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THE CATHOLIC HOUR

LESS OF THE SUN-WORSHIP

BY

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LESS OF THE SUN-WORSHIP

A modern spiritual writer once wrote: "Through Our Lady, God fell in love with humanity." In this happily phrased thought we find the key that unlocks the mystery of Mary, Our Life. The scene is beautifully recorded in the Gospel according to St. Luke in the passage relating to the Annunciation.

The Angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a virgin . . . and the virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel being come in, said unto her: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women." Mary was troubled and thought with herself "what manner of salutation this should be." But the Angel reassured her, saying: "Fear not, Mary, thou hast found grace with God. Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the most High . . . And of his kingdom there shall be no end" (*Luke 1:26-33*).

And Mary, perplexed, said to the Angel: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" (*Luke 1:34*). Yet through divine inspiration she knew in her heart the extraordinary signifi-

cance of the pronouncement. And the Angel, continuing, said to her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (*Luke 1:35*). Because no word shall be impossible with God, Mary made her humble reply: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (*Luke 1:38*).

Mary had spoken her fiat. She was resigned to God's holy will. And months later at Bethlehem, in the abandoned stable warmed only by the breath of cattle, she gave birth to the Son of God—to Life Itself—to the God-Man, Jesus Christ.

Thus Mary, whose body became a sanctuary for divine life, also became the mediatrix through whom all the members of the human race can reach that Life Itself. "Impossible," says the world. "Quite possible," rejoins those who have the gift of faith. "But how?" asks the world. And the faithful answer: "By having recourse to Mary in carrying out the teachings of her Divine Son, as sanctified and promulgated by His Church, which He founded, and to which

He gave His divine sanction to the end of time." "Behold," He said, "I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world" (*Matthew 28:20*). Know true life, says the Church, and the mystery unfolds itself. The question is answered.

Now in order to have a full appreciation of what this life means, it is necessary to understand the true composition of man, beginning with the miracle of childbirth.

Motherhood is woman's glorious prerogative. It is her high destiny to be God's agent in bringing life into the world. Who has not been touched by the beauty that transfigures a mother when she enfolds her child in arms for the first time? And who has not been moved at the sight of a new-born babe? Who has not marveled at the fair body of the infant, so symmetrically perfect, so tender, so helpless, yet so promising? Immediately we think of the poet's tribute: "What a piece of work is man! how noble is reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!"

But what would the body of man be were it not for the principle that animates it? For it is the soul that gives it life. That

soul is brought into being by the direct act of the Creator Himself. It is what makes man the image of God. The soul is immortal. It never dies. And, as God's image, it will never rest until it rests in God. "We were made, O Lord, for Thee," says St. Augustine, "and our heart is restless until it finds peace in Thee."

Since the soul sets man above and apart from all of God's other creatures, it is the supernatural life, the life of the immortal soul, that should be our first concern. It is this life eternal that we are striving for as we sojourn here in this our exile. Such is our goal, and as we strive to reach it, Mary is our helpmate and our mediatrix. In this sense she is our life, because she will lead us to God, the Source of Life.

Now, in order to possess God, man must follow in the footsteps of His Son. He must accept the way of the Cross as the Master does. He must undergo another Calvary, if he is to enjoy life eternal. Truly does the author of the precious little book, *The Following of Christ*, declare: "If, indeed, there had been anything better and more beneficial to man's salvation than suffering, Christ certainly would have showed it by word and example."

And what creature knows the meaning of suffering better than Mary, His Mother? "And because of Our Lady God fell in love with humanity."

Mary stood at the foot of the cross on Calvary and saw her Son breathe forth his human life as an oblation to God the Father for the sins of mankind. She is the tender, loving Mother of Mercy. Because she herself knew every sorrow except sin, she knows the philosophy of the Cross, which is that to suffer is to live not only here, but hereafter. We too must go through a refining process if we are to possess God for all eternity. As St. Paul says, we must lose our life to save it; we must crucify our body and bring it into submission; we must die to the things of this world if we are to enjoy the fullness of life hereafter. The Cross is ever with us; but in Mary we have the eternal cross-bearer. When the Angel told her that she had been chosen by God, she foresaw the trials, the burdens, the sacrifices, the sorrows that awaited her. Yet she confidently placed herself in God's hands, and accepted her mission as co-redemptrix of mankind with the words: "Be it done to me according to thy word" (*Luke 1:38*).

Now, in order to bring the

body into subjection so that the soul may enjoy the glorified life for all eternity, we must practice penance and mortification; which is just another way of saying that the cross is always with us. From the natural point of view, this is a hard saying. Being human, we instinctively shrink from pain, and even discomfort. It is not easy to accept the cross. Indeed, who can accept it without the help of Mary, who bore her cross so nobly? For a moment let us contrast the philosophy of the cross with the philosophy of the world.

A characteristic of the philosophy of the world is that being agnostic—that is, not-knowing—it has neither vision nor retrospection. Indeed, both must be alien to it, because by its nature the philosophy of the world is of the present, and of the present only. It recognizes no spiritual origins, and hence can have no destination beyond the limits of this world's horizons. According to this philosophy, life has only a material purpose; and since there is no spiritual end, those who live by it have no choice but to be of the earth, earthy; and to pervert the natural order and use earthly means as ends in themselves.

Consider today's cult of sun-worshippers. Perhaps they

would object to the title, but in sober fact there is little substantial difference between them and the sun-worshippers of old. Like the pagans, they offer their bodies to the sun, in the hope that the alchemy of its titillating rays will somehow enhance and ennoble them. In performing the rite, some get well browned. Others, we might say, go so far as to give their bodies to be burned—and coconut oil is no soothing ointment. Now, doctors have long recognized the therapeutic value of the sun, and in certain ailments advise sun-bathing as a restorer of health. Within reason, the practice is good. But what concerns me is that so often the sun-bath is prolonged into a moon-bath accompanied by bodily pleasures that are ruinous not only to the body but also to the soul. Sin in some of its various aspects follows. The tragedy is that such cultists confuse the means with the end: in glorifying their bodies through obeisance to the sun, they are losing their souls by not recognizing the Creator of the sun, God Himself, their last end. For God sent His only Son to redeem men in order that they might become sons of God. Instead of sun-worship, mankind must return to the worship of the Son—of God.

From Mary is learned the les-

son of the body as the repository of the soul, the image of God. Recall the words of the Archangel Gabriel: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee:" That is, Mary's conception of the Incarnate Word was brought about by the Holy Spirit, Who also supported and strengthened her through all that the Incarnation implied. The very life of mankind dwelt within the body of the Blessed Mother, who was the Vessel of Honor, the Vessel of Singular Devotion. This portrays more clearly St. Paul's reference to the body as the "temple of the Holy Ghost." "And the Lord God formed man out of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (*Genesis 2:7*).

Without the soul the body is a lifeless thing—"for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return" (*Genesis 3:19*). But the philosophy of the world does not believe in the soul. The philosophy of materialism takes many forms, ranging from the hedonism of the sun-worshipper to the pragmatism of the utilitarian, and all forms have this fault in common: they see man as a soulless automaton, self-made, sufficient unto himself, coming out of nothingness, and to nothingness returning.

No doubt the sun-worshipper would think you were simple if you were to suggest that the beach wagon that he drives to the scene of his rituals could spring into being by itself, fully assembled, just by chance. Yet, when he considers himself, a far more perfect machine, and the ordered universe in which he moves, he naively brushes aside the basic truths that every effect must have a cause; that there can be no such thing as an endless series of secondary causes; that everything must be contingent upon a first cause, and that the First Cause is God.

What is the body without the soul? Look at the body in death, so strangely meaner than in life, as it is consigned to its narrow grave. Is this the end of man? Is he as inconsiderable as this? If so, then we may say with Carlyle that the stars look down "as if with pity from their serene spaces, like eyes glistening with heavenly tears over the little lot of man." But this is not the end, for after death comes life, life eternal. The soul leaves the body and returns to the God Who made it, there to hear the words. "Come, ye blessed of my father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," or "Depart from me, you cursed, into ever-

lasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels" (*Matthew* 25:34, 41) As you live, so shall you die. "As you sow, so shall you reap," was not spoken of the body, but of the soul. Let us reflect, therefore on our brief sojourn "in this our exile." Let us see it in the light of our true home in heaven, and keep always "an alien ear, homesick for harpings of eternity." Let us look beyond this confused, distraught, and weary world to the heavenly kingdom where there are neither the uncertainties of life nor the certainty of death, but only bliss forever.

No modern writer has expressed so well the true philosophy of life and death as the late and beloved Father John W. Cavanaugh, distinguished ninth president of Notre Dame: "Come with me then to God's own, to the last resting place where the great ones of the earth are sleeping their dreamless sleep. Stand in spirit beside these moss-grown graves and remember that the clods beneath your feet were once a human heart disquieted by the wild thirst for wealth or power or pleasure. Standing in the silence and the loneliness of that place, reflect how trivial, how infinitely trivial and unimportant are the petty ambitions and jealousies and pains and

pleasures of life, and as the sense of this universal emptiness grows upon you, reflect what a precious privilege it is to exchange the cares and heart burnings of life for that interior peace which was the sole possession of Jesus and Mary. Remember the beautiful promise of Our Lord that they who instruct others unto justice shall shine as stars in the Kingdom of Heaven. Go think of it in silence and alone, and weigh against a grain of sand the glory of a throne."

To all who are maimed in body, or bruised in spirit because of the war; to the crippled and ill; to sinners who have put God out of their lives for some created thing; to boys and girls whose lives are before them with the temptations that may lead them from the path of happiness; to fathers and mothers oppressed

with daily and heavy burdens as they struggle to maintain a home in which to rear children in righteousness; to all who are wearied and distressed, remember that we have a powerful intercessor and helpmate, if we but have recourse to her. "Anyone who can recall ever having invoked Mary and having been left unaided," says St. Bernard, "may cease further to praise her mercy."

She within whose body rested the Infant Christ; she, glorified by the poet as "the one woman above all women glorified—our tainted nature's solitary boast"; she, given to us by her Divine Son as the mother of all mankind—she it is who yearns to have her children united with her so that she may bring them at last to the throne of her Son—**Life. Eternal.**

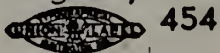
THE CATHOLIC HOUR

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The nationwide Catholic Hour was inaugurated on March 2, 1930, by the National Council of Catholic Men in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company and its associated stations. Radio facilities are provided by NBC and the stations associated with it; the program is arranged and produced by NCCM.

The Catholic Hour was begun on a network of 22 stations, and now carries its message of Catholic truth on each Sunday of the year through a number of stations varying from 90 to 110, situated in 40 states, the District of Columbia, and Hawaii. Consisting usually of an address, mainly expository, by one or another of America's leading Catholic preachers—though sometimes of talks by laymen, sometimes of dramatizations—and of sacred music provided by a volunteer choir, the Catholic Hour has distinguished itself as one of the most popular and extensive religious broadcasts in the world. An average of 100,000 audience letters a year, about twenty per cent of which come from listeners of other faiths, gives some indication of its popularity and influence.

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