesses, the heavenly and eternal Wisdom *built Herself a house* (Prov. 9:1); who so filled the mind of the Virgin that from the fullness of her mind her flesh was made fruitful, and the Virgin by a singular grace brought forth that same Wisdom covered with flesh, whom she had first conceived pure.

Lastly, this is that most worthy woman whose beauty and comeliness is for the ornament of her house, the house above, the house of the whole Church triumphant, *as the sun when it riseth to the world in the high places of God* (Ecclus. 26:21) is the ornament of the whole sensible world. Hence the divine Dionysius most truly taught and wrote that even the highest orders of angels, Thrones, Cherubim and Seraphim, are purified, illumined and perfected by her: far more illustriously, without doubt, than the lower orders are by any higher choir;[1] *(p. 171)* inasmuch as this unique and incomparable Virgin incomparably surpasses all the citizens of heaven in all wisdom, knowledge and acquaintance with the divine secrets; and therefore from her most overflowing fullness she communicates and pours out to those below.

[1] Dionysius (*Celestial Hierarchy* 7–9) teaches that the higher orders purify, illumine and perfect the lower; he does not apply this to Mary. Denis is applying the principle, not quoting the text.

Article XVI: On the joy and glory which the best virgin Mary has in all the elect and Blessed

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glory? Are not you, in the presence of our Lord? (1 Thess. 2:19). All the Blessed, freed by the blood of Christ and reborn by His grace, are her spiritual sons and daughters. Now it is natural for a mother to glory in the offspring of her child when things go well with that offspring. Therefore the most happy Mary glories inwardly in all the blessed souls; and the more clearly she knows and the more fully she loves all and each of the citizens of heaven, the more heartily she delights in the salvation, beauty and glory of all and each, rejoices with all of them, and beholds that whole most copious, most beautiful, most joyful, most ordered and most holy army of the Church triumphant with inestimable joy, complacency, congratulation, charity and goodwill, as the work and host, the court and army of her only-begotten Son, nay, as her own ministers and children, because through her all have been saved or restored.

Further, it is delightful to have the good one has wished for, and to be united to the good one has desired. Therefore, the more affectionately the most excellent and most fervent virgin Mary desired in this life the conversion, grace and salvation of all, and the more intensely she prayed and the more strongly she laboured for all, the more heartily does she rejoice in the salvation they have obtained, and the more devoutly and joyfully does she ever give thanks for it to the super-blessed Trinity. Moreover, the more ardently she loves the blessed and adorable fruit of her virginal womb, the more intensely she has continually longed and longs for the fruitfulness of His passion and death. Therefore, seeing that the passion of her Son has borne most saving fruit in so many innumerable thousands of holy souls, she rejoices most vehemently over the salvation of them all.

Furthermore, it has been said that whatever of grace and virtue is conferred on men is distributed to them through the most sweet Mary: therefore she is truly called the Mother of grace, the Mother and Queen of mercy. Hence she delights wonderfully in the blessed souls as in her offspring. For by the merits and prayers

of our most serene Lady, after the prayers and merits of Christ, the grace of restoration was given even to the Apostles themselves after their fall; and whatever good was done in the world through the Apostles and their helpers, successors and followers is to be ascribed, after her Son, to the most splendid and most loving Virgin.

Hence Ubertino asserts: This most worthy Virgin singularly carried in her womb the whole mystical body together with the true body of Christ, and, likened in the continual sorrows of her heart to the sorrows of her Son, brought forth each one. To her is attributed the whole crown of the twelve Apostles, because by her merits they were called, and taught by her instruction, and filled with the Holy Spirit through her sighs and prayers. Hence too the whole victory over the world won through the Apostles is singularly attributed to the holy Virgin.

You, therefore, most delightful, most tender and most illustrious virgin Mary, glory in the holy Patriarchs as in your forebears and mystical prefigurers; in the holy Prophets too, as in the foretellers of the mysteries of your Son and of your person and dignity; and in all the saints of the old Testament and of the law of nature, who desired your coming, without whose going before they knew that the King Messiah would not come. You rejoice especially in the holy Apostles, as in the highest heralds and most dear friends of your Son, and the converters and teachers of the whole world: through whose preaching, *(p. 172)* virtues and miracles the passion of your Son bore fruit and the world was converted. But you rejoice especially in your adopted son and guardian, John the apostle, as also in your paranymph, the archangel Gabriel; so too in your holy parents, in your kinsmen the Apostles and the other chosen persons of your holy kindred, and in your most faithful minister, guardian and most chaste spouse Joseph; in the holy women also, who were intimate with you in the world and faithful to your Son, especially in that chosen Magdalene; likewise in the victorious martyrs, as in the most effective witnesses and most valiant soldiers of your Son; in the confessors, heroic men; and above all in the sacred virgins, your special lovers, imitators, daughters, maidens and most dear handmaids; and so in the rest, the more devoted they were to you in this life, and the more fervent in your holy love, the more they were kindled with zeal for the salvation of their brethren and for the divine honour, and the more they laboured for the honour of Christ and the salvation of their neighbours, and the more and the heavier things they suffered.

With all these you are crowned as with a diadem, and adorned *as a bride adorned with her jewels* (Isa. 61:10). These holy souls *shall be brought to the King* of kings *after* you (Ps. 44:15), to whom they unceasingly give thanks and sing with jubilation: from whose super-sweet embrace and altogether most loving address you are never torn away, and whom, heart to heart and face to face, you behold unceasingly and most joyfully.

Article XVII: On the endowments of the most glorified body of the most happy Virgin

The just shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the reeds (Wis. 3:7). All the household of the heavenly Father shall be *clothed with double garments* (Prov. 31:21), that is, with the full glorification of soul and body. For the body, which now cooperates with the soul and obeys it in good acts, and shares in the tribulations and sufferings which are borne for the love of God, will also be a partaker of its glorification and reward. Hence the Apostle said: *We look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of His glory* (Phil. 3:20–21); and again: *For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality* (1 Cor. 15:53).

And so four endowments of glorified bodies are set down, namely clarity, impassibility, agility and subtlety.[1] Anselm, however, seems to set down seven: There will be, he says, beatitudes of the body: beauty, swiftness, strength, freedom, health, long duration and pleasure. But these seven are reduced to the four mentioned and

are contained under them: thus beauty under clarity; swiftness, freedom and strength under agility; health and long duration under impassibility; while pleasure concerns all those already named. Glorified bodies will also be of an altogether most sweet fragrance. And all these things will be in the bodies of the saints through a certain overflow from the soul, by way of meritorious cause, but effectively they will be from God. Therefore the greater the beatitude of the soul and its essential reward, the more eminently these endowments will be in the body. And the more closely the soul is united to the uncreated light, and the more deeply it is immersed in it and the more clearly intent on it through contemplation, the more splendid, beautiful, agile, delightful, sweet, free and strong will the flesh be.

If, then, we weigh what was set forth before (Arts. 9, 10), where it was shown how incomparably and inestimably great, copious and overflowing is the beatitude of the soul of the most sacred Virgin after the beatitude of the soul of Christ, we shall be able in some measure to conjecture, imagine and understand how altogether ineffably the now glorified body of the most holy Mary abounds in all the endowments, properties and felicities just touched upon. O how unspeakably beautiful, bright and splendid, nay, super-most-bright, is the body of the inviolate and blessed Mary, whose soul is immersed in the uncreated light *(p. 173)* as most deeply and most radiantly as could be communicated to or befitted a creature without personal union!

Further, as the Saviour says, *the just shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father* (Matt. 13:43): surely not only as the sun now shines and radiates, but as it will shine after the general judgement, when, the world being renewed, *the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold* (Isa. 30:26) what it is now, as Isaiah foretold. Moreover, it is believed that that light of glory, to be graciously bestowed, will exceed all the light of nature. And if inanimate bodies are to be clothed supernaturally with so much light, with how great clarity and light will the bodies of rational creatures enjoying God, immersed in the uncreated light, be beautified and clothed, in whom the inward light will incomparably surpass and inestimably transcend all natural light and clarity? Hence it is believed that even the glorified bodies of the lesser Saints will be brighter and more beautiful than the renewed sun.

Granting this, who now will be able to number, conceive or utter how incomparably, how manifoldly, how most abundantly the body of the God-bearing Virgin, the flesh of the prince of life, which received God into itself and began life, will be brighter, whiter and more beautiful even than the renewed sun? Certainly then the sun and moon will wonder at the beauty and splendour of the virginal and deified flesh of Mary, and in comparison with her not even the stars will shine. Then through the whole expanse of the empyrean heaven the most serene virgin Mary will pour forth the most splendid rays of her most unfailing clarity, and spread the fragrance of her sweetness on every side, and will beautify and delight the whole heavenly fatherland, and hold the souls of all suspended in wonder at her: nay, even now in the meantime she does all these things.

Moreover, if we consider how deified, and how most supernaturally and most graciously dignified and exalted, was the most holy body of Mary in the present life: by the incarnation of the eternal Word made in her and from her; by the conception of the Son of God; by the so long indwelling of the true God in her womb; by the upbringing, suckling and continual handling of the Holy of Holies; by her most intimate and motherly converse with Him; by the sanctification granted her in her mother’s womb; by the most virtuous exercise in every perfect act; by freedom from sin and most full subjection under the rule of right reason: we shall be able to grasp in some way how most just and most fitting it was that the body of the most innocent Virgin should be so glorified and adorned by her Son in heaven. For the more singularly, intimately and closely that virginal flesh communed with and was joined to God Most High in this life, the more sublimely and abundantly is it now glorified by Him.

O who could grasp how those most pure breasts now shine, which nourished the King of glory and had been made most honourable by the continual contact of the divine mouth! So too that most chaste womb, in which for so many months the fountain of all beauty, the fountain of immense sweetness, the God of majesty and of

uncircumscribed brightness, made flesh, rested and dwelt: does it not shine and breathe fragrance with inestimable brightness, beauty and sweetness! So too that virginal and motherly breast, against which the Only-begotten of God so often rested, whom the most modest, most affectionate and most honourable Mother so often laid against her breast and clasped with the most pure ardour of supreme charity; so too her ivory hands, her starry eyes, her most sweet lips, and in short each of the members of the most excellent Lady and Queen, are unspeakably glorified, and most abundantly and incomprehensibly flooded, filled and over-filled with all sweetness and beauty: which to behold face to face, to perceive by sense and to taste by experience is altogether most joyful, and incomparably surpasses all the joys of the world. O how most blessed are you, most loving Virgin and Mother! How much ought we to rejoice with you! How much are we bound to praise, love and venerate you!

[1] The four "endowments" (*dotes*) of the risen body follow 1 Cor. 15:42–44.

Article XVIII: Whether the most excellent virgin Mary is adorned in glory with a threefold aureole and a threefold fruit

(p. 174) She that hath not known bed in sin shall have fruit in the visitation of holy souls (Wis. 3:13). Three aureoles of the Blessed are set down, which belong to and are bestowed for arduous and privileged works, through which a special victory is won and in which a special difficulty and pain is wont to consist: as in martyrdom, in virginity and in the effective exercise of teaching. Since, then, the Apostle says, *I suffer not a woman to teach* (1 Tim. 2:12), the most blessed Virgin seems not to have the aureole of doctors. Again, since she never had any inclination of the tinder of sin to lust, nor difficulty in resisting concupiscence, she seems not to possess the aureole of virginity either. Further, the aureole of martyrs is not due to the will to suffer alone, or to inward compassion, but to real martyrdom. Since, then, the most worthy Virgin ended her life in peace, she seems not to be adorned with the aureole of martyrs.

And it must be answered that the most holy Mary, who is surpassed by none of the illustrious, and shines with all grace, glory and beauty, is most illustriously adorned with the three aureoles mentioned: as she is also the Virgin of virgins, the teacher of the Apostles and the guide of the Evangelists. And, as was declared above in the second book (Art. 5), this most blessed Virgin by words and certain letters taught many persons of both sexes converted both from Judaism and from paganism. At the time of the passion of Christ, too, she became more than a martyr, most vehemently afflicted and sorrowing in mind and body, so much so that, had she not been divinely sustained, she would have breathed out her spirit, as many things were set forth on this above in the third book (Arts. 24–25).

Further, there was in her a threefold chastity in the highest degree, namely virginal, conjugal and widowed. For before marriage she vowed virginity, in marriage she remained a virgin, and after the death of her spouse she persevered in holy widowhood. Therefore the hundredfold fruit, corresponding to virginal chastity, the sixtyfold fruit also, which is due to widowed chastity, and likewise the thirtyfold fruit, proportioned to conjugal chastity (Matt. 13:8), are found most fully in the most glorious and most pure Virgin, who shines forth incomparably with all nobility, fullness and excellence of grace and glory.

Now, then, O most merciful, most chosen and most affectionate virgin Mary, most sweet Mother and most illustrious Lady, most spiritual and most divine creature, most worthy for ever: admit patiently this little work of my unskilfulness, this praise of my littleness; receive it most kindly, accept it with most clement condescension. And do not justly despise it that I, unclean, vile and most unworthy, have presumed to praise you and have usurped the describing of your praises; but show your wonted kindness towards me, and before the just Judge of all, your adorable Son, excuse my presumption, insufficiency and unworthiness, and keep me unceasingly under the wings of your motherly mercy, preserve me and save me. To the praise and glory of the Almighty, who is God sublime and blessed above all. Amen.

End of the four books On the Dignity and Praises of the Blessed Virgin Mary.