The Blessed Virgin in Classical Anglicanism

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THE attention given to "Mariology" by the Anglican divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has received very little consideration in studies of classical Anglicanism and its major problems. Yet the determination to preserve a proper Mariology was a prominent feature of the classical period, and involved the theologians of the day in a quite typical dilemma. On the one hand, they were only too conscious of the unbalanced cultus of our Lady in popular Roman devotion, as well as of the highly questionable Mariology connected with that cult. On the other hand, they were faced with a growing Puritan body which considered anything "Marian"—even the saying of the *Magnificat*—to be "popish superstition." Here, as on other issues, the exponents of classical Anglicanism were consciously following the middle way between the Roman and Puritan extremes. We should not, however, confuse this attitude with mere compromise, or suppose that these theologians arrived at their position by the judicious use of some quasi-mathematical method. Rather, in the perspective of their fundamental doctrinal principles, they saw in the Mariology of their middle way an integral part of the Church's faith, attested to by the Scriptures, expounded by the Fathers, defined by General Councils, and received in the Anglican Church, and their concern to maintain and defend a proper theological and devotional attitude towards the Blessed Virgin Mary within that Church was one with their concern to preserve the integrity of the Catholic Faith as a whole.

This concern, and the problem it involved for the classical divines, is well illustrated in the work of a seventeenth-century Anglican layman, Anthony Stafford. Stafford produced a devotional book entitled *The Female Glory* (1635) which was devoted entirely to Mary, and which was documented fully with statements from the Fathers. This book, though bearing the official *Imprimatur* of the Church of England, was severely criticized by the Puritans, in particular, one Henry Burton. In an apology for his book Stafford describes the Anglican dilemma and the difficulties of the middle way:

> Had I debased Mary all I could, these sworn enemies of all her infinite graces, had extolled me to the skies; or had I superstitiously idolatrized her, the papists had both magnified and advanced me; whereas keeping the middle, I am cried down by both extremes. But I loathe all preferment that must be acquired by swimming against the stream of that Church from whom I received the first principle of my religion which till death, I will preserve entire.[1]

The seriousness with which the Puritan attacks on Mariology were regarded at this time is indicated by the fact that Burton was summoned before the

1. Stafford, *The Female Glory* (Ed. Orby Shipley, 1869), p. cvii.

Star Chamber to answer for his attacks, and finally along with two colleagues, was severely punished.

The aspect of Mariology with which the classical Anglican divines were primarily concerned was that of Mary's real instrumentality in the scheme of redemption. This aspect is central in the New Testament picture of Mary, especially in the Lucan narrative which devotes considerable attenition to her unique role as a human moral and physical agent co-operating with God in the Mystery of the Incarnation. The Church, in the second and third centuries, went on to express this instrumentality or agency of Mary by the analogy of the "second Eve" and the title "Mother of God," the latter eventually receiving conciliar authority.

I. The Mother of God

The title "Mother of God" was continuously used in Anglicanism in the classical period, and the evidence would indicate that the title was a familiar one to Anglicans on all levels.

The acceptance of the term "Mother of God" in the Church of England was seized upon by the Roman controversialists in the sixteenth century as evidence of her inconsistency in emphasizing the principle of scriptural authority. The bishops of the Church of England in 1537 had declared that they had compiled *The Institution of A Christian Man* after a careful search of the Holy Scriptures to determine all things necessary for the Christian man to believe, and in this work they said that the Blessed Virgin is called the Mother of God in virtue of her unique part in the redemption as described in the New Testament.[2]

Rather later both Bishop Jewel and William Whitaker, a close friend of Archbishop Whitgift, justified the use of the term in the Anglican Church, against Roman polemic. Jewel referred to the term as part of the "catholic truth of our religion" and justified its use on the ground that it was implicit in Scripture and authorized by the Fathers.[3] Whitaker similarly maintained that the term expounds "the genuine sense of Scripture"[4] and declared that it is a "notable calumny" to suggest "that the title of *theotokos* or *Deipara* is not grounded upon the Scripture, for the Fathers proved the Virgin to be *theotokos* from the Scriptures, against Nestorius."[5]

In the next century the title "Mother of God" is found constantly in the forefront of Anglican apologetic. Anthony Stafford loses all patience with his Puritan opponents over having to defend Mary's right to the title, and says,

The union of both Natures, God and Man, being in Christ, she must, by strong consequences, bring forth God and Man. But Burton, and his silly fraternity, have not brains of a temper fine enough to distinguish between the

2. *Formularies of Faith in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Oxford, 1856), p. 206.
3. *Works* (PS), III, p. 225. (Note. PS = Parker Society. LACT = Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.)
4. Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* (PS), p. 603.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 538 f.

Mother of God and the Mother of the Godhead, the first of which she truly is; the latter she is not.[6]

Bishop Bramhall, living as an exile on the continent during the Commonwealth because he held to the Catholic Faith, similarly takes a very firm stand with his opponent—in this case a representative of the Roman Communion, by whom the catholicity of the Anglican Communion has been impugned. Bramhall answers: "We receive not your upstart suppositious traditions, nor unwritten fundamentals; but we admit genuine, universal, Apostolic traditions; as the Apostles' Creed, the perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God . . . "[7]

At the end of the seventeenth century George Bull defends the position given to the Blessed Virgin in Anglicanism, against the Puritan dissenters, in a sermon entitled "The Blessed Virgin's Low and Exalted Condition." In a passage in this sermon Bishop Bull gives an apology for the title "Mother of God:"

> The Fathers of the Third General Council at Ephesus, convened against Nestorius, approved the title of *theotokos*, the Mother of God, given to the Blessed Virgin.
>
> They approved it, I say. They did not first invent it, as some have ignorantly affirmed. And therefore they themselves in their synodical Epistle say, that the holy Fathers before them, doubted not to call the Blessed Virgin *theotokon Deiparam*, the Mother of God . . . We have heard Irenaeus, who was a scholar to a scholar of the Apostles, magnifying the Virgin upon this account, that she did *portare Deum*, bear God within her. If she did *portare Deum*, she did *parere Deum*, if she bore God, she brought him forth too, and so was the Mother of God, that is: of him that was God. Nay the blessed Martyr and disciple of one of the Apostles, Ignatius, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, feared not to say, Our God Jesus was conceived of Mary. But what need we search after human authorities, when the inspired Elizabeth plainly gives the Blessed Virgin the same title? "And whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come unto me?" Where "the Mother of our Lord" is doubtless of the same import with the Mother of God: For the title of "our Lord" belongs to Christ chiefly, as He is "our God."[8]

In the area of theological exposition, it is John Pearson in the mid-seventeenth century who gives the most complete explanation of the term. Bishop Pearson, whose *Exposition of the Creed* (1659) became a standard theological text-book, in his discussion of the Incarnation skilfully elucidates the real dependence of Christ in His human nature on His Mother who gave Him mortal flesh, as the ultimate reason for her description by the Councils as Mother of God. Pearson describes how we must attribute a true conception, nutrition, and parturition to the Blessed Virgin in the Nativity:

> Wherefore from these three . . . we must acknowledge that the Blessed Virgin was truly and properly the mother of our Saviour. And so is she frequently

6. *Op. cit.*, p. lxxxix.
7. *Works* (LACT), I, p. 53.
8. Bull, *Some Important Points of Primitive Christianity Maintained and Defended* (London, 1714), II, pp. 154–156.

styled the mother of Jesus in the language of the Evangelists, and so by Elizabeth particularly the "Mother of her Lord," as also by the general assent of the Church (because He which was born of her was God), the *Deipara*; . . . and so the Virgin was plainly named the Mother of God.[9]

Bishop Pearson gives an extensive footnote tracing the history of the term *Theotokos*, and points out that the title can only be denied at the risk of incurring the charge of heresy.[10]

Isaac Barrow, about ten years later, follows Pearson in stressing the three particulars which are involved in "the concurrence of the Blessed Virgin Mary to our Lord's generation," and which safeguard the reality of the part played by human agency in the actual bringing about of the Incarnation. Barrow goes on to say:

Whatever, therefore, any mother does confer to the entire production of a child, is to be attributed to the Blessed Virgin; whence also she was truly and properly the mother of our Lord, and is accordingly often so called in the Gospel; whence also she has been in the Church defined to be and commonly styled *theotokos*, the bearer and mother of God, that is, of Him who is God; that term asserting the Divinity of Christ and the unity of His person against Nestorius and his partisans.[11]

Although the title "Mother of God" disappeared from the common worship in the 1552 Prayer Book, nevertheless it continued to be used in private prayers, and appears frequently in sermons and devotional literature of the seventeenth century. Bishop Andrewes used the prayer from the Eastern Liturgy in his *Preces Privatae*: "commemorating the all holy, immaculate, more than blessed Mother of God and ever Virgin Mary with all saints . . . "[12] and Bishop Jeremy Taylor in his *Great Exemplar* prays to be given the virtues created in the "ever-blessed Virgin, the Mother of God."[13]

John Donne gives us an indication of how familiar the description of Mary as Mother of God was to an early seventeenth-century congregation in England, when in a Christmas sermon in 1624 he says quite naturally: "The Blessed Mother of God in our text was a Virgin."[14] Dr. Mark Frank (1612-1664), who was chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, used the title freely in his sermons, which were collected and published after his death under the *Imprimatur* of his successor. Bishop Ken refers to the Mother of God in his hymn for the Sunday after Epiphany; and his contemporary George Hickes in his *Discourse of the Due Praise and Honour of the Virgin Mary*, bearing the official *Imprimatur* (1684), says that the English Church honours Mary as did the Primitive Church, by calling her "without scruple the Holy, and Blessed Mother of God."[15]

9. Pearson, *Exposition of the Creed* (Oxford, 1890, ed. E. Burton), Art. III, p.317–320.
10. *Op. cit.*, Art. III, n. 36.
11. *Theological Works* (Cambridge, 1859), VI, p. 250.
12. Intercession for Thursday Morning.
13. *Works* (London, 1822, ed. R. Heber), II, p. 9.
14. *Works* (London, 1839), p. 35.
15. *Sermons* (London, 1713), II, p. 131.

The degree to which the laity must have been familiar with the term "Mother of God" is pointed up by the devotional books published for the laity in this period. Anthony Stafford uses the term frequently throughout his book, the full title of which is *The Female Glory; or The Life and Death of our Blessed Lady, the Holy Virgin Mary, God's own Immaculate Mother.* But much more influential amongst the laity, was Robert Nelson's *Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England*, first published in 1703 and frequently reprinted during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his section on the Feast of the Annunciation, Nelson asks and answers:

Q: Why is the Blessed Virgin Mary styled the Mother of God?
A: Because the second person in the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God, by virtue of an eternal generation, vouchsafed to descend from heaven, and to stoop so low as to enter into the womb of the Virgin; where, being united to our nature, which was formed and conceived there, He submitted to a second generation according to the flesh. So that this Son of God was truly the Son of the Virgin, and consequently she that brought forth the man was really the mother of God; and by her cousin Elizabeth she is styled the mother of her Lord, which word Lord was counted equivalent to the word God.[16]

II. The Second Eve

The analogy of the second Eve was introduced very early in the Church as the natural complement of St. Paul's analogy of the second Adam, relating the story of man's fall to the drama of man's redemption. The analogy is a most useful one, for it helps us to keep in mind that Mary was an agent of God in the Incarnation in a moral as well as physical way. True human instrumentality required a real moral decision on Mary's part. The God who created man as a purposeful creature with a free will would not do violence to man's nature by ignoring the full scope of his instrumentality and over-ruling his will.

Hence the doctrine of the second Eve says that Mary was a real, effective, creaturely agent in the process of God's re-creation of the world, a process which was initiated when Mary reversed Eve's unfaithfulness and declared, "Be it unto me according to thy word," and the "power of the Highest" overshadowed her. Yet the analogy at this point must break down, for while Eve possessed the power to initiate man's fall, it was only Christ who possessed the power to initiate and effect man's salvation; the choice, preparation and conception of Mary were effected by the God whom she willingly bore.

The truth contained in the analogy was well expressed by the Anglican bishops in *The Institution of A Christian Man* (1537), in their exposition of the *Ave Maria*:

What excellent honour was she put to when, notwithstanding the decree was made of his nativity by the whole Trinity, yet the thing was not done and

16. Nelson, *A Companion to the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* (London, 1846), p. 154.

accomplished without or before her consent was granted. . . . And how high grace was this, that after the default made through the persuasion of the first woman, our mother Eve, (by whom Adam was brought into disobedience), this blessed virgin was elect to be the instrument of our reparation, in that she was chosen to bear the Saviour and Redeemer of the world! And is not this a wonderful prerogative, to see a virgin to be a mother, and against the general sentence of the malediction of Eve, to conceive and bring forth her child without sin? And well he may be called the blessed fruit, which hath saved us and given us life, contrary to the cursed fruit, which Eve gave to Adam, by which we were destroyed and brought to death; but blessed is the fruit of this womb which is the fruit of life everlasting.[17]

Roger Hutchinson (?-1555) made use of the analogy between Eve and the Virgin, in defending the reality of the Incarnation against a woman who was probably an anabaptist, and who apparently professed a docetic Christ. Hutchinson, along with Latimer, Cranmer and Ridley, was involved in the case against the woman. The woman, Joan Bocher, was burned for heresy on May 2, 1550 and Hutchinson, who published his book, *Image of God* or *Layman's Book*, later the same year, wrote the following passage with specific reference to Bocher's case:

God sent His Son, "born, or made, of a woman." But why Christ born of a woman? Truly, because sin and death overflowed the world through the first woman, He worketh the mystery of life and righteousness by another woman; that the blame of sin should not be imputed to His creature which is good, but to the will by which Eve sinned.[18]

Hutchinson goes on to refute the old heresy professed by Joan, that Christ passed through Mary "as water gusheth through a pipe or conduit" (Anglicans of the following century were continually being called upon to refute this heresy), and says that the "second Adam" took of the substance and nature" of Mary for

it was needful that the same flesh should be punished on the tree, which offended in eating of the fruit of the tree . . . Besides St. Paul says, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." But how are we "flesh of Christ's flesh," except he be flesh of Mary's flesh, and bones of Mary's bones?[19]

The seventeenth-century Anglican writers make frequent references to the analogy of the second Eve. John Donne alludes to Mary as the inverse of Eve in the poem *The Virgin Mary* (1608-1609):

> For that fair blessed Mother-maid,
> Whose flesh redeemed us; that she-cherubim,
> Which unlocked Paradise, and made
> One claim for innocence, and disseized sin.

Bishop Forbes, in commenting on the passage from St. Irenaeus where he writes of the Virgin Mary as the "advocate of the Virgin Eve" speaks of the Blessed Virgin as "an instrument of the saving incarnation."[20]

17. *Op. cit.*, pp. 206–208.
18. *Works* (PS), p. 144.
19. *Loc. cit.*
20. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* III, 22:4; Forbes, *Considerationes Modestae* (LACT), I, p. 351.

Bishop Hall introduces the analogy between Eve and the Virgin Mary to show how the Redemption was the inverse of the Fall, in his meditation on the Annunciation: "It was fit our reparation should answer our fall. An evil angel was the first motioner of the one to Eve, a virgin then espoused to Adam, in the garden of Eden; a good angel is the first reporter of the other to Mary, a virgin espoused to Joseph."[21]

Anthony Stafford draws on the doctrine of the second Eve, and says that Mary "might better be called the Mother of the Living, than Eve, since she, like a murderess, gave her children death ere birth"[22] and when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, Stafford has him say to her: "Consent to thy own happiness, and the Redemption of all humanity."[23] Stafford brings out Mary's essential agency in the Redemption elsewhere in two panegyrics upon the Virgin:

> Methinks I hear her plaints. "O Christ that I
> Should give Thee Flesh; for else Thou could'st not die!
> Divinity is from all passion free,
> That Thou canst suffer torments was from me" . . . [24]

and

> He who made the world, and nature did ordain,
> Was made of Thy flesh; . . .
> That of the greatest blessing God e'er sent
> To sinful man, thou wert the instrument.[25]

Bishop Taylor, though he does not use the second Eve analogy directly, says that God "chose her from all the daughters of Adam, to be instrumental of the restitution of grace and innocence to all her father's family."[26]

Bishop Hickes says of the obedience of the second Eve:

The Blessed Virgin . . . was strong in faith. . . . She knew that He who formed Adam, of the ground and Eve of one of the ribs of Adam, was also able to form the Body of His Son of her substance; and therefore though she knew not a man, she said unto the angel, "Behold, the Handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to thy word."[27]

Bishop Ken, in a hymn for the First Sunday after Epiphany contrasts Eve and the Virgin Mary in their respective roles:

> As Eve when she her fontal sin reviewed,
> Wept for herself, and all she should include;
> Blessed Mary, with man's Saviour in embrace,
> Joyed for herself, and for all human race.[28]

And finally near the end of the century we have a reference in Bishop Bull's sermon on the Blessed Virgin:

The Blessed Virgin Mary was the only woman, that took off the stain and dishonour of her sex, by being the instrument of bringing that into the world, which should repair and make amends for the loss and damage brought to mankind by the transgression of the first woman Eve. By a woman, as the

21. *Works* (Oxford, 1858, ed. P. Wynter), II, p. 301.
22. *Op. cit.*, p. 15.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 32 f.
24. *Ibid.*, p. cxlvii.
25. *Ibid.*, p. cxxxvi f.
26. *Op. cit.*, II, p. 12.
27. *Op. cit.*, II, p. 70.
28. Ken, *Christian Year* (London, 1868), p. 62.

principal cause, we were undone; and by a woman as a instrument under God, a Saviour and Redeemer is born to us. And the Blessed Virgin is that woman.[29]

Bishop Bull goes on to discuss St. Irenaeus' passage on the subject, in regard to the Virgin Mary as the "advocate of the Virgin Eve." Bull translates *advocata* as "comforter" and says:

How did Eve receive comfort from the Blessed Virgin Mary? I answer, in that gracious promise delivered by God Himself in the sentence passed on the Serpent, after Eve's seduction by him, Gen. 3:15, where it is said "that the Seed of the woman should bruise the Serpent's head." Every man knows now that the Seed there spoken of, is Christ: and consequently, that the individual woman, whose immediate seed He was to be is the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Holy Virgin was the happy instrument of the saving incarnation of the Son of God, who has effectually crushed the old Serpent the Devil, and destroyed his power over all those that believe on Himself; and thereby she became the instrument of comfort to Eve, and all other sinners.[30]

It is evident that from the first existence of Anglicanism independent of Rome at the beginning of Archbishop Cranmer's primacy, right up to the eighteenth century, the Anglican Church maintained without interruption the essential Mariology that was developed by the Fathers and defined by the General Councils. Throughout this period it was recognized that God's real involvement in human history and human nature depended on the real human instrumentality of Mary, and in consequence, the conciliar acknowledgment of Mary as Mother of God occupied a central place in expositions and sermons on the Incarnation, as did to a lesser extent the analogy of the second Eve.

It is significant that this Mariology was held with such firmness, and was accompanied by a real devotion to Mary, during the very difficult classical period when Anglican divines were most critical of the unbalanced Marian practices of the Roman Communion. But what they saw exemplified in an unique way in Mary, was God's proper and effectual use of human instruments in His work of Redemption, and it is this principle which is implicit in the doctrine of the Church, the Sacraments, and the Ministry. At a time when the whole Catholic structure of the historic Church was being challenged by the growing force of radical Puritanism, the classical Anglican divines could not afford to neglect the position given in Christian tradition to the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God.

29. *Op. cit.*, II, pp. 151–3. 30. *Loc. cit.*