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Arthur Carl Piepkorn

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## MARY'S PLACE WITHIN THE PEOPLE OF GOD ACCORDING TO NON-ROMAN-CATHOLICS

"Mariology is the point at which the totality of the doctrinal differences between evangelical Christianity and the [Roman] Catholic Church discloses itself," declares Karl Rahner.<sup>1</sup> What he says is not much different from what the Lutheran theologian Kristen Ejner Skydsgaard asserts: "There is probably no place where the difference between the two understandings of Christianity becomes so plain as in their different conceptions of the Virgin Mary."<sup>2</sup>

Writing in *America* for January 3, 1959 Titus Cranny observed: "The desire for unity on the part of our separated brethren has brought them to a closer study of the [Roman] Catholic position. It has made them aware of [Roman] Catholic teaching . . . especially on the Blessed Virgin Mary. But they view our Lady, not as the great means of effecting unity, but as an obstacle of staggering proportions."<sup>3</sup>

In 1950 Pierre Maury of Paris affirmed that "the doctrine of Mary and the cult of the Virgin seem to pose with increasing precision—and with an unmistakable clarity at the present time—the real problem of our relations with the Roman Church."<sup>4</sup>

Max Thurian, of the French Reformed community at Taizé, writing in the symposium prepared in advance of the 1952 Lund Conference on Faith and Order, *Ways of Worship*, made this provocative charge in his paper on Mariology (one of four

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Albert Brandenburg, *Maria in der evangelischen Theologie der Gegenwart* (Paderborn, 1965) 118.

<sup>2</sup> Kristen Ejner Skydsgaard, *One in Christ*, tr. by Alex C. Kildegaard (Philadelphia, 1957) 207.

<sup>3</sup> Titus Cranny, *Our Lady and Ecumenism*, in *America*, 100 (1959) 402.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Maury, *La Vierge Marie dans le catholicisme contemporain*, in *Le protestantisme et la Vierge Marie* (Paris, 1950) 25.



contributed respectively by the Dominican priest Conrad Pepler, the Orthodox lay theologian Vladimir Lossky, the Anglican scholar T. M. Parker, and Frère Max): "The doctrine and the veneration of Mary in the Roman Church create extreme difficulties"—in another place he calls it "the most agonizing problem"—"for ecumenical thought. . . One can see no way through the problem posed by Mariology and the veneration of the Blessed Virgin in the [Roman Catholic] Church."<sup>5</sup>

This paper travels over a road rather solidly packed down by the feet of predecessors. Other recent surveys of non-Roman-Catholic thought about Mary—all, incidentally, by Roman Catholics—are: chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7 of Thomas A. O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology*;<sup>6</sup> William J. Cole, *The Role of Scripture in the Current Understanding of Our Lady among Our Separated Brethren* (Especially United States Protestants);<sup>7</sup> and Albert Brandenburg's *Maria in der evangelischen Theologie der Gegenwart*. All three have impressive bibliographies that illustrate the formidable volume of material on the subject in English, French, German, and Latin.<sup>8</sup>

Three stipulations are in order. First, there is no single conception of the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary within the people of God among non-Roman-Catholic Christians. The x and

<sup>5</sup> Max Thurian, *Mariology*, in Pehr Edwall, Eric Hayman, and William D. Maxwell (editors), *Ways of Worship* (London, 1951) 289.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas A. O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (New York, 1966).

<sup>7</sup> Fr. Cole has kindly made this available to me in manuscript.

<sup>8</sup> Other important surveys are Walter Delius, *Geschichte der Marienverehrung* (Munich, 1963), which devotes pp. 300-320 to "Der Protestantismus und das marianische Zeitalter," and Reintraud Schimmelpfennig, *Die Geschichte der Marienverehrung im deutschen Protestantismus* (Paderborn, 1952), of which chapter 5, pp. 115-145, surveys the first half of the 20th century. See also *Evangelische Marienverehrung*, in *Eine heilige Kirche*, 1955/1965, no. 1. The reportedly very complete survey in Heinrich M. Köster, *Heilige Schrift und Maria* (Essen, 1963) 166-260, was not accessible to me. Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 (New York, 1965) devotes two pages to contemporary Anglicanism and "Continental Protestantism" (pp. 133-135).

*non-x* type of dichotomy (Jew and non-Jew, or Jew and goy; Greek and non-Greek, or Greek and barbarian; Americans and non-Americans, or Americans and foreigners) tends to occlude for the *x* element the possibility that *non-x* may be a very complex aggregation of incommensurable and heterogeneous entities without any antecedent principle of inherent unity. Accordingly you must not expect to be able to generalize from any observation that I make. It may seem inconsiderate of non-Roman-Catholics not to agree with one another in their views on the Blessed Virgin Mary, but in the premises there is really no reason to expect them to do so.

The second stipulation is that when the word "church" occurs in this inquiry I mean by it the one holy catholic and apostolic Church that exists empirically wherever the Gospel of the divine grace in Jesus Christ is proclaimed and the sacraments are administered and the Holy Spirit imparts the new birth and the life of God Himself to men and women. In the view of your reporter this one holy catholic and apostolic Church subsists in every church and ecclesial community to the extent that it meets these criteria, but in his view *the* Church does not subsist only or even pre-eminently in one Church or ecclesial community.

The third stipulation is that this is a report, not an arraignment, a survey, not a tract. As a Lutheran, that is to say, an ecumenically oriented Evangelical Catholic, I have been influenced by my own convictions in the selection both of the material and of the words in which I introduce the material, but I have tried to operate with an awareness of my biases and prejudices and to keep them from affecting my objectivity. Where I have failed, I can only ask the pardon of those whom I have inadvertently misrepresented and of you whom, to that extent, I shall have inadvertently misled.

# I

For the theologian for whom God is really dead and for his followers it would seem obvious that the Blessed Virgin Mary

can have no religiously exceptional significance within the people of God.

The same is true of the theologian for whom "God" is merely a verbal symbol for something else. It may be the verbal symbol of the totality of the integrating forces of the universe. It may be the verbal symbol of the sum of all the positive values in our environment. It may be the verbal symbol of the claim that my fellow-men place upon my love and that I place on their love and of our several responses to these claims.

Nor can the Blessed Virgin Mary have a religiously exceptional place among the people of God in the case of these theologians for whom it is difficult, if not impossible, honestly to affirm that Jesus Christ is the unique Son of God, begotten of His Father before all ages, God out of God, Light out of Light, true God out of true God, begotten and not made, possessed of the same being as the Father, and the One through whom everything was made. If our Lord only *became* God in some sense in the course of His life, say at His baptism, or at His crucifixion, or at His rising to life again, no religiously exceptional significance would seem logically to attach to His human mother.

Again, if the Biblical affirmations about Our Lord's pre-existence are simply a part of a redeemer-myth, Gnostic or otherwise, that needs to be demythologized before it can be proclaimed to contemporary scientific man, or if the special virtue of the Christian Gospel is that it provides "stories" which have an unusually high potency in evoking the intention to practice an agapeistic mode of life, the mother of this mythical person obviously cannot really hold a religiously exceptional place in the community of Christians.

To the extent that theologians who hold such views may accord the accounts of the life of the historical Jesus in the Sacred Scriptures any credibility, they may praise the pedagogical skill and ability of the mother that was able amid the negative influences of her environment to rear the kind of person who could evoke the faith of so many people in the primitive Christian



community, and who could inspire the legends that came to cluster about His name. They may describe with great detail and on the basis of diligent research and reflection how the subsequent image of his mother in the Christian community came into being and what factors entered into its evolution. But on their own premises they cannot accord the real, historical person who bore our Lord anything more than an incidental biological or educative significance.

So far we have been speaking of theologians who, in spite of their desire and determination to be identified with and to instruct the Christian community, are, by the standard of Nicene orthodoxy, sub-Christian. But now we come to a phenomenon that is clear intra-Christian, the crisis of belief in the virgin conception and birth of our Lord.

Questions and doubts about the virgin conception and birth are not new even with Christendom. Schleiermacher voiced them over a century and a half ago. What is new is the extent to which theological scholars assert that they feel compelled to call the Virgin Birth into question, partly, they insist, in order to avoid presuppositions and presumptions that have led to certain later Mariological developments.

There is common agreement that there is probably no area of Christian conviction, in Europe or America, where the difference between the professional theology of university faculties and the faith of the Christian layfolk is so striking.<sup>9</sup>

The late Emil Brunner conceded that the doctrine of the virginal conception and birth of our Lord "has exercised a very wholesome influence and, as the first attempt of primitive Christianity to proclaim the mystery of the Person of Jesus it deserves our utmost respect," but on both biblical and theological grounds he vigorously rejects the virgin birth. He implies that a human being conceived without a father is only half a human

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, the editorial, *Ex Virgine or Ex-Virgin*, in *Dialog*, 2 (1963) 103-104.

being, one who lacks the most essential aspect of humanity, that is, to have been born as we all have been born.<sup>10</sup>

Walther von Loewenich, who takes a disapproving view of Roman Catholic Mariology in general, asserts: "The germ of Mariology is to be found in the virgin birth, as presented in Matthew 1 and Luke 1. . . . The virgin birth has made an essential contribution to the mythologizing of Christianity when once it was raised to the status of a dogma. That the virgin birth has a profound symbolical significance we would not for a moment deny. But it is not suitable for treatment as a dogma. We can understand it as an expression of Christian experience of the person of Christ, but it cannot be used as a jumping ground for an interpretation of his person."<sup>11</sup>

In 1958 the American ecumenical weekly, *The Christian Century*, editorialized: "Those for whom we write do not reject the Virgin Birth because it is 'impossible.' In the discussion of miracles, possibility cannot be an issue. The Virgin Birth is rejected because it is so radically out of character with the rest of the manner and the matter of Christian revelation. We doubt the Virgin Birth not because it has not been 'proven'; we doubt it because it does not prove what has to be proven. To account so materially, so biologically, so cellularly for the uniqueness of Jesus is to land dead center on what is precisely *not* the point.

"The paradox of Jesus' divine humanity is not a physical-spiritual ambiguity. To make it such is an absolute contradiction of biblical anthropology. Yet what else does the Virgin Birth assure except that Jesus was some kind of *tertium quid*, half

<sup>10</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, tr. by Olive Wyon (Philadelphia, 1952) 352-356. The quotation is on page 356.

<sup>11</sup> Walther von Loewenich, *Modern Catholicism*, tr. by Reginal H. Fuller (New York, 1959) 237. See also his somewhat more objective article in Julius Bodensieck (editor), *The Encyclopedia of the Lutheran Church*, 2 (Minneapolis, 1965) 1495-1496. Heiko A. Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964) 271, holds that the Virgin Birth is *didachē* not *kērygma*; see also pp. 277-280.

and half, substantially divine creature? And that is not the central Christian claim. He is not God in his structure, but in that unique relationship to God and his purpose which still identifies Jesus as Christ. He is not half-God-half-man, he is not man-trapped God or God-inflated man—which are the only interpretations the Virgin Birth helps with.”<sup>12</sup>

The *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* is a distinguished modern German reference work. In the article on the virgin birth, Werner Wiesner of Mayence insists that primitive Christianity had, in addition to what he calls the poorly attested virgin birth tradition, a tradition that Jesus was born by natural generation. He expresses some surprise that Karl Barth retains the virgin birth as an article of faith, not as a fact on which salvation depends but as a sign of the mystery of the Incarnation. For himself he regards the virgin birth as “the inadequate expression of the fact that the birth of Jesus Christ is not to be understood in terms of the natural biological context nor in terms of human action . . . but alone in terms of the divine miracle which has made this man Jesus to be a new beginning of humanity.”<sup>13</sup>

The third edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* is an even more prestigious theological lexicon. In it the late Erlangen theologian, Paul Althaus, argues that the virgin

<sup>12</sup> Editorial, “A Choice of Miracles,” *The Christian Century* 75 (1958) 396. See also Paul M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel Based on an Analysis of Its Language* (New York, 1963) 164-165.

<sup>13</sup> Werner Wiesner, article *Jungfrauengeburt*, in Heinz Brunotte and Otto Weber (editors), *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon* 2 (Göttingen, 1958) 498. In the article on *Maria, Marienverehrung*, Kurt Nitzschke of the traditionally anti-Roman-Catholic Konfessionskundliches Institut at Bensheim summarizes the place of the Blessed Virgin for an evangelical Christian: “In evangelical thought, Mary is a human being whom God richly endowed with grace in a unique encounter with Him. In evangelical thought this encounter with God stands in the foreground. Thus the Marian question cannot read: What is Mary, what characteristics and prerogatives does she have? Instead it must read: What happens to this human being in this encounter with God and Christ? It is this precisely that the few New Testament passages about Mary record. Mary too must learn to conquer her own maternal will and to submit herself wholly to the will of God. In this way she can be an example to us, but nothing more” (*Ibid.*, 2, 1250-1251).



birth is not "a dogmatically necessary and indispensable part of the commitment to Jesus Christ." It could signify that "although Jesus appears in the context of Adamic humanity and participates in its inheritance [Romans 8:3], the Incarnation of God takes place through His conception and a new humanity begins." But the certainty of this divine miracle is not bound to the historicity of the virgin birth and it is not affected by our recognition that the infancy accounts are legendary in character.<sup>14</sup>

The rejection of the virgin birth by the former Protestant Episcopal Bishop of California, the Right Reverend James A. Pike, in spite of the occurrence of the article in both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds that his denomination has incorporated in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as part of the basis of its ecumenical effort, was one of the factors that led some of his fellow-bishops to demand a few weeks ago that he be tried for heresy. One of his earliest statements on the subject appeared in an article in *The Christian Century*, subsequently republished in a symposium entitled *How My Mind Has Changed*: "I am more liberal in theology than I was ten years ago. When Norman Pittenger [of General Theological Seminary, New York] and I were writing *The Faith of the Church* (a semi-official Episcopal book on doctrine), he did not find reason to accept the historical virgin birth; I *thought* I did.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Althaus, article *Jungfrauengeburt*, in Kurt Galling (editor), *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 3d edition, 3 (Tübingen, 1959) 1069. In the article *Marienverbrung in der evangelischen Kirche der Gegenwart* in the same work, Wilhelm Jannasch expresses concern that evangelical veneration of the Blessed Virgin, especially when thought of in Hans Asmussen's terms as "the echo of the blessing that God spoke over the mother of the Lord," will become "a new law" and "an attack on the evangelical message of justification and a restriction of the 'Christ alone.'" Precisely in the era of the new Marian dogma, "no evangelical group and no individual evangelical clergyman has the right to proceed practically with the veneration of Mary until the very disparate modern stimuli to the veneration of Mary that come from theologians... and poets... have been thoroughly worked over in serious discussion among theologians." (*Ibid.*, 4 [1960] 766)

Our wrestling over the matter—not only a personal wrestling, but a wrestling with both theological professors and bishops of our church—resulted in the book's leaving an opening for people like Dr. Pittenger.<sup>15</sup> *Now I am with him.* While neither he nor I would deny the possibility of the miracle, the biblical evidence and the theological implications seem to be in favor of assuming that Joseph was the human father of Jesus. We certainly do not deny in the least the *doctrine* of the virgin birth, namely the paradox which the image so well presents: Jesus as part of the historical process and also as divine interruption in history—a mighty act of God, indeed the Supreme Mighty Act of God.”<sup>16</sup> (It should be stressed that the virgin birth does not lack Protestant Episcopal defenders. In an article in *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, J. V. Langmead Casserley concedes that the reference to Isaiah 7, 14 in the Matthaean infancy account is “almost certainly due to an exegetical mistake” and that “the New Testament evidence is not as strong in the case of the Virgin Birth as it is in that of the Resurrection.” Nevertheless, “there is no evidence at all for any other alternative and those who accept the complete doctrine of the Incarnation would probably contend that the Virgin birth accords perfectly with their belief that the eternal Son of God entered the realm of nature and history by assuming human nature to himself without emerging as a consequence of natural processes. Those who deny the virgin birth usually tend toward some kind of adoptionism or Nestorianism in Christology—which is often called a ‘reduced Christology’—and toward some kind of naturalism in philosophy.”)<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> See W. Norman Pittenger, *The Word Incarnate: A Study of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (New York, 1959) 66-67, 69-72.

<sup>16</sup> James A. Pike, in Harold E. Fey (editor), *How My Mind Has Changed* (Cleveland, 1961) 170-171. See also Pike, *A Time for Christian Candor* (New York, 1964) 139-140.

<sup>17</sup> J. V. Langmead Casserley, article *The Virgin Birth*, in Marvin Halverson and Arthur A. Cohen (editors), *A Handbook of Christian Theology* (Cleveland, 1958) 369-370. In Alan Richardson (editor), *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible* (New York, 1951) 277, the Scottish Presbyterian

The distinguished Heidelberg church historian, Hans Baron von Campenhausen, in *Die Jungfrauengeburt in der alten Kirche* surveys the historical evidence down to St. Augustine and argues that the primitive Church never knew a Mariology in the strict sense. The infancy accounts of the first and the third Gospels disclose different primitive traditions about the ancestry of our Lord; one stream of tradition sees him as Joseph's natural son, the other as virgin-born. The rest of the New Testament knows nothing about the virgin birth, nor do the Apostolic Fathers, St. Ignatius excepted.<sup>18</sup>

The European Reformed theologian Otto Weber holds that the virgin birth is inconsistent with the doctrine of Christ's preexistence and that the virgin birth represents a later stage of Christian tradition. The doctrine says nothing about the ancestry (*Herkunft*) of Jesus, but speaks only about his origin (*Ursprung*). It is a proclamatory assertion, not a biological one; its meaning derives from the fact that it is an "eschatological" account.<sup>19</sup>

In 1962 John Harwood Hick, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary (United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.), was denied membership in the New Brunswick (N.J.) presbytery of his church for refusing to affirm belief in the virgin birth. In defending him, a member of the presbytery, Conrad Henry Massa, is quoted as declaring: "The basic Christian doctrine is the divinity of Jesus Christ, not the virginity of Mary."<sup>20</sup>

theologian J. K. S. Reid sees the virgin birth commended to the credence of Christians by its factual probability, theological propriety, excellent tradition, and spiritual fittingness.

<sup>18</sup> Hans von Campenhausen, *The Virgin Birth in the Theology of the Ancient Church* (Naperville, 1964). The German original was published at Heidelberg in 1962. See the review by Robert Wilken in *Una Sancta* 22, No. 2 (Pentecost, 1965) 59-61, which ends: "We must ask ourselves as Lutherans: Can a theology of Mary rely solely on the evidence of primitive Christianity?"

<sup>19</sup> Otto Weber, *Grundlagen der Dogmatik* 2 (1962) 120, quoted in Brandenburg, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Hick declared: "I distinguished between the central Christian faith in the Incarnation and the theologically peripheral stress of the virgin birth,



Thomas Boslooper, a Reformed theologian in this country, says in his book *The Virgin Birth*: "The story of the virgin birth represents in mythical form two of Christendom's principal logical propositions: that God acted in history and that monogamous marriage is civilization's most important special institution . . . This virgin birth is a positive affirmation of the sanctity of marriage . . . What is set forth in the record of Jesus's ministry as a bold and provocative moral injunction (Mark 10:6 ff.) is portrayed in the narrative of his origin with poetic beauty and esthetic sensitivity. The couple is betrothed. The marriage bond has been established. Within this relationship God acted. The atmosphere is charged with ethical purity and moral vigor. Those who receive this story with faith accept premarital chastity, heterosexuality, and monogamous marriage as a divinely ordained way of life . . . The birth narratives, then, are 'Christian midrashic haggada' which reflect the following Christian convictions based on the teaching of Jesus and the faith of the earliest church: the unity of God and man in Christ, the sanctity of sex, the necessity of monogamy and fidelity in marriage, the superiority of Christianity over astrology, the superiority of Christianity over the Baptist movement, the fulfilment of Judaism in Christianity, the universality of the gospel, and the inevitability of the success of the Christian mission."<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, although Boslooper denies the historic *fact* of the virgin birth, he ends his book with the hope that the time will soon come when the whole church will confess: "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."<sup>22</sup>

It would not be difficult to provide additional quotations.

and following St. Paul, St. John, and St. Mark, and most of the other New Testament writers, I do not found my belief upon the virgin birth tradition." Editorial, *Ministers Protest Exclusion of Professor*, in *The Christian Century* 79 (1962) 450. See also the special report, *United Presbyterians in Action*, *ibid.*, 750-751.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Boslooper, *The Virgin Birth* (Philadelphia, 1963) 234-236.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

Where these views of the virgin birth are seriously held—and this position represents the view of the bulk of modern liberal theological thought—all that is left of Mariology is the thesis that the mother of Jesus of Nazareth was called Mary. But where she is merely the wife of Joseph the artisan and the mother of a considerable number of his children, one of whom bore the name of the successor of Moses and later achieved distinction as the eponym of the Christian community, we cannot speak of a religiously exceptional place of the mother of Jesus in the Christian community and in the people of God.

There is another large group of Christians who deny to the mother of Christ any religiously exceptional place among the people of God. These are the numerous conservative evangelical Christians who intransigently affirm and defend the virgin conception and birth of our Lord as an often indispensable (biblically and theologically) part of Christian teaching and belief, but for whom His mother is only a biologically necessary means. In this group we should count the very considerable body of conservative Reformed, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Evangelical United Brethren who identify themselves broadly with the theology of the biweekly, *Christianity Today*,<sup>23</sup> together with the Churches of Christ, the major Holiness bodies, the Trinitarian Pentecostals, the Menonites, and others who belong to conservative groups like the National Association of Evangelicals, the American Council of Christian Churches, and the Associated Gospel Churches.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the article by F. F. Bruce, *The Person of Christ: Incarnation and Virgin Birth*, in the symposium edited by the editor of *Christianity Today*, Carl F. H. Henry, *Basic Christian Doctrines* (New York, 1962) 124-130.

<sup>24</sup> Typical tributes to the Blessed Virgin from these circles are the appeal not to "neglect to give Mary, the mother of Jesus, the distinguished place which the Holy Scriptures itself accords her," by Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Mother of Our Lord*, in *Eternity* (December, 1958) 18-19 and 44 (abbreviated from Zwemer's book *The Glory of the Manger: Studies on the Incarnation* [New York, 1940] 61-70), and Arthur F. Glasser, *Mary in His* (December, 1960) 4-6 and 25-26.

A case in point is J. Oliver Buswell, Junior, a respected conservative systematician on the faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary (Evangelical Presbyterian Synod), Creve Coeur, St. Louis County, Missouri. He affirms that the importance of the Virgin Birth is such that, if it is not historically true, there is no reason or basis for holding other evangelical doctrines. "We cannot conceive of the eternally preexistent Son of God becoming man by means of ordinary generation without ceasing to be God. In ordinary generation a new person begins to exist."<sup>25</sup>

Similarly Howard A. Hanke, professor of Bible at Asbury College, Wilmore, Kentucky, in his book *The Validity of the Virgin Birth*, sees belief in Christ's deity, His Saviorhood, His bodily resurrection, His second coming, His relationship to God the Father, and the new birth of believers as all dependent on faith in the virgin birth.<sup>26</sup>

When this conservatism is linked with the anti-Roman-Catholicism that is often endemic in these religious subcultures, the result may be an aggressive polemic against any statement about our Lord's mother that cannot be literally documented in the Sacred Scriptures.

One of the most influential journals among American evangelical conservatives is *Eternity*. Its June 1960 issue carried a three-page review of C. X. J. M. Friethoff's *A Complete Mariology* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1958) which concluded: "This book, *A Complete Mariology*, should be in everyone's library . . . Its a work which is clearly presented and authoritatively documented, with the accompanying frank admission that the doctrine of Mary is not a scriptural doctrine but

<sup>25</sup> J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., article *Virgin Birth of Jesus (The)*, in Everett F. Harrison (editor), *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1960) 545. It may be significant that while this conservative theological lexicon has critical articles on the Assumption, the Immaculate Conception, Mariolatry, and the title Mother of God, it has no article on Mary herself.

<sup>26</sup> Howard A. Hanke, *The Validity of the Virgin Birth: The Theological Debate and the Evidence* (Grand Rapids, 1963) 53-63.



the product of church tradition and church logic.''<sup>27</sup>

J. Dwight Pentecost, professor of Bible exposition at Dallas (Texas) Theological Seminary, has written *Romanism in the Light of Scripture*. It can stand as a sample of the attitudes that a large segment of American Fundamentalism takes toward Roman Catholic Marian teaching and practice: "The steps that have been followed to establish the Mariolatry of the Roman Church are plain: First, they pronounced her the Mother of God; to that they added the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary; from that they built the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; because she was immaculately conceived she was taken bodily into heaven without her body seeing corruption and was seated at the right hand of the Father, together with her Son, Jesus Christ. There is only one step left, and that is the step of absolute deification. I do not know how long it is going to take Rome to promulgate that doctrine. Some pope, claiming to speak as God, will pronounce that Mary is God.'"<sup>28</sup>

Opposition to Roman Catholic Marian doctrine and practice is not restricted to the conservative fraction of Christendom.<sup>29</sup> Particularly the definition of the Assumption in 1950 proved to be a potent catalyst in precipitating some of this animus.

The attitudes of such mid-20th-century theological bell-

<sup>27</sup> Ralph L. Keiper, *The Virgin Mary and the Roman Church*, in *Eternity* (June, 1960) 15-17. The quotation is on p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Romanism in the Light of Scripture* (Chicago, 1962) 26-60. Similarly vehement polemics are found in E. Harold Henderson, *Roman Dogma versus Bible Doctrine* (Little Rock, 1964) 9-20, published by the North American Baptist Association; Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Philadelphia, 1962) 132-167; F. C. H. Dreyer (formerly of the China Inland Mission), *Roman Catholicism in the Light of Scripture* (Chicago, 1960) 179-196; and C. Anderson Scott, *Romanism and the Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1946) 68-81.

<sup>29</sup> The distinguished Dutch theologian, Gerrit C. Berkouwer, deserves special consideration. See his *The Conflict with Rome* (Grand Rapids, 1958) 152-178; his *Recent Developments in Roman Catholic Thought* (Grand Rapids, 1958) 17-25; and especially his *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, tr. by Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids, 1965) 221-248.

wethers as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr toward Roman Catholic Mariology are commonplaces. "We reject Mariology (1) because it is an arbitrary innovation in the face of Scripture and the early church, and (2) because this innovation consists essentially in a falsification of Christian truth," says the first.<sup>30</sup> "Apollo has no revelatory significance for Christians; the Virgin Mother Mary reveals nothing to Protestantism," says the second.<sup>31</sup> "Another basic religious cause of tension is the increased Mariolatry of modern [Roman] Catholicism. Building on Catholic piety with roots preceding even the medieval period, the church, for some mysterious reason, has chosen to widen the breach between it and modern culture . . . It has virtually lifted the Virgin Mary into the Godhead (some say into the Trinity), replacing the less historical Holy Spirit." So says the third.<sup>32</sup>

Following the promulgation of the dogma of bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Heinrich M. Köster compiled an instructive article for *Marianum* in which he documented the vehemently negative reaction of German Lutheran, Reformed, and United Church circles and their conviction that the defini-

<sup>30</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, tr. by G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance, I/2 (Edinburgh, 1956) 143. See also W. Paul Jones, *Mariology: An Unrecognized Entrée to Ecumenical Dialog*, in *Journal of Religion* 44 (1964) 210-222, which is especially useful for its discussion of Barth's attitude toward the Blessed Virgin.

<sup>31</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* 1 (Chicago, 1951) 128. See also Thomas A. O'Meara, *Paul Tillich and Ecumenism*, in O'Meara and Celestin E. Weisser (editors), *Paul Tillich in Catholic Thought* (Dubuque, 1964) 278-284.

<sup>32</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *A Plea for Tolerance*, in *The Atlantic Monthly* 210 (1962) 76. A propos the Marian Year of 1954 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America "in charity but with candor" criticized the "cult whose chief contemporary emblem is 'Our Lady of Fatima'" for having "widened the breach between the Roman Catholic Church and all other Christian communions." The text of the Assembly's statement is reproduced in *The Christian Century* 72 (1955) 756-758.

tion had seriously impeded interconfessional understanding;<sup>33</sup> an English abridgement appeared in *Theology Digest* in 1957.<sup>34</sup>

Among the most scathing criticisms of the definition of the Assumption is the theological opinion drafted by Edmund Schlink, Peter Brunner, Wilfred Joest, Hans Baron von Campenhausen, and Günther Bornkamm. The fact that these five could unite to produce the opinion, despite the wide range of their individual viewpoints, is in itself significant; only a definition that represented a fundamental threat to a great variety of cherished values could have brought them together as coauthors. The opinion describes the definition as the dogmatization of a myth, sees the danger of an obscuring of the Incarnation and of the entire salvific work of the Son of God, and fears serious consequences for the relation between Rome and evangelical Christianity.<sup>35</sup>

Karl Bernhard Ritter, one of the leaders of the mid-20th-century German Evangelical liturgical revival, also criticized the Roman Catholic Church for defining the Assumption. Thereby, he avers, it has not administered the deposit of the faith but has enlarged it. At the same time he appeals to the Evangelical community seriously and positively to address itself to the creation of an Evangelical Mariology. This must include, as he sees it, the realization that the virgin Mother of God is the link that unites Christ and humanity, and that in her *fiat mihi*

<sup>33</sup> Heinrich M. Köster, *De novo dogmate mariano quid protestantes Germaniae sentiunt*, in *Marianum* 17 (1955) 37-75.

<sup>34</sup> Köster, *Protestant Reaction to Mary's Assumption*, in *Theology Digest* 5 (1957) 105-108. See also *Das neue Mariendogma im Lichte der Geschichte und im Urteil der Oekumene*, in *Oekumenische Einheit*, edited by Friedrich Heiler and Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, Vol. 2, No. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *Zur Dogmatisierung der Assumptio Mariae: Ein Gutachten evangelischer Theologen*, in *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 75 (1950) 578-586. See also Gehard Ebeling's short survey, *Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des Mariologischen Dogmas*, in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 47 (1950) 383-391. In the conservative Lutheran tradition is Walter Künneth, *Christus oder Maria? Ein evangelisches Wort zum Mariendogma* (Berlin-Spandau, 1950).



the cooperation of all generations since Adam with the divine grace culminates.<sup>36</sup>

Even Max Thurian joined the critics. His long and penetrating analysis voices the outrage of a great many other Christians at the commination which Pius XII attached to *Munificentissimus Deus* when he declared that those who deny the Assumption have completely apostasized from the divine and Catholic faith and have incurred the wrath of Almighty God and of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.<sup>37</sup>

The French Reformed theologian Hébert Roux denies the Blessed Virgin any place in Reformed piety, although he sees her as a type of the human creature, as the object of the divine grace and redemption, and as an example of humility, hope and joy in the Lord. He urges that the biblical doctrine of the Blessed Virgin appears precisely to guard against what he calls the fundamental heresy of making this creature, who is the witness of faith in and the devotion to the Savior alone, herself an object of faith and devotion in the Church.<sup>38</sup>

In 1961 Friedrich-Wilhelm Künneth published his major contribution in this area, a patiently and carefully detailed survey of modern German Roman Catholic Mariological reflection. It is of interest because of his categorizations of Mariologies as either unipolar or bipolar. The unipolar type he sees as primitive; it concentrates on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Incarnation and its iconographic symbol is St. Mary with the

<sup>36</sup> Karl Bernhard Ritter, *Das römische Mariendogma*, in *Evangelische Jahresbriefe*, edited by Walter Uhsadel, 1951/1952, 8-16, quoted in Brandenburger, *op. cit.*, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Max Thurian, *Le dogme de l'Assomption*, in *Verbum caro* 5 (1950) 2-41.

<sup>38</sup> Hébert Roux, *Pour une doctrine biblique de la Vierge Marie*, in *Le protestantisme et la Vierge Marie*, 69-89. Another French Reformed voice is that of J.-J. von Allmen, *A Companion to the Bible* (New York, 1958) 292-295. In his article, *Mary, the Mother of Our Lord*, written in the best style of modern biblical theology, he says of the Blessed Virgin: "She is not comparable to any other woman and her vocation was . . . unique and unrepeatable."

Holy Child. The bipolar type Künneth sees as a late development in Western Christianity that perpetuated itself in Roman Catholicism; it concerns itself with the implications of the Mother of God standing under the cross, and seeks to give her, in addition to her maternal role, an active mediatorial role in the redemption and salvation of mankind. Another matter of ecumenical interest in this revised Erlangen doctoral dissertation is Künneth's frank expression of a fear that a number of Roman Catholic theologians themselves have voiced (and that the present writer finds himself unable entirely to banish). It is the fear that the thrust of a great deal of modern Roman Catholic Mariology is in the direction of a 20th century rejection of the real humanity of our Lord, the fear that the increasing emphasis on His deity has pushed Him outside the realm where He is one of us and has thus created a vacuum which Mariological speculation is filling. The representative offering of Christ's humanity to God for the salvation of mankind no longer suffices; His mother's contribution must supplement it. Christ's resurrection is no longer a sufficient guarantee of our own; His mother must rise from the dead (or even escape death) and be taken up bodily into heaven. Christ's virginal conception and birth are not enough to heal the ravages of the original sin; His mother must be preserved from the taint of original sin from the first moment of her existence as a human being.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Friedrich-Wilhelm Künneth, *Maria, das römisch-katholische Bild vom Menschen: Der Zusammenhang von Anthropologie und Mariologie in der römisch-katholischen Kirche im deutschen Sprachraum* (Berlin, 1961).—The closing words of the article by Marc Lods, *Marie, Mère de Dieu, selon le concile oecuménique d'Éphèse 431*, in *Positions Luthériennes* 13 (1965) 280, are apposite: "Monophysitism did not remain triumphant only in the schismatic churches of the East, the Jacobite Church of Syria, and the Coptic Church of Egypt. The Catholic Church itself, by an unhappy rebound, has known a deviation which little by little has imposed itself on its piety and its theology. Without disavowing the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon, the Catholic Church little by little has come to consider in Jesus Christ nothing beyond His unique nature as incarnate God. Lifted up higher and higher into heaven, adored as He sits on the throne of God His Father, His Godhead has been venerated to the detriment of

Stanley Irving Stuber, one of the most widely-known American observers at Vatican II, is a Baptist. He declares that "Protestantism does not venerate the Virgin Mary, because on scriptural grounds it accepts Mary not as the 'Mother of God,' but as the human mother of Christ. . . . Protestants are at an absolute loss when it comes to appreciating the Roman Catholic attitude in regard to the Virgin Mary. . . . Considerate Protestants will say that her alleged appearances, miracles, and special blessings verge on the side of superstition—if they are taken in any literal sense, as they are by many in the Roman Catholic Church."<sup>40</sup>

A propos Mariology Mario Colacci of Augsburg College and Theological Seminary, Minneapolis, sees the real tragedy less in the content of Mariology than in its official sanction. If the Roman Catholic Church had left the Mariological dogmas within the realm of private evaluation and private commitment, the gulf between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christians might perhaps not be as deep and as wide as it is now. As things stand, Mariology seems to have become for other Christians the most obnoxious feature of Roman Catholicism and one of the strongest barriers that keeps them from the Roman Catholic Church. Other Christians feel, he says, that with the increasing emphasis on Mary the Roman Catholic Church has been overshadowing the power of the Cross and pushing into the background the person and redemptive work of Christ.<sup>41</sup>

His manhood. His role as Mediator has been attenuated. And then, more and more, the Virgin Mary has been installed in the place where He was no longer found, as the availing intermediary between God and men. Then this kind of Mariology becomes Mariolatry; this return of Monophysitism to the church explains in a large measure the direction and—let us speak the word—the deviation of Christology after Ephesus."

<sup>40</sup> Stanley Irving Stuber, *Primer on Roman Catholicism for Protestants*, revised edition (New York, 1960) 128-129. See also his *How Protestants Differ from Roman Catholics* (New York, 1961), 65-75. For a British Congregationalist view, see E. L. Allen, *Mariology and Christology*, in *Congregational Quarterly* 35 (1957) 33-43.

<sup>41</sup> Mario Colacci, *The Doctrinal Conflict between Roman Catholic and*



Cyrus Pangborn sees three possible effects of Mariological development upon both Roman Catholicism and other Christians, none of them exclusive: "The first possibility is that . . . the operative doctrine may become one in which Mary displaces Christ in the Trinity . . . A second possibility . . . is that [Roman] Catholic Christianity may be entering upon a second 'Dark Age' of competition with the gods of the world's remaining polytheisms . . . A third possibility is that Mariology . . . may seriously hamper communication with non-[Roman]-Catholic Christians and may even isolate the [Roman] Catholic Church from the world of general intellectual discourse."<sup>42</sup>

Richard A. Newman, a Presbyterian minister, asserts: "The promulgation of St. Mary's Immaculate Conception and Assumption, along with the phenomena of the [Roman] Catholic Marian Year and robust popular [Roman] Catholic devotion to the Virgin appear . . . at best as an inscrutable riddle to Protestants; at worst as the making authoritative of nonbiblical and nonhistorical materials, or even superstition. The Protestant concern at this point is that the unique, once-for-all intercessory atonement of Christ is being threatened or obscured, the fine points of [Roman] Catholic doctrine notwithstanding."<sup>43</sup>

Even as sympathetic an observer of Roman Catholicism as

*Protestant Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1963). A former Roman Catholic priest, Colacci is now a Lutheran. See also Georges A. Barrois' careful evaluation of the significance of Marian developments in the Roman Catholic Church in *Roman Catholicism: New Look in Doctrine*, in *Religion in Life* 29 (1960) 167-173, and his earlier *The Rise of Marian Doctrine*, in *Theology Today* (1955-1956) 463-476. Barrois, a former Roman Catholic priest, is now a Presbyterian.

<sup>42</sup> Cyrus Pangborn, *Christian Theology and the Dogma of the Assumption*, in *Journal of Bible and Religion* 30 (1962) 98-99. The late Waldensian theologian Giovanni Miegge, *The Virgin Mary: The Roman Catholic Marian Doctrine*, tr. by Waldo Smith (Philadelphia, [1956]) 188-191, takes a similar position. The original Italian edition of Miegge's work was elicited by the definition of the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1950.

<sup>43</sup> Richard A. Newman, *A Protestant Note on St. Mary*, in *The Ecumenist* 2 (1963-1964) 27.

Jaroslav Pelikan is constrained to make an assertion that represents not only his own view but that of many others: "The real evil is in the elevation of . . . naive piety to the status of a system and in the use of advertising tricks to 'merchandise' the cult of Mary. The simple and unreflecting *Ave Maria* of a South American peon is one thing, and a multivolume theological opus on 'the prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin Mary' is quite another thing. The theologians and bishops of the Church, who ought to watch and warn the faithful of the excesses in such piety, are actually the ones who encourage the excesses."<sup>44</sup>

Distinctly exceptional is the quasi-apologia for Mariology in Walter Marshall Horton's *Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach*. He wrote this work during a sabbatical leave at the University of Strasbourg, where he had the opportunity to discuss its contents with the members of the Roman Catholic theological faculty:

"What must be understood if this doctrine is not to be unfairly misinterpreted is the Catholic doctrine of the Communion of Saints. The Eastern Orthodox Churches, which take their Mariology more mystically and less logically than Rome, are accustomed to pray for St. Mary and ask her to pray for us, just as they do with all the great saints, but . . . on the highest level below Christ. The issue here is not whether Christ's saving Mediatorship is unique, but whether there is a place below Christ for other mediators, who mediate Christ's grace and presence as Christ mediates God's. In Protestant *practice* . . . does not each generation of Christian parents and teachers mediate Christ to the next? And is there not a psychological analogue to the cult of the Blessed Mother in that cult of 'Home and Mother' which plays such a role in revivalistic hymn books?

"It is of course unlikely that interpretations and comparisons of this sort will ever bring [Roman] Catholics and Protestants

<sup>44</sup> Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (Nashville, 1959) 140.

together on this crucially divisive issue. But to confront the other party—perhaps through the Orthodox and Anglo-Catholics who occupy intermediate positions—may be a salutary source of self-knowledge and corrective self-criticism for both parties. If [Roman] Catholics need to be made aware of the danger of idolatry in the veneration of the Virgin and the saints, Protestants need to be made aware of the danger of reverting, through fear of idolatry, to a bare, austere Old Testament piety in which the joyful New Testament sense of 'God *with us*' would be lost.

"Protestants commonly object to Unitarians for losing the distinctive Christian revelation in an abstract devotion to 'mathematical unity'; but they should realize that they seem to [Roman] Catholics to fall just short of Unitarianism in their failure to recognize the Communion of Saints and the place of the Virgin Mary at the head of the saints. Vigorous, concrete faith in God thinks of the Deity as *supreme but not solitary*, surrounded by messengers and blessed ones who live in the divine light. If even Judaism did not wholly reject the idea of subordinate messengers (angels) and mediators, why should Protestantism try to confine itself exclusively to the One Mediator? . . . If there is idolatry in [Roman] Catholic Mariology, there is a worse idolatry . . . at the root of Protestant sectarianism."<sup>45</sup>

## II

The judgment of Roland A. Seboldt, the book editor of Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, is still only slightly exaggerated: "The common position of Protestantism and recent Lutheranism has been to ignore Mary altogether."<sup>46</sup> Yet both before and after Vatican II, some non-Roman-Catholic Christians have been ready to accord the Mother of God a special place in the company of His people.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Marshall Horton, *Christian Theology: An Ecumenical Approach*, revised edition (New York, 1958) 202-203.

<sup>46</sup> Roland A. Seboldt, *Christ or Mary* (St. Louis, 1963) 46.



Their motivation may vary, and it is likely to be complex, with one or the other strand strongest in a given case. One of these strands may be biblicist in the good sense; it rises out of the awareness that along with St. John the Baptist and two or three individual apostles the Blessed Virgin Mary possesses a prominence of her own in the accounts of the evangelists that is not limited to the simple fact of her parturition. Another may be an indispensable commitment to the Catholic tradition; this would be particularly present in the case of Lutherans and Anglo-Catholics but also among tradition-oriented Christians of other denominations. A third may be sober reflection on the lessons which the history of dogma and of Christian thought teaches. A fourth may be an ecumenical awareness which senses that the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary by so many Christians, in spite of intolerable excesses from time to time and from place to place, points to an underlying verity of which a genuinely ecumenical approach must be ready to take account. A fifth factor, one that is likely to function chiefly as a reinforcement of the others, is the impact of centuries of the art and the **poetry that have taken the Blessed Virgin Mary as their theme.**

These Christians would be likely to concur in two of Jaroslav Pelikan's observations. In his introduction to the English version of Otto Semmelroth's *Mary, Archetype of the Church*, Pelikan declared: "Neither the doctrine of the church nor the doctrine of Christ can be fully articulated without some doctrine of Mary . . . Christological orthodoxy . . . was bound up with the clarification of the role of Mary in the plan of God. Protestant theology must ask itself whether this connection between Christology and Mariology was a historical coincidence or whether there was in fact some ineluctable obligation in the orthodox confession of Jesus Christ that compelled the church to speak as it did of his mother."<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Pelikan, in Otto Semmelroth, *Mary, Archetype of the Church* (New York, 1963) xii. For a critical Lutheran reaction to Semmelroth's book, see Bernard Erling, *Recent Roman Studies in Mariology*, in *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (1964) 322-326.

The next year he was quoted as asserting that any criticism of Roman doctrine concerning Marian idolatry "must be accompanied by a positive discussion of the Mother of our Lord from a biblical and evangelical perspective." Mary cannot be ignored, because she "is the warrant for the Christian declaration that our Lord was a true man, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone." She also has a significance for the church; "the brief description of her career in the New Testament is a summary of the church's life in its elations and in its depressions."<sup>48</sup>

We turn to concrete examples of this approach. Still a notable contribution to the discussion, even after fifteen years, is that of Lutheran provost Hans Asmussen, *Maria die Mutter Gottes*. Herein he observes, for example, that one cannot ask about Jesus Christ without including His mother in the purview of the question. "One does not have Jesus Christ without Mary."<sup>49</sup> He asserts that "the true church of Christ confesses that Jesus was born of the virgin. Apart from this confession there is no true church but only Christian-ism."<sup>50</sup> Mary is the primordial type of the Church and she has a significance that transcends her individual person; her *fiat mihi* was a decision on behalf of all humanity. "To speak of Mary demands that at

<sup>48</sup> In *What Mary Means to Protestants*, in *Time* (September 11, 1964) 58. See also the statement of Albert C. Outler, *A Response* [to Lumen Gentium], in Walter M. Abbott (editor), *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966) 105: "The identification of the Blessed Virgin (in Chapter VIII) as the foremost of all those who have shared in, and who still enrich, the communion of saints may well have the effect, among other things, of recalling Protestants to an important aspect of Christian faith that they have tended to underestimate in their reaction to what was deemed the excesses of conventional Mariology."

<sup>49</sup> Hans Asmussen, *Maria die Mutter Gottes* (Stuttgart, 1950) 13.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 17. The "Brunswick Theses" of the Aktionsgemeinschaft für Bibel und Bekenntnis (Association for Action on Behalf of the Bible and the Symbolical Books) in Germany strongly repudiates denials of the virgin conception and birth of Our Lord (*The Braunschweig Theses on the Teaching and Mission of the Church*, translated by Paul M. Bretscher, *Concordia Theological Monthly* 37 [1966] 512). See also Otto Rodenberg, *Der Sohn: Beiträge zum theologischen Gespräch der Gegenwart* (Wuppertal, 1963) 9-61.

the same time we speak of the history that begins with Adam, but it also demands that we speak about the church that is committed to the Son of Mary as a spotless virgin so that she too might bear children without a human husband."<sup>51</sup> At the same time he refuses to concede that the Mother of God was conceived without original sin.<sup>52</sup>

The brilliant Presbyterian medievalist, Allen Cabaniss, published a little essay a dozen years ago, in which he defends the completely evangelical character of such Marian titles as mother of the Savior, intercessor with her Son, ever-virgin Mother of God, seat of wisdom, cause of our joy, and mother of sorrows.<sup>53</sup>

The retired bishop of Oldenburg Wilhelm Stählin, has given German Lutheranism a charming biblical Mariology. He sees it as her great role to have been the concrete place where the incarnation takes place; she is the gateway through which God himself entered our world; she is the "representative of humanity."<sup>54</sup>

In the Otto Karrer *Festschrift* the Reformed Dean Werner Meyer of Küsnacht-Zürich sketches a biblical Mariology which depicts the Mother of God as the picture of grace, in whom Christ is glorified.<sup>55</sup> "Her grace consists in this that in her and through her, God accomplishes a prodigy that is rooted neither in her existence nor in her own constitution."<sup>56</sup> Hers is a "grace of such incomprehensible magnitude, that in comparison with all other recipients of the divine grace throughout the history of salvation Mary constitutes a unique exception."<sup>57</sup> Since

<sup>51</sup> Asmussen, 26.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Allen Cabaniss, *Our Lady of the Apocalypse* (Oxford, 1954).

<sup>54</sup> Wilhelm Stählin, *Maria die Mutter des Herrn: Ihr biblisches Bild, in Symbolon* (Stuttgart, 1958) 226, quoted in Brandenburg, *op. cit.*, 47-48. See also Stählin's earlier but no less charming *Freu dich, Begnadete: Eine Betrachtung über die Verkündigung der Geburt des Herrn* (Kassel, 1950).

<sup>55</sup> Werner Meyer, *Maria als Bild der Gnade und Heiligkeit, in Begegnung der Christen* (Stuttgart, 1959) 573-592.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 577.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 578.



"God is glorified only by a freely given assent," her *fiat* has resting on it a reflection (*Abglanz*) of the utter obedience of her Son.<sup>58</sup> Mary is also the picture of sanctity; the woman who has been the recipient of grace is at once hallowed and being hallowed through humility, repentance, and suffering. As the creaturely reflector of the divine grace, the Blessed Virgin Mary radiates grace and holiness into the Church as a supremely attractive example.

Probably the most comprehensive biblical Mariology to come from the pen of a Reformed theologian is the one written by the French monk of Taizé-sur-Cluny, Max Thurian.<sup>59</sup> The British edition of the English translation rendered the original title literally: *Mary, the Mother of the Lord, Figure of the Church*.<sup>60</sup> The American edition put out by Herder, however, changed the title to *Mary, the Mother of All Christians*,<sup>61</sup> a designation not once used by Thurian himself and justified in the book itself only by a quotation from Martin Luther. Thurian sees Mary as the poor virgin, whose virginity is not a badge of disgrace but the new sign of the divine nearness. She is the symbol of the presence of God among his people, the one who combines in her person all the expectation of Israel and the entire mystery of the Church. She is the handmaiden of the Lord who lives by faith in him, the first herald of the Gospel in her visitation of St. Elizabeth, when, like the Church, she bears within her the word and the body of the Lord. At Cana she is the believer in the midst of the messianic community. Under the cross she is the suffering daughter of Zion, who brings forth her hope in her Son's resurrection and suffers the birth of the new people of God in her own flesh. The woman clothed with the sun in Revelation 12 has many of the traits of Mary the Mother of God. She has a privileged place in the communion of saints. In her the Church militant sees a sign of certain victory. On her

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 579.

<sup>59</sup> Thurian, *Marie, mère du Seigneur, figure de l'église* (Taizé, 1963).

<sup>60</sup> London, 1963.

<sup>61</sup> New York, 1964.

feasts—the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Purification, and her Falling Asleep (for with all other Christians she still awaits the resurrection)—the Church praises the wonderful works of God and her own example of obedience, perseverance, and faith.<sup>62</sup>

One expects a certain degree of native sympathy for an appreciation of the uniqueness of St. Mary's role within the people of God from Anglicans and Lutherans, although the position of neither tradition is likely to give a great deal of comfort to Marian maximalists.

In 1960 Francis C. Lightbourn, the book editor of the American Anglo-Catholic weekly, *The Living Church*, sent a questionnaire at random to every seventh name on the clergy list of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. He received 539 valid responses. Of these 39 (7%) said "no" to the virgin conception, birth; 346 to St. Mary's perpetual virginity; 382 to her delivery of the Holy Child *clauso utero*, 425 to St. Mary's freedom from actual sin; 445 to the Assumption; 467 to the Immaculate Conception; 476 to a vow of profession or purpose of virginity; 507 to the title Coredemptrix; and 522 (97%) to the title Mediatrix of All Graces. Lightbourn offers the understated summary: "Most of the [Protestant Episcopal] Church's clergy do not habitually think in Roman Mariological terms."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> While, in general, the Reformed tradition has been less appreciative of the Blessed Virgin Mary than the Lutheran tradition, the survey of John Calvin's Mariology by James A. Shuel, *The Virgin Mary in a Reformation Theology*, in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 6 (1960) 275-283, is designed to pose the question, "looking at the Reformed tradition from the outside, whether its essential doctrinal principles necessarily impose the inhibited silence or the automatic rejection of serious Mariology" that Shuel has noted among the spiritual progeny of Calvin.

<sup>63</sup> Francis C. Lightbourn, *What About the Virgin Mary?* in *The Living Church* 141, No. 1 (July 3, 1960) 10-12. These data may be compared with the results of a survey reported on by Kenneth F. Dougherty. In 1957 a questionnaire was sent out to the superiors of 52 Anglican religious communities in England. Twenty-five replies were returned. All those replying regarded the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Mother of God, 16 affirmed her

Lutheran affection for the Blessed Virgin Mary is rooted both in the Lutheran symbolical books as well as in Lutheran history.

Martin Luther's personal devotion to the Mother of God is lifelong; not even the casual reader can escape this impression, which every recent study in depth has abundantly established and confirmed.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, Luther's devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is basically theological and Christological rather than Marian, and must be read against the background of his own religious evolution. He begins as the docile disciple of John von Paltz, whose magnum opus, the *Coelifodina*, converts the history of our Lord's passion into a history of the compassion of His mother, whose great merits (as von Paltz says in one of his sermons) drew God down from heaven and became the foundation not only of monastic piety but of the entire Christian faith. From this kind of distortion Luther gradually emancipates himself. As early as 1516, the dominant image of the Blessed Virgin has ceased practically for Luther to be that of the Queen of Heaven and has become that of the paradigmatic humble worshipper of God. "She is not puffed up because of the great distinction that has been given to her and the great praise with which she is lauded, because she has recognized therein the Lord, who is far greater, and she acknowledges him, thanks him, loves him and blesses him."<sup>65</sup>

By 1523 Luther no longer invokes the Mother of God, but

Immaculate Conception, 15 her perpetual virginity, 14 her bodily Assumption, 8 held her to be Corredemptress and Dispenser of All Graces, and 7 accorded her the title Queen of Heaven. (Kenneth F. Dougherty, *Our Lady and the Protestants*, in Juniper B. Carol (editor), *Mariology* 3 [Milwaukee, 1960] 431).

<sup>64</sup> Schimmelpfenning, *op. cit.*, 9-18; Delius, *op. cit.*, 195-229; Walter Tappolet and Albert Ebner, *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren* (Tübingen, 1962) 17-160; Théodore Süß, *La Mère de Jésus-Christ dans la pensée de Luther*, in *Positions Luthériennes* 2 (1954) 97-122; Gottfried Voigt, *Die Mutter des Herrn: Gedanken aus Luthers Weihnachtspredigten*, in *Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung* (December 15, 1951) 357-361.

<sup>65</sup> *D. Martin Luthers Werke* 1 (Weimar, 1883) 61. See the account of Luther's Mariological development through 1520 in Hans Düfel, *Luthers Stellung zur Marienverehrung*, in *Luther* 35 (1966) 122-131.



his devotion to her remains unabated. Hermann Joseph Brosch sees a large area of Mariological doctrine that both Roman Catholicism and Martin Luther hold. After specifying details he summarizes: "It is accordingly a great common heritage that we must watch over together."<sup>66</sup>

The Lutheran love for the Mother of God is tempered, but by no means eliminated, during the era of Lutheran Orthodoxy (1580-1713), with its embittered interconfessional polemics. Indeed, the mid-17th century sees the founding of a Lutheran order of sisters at Mount St. Mary, Helmstedt.<sup>67</sup> It is during the periods of Pietism and Rationalism that Lutheran interest in the Blessed Virgin goes into progressively deeper eclipse, only to come to light again in the age of the 19th century confessional and liturgical revival. In the history of both American and German Lutheranism of the last century one of the preeminent names is that of Wilhelm Löhe of Neuendettelsau, Bavaria. Most Lutherans would agree that if their denomination had a process of canonization, he would certainly have been elevated to the honors of the altar. It is characteristic of his attitude to the Blessed Virgin Mary that in his lovely study *On Womanly Singleness of Heart* he devotes nearly half the book to the Blessed Virgin as a model of feminine modesty, faith and devotion.<sup>68</sup>

For normal Lutheran theology the Blessed Virgin Mary is *theotokos*, *Deipara*. *Mētēr theou*, *Dei genetrix*, *mater Dei* are less satisfactory, because they are superficially misleading. The German can create the word *Gottesgebärerin* to stand beside *Gottesmutter* or *Mutter Gottes*. The English has the choice between "Mother of God" or an overly complicated paraphrase,

<sup>66</sup> Hermann Joseph Brosch, *Eine katholische Antwort auf die evangelischen Bedenken einer bipolaren Mariologie*, in *Maria im Kult* (1964) 202-203, quoted in Brandenburg, *op. cit.*, 25, n. 18.

<sup>67</sup> Marianne Nordström, *Klostertraditionen i Tyskland efter reformationen*, in Wilhelm Harsten (editor), *Kyrkotankar* (Lund, 1958) 44-51.

<sup>68</sup> Wilhelm Löhe, *Von der weiblichen Einsalt*, 3d edition (Stuttgart, 1856) 63-111.

"The woman whose child is God" or "The woman who gave birth to God." Lutherans stand committed to the title by their subscription to the Book of Concord, which twice applies the term to her. "We believe, teach, and confess, that Mary did not conceive and bear a mere and ordinary human being, but the true Son of God; for that reason she is rightly called and in truth is the Mother of God."<sup>69</sup> "Because of this hypostatic union and communion of the natures the most praiseworthy (*hochgelobte, laudatissima*) virgin Mary did not bear a merely ordinary human being, but a human being who is truly the Son of God the Most High, as the angel attests. He demonstrated his divine majesty even in his mother's womb, in that he was born out of a virgin without violation of her virgin state. For that reason she is truly the Mother of God and yet remained a virgin."<sup>70</sup> The Book of Concord also calls the Blessed Virgin Mary "most worthy of the amplest honors" and grants that "Blessed Mary prays for the church."<sup>71</sup>

The Lutheran Book of Concord, on the basis of the Sacred Scriptures and the Catholic Creeds, affirms the virginity of the Mother of God *ante partum* and *in partu*. The official (1584) Latin version of the Smalcald Articles (Part One, IV) expands the "pure, holy Virgin Mary" of the original into "*Maria pura, sancta, semper virgo*."<sup>72</sup> But in general, Lutheran theologians feel themselves constrained to urge that the biblical evidence, when subjected to a sober exegesis, appears to provide no basis for demanding acceptance of the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary as an article of faith. Thus, unless an individual found an interpretation of the texts which come into consideration as personally compelling him to hold the perpetual virginity as a biblically-based conviction, for a Lutheran this tenet would be a theologoumenon and a pious opinion, a tenet in harmony with the analogy of the faith rather than an

<sup>69</sup> *Formula of Concord*, Epitome, 8, 12.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, Solid Declaration, 8, 24.

<sup>71</sup> *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, 21, 27.

<sup>72</sup> Smalcald Articles (Latin), Part One, IV.

article of the Christian faith, a conviction that recommends itself on account of considerations of propriety and decency and that is entirely consistent with the biblical evidence.<sup>73</sup>

As far as the other privileges that Roman Catholic theology ascribes to the Blessed Virgin Mary are concerned, neither the Immaculate Conception nor the bodily Assumption appear to have commended themselves to contemporary Lutherans even as pious opinions, tolerable as long as no heretical inferences are drawn from them. This is true even though Martin Luther's personal adherence to the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God (barring two lapses) seems to have been life-long and even though as orthodox a theologian as Valerius Herberger affirmed the bodily Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a sermon one part of which explained why there is nothing in the Sacred Scriptures about this event.<sup>74</sup> Unquestionably a polemic reaction against the Roman Catholic advocacy of these two tenets has played a part in discouraging any wide-spread acceptance of these opinions as a concomitant of the liturgical and confessional revival.

The ideas that the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Mediatrix of All Graces and a Coredemptrix come in for general criticism among Lutherans. This is undoubtedly due in part to misconceptions about the scope of these terms, evoked by their irresponsible popular use on the lips of Roman Catholics in such a way as to suggest that the Blessed Virgin Mary personally contributed to the objective redemption of the human race. In part, however, even Lutherans who fully understand the theological limitations that must be put on these terms still regard

<sup>73</sup> Some Lutherans explicitly reject the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin; see, for example, Stephen Benko, *The Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, in *Lutheran Quarterly* 16 (1964) 147-163. Benko regards this as "the basic problem of Mariology." He holds that "it is a historical fact that Joseph and Mary had several children after the birth of Jesus," and regards the "theory of the perpetual virginity of Mary as dangerous to the Christian faith."

<sup>74</sup> Valerius Herberger, *Evangelische Hertz-Postilla*, Part Two (Leipzig, 1697) 257.



them both as misleading and as stressing an aspect of the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the subjective redemption of men for which there is no explicit word of God which would differentiate her activity from that of any other saint.

A Lutheran would see the analogy between the Mother of God and the Church as nowhere better typified than in the use of the *Magnificat* as the vespers canticle. In this place the *Magnificat* has become more than a memorial; the words that the Gospel attributes to our Lord's mother have been wholly appropriated as the prayer of His bride. What the mother of the Savior said of herself expresses exactly the faith of the Church that is mother of us all. When we sing the *Magnificat*—every phrase of it profoundly informed by Hannah's Song, *Exsultavit cor meum*, and by the Psalter—we are not imitating someone else's hymn; we find ourselves singing our own. The Ecclesia-Mary parallel that primitive reflections saw in the vision of Revelation 12 thus receives practical liturgical sanction.

Again, on the occasion of her Purification, the Blessed Virgin offered both her Son and the two birds that Leviticus prescribed, in what was of course an intrinsically unnecessary action. There was no need for her to buy back her son from Yahweh, for He was Himself Yahweh. Nor did she stand in need of purification whose body had been the temple of God. Certainly we can speak of a priestly element in the Blessed Virgin's activity as the Sacred Scriptures here depict it. She was part of both old Jewry and of the new Israel, both of the *qahal* and of the *ekklesia*, thus doubly a part of the chosen race, the royal priesthood, the holy nation, God's own people. In offering her own self and her own future to God at the Annunciation and her Son to Him at the time of the Presentation, she was performing acts that are of the very essence of Christian sacrifice, the yielding up of body and mind, of will and intellect and affections, to Him from whom we have everything, and the pleading before God of the sacrifice of Him through whom we have everything that is needful for this life and profitable for our salva-

tion. Herein the Blessed Virgin stands as a symbol of the church.<sup>75</sup>

*The Lutheran Liturgy* provides propers for the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Purification/Presentation. The tract for the Annunciation includes the opening verse of the *Angelus*: "The angel of the Lord came in unto Mary and said, 'Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women.'" The Collect for the Annunciation is the same medieval postcommunion for the feast that Roman Catholics use in connection with the *Angelus*. The alleluia verse for the Visitation includes the apostrophe: "Blessed art thou, O Mary, among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb."<sup>76</sup> The first one hundred hymns of *The Lutheran Hymnal* contain at least fifteen references to the Mother of God (among them "with virgin honor pure," "the blessed maid," "chosen virgin mild," "virgin undefiled," "full of grace," and "undefiled virgin mother"). *The Lutheran Hymnal* also has a metrical version of the Eastern *Theotokion*: "O higher than the cherubim, more glorious than the seraphim, lead their praises; thou bearer of the eternal Word, most gracious, magnify the Lord!"<sup>77</sup> As a post-communion hymn we often sing the medieval "O Lord, we praise Thee, bless Thee, and adore Thee," with its stress upon the *verum corpus*: "May Thy body, Lord, born of Mary, that our sins and sorrows did carry, and Thy blood for us plead in all trial, fear, and need: *Kyrie, eleison!*"<sup>78</sup>

### III

Is a fruitful dialog about the place and the role of Mary

<sup>75</sup> See this writer's *Eve Reversed: Intentionally Noncontroversial Reflections on the Woman Who Gave Birth to God*, in *Seminarian* 51, No. 2 (February, 1960) 6-19, and his 'Blessed Art Thou Among Women,' in *Una Sancta* 15, No. 3 (Visitation, 1958) 4-7.

<sup>76</sup> *The Lutheran Liturgy* (St. Louis, [1948]) 187-190; *The Lutheran Hymnal* (St. Louis, 1941) 85-87. *Service Book and Hymnal* (Minneapolis, 1958) the other major American Lutheran rite, has different texts (pp. 108-110).

<sup>77</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 475; *Service Book and Hymnal*, No. 437.

<sup>78</sup> *The Lutheran Hymnal*, No. 313.

within the people of God between Roman Catholics and non-Roman-Catholics possible?<sup>79</sup>

Obviously this is not something for any non-Roman-Catholic to decide, since it takes two to create dialogue.

If Roman Catholics desire such a dialog, it cannot effectively be carried on with Roman Catholics on the one side and a heterogeneous and indiscriminate assembly of non-Roman-Catholics on the other. A non-Roman-Catholic with any kind of Roman Catholic acquaintance soon receives the impression that Roman Catholics are not all completely unanimous in every detail of their Mariological faith and practice. If this be true, the diversity is incalculably greater among non-Roman-Catholics. It would seem doubtful if an effective dialog could be carried on with a panel of partners divided among themselves, say, on an issue like the virgin conception and birth of our Lord. I am not saying that fruitful separate dialogs could not be carried on; I merely suggest that the disparity of conviction within one part of the panel would largely paralyze effective overall dialog.

Again, any dialog would require Roman Catholic partners who realize that an appeal to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church or of the bishop of Rome to define doctrine would carry little weight, and that in consequence the dialog would have to be on a basis that both partners could accept, the Sacred Scriptures as the primitive Church understood them. On such a basis, it seems to me, a considerable measure of agreement could be established—a place for Mary in prophecy (although it would probably be somewhat more restricted than a Marian maximalist would rejoice at); the virgin conception and birth; the rightfulness of the title *theotokos*; the Virgin's place in the

<sup>79</sup> See *Dialogs on Mary*, in *Mary Today* 56, No. 1 (January-February, 1965). Oberman, *op. cit.*, sees as problems in the biblical area Roman Catholic hermeneutics, form history, and "Protestant hermeneutics." In the historical area he sees problems especially in the early Church and in the medieval and Reformation periods. In a final section he argues against an "independent Mariology" and, inverting the principle to read *lex credendi est lex orandi*, against giving her a place in the worship of the Church.



Church as the first of the redeemed; her role as the *kecharitomenē* par excellence, uniquely endowed with God's favor; her paradigmatic piety, patience, humility, and faith; her status as the most blessed of women; her *fiat mihi* as the typical divinely empowered response that God elicits from all those of His children whom He calls to be in freedom workers together with Him; the analogy between the Blessed Virgin Mary and the church<sup>80</sup> that makes it possible for a Lutheran to use the *Magnificat* as the canticle at vespers and to say the first, pre-Counter-reformation part of the *Ave Maria* (as far as "and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus") as memorials of the Incarnation; the probability of her intercession for the Church; the paradoxical parallel between the obedient Virgin Mary and the disobedient Virgin Eve that theologians have noted since the second century (although originally the thrust was Christological rather than Marian); St. Mary's virginity certainly *ante partum* and *in partu* and fittingly *post partum*; the legitimacy of apostrophes to her in hymns and in the liturgy; the propriety of celebrating the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Purification for what they really are, feasts of our Lord, to which some non-Roman-Catholics, following the Church's example in the case of St. John the Baptist, would be willing to add her Nativity on Sep-

<sup>80</sup> Hans Carl von Haebler, *Maria-Ekklesia*, in *Quatember* 28 (1963-1964) 1, refers, in connection with an editorial reflection on the representation of the Blessed Virgin Mary as sheltering her clients beneath her mantle (*Schutzmantelmadonna*), to the vision of St. Birgitta in which she believed that the Blessed Virgin told her: "My wide mantle is my mercy; truly, my daughter, my Son's mercy makes me merciful." He goes on: "I believe that the representation of the Blessed Virgin with the sheltering mantle was prayed out of the picture of the Mother of God which represents her in prayer and which ties her up with the church. This representation belongs together with the picture of Christ's ascension. The Lord ascends to heaven and leaves His church behind Him on earth, so that, filled with the Holy Spirit, she may produce progeny for Him. As Christ was born out of Mary through the Holy Spirit, so Christians are born out of the church through the Holy Spirit. In the figure of the Blessed Virgin of the sheltering mantle, who opens her mantle and discloses her offspring, the church reveals her own mystery."

tember 8 and her Falling Asleep on August 15; the devotional value of good, unsentimental representations of her in the arts, especially after the earliest surviving models which always show her with the holy Child; and the legitimacy of naming churches and church institutions after her and after the mysteries of her Annunciation, Visitation, Purification, Birth, and Falling Asleep.<sup>81</sup> As long as distinctions are carefully made among homiletic exuberance, poetic formulation, theological speculation, and binding doctrine, the tolerable nature even of certain other views and practices might be mutually established. Differences certainly would emerge in the area of piety;<sup>82</sup> the invocation of the Mother of God or of any saint, for that matter, in the absence of a clear word of God in its favor, seems to many outside the Roman Catholic Church with whom a large area of agreement might be otherwise established to be based upon unexamined assumptions in the area of theological anthro-

<sup>81</sup> See the excellent statement of Andrew Weyermann, assistant professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, *Mary in the Church: A Lutheran Position*, in *American Lutheran* 49 (1966) 126-129, especially the concluding section "Current Relevance," as well as Warren A. Quanbeck, *Problems of Mariology*, in George A. Lindbeck (editor), *Dialogue on the Way* (Minneapolis, 1965) 175-185; Alvin Horst, *Mariology and Ecumenical Discussion*, in *Seminarian* 51, No. 5 (May, 1960) 24-27; Gustav Aulen, *The Faith of the Christian Church*, tr. by Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia, 1960) 195-196, 311-312; and Skydsgaard's interesting article, *Maria, Herrens moder*, in Ragnar Askmark and others (editors), *Nordisk teologisk uppslagsbok* 2 (Lund, 1955) 958-967, in which he affirms the doctrine of the New Testament against postcanonical Mariological developments based on tradition, and rejects an independent Mariology but stresses the need for recognizing the Blessed Virgin's uniqueness as the divinely chosen *theotokos* as well as the need for interconfessional dialog.

<sup>82</sup> See, for instance, the words of Lutheran editor Wilfred Bockelmann in *I'm Hoping to Meet More Catholics*, in *America* (July 18, 1964) 68: "Protestants will undoubtedly continue to believe that Catholics worship Mary. I hope Catholics will be tolerant of us for thinking that. To one not schooled in your rather complex doctrine, it does seem that when a Catholic prays: 'Hail Mary . . .' he is indeed praying to Mary. I've become convinced Catholic doctrine does not teach this. Nevertheless, I am convinced that many Catholics do just that."

pology and eschatology that it is difficult to reconcile with divine revelation.

It might be well to recognize from the outset that agreement on the revealed character of the definitions of the Immaculate Conception and the bodily Assumption cannot forseably be reached, fruitful as a critical discussion of the meaning that these dogmas have for the Roman Catholic may be for both participants in the discussion. The one eventuality that a non-Roman-Catholic can contemplate is so unlikely at this moment that a Roman Catholic would be bound to reject it as impossible. This eventuality is that with the maturing of certain insights in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Church that have found seminal and nascent expression in *Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*, it may some day be realized and reconized that the *whole* Church was not consulted prior to 1854 and 1950, that the *whole* Church did not concur in and consent to the definitions, and that whatever degree of canonical validity these definitions have for those who accept the authority of the bishop of Rome, they are still open questions for the *whole* Church.

But the difficulties, formidable as they are, ought not to be allowed to deter us from this *opus arduum* either in terms of our inquiry or of our mutual conversation. René Laurentin has proposed as an ecumenical Mariological program the rediscovery of the Virgin by Roman Catholics *in* the Bible and the rediscovery of the Virgin by "Protestants" *through* the Bible.<sup>83</sup> I should prefer to paraphrase his proposal and urge that *all* Christians who receive the Sacred Scripture as the written word of God should seek to discover the Virgin both *in* the Bible and *through* the Bible, that we all in our time may meetly join in the chorus of generations that perennially calls the Handmaid of the Lord and the Mother of God blessed.

I cannot end without following the example of two of the

<sup>83</sup> René Laurentin, *The Question of Mary*, tr. by I. G. Pidoux (New York, 1965) 119, 157-158.



Lutheran tradition's archtheologians—Martin Chemnitz and John Gerhard. As each concludes his discussion of the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he disclaims in the foregoing discussion to have detracted in any way from the dignity of the Mother of God that the Sacred Scriptures ascribe to her in the just cited verse of the *Magnificat*. John Gerhard concludes with the observation that even though she was not wholly immune from the contagion of original sin, "it is our pious belief that St. Mary was never guilty of any flames of illicit passions, but that she obtained the perpetual adornment of virginity both in body and in soul and thus was in perfect fashion a virgin."<sup>84</sup> And Chemnitz closes: "But for the same reason, I hold that the Virgin Mary is set forth as blessed when those things are attributed to her which are in harmony with the Sacred Scriptures and can be proved out of it, so that the Name of the Lord is Holy. Nor can she herself find any other glorification pleasing."<sup>85</sup>

*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventri tui, JESUS. Amen.*

REV. DR. ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN

*Concordia Lutheran Seminary*

*St. Louis, Mo.*

<sup>84</sup> Johannes Gerhardus, *Loci theologici*, II, locus IX, cap. vii, para. 121, ed. Eduard Preuss (Berlin, 1864) 179.

<sup>85</sup> Martinus Chemnitius, *Examen Concilii Tridentini*, Pars I, locus V, para. 9, ed. Eduard Preuss (Berlin, 1861) 122.