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CHRIST AND THE HUMAN BODY *

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I suppose in the whole visible universe of marvels, there is no greater marvel than the human body. The silent stars in their intricate movements and the play and interplay of atom with atom are an inexhaustible mine for human study and research. Yet still more inexhaustible is the mystery of the human body and its mechanism. The ancients used to call the universe a cosmos, that is, a system perfect in order, and man a micro-cosm or a universe in miniature. All the elements of the universe are summed up in man. The activities of the chemical world, the baffling operations of vegetative and sensitive life, are found in all their perfection in man. Man stands at the very pinnacle of the mounting and progressive perfections of the universe. For man every element of the universe is forever and ceaselessly at work and they realize through man their own ultimate purpose.

The human body has been the object of scientific research from the very cradle of science. It has equally been the object of art since the birth of art. Yet neither science nor art has exhausted its possibilities. But what neither human science nor art could accomplish has been achieved by Divine science and Divine art. God has

exhausted the possibilities of the human body by raising it to union with the Divinity. "God so loved the world as to give to it His only begotten Son." (*John* iii, 16.) "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us (and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." (*John* 1.14.)

And just as the human body reached the heights of beauty, strength and perfection in Christ, so too in Him it sounded the depths of human suffering. Because Christ knew what suffering was He could feel for it and with it wherever it disclosed itself. He will be for all time the ideal of the physician and the ideal of the nurse. He protected the human body from its enemies, natural and preternatural. He drove forth from the bodies of men devils as well as disease. On a famous Sabbath morn in the synagogue, there was a man who had an unclean devil, and he cried out with a loud voice saying: let us alone, what have we to do with the Jesus of Nazareth? . . . And Jesus rebuked him and threatened him saying: speak no more and go out of the man. And the unclean spirit, tearing him and crying out with a loud voice, went out of him, when he had thrown him in the midst and hurt him not at all. (*St. Luke* 4,33-35 and *St. Mark* 1.23-26.)

* An address to Graduates of St. Francis Hospital School of Nursing, Trenton, N. J.

And immediately afterwards Jesus went out of the synagogue into the house of Simon and Andrew. And Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a great fever. And He came, and standing over her, he commanded the fever, and lifted her up taking her by the hand: and immediately the fever left her. And immediately rising she ministered to them. (*St. Luke iv 38-39; St. Mark i 29-31.*)

And that same day in the evening all the city was gathered together at the door of the house of Peter and Andrew and the sick were brought to Him. And He laying His hands on every one, healed all that were sick, and he cast out the spirit with his word: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet Isaias, saying: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases." (*St. Mark i; St. Luke iv; St. Matthew viii.*)

And it came to pass, when He was in a certain city, behold there came to Him a man full of the leprosy, who seeing Jesus, falling on his face, adored Him, beseeching Him, and kneeling down, said to Him: Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean. And Jesus having compassion on him stretched forth His hand and touched him saying: I will, be thou cleansed. And when He had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him and he was made clean. (*St. Luke 5; St. Mark i; St. Matthew 8.*)

And there was the blind man, Bartimaeus, who stood and begged outside of Jericho and when he

heard that the Christ was passing by, he would not be silenced but cried out, "Son of David have mercy on me." And Jesus bade him be called and asked what he desired and the poor Bartimaeus cried out, "Rabboni, that I may see." And immediately the Divine Physician healed him and the eyes of the blind opened to look upon the glory of Christ's face and the real light of the world. (*St. Mark x; St. Luke 18; St. Matthew 20.*)

Jesus spoke to the paralytic, waiting for thirty-eight years at the pool of Bethesda, where he had come to be cured, and at his command the sick man took up his bed and walked. He had compassion on the widow of Naim as she brought out for burial her only son. Death and the tomb could not resist Christ's compassionate love, There was not a human ill which could resist His sweetness, His gentleness, His power.

Not only did He do these things; He commanded others to do them. He brought into being the power of Christian healing and the virtues of Christian compassion and charity. When a Jewish scribe asked him the question: who is my neighbor, Christ answered with the golden parable of the good Samaritan. How a certain man went from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell amongst thieves and was wounded and stripped and left half dead. And how a priest journeyed that way and saw the man and went on his journey; and how a levite did the same. But a certain Samaritan came near the

man and was moved to compassion and bound his wounds, pouring in oil and wine and put him on his own beast and brought him to an inn and paid for him. And Christ told the scribe to go and do likewise. Christ told this parable for all ages and He has inspired the men of all ages to walk in the footsteps of the good Samaritan.

Even more than this Christ did. He crowned works of mercy with the crown of eternal life. On the last day Christ tells us himself, He will say; "Come ye blessed of my Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you covered me: sick and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me. Then shall the just answer Him, saying: Lord when did we see Thee hungry, and fed Thee; thirsty and gave Thee to drink? And when did we see Thee a stranger and took Thee in? Or naked and covered Thee? Or when did we see Thee sick or in prison and came to Thee? And the King answering shall say to them: Amen. I say to you that as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me." (*Mat. 25, 34-40.*)

Who can fathom the dignity, the beauty, and the glory of the human body, if we examine and study it in the light of right reason and the revealed word of God. Yet great as is its dignity and

beauty and glory, the human body is not an end in itself. It is but the minister and the servant of the soul. It is the instrument which the soul must use in struggling forward to the end set for it by God. If bodily well-being, or health and opportunity and wealth and honor are a menace to the health and well-being of the soul and are opposed to the commandment and will of God, then the former, the well-being and the health of the body and all things are to be sacrificed to the good of the soul. It is the compassionate, the gentle, yet the strong, the brave Christ who has spoken out in no mistakable terms. "And if thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is expedient for thee that one of your members should perish, than that the whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee; for it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should go to hell." (*Mat. v 29-30.*) The body is for the soul, and the whole man, body and soul is for God. We are not our own masters. We are only the stewards of our lives. And precious as our lives and bodies are in the eyes of God, they are sometimes to be sacrificed on the altar of a higher duty.

True and certain as all this is there are millions of men and women who hold another philosophy of life. Millions of materialists think that man is his own end

and hence master of his own life and his own destiny. They make the human body and its well-being here the supreme object of their thought and care, and sometimes practically the supreme standard of conduct.

For the materialist, human life begins with the body and ends with the body. Moreover the materialist claims for the individual man and sometimes for the state a mastery and dominion over the human body and human life-stream which in all reality, one way or another, must be destructive of all human life, though the followers of this theory, blinded by their slogans and their desires and emotions, do not see it.

Of course this is a pagan philosophy of life and we are witnessing the results of this pagan philosophy all around us in the world today in its contempt for human life and human dignity and the divine and eternal destiny of man. It is a pagan philosophy of life which is used all too frequently to justify the assault on the life of the child in the mother's womb either by private attempt or medical interference. The reasons are sometimes economic, sometimes social and sometimes therapeutic. This is done with either ignorance of or no thought of the soul of the child or the soul of the mother or God's dominion over both soul and body of mother and child.

I know that not all those who advocate contraceptive birth control are materialists. But this fact only goes to show how well-mean-

ing persons can be led astray by false logic and unsuspected emotions when they are deprived of the infallible guidance of the Catholic Church. The old birth control league has graduated into a new phase of life under the name of Planned Parenthood. The Birth Control League has changed its name but not its technique and contraception is of the essence of that technique. With a zeal that is unremitting and unflagging in a cause which is from the moral standpoint hopelessly unsound it is trying to carry its crusade into the defense industries of the country. One of the motives it offers for the use of contraceptives is that such use will aid the health of the mother and the health of the offspring. Another motive is that it reduces the incidence of abortions. All this is to justify a terrible human perversion in the name of health or to do away with one human perversion by substituting another. It is against human perversion through contraception that the mystical voice of Christ spoke in the words of the late lamented Pius XI when he declared in his encyclical on Chaste Marriage: "Any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and nature and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of grave sin."

There is another large group of men and women who think that

they can ropt out to a considerable extent, disease, mental deficiency and crime by an attack on the human life stream through sterilization. From many angles their opinions can be shown to be unscientific. We are learning, for instance, that mental deficiency may be corrected in early stages by a sufficient supply of Vitamin B. Such propaganda can become a serious threat to the American democratic concept. It is true that the supreme court has declared constitutional the Virginia Sterilization law. Eugenic sterilization, however, whether voluntary or state commanded and enforced, is permanent contraception in intent and purposes and against sound morality.

It is true that individuals who talk much and make much of bodily health as birth-controllers do, are often advocates of the right to die which is the aim of the mercy killers and the advocates of euthanasia. It is the dogma of the advocates of euthanasia that when an individual is face to face with an incurable disease and a prolonged agony he has every right to seek the ending of his life. This is a logical result of making health and bodily well-being, the standard of human happiness. The mercy killers would like to enlist the medical profession in their crusade and bring about legislation that would permit physicians to co-operate with this desire of death. Some advocate legal death for certain types of insanity. Mercy killing is given the lovely

Greek name of euthanasia which means an easy death and is proposed as a real kindness to human nature but under it all I discover the terrible cruelty of paganism that puts man on the level in his destiny with the brute.

Many doctors and some non-Catholic clergymen have joined the ranks of the mercy killers but let us hope that the medical profession at large will remain sound. The end of the medical profession and the nursing profession is to save life, not to destroy it, and both professions should refuse to become the grave diggers of the nation, as they would become, if they accept and propagate these false doctrines of the birth-controllers, the sterilizers and the mercy killers. If these doctrines prevail in America, then the America we love and are fighting for will not prevail. Winston Churchill in a recent speech made in England, declared that one of the post-war problems of England would be to step up the fertility of the English family. These are his words: "One of the most somber anxieties which beset those who look thirty or forty or fifty years ahead, and in the field one can see ahead only too clearly, is a dwindling birth rate. In thirty years unless the present trends alter, a smaller working and fighting population will have to support and protect nearly twice as many old people; in fifty years the position will be worse still. If this country is to keep her high place in the leadership of the world and

to survive as a great power that can hold its own against external pressure, our people must be encouraged by every means to have larger families." Planned parenthood through contraception will end up in this country by unplanned destruction. God does not intend that rightful planning of the family should be based on contraception and this will be made clear in this country as in other countries by the incontrovertible figures of births and deaths.

It is a strange fact that modern material doctrines that make so much of life are leading the race to death. Catholicism in the minds of many, with its emphasis on penance, on the supernatural, on the soul, and on eternity, is opposed to the joy of living and the expression of man's vitality. As a matter of fact, Catholicism today stands out as the only organized international influence which is the protector and the conserver of the stream of human vital forces, by its moral doctrine on the right use of the procreative faculty, on the rights of unborn life, and on the rights of God and His glory over every phase of human life. Materialism and paganism are the philosophy of death and Catholicism is the religion of life. Christ declared of himself: "I am come that they may have life and have it more abundantly."

And that brings me to a consideration of another great thing that Christ has done with his hu-

man body and for the human body which I have purposely saved until the last. God, through the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity took to himself a human body that through it He might suffer and die and likewise through it and with it might rise from the dead. By His sufferings he atoned for our sins and taught us that by our sufferings we might atone for our sins through and in Him and through and in Him rise again from the dead. Christ gave us the only philosophy of suffering when he gave it a purpose and a meaning. Just as His resurrection is the central fact in Christ's life as well as the proof of His Divine mission, so too the personal resurrection of each one of us, guaranteed by Christ's resurrection is a central fact which gives meaning and purpose to our lives with all their labor and suffering. For if Christ be risen, we also shall rise. But now says St. Paul: "Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruits of those who sleep. For by a man came death and by a man came resurrection from the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive." (*Cor. xv 20-21.*) "I am the resurrection and the life; if any man believe in me, even if he shall be dead he shall live, and he that liveth and believeth in me shall not die forever." (*St. John xi 25.*)

Thus St. Paul speaks of the resurrection of the body under the metaphor of a seed. "It is sown in corruption, it shall rise in in-

corruption; it is sown in dishonor, it shall arise in glory; it is sown in weakness, it shall arise in power; it is sown a natural body, it shall arise a spiritual body." (Cor. xv 42,43.) For the Catholic there is no mere dead, mummified past, there is always a hope, always a tomorrow, always a beckoning and glorious future even when we face death on a bed of pain. It is true. Those who have died or will die in Christ, will rise again; our dear departed dead, the boys of the world dying on the battlefields of the world, having on their lips the name of Him who conquered death and the world, they and we dying in Christ will live again in these bodies. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortality must put on immortality. And when this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy victory, o death where is thy sting?" (Cor. v, 53-55.)

Christ is the only physician and nurse that has met death, grappled with it, conquered it for all time for himself and for us. He gives us life in the body here, divine life in the soul here and life in the body hereafter and life divine in the world to come. It is the truth of our resurrection in the body which gives a new meaning and purpose to human sufferings. It is the fact of our resurrection in the body that can make us rise on stepping stones of our

dead selves to higher things. Sickness and death are the lot of man by the very nature of his being. Our human lives are filled with many sorrows mingled with its joys. It is human destiny to be born in others' pain and perish in our own. All around me I see darkness, loneliness, suffering of mind and body. But it all has a meaning and a purpose. The human destiny to suffer, Christ has made the way to joy. If any man will come after me let him take up His cross daily and follow me. The way of Calvary leads to the mountain of the resurrection. Crosses are multiplied today in this wicked and pagan world within our hearts and marking the dead on the battlefields of the world. All men are on Calvary today. The only question is whether they have a philosophy of suffering or not; whether they are suffering with the bad thief or crying out with the good thief; Lord remember me when you enter into your kingdom. For the Christian the sufferings of today, the passion flowers will be exchanged for the lillies of resurrection. In the resurrection of each follower of Christ all his life will be made clear. The contradictions of life will be reconciled, its mysteries unraveled, the whole of life made intelligible. The personal resurrection of the follower of Christ will be the fitting crown and consummation of his life as Christ's resurrection was crown and consummation of his.

And this is the final crown and

glory that the Incarnate God has given to the human body. All this you have learned in your days of training at your training school of St. Francis and of Christ. You have learned all this not always explicitly but more often perhaps and better implicitly. You have learned in the lives of the Sisters who guide your school and your hospital. You have learned all this from their lives more than from their words. You have learned it from the life of the great St. Francis who is the patron of your school and the hospital to which it is attached. He, the Apostle of joy and light and life and love, bore in his very hands and side the marks of the crucified one. You have learned this philosophy of life and love and suffering of our Lord and Master while you have learned also what human science has been able to teach you about the care and saving of hurt human bodies. You have learned it for yourselves and for others. Hence you go out into this stricken world to lend your aid in binding up its wounds with a knowledge both human and divine. You go out differently equipped and so much better equipped than those who are the product of schools of nursing based on merely material principles that there can be no comparison. You bring to your work a mentality that is both divine and human. While you will have remedies for the stricken bodies of men and women you will have more

powerful remedies for their minds and hearts and souls. Your future should not therefore be merely an avocation, a profession. It should be a vocation. And the world needs that vocation as it perhaps never needed it before. If sickness, disease, death are multiplied in this war-stricken world, it is because mankind has deserted the fountains of life-giving waters and dug for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, materialistic systems which will hold no water of life. The world knows it is sick in heart and soul as well as body. It needs you to care for the body. It needs you more to minister to its soul. It wants all this and you have this to give,—human knowledge and Christ knowledge. Will you give?

You have learned that the ailing bodies of men and women are first and foremost Christ's and God's. You have had held before your eyes Christ as the ideal exponent of the science and art of healing. He was physician of men's bodies but also of men's souls. He exalted the dignity of the human body but much more, the dignity of the human soul. Men and women are either actually or potentially members of Christ's mystical body. He will reward your good deeds to men as if you did it to himself.

Go forth from this school of St. Francis, this school of Christ, with the ideal of Christ before your eyes, the sweetness and tenderness of Mary in your hearts,

and the principles of your Catholic Faith to guide your steps. Save human bodies, alleviate human pain, cheer human hearts, lift

up human souls. Keep always before your mind the words of Christ, "As long as you did it to the least of these you did it to me."

Heroic Nursing

In time of war women as well as men are drawn towards the fighting front. You will find them in the Red Cross, and assisting the Armed Forces on land and sea. Wherever the battle rages men are wounded and killed. The noble-minded want to help, to do the heroic thing if necessary, even to the extent of facing death. Those who stay at home pray fervently that their loved ones may come back unharmed, if it is the will of God. Hymns are sung in honor of the Queen of Peace, asking her to pray for us all in time of war. Here are a few lines that were fashioned for the Medical Corps:

"Bless our doctors and our nurses,
As they bind the wounds of war,
Guard them in their work of mercy,
On the sea and distant shore."

You Will Never Be Sorry —

For living a pure life.
For doing your level best.
For being kind to the poor.
For looking before leaping.
For hearing before judging.
For thinking before speaking.
For harboring clean thoughts.
For standing by your principles.
For stopping your ears to gossip.
For being as courteous as a duke.
For being generous to an enemy.
For bridling a slanderous tongue.
For asking pardon when in error.

For being square in business dealings.
For giving an unfortunate fellow a lift.
For promptness in keeping your promise.
For putting the best construction on the acts of others.
For paying your Church dues.
For putting an offering in the collection basket.
For paying your honest debts.

—*The Monstrance.*