

MARY IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGY AND WORSHIP

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“WHAT Protestant does not tremble on hearing the phrase ‘the blessed Virgin Mary?’” The question is asked rhetorically by Max Thurian of the Reformed (Calvinist) Church of France.¹ Until the question is pondered with all the serious attention it deserves Catholics will not understand the prevailing attitude of Protestants towards our Lady. Thurian himself finds the mood of his coreligionists difficult to explain, since it is so unscriptural. “As to the episode of the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, we are obliged to recognize that Protestantism, in its exegesis of the sacred text, in its preaching and in its piety, does not take full account of the word of Elizabeth: ‘Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb’. . . . The Magnificat which the Virgin then sings manifests both the humility of Mary and the splendour of the choice that God makes of her. Thus she dares to prophesy that all generations will call her ‘blessed.’ Can we say that this title is conferred in all truth by our Reformed piety? What Protestant does not tremble on hearing the phrase ‘the blessed Virgin Mary?’”²

No doubt the word, “tremble,” is too strong; perhaps the question, rhetorical in form, is used solely for rhetorical effect. Whatever the answer, “the blessed Virgin Mary” has throughout history awakened sentiments of love or hostility; rarely has the phrase left men of deep religious convictions neutral or indifferent. More than that, reaction to the phrase has been a leading test of orthodoxy or heterodoxy.

MARY AS SCEPTER OF ORTHODOXY

It is not to the purpose here fully to explore the patristic tradition with regard to Mariological doctrine as a standard of orthodoxy. It might even be going too far to assert that there exists a full consensus of the Fathers in the matter. However, the following facts and texts

¹ *Ways of Worship*. A Report of a Theological Commission of Faith and Order (London, 1951), p. 300.

² *Ibid.*, p. 299 f.

are significant. They afford some background against which to consider the main theme of this article.

In the early second century heterodoxy took the form of Docetism, an attack on the humanity of Christ. That the Word became flesh, that God sent His Son made of a woman was blasphemous to these earliest of heretics. St. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 110) warned Christians to be on their guard, and in that warning we find the earliest explicit reference to what will one day be known as the Apostles' Creed: "Stop your ears when anyone speaks to you that stands apart from Jesus Christ, from David's scion and Mary's Son, who was really born and ate and drank, really persecuted by Pontius Pilate, really crucified and died . . . who really rose from the dead. . . ."³

In the ensuing decades of the second century, heterodoxy received the name of Gnosticism, but the attack on the humanity of Christ continued, revealing itself in an attempt to divorce Christ from His mother. According to Saturninus (c. 120), "the Saviour was unborn, incorporeal and without form . . . a man only in appearance."⁴ According to Cerinthus (c. 170), "Jesus was not born of a virgin but was the son of Joseph and Mary, like all the rest of men . . . ; that after His baptism Christ descended upon Him in the form of a dove."⁵ According to Marcion, the most influential of all the Gnostics, Jesus was not allowed even a seeming birth from the Virgin. Thus the God of Marcion appears as a full-grown man, without human father and even without a human mother. To erase from the minds of his followers all trace of Jesus' descent from David through Mary, Marcion rewrote the Gospel, eliminating the genealogies of Matthew and Mark and the early chapters of Luke which tell of the Angel's salutation, the virgin conception, the nativity, infancy and early childhood of Jesus, incidents that Mary pondered and treasured in her heart until the day came when they had to be revealed lest we should never come to learn of them, incidents that Mary may have related to Luke whom God inspired to write them down. One text, however, Marcion sal-

³ *To the Trallians*, 9; trans. J. Kleist in *Ancient Christian Writers*, I (ed. Plumpe & Quasten; Westminster, Md., 1946), 77.

⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, 24, 2; trans. in *Mary in the Documents of the Church* (ed. P. Palmer, S.J.; Westminster, Md., 1952), p. 6. This work will henceforth be cited *Mary*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 26, 1.

vaged from the Gospel of St. Matthew: "And someone said to him, 'Behold thy mother and thy brethren are standing outside, seeking thee.' But he answered and said to him who told him, 'Who is my mother and who are my brethren?' " (Mt. 12:47 f.). The text will be used in the centuries to come to prove that Christ disowned His mother. It is used by Marcion to prove that Christ had no mother.⁶

In the third century, Gnosticism was gradually engulfed in the rising tide of Manichaeism, but the attack on the Virgin continued. Of eastern origin, Manichaeism became a real threat in the West and in the fourth century it found its ablest champion in Faustus the Manichaean. Faustus admitted that a virgin had been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, but the virgin in question was not the Virgin Mary but the virgin earth: "We also believe that the Holy Spirit, the third majesty, has His seat and His home in the whole circle of the atmosphere. By His influence and spiritual infusion, the earth conceives and brings forth the mortal Jesus."⁷ In these early centuries it was not the fashion for Christians to deal gently with heretics, particularly when the honor of the Virgin was at stake.⁸ Accordingly, Augustine is bitterly contemptuous of Faustus' feigned horror of the Virgin's womb: "Dare you compare the holiness of that chaste virgin's womb with any piece of ground where trees and plants grow? Do you pretend to look with abhorrence upon a pure virgin, while you do not shrink from believing that Jesus is produced in gardens watered by the filthy drains of a city?"⁹

The Gnostic-Manichaean attack on the humanity of Christ resulted in the affirmation that Mary is truly the Mother of Jesus, the Christ, *Christotokos*. By professing faith, however, in "Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary," Christians implicitly asserted their belief that Mary was the Mother of God, *theotokos*. The first to reject the implication were the Arians. Denying that He who issued from the Virgin's womb in the fulness of time was the very same who was born of the Father

⁶ Cf. H. L. Mansel, *The Gnostic Heresies* (London, 1875), p. 215 f.

⁷ *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, XX, 2; trans. in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (series I), IV, 253.

⁸ Cf. St. Jerome, *The Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary, Against Helvidius* (PL 23, 209 ff.); extract in *Mary*, pp. 25-27.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, XX, 11; trans. in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (series I), IV, 257.

before all time, the Arians rejected at once Christ's divinity and Mary's divine motherhood.

Unquestionably, the chief concern of Christians at Nicaea was to safeguard the prerogatives of the Son, but Christians had learned from their dealings with the Gnostics that this could best be done by extolling the privileges of the Mother. She who was hailed from the beginning as *Christotokos* must now be hailed as *theotokos*. This was a century before Nestorius' deacon shocked the congregation at St. Sophia by refusing Mary the title. St. Ephraem the Syrian thus addressed her: "O Virgin Lady, immaculate Mother of God, my Lady. . . ."^{9a} The great Athanasius thus referred to her: "That Word which was born of the Father from above . . . and eternally, the very same in time and here below is born of Mary, the virgin Mother of God (*theotokou*)."¹⁰ For St. Gregory of Nazianzus acceptance of the title *theotokos* was not only a test of orthodoxy but a requisite for salvation. "If anyone does not accept holy Mary as Mother of God, he is cut off from the Deity."¹¹

After the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431), at which the dogma of Mary's divine motherhood was officially defined by proclaiming her *theotokos*,¹² acceptance of Mary's title could not possibly remain, if it had ever so remained, an affair of the mind and not of the heart. Christian instinct demanded that the indignity done the Mother of God by Nestorius' denial should be atoned at once. Sermons in honor of the *theotokos* resounded in the churches of the East; feasts in her honor began to fill the liturgical calendar; ikons to her image found a place of prominence next to those of her Son; and in East and West alike, a new phrase was added to the liturgy and the Roman Mass. Christians had been accustomed to offer the Eucharistic Sacrifice in holy fellowship with the saints and martyrs; henceforth they will commemorate and honor "in the first place, the memory of the glorious and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Lord Jesus Christ."

At the time of Ephesus Mary, Mother of God, was hailed with a

^{9a} *Address to the Most Holy Mother of God* (Assemani, *Opera graeca*, III, 545).

¹⁰ *On the Incarnation of the Word of God against the Arians*, 8 (PG 26, 996).

¹¹ *Letter 101* (PG 37, 177); other anathemas of Gregory dealing with the relationship of Christ to his Mother are translated in *Mary*, p. 9.

¹² *Second Letter of St. Cyril of Alexandria to Nestorius*, read and approved at the Council of Ephesus (DB 111a).

variety of titles. For St. Proclus of Constantinople she was the "only bridge of God to men . . . the awe-inspiring loom of the Incarnation . . . with the Logos as artist."¹³ For Theodotus of Ancyra she was the Virgin "more glorious than paradise. For paradise was cultivated by God; but Mary cultivated God Himself according to the flesh, willing as He did to be united to man's nature."¹⁴ Mary was the Virgin, "innocent, without blemish, all-immaculate, inviolate, spotless, holy in soul and body, who has blossomed as a lily from among thorns, unlearned in the evil ways of Eve."¹⁵ There was, however, one title that sums up Mary's role in the early Church, a title given by St. Cyril of Alexandria at the very time of the Council and in the church dedicated to the *theotokos*: "Hail, from us, Mary, Mother of God . . . the sceptre of orthodoxy!"¹⁶ With the same surety of insight the Church of the West has spelled out the significance of the title by chanting: "Rejoice, Virgin Mary, thou alone hast overthrown all heresies."¹⁷

MARY AND THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

Orthodoxy is essentially a thing of the mind, but it is also a thing of the heart. A Christian must accept Mary as Mother of God, *corde et animo*, if he is to continue to accept Christ as the Son of God. It is not enough that his faith be discoverable in official documents, whether these be the official acts of the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus or the articles of the Lutheran Confession of Augsburg. Proof of this is the history of Protestantism. We will merely sketch that history, since there is scarcely a Protestant sect which cannot supply the details.

When we speak of orthodoxy in this connection, we refer to the central doctrine of the Christian religion, the Incarnation. Judged by this test, Protestantism in its origins was completely orthodox, or, to put it another way, no protest was lodged against this basic Christian dogma. What is even more significant, Protestants continued to give to the dogma a Mariological setting, a setting that it had received in the

¹³ *Encomium on the All-Holy Mary, Mother of God*, I, 1 (*Acta conciliorum oecumenicorum* [ed. Schwartz; Berlin and Leipzig, 1914 ff.], 1, 1, 1, 103). Extracts of this and other Marian sermons preached at the time of the Council will be found in *Mary*, pp. 50 ff.

¹⁴ *On the Nativity of Our Savior*, 2 (*ACO* 1, 1, 2, 80-81).

¹⁵ Theodotus of Ancyra, *Homily 6, On Holy Mary, Mother of God*, 11 (*PG* 77, 1427).

¹⁶ *Homily 4* (*ACO* 1, 1, 2, 102-103).

¹⁷ Matins for the Feast of the Annunciation.

earliest Christian creed, that of the Apostles. The *Augsburg Confession* (1530), the first of the Lutheran confessional writings, teaches that "the Word, that is, the Son of God, assumed a human nature in the womb of the blessed virgin Mary, with the result that the two natures, the human and the divine, [are] inseparably united in the unity of the person, one Christ, truly God and truly man, born of the virgin Mary."¹⁸

In the last of the confessional writings, the *Formula of Concord* (1579), the statement of Augsburg is given fuller expression: "By reason of this hypostatic union and the communion of natures, Mary, that virgin most worthy of praise (*laudatissima*), brought forth not only a man but such a man as is truly the Son of the Most High God, as the archangel Gabriel bears witness. He, the Son of God, showed forth His majesty as well in that He was born of a virgin, her virginity inviolate. And thus is she truly *theotokos*, and yet remained a virgin."¹⁹

"Virgin, most worthy of praise." Such was the official verdict of Protestantism in its origins and early development. Had Protestants followed this directive, Protestantism might have retained its orthodoxy as did the Orthodox Church of the East, which needed no directive.

For a brief period after his break with Rome, Martin Luther continued to praise the virgin most worthy of praise and even begged her assistance that he might praise her well. Luther's favorite theme was the *Magnificat*; in 1521 he published a commentary on Mary's song of praise which runs to some fifty-six pages in the Weimar edition of Luther's works. By way of preface, Luther with traditional piety invokes Mary's assistance: "May the same tender Mother of God obtain for me the spirit to interpret her song usefully and practically . . . , that we may sing and chant this *Magnificat* eternally in the life to come. So help us God. Amen." By way of conclusion, Luther expresses the hope that a right understanding of the *Magnificat* "may not only illumine and teach, but burn and live in body and soul; may Christ grant us this by the intercession and assistance of His dear Mother Mary. Amen."²⁰

¹⁸ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche* (2d. ed.; Göttingen, 1952), p. 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1024.

²⁰ *Luthers Werke* (Weimar edition, 1883—), VII, 546, 601.

The year 1522 marks a distinct change in Luther's attitude towards our Lady. She is still worthy of praise, but the compliments he pays with one breath he takes back with the next. In a Christmas sermon of that year, he allows that we "owe honor to Mary, but we must take care that we honor her aright . . . ; we have gone too far in honoring her and esteem her more highly than we should." For "by the profound honor paid to the Mother of God [we have] derogated from the honor and knowledge of Christ." Mary is still the Mother of God, but she is so "simply because we cannot all be Mothers of God; otherwise she is on the same level with us."²¹ In connection with the *Salve Regina*, which he regards as a "great blasphemy against God," Luther grants that Mary is the advocate of Christians; but there is little in the admission since he is quick to assure his listeners: "Your prayers, O Christian, are as dear to me as hers. And why? Because if you believe that Christ lives in you as much as in her, then you can help me as much as she."²²

This pitting of the "saints" on earth against the saints in heaven with Mary as their queen eventually led Luther to reinterpret the article of the creed which professes faith in the "communion of saints." That article will no longer refer to that holy fellowship or *koinonia* between the Church triumphant and the Church militant and suffering; rather it will apply exclusively to the Church on earth. Thus, after a lengthy and somewhat tortuous exposition in which belief in the Catholic Church is made to mean the same as belief in the communion of saints, Luther concludes: "I believe that there is on earth a small company and community (*Haüfstein und Gemeine*) of saints made up of holy men alone, under one Head Christ, called together by the Holy Spirit, in one faith, etc."²³ In such a context we can understand Luther's violent rejection of the commemoration of the saints in the Canon of the Mass. "Christ instituted the Supper as a memorial of His own person and as a communion of the living. But here there is stupidly made a memorial and a communion of the dead. . . . O detestable and execrable malice. O Canon impure! It is easily seen that it was composed by ignorant and senseless priests."²⁴

²¹ *Ibid.*, X, 113 ff.

²² *Ibid.*, X, 321 f.

²³ *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, p. 657.

²⁴ This is cited from Luther, *Opera omnia*, T. A. (Wittenbergae, 1551), p. 389, by C. Crivelli, S.J., in his contribution to *Maria, Etude sur la sainte Vierge* (Paris, 1949), I, 677.

And thus it came about that the "memory of the glorious and ever Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Lord Jesus Christ," commemorated in the liturgies of the East and the West since the days of Ephesus, was obliterated from Protestant Eucharistic worship.²⁵ In the confessional writings Mary still remained "illa virgo laudatissima," but to praise her was to be suspect of that new sin, coined by Protestants, Mariolatry.

In England, the memorials of the Virgin Mother of God, which had survived the iconoclastic efforts of Cranmer and Elizabeth, were smashed and defaced by the Puritans. In some sections men went so far as to give up public use of the Apostles' Creed because Mary's name occurred in it. The lesson of history that any repudiation of the Mother must inevitably lead to a rejection of the Son was beginning to repeat itself. James Cooper, to whom we are indebted for this last detail of Puritan reaction, expressed doubt "whether such courses have helped either to a livelier faith in Jesus Christ or to a deeper love towards Him; or how far they have furthered Christian ideals of purity, chivalry and saintliness."²⁶ Cardinal Newman spells out the lesson of history and applies it not only to Puritans but to Protestants more generally: "The Church and Satan agreed in this, that Son and Mother went together; and the experience of three centuries has confirmed their testimony, for Catholics, who have honoured the Mother, still worship the Son, while Protestants, who now have ceased to confess the Son, began then by scoffing at the Mother."²⁷

More than a century has passed since Newman delivered this indictment of Protestantism, which in England as well as on the Continent had passed through the various stages of pietism, rationalism, deism and liberalism. Today all these movements are present in Protestantism both in this country and abroad. However, a change in the direction of orthodoxy is discernible. In England the change, which has been

²⁵ In the non-Eucharistic, or Synaxis, service of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, as well as in some Lutheran service books, the Virgin Mary is commemorated on the feasts of the Purification and the Annunciation. As yet, the Reformed Churches have no feast in Mary's honor, but an office of Matins has been suggested for a feast of Mary, Mother of the Lord, on Aug. 15. Cf. *Ways of Worship*, pp. 315 f., 319; cf. below, p. 539.

²⁶ Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York, 1921), VIII, 479.

²⁷ *The Glories of Mary for the Sake of Her Son*, reprinted in *The New Eve* (Westminster, Md., 1952), p. 71.

slowly progressing from the days of the Oxford movement, is marked by a return to the Church of the first four or six centuries in the hope of regaining something of that common tradition which is shared by Catholics of the West and Orthodox of the East. On the Continent and in the United States the change is marked by a return to biblical theology, and with some reservations to the confessional writings of the Reformers. In each instance, the return to orthodoxy involves a confrontation with the Blessed Virgin Mary.

MARY AND THE NEO-ORTHODOX

When we speak of neo-orthodoxy in Lutheran and Reformed theology three names immediately come to mind, Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich. Tillich need not detain us, since his return to orthodoxy has stopped at the half-way house which is Nestorianism.²⁸ For Tillich, Mary is not the Mother of God, nor is she the mother of the Christ. She is the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, and he in turn "is the Christ as the one who sacrifices what is merely 'Jesus' in him. . . . Christianity which does not assert that Jesus of Nazareth is sacrificed to Jesus as the Christ is just one more religion among others."²⁹ Accordingly, "Apollo has no revelatory significance for Christians; the Virgin Mother Mary reveals nothing to Protestants."³⁰

Emil Brunner is rightly styled a neo-orthodox theologian. For him the fact of the Incarnation is expressed "in lapidary simplicity, for the first time, by the *Confessio Augustana*: 'Vere Deus, vere homo!'"³¹ He rejects the manner of the Incarnation, although it was expressed

²⁸ Tillich has been styled a Docetist, but his Docetism is more apparent than real. He does not deny the historical Jesus, as did Saturninus and Marcion; he rather denies the relevance of the historical Jesus as the foundation of Christian belief. Cf. D. W. Soper, *Major Voices in American Theology* (Philadelphia, 1952), p. 121. Tillich himself judges that he is nearer to the position of the Antiochene school of Nestorius than to the Alexandrian tradition of St. Cyril: "You are further right that I am more in sympathy with the Antiochene rather than the Alexandrian Christology, although I have been accused of Docetism, which is certainly nearer to Cyril than to Theodore" (Tillich's reply to Fr. G. Weigel, S.J., after prereading the latter's article, "Protestantism and Paul Tillich," *THEOLOGICAL STUDIES*, XI [1950], 201, Author's note).

²⁹ *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, 1951), p. 134 f. ³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³¹ *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics*, trans. Olive Wyon (London, 1952), II, 357.

with theological accuracy, if not with lapidary simplicity, in the same Augsburg Confession. Enough for Brunner that the Eternal Son of God became man: "All that goes further than this is useless speculation."³² The manner of the Incarnation raises for Brunner the disturbing question as to the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or, as he phrases it, "the so-called 'Virgin Birth' of Jesus, which some theologians, and, above all, certain ecclesiastical circles, regard as a central doctrine of the Christian Faith."³³

Orthodox Christians had always believed that something of the manner of the Incarnation was given expression in the Gospels of Matthew and more particularly of Luke; that further clarification was given in the prologue of John and in the epistles of Paul; that the fact of the Incarnation and the way it was accomplished was summed up in the formula of the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord, who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. . . ."³⁴ Brunner, a neo-orthodox Christian, who regards faith not as the acceptance of "revealed truths," but as an "encounter with the living Christ,"³⁵ proceeds to explain how we can meet the Eternal Son of God become man without encountering the Virgin. To prove that Christ had no mother, Marcion the Gnostic deleted the early chapters of Matthew and Luke. To prove that the mother of Christ was not a virgin, Brunner questions the historicity of these same chapters.

"According to Matthew and Luke," Brunner writes, "Jesus Christ was created in time through procreation in the womb of the Virgin." Although these are not the words of either Matthew or Luke, Brunner interprets them to mean that Jesus Christ as Person was "procreated" in time, "an idea which belongs to the sphere of Arian thought."³⁶ Matthew and Luke must therefore be written off as Arians, and the testimony they give to the Virgin Birth is at least suspect. After noting that the Virgin Birth, if it is a historical fact, must have come "from the Mother of Jesus, who alone could know whether her Son had been born without a human husband or not," Brunner concludes: "Although we cannot say absolutely that the narrative of both Synoptists

³² *Ibid.*, p. 352.

³³ *Loc. cit.*

³⁴ The Roman Creed according to Rufinus; cf. *DB* 2.

³⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. vi.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.

is evidently non-historical, yet we must admit that the historical basis is uncertain."³⁷

"One thing cannot be gainsaid," Brunner insists, "the Apostles never mention the Virgin Birth. In the preaching of the Apostles, in the preaching of Paul and of John, as well as of the other writers of the New Testament, this idea does not play even a small part; it plays no part at all. Thus the doctrine of the Virgin Birth does not belong to the *Kerygma* of the Church of the New Testament, for which we have documentary evidence."³⁸ For their heterodoxy Matthew is stripped of his apostleship and Luke no longer qualifies as a New Testament writer. John, who certainly had greater opportunities than Luke to learn of the words that Mary had kept in her heart, does not mention the Virgin Birth "either because he does not know it, or because, although he knows it, he does not accept it. . . ." ³⁹ Brunner inclines to the latter view, and suggests that it is not "wholly improbable that the Johannine Prologue was deliberately placed where it is, in opposition to the Virgin Birth."⁴⁰ We are thus confronted with the possibility that Mary invented the whole story of the Virgin Birth; that she related it to Luke who duly set it down only to have it corrected by John. Origen ventured to say that "of all the Gospels that according to John is the most excellent." With this judgement Brunner will concur. But Origen goes on to say: "Its meaning no one can grasp unless he has reclined on the bosom of Jesus, or has received from Jesus Mary who also becomes his mother."⁴¹

Karl Barth belongs to one of those "ecclesiastical circles" which regard the Virgin Birth of Jesus as a central doctrine of the Christian Faith. In the Prolegomena of his monumental *Church Dogmatics* Barth promises to treat fully the doctrine of the Trinity, and in its proper place that of the Virgin Birth, even though he is fully aware that many of his contemporaries hold him "more than suspect of crypto-Catholicism."⁴² Turning on his critics, Barth asks ironically whether he ought to smile or weep "over the constantly increasing barbarism, tedium, and insignificance of modern Protestantism,

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 355.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 354.

³⁹ *Loc. cit.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 353.

⁴¹ *Commentary on John*, Preface, 6 (PG 14, 32).

⁴² *The Doctrine of the Word of God, Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thompson (New York, 1936), I, 1, x.

which has lost, (apparently along with the Trinity and the Virgin Birth—an entire third dimension—let us say it once for all, the dimension of mystery—not to be confused with religiously moral ‘seriousness’).⁴³

Barth’s systematic treatment of dogma, already seven volumes long, is still engaged in discussing God as Creator.⁴⁴ His contribution to Mariology is still in the stage of promise, but not altogether so. In discussing the role of the Holy Spirit Barth is confronted with what he unhesitatingly calls the “dogma” of the Virgin Birth. The confrontation is quite acceptable to him, since it gives him an opportunity to allay the fears of those who might be tempted to give an Arian interpretation to the early chapters of Matthew and Luke. Barth comments as follows on the passages dealing with the Virgin Birth:

The Incarnation of the Son of God out of Mary cannot indeed consist of the origination for the first time, here and now, of the Son of God; but it consists in the Son of God taking to Himself here and now this other thing which already exists previously in Mary, namely flesh, humanity, human nature, human-ness. And now the dogma of the Virgin Birth by no means specially claims that the Holy Spirit is the Father of the man Jesus and so, when the Son of God becomes man, becomes also the Father of the Son of God. But it claims that the man Jesus has no Father (exactly in the way in which as the Son of God He has no mother). What is ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the birth of Christ is the assumption of human-ness in the Virgin Mary into unity with God in the Logos mode of existence. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in the birth of Christ that this is possible, that this other thing, this human-ness, this flesh exists for God, for communion, in fact unity with God, that flesh can be the Word by the Word becoming flesh.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the passage suffers in translation; but even as it stands it is an eloquent witness to the essential oneness of the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John.

In the second part of Volume I Barth returns to the subject of the Virgin Birth and quotes with approval Berdyaev’s criticism of Brunner’s rejection of that dogma. This draws from Brunner a sharp reply which reveals Brunner’s real reason for rejecting the Virgin Birth: “He [Barth] has forgotten to add the continuation of the passage by Berdyaev where it becomes plain that Berdyaev’s passionate rejection

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁴⁴ *Die Lehre von der Schöpfung: Der Schöpfer und sein Geschöpf* (1950).

⁴⁵ *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 556.

of my view is due to the fact that it destroys the foundation of the worship of the Virgin, of Mariolatry."⁴⁶

Barth, Brunner, and Tillich are perhaps the three theologians most widely read at the present time. Apart from Barth, little has been contributed to the field of Mariology and much has been taken away. For Tillich, Mary has nothing to reveal to Protestants. For Brunner, Mary is perhaps the Mother of God, although he never gives her the title. Were he to give it, logic would oblige him to call Joseph the Father of God, according to the flesh.

MARY IN THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

The World Council of Churches is at times mistakenly referred to as a pan-Protestant group. Actually, the Council includes representatives of the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches and members of that separate, but not separatist, movement in Anglicanism which is usually referred to as "Anglo-Catholic." The presence of these representatives explains, at least in part, the awakened interest in Mariology outside Catholic circles. At the second World Conference of Faith and Order, held at Edinburgh in the summer of 1937, the relevance of Mary in Christian worship was candidly discussed, although no agreement was reached. For the orthodox and some other Churches and isolated believers the expression, "communion of saints," included not only communion with the living and the dead, but also with the Angels, and in a very special sense with the Blessed Virgin Mary, who as *theotokos* and ever Virgin is to be venerated as a creature more highly esteemed than saints, angels, and the whole of creation. There is no record that this forthright position provoked any strong reaction from the other delegates. Instead, it was agreed that Mary's prophecy, "All generations shall call me blessed," should receive further study.⁴⁷

In 1948 the Commission on Faith and Order agreed that the subject of Mary was primarily a liturgical question; considerable discussion took place in the following year.⁴⁸ Something of the nature of that discussion is revealed in the report of the Commission of 1951 which met to prepare the agenda for the World Conference at Lund in 1952:

⁴⁶ *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, p. 355, note 1.

⁴⁷ *Report of the Second World Conference on Faith and Order* (Edinburgh, 1937).

⁴⁸ *Ways of Worship*, p. 256.

"There are, however, some differences in ways of worship which undoubtedly reflect doctrinal positions that appear to be stubbornly incompatible. In the Eastern Orthodox Church, for example, there are devotions connected with the Mother of the Lord and the saints which most Protestants are convinced should have no place in any true Church of God."⁴⁹ However, this same commission agreed to include in their report, *Ways of Worship*, a special section on Mariology from the Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, and Reformed standpoint. Our chief interest is in the last paper, by Max Thurian of the Reformed Church of France, since it was prepared expressly for the Commission of 1949. The first three papers, however, deserve comment.

The presentation of the Catholic position is in good hands. Father Conrad Pepler, of the Order of Preachers, brings to life the age-old distinction between *latria*, the adoration that is given to God, and *dulia*, the reverence and worship that is given to the creature. This *dulia* or worship can be either civil—the honor, for example, paid to His Worship the Mayor or to His Majesty the King—or religious, the reverence and honor paid to the saints and to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Because of Mary's unique privilege of being the Mother of God, the reverence or worship given her is also unique. To express it a term had to be manufactured, *hyper-dulia*, which simply means that the veneration shown to her is "above" that shown to the ordinary saints. "Yet that honour, in the eyes of the Catholic, can never be seen as apart from God, still less as a rival to God's own honour. For Mary is the fairest of His creatures, and if she is praised for her beauty, so much the more praise and love does the Author receive. Every hymn to the Blessed Virgin leads the singer to the Father, and to her Son in the love of the Holy Spirit. *Corde et animo*, the Church says in her liturgy, 'In heart and spirit we sing glory to Christ in this celebration sacred to the super-excellent Mother of God, Mary.'"⁵⁰

The Anglican position is stated by the Rev. T. M. Parker of Great Britain. One may legitimately wonder whether the position stated is that of the Anglican Church or Parker's own. Actually Parker pays tribute to the unity of doctrine and instinct which characterizes Marian devotion in Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism. In speaking of Western Catholicism, the writer is speaking

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 261 f.

primarily of those parts of the West in which there has been no break in continuity of the popular tradition of Marian devotion. . . . In the Anglican area of Western Christendom it would be idle to deny that there has been such a break, even though the tradition has never become quite extinct. There has never been any formal condemnation of devotion to the Mother of God by the Church of England; there have almost always been, from the sixteenth century onwards, a few who have practiced it. Yet one swallow does not make a summer, and, if we are to look at the matter objectively and dispassionately as we should, we must face the fact that prayer to our Lady was, for something like three centuries, the exception rather than the rule in Anglican devotion. Such a gap is bound to have its effects, and consequently we cannot take England as a norm if we are considering the relationship of East and West in this matter.⁵¹

Parker's contribution to Mariology is less a statement of the position of the Anglican Church than a presentation to Anglicans of two great Marian traditions, essentially one in doctrine and in religious instinct, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. However, the presentation is not sheerly academic; it is an earnest plea that Anglicans should identify themselves with what is common to both traditions—an acceptance of Mary not only as the Mother of God (a phrase which “seems to frighten many worthy people”⁵²) but as the Mother of Christians with all that the phrase implies. The writer here is at his best. He reveals an instinct that is Catholic:

Prayer should always be theological, but not nervously so. Always to be stopping short in praises of the Virgin lest we might overstep the bounds of exact truth is to be like the man who is terrified lest he might say something extravagant about his mother. A good mother would not mind if he did; still less, if I may use a daring, yet I hope not irreverent, analogy, would a good father over-hearing.⁵³

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 281. Parker suspects “that some of the objection to the words ‘Mother of God’ springs unconsciously from a lack of deep conviction about the Deity of Christ. This is more frequently met with than we think. I said just now that the laity can be trusted if well instructed. And I sometimes wonder what the honest answer would be if we pressed upon certain Anglicans, not ordinarily suspected of unorthodoxy, the question, ‘When you say that Christ is God, do you really mean that He is so in just the same sense as the Father is God?’ Would they perhaps hedge, or at least hesitate?” (p. 282 f.). Echoing the sentiments of Cardinal Newman, Parker believes that it is no accident “that absence of devotion to Mary commonly goes with lukewarmness to her Son” (p. 282).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

Max Thurian, of the Reformed Church of France, starts from this frank position:

Catholic Mariology poses the most agonizing problem for ecumenical thought. . . . A Protestant cannot understand how, on a silence as great as that of the first centuries of the Church with regard to Mary, Catholic Mariology has been able to build in all good faith. He cannot but be impressed by the considerable disproportion which exists between the attitude of the biblical writers with regard to the Virgin and the veneration sometimes tantamount to worship which is paid to her. There is here something overwhelming for a mind which in other respects is ready to admit the incontestable values of pure Catholic theology and of the Roman liturgy.⁵⁴

Thurian's difficulty stems from a misunderstanding of the nature and the role of Christian tradition. Since his complaint, made in all good faith, should be directed against Orthodox Christians of the East as well as Catholics of the West, Professor Vladimir Lossky of the Orthodox Church of France may act as spokesman for both parties. As was the case with Father Pepler, the defense of the traditional position is in good hands. Professor Lossky prefaces his defense with this observation: "Christian communities which reject the idea of tradition in every form are also alien to the cult of the Mother of God." He continues with what is, to my mind, a fine piece of theological writing on the role that tradition must play in a living Church:

The notion of tradition is richer than we habitually think. Tradition does not merely consist of an oral transmission of facts capable of supplementing the biblical narrative. It is the complement of the Bible, and above all it is the fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New Testament, as the Church becomes aware of it. It is tradition which confers the power of comprehension of the meaning of revealed truth (Luke 24. 45). Tradition tells us what we must hear and, still more important, how we must keep what we hear. In this general sense, tradition implies an incessant operation of the Holy Spirit, who could have His full outpouring and bear His fruits only in the Church, after the Day of Pentecost. It is only in the Church that we find that we are capable of tracing the inner connections between the sacred texts which make the Old Testament and the New Testament into a single living *corpus* of truth, wherein Christ is present in each word. It is only in the Church that the seed sown by the Word is not barren, but brings forth fruit, and this fruitfulness of truth, as well as its capacity for being fruitful, is called tradition. The cultus of the Mother of God which, viewed externally,

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 289 f.

might seem to be in contradiction with the biblical data, is spread far and wide in the tradition of the Church and is the most precious fruit of tradition.⁵⁵

The veneration of Mary is not only the fruit of tradition; Mary herself is the personification and earliest embodiment of tradition. She is the "good ground" of the parable; she is the first of those who "having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience." For of Mary alone is it recorded in Scripture that she "kept all these sayings and gathered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19, 51). Time and the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost were necessary for Mary to be fully aware of the truths that she pondered in her heart. Time and the perpetual outpouring of the Holy Spirit are necessary for the Church to be fully aware of the truths that she has treasured from the Day of Pentecost.

Among the truths that need time and the operation of the Spirit for the Church to be fully aware of their significance, Lossky mentions the Assumption of our Lady into heaven.⁵⁶ He excludes, however, the Immaculate Conception. The exclusion will shock Catholics and surprise Protestants. For it is a known fact that the awareness of the Immaculate Conception is as old in the Church of the East as the awareness of the Assumption. True, from the time of the Reformation a new tradition has been fostered by Orthodox theologians which would postpone the sanctification of Mary until the moment immediately preceding the Incarnation. We admit that a tradition can grow, but can it reverse itself? It is understandable that difficulties should delay the general acceptance of a doctrine, as happened in the West; but once accepted is it allowable to raise objections already answered and to discard the doctrine? A Catholic can readily understand why an Orthodox should challenge the right of the Pope of Rome to pronounce dogmatically on any subject. We are centuries removed from the days when the Fathers of the East in ecumenical assembly rose as a body to acclaim two successive Popes of Rome with the words, "Peter has spoken through Leo," "Peter has spoken through Agatho."⁵⁷ But to reject a doctrine that was cherished in the East from the days at least of St. John of Damascus, Doctor of the Universal Church; that survived the disastrous Photian schism; that remained the common

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

⁵⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁷ Cf. *Mary*, pp. 29, 31.

doctrine of the Greek Orthodox Church up until the second half of the sixteenth century, when theologians trained in Protestant universities became aware of a conflicting tradition—to reject such a traditional doctrine not only distresses Catholics but (let us be candid in saying it) makes us wonder whether the breach to be closed through the intercession of our Lady has not widened into something more divisive than schism.⁵⁸

According to Lossky, Mary was sanctified neither at the moment of her conception nor while she lay in the womb of her mother. This privilege was accorded to her at the moment of the Annunciation. “The first Eve, ‘the mother of all living,’ lent her ear to the sayings of the seducer in the state of paradise, the state of innocent humanity. The second Eve, who was chosen to become the Mother of God, heard and understood the angelic saying when she was in the state of fallen humanity. That is why this unique election does not separate her from the rest of humanity and from all her fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, whether saints or sinners, whose best part she represented.”⁵⁹

The theme of Mary as the Second Eve is as old as the second century. As the theme develops, particularly in the Church of the East, it becomes increasingly evident that Mary at no moment of her existence can be compared unfavorably with Eve even before the Fall. Mary is not only the new Eve; she is God’s new Eden. “In her is no tree of knowledge, no serpent that harms, no Eve that kills; but from her springs the Tree of Life that restores the exiles to Eden.”⁶⁰ Four centuries later St. John of Damascus takes up the theme. Mary is the “paradise of the new Adam, in which the condemnation is lifted, and in which the tree of life is planted. . . . In this paradise there was no serpent. . . . For the only-begotten Son of God, being God, of the same substance as God, from this virgin and pure earth formed Himself

⁵⁸ The first to doubt, but not to deny, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the Greek Orthodox Church was Nicephoros Xanthopoulos writing in the 14th century (cf. M. Jugie, “Immaculée conception dans l’église grecque après le Concile d’Ephèse,” *DTC*, VII, 950). The first to resolve Xanthopoulos’ doubt into an open denial was John Nathanael who had studied at Protestant universities in Germany and in England during the second half of the 16th century (cf. M. Gordillo, S.J., *Compendium theologiae orientalis* [Romae, 1939], p. 137).

⁵⁹ *Ways of Worship*, p. 271.

⁶⁰ Ephraem the Syrian, *On the Annunciation of the Mother of God*, Hymn 3, 30; trans. in *Mary*, p. 22.

into a man.”⁶¹ Nor was Mary sanctified for her role of motherhood just prior to the Incarnation. On the feast of the Nativity of our Lady, John of Damascus addresses Mary: “O most sacred daughter of Joachim and Ann, who wast hidden from principalities and powers as well as from the fiery darts of the wicked one, who didst dwell in the bridal chamber of the Holy Spirit and wast kept without stain, in order to become the bride of God and God’s mother.”⁶²

According to the new tradition of the Orthodox Church, “the Holy Virgin was born under the law of original sin, sharing with all other human beings their common responsibility for the fall.”⁶³ According to the older and more universal tradition of the Catholic East and West, “Adam, in offering the first fruits to the Lord for us and from us, selects as first fruits Mary; out of the whole mass that had spoiled she remained unspoiled; from her the bread was made for the redemption of the race. . . . Today [commemorating the feast of Mary’s nativity] mankind is pure and nobly born and receives the gift of its original divine creation and returns to its [former] self [In Mary] nature’s formation becomes in reality a restoration; and the restoration, a deification, which in turn is a replica of the original deification.”⁶⁴ Mary is truly of the race of Adam, but she “remained unspoiled,” untouched by sin.

This tendency to reduce Mary to the level of fallen humanity has been a characteristic of Protestant Mariology from the time of Martin Luther. It reveals itself, as one might expect, in the contribution of Max Thurian of the Reformed Church of France. Commenting on the incident of the Purification of the Virgin, Thurian concludes: “She had need to be purified like every woman here on earth and, although blessed among them, she does not distinguish herself from their full humanity. She is a sinner like the others. This precision of the text allows us greatly to doubt the affirmation of the Immaculate Conception and the perpetual virginity *in partu* and *post partum*.”⁶⁵

Of the last of Mary’s greatest privileges, last in the order of history

⁶¹ *On the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God*, 2 (PG 96, 725); trans. in *Mary*, p. 63.

⁶² *On the Nativity of the Mother of God* (PG 96, 672); trans. in *Mary*, p. 63.

⁶³ *Ways of Worship*, p. 271.

⁶⁴ St. Andrew of Crete (d. 740), *On the Nativity of the Mother of God*, 1 (PG 97, 809–812); trans. in *Mary*, p. 62.

⁶⁵ *Ways of Worship*, p. 301.

and in the Church's definition, Thurian is equally critical, and for the same reasons. "Reformed theology wishes to keep Mary in the Church, and it accuses Catholicism of taking her out of it, and placing her above and against the Church. . . . The new dogma of the Assumption, now promulgated as being *de fide*, completes the removal of Mary from the conditions of the Church. There, indeed, Mary passes from the conditions of the Church and enters the level of eschatology. Her body has undergone glorification, has not known corruption, and has nothing more to wait for. She has passed through all the stages of the transformation 'from glory to glory.' She is alone in this state, between the Church which awaits the end and the Trinity which prepares for it; she is the kingdom of God."⁶⁶

Actually, this line of reasoning might lead to a denial of Christ's resurrection according to the flesh, lest Christ in His sacred humanity be removed from the Church, lest He be placed above and over against the Church. If, as implied, no creature should pass through all the stages of transformation "from glory to glory" and thus stand between the Church and the Trinity, why should an exception be made for the created humanity of Christ?

The difficulty is Thurian's to resolve. For a Catholic it has no meaning, whether applied to the sacred humanity of Christ or to the humanity of His Mother. Both Son and Mother have been glorified above the Church; but both are still very much a part of the Church, Christ as Head of the Church, Mary as its most privileged member. Christ in His glory has not divested Himself of the fullness of that humanity which He shares with us and which He received from His Mother; neither has Mary ceased to be one of us by being raised above us. "Changeless in all that is human, thy body is exalted to immortal life, that very same body, now living and glorified, and sharing without loss the perfection of life, inasmuch as it was impossible that the vessel which had received God, the living temple of the Sacred Deity of the only-begotten, should be held fast by death's sepulchre. Therefore, O Mother of God, we believe that thou goest about among us."⁶⁷

Nor is there any danger that Mary will be confused with the kingdom

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 312, f.

⁶⁷ St. Germanus of Constantinople (c. 720), *On the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God*, 1 (PG 98, 345); trans. in *Mary*, p. 58.

of God, whatever the phrase may mean in this connection. In the most eloquent and exuberant of all sermons preached on our Lady's Assumption, St. John of Damascus introduces a title dear to our Lady that should remove all honest fear of Catholic Mariolatry: "There was need that the Mother of God should enter into the possessions of her Son and, as Mother of God and handmaid, be revered by all creation."⁶⁸ Mother of God, exalted above the rest of us; but in relation to God, handmaid, *ancilla Domini*.

It would be wrong to conclude that Thurian's contribution to Protestant Mariology is wholly negative. A member of the religious community of Neuchâtel (his proper title is *frère*), Thurian is sincerely anxious to introduce Mary into Protestant piety and worship. He even suggests a suitable "office of Matins and Propers at a feast of Mary, Mother of the Lord, on [the] 15th of August."⁶⁹ True, Mary will not be prayed to nor will her intercession be asked: "such prayers would be foreign to Reformed tradition."⁷⁰ But Thurian, in passing, poses what he calls a "disturbing ecumenical question" when he asks, "whether any request for the intercession of the saints who have preceded us in Christ must necessarily be considered as foreign to the strict evangelical spirit. Are not prayers for one another, intercession and the request for intercession, the most significant manifestation of the mystery of the communion of saints in the Church?"⁷¹ Luther and Protestants after him had answered yes, provided the communion of saints was limited to the Church on earth.⁷² But Thurian is of a different view that, if once accepted, would reverse the whole trend of Protestant devotion and piety. The passage is revolutionary enough to be quoted at length:

In the Communion of the Holy Supper, we must be equally conscious that it unites us not only to our brothers communicating with us but to the whole Church; such is the meaning of the commemoration of the saints in the Canon of the Mass. Finally, intercession strengthens the sense of the *koinonia*. It would not make sense for Reformed doctrine to pray for those who have died within the communion of the Church. We do not pray for saints who now rest in

⁶⁸ *On the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God*, 2, 14 (PG 96, 741); trans. in *Mary*, p. 60 f.

⁶⁹ *Ways of Worship*, p. 319.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 317.

⁷¹ *Loc. cit.*

⁷² See above, p. 525.

Christ; we do not pray for Christ. But just as we invoke the intercession of Christ, why do we not ask that of those who live close to Him? They are no more separated from us than when they were alive. St. Paul or St. Peter or Mary are as near to us as they were to their contemporaries in the Church. To ask their intercession with God no more devalues the unique intercession of Christ, than to ask here on earth the prayers of a brother for oneself, or to intercede for others. . . . The great litany of the saints is the most moving and the strongest ecumenical prayer. And Mary is present at the head of this general assembly and Church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven.⁷³

Max Thurian has done a service by asking his co-religionists to put aside their fears of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and by calling them to task for not realizing in their own person Mary's prophesy, "Behold, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." More than that, he has assured Protestants that it is not improper to ask Mary's intercession. Should Protestants follow where Thurian would lead them, Catholic Mariology would no longer remain "the most agonizing problem for ecumenical thought."

⁷³ *Ways of Worship*, p. 317 f.