ENCOURAGEMENT for CHRISTIAN MOTHERS

James Cameron (1809-1873)

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ENCOURAGEMENT FOR CHRISTIAN MOTHERS

I. Encouragement in a Christian Mother's Calling

Perhaps in no department of Christian exertion are influences of a depressing kind more numerous than in that which you, as mothers, occupy. But, blessed be God, there is an exhaustless fund of all you need for your encouragement and support. Permit me to direct your attention, first of all, to the encouraging fact, that

The work in which you are engaged is directly and pre-eminently the work of God. The great end for which the created universe was called into being and for which it is upheld from age to age is the *manifestation of the divine glory*. In all that God does or permits to be done, He is actuated by a regard to this. All agencies—angelic and human, rational and irrational, animate and inanimate—are made to subserve¹ in all their actions this great design. The tendency of all the apparently involved working of the whole machinery of the universe, whether moral or physical, is to produce motion in this one direction. In the salvation of fallen man by the remedial provisions of the gospel, this great end is especially promoted—for "by the Church" is made known, even "unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3:10).

And by what instrumentality is a redeemed Church to be raised up from amongst the sinful children of men? By the instrumentality of those who have themselves, by the grace of God, been delivered from the guilt and the power of sin and made "[vessels] unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use" (2Ti 2:21). By means of human agency, the multitude that no man can number is to be gathered home to the Redeemer's fold. And you are they whom God has appointed to train up those who are to embark in this glorious enterprise! To you is committed the task of molding and fashioning the human agencies by which God's great purpose of glorifying Himself forever in the sight of all intelligent beings is to be accomplished! In your hands are the leaders of the public sentiment of the next generation—the Luthers, the Knoxes,...the Whitefields, the Wilberforces of a future age. They are in your hands; and through them, you wield the destinies of millions yet unborn. I have already spoken of the awful responsibility

¹ **subserve** – serve as a means of furthering.

of such a situation; but there is another light in which, likewise, I would have you view it.

Consider how honorable a situation it is to have the most important part of the work of God committed to you! Consider how near it brings you to God: to have the training, not merely of His soldiers, but of those who are to officer His armies and lead them on to glorious, yet bloodless victory. You occupy the highest, the noblest, and the most honorable position in which a human being can be placed. Murmur not that you are excluded from camps, cabinets, and senates; yours is a higher vocation. You are directly engaged in that work that has employed the tongues, the pens, the labors, the hearts, of the world's best and wisest in every age—the work for which the goodly fellowship of the prophets lived, for which the glorious company of the apostles labored, for which the noble army of martyrs died. To witness the progress of this work, angels stoop from their exalted thrones and watch with intensest interest the unfolding of every plan, the development of every principle, and the accomplishment of every event that bears upon it.

For the furtherance of this work, the Son of the Highest left the throne of heaven and became a wanderer on earth,² submitting to the reproach and scorn of men, to the anguish and ignominy³ of the cross. For this, also, the divine Spirit is sent forth from the Father and the Son. In short, this is the work, for the furtherance of which the noblest energies in heaven and earth have been and are continually put forth. Compared with it, the fleeting interests of time dwindle into a speck. But how is it that we derive from such considerations matter of encouragement? Very obviously, as for instance, thus: If you are engaged in a work that God has more at heart (if we may so speak) than aught else in the universe because thereby His own glory is most abundantly manifested, can you for a moment suppose that He will leave you to toil in that work unnoticed and uncared for? Such a supposition is alike impious⁴ and absurd. To admit it would be to impeach the divine wisdom, as well as the divine goodness. In immediate connection, then, with the consideration that it is the work of God in which you are engaged, consider in the second place

That God is always willing to grant you the strength and wisdom you need for the successful discharge of your important duties. On the throne of grace He ever sits, ready to dispense blessings, countless and rich, to all who ask. Never is His ear turned away from the cry of the needy suppliant.⁵ What an inexhaustible

² See FGB 219, *The Person of Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ **ignominy** – public disgrace; dishonor.

⁴ **impious** – disrespectful; irreverent toward God.

⁵ **suppliant** – one who humbly prays.

fund of encouragement does this truth present! At what time your heart is overwhelmed, look to the Rock that is higher than you (Psa 61:2). In the confidence of filial⁶ love, cast your burden upon the Lord, assured that He will sustain you. He cannot disappoint the expectations that His own Word teaches you to cherish. He will be your Instructor, your Counsellor, your Guide, your Comforter, your Refuge, your Fortress, your Sun, and your Shield. Do you feel that you lack⁷ strength? Go to God. He is the Almighty One in Whom all strength dwells. Do you feel that you lack wisdom? Go to God. He is "the only wise God" (1Ti 1:17); and of His wisdom, "He giveth unto all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (Jam 1:5). Do you feel that you lack patience? Go to God. He is "the God of patience" (Rom 15:5). Do you feel that you are in danger of fainting by the way? Go to God. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isa 40:29). In short, do you feel bowed down under a sense of insufficiency and unworthiness? Go to God. Your sufficiency is of Him (2Co 3:5). "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2Co 9:8). In all generations, He has been the dwelling-place of His people, a refuge in the day of distress, a stay and support in the time of trouble.

Listen to the sweet strains of the sweet singer of Israel, who had often tried God's faithfulness to His promises: "O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him" (Psa 34:3-8). You may derive much encouragement from the fact that

Thousands of Christian mothers have tried the faithfulness of God to His promise and have had the happiness of witnessing the success of their labors in the conversion of their offspring. The history of the Church of God is full of instances in point. Let us look at one or two.

The case of Augustine⁸...is a striking one. He was one of the brightest ornaments of Christianity in the latter part of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century. But up to his twenty-eighth year, he lived in sin. From his remarkable

⁶ filial – having the relationship of a child to a parent.

⁷ The original word *want* has been replaced with *lack*.

⁸ Aurelius Augustine (354-430) – Theologian and bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa.

Confessions,⁹ written by him after his conversion, we learn that he broke loose from every restraint and gave himself up "to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph 4:19). He had, however, a pious mother; and amidst all his wanderings, her tears and prayers came up for a memorial before God. At length, her cry was heard and the answer came. From her son's own lips, she one day received the glad tidings of his conversion to God; and the voice of lamentation was changed into the song of praise. Not long after, as they were journeying together, she said, "My son, what have I to do here any longer? The only thing for which I wished to live was your conversion, and that the Lord has now granted me in an abundant manner." Five days after, she was seized with a fever, which, in a few days more, wafted her spirit into that blissful region where all tears are forever wiped away. And the son, for whom she had shed so many tears and breathed so many prayers, lived to be the admiration of his age and the means of the conversion of thousands of his fellowmen.

That eminent servant of Christ, John Newton,¹⁰ was the son of a praying mother! Even at the worst period of his life, profane and dissolute¹¹ as he was, the influence of the pious counsels that he received in childhood was never obliterated. He has himself left it on record that in the midst of the most daring wickedness, the remembrance of his mother's prayers haunted him continually. At times, these impressions were so vivid that "he could almost feel his mother's soft hand resting on his head, as when she used to kneel beside him in early boyhood and plead for God's blessing on his soul." There is no reason to doubt that these impressions, received in childhood and retaining their hold of the spirit in [later] life, were among the principal means by which he was arrested in his career of sin and made a zealous and successful propagator of the gospel that he had so long despised...

A faithful and zealous minister of Christ gives the following account of himself in writing to a friend:

...Ah! Sir, you know but little of my obligations to almighty grace and redeeming love. I look back with dismay and horror to the time when I led the van¹² in wickedness...Even now my heart bleeds at the thought of the nights when, mad with intoxication, I have returned to my tender mother

⁹ Confessions – in the modern sense of the term, Augustine's Confessions, written between 397 and 401 A.D., was an early autobiography. Its most famous line is "Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."

¹⁰ John Newton (1725-1807) – Anglican minister, author of *Amazing Grace* and numerous other hymns.

¹¹ **dissolute** – overindulging in sensual pleasures.

¹² van – front position of a group moving forward.

between two and three o'clock, burst open the window, poured out a torrent of abuse, and sunk upon the bed, a monster of iniquity. Next morning, I have been aroused by a mournful voice, smothered with heavy sobs and tears. I have listened; and to my inexpressible astonishment, found it was my mother pouring out her soul in this language: "O Lord, Oh mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy upon my poor child. Lord, I will not, cannot give him up—he is still my child. Surely he is not yet out of the reach of mercy. O Lord, hear, hear, I beseech thee, a mother's prayers. Spare, oh spare, for Christ's sake, the son of her old age. O Absalom, my son; O Absalom, my son, my son!" (2Sa 19:4). Yes! Precious mother, thy prayers are now answered; and thy child—thy worthless, guilty child—still lives a monument of boundless grace and incomprehensible mercy.

...Let one more fact suffice. It is one that speaks volumes in proof of our position. An inquiry was instituted in the United States in six theological seminaries, belonging to three different denominations of Christians, by which it was ascertained that of 507 students who were being educated for the ministry, no fewer than 428 were children of praying mothers.

Christian mothers! Be of good courage! You are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses—witnesses to the faithfulness of God's promise, witnesses to the power of believing prayer, witnesses to the efficacy of sound religious instruction. Go forward in your work with holy confidence. Great and many, indeed, are your difficulties, but greater is He that is for you than all that can be against you! "Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength" (Isa 26:4). In due time you shall reap if you faint not (Gal 6:9). May the Lord grant you grace to be faithful, and may you at last have the unspeakable happiness of entering, along with all who have been committed to your care, into the heavenly holy place, there to celebrate forever the praise of redeeming love and to serve God day and night without ceasing.

II. Encouragement in a Christian Mother's Duty

"Train up a child in the way he should go." (Proverbs 22:6)

These are the words of the wise man, who spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost (2Pe 1:21). They are to be viewed, therefore, not as the admonition of a fellow-creature, but as the authoritative injunction of the God of heaven—the Governor of the universe. Christian mothers! This injunction is addressed to you...Suffer me now to address you respecting your duty:

If you would train up your children in the way they should go, it is necessary that you cultivate a deep and abiding sense of your own insufficiency. I need say nothing, I am persuaded, to convince you of the fact of your insufficiency. If you have seriously reflected on the *magnitude* of your responsibility, you are ready to ask, "Who is sufficient for these things?" (2Co 2:16). Your work is to train immortal beings for God-the same work, in substance, as that for which the Christian ministry has been instituted. And in reference to this work, even the apostle of the Gentiles said, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves" (2Co 3:5). You are partakers of the same sinful nature with those whom you have to train, encompassed with all the weakness of fallen humanity, and subject to all its temptations. You have to contend against your own sinful propensities:¹³ to watch over your own spirits: to strive with your own waywardness; and in the midst of all this, to set before your children such an example of patience, forbearance, and holy living, as shall be a true and faithful comment on the sacred truths you teach them. If ever you become self-sufficient, be assured you will labor in vain; "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (Jam 4:6).

But why do I urge upon you the consideration of your insufficiency? Is it to sink you into despair? Nay, verily; that would be a profitless, as well as a cheerless undertaking. It is to induce you, in utter hopelessness of accomplishing the desired result by your own wisdom or strength, to cast yourselves on the God of all wisdom and of all strength, for it is written, "Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee" (Psa 55:22); and, "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa 40:29-31). You can have no fitness *for* your work and no success *in* your work, but what comes from God. You cannot expect that God will grant this fitness and this success, unless you look to Him alone for them. But such is the natural unwillingness of the human heart to turn to God and to trust only in Him that it is not until we are driven from every other refuge and deprived of every other stay¹⁴ that we cling to Him with the simple childlike dependence of those who have truly learned that there is no other God besides Jehovah; that all power, all wisdom, and all blessings are from Him; and that without Him, every effort must be vain and every undertaking abortive. The [doctrine of the] absolute helplessness and moral impotency of fallen man is one of the most important lessons we can be taught. But alas! It is one

¹³ propensities – tendencies to certain kinds of behavior.

¹⁴ stay – support; something upon which someone relies.

of the most difficult for proud human nature to learn. The Spirit of God can teach it; and blessed are they who, being taught by the divine Spirit their own utter helplessness, are taught at the same time that they have a God to go to Who can furnish them richly with all they need.

Again, then, I repeat, cultivate a sense of your insufficiency for the great work to which God has called you; and let this be so thoroughly interwoven in the very texture of your minds—let it so thoroughly pervade your whole habits of thinking and feeling—that you shall be kept in the very lowest depths of self-distrust, feeling that your only safety is in clinging, as with a death-grasp, to the soulsustaining declaration, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12:9). It is only when a deep sense of insufficiency and a strong confidence in God are combined that you are at all likely to be successful in your arduous¹⁵ work. Your sense of insufficiency will make you cautious, tender, watchful, prayerful; and your confidence in God will nerve your soul and strengthen you to grapple with the difficulties you have to encounter.

If you would train up your children in the way they should go, it is necessary that you *diligently cultivate your own minds, imbuing*¹⁶ *them with sound principles and storing them with useful knowledge*. It may be said that this ought to have been done before you occupied the position you do—and it is true. But it will be acknowledged, we think, by almost all who are capable of forming a judgment on the subject, that generally speaking, it is not done before, and that in nine-tenths, perhaps, of those cases in which the mind has been fitted for the efficient discharge of a mother's duties, its cultivation has been chiefly, if not entirely, effected at a period subsequent to that allotted to what is termed *education*.

The education that females generally receive in youth is but ill-fitted for enabling them rightly "to mold the mass of human mind." Education properly so called is the training of the intellect, the conscience, and the affections. But is this a description of female education as it actually is, even with all the boasted improvements of modern times? Is that education in any prominent degree, the education of the mind or heart at all—*in any form*? Alas! It is too frequently the cultivation of *manner* only. The useful is sacrificed to the ornamental. The casket is embellished with all kinds of tinsel-work, which may attract the admiration of the beholder, while the invaluable jewel it contains is left to comparative neglect. Let it not be supposed that we undervalue accomplishments. We believe them to be highly valuable—much more valuable than many who eagerly pursue them seem to be aware...And assuredly they are too dearly purchased whenever they so

¹⁵ arduous – difficult and tiring.

¹⁶ **imbuing** – filling.

engross the time and attention as to leave little or no opportunity *for the cultivation of the mind itself*.

It is distressing to think that while so much depends on the training of the female mind, so little provision is made for that training being effective. Napoleon¹⁷ once asked Madame Campan¹⁸ what the French nation most needed in order that her youth might be properly educated. Her reply was comprised in one word: that word was—"Mothers!" And it was a wise reply. Not the French nation only *the world* needs mothers—Christian, intelligent, well-trained mothers to whom the destinies of the rising generation may safely be entrusted.

A distinguished philosopher has remarked that all the world is but the pupil and disciple of female influence! How important, then, that females should be fitted for their work! And is the education they generally receive in youth such as is likely to fit them for that work? No one acquainted with the subject will reply in the affirmative. The end desired seems rather that they should be qualified for securing admiration and applause, than for molding the minds and forming the characters of those who are to be the future defenders of the faith—the ministers of the gospel, the philosophers, the legislators of the next generation. I [think] that I cannot do better than present you with the remarks of one of your own sex on this subject—one who is well-entitled to an attentive hearing—I mean the author of *Woman's Mission*:¹⁹

What, then, is the true object of female education? The best answer to this question is a statement of future duties; for it must never be forgotten that if education is not training for future duties, it is nothing. The ordinary lot of woman is to marry. Has anything in these educations prepared her to make a wise choice in marriage? To be a mother? Have the duties of maternity—*the nature of moral influence*—been pointed out to her? Has she ever been enlightened as to the consequent unspeakable importance of personal character *as* the source of influence? In a word, have any means, direct or indirect, prepared her for her duties? No! But she is a linguist, a pianist—graceful, admired. What is *that* to the purpose?...The time when young women enter upon life is the one point to which all plans of education tend and at which they all terminate; and *to prepare them for that point is the object of their training*. Is it not cruel to lay up for them a store of future wretchedness by an education that has no period in view but one—a very short one, and the most unimportant and irresponsible of the

¹⁷ Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1820) – French general who became emperor of France.

¹⁸ Madame Jeanne Louise Henriette Genet Campan (1752-1822) – a French educator and a lady-in-waiting for Marie Antoinette.

¹⁹ Sarah Lewis, *Woman's Mission* (London: John W. Parker, West Strand; 1839).

whole life? Who that had the power of choice would choose to buy *the admiration of the world for a few short years* with the happiness of a whole life?²⁰

I have a double object in view in directing your attention so prominently to this point: that you may bring these sentiments to bear on the education of your *daughters* and that you may feel the necessity, whatever may have been the nature and extent of your own previous education, of continuing diligently to educate yourselves and add to your resources. You will find that there is need of all, for you have a great work given you to do. Especially, let the sacred truths of God's Word be the subject of your constant study. Be not content with a superficial knowledge of the great things of God's law, but seek to know them in all their depth and fullness, tracing their bearings and connections, studying their harmonies and proportions that thus, by having the Word of Christ dwelling in you richly in all wisdom (Col 3:16), you may be "throughly furnished unto all good works" (2Ti 3:17)...But though the Word of God must be your *chief* study, beware of supposing it must be your *only* study. All truth is *from* God, and all truth may be made subservient to the great work of training your children *for* God...

In all your conduct, manifest the most undeviating²¹ consistency...Children, even at a very early age, are eagle-eyed to observe the inconsistencies of a parent. And the slightest inconsistency, though it is manifested only in a word or a look, lowers your influence over them in an inconceivable degree. When a child learns to distrust its mother, all her warnings, admonitions, and strances²²—however earnest and unremitting—fall powerless. This is the chief reason, it is to be feared, why we so frequently see the children of pious parents grow up impenitent.²³ The example of their parents has not been uniformly consistent with their instructions and therefore have these instructions been useless...Mothers! Watch your conduct. Your children watch it. Every expression of your countenance—every word you utter—every action they see you perform is scanned and scrutinized by them. If they perceive that you act inconsistently, they will in their hearts despise you. And you cannot long deceive a child with regard to character; the only sure way to appear consistent is to be so.

Be firm and unbending in the exercise of your authority, requiring on all occasions implicit, unresisting obedience. Implicit submission to the authority of God is *essential* to true [Christianity]. And God has given you absolute authori-

²⁰ Lewis, *Mission*, 66-68.

²¹ **undeviating** – steady; not turning or changing.

²² remonstrances – protests.

²³ **impenitent** – not feeling shame or regret about one's actions or attitudes; not repentant.

ty over your child, so that by being habituated to²⁴ the exercise of implicit submission²⁵ to your will, he may be trained to the exercise of implicit submission to His. Until your child is able in some measure to judge for himself, you are to him in the place of God; and if you allow your will to be disputed—if you shrink from the exercise of absolute, uncompromising authority—you train your child to be a rebel against God. A mother's indulgence lays the foundation for disobedience and insubordination toward God; which, unless divine grace in future years prevents, must issue in the child's eternal ruin...Let it not be said that the principle we inculcate is severe. It is not so. The most unbending authority may be blended with *the most unwearied love*. And the two ought ever to be blended. These are the two great principles of God's government, and your family government should resemble His. The unwearied exercise of love will prevent your authority from degenerating into harshness—the unbending exercise of authority will prevent your love from degenerating into foolish indulgence.

If you would train up your children in the way they should go, you must restrain and curb their wayward propensities. Never forget that they possess a depraved nature, prone to all evil, averse from all good. Beware, therefore, of allowing them to have their own way. That is the way that leadeth to death (Pro 14:12; 16:25). Accustom them by times to submit to restraint. Subject them to wholesome discipline; and do this in such a manner as shall prove even to them that it is done not for the gratification of your passion, but for their profit. A child left to his own way will bring ruin on himself and sorrow and disgrace on his parents. Remember the case of Adonijah. "His father had not displeased him at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so?" (1Ki 1:6). In other words, he was a spoiled child. And what was the consequence? His father's dying bed was disturbed by his treasonable machinations;²⁶ and in order to secure the peace of the kingdom, his own brother was obliged to issue an order for his death.

If you would train your children in the way they should go, you must make all their training bear, directly or indirectly, on their spiritual and eternal well-being. By this, I do not mean that you should be always speaking to them about religion, for there is such a thing as forming in the mind of a child a permanent association between religious truth and the feeling of weariness or disgust; and against this evil, parents should especially guard. I mean that you should yourself always keep in view their eternal interests. It is not merely for the employment of the few fleeting years of the present life that you are training them: it is for the service and enjoyment of God forever. Oh! What a noble work is

²⁴ habituated to – accustomed to; used to.

²⁵ **implicit submission** – submitting without question.

²⁶ treasonable machinations – secret and complicated plans of betrayal.

yours! Contemplate it in the light of eternity, and you will feel that it is the most dignified—the most glorious—employment in which an immortal being can engage. The thought that it is for eternity will sustain you amidst every difficulty and cheer you on in your noble career. Yes, it is a noble career! For when all the honor, pomp, and glare of mere temporal pursuits have passed away, the effects of your work shall remain; and ceaseless ages shall record the triumph of your faith, fortitude, and patience...You train your children for eternity. Ought you not, then, to exercise unceasing care and vigilance?

It is surely scarcely necessary for me to add, as my last observation, that if you would train up your children in the way they should go, *you must abound in prayer—fervent, wrestling, believing prayer.*²⁷ Without this, you can do nothing as it ought to be done. Great and arduous are your duties, and great is the preparation you need for the discharge of them. You need wisdom; you need firmness; you need decision; you need patience; you need self-control; you need perseverance; and whither can you go for these but to the mercy-seat of Him "that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not" (Jam 1:5). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights" (Jam 1:17). Continual prayer will fit you for your duties and make these duties pleasant. By prayer, you will lay hold on the strength of God and be able to say with the apostle, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phi 4:13).

I close these remarks by reminding you once more of the magnitude of your responsibility. To you (under God) are entrusted the destinies of the rising generation, and through it, the destinies of the generations following. The world looks to you; the Church of God looks to you; the spirits of departed saints look to you; the angelic hosts look to you; God Himself looks to you, as those whose influence shall tell forever on thousands yet unborn. Let a sense of the importance of your high calling animate you to run with patience the race that is set before you; and when you have finished your course, and are called to give in your account, yours will be the unspeakable happiness of being welcomed to the realms of glory by the approving voice of your Savior God: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Mat 25:21). And with all your loved ones around you, you will stand on the Mount Zion when earth and seas have fled, and with a heart overflowing with gratitude, will cast your crowns at Jesus' feet, saying, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psa 115:1).

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²⁷ See FGB 221, Vital Prayer, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.