

# FROM THE HOUSETOPS



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## SENTIMENTAL THEOLOGY

FAKHRI MALUF

SENTIMENT is a human thing and nothing human is either scorned or despised by a Christian. In Christianity there is a place for the exercise of every impulse that God put in human nature. A Christian is not a Stoic who shuns his emotions, nor a Quaker who lets them simmer under the surface of a placid face. He does not pretend to deny the reality of human sufferings like a Christian Scientist, nor does he glut in them like a Jansenist. A Christian finds time for weeping and time for laughter, for gayety as well as for solemnity, for emotion as well as for sentiment. Our Lord was not ashamed to show emotion when He wept as he heard of the death of his friend, nor did He hesitate to explode with anger when He saw the wicked and the avaricious desecrate the house of God. He manifested sublime sentiment when He inspired and guided the discovery of the real Cross and made it an object of veneration in His Church. And so, what I am about to condemn in this article is not sentiment, but sentimentality.

Sentimentality is not only a sentiment out of place, it is a sentiment without object. It is like falling in love with love, hoping for hope, or making a sincere effort at being sincere. It is good sentiment to guard the gifts of those you love; it is sentimentality to crowd the house with all kinds of things you cannot bring yourself to burn or throw away. Sentimentality is not even an act; it is just a state of the mind. It is an atmosphere which softens the character, suffocates the mind, and inflicts the will with paralysis. A sentimental mother would let her child die rather than allow a surgical operation to wound his body. In the same way, a sentimental Christian would let his friend miss the opportunity of salvation and go to hell rather than hurt his feelings. Sentimentality is inimical both to charity and to truth. Am I intelligent as a Christian if I allow those who are dear and close to me to incur the slightest danger of losing the friendship of God for all eternity by giving them in return my friendship in this short life? And would I not be endangering my own soul were I to drive this bargain?