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Augustine Cardinal Bea
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Augustine Cardinal Bea, S.J.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

His Eminence Augustine Cardinal Bea, a German-born Jesuit theologian, is a world-renowned scriptural scholar and the author of numerous articles and books dealing with the Old Testament. He has been a Professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute since 1924, Director of the review Biblica from 1930 to 1949, and Consultor for various Commissions and Congregations. He has recently been named a cardinal (November, 1959) and appointed head of a secretariat created to deal with problems of liaison with non-Catholic bodies in preparation for the coming Second Vatican Council. Last June the cardinal received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from Fordham University.

It is a well-known fact that the doctrine of the Church concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary is a stumbling block for most Protestants. Catholic authors seeking to advance the cause of Christian unity must give evidence of sympathy and understanding for the difficulties our non-Catholic brethren experience in regard to Marian doctrine. The following article by Cardinal Bea, "Mary and the Protestants," translated from the Encyclopaedia Mariana Theotokos (Genoa, Bevilacqua et Solari, 1958), 342-48, is indicative of the broad understanding and Christian charity which animate the President of the Secretariat for Christian Unity in preparation for the Twenty-First Ecumenical Council. His approach enables us to hope that the wish recently expressed by the Cardinal in an address on Protestantism may be realized: "The Council will know how to take into account the needs and demands of the present which will make the way of unity more free and easy for separated brethren."

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The opposition of Protestants to the cult of Mary has its roots in the more general thesis which rejects the cult and invocation of the saints and asserts that Christ is the only mediator between man and God. This explains why the first reformers engage on the one hand in a eulogy of the dignity and power of the Blessed Virgin, and on the other hand declare that they are opposed to any veneration and invocation of the mother of Jesus. Luther himself, in his commentary on the Magnificat published in 1521, three years after his break with the Church, speaks of Mary often with great reverence and love. Explaining the words, "Fecit mihi magna qui potens est," he says: "The important thing is nothing other than the fact that Mary became the mother of God. From this fact flows all her honor, all her happiness. She, of all the human race, is the only person superior to all, to whom no one is equal, having had a Son, together with the heavenly Father, - and such a Son!"

The founder of Protestantism professes and teaches the immunity of Mary from all sin, her perpetual virginity, her constant fidelity to the will of God, and even her Immaculate Conception, at least until 1527, and up to a certain point also the corporal Assumption of Mary into heaven.

Uhlrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, speaks in a similar way. When in 1522 rumors began to spread that he had outraged Mary by calling her a sinner, a stupid woman, he protested energetically, saying that he was able to swear "that never in his life has there occurred to my mind such contempt for the worthy mother of God." And he published a "sermon on the Virgin eternally pure, Mary, mother of Jesus Christ our Savior." There he explains the prerogatives of Mary and illustrates her virtues, reasserting his own faith with the words, "I firmly believe according to the words of the Gospel that a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God, and remained a Virgin pure and intact in childbirth and also after the birth, for all eternity. I firmly trust that she has been exalted by God to eternal joy above all creatures, both the blessed and the angels."

John Calvin likewise often expressed his reverence for the Virgin Mary, who according to him always preserved her virginity, and praises her faith, humility, and modesty. He calls her our model and our mistress.

None of the first spirits of the reform, however, admits that Mary can or should be invoked, that she is to be considered as a mediatrix with God or with Christ, or our advocate. Luther himself at the beginning was still a little hesitant. His short work on the Magnificat begins with the words "May this same sweet mother of God obtain for me the spirit to

explain usefully and profoundly this, her canticle,” and at the end he says, “May Christ grant me this through the intercession of His beloved mother.”

In the same work he had also said “Mary should be invoked so that God will give us and do to us, according to her will, that which we request.”

But already a year later he says in a sermon for the feast of the Nativity of Mary, “That Mary should be honored is true; but be careful to honor her in the proper measure.” And he protested against the title given to Mary in the Salve Regina: “Queen of Mercy, our life, sweetness, and hope.”

Little by little he also becomes accustomed to speak of Mary as a goddess or an idol, to impute to Catholics the adoration of Mary, and to reject pilgrimages and other pious customs. As the struggle went on, his bitterness against the cult of Mary kept growing.

Much clearer from the very beginning is the position of Calvin. According to him the Papists make of Mary an idol.

“Here is the song of the Papists: Ask the Father; order the Son.”

When to her are attributed the office of advocate, of mediatrix between God and man, when the statement is made that she is the life, the light, the hope of men, “what remains for our Lord Jesus Christ?”

To call her “a treasury of grace” is a blasphemy against God, and attributes to her a title which is frivolous and imaginary.

The same position is found in the confessions, that is to say, in the official formulae of faith of the various sects of Protestantism: “The Augustinian Confession, 1530, drawn up by the clever Melanchton, is generally rather conciliatory, but in Article 21 rejects the invocation of the saints without making any exception in regard to Mary. In the defense of the Augustinian Confession (1532), Melanchton agrees that Mary is worthy of the greatest honor and that she prays for the Church, but he asserts that, nonetheless, she should not be invoked nor put on a level with Christ as is done by Catholics. In other confession formulae, Mary is also spoken of with respect and reverence, but without admitting that she should be invoked. The articles of Schmalkalden (1537), call her “pure, holy, always a Virgin” (Article 414). The formulae of Agreement (1577), which became a fundamental document of the Protestant Creed, speaks of “the Blessed Virgin,” of “the Mother of God.”

The Immaculate Conception is expressly denied in the declaration of Turin (1645), a formula of the Calvin reformers of Brandenburg, which says: “All men except Christ are born with original sin, even the most holy Virgin Mary.”

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8. Idem., p. 798.
MARY AND THE PROTESTANTS

In regard to the cult of Mary, religious practice is not the same in all Protestant groups, and generally depends upon their overall position in regard to the Catholic Church and tradition. The most vigorous intransigence is found in Calvinism, which aims to have done once and for all with images, statues, altars, pilgrimages, and other customs of the Marian devotion of Papists, and speaks at times of Mary with real contempt.

Lutheran Protestantism is more tolerant. In some areas it continues to celebrate the Marian Feasts of the Purification and Annunciation up to the end of the 19th century.15

In this connection it is significant that quite a few poems in which the grandeur of Mary is exalted have been composed by Lutheran Protestants, as for example, Novalis (1772-1801) and even Goethe. The Protestant, Paul de Lagarde (1827-1891) says: "Real clouds of blessings and of poetry billowing from the image of the Madonna have come back over humanity."16 The Protestant Johann Sebastian Bach has left us his grand Magnificat in five parts. Lutheran theologians like Augustus Vilmar (1800-1868) seek to create a Protestant Mariology, in which is manifested all of the holiness and the peculiar glory of the mother of God, without on the other hand, abandoning the fundamental principles of Protestantism.

These tendencies are found especially in authors who are inclined toward pietism or are favorable to it. The representatives of the orthodox Lutheran group still continue to talk in our own day of "Mariolatry"17 and to consider Catholic Mariology as apostasy and heresy contrary to the doctrine of the Gospels, as mere theological speculation without any biblical foundation.18

The situation in the area of the English language is similar. There, too, Puritanism, derived from Calvinism, holds the more intransigent line, and does not wish even to admit the singing of the Magnificat or the public recitation of the Apostolic Creed, because in them there is mention of Mary. In Scotland Presbyterianism, although derived from Calvinism, softens this intransigence a little without, however, reaching a real cult of Mary.

In England itself one must distinguish between the various branches of Anglicanism. The low Church rejects Marian devotion; the broad Church, since it does not concern itself with other dogmas, likewise is not interested in Marian dogma, and is satisfied with moral norms and ethical practices. The high Church, however, is more positive in regard to the cult of Mary. There Mary is always spoken of with a certain respect and even with veneration, and the high Church has preserved to our time the celebration of the Feasts of the Annunciation and of the Purification.

Anglican authors willingly agree that the Catholic Church does not teach a Mariolatry, but distinguishes between dulia and latria and reserves

for Mary only a cult of hyperdulia. However, they claim that the Catholic populace does not observe this distinction of doctrine and gives to Mary also a cult of latria.\(^{19}\)

The Oxford Movement (Keeble, Newman, Pusey), with the Anglo-Catholicism derived therefrom, still uses, in the liturgy, hymns invoking Mary, celebrates the feast of the Assumption, and permits the recitation of the rosary.\(^{20}\)

The numerous American sects (for example, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterian, Episcopalians, Congregationalists) generally follow also in Mariology the Protestant branch from which they derive and do not present any special points of view. The Mariological question has become one of particular interest in our time in those sections of Protestantism which are looking toward the unity of the Church, the ecumenical movement; moreover, the oriental dissidents profess a great devotion toward the mother of God. In the pan-Christian conference of Edinburg (1937) Mariology has been called “the vital point of an ecumenical theology,” and in the fourth session of the conference a proposal was made, after serious discussion, of the following resolution: The position of the mother of Christ has been considered by the session, and all will agree that she should have an eminent place in Christian esteem. We recommend to the Churches a further study of this question.\(^{21}\)

At a convention of Protestant theologians held at the beginning of March, 1949, at Heidelberg, to discuss the question of union with the oriental Churches, Professor Wolf of Goettingen admitted that the Protestants were wrong in abandoning Mariology.\(^{22}\)

The Lutheran theologian Hans Asmussen has recently published a Protestant Mariology, *Mary Mother of God*, in which he says, “There is no Jesus without Mary.” The author does not even deny the role of Mary as mediatrix. She, following Christ, takes part in His meditation. However, he does not come out clearly and say that Mary should be invoked.\(^{23}\)

Today quite a few Protestant theologians admit that the Marian cult of the Catholic Church is not really an aberration, but that Marian doctrine is intimately bound up with many doctrines of the Christian religion which interest Protestants also.\(^{24}\)

This new position manifested itself in a particular way on the occasion of a solemn definition of the Assumption. The statements made by Protestants in opposition to the new dogma were often numerous and sometimes very energetic, but with few exceptions those who made those protests showed at the same time a true reverence for the mother of Jesus. Thus, for example, two Anglican archbishops wrote: “We ought to demand at once publicly that the Church of England render honor and reverence to the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.”\(^{25}\)

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25. Declaration ordered to be printed on August 17, 1950, by the Lambeth Palace.
The Lutheran Bishops of Germany declared: "According to the testimony of the Scripture, Mary the mother of Jesus was called to the service of God in a special manner, bringing to the world, as a virgin, the Son of God. Therefore, she may be called, together with the Father, Mother of God, and consequently occupies a special place in the entire human race."26

The Living Church the magazine of the Episcopalian Church of the United States writes: "The Blessed Virgin belongs to us all. The Episcopalian Church honors her with two great feasts, and the Sacred Scripture teaches us to call her 'full of grace' whose purity and obedience has made her the bearer of the Eternal Word."27

The opposition therefore is directed no longer against the cult of Mary as such, but stems from principles extraneous to any strictly Marian question, that is to say, from the fundamental principles of Protestantism as well as from the basic principle of the so-called Reform: the Sacred Scripture is the sole source and norm of faith. Therefore the question arises of the doctrine of Christ as the only mediator between God and man, which excludes the invocation of the saints, and consequently also, Mary, and finally, the denial of the power of the successor of Peter to teach and to define with infallibility the dogmas of faith.

Summing up, therefore, we may say Protestantism has certainly made some progress in the esteem and veneration for the Blessed Virgin as an individual person. It has likewise achieved here and there a greater understanding of the peculiar position of the mother of Christ in the Church, but in regard to the fundamental points on which any real Mariology depends it remains negative and can be nothing else until the very basic principles of Protestantism itself have been revised.

27. The Living Church, Nov. 12, 1950, p. 5.

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