

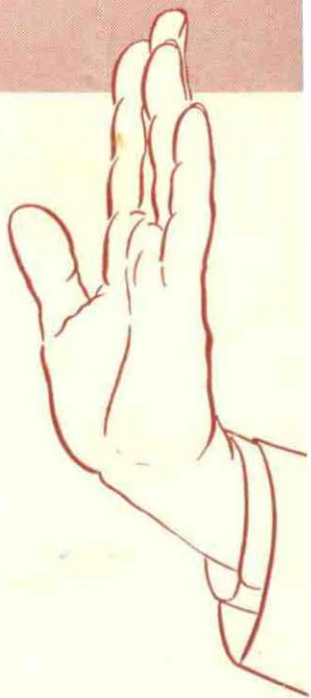
MARY

and the mocker

William Hermanns

Introduction by Most Reverend

FULTON J. SHEEN



Mary And The Mocker

by

William Hermanns

Third Edition, 15,000

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Note:

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Our Sunday Visitor then published the 4th Edition under the title *Mary Converts Her Mocker*, and added the outstretched priestly garbed arm in a welcoming gesture to the cover illustration, but left out the poem that spanned 18-pages.

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The William Hermanns Trust
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Nihil Obstat:

REV. EDWARD A. MILLER
Censor Librorum

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✠ JOHN FRANCIS NOLL, D.D.
Archbishop, Bishop of Fort Wayne

3rd edition

Mary Converts Her Mocker

by
William Hermanns

To
EDWARD JOSEPH MAHER
a humble Irish priest who loves Mary
and to all who do not love her

Nihil Obstat:
REV. JAMES J. O'CONNOR
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Preface

BY MOST REV. FULTON SHEEN, D.D.

NATUS *ex Maria Virgine*:—"Born of the Virgin Mary."

Such is the Creed's simple affirmation of the temporal origin of the humanity of Christ, whose Divine Nature as the Son of the living God is eternal. But if Christ, the Head of the Mystical Body, is born of Mary, it is true in a lesser degree that every true Christian who is a member of the Body is also born of her.

This book tells the story of a man who came to Christ through Mary, as Christ comes to us through her. This story reveals that a Mother is a portal through which God comes to man, and man goes back again to God.

Mary is not the curtain where the eye of the soul stops to adore; she is the window through which the Light comes to us, and through which our eyes scale the heavens! She is God's Fifth Column in the world of evil! Those who would not immediately surrender to her Divine Son, she solicits and tempts with her virtue and the starry treachery of her eyes, and then with "traitorous trueness and loyal deceit" delivers them over to her Divine Son.

In the natural order, man makes the cities, but woman makes the man. Man lives more for the present, but a woman is the guarantor of Eternity through procreation. A man is afraid of dying; a woman is afraid of not living, in the sense of not fulfilling her co-creative powers under God.

In the Divine order too, a woman who was the occasion of man's loss of God, is fittingly chosen by God as the condition through which man again finds His God! No greater act of freedom in all the world was ever known, than that of a Woman pondering an Angel's suggestion that she become the

Mother of the Messias, and then accepting it when it was revealed that she would still remain a Virgin.

"Be it done to me according to Thy Word," is one of the three great *Fiats* of the universe. The others were: "Let there be light," said at Creation; and "Not My Will but Thine be done," spoken amidst the olive roots of Gethsemane.

The author not yet strong enough intellectually to accept Christ the Savior thought he was preserving his freedom by accepting only the Beauty of the Woman. But she too makes men her slaves, as she "sold" him into the glorious liberty of the children of God through belief in Christ, Teacher, King, and Priest.

It may be asked why the author of this book, once he was betrayed by a Lady into the Hands of the Living God, should center his talents around Our Lady of Fatima, instead of around the less catastrophic emphasis on her Assumption and Coronation. I can only guess, but knowing his life, I would say it is because, purified by suffering, grief, and persecution, he understands best the Christian mystery that just as debts demand payment, so sin calls for expiation, either on the part of the sinner, or on the part of those who feel that sin as their own. This is the core of the Mystery of Fatima.

The Revelation of Fatima, which took place in the evening of World War I, announced that World War II would be averted if men returned to God through penance in atonement for the sins of the world. At Fatima we may picture Mary the Mother, holding the arm of her Divine Son, begging Him not to allow the full consequences of the world's sin to fall upon a guilty world! All the while, she pleads to those who are her lovers to pray, atone, suffer, that another apocalyptic war-sucide be not loosed again upon the world.

The author, who saw his people burned like holocausts in the fiery furnace, and who had dragged himself from shell-hole to shell-hole in the mucky mire of the Western front as all hell broke loose overhead, came to see that in some way pain can not only sear and embitter a soul, but also purify

it, so that in its denuded and de-materialized state, it will reach out through a Cross to Him Who hangs upon it.

To such a soul, the Message of Fatima has a heartrending appeal for it reveals that suffering and pain are tied up with guilt, not necessarily in the same person, but in the world. As it takes the blood of a healthy person transfused into the veins of an anemic to cure him of that condition, so it takes the prayers of the healthy members of Christ's Mystical Body to save the guilty of the world. Fatima merely reproclaimed the injunction of St. Paul: "Bear ye one another's burdens."

The corrupted nature of humanity can be compared to a sponge, in the sense that it is a mixture of *being* and *nothingness*. The more good a man does, the more he increases his Godlikeness and being. The more evil he does, the more he annihilates himself from God, which means he gets closer to nothing.

Evil is like the holes in that sponge; it is a non-plenitude, a void. If the "sponge" exists, it is because of the parts that are still solid, for man never ceases to have being and immortality.

Evil is not being; it is the corruption of being, a disorder, an eccentricity; the privation of being. Sin is an action; suffering is its reaction. We create sin by a free act within, but the resulting chaos, and crises, and wars strike us from the outside.

To avert these external manifestations of the sins of the world, Our Blessed Mother at Fatima asked that the good souls graft intensified spirituality on others, as physicians might graft skin on those who are burned.

Holiness is uncompromising with evil, and yet it bears all things patiently. Combined with heroic efforts toward purity, the good have an unlimited pity toward evil. God desires not the death of the sinner, Scripture tells, but that the sinner be converted from the evil of his ways and *live*. This is the clarion call of Mary at Fatima.

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Saddened, but not despairing of evil, the good can make up for the bad. Since the modern evil is interior, it will take a spiritual interiorization of lives to make amendment and to that high summons, the trumpet of Our Lady sounds!

Sin, man may deny, but he can not deny the effects of sin. He may ridicule the law of gravitation, but if he throws himself from the pinnacle of the temple, he is not free to escape the effects of that denial.

Mary, of all women, knew what guilt and sin really are, for she saw the effects of them in her Divine Son. Only the innocent, like Mary, know evil; never the sinner, for sin becomes so much a part of the sinner, that he is not always able to see its deformity, just as a feverish patient can become so burned with fever, that he may imagine he is healthy.

Standing beneath the foot of the Cross, this woman saw war, egotism, greed, hate, bigotry, lust, written on the hands and feet of her Divine Son. On His Body was written the biography of man's rebellion against God. She saw pride plaiting thorns, and unholy loves piercing a side, and blasphemy feeding lips with gall, and avarice nailing hands. The memory of what happened on that day, she could never forget.

And now 1900 years later, that Woman who stood at the foot of the cross, re-appears in the world, to say that her Son is being re-crucified in those who love Him; therefore, pray, atone, expiate.

This author, a non-Catholic, came to the full cognizance of the mystery of man's redemption in Christ through a Woman, whom he at first thought as less than a woman, until through grace there dawned the full vision that she is the Ciborium that on Christmas Day held the Host, Who is the Guest of the world, the Son of the Living God, and that through her a man can be reborn. Our Lord said that unless we are reborn, we cannot live in His Kingdom. But can a man be reborn without a woman? *Natus ex Maria Virgine.*

Apology to Mary

I COULD rather have believed that the earth would open under my feet to swallow me, than that I, a student of the Bible, who had searched for the one Truth all my life, explored Judaism and Protestantism, traced out the Metaphysics of Swedenborg, believed in Christian Science, studied Hindu Scriptures and the Koran; in short, I, who had searched for an answer to my religious hunger, everywhere except in Catholicism—for education and prejudice forbade me to do so—should end my forty years wandering through a religious desert by writing an Apology to Mary.

In May 1949, the rector of St. Patrick's Church, in San Jose, California, Monsignor Edward J. Maher, asked me to visit his church where the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, sculptured by a renowned Portuguese, was on exhibition. When I arrived, the church was already overcrowded.

Ushered to a reserved seat, I became momentarily conscious of the eyes of my neighbors as if I were an intruder; and a woman, as I learned later, promptly proceeded to the sacristy to tell the priest of the presence of a Communist, because I had not genuflected when entering the pew. Indeed, at that time the local newspapers contained headlines about Communistic conspiracies in our country, but in my case the priest assured her that Monsignor Maher had invited guests of other faiths, and that there was no danger of my harming the statue.

Meanwhile, in the church, the ceremonies unfolded with organ, choir, and sermon. Although I participated, sitting, kneeling, and standing again with the congregation, I could not overcome an uneasiness, a slight confusion. Was this inner sensation the aftermath of the stir caused by my arrival, or the foreboding of things to come?

As I, in the procession with the others, passed the statue carved from cedar, it was as if for a split second she became alive. Her face, perhaps that of a girl of seventeen, looked at me. The harsh edges of her mantle, tinted in shades of gold,

changed into soft lace, and her heart beat. A poet's fancy, I thought as I filed by, when within me something said, "Go home! Amend!" Looking around I almost asked aloud: "Why should I amend?"

The continuous stream of people carried me slowly to the exit. Lingered in the vestibule, I wanted to leave, yet not to leave; at last, when the bright lights were extinguished, I re-entered to sit down near the altar.

Nothing moved in the dimness of the huge church except the vigil lights and the shadows of a darkening sky behind the stained glass of the high Gothic windows. From somewhere came the "Hail Mary's" of women who had remained in the Church. After a while I left the pew to stand before the statue.

The description in the little booklet handed to me at the beginning of the ceremony said the statue was the exact replica of Our Lady, as the child Lucy, still living as a Carmelite nun in Portugal, had seen her when she appeared above a tree at Fatima in 1917. Indeed, there was a suggestion of a twig within the cloud on which she stood. A veil-like mantle, resting on her head like a hood, draped its flowing folds to her bare feet. Her snow-white dress was ornamented on its lower border with a glittering star. From her folded hands fell a pearly rosary with a silver cross.

Beholding her, I would have been flattered and thrilled had my fancy become real, the wooden face glowed with life, smiled and said: "You are my chosen one," or at least repeated those words: "Go home! Amend!" But the statue remained a statue. I left.

I had almost reached the exit when the following lines flashed to me: "Let me not die, O God! not die, O Christ! Let me not die, O Mary, in my sins!" I turned about. Who was the originator of these words? God? Certainly He would not suggest my asking a power outside Himself for help. The Virgin? Certainly I would not admit any connection between a motionless statue and her, for I am not superstitious—al-

though I would not refuse a sign proving that the Virgin is more than a Bible figure. Were the words merely an invention of my own mind?

I went to a pew. Could I create what was not akin to my thinking? No! For me Mary was the joke of an invention and the invention of a joke! Even as a child the monotonous repetition of the Rosary, while her statue was carried by peasants through the streets on Holy Thursday, had made me smile.

As I grew older and read the Bible from cover to cover and found her mentioned in Isaiah: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel," I smiled again. Had I not been fore-warned by my religious teachers that the original meaning of the word "Virgin" was narrowed by the Catholic Church in order to fit her dogma of the Immaculate Virgin.

And when I myself became a teacher, active in religion and addressing student groups of many denominations, this smile about Mary stayed with me; but I avoided the mention of her name like the name of a woman of whom it is best not to speak.

Thus, I can truly say, there was in my subconscious no remnant of a good thought stored away for Mary. Yet, here were the words: "Let me not die, O Mary, in my sins!"

Was there still another power in man separated from his intellect? Yes, conscience. Could my conscience have moulded these two messages against my own thoughts or will? If so, what wrong have I done, that I should "Amend"?

True, I was not a Catholic, but the Church would not hold this against me. According to her teaching, anyone living up to his own faith, even a heathen, can come into the Kingdom of Heaven as long as he acts sincerely and with his highest understanding of right.

I sat for a long time lost in thought. The murmuring of the "Hail Mary's" from the kneeling women in the front pews was the only sound.

I have always loved the houses of God, whether they were Jewish, Moslem, or Christian, and twice while sitting in the mystic light of huge churches, I sent up prayers with results unforgettable to me.

In the early twenties in Dortmund, Germany, visiting a hospital, I was aroused by the suffering of a young miner who, clutching his Rosary in his hand, prayed constantly. The doctor told me that he had consumption, and the wound, following an operation removing several ribs, would not close. On my way home, a strange urge made me enter the open door of a church and pray. The next morning, the doctor told me a miracle had happened—the wound had closed! An inner shyness kept me silent.

Fifteen years later, in Berlin, chance took me to the sickbed of a Jewish woman. She had contracted a deadly disease through drinking contaminated water, and according to the doctors there was no hope for her. Seeing her in this pitiful state, I again had the urge to enter the first church on my way home to pray. The next morning the nurse phoned me that the fever had gone and the woman was well.

Were these miraculous interventions by Mary or the Saints? True, I sat in those churches before statues to concentrate on my prayers, but their religious denominations had no meaning for me.

I remember, too, that when I lost my mother, after the funeral one of the maids brought me to her mother, and she prayed in my presence before a picture of Mary that hung in her bedroom, saying: "She will be your Mother." Later, when I was in the First World War, this maid and her mother continued to pray for me. Also, for forty years, there lived in my aunt's house a Catholic maid who was good to me and whom I in turn revered until her death. Moreover, two Franciscan nuns, with the beautiful names, Kiliana and Modesta, have shrines in my memory, for they watched day and night at the sickbeds of three of my aunts with self-effacing love.

True, I had no sympathy with the Catholic concept of

Mary and yet I had accepted love from Catholics, but had I not also shown love for my Catholic neighbor and thereby kept the great Commandment? Why, then, should I amend? Why should I say, "Let me not die, O Mary, in my sins"? I came to the conclusion that those words had been moulded by my subconscious in order to relieve a tension caused by my aversion to Mary through the years.

Yet, this answer led to a new question: What made the subconscious act beneficially in my case, while in other cases it has released repressed emotions to destroy soul, mind, and man? The more I knew, the less I knew. I left the church and tried to forget the entire experience.

The weekend brought the usual distractions and invitations; but Monday a student who during the war had spent several years in the front lines in the Pacific handed me a parcel after class with the words: "Mother Ottilia, in Monterey, gave me these books for you Saturday, while I was working in the garden of the Convent."

Mother Ottilia? A year earlier I had a short conversation in German with a little Ursuline nun who had come to America some fifty years before. Why should she now send me two books? I opened the parcel; one book was "Our Lady of Light" and the other "The Vision of Fatima"—both were historical accounts of the apparitions.

But how much more I was amazed, when eight days later a friend showed me in Life magazine photographs of the events near Fatima in October 1917, where awestruck people were watching a heavenly phenomenon, promised by the apparition three months earlier. Since the student was an Episcopalian and my friend a Christian Scientist, I could not suppress a notion that a mysterious power was drawing me toward an objective investigation of the "Case Fatima." Something else startled my thinking even more: I had seen those pictures before, but where?

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I pressed on to find a flaw and bolster up my doubts, the more the facts about Fatima grew like a spire from earth to Heaven. This investigation taught me that neither human reason nor the five senses are adequate to explain supernatural phenomena or miracles.

I now tried to convince myself that this apparition was from the Devil. Had I not witnessed with my own eyes how the church in Portugal possessed the cloven foot, robbing through the centuries the widows of their mite?

In 1934, when I lived near Lisbon, I met a Portuguese fisherman on the beach who was wearing only one shoe. In answer to my question whether he had hurt his foot, he smiled at me with wide eyes, "I have never had shoes on my feet, but yesterday I found this shoe on the beach. Now I am looking around—perhaps I will find another one." Yet, a stone's throw away from where we talked was a church laden with gold and silver, which had a marble altar dedicated to John the Baptist, second only in value, so I was told, to that hand-carved altar in St. Peter's in Rome.

No doubt the Devil had come to Fatima in Mary's shimmering gown to blaze the fire of superstition into spineless men. Had I not reason to be proud of belonging to the mighty group of protestors who had done away with images and altars of Mary?

My inner triumph faded as quickly as it had come. I remembered that I had seen together in Lisbon not only poor fishermen and a rich church, but also on the pavements bloodstains of a king and his son. They had been murdered to make way for a government that had for its motto: "Freedom from Religion." And now for a generation the poor became poorer; the bad worse, while the masters of the regime filled their granaries.

Yet not for long. The vision of three shepherd children changed Portugal's horizon overnight. In vain, the enemies of the Catholic Church rallied to jail the children, to chop down the tree where the apparition had appeared, and to tear down

the first shrine in Fatima. The message of three children, that the World War would soon end; that if people did not pray—especially for the conversion of Russia—more terrible wars would come, leavened and alarmed the consciousness of the inert masses and saved Portugal from economic and moral disaster.

If this message was from the Devil, then God must have sided with those who had done away with His commandment, "Thou shalt not kill" in order to persecute this, the Devil's Church.

And yet, it was this church which through the centuries stood behind the Ten Commandments in the face of the hostile world. Did she not say "no" to Henry VIII when he wanted a divorce, although she knew this king had the power to stir up a whole nation against her?

Can a church compromise; can it be made after man's liking?

A church is a school that teaches the knowledge of God. But any school that fits the truth to the pupil's mind instead of fitting the pupil's mind to the truth betrays its mission. I now saw clearly that for forty years or more I had looked for the church of my own liking.

"Come in," said the first church. "We preach the Bible and the divinity of Christ." I went for a while.

"Come," said the second church. "We preach the Bible and Christ, the human prophet."

The third called, "We preach the Bible and believe in the Sacrament of Baptism."

"Come to us," said the fourth. "We preach the Bible, believe in three sacraments, and the Holy Trinity."

The fifth said, "God is love, hence the man of God is not fallen and needs no Saviour, only a shower of the way."

"There is only one God and nothing else," said the sixth.

I went to all those churches, which, as much as they differed from one another, had in common the devotion to God, and the dislike of the Catholic Church.

This led me to another question: What causes this dislike? I revived before my eyes the finest non-Catholics, preachers and teachers, whom I had met in the last thirty years and found a strange paradox: The more they relied upon the Bible alone, the greater was their dislike of the Catholic Church.

Their Bible, of course, is somewhat different from the Catholic Bible. About 1600 the Puritans founded a tradition by omitting the Apocrypha that had not only been an integral part of the Bible for over a thousand years but which still are the historical link between the Old Testament and the New, the literary prelude to Jesus' coming. Was the dislike caused by this difference or other differences developed and emphasized by new religious groups since the Reformation?

It was, of necessity, for who likes his creditor? The more those groups had in common with the Catholic Church, the more they magnified what they had not in common in order to justify their existence; hence this dislike handed down for generations became the heritage of my contemporaries and me, in turn to be perpetuated by future generations.

Thus I would say to all who have ears to hear: "Look how priestcraft fills *their* church!" In my heart I naturally thought God fills *my* church. Prejudice had clipped my reason too much to allow me to see that God was doing a poor job, for the churches I visited were not filled.

In the same vein a missionary who would be glad to give his life for the Lord said: "The Catholics have not the Word, their teaching is based on superstition." Those words from a fellow Protestant, who scorned the creed of the church I was visiting Sundays, proved we agree, at least in our anti-Catholic sentiments, and inevitably silenced in me the voice of reason: "Are you certain your church has the Word?"

This same traditional dislike was expressed by another exponent of the Word who said to me upon hearing that a sister of a mutual friend, recently converted, now desired to

become a nun: "If she were my sister I would rather see her dead."

Were I not shackled by religious prejudice myself, I would have asked: "Do you think our God, who is Love, would not answer the unselfish prayers offered through the centuries by monks and nuns for a sinful world of which you and I are a part, because those who reared and taught you said God would not?"

And when a well-known divine who during his long life had embraced three different Protestant denominations in his search for truth said to me: "The Pope has the number of the apocalyptic beast written on his forehead," I accepted it without questioning. Did it not prove again, that as different as we might be in our creeds, we were one and undivided in our condemnation of the Catholic Church?

Thus, like them, I was dead to reason and did not know it, else the psalmist's words would have stirred me: "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark?"

Thus, like them, I was complacent and at peace with my own knowledge, else Jesus' words would have awakened me: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them."

The miracles of Fatima lit a candle in my mental tomb. All my thinking became lucid. I began to see myself for the first time. I realized that there had always been a longing within me to worship God with the esthetic, the pure, and beautiful things I found in His creation. Does He not reveal Himself in the flower, the child, and the bird? Hence, the fragrance, the gurgling laughter, the singing, and the jubilating should symbolize His bounty. How I should have loved bringing all the beautiful things I beheld into His tabernacle and saying, "Dear God, I know that you do not need them, but it makes me so happy to give them to You." How I should have loved to illumine His altar with the light of my eye!

Alas! My religious teaching said: "Away with images!" It confounded tokens of love for God with false images of gods. From my childhood the natural urge for a visible adoration was curbed.

Therefore, I resented those who could bring the flowers to the altar, paint the babe and the love of the Mother on the walls, make stained glass from rainbows, carry the lamb on an azure cushion and light candles between arches and in the niches to warm the eye and heart of their brother man who comes in from the street; and when all this is done, they would sing and jubilate with the same notes and paeans which the angels and archangels, the cherubim and seraphim pour out in their "Holy, Holy, Holy, God of Hosts!"

Thus, my frustration built up resentment. Like the sparrow who pecks the bird with the brighter colors, the "have not" pecks the "have." Jealousy gnawed at my mental storehouse. I would pass no opportunity to think or speak evil against that Roman Church, and I could say with the apostle James that I, with unbridled tongue, deceived my own heart and made my religion void.

Indeed, a child's ignorance is harmless as it does not judge, but a man's ignorance is pernicious as it mistakes reasoning for reason, confusing resentment against the church for the divine call to teach and preach.

The miracles also made my surroundings lucid. I recalled the churches I had visited, and had to ask myself whether the Reformation had not robbed God by putting away the altars and symbols.

"Will a man rob God?" asks Malachi, "Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." The prophet distinctly says, "... in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering." Who would deny that the Catholic Church, alone, has obeyed?

"For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down," this church breaks the bread on its altars as the pure

offering of Him who by breaking the bread and giving it to the Apostles has said: "This is My body which was given for you: this do in remembrance of Me."

Moreover, studying the Missal, I found that it embodies the earliest prayers and ceremonies of Temple days. In fact, the liturgy of the Mass is not only made up of the very words of our Lord, of sayings and traditions of the Apostles, but encloses much more of the Bible than any Protestant service. Yet the Catholics are constantly charged with not having the Word.

In the light of this propaganda against the Catholic Church, another question becomes pertinent: "Is the existence of a new religious group justified through its being different, or through the love it teaches?"

The thousand different interpretations of the Word from as many different pulpits that sprang up during the last four hundred years I can no longer appraise as a token of individualism in a democratic world, but of confusion, of which Peter warns: "No prophecy of the Scriptures is of any private interpretation."

Yet, the Puritans purged the Bible of seven Septuagint Old Testament Books and called them the Apocrypha, although Jesus and His disciples used many quotations and allusions from the so-called Apocrypha.

Thus, many Protestants who rejected the dogmas of the Catholic Church have accepted as their dogma a religious opinion of the Puritans. For most Protestant Bibles have omitted the Apocrypha. Certainly Luther was not embittered against the Catholic Religion. He writes, "That there is no doubt whatever but the Holy Christian Church will last on earth eternally, as Christ says in the last verse of Matthew: 'Lo! I am with you always even unto the end of the world'—for where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are rightly administered or conferred, there is the Holy Christian Church."

It is futile to ponder whether Luther would have submit-

ted himself "to the judgment and determination of the Holy Church" had he not been backed by mighty German princes for political reasons. But it is not futile to ask: "Why are there still protestors today, when long since Luther's protest the Catholic Church has reformed herself?" Certainly the differences in interpretation regarding transubstantiation or the Sacraments are greater between Luther and many Protestant denominations than between Luther and the Catholic Church.

Of course, Luther proclaimed liberty of the individual conscience against the authority of the Church; yet at the same time, he wrote: "When it is possible, opposing doctrines are not to be tolerated under one government that trouble may be avoided."

And we see indeed how many Protestant preachers not only try to interpret the Bible with authority to their own denomination, but also attempt to influence, if not to crush, different interpretations adhered to by other denominations. Yet, at the same time, they begrudge the authority of the Catholic Church.

What inner revolution Fatima caused! I discovered that reason can be the friend or enemy of faith. It is the longing for faith that makes reason a friend, as grace participates.

The moment I wished to change myself, I felt a change taking place. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" Whether I would go to Heaven, to hell, or take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, the truth would have preceded me as it did King David of old.

I now resolved to unlearn what I learned, to dismount the high horse of religious intellectualism and walk barefoot, a pilgrim in search of the truth, and I walked straight into the hostile camp of Catholicism to find out for myself what sort of people were there, what they taught and preached.

I visited two Cardinals, three Archbishops, four Bishops, more than a hundred parish priests, and spoke to as many monks and nuns of the various orders. Twice I lived among

the feared world conspirators—the Jesuits—sat at their table, walked and talked with them, and especially observed them.

What, then, to my amazement, did I find? None of them was eager to make me a Catholic. When I asked a Cardinal whether he would not like to make me a Catholic, he said, "Only the grace of God can make you a Catholic." When I posed the same question to a learned prelate, famous for his influence and persuasiveness regarding non-Catholics, he answered: "To become a Catholic you must ask God to give you the light and the strength to follow it."

But I discovered more: None of them mentioned the Protestants otherwise than as our brothers who were led astray, or who will come back in God's good time—or—all who are sincere will go to heaven. I not only found the absence of dislike for the Protestants, but for the Jews as well, whom they referred to as the chosen people—the people we must love, for they have given us the Lord.

This pattern of Catholic thinking reminded me of the words I heard Cardinal Faulhaber speak from the pulpit in Munich—exposing himself to a concentration camp and death—that the Catholic who would accept the Nazi doctrine that Jesus is not a Jew, but an Aryan, would place himself outside the Church.

After finishing my investigation among the hierarchy, I studied the attitudes of some hundred Catholic students. The fruit fell not far from the tree. Not one was prejudiced against his Protestant friend, nor was any eager to convert him.

And when I asked an elderly woman who for years has cooked for five priests whether she was not receiving Catholic literature, she said: "I have never been influenced to give up my Protestant religion." But what about those Catholic witnesses who have turned against their own church?

A friend, worried about my salvation, gave me the autobiography of a priest who had abandoned the Church. After reading it, I went to Canada to investigate. The documents of his case, shown me by the Bishop of this priest's former dio-

cese, proved that he had been excommunicated three times and reinstated twice. The letters in which several Bishops admonished the priest in his behavior were exemplary of Christian charity.

The incident at St. Patrick's Church in San Jose had done more than to make me think with my own reason. It made me stand and it made me search further. Of course, my old friends took offense and I will lose them, but I can only say to them with Nehemiah, the builder of the Holy Wall: "I am doing a great work . . . why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"

What were the results of my investigations? I had been taught that Catholicism strives not only for spiritual power but also for political power. After many years of believing the accusers, I found that their arguments are not only identical to those of the Communists, but were used through the centuries by European princes and landowners in order to get Church property. Moreover, did not the Pharisees of old say to Pilate that Jesus wanted to make himself a king?

I had been taught that the Catholics replaced interior worship with exterior worship. I found, however, in the Bible that King Solomon not only built a temple with the most costly material, pure and precious stones, but also told the people that when they prayed in this place and confessed their sins, God would hear them.

And God did accept this earthly shrine of glory with the words: "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there forever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually."

Nor did Jesus rebuke sacrifices made in favor of the church. Said he to the woman who brought her last mite to the temple, "This poor widow has cast more in than all they that have cast into the treasury . . . She of her want did cast in all that she had, even her living."

I had been taught that the Catholics prayed *to* statues, but I found that they prayed *before* them. Besides, did not

the people in the Temple in Jerusalem pray near an altar with huge statues of cherubims having outstretched golden wings? Nor did Jesus rebuke Peter as superstitious when he, conforming to Jewish custom, wished to build tabernacles for two departed men, Moses and Elias.

I had been taught that the tradition of the Catholic Church contradicted the Bible which John had closed forever with the final word of Revelation. I found, however, that the gospel was the outcome of tradition and not tradition the outcome of the gospel; for, as the Acts prove, all teaching began immediately after the ascension of Jesus, but it was oral teaching.

Moreover, the first church was founded many years before the Gospels were written, and Mary, the Mother of God, still living then with John, no doubt was venerated by the members of that church. Was she not the original source of information about her divine Son?

Luke plainly states, "Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart," and again, "His mother kept all these sayings in her heart." And when John writes, "There were also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written, everyone, I suppose that even the world itself, would not contain the books," was it not, besides his own experiences, Mary that told him of the many other things Jesus did? Certainly a Mary of whom the angel said, "The spirit of the Lord shall overshadow thee," was predestined for a mission that could not have ended with the crucifixion of her Son.

And does not Jesus confirm this? He honored her twice in a most conspicuous way. In spite of the fact that His time had not yet come, He performed the first miracle because she, "the Mother of Jesus," interceded. From the cross, He dedicated His last thought to Mary by placing her in the care of His beloved disciple. Had He, the Son of God, not foreknown that His mother, in the house of John, would preserve and uphold His memory, so that this gentle recorder of the

Word Incarnate could glean from her those details he had not witnessed himself?

Never had I such awe for the word "mother," as when, in search of the truth about Mary, I read the passage again which I had seen a hundred times but had not felt:

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother . . . When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he said unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then said he to the disciple, Behold, thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled . . . bowed his head and gave up the ghost."

Jesus foreknew the content of the Gospel. Did He not announce that the love of Mary of Bethany would be recorded, or the Holy Supper continued in remembrance of Him? Did He not say He must depart in order that the Holy Ghost could come down to teach them? Certainly, then, the writers of the Gospel were filled with the Holy Ghost, filled with Jesus' intentions.

If Mary is the Mother of God, should it be offensive to others that the Catholic Church declares her conception immaculate, thus fulfilling her own prophecy: "All generations shall call me blessed?"

How wrong it was of me to smile when the statue of Mary was carried through the streets, or when people with Litany and beads numbered their prayers for her intercession! Is it reasonable that God gives man a metaphysical sense of hope and faith that makes him believe in a life after this life, and at the same time condemns man for believing that those who have gone into the beyond are not dead to him?

Who dares say that Mary, who had interceded for friends at the wedding feast in Cana, is no longer Jesus' Mother after having left this earth, when the Bible proves that man does not lose his identity after death?

So Saul spoke to Samuel, who had been buried two years earlier, and Jesus, in the presence of Peter, James, and John, spoke to Moses and Elias. Yet Moses had left this earth about fourteen hundred and Elias about a thousand years before the birth of Christ. Did not holy men talk with God, the Christ, angels and saints?

Who dares say that our prayers reach not the departed, when according to the Book of the Maccabees, prayers and sacrifices were made for the dead in the temple, the same temple in which only a few generations later Jesus prayed? Did He not say that He had not come to destroy, but to fulfill? And do not the Jews, even to this day, maintain the thousands-of-years-old custom of praying for the dead in their Feast of Atonement?

How wrong I was to look down on the Catholic Church that filled pews Sunday after Sunday with those who have two shoes, one shoe, or even no shoes at all. Does it make sense to believe that the virtues of these people are weakened in the church rather than outside of its doors? Is the edification of soul worth less than that of mind and body? Does it make sense to believe that the money with which they build precious altars is lost to human progress?

I need only to have looked at myself and other non-Catholics in Portugal at that time to answer this. The word of God was remote for us; perhaps it was nearer when we were sick. The only urge we had was to have intellectual discussions, while we were lying on the beach or passing the evening in the pompous Casino of Estoril. The drones of society are the drones of religion.

With whom does God side? He is the God of Love who would not deceive, nor permit the Devil to deceive, those people who have gone to the Catholic Church, generation after generation, to kneel and pray in such humility as no other congregation has ever done. Nor would God abandon the priest, who, all day long, fulfills the word of Moses to "teach them (the Commandments) diligently unto thy chil-

dren, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Would God abandon a church that, through the centuries made enemies of dictators, crowned and uncrowned, to uphold her teaching and could often cry out with Elijah: "I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord."

Is it thinkable that Jesus would no longer be in the church that consecrates each day all over the world the bread and wine in memory of His eternal sacrifice, or that He would allow the Devil to conduct the veneration of His mother, to whom He gave His loving thoughts while dying on the cross?

Would the Holy Ghost have deserted this church, born on the first Pentecost day, to become the originator of dissension and strife by saying to Luther, Henry VIII, Wesley, or other founders of new creeds: Thou, not Peter, art now the Rock.

One may reply that the Holy Ghost has indeed come down to all churches, because from the infinite height of God's vantage point the differences between Christian churches are too small to bar God's love from one or the other. If that were true, should not one still choose that church which proves to this day best the effects of the indwelling Holy Ghost by the holiness of her servants and by her miracles? All the Saints were Catholics, and it is perhaps more providence than chance that many Protestants have Catholic names and therefore have Catholic Patron Saints.

Truly, the glory of the Saints is the glory of the Church. When in the council of Constantinople in the year 381 the question arose: "How may the true Church be recognized?" the assembled Bishops answered: "By the four marks of apostolicity, unity, universality, and sanctity." Although more than a thousand years have passed since this council, who dares say the Catholic Church has lost those four marks which make her different from all other churches?

I had been taught that the Catholic Church was filled with evil in high places. Yet, Christ's promise: "Lo, I am with you always" must still hold, for no human institution could have survived the trials this Church had, not only from without, but from within.

And what of the sinners in high places? She has to bear this shame as little as Christ has to bear the shame of Judas. Moreover, Jesus made the man who denied Him thrice the cornerstone of His church, which was to call the sinner, not the saint, to repentance.

A careful study of the history of the Popes proved to me that not only the few called wicked towered above the secular rulers of their time in Christian manners and charity, but that all the Popes defended Christianity, many dying as martyrs.

How well this church prevailed against the gates of hell! When the savage hordes of the Huns invaded Italy, Pope Leo I, without any troops, by his personal authority moved Attila to withdraw, and saved Rome.

When the Emperor Frederic II in his fierce struggle with the Church menaced the Eternal City, Pope Gregory IX, almost one hundred years old, seeing the faintheartedness of the Romans, ran through the streets with the skulls of Peter and Paul, crying: "If you will not defend Rome, the Saints will." The German Emperor suddenly withdrew from Rome without even giving battle.

Three hundred years later Pius V called the entire Christian world to recite the rosary, and the Mohammedans were defeated at Lepanto.

Pope Pius XII, in spite of Hitler's threats to raze the Vatican, remained in Rome to die, if need be, with his people, who called him *Defensor Urbis*.

If those Popes were the anti-Christ and had the number of the Beast written on their foreheads, under what sign must their enemies have come?

I had been taught that the priest has no right to forgive

sinner, but I found that since the time of Moses the Jews had made confessions and offerings to the priesthood; and Jesus, who did not come to destroy the law said to His disciples: "Whose sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose sins ye retain, they are retained."

When He commanded them to preach the Gospel throughout the world, He naturally knew that this task could not be accomplished by the handful of disciples He had chosen Himself, but every one dedicating his life to the church would have the power to forgive sins in the name of Christ.

Paul, who was not one of the original group, emphatically says: "To whom ye forgive anything, I forgive also," and called his fellow workers ambassadors, in whom is placed the power of reconciliation for Christ.

St. Clement, a contemporary of St. John, who died in 100 A.D., writes: "Christ was sent by God, the Apostles by Christ. They appointed Bishops and Deacons, and they ordered that when they died, other men of tried virtue should succeed their ministry."

If the priest, as the adversaries say, has not the right "to bind and to loose," forgive sins, why, then, did St. Paul write that the church "is built on the foundations of the Apostles?" Why, then, do the carvings and ornamentations in the catacombs represent St. Peter as the Moses of The New Testament receiving the law from the Christ, and Moses as St. Peter of the Old Testament? Besides, is not a religious law often a health-giving law? Who dares say whether the abolishing of the confessional in new religions has not contributed to the business of psychiatrists and insane asylums?

Thus I investigated, "reproved, rebuked, exhorted" until the old religious fence crumbled, making place for a holy wall whose stones were gathered during my search for truth and cemented by experiences. When I look back on the trials of my life, I see they have been as necessary to my soul as food has to my body.

Indeed, there are two kinds of memories: one is a museum in which experiences are stored away as antiques, the other is a factory in which experiences change to tools for reason.

Certainly, the apparition in Fatima was not of the Devil, but my ignorance and prejudice was of the Devil. Although I lived in Portugal for five months, I did not see, nor did I wish to see, that a few miles away in Fatima the desert rejoiced and blossomed like a rose because of the mighty signs and wonders there since 1917. Ignorance and prejudice had made of my soul and body a kingdom divided that could not stand, and I might well be counted among those of whom it was said: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

There is no greater sin of omission than to neglect praying for more truth. "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark?" God will not show wonders to those who are satisfied with the concept of truth handed down by their fathers, without striving to possess it by their own efforts. The grace of God is an individual experience. Thus, in routine and stereotyped thinking, my Protestant friends attack the Catholic tree, without having tasted the fruit.

Yet, St. Francis, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, or St. Ignatius of Loyola have shaped the religious thinking of many more people than have the founders of Protestantism. Nor have these friends ever read the life of Mother Cabrini. Yet, she alone has done more in America to arouse the consciousness of the people against the exploitation and misery of slum children than many a combined effort of humanitarians. And who of these friends has ever read the "Social Encyclicals" of Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI, documents which eclipse any other humanitarian protests in their crusade for just wages and decent living conditions for labor?

My friends reproach the Catholic Church for having given tradition the same high honor as the Bible itself. Have they

forgotten that almost ninety per cent of religious thinking is based on tradition? Is then not the choice of their own denomination based on tradition also?

Hence, the question should be asked, not how much or how little a church has tradition, but whether the tradition is inspired by the ceremonies of the Jewish Temple, or inaugurated by holy men, or whether it has developed through church by-laws from the hand of "Mr. X" or "Mrs. Y," founders of new creeds in our time. The absence of tradition is also tradition, namely the obsession against tradition in order to be different.

Moreover, I found it is not the Word but the purity of the Word that is preached which makes a church holy. And where is the church which preaches so pure and undefiled the Holy Trinity, the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Son of God, as the Catholic Church? She is apostolic, for she has the seal of that imperishability that Christ has promised the Apostles. She is to last to the end of the world, preaching, teaching, and governing man.

The novelties in faith may flatter secular knowledge and intellectualism and give the Word novel interpretations. However, it is not intellectualism but simplicity of the Word, not quantity, but quality that leads man to God.

Where reason is not bridled by humility toward God, there man inflates himself. His secularism, being a conscious effort to escape religious feelings which he senses within, but cannot explain, may truly be called imitation through opposition. Therefore, it became clear to me, that to draw Mary, the mother of Christ, into a religious argument is to draw the ocean into a puddle.

One night when I could not sleep, an event of the past pictured itself in my mind. It had happened during my French captivity. I saw myself again, herded with some fifty other Germans in a barracks in Limoges. We all wore grass-green woolen uniforms bearing the letters P.G. (prisoner de

Guerre) and numbers—I had the number 6407—painted in white upon the front and back.

Most of us were hard at work in a quarry breaking stones for the construction of a vital road. I was then in great misery. I had just tried to escape and was put on bread and water for several weeks. Also, the grippe epidemic was raging among us, and in an instant two of my closest comrades had been snatched away. At the same time two others had fled for the Swiss border, but were captured near Clermont-Ferrand. In their knapsacks the gendarmes had found not only stolen bread but also statistics, some written by my own hand, to prove to the Red Cross in Switzerland that we were underfed and maltreated contrary to mandates of the Geneva Convention. Over my head hung the accusation of being an accessory to the theft of food essential to a country at war. Worse still was the fact that all the prisoners, seeing that our two carrier pigeons were caught, planned to strike. Had I counselled against it, upon my release I could be tried in Germany as a traitor who had cooperated with the French; on the other hand, if they struck, the French would jail me as a hostage for the fifty whose slaving hands were necessary to finish the road. Yet, my position as a buffer, that is, an interpreter, was breaking me morally and physically.

One evening during this time a fellow-prisoner brought from work a French newspaper that he asked me to translate. After nine o'clock when the French sergeant with a soldier had counted us by passing the bunks and shining his lantern into each face, and had bolted the door so nothing could be heard but the regular steps of the sentry marching between the barbedwire fences, a little candle was lighted, and the prisoners huddled together on the lower tier where I was lying, to listen as I read this paper. But what was my surprise when the headline on the front page did not say: "Defeat of the Germans in Champagne," or "The Kaiser Makes Overtures for Peace," or "Clemenceau Forms New Cabinet," but instead "The Apparition in Fatima."

Its story was that on the thirteenth of October the Virgin Mary, who had appeared five times previously to three illiterate peasant children, had performed a miracle before the eyes of some seventy-thousand people, among them unbelievers who had come scoffing and had gone away praying. Also with the article were photographs of awe-struck people kneeling in veneration. The miracle of the rainbow coloring and the spinning and tumbling of the sun was described in several columns, and the more I read to them, the more angry I became, until I refused to translate further, and threw the newspaper onto the floor with the words: "Superstition and food for empty-headed people." I still remember how some of the prisoners who were Catholics asked me to continue. The news brought them solace; but I refused and blew out the candle.

Had the mysterious voice I heard thirty years later referred to this incident when it said: "Go home! amend"? How cruel I had been to those Catholics, and at a time when I would have given anything for a single ray of hope! Was it not as if I, imprisoned with a friend for more than three years, had withheld a letter written to him by his mother—and in this instance, the Mother of mothers had written, and I held her message back?

The grace of a higher power must have whispered to me when I stood before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

That very night I began a poetic monologue. I felt the final lines should have the dramatic message I received in the church: "Let me not die, O God! not die, O Christ! Let me not die, O Mary, in my sins."

As religious discipline is the highest form of worship, so is a religious poem the highest form of meditation. If my poem could convey to the reader my inner struggle of pride that did not want my mouth to cry out: "I surrender; let me not die, O Mary, in my sins," then I would achieved my goal.

What a task, almost superhuman! Was not my knowledge of the English language inadequate? But, is there not a way when there is a will? Will or no will, I had no choice.

No sooner had the scene of my French captivity filmed itself upon my mind, than the idea to write owned me, and not I the idea. It hounded and harassed me so much that after my three hours of daily teaching were over, I ran home from the college to work on the poem, denying myself any distraction for a year.

All my self-chastising and sacrifice in order to succeed does not mean that I have succeeded. Never before did I feel that man is spiritual, and how much more silence is his instrument for expression than his tongue. Let me then plead extenuating circumstances. Should the hand that reaches for a star be whipped because it cannot grasp it?

In my poem, psychologically, I run the gauntlet of the protestor against Mary, of a protestor who, haunted by a subconscious religious defect, criticizes those who have completeness in that sphere.

Thus in my poetical pilgrimage from haughtiness to humility, from academic reasoning to childlike faith, from a vague God to Him who died for me, I shall revive and meet again all those whom I have offended because of their reverence for the Mother of God.

No sooner was my poem known, a new cross was laid on my shoulder. Resistance now came from the most unexpected quarters—the Catholic camp. The Catholics, since childhood blessed with the understanding of Mary's co-redemptive role in man's salvation, thought it irreverent to read a poem of many pages, mocking the event of Fatima only to find on the last page the mocker on his knees—converted.

It seems not to occur to Catholics the difficulty, the inner struggle painted in this poetical epic which a non-Catholic must face when he begins to wrestle with the problem of Mary's position in the Catholic Church.

It broke me, almost, to think that my toil of one year should be thus rejected. But then I was advised by a professor of English literature to write an introduction giving the insight of a non-Catholic's struggle.

Then it happened. My poem was accepted and acclaimed. This booklet describes my odyssey and the part my poem played in it.

Have I now, by making good the wrong I did to Mary, done wrong to you who still stand in a solid phalanx of protesting against Mary today? Obeying the word: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," I at last succeeded in tearing down the old fence of religious prejudice and ventured into a Catholic garden to bring home a flower that you also might enjoy. Consider that this blossom was cultivated in the garden of your ancestors who took the seed from the first two chapters of Luke telling about Mary, the mother of Christ. Do not say the Devil enticed me to this new venture; if that were true, then for fifteen-hundred years the Devil must have snatched your ancestors away with their last breath while the Son of Mary looked on.

Perhaps after reading my apology, you will pass over the issue lightly as did the sexton of an old English cathedral, who in ceremonial garb conducting visitors was asked by a group: "What is this chapel behind the high altar?" He gave the routine answer: "In former centuries women were separated from men and sat in this chapel." Would not the letter "M" carved over the altar of this chapel built in honor of Mary, would not all the "M's" carved in gold on the pillars of the ancient English cathedrals cry out if they could to that sexton and his kind: "You are neither hot nor cold"?

Indeed a man who harbors resentment against the Catholic religion but calls himself a Christian, may be likened to the guest, who, after having lived for a long time under the roof of a rich man, departs with some of his host's clothes, but does not feel at ease in them. Jealousy and resentment are twins born of guilt.

And you who are called "humanitarians," sitting at round tables with an international code of ethics trying to turn the tide of materialism, will you ignore the message of Fatima that man must pray lest more wars come? Your ethics will

not convince those who believe in the Sermon on the Mount, and if many of the poor and wretched people turn a deaf ear to you, it is that they in the church feel the presence of Him Who said, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Neither will your ethics convince those outside of the church, for they will ask you, who are as much of this world as they, with what authority you speak; and certainly the rulers of aggressive nations will not listen to you, for it is obvious that when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, your homes will fall and bury you.

Why do you humanitarians overlook the lesson David teaches you? He did not go toward Goliath with an ethical code, proposals of appeasement, gifts, or sword and armor, but with the knowledge, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts." You seem not to know that before ethics was, religion was.

I have always been held in awe at two of the Last Words which Jesus spoke from the Cross. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," identifies Christ with divine mercy. Even dying, He did not hesitate to exercise this divine mercy by forgiving the "Good" Thief.

The other words, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" identifies Him with human misery. Even dying, He, by shouldering the sins of others, was not spared the loneliness and void of a sin-racked soul who has forfeited his right to live.

Thus, in His agony of death was compressed the distance from the height of Beatific Vision to the depths of human desolation, to prove to the onlooker that He had kept His contract toward God and man — the contract to which the prophet alluded with the words, "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. . . He was made a curse for us." And what a contract it is! What a joy it is to know that whenever I go to Mass, or even if I so much as believe in the validity

of the contract, I have it ratified on my behalf and signed with Christ's Blood.

And you, Mary, to whom I have written the apology, may I also ask you a question? When almost 2000 years ago you said, "Through generations to come they will call me blessed," you did not think of me, but do you think of me now?

It becomes clear to me that the devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a powerful means for salvation. As Jesus Christ had chosen her as a channel to come to us, so we have chosen her to go to Him. If she is, as the Bible says full of grace, then it is also in our behalf.

Does the Church neglect God? There is no set of prayers which does not begin or end with "Our Father who art in heaven." Moreover, the Church never speaks of Christ as the Father but as the Lord and Saviour. The Holy Ghost is considered the soul and life of the Mystical Body of the Church. Her members go to Christ with the help of the Holy Ghost and to God with the help of Christ.

Meditating on the Trinity, I began to understand that man is given rational and sensitive potencies or faculties emanating from the soul which enable him to grow and develop in conformity with the plans of divine providence. If he does not strive to grow, he will perish. As St. Augustine says, "He who created thee without thyself, will not save thee without thyself."