**Denis the Carthusian**

# ON THE PRAISE AND DIGNITY OF MARY

*De praeconio et dignitate Mariae*

From the Latin of the Montreuil edition of his works

*English translation*

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## About this translation

Translated from *De praeconio et dignitate Mariae*, in four books, in *Doctoris ecstatici D. Dionysii Cartusiani Opera omnia*, tome 35 (Montreuil, Tournai and Parkminster, 1908), pp. 477–574, which follows the Cologne edition of Johann Soter (1532). Denis treats in the first book of the dignity of the Virgin's flesh, in the second of her wisdom, in the third of her virtues and grace, and in the fourth of her happiness and glory in heaven.

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 of the edition's margins.

# Book I: The Dignity of Her Most Pure Flesh

## Prologue

*(p. 479)*

“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).

God spoke these things to the serpent. For by the envy of the devil death entered into the world (Wis. 2:24): since he deceived the man through the woman, and thereby infected the whole posterity of the offspring. Indeed God made man right from the beginning (Eccles. 7:30); but by the suggestion of the envious serpent the will of the first-formed became crooked. Yet most wise and divine equity, judging that help ought to be given from elsewhere to him who was seduced from elsewhere, decreed to redeem man in that very manner by which he was deceived. For through the woman the man himself—the first-formed man and first parent—infected and damned the whole succession of offspring. Therefore in the man whom He appointed, in him whom He chose and also assumed, yet not except through a woman, the clement and eternal God decreed to free the human race. For the remedy had to be made equal to the disease, and the form of redemption to the manner of damnation. Therefore, as by the just and ineffable censure of eternal equity, one transgressing, the woman furnishing counsel and beginning, we all fell; so by one obeying, the woman cooperating, conceiving Him and bearing Him, we are each freed from the obligation of infernal death. And for this, rivalry arose between this woman and the serpent. Yet she prevails: for she crushes his head (Gen. 3:15). Nonetheless he lies in wait for her heel. For he goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8), introducing schisms and heresies; and at last he curses the dignity of this woman through the mouth of his reprobates.

## Article I: What the intention of the present work is

That singular and pre-elect Virgin says: “All generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). Therefore, that I also may repay as I can a return to your dignity, O most lovable and most pure Mary, and may show praise as I am able—to call you blessed, and also to confess your proclamations—I have decreed. And for this I have judged that this work ought to be entitled On the Proclamation and Dignity of Mary. But now be present, sacred and divine Virgin; be present, I pray, O desirable and most clean Mother; be present—I desire and truly desire—O comely and delightful Lady maiden; obtain for your servant, O most excellent and incomparable Mary, *(p. 480)* wisdom by which I may sincerely contemplate your excellence in the light of truth, vehemence of love by which I may affectionately embrace your goodness, efficacy of word by which I may commend you worthily as I am able, and virtue by which I may honor you in all things according to my strength. I know, Lady, and confess, O Queen of the world, that “praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner” (Ecclus. 15:9). But spare, I beg, O most celebrated spouse, and with me, I ask, in all things and everywhere proceed and act maternally and also most clemently.

## Article II: Of the enmity which arose between the woman and the serpent

But as the origin of friendship is likeness, so I plainly judge enmity to proceed from unlikeness. Therefore to the woman between whom and the serpent God judged to put enmities, He granted and infused qualities contrary to the serpentine and also diabolical dispositions. For from this envy flowed. Now we know that pride is the root of every fault (Ecclus. 10:15), and for this the angel fell from the heights into the depths. Humility therefore first had to be imparted from heaven to the pre-elect woman; and for this the serpent lies in wait for her and envies her, the most proud unable to bear the most humble. Further from pride rancor springs, and from humility love. For the proud man, eager for his own excellence, presently envies him by

whom he sees himself deprived of the effect of his desire. Finally the humble man, contemplating himself and attributing every good to the fountain-goodness, is at once kindled with love of this goodness, and strives to cling to it and to be united to it. As therefore to the most proud there is innate (not from God the creator, but by his own will) the highest envy, so I think it just that to the most humble Virgin full and perfect charity be given from the Fount of virtues. She therefore stood wounded with charity, as the demon is tormented with serpentine envy. For the mind of the diabolical spirit, turned away from the Fount of purity, was made a lover of foul and unclean and also carnal works, stained with foulness and uncleanness. Therefore chastity of mind and body had to be granted to this woman, by which the most clean and most holy little virgin would displease the most unclean serpent. Therefore from these and like diversities of qualities envy is incessantly born in the serpentine mind: while she, hedged about with these virtues, hastens to draw near to God; but he, persevering in the crookedness of his aversion, is irrecoverably elongated from the Fount of beatitude.

## Article III: Who this woman is, the enemy of the serpent

That incomprehensible and eternal Wisdom, doing nothing by chance or fortuitously, contemplated and disposed in Herself in the very moment of eternity the outcome or providence of all things. Indeed the reason of the immutable and most wise Author stands stable and invariable. Hence it becomes known that providence of all things, and especially of intellectual creatures and of men, is in God. And therefore whatever in the light of the hour of times shall have been imparted to man from above, was (unless I err) decreed from eternity to be given: for from Him, through Him, and in Him are all things (Rom. 11:36). It therefore shines forth that by the supersapiential counsel of the divine mind this formed and elect Maiden was appointed, by whom the offspring of this lost age might be redeemed. This is that most loving one of God by whom, as through the primordial woman the world perished, God truly good and naturally benign deigned to repair the human race. For when already the fullness of time was at hand (Gal. 4:4) in which the clemency preordained from eternity was to be granted to man, the eternal Father, wishing to send His Only-begotten into this world, prepared for Him a receptacle and tabernacle. Decreed also that He be incarnate, He provided and also made for Him a mother. This is that sacred virgin whose name is Mary, daughter of the Patriarchs, most desired of the Prophets, Lady of the Apostles, and utterly most worthy Mother of the only Son of the supreme Begetter.

*(p. 481)*

## Article IV: That by the Incarnation of the Word, God just and merciful decreed by most right reason to free the world from the eternal obligation of death

“The Word was made flesh of Mary the virgin” (cf. John 1:14). A little before, if I remember rightly, I confessed that it befitted the divine clemency that to him deceived from elsewhere help should also come from elsewhere, and that he damned by infernal wickedness should be snatchingly saved from heaven by heavenly goodness. But who will be able to placate God offended? If guilt is so much the heavier the more excellent the one offended, who will satisfy the most high King of immense majesty indignant and angry? No one at all, as I judge, unless he also have obtained and possess the excellence of uncircumscribed dignity. Further, for man wholly destitute of grace, who except the author of graces will be able, or certainly fit, to recover what was lost? Moreover, a nature totally infected and also liable to eternal death, since it is of infinite communicability, who except a redeemer of immense efficacy will be able to save? Hence divine justice, unwilling that the crime of the first parents remain unpunished, and supreme clemency wishing again to heal him lamentably wounded, composed a most beautiful work by the tempering of equity and mercy, that death, avenged by death, might cease, and the slain, redeemed by the death of his friend and brother, might live again. This is the mystery of the Christian religion, this the sacrament of the divine faith: because the Father sent His Son into the world, that the world may be saved by Him (John 3:17); and because He was

made to Him of the seed of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3), made of a woman, and made under the law (Gal. 4:4). In this order the ineffable and almighty God, who by His absolute power can do all things in whatever manner according to all His good pleasure, redeemed man most becomingly.

## Article V: That from the origin of the world the pre-elect Mother of God was prefigured and described

The seers of ancient time had foretold what was done: that a Virgin would conceive and bear Emmanuel. It belongs to a magnificent and foreseeing maker, when about to do something sublime, to delay in turn: that meanwhile he may make the minds of others attentive, and intimate to all what he is about to work in the future, and by fitting preambles anticipate the lofty work. Do not the kings of the nations and princes of peoples observe this order in their tournaments and also spectacles? For they fix a time, they appoint heralds, and by certain previous preludes, as signs and indications of things to come, they occupy beforehand the intended work. Just so the supreme Craftsman of the world, God sublime and blessed, from the very beginnings of the ages—indeed rather from eternity—disposing that His most loving and most intimate Son be incarnate for the beatitude of the world, did not at once prosecute this, but completed the supersublime and most worthy work at the end of the ages, that meanwhile inflaming and instructing the minds of men He might anticipate so great a work by fitting prophecies, oracles, prodigies, and figures. From of old therefore He sent heralds, appointing Prophets; He wrought wonders bearing the likeness and type of things to come. And therefore just Zachary beginning of God: “He has raised up,” he says, “a horn of salvation to us, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy Prophets, who are from the beginning” (Luke 1:69–70).

In this manner, O most celebrated and most excellent Virgin, the most benign Creator, wishing to exalt you so incomparably, made known this your excellence from the origin in many ways by words and deeds. For of you, *(p. 482)* contesting with the serpent: “I will put enmities,” He says, “between you and the woman; she shall crush your head” (Gen. 3:15). Finally you are believed figured in the burning bush and in the fleece of Gideon (Exod. 3; Judg. 6). Of you, contemplating you with most sincere mind, divine David sang with jubilee of heart: “Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear” (Ps. 44:11). And after a little: “The king shall greatly desire your beauty” (Ps. 44:12). How often is Solomon seen to have described you in the Canticle of love, in the dialogue of bridegroom and bride? Did he not with prophetic spirit inquire of you, “Who shall find a valiant woman?” (Prov. 31:10). But sacred Isaias: “Behold,” he says, “a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isa. 7:14). And most blessed Jeremias: “The Lord,” he says, “will do a new thing upon the earth: a woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22).

## Article VI: That divine Mary is true Mother of the true God

It is utterly verified what God declared to the serpent concerning the pre-elect woman: “You shall lie in wait,” He says, “for her heel” (Gen. 3:15). This indeed he has done unweariedly through heretics and unbelievers. Some were unwilling to confess her a virgin, as Ebion and Helvidius. Others asserted that she bore a mere man, as Arius and Eunomius; others said that she generated one who was God indeed, but not true God, as Cerinthus and Photinus. Another blasphemed that she brought forth not a true man but a fantastic one, as Manichaeus; further another feigned that Christ took nothing from her, but only passed through her as through a water-pipe, as Valentinus.

And what need is there to narrate the snares and blasphemies of all, when John beginning to speak of her Son says: “That we may be in His true Son; this is the true God, and life eternal” (1 John 5:20)? And again, the same teaching: the Word, through whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made (John 1:3)—the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (John 1:14). Finally the Only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, Himself declared: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30); and again: “All things whatsoever the Father has are Mine” (John 16:15). Speaking also to the Father the Only-begotten asserts:

“All My things are Yours, and Yours are Mine” (John 17:10). This One took true flesh from the Virgin, as He confessed to the disciples: “Handle and see: for a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see Me to have” (Luke 24:39). Otherwise what the Archangel said to her will not be true: “Behold you shall conceive in your womb, and shall bring forth a son” (Luke 1:31). Therefore she truly conceived the true God, truly ministering to Him human flesh, though in an unusual and supernatural manner; and she truly bore Him, generating a true man like to herself in nature.

## Article VII: That the same Son whom the Father begot in eternity, blessed Mary bore in time

The Archangel speaking to the sacred and divine Virgin: “The Holy Spirit,” he says, “shall come upon you, and the power of the most High shall overshadow you; and therefore also the Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Further, whatever is truly begotten of another also obtains a true nature from him, and proceeds from him in likeness of nature. Therefore two generations, and also two natures, but one sonship, must be in Christ. Yet in the maternal generation neither a new suppositability, nor a fresh subsistence, nor any change, came to the Word of God: for from the paternal mind He flowed forth eternally and unchangeably as true God and perfect hypostasis. But humanity was assumed to the being and personality of the Word, that there be in one person two natures, the essential truth and natural property of each nonetheless retained and permanent.

*(p. 483)*

But if you say: What is generated progresses from non-being to being; and again, what is born temporally is certainly subjected to change: how then could what is eternal and always unchangeably subsisting be newly and in time conceived and born? I shall answer that for the reason of true generation it is required and suffices that a thing produce from its substance another according to likeness of nature. And this certainly befits the virgin Mother. As indeed Christ is God, begotten of the substance of the Father before the ages; so assuredly He is man, born of the substance of the Mother in the age. Moreover what is said—that the begotten proceeds from non-being into being—I think is to be denied if anyone strive to assert it universally. For the Word, existing as offspring of the paternal intellect, is most truly begotten; but far be it that He be believed to progress from non-being to being: for so He would migrate from potency into act, and would not be true God. For in uncreated being one must not take non-being before being, but there is there only a simple diffusion. And this is nothing other than the procession of light from light, of act from act, and of God from God. For in the divine and eternal procession it does not happen that any term on the prior side is taken except the term *by which*; there is no term *from which*, neither in reality nor in the understanding.

In creation indeed a terminus *from which* is taken, but by reason only: for here nothing is understood; which I plainly judge not to be a real terminus. Moreover, in natural and sensible generation, both termini on the prior side—namely the *from which* and the *by which*—are real; but in the divine emanation ad intra there is only the terminus *from which*, or the originating principle on the prior side. Finally, in the assumption of humanity by the Word, change is to be reckoned made not in the divinity but in the humanity. For the divinity is neither mixed nor immersed, and properly also neither made a part nor composed; but humanity is united to it, obtaining sustentation and subsistence from it immediately.

## Article VIII: That this glory of Mary, her dignity and grace, is ineffable, and in a manner infinite

The nearer anything is to another, so much the more like it is to it. But what is so near to Christ as His Mother? Nothing therefore stands more like to Him than she. Now it is clear that Christ obtained without measure the fullness of every grace (John 3:34). To this fullness therefore and infinite grace Mary most

vehemently approaches. Further, natural right demands that offspring honor the parent, and also exhibit to her whatever is fitting, according to strength; and the better and more powerful the son has been, so much (unless I err) the more sublimely will he complete this. Most certainly therefore it shines that whatever it became the Mother of the true God to have was conferred divinely upon Mary. But what mind can conceive, what tongue discuss, how great purity and sanctity it became that Virgin to have, who was to conceive, bear, suckle, and nourish the fountain of all cleanliness and of all virtue and sanctity, the Only-begotten of the most high Father?

Moreover, according to noble Aristotle, an equivalent cannot be rendered to gods, masters, and parents. But he is excepted from this who made His own mother, because He conferred more than He received. Yet this is clear—that He gave as much as it became so great and such a Son to give to His Mother. But who can comprehend what it became a Son of immense majesty, of uncircumscribed goodness, of most magnificent liberality, to give to so sweet and pre-elect a Mother? But He who gives to all freely and abundantly and upbraids no one (James 1:5)—what is He to be reckoned to have granted to her who so maternally suckled Him, so affectionately cherished Him, and exhibited the other exercises of maternal ministration so reverently?

*(p. 484)*

Further, the more a creature is conformed to God, so much the more gloriously it rises to the divine excellences. But what in created things is so like the eternal Father as she who bore the same Son with Him, who so without a man as He without a woman produced Him with the beauty of integrity, who also brought forth Him from whom the Holy Spirit is given and proceeds? Accordingly, those things which are more fruitful are reckoned by philosophers more excellent. Is she not therefore of a dignity in a manner infinite, who brought forth a Son of immense height, who poured forth the Craftsman of the world, the Lord of the globe, and the true God of all? Moreover, a parent naturally possesses a certain authority over offspring. What then is the sublimity of this Virgin, to whom even God according to something subjected Himself? For He was subject to her (Luke 2:51): He indeed to whom thousands of thousands minister, and ten thousand times a hundred thousand assist (Dan. 7:10). Finally, what glory does this confer on Mary—that through her the salvation of the whole world was begun and repaired?

## Article IX: An outpouring of the mind into the love of Mary

“You have wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse; you have wounded my heart” (Cant. 4:9). “My soul melted as she spoke” (Cant. 5:6)—O most beautiful of women, O sweetest Virgin, O most clean Mother. I have a word to you, O incomparable and Godlike Mary; I will pour out my heart like water before your face (Lam. 2:19), Lady; I will praise and exalt you, lovable, comely Maiden; I will confess to your name, most modest turtledove, most chaste dove; I will be glad and rejoice in you (Ps. 9:3), singular and also most celebrated spouse of God; I will marvel and contemplate you, most honest Mary. You are lovable to me and always to be desired, O Mary, who are full of goodness; from whose help from the beginning of life I have not been destitute; who while I was still a youth and not yet able to discern between good and evil conferred on me the affection of your name. For you are lovable, O Lady, whom God loved, and whose beauty He desired (Ps. 44:12); in whom I can find nothing other than benignity and sweetness, mercy and mildness, charity and honesty; who are all fair, having neither spot of mind nor of flesh; the ornament and glory of women, the honor and joy of men, our hope and advocate; who surpass the angelic minds in purity, who excel those supercelestial and simple spirits in sanctity; principal pitying one of the wretched, most ardent lover, and strong and most faithful protectress.

## Article X: Of the announcement made to the glorious Maiden

For now, the hour disposed from eternity being already at hand, the supreme Begetter, about to send His Only-begotten into this world, wishing to intimate the clement counsel of the most adorable and ever-living Trinity to the most happy Maiden, sends the Archangel to her (Luke 1:26), that he may most celebratedly salute her, and reveal to her the Incarnation of God's Only-begotten to be completed in her and also from her.

Now therefore hearken, Mary; attend, O blessed; acknowledge what the high God, the infallible Judge, thinks of you, of what sort He reckons you. Indeed He sends you His Only-begotten, whom assuredly He loves no less than Himself. Finally He gives you the Son whom from His own heart He produced equal to Himself in goodness and also consubstantial. This One He commits to you, O incomparable and most loving Mary, that you may nourish Him in the womb, suckle and cherish Him when born, handle Him and lead Him even to growth. He offers you great things, O most worthy spouse. Would that most wise Father accomplish these things, O Lady, unless He reckoned you fit and worthy? He entrusts to you a noble pledge, and deals with you confidently.

*(p. 485)*

This is the hour preordained from eternity, promised to the Patriarchs, foretold by the Prophets, and most desirable to the whole world. Presently the angel descends, salutes the little Virgin, venerates the most modest and most honest Maiden with a most joyful eulogy: "Hail," saying, "full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women" (Luke 1:28).

From of old such a salutation from the supernals has not been heard. To Gideon it was said: "The Lord is with you, O most valiant of men" (Judg. 6:12). But was it, "Full of grace," or, "Blessed among men"? For how was he full of grace, who wavering in faith and tempting God asked a sign? Further, how blessed among men, who working against the law made for himself a priestly ephod unto the scandal and ruin of himself and of his house? Finally, God bearing testimony to holy David: "I have found," He says, "David the son of Jesse, a man according to My heart" (Acts 13:22; 1 Kings 13:14). Yet afterward he fell. Solomon also was called Jedidiah—"beloved of the Lord" (2 Kings 12:25)—and yet this one became effeminate and an idolater. But you, O Mary, are saluted full of grace; yet you are to be more vehemently filled, nor will you ever by sinning fall from the fullness of grace. Moreover the Lord is with you; but specially exceedingly: for you are His friend, you His spouse, you His daughter, you His treasure; and we know that where the treasure of God is, there also is His heart (cf. Matt. 6:21). The Lord therefore is with you in intellect, through true wisdom; in affection, through most ardent charity; in memory, through stable and most sincere adhesion. Behold He will not slumber nor sleep that keeps you (Ps. 120:4), O most happy. For His ears are intent upon your vows, and His eyes also are open upon you day and night (2 Par. 6:40).

## Article XI: How the blessed God loved this Virgin

Union proceeds from likeness: because likeness effects love, but love joins the lover and the beloved. Now therefore I see, O glorious Virgin, that the more nearly and inwardly God unites Himself to you, so much the more vehement charity He embraces you with and the more ardently He loves you. But after that personal coupling of the Word and of humanity, I neither behold nor find another like to the union by which the sublime God joined Himself to you. For He descended, O lovable Mary, not now only to you, but into you also and even into the midst of your womb; in your bowels He chose for Himself a mansion and rest—He who in the fountain of the paternal heart, who in the light of the eternal mind and in the bosom of the Father, unchangeably consists. Finally He put on flesh from you, and was made something of yours, as offspring is something of the parent. Therefore, now if I rightly conceive, the conjunction of God and of you, O Mary, is not only through illumination or love or extrinsic adhesion, but through a certain real identity, intimate and also penetrative.

Moreover, charity makes communion: it keeps nothing as its own, but imparts its own riches to the beloved. Therefore, while I contemplate the communion of divine excellence exhibited to you from above by the whole Trinity, O happy Mary, I do not suffice to marvel at the greatness and also fervor of that charity with which the whole most holy Trinity loved you. For the Father sent and gave you His only and most dear Son. He moreover made you His true spouse, begetting from you the same and His natural Son. Further the Holy Spirit ineffably impregnated you with this adorable offspring, from whom He Himself truly and eternally proceeds. The Son also singularly venerated you, while He Himself the fountain of goods and of lights did not abhor your womb, shut Himself in it, and at last committed and subjected Himself to you.

## Article XII: That the delights of God are to be in Mary and to live with her

"He has rejoiced as a giant to run the way; His going out is from the end of heaven" (Ps. 18:6–7). For since, O pre-elect of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords desired your beauty (Ps. 44:12; Apoc. 19:16), it is no wonder if with exultation and haste He descended to you: since in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, He proceeded from the highest heaven into your womb.

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Further, if the delights of God are to be with the children of men (Prov. 8:31)—not assuredly with those who are flesh, in whom His spirit will not remain forever, because they are flesh (Gen. 6:3), but with those who worship and adore the Father in spirit and in truth (John 4:23)—how much more are His delights to be believed to be with you, in whom nothing carnal stood, who had been united to God by faith, transposed into Him by hope, and indissolubly bound to Him by charity? Again, it hides from no one (as I judge) that the mutual conversation of those who love is delightful. Further, the stronger the love, so much the more joyful this life. But who can measure or certainly conceive that mutual love of Christ and of His Mother? And for this neither can anyone comprehend how delicious their companionship was. To these things moreover, who is ignorant that the coupling of bridegroom and bride will be joyful? And who knows not that Mary is the singular spouse of Christ? Singularly therefore their conjunction was joyful and delicious. Further, who does not see that the mutual conversation of an only son and a most loving mother—and of those especially of whom neither ever offended the other, nor has what displeases (for in whom there is no fault, no dishonesty, but sincere virtue, and also consummate perfection)—is most delightful?

## Article XIII: Of the sanctification and purity of deified Mary

"The most High has sanctified His own tabernacle" (Ps. 45:5). A little before it was (unless I err) effectively enough shown that whatever it became her who was soon to be true Mother of the true God to have was conferred from heaven upon Mary, and that she was also sublimated by her Only-begotten with that honor with which it befits such a Mother to be honored by such a Son. Now we read in the old and new law that certain ones were sanctified in maternal wombs, as Scripture confesses of Jeremias and of John (Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:15); and we judge that this was communicated to them in figure of the sanctification of king Messias. Further, he nearer to Christ's nativity obtained assuredly ampler grace of sanctification. But to assert that grace given to ministers was denied to the mother I judge a crime. Therefore in her mother's womb Mary was holy, so much the more abundantly as before servants she stood a Mother to be venerated. But truly maidenly flesh was to be adorned with such excellent purity that it might be worthy to be united to the supersplendid Godhead: and therefore it had to be preserved from every stain utterly, that it might befit so great a ministry. Most excellently therefore does that befit you, O best Virgin, which in the Canticles the Spirit of truth asserts: "You are all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in you" (Cant. 4:7); and again: "You are beautiful, O my love, sweet and comely" (Cant. 6:3); and again: "As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters" (Cant. 2:2).

Since therefore so great a sanctity, as has now been introduced, became Mary who conceived and brought forth the Fount of sanctity, she ought also to have been immune from original fault, especially since it appears becoming that her Son also venerated her with this honor. To these things moreover, if she is all fair, therefore she received not even the spot of original fault, as innoxious from original and actual fault. Moreover, so great (as Anselm says) is the sanctity of Mary that under God a greater cannot be understood. Nothing therefore of fault anywhere obtained place in her. And this position they defended who were most devout to the sacred Virgin—Saint Anselm, most devout Bernard, Saint Thomas, and venerable Albert and Giles: because Mary's Son Christ, who is the power and wisdom of the Father (1 Cor. 1:24), effects all things in order, for He constituted all things in number, weight, and measure (Wis. 11:21); and for this He reserved to Himself this privilege of being born, that His Mother should be all fair, because she was free of every actual crime, mortal and also venial, nor ever displeased her Creator.

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## Article XIV: Whether the sanctity of Mary is so great that under God a greater cannot be understood

The sanctity of every created mind is finite, because no created entity can be infinite. Finally, when so great a sanctity of Mary is asserted that under God a greater cannot be thought, it is certain that this is said saving the created sanctity of the soul of Christ, which assuredly is greater than the sanctity of Mary and of all creatures. But since Christ is not a pure creature, therefore in the aforesaid speech His sanctity is excepted. Now the inquiry is whether the sanctity of Mary is so great that under God a more sublime sanctity cannot be conceived. And indeed, that the sanctity of no created nor angelic mind can be compared to her sanctity, I plainly judge from this—that incomparable sanctity became her who deserved to conceive and generate the adorable Creator of all. But perhaps it will seem to someone that under God a sanctity greater than hers can be and be understood: for if it can be, it can also be understood. For the sanctity of Mary stands distant by many degrees from the created sanctity of her Son, as has now been said, since even if she had obtained the sanctity of all the other elect, she could not be compared or equaled to the created sanctity of her Only-begotten. Therefore a greater sanctity than that given to Mary can be created and also given by God. For He could add to her sanctity as much as Peter received. But divine power is unlimited, which can found something worthier than every created essence: otherwise it would be constrained and exhaustible. Further Mary, as long as she dwelt in this vale of tears, was a wayfarer, and daily progressed.

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For the recognition of this inquiry, therefore, it is to be contemplated a little that the divine Wisdom produces all things in order, because He does all things in measure, number, and weight (Wis. 11:21). In the divine donation, therefore, the sublimity of the giver and the condition of the receiver are to be weighed. Therefore, if the majesty of the Word, and also Mary's lowliness which she had of herself, be wisely compared, it will shine, if I rightly contemplate, that according to the moderation of both, neither a greater nor a lesser sanctity became to be conferred on Mary. For a greater cannot be: not because God by His absolute power cannot grant a ampler one, not only to her but also to others; but it neither becomes, nor assuredly will be. Therefore a sanctity greater than Mary's, under the created sanctity of her Son, cannot be understood or be: both because even in the present life the greatness of her sanctity cannot be fully comprehended—even that which she obtained on earth (for the Incomprehensible, as Ambrose most excellently introduced, incomprehensibly worked in the mother)—and because what became the Mother of God was given her. From the things introduced therefore it is clear how true and subtle is the aforesaid testimony of Anselm concerning the excellence of the sanctity of blessed and venerable Mary. Yet, as far as I discern, if its truth ought to be understood deeply, a sharp intellect is needed.

## Article XV: That it does not derogate from the splendor of the Godhead—that is from the Son, who is the brightness of the Father—to be conceived and born of a woman

"All things are clean to the clean" (Tit. 1:15). But to the unclean, even clean things are unclean in turn. For those having a gross mind, and a darkened and carnal intellect, cannot behold a thing with a sincere eye. They therefore abhor to confess, and it seems utterly unworthy to them, that God descended into a feminine womb, was united to feminine flesh, finally lay in a womb not lacking natural superfluities, and also was so straitened and enclosed. But the grossness of their rudeness is plain. For sense attends the same thing otherwise, and intellect otherwise. Whence if with clear intellect they beheld the difference of that womb (which God pre-elected and prepared for Himself) from others—which with fleshly sense they see to agree with others—they would not judge so bestially. For what uncleanness except that of fault does the Lord abominate? Does He weigh the impurity of natural superfluities, and not rather the spot of the soul? Which if He also hates and avoids those, He is assuredly not everywhere. What wonder then if God did not abhor the Virgin's womb, whose immense divinity is present to all and penetrates all, and yet knows not to be clouded or stained by any, for it communicates with none materially, standing supersimple and invariable? Which if a sensible ray purge unclean things, remaining clean, and be united to filth without contracting filth: why should the supersplendid and uncircumscribed ray of the Godhead not be able to be united to the most pure bloods of the virgin and also sacred Maiden without loss of its own purity, especially since we confess the same union effected without Its variation or circumscription?

Finally, neither the spot of fault nor the splendor of virtue is agreed to be in flesh except by redundancy from the soul. For the will is the root of fault, and the origin of virtues. Therefore if you hasten to behold the dignity of Mary's flesh with serene eye, first contemplate the virtues of the soul. Further no virtue of the soul (unless I err) so vehemently overflows into the flesh and beautifies it as chastity, since also luxury most of all stains and corrupts it. By what judgment then did the little body of the most pure and most chaste Virgin stand horrible or abominable to the superclean and superbeautiful God? What to you, unclean and shameless Manichaeus, and to you also, impure Jew, is ignominious and vile, to us is glorious, lovable, and also sweet. The Incarnation of God is our deification; His descent is our advancement; His declining into the Virgin's womb is our sublimation to the throne of heaven.

## Article XVI: That those things which in the virgin flesh of the pre-elect Virgin seem humbler are adorned with more vehement divine beauty

The divine Apostle: "Those that we think to be the less honorable members of the body, about these we put more abundant honor: for they need it more" (1 Cor. 12:23). Just so the almighty and most wise Father, wishing to leave nothing unseemly and also nothing dishonest in His most loving daughter and singular spouse and most excellent Mother of His Only-begotten, made also that which by nature stood humbler more sublime by grace; and what considered in itself seemed more dishonest He divinely made more glorious. For what more vehemently needed to be adorned He assuredly decorated more fully.

Now therefore let no one with most unclean mind despise in you, O renowned and tender spouse, either sex, or womb, or breasts, while the organ of the feminine sex is hedged about with incomparable and most fragrant chastity: for it never experienced the impulse of culpable motion either from within *(p. 489)* or assuredly from without, but was more graciously adorned from heaven the more it is seen to have needed: for if you take away grace, there will be nothing in which you can discern it from others. Further, the Virgin's womb was venerated with incomparable and Godlike fecundity: for it brought forth Him who flowed from the mind of the eternal Father. Finally her breasts suckled Him who provides for all, sustains all; who gives to beasts their food, and fills every living creature with blessing (Ps. 146:9; 144:16). And so the most clement

Creator exalted flesh, and the members of your flesh, O Mary, that through it He might repair in men the beatitude of all the elect spirits, and supply it in the angels. Let my soul, I pray, contemplate you, love you, and venerate you, O divine Mary.

## Article XVII: Of the perpetual and most excellent virginity of the Mother

"A garden enclosed art thou, my sister, my spouse, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed" (Cant. 4:12). It was altogether fitting (unless I am mistaken) that her flesh should be incorrupt in conception, unharmed in childbirth, and likewise untouched after childbirth, who merited to bear the author of salvation for the broken, the stained and the wounded. Moreover, she who had been chosen to bring forth the Holy of Holies and the Fountain of all nobility was by no means to suffer, through conception or childbirth, any loss, or indeed any stain of baseness. For a mother wholly pure befitted the cause and origin of all cleanness. Furthermore, it is fitting that He should be born without any fault who is the destroyer of all sin, and likewise the redeemer of sinners. And it was He whom Mary conceived and bore. She therefore never knew man; and she who had first conceived without concupiscence and without any touching of her modesty was also to bring forth without pain and without corruption. Again, He who was begotten of the Father without a mother had also to be born of a mother without a father: so that, as far as might be and as is fitting, the temporal and maternal generation should correspond to the heavenly and paternal.

As, therefore, most worthy Mary, the enclosures of modesty remained in the conception of Christ, so too in childbirth the gate of the virgin's womb remained closed and inviolate. And in these things God so possessed you that henceforth no use of a woman was permitted to you. For who would touch, or indeed approach, with unchaste or lustful flesh the temple of the Godhead, the dwelling of the Trinity, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the maternal tabernacle of the Son of God?

You, O most happy Mary, are the garden enclosed, open to God alone and opened from nowhere else: from which flowed forth that most flowering Flower, by whose greenness the dried-up nature of the human race flowered again and was brought back to the loveliness of a flowering above the heavens. A Flower most fragrant indeed, by its own sweetness extinguishing the stench of every sin, adorning its world and likewise saving it by its sweetness and strength. For "as the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons," O Mary (Cant. 2:3). Finally, O most gentle mind, O most serene Mary, you are the fountain sealed: the fountain from whose outflow came that most pure stream which came forth also from the light of the Father's heart. Do you not reckon the Son of Mary a stream, who waters dry minds, washes the foul, makes fruitful and sanctifies the barren? Truly, as Christ entered the room and went out of it with the doors shut, so it must be believed that Christ entered and likewise went forth while the virginal womb remained closed and whole (John 20:19, 26). He could do this who brought forth all things from nothing, who ordered all things, who commands all, whom all things obey and nothing resists. Hail, Mary, more excellent than all praise; rejoice, chosen beforehand by God, more sublime than all honor; rejoice, most lovable one, full of all sweetness and more merciful than all.

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## Article XVIII: Of the fruitfulness of the incomparable Mary

Every good is diffusive of itself. Moreover, what is more excellent is also more fruitful; and likewise, what is productive of a better offspring is to be reckoned altogether more worthy. Indeed, there now comes to my mind what I know to be famous and wise among the philosophers. They say that two properties chiefly belong to the Godhead, namely causality and providence. In short, nothing is more causal than God, nothing more fruitful than He: for He stands as the fountain-goodness of all goodnesses; and the more like Him anything is among created beings, the nearer it most certainly is to Him in dignity and in Godlike likeness. But every creature, as in goodness so also in fruitfulness, falls infinitely short of God according to nature. If,

then, any creature should be productive, not of an offspring merely like His, but of the very same offspring as God, there is no doubt that it has been made most like to the Godhead, and has received a Godlike excellence greater than can be thought or uttered. But in what has gone before (if I remember rightly) it was abundantly declared that the same Son who was eternally begotten of the Father was born in time of Mary; and as God is Father, so a human being is mother, and she is to be held the Mother of the true God. For the same Christ who is the Son of the Father, His wisdom and power, is also the Only-begotten of Mary.

Now therefore rejoice, and be glad beyond all thinking, O most divine Mary, for in the whole universe of creatures there is none that can be compared to your fruitfulness.

The most elegant of the philosophers count four universal and most worthy causes: God, the intelligence, the noble soul (which they supposed to be the soul of the heaven), and universal nature, which, as they explain, is the power of the stars and spheres bound up with their substances. But even if, as they claim, there were a soul of the heaven, still none of these divine universal causes after God, nor any other cause, can be equaled to your causal fruitfulness, O most illustrious Mary. For you brought forth their maker, and bore their Creator: He who founded heaven and earth, who set in order the stars and the elements, who in short created all things, deigned to be born of you, O happy Mary; He who gave causal fruitfulness to all things flowed forth from your most blessed fruitfulness.

Finally, whence is there such fruitfulness in you, unless there were also in you a corresponding goodness? But it is fitting that this be bestowed by grace, not by nature. Blessed therefore, O Mary, is the fruit of your womb (Luke 1:42), which stands more fruitful than heaven and the sun and every creature.

Love Him, O most desirable spouse, give Him thanks, embrace Him who has so conformed you to Himself, who has conferred on you so incomparable a grace, and has so vehemently preferred you to every creature. You are bound to love Him, but you cannot love Him enough: for not by your merits, but purely by His preventing grace, did He impart these things to you, O most lovable Mother.

## Article XIX: Of the comparison of the fruitfulness of the holy Virgin with the fruitfulness of the eternal Father

The Father begot the Son from whom all nature proceeded into being: for all things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing (John 1:3). And Mary brought forth Him through whom every creature attained to being well, perfectly and blessedly. The Father begot the Creator of all, and the Virgin Mother bore the Saviour of all. As God made the world through His Son, so through Mary He remade it when it had perished.

Behold, Mary, your glory (as I see it) surpasses all glory. For you brought forth your own Creator, and gave birth to your Saviour; and He who created all things fashioned Himself from you. Through the fruit of your immaculate and sweet womb the world is redeemed, hell is despoiled, heaven is filled, death dies, life is restored. He who *(p. 491)* by Himself brought forth the natures of all things from nothing, and without any intermediary freely gave to all their being and their form, willed to repair and remake nothing at all without you and your cooperation, O more than happy Mary. For His goodness chose you and chose you beforehand, loved you and loved you beforehand. He was well pleased in you. And He who at last created you rested in your tabernacle (Ecclus. 24:12); and He came forth from the midst of your most chaste and most fruitful womb in true humanity, who had flowed forth from the most pure and superabundantly fruitful heart of the Father in true divinity, the one divine Person remaining none the less in both.

## Article XX: How every creature is bound to venerate and to love Mary

The perfection of every created nature lies in this, that it be made like its Creator as far as its powers allow; for what is more like Him is also judged more perfect. But if the creature is not only conformed to the

Creator, but the Maker of all things Himself deigns besides to be made like the creature He has fashioned, then the more kindly this is believed to be in the majesty of the Creator, and the fuller of condescension, the larger and the more surpassing is the eminence it confers upon the creature. And now through you, O truly most worthy and true Mother of the true God, God the Creator has made Himself like His creature, taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), and coming forth in the truth of human nature from the virginal chamber of your royal hall. Let every creature therefore, O Mary, exult in you and because of you: for Him whom to imitate in any way at all is its highest perfection, it has, through you, received as like to itself (even in the truth of species and nature, or at least according to genus). Once the condition of the creature lay low, and stood infinitely distant from the height of Him who created it; but now through you, O holy, sweet and comely Virgin, the Creator and the creature have come together into the unity of a Person; and the Creator has been made not merely like the creature, but the same with it (that is, one in Person, though not the same in nature also).

Lastly, the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars, the very elements too and the signs of heaven, and likewise every creature of the world, which were made for the service of all nations to this end, that man might obey and serve God alone, seemed to have fallen into a certain ignobleness and unseemliness when they ministered no longer to the worshippers of God and the faithful, but to idolaters. But through you, O Mary, they rejoice to have regained their natural nobility and the end for which they were by nature established, since you brought forth the Light, the Saviour and Lord of the world, by whom the worship of demons was cast off, their deceit laid bare, and the knowledge of the true Creator of all restored. Moreover, when through you they held their own Maker enclosed within themselves, and served Him in His own Person, they seem to have flowered again with a greener beauty, and to have received a loftier loveliness. All things therefore are bound to love you, O Mary, and each one of them to honour you, through whom the whole world has been adorned.

## Article XXI: How the whole human race is bound to embrace Mary with singular love and to venerate her with special honor

The law of nature demands and reason dictates that anyone love that through which he is perfected and obtains goodness and benefits. Further, the more he receives, so much assuredly the more ardent love of that it is just to have. Now therefore behold what goods the human race has obtained through Mary, if you desire to know with what and how great charity she is to be loved by us. For what would it profit to be created or to be through the Word of God, if it did not happen to be repaired and to be well through Mary’s Son? I would rather, I confess, O Lady, not have been created through the Father’s Word, than, having been created, not have been repaired and reborn through your Son. Through Mary therefore I am freed from Immortal death, and led back to the lost heavenly and eternal beatitude. For every salvation was begun through Mary, and consummated through Mary’s Son.

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Finally through Mary human nature, which once lay under every vileness, contemptibility, and misery, obtained incomparable honor and most excellent and certainly Godlike dignity: for through her it was exalted and also assumed above every angelic height, and—to say all—above every creature also, even unto the hypostatic union of the Word. There is finally nothing in which an angel may despise man, or assuredly, as in preceding ages, permit himself to be adored by him, while in Him who alone is truly to be adored by every creature he sees and venerates not the likeness of his own nature, but the form of our substance. O high Lady, how bound to you is the race of men! how much it is bound to love and honor you! Moreover this from the beginning was imparted to man as singular and for excellent glory—that he was formed to the image and likeness of his God (Gen. 1:26). For if the perfection of a creature is somehow to be assimilated to the Creator, it will be utterly great sublimity also to be produced to His image and likeness. Yet this assimilation

is only imitative, not natural—indeed of infinite falling short: because from the Creator's majesty the condition of the creature always infinitely distances and fails. But what affords man a ampler likeness with God perfects him more vehemently and exalts him more. But you, O Mother of fair love (Ecclus. 24:24), bore our God like to us according to the species and truth of nature; through you our God was made our brother; through you the Judge of the world mixed and fitted Himself to the conversation and society of men; through you we have been made more like to God than all the entities of the world, and the Lord of all deigned to become one of us. Therefore we are bound exceedingly to love you, O Mary, who also cherished our Lord and Savior in the womb, O most blessed, and suckled Him when born; and you are our most faithful advocate with Him: for between Himself and us the Judge of the age has set you as mediatrix.

Moreover the flesh of Christ, which truly is the food by which our soul is sustained and nourished (John 6), and eternal life is granted us, by which grace is renewed, devotion cherished, fault remitted, mercy obtained: how much this confers on us, Mary, how much it bestows! how useful, how necessary it is! Yet it descended to us from you: for it stands assumed from your blessed and virgin womb. With this same flesh which Christ took from your most sacred belly He feeds, heals, and comforts our spirit.

## Article XXII: That the sacred womb of the divine Virgin is most fittingly called the throne of God

"He hath set his tabernacle in the sun: and he as a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber" (Ps. 18:6). I remember having read in the Scriptures of truth, as it now comes to mind, of three things that are thrones of God; for thrones signify nothing other than seats. First, then, the thrones and seats of God are those supermundane minds which in the highest heavenly hierarchy have received the lowest order. And again it is written: "Heaven is my throne" (Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:49); and nothing at all forbids this to be taken also of the material and empyrean heaven. For that is a throne to God, and He is said to be and to reside in it in a singular manner: not, indeed, because His substance is contained or His essence circumscribed there, but because of the eminence of His working there, and the more abundant communication of the divine munificence. Further, the soul of the just man is the seat of wisdom (Wis. 7), and above all of that Wisdom which is Christ; for He is the wisdom and the power of the Father (1 Cor. 1:24).

But now I will speak confidently to you, O truly sublime and lovable Mary, of what I have conceived with a faithful mind concerning your dignity and glory. None of these can be called the throne of God so singularly, so wonderfully, so excellently, as your blessed womb. For does any of them *(p. 493)* contain God within bounds? Or is any of them the throne of God because it really encloses Him within itself, and not rather by reason of illumination or of operation, or at least of special grace? Otherwise, if a creature could be called the throne of God because it has Him within itself by His essence, then, since His unlimited nature is present in all things, every one of them would be a throne of God. But behold, O chosen and only one of God, He whom the whole world does not contain shut Himself within your most chaste womb, and the whole Godhead abode and rested in you bodily; and God sat in you, fitted to a mother's narrow room, who cannot be measured even among the Thrones above the heavens. O happy, O lovable and more than lovable, and truly incomparable Mary, to whom God, to whom nothing is equal, nothing like, nothing at all proportionate, so condescendingly and so mercifully measured and fitted Himself, united Himself, enclosed Himself, and (as may truly be said, though it is beyond all reckoning) made Himself subject! O happy womb (Luke 11:27), which carried Him who sustains the world and governs all things; which nourished within itself Him on whom the eyes of all hope, and who gives them their meat in due season (Ps. 144:15); Him who rules, orders, holds together and preserves heaven and earth.

## Article XXIII: A commendation of the virginal and maternal womb of the glorious Maiden and divine Virgin

“Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and weighed the heavens with his palm? Who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?” (Isa. 40:12). These words were brought forward by the blessed Prophet to set forth the incomparable excellence, the uncircumscribed height, and the wholly omnipotent power of the eternal and supreme Godhead. But behold, O Godlike Mary: He who does all these things, who measures the spheres with His palm, who founded the heights of the heavens, the expanses of the lands and the depths of the seas, at whose look the pillars of heaven too and the foundations of the world tremble (Job 26:11) (for He looketh upon the earth, and maketh it tremble; He toucheth the mountains, and they smoke: Ps. 103:32), was measured, was bounded, was enclosed in your most glorious and most clean womb: not indeed in His own nature, but in the nature He assumed. And the deeper the self-emptying of His majesty, O Mary, the greater, surely (unless I am mistaken), has your exaltation become.

Hail, most sacred womb of the most pure Virgin, bride chamber of the heavenly Bridegroom, chamber of God the Father, temple of His Son, sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, resting place of the Godhead, tabernacle of the salvation of all, garden of delights, paradise of joys, mystery of divine wonders! From you light has risen for the world (Ps. 96:11), from you the salvation of men was born; from you the world enclosed its own Creator within itself, and received its Deliverer; from you the Fountain of all joy came forth; from you we rejoice to have received the matter of unceasing glory and the gladness of eternal happiness. Let every age therefore love and venerate your womb, as a chosen sanctuary and the temple of God, from which the stream that waters and quickens all things, the most beautiful Flower that adorns and likewise renews all things, deigned to come forth and be born.

## Article XXIV: How Mary ought to be contemplated by a serene lover

Knowledge comes about through likeness and assimilation; and so contemplation cannot be sincere unless the one who contemplates is in some way conformed to what he contemplates. “For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul” (Wis. 1:4), since the receiver must be fitted to what is received. Wisdom, moreover, is a divine possession: how then shall it be able to enter a malign and perverse mind?

*(p. 494)*

For even if such a mind may gain a wisdom without form, it will by no means be able to gain the wisdom that is formed and true. “All wisdom is from the Lord God” (Ecclus. 1:1), and He in no wise grants to an unclean and arid mind that chaste and affectionate wisdom which alone is truly wisdom. Neither Christ, then, who is holy in His substance and is besides superessential holiness itself, nor His most sacred Mother, can be beheld except by a chaste and serene mind. But who (to leave aside now the supernatural holiness which is Christ) is able to look worthily upon the holiness of His chosen Mother? I confess that I am neither fit for it nor equal to it. Yet, though I be, alas, an unworthy praiser, I will none the less speak out what I have conceived.

For, as the great and divine Dionysius teaches us (On the Divine Names, ch. 7), we go forward from creatures to the contemplation of the Creator by a threefold way: namely, by causality, by affirmation and by removal. For an effect makes its cause known, since every effect is a certain participated likeness of its cause. Then it is right to acknowledge in God, as in the causal and fontal principle of the universe, the perfections of all secondary things. And again we must remove these same perfections from Him, since He is supersubstantially and infinitely higher than all things, and is incomprehensible and beyond all naming. On the way of affirmation, therefore, the perfection of a created thing is to be ascribed to God in such a manner that whatever it contains of defect and of ignobleness is banished far from God, and whatever remains of dignity is held to be in God by an excellence in every way complete. For we see in created things being, living, understanding, light, wisdom and happiness, but with some imperfection. It is fitting, then, to ascribe to God what is of perfection in them, and to take from Him what they have of defect.

If then, O lover of Mary, you strive to behold her with a worthy gaze, make haste to go to the contemplation of her by the three ways set out above, and fix your sincere mind on her in a Godlike manner. Of Mary's causality, which is her virginal and maternal fruitfulness, I remember having treated a little before, as well as I could (Art. 18); and, if I hold it rightly, it was shown that neither the causality of the heavens, nor the fruitfulness of the stars and planets, nor the seminal reason of the elements, can be compared with the fruitfulness of the holy Virgin, who brought forth from her happy womb the Maker of all these and the Fountain of every created good.

Go forward further, then, to the contemplation of Mary by affirmation, in this way. Consider the order and the qualities of all women and virgins, and whatever of dignity and perfection you find in them, ascribe to Mary by way of excellence. In some, virginity is to be praised, but it is barren; in others, fruitfulness is to be commended, but it is subject to corruption. Again, in some, integrity kept even in marriage is to be admired, and in some the honourable state of widowhood is to be revered. And these things belong chiefly to the comeliness of the body. All these perfections befit Mary in a surpassing degree. She is mother and virgin: but a virgin of virgins, surpassing the purity of the angels; and a mother through whose offspring all fruitfulness is saved, and even the integrity of the angels made good. Again, having a spouse, she remained untouched; and being a widow, she did not live in pleasures. And if you look to the virtue of the soul, "there was not found the like to her", for she embraces in an eminent degree the virtues of each one. What is humbler than she, to whom God first and most excellently bowed Himself down? What purer than she, whose flesh the Only-begotten, the brightness of the Father, did not shrink from uniting to His own Godhead? What more ardent in divine charity and in the love of neighbour than she, who unceasingly longed for the Incarnation of God, and drew God into herself and (if I may so say) transformed Him? What, too, fuller of faith than she, who, thinking herself the least of all, yet in no way doubted that she would conceive God, with the brightness of her modesty kept safe? You, O happy and honourable Mary, are the pattern of life, the image of the virtues, *(p. 495)* the mirror of ripeness and honour. To you indeed it altogether belongs, what we proclaim so abundantly in your praise: "As the vine I have brought forth a pleasant odour: and my flowers are the fruit of honour and riches" (Ecclus. 24:23). For you, O most renowned Bride, like a most fruitful vine, brought forth the Fountain of all sweetness; and your flowers are the fruit of honour and riches, since without touch or loss of modesty and honour you bore Christ the King, who is the Flower that renews and adorns all things.

Further, take pains so to behold Mary by removal that you take far from her every imperfection that it has befallen you to find in others. Look, I urge you, now and again into the books of wisdom of wise Solomon, and consider as well as you can the distinction between the good woman and the wicked. For a good woman is above every gift, and there is no gift that can be equal to her; blessed besides is he who has deserved to obtain her (Ecclus. 26:1–3). Indeed, to speak the truth, what in the whole of created being can be thought more lovable than a comely, modest and devout maiden? For the more inclined to fall and the more liable to fail she appears by her sex and nature, the more lovable most certainly is she, and the more excellent, by virtue and grace. Yet among women there are those in whom wantonness and lust are found, dishonour and corruption, levity and wandering, folly and contention; and the other imperfections of their flesh and mind it neither profits nor am I able to number. If, then, you desire to see the most sweet Mary with a chaste and clean heart, not only remove these imperfections from her, but bestow on her also, in a surpassing degree, the virtues that are opposed to them. Behold, if you can, a valiant and chosen woman, fragrant with chastity, incomparable in honour, inviolate in integrity, steadfast; adorned likewise with wisdom and knowledge, meek, humble, beautiful in body and holy in mind: what is more to be desired than she? Does it not seem to you fitting and worthy that God, the more than beautiful Fountain of all comeliness, should have desired her beauty (Ps. 44:12)? For the frailer a woman encompassed with these virtues and upheld by these excellences was according to nature or sex, or the nearer to the flesh, or the more changeable in sense, the more steadfast, the more divine and the more eminent she has been made from above and by God.

Spare me now, therefore, I pray, O Mary, Lady of the world and Queen of heaven, me the most unclean and the vilest of all who love you and serve you, that I, most foul, torn by so many turnings away from God, wounded by so many crimes, and stained with such great uncleannesses, dare with so impure and so shameless a mind to contemplate you, the most beautiful and most holy, or presume to name you with most polluted lips, or, unskilled in knowledge and in speech, do not fear to praise you further.

## Article XXV: That after God there is nothing in the whole of things more lovable than Mary, nothing more excellent; nay, that she is worthier than all, and more to be venerated

"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). This question about you, O Mary, was framed by the Holy Spirit to magnify and proclaim your excellence. For of you your Son and Bridegroom says: "One is my dove, my perfect one" (Cant. 6:8). You come forth like the morning rising, for you were made ready and chosen beforehand to bring the true light into the world and to bring forth the day that knows no darkening. Again, you are fair as the moon, since your beauty is most like the beauty of the true Sun. You are bright, too, as the sun: the Sun, I mean, of justice (Mal. 4:2), Christ the Lord, who rose from you; for as He is incomparable among men, so are you among women. Moreover, to your enemies, the enemies, that is, of the virtues, and above all to him who is king over all the children of pride (Job 41:25), and by whose envy death came *(p. 496)* into the world (Wis. 2:24), you are terrible; but to us you are sweet and lovable.

I remember having said in what went before (Art. 14), concerning the grace and dignity of Mary, how it may be called infinite, and so great that a greater cannot be conceived under God. For it is plain that nothing among creatures can be more like God or nearer to Him than the Mother of God.

O most illustrious and most high Lady, you are exceedingly lovable and sweet to us; and, to speak the truth, in a certain respect you have a sweeter savour for us than God Himself, though this comes about not on God's part but on ours. For in God your Son, O Mary, we find not only the bowels of mercy, but also the rigour of justice and a judicial power that leaves no evil unexamined or unpunished (Job 24:12). "He is terrible in his counsels over the sons of men" (Ps. 65:5); "incomprehensible are his judgments, and unsearchable his ways" (Rom. 11:33). And who knows whether he is worthy of love or of hatred (Eccles. 9:1)? Let the perfect man, then, burning with charity, love God as a father. Let the servant who is making progress be careful, and with initial fear hasten to go forward to love. And let the beginner, bewailing his faults and struggling against his vices, work out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), by no means forgetting how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). But the transgressor and despiser, who is glad when he has done evil and rejoices in most wicked things (Prov. 2:14), let him be troubled and wither away, and groan within himself for anguish of spirit (Wis. 5:2–3), and ponder what is to come upon him. To all these God is terrible, though more to some and less to others. But you, O blessed Mary, you are to these also their one refreshment and singular solace; you are altogether lovable and sweet, not only to the just and devout, but to the wretched also, and even to those in despair.

For what has man found in you that is hard, or even severe? Since you are wholly gentle and kind, and your bowels seem to be transformed into sweetness and clemency. For though you are of such exceeding purity that, while still dwelling upon earth, you were fit to furnish God with the matter of His Incarnation, and, having been taken hence, have deserved to draw near and be joined immediately to the seat of the supreme King and to the throne of the Trinity, yet the wretched sinner, however contemptible and unclean, if he cries out to you, sighing with a penitent mind and a compunct heart, you do not despise or forsake, but receive and cherish, and, interceding for him, most faithfully reconcile him to the Judge. O how many wretched, how many wicked, how many at last in despair, rejoice through you, O merciful Mary, to have recovered salvation and to have come to life again!

## Article XXVI: How greatly human flesh has been ennobled by the most clean flesh of the most holy Virgin

“The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich, he humbleth and he exalteth. He raiseth up the needy from the dust, and lifteth up the poor from the dunghill” (1 Kings 2:7–8). In this, O adorable and blessed God, the freedom of your omnipotence shines out most splendidly in its working: that what the nature of beings does not possess you bring about in things so eminently that the things which by nature are lowest, or at least sinking downward, you make high, and in turn supreme, through your grace alone.

Do not be too much cast down, O man. Many, indeed, have said and written many things of the misery of your condition; but there is not so much either of misery or of vileness in your flesh, whether through fault or through nature, as the more than merciful Creator has deigned to bestow upon that same flesh of nobility and of happiness, through the flesh, in the flesh and from the flesh of the sacred and most divine Mary.

You must remember, indeed, what Scripture asserts and declares of you because of the condition of the flesh. Or are you unaware of what the sentence brought down to you from heaven testifies? For it began with you, saying: “Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return” (Gen. 3:19); and again: “My spirit shall not remain in man, because he is flesh” (Gen. 6:3); and *(p. 497)* once more: “The corruptible body is a load upon the soul” (Wis. 9:15); and: “Why is earth and ashes proud?” (Ecclus. 10:9); and many things to the same effect. Further, the daily and pitiable necessities of man, which flow chiefly from the needs of the body, and its natural superfluities too, its instabilities and frailties, show plainly how pitiable and how liable to failure is the condition of man. Yet “not as the offence, so also the gift”: for “where sin abounded, grace did more abound” (Rom. 5:15, 20). And therefore, O man, that you be not ungrateful, look by what means and how your flesh has been restored and ennobled. The dignity and happiness of a creature is its union with the Creator and its drawing near to Him; and its separation from Him is its misery. Consider, then, by what means and in what manner your flesh has been reunited to God and brought nearer to Him.

Through you, O gracious and most adorned Mary, our flesh too is held to have been brought nearer to the Godhead than the angelic mind; for it is believed to have been taken up into the subsistence of the Word. “The Word,” moreover, “was made” not angel but “flesh” (John 1:14). Again, when the Most High willed to pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28), He first filled with Himself the most chaste womb of your flesh; and coming forth from there, He enlightened every man that cometh into this world (John 1:9); and through your flesh, Mary, the happiness above the world was restored, the flesh which in all others was subject to so many faults and miseries.

O incomparable glory, and unutterable praise, of the virginal flesh of the holy Maiden, a small portion of which, once assumed, was sufficient to loose the sins of all ages! When, O blessed and kind Mary, I contemplate the glory of your body, I wonder at it as much as I can, but I am not able to wonder enough. God came, and chose for Himself a dwelling in your flesh; there He dwelt, there He rested; He put it on and assumed it; He deigned at last to be nourished by it, and to touch it, kiss it and embrace it. Through it He did not disdain to restore the mansions above the stars, to break the bars of hell, and to refresh the minds of the elect while they are on the way; He did not shrink, either, from taking on its defects that bring no reproach, and from making Himself like His brethren in all things, sin excepted (Heb. 2:17).

## Article XXVII: Of the conception by which the most clean Virgin conceived the Only-begotten of God

“The Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth: a woman shall compass a man” (Jer. 31:22), and shall not receive it from elsewhere. O new thing indeed, the most wonderful and the highest of all the wonders of God, when a woman, not of the seed of man but by the shining of the divine light, in an untouched womb, compassed, embraced and conceived not only a child but a man! A man, I say, in wisdom, not in age; in the

dignity of virtue, not in the size of the body. A new thing, when things supremely and infinitely distant are joined without any mean, in the one suppositum; when the most simple Godhead is joined, with no distance between, to human flesh, than which nothing in the whole universe is more composite.

God most high has brought about five unions, wonderful in the extreme and beyond compare: of faith with reason; of virginity with motherhood; of the body of Christ with the sensible form of the bread transubstantiated; of the created mind with the divine essence, by which in the fatherland it beholds that essence face to face; and of the Word with the manhood, by which one hypostasis is made of the two. But this fifth is more wonderful than the four before it. For in it there is a joining of the created and the uncreated; and though this is rightly held to be in the fourth as well, yet that union is not hypostatic, as though one thing simply, or by way of subsistence, resulted from the blessed intellect and the divine essence. For that union regards second act, which is acting, such as enjoying, seeing and loving; but the fifth is personal, and regards first act, which is being, since the manhood was assumed into the subsistence of the Word. And in the three former wonderful unions *(p. 498)* it is only a created thing that is coupled with a created being.

But now, O most sweet and most beloved Virgin, sublime and happy Mary, rejoice in the Lord. Make ready the hall for the King, O Queen; prepare the chamber for the Bridegroom; adorn your bride chamber, O Virgin daughter of Sion, and receive Christ the King, conceive the Messiah. Do not fear, Mary, to consent to the Archangel. Say to him, O most humble mind: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38); and also: “Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth” (Cant. 1:1); and again: “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees” (Cant. 5:1). Rejoice, Mary, to whom it is offered from heaven, and whose consent is awaited, that the Son of God may be made flesh in you and of you. O exceedingly blessed one, by whom the Maker of the world, the Ruler of the universe, the Lord of the angels, desires to be conceived and deigns to be made flesh! O modest, devout and most serene Maiden, lover of solitude, zealous for inward quiet and true peace, and yet most tenderly desirous of the salvation of all mankind! Behold, there comes and descends to you, or rather into you, the Lord of hosts, to whom the whole multitude of the heavenly ranks sings for joy (Job 38:7); and now He who sits upon the Cherubim (Ps. 79:2), whose seats are the Thrones, nay rather He who is immense, and whom the heavens of heavens cannot contain (2 Paral. 6:18), has chosen in you the dwelling He desired and has taken it up. For the Prince of peace and Author of quiet delights to be with the peaceable and the quiet; and the heavenly and most secret Bridegroom loves a modest and solitary bride. Truly, for such a Bridegroom and such a bride it is fitting that she should say to the Bridegroom: “My beloved to me, and I to him, who feedeth among the lilies” (Cant. 2:16).

## Article XXVIII: How Christ the Lord dwelt in the virginal womb of His sacred Mother

“The voice of my beloved knocking: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the nights” (Cant. 5:2). He has rejoiced indeed as a giant to run the way (Ps. 18:6); but until she consents, He neither enters nor descends. And so, while the Archangel speaks to the Virgin, the Only-begotten of God, desiring her beauty, invites her by a most hidden inspiration, and pours into her the grace to open to Him by faith and to incline her consent. And she, attending to what the Lord God speaks within her (Ps. 84:9), says: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). And at once the power of the Most High prepares a body for the Only-begotten from the most pure blood of the sacred Maiden, and in the same instant organizes it most perfectly, pours into it a most blessed soul, and at that same instant unites both to the Word; and the Son assumed that nature as one, true and specific nature. And therefore whatever belongs to the perfection of the soul’s nature was created together with this more than happy soul, and more besides; for from the beginning of its creation it beheld the Godhead face to face, and knew all the mysteries of the graces and the sacraments most excellently.

This is the man, O Lady Mary, whom you compassed in your holy womb (Jer. 31:22). Is it not right that He should be called a man, in whom the fullness of all virtues, and wisdom too and knowledge, were perfectly present? O happy Mother, who deserved to carry this offspring! O glorious womb, in which that noble pledge rested! O rich Mary, who carried shut up within you that incomparable and most precious ransom of the world, to whose dignity the whole world cannot be compared; in whose chaste bowels the heavenly Bridegroom, made a little infant, was nourished and grew, and came to the size fit for birth!

How, O wonderful and unutterable Mary, are we to believe that God cherished your mind during those nine months, enlightening it, inflaming it, transforming it into Himself, whose flesh you were thus nourishing within you? Most certainly the Incomprehensible was then working in you in a manner wholly beyond comprehension. For He who abides unchangeably in the *(p. 499)* bosom of the Father (John 1:18) and in the heart of the supreme Begetter, who is the intelligible Utterance of the Father's mind, His full Image, His perfect Splendour and only Offspring, rested in the midst of your womb, made your son as well.

And how strong a fragrance of sweetness, how great a clemency, and how vast an affection of charity, must your bowels be thought to have gained from so long a dwelling of God within you, O blessed Mary! For if anyone holding something fragrant in his hand draws a sweetness from it, and when he has put it away still keeps traces of its sweetness, how much more, O Queen of heaven, most loving, chosen and only one of God, is it right and just to believe that you drew a fragrance of perfume, an overflowing of tenderness, and a superabundance of charity, from so great an indwelling in you of Him who is the fontal source of all the sweetness in the universe, whose property it is to have mercy, and who is good by nature and charity by essence? Most fittingly, I confess, O Mary, is that applied to you which is written: "While the king was at his repose, my spikenard sent forth the odour thereof" (Cant. 1:11); and again: "I gave a sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatical balm" (Ecclus. 24:20). Further, if the Lord smelled the sweet savour of a holocaust of holiness (Gen. 8:21), how shall He not be thought to have smelled the most fragrant savour of the chastity of your most clean flesh as well, to say nothing for a moment of your spirit? He smelled it indeed, was delighted and drawn by it. And behold, He whose strength is like the rhinoceros (Num. 23:22) is taken by a most chaste Virgin, and (if I may so speak) drawn and caught, as though overcome. Indeed, so did Mary's charity draw God down into this valley of the world, and so move Him, that not unfittingly the heavenly Bridegroom willed to say to her: "Thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse" (Cant. 4:9); and again: "Turn away thy eyes from me, for they have made me flee away" (Cant. 6:4).

What then, O most blessed Mary, was your inward joy in return, and how abundant, when you felt the most sacred body of Christ grow within you, move and be nourished; when you bore the Fountain of gladness, the King of glory and the Angel of peace in your own most sweet and most clean womb, the pledge of your womb, your fruit and your son? The stream of the river, unless I am mistaken, made glad the hall, the dwelling and the bride chamber of the King and Bridegroom (Ps. 45:5).

## Article XXIX: Of the birth of Him who is desired by all nations

"Bethlehem, city of the most high God, out of thee shall he come forth that is to be the ruler in Israel; and his going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity; and he shall be magnified in the midst of the whole earth; and there shall be peace in our land when he shall come" (Mich. 5:2, 4–5). "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad" (Ps. 95:11); shout with joy to the Lord, all you sons of God (Job 38:7). Praise Him, sun and moon, with the morning stars (Ps. 148:3); magnify God, all you host of heaven and all the stars; dance for joy, every creature: for "behold, I bring you tidings of great joy: for this day is born to you" Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10–11), the King Messiah, the expectation of the nations (Gen. 49:10) and the desired of them (Agg. 2:8). There has risen upon the world the eternal light, everlasting salvation, immense honour: for "God himself will come and will save us" (Isa. 35:4). Jerusalem, why do you waste away with grief? "Is there no counsellor in thee," because sorrow has made you new (Mich. 4:9)? Know that because of

His exceeding charity wherewith God loved you (Eph. 2:4), He has sent you His Son as your deliverer. Now therefore, “hear, O ye heavens, the things I speak; let the earth give ear to the words of my mouth” (Deut. 32:1). Rejoice, O world, and receive God your Creator: you who were once the slave of the prince of darkness and served him, become now the servant of the King of kings, of the Light of lights and the Lord of heaven; minister to Him.

Now then, holy Virgin, divine Mother, enlighten the world; pour out and bring forth the eternal light hidden in you; show to the world its Maker. “Let the earth be opened, and bud forth a saviour” (Isa. 45:8): bring forth for men the Prince of life and salvation, the destroyer of death, of hell and of despair, O truly *(p. 500)* incomparably happy Mary, who conceive without concupiscence, carry without heaviness, and bring forth without pain, abiding everywhere untouched, entire and inviolate; in whose conception the holy Trinity is at work, at whose childbirth the purity of the angels sings; who in conception were consecrated to God, and in childbirth and after childbirth remain so enclosed and fortified that it is in no way lawful for any other henceforth to approach you, or to use you as a woman. Great is this mystery that is granted to you, O Mary: to see God, by whom all things were made, come forth from you; whom you bring forth with unspeakable joy, and at once, when He is born, adore with a most devout mind, and touch with most pure and most gentle hands.

How greatly, O Lady, do you gladden us by your childbirth, honour us and make us happy; for by it we are made sons and heirs of God the Father, joint heirs and brethren of Christ (Rom. 8:17), and fellow citizens of the spirits above the world! O you who are most familiar with God and most intimate with Him, not ignorant of the divine counsel, through whom it pleased God to impart whatever of grace and happiness the world has received from heaven! Never did nature so change its laws as in this most holy birth. The star promised of old appeared in it to the Magi (Matt. 2:2), because you, O Mary, have brought forth Him who made the stars, and numbers them, and calls them by name. The heavenly host sings for joy, because the Lord, their God and Creator, is born of you (Luke 2:13–14). The temple of eternity at Rome falls, because the Son of God comes forth from you, a virgin. O Mary, fountain of unfailing bounty, from which rises that stream which spreads itself into the four quarters of the world (Gen. 2:6, 10), watering and beautifying every age! Rejoice, Mary, mother of life; be glad, source of light, saviour of the world, Mother of holiness, glory of creation, ornament of heaven, love of the devout, refuge of the wretched and glory of the elect.

Further, we do not doubt, O venerable Mother of the most high God, that a great multitude of angels was sent from heaven to guard you; for you are the true bed, throne and bride chamber of the true Solomon; and we know that threescore valiant ones of the most valiant of Israel surround the bed of Solomon, all holding swords, and most expert in war (Cant. 3:7–8). For He has given His angels charge over you, O Mary, to keep you in all your ways (Ps. 90:11). They too serve the Mother of God their Creator with a most reverent and most ready obedience.

Now, O Lady, O most high Mary, with a joyful heart, with a most delighted gaze and a most loving mind, behold the true and immense God, the Ancient of days and the Fountain of all happiness, made an infant from you and born a little one, giving Himself into your hands, and receiving besides, as a son, your motherly services. O Mary, sweet Lady, most gentle mind, most loving Virgin and most kind Mother, increase in me, I pray, the contemplation of your dignity and the fervour of it; may your Son give me to you: for as of all that the Father gives Him He loses nothing (John 6:39), so of those whom your Son has given you, you lose none and suffer none to perish.

## Article XXX: Of the wonders wrought in Mary

“Thy way, O God, is in the holy place: who is the great God like our God? Thou art the God that dost wonders” (Ps. 76:14–15). You did great things when you formed things visible and invisible out of nothing; when you distinguished the natures of beings, and set and ordered each one most fittingly. Again, you are

known to have wrought in heaven and on earth things wonderful, great and unsearchable (Job 5:9). Of old you covered the world with the flood (Gen. 7:11 ff.); and likewise with mighty portents and unheard-of prodigies you led your chosen people of that time out of Egypt, led them through the desert, and at last brought them into the promised lands (Exod. 14 ff.). Moreover, at sundry times and in divers manners you deigned of old to speak to the fathers, to the Prophets and the chosen, to appear to them and to inspire them (Heb. 1:1).

Yet these have no more beauty or comeliness *(p. 501)* if we contemplate the things you have wrought in your dearest daughter. For the creation of the world is not so wonderful as the Incarnation of God which was brought about in her, from her and through her; in which many wonderful things may be beheld: for instance, the union without any mean of things infinitely distant, the true generation of a Person who already subsisted, the hypostatic joining of the divine and the human nature, the circumscribing of the Infinite, and the new bringing forth of the Eternal. Nowhere else can it be found or comprehended that things personally united should exceed one another, one, that is, existing where there is nothing at all of the other; nay, that the very Person, true and perfect, should be there by His essence where the nature united to Him in no way exists. But in God incarnate, in the Son of Mary, this is found to be so: for the hypostasis and the nature of the Word, but not the assumed manhood, is everywhere, and remains in itself uncircumscribed and unchanged.

There are other great things also, though less than these, to be beheld in the blessed Virgin: that she conceived by the Holy Spirit through faith; that she carried a true body without burden or heaviness; that she brought forth a sensible and passible body while she remained closed; that though the just man falls seven times a day (Prov. 24:16), she never fell even in the least; that while still living on earth she went before the spirits above the heavens in the merit of purity and holiness. And then the other intimate and secret things between the child Jesus, true God, and His most happy Mother, from the infancy of Christ until the age at which He began to preach: what He showed her, what she in turn showed Him, what He poured into her, what she did in His presence, while she cherished and suckled Him as a mother, while she took Him into Egypt and brought Him back (Matt. 2:14, 21), and spent upon Him every motherly service with a most ardent and reverent affection, while she, the only one, ate in secret with the Only One, while He moreover was subject to her (Luke 2:51) and very often served her as a son: who, I say, could search out these things, contemplate them or tell them?

## Article XXXI: That it is beautiful and delightful to contemplate the wisdom, goodness and power of God in Mary

Everything is made perfect and fit for working in three things: in knowing, willing and being able; that the knowledge be not darkened, the will not grudging, and the power not hindered. This was said by the great and noble Plato. And in every work of God these three shine out. For in His bringing a thing from not being into being, His power is shown; in its order, His wisdom; and in His having made all things for His own sake (Prov. 16:4) (that is, without any merit on the part of the things), His goodness shines.

But in the sublime Virgin it is right to contemplate these more fully. For in the first place there is no mere creature in which these three shine forth so far as in Mary. The goodness of God becomes plainly known in His gifts, which He bestows freely; since to communicate and pour itself out is the property of the good. And so, the more gifts of grace have been bestowed by God upon the sacred Virgin, the more brightly the goodness of God shines in her. And indeed, if we search out the gifts both of nature and of grace in all things, none will appear comparable to her. For to which of creatures has it been given to be the parent of the Creator, to have one and the same Son in common with the eternal Father, to bring forth Him from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds, to be the saviour of the world, the lady of the angels, the queen of the heavens? O most high Ruler, how truly good you are, how bountiful and kind, who have so greatly conformed your creature to yourself, and shown yourself so near to her; who have so divinely exalted that illustrious Maiden, our virgin

Mother and our sister! They praise you who love her; and those who rejoice with her in her happiness sing together thanksgiving and blessing to you.

Further, the wisdom of God shines in Mary in this, that through her, by a most orderly *(p. 502)* course, with the equity and clemency of God kept safe and tempered together, the happiness of men has been restored. But since we have spoken of this at length in what went before (Art. 4), it remains to speak a little of the third.

The might of one who works is measured by the distance between the terms of his work. For everyone who works begins from something and rests in something. Hence the further the beginning, or the term from which the work starts, stands from the term to which it goes, or its end, the stronger the power that must be in the agent. And so, since not being stands infinitely distant from being (for there is no comparison between them), creation belongs to none but Him who has immeasurable power. If therefore we seek to know how the power of God shines in Mary, we must consider what belongs to her of herself and by nature, and what by grace. For if you take grace from her, there will be nothing in which she surpasses others; but if you acknowledge her grace, you cannot wonder enough. You will behold a young and tender maiden, the most valiant conqueror of the devil's deceit and wickedness, so girt about with all the virtues in their order that "a thousand shall fall at her side, and ten thousand at her right hand" (Ps. 90:7). For to the princes of darkness she was as terrible as an army set in array (Cant. 6:9), fenced with walls and fortresses. You will see, besides, the Mother of God made of the humblest handmaid, and her who was least in her own eyes raised above all the choirs of angels.

Now, O enemy of men, most false serpent, behold and blush: you who in your great pride longed to be made equal to the Godhead, overthrown and trodden underfoot by this little Virgin, with all your strength and all your band. And now, whether you will or no, you and yours are subject to her rule and obey her; you cannot resist, nor dare you so much as mutter: her charity burns you, her humility crushes you, and her purity puts you to flight.

Most rightly, O Mary, are you dissolved and melted in the love of your God, and, failing from yourself, embrace Him with an everlasting ardour beyond all telling. For He that is mighty has done great things to you, and holy is His name (Luke 1:49): for He made Himself from you, taking what He was not, and remaining none the less what He was; and by this He remade all the things that He had made.

## Article XXXII: Of the happiness of Mary which she received in the present life

"Afterwards he was seen upon earth, and conversed with men" (Bar. 3:38). The happiness of a creature is nothing other than its union with its Creator. Hence that is to be judged the happier which is nearer to God. Who then, O more than glorious Virgin, O holy Mary, can fully meditate or worthily tell the happiness which you had while still living on earth? For if, on the witness of Christ, the eyes were blessed which saw the things His disciples looked upon, who received Him as a guest and deserved to hear Him (Luke 10:23–24), how much happier were you, Mary, with whom He dwelt thirty years; by whom He was then seen and heard daily; who deserved not only to see and hear Him, but also to conceive and bear Him, to suckle Him and handle Him; who shared one table with Him, and in His infancy one bed besides? Further, the stronger the reason you had, O heavenly Lady, for loving Him, the sweeter and more delightful, unless I am mistaken, was this life of yours with the King Messiah. Exceedingly great was the cause you had for loving Him. For He was your God, your Creator and Lord; He who did great and incomparable things to you; and He was your Son also, and your Saviour. Moreover, He was "beautiful above the sons of men" (Ps. 44:3): "white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands" (Cant. 5:10), gentle and sweet, and "humble of heart" (Matt. 11:29).

O exalted and truly most blessed Mary, who saw Him, so great and such as He was, going before you daily with your most happy eyes! O with how sweet, how delightful and how ardent *(p. 503)* a gaze, O Lady, did

you look upon Him! For you knew Him; it was not hidden from you that He was the Creator of the world, its Saviour and its Judge. What joy of mind was yours, O good and lovable Mary, when, beholding Him with a most wise mind and turning over in a most diligent heart all that you yourself had known of Him, had perceived, seen, heard and believed, you recognized that He was the one of whom the Prophets had prophesied from the beginning of the world (Luke 1:70), the desired of all nations (Agg. 2:8); when you pondered how He had chosen and loved you, so as to make you and take you as His mother, and as a cooperator in the salvation of mankind as well; when at last you gave yourself to living with Him, who was so familiar with you, so filial, so humble and so reverent; when, while He was still a little child, you handled Him at your will with a mother's authority, embraced Him and covered Him with kisses? For He is, O Queen, the happiness of the angels, the power and wisdom of the Father. And now, O most high Mary, you possessed Him, you lived with Him and provided for Him, in whose hand are all the ends of the earth (Ps. 94:4), who is the fountain of life (Ps. 35:10), who provides for all, and has no need of our goods (Ps. 15:2).

## Article XXXIII: Of the loving converse of Christ and Mary

"Behold my beloved speaketh to me: Behold thou art fair, O my love, behold thou art fair" (Cant. 2:10; 1:14). The voice of the bride: "Behold thou art fair, my beloved, and comely" (Cant. 1:15). Christ has a threefold bride: the universal, which is the Church; the particular also, which is the devout soul; and the singular, whom we hold to be the Virgin who bore God. Between each of these and Christ fly words of chaste and comely love, flowing with sweetness and bearing love. Yet between God the Son and the Virgin Mother, between the most loving Bridegroom and His singular bride, between the only Son and His most ardent Mother, it is fitting that words should flow that are fiery, and sweeter even than milk and the honeycomb, than oil and balsam. For fervent and burning love is restless; it urges on the lover, cannot contain itself, pours itself out, and wills nothing to be hidden from the beloved; it knows no measure, it causes ecstasy, and would rush, if it could, into the embrace of the beloved. And so, if you are a lover, if you have in any way experienced the divine familiarity and kindness, consider as well as you can what converse there was between Jesus and Mary, love spurring them on in turn, now of the mind and now also of the voice. Could that most affectionate and motherly mind, and the Son, who was meek and humble and charity itself, refrain from the converse of love, from the proclaiming of dignity, from the showing of their desires?

The Son, the Bridegroom, speaks therefore to His bride and Mother: "Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee" (Cant. 4:7). And she: "Behold thou art fair, my beloved, and comely" (Cant. 1:15). Then the Bridegroom, speaking to the friends of the bride: "As the lily among thorns," He says, "so is my love among the daughters" (Cant. 2:2). And she, wishing to return the like, began to speak of her Bridegroom and Son, a youth: "As the apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons" (Cant. 2:3); and again: "My soul melted when my beloved spoke" (Cant. 5:6). Then the Bridegroom, inviting the Virgin bride: "Shew me thy face," He says; "let thy voice sound in my ears: for thy voice is sweet, and thy face comely" (Cant. 2:14).

There are, moreover, other most sweet converses of the Bridegroom and the bride, which the Holy Spirit gathered together in the Canticle by the mouth of a man chosen for this. If these can be understood of Christ and of any devout soul, which is in particular the bride of the heavenly Bridegroom, I do not see why they cannot be taken more fully still of the Bridegroom and His singular bride, who is His clean and virgin Mother; for their love is stronger, their union more intimate, and their likeness greater. There were surely, if I contemplate rightly and as it is devout to suppose, many and manifold converses between the Virgin Mother and God the child: for sometimes she speaks to Him as God, and at once adores Him; sometimes as the Judge of the world, and suddenly *(p. 504)* trembles, either for herself or for others; now as her only son, as her most heartfelt Bridegroom, as her dearest beloved; and now as her Saviour, her Sanctifier, her Chooser, and the Giver of all her grace.

Who moreover could imagine how sweet and loving, how fitting and kind, how venerable and most wise were the words that flowed from either side in each of these? She adores the majesty of the Creator with reverence; she entreats and honours the Judge of the world. Nor do I think it doubtful that what she had begged so ardently for the salvation of the world before the Incarnation of God, she now, seeing Him on earth before her, asked for more confidently and more lovingly. Then she embraces her Son with kisses; she is united with her whole heart to her Bridegroom, inwardly and spiritually, and passes over into the beloved. And besides, she strives to be grateful to Him who chose her and gave her grace, and spends upon Him herself and all that she can.

## Article XXXIV: Of the sweetness and fecundity of the breasts of the venerable Virgin

“How beautiful are your breasts, my sister, my spouse!” (Cant. 4:10). “Blessed is the womb that bore You, Christ, and the breasts that suckled You” (Luke 11:27). O Mother to be glorified, most excellent Virgin, totally lovable Mary: while I strive and yearn to consider the grace granted you from heaven, I already have no more spirit (cf. 3 Kings 10:5). Let the queen of Saba glory in all the glory of Solomon; let Nabuchodonosor exult in the fortitude and also beauty of Babylon; let Aristotle be glad in the investigation of the nature of things; let Ptolemy rejoice in the knowledge of the planets, in the course of the stars, in the amenity of the spheres: my glory meanwhile, O Mary, is this—that I may according to my strength contemplate the dignity and grace of your whole substance, of flesh assuredly and of soul, and also of all the powers and members that are in you—but now in this hour, of your breasts. Yet their speculation requires a clean eye; and for this I grieve over myself, and confess myself unfit. But help, I pray, O pious one; and cleanse me, O Mother of cleanliness, friend of God, joyful Mary.

And now, O Mary, I behold Christ the Lord, king Messias, the Only-begotten of God, hanging at your breasts, sucking your breasts, with those His infant hands, most tender and most sweet, handling them, applying them to His mouth, and obtaining from them the aliment of life and the sustentation of the body. He is, O supermundane Lady, who covers the heaven with clouds and prepares rain for the earth; who produces grass on the mountains, and herb for the service of men; who gives to beasts their food, and to the young of ravens that call upon Him (Ps. 146:8–9). O most pure Virgin, who with virgin breasts suckled God—how much from the contact of the divine mouth were they deified, how sweet, how fragrant were your breasts made! “Your breasts are better than wine” (Cant. 1:1): for lacking the stain and contact of earthly and carnal concupiscence, they cherished the author of sweetness; further the root of luxury is hidden in wine, and he who loves it will not be wise (Prov. 20:1). O most fruitful breasts, which were elect to nourish the Fount of universal goodness!

What was in your mind, what of glory, O most modest turtledove, O most chaste dove, O most devout and most beautiful Virgin, while with those your virgin, dove-like, and also most clement eyes you beheld this fair little Child, white, ruddy, and desirable, so applied to you, so hanging at your breasts? I judge, O Lady, that your heart melted with love; that you worshipped Him as God and embraced Him as Son; that you bound with love Him whose flesh He put on, whose breasts He sucked! O happy breasts, of whose abundance and most fruitful fecundity heaven-born and earth-born rejoice *(p. 505)* and also are recreated from most sweet fruits! These indeed are two fruitful and pleasant olive trees, emanating to all the liquor of grace, the sweetness of milk and honey. Fairer are your breasts than wine, O divine spouse. For these are odorous mandrakes rooted in the garden of delights (Cant. 7:13); clusters also of the vineyards of Engaddi (Cant. 1:13), gladdening the breasts of the wretched and driving away sorrow; little apples moreover of snowy splendor, fecundated by the Paraclete; golden pomegranates, little spheres and lilies, adorning the temple of the true Solomon (3 Kings 7; Exod. 25).

## Article XXXV: Of the flowery little bed of the Son the bridegroom and of His virgin Mother and spouse

“His left hand is under my head, and His right hand shall embrace me” (Cant. 2:6). Ardent and boiling love, singular and also incomparable love, did not (if I rightly intend) suffer that less be exhibited to the little infant Jesus and Child by the elect Mother than other mothers exhibit to their own children. But I altogether judge more. For I reckon that the embraces of the Virgin Mother and of the divine Offspring were so much the more ardent, the kisses more abundant, and the unions nearer, the more vehement their mutual love stood. For perfect love is impatient of separation. Further who is ignorant that faithful and affectionate mothers place their own most loving infants and sons with themselves abundantly in the nocturnal silence on the little bed, embrace them, kiss them, and commit them to rest and appoint them to sleep beside the maternal breast and breasts? How therefore can it be believed that the sacred Virgin, the Godlike and most affectionate Mother, did not exhibit this same to her only most sweet Son—such and so great, so sweet and so beautiful? She exhibited it utterly, and indubitably exhibited it.

Now therefore, O Mary, O happy spouse, my soul congratulates your beatitude, and in the incomparable fullness of your joys there is for me huge and eminent exultation. For what I, solitary and dwelling in solitude, at twilight and also in the midst of night, and also at dawn, abundantly and not without recreation contemplate, now of you, O Mary, I will assuredly not be silent. Often, I confess, I remember the word of Aristotle—that a man alone is either a god or a beast. Further he with whom God is, is himself also divine; but who is without Him, I judge a beast. Finally God: “Man shall not see Me,” He says, “and live” (Exod. 33:20). And this indeed is fitting to be taken of the nature of divinity; but also those who saw Him in the form of a servant are reckoned blessed (Luke 10:23).

Attend moreover, O my soul, falling silent a little meanwhile concerning the felicity of the spirit of the holy Virgin, whether from the constitution of the world any spouse ever obtained so great a gladness, even through flesh and from flesh, as once in this life the divine Virgin. You went to the little bed, O most happy Mary, O most delicate spouse, assuredly not about to lack the conjunction of a bridegroom—not about to embrace Joseph the carpenter, but Jesus the Fabricator of the world; about to kiss a heavenly, not a worldly, spouse. Ineffable (as I judge), O most loving and also most intimate Mary, was that most joyful, delightful, and clean union of Christ the king and of Mary the mother, while the Mother of purity and most chaste Virgin binds with her neck the Fount of sanctity, assuredly the Wisdom and power of God, takes Him in her arms, places Him between her breasts, applies Him to her most sweet face and soothes Him with ruddy lips; while He rests between the breasts of the most divine, most flaming, and most honest Mother, sleeps at the maternal breast, and the spouse of the Church constrains His singular and most dear spouse! O delights of delights, while the most tender and most devout Maiden adores Him sleeping with her in turn as God, and also abundantly surrounds Him with kisses as her only born! And indeed this union, the more intimate, so much the purer; and the more frequent also, so much the more salutary.

*(p. 506)*

## Article XXXVI: That from the handling of the divine Offspring all the members of the sacred Virgin were deified

“Who will give You to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find You without, and may kiss You, and now no man may despise me?” (Cant. 8:1). There is none (as I judge) of sound reason who is ignorant that from mutual and frequent contact of bodies the quality of one migrates into another, and one obtains and contracts a new disposition from the other. For who touches the polluted is polluted; and who shall have touched the holy will himself also be sanctified. Further, in bodies over which mistress reason also presides and exists within, this especially has truth when from the consent and appetite of the spirit the

contact of bodies happens. In turn also from the touch of the clean the unclean is more vehemently stained, when namely there is either a depraved intention or a profane faith: as is plain to have happened to those who crucified the most clean flesh of Christ. And again sometimes from the contact of the unclean what is pure is more eminently purged: as the kisses of lepers sometimes sanctified the flesh and mind of Saints. Yet none of these is certain to be effected from the virtue of the body. For the unclean does not of itself know how to stain the clean: but as the contact of the clean, mixed with perfidy and also oblique intention, fouls the toucher because of the vices of his mind; so (unless I err) the handling of the unclean, because of the faith and also charity of the toucher, cleanses the same. Since therefore every active body, as far as of itself, assimilates to itself what is applied, and if it be capable transfuses into it its own virtue: from this it is fitting to weigh and measure how much from the most abundant and most affectionate contact of God incarnate the most pure flesh of the Virgin was deified. For who can explain the virtue of that Godlike body which stood joined to the most blessed soul and to the divinity itself? It was, if I rightly consider, hedged about with every virtue exceedingly: for it stood the proper and most worthy organ of the divine operation. Indeed the virtue of the soul overflows into the body; and in Christ assuredly the virtue of divinity overflowed into both. Most tender therefore and most sweet, most clean and most holy, most causal and most virtuous was that chosen flesh; and through it and in it what lay hidden within shone forth, and, if I may so say, gave forth its fragrance and worked, for those ears alone of which it is said: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Luke 8:8). How then, I say, must the noble body of that most modest Virgin and most honourable Mother be judged to have been deified by such and so great a handling of the divine flesh: she who rendered Him every motherly service and brought Him up to His growth; who so often took the most sweet infant and most beautiful little boy into her arms, cherished Him in her lap, held Him to her breasts, and so sweetly kissed the little one as He caressed her and smiled at her, so peacefully gazed upon Him, so lovingly spoke to Him; with whom and in whose arms the sweet and heavenly Bridegroom so often slept, and on whose motherly breast and virgin bosom He so abundantly rested? How great a sweetness and fragrance, how great a cleanness and virtue did it receive from this?

O most high Mary, whose lower part (I mean the flesh) has been made so lovable, so pure, so sweet and comely! For if virtue went out from Him and healed all (Luke 6:19), what did that virtue of Christ work in the motherly and virginal flesh, most capable of the divine influence? We read in turn *(p. 507)* that some, from the converse or the sight, the kiss or the touch, of certain holy men, have gained fervour of mind and compunction: what then must the divine Mother be believed to have drawn from this, of holiness and of grace in mind and body, she who, as has just been said, lived first on earth with the Holy of Holies?

## Article XXXVII: The description in which the heavenly Bridegroom describes His singular bride and virgin Mother

“To my company of horsemen in Pharao’s chariots have I likened thee, O my love” (Cant. 1:8). Since the dignity of the holy Virgin by nature is one thing, and that by grace far another, in the description in which the Spirit of Christ has described her she is compared with various and manifold things, because of the many graces she has received from God. Further, describing each of her members, He has compared them with those things whose properties are likest to her graces and virtues. Yet this whole description is more fittingly taken spiritually. It can also be taken according to the letter, either wholly or at least in great part, because of the natural and supernatural perfections of His bride, and her dignities and graces in body and in mind. I have decided not to insert here the spiritual understanding, which is long and difficult. But what I bring in from the Canticle in praise of the bride I insert here for this reason: to give the loving mind of her lover an occasion by which it may contemplate more purely the perfection and dignity of Mary, natural as well as supernatural, which her Son and Bridegroom bestowed on her chosen body also. For in this first book of the present work I am striving to write chiefly of those things which regard the glory and praise of the virginal flesh of the most sweet Mother of God. And I think it is not unknown to the wise how of old the army of God, the Hebrew

people, when the Egyptians were drowned (Exod. 14:23–28), displayed the omnipotence and magnificence of God. So Mary, since by the power of the Creator she conquered and crushed all the powers of the air, is not unfittingly likened to that army of God when the chariots of Pharao were drowned.

Further, the Bridegroom, speaking to His bride the Virgin: “Thy cheeks,” He says, “are beautiful as the turtledove’s, thy neck as jewels” (Cant. 1:9). Beautiful indeed, those cheeks suffused with the comeliness of modesty, which were so often joined with a sweet kiss to those most fair cheeks of the divine Bridegroom, the Only-begotten of the Father. Again: “How beautiful art thou,” He says, “my love, how beautiful art thou! Thy eyes are doves’ eyes, besides what is hid within” (Cant. 4:1); and again: “Thy eyes like the fishpools in Hesebon” (Cant. 7:4): signifying by the first the simplicity, by the second the clearness, of her most sweet eyes. “Thy hair is as flocks of goats, which come up from mount Galaad. Thy teeth as flocks of sheep that are shorn, which come up from the washing” (Cant. 4:1–2). Further, describing those most sweet and rosy lips of the happy Mother, deified in the highest degree by the frequent kisses of her adorable Son and most dear Bridegroom: “Thy lips,” He says, “are as a scarlet lace, and thy speech sweet” (Cant. 4:3); and again: “Thy lips, my spouse, are as a dropping honeycomb” (Cant. 4:11): declaring by the first their beauty and eloquence, by the second their fragrance. And for the most sweet and honeyed sound of her words: “Honey and milk,” He says, “are under thy tongue” (ibid.). Further, beginning to speak of her most clean breasts: “Thy two breasts,” He says, “like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies” (Cant. 4:5). Of their praise, however, I remember having treated a little before (Art. 34), as far as the most holy Virgin deigned to grant me.

Moreover, signifying the most gracious and delightful ripeness of the gait of His most modest and most chaste bride: “How beautiful,” He declares, “are thy steps in shoes, O prince’s daughter! The joints of thy thighs are like jewels, that are made by the hand of a skilful workman” (Cant. 7:1). And straightway the virginal Bridegroom, delighting to speak of many of the joinings of His singular bride: *(p. 508)* “Thy navel,” He says, “is like a round bowl never wanting cups; thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies” (Cant. 7:2). By this He most sweetly signifies and declares the motherly fruitfulness of her most sacred womb, adorned with virginal purity. Of its most fragrant and desirable abundance also the most delightful and most clean Bridegroom discourses with delight. For speaking to the Virgin Mother and to her motherly womb with the most excellent praise: “Thy plants,” He says, “are a paradise of pomegranates with the fruits of the orchard” (Cant. 4:13). But since I have treated of this more fully before, as well as I could (Art. 22, 23), I pass over it now for a little.

Further, then, Christ the Lord, the King Messiah, breaking out into the praises of His virgin Mother and singular bride: “Thy neck,” He says, “is as a tower of ivory” (Cant. 7:4); and again: “Thy neck is as the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks” (Cant. 4:4); “thy nose is as the tower of Libanus, that looketh toward Damascus. Thy head is like Carmel, and the hairs of thy head as the purple of the king bound in the channels” (Cant. 7:4–5); “thy stature is like to a palm tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes; and the odour of thy mouth like apples; thy throat like the best wine, worthy for my beloved to drink” (Cant. 7:7–9). At last, concluding of the quality of His bride, the Bridegroom says: “How beautiful art thou, and how comely, my dearest, in delights!” (Cant. 7:6). And she, returning thanks and the like in turn: “I to my beloved,” she says, “and his turning is towards me” (Cant. 7:10).

Now I have brought these things forward in this way not as thinking to open here the full, subtle, spiritual and higher understanding of these most divine words (for that is a very lofty business, and needs greater searching); but, as I have confessed, I have set them down here superficially, so that the loving reader may be given an occasion of contemplating the most holy Virgin devoutly and with delight. Of her, indeed, we can neither speak nor write nor contemplate fully or worthily, since we are not fit even to behold the dignity and deification of her body. Would that she in her great tenderness might deign to spare me, her most unworthy praiser, who am not worthy even to utter her name.

## Article XXXVIII: Of the goodness of the harmony and the evenness of the constitution of the blessed and divine Virgin

From what has gone before (Arts. 7, 8) it is plain, I think, that the sacred Virgin was such in mind and in body as it befitted the Mother of God to be. And it befitted, and altogether (unless I am mistaken) it behoved, that the Maiden whose flesh was to be coupled with the Godhead, and from whom God chose to be made flesh, should be of the best constitution, and should have received a most fitting harmony: for no imperfection of nature befitted the Word of God; rather, to the more than holy Son above the world was owed a mother pure and perfect in mind and in flesh.

Further, it is altogether certain that the flesh of Christ was most tender, most fittingly and supremely disposed by nature; and so to so noble a flesh a proportionate and fitting nourishment was owed. Hence the virginal milk of His most happy Mother was such as to be a worthy and apt nourishment for the divine flesh; and for this the best disposition of nature was needed.

Besides, every natural perfection was to be given her through whom all nature was to be repaired and bettered. For if what was set down before (Art. 3) has been rightly drawn out, through Mary the ruin of the heavens is repaired, the world is redeemed, and hell itself is healed. In things natural, therefore, she was altogether perfect. And indeed, what perfection can you deny her who conceived and brought forth the Fountain of all perfection? Again, as in the gifts of grace, so too in the perfections of nature Mary was most like her Son. And to His nature no nobility or perfection was lacking: *(p. 509)* for He took only the defects that bring no reproach. In this respect, then, the most fruitful Virgin was most like to Him.

Further, through the goodness of natural things a person is made more capable of the gifts of grace, sweeter for mutual converse, and more lovable and more virtuous besides. That Maiden, then, who was to be filled not only with grace but with the fullness of graces, and with the very Fountain of graces, and dowered with it; with whom to live, nay in whom to be, were the delights of God (Prov. 8:31); with whom He chose to converse so singularly on earth; who in the end had been His highest friend and singular bride: she was to be eminently adorned with every natural goodness, and filled to the full with every sweetness and lovableness. Otherwise God the Son will not seem to have honoured His most chosen Mother as was fitting.

## Article XXXIX: Of the corporeal beauty of the incomparable Virgin

Already according to strength it has been deduced that not only the fullness of grace, but also every natural perfection utterly became her who bore the Fount of universal perfection, the author of nature and also of grace. Whence it evidently shines that excellence of corporeal beauty by no means was lacking to her. Finally, although naturals of themselves cannot merit, yet formed by grace they accumulate the merits of the just: because the more one seems more pleasing to the world by gifts of natural perfections, so much more acceptable to God stands his abnegation of them. That therefore Mary's merits might be everywhere increased, by no means was there lacking to her that by which she could please the age. Further, unless corporeal beauty also dignified the one having it, why the Only-begotten of God would have pre-elected to be fair also in body before the sons of men (Ps. 44:3), I do not see. And therefore His virgin Mother and singular spouse ought not to have been unlike Him in this part: so that, as He is white and ruddy, elect out of thousands (Cant. 5:10)—indeed out of all and before all—so after Him there should be no equal to her, neither in naturals nor in gratuities. For the eternal Father (unless I err) provided and prepared for His Only-begotten a convenient and proportionate mother, and that His most fair and most sweet face should assuredly be kissed only by a most beautiful and most sweet maiden and most clean mother. Most fittingly therefore of you, O illustrious and comely Mother, the bridegroom utters: "You are all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in you" (Cant. 4:7). For from the sole of the foot even to the crown of the head, nothing at all stood in you, neither in mind nor in flesh, unseemly, indecent, or unpleasant: nay rather, whatever is in

you was most fairly and most gracefully formed by the industry of divine sagacity and the compass of eternal Wisdom, and all sweet and lovable, eminent and delightful.

## Article XL: Whether some supernatural splendor and unwonted odor shone in the sacred flesh of the Virgin Mother

"Let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth: for your breasts are better than wine, smelling sweet of the best ointments" (Cant. 1:1–2). Abundantly, if I remember rightly, in that most joyful canticle of bridegroom and bride the bridegroom begins speech concerning the sweetness of the bride. Finally there are those kindled with fervor of the most clement Virgin who ascribe to her not only natural beauty and goodness of complexion, but also relate that a certain divine splendor shone in her, and that there was some supernatural fragrance of odor in her holy flesh, because she conceived and bore that fountain and eternal light, and for so many months carried and also nourished in the womb the causal origin of all sweetness. They also bring the example of Moses (Exod. 34:29). Yet, whatever be of this, or in whatever manner they desire these things to be understood, *(p. 510)* this is credible—indeed assuredly utterly certain—that that most excellent fullness of the grace of her mind overflowed into the body, and especially shone in the face: which (unless I err) becomes known from a double sign. For if the tortuous disposition of a perturbed and passionate soul, lying hidden within, is abundantly known in the face, and in turn induces deformity on the body: why should not the limpidity of a most serene conscience, most joyful in the Holy Spirit, overflow and redundant unto the beauty of the face and the elegance of the whole body? Again also, of many Saints this is read—that even in their already aged faces something angelic shone, which was an indication of divine and excellent grace. In the Mother of sanctity therefore, and most happy Mother of the Holy of Holies, this assuredly stood more sublime—that a certain gracious and divine serenity poured through her whole, and especially in the face. Whence she is believed to have been of such chastity that she could never be lustfully desired by anyone: because interior purity expressed in the face extinguished by its virtue the carnal appetite of the beholder. Further I do not doubt that this grace of the virgin body, after the glorification of her Son, was increased and vehemently continued, that with the Son glorified in the heavens the divine Mother also might gradually obtain glorification by beginning on earth. Hence indeed it is by no means doubtful that by the mere sight of Mary many of the Jews and of the gentiles were converted and heartily compunct.

## Article XLI: Of that joyful table of king Messias and of His virgin Mother

"Wisdom has built herself a house; she has mingled her wine, and set forth her table" (Prov. 9:1–2). Blessed who were Your table-companions, O Christ most high. But you, O Mary to be glorified and totally sweet and delightful, are happier and more pre-elect than all. For when that Your most loving Jesus had ceased to suck Your maternal breasts, and was of ampler age, already He sat at Your table, You placing Him, and what You prepared for Him, and also set before Him, He ate and drank. O benign Mary, how illustrious and joyful was this very spectacle for You! Joyful (unless I err) and sweet was the table for You (O holy Mother)—to take food and drink with the Only-begotten of God, who refreshes and satiates the angels; to behold Him present; and (as I judge) to see Him abundantly ministering to You, setting food and drink, disposing the table, and doing like things. For He was subject to You (Luke 2:51); nor do I reckon it ambiguous that with always filial and humble reverence He stood obedient to You in all things, even unbidden, after the manner of a good son. O great Lady, and Queen of heaven, with whom as You eat the King of kings and Lord of lords (Apoc. 19:16) eats and ministers, lest anything be lacking to that table at which with the eternal bridegroom the most dear spouse was present!

# Book II: Her Wisdom

## Prologue

*(p. 511)* “But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

The immortal and almighty God, whose most happy life—if I rightly contemplate—is the contemplation of uncircumscribed and unchangeable truth, and also the immense love of perfect and unlimited goodness, for this produced the rational soul to His likeness and image, that it might strive to become an imitator of the divine life, and study to be assimilated to the Creator according to its strength: to which the most benign Creator first through a servant, and at last also through Himself, deigned abundantly to teach and exhort us. For beginning to speak to us through Moses: “Be holy,” He says, “as I also am holy” (Lev. 11:44). Finally Christ the Lord: “Be perfect,” He says, “as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). From which (unless I err) it shines that the beatitude of the created mind is situated in the contemplation of truth and the love of the good. Further, since in the three powers of the soul the image of the Trinity shines in man (I mean intellect, will, and memory), in this the highest perfection of man is placed—that these powers be reformed and also perfected. Now the perfection of the intellect is highest wisdom; of the will, charity; but of memory, stability in both. And therefore human felicity is to be set in fixed contemplation of divine things and stable love.

Since therefore in the first book of this edition I discussed, as I was able with her helping, of the proclamation and dignity of Mary pertaining especially to her blessed and deified flesh: now it behooves to speak of the perfection of her mind, and first of her wisdom.

## Article I: That the Mother of the true and eternal Wisdom became an excellent wisdom

Just as it became the Holy of Holies to have a most holy mother—indeed to Him who is essentially holy a mother of such sanctity was owed that under God a greater cannot be—so utterly it is fitting that Christ, who is the wisdom of the Father (1 Cor. 1:24) and the fountain origin of all wisdom (“the fountain of wisdom is the Word of God on high,” Ecclus. 1:5), have a most wise mother of such wisdom that no one of men on earth was wiser. For the overflowing fountain of wisdom, Christ the Lord—into what would He more strongly act, illuminate, and transfuse streams of wisdom than into His own Mother? Nothing indeed is nearer to Him, nothing dearer, nothing more like than she. And therefore she obtained more fully from Him the rays of true wisdom, and was made most like to Him, as in sanctity, so also in wisdom. *(p. 512)* This indeed became—that to Christ the Son, who is essentially perfect and the exemplar of all perfection, the elect Mother be most highly assimilated in every perfection utterly.

Finally, as a wise son is the glory of the father (Prov. 10:1), so assuredly a wise mother is the honor of the son. Whence none but a most wise mother became the supersapient Only-begotten of God. Moreover, the mutual conversation of the wise is sweeter, more pleasant, and more loving. For more like things love each other more ardently; the wiser also behold each other more sincerely, and understand more clearly the nobility infused. Therefore she with whom God willed so familiarly and so singularly to live on earth was assuredly most wise.

## Article II: That the blessed Virgin excellently knew all the benefits divinely imparted to her

“He that is mighty has done great things to me, and holy is His name” (Luke 1:49). Do you think that when Mary said this she was ignorant what those great things were which she confessed with glorying to have been

granted her from above? For if she had not known them, how did she stand grateful? For who gives thanks to the giver for those things which he does not know or utterly ignores that he has received? Further, who is ungrateful is reckoned unjust, and that also which he seems to have shall be taken away from him (Matt. 25:29). Mary therefore, who stood most holy and perfect, that in all things she might be most pleasing to God, most limpidly knew all the gifts—especially the singular ones—of the divine munificence so superclemently bestowed on her from heaven.

Moreover, who has received more is bound to love more strongly. But love requires knowledge. Since therefore Mary had nothing of injustice, but rather most ardent charity, it is altogether opportune that the most sincere notion of the divine gifts be bestowed on her. For it is necessary that the more fervent the love has been, so much clearer be the recognition of the beloved in the same process—although by no means must there be ampler love in him who knows more deeply. Further, the unction teaches the elect concerning all things (1 John 2:27). And of the Saints also it is written: “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). Therefore it is clear that the fuller Mary was of the divine Spirit, so much the more learned and more fit she was for contemplating God’s benefits.

## Article III: That as the first parent fell through ignorance, so the holy Virgin stood through wisdom

The serpent said to the woman: “Why has God commanded you that you should not eat of every tree of paradise?” To whom the woman answered: “Lest perhaps we die.” But the serpent said to her: “No, you shall not die” (Gen. 3:1–4). To this assertion of the demon proceeding against the divine contestation, the foolish woman applying faith transgressed. For original sin, by which the whole nature was infected, was consummated through the man; but Eve introduced it occasionally or inchoatively, and introduced upon the offspring of her posterity a most obscure darkness of ignorances. Therefore, as from Eve’s folly and perfidy the destruction of the world was begun, so also its life began from Mary’s wisdom and faith. For Eve, hearing the questioning of the demon transforming himself, presently spoke, and indeed to her own folly: for she broke forth into words full of distrust. Indeed in the very series of her response she confessed herself ambiguous of the heavenly and also divine sentence: “Lest perhaps,” saying, “we die.” Further Mary went by a contrary path. Having obtained an unwonted salutation, she did not suddenly answer after the manner of Eve, but rather thought of what sort the salutation brought was (Luke 1:29). For the craft of the serpent and the simulation of the demon did not hide from the most wise. Finally, certified concerning the messenger, she was not incredulous toward the divine mouth, knowing most certainly that whatever the Most High promised or certainly announced—standing almighty and true—He would fulfill. And therefore, as from Eve, alas! the darknesses of the world flowed, so from Mary saving light arose for the whole world.

*(p. 513)*

## Article IV: That for the fullness of perfection, which cannot be denied to Mary, a sublime and excellent wisdom was needed

“Above health and beauty I loved wisdom, and I chose to have her instead of light, for her light cannot be put out; and all good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands” (Wis. 7:10–11). For wisdom is a divine possession, by which we are separated from brutes and also carnal ones, and communicate with the supercelestial spirits themselves. For it is an infinite treasure to men: which they who have used have been made partakers of the friendship of God. For God loves none except who dwells with wisdom. For He Himself is who says: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than holocausts” (Osee 6:6; Matt. 9:13; 12:7). For since human perfection consists neither in knowledge alone nor in love alone, but in knowledge essentially (as Truth Itself confesses: “This is,” saying

to the Father, “eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God,” John 17:3), but in love completively—for on it hangs the whole law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40)—it becomes known, I judge, that the beatitude of the present life stands more perfect the more united and greater these two have been. For love is the form and completion of knowledge. Further knowledge founds charity and effects it as to act. Therefore, since it is a crime to deny the highest perfection to the most holy Virgin, it is altogether fitting to assert that her wisdom was most excellent, that the intellect, memory, and will of her most divine mind be believed to have been perfectly and eminently decorated each with its proper perfections.

Moreover, what has been communicated to the other Saints—servants assuredly and also handmaids—either sparsely or certainly in part, I judge was given to Mary the pre-elect mother unitedly and perfectly: for into her the fullness of grace itself, the fountain and author of graces and virtues, poured itself wholly. Now we know that in some Saints charity abounded, in others wisdom; and in some both so abounded that one can scarcely measure which of the two they received from above more fully and more plentifully. And these last are to be judged the more excellent. How then in the incomparable and most excellent Mother and Virgin can you not assert that both superabounded?

## Article V: Of the incomparable wisdom of the divine Mother

“The riches of salvation wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is his treasure” (Isa. 33:6). Now wisdom is the contemplation of divine things; and it is bipartite, because one is natural and philosophical, but another supernatural and theological—of which I now especially intend. Finally by salvation I understand felicity: whose riches wisdom and knowledge are called for this—that true salvation embraces and possesses them, and also stands needy and unseemly without them; but if it is full, they overflow in it and emanate from it. As wisdom looks to divine things, so knowledge looks to inferior and human things. Whence, since true salvation consists principally in the vision of God, but secondarily in the speculation of creatures, not only wisdom but also knowledge pertains to the riches of salvation. Moreover, as Mary’s already consummated felicity, which she has now obtained in the fatherland, most vehemently transcends after God the Son the beatitude of all the elect: so also that begun felicity which she once obtained on the way was incomparable among wayfarers: therefore her riches, wisdom and also knowledge, were proportionally.

*(p. 514)*

Moreover, in every genus the first is most powerful and per se; but what is nearer to it is also more like. Now Christ is the universal cause of the illumination of the world. “For that was the true light, which enlightens every man that comes into this world” (John 1:9). And therefore that He is most wise and wisdom itself hides from no one of the faithful. Further that Mary is the first and highest co-cause and co-worker of the illumination of the world shines to the learned. As therefore she is nearest to God the Son and most cooperating, so, if I rightly conclude, she was also most like to Him, and first after Him in wisdom. But a contemplative and theoretical man is most loving to God. Therefore the most loving and most pre-elect of God did not lack the highest theory.

Moreover, as the great and divine Dionysius says (*Divine Names* IV), the superessential Godhead is compared to this sensible sun for this—that after the manner of solar light It communicates Itself to all, and overflowing upon all fills the capacities of all; and finally the more capable anything has been of Its influx, so much more copiously It pours into it the rays of divine illustration. But what so capable of heavenly instruction as the mind of Mary? For she was of highest tranquillity and virtue, teachable and clean, and also alien from every fault and perturbation. And therefore the most munificent Godhead most exuberantly communicated to her mind most full streams of wisdom and rivers of theory.

## Article VI: That the blessed Virgin understood more clearly and deeply than all wayfarers the manner and mystery of the Incarnation, and also the unity of person and duality of natures in Christ

"Who shall declare His generation?" (Isa. 53:8). In the foregoing, if I rightly remember, I spoke according to my strength of the incomprehensibility of the Incarnation of the Word. Yet what was given to Mary to be, and through her, in her, and from her to be done—that assuredly (unless I err) was given her to know, and to understand as became: that she might know what things given her from God consisted, and knowledgeably utter, "Because He that is mighty has done great things to me, and holy is His name" (Luke 1:49); and also that she might stand more grateful and more loving to God.

Moreover, each thing is known through operation. It is clear therefore that Christ's nature, and every consistency, virtue, and quality shone more sincerely to Mary, the more conscious, more assiduous, and also more familiar helper, inspector, and contemplator she stood of His divine wonders, Godlike operations, and whole conversation. Which if you strive to know how Mary stood concerning the aforesaid insignia of Christ, and how more familiar and more secret, more assiduous and more joined than all she stood to her only Son in them—search the Gospels, discuss reason, investigate nature. What from the beginning so familiar to offspring as a parent? Who hunts a fuller notion of a son than she? Further, if anyone unroll the text of evangelical truth, he will find how alone most blessed and too much pre-elect Mary from the beginning hears the angel saluting, announcing God's counsel, consoling the Virgin, instructing the holy manner of the effect; finally, how she receives the Holy Spirit coming upon her, and senses the Father overshadowing, and at last conceives His Only-begotten intact, nourishes the virgin in the womb, carries without heaviness, bears without sadness; moreover, how she suckles, cherishes, handles the infant, recognizes the coming shepherds, beholds the Magi sacrificing and adoring, advertises the star and the army of angels indicating the proclamation of her Son and also deputed to His service; accordingly, how with Him she enters into Egypt, idols are cast down, there she dwells with Him, and at last brings Him back, and unto His thirtieth year as she was familiar to Him in all things, so also singular. Finally, all things which she saw, heard, and knew, she most diligently kept, *(p. 515)* and weighed with most prudent mind. How much in these and from these is she to be reckoned to have progressed in sapiential contemplation of divine things?

Moreover, inasmuch as God assumed and put on what was Mary's, He (unless I err) repaid her what is His. Now He assumed from her nature, and poured back grace. The most clement Creator, who from the beginning so freely and so mercifully and superabundantly illuminated and taught the angels, and at last elect men, from whom assuredly He received nothing, whose goods He did not yet need—what of illumination and grace is He to be believed to have granted to her whose substance He put on, by whose milk He was nourished, by whose diligence moreover He stands educated, to whom He bound Himself so incomparably? It became utterly, if I am not too much deceived, that neither Prophet nor Apostle of God be equaled to His Mother, that they know with so great wisdom of heart the manner and mystery of the Incarnation, and Christ's natures, personality, and also properties, as she to whom by so ineffable and immense grace it was imparted that through her the prophecies of the Prophets be fulfilled, and she also pour forth the King of the Apostles and the Savior of the age.

How much, O sweetest Lady, most lovable Mary, your most pure mind was delighted, while so sincerely and deeply you intended your own Only-begotten living with you on earth; while contemplating majesty, stupifying at condescension, not able fully to marvel at grace, your most ardent spirit was recreated, kindled, and elevated by that most happy corporal and mental vision of Him!

## Article VII: That through grace and nature the most wise Virgin stood teachable and studious

"She has opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue" (Prov. 31:26). If those things which a little before were shown concerning the natural goodness of Mary's complexion and the most fitting equality of her harmony be remembered again, it will plainly (I judge) be clear that according to nature she was most teachable and most studious. For it was introduced (unless I err) that this Maiden, who stood pre-elect to bear the author of nature, the fountain of all perfection, and the repairer of the broken, did not lack gifts of nature and natural perfections—indeed was most like her blessed Son in the excellences of grace and also of nature. Whence it evidently becomes known that she was of the best ingenium and of a studious mind, so that it most aptly befits her to confess: "I was an ingenious girl, and I obtained a good soul" (Wis. 8:19). Further in Mary grace utterly overfilled nature, altogether conquered it, and ineffably comforted and perfected it. And therefore it shines, as I judge, that through grace Mary was more vehemently utterly teachable and studious. Finally, through grace she lacked every vain solicitude, stood tranquil and quiet, did not sense inordinate motions. But who is so inept and so tasteless as not to see that a soul of this sort is most capable of wisdom? That her capacity also was filled the foregoing things demonstrate. Moreover, the almighty Father prepared for His beloved Son a fit and apt mother. But His Son is the Word and truth, wisdom and brightness. But altogether none is receptive of such a son except a sapiential and simple virgin, lest dullness exclude wisdom, and carnality brightness. Therefore that Virgin was subtle and capable, studious and prudent.

## Article VIII: That after her Son the venerable Virgin excellently knew those things which pertain to the mysteries of grace

As the sapiential truth of the theologians confesses, a double wisdom befits Christ, created and uncreated: as also a double nature, and a double power. *(p. 516)* Further Christ's created wisdom is partitioned. For there is one by which He sees the divine essence and in it all things; but another divinely infused, by which He fully knows all those things to which the natural faculty of man expands. Finally a third is in Him, by which He obtained perfect knowledge of the divine mysteries; a fourth also, which is experimental: in this alone He progressed, because in the others from the very beginning of conception He stood perfect.

Now the reason why the third-named wisdom is in Christ is handed down: because through the assumed nature He not only repaired human nature, but was moreover the propagator of grace. But this knowledge transcends the natural force of men and also of angels; now the divine mysteries are known by men through the gift of wisdom and the spirit of prophecy.

Accordingly from the force of this reason (if I rightly consider) nothing prohibits inferring that the nearer and more co-causal the Virgin Mother was to Christ in the reparation of nature and the propagation of grace, so much ampler after Him the notion of the mysteries of grace she obtained from heaven. For it is not fitting to doubt that the glorious Mother, even still living on earth, contemplated more secret things concerning the Incarnation and the other sacraments of the new law, and also more things in the spirit of prophecy concerning the secrets of the divine counsel, than all wayfarers. Otherwise, how can she be reckoned mother of grace and redemptrix of the world?—unless perhaps it was not granted her to know what was given her to be, and she be either ungrateful, or certainly not sufficiently grateful: which I judge a crime. For, to speak securely, neither the prince of the Apostles Peter, nor Paul caught up into the third heaven, nor John the highest of theologians and abundantly consisting in the spirit, nor the lawgiver Moses, nor David the most spiritual of the Prophets, whom the Spirit of God put on, nor Isaias, who sang so eminently of the mysteries of Christ and of the Church, can be compared to this holy Virgin and divine Mother in the contemplation of divine mysteries, in the revelation of the divine counsel, in sincerity of wisdom—and they distance so far as it becomes servants to distance from a mother.

## Article IX: How the Virgin Mother is to be understood to have cooperated with Christ the Son in the redemption of the world

"God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by Him" (John 3:17). Yet the most high and eternal Creator, who made all things in wisdom (Ps. 103:24), also repaired human salvation most wisely, that as a man not without a cooperating woman killed the world, so neither without a consenting woman should a man redeem the world.

Yet I do not reckon Mary to have cooperated with Christ the Savior as if He did not suffice. He utterly sufficed, and utterly supersufficed: for a thousandth part of His satisfaction was altogether worthy and stood superfit. Nonetheless for many reasons Mary is said to have cooperated with Christ and to be savior of the world. First indeed, because she conceived and brought forth, suckled and cherished Him who remade the globe: and we know that what is the cause of a cause is the cause of the caused. — But if you object that similarly she could also be called creatrix of the world: for she bore Him who founded the world. It is to be answered that the act of creation befits Christ from the divinity, which He did not take from Mary, but through which He also created her. Further satisfaction is the fitness of humanity only, and also the efficacy of that satisfaction emanates from the united divinity. But humanity He took from the Virgin: and therefore she can be called not creatrix of the world, but savior.

Finally she is called savior of the globe not because of efficiency—because she herself effects neither salvation nor grace; but because of subvention: because she prays for and procures grace and felicity for us. Again, because she was made mediatrix of the world, *(p. 517)* and again repairs those who have fallen from her Son's grace through ingratitude, standing the refuge of the wretched, the hope of sinners, and the singular protection of the desperate: not ineptly is she to be named mother of mercy and liberatrix of the age. How many lost and almost or certainly totally desperate have been redeemed through her? How many finally rejoice to have been freed and preserved by her prayer and grace from the iniquity of the age, and also from the abyss of hell?

## Article X: How fittingly Mary is called the enlightener of the world

The Only-begotten of God: "I," He says, "am the light of the world" (John 8:12). O most splendid lamp, divinely illustrated, burning and shining lantern (John 5:35), kindled from heaven, transfused with the rays of the Holy Spirit, most celebrated Mary, who within virgin and most chaste bowels carried the superbright light, by whose splendor all your inward parts shone ruddy in themselves after the manner of the sun, and were inwardly beautiful with most clean light! How much, O Lady, you conferred on the world, when you brought forth that desired light to those sitting in the darkness of the age and in the shadow of death of sighing limbo (Luke 1:79)! For He Himself, O supercelestial Empress, is the sun of justice, the salvation of the world, the fountain of knowledge, the wisdom and power of the Father. For the law was given by Moses; but truth and grace were made by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Through Him, your merits and prayers always and everywhere mediating and helping, we have learned divine and most high theory, and have also received mystical and supernatural theosophy. Finally we have obtained from Him such and so great a wisdom to which no other is equal: for to which all others are subject and serve.

These so great things through you and from you, O most joyful Queen, we confess to have obtained, when you poured forth to us Him who is a vapor of the power of God, and a certain pure emanation of the brightness of the almighty God, into which nothing defiled comes: for He is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness (Wis. 7:25–26). And since He is one, He can do all things; and remaining in Himself, He renews all things, and through nations transfers Himself into holy souls, constitutes friends of God and Prophets. Yet, because it is impossible for the divine ray to shine otherwise to us unless covered with various veils of sensible forms, from Mary the

Only-begotten of God put on the habit and form by which He could be applied to us more connaturally. O Mother of the illuminator and illustrator of my mind, from whom eternal Truth proceeded, make Your face shine upon Your servant (Ps. 30:17), and by Your most worthy and maternal prayers obtain that I always cling to the most sincere light of Your only Son.

## Article XI: That the life of Mary stood most highly contemplative

"Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42). There being a double life, active and contemplative, the contemplative is to be reckoned more excellent and more stable. Yet a conversation embracing the perfection of both lives stands highest. That such was Mary's most holy life, it now befits to intimate as regards contemplative perfection. Of the active life—how she also obtained its sanctity—it will be fitting later to treat, when there will be need to speak of Mary's sanctity and virtues. Now truly, that her life was truly and incomparably contemplative, I show as I can.

Indeed for the perfect excellence of the contemplative life I judge three things to be required and also to suffice. First, if I am not deceived, the casting out of vices, namely that faults be amended. But this plainly pertains to the purgative way. Further secondly there is necessary *(p. 518)* the subjection of sensuality and of the lower powers under reason: which is perfected through the moral and other virtues. But this subjection cannot be effected without the illumination of reason, by which it may be directed and command in things to be done: and therefore it shines forth that this is completed through the illuminative way. But thirdly, the theoretical and sapiential illustration of reason, and also the love-bearing kindling of the will itself, stand opportune. For the more sublimely anyone has obtained these three, so much more apt he stands for contemplation. Because indeed wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul (Wis. 1:4), I have confessed the first of these to be required. Again, because the inordination of the passions brings solicitude and perturbation, inquietude and vain fear and also instability into the mind, takes away and beclouds the sincerity of contemplation: and therefore I have said the second also necessary. Finally, since contemplation is the act of wisdom, but wisdom not formed by dilection is imperfect; on that account the soul ought to be adorned with the ray of wisdom and the ardor of charity: which (unless I err) pertains to the unitive way.

How therefore Mary was utterly immune from every fault, the first book embraces. Moreover the third book, if she herself grant, will set forth the plenitude of her virtues. But of her incomparable and full wisdom I have a little before woven speech, and there is still more to utter. It therefore becomes known that as Mary was purer from every fault, fuller of every virtue, and finally more splendid and more fervent in wisdom and also in charity after the Son ineffably than all, so also she inestimably surpassed all in the sincerity of contemplations. Further also her mind stood most free and utterly without any penal fear; and grace totally conquered and possessed nature itself. Therefore she was most highly suited to the height of contemplations. Moreover, from the object of the senses the intellect is moved. Therefore the more present that divine contemplable—I mean Christ—was to Mary's senses, so much more known and patent He stood to her intellectual countenance. And indeed, if you remember what was predetermined, it will by no means be hidden how God-man conversed on earth with the virgin Mother, how the most clean Mother handled, saw, heard, suckled the adorable Son; and to Him in each thing she was most familiar, most secret, and also most loving. How singularly and eminently do you reckon the maternal mind to have been moved and inflamed in all these to the contemplation of the Son? But truly, the whole intention of the theologians principally turns about the Trinity of Persons and the humanity of Christ. But who so knew Christ's humanity as she from whom it was taken? Further, to whom is it credible that speculation of the Trinity was so granted as to her in whom the whole so incomprehensibly acted and came upon, who truly bore the true God Himself?

## Article XII: Of the stability and also the actual suspension of the contemplations of the sacred Virgin

“Hear, O daughter, and see, and incline your ear” (Ps. 44:11). This is the virtue and property of charity, that it unite the lover to the beloved. But if it be more perfect, it will transpose one into the other, that already they be one and desire the same. For divine love causes ecstasy, because it puts the lover outside himself, namely transforms and places him into the beloved. Further most perfect charity, united and transposed, binds indissolubly. Finally, of the fervor, quantity, and ineffability of the mutual dilection of the king Messias spouse and son, and of His glorious virgin Mother and spouse, treatise has often and scatteredly been had; yet a fuller is to be had when it will be incumbent to discourse of the sanctity of the blessed Mother. But now let it be said only so far, that it was most highly perfect, and also ineffably kindling. It therefore becomes known, if you subtly look, that the charity of the Virgin Mother indicibly and (as is lawful) unceasingly excited and inflamed her to union with her beloved. But the intellectual union of the lover himself to the beloved is effected through mental vision, because the will can be borne only into what is known. Therefore the sapiential and affectionate mind is coupled to the beloved through contemplation. Whence I reckon it to shine forth that so incessable, and more continuous than can be spoken, was the contemplation of the adorable Son by the most pure Mother, as the mutual most glowing and continuous love of each stood.

Moreover, although the just falls seven times in a day, and again if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; yet to reckon that Mary ever fell, or certainly sinned, is altogether a crime. Never therefore was Mary’s mind inordinately occupied or idle. Therefore every interior work of hers was either the speculation of divine things, or the reduction of other operations into God: so that she utterly did or knew or certainly affected nothing which she did not incessantly and suddenly refer to the honor and glory of God. But a life of this kind is most excellently and stably suspended in contemplation. But truly, a mind which no inordinate, worldly or carnal affection holds, which burns most hotly with charity, and also shines most brightly with wisdom, is most highly fixed in the sincerity of deiform speculations: and that such also was the mind of the most wise Maiden, the things previously induced demonstrate.

*(p. 519)*

## Article XIII: Commendation of wisdom for the honor and praise of most wise Mary

“But where is wisdom found? And what is the place of understanding? Man knows not its price, neither is it found in the land of them that live in delights. The depth says: It is not in me. And the sea speaks: It is not with me. The finest gold shall not be given for it, neither shall silver be weighed in exchange for it. It shall not be compared with the dyed colors of India, or with the most precious stone sardonyx, or the sapphire. Gold or crystal cannot equal it, nor the topaz of Ethiopia. But wisdom is drawn out of secret places, and is hid from the eyes of them that live delicately. Destruction and death have said: With our ears we have heard the fame thereof. God understands the way of it, and He knows the place thereof. Who made a weight for the winds, and weighed the waters by measure. When He gave a law for the rain, and a way for the sounding storms, then He saw it and declared it” (Job 28:12–26).

“Wherefore I wished, and understanding was given me: and I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came upon me. And I preferred her before kingdoms and thrones, and esteemed riches nothing in comparison of her” (Wis. 7:7–8). “Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth away, and is easily found by them that seek her. She preventeth them that covet her; and he that awaketh early to seek her shall quickly be secure” (Wis. 6:13–16). “For her conversation hath no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness. When I go into my house, I shall repose myself with her: for she hath joy and gladness” (Wis. 8:16).

You have found, O best Mary, wisdom; and because you loved her and sought her from your youth, and were made a lover of her form—a lover simple and pure, ardent and most humble—there came into you the Fountain of all wisdom (Ecclus. 1:5), the Word of the Father in the highest, and His splendor taught and

penetrated you, above every disposition and beauty of heaven and of the stars, of sun, moon and orbs, beautifying and illustrating all the inward parts of your bowels. Not so does the sun shine in heaven as wisdom in your mind.

## Article XIV: Whether before the Archangel of God had announced the Incarnation to the Virgin, she herself had knowledge of the most holy Trinity from the Law and the Prophets

Leaving aside the question whether from the Law and the Prophets the faith of the Trinity was known to the ancients, or can be proved—*(p. 520)* yet with the orthodox doctors it is fitting to assert that the faith of the Trinity did not hide from the ancient saints, and especially the Prophets. But to deduce that here, the brevity I study forbids. Now diligently I will examine whether it also lay open to Mary, and whether that can be shown from the Gospel.

And indeed, if I rightly contemplate, from the context of evangelical truth it can be elicited that Mary, before she had heard the heavenly mystery from the angel, was not ignorant that God is triune. For when she herself, inquiring the manner of the divine efficiency, had said, “How shall this be done, because I know not man?” (Luke 1:34), soon the herald of God began to answer: “The Holy Spirit,” he says, “shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you; and therefore also the Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). That in this response the Archangel intimated the distinction of the divine Persons, whoever is Catholic does not doubt. Therefore either before hearing this response she had learned by faith the distinction of Persons—which given, the intent is plain; or not at all: and if you say that, she certainly profited nothing from the Archangel’s response. For how would she be certified of divine marvels, hearing their effect ascribed to a cause unknown to her?

Therefore, when the heavenly messenger refers the efficiency of his annunciation to the causality of the Holy Spirit, if knowledge of the Holy Spirit was not in Mary, as neither in those who said, “We have not so much as heard whether there be a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2), she could not be certified. Nay, she would not have known what he was saying to her: as when divine Paul had asked certain ones, “Have you received the Holy Spirit, believing?” they, not knowing what he meant by the name of the Holy Spirit: “We have not so much as heard,” they say, “whether there be a Holy Spirit.” And therefore a little after he teaches the same the faith of the Holy Spirit. Conformably, if Mary had not obtained true faith concerning the Holy Spirit (which certainly would by no means have been hidden from Gabriel), she was first to be instructed by the angel concerning the faith of the Holy Spirit; or certainly she herself ought to have asked what was to be thought of the Holy Spirit. For most wicked men, who have also lied that they are Christians, have reckoned the Holy Spirit either distinguished from Father and Son by name alone, as Sabellius; or by nature and name, as Macedonius. Since therefore Mary neither inquired of the angel concerning the Holy Spirit, nor was then instructed by him, it shines forth that she had knowledge of Him, nay of the whole Trinity.

And of this also there is confirmation in what Ambrose says: So indeed Mary’s soul magnified the Lord, because devoted to Father and Son she venerates with pious affection one God from whom are all things, and one Lord through whom are all things (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6). But devotion presupposes faith, and proceeds from it. And this reason (unless I err) obtains, that from subtle inquiry of the evangelical word it can be elicited that knowledge of the Trinity was not lacking to Mary, even before that most reverend angelic salutation.

Finally it by no means sounds right that to that most excellent Virgin through whom and in whom God disposed to fulfill the prophecies of the Prophets, He would not have revealed their understanding, especially in those things which pertain to the perfection of faith and the mystery of the Incarnation. Whence, since the sacred Seers intimated the Trinity, and sang that the Son of God was to be incarnate, it is not fitting to doubt that God also furnished that most clean Maiden a most clear knowledge of these things, through whom His

Prophets were found faithful: that she might both more ardently desire the sacrament of human salvation, and possess a fuller and also more meritorious faith.

Further also, how the Holy Spirit, Spirit indeed of truth and piety, would not have indicated knowledge of Himself also from the time she was capable to that Virgin whom He chose from eternity as temple and sanctuary for Himself, I confess I cannot see. Further that Wisdom which communicates Herself to all capable of Her, which is reckoned more mobile than all mobile things (for She reaches from end to end strongly, and disposes all things sweetly), how She would not have unlocked Herself to that Virgin in whom She decreed totally to descend, and also from whom to be incarnate, I do not find. Moreover how the Father would have hidden Himself from His most cordial daughter and most loving spouse, whom He prepared for His own Only-begotten, I do not see. But also that which He manifested of Himself to servants, He ought not (as I reckon) to have concealed from the pre-elect Mother. Yet in this theory the most integral Virgin vehemently progressed from the moment of the Incarnation: for immense Wisdom dwelling in her taught her of all things without discussion.

*(p. 521)*

## Article XV: Of the species of contemplations

"Shake yourself from the dust, O virgin daughter of Sion" (Isa. 52:2). There being a multiple partition of contemplation among diverse men, the other divisions which illustrious men have handed down being reserved for a more apt place, now I will introduce only one.

There are therefore four species of contemplation. For the first is the speculation of majesty: namely when in the contemplation of the divine height, and in the beholding of the incomprehensibility of the divine substance, the mind itself is suspended and intent. Finally the second species stood the consideration of the judgments of God; in the discussion of which when the intellect sees itself fail, soon with the Apostle it proclaims: "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments!" (Rom. 11:33). And also it confesses that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb. 10:31). Accordingly the third species is the remembrance of the munificence and benefits of God: namely that by His goodness alone forming us from nothing He made us rational; and finally for His exceeding charity and immense clemency He deigned to be incarnate for us, to converse on earth, and at the last to be condemned to a most shameful death. Indeed remembering these, a man striving to be grateful addresses himself: "Bless the Lord, O my soul," saying, "and forget not all His rewards" (Ps. 102:2); and again: "What shall I render to the Lord, for all the things that He has rendered to me?" (Ps. 115:12). Moreover the fourth species stands the beholding of divine promises: namely that He promised us equality of beatitude with the angels, and willed us to be with Him, and also decreed to grant those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man (1 Cor. 2:9).

Indeed these four the sacred Apostle embraces and intimates: "That you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth" of God (Eph. 3:18). For length regards the promises, breadth the benefits, depth the judgments, but height the insignia of majesty.

## Article XVI: That in these four species of contemplations most learned Mary was highest and most elevated

"My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). What, the things previously introduced being recalled, do you think the most happy Virgin apprehended and felt in the four aforesaid modes of contemplations, when she returned into herself and gathered her spirit, when she meditated by night with her heart, and her heart grew hot within her (Ps. 76:7; 38:4)? How was she affected and exercised? For, being most humble, the viler she was in her own eyes, so much more sublime stood the heavenly and uncreated

goodness in her mind. The more dignifiedly the most good and truly most benign God acted and lived with her, so much more vehemently she despises herself, and more deeply marvels at His unthinkable height, and sits within herself revolving the majesty of Him dwelling with her and conversing with her, and soon in His meditation a fire burns; and in comparison of so great an emptying, she utterly reckons herself nothing, and also with most profound humility descends under all men. *(p. 522)* For when that just Elizabeth, having uttered Mary's high praises and incomparable beatitude, had confessed, suddenly bursting into praise of the divine majesty, attributing nothing to herself: "My soul," she says, "magnifies the Lord"—not indeed myself. But what is it to magnify the Lord, unless to confess and intend, venerate and also love His magnitude and also dignity? And these contemplations indeed of the majesty of the Son of God Mary obtained from the beginning of mutual conversation. Further, when she saw Him working miracles, raising the dead, and opening the secrets of minds; when in His most bitter passion she beheld heaven and earth troubled; when she knew Him rising, beheld Him ascending and sending the Paraclete: she was utterly vehemently elevated and excited in the speculation of the divine majesty of her Only-begotten.

Finally, the inscrutable abyss of divine judgments she abundantly (unless I err) weighed with most sober and most prudent mind, that she might be more fully moved to reverence of God, and also to custody of herself. She contemplated how from the foundation of the world many were called, but few chosen (Matt. 20:16; 22:14); how God chose His own nation, the others left, and discerned between the proud and the pious. And therefore she said: "He has scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart; He has put down the mighty from their seat, and has exalted the humble" (Luke 1:51–52).

Moreover she stupified within herself, nor sufficed to marvel, looking upon herself elect to so great grace. For, being utterly least in her own mind, seeing herself assumed to most excellent dignity, she was the more astonished the less she presumed such of herself.

But of the speculation of the promises of eternal Truth, while she had the Son with her on earth she bore equably; but He ascending and glorified, already her heart ascended with Him, nor remained in the age without the loving languor of most ardent desires. For having her only Son, spouse and beloved in the heavens, she could wish nothing other than to be with Him. Yet of this matter there will still be place for ampler word.

## Article XVII: How eminently the most wise Virgin learned mystical theology from her Son

"The king brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me" (Cant. 2:4). The most excellent perfection which anyone can obtain in this life is itself the mystical vision of God: how it can be acquired, the great and divine Dionysius taught Timothy. And indeed his words, avoiding difficulty, I leave; but his sentence I introduce as I can.

Therefore one desiring to obtain this mystical contemplation of God must leave the acts and objects of sense and also of intellect, and rest from the operations of all apprehensive powers turning about created things, and also desert himself and surpass every created thing. But this cannot be done without previous peace of mind. Further peace is the tranquillity of order; but order demands that lower things be subjected and obey higher: and therefore this man ought to have all lower powers and appetites subject to reason. Moreover illumination is necessary to the mind, by which it may be caught up into that divine and eternal light of unchangeable truth, not through symbolic speculation, nor through a sensible or intelligible or created species, so as to stand in those and know God only as He shines in them. Whence, since every intellectual knowledge is made through some species of the known consisting in the intellect of the knower, but every intelligible species is either created or uncreated, and to see God through an uncreated species is reckoned the prerogative not of the way but of the fatherland; it is certain that this mystical vision of God is effected

through a created species. Yet it is necessary to transcend and also leave it, *(p. 523)* as infinitely falling short of the height of the divine nature super-exalted; and on that account mystical vision is said to be without a created image of things, in a simple ecstatic ascent of the mind, because through a created likeness it is united to the divine light only as to the utterly unknown and incomprehensible. Finally this vision is consummated in the apex of affection: for love enters where knowledge fails and remains outside. Therefore through actual ignorance of all things, and most ardent love, one reaches mystical vision. But for full and glowing love of the Divinity it is altogether necessary that the mind be not inordinately affected, kindled or immersed in any created thing, but rather be free and naked and absolute.

Therefore leaving and surpassing all things, and also with mind burning with most glowing desire of seeing God, one obtains this mystical theology. For mystical theology is a most secret and immediate and excessive speaking of the mind with God. It is indeed most secret: because it stands hidden from the eyes of all living sensually and according to the common life of man; and again, because it becomes known only to those who have obtained it, who are very few. Finally it is also immediate: because it happens not through a symbol or image of a sensible thing, but in the clarity of the divine splendor infused into the created soul. For a certain simple ray of the divine and eternal light impressed on the mind raises and exalts it. Moreover this vision stands excessive: for it is made through ecstasy and a certain transformation of the mind into the desired, all created things having been surpassed and left.

Yet, since every created light infinitely falls short, distances and fails from that fountainous, supersplendid, superfull and uncreated light, in the previously introduced contemplation of God the spirit by no means sees of God what He is, but only what He is not. For not by position, but by ablation, is the desired precisely beheld and praised in the prenamed speculation. Therefore to see God in this mode the sacred Dionysius calls to enter into the darkness: calling darkness the inaccessibility of the divine light; as also elsewhere he asserts divine darknesses the abundance and invisible plenitude of uncreated light.

Further into this darkness the more fully the mind itself enters, so much more vehemently its intellectual edge is reverberated, darkens and is blinded. But speech also according to the analogy of entrance is diminished, and at last utterly fails, and also is finished. Indeed, supervening on the mind, the interminable splendor of divine and uncircumscribed clarity darkens its countenance; and the soul discerns that He is utterly nothing of those things which are, but that His nature super-exalted and superviving and also supersubstantial incomparably and immensely transcends all: and that itself will be for the intellect to know, to see that He stands ineffable and unknowable. And finally, the more clearly it has understood that, so much more sublimely and truly it will see God. Indeed weigh that neither by genus, nor by species, nor by number does the divine essence communicate with created beings; but if anything of what belongs to things is ascribed to God, it will not be univocally, but by way of cause and exemplar. And therefore Dionysius declares: “This,” he says, “is truly to see and to know God: to praise the Supersubstantial supersubstantially through the removal of all beings.”

Accordingly, the more sublime and the more perfect than all Mary was in those things which I have set down as necessary to this mystical theology, the more excellently did she attain this vision of God on earth.

For the more stable the tranquillity of her most holy mind, the clearer her wisdom, the more glowing her love, the more absolute her liberty and every grace more copious in her, so much more fully she obtained this deiform and most high perfection. And indeed that in these aforesaid she stood incomparable, partly (unless I err) has been plain, and will shine more lucidly. Moreover, since Mary’s humility was most profound and perfect, she most clearly and eminently knew herself and also what is above her. And therefore, as no one’s humility can be equaled to her humility, so also she more excellently and more limpidly than all contemplated the majesty, incomprehensibility, simplicity and goodness, uncircumscriptibility, independence and beatitude of the eternal nature.

*(p. 524)*

## Article XVIII: Whether the blessed and venerable virgin Mary in the present life saw God through His essence

“I to my beloved, and his turning is toward me” (Cant. 7:10). Already now of Mary’s most bright and incomparable wisdom I have discoursed many things, as I could. And this (unless I err) shines forth from what was previously shown: that that most sacred Maiden, most loving and most cordial daughter of the eternal Father, and pre-elect and also prepared by the same for this, that with happy womb she might pour forth His natural and only-begotten Son, existing His Word and wisdom, was adorned with most splendid wisdom and illustrious genius; further in these, that she was more singularly and excellently decorated before all by her Only-begotten, fountain indeed of all wisdom and principle of intellectual virtue, as it became true and most honest Mother to be upheld before servants, whether Prophets or Apostles. But also already a little before it was deduced how she was most highly contemplative, and also most lucidly learned mystical theology.

Finally, according to the tradition of the holy Doctors, concerning certain pre-elect men, and themselves especially Moses the master of the Jews, and also Paul the teacher of the nations, it is fitting to reckon that even in this life they were brought to so great grace that they saw God through His essence. For of Moses the sublime and blessed God: “Mouth to mouth,” He says, “I speak to him; and plainly, not by enigmas and figures, he sees God” (Num. 12:8). And Paul indeed intimating himself: “I know,” he says, “a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not, or out of the body, I know not: God knows), 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 knows), 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). Therefore, if according to what was previously demonstrated, God’s most dear one stood not only equal to these so sublime men, but utterly more eminent and in every perfection more exalted, why so desirable and so divine a perfection was not granted her, or why it ought to be denied her, I neither see nor find.

Moreover, greater love effects more intimate union, and impends more goods on the beloved. How therefore is God not to be believed to have furnished her this grace, whom before all He so ineffably chose and loved? Further, what wonder if in this life also God gave the pre-elect Virgin to understand His own essence through species, of whom and from whom He Himself deigned to assume true nature? If she gave God to be what she is, why would God not have given her to understand what He Himself is?

But truly it stands that things believed and seen are more ardently desired than things only believed: for desire or love is rooted in knowledge and proceeds from it. Therefore as the blessed Virgin always more ardently and more cordially than all desired and also loved God, so utterly she had obtained fuller knowledge of Him. But a wayfarer who even once saw God through His essence, although afterward he may not always persevere in that perfection, yet always, if I rightly contemplate, knows God more fully than those who never saw Him through species, and remains more fervent. Therefore, if Mary continually knew God more clearly and loved Him more glowingly, she, if I am not deceived, at least sometime saw Him more excellently than all.

Moreover, according to what was previously introduced, in all gifts of nature and of grace the most clean Mother was most similar to the adorable Son, true God. But her Son from the moment of His conception stood perfect even according to the assumed nature as comprehensor: yet not so as the divine intellect. Therefore in this also the virgin Mother is to be reckoned more similar to Him than the rest. Nor do I reckon it alien if what was unceasingly imparted to the Son’s soul, someone assert was also granted to the most pure and most holy mind of the Mother, either once, or sometimes, or certainly abundantly.

Moreover, so great is Mary's plenitude of grace that not even she herself could fully see the same unless contemplating God's essence. For this height of her grace consists, that she was made true Mother of the true and almighty God: which gift, as I opine, cannot be comprehended unless the majesty of God Himself be seen through species. Therefore that the incomparable and most gracious Virgin might stand incessably more grateful to God, more perfectly conceive the grace given her, and also through this handle God the Son more honestly, love more ardently, suckle more joyfully, minister more humbly, and live together more decently, it seems to have become that at least sometime He clearly manifested Himself to her.

*(p. 525)*

## Article XIX: An objection against the things previously introduced, and its solution: in which fuller explanation is given how God in this life can be seen through species

But perhaps someone will object to these, that the eternal and high God answered Moses praying and saying, "Show me Your face, if I have found grace before You" (Exod. 33:13): "Man shall not see Me," He saying, "and live" (Exod. 33:20). Further John: "No man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18). Finally Dionysius teaches us that the most excellent perfection of the present life is to be united to God as utterly unknown. — But perhaps you will object to me, and perhaps accuse me of presumption, that already and in the preceding I have said and also determined many things which, as it seems, I can neither prove nor establish through canonical Scripture, nor through the testimonies of the saints and documents of the doctors.

But to these already it is to be answered briefly: that to see God through His essence is by no means the beatitude and perfection of the way but of the fatherland, nor is it imparted to anyone except altogether supernaturally; but also a man of this kind, while God's contemplation lasts, is utterly suspended from the action of the senses, nor lives with human and sensible life: and so in a certain way he is dead, because for then he evidently exercises no operation of the present life. Further, what was denied Moses in Exodus (for it was said to him there: "You cannot see My glory or face"), the same is said to have been granted him in Numbers, as was deduced a little before (Num. 12:8). John also speaks of the vision of perfect comprehension, by which no created mind, nay not even the soul of Christ, can behold the sublime God. Finally Dionysius spoke of that vision of God which is effected through a created species. But every created form infinitely falls short of the uncircumscribed plenitude of divine perfection: and therefore through it the divine essence cannot be seen clearly and also in itself. But so much more excellent stands this contemplation of adorable God, the more lucidly through a species of this kind it has become known that God consists of utterly nothing of those things which are, but is super-elevated above all, superineffable and utterly incomprehensible; and through this the mind is united to God as to the unknown.

Indeed, what is last opposed I judge to be discussed. And indeed this I securely profess, that I have knowingly asserted nothing contrary to the sayings or writings of the Saints: which if I do, I do not avoid correction. Moreover, what has been said I have not discoursed without reason; but from those things which faith asserts, either necessarily or certainly reasonably are inferred: and therefore I have left and will leave many apocrypha. Finally neither do I have it certain whether the things said and also to be said can always be propped by the authorities of orthodox doctors. I know indeed that illustrious men have written of this very matter. For Anselm edited an edition of these which he called *On the Excellence of Mary*. Also the great and most profound Albert composed a book *On the Praises of Mary*. Yet, because I have inspected the writings of none of these, I am ignorant what they spoke; nor do I know whether those things which this work embraces they also confessed.

*(p. 526)*

## Article XX: That Mary is to be believed to have frequently learned, heard and asked many secrets from her Son

"I will take hold of you, and bring you into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that bore me: there you shall teach me, and I will give you a cup of spiced wine, and new wine of my pomegranates" (Cant. 8:2). With sincere eye, I pray, if you can, contemplate for thirty years Christ the Lord, the king Messias, nearest also cohabiting and also eating with Mary spouse, mother and virgin, first indeed in Nazareth, finally in Egypt, and again in Judea. For the youth dwelt with the virgin, God incarnate with His creature and own Mother; the spouse rejoiced over the spouse; Christ, power indeed and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and His most loving friend remained together. One did not hide from the other; they knew each other mutually. She knew that in Him all treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hidden (Col. 2:3), and that He was the fountain of wisdom, and the Word of the Father (Ecclus. 1:5). Further He knew her most capable of wisdom, most studious and teachable, without every inordinate appetite, most free and most clean in mind. Therefore, what condition now, I ask, is lacking that He most copiously illustrated and taught her? If indeed He freely communicates Himself to every being according to its capacity and dignity, what is He to be believed to have infused, what to have revealed, to that most serene and most holy virgin and also maternal mind?

Further it is the property of familiar and most cordial friends that they intimate their secrets to each other mutually, and hide nothing from one another: for to whom all things are common, whose will is one and affection equal. But who can suffice to measure or certainly meditate the familiarity and charity of the virgin Mary and Christ the Savior which they obtained on earth? Conformably neither do I opine that anyone can think the illumination and also instruction, and also revelation of hidden things, which God the Son furnished to His most cordial and superdulcet Mother.

Moreover, since the most wise Virgin conserved and conferred with tenacious and sagacious mind all things seen and heard concerning Christ her only Son, which were so arduous and so profound and mystical that without Christ's superabundant and much singular illustration they could not be grasped; by no means does it seem but that the most prudent Virgin, eminently dedicated to divine theories, and more vehemently than all wayfarers (if I rightly look) intent on the contemplation of her own Son, asked from her supersapient Son and in turn obtained fuller and more lucid understanding of the same. I opine that of many things which she had heard and known in the beginnings of the divine Offspring's infancy, she afterward sought the reason and mystery: what the Magi's offering designated for her; what mystery in the gifts; why a star appeared to them, but an angel to the shepherds; and many things indeed which (unless I err) no mortal at all is fit to think out.

Moreover, since she was adorned with a natural gift of mind, and wholly filled besides with the light of grace, and knew most certainly that she was conversing with the true God, incarnate of her and born of her, it would have seemed sloth and negligent torpor had she not given herself to the most wholesome inquiries of wisdom: above all since she *(p. 527)* knew that nothing would be denied her. She learned from Him, as I think, secret words, the torments of the reprobate, the joys of the elect, and the unsearchable judgments of God. Again, the disciples, though still carnal and untaught, asked Christ on earth many things, some of them secret, and He in turn answered them, though they did not understand: how much more must His most spiritual and most learned Mother be held to have done the same? Indeed, since her mind was always free from every evil anxiety and from every disordered occupation, never idle, unceasingly tranquil, burning with perfect charity, which casteth out fear (1 John 4:18) and gives an indissoluble confidence, she spoke to her Son not only often, but ardently and confidently. And, to say the truth, it most elegantly befits her (as I remember touching on before, Book I, Art. 36) that hers should be the word that breaks forth to her Son: "Who shall give thee to me for my brother, that I may find thee without, and kiss thee, and now no man may despise me? I will take hold of thee" (Cant. 8:1–2); with the other things which I remember having brought in at the beginning of this article.

## Article XXI: How eminently the most excellent Virgin understood before the rest the doctrine of her preaching Son

"He that has ears to hear, let him hear" (Matt. 11:15; 13:9). Jesus saying this required the ears of the heart. For not all took His words; but neither the Apostles, to whom Christ: "Are you also yet without understanding?" (Matt. 15:16). Yet the speech for whose obscurity they were induced to inquire, and suffered that rebuke of Christ, embraces either no or little difficulty. For so the Savior discoursed: "Not that which enters into the mouth defiles a man; but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles a man" (Matt. 15:11). For the obscurity of which word, the prince of the Apostles also began to address Christ: "Expound to us this parable" (Matt. 15:15). But if this word was hidden from the same, how much more other higher and also more spiritual things did they take with deaf mind? Finally, when He had abundantly and openly intimated to them His imminent passion and the manner of the passion—"Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed to the chief priests, and they shall deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked" (Matt. 20:18–19; Luke 18:31–34)—they did not understand. Further, when at last Peter somehow conceived that Christ asserted Himself to be crucified, taking Him aside he rebuked, saying: "Lord, be it far from You; this shall not be unto You" (Matt. 16:22). Whose folly Christ soon bare: "Go behind Me, satan, because you savor not the things that are of God" (Matt. 16:23). Moreover the disciple whom Jesus loved, confessing his own ignorance before the passion, speaking of himself: "As yet he knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9)—although the Lord had so often and so manifestly, and also in the time of the passion, attested the same to them. In which much of their simplicity is clear.

But if in these they were without understanding, I reckon it not wonderful if they darkened in more divine things, as is that: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30); and, "Before Abraham was made, I am" (John 8:58); and, "What things soever the Father does, these the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19); and, "As the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son also to have life in Himself" (John 5:26); and, "No man can come to Me, except My Father draw him" (John 6:44); and, "All things whatsoever the Father has are Mine" (John 16:15); and what speaking of the Spirit He says: "He shall receive of Mine" (John 16:14). Finally it is no wonder if when Christ already intimated that He would return to the Father, Thomas answered Him: "Lord, we know not whither You go" (John 14:5); and a little after Philip: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us" (John 14:8).

These things I have said that from the disciples' ignorance the wisdom of the blessed Mother may become known: for one of contraries is known through the remaining. If therefore those things which were said of the teachable and ingenious mind of the most holy Virgin, of her studious intellect and her excellent wisdom have just been shown (Art. 7) *(p. 528)* are considered again, it will be clear (unless I am mistaken) that nothing of what has now been touched upon was obscure and unknown to her most splendid mind. For it has been shown, if I remember rightly (Art. 6), that she knew eminently in Christ her Son the unity of the Person and the duality of the natures, and that she contemplated His Godhead also. Again, even if she was not always present, and did not hear all that has just been cited at the time when, according to the tenor of the Gospel, it was said by Christ (for some things He is described as having said to the Apostles apart, and after the last supper), these things were none the less known to Mary: for either she heard them at other times from the mouth of her Only-begotten, or she certainly learned them by inward inspiration.

## Article XXII: How eagerly the Virgin Mother heard her Son teaching and preaching, and how greatly she profited in these things

"He that is of God heareth the words of God" (John 8:47). And therefore, the dearer to God and the liker to Him, the nearer and the more familiar the most gracious and most graceful Virgin was, the more eagerly she heard His sayings, the more carefully she considered them, and the more tenaciously she kept them. Indeed, if she kept in her heart, pondering them, all those things which she heard from others (I mean the angel and

the shepherds, Simeon and Anna, Zachary and Elizabeth) about her own more than beloved and only Jesus (Luke 2:19, 51), how much more did she turn over with a most keen and most studious understanding the words of her Son, whom she knew to be the only and eternal Word of God the Father? Moreover, it is a delight to a lover not only to hear the beloved, but even to hear a little about the beloved. And so, the more fully the most worthy Mother knew her Son as He spoke, and the more ardently she loved Him, the more delightful it plainly was for her to attend to His word and to hear Him speak. But if that Mary, the sinner and the handmaid, was so intent upon the word of Christ that she could not be turned from it even by her sister complaining of her and appealing to the Lord (Luke 10:39–40), how much more that holy and incomparable, that greatest Mary? For she chose the best part (Luke 10:42) in a surpassing manner, and clung without turning aside to that one thing which is said to be necessary: for she was not careful about many things, nor distracted or scattered.

## Article XXIII: An objection from the word of Luke the evangelist, and its solution

Further, if someone insist and say: Many things indeed have already been deduced concerning Mary's wisdom and genius, but the speech of truth does not seem consentaneous to them. For, as Luke's gospel reports, when Mary and Joseph had found Jesus already having twelve years of age in the temple in the midst of the doctors, and that most pious Virgin with maternal affection had said, "Son, why have You done so to us? behold Your father and I have sought You sorrowing" (Luke 2:48); soon He Himself answering them: "How is it," He says, "that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). And the Evangelist adds: "And they understood not the word that He spoke unto them" (Luke 2:50). Therefore, if Mary did not understand this word, her wisdom will not seem to have been so great as the things previously introduced assert.

To one machinating this instance, inquiring I answer thus: What indeed in these words of Christ do you reckon Mary not to have understood? Whether that He signified God as His Father? or that she knew not that He ought to be intent on the work of God? or rather that she herself knew not the mode in which He ought to be about the things that are God's, namely that at such a time or place He should be free for the honor and work of God the Father? The first of these it is a crime for a Christian to say: for she herself not only knew, but even (if it is lawful so to speak) sensed that He was the Son of God. Then, it was not hidden from her that her Son must always be intent upon divine things; and so neither may the second be said. But the third *(p. 529)* I do not reject, since this too takes nothing from the wisdom of the blessed Virgin.

The objection is resolved, then, more easily in this way: that they did not understand Christ's answer because they were not yet accustomed to see such deeds of His or to hear such words. Yet the first solution pleases me more. Indeed, it is right to recall for a little what the most studious Origen said of these things. He says in a homily upon those words of Luke which have already been alleged, that by no means did Joseph and Mary seek the boy Jesus because they suspected Him either to have erred or to have incurred something adverse—whom they most certainly knew to be God's Only-begotten and true Christ; but (as it pleased Origen) they rather feared lest perhaps He had again ascended the heavens, thence, when it pleased, to descend again. Finally, unless Mary had known her Son the author of nature and Lord, she would not so securely have said to Him at the wedding, "They have no wine" (John 2:3): most certainly knowing that whatever He wished He could effect, whether by turning water into wine, or by multiplying a little wine, or certainly by freshly creating abundant wine. And therefore to the ministers: "Whatsoever He shall say to you," she says, "do you" (John 2:5).

## Article XXIV: Of the doctrine of most high Mary

“They that instruct many to justice, shall shine as stars for all eternity” (Dan. 12:3). It is believed, nor irrationally, that after the mission of the Paraclete all Christ’s Apostles and disciples recurred to Mary, as to a most sweet mother and most wise mistress, in things to be done and also in doubts, and often used her direction. For although each had been filled with the Holy Spirit, yet not equally: and hence the rest went forth to the wiser and greater for subsidy or reverence, and in the Mother of their Lord as in the Lord they trusted and were consoled. But singularly it is believed that St. Luke learned many things from her: namely those which either he alone, or more fully, happily and faithfully wrote concerning Christ’s annunciation, generation, circumcision, purification and infancy. For this stands one of the causes why the Christ-bearing Maiden conserved all things which she knew, seen and also heard, conferring them in her heart (Luke 2:19): that at an opportune time she might pour them forth and teach others. Therefore also, not ignorant of Mary’s wisdom and efficacy of doctrine, sacred Ignatius in the epistles which he so reverently wrote to her prayed that she visit him and his neophyte companions and instruct them in the faith.

## Article XXV: Of the prophecy of God-bearing Mary

“Blessed are you among women,” O most serene Virgin (Luke 1:42): blessed indeed and full of blessings, to whom the plenitude of graces and perfections has been imparted. Not from you, O sacred and Christ-bearing Virgin, was the gift of prophecy to be taken away: for that Wisdom which you intact and most integral brought forth transfers Herself through nations into holy souls, constituting Prophets and friends of God (Wis. 7:27).

You saw in the spirit, O most excellent Mary, the glory of your Son to be magnified among the nations; you knew His Gospel to be preached through the globe, in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the utmost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). It was not hidden from you, Lady, what the holy man sang: “All the tribes of the earth shall be blessed in Him, all nations shall magnify Him” (Ps. 71:17); and also Isaias’s prophecy: “From the ends of the earth we have heard praises, the glory of the Just one” (Isa. 24:16); and the prophetic and renowned speech of your own blessed father Jacob: “The scepter shall not be taken away from Juda, and a leader from his thigh, till He come that is to be sent, and He shall be the expectation of nations” (Gen. 49:10). Further you beheld in the Holy Spirit, O most illustrious spouse, that you also were to be glorified by those *(p. 530)* who would believe in the blessed fruit of your most sweet and most chaste womb; therefore, O most holy, prophesying you sang: “All generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). And why indeed, unless because you bore the beatitude of the world? You knew in the light of eternal truth what divine David began to address you: “All the rich among the people,” he says, “shall entreat your countenance” (Ps. 44:13).

Yet, O sober and most modest turtledove, everywhere you kept the temper of holy moderation: you spoke not many things. Nonetheless I opine more future things were revealed to you. For if to your own son—not indeed natural, but serving and guardian (I mean John)—the whole future state of the militant Church was divinely unlocked, why it would not be fitting to confess that the same was also granted to you, mother indeed and also protectress of the Church, I do not behold. Indeed, if what has been shown before is rightly supported, it is not lawful to think otherwise, since you were more familiar with God and closer to His secrets, dearer to Him and more united with Him. Moreover, it befitted the mother (unless I am mistaken) to know the whole state and outcome of the daughter committed to her, that she might cherish her the more carefully and provide for her the more as a mother.

## Article XXVI: That Mary most certainly knew 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 these words of her sweet-sounding canticle the Godlike Mother and most sweet Virgin shows that she was not unaware how at sundry times and in divers manners God spoke of old to the fathers (Heb. 1:1) of the coming of the King Messiah and of the salvation of the world that was to be restored. For she learned, the

Spirit of truth revealing it, that the coming of Christ is twofold. The first in humility and in hiddenness, that being judged and slain He might save the world: for had He come openly then, they would surely have known Him; and we know that if they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). And she foresaw the other coming of her Son, manifest and glorious, in which He is to return as judge and rewarder. For, according to the tenor and force of what has gone before, the Only-begotten of God did not hide from that chosen Maiden, whom He chose from eternity to be His mother, that is, concerning His Incarnation and His coming, what He revealed to His servants, I mean the Prophets. It was not hidden from her, even before the coming of Christ had been made known to her, what became known to Daniel by the teaching of God: “And after seventy weeks,” he says, “Christ shall be slain” (Dan. 9:26). Indeed to her through whom God the fountain of truth decreed to verify the prophecies of the Prophets, He by no means suffered the same to be unknown. I do not reckon that before the Incarnation of the Word she was ignorant of what became known to that God-fearing and just Simeon. For speaking to Mary: “And your own soul,” he says, “a sword shall pierce” (Luke 2:35): intimating the compassion which she stood to suffer with the Son suffering.

Finally, if with Ambrose as witness she read and learned in the Prophet that a virgin would bear Christ, why would she not in the same, and also in others, have known that the same also would suffer? For he who says, “Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” (Isa. 7:14), the same himself also attested: “He has delivered His soul unto death, and was reputed with the wicked; and He has borne the sins of many, and has prayed for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). Further of the Virgin’s Son the prince of the Apostles: “God,” he asserts, “who foretold by the mouth of all the Prophets that His Christ should suffer, has so fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). Therefore, what lay open to all those, by what pact, I pray, will you confess to have been hidden from the Mother preordained of the King of Seers?

Moreover, as she most ardently desired the advent of the Messias, so altogether, if I am not deceived, she most lucidly knew also the necessity of the same and the cause of the advent: otherwise, if she had not known the fruit and need of His advent, how still would she so glowingly have sighed for the Illuminator? She knew what the Prophet, declaring the fruit of the Lord’s passion, sets forth: “He was wounded,” saying, “for our iniquities; by His bruises we are healed” (Isa. 53:5).

Moreover from the blessed mouth of her own adorable Son she abundantly heard these things, and more fully from Him recognized His passion, and also the resurrection soon to follow, if the things previously had are rightly and firmly deduced.

*(p. 531)*

## Article XXVII: How excellent an increment of all wisdom the deiform Mary obtained in the mission of the Paraclete

“But when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will teach you all truth” (John 16:13). To disciples still rude and also carnal Christ the Lord uttered these things. But we know that that most pious Spirit of truth, who indeed essentially stands benign and naturally diffusive of Himself, so much more exuberantly fills every mind into which He descends, the worthier and more capable it has stood. Further nothing so far disposes a mind to the mission and reception of the Holy Spirit as ardent affection for God. It therefore shines forth that on the sacred day of Pentecost the gifts of the Holy Spirit flowed more copiously into most blessed Mary, the more affectionate she was in the sublime God than all the rest: and therefore (unless I err) she alone then received more than all together. For I do not doubt to say that she alone loved God more ardently than all. For if the created love of Christ her Son so incomparably surpasses the charity with which all the elect together, men and angels, Cherubim, Seraphim and Thrones, love God; I do not marvel if Mary’s dilection alone exceeded the love of those one hundred twenty, however most elect: for of whom so great stood

sanctity and grace, than which under God a greater cannot be understood.

Moreover, as one sin prepares for another, so one virtue, one grace and also wisdom disposes to another. For to him that has, it shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that has not, even that which he seems to have shall be taken away (Matt. 13:12). Therefore, the cleaner sanctity, fuller grace, more splendid wisdom was in Mary before the Paraclete's advent, so also before the rest in His advent she was more sublimely exalted in each of these. Therefore, if before the Incarnation of the Word she was saluted from heaven full of grace (Luke 1:28), and in God's conception, mind and womb filled with God, I see nothing other than that she was already made superfull: that after the manner of a liquid element she might pour herself forth on every side, and enrich all coming to her with her efflux.

But truly, the Wisdom of God, Christ the Lord, before the Paraclete's descent, willed the hearts of the elect to be purified and also prepared, that with sincere faith, and also devout and fervent mind, they might receive Him descending. For as Luke commemorates, the disciples returning, Christ already having entered the heights of the heavens, from Mount Olivet into the holy city, remaining in that large upper room with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, persevered unanimously in prayer for ten days, already awaiting with most certain and utterly immobile faith the promise of the Father, which they heard through the mouth of the Son (Acts 1:12–14; 1:4). But what mind can suffice to meditate meanwhile Mary's ignited ardors of prayers and most hot affections? For the more glowingly she loved her Only One, so much more cordially she desired the fruit of His passion which is the salvation of the world. But these things she could not effect unless the Holy Spirit coming: and hence meanwhile more affectionately and above every estimation more intimately the virgin Mother prayed and was inflamed.

## Article XXVIII: Of the contemplations of the happy and divine Virgin, which she received most abundantly from heaven when her Only-begotten had already been glorified

"But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, *(p. 532)* as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18). It fell to you, O divine Apostle and vessel of election, to say this most fittingly, who elsewhere also truly confessed: "Our conversation is in heaven" (Phil. 3:20); and again: "I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). Indeed, the more vehemently your heart, O Queen above the heavens, sweet and gentle Mary, ascended together with your Son as He ascended, the more immovably it had been fixed in Him and the more it burned, the more was your conversation in heaven. And if it is rightly held to be as it were the custom of the most kind Godhead to refresh His faithful and fervent worshippers meanwhile with spiritual consolations, and to sustain them in turn with the contemplation of things to come and of things divine, how much more, O most loving one, did He cherish with most sweet contemplations, strengthen with enlightenments, and touch with certain foretastes of sweetness, your soul, to which the whole world had now grown worthless, which relished nothing and delighted in nothing outside God, which unceasingly longed for heavenly things and sighed after the Son? So great, O best Virgin, most sweet Mary, was the reflected splendour of your inward grace that shone in your face and bearing, so great the brightness of your wisdom that flashed out in your word and in every act, so did your inward virtue go forth outwardly and shine again, that from the very sight of you, from the hearing of your words, and from the contemplation of your whole life, the truth of the Christian faith lay plainly open to those who beheld you.

Moreover, since you suffered with your Son most vehemently in His Passion, it was right that when He was glorified His glory too should in some manner begin in you; and having now passed beyond all the things of this world, you loved nothing, sought nothing, admitted nothing outside your beloved and only Son. The Only-begotten did not fail the Mother of God; and the Holy Spirit unceasingly inhabited and possessed that most venerable temple of His, His most loving and chosen sanctuary, the most glorious banquet hall of the

eternal Trinity; He shone upon it, and filled it, gladdened it, guarded it and lifted it up.

# Book III: Her Virtues and Grace

## Prologue

*(p. 533)* “One is my dove, my perfect one” (Cant. 6:8).

For there being sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and young maidens without number, there stands only one most loving, one alone singular spouse, most simple dove; and yet also in her kind totally perfect: for she who is all fair, and has utterly no spot (Cant. 4:7).

Indeed that heavenly, super-lovable and most sweet spouse has many beloved. For His name is as oil poured out: and therefore the young maidens have loved Him (Cant. 1:2). Yet among them an order consists. For some of them are beginners, and not yet spiritual, having indeed zeal for the spouse, and united to Him through faith and the grace of Baptism, but are somehow still reckoned animal; and of these the number is more copious. Finally others standing more perfect and progressing have already been taught to imitate and desire the spouse spiritually. Yet their affection is not yet merely sincere and free and stabilized in the beloved. And these indeed are fewer; and they are called concubines: because not continually, but by turns they enjoy the desired and also most clean embraces of the spouse; finally neither are they much familiar or secretaries to Him. Therefore others are perfect and merely spiritual: whose affections are reformed, the mind also free and absolute; who have learned to dominate themselves and their own mind, and to be subjected and also obey the spouse Himself; not receiving adulterous and extraneous delights, they desire to be refreshed only with the most pure sweetnesses of their spouse. But these are very few, and are reckoned queens: for they who by love of their spouse have scorned the kingdom and beauty of the age. They are moreover perfect, especially in respect of the others. Yet by relation to that unique and singular spouse, virgin and mother, they also are to be reputed imperfect. For of her the Son spouse began to speak: “As the lily,” He says, “among thorns, so is my love among the daughters” (Cant. 2:2). As indeed I remember excellently said by Jerome, as in comparison of God no one is good, so in comparison of Mary utterly no one stands perfect, however excellent she stand.

Therefore, since in the first book of the present edition I discoursed as I could of Mary’s dignity and proclamations looking most potently to her virgin and deified flesh, and in the second also of her incomparable wisdom, now it is incumbent to treat in equal order of her virtues.

But, as I have often formerly confessed, so unworthy, alas! and also unfit, and (as I fear) also wicked and contemptible a praiser I stand. For that the most holy and most clean one, *(p. 534)* illustrious also with the plenitude of all virtues, be praised by a vile and vicious little man, especially in this mode of praising, does not become. For it is to be feared lest the reader from his writing be not already edified and kindled, but rather scandalized, and rather beclouded, namely drawing thence occasion of thinking and praising less worthily of the most excellent. What therefore shall I do? If I proceed, I seem presumptuous; if I cease, rash: for why did I wish to begin what I cannot perfect?

But lo, consolation and counsel occur. For my Lady, although she is sublime and great, is nonetheless mild and pious, humble and affectionate; finally, her mercies are above all her works (Ps. 144:9). Come therefore, needy and poor, if you fear to praise and address the deiform, super-exalted Lady, why indeed do you dread the most benign and also most humble? Although indeed praise is not seemly in the mouth of a sinner (Ecclus. 15:9), yet a contrite and humbled heart the most merciful and superdulcet Virgin does not despise (Ps. 50:19). Therefore confessing and weighing your imperfection and insufficiency, and also trusting in her clemency as from the beginning, securely pursue what remains. For if you have praised, although not as she is worthy, but as you can, I hope it is accepted by her.

Now therefore, O most cordial and truly altogether sweet and fair and delightful Mary, most clemently and maternally be present, and you who bore the Fountain of all sanctity, from the very plenitude of your virtues pour into me streams of graces, that you, O Lady, my mind may virtuously follow, my mouth truly praise, and finally my whole life and every sense honor.

## Article I: Of the perfection and magnitude of the faith of Christ-bearing Mary

"Blessed are you that have believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to you by the Lord" (Luke 1:45). That most wise architect and craftsman of the world, wishing to build in Mary a sublime and most strong edifice (an edifice, I say, compacted of all virtues), cast in her a stable and firm foundation. Do you not reckon faith the foundation of spiritual construction?—which initiating hope, also induces charity as to act, not as to the habits which are said infused. Finally, the just lives by faith; and also, without faith it is impossible to please God: for unless we have believed, we shall by no means understand.

You, O Mary, are the most excellent daughter of the patriarch Abraham, not so much by propagation of flesh as by equity of faith. For he believed God, and it was reputed to him unto justice (Gen. 15:6). Further you also are blessed, because you have believed (Luke 1:45). Yet more than Abraham is this. For he often either doubted, or certainly stood similar to one doubting. Having obtained the divine promise of a son to be born of Sara: "O that Ismael," he says, "may live before You" (Gen. 17:18). This indeed, if I rightly remember, he uttered to promising God—that is, the angel speaking in the person of God—as not having confidence concerning the begetting of Isaac, or certainly so it seems. Finally, having obtained the divine promise of possessing the land: "Whereby," he says, "shall I know that I am to possess it?" (Gen. 15:8). But you, O most faithful Mary, having heard the heavenly herald, did not soon as hesitating answer: Whereby shall I know this? or, What sign will there be for me? But inquiring the mode, you spoke: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" (Luke 1:34). For most certainly you beheld God to be true and also almighty; and therefore neither could the marvels of God announced to you overwhelm the edge of your mind: because a mind firmed with immobile and perfect faith looked not to the order of nature, but to the divine power. Whence a little instructed concerning the mode, you said: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Moreover you excel Barac in faith: for when Debbora the prophetess promised him from heaven triumph over the enemies of God, he dared not go forth to battle without her; *(p. 535)* and on that account, by the most equal censure of highest reason, the victory itself was ascribed not to him, but to a woman (Judges 4). Further you stood more robust than Gedeon the strongest of men: for twice he sought a sign of the victory promised from heaven (Judges 6–7). So Manue, when he had heard from the angel and believed that he would beget Samson of a sterile wife, yet suddenly at the angelic vision with wonderful and unexpected ascent his faith wasted: for addressing the woman: "We shall die," he says, "because we have seen the Lord." She intending: "If God," she says, "willed to kill us, He would not have said the things that are to come" (Judges 13:22–23). Moreover Ezechias the most pious of kings sought a sign of his ascent into the temple of the Lord; and at his asking the sun returned ten lines on the dial of Achaz (4 Kings 20). But also just Zachary seeking a sign of the promised son from the angel: "Whereby," he says, "shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife Elizabeth is barren" (Luke 1:18). Therefore these illustrious and most worthy men you, O admirable woman, transcend by the virtue of faith, and incomparably excel.

Further, it is right to make plain how you shine with this blessing among women also. Yet first you are to be preferred to Moses the lawgiver, and to Aaron also, the holy one of the Lord. For both of them, at the waters of Contradiction, where the children of Israel strove, were unbelieving toward the word of God. For Moses began to speak to Israel thus: "Hear, ye rebellious and incredulous: can we bring you forth water out of this rock?" And for this unbelief they were forbidden to enter the land of promise (Num. 20:10–12). Then your first mother, O Mary, confessed herself doubtful of the divine warning when she answered the serpent: "Lest

perhaps we die" (Gen. 3:3). A little before, the Lord had declared and warned: "In what day soever thou shalt eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt die the death" (Gen. 2:17). But she, when the serpent asked the reason of the divine prohibition, added the mark of her unbelief, saying: "Lest perhaps we die." So too Sara your forebear, when she perceived that a son was promised her, laughed and said: "After I am grown old, and my lord is an old man, shall I give myself to pleasure?" (Gen. 18:12).

There is, moreover, O Virgin who bore God, that in which the incomparable and sublime glory of your faith shines out. For the more supernatural and incomprehensible the things promised by God, the more glorious and meritorious it is to give them faith. But to none of the men or women who have been brought forward, or could be, were such wonderful things promised and announced as to you, O most renowned and most sweet bride, Mary. To them an unhoped-for offspring was promised, or an unexpected victory, or something of the kind; but what comparison have these with what was announced to you? For to you fruitfulness was promised together with integrity; the Only-begotten of God was offered you to conceive and to bring forth, Christ the Lord Himself, the true Messiah: which I hold to be the most wonderful of all wonders.

## Article II: Of fuller praise of Mary's faith

"As many as were ordained to life everlasting believed" (Acts 13:48). For not all have faith (2 Thess. 3:2). Further those whom He has chosen, He purifies their hearts by faith. But the plenitude of faith consists not only in its firmness and certainty, but also in this, that one penetrate with subtle and learned mind the things that are of faith, and with clear edge speculate (as is lawful) the reasons of faith itself, and also the order and nexus of things to be believed. For although faith does not lean on reason, nor is propped by inquiry, yet an illustrated mind plainly beholds this, that nothing is more rational than faith: for to which reason and nature and every natural science serve. Therefore, if those things which were said of Mary's most excellent wisdom in the second book are remembered, it will be plain (unless I err) how all these things convened in Mary—namely with how splendid a mind she contemplated every nexus and order of faith, and finally its articles and the causes of the Incarnation.

*(p. 536)* Moreover, as Mary's sanctity so far approached Christ's sanctity that no sanctity can approach further; so among the knowledge of wayfarers Mary's knowledge of faith was most similar to the comprehension of Christ's soul, which never stood a wayfarer; and she herself most profoundly knew what was done in her and also through her and from her. Indeed, when at the hour of the Just One's passion the faith of all wasted and failed, yours only, O Mary, most constant and unshaken faith remained, nor did you in any way hesitate concerning your Son's resurrection and ascension soon to come. You also obtained most eminently the gifts of the Paraclete which pertain to the perfection of faith. And therefore because of the beauty of faith and the most bitter and maternal compassion of whole body and mind which were in you, O Mary, at the most shameful death of your beloved, most conveniently you could speak what is written: "I am black but beautiful, O you daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Cedar, as the curtains of Solomon" (Cant. 1:4). The cause of which darkening is intimated by what a little after is added: "The sons of my mother have fought against me" (Cant. 1:5). For against you fought the sons of the Synagogue, in flesh not in spirit, taking from you your only Son, and while you looked on, fixing Him to the wood.

## Article III: Of the virtue of hope of the blessed Virgin

"Look upon the nations of men, and know that no one has hoped in the Lord and been confounded. For who has continued in His commandments and been forsaken? Or who has called upon Him, and He despised him?" (Ecclus. 2:11–12). There being three theological virtues, which on this account that they have obtained God for immediate object are called theological, it is plain that each of them according to substance flows and is caused from God's grace alone: for they consist as infused habits, and also prevent every merit. For without faith, hope and charity no action can be reckoned meritorious. For he that comes to God must believe

that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him (Heb. 11:6).

Yet hope is said to proceed from two things, namely God's grace and one's own merits. But this is fitting to be understood of formed hope and the operation of hope. For hope cannot be without grace, and in the wicked there is no true hope: because the hope of the impious is as the down which is taken away by the wind, and as thin foam which is dispersed by the storm, and as smoke which is diffused by the wind, and as the memory of a guest of one day that passes by (Wis. 5:15). Indeed, he who remains in filth, who loves the world and the things that are in the world, who does not walk by the paths of justice, yet asserts that he hopes in the Lord, lies, and makes God unjust, and fallaciously presumes: for cursed is he who sins in hope.

Since therefore hope is defined a certain expectation of eternal beatitude proceeding from divine grace and the merits of the one hoping, it shines forth that the hope of the most excellent Virgin was so much more sublime, the fuller grace and holier life existed in her. Further she was filled not only with grace, but also with the plenitude of grace, nay with the very Fountain of all grace; nor after the created holiness of her Son is there any holiness in the universe comparable to hers: she was therefore more than full of hope.

Moreover, hope arises and grows from the experience of familiarity, from the revealing of secrets, and from having tasted abundantly the goodness of another. But who was ever so familiar with Christ the Lord, the Angel of great counsel (Isa. 9:6), as that chosen one, singular and only, who conceived Him and brought Him forth, suckled Him and brought Him up to His growth? Who, again, so experienced and tasted the goodness and love of the adorable God as she, whose Son He did not shrink from being, to whom He joined Himself so intimately, and with whom He chose first to dwell on earth? Wholly unspeakable, therefore, and perfect was the hope of the divine Mother.

But the more clearly a man comes to know the insufficiency *(p. 537)* and frailty of his own condition, and likewise the munificence and kindness of the divine goodness, the less (unless I am mistaken) he trusts in himself, and the more vehemently in God. And after Christ there is none to whom both of these were known as they were to the most humble Mary.

She most fully knew, and had such confidence toward God, that she was not sufficient to think anything as of herself from herself (2 Cor. 3:5); but most devoutly confessed with the Psalmist: "In God is my salvation and my glory; God is my help, and my hope is in God" (Ps. 61:8). Finally, if it was lawful for the holy man to say, "Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him" (Job 13:15): what ought one to opine of the deified Mother of the king Messias?

## Article IV: Of the most ardent charity of Mary towards God

"Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love" (Cant. 2:5). This is your voice, O Mary. For if Christ is to be loved by all with the whole heart, with the whole mind and the whole soul, and with all their strength (Deut. 6:5), yet by you He was to be loved singularly, and for many special reasons. Indeed, to recall them for the present, these were the reasons of divine charity for you, O blessed one: that He is the Creator and you the creature; He the Lord and you the handmaid; He the Saviour and you the one set free; He the giver of benefits and graces, and you the one who received them. And these were reasons of divine love common to you and to the rest. But there remain the special causes: that He is the Son and you the Mother; He the Bridegroom and you His singular bride; He the familiar Friend and you the keeper of His secrets. I confess, O my Lady, incomparable and inestimable Mary, that though I had the power of the eloquence and the tongues of all the orators, and were adorned with the subtlety and the learning of all the philosophers, and shone at last with the grace, the wisdom and the holiness of the apostolic men themselves, yet I should be unfit and powerless to utter or even to conceive with what most fervent and burning charity towards your Son and your God you were unceasingly aflame, while you turned over all these things in your mind, and beheld Christ the Lord chiefly with your most happy eyes, both bodily and

inward. For even we, your very little servants, owe ourselves wholly to the love of your Son, because He created us. Again, because He redeemed us, we owe ourselves wholly; nay, we owe more than ourselves to His love, by as much as He for whom we were spent is more excellent and more sublime than we.

And further, if a wise son is the love and glory of his parent (Prov. 10:1), and a true mother naturally loves the offspring of her own womb as something of herself, it is plain, if I understand rightly, that the wiser and better the child, the more fervently and the more joyfully he is loved by a good and sensible mother. But the fruit of your virginal, most sweet and most fruitful womb, O Mary, is the Wisdom and the Power of God (1 Cor. 1:24), and the fountain and source of all holiness and knowledge; and therefore, O Lady, He was most heartily lovable to you. Nor was it needful for you to desire or seek anything outside Him: for in Him lies the perfect possession of all things beautiful and good, since nothing more beautiful, nothing more worthy, nothing holier than He can be thought.

Further, that the love of your mind might not be scattered among several sons and be lessened, you had one Son only, and in Him you found the matter of all pure and holy delight. Again, the more He bestowed on you, the more intimately was He to be loved by you. And the gifts which He granted you, O most excellent Virgin, are very great, unspeakable and supernatural. For He gave you not His gifts, but Himself; He made Himself your son; through you first He brought mercy and salvation into the world; and by this He set you above every creature. For what can be equal to her who brought forth the Maker of the universe?

Moreover, if that sinner, happy now, once loved much (Luke 7:47), *(p. 538)* to whom Christ forgave much, not so much by pouring in grace as by showing pardon and then bestowing grace, how much more, O Mary, had you loved much, whom God so went before, chose and chose beforehand, sanctified in the womb, kept wholly free from every fault both venial and mortal, and filled unceasingly with every spiritual increase?

Lastly, this too is not hidden: the more sublime and illustrious a person is who converses and deals with a lowly and lesser one in a more condescending and familiar way, the more is the lesser inclined to his love, and the more heartily warmed by it. Since then, O Mary, you were most humble and the lowest in your own eyes, and knew your Son perfectly, and therefore esteemed Him most highly, the more familiarly and the more humbly He lived with you, the more were you kindled in His charity. And He was subject to you (Luke 2:51), and made Himself like His brethren in all things (Heb. 2:17), save that He emptied Himself more deeply than all; and so, contemplating His majesty and His humility together, and esteeming yourself the last of all, you burned exceedingly with His love. Further, the secret words which it is not granted to man to utter (2 Cor. 12:4) He revealed to you (unless I am mistaken) far more fully than to the servant, the Apostle: of which I remember to have treated in what went before, as well as I could (Book II, Art. 20).

## Article V: Of the charity and zeal for the salvation of neighbors in the most affectionate and most clean Mother

“I as a turpentine tree stretched out my branches, and my branches are of honor and grace” (Ecclus. 24:22). Of all divine perfections this is most eminent, to be a cooperator of God around the salvation of neighbors. For love of neighbor, and the zeal of souls proceeding from it, is coordinated to divine charity, and proximately accompanies it: for on these hang the whole Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40). Nor are they segregated from each other: because he who loves God also loves His image. For this commandment we have from God, that he who loves God love also his brother (1 John 4:21).

But we find in most blessed men, among whom the doctor of the Hebrews and master of the nations shine, this dilection of neighbors to have burned vehemently and almost incredibly. For Moses praying God for that stiff-necked people and rebellious crowd: “Either forgive them this trespass,” he says, “or strike me out of the book that You have written” (Exod. 32:31–32). And Paul writing of unbelieving Jews: “I wished myself,” he says, “to be anathema from Christ for my brethren the Jews, who are my kinsmen according to the flesh”

(Rom. 9:3). And speaking to the nations: “I most gladly,” he says, “will spend and be spent myself for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:15). Therefore, if this dilection of neighbor so abounded in Christ’s ministers, more copiously indeed it superfluously flowed in His most holy Mother.

Finally, the more perfectly anyone loves Christ, so much more intensely he desires the price of His blood and the merit of His death to work and bear fruit in the salvation of men. Therefore indeed, as before all Mary incomparably loved Christ, so more cordially she always desired the salvation of those who were redeemed by His holy, precious and fair blood. Moreover, since she herself was constituted mother and advocate and protectress of the Church, she most certainly always sought its good with a mother’s zeal. In this too, as in all else, she was most like her Son.

How great, moreover, and how wholesome the love of neighbour is may be weighed from this, that Christ the Lord at the Last Supper taught it to His disciples so singularly, as His final teaching and a father’s testament: “A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another” (John 13:34); “By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another” (John 13:35). Moreover the disciple whom Jesus loved: “We know,” he says, “that we have passed from death to life, *(p. 539)* because we love the brethren; he that loves not, abides in death” (1 John 3:14). For without charity utterly nothing meritorious stands. Finally whatever you have done or suffered will profit you nothing unto salvation, if charity does not perfect it; so much also every exercise profits, as much as it is augmentative of dilection.

## Article VI: Introduction to the commandment given concerning charity, and its explanation

“My soul has desired You in the night; but also my spirit in my breast: in the morning I will watch to You” (Isa. 26:9). Since indeed charity is the queen of virtues, and in every meritorious action of universal virtue first and also last, because from it every good work proceeds, and unto it is to be directed; it shines forth that a perfect and principal precept was to be given concerning it. And indeed the same is fully and openly unlocked in Mark. He says indeed: “You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole mind, and with your whole soul, and with your whole strength” (Mark 12:30). Whose explanation, although by diverse—namely Augustine, Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa and others—is handed down diversely and multifariously, yet one apt one, which the holy Doctor also chose in the *Secunda Secundae*, I will now introduce. Since indeed of all spiritual virtues, and especially as to intention of the last end, the will is the motive principle, as the material heart stands the motive principle of all bodily virtues; therefore by heart the will is taken. Finally, three principles of human acts are reckoned moved by the will: namely the intellect, which here is called mind; the inferior appetitive power, and it is designated by the name of soul; and the exterior executive virtue itself, which is given to be understood by strength. We are therefore commanded to love God with whole heart, namely that whole intention, desire and affection be directed into Him; also with whole mind, subjecting our intellect to Him in all things; also with whole soul, that the inferior appetite itself be governed according to God; finally with all strength, that according to God’s law and pleasure every exterior operation of ours be regulated.

Further it is also commanded that we love the neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39): not, indeed, according to equality. For among the things which we are taught to love out of charity, namely God, ourselves, our neighbour and our own body, there is an order; and among them all, always the first is to be loved more than the second. We are commanded, then, to love our neighbour as ourselves according to a threefold likeness: first, by reason of the end, that we love him so for eternal beatitude as also ourselves; second, that we not condescend to him in vices; last, that we not love him for our own utility and delight. By reason of the first this dilection of neighbor is holy; by cause of the second, chaste; and because of the third it is said true. The ordered charity of these things to be loved the spouse having obtained, exulting in the Canticles: “The king,” she says, “brought me into the cellar of wine, he set in order charity in me” (Cant.

2:4).

## Article VII: How before all Mary excellently fulfilled this precept of charity

“Your name, and Your remembrance, O Lord, in the desire of the soul” (Isa. 26:8). Although according to the sentence of the Saints the previously introduced commandment of charity cannot in the present life be fully and perfectly fulfilled (for then it will be fully fulfilled, when a man has always actually been suspended into the love of God according to the four things previously touched: which befits the fatherland, not the way); yet every wayfarer as long as he is in the way can incessantly reach a fuller execution of the aforesaid commandment.

*(p. 540)* Finally, a rational mind, if it has stood healthy and lively, by no means can subsist without love. And this finally (unless I err) shines forth, that anyone can kindle and burn so much more vehemently in the dilection of one, the farther and more sincerely his affection has been segregated from many. Therefore, the more absolute from every inordinate desire of created things stood the mind of the God-bearing blessed Virgin, so much more stable she consisted in the love of God. But those things which draw back and impede the mind from divine charity are tripartite: for some exist utterly outside us, as moneys, fields, riches; but others lie hidden within us, as the inordination of sensuality and of the passions; further the rest are placed midway between these, for they are outside us, and yet somehow conjoined to us, and also consist one with us, as parents and spouse, and the other kinsmen. If the affection of these in us has been cut off and extinguished, we shall soon be fixed in God’s charity, and it will also be ready to be affected and also stabilized in God. It is therefore to be contemplated how free and sincere from inordinate affection of these was the mind of the glorious Maiden.

And indeed that she stood poor becomes known from the Gospel. Finally, that love of riches also was utterly not in her, hence shines, that the gold offered to the Son by the kings she is believed to have spent swiftly on the use of the needy: otherwise, how at the Purification, when she presented the Child to the Lord (Luke 2:24)… [here the printed text notes that some words are wanting]. Moreover, that the most gentle and most sweet Virgin never felt within herself any disordered movement or rebellion of sensuality has partly been made known from what went before (Book I, Art. 38; Book II, Art. 7), and will be clearer still, by her favour, from what is soon to be said. Further, it is certain that she was not hindered by affection for those joined to her. For the most obedient and supremely prudent Virgin heard her father exhorting her, and obeyed: for the patriarch David began to address her thus: “Hearken, O daughter, and see, and incline thy ear: and forget thy people and thy father’s house” (Ps. 44:11). Lastly, having a spouse, she remained untouched. And so her Godlike mind, which God desired, was set apart and free from every movement and affection that draws away from God; and therefore she was steadfast and whole in the divine love.

Moreover, as nature is the cause and principle of natural operations and movements, so grace is held to be the cause and origin of meritorious acts also, and above all of love. Again, as nature when it is unhindered, so grace too when it is perfect acts with ease. The more sublime, then, the fullness of grace in the chosen and incomparable Virgin, the more abundantly was she intent on divine things, the more steadfast in charity, and the more unceasing in every meritorious act. Since, then, she was sanctified in her mother’s womb, full of grace before the Incarnation of the Word (Luke 1:28), fuller in the Incarnation, and afterwards more filled still, advancing supremely every day, it is certain that, as far as the pilgrimage of the present life allows, she was always actually burning with divine love.

Again, love is rooted in the contemplation of God, as the Psalmist says: “In my meditation a fire shall flame out” (Ps. 38:4). And therefore, the more steadfast the contemplation, the more lasting and the more indissoluble is the love. In the second book I remember having shown (Book II, Art. 12) with how clear and excellent a fixedness the mind of the sacred and divine Virgin was intent on the contemplation of divine things. Hence it is known that she burned with the love of them incomparably and (if it be lawful so to speak)

unceasingly.

Further, the fire of divine love, once kindled in the rational mind, burns always unceasingly and ever more vehemently, if it has fuel and is not lessened through fault and negligence. For a virtuous act always makes the mind capable of fuller grace. But every fault, if it is mortal, destroys grace and charity; if venial, it disposes to another fall, and wounds the vigour of grace. *(p. 541)* Since therefore Mary never sinned either by omission of good or by commission of evil, nor ever lived idle, it stands that the flame of divine charity burning in her always kindled more strongly, so that it rested not even in her eating, working or sleeping: and hence in the Canticles the virgin mother and spouse: "I sleep," she says, "and my heart watches" (Cant. 5:2).

## Article VIII: Of that most ardent charity with which Mary, who bore Christ, burned after the Ascension of her adorable Son, as she visited His holy places

"Put me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm: for love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell" (Cant. 8:6). This is the voice of Christ to holy Church, and to every faithful soul, but especially to the singular spouse, the most fruitful Virgin.

Intend, I pray, all my inward parts, with what flame of love indeed this Virgin glowed, when Christ her only Son already taken from the eyes of flesh, she incessantly visited and beheld those places of His most potently in which the businesses of our salvation, and His singular acts, the apprehension and binding, the passion and resurrection, the preaching, and the mission of the Paraclete, and finally the Ascension itself, had been consummated and also transacted. For she visiting and contemplating, the memory of past things was renewed, and in them she beheld the Son as present; she handled reminiscing what and how great things He sustained: how she beheld Him suffer, be fixed to the cross, hang on it and finally die; how she saw rosy and also salvific streams of sacred blood flow from the Son's lacerated and transfused flesh, and heard Him addressing her from the cross. Further, when she intends the sacred places of the Ascension, with what affection did she then sigh for her beloved? How finally glowing with zeal of neighbors in these things did she pray and obtain that so noble a price of filial blood bear fruit? We read that sometimes some devout, when they visited the most blessed places of the divine passion, were affected with so great dilection of Christ and piety of compassion, that either they utterly failed from themselves, or certainly could not contain themselves at all: how much more did the most affectionate and Christ-bearing Virgin kindle, melt and fail in such things?

## Article IX: That Mary eminently arrived at conformity with original justice

"For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of His own likeness He made him. But by the envy of the devil, death came into the world" (Wis. 2:23–24). "For God made not death, neither has He pleasure in the destruction of the living. For He created all things that they might be: and He made the nations of the earth for health" (Wis. 1:13–14). The most wise and almighty craftsman of the world produced man in the beginning right and also ordered (Eccles. 7:30). Further this rightness and ordering was located in this, that the more declining be subjected and obey the superior. But in man there are flesh and spirit, sense and reason, sensitive and intellectual appetite. And therefore in the protoplast parents these were disposed orderly and without rebellion: because neither did the flesh covet against the spirit, nor did sensuality resist reason. Yet this so ordered state utterly depended on the observance of the divine commandment. Whence through disobedience, the will averted from God, the previously introduced state was utterly corrupted, the powers were deformed, and the whole nature infected. But through the help of divine grace the elect posterity rise again, striving to reform in themselves the deformed image of the eternal Trinity, and to govern the sensitive part of the soul according to the censure of reason. *(p. 542)* And the more vehemently they progress in this very thing, so much more perfect they stand.

Finally, the previously touched state was called original justice: which lost, the intellect was involved in the darknesses of ignorance; the will also was made declinable from the good and easily avertible from the right, and finally memory itself was constituted vague and unstable, and the sensitive powers were made rebellious to reason. Since therefore the perfection of reason is wisdom, especially that which proceeds from faith; but of the will, dilection, and such as flows from grace; but of memory, firm stability in both, which cannot happen without the moderation of the sensitive virtues: it sufficiently (unless I err) shines forth that he who has obtained these interior and intellectual perfections has returned to conformity with original justice, and has obtained in himself the reformation of the Trinity. Therefore if those things which were determined a little before of the quality of wisdom in the second book, and of the ardor of charity of the fecund Virgin, are now again a little intended, it will be plain that the wiser and also more affectionate the Lady of the world, Queen of heaven, and (what is more excellent) true Mother of the most high God stood than all the rest, so much more excellently she progressed to the virtue of original justice.

Finally, so far you excelled all in the plenitude of wisdom and the fervor of charity, O Virgin, that most worthily you confess of yourself: “I,” saying, “am the mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope. In me is all grace of the way and of the truth, in me all hope of life and of virtue” (Ecclus. 24:24–25). Moreover, so sanctified and filled with grace while still existing in her mother’s womb was she, that never afterward did she experience a culpable and inordinate motion of passion; the very tinder of sin also was so far repressed in her by preventing grace that the most clean Virgin never felt the itch of the flesh, and progressed with alacrity to consummate and utterly perfect chastity, nor did sensuality ever resist reason.

## Article X: That the blessed Virgin stood full and adorned with all the moral virtues

There are moreover moral virtues moderatrices of the passions, rectifying them and subjecting them to reason. For the passions themselves according to themselves are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy: but if they exceed or fail, they are blameworthy; further, if they are regulated by reason, they become praiseworthy. Since therefore, according to what was a little before introduced, Mary arrived at the perfection of original justice, and in her the sensitive part was most highly subject to the intellectual portion, it is utterly certain that she eminently obtained the chain of moral virtues.

Indeed, according to the dogmas of the philosophers, there are twelve moral virtues: namely fortitude, temperance, love of the honorable, magnanimity, liberality, magnificence, meekness, truth, affability, eutrapelia or sociality, prudence and justice. Of these prudence is in the practical intellect, but justice in the will; but the rest are situated in the sensitive appetite, and turn about delights and sadnesses. Justice also is directive of operations, and prudence is reckoned the right reason of things to be done. But fortitude is a certain mean of fear and audacity, most potently around the dangers of death. Temperance however turns about irrational passions, namely refraining and moderating the delights of touch and taste. Finally love of honors is the virtue by which one is orderly affected around middling honors; but magnanimity exists around great honors. Liberality finally is around middling expenses, but magnificence around great expenses. Meekness also mediates between anger and unprovokability: for it is a virtue moderative of anger. But truth as now undertaken is the virtue by which one shows himself in words and deeds such as he is, lest he be a boaster, or hypocrite or veiler. Moreover affability *(p. 543)* consists in this, that in the conversation of life one bear himself well, not as a flatterer or difficult person, but as civil and affable. But eutrapelia is that around games a man exhibit himself modestly, not histrionically. By these virtues all the affections, sadnesses, delights and motions of the sensitive part are reformed and ruled.

## Article XI: Of the fortitude of victorious Mary

“Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her” (Prov. 31:10). Fortitude has already been defined as ordinative of those audacities and fears which are around the dangers of death: lest anyone fear death too much, nor inconsultedly enter its dangers, but for time, place and cause manfully expose himself to its dangers. And indeed this is the proper undertaking of fortitude, and so it is reckoned a cardinal virtue. Finally sometimes it is more universally described, that fortitude be said the virtue by which one can dominate his mind, and resist its concupiscences, temptations and perverse affections. But fortitude so described is not a special, but a general virtue. Yet in the previously alleged speech of Solomon it is undertaken in this common mode. For the wise man recognizing in the spirit the liberation of the world to be future through a woman, and that she would bear the king Messias; again also considering how fragile, defective and also unstable the feminine sex is; knowing moreover that for Christ’s conception a holy and perfect woman was required, desiring such to arise for the world, so he begins: “Who,” saying, “shall find a valiant woman?” For he had known what was said from heaven to a certain serpent: “She shall crush your head” (Gen. 3:15). And he desired her to be born, that armed with fortitude, and having surpassed all softness of feminine condition, she might tread under foot the actor of human perdition, and also produce the repairer of lost beatitude. Finally, most certainly knowing her about to be born, and beginning to prophesy of her: “She has girded,” he says, “her loins with strength, and has strengthened her arm” (Prov. 31:17).

But that she was fearless of death, hence it stands, because not only with the Son, but even (if it had been possible) for Him and also before Him she would have wished to die: for she who loved Him more than herself, and already lived not herself, but Christ in her (Gal. 2:20). Whence also that which Peter incaute asserted to Christ: “Lord,” saying, “I am ready to go with You both into prison and to death” (Luke 22:33); and again, “Although I should die with You, I will not deny You” (Matt. 26:35): she herself indeed could securely attest. Moreover, if it was lawful for Christ’s servant—I intimate Paul—to utter: “I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13); again, “I am sure that neither death, nor life, shall be able to separate me from the charity of Christ” (Rom. 8:38–39); and also, “I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23): if, I say, these things were lawful for him, how much more sublimely and perfectly could the Virgin Mother speak these, and had she obtained this virtue?

O sacred Mary, strongest not only of women but also of men! through whom the prisons of hell were broken, the gates of brass destroyed, and the bars of iron burst (Ps. 106:16); who so far dominated your own mind and all its motions that never did the mind stand rebellious to the most right censures of reason; who expecting present death with desire and future life with security, lived always cheerful, tranquil and joyful (in the manner of which the Apostle says: “Rejoice in the Lord always”, Phil. 4:4); and you cast down all the powers of the air in so glorious a triumph that a thousand fell at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand (Ps. 90:7), and they no longer dared to draw near you; but rather, seeing in you the chain and order of the spiritual virtues, terrified and urging one another to flight, they said: “These are the camps of God” (Gen. 32:2); “let us flee from Israel” (Exod. 14:25). For you were as terrible to them as an army *(p. 544)* set in array is to the enemy (Cant. 6:9). Nor do I wonder, O Lady stronger even than the highest of the angels, that you were so mighty in fortitude: for you brought forth the Lord of hosts, Christ the King, who is the power of the Father, upholding all things.

## Article XII: Of the temperance of the sober and most modest Virgin

But temperance is the ordinatrix of those delights which happen around taste and touch. And because those delights are greatest and more innate, and on that account more laboriously eradicable, therefore the virtue refraining them is said cardinal. Further this virtue most potently became Mary. For the saving woman, restitutrix of life, was to be adorned with qualities altogether opposite from that condemning woman and inducer of death. Since therefore through taste Eve exceeded and lost life, so utterly Mary was to be

preserved from every excess which happens in the sense of taste. But more vehemently it became that she be guarded from the stain and softness of touch and every fervor and lust of flesh: for she who was preordained and pre-elect to take up into herself and finally bear the Fountain of purity, the eternal light, and also the origin of all sanctity.

O ineffable and also utterly supernatural praise of Mary, O plenitude of grace and sapiential ordination, that in things so daily and necessary, so natural and declining, fragile and bodily, she never slipped or transgressed even in one thing nor in the least! For taste and touch are senses most highly bodily, and therefore are more difficultly ruled by the spirit. Yet, O blessed, in no operation or use of them ever did you act inordinately; nowhere did you take food or drink either avidly or superfluously, or certainly in any way immoderately; and from the beginning of that age at which you used reason you fulfilled what afterward you were to hear from the Son: “Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness” (Luke 21:34). Whence it follows that you also used sleep most moderately, and also were always fit and most apt for God’s service. Further, since from superfluous aliment seed emanates, but you never exceeded in food and drink, your spirit possessed the body subject with tranquillity, without every inordinate motion, leading a heavenly and angelic life in it.

Finally, the more temperate and chaster you were, so much more also were you modest, more honest and more modest, and in the very course of adolescence more shamefaced. Yet of these it is fitting to speak a little more fully.

## Article XIII: Of the honesty, pudicity, modesty and shamefacedness of divine Mary

“Grace upon grace is a holy and shamefaced woman; and there is no price worthy of a continent soul” (Ecclus. 26:19). But the honest is what is reckoned worthy of honor, because honesty intimates nothing other than the state of honor. But honor is to be exhibited to virtue. And therefore, as the most sacred Virgin was surrounded with the plenitude of all virtues, so utterly she stood and stands most honest and truly most honorable. Finally, although honesty coincides with virtue, nonetheless it specially regards temperance, and consists as a certain integral part of it. For it says a certain spiritual beauty of mind, to which turpitude is opposed. Further turpitude is especially in those delights which temperance restrains: for the motions and delights of touch are more vehemently base and brutish. Since therefore the most clean Virgin, according to what was a little before shown, was most temperate, it is also certain that she shone with every honesty.

Moreover, pudicity obtains its name from pudor. But pudor is of a base thing, *(p. 545)* of which also a man is more ashamed; but most potently of venereal things and signs of venereal things—as are impure glances, kisses, touches—men are ashamed. Since therefore the most pure and incomparable Virgin was most immune and most remote from such things and thoughts of such things, not unworthily is she said most pudic, having indeed a simple and dove-like eye, a touch most serene from every unclean contagion of flesh.

Moreover, modesty regards exterior actions: in which you, O Holy of Holies, stood most highly mature and composed. For in everything you did, you were delightful, lovable and also gracious. For to you most truly we confess: “How beautiful are your steps in shoes, O prince’s daughter!” (Cant. 7:1). For never without cause did you move hand or foot. You were not light, not dissolute, not lazy, not tedious; but as all your interior things were filled with grace and virtues, so indeed in all exterior deeds also you stood most highly exemplary and utterly ordered. And it was sweet and pleasant to behold you in all things, to live with you and dwell with you, because interior beauty shone exteriorly. Whence also that is fulfilled in you which Solomon says of the strong woman: “The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he shall have no need of spoils” (Prov. 31:11); and what again is written: “The grace of a diligent woman shall delight her husband, and shall fat his bones” (Ecclus. 26:16).

Moreover shamefacedness is praiseworthy in the young, but not in the old. For shamefacedness is fear of a base thing as arduous and difficult to avoid. And therefore in adolescents not yet stabilized in virtue and still inexperienced it merits praise; but in the perfect and virtuous and experienced it has no place, because they do not conceive base things as difficult to avoid: yet they are so disposed that if anything base should happen to them, they would soon be ashamed. And on that account shamefacedness properly is not a virtue, but a fitness for virtue. It therefore becomes known that God-bearing and admirable Mary altogether quickly surpassed shamefacedness: for she was brought so swiftly and so suddenly to the fullness of grace and the stability of the virtues.

## Article XIV: Of the justice of the Mother of the Just of the just

As Aristotle confessed in the fifth of the Ethics, justice is the most bright virtue, and neither Hesperus nor Lucifer is so admirable. To which Marcus Tullius in the first *On Duties* consenting: “In justice,” he says, “is the greatest splendor of virtue.” And Plato: “If it were lawful,” he says, “to behold with bodily eyes the beauty of the virtue of justice, it would vehemently kindle the mind of the beholder to desire of it.” Further justice is the virtue attributing to each what is his. But we are debtors to God, to ourselves and to the neighbor; and we are bound also to exhibit something else to each of these.

Indeed in all these, O Mary, we confess you to have stood perfectly and singularly just. This indeed, as that illustrious man, the holy bishop Hilary, introduced, we are most potently and especially bound to God, that every sense of ours, life, virtue and action speak and honor Him: because, as from the most splendid fountain of eternal light whatever we have we have obtained; so utterly to refer and also convert it into His veneration, I reckon equal. And therefore the divine Apostle: “What have you,” he says, “that you have not received? And if you have received, why do you glory, as if you had not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Since therefore, O admirable and most excellent Mary, you never utterly deviated from the right and equal path, nor failed from the rightness of order, this (if I rightly contemplate) is soon plain, that indeed as regards God you were utterly just: for whom every virtue and action and also life of yours intended, glorified *(p. 546)* and exalted; whose will you always obeyed; to whose benefits you had been most grateful; to whom you always and everywhere exhibited every honor and glory, and also desired it to be exhibited.

Yet it is fitting to begin of these more deeply. For most super-excellently, O Lady, you attributed to God what is His. For of God and of you and also of all are being, power and acting. For the earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and all they that dwell therein (Ps. 23:1). Finally we are said to attribute to Him then, when we mancipate ourselves to His cult and praise; and the more fully and purely we have done this, so much more just we are reckoned. But you, O unthinkable and deiform Mary, are just not only in this mode, but also in that you furnished Him even a portion of your own substance: for whose flesh He assumed, assuming from you a new nature for Himself, and proceeding as son from your substance. Moreover you cherished your God with most clean virgin milk, and around His ministry you maternally occupied all the members of your unspotted body: and so singularly you condoned yourself to your God.

Moreover we are also bound something to ourselves: for the spirit owes the flesh aliment, sustentation and also governance; further it is fitting that the body obey and serve the spirit. So exhibiting himself, one stands just to himself. From this rightness finally nowhere, O Mary, did you recede. For through temperance, as a little before shone, you utterly extinguished the concupiscences of taste and touch; and in all things according to the exigency of the spirit and the dictate of reason you governed the flesh. Moreover to neighbors also we are obliged to exhibit counsel and also subsidy, and so to do to them as we justly wish to be done to ourselves and as is equal (Matt. 7:12). But this, O Mother of clemency, most affectionate Mary, you most eminently fulfilled: for kindled with highest zeal of human salvation, you nowhere desisted from helping and benefiting men.

## Article XV: Of the mercy of the holy Virgin

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7). Mercy is compassion of another's misery; but compassion stands a certain sadness; sadness also proceeds from consideration of one's own evil: therefore so far we compassion others as we reckon their miseries as ours. But this proceeds in one mode from the affection of charity: for a friend estimates another as himself, and love also makes all things common: and therefore, as he rejoices of the beloved's good, so also he is saddened of his evil. Again sometimes this compassion arises hence, because one shudders to fall into a similar misery into which he sees another fallen: and this happens from a certain real union, namely because some are so conjoined and near that adversity can quickly flow from one into another. But in this mode the fearful and weak, the old and the wise, because they attend that evils can slip upon them, stand more merciful. Further the presumptuous and those utterly perishing and the desperate do not condole. But it is plain that not indeed in this second mode can mercy be in the Blessed in the fatherland, for they are reckoned eternally secure of true felicity. But neither in the first mode are they merciful through the affection of compassion: because full and also heavenly felicity takes away from them utterly every sadness and sorrow. Nonetheless they are merciful through likeness of effect: for they heal our languors, and lift up our necessities, and succor us in all indigence.

It therefore becomes known, I opine, from these, that the more vehemently the most celebrated Virgin burns with charity of neighbors, so certainly she more exuberantly overflows with the bowels of mercy. But a little before that (if I rightly remember) was altogether lucidly deduced, that she was always *(p. 547)* kindled with incomparable zeal of human salvation. For the more cordially she loved her own Son, and the price of His sacred blood and also the merit of His most precious death, so much more vehemently she desired also the salvation of men, for which He delivered His soul: conformably therefore she overflows with highest and incredible clemency, and stands utterly most merciful.

Moreover, the more copious mercy anyone has obtained, so much more merciful it is fitting and just that he stand. Otherwise it is to be feared lest it happen that he hear that horrible reproach of the infallible Judge, by which speaking to the cruel servant: "You wicked servant," He says, "I forgave you all the debt, because you besought Me: should not you then have had compassion also on your fellow servant, even as I had compassion on you?" (Matt. 18:32–33). But most excellent and utterly unspeakable mercy Mary obtained. For God's compassion consists not only in remission of fault, but also in prevention of graces and preservation from ruin. But this Mary utterly indicibly obtained: for whom God prevented in the blessings of sweetness (Ps. 20:4), sanctified before she was conceived, and guarded afterward from every stain, and what is too much more excellent, also chose from eternity into His own mother. It therefore stands (unless I err) that Mary's mercy exists very great, most large and indeficient. Nor is it wonderful: for in her we reckon that salvific work of incomprehensible mercy to have been done by the craftsman of the world, which is the Incarnation of God, which is the salvation of the world; and through her first we obtained mercy from the hand of God most high.

Further, clemency (as I reckon) most becomes the feminine sex. But also that the advocate of the poor ought to be merciful, there is none who doubts.

Moreover I remember that in the superior things I formerly said that nothing more similar to God and nothing nearer exists than Mary. Further it is proper to God always to have mercy and to spare. In this, then, Mary imitates God most vehemently and singularly. For you fulfilled, O most obedient handmaid of God, nay more, and more wonderfully, His blessed and virgin Mother, the will of your Creator, who says: "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than holocausts" (Osee 6:6). And you carried out the teaching of your Son also, who said: "Be ye merciful, as your heavenly Father also is merciful" (Luke 6:36). For like a liquid element, or a vessel filled with a most fluid liquor, which, moved on whatever side, at once pours itself out and imparts itself, so you, O Mary, overflow with mercy and compassions. When you

are knocked at by prayer, you come to the rescue at once; to all you show yourself ready to hear and easy to be appeased. You do not remember injuries done to you; but as this shining and sensible sun pours the rays of its brightness upon all without distinction, according to the capacity of each, so you, O most kind Mary, so greatly to be embraced, are open to entreaty and full of compassion towards good and bad, the grateful and the ungrateful, the just and the unjust. Indeed, many you forestall and rescue, save and enrich; and you receive and embrace the prayers and needs of all with a most large and motherly affection.

O utterly most pious Mary, who although you are most high and most clean, yet do not scorn nor desert (if they have fled to you) the vilest, most wretched and altogether most impure sinners!

Moreover, who, O Queen, can utter the plenitude of your mercies? For their length is from age unto age, and unto the consummation of the age, upon all who flee to them; but their breadth from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth (Ps. 71:8), that by your compassions also, O Lady, the earth may be full; but their height repairs the ruins of the sacred city Jerusalem; their depth also descends unto hell, and brought to those existing in limbo the light long desired.

## Article XVI: Of Mary's true riches, which never fail, and her inexhaustible mercies

*(p. 548)*

"Blessed is the man that shall continue in wisdom, and that shall meditate in his justice, and in his mind shall think of the all-seeing eye of God" (Ecclus. 14:22). There are indeed true riches, not those which bring pleasure and superfluity to the flesh, but which are fit to bestow beauty and also spiritual perfection on the mind. For in this mode God is said rich (Rom. 10:12): for in whom stands the perfect possession of all beautiful and good things. Which the author of the *Book of Causes* looking forth: "The first cause," he says, "is rich in itself, and rich unto others." Conformably also the generous Virgin, most dear of God, not indeed in caducous and mind-staining sensible riches, but in true and eternal ones superfluously overflowed: for full of grace, full of wisdom, full of virtues, full of mercies, she was utterly most rich. Finally, the work of mercy is to supply the defects of the wretched: but he who is poor in himself, how shall he subvene the needy? or how shall he give to another what he himself has not? Therefore, insofar as Mary's mercy according to its incomparable magnitude could progress into act, riches were necessary to her.

Further, although in bodily defects of others also Mary was merciful, nonetheless in spiritual indigence she stood so much more merciful, the more she loved the beatitude of souls than the sufficiency of bodies: and therefore spiritual riches vehemently became her, which she could communicate to needy hearts. Yet in bodily necessities also she indeed impended emoluments to others as she could. For I do not reckon it ambiguous that from the labors of her hands she bestowed alms on the needy. For she fulfilled (as I judge) what the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Solomon discoursed of her: "She hath sought," it says, "wool and flax, and hath wrought by the counsel of her hands. She is like the merchant's ship, she bringeth her bread from afar" (Prov. 31:13–14). And a little after: "She hath put out her hand," it says, "to strong things, and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle. She hath opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hands to the poor" (Prov. 31:19–20). And again: "She hath looked well," it says, "to the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle" (Prov. 31:27).

Yet I am not so insipid as to be ignorant that the spiritual and more efficacious understanding of these words is to be preferred. For that whole most bright song which through Solomon the Spirit of truth drew forth of this strong woman is spiritual. Otherwise, if you look to the letter, how still does it pertain to her praise or another's what is said in it, "She has risen in the night, and given a prey to her household"? Is living from spoils reckoned worthy of praise? Finally neither of Mary is it fitting to opine to the letter what is had in the same: "She has made for herself clothing of tapestry: fine linen, and purple is her covering." But therefore I

have here inserted the previously introduced sweet-sounding and pleasant words of that prophecy, because it becomes known that to the letter also they were fulfilled in the temple and sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (I speak of Mary): especially since according to the sayings and writings of many of the faithful, in mechanical things looking to the weaving art she was most artificial and most subtle, and in the temple of the Lord, in which according to these she was still offered as an infant, before the other coevals and maidens there ministering to God under the hand of the pontiff, she progressed more in artifices of this kind. But they also adduce for this the seamless garment of Christ, which they set forth as wrought by her (John 19:23).

Moreover how merciful and compassionating she was became known at the wedding when wine failed (John 2:3): for soon she condoled with the shame of the spouse and bride; and what she could not exhibit through herself, she induced her almighty Son unto.

Most fittingly, I confess, O Lady, did your most devoted child Bernard speak of you.

*(p. 549)*

For he began thus of you: “Mary,” he says, “opens the bosom of her mercy to all, that all may receive of her fullness: the captive redemption, the sick healing, the sorrowful consolation, the sinner pardon, the just grace, the angels gladness, the whole Trinity glory, and the Person of the Son the substance of human flesh.” And again: “O Mary,” he says, “rich toward all and above all, a small part of whose substance, once assumed, suffices to loose the sins of the whole world!”

Now, for the rest, be with me, I pray, O Lady; help me and keep me, I beg, O Mary. For behold, most sweet one, I am now called away to outward things, and henceforth I cannot attend to these and the like as I have till now, except through your mercy and your motherly aid.

## Article XVII: Of the religion and worship of the admirable Virgin

“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and let all that is within me bless his holy name” (Ps. 102:1). For what shall I render to the Lord for all the things that He has so most kindly rendered to me (Ps. 115:12)? I know indeed that He has no need of my goods (Ps. 15:2), for He is full and perfect. Yet because the honour of the King loveth judgment (Ps. 98:4), and praise too and beauty are before Him (Ps. 95:6), who requires gratitude and truth (Ps. 30:24); lest I be found ungrateful to God, most liberal and most munificent, and lose through ingratitude the very thing I have received, I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise shall be always in my mouth (Ps. 33:2). And I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify thy name for ever: for thy mercy is great towards me (Ps. 85:12–13); and you have made your mercy wonderful to me, O blessed God, in a fortified city (Ps. 30:22).

Now therefore bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all He hath done for thee (Ps. 102:2). For He it is who forgiveth all thy iniquities (Ps. 102:3), who maketh His face to shine upon His servant (Ps. 30:17), who hath given thee understanding (Ps. 15:7); who, moreover, hath not dealt with thee according to thy sins, nor rewarded thee according to thy iniquities: for according to the height of the heaven above the earth, He hath strengthened His mercy towards thee (Ps. 102:10–11). Praise the Lord, then, O my soul; I will praise the Lord in my life, I will sing to my God as long as I shall be (Ps. 145:2). Therefore I will give glory to thee, O Lord and King, and I will praise thee, O God my Saviour; I will give glory to thy name, for thou hast been a helper and protector to me (Ecclus. 51:1–2): for as a father hath compassion on his children (Ps. 102:13), so have you in every way had mercy on me.

O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God (Rom. 11:33)! O Father of mercies and God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3)! O Trinity supersubstantial, more than divine and more than good, guardian of the divine wisdom of Christians! God of immense majesty, and of liberality infinite in every way and in every form, what good did you see in me, that you should deal with me so most mercifully, and make your

mercy so wonderful (Ps. 30:22) in one so vile, so unclean and so contemptible? But, as I see, these things are not from my merits: otherwise grace would no longer be grace (Rom. 11:6), nor would your mercy go before my merits. And because the accursed Pelagius said so, that wretched companion of heretics, enemy of God and, in the end, foe of grace, he was made wholly bereft of every grace. I confess to thee, therefore, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth (Luke 10:21), that not by the works of justice which I have done (Titus 3:5), but according to your mercy alone, for the sake of your pure goodness itself, you have so dealt with your unhappy servant. For all good things proceed from you, and (as I confess) without you we can do nothing at all: since from you comes every best gift and every perfect gift (James 1:17). Let no man therefore glory (Eph. 2:9); but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31): for as the branch cannot bear fruit *(p. 550)* unless it abide in the vine, so neither can we (John 15:4), unless we abide in you, O good Jesus, O King Messiah, O Son of Mary, most high and adorable Christ.

But now, putting an end to this digression, I rejoice and exult in your ordering, O Lord. For before (as appears at the end of the preceding article) I was made sorrowful because of the office laid upon me concerning outward things; now I am glad, because what I left off with sorrow and tears I now begin to take up again and to finish with heartfelt joy. Further, to speak the truth, and to show the reason of my present delight also, such and so great was the burden of that occupation that in the meantime I wrote not even one article of this work. And I suffered, alas, a greater loss as well from it; for in the meantime my mind was more unsteady, my spirit more distracted, my devotion less, my fervour colder, my talkativeness greater, my manner more worldly, my heart, alas, less God-fearing, and my whole work more lacking in devotion. For, to speak without pretence, it is not expedient for a religious and a monk, and above all for a Carthusian, not yet well exercised and established in the spiritual life and the contemplative virtue, to take up the office of outward things and the business of Martha. For, as it is said, he who is intent on many things has less sense for each one. If spiritual perfection has not been made firm in the soul, it will at once be hindered, wholly and suddenly, by the vehement anxiety about outward things that comes upon it. For in such a position many things happen and befall which suddenly wound or kill inward and mental devotion, unless the soul be unceasingly watchful over itself and careful. And so, now that I have been given back to quiet and to my cell, I begin what remains, asking pardon for the excess of this digression: for I could not contain the fullness of my mind.

Religion, as Cicero has set it down, is the virtue that brings to God worship and ceremony; and the same is the meaning of worship (latria). Dulia, again, is the virtue that shows due service and honour to higher and excellent created persons. And therefore those are called idolaters who worship idols in place of God. Further, since religion is said to come from relegere, in that it sets the mind apart and frees it from all else, and makes it cling to God Himself and be one with Him, it is plain that not all who worship God are to be held religious, but those only who, estranging themselves from all perishable things, are intent upon God with a free and sincere mind, since their affection is clean and their soul holy. And so now (unless I am mistaken) it becomes known that Mary was the more religious, the further her mind stood from every affection that draws away from Christ, and the more immovable it was in the ardour of her Only-begotten. And if I spoke with the tongues of men and of angels, I should not yet be able to tell the vehemence of this love. Moreover, Mary employed herself and all that was in her in the service of God singularly, exceedingly and wholly beyond compare: for, rendering motherly service to the Son, who is God, she spread out all the members of her body in His service; nor could she think upon or speak of anything other than that sweet fruit of her most sweet womb, in whom she found and possessed most fully all things desirable and all things wholesome.

## Article XVIII: Of the devotion of super-excellent Mary

“My heart grew hot within me: and in my meditation a fire shall flame out” (Ps. 38:4). It shines forth, I opine, if I rightly intend, that in a religious mind from divine love a certain promptitude flows forth to those things which are to be executed of divine cult: but this is devotion. For devotion is rightly described a prompt will of handing oneself over to divine service, as the Psalmist: “My lips,” he says, “shall rejoice when I shall sing to You.” Devotion is therefore an act of *(p. 551)* religion: for religion disposes the mind to God’s service; and the interior act of this disposition indeed is devotion. Further devotion is founded in contemplation, and proceeds from glowing charity.

Finally from these I plainly reckon that contemplation of those things which make divine fervor hotter in the mind and more inflame it induces greater devotion. But it is manifest that those things which are better and more excellent are of this kind: for they consist more desirable and also more lovable. Whence speculation of the most high Trinity and of the superblessed Divinity is according to itself most of all causative of devotion. Yet because of our defect it often happens otherwise. For because we need the leading of sensibles to the contemplation of divine things, those things abundantly bring into the mind potior devotion which more nearly and more efficaciously lead to the contemplation, clemency and love of the Divinity: among which it is certain that the insignia of Christ’s humanity prevail and obtain primacy. And therefore meditation of the Incarnation, passion and of all things meanwhile which Christ the Lord took up, did and sustained for us more swiftly inflames the mind. Yet the more deiform a perfection a man has obtained, so much more hotly and more immediately he obtains devotion from the very beholding of the Divinity. Therefore, if those things which were introduced in the second book of Mary’s incomparable and most splendid wisdom, and finally a little before in this third of her most ardent and God-bearing love, are now also again handed to memory, how proportionally super-excellent also was the devotion of her heart will suddenly be plain. For the more clearly she knew her only Jesus with mind, and more fervently loved Him with heart, so much more affectionately and more delightfully she was borne into His obedience.

But truly devotion has annexed holy joy, especially that which proceeds from the beholding of divine goodness. Sometimes however devotion flows from consideration of one’s own defect, because through this a man more fully subjects himself to God. And this through itself indeed has sadness, namely when someone grieves over his misery; but secondarily it also has joy, when he breathes again in the hope of the divine kindness. But devotion born in the first way, too, has a certain sadness joined to it secondarily, because of the absence of the beloved, as it is written: “Stay me up with flowers, compass me about with apples: because I languish with love” (Cant. 2:5); and again: “My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily: Where is thy God?” (Ps. 41:4). Further, the devotion that springs from meditation on the sufferings of Christ includes compassion; but this compassion soon takes on joy, since it brings to mind the divine charity and clemency towards us. From these things, then (unless I am mistaken), it becomes known that, though a great devotion was mingled with Mary’s contemplations, and joy with her devotion, there was none the less present in them a certain sad and afflicting affection also, above all after the Passion and Ascension of her Beloved, for whom, loving Him and longing for Him beyond all telling, she sighed unceasingly. And therefore she says in the Canticle to her Bridegroom and Son: “Draw me after thee” (Cant. 1:3).

Moreover, it is delightful to each one to do that to which he has received a loving inclination and an inward desire. And it has been set down already that devotion is a ready affection towards the worship of God. Therefore pure delight is united to the acts of devotion. Hence indeed to the lover even arduous things are easy and sweet. For love among all habits acts most easily and most joyfully. And therefore Christ the Lord: “My yoke,” He says, “is sweet, and My burden light” (Matt. 11:30). To whom indeed, unless to lovers? Indeed for non-lovers what is incumbent to confess, unless what in their person the Prophet sings: “For the words of Your lips,” saying to God, “I have kept hard ways” (Ps. 16:4)? This is the song of those fearing and not yet perfectly loving. And therefore all things which the most happy Virgin did, she perfected with most joyful mind.

*(p. 552)*

## Article XIX: Of the meekness or gentleness of the sublime Mary

The Only-begotten of God says: “Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart” (Matt. 11:29). Meekness makes a person lovable to God and to men, since it is the moderator and the bridle of anger and fury. Indeed, as anger most violently clouds the judgment and the searching of reason, so meekness disposes the understanding eminently to the enlightenment of God and to the judgment of the mind. For as overmuch smoke drives out a guest, so anger drives from the heart the Paraclete, who is the Spirit of godliness (Isa. 11:2). Anger, moreover, is the desire of vengeance, born of injury. It is plain, then, that the more pernicious anger is, the more excellent is meekness. And how wicked anger is, the Wise Man teaches: “He that seeketh to revenge himself,” he says, “shall find vengeance from the Lord, and he will surely keep his sins in remembrance” (Ecclus. 28:1). And therefore Solomon counsels you: “Forgive thy neighbour if he hath hurt thee: and then shall thy sins be forgiven to thee when thou prayest” (Ecclus. 28:2). Indeed, seeing the unreasonableness of anger, the Wise Man rebukes the angry man as though questioning him: “Man to man reserveth anger, and doth he seek remedy of God? He hath no mercy on a man like himself, and doth he entreat for his own sins?” (Ecclus. 28:3–4). Whence a little after, showing the enormity of this crime: “Who,” he says, “shall obtain pardon for his sins?” (Ecclus. 28:5). It is clear, then, that the virtue of meekness is excellent. And this too, I think, is plain from the fact that the King Messiah gave it to us so singularly to be imitated: “Learn of me,” He says, “because I am meek.” This virtue befitted you eminently, O Mary. For as anger singularly infects, troubles and disgraces a woman, so meekness ennobles her and makes her gracious. And how ill anger becomes a woman, the Wise Man teaches. He says: “Every wound is sorrow of heart, and all evil is the wickedness of a woman” (Ecclus. 25:17). And again a little after: “There is no head worse than the head of a serpent: and there is no anger above the anger of a woman” (Ecclus. 25:22). Meekness, then, most befits a woman: for all meekness and humility befits this sex, which is frail and by nature liable to fail. And if this virtue so shone in famous men, how much more in the deified, truly incomparable and highly exalted Mary? For of Moses the Scripture of truth declares: “For Moses was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwelt upon earth” (Num. 12:3).

Further, it is right to consider that the less the meek demand vengeance, and the sweeter they are toward those who wrong them, the more terribly does the most just God avenge and visit the wrong done to them. And this shines out plainly in the enemies of Moses (I mean Dathan and Abiron), whom the earth swallowed alive (Num. 16:31–33). So, altogether, the meeker Mary the Mother of God is, the more to be feared is her Son the Judge in the offences done against her. And so Mary is exceedingly to be feared, since the Judge is most strict and most severe in avenging her: for He leaves unpunished not even the least offence done to His most meek Mother.

Moreover, how meek the most clement Virgin was in the Passion of her Only-begotten may plainly be seen. For towards those most wicked crucifiers of her Beloved she was not angry but compassionate: since she was most like her suffering Son in charity and meekness, and knew also the mystery and dispensation of man’s redemption, that most meek and most sweet mind, the lovable and most serene Mary.

And further, O Mary, you were incomparably meeker even than the most meek Moses: for he often, sometimes justly and sometimes unjustly, blazed *(p. 553)* into anger. He slew that Egyptian, indeed, not without sin (Exod. 2:12): Augustine, in his Questions on Exodus, says that Moses sinned in slaying the Egyptian; yet some excuse him, especially since the Apostle says: “By faith Moses slew the Egyptian, not fearing the fierceness of the king” (cf. Heb. 11:27). Then he was moved terribly enough against the idolaters, killing twenty-three thousand (if I remember rightly) in one day (Exod. 32:28). Again, how angry he was with Core and his partners his own prayer shows; for he besought God: “Respect not their sacrifices” (Num. 16:15); and soon those men were consumed by fire (Num. 16:35), but Core was swallowed by the earth

(Num. 16:31–33). But do you know anything of this kind of the sweet Virgin? She fled with her Son into Egypt; she saw Him wronged and blasphemed as He preached; she heard Him called one possessed, a seducer, a wine-drinker, a blasphemer. Further, she saw Him scourged, mocked in a white garment, and coming forth crowned with thorns and clothed in purple, while the governor said: “Behold the man” (John 19:5). She follows Him besides as He carries His cross; she sees Him stripped and crucified. But is she described as having reproached, in any of these things, those who wronged her Beloved, or as having spoken anything harsh? That most meek mind could not conceive anger and bitterness, or render evil for evil; nay rather, since she was most ardent in the love of her neighbours, she must be held to have grieved deeply with the blind and the erring.

Go over again, if you will, the whole history of the Gospel truth, and see whether you find anything harsh, or cruel, or threatening, of Mary. For the most wise and most modest turtledove is known to have spoken very seldom. Yet consider the quality of her words. Beginning to speak to the Archangel: “How shall this be done,” she says, “because I know not man?” (Luke 1:34). This was (unless I am mistaken) a wise and modest word: for the most prudent Virgin wished to be more fully taught of the manner of an unaccustomed and supernatural effect, and she was careful besides for the keeping of the chastity she had promised. And again the sacred Virgin to the heavenly paranymph: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). Does not this word breathe humility? Further, at the wedding, to her Son: “They have no wine” (John 2:3). And behold a gentle compassion. Lastly, when her Son was at length found in the temple after much anxiety: “Son,” she says, “why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing” (Luke 2:48). Does not this speech overflow with a sweet and motherly affection?

And in these she seems to be rebuked by her Son: for in the first it was said to her, “Woman, what is that to me and to thee?” (John 2:4), and in the second, “How is it that you sought me?” (Luke 2:49). Yet in truth she was not rebuked: for she had no fault at all, and was free from every cause of reproof. Indeed, if she was at fault, why did her Son so readily give way to her in both? For it is not right to consent to an unreasonable request. Yet at her instance the Author of nature, her own Son, produced the wine; and going down from the temple with her, He was subject to her as a son (Luke 2:51).

That her Son, the Power and Wisdom of the Father, seems in these to have answered her somewhat sternly, He did for our sakes, teaching us not to be too carnally affected towards our parents. For this reason also, when once, as He was preaching, someone told Him, “Behold thy mother and thy brethren stand without, seeking thee” (Matt. 12:47), He appears to have spoken more harshly: “Who is my mother,” He says, “and who are my brethren?” (Matt. 12:48). For since He came to send not peace but the sword upon earth, since He came down to separate parent and child, man and woman, bridegroom and bride (Matt. 10:34–35), if He had addressed His Mother too softly, who, at His persuading, would show his parents the sternness which He taught? For speaking to His own: “If any man hate not his father, and mother, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). And so, that we might have a pattern of this holy sternness too, He chose at times to speak and to answer more harshly to His blameless *(p. 554)* and most sweet virgin Mother. Yet, though He answered the man who told Him that His Mother was without and wished to speak with Him as has just been set down, it is most certainly to be known that He soon showed Himself to her, to be seen and spoken with, as she had wished. Indeed, she herself, sharing the most secret counsels of her Only-begotten, knew the mind of the speaker better than His words. And so she said to the ministers of the wedding: “Whatsoever he shall say to you, do ye” (John 2:5), the most holy one knowing full well that whatever she urged He would at once fulfil.

Since therefore, recalling and turning over all that the Gospel narrative reveals of Mary, you find nothing else but that she was most meek in all her words and deeds, and wholly free from all cruelty and bitterness, overflowing abundantly with the bowels of mercy and sweetness, open to the entreaty of each and easily appeased by all: from this, I say, for the rest do not fear or despair; draw near to Mary, implore her as your

most merciful advocate; trust in her as in your most faithful protectress; ask to be saved through her, as through a most gentle mediatress; rest under her shadow, persevere there, and do not go away from it.

## Article XX: Of the obedience of the sacred Virgin

“Obedience is better than sacrifices: and to hearken rather than to offer the fat of rams. Because it is like the sin of witchcraft, to rebel: and like the crime of idolatry, to refuse to obey” (1 Kings 15:22–23). With this one holy testimony, if I judge rightly, the faithful Samuel bore exceedingly strong witness to the dignity and praise of obedience. So you, O admirable Virgin, O perfect Mary, obeyed the mouth of God in all things with a most humble mind, and never, O holy and great one, went beyond it. Nay, made stronger than Aod the strong judge (Judg. 3:15), you never turned aside to the right hand or to the left (Deut. 5:32); for your will was in the law of the Lord, and on His law you meditated day and night (Ps. 1:2).

Further, such was the obedience of your holy heart, O most excellent one, that you deserved to have the most exalted Prince of all, God the Maker, not as commanding you, nor even as your equal, but as obeying you. For He was subject to you (Luke 2:51): and who was He, but He at whose nod even the pillars of heaven tremble (Job 26:11)? O truly high and more than high Lady, all fair and pleasant, delightful, joyous and more than serene Mary, most rightly now does every creature, in heaven and on earth, obey you and is subject to you: for it is not unworthy of it to be subject to her to whom its Creator also deigned to be subject and to obey.

Moreover, I remember having read in the Scripture of truth of another illustrious man also, that the blessed God obeyed his voice. For when Josue was pursuing the enemies of Israel, and the sun was going down, this man spoke out, not so much praying (as it seems) as commanding: “Move not, O sun, toward Gabaon, nor thou, O moon, toward the valley of Ajalon. And the sun and the moon stood still, till the people revenged themselves of their enemies. So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down the space of one day. There was not before nor after so long a day, the Lord obeying the voice of a man” (Jos. 10:12–14). What more, then, is there in Mary, or in what is she so incomparable? Nay, in this respect Josue will seem to be greater than she, since God is related to have obeyed him according to the nature of the Godhead, for He was not yet incarnate; but to Mary He is held to have been obedient only according to the manhood He had assumed. But I will say that obedience, or indeed humility, cannot belong to God according to the essence of the Godhead, since He has neither superior nor equal, and no command can fall upon Him. That He is described as having obeyed the voice of a man *(p. 555)* is to be understood, I think, not according to the truth of the virtue, but according to the likeness of the effect: for He behaved as one obeying a command. Nor is Josue to be believed to have uttered those words as one commanding, unless perhaps in the person of God; for what could have been so presumptuous? But kindled with zeal for the divine justice, and made firm in God, led on by confidence and by His most secret inspiration, he spoke as has been set down. In this manner many things are written of the holy and true God, as that saying of Genesis, “being touched inwardly with sorrow of heart” (Gen. 6:6), of Him whose joy is always pure and infinite; and that of the prophet Nahum, “The Lord is a revenger, and hath wrath” (Nah. 1:2), of Him who remains eternally undisturbed and unchangeable. But in Mary this makes an incomparable excellence: that the true and adorable God was obedient to her as a son. And even now her Son, honouring her, denies her nothing. Meanwhile let it be great for Josue the son of Nun to be the servant of her who has been made by God the Son the Lady of all the Apostles and Prophets.

## Article XXI: Of the humility of great Mary

“Because He has regarded the humility of His handmaid” (Luke 1:48). Why, O Lady, shining with all virtues, full and perfect, did you not confess that God had regarded virginity or certainly charity in you—especially since through virginity you seem to have been more apt to the purity of the Divinity, and

finally charity itself is the most bright virtue, and its property is to unite the lover to the beloved? Therefore why, O most wise, did you sing that humility was beheld in you from heaven?—unless because the mystery of the Incarnation celebrated in the midst of your sacred womb was a work of immense compassion and mere dignation, having utterly nothing of merit in us corresponding to it, but proceeding from God's goodness alone and also anticipating charity; and again, because in the Incarnation of the Only-begotten there exists an infinite emptying of the divine majesty, to which utterly extreme humility was becoming. Therefore, wishing to attribute utterly nothing to herself in so great grace, but reducing the whole to God's clemency, "He has regarded," she says, "the humility of His handmaid"; as if she confess: He knew nothing in me worthy or meritorious for so sublime a mystery, except that I knew myself unworthy and least, and knew myself infinitely unfit for an arcanum of this kind. Indeed, if she had said, "Because He has regarded the virginity or charity of His handmaid," she would seem (unless I err) to have given herself some merit in God's Incarnation. For if she had introduced virginity, she would somehow seem to have intimated herself proportioned to the divine union through purity of flesh and chastity of mind.

Further humility is true and ordered contempt of self. For as charity is rooted in contemplation, so humility is rooted in truth. It stands that whatever good is in us we obtain from God; but what is evil is from us. Therefore humility (unless I err) stands bipartite; and one indeed is of saints and just, but the other of sinners. For humility can arise from a double principle, namely from one's own defectibility, and from consideration of our own faults. Again also from contemplation and comparison of the divine height, humility itself emanates. Therefore, since humility is founded in truth, and Christ the Lord and also Mary utterly lacked every fault, it shines forth that that virtue of humility was not in them by which someone confesses himself a sinner and liable to faults, but rather that which proceeds hence, that a man sees himself from himself to be nothing and able to do nothing, and in all goods somehow dependent on God; and again that which proceeds from speculation of the divine height.

It therefore becomes known, if I rightly understand, that the more fully the high Virgin knew herself according to what she was from herself, and what she could be if God deserted her, *(p. 556)* and more brightly and deeply conceived the dignity of the divine super-exaltation, and also weighed that she had merited neither of condignity nor efficaciously the benefits divinely impended on her, so much more humble she was. Further most wisely she most fully knew herself to be, to be able and to act. And finally she knew every goodness and virtue obtained from above, and in each of these contemplated herself more vehemently and incessably dependent on the goodness of divine maintenance than a brook depends on a fountain, or a ray on the sun. For it stands that if even for a moment you take away the light, the splendor itself will at once pass. So utterly, if even in the twinkling of an eye the clemency of divine conservation fail from a created intellect, every virtue and perfection of it is at once discoloured, and wastes away, brought to nothing. And so it is right for one who knows this to humble himself. For not only in our being, but in the continuance and steadfastness of the perfection we have gained, we depend upon God unfailingly and wholly. And therefore the divine Apostle says: "What hast thou that thou hast not received? And if thou hast received, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7). It is clear, then, that the truly humble man ascribes all honour and glory to the holy God, the fountain of all good things, and vehemently despises their being paid to himself. Indeed, ascribing to himself whatever of vice and evil he has or can have, he in no wise loathes or hates injury and insult and his own abasement, but embraces and loves them as a just punishment. And so the most just Mother, the sacred Mary, despised the veneration of herself as a most heinous theft, knowing that all glory and honour are owed to God. It shines out, then, that on this side the holy Virgin was most humble.

Moreover, how Mary, after her Son, knew most splendidly before all others the unspeakable properties and the surpassing height of the divine nature, I have set out as well as I could in the second book of this work (Book II, Art. 17); and therefore in this respect too she was humbler than all, in proportion.

For it is the custom of contemplative and most holy men, as Origen has truly and subtly drawn out, to humble themselves above all when they behold themselves, or set themselves, in the sight of the divine Wisdom. Hence Abraham, beginning to speak to almighty God: “I will speak to my Lord,” he says, “whereas I am dust and ashes” (Gen. 18:27). And Moses, enjoying converse with God, who, as Origen held, was eloquent (for it is written of him: “And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians: and he was mighty in his words and in his deeds”, Acts 7:22), when he had heard the Word that was in the beginning with God, said: “I beseech thee, Lord, I am not eloquent from yesterday and the day before: and since thou hast spoken to thy servant, I have more impediment and slowness of tongue” (Exod. 4:10). So too Jeremias, bidden by God to go and speak, says: “Ah, ah, ah, Lord God: behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child” (Jer. 1:6). And Isaias, when he had seen the purity of the divine light: “Woe is me,” he says, “because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). Further, the Psalmist, beholding himself in comparison with God: “My substance,” he says, “is as nothing before thee” (Ps. 38:6). And Job declares: “I know that man cannot be justified compared with God” (Job 9:2). The higher, then, and the more steadfast the most sacred Virgin was in the contemplation of God, the humbler she was. She said, I think, often or almost unceasingly, with her holy brethren Eliseus and Elias: “As the Lord liveth, in whose sight I stand this day” (3 Kings 17:1; 4 Kings 3:14).

Moreover, the whole operation of Christ’s life in the flesh and also in the world is indeed our erudition; and finally the more frequently and more serenely anyone contemplates it, so much more he strives and labors to be made its imitator. And since Mary beheld this, not only as the rest by faith and vision of mind, but also with her most happy bodily eyes, for so great a time and from beginning unto end, she certainly most affectionately and preeminently followed it. With what affection, I pray, did she embrace and also love humility, *(p. 557)* contemplating the Only-begotten of the eternal Father, true God, and king Messias so familiarly and so most humbly cohabiting and conversing with her? You learned, O beautiful to behold, O delightful to love, O lovable to venerate, O unique and happy Mary, from your beloved, because He is meek and humble of heart (Matt. 11:29); and in this more sublimely than the rest you imitated Him: for neither after His resurrection nor before are you described to have worked miracles. And truly, what need was there that you work miracles, in whom the author of nature so supermiraculously and more wonderfully than every miracle utterly was made subject to the laws of nature, whose moreover whole life and all deeds were so supernatural?

Moreover it is of grateful and elect minds that the more they receive from God and are more exalted, so much more deeply they cast themselves down and humble themselves, and reckon themselves more unworthy of divine gifts. Therefore, the more incomparable the gifts of graces imparted to Mary, so much more vehemently she emptied herself. Indeed remember evangelical truth, and all things that are written of Mary. You hear from the beginning that soon to be Mother of God, and taught from heaven that she was elect into true Mother of the true God, she did not swell for ineffable excellence, but rather with most humble mind answered: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Finally already fecund with the adorable Offspring, she hastens to Elizabeth and first salutes her; and studying sacred service, perseveres with her unto her parturition. The Mother of the King did not scorn to visit and minister to the mother of the servant. Moreover, when most excellent Elizabeth (as became) extolled and beatified her—“Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?” and again, “Blessed are you that have believed” (Luke 1:43, 45)—the Holy one refusing honor of God to be ascribed to herself, soon burst into praise of God and affectionate confession of His grace: “My soul,” she says, “doth magnify the Lord” (Luke 1:46); and a little after: “He that is mighty hath done great things to me” (Luke 1:49). Finally she accompanied the preaching Son, saw Him raising the dead and working many magnalia, beheld Him honored and sought as king: but did she ever inanely glory in these or speak proudly? Further also after the resurrection of her Only One, incumbent on prayer in the upper room with the pre-elect company of the Apostles and the rest (Acts 1:13–14), did she presume to ordain anything or teach? For while Peter discoursed of choosing in place of the apostle Judas, she herself was silent: nay even she made herself the

last of all, humbling herself under the publican, under the sinneress, under all.

But perhaps someone will inquire: Humility leans on truth, nor is it propped by falsity. Therefore how can the highest of all truly humble herself under all? For, as is said, she would never ascend above all the choirs of angels, if she had not first through humility descended beneath all men. Again, someone will perhaps object: one who is truly humble desires to be called, not humble, but vile; how then is she truly humble who calls herself humble (Luke 1:48)?

To these things it must be answered that two things may be considered in a man: one which is the man's own, the other which is God's. Of himself a man has whatever there is of fault and imperfection; but whatever there is of virtue and grace he receives from God. So, then, one who is holy and higher confesses himself less than a lower according to what he is of himself. Indeed, since he ascribes nothing to his own merits, but the whole of whatever dignity he has to the divine grace, he judges himself the lowest according to what is to be attributed to him of himself, and unworthy of every preferment, especially when he looks upon another according to what that other has received from God. Again, since the evils that we ourselves can have are plain to us, but not so those of others, who may also have many hidden goods unknown to us, we ought rightly to humble ourselves beneath others. But it is not necessary that one who is holy and perfect in humility *(p. 558)* should think himself simply, and according to what he has from above, inferior to the less perfect: for it is right to know what has been given us by God, lest through ingratitude we lose the very thing. And therefore the Apostle 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). Whence I say this with confidence, that the blessed Virgin knew herself to be, after Christ, the most excellent and most chosen creature of God; and therefore, speaking with greatness of soul: "All generations," she says, "shall call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). None the less, attending to herself according to what she was of herself, since she knew herself most clearly in this way also, she remained most humble. And nothing at all forbids this to be done without any prejudice to humility. So indeed Paul, truly preferring himself and the other Apostles of Christ to all: "Ourselves also," he says, "who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves" (Rom. 8:23).

Moreover, to what was last introduced it is to be answered, that indeed for place, time and cause, to unlock one's own virtues and open holy works is not only lawful, but also expedient. For how often does Paul commend himself and his? For in turn: "I have labored more abundantly than all" (1 Cor. 15:10); and again: "I have fought a good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7); and also: "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). Finally, when the most holy and principal call themselves humble, I do not opine that they intended to intimate themselves endowed with the virtue of humility; but rather I reckon that saying themselves humble, they signified themselves small and middling.

You therefore, if you love Mary, if you desire to venerate and praise her, study to attain her humility. For God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble (James 4:6), as the divine voice set forth to Saul: "When thou wast a little one in thy own eyes, thou wast made the head in Israel; now, because thou hast grown proud, I have rejected thee" (1 Kings 15:17–23). Therefore through Isaias the heavenly Father: "Upon whom shall My spirit rest, but upon him that is humble and quiet?" (Isa. 66:2). And in the Gospel Christ: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (that is, the humble, such as count themselves needy in mind and covet nothing carnal inordinately), "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). Finally humility is the root and foundation of the virtues; and he who without it studies virtues and cultivates holy works is as one who in a blowing wind carries dust in the air without covering, or who desires to build an edifice without support. Let us therefore be humbled under the mighty hand of God (1 Pet. 5:6). For everyone that humbles himself shall be exalted; and he that exalts himself shall be humbled (Luke 14:11).

## Article XXII: Of the steadfastness or constancy of the holy Virgin

He who is constant in mind and steadfast in virtue imitates God, who says: “I am the Lord, and I change not” (Mal. 3:6). Now the memory of the human mind was made wandering and unsteady in the sin of our first parents, and therefore it needs to be made perfect through constancy. Indeed, without steadfastness there is no virtue. For virtue is a habit; and a habit is a quality deeply rooted.

Further, it is certain that the condition of the female sex is by nature frail and unsteady. Since, then, in the blessed and untouched Mary the things which by nature must have been more imperfect were surrounded with a greater glory, it becomes known that she was girt about and adorned with a wholly excellent steadfastness. Again, steadfastness flows from wisdom: for it belongs to the wise man to set in order, and to be and to act uniformly. As, then, the more than blessed Mother of the eternal and almighty God was most wise, so too was she most constant. Moreover, he who leans upon reason is steadfast; but he who is laid beneath his passions is changeable and inconstant: for the passions darken the light of the understanding and the judgment of reason. Since, then, Mary was resplendent with the moral *(p. 559)* virtues, she lacked wholly every disordered movement of the passions; and therefore she always exercised in all things the most free judgment of reason. She was, then, most constant.

Again, if the Apostle might say: “Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35); and again: “I am sure that neither death, nor life, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38–39): how much more Mary, complete in every perfection? For the constant man is neither lifted up by prosperity, but gives thanks; nor cast down by adversity, but bears it with an even mind. This constancy holy Job had: “Till I die,” he says, “I will not depart from my innocence. My justification, which I have begun to hold, I will not forsake” (Job 27:5–6). And so he who has gained true constancy cannot be bent or broken either by the praise and favour of men or by the threats and torments of enemies. This the most valiant athletes and brides of Christ possessed, who in a frail sex won the palm of martyrdom. Indeed, through it every woman is made not only manly but even Godlike. For Balaam, beginning to speak of God: “God is not as a man,” he says, “that he should lie, nor as the son of man, that he should be changed” (Num. 23:19). And therefore one who walks without turning aside in the paths of justice, declining neither to the right hand nor to the left, is rightly called a kind of god.

## Article XXIII: Of the sweetness of most loving Mary toward God

“My spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb. My memory is unto everlasting generations” (Ecclus. 24:27–28). What is it, most sweet one, what is it, O most meek, O truly too sweet Mary? You never, O Lady, can enter through the gates of memory unless you disperse the odor of the sweetness innate in you. O sweet and delightful, O fragrant and lovable Mary!

But what is this mental and interior sweetness, unless a certain serene disposition exhilarating the mind of the one having it, and delighting and refreshing the soul of the one contemplating? Finally, from goodness, lovability and also convenience this disposition emanates. Therefore, the better, the more lovable and more convenient to all you stand, O Mary, so much more sweet you plainly are. And since utterly nothing of bitterness, and nothing at all of tortuosity consists in you, but highest mercy, full meekness, and perfect charity, it shines forth, I opine, that you are truly wholly sweet and also pleasant. Indeed, how could you not already be most sweet, nay even a certain most pure sweetness, you who conceived the Fountain of sweetness, the King of infinite suavity, bore Him in the womb, brought Him forth closed, suckled Him born, handled Him, and led Him to growth? The remains of His sweetness, O Mary, remained in you, and the odor of His suavity adhered immobile to your substance. For He Himself your Son, of whom we sing, “For You, O Lord, are sweet and mild” (Ps. 85:5), willed you to be lovable to every creature, and especially to man, and made you sweet. And behold, O Lady, after God most high there is utterly nothing in the universe that stands equal to your sweetness.

## Article XXIV: Of that motherly and most bitter compassion with which His most loving Mother suffered with her suffering Son

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother" (John 19:25). In what has gone before it has already been made plain (unless I am mistaken) that Mary knew beforehand that her Beloved was to suffer; and so, meditating abundantly beforehand on His coming Passion, she must devoutly be believed to have been often touched with bitter affliction, yet according to the dispensation and the governance of the counsel from above. In like manner too, if I contemplate rightly, she received consolation at that time from His resurrection soon to follow. But now, when the hour of the Passion was present, and while the Passion itself lasted, so great a sorrow weighed upon her that she found no breathing space at all *(p. 560)* from the thought of the resurrection near at hand.

For as the bitterness of the Lord's Passion was so great that the Only-begotten of God confessed Himself forsaken by the heavenly Father (as He says: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?", Matt. 27:46; as Isaias also, prophesying: "We have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God", Isa. 53:4, and "the most abject of men", Isa. 53:3), so too in that hour Mary's compassion was so great that she also seemed to have been forsaken by God. For that forsaking of Christ was nothing else than the withholding of the divine consolation, and then His being delivered into the hands of sinners. In the Passion itself, indeed, there was in the Messiah no overflowing of the Godhead, or of the rational and highest part of the soul, into the sensitive part and the bodily powers. And therefore the sorrow was most bitter: both because the constitution of the Sufferer was most tender, and again because He who was tormented was of a most strong constitution and nature. In like manner it was with Mary then: for the Mother's sorrow could be softened by no consideration, neither of the Sufferer's resurrection nor of the fruit of the Passion. Whence, as the bitterness of the Lord's Passion was then so great that not even the passion of any martyr can be equalled to it, so Mary's compassion then exceeded all compassion whatever. And not only so, but I think that no one in this world could have borne a death of such bitterness as Mary's compassion was in that hour: for that she could live while suffering with Him, and not die, was (unless I am mistaken) the work not of human strength but of the divine dispensation.

For if you seek to know in any way the greatness of the virgin Mother's compassion, strive to see the vehemence of the love with which she loved her Son. And indeed, though I should speak with the tongues of all, of angels and of men, I confess I could not tell the ardour of this love. Further, I remember having treated, as well as I could, of the quality of this love of Mary in what went before (Art. 4). And it is plain, I think, that as we suffer with one we love, so the more intimately we love, the more heartily we bear together with him. Since, then, according to what has been said, the virgin Mother loved Jesus the Son of God beyond all telling, it is plain that she suffered with Him in His suffering beyond all telling.

Go over now, then, from the beginning, O my soul, the manner of the Passion of your God, and likewise the sorrow of the compassion of His Mother. On the day when the Holy of Holies was sold, when Jesus had said to His disciples, "You know that after two days shall be the pasch, and the Son of man shall be delivered up to be crucified" (Matt. 26:2), that only Jesus of yours, O lovable Mary, remained in Bethania, in the house of Martha; and Lazarus was one of those at table (John 12:2). Many converses of yours with Jesus are written to have taken place on that day and at that supper (which I neither reject nor affirm, since they are held to be apocryphal). But what is certain and true I will set out as best I can. For I do not think it doubtful that at that most sacred table, at which the princes of the peoples were gathered with the God of Abraham (Ps. 46:10), and you, the Queen of the world, with the King Messiah, and Lazarus too with Martha and Mary, were at meat with Christ, your Only-begotten spoke of the Passion already at hand: and in His speech your motherly mind was most bitterly pierced and suffered with Him. That night He remained with you in the house of Martha. What loving, fervent and sorrowful words passed at that time between you and Him and the others, I leave to the devout and loving mind to meditate.

Further, before the festival day of the Pasch, sending two of His disciples ahead to prepare the Pasch of the Law, He at length went with the other Apostles out of Bethania, and set out for Jerusalem and entered it. On this day too, O Mary, I hold it certain that you went in from Bethania to Jerusalem, not alone, but with those other most devout women who burned more fully with the love of Christ (I mean Magdalen and the other Marys); for it is plain *(p. 561)* that you were not present at the Supper of Christ. I remember, O Lady, that bitter parting by which you were separated from your Beloved and only Son on the day of the Last Supper. For most surely, O Lady, you knew that you would not see Him again except as delivered into the hands of sinners: and so you were parted from Him with a most burning affection of compassion and with most loving and fiery words.

Further, with what anxiety and dread, with what watchings and how great compassion you passed that night, in which you knew that your most beloved was to be betrayed, seized, bound, mocked, spat upon, struck and blasphemed, I leave to a more devout and more secret lover to contemplate. This meanwhile I take as certain, that if you had been with Him, you would not have fled from Him for fear of death, as the Apostles did.

Moreover, how great a sorrow came upon you, O more than serene and purely beautiful Mary, when you first heard, whether in the night or on the day of the Parasceve, that your Son was taken! You fell to the ground, perhaps, then, from the bitterness of your compassion.

Then, when you saw Him, His hands bound (perhaps even behind His back, as it is said), disfigured with spitting and bruised with blows, brought most shamefully before the governor, and heard Him most falsely accused, how wholly unimaginable an affliction, O Mary, swallowed you up! For this sight was the beginning of sorrows, but not yet the end: sharper things press on, and the most painful remain. For when you saw, at least with your inward eyes, your dearest, whom you had loved more, and incomparably more, than yourself, clothed in a white garment and so clothed led like a fool through the streets and squares, stripped wholly, bound to a pillar and torn most inhumanly and most cruelly with scourges, what, O holy one, must that most gentle virginal and motherly mind of yours be thought to have borne then? For He, O most heartfelt one, who was then so shamefully stripped, is He who clothes the day with comely light, and the night with the grace of sleep. And He who is so mocked is the Power and the Wisdom of the Father.

Moreover, when you beheld Him crowned with thorns and clothed in purple, presented to the Jews, His sacred face disfigured with spittle and streams of holy blood, did not the sword of sorrow then begin to pierce you, when Pilate said, “Behold the man” (John 19:5)? And when you heard Him judged, and perceived those words of the sacrilegious as they cried, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him” (John 19:15), and again as they said, “Not this man, but Barabbas” (John 18:40), and as they rejoiced at the sentence condemning your most beloved, I think that a material sword does not so bitterly cleave the substance of the flesh as those words painfully cut the inmost parts of your motherly mind: for in truth those most hard men whetted their tongues like a sword (Ps. 63:4). Your eyes, O Mary, shed tears day and night, and did not cease (Lam. 2:18). For you heard, O blessed one, the wicked then saying among themselves what Jeremias long ago told, prophesying the Passion of your Son: “Come,” he says in their person, “let us put wood on his bread, and cut him off from the land of the living” (Jer. 11:19).

Then, with what sorrow did you follow Him as He went forth, carrying His own cross with the utmost insult and contempt? O truly painful sight, to behold the innocent, holy and most gentle Lamb so inhumanly handled! For His sacred head was pierced with thorns, His face was wet with that rosy and ruddy blood, His wearied shoulders were laden with the heavy wood; and amid all this He is led as a sheep to the slaughter, and is dumb (Isa. 53:7).

It is a common thing that a person, when he sees his beloved bearing adversity, remembers the more the benefits of the beloved, and the former deeds of their old love and wonted familiarity, and suffers with him the more intimately on that account. So altogether, O Lady, above all in the very Passion of your most

heartfelt Son, you remembered His benefits: that He chose you, a humble handmaid, for His Mother, *(p. 562)* and preferred you, a poor maiden, to the princedom of the angels; that, keeping you from every stain, He made you full of grace; and moreover how familiarly, humbly, lovingly and joyfully He lived with you. The more fully you recalled such things, O Mary, the more you languished with love of your Son, and the more vehemently you suffered with Him in His suffering. Of these you were mindful with remembrance, O great Queen, and your soul wasted away within you (Lam. 3:20).

At length, then, they came to the place of Calvary. And behold, at once, while you, O Mary, looked on, He whom your soul loveth (Cant. 3:3) is stripped, and that most beautiful body now seems most disfigured and most pitiable, for it was so torn and bloodied. Then it is laid upon the cross, and at once His hands and feet are pierced with dreadful and blunt nails; and that whole most sacred and Godlike body is stretched so violently by the wicked that no member remains in its first and natural place, and the very bones can be numbered (Ps. 21:18): for the whole frame of the holy and delicate flesh was loosened, and the veins and the sinews were broken. This piercing and stretching was a most bitter torment. Fixed thus, then, they hang Him up between thieves.

O thing more than bitter, O sight more than sorrowful, when the most loving and most gentle Mother beholds her only Son so slaughtered, and (as it is told) wraps Him in the veil of her head to cover His shame! O hard blows and bitter sounds, when you, O happy one, being present, heard the thick nails driven into the hands and feet of your most beloved Son! For the better you knew Him, O Lady, the more painfully you suffered with Him. His lovableness of nature was not hidden from you, nor the sweetness of His heart, the holiness of His mind, the tenderness and the passibility of His constitution. Where now, O Mary, no longer a singular and delighted bride but a most sorrowful widow, and now well nigh sorrowfully bereaved, where now is that pleasant voice: “My beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands” (Cant. 5:10)?

For behold, you look, and there is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness (Isa. 53:2). His colour is changed (Lam. 4:1), and turned to an ashen paleness. Where now, too, is that voice: “I to my beloved, and his turning is towards me” (Cant. 7:10)? For now, O Lady, He is taken from you, and He leaves you, the one solace of your life, the joy of your heart, and the light of your eyes (Ps. 37:11). Him to see, to hear, to think of, to speak with, to follow, to live with, to serve, to be united and to cleave to, was your one refreshment and your highest joy: and Him, O kind one, the most raging dogs take from you, and kill while you stand by.

Further, you heard eagerly and with groaning those most sacred words of your Son as He hung there; and that one above all moved and pierced all your motherly heart, when your most faithful Son, suffering with you also, said: “Woman, behold thy son”; and to the disciple, showing you to him and commending you: “Behold thy mother” (John 19:26–27). O what an exchange! How, O most clement mind, should these words and the others that have been recalled not have wounded your soul with the sword of sorrow, and driven you to the failing of the mind and the fainting and falling of the body, when the mere remembrance of them so softens and dissolves our hearts, though they are of stone and exceedingly hard, and makes them tearful and loving?

Straits were upon you, O Lady, on every side (Dan. 13:22). If you looked up, you saw the only fruit of your womb, your pledge and your treasure, hanging on the cross. If you looked around, you heard the most wicked blaspheming, mocking, wagging their sacrilegious heads and saying: “Vah, thou that destroyest the temple of God, save thy own self” (Matt. 27:40); and again: “If he be Christ, the Son of the blessed God, let him now come down from the cross”; and again: “Let the King of Israel come down now, and we will believe him” (Matt. 27:42; Mark 15:32). On every side, O holy one, your sorrow grew: for when your Beloved cried, “I thirst” (John 19:28), the unhappy men, full of gall, gave Him vinegar mingled with gall (Matt. 27:34). Then, while you suffered with Him so inconsolably and beyond all imagining, those reprobates exulted vehemently, as though sated with the pains and miseries of your Only-begotten. And since you looked about, and there was none to help (Isa. 63:5), so too He looked for one that would grieve together with Him, *(p. 563)* and there was none: and for one that would comfort Him, and He found none (Ps. 68:21).

Soon the whole creation, suffering (if I may so say) with its Creator, loses its colour, and is darkened as though about to fall back into the first chaos. The Athenians marvel, and Dionysius, the highest of the philosophers, is astounded. This, unless I am mistaken, was some sort of consolation to you, O sublime Mary.

Then, about the ninth hour, when all things were now accomplished, bowing His head and crying with a loud voice, He gave up the ghost (Matt. 27:50; John 19:30). And then, O Mary, had not the omnipotence of the Dying One preserved you, you too would surely have breathed your last with Him. And now, what anguish of your motherly heart, what groaning, what desolation, how loving and lamenting the words, how sad the look, how most mournful the bearing!

Then, when the soldier pierced the side of the dead with a lance (John 19:34), it is not His body, already dead, that suffers, but the sword of compassion pierces again your most fervent mind; and it is painful to you that it did not suffice the wicked to torment Him living, unless they wounded you through Him dead. And this sorrow was surely renewed once more when you saw the most cruel men go up to break His bones (John 19:32–33).

But when those blessed men took Him down from the cross, how lovingly and mournfully you receive the body of your Son, embrace it, kiss it and water it with tears! With what lamentation, too, you weep for the Holy of Holies and the King of glory! Those most burning tears, flowing unfailingly drop by drop from your most lovable dove's eyes, scorched your rosy face, O Virgin; nor is the body of your Beloved torn from you to be laid in the tomb without the most bitter torment of your holy breast.

Then, late, with incredible sorrow, you are led back from the sepulchre. Yet when you had entered the house, at once, as was most fitting, your most sweet mind received consolation from the most certain contemplation of the resurrection near at hand. It was indeed reasonable that, as He was ending death, you too should receive relief from sorrow. And lastly it is to be devoutly believed that your most loving Son appeared a little afterwards to you first of all.

## Article XXV: Why the king Messias disposed His most dear Mother to be present at His passion; and of the merit of maternal compassion

"But thou, O Lord of all things, disposest all things wisely." Why therefore, O good Jesus, O most meek Lamb, did You not spare Your most cordial and most sweet Mother, ordaining that she not intend Your passion present and standing by? But already, because utterly nothing happens without Your providence, nor do You permit anything to come about without efficacious reason, not indeed without a sublime and admirable cause did You ordain Your loving Mother to assist at death and the cross. Indeed You willed her to be cooperator of our whole salvation, and You constituted her advocate of the Church, and through her You decreed to save many. And therefore (unless I err) You also willed her to compassion You, that on that account, by the merit of her maternal compassion, You Yourself might be more prompt to mercy: not indeed as if the sanctity and merit of Your most superworthy death did not suffice, but that You might also impend this honor on her, and through her patronages repair the desperate and those who showed themselves ungrateful and also unworthy to Your passion. Moreover also that through this she herself also might ineffably accumulate her own merit. We know indeed that if we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him (Rom. 8:17; 2 Tim. 2:12). Finally, who more compassionates shall utterly more also be conglorified: and therefore, as the Holy of Holies incomparably compassionated the Holy of Holies, so also she has been constituted most similar in glory.

Now therefore, O most high Christ, O good Jesus, O lover of men and Son of Mary, since I have been, alas, so most ungrateful and wicked toward Your holy Passion, Your cross and Your blood, *(p. 564)* have not grieved with You, nor been conformed to You in Your suffering, nor been fixed to the cross with You

crucified, and have therefore wholly deserved to be forsaken and to perish, save me, I pray, by the merit of the compassion of Your most excellent Mother; give me over to her. And you, O good one, receive me, and by the merit of your most sacred compassion keep me for ever.

## Article XXVI: That the illustrious Virgin had vowed virginity to God

“O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory!” (Wis. 4:1). If the things previously introduced are rightly propped, no perfection of virtue was lacking to Mary; and since the vow of virginity consists the graceful beauty of virtue, it is plain that the most blessed one also devoted to God the sanctimony of mind and body. For it was not hidden from her that the operation of virtue from a vow is more praiseworthy, for she heard Him saying: “Vow you, and pay to the Lord your God” (Ps. 75:12).

But you will say: Since the holy Virgin was obedient to the Law in all things; but the Law damned infecundity with a curse (Exod. 23:26; Deut. 7:14): how therefore is she to be reckoned to have obliged herself to virginity against the precept of the Law? And again, if she had vowed virginity, she subjected herself to danger, permitting herself to be betrothed: for she who truly contracts matrimony submits herself to the power of a man.

But it is to be answered that the blessed Virgin, who was the confine and as it were the horizon of both laws, devoted virginity indeed as most pleasing to herself; but because she was still under the Law, she did not vow this so absolutely that she did not add this most honest condition: unless God dispose something else of her. Not that she herself doubted whether she wished to remain intact, but whether she ought. Finally God most high, who stands author and Lord of the Law, chose to work in His most loving one above the Law; and on that account, from a special instinct of the Holy Spirit she herself emitted the vow. For also those most holy men—I speak of Elias and Jeremias—remained virgins, as Gregory reports of Elias, and also Jerome of Jeremias. Further, that nonetheless the most modest Virgin sustained betrothal is acknowledged done by induction of the Holy Spirit: because she herself also was taught from heaven of the purpose of chastity of her spouse. But truly, to conceal from demons the mystery of the Incarnation, and to spare virginal tenderness, nor that she be stoned as a fornicatrix, especially since she was of priestly lineage, she was betrothed to a just man.

# Book IV: Her Happiness and Glory

## Prologue

*(p. 565)* “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).

“Put on,” says the Apostle, “the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14). And you, O Mary blessed not only among women but among creatures, are clothed with light as with a garment: for you who so immersed in that inaccessible light have been made so intimate and also so near, that after the personal union of the humanity of your adorable beloved and only-begotten Son with the Word, I will not say a greater or so great, but not even a comparable union of anyone with God can stand to your most happy conjunction with God.

Finally under your feet the moon is set. I, with better judgment safe, understand by the moon the universal creature: for the moon abundantly designates defect in the Scripture of truth. For the fool is changed as the moon, but the wise man remains as the sun (Ecclus. 27:12). But every creature from itself is indeed defective and unstable: for it depends on the almighty God in being and also in being conserved, nor without His maintenance can it subsist even for a moment. Rightly therefore the moon is said under Mary’s feet: for she herself has been preferred to every creature, because she poured forth the Creator of the universe.

Finally by the appellation of the moon that the militant Church be taken, nothing (as I opine) is inconvenient: for she herself obtains light from the true Sun, and from herself is reckoned dark. And this also is prostrate at Mary’s feet, congratulating herself to have her as advocate and mediatrix.

Moreover the head of this woman is adorned with a diadem of twelve stars. But what more efficaciously it is fitting to understand by these twelve stars, I meanwhile leave to the wiser. Yet what by them the ardent lover of this Queen (I intimate Bernard) reckoned to be understood, I judge equal to utter. Therefore he conceived twelve prerogatives of Mary through the twelve stars. “There is,” saying, “to find in Mary prerogatives of heaven, prerogatives of flesh, and prerogatives of heart.” Finally these triform prerogatives he partitioned in four, placing four heavenly, four of flesh, and four of mind. Enumerating which: “To me,” he says, “a singular brightness shines, first indeed in Mary’s generation; second, in the angelic salutation; third, in the coming upon of the Holy Spirit; fourth, in the ineffable conception of the Son of God.” Moreover touching also the excellences of flesh: “In these,” he says, “also a starry beauty radiates, that she is first of virginity, that without corruption fecund, that without heaviness pregnant, that without pain a child-bearer.” And lastly, setting down the last four: *(p. 566)* “There flash in Mary,” he declares, “the meekness of modesty, the devotion of humility, the greatness of soul of her belief, the martyrdom of her heart.”

Again, I too think (unless I am mistaken) that these twelve stars can be interpreted otherwise. For there are three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity; four cardinal, justice, prudence, fortitude and temperance; and five intellectual: and since the sacred heart of the most holy Virgin shone with these, she is fittingly described as adorned with a crown of twelve stars. Moreover, since according to what was shown before (Book III, Art. 10) Mary shone most highly with the splendor of the moral virtues, which indeed, if I rightly remember, are twelve, and a little before were enumerated, nothing prohibits that by the twelve stars these also twelve virtues be taken.

Since therefore already now three treatises of the present edition are consummated, it rightly is incumbent to approach the last. For in the first, of the dignity of the most clean flesh of the holy Virgin, in the second however of her wisdom, in the third finally of the virtues and grace of the same, according to powers dispute has been made: and therefore now it is fitting to speak of the beatitude and glory of God’s most loving one.

## Article I: Of the Assumption of sublime Mary

“The voice of my beloved: Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone” (Cant. 2:10–11). Of the glorious and nurturing Virgin, true and most excellent Mother of blessed God, I do not remember anything else written in authentic Scriptures what she did after the Son’s resurrection, or where she remained, or how long she survived, than what Luke reports in the Acts: “All these,” saying (but he speaks of the Apostles), “were persevering with one mind in prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14). Whence (unless I err) it becomes known that after the mission of the Paraclete she conversed especially with the Apostles and the other holy women. Finally, the disciples dispersed, and the Apostles also incumbent far and wide on preaching, happy Mary is said to have remained in a house located by Mount Sion, and most holy, in all the time she lived, incessantly and most affectionately visited the places of her Son in which He had spoken, worked, been baptized, been taken and suspended, and whence finally He rose and ascended. There were moreover (as is believed) cohabiting with her, and if need was reverently intent in her ministry, one hundred twenty clean virgins.

Therefore, while the divine Mother and Lady of the world indefectibly and always more hotly burned with desire of her Only-begotten and glowed with love, on a certain day the glowing dilection of the maternal mind, no longer able to contain herself and also impatient of separation, boiled over too much and also flamed, and asked of the Son that she be united to Him, nor longer be frustrated of His presence by longer delay. As therefore it has been believed and written by holy and Catholic men, God the Son at once sends an angel to the Mother, and announces beforehand how she is now to be assumed, and for venerable burial to be exhibited to her miraculously and suddenly gathers the Apostles to her dwelling. She therefore makes known the cause, first to her son John and then to the others: which they hearing not without sorrow, commit themselves and also every Church of Christ to the same. After these things, the Apostles praising her, the house itself is filled with most sweet sweetness; and Christ the Lord, surrounded by a heavenly army, soon receives and embraces the spirit of His Mother handing over her soul with sweet expiration, shining with ineffable splendor, and leads her to the seat prepared for her from the origin next to His own throne, and with immense glory places her with Himself in eternal felicity. Further, the sacred body washed by the virgins, they buried it in the field of Gethsemani: which a little after reunited to the soul is believed exalted by Christ to supercelestial beatitude.

*(p. 567)*

For if it is most certainly believed that Christ foretold the hour of death to certain others of the Saints, or appeared in His own person at their departure, or at least sent some of the heavenly ones to their help and consolation, and He is acknowledged to have brought them with a joyful procession into the heavenly kingdoms, how much more must He be held to have bestowed on His dearest and most worthy Mother, with incomparable eminence, the things that have now been touched upon, and many greater besides? Many wonderful and beautiful things have indeed been written on the present matter; since they are found clearly enough elsewhere, I have thought they should be left aside now. Yet this I hold wholly certain, that the heavenly Bridegroom called and invited His unique and singular spouse and most loving Mother to Himself with most sweet eloquence: “Arise,” saying, “make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, my immaculate one, and come, about to obtain the palm of eternal beatitude and the triumph of incessable glory; for already the winter of tribulation has passed, the rain of tears of pious compassion has gone, flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come.” Before the sweetness of these speeches, and before the most excellent contemplation of heavenly things, that most holy soul was separated from the body with most sweet separation.

## Article II: Of the testimony of the great and divine Dionysius, which he himself attested of the dormition of the unspotted Virgin

The most loving and most profound disciple of Paul, sacred Dionysius, most victorious martyr and highest of theologians, attesting that he was present at the dormition of the immaculate and most holy Virgin, perfect Mary, taught that the Apostles and also many of the disciples were present at the same. Whence because of the excellence of his testimony it has pleased to introduce his words according to a double translation.

Therefore in the book *On the Divine Names* beginning to address Timothy: "We," he says, "as you know, both myself, and many of our holy brethren, came together to the visitation of the body of the principle of life and which received God; but there was present also James the brother of the Lord, and Peter the highest and most advanced summit of the theologians. Afterward it seemed good after the vision that all the hierarchs should praise, as each was sufficient, the goodness of the infinite power of thearchic infirmity." Further another translation thus embraces this sense. For speaking to Timothy: "We," he says, "as is estimated, both you, and many of our holy brethren, came together into the vision of the body beginning life and receiving God; but there was present also James the brother of God, and Peter the vertex and most honorable summit of the theologians. Then it pleased after the vision that the high priests all together praise, as each was fit, the much powerful goodness of divine infirmity": that is, it pleased that Mary, weak indeed from herself, but from God much powerful, each of the Apostles, as each sufficed, should praise: which also was done.

## Article III: Of the reasons of faithful Augustine, by which he confirms Mary already assumed with the body

Augustine introduced four reasons by which he asserted the Virgin Mother united to Christ the Son in mind and flesh and conglorified. And indeed the first is elicited from her perfect integrity. He says indeed: If the Lord willed to keep the Mother integral with the pudor of virginity, why would He not will to keep her incorrupt from the stench of putrefaction? And truly that most serene flesh, which neither before birth was touched, nor in birth wounded, nor finally after birth violated; through which moreover all things both heavenly and earthly once broken are already reintegrated: *(p. 568)* by what pact, I ask, is it to be believed dissolved and consumed?

Moreover (and it is Augustine's second reason): Does it not, he says, pertain to the Lord's benignity to keep the Mother's honor—He who had come to fulfill the Law, not to dissolve it (Matt. 5:17)? As therefore in life He decorated His most cordial and indeed unthinkably most beloved and utterly most lovable Mother with more excellent grace before the rest; so also in death He venerated her with singular honor. And indeed that most pious one, who impended on Him as Son every honor and glory she could, how is she not to be believed to have obtained a return from the most clement and most just Son? Indeed He Himself who so glorifies the extinguished bodies of the other Saints, if He left the Mother's body so unknown and unhonored on earth, would seem to venerate the Mother little enough—He who nonetheless says: "Them that honor Me, I will honor" (1 Kings 2:30). How therefore would He not more sublimely have glorified her who so most highly glorified Him from childbearing unto rest? Unless perhaps He who stands so liberal and munificent to all was so sparing and also so tenacious only to His own Mother. And Bernard introduced this reason.

Further (and it is Augustine's third reason), since the unity of Christ's flesh and Mary's is so great, it is utterly reasonable that they neither be separated by place, nor divided by so great an interval. Whence, since putrefaction and the worm are the opprobrium of human condition, from which since Christ is alien, thence Mary's nature, which Christ took from her, is excepted. And since greater indeed is the unity of nature than of grace, and to Christ and Mary there is unity of nature (for a son is from the substance of the parent and something of him); their conjunction would be ampler than Christ's with the other Saints. If therefore, because of the unity of grace, Christ said, "Father, I will that where I am, there also shall my minister be" (John 12:26; 17:24), how much more must He have willed that that deified and most pure flesh, of which His own flesh is a certain portion, should in no wise be separated from His Godlike body?

The fourth reason draws its force from the dignity of the virginal flesh. “If no authority yet seen stands in the way,” says Augustine, “I truly believe that so great a sanctification is more worthy of heaven than of earth; that the throne of God, the bride chamber of the Lord of heaven and the tabernacle of Christ, is worthy to be where He is; that heaven is more worthy than earth to keep so precious a treasure. Rightly, then, incorruption, and no dissolution of decay, follows such integrity. That most sacred body given as food to worms, since I cannot think it, I dread to say.” Thus Augustine. For that most chaste flesh, so dear to Christ, which nourished Him, whose breasts He sucked, which from the beginning ministered to Him so reverently and as a mother, which so often embraced and kissed Him, in whose sacred bosom He so abundantly rested, in whose arms He quieted, by whose maternal breast He so frequently slept: how indeed would she, whose temple and also sanctuary she was, have been given by Christ to see corruption? How did He Himself not so repay her as she to Him? How could He suffer her to be separated from Himself so long, and leave the Mother’s beatitude incomplete?

## Article IV: Of that most glorious procession by which the spouse Son introduced the spouse Mother to the eternal and heavenly nuptials

“Who is she that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?” (Cant. 8:5). We indubitably believe, O God-bearing virgin, O most beautiful of women, O Christ-bearing Mary, that your most happy soul emigrating from your immaculate body was soon received in the arms of your most sweet Only-begotten. Finally we most certainly and truly confess that the same your beloved, and with Him thousands of the Saints, *(p. 569)* most reverently came and most decently met you as Queen of heaven, as savior of the world, as Mother of God, and most joyfully introduced you into the Holy of Holies, into the uranic palace. Then, O Lady, the daughters of Sion had seen you and predicated you most blessed, and the queens had praised you (Cant. 6:8; Ecclus. 24). Moreover, as days of spring, flowers of roses and lilies of the valleys surrounded you. Further, others seeing you leaning on the Son spouse, too graceful and incomparably beautiful, inquiring for admiration: “Who is,” they say, “this that comes up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer?” (Cant. 3:6).

Therefore to you, O Lady, ascending, every heavenly army applauds. Joyfully the angelic minds embrace you, through whom the ruins of their seats were repaired. The happy Patriarchs are gladdened in your advent, in whose germ both they themselves and all their seed, and moreover every people, congratulate themselves to have obtained blessing. The Prophets salute and venerate you coming: for whom they so often predicted from afar, and through whom they were found faithful (Ecclus. 24:31). Accordingly Christ’s most strong athletes glorify you ascending as arch-martyr and also most bright ray of martyrdom. Moreover the holy confessors exalt you as example of life and norm of justice and rule of universal perfection. Finally virgins are brought to the King after her (Ps. 44:15), and every heavenly army meets, sings and jubilates to Mary as most bright Mother of their God; and so with ineffable joy she enters the supermundane bridal chambers, and there perseveres without end with the spouse of infinite joy.

## Article V: That Mary is exalted above all the choirs of angels

“Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come: you shall be crowned from the top of Amana, from the top of Sanir and Hermon, from the dens of the lions, from the mountains of the leopards” (Cant. 4:8). Rightly accordingly (unless I err) she who conceived and bore the Word God merited to approximate immediately the throne of the Divinity; and altogether justly the Founder of the universe preferred His own Mother to every creature and made her more sublime.

Further, according to what was previously introduced in the first book, so great a sanctity became to be in the Mother of the true God, than which under God a greater cannot be; and therefore a place next to God is justly furnished her: for it is plain that a higher place is owed to ampler sanctity. Finally, who more loves will be

nearer to God: for the theologians confess that the essential reward is owed to charity. But it is plain that no created mind, after the soul of Christ, loved God so intimately and ardently as Mary: for she who loved Him as only and own Son. For if less, she would by no means have loved Him so much as it stood fitting and just that He be loved by her.

Yet I do not opine this to be so understood, that Mary as wayfarer loved God with more intense charity before the angels: for the charity of the way cannot be equaled to the charity of the fatherland, as neither the knowledge in which charity is rooted. And therefore Christ the Lord: "He that is the lesser," He says, "in the kingdom of heaven"—that is, the lowest comprehensor—"is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11): than him indeed of whom a little before He said, "There has not risen among them that are born of women a greater than John the Baptist": intimating, as I reckon, and attesting that the perfection of the way cannot be coequated to the perfection of the fatherland. How therefore is Mary to be reckoned to have loved God more ardently than all and to have obtained highest sanctity?—unless that so far, if I rightly consider, she loved God, and adhered to Him with so great charity, as merited to be exalted above every angelic height. For in this mode also, although he that is lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he—that is, than John—nonetheless John merited to be preferred to many of them.

Yet to reckon any man after Mary *(p. 570)* preferred to all angelic choirs I judge temerarious. For although likeness is promised, yet preferment is denied (Luke 20:36). This after the God-man we reckon reserved only to Mary. For from this that you have the Word, O Mary, as God Son, you also stand lady and empress of the angels, and you can most justly command them as you will. It is plain, then, that you, O happy and sublime Mary, are next to God. In figure of this, when Bethsabee of old went in to her son Solomon, a throne was set for her at the right hand of her son (3 Kings 2:19). And again, the lowly Esther of old so pleased Assuerus, the most powerful and most rich king, that after him she reigned in all his kingdom (Esth. 2:17). So, O Lady, it has pleased the eternal and adorable Prince, the King of kings and Lord of lords (Apoc. 19:16), God holy and high, to exalt you, His humble handmaid (Luke 1:48), yet comely with incredible beauty, above all things, and to set you next to Himself.

O admirable and venerable Mary, you excel the most fervid Seraphim in divine fervor; you conquer the most lucid Cherubim in wisdom; in whom God resides more amplily and more truly than in the Thrones, and through whom He more vehemently decrees the censure of His own judgments! Finally, O most high, you are higher and freer than the holy Dominations, and above them and also before them you command and intimate to the other sacred subordinate phalanxes what is to be done; finally you also principate over the Principalities themselves.

## Article VI: Of the ineffable felicity of Mary, which she obtained in the vision of the divine essence and most profound knowledge of the superblessed Trinity

"This is," says the Only-begotten to the Father, "eternal life: That they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3). But we know that charity makes ecstasy: for which unites the lover to the beloved, and transforms them into each other and binds them indissolubly. Since therefore, according to what was previously introduced, Mary loved God with most excellent ardor, it is plain that intimate to Him, and (to use the words of the great lover of Mary) as far as after the personal union the condition of a creature suffers, Mary seems to be immersed in the inaccessible and eternal light. Moreover vision succeeds faith. As therefore Mary's faith exceeded the faith of all in magnanimity and illumination, according to what was previously shown, so also a most subtle vision succeeded to it. Further also Christ promised to one obedient to Him: "I," saying, "will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). But who in heaven and earth so fulfilled Christ's will as His singular spouse, unique dove and most dear Mother? Most clearly therefore He is to be confessed to have manifested Himself to her. But truly the vision of God is known promised to purity of heart: for blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God (Matt. 5:8). With

what clarity therefore does that most clean mind of Mary, which never stood stained with any stain whatsoever, know God?

Moreover, as from Mary God assumed what was Mary's, so indeed, according to her capacity, He also repaid to the same what is of divinity. But He took from her true nature, filial aliment and perfect education: to which, unless from God the Son, an equivalent cannot be rendered (as Aristotle says). "To the gods," he says, "to parents and to masters an equivalent cannot be given." And therefore, since the divine nature is not hypostatically united to Mary, it is plain that holy and most high God imparted to her an incomprehensible and super-excellent fruition of Himself, and communicated to her so much more incomparable and also more evident a notion, the more amplily He was spontaneously made obliged to her, and the more He assumed from her.

Further, the clearer the vision of God in the fatherland, the greater the felicity. Again, because to be joined to the convenient and good and also beloved stands delightful, the more the holy Virgin loved and loves God, so much more delightfully it consists for her to be united to Him. And again, the more intimate that union, the greater the glory. Further, the better and the more fitting the object of this union, the more delightful, the more glorious and the sweeter it is to be joined to it so clearly and so immediately.

*(p. 571)*

And God is uncircumscribed goodness, supremely fitting to every mind. Your happiness in God, then, O Mary, is most delightful, most sweet and supremely secure. You are absorbed into God and wholly immersed in Him; you are dissolved and melted into Him, made simple and at rest in Him. You are one spirit with Him (1 Cor. 6:17): to cleave to Him is your being; to taste Him, your life; to love Him, your delight; to abide in Him, your perfect contentment.

Moreover, the more familiar you are to the more than blessed Trinity, the dearer and the nearer, the more clearly you see it, the more warmly you love it, and the more sweetly you rest in it. And it is certain that you are the only bride of God the Father, the chosen Mother of His Only-begotten, the banquet hall of the Holy Spirit, and the most splendid resting place of the whole more than holy Trinity. God the Father overshadowed you, and of His incomprehensible kindness deigned to bestow on you so great a fellowship with Himself that you should possess with Him one and the same only Son. The Holy Spirit made you fruitful, and with that offspring from whom He Himself proceeds He made you fecund. Into you the Son of God descended, and from you truly being born He flowed forth. Moreover through you the whole superhappy Trinity obtained glory. For through you its faith became known to the world; and you mediating, O sacred, heavenly felicity was repaired. And already now, O Queen of joy, the holy Trinity joyfully embraces you; surrounds you with superlucent splendor, fills you with glory, and exalts you with incomparable honor.

## Article VII: Of that sublime joy which the most joyful Virgin receives in the contemplation of the manhood of Christ

"My beloved to me, and I to him who feedeth among the lilies" (Cant. 2:16). The essential reward of the elect is the vision of God; while the glory that is had in the creatures of God is called the accidental reward. For if the Lord rejoices in His works (Ps. 103:31), it is certain that created minds too exult in the beauty of the works of their Creator. And so the Psalmist says: "How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord" (Ps. 83:2–3). Indeed, the more beautiful a creature is, the holier, the more perfect and the nearer to God, the more lovable it is to be judged. And it is plain that the manhood of Christ is not only nearest to the Godhead, but alone surpasses the beauty, grace and glory, the sweetness, holiness and happiness of the whole universe, and of all and each of the elect. Therefore in the beholding of it lies the highest delight, after the glory that lies in the vision of the Godhead. Nor can all the

delights together which are found in heaven and on earth in the possession of creatures be compared with this glory which the Saints in the fatherland receive in the contemplation of the manhood of Christ.

Moreover, blessed men rejoice in it singularly: for by it they were saved; they know that it bore so much for their salvation; by it, in the end, they were forestalled with so excellent a love; they see it so like to themselves; and through it their very nature has been so exalted and deified. But to you, O Lady, the joy in beholding it is far fuller, and the more sublime as you love it the more, as the unity between it and you is greater, and as you rejoice with it in its glory the more vehemently. Who indeed could write how intimately you love the manhood of Christ, O most clean one, which you conceived as a virgin and cherished in your womb, which is a portion of your substance and something of yourself, through which you have obtained so great a glory and so great an honour? Again, who could tell how eminently you rejoice with the happiness of the manhood of your Beloved? You rejoice with it the more, unless I am mistaken, the more you love it, and the more heartily and painfully you once suffered with it in its labours and bitternesses, in its Passion *(p. 572)* and its contempt.

Now then, O Virgin who bore Christ, O glorious Mary, rejoice in your most loving Jesus, and exult in Him with a singular gladness: for Him whom you once saw reputed as the most abject of men (Isa. 53:3) you now see presiding over every creature and ruling it; Him whom you once beheld with a mother's compassion as a leper, without beauty or comeliness (Isa. 53:4, 2), you now look upon surrounded with an immense brightness that lights up all things in the heavens; and Him whom you once pondered with a mourning mind as despised by all, you now see adored by the host of heaven. Now the morning stars praise Him, and all the sons of God shout for joy (Job 38:7). Now feast with your dearest Bridegroom; keep with Him the eternal marriage feast; be joined to Him indissolubly, and rest, O happy one, with Him in secure and eternal rest.

## Article VIII: Of the glorious and incomparable honour which the Only-begotten always pays to His virgin Mother

"Everyone that shall confess Me before men," says Christ, "I will also confess him before My Father" (Matt. 10:32). Will You not therefore, O Christ of God, O blessed of the Lord, confess Your Mother—who not only never blushed for You, but for exceeding humility scarcely dared to call herself Your mother, but rather called herself handmaid (Luke 1:38), and in all Your holy speeches was most obedient—will You not, I say, now confess her before Your Father, His angels and all the elect? Utterly You confess before the most high and holy Trinity, and in the sight of thousands of thousands and of all adoring Him sitting on the supercelestial throne (Apoc. 7:9–11), that she herself is truly Your Mother, who conceived of heavenly light, who most affectionately, most reverently and most humbly ministered to You. You do not blush to confess in the heavens what You deigned to become on earth: nay You do not scorn to honor her as most venerable and most honest among Yours and in Your own, You who were subject to her in hers and obeyed in all. You most pious, most wise, most liberal and most grateful Son, indicibly venerate in all things Your most meek and most humble Mother.

## Article IX: Of the veneration with which every army of heaven and its whole militia honors the Mother of God

They do not disdain, O most blessed, O beautiful Mary, O altogether unspotted and superdelightful and graceful in all things Mary, to venerate and praise you, to obey you and also serve you—the supercelestial intellects, supermundane minds and those incorporeal minds—although by nature they are vehemently more excellent than you, more simple and less needy: because grace superabounds in you, and it has pleased almighty and holy God to prefer you, declining in species and humble in sex, to them who are neither pressed by bodily mass nor weakened by sex. Finally the sacred order of Cherubim, the highest order of Seraphim and the virtue and sublimity of the heavenly court promptly serve and obey her whose Son they acknowledge

the God whom they adore and cultivate to be, and to whom they confess the same to have been subject, and whom they behold indefectibly venerated by Him. Indeed perfect charity does not permit envy to be in the heavens; nor do those most high and immaterial spirits blush that a woman is preferred to them, while they behold so great an emptying to have preceded in the Only-begotten of God. Therefore you, O blessed and utterly immaculate in mind and flesh Mary, all heavenly citizens honor as true and most excellent Mother of the true God and their Creator and reparatrix of the heavenly ruin.

Further the souls of the just or pre-elect men singularly greatly venerate and love you, through whom they have obtained so many goods: through whom our God has been made *(p. 573)* our brother, our Creator has been made our Savior; through whom before all others we have been made more similar to God; through whom first we have obtained mercy from the hand of the Lord and attained felicity; who bore light for us, generated life, and poured forth the master of truth to the blind and those sitting in the shadow of death; through whom moreover whatever good we have, we have obtained.

## Article X: Of the glory which Mary has in the elect and the Blessed

“Give her of the fruit of her hands: and let her works praise her in the gates” (Prov. 31:31). It has been shown that the more the virgin Mother loved her Son, so much more cordially she desired the fruit of His passion and blood. Finally, the more vehemently she sighed for this, so much more exuberantly she rejoices in it already obtained and attained.

Great therefore is your exultation, O renowned Empress, O gracious Mary, when you intend that the death and blood of your beloved have fructified in so many thousands of Saints, in so many ten times hundred thousands of elect, when through you you so see hells despoiled by the price of that most holy blood, men saved, heavens filled. Finally in those who either bore you or sang you to be born—I speak of Patriarchs and Prophets—you indeed greatly rightly exult; and also in those with whom once on earth you so familiarly, lovingly and humbly conversed; again also in those who in this world so devoutly cultivated you, so singularly venerated you and so ardently loved you, and rejoice to have been specially helped and recovered through you, among whom there are some who once were so desperate, desolate and wicked: for these indeed never cease to give you thanks. Further, in that most clean and sweet choir of virgins there is great rejoicing with you, O most fruitful Virgin; and they venerate and love you singularly as the more than worthy Mother of their most sweet Bridegroom. These, O Queen of those who reign, are brought to the King after you (Ps. 44:15), with whom you converse always in a more than sweet and love-bearing converse: for you see Him face to face, bodily as well, and never cease to attend to Him and to speak with Him.

## Article XI: Of the glory and brightness of the flesh of Mary, admirable and to be magnified

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:53). Four (as the theologians say) are the dowries of glorified bodies—namely impassibility, agility, subtlety and clarity: which yet exist in a body in so much more eminent a mode, the more sublime and more intimate the mode in which the spirit has been united to the light of the Divinity. Since therefore, according to what was previously introduced, Mary’s felicity in mind is too incomparable, and after Christ’s soul she is ineffably nearer and more intimate to God than all created minds, it becomes known that the dowries of the body also proportionally become her.

And indeed of her clarity what shall I say? For if on that day the light of the sun shall be sevenfold (Isa. 30:26), and nonetheless even the bodies of the inferior Saints will be more splendid than it: who can divine how multiply the solar ray the clarity of the body of the prince of life, which received God into itself and began life, excels? Yet when I desire to contemplate the clarity of the most serene flesh of the holy Virgin, I

vehemently stupify and utterly fail. For I intend first with what honor it becomes such a mother to be venerated by such a son: because indeed the mother herself is most benign, most affectionate, most chaste and most holy; further these also become the son (because as the mother, so also the son), and moreover that He is of immense majesty, *(p. 574)* of uncircumscribed goodness and unfailing munificence. But second I behold how familiar and dear and also obsequious that virgin flesh was to God in this life. Her womb received God, and from her most pure bloods exhibited true nature to Him, and a habitation, and (that I so confess) a temple, and also a hiding-place; with her most sacred virgin milk she nourished God, and the other things which have been so abundantly uttered she impended with maternal affection.

From these (unless I err) it is plain that incomparable and altogether unspeakable clarity has been infused into the virgin and maternal flesh from the Fountain of lights. And most certainly this clarity is to be reckoned such and so great that the sun and moon admire it; nor are, in comparison of it, the shining stars of heaven. For as the splendour of the moon, after the brightness of the sun, far excels the light of the stars, so wholly, after the brightness of the Godlike and more than exalted body of Christ, the brightness of the holy flesh of the divine Mother surpasses with sublime height the brightness of all the rest. And so, as the shining moon gladdens, adorns and lights up this world and this earth of ours, so you, O Lady, shining in the region of the living, in the land of the living, gladden the souls of all, and pour your most splendid rays through all the breadth of the empyrean heaven; you beautify the paradise above the world, hold the understanding of each one suspended in wonder at your beauty, refresh them beyond all imagining with your sweetness and the fragrance of your loveliness, and at last kindle them vehemently with the lovableness of your goodness. And what more shall I say? The highest happiness, O Lady, after your Son, is to cleave to you, to be united to you, to abide in you, and to behold the goodness of God in you. Nor indeed are you deprived of the beauty of the aureoles, since you are the first of virginity, the prince of martyrs, more than a martyr, and the teacher of the doctors, the highest and first of our doctors.

Now therefore, O most excellent of the creatures of God, O happy Mary, spare your servant, and forgive my imperfection. Do not, O holy one, justly despise the praise of a sinner, nor judge me presumptuous; but according to the incredible tenderness that is in you, receive this work. For I did not begin it or carry it through as though I thought myself worthy or fit to praise you as you are praiseworthy and great, but that I too might praise you as well as I could, who are the Mother of my God and my Creator, and whom the whole company of the Saints praises. And I confess, O only one, that if I have written anything worthy and apt, it is of your gift; but whatever there is of weakness and insufficiency, I ascribe to myself.

Finally I also pray you, O benign Jesus, O king Messias, O adorable Christ, not to be indignant with me, that with so unclean a mind and polluted mouth I have presumed to praise Your most serene and most holy Mother; but through her forgive, through her receive me, conserve and possess me, You who for me chose to be her son, who stand prince of all and govern all things, God most high and blessed. Amen.

*The end of the four books on the praise and dignity of Mary.*