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# THE ATHANASIAN

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## CREMATION

John Kenneth Weiskittel

**T**he grieving family listens as the minister intones the words of the service. Before them in the chapel is a coffin bearing the body of their loved one. At length the rite concludes and the family moves forward to take a last glimpse of the deceased in a recognizable form. Their next view will be after the corpse has been reduced to a few pounds of ash and bone fragments, for this service has taken place in a crematory (or crematorium).

The coffin is now removed by crematory personnel from the chapel to the retort, the special oven in which the body will be incinerated. When the remains are inside and the door shut, the retort is heated to about 2500° F. for an hour and a half or longer. After the process is complete and the cremation chamber has cooled, an attendant slides out the rack that has held the body. All that are left are whitish piles of ashes and fragments (the largest of which will be pulverized). Finally, the attendant searches for the only means by which he is able to identify these "cremains" (a term coined by the profession) from someone else's: a small, numbered metallic disc placed into the retort with the body. When identification has been made, the family's request for the manner of disposition is carried out and the mortal remains are either put into an urn to be buried or placed in a cemetery columbarium niche or set upon a mantel or scattered over land or sea—or even *shot into space*.

Scenes like this are increasing in popularity around the country and around the world. In the United States, an estimated 10 percent of 1984's 2,000,000 deaths had crematory epilogues, up from 6.2 percent of U.S. deaths in 1974 and from 4.5 percent in 1954. Canada has a 20 percent rate, while Western European nations average 40 percent or more, with the United Kingdom rate being some 60 percent. Even higher is Japan, where eight out of every ten citizens have a date with the oven and where Tokyo has a *mandatory* cremation law on the books.

How is it that more and more Christians are availing themselves of a practice held odious by the faithful throughout the centuries? What forces are behind the revival of this pagan custom? Why is cremation unacceptable to the devout Catholic? To answer these and other questions, let's take a brief journey into the past in order to get an historical overview of the development of various arrangements for disposal of the body.

### Resting in Peace?

In the modern world, burial and cremation compete for

the final earthly possession of the human frame, yet they are only two of many means used in ages past. Entombment, still employed on occasion today, reached grandiose peaks in the pyramids of Pharaonic Egypt. Some of the other methods used by primitives were (and are) often unspeakable. The 1983 edition of *Encyclopedia Britannica* (vol. 6., p. 738) mentions the widespread practice of leaving corpses as food for "scavenging birds and animals," such as "in the Solomon Islands, (where) bodies are simply laid on a reef to be eaten by sharks." Similar horrific rituals have been noted among the Mongols, who menaced nearly all of Asia at one time, in Tibetan Buddhism, and in Parsiism, a Zoroastrian sect in India which teaches that the animals cleanse the earth by removing from it such "filth." Less prevalent, but even more repugnant, is cannibalism.

Still, all such disposals have amounted to relatively few. The vast majority of people who have walked the face of the earth have either been cremated or buried. (Of the two largest population centers, Hindu India has opted for the former, while China, with its ancestor worship, has favored the latter.) And, though burial has been nearly universal in the West for centuries, it was not always so. "The spread of cremation throughout the ancient world was rather general. Only a few cultured resisted the practice: The Egyptians developed the preservation of the body by embalming; the Chinese buried their dead; and the Jews changed from cave and sepulchre to earth burial." (Yaffa Draznin, *The Business of Dying*, New York: Hawthorn, 1976, p. 11) According to E. Sidney Hartland in the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (vol. 4, p. 423), the cremation ritual was popular in such disparate cultures as the Greco-Roman, Indo-Chinese, American Indian (for example, the Pueblos), West African, North European and ancient British.

What made cremation so appealing to the primitive mind? Hartland lists three main reasons: 1. nomadic tribes found it enabled them to take their dead with them and "beyond the possibility of desecration by their enemies"; 2. it satisfied the desire (in peoples like the West Africans) "to be quit of the ghost," in line with the belief that evil spirits occupy the body after death; and 3. it was a logical outgrowth of those theologies that viewed the body as a prison—it was seen as a means of *freeing* the soul. (*ibid.*, pp. 423-424)

As the Church gained in Europe, cremation became increasingly frowned upon. In adopting the practice of the

Jews, writes Father Bertrand L. Conway, "The Fathers based their custom of burial on the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, and the respect due it as the temple of the Holy Ghost." (*The Question Box*, p. 208) Along with this went an accompanying loathing of cremation, also taken from the Jews. And early Catholic writers such as Origen, Tertullian (not always a Catholic) and Minucius Felix urged Christians to retain burial and denounced "the cruel and atrocious custom of cremation." (Conway, op. cit.) So rapidly did the Church's influence prevail that "by the fifth century A.D. burial had totally superseded cremation throughout the Christian world." (Draznin, op. cit., p. 12)

For over one thousand years no major attempt to displace burial was made, but the anti-Christian ferment that grew out of the so-called Age of Enlightenment would mount the first of many assaults. "The reintroduction of cremation," we read in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (vol. 4, p. 475), "was first attempted by supporters of the French Revolution in 1797. Freemasons, materialists, and Marxists of the nineteenth century joined in the movement, but the Roman Catholic Church rejected cremation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, proletarian free-thinkers demanded cremation and withdrawal from the church..."

Father Conway maintains that cremation was not a coincidental sidelight of the French revolt but an integral element of its anti-Catholic fury:

...The project did not meet with any popular response at the time, although the spirit back of it was part of the Revolution's attack upon Christian doctrine, law and custom. The same scoundrels who put priests to death, abolished the Mass and Sunday, and invented the new cult of reason, advocated cremation, the better to destroy "the superstitions of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body." (op. cit.)

Further, he cites revealing quotes from two Italian Freemasons, quotes that leave no doubt as to the motive behind their support. Ghisleri, for example, wrote that "Catholics have good reason to oppose cremation; this purification of the dead by means of fire will shake to its foundations Catholic predominance, based on the terror with which it has surrounded death." And another named Gorini argued, "Our task is not confined to the mere burning of the dead, but extends to burning and destroying superstition as well." To achieve that end, he proposes selling the ashes of the dead to the farmers, saying: "The result would be that this common material would partially return to be reincarnated in the bodies of the living Milanese. This is the only resurrection of the body recognized by science." (op. cit., pp. 208-209)

By the late 1800's the pro-cremation forces had gained considerable ground. The first modern cremation oc-

curred at Padua in 1872 and the movement, if you'll excuse the expression, soon caught fire throughout Europe and the U.S. Two years later, Queen Victoria's surgeon organized the Cremation Society of England, and in 1876 and 1879 the first cremations were performed in America and Germany, respectively. The New York Cremation Society was founded in 1881 and the Cremation Society of America in 1913. The practice quickly gained support in Britain, primarily due to the influence of the Anglican Church with its ties to Freemasonry. In the United States, however, it took the religious revolution of the 1960's to spark any substantial interest. (Promotion of cremation is a chief theological concern of humanistic cults like the Unitarian-Universalists.) Today, virtually the only opposition to cremation comes from fundamentalists, Eastern Orthodox Christians, Orthodox Jews—and, to a lesser extent, Conservative ones—and, of course, traditional Roman Catholics.

### The Burning Issue

The Catholic Church, as we've seen, has always stood firmly against cremation. During the years the Black Death ravaged Europe in the fourteenth century, the Church relaxed her position to allow the burning of the contaminating dead because of the highly virulent nature of the plague—but only on the principle that "there is no law for necessity." Her fundamental teaching remained unchanged. It was not until the final years of the last century, however, that the Church legislated against it, as a response to the growing movement.

The first two of these decrees, coming in 1886, forbids Catholics from joining cremation societies or ordering their bodies burned and deprives such individuals of Christian burial. The third, issued in 1892, forbids priests to give them the Last Sacraments. In certain instances, excommunication is prescribed. The language of these documents is direct: cremation is a "detestable pagan practice, introduced by men of doubtful faith"; men who are "enemies of the Christian faith."

But this was challenged by the Second Vatican Council, its revolutionary mandates not even sparing the dead. The 1963 decision *De Cadaverum Crematione* gives the go-ahead, with a typical Conciliar disclaimer that no anti-Catholic motive be behind the act. Conditions were tacked on to it: besides the matter of wars, plagues, epidemics, which could spread disease, Conciliar "Catholics" may choose cremation if demanded by civil law (e.g., Tokyo), if it is customary in the nation, as in India, or if a grave site is unavailable due to cost or to geographical distance. (Consumer Reports' *Funerals: Consumers' Last Rights*, New York: Pantheon, 1977, p. 166.)

As would be expected, these conditions are meaningless. Conciliar writer Bernard Hassan gives an idea of just how easy it is for the "faithful" to obtain a cremation and how they are being indoctrinated with the new spirit:

...At present, no special permission is required for cremation. Burial rites may be conducted at the crematorium by the priest. If the family prefers, the body may be cremated immediately after death and the urn of ashes brought to the Church for the Mass of the Resurrection. The urn would be placed on a table in the center aisle during Mass and the lighted Paschal candle would stand nearby. Because this is still new and rare for Catholics, the priest is directed to explain this action to the faithful present... (*The American Catholic Catalog*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977, p. 90)

Though burial is still the norm in the Conciliar Church, cremation is growing increasingly acceptable as an equal, and more and more are being procured without objection.

So how is this "detestable pagan practice" being defended by alleged Catholics and other proponents? The usual reasons given are its being inexpensive and a way to conserve land. Other arguments take on a clearly modernist cast. While burial advocates are said to appeal to "religious, non-rational needs," those who take the opposite course advance a "logical, rational, secular" approach. (Draznin, op. cit.) "Traditionally," writes Hassan, "the Church opposed cremation as contrary to her pre-scientific understanding of the nature of physical organization of life." (op. cit.) *The 1984 Catholic Almanac*, while maintaining that Vatican II merely "modified" the Catholic position on cremation, claims a reason for "the earlier prohibition" was that the act "appeared a form of violence against the body which, as the temple of the Holy Spirit during life, should be treated with reverence." (P. 314—emphasis added)

And how do we respond? First, Catholics are never obliged, nor should they be encouraged, to adopt a practice simply because it is convenient, national custom or called for by civil law, if that practice is condemned by the Church. Second, relatively low-cost burials are available, while only the "no frills" cremation plans are cheap. Third, the land-use argument involves belief in the non-existent population explosion. Fourth, as history shows, the appeal of cremation isn't based on reason but on a particular way of viewing the dead. (Draznin, after advancing the "logical" claim of cremationists, quotes material from them in which they speak of the body being "in light, like the sun" and of "quickly doing away with the body so that all attention may be devoted to the spirit."—op. cit., p. 17. Logical?) Fifth, Catholic opposition is not based on any "pre-scientific" attitude about the makeup of life but, as Fathers Rumble and Carty hold, on the conviction that the body "should not be treated as so much offal and refuse, but should be allowed to disintegrate according to the ordinary laws of nature in God's earth." (*Radio Replies*, vol. 1, pp. 230-31) Sixth, cremation not only "appears" to do violence to the body; it does *real* violence to the way we part with loved ones.

"It is opposed to human instinct," we also read in *Radio Replies*, "and the better sentiments of the human heart. Filial piety protests such treatment of, say, a deceased mother. Christian reverence for the dead also protests."

There are other compelling reasons to reject cremation in favor of burial. What relics would we have of the saints, including the striking evidence of sanctity seen in incorruptibility, if these blessed bodies had been burned? And, on the down side, isn't the practice strange in light of a symbolism that reminds us of the "everlasting fire" of which Christ warns us? And there are non-religious reasons as well. Cremation destroys all evidence of crime or mistaken identity but earth burial does not. Also, writes Father Conway: "Modern science denies that cemeteries cause infection, either of the air, or of the wells and rivers. The origin of all the plagues of history has been traced, not to the dead, but to the living." (op. cit., p. 209)

In *The City of God*, (Book 1, Part 13) Saint Augustine reminds us of how noble an act is the burial of the dead in the eyes of God, recalling how Tobias is commended for performing it (Tobias 12:12); how Christ praised the woman who poured ointment over His limbs against His death (Matthew 26:10-13); and how those who cared for our Lord's body after His crucifixion are remembered (John 19:38-40). Our saint concludes:

...the dead are not...to be despised and left unburied; least of all the bodies of the righteous and faithful, which have been used by the Holy Ghost as His organs and instruments for all good works. For if the dress of a father, or his ring, or anything he wore, be precious to his children, in proportion to the love they bore him, with how much more reason ought we to care for the bodies of those we love, which they wore far more closely and intimately than any clothing? For the body is not an extraneous ornament or aid, but a part of man's very nature...†

## Pray the Rosary Daily

# CATHOLIC ACTION

*Fr. Francis E. Fenton*

**T**he term, Catholic Action, as employed by the Church in times past, was a rather technical one and meant the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the Church's hierarchy. Nor could there be any properly so-called Catholic Action without the bishop's authorization. It is obvious that the words are not here used in that sense but rather as a general term to signify a broad range of apostolic activity in which Roman Catholics can engage themselves. Some of those activities would directly relate to the defense or propagation of the Faith; others, because of the nature of a particular issue, would involve participation with non-Catholics as, for example, in anti-abortion demonstrations. (Because abortion for whatever reason is murder, it is forbidden by the moral law of God not only to Catholics but to all without exception.) Manifold, then, are the opportunities for traditional Roman Catholics to become involved in Catholic Action.

The Roman Catholic Church is the one organization on the face of the globe founded by the Son of God for the salvation of mankind. In it alone is found the totality of divine Truth. The code of conduct which it teaches is the moral law of God. The sources of sanctification which it possesses (first and foremost, the Sacraments) are the means whereby multitudes of individuals have led lives of extraordinary holiness within its fold. God alone knows the number of those who have undergone all kinds of suffering and have joyfully accepted the most cruel and barbaric forms of death in martyrdom in glorious testimony to that Church and its divine Founder. And, far and away the greatest of its possessions, there are found therein the supreme act of divine worship, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist ("I dare to say that God, though He be all-powerful, could not give us more; though He be all-wise, knows not how to give more; though He be all-rich, has not more to give."—Saint Augustine.)

In a word, there is nothing comparable to the Roman Catholic Faith this side of Heaven. It is unique. It is a pearl of inestimable value. It is a gem of unparalleled worth. It is the treasure of all treasures. Its greatness, its grandeur, its beauty, its nobility and, above all, its truth have, by the grace of God, led untold millions to become converts to it down through the Christian centuries. And those converts include some of the keenest intellects of their time. It was the famous author and convert to the Church, Robert Hugh Benson, who wrote: "The Catholic Church is supremely what she promises to be. She is the priceless pearl for which the greatest sacrifice is not too great."

The thoughts expressed in the preceding two paragraphs have been stated numerous times in the pages of this newsletter. Nor would any traditional Roman Catholic disagree with them. Indeed, he could not for they are absolutely true. That being the case then, the living of the Faith in his daily life to the best of his ability should be the predominant concern of his life. And it is safe to say that the vast majority of such Catholics are men and women of prayer; they attend Mass as often as they reasonably can; they receive the Sacraments; they have an awareness of sin and make an honest effort to observe the Commandments of God and the Precepts of the Church. And they are concerned too about the spiritual and moral well-being and the living of the Faith of the members of their family and other loved ones. They are, in short, commendable, some even exemplary, traditional Catholics, are they not?

No, they are not. Typical traditionalists, they certainly are. Commendable, exemplary, they certainly are not. How come? Because the traditional Catholics to whom I refer, however praiseworthy they may otherwise be, lack or, at least, fail to manifest a spirit of militancy in relation to the Faith. In other words, while they themselves are good, sincere, wholesome men and women, they fail in their obvious obligation—and it is an obligation—to be activists, apostolic, militant in the promotion and defense of the Faith. The typical traditional Roman Catholic lives the Faith himself but God forbid that he proclaim it "from the housetops" or even endeavor to promote it in one or another of numerous ways in which he could do so. Indeed, were it not for a small percentage of exceptions who are genuinely apostolic and truly dedicated traditional Catholics, one might almost think that traditional Catholicism was supposed to be a strictly personal, private affair, a sort of secret religion. So help me, that's the impression that may well be conveyed at times. When I tell people with whom I casually converse in my Mass circuit travels that I am a traditional Roman Catholic priest, they invariably ask in effect: What's that? The Conciliar Church media and the conservative "Catholic" publications do a masterful job, to be sure, in keeping genuine traditional Catholicism a practical nonentity but the generality of traditional Catholics bears a portion of the blame for this condition.

As to what traditional Roman Catholics can do in the way of Catholic Action, well, a more or less complete list of such projects would be a lengthy one indeed. Nor is a detailed listing really needed since so many opportunities are self-evident and others can be found without much effort. Following, then, are a few suggestions for Catholic

Action, some of them directly involving the defense or promotion of the Faith, others indirectly so.

1. Protesting in one or more ways (picketing, letters to the editor of the local paper, calling in to radio talk shows) abortion locations, pornographic bookstores, immoral motion pictures, etc.
2. Refusing to purchase any items or merchandise produced by companies or corporations which advertise their wares on morally objectionable and anti-God and anti-Catholic TV programs or in pornographic publications (there are scores of such companies and they produce hundreds of such items); refraining from trading in any stores which carry pornographic material; refraining too from purchasing any products coming from Communist countries, products which are all but certainly made by slave labor. In all of this results are far more likely to be forthcoming if those responsible (the owner or manager of the store, the president of the corporation) are informed of one's action and the reason for it. (Several chain stores around the country, for example, have removed objectionable literature as a consequence of persistent and widespread protest.)
3. Striving to inform others about traditional Catholicism (in contrast to the Conciliar Church), Freemasonry, Communism and so much else of vital importance.
4. Making every reasonable effort to explain and promote the Faith when there is the opportunity to do so (for example, instructing potential converts) and to defend it when it is attacked or misrepresented.
5. Taking advantage of the various opportunities which arise to be an influence and force for good and, in word and deed, to reflect favorably upon the Faith which we profess.
6. If and to the extent that circumstances permit, being active in civil and political affairs, especially those relating to religion and morality. (We may criticize to our heart's content the abhorrent moral condition of the country but, unless we try to do what we can to improve the situation, we are ourselves partially to blame for it. "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.")

Such, then, are a few suggestions for Catholic Action. Dedicated, apostolic, militant action has not been a par-

ticularly distinguishing mark of traditional Catholicism to date—and that assuredly is an understatement. How to explain this, I do not know. Only in the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are found the answers to the spiritual and moral problems that plague our nation and the world—and the Roman Catholic Church today is traditional Catholicism. One would logically suppose, then, that traditional Roman Catholics would be burning with zeal and ablaze with enthusiasm to bring the glorious tidings of their divine Faith to their fellowmen and to make its influence felt as forcefully as possible upon the American scene. But where are they?

The vast majority of traditional Roman Catholics has a tunnel vision with regard to the Faith, a self-centered outlook, a provincial frame of mind which ill becomes a Roman Catholic at any time—and especially here and now when the remnant of the Church so desperately needs warriors, crusaders, fighters for the Faith. Each time we recite The Apostles Creed we profess our belief in the doctrine of the Communion of Saints, that is, the spiritual union under the headship of Christ of the Church Triumphant in Heaven, the Church Suffering in purgatory and the Church Militant on earth. But "militant" is defined as "fighting, having a fighting spirit." The Church Militant today means us traditional Roman Catholics. But where, pray tell, is the militancy? For the most part, what I see is a Church Dormant.

How long more before traditional Catholics cease merely bemoaning among themselves how bad things are and become what they are supposed to be by virtue of the Sacrament of Confirmation—active, dedicated, militant, apostolic warriors for the most glorious cause in the world, Christ and His Church, the Roman Catholic Faith? Catholic Action is not something above and beyond the call of duty, a sort of "take-it-or-leave-it" proposition, for traditional Roman Catholics. It is a *moral obligation* for them. †

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# THE MIDDLE AGES: DARK AGES OR AGES OF FAITH? (PART II)

*Jill Wiesner*

**A**t the dawn of the seventh century, the political unity of the old Roman Empire was in ruins, leaving in its place a system of feudal government. Under the feudal system, authority was local, each feudal lord having complete control over the people on his lands. Rival chieftains, jealous of their own power, were constantly at war with one another.

As Christian Europe was wracked by dissension from within a mortal danger arose from the south. In Arabia, a camel driver known as Mohammed had formulated a new religion which gained many adherents because of its emphasis on sensual pleasures.

Born in 570 in Mecca, Mohammed was orphaned at an early age. His business ability and charming personality attracted the attention of a wealthy woman, whom he married when he was 20. Throughout his life, Mohammed was afflicted with epilepsy and religious fanaticism. At age 40, he claimed to have had visions sent to him by the Angel Gabriel. These visions convinced him that Allah (God) had chosen him to organize a new religion. He compiled his private revelations into a book called the Koran.

The Koran contains religious tenets derived from three sources: 1. the paganism of Arabia which honored 360 false gods; 2. the practice of Judaism; and 3. the beliefs of Christianity acquired from a Nestorian sect. (Nestorius was a Patriarch of Constantinople in the fifth century who taught that there were two persons in Christ, one divine and one human, and that Mary, being only the mother of the human person, is not truly the Mother of God. Nestorianism was condemned as a heresy by Pope Celestine I and Nestorius was excommunicated by the Council of Ephesus in 431.)

Mohammed's religion denied the doctrine of the Holy Trinity and taught that there was one god and Mohammed was his prophet. All virtue lies in submission to the will of this god. Islam, another name for this religion, means "submission." Everyone is predestined to either reward or punishment in the next world. Since the religion of Mohammed is an external one, a person does not have to practice any form of internal self-discipline as long as he performs the external observances. Mohammed taught that it was forbidden to eat pork, but permitted a man to have as many wives as he pleased. A Mohammedan killed in a war for his religion would go straight to heaven, which was supposedly a beautiful grove filled with sensual delights.

In Mohammed's lifetime all of Arabia was conquered and converted by him and his followers. After his death his

leadership was taken over by the Caliphs (kings) and Islam spread throughout Syria, Palestine, Persia and North Africa. The Mohammedans then crossed Spain and pressed north into France.

It seemed that Europe would be overrun by the irresistible tide of Islam. But Christian France, under the leadership of Charles Martel ("Charles the Hammer"), blocked the onslaught at the Battle of Tours in 732. That battle, which lasted for several days, is one of the most important in history. The Cross, symbol of Christian salvation, defeated the Crescent, symbol of Mohammedan cruelty and slavery. Europe, a loose conglomeration of quarreling states, had been able to withstand an organized, superior military force and to repel it with such vigor that Mohammedanism never again tried to cross the Pyrenees.

The strength and unity of Europe came from the Catholic Faith. Through all the feuding and rivalry of the nations under her care, the Church was a watchful mother, instilling all with common principles. Within the Church the monasteries maintained the integrity of the Faith. The great monasteries of Cluny, Grand Chartreuse and Citeaux were responsible for resisting the worldliness which was beginning to tempt some monks and nuns as well as the laity.

From Citeaux came a young monk who was to have a profound influence on Christian Europe. Through his holy example as well as his teachings, Saint Bernard strengthened the resolve of all. Consecrated to the service of God by his mother at birth, Bernard loved solitude from his youth, though he was obedient and obliging to all. His sweet disposition, intelligence and natural modesty won him many worldly friends but he soon saw the danger in such associations. After much prayer and reflection he made the decision to retire from the world and entered the strict monastery at Citeaux.

From the outset he was exemplary even among the holy monks of Citeaux. He avoided all snares of the flesh with such determination that his superiors had to caution him to exercise moderation. He mortified his appetite so thoroughly that the sight of food became distasteful to him, and he refrained from taking pleasure in conversation and companionship, reminding himself that "Humiliation is the road to humility, as meekness in suffering tribulations and injuries produces patience."

Eventually, Citeaux became so crowded that a second monastery was necessary to accommodate the monks. Bernard was chosen as abbot and a new building was erected in the forest and given the name Clairvaux, which means "The Valley of Light." Clairvaux became

a center of holiness and the motherhouse of more than seventy other monasteries.

Bernard was especially devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. His beautiful prayer, "The Memorare," is a source of consolation to us today. He carefully instructed the monks under his guidance to avoid worldly honors and pleasures. "How much less does the soul that loves God seek anything besides God as the reward of her love! If she seeks anything else, it is clearly something else and not God that she loves."

He warned that the things of this world only inflame the mind with desire for more without every bringing satisfaction, as "he who has a good-looking wife, for instance, gazes with wanton eye upon one more beautiful, and he who is dressed in costly attire desires something more costly, and one possessing much wealth envies the man who is wealthier."

Strengthened and purified by the influence of Bernard and his fellow monks, the Church expanded into new territories. Saint Boniface, the "propagator, purifier and organizer" of the Church in Germany, came as a missionary from England and won over 100,000 conversions before being martyred by the Frisians. Saint Ansgar, the Apostle of the North, labored for 40 years among the people of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Many souls were won to the Faith, among them an Icelander named Leif Ericsson, who discovered the North American continent in the year 1000.

The Apostles of the Slavs, Saints Cyril and Methodius, brought the Catholic Faith to Eastern Europe. In the ninth century the Slavs controlled all the tribes of Eastern Europe, including the Russians, Bohemians, Slovaks, Moravians, Poles, Slovenes, Croatians and Serbs. These pagans practiced slavery and polygamy and offered human sacrifices to their false gods. Pagan priests ran the government.

At the invitation of the Duke of Moravia, Cyril and Methodius came to instruct him and his family in the truths of the Faith. In due time they were baptized, an event which greatly influenced the entire nation. His grandson was Saint Wenceslaus.

Christianity was introduced to the Poles by Moravian immigrants and, in the tenth century, King Boleslaus I outlawed paganism. Nearby, a Swedish tribe known as the Ross settled in the Ukraine. They established a capital at Kiev and named the new country Russia. Later, the Russian King Vladimir made Christianity the religion of his nation.

The Croatians, the first Slavonic nation to be completely converted, were all Christians by the beginning of the ninth century. The Slovenes, who settled on the border

of the Diocese of Salzburg, followed soon after. The Serbs, however, were forcibly baptized by the Greek Emperor Heraclius and, as a result, held onto their pagan practices for two more centuries.

Early in the ninth century, a Mongol tribe known as the Magyars invaded Europe, causing destruction on a wide scale. They were eventually repulsed and settled in Hungary. When their king, Stephen, embraced the Faith many of his people followed.

Stephen, the Patron Saint of Hungary, was the son of Christian converts. Born in 977, Stephen was educated by Saint Adalbert, Bishop of Prague. Succeeding his father in 997, Stephen established peace with neighboring countries and turned to the task of ending idolatry within his own nation. When attempts at persuasion were met with armed insurrection, Stephen prepared himself for the inevitable battle by fasting and prayer. Though the enemy forces far outnumbered his own, he easily defeated them.

Saint Stephen's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary caused him to place his nation under her protection. Though he was never the aggressor, he was always victorious in battle. Like the holy monks, he avoided worldly pleasures, dividing his time between his religious duties and those of his station. His thoughts were ever on God, and he continually practiced mortification and humility.

Though Stephen drew up a Christian code of laws for his kingdom, the pagans ignored them after his death. Bloody persecutions followed in which many martyrs died for their Faith. In 1080, however, a Christian leader named Ladislaus (Lancelot) was elected king by the people. He restored the laws established by Saint Stephen and, like his predecessor, lived an exemplary life. Austere in his own habits, he was generous to the Church and to the poor. Merciful to his enemies, he was vigorous in the defense of the Church and of his nation. He was canonized by Pope Celestine III in 1198.

Guided by religious like Saint Bernard and the other holy monks and defended by Christian leaders like Saint Stephen and Saint Ladislaus, the people converted in such great numbers that, by the middle of the eleventh century, Europe was Catholic from Spain to Russia and from Scandinavia to Italy. The apparent power of Mohammedanism and paganism was an illusion when confronted by the Faith which is divine in origin. That same Faith is in our possession today. In addition, we have the example of these saints. Each of them kept one thought uppermost in his mind: all for the greater honor and glory of God. They have set the example. We have but to follow it. †

# Mary, The Hope of the World

**I**n the Catholic Church the Blessed Virgin Mary occupies a unique position. Of course, we Catholics do not adore or worship her for she is not divine, she is not God, and adoration and worship are given to God alone. But we do pay honor and veneration to Mary to a degree far above that paid to any other of the saints. Mary was only a human being, yes, but she was the most perfect human being that ever came forth from the creative hand of the Almighty. Sinless, and filled with an extraordinary measure of grace from the very first instant of her conception, Mary advanced in the God-life in her soul through each moment of her existence. "From the very moment of Mary's conception," writes one author, "the Holy Spirit poured out on her more graces than all the most perfect and most eminent souls together ever possessed or ever will possess." The brilliance of holiness of the greatest of the saints fades into oblivion in the dazzling light of the incomprehensible sanctity of Mary. She was and she is, in the words of the poet, "our tainted nature's solitary boast" for no other creature can approach her in godliness and fullness of grace.

And all of this glory is Mary's because she was chosen from eternity and became in time the Mother of the Word Incarnate, the Mother of God. And that is why she occupies so privileged a place in the Faith and in the prayer of the Catholic Church—because she was the Mother of the God-Man, Christ Jesus our Savior. She it was who brought the

Redeemer into the world, she it was who was closest to Him in life, she it was who offered Him on Calvary for the sins of the world, she it was whom He loved above all others. And in Heaven, today and for all eternity, she it is who is the Queen of Heaven, the Queen of the angels and saints, the most beloved creature of God and man's most powerful advocate before the throne of the Almighty, Mary, the Mother of God.

And in the whole court of Heaven there is no one more desirous to plead our cause and no creature to whom the Almighty will more readily respond than to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the Mediatrix of all graces, which is to say that through her come all heavenly graces and blessings, and she wills to bestow them abundantly upon all of her children who approach her with the proper dispositions of soul and humbly beg her assistance.

Frequent prayer and devotion to Mary, and especially the rosary, are a "must" for all truly traditional Roman Catholics. She is the Virgin most powerful, the Refuge of sinners, the Comforter of the afflicted, the Queen of martyrs, the Queen of peace. All graces come through her. Our interests and our welfare are her vital concern. She will not fail us if we but turn to her with confidence and humility and love; to her who is "our life, our sweetness and our hope"; to her who is, in a very true and thoroughly Catholic sense, the Hope of the world. †

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