

# Alter Christus

“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

## *All Mothers Are Alike— Save One*

*By Archbishop Fulton Sheen*

[From the Book *The World's First Love*]

No mother whose son has won distinction for himself, either in a profession or in the field of battle, believes that the respect paid her for being his mother detracts from the honor or dignity that is paid her son. Why, then, do some minds think that any reverence paid to the Mother of Jesus detracts from His Power and

Divinity? We know the false rejoinder of those who say that Catholics “adore” Mary or make her a “goddess,” but that is a lie. Since no reader of these pages would be guilty of such nonsense, it shall be ignored.

Where do this coldness, forgetfulness, and, at the least, indifference to the Blessed Mother start? From a failure to realize that her Son, Jesus, is the Eternal Son of God. The moment I put Our Divine Lord on the same level with Julius

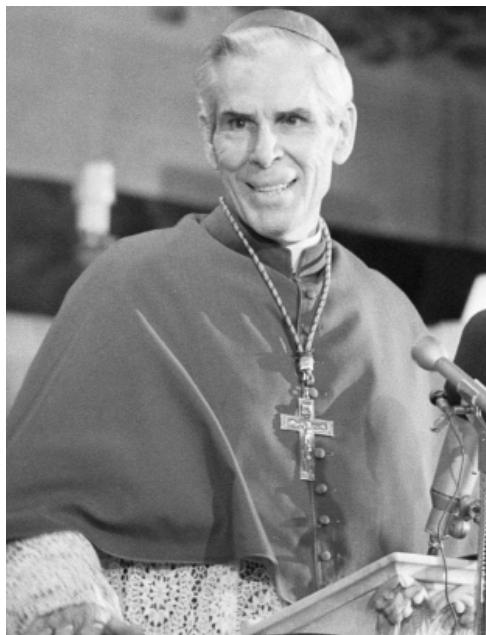
Caesar or Karl Marx, with Buddha or Charles Darwin, that is, as a mere man among men, then the thought of special reverence to His Mother as different from our mothers becomes positively repellent. Each famous man has his mother, too. Each person can say: "I

have my mother, and mine is as good as or better than yours." That is why little is written of the mothers of any great men—because each mother was considered the best mother by her son. No one mother of a mortal is entitled to more love than any other mother.

## Author: Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen

Fulton John Sheen (May 8, 1895 - December 9, 1979) was an American bishop (later archbishop) of the Catholic Church known for his preaching and especially his work on television and radio. Ordained a priest of the Diocese of Peoria in 1919, Sheen quickly became a renowned theologian. He went on to teach theology and philosophy at the Catholic University of America as well as acting as a parish priest before being appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New York in 1951. He held this position until 1966, when he was made the Bishop of Rochester. He resigned in 1969 as his 75th birthday approached, and was made the Archbishop of the titular see of Newport, Wales.

For 20 years as Father Sheen, later Monsignor, he hosted the night-time radio program



*The Catholic Hour* on NBC (1930–1950) before moving to television and presenting *Life Is Worth Living* (1952–1957). Sheen's final presenting role was on the syndicated *The Fulton Sheen Program* (1961–1968) with a format very similar to that of the earlier *Life is Worth Living* show.

The cause for his canonization was officially opened in 2002. In June 2012, Pope Benedict XVI officially recognized a decree stating that he lived a life of "heroic virtues"—a major step towards beatification – and he is now referred to as "Venerable." On July 5, 2019, Pope Francis approved a miracle that occurred through the intercession of Archbishop Sheen, clearing the way for his beatification.

Therefore no sons and daughters should be required to single out someone else's mother as the Mother of mothers.

Our Lord described John the Baptist as "the greatest man ever born of woman." Suppose that a cult were started to honor his mother, Elizabeth, as superior to any other mother? Who among us would not rebel against it as excessive? Everything the critics would say of such exaggeration would be well taken, for the simple reason that John the Baptist is only a man. If Our Lord is just another man, or another ethical reformer, or another sociologist, then we share, even with the most bigoted, the resentment against thinking that the Mother of Jesus is different from any other mother.

The Fourth Commandment says: "Honor thy father and thy mother." It says nothing about honoring Gandhi's mother or Napoleon's father. But the Commandment to honor our fathers

does not preclude adoring the Heavenly Father. If the Heavenly Father sends His Divine Son to this earth, then the Commandment to honor our earthly mothers does not preclude venerating the Mother of the Son of God.

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of everyone whom Christ redeemed.

The key to understanding Mary is this: We do not start with Mary. We start with Christ, the Son of the Living God! The less we think of Him, the less we think of her; the more we think of Him, the more we think of her; the more we adore His Divinity, the more we venerate her Motherhood; the less



we adore His Divinity, the less reason we have for respecting her. We could even resent hearing her name, if we had become so perverse as not to believe in Christ the Son of God. Never will it be found that anyone who really loves Our Lord as a Divine Savior dislikes Mary. Those who dislike any devotion to Mary are those who deny His Divinity or find fault with Our Lord because of what He says about hell, divorce, and judgment. It is on account of Our Divine Lord that Mary receives special attention, and not on account of herself. Left to herself, her motherhood would dissolve into humanity. But when seen in the light of His Divinity, she becomes unique. Our Lord is God Who became man. Never before or since did Eternity become

time in a woman, nor did Omnipotence take on the bonds of flesh in a maid. It is her Son who makes her motherhood different.

A Catholic boy from a parochial school was telling a university professor who lived next door about the Blessed Mother. The professor scoffed at the boy, saying: "But there is no difference between her and my mother." The boy answered: "That's what you say, but there's a heck of a lot of difference between the sons."

That is the answer. It is because Our Lord is so different from other sons that we set His Mother apart from all mothers. Because He had an Eternal Generation in the bosom of the Father as the Son of God and a temporal

generation in the womb of Mary as the Son of Man, His coming created a new set of relationships. She is not a private person; all other mothers are. We did not make her different; we found her different. We did not choose Mary; He did.

But why was there a Virgin Birth? Because Christ is the Son of God, we cannot be as indifferent to the circumstances of His birth as we would be to the birth of the butcher or the baker. If Mary told the Apostles after Pentecost about His virgin birth, it must have made a difference; if the Apostles put it in their Creed and teaching, it must have made a difference. Once Christ is accepted as the Son of God, there is immediate interest

not only in His prehistory, which John describes in the Prologue of his Gospel, but also in His history and particularly in His birth.

Is the Virgin Birth fitting and

becoming? The challenge to our faith in the Virgin Birth is not related by anyone (except in the Jewish Talmud) to sinfulness on Mary's part. The challenge concerns the physical possibility of a miraculous process of life. By keeping

His Mother absolutely stainless, He has prevented the doubts about His Divine Paternity from being such that they would wound her heart, her womanly heart. It is impossible for us to imagine or feel, even to a slight degree, the vast ocean of love of Christ for His Mother. Yet if even we were faced with the problem of keeping the miasmic breath of scandal from our own mothers, what would we not do? And is it therefore hard to believe that the omnipotent Son

of God would do all in His power to protect His Own Mother? With this in mind, there are many conclusions apparent.

No great triumphant leader makes his

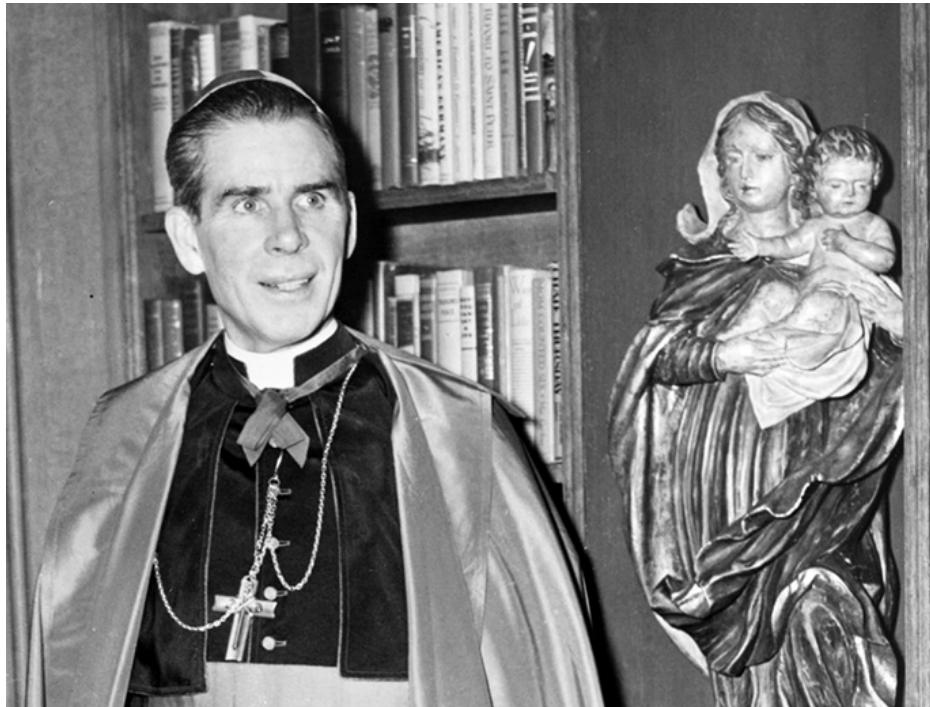
entrance into the city over dust-covered roads when he could come on a flower-strewn avenue. Had Infinite Purity chosen any other port of entrance into humanity but that of human purity, it would have created a tremendous difficulty—namely, how could He be sinless if He was born of sin-laden humanity? If a brush dipped in black becomes black, and if cloth takes on the color of the dye, would not He, in the eyes of the world, have also partaken of the guilt in which all humanity shared? If He came to this earth through the wheatfield of moral weakness, He certainly would have some chaff hanging on the garment of His human nature.

Putting the problem in another way: How could God become man and yet be a sinless man and the Head of the new Humanity? First of all, He had to be a perfect man in order to act in our name, to plead our defense, and to pay our debt. If I am arrested for speeding, you cannot walk into the courtroom and say: “Judge, forget it, I will take the blame.” If I am drowning, I cannot save anyone else who is drowning. Unless Our Lord is outside the sin-current of humanity, He cannot be Our Savior. “If the blind lead the blind, then both fall into the pit,” said Our Lord. If

He was to be the new Adam, the new Head of Humanity, the Founder of a new corporation or Mystical Body of regenerated humanity, as Adam was the head of fallen humanity, then He also had to be different from all other men. He had to be absolutely perfect, sinless, the Holy of Holies, all that God ever conceived man to be.

Such is the problem: How could God become man and yet be sinless man without Original Sin? How, in the language of St. Paul, could He “be like unto us in all things save sin”? How could He be a man, by being born of a woman? He could be a sinless man by being born of a virgin. The first statement is obvious: that He is born of a woman, then He shares in our humanity. But how would being born of a virgin make Him free from Original Sin?

Now, it must never be thought that the Incarnation would have been impossible without the Virgin Birth. Rash, indeed, would be the human mind to dictate to Almighty God the methods that He should use in coming to this earth. But once the Virgin Birth is revealed, then it is proper for us to inquire into its fitness, as we are now doing. The Virgin Birth is important because of its bearing upon the solidarity of the human race in guilt.



The human race became incorporated to the first Adam by being born of the flesh; incorporation to the new Adam, Christ, is by being born of the spirit, or through a virgin birth. Thanks to it, we see how Our Blessed Lord entered into the sinful race from the outside. Therefore, upon Him the curse did not rest, save as He freely bore it for those whom He redeemed by His blood. Nowhere do the New Testament writers argue from the Virgin Birth to the Godhead of the Virgin-born. Rather do they argue from it His sinless humanity.

To sum up: in order that Jesus Christ

might be a descendant of Adam, he had to be born of a daughter of Adam. But the process of generation and birth of any individual is invisible. The only way to show that this process in the birth of Christ was miraculous was to have its invisible workings develop in a woman agreed by all to be incapable of having experienced the process—a virgin. Joseph, the just man, stood for all humanity when in his heart he questioned the fidelity of Mary. More than any other person he knew how cruel it was to place that doubt even in the face of the most incontrovertible evidence.

He witnessed to Mary's immaculate life and her amiability even before her Son was born. His doubt was settled by Heaven itself. St. Joseph, more than any other human being on this earth, had a right to know the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus. And just as any husband is the prime witness of the fidelity of his wife, so, too, is Joseph in the case of Mary, his espoused; his testimony establishes for all men her virginity and the miraculous nature of the generation and birth of her Son.

As Father Joseph Tennant points out, there is a type of this miraculous birth in the story of Abraham and Sara. When they

journeyed down to Egypt, Abraham asked Sara to say that she was his sister rather than his wife, lest the Egyptians kill him. The Pharaoh took her into his household. How long she lived with the Egyptian King is not indicated, but some space of time, and the Pharaoh and his household were punished with

a sickness because of it. He finally dismissed both Abraham and Sara from his palace. There is no expression of divine wrath reported in this case. But after God had promised that Sara would bear a son whose father would be Abraham, it was important that there be no doubt in Abraham's mind or in anybody else's about the paternity of Sara's son. Some time after the promise, in Gerara, there was danger that the King, Abimelech, would take her into his harem. With shameful cowardice Abraham permitted it to be done. (He was punished for this when God ordered him to sacrifice Isaac.) But God intervened immediately by

appearing to Abimelech at night and threatening to wipe out his whole kingdom if he dared to touch Sara. "And Abimelech forthwith rising up in the night. . . called for Abraham and said to him, 'What hast thou done to us?'" It was not enough merely to have protected Sara. Abraham had to know

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from the lips of Abimelech himself that Sara was untouched, just as Joseph did in the case of Mary. And thus Isaac, the first of the “children of promise” (Gal 4:28) and of the miraculous seed of Abraham, was born.

Mary was not sinless because she was a virgin, but the best sign of her sinlessness was her virginity. Just as the Gospels prove the humble humanity of Christ by naming among his ancestors Lamech, the boastful murderer; Abraham, the coward; Jacob, the liar; Judas, the adulterer; Ruth, the pagan; David, the murderer and adulterer; and many idolatrous kings, showing that He was like to us in all things except sin, so, too, the same Gospels disassociate Mary from all sin in order to show her to be as much as possible “in the image and likeness of God.” Mary was of the house of David, but Christ’s relationship to that line is not given through Mary, but through Joseph, His foster father. And it had to be that the Mother of God was sinless in order that we might more easily believe that she had flung before the face of the world woman’s greatest challenge to sin—the vow of virginity—and kept it and made it bear divine fruit.

We do not believe that Jesus is God because He was born of a virgin mother,

as the Apostles and Evangelists did not believe it for that reason alone. We believe in the Divinity of Christ because of the evidence of the Resurrection, the marvel of the Gospel portrait, the growth of the Church, the miracles and prophecies of Christ, the consonance of His doctrine with the aspirations of the human heart. The Virgin Birth is rather related to the manhood of Christ and His separateness from the sin that affected all men who are born of the union of man and woman. Far from treating the Virgin Birth as the dazzling mark of Divinity, the Te Deum regards it as Our Lord’s sublime condescension to the lowly conditions of humanity:

When thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man: Thou didst not abhor the Virgin’s womb.

The Virgin Birth is the safeguard of the sinlessness of the human nature that Our Blessed Lord assumed. The only salvation that is given to men on this earth is in the name of Him Who as God Himself entered the ranks of sinful men. That no one should ever deny He was a man, He was born like the rest of men from the womb of a woman—a fact that so scandalized Marcion that he said: “A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes is not the kind of a God that I will adore.”



In the Incarnation, God the Son initiates the process of the re-creation of His own earlier and disordered creation by the method of clothing Himself with those very elements within it that had fallen into disarray. For the first time since the Fall of Man, a completely perfected unit of humanity is created in the world. This humanity is united substantially to the very Person of the Son of God.

What do all denials of the Virgin Birth

testify? Generally, to the subtle attempt to pull down the new order of humanity and the race of the second Adam into the unredeemed world of the old Adam. If a human father supplied the human

nature of Christ, then Christ is not the new Adam. The Virgin Birth keeps the Divine initiative of Redemption to God Himself. If the initiation of the new order is given to man, then it is taken from God. Without the Virgin Birth, Our Lord would be entangled in a sinful humanity. With it, He is incarnate in humanity without its sin. By getting rid of the Virgin Birth, one seeks to get rid of the Divine initiative within the race of the new Adam. The early

heretics doubted the humanity of Our Lord, and so they denied that He had a human mother. Modern agnostics doubt the true Divinity, so they add a human father to His parentage.

***Christ is a Mediator between God and humanity; Mary is the Mediatrix between Christ and us.***

There is never any danger that men will think too much of Mary; the danger is that they will think too little of Christ. Coldness toward Mary is a consequence of indifference to Christ. Any objection to calling her the “Mother of God” is fundamentally an objection to the Deity of Christ. The consecrated term Theotokos, “Mother of God,” has ever since 432 been the touchstone of the Christian Faith. It was not that the Church then had the intention of expanding Mariology; it was rather that she was concerned with Christological orthodoxy. As John of Damascus said: “This name contains the whole mystery of the Incarnation.” Once Christ is diminished, humanized, naturalized, there is no longer any use for the term “Mother of God.” It implies a twofold generation of the Divine Word: one eternal in the bosom of the Father, the other temporal in the womb of Mary. Mary therefore did not bear a “mere man” but the “true God.” No new person came into the world when Mary opened the portals of the flesh, but the Eternal Son of God was made man. All that came into being was a new nature, or a human nature to a Person Who existed from all eternity. It was the Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Who became flesh and

dwelt amongst us. Theanthropos, or God-Man, and Theotokos, or Mother of God, go together and fall together.

It will be discovered that so-called Christians who think they believe in the Divinity of Christ but do not believe in Mary as the Mother of God fall generally into four ancient heresies. They are Adoptionists, who believe that Christ was a mere man but after birth was adopted by God as His Son. Or they are Nestorians, who held that Mary gave birth to a man who had only a close union with Divinity. Or they are Eutychians, who denied the human nature of Christ and hence made Mary merely an instrument in a theophany. Or they are Docetists, holding that Christ’s nature was only a phantom or an appearance. Those who are offended at reverence paid Mary, if they will analyze their thoughts, will discover that they are holding a Docetist or some similar ancient error. Even if they profess the Divinity of Christ in His earthly existence, such people shrink from affirming that His human nature is glorified with Him at the right hand of the Father, where He makes intercession for us. As some no longer think of Christ as God, so some no longer think of Christ as glorified Man. If He is no longer Man, then

Mary is no longer His Mother. But if He is still Man, the relation of Mary to Him extends beyond Bethlehem and Calvary even to His Mystical Body the Church. No one, therefore, who thinks logically about Christ can understand such a question as: "Why do you speak so often of His Mother?"

The Virgin Birth, indeed, was a new type of generation.

As our mind begets a thought without in any way destroying the mind, so Mary begot the Word within herself without in any way affecting her virginity. There are various ways of generating, but the three principal ways are carnal, intellectual, and Divine. The carnal is sexual, whether it be in animals or in humans. Second is

the generation of a thought within the mind. I take the idea of "fortitude." That thought, or word (for it is a word even before I pronounce it), does not exist in the outside world. It has neither weight, nor color, nor longitude. Whence came it, then? It was begotten by the chaste generation of the mind. This intellectual

generation is really a feeble image of the spiritual order of the Eternal Generation of the Son by the Father. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." God thinks a thought or a Word. But God does not think many thoughts or words. He thinks only one Word, which reaches to the abyss of all that is known

or can be known. That Word is the perfect image of Himself as the Thinker. Because it has been eternally generated, God the Thinker is called the Father, as the principle of generation, and the Word is called the Son as the term of generation.

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God willed that there be another kind of generation that would be neither wholly intellectual nor wholly carnal but, in the order of flesh, would reflect His eternal generation in time. God willed to take on a human nature like our own through a virgin, while conserving the virginity of His Mother, and showing precisely that He is the Word of God. As our mind does not alter or destroy itself

in the begetting of a thought, so neither does the virginal body of Our Blessed Mother go through any alteration in begetting Him, as the Son of God made man. The Word of God willed that His generation in the order of the flesh and in time be elevated with as close a resemblance as possible to His Heavenly generation.

Christ is a Mediator between God and humanity; Mary is the Mediatrix between Christ and us. Our Lord is a Mediator between God and man. A mediator is like a bridge that unites two opposite banks of a river, except that here the bridge is between Heaven and earth. As you cannot touch the ceiling without a stepladder acting as a mediator, so sinful man could not in justice reach God, except by One Who mediated and was both God and man. As man, He could act in our name, take on our sins; as one of us, He redeems us on the Cross and gives

us new life in His Resurrection. But as God, His words, miracles, and death have an infinite value, and therefore He restores more than we lost. God became man without ceasing to be either God or man and therefore is our Mediator, Our Savior, Our Divine Lord.

**Without Mary we can never get to Our Lord, because He came through her. She is not to be compared to Our Lord, for she is a creature and He is a Creator. But if we lose her, we cannot get to Him. That is why we pay so much attention to her; without her we could never understand how that bridge was built between Heaven and earth.**

with nails on the Cross. But the Woman gave Our Lord His human nature. He asked her to give Him a human life—to give Him hands with which to bless children, feet with which to go in search of stray sheep, eyes with which to weep

over dead friends, and a body with which to suffer—that He might give us a rebirth in freedom and love.

It was through her that He became the bridge between the Divine and the human. If we take her away, then either God does not become man, or He that is born of her is a man and not God. Without her we would no longer have Our Lord! If we have a box in which we keep our money, we know that one thing we must always give attention to is the key; we never think that the key is the money, but we know that without the key we cannot get our money. Our Blessed Mother is like the key. Without her we can never get to Our Lord, because He came through her. She is not to be compared to Our Lord, for she is a creature and He is a Creator. But if we lose her, we cannot get to Him. That is why we pay so much attention to her; without her we could never understand how that bridge was built between Heaven and earth.

It may be objected: “Our Lord is enough for me. I have no need of her.” But He needed her, whether we do or not. And, what is more important, Our Blessed Lord gave us His Mother as our Mother. On that Friday men call Good, when He was unfurled upon the Cross as the banner of salvation, He

looked down to the two most precious creatures He had on earth: His Mother and His beloved disciple John. The night before, at the Last Supper, He had made His last Will and Testament, giving us that which on dying no man was ever able to give, namely, Himself in the Holy Eucharist. Thus He would be with us, as He said, “all days unto the consummation of the world.” Now in the darkening shadows of Calvary, He adds a codicil to His will. There beneath the Cross, not prostrate, as the Gospel notes, “stood” His Mother. As a Son, He thought of His Mother; as a Savior, He thought of us. So He gave to us His Mother: “Behold thy mother.”

At last we see illumined the Gospel’s description of His birth, namely, that Mary “brought forth her first born and laid him in a manger.” Her first born. St. Paul calls Him the “first born of all creatures.” Does that mean that she was to have other children? Most certainly! But not according to the flesh, for Jesus was Her only Son. But she was to have other children by the spirit. Of these John is the first, born at the foot of the Cross, maybe Peter is the second, James, the third, and all of us the millionth and millionth of children. She gave birth in joy to Christ, Who redeemed us, then she

gave birth in sorrow to us, whom Christ redeemed! Not by a mere figure of speech, not by a metaphor, but in virtue of Baptism did we become children of Mary and brothers of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Just as we do not shrink from the thought of God giving us His Father, so that we can pray: "Our Father," so neither do we rebel when He gives us His Mother, so that we can pray: "Our Mother." Thus the Fall of man is undone through another Tree, the Cross; Adam through another Adam, Christ; and Eve through the new Eve, Mary.

Born of the Virgin Mary: this is a true statement not only of Christ but also of every Christian, although in a lesser way. Every man is born of woman in the flesh as a member of the race of Adam. He is also born of the Woman in the Spirit if he is of the redeemed race of Christ. As she formed Jesus in her body, so she forms Jesus in our souls. In this one Woman are virginity and motherhood united, as if God willed to show us that both are necessary for the world. Things separated in other creatures are united in her. The Mother is the protector of the virgin, and the Virgin is also the inspiration of motherhood.

One cannot go to a statue of a mother holding a babe, hack away the mother,

and expect to have the babe. Touch her and you spoil him. All other world religions are lost in myth and legend except Christianity. Christ is cut off from all the gods of paganism because He is tied to woman and to history. "Born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate." Coventry Patmore rightly calls Mary "Our only Savior from an abstract Christ." It is easier to understand the meek and humble heart of Christ by looking at His Mother. She holds all the great Truths of Christianity together, as a piece of wood holds a kite. Children wrap the string of a kite around a stick and release the string as the kite climbs to the heavens. Mary is like that piece of wood. Around her we wrap all the precious strings of the great Truths of our holy Faith—for example, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, the Church. No matter how far we get above the earth, as the kite may, we always have need of Mary to hold the doctrines of the Creed together. If we threw away the stick, we would no longer have the kite; if we threw away Mary, we would never have Our Lord. He would be lost in the Heavens, like our runaway kite, and that would be terrible, indeed, for us on earth.

Mary does not prevent our honoring Our Lord. Nothing is more cruel than

to say that she takes souls away from Christ. That could mean that Our Lord chose a mother who is selfish, He Who is Love itself. If she kept us from her Son, we would disown her! But is not she, who is the Mother of Jesus, good enough for us sinners? We would never have had Our Divine Lord if He had not chosen her.

We pray to the Heavenly Father, "Give us this day our daily bread." Though we ask God for our daily bread, we do not hate the farmer and the baker who help prepare it. Neither does the mother who gives the bread to her child dispense with the Heavenly Provider. If the only charge Our Lord has against us on Judgment Day is that we loved His Mother—then we shall be very happy!

As our love does not start with Mary, so neither does it stop with Mary. Mary is a window through which our humanity

first catches a glimpse of Divinity on earth. Or perhaps she is more like a magnifying glass; she intensifies our love of her Son and makes our prayers more bright and burning.

God, Who made the sun, also made the moon. The moon does not take away from the brilliance of the sun. The moon would be only a burnt-out cinder floating in the immensity of space were it not for the sun. All its light is reflected from the sun. The Blessed Mother reflects her Divine Son; without Him, she is nothing. With Him, she is the Mother of Men. On dark nights we are grateful for the moon; when we see it shining, we know there must be a sun. So in this dark night of the world when men turn their backs on Him Who is the Light of the World, we look to Mary to guide their feet while we await the sunrise.

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