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MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Ginder, Richard
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by

RICHARD GINDER

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THREE or four times a year a gentleman whom I've never met sends me reading matter in the form of little leaflets which he writes himself. He's not a Catholic and, as far as I can see, he doesn't belong to any of the ten or twelve larger Protestant bodies. He's just one of those souls who's become obsessed with one particular truth, which he feeds and nourishes at the expense of all the rest — you know . . . as though a man were to convince himself that his stomach was the most important part of his body, so that he takes good care of his stomach, all right, but he finally dies of T.B.

Anyway, those little leaflets are often very critical of Catholic beliefs. Yet I have never answered the gentleman for the simple reason that I don't care to be drawn into a religious argument. When we're young we love to argue, but as we get older, we find that it rarely does any good. A man holding up his own view in an argument finds it hard to be impartial, because only a big man will admit that he's been wrong, and very few of us are that big. And then even if we can talk our opponent down or make a fool of him, we've only lost his good-will and the chances are that after we've rammed our facts down his throat, he'll spew them right out and never have anything to do with them again for the rest of his life.

Truth is discovered in quietude, perhaps in our living room, after the family's gone to bed, or as we walk in the country, or through the city streets; very often our view

is clearest as we lie in the dark at night, waiting for sleep to come. Truth is given to those who will ask God for it — to those who are prepared to admit that they may have been wrong — to those who are ready to take God's arm and let Him lead them where He will. It's a matter for prayerful investigation — not for railing, and hollering, and arguing, and name-calling.

But, getting back to the subject, among the leaflets sent to me by my Canadian friend, there is always one which is nothing more than a vicious attack on Catholic devotion to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Why he singles her out, I don't know. The only reason I can think of is that he must not know how Catholics look upon her.

I say that because in recent years we Catholics have found fewer and fewer of our non-Catholic friends inclined to be disturbed at our love for the Mother of

Jesus. Where we meet the attitude, it generally shows — not bad feeling, but a lack of information.

Everyone will grant that Christians have a right to single out their own heroes for special honor. The Lutherans, for instance, honor Dr. Martin Luther each year on Reformation Day, and they have a pious organization known as the Luther League. In the little town where I was stationed for a time, we had St. Paul's Lutheran Church and St. Peter's Reformed Church. I take it that those congregations had a special love for their respective patrons, St. Paul and St. Peter.

Now let's put it on the same basis for Catholics. We find, in both the Protestant and the Catholic Bibles, that the Evangelists frequently make mention of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles, St. Luke tells us that she received the Holy Ghost with the Apostles

on that first Pentecost — the event which Christians all over the world commemorate to this very day. Well, then, surely Mary must rank as one of the heroines of Christianity, and there's nothing wrong in calling our churches after her name, just as non-Catholics feel free to name their churches after some one or other of the Apostles.

We Catholics say, and we believe, that she is the Mother of God. Now, perhaps, it's right there that misunderstanding begins. Maybe there are those who imagine we want to make Mary older than God the Father, if that were possible. But actually, this is what we mean when we refer to Mary as the Mother of God: If we believe that Mary was the Mother of Jesus, and if we believe that Jesus was God, then we must logically believe that Mary was the Mother of God. She was

the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of Christ our Savior, therefore the Mother of God.

Again, there are those who don't quite understand the nature of our Catholic love for Mary. I'm afraid there are some who imagine we adore her as a goddess, as a kind of female divinity. Well, take my word for it as a Catholic priest, we don't. There is a difference in the honor we give to God and the honor we give to Mary: a difference not merely of degree but of kind. It isn't that we measure out one for Mary and two for God. The difference is exactly the same as the difference in our feelings toward our own mother and toward God. You see, it's an entirely different attitude in each case: we love the one; the other we adore. A man may give half his salary to his mother and only one-tenth of it to God; but it needn't mean that he's putting his mother above God. He might talk three hours a day to his

mother and only ten minutes to God and still — do you see what I mean?

Our sacred books are open to the inspection of all who care to investigate. A prayer-book can be had at any Catholic book store and there, when we turn to the Litany of the Blessed Mother, we find it starting off:

God, the Father of Heaven, have mercy on us.

God, the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.

God, the Holy Ghost, have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, *pray for us.*

Notice the change. We ask God to have mercy on us; but when we come to Mary, since she is only a creature like ourselves, since she will never judge us, we ask her only to pray for us:

So then it's a mistake to say that we Catholics adore Mary or that we make her a kind of fourth Person of the Blessed Trinity.

But there's another difficulty remaining. It sound a little silly as I say it, but many people have the sneaking suspicion that Jesus might be just a wee bit jealous of so much honor being paid to His Mother. But there—we've met the difficulty merely by bringing it into the light. For who could be jealous of his own mother? — and how can we suspect the Most High of something which isn't even a human shortcoming? Jesus jealous? — if we pause to gather a bouquet for His Mother before kneeling at His feet? If we tip our hat to her and bid her the time of day as we make our way toward her Son's altar? Not a bit of it! What son was ever insulted by honor given to his mother?

God wouldn't have chosen just any woman to be the mother of His Son. The one He selected would have had to measure up to awfully high standards. You know how we ourselves go into the family background of a man before we elect him to a public office. We like to make sure that there are no skeletons in the family closet of the candidate. But just think how careful God must have been about choosing one who would nurse His Son, and rear Him and train Him among the children of men. He must have reviewed every woman ever born or ever to be born. And of all of them, He chose Mary; so that the Archangel Gabriel could come down and call her, "Full of grace" — that is, absolutely pleasing to the Most High.

There's been some talk in recent years of the idea that Mary brought up a family of children, brothers and sisters of Jesus. That's a queer idea, and it doesn't square

with the facts. The Gospels speak of the Lord's brethren, it's true, but it's a loose sort of a word, used in the Bible to describe a man's uncles and his aunts and his cousins, together with his brothers and his sisters; so that, in itself, the word brethren doesn't mean a thing. It's like the word "family," you know. When we have a family reunion, it doesn't necessarily mean that no one's going to be there but our mother and dad, our brothers and our sisters. It takes in the whole clan, all the way up to the thirty-second cousins, if they can get the gas to drive over.

In fact, the unanimous Christian tradition says that Mary was *always* a virgin. I mean, that St. Joseph was not Our Lord's natural father, but that Jesus was conceived by Mary without the cooperation of any man. That was her first thought when Gabriel told her she was to bring the Messiah into the world. "How shall this

happen," she asked, "since I do not know man?" Unless she had vowed her virginity to God there's no very sound explanation of her question, for the Gospel has just described her as being married to Joseph. And then, from the Cross, Jesus committed her to the care of St. John. It would have been natural to leave her with her other children, had there been any.

We Catholics honor Mary. For us, she is the Queen of the Angels and saints and the Mother of all Mankind. We feel toward her just about the same as we feel toward our earthly mother, only we have a greater reverence for this heavenly mother because of her intimacy with Jesus. In fact, we try to treat her as Jesus must have treated her. We know that, being in heaven, she knows all of us, that she has a vital interest in every soul redeemed by her Son, that she loves each of us, and that she will pray for us if we ask her to.

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FACE THE FACTS

AM I RIGHT?

Four hundred years ago all English speaking people were Catholic. Many of the greatest minds of the age — scientists, philosophers, reformers, poets, critics, etc., have become convinced that the Catholic Church is the Living Representative of the Greatest Mind of all time, Jesus Christ, The Son of God. ARE THEY RIGHT OR AM I?

AM I JUST?

As an American I do not deny, even to murderers, the hearing I refuse to the Catholic Church. I condemn her upon the evidence of her enemies only, and in doing so I forget that men once so condemned Jesus Christ Himself. IS THIS JUST?

AM I PRUDENT?

Jesus founded a Church to teach all nations and to endure to the end of the world.

“Going therefore, teach ye all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” (Matt. 28:19-20). To her teachers He said, “He that heareth you heareth Me and he that despiseth you despiseth Me.” (Luke 10:16). “He that believeth not shall be condemned.” (Mark 16:16).

History tells me that she is the only world wide church that has preserved her identity, authority and worship from Apostolic times — that she is the only Church founded by the infallible Son of God.

AM I PRUDENT IN FAILING TO INVESTIGATE HER CLAIMS? Saint James tells us that Faith without good works is dead. WHAT HAVE I DONE TO MERIT A HAPPY ETERNITY?

REV. JOSEPH B. WARD

