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The Motherhood of Mary

EMIL NEUBERT, S.M.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR . . .

Father Emil Neubert, S.M., S.T.D., has written many books on the Blessed Virgin, four of which are now available in English: My Ideal (Maryhurst Press), Queen of Militants (Grail), Living with Mary (Marianist Publications), and Mary in Doctrine (Bruce).

The present reprint has been translated by Father J. Willis Langlinais, S.M., from two articles by Father Neubert written for L’Apostre de Marie, April and June, 1931, the fifteenth centenary of the Council of Ephesus.

(For further information on the author, see About the Author notes for Marian Reprints 3 and 16).

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THE MOTHERHOOD OF MARY

EMIL NEUBERT, S.M.

IT WAS LATE IN THE EVENING OF JUNE 22, 431 when the great doors of the Church of Marie Theotokos of Ephesus opened and St. Cyril of Alexandria walked out onto the steps. In the street, the expectant crowd had been growing in size and impatience all day, while inside the church, the Council of 200 Bishops discussed their important problem. And when the great St. Cyril announced that the Council had declared anathema anyone who denied the Divine Maternity—theotokos—of Mary, the crowd shouted its relief and happiness in hymns of thanks and praise that were to echo down the ages.

For fifteen hundred years, in fact, these expressions of honor and devotion to Mary have grown in enthusiasm and in conviction all across the world. Lecturers, preachers, and writers outdo each other in honoring this grand privilege which "touches the very limits of the divinity." They show how this great gift of Mary is at once the source of all her special graces and the touchstone of orthodoxy. With all our heart we too join in this spontaneous praise. Those who imitate the filial piety of Jesus toward His Mother should be inspired to envisage Mary's glory in an even brighter light, we might say in its most maternal aspect, that is, in its aspect of love. Mary must surely desire all the expressions of honor we pay her, and must accept them with maternal benevolence, because she knows that they are all part of the Will of God, because she knows that honoring the Mother is paying honor to Her Son. In no sense then does she desire these honors in or for themselves. What she desires much more is what affects her love for Jesus and Jesus' love for her. Long ago, when she found Jesus in the Temple astounding the greatest Doctors of Israel, it was not the honor of possessing such a Child that moved her so, but rather the pain of loss that His absence had caused her Immaculate Heart. And that other time, when Jesus, in answer to the spontaneous cry of the woman—"Blessed is the womb that bore Thee and the paps that gave Thee suck"—had said, "Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it," (Luke 11:27) He showed that Mary's glory was not so much in her being His Mother, as in her immense love of God.
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Indeed was it not precisely the Divine Maternity that permitted Mary to love God with a unique love, and to be loved by God with a love beyond compare?

OVER AND ABOVE ITS PHYSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS, MATERNITY IS first of all an act of love. And the higher the form of being, the more obvious and beautiful is the role of love in the giving of life. In human maternity, love is such an important element that it is impossible for us to imagine a mother worthy of the name who would lack all love for her child. This child, a composite of body and soul, has received from his mother most of his bodily substance, and his very soul has been fashioned, in a way, according to her soul. Now when a woman gives her soul, or something of her soul to someone, she is loving him; the more she is woman or mother, the more she gives of her soul, and the more she loves. And the more she loves, the more she is mother.

And so it was that the Lord wished to make Mary His Mother. He would have her give Him His Sacred Humanity, a Humanity more perfect than that of the most perfect men, a Humanity joined to the Divinity as intimately as the body is joined to the soul. He would make her then Mother of God. Could He do anything but make her the most worthy Mother of God? Would He not give her the power of loving worthy of such a Divine Mother toward Her Divine Son?

That power of loving we call grace. God made her completely "full of grace". Such is the plenitude of this grace that, to our feeble minds, it seems an unfathomable ocean, a shoreless sea of love, so tremendous that only the Divine Mind—as Pius IX said—can grasp its limits. Nevertheless theologians agree that already from her Immaculate Conception Mary's grace surpassed the final grace of any saint or angel. And more and more the opinion is being accepted that her initial grace exceeded the final grace of all the angels and saints combined. Moreover, her ability to love grew in intensity from the first instant of her existence to her dying breath. Contemplare et mirare.

Besides this plenitude of grace, God added innumerable special privileges so that in every circumstance of her life Mary might love her Son with the most perfect love possible, with the greatest purity and strength and perseverance God could give a human creature.
So that she might love God from the first moment of life, He created her perfectly immaculate. So that the power of her love might never be hindered by unruly passion, God freed her from all disordered concupiscence. So that no imperfection, even involuntary, might ever tarnish her constant love, God blessed her with complete sinlessness. So that her most pure heart might know no other love, He made her the Virgin of virgins. So that she might make the supreme sacrifice as part of her love, He associated her in His Passion and Redemption. So that in heaven she might love Him with all the faculties of her glorified state, He raised her, body and soul, into heaven with Him. And finally, in order that she might communicate her love of God to all creatures, He made her the Mother of Men and Distributrix of All Graces. But not only was it the intensity of Mary's love that merited her such glory. Her love had an altogether special, in fact, a unique characteristic: it was a mother's love. We experience rather than define such maternal love, that incomparable love that is so generous, so delicate, so pure—all at once. On earth there are souls who are, in a sense, all holy. In heaven there are millions of pure spirits who have never known the slightest stain of sin. And yet, their love of Jesus will never have that special mark, that distinctive trait of Mary's love for Jesus. For Mary's love is the love of a mother. Mary—and Mary alone—can love God as her own Son. That was the singular love which the young Virgin of Nazareth had for the tiny little Being Whom she carried and formed in her chaste womb for nine months. It was this maternal love that filled her contemplation of this, the most beautiful of the sons of men, as He lay in the crib or slept in her arms. It was the love of her God that united her for 30 years to the Boy Jesus, the Adolescent, the Young Man. It was the solicitude of the Mother of a God that moved her to watch anxiously after the successes and failures of His Public Life. It was the mystery of the Divine Maternity that inspired all these acts of a unique love.

It was this signal, perfect love which gave Mary her first claim, we might say, to the Divine Maternity. Her second incomparable merit was that she was loved by God such as no other creature has ever been loved.

**IF THE SON WANTED MARY TO BE A WORTHY MOTHER OF GOD**

it was because, before all, He wished to be the worthy Son of His
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Mother. Filial love is natural to any normal child just as maternal love is natural to any normal mother. And the finer the character of the child, the greater is his love for his mother, for her who gave him his very life. It was God Himself, Whose very Essence is Love, Who so established nature. And to make sure that man never forget this, He engraved at the head of the second tablet of the Commandments, and inserted again in His Gospel, the law of filial love whose rights transcended all the subtleties of the Pharisees. Could such a God, in becoming the Son of a human mother, be anything but a perfect Son, do anything but love His Mother with a filial devotedness worthy of God Himself?

What an ineffable consolation for Mary! To be loved with such a unique love, the immeasurable love of a perfect Human Son, the infinite love of a Divine Son, the predestined love of an Eternal God. It was Her Son Who was Her God Who had already promised this miracle of love to Adam after his fall, Who had repeated the promise all through the Old Testament, Who had created her, from her very conception, most beautiful, all-pure, all-holy, more perfect than all of the rest of creation. And now it was He Who showered her with unique, marvelous privileges, Who was choosing her to give Him His human substance and to fulfill all His humble needs of childhood. Her Son, Her God, depended on her for everything, obeyed her, served her, deigned to associate her in the very Mission His Father had given Him, the Redemption, by making her the Distributrix of His Graces. He had made her, the "handmaid of the Lord", resemble Him so perfectly in her life, her privileges, her grace, her virtues, her functions—in all that was not necessarily His alone in virtue of the Hypostatic Union—so that They were as one in soul and love and aspiration, so that God found more happiness in her simplest action, in her humblest thought, than in the combined actions—heroic and sacrificial—of all the saints and martyrs of history.

MOREOVER, THERE IS ALSO A PECULIARITY IN THE LOVE JESUS bore His Mother, different—not only in degree but in kind—from His love for other creatures. The Son of God loves other human beings as His servants, His children, even His brothers and sisters. But He love Mary as His Mother. Her alone He can love with a filial love. To hear the very Son of God say "Mother"; to see and feel and hear all the little gestures with which the Son of God as a small Child,
as a Boy, as a Young Man expresses His infinite filial love; to know that the Son of God loved her with this unique filial love from all eternity and will continue to love her for all eternity! To believe, to know that He will always be her Son, that she will always be His Mother! What unspeakable happiness is Mary's!

But there is yet another aspect of this happiness which we might consider, a secondary aspect no doubt, but one which seems closest to all of us.

In becoming Mother of God, Mary became our Mother. The Child in the womb of that young Virgin of Nazareth was not only the Infant Whom she showed to the shepherds and Magi to adore. She was mother also of all those who would be united to that Child in His Mystical Body. For she gave birth to them too when she gave them Jesus, their supernatural life. And even more, she exercised her Motherhood not only by loving Her Son, but in loving all her other children too, thereby meriting an even greater love from Her Son.

If Almighty God chose to make Mary the worthy Mother of Christ, He must also have made her the worthy Mother of the Members of Christ. And just as He gave her an unlimited power to love her First-Born, so also He gave her an immeasurable power to love her other children, that is, those children who are one with her First-Born. Who will ever fathom the maternal love for all men which God implanted in that virginal heart? Can we say that it surpasses that of all the mothers of the world combined? That would not seem to say enough! Our mothers gave us only human life; Mary is the mother of our divine life. Imagine the love that must correspond to such motherhood! What a joy it must be for Mary to love us to that extent, to be able to love Her Son all over again in loving us.

Whoever loves wants to give. The greatest grief of love is not having anything to give; the greatest joy is to give anything, if possible to give one's self without measure, without limit. That was Mary's consolation. She gave all; she gave herself. And she gave us more than herself in giving us Jesus. And even now in heaven she continues to give us of herself, to give us Jesus. As Mediatrix of All Graces she can, in the beautiful words of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, "pass her heaven doing good on earth." With the great-
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... pleasure she watches over each of us, caring for Jesus within us, just as long ago, she took care of Him at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, and on Calvary.

And just as she continues to love Jesus in us, Jesus in us continues to love her. Her Son continues His life in the Church. The life of the Church is the life of Christ, her purity is His purity, her charity is His charity, her love of Mary is Christ's love of Mary.

HERE WE COULD STUDY AT LENGTH ALL THAT THE CHURCH HAS ever done for Mary: a jealous defense of Mary's privileges; a recurrent preoccupation to put her sublime prerogatives in ever clearer light; a repeated dogmatic proclamation of her functions; a special delight in multiplying the number of her feasts; a generous recommendation of myriad devotions in her honor; an eager approval of congregations and orders devoted to her cult.

And besides all these official acts of the Church we could take note of the attitude of the vast number of her children toward the Blessed Virgin. There have been so many saints from St. John to our day who have loved her with a filial piety, who have seemed ever more zealous for her honor. There have been so many millions of priests, religious, and nuns, so many religious orders consecrated to her honor. All over the world there have been devotions to fit every taste—tender, naive, profound. There are children beyond counting whose special delight is to pray before the image of their Mother, girls whose generosity knows no bounds in consecrating their virginity to God, boys who put all their confidence in her triumph over the greatest temptations of their lives, parents who entrust the care and purity of their children especially to her, aged men and women who, despite years of grief and loneliness, still find hope and love in considering themselves under the special protection of their heavenly Mother. In short, the whole Catholic world, like the population of Ephesus of long ago, gives itself with childlike enthusiasm to any manifestation in honor of Mary, or to the defense of any of her prerogatives against every doubt or evil suggestion. As though moved by divine instinct, the faithful are drawn to any act of veneration of Mary and seem to sense (sometimes even better than expert theologians) exactly what Jesus would have done for his Mother. Why is it that we love the Mother of Jesus so much and are so happy to love her so? Is it because Jesus in us loves her and is
happy to love her through us.

**FURTHERMORE WE CAN EASILY LOOK INTO THE FUTURE AND**

foresee great apostles of devotion to Mary whose inspiration might well surpass most of the saints we know, even as "the cedars of Libanus, of high stature, were elevated among the thick boughs." (Ezech. 31:3) We can easily conceive of great multitudes of devotees of Mary succeeding each other till the end of time, like the countless waves of the seashore, each more eager than the other to contemplate Mary's glory, to love her, to confide in her. Whence this love, this enthusiasm? From Him Who in them continues to love His Mother. And over and above what the Church Militant has done and will do, throughout history, for the honor of Mary, we must add all that the Church Triumphant, throughout eternity, has done and will do for her. The Church Triumphant is even more perfectly the continuation of Christ; in fact, it is Christ in the fullness of His glory. Eternal hymns of praise rise constantly from the legions of the Blessed and redound about the throne of the Mother of God. Each of the Saints now fully realizes the eternal bliss of being her child, of possessing her, of expressing the most sublime respect and love. And all that too is an expression of Jesus' own love for His Mother.
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