

Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 30 • Number 2 • April 2006

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

Evangelicals and Mary: Recent Theological Evaluations

David Parker

KEYWORDS: *Authority, grace, symbolism, discipleship, Christology, narrative exegesis, example, typology, piety*

MARY IS WELL RESPECTED and honoured by evangelical and other Protestant Christians as the mother of Jesus and a faithful woman of God. However, apart from strong recognition of the Virgin Birth, evangelical Christians do not usually single her out for any special attention. On the surface, this would seem to be in accordance with Scripture. Jerry Sandidge's comment about Pentecostals is also generally true of evangelicals: 'So, it could almost be said that [they]... have no "view" or "theology" of Mary, unless it would be in negative terms, i.e., those things which are *not* believed about her.'¹

However, other branches of the Church take a different view. Perhaps the best known and most influential example would be the late Pope who

venerated Mary highly, as can be seen in his writings², pilgrimages and above all in his funeral service. The report of a joint Anglican-Roman Catholic task force, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (known also as The Seattle Statement) published in 2005 also highlights the continuing high-level interest in Mary. At the popular level, Catholic Christianity (that is, some sections of the Anglican Church, the Orthodox churches and Roman Catholicism), often seems to go to extremes of devotion, although this is not necessarily approved by the leaders. However, even at the level of official doctrine, Mary is given an important role which spills over into inter-church ecumenical relationships, placing pressure on all to recognize Mary as 'the mother of all Christians'.³

¹ Jerry L. Sandidge, 'A Pentecostal Response to Roman Catholic Teaching on Mary', *Pneuma* (Fall, 1982), p. 34.

² He decreed 1987-88 as a Marian year to commemorate her birthday and issued the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987 in support.

³ For a recent survey of the Catholic position, see Lawrence S. Cunningham, 'Mary in Catholic Doctrine and Practice', *Theology Today*, 56/3 (October 1999), pp. 307-318.

Protestant reaction to such trends is often highly polemic, rejecting such attitudes as completely unbiblical and unhelpful to the gospel. However, even among those who take a more moderate line, it is agreed that there are serious differences on the matter. Accordingly, Marian teaching and devotion continues as a prominent part of Catholic practice. Yet on the other hand, as Mackenzie observes, 'the very naming of Mary arouses powerful feelings of antipathy still amongst many Protestants', which, together with the use of exalted titles for her, leaves 'many Protestants shaking their heads and wondering if the gulf between Catholic and Protestant can ever be bridged'.⁴

This difference is no merely superficial matter, for as Jürgen Moltmann has stated, 'The discrepancy between Church teaching and the New Testament is nowhere as great as in Mariology'.⁵ Oberman has identified Mariology as 'the focus and locus where all the heresies of Roman Catholicism are welded together'.⁶ Kantzer concludes, 'The difference between Protestants

and Roman Catholics over Mary is actually a microcosm of what ultimately separates the two faiths.' He refers especially to the means of salvation and biblical authority.⁷ The WEA Theological Commission report therefore stated: 'As evangelicals we consider the Roman Catholic doctrines concerning Mary a formidable barrier between ourselves and Roman Catholics.... We join the author of old in saying: "The mother of Jesus is not the papal Mary"'.⁸

Evangelicals and renewed interest in Mary

In recent times, some evangelicals are showing more interest in Mary on the grounds that there has been an unnecessary, and even anti-biblical, over-reaction to the catholic position. They argue that Mary should not be ignored or worse still, discussion of her person and role should not be prohibited simply because others may have taken up untenable positions. Evangelicals are being urged to adopt a position which is more in accord with the biblical text and the attitude of Christ himself, and

4 J.A. Ross MacKenzie, 'Mary as an Ecumenical Problem' in Alberic Stacpoole (editor), *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue* (Middlegreen, Slough: St Paul Publications, 1982), p. 36.

5 Jürgen Moltmann, in Hans Küng and Jürgen Moltmann (editors), *Mary in the Churches, Concilium* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), xii. cf George Carey, *A Tale of Two Churches: Can Protestants and Catholics Get Together?* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), p. 25.

6 Heiko A. Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, (Philadelphia: Facet Books, 1971), p. 13, quoting Roger Mehl; see also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.2.143.

7 Kenneth S. Kantzer, 'A Most Misunderstood Woman', *Christianity Today*, Dec 12, 1986, 20. cf also Barth: 'Marian dogma is neither more nor less than the critical, central dogma of the Roman Catholic Church... In the doctrine and worship of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest' (*Church Dogmatics*, I.2.143).

8 Paul G. Schrottenboer, *Roman Catholicism: a Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 41; for the whole section on Mary, see chapter 3, pp. 31-41.

thus restore Mary to her rightful place in our doctrine and spirituality. Timothy George⁹ refers to the story of the Scottish reformer, John Knox, who once hurled an image of Mary out of a ship when he was being forced to respect it; George says it is time for evangelicals to reverse this rejection of Mary.

This raises the question of whether evangelical theology and practice can give any greater place to Mary than has been traditionally accorded her. For many evangelicals, the answer would be a strong negative. With the various Catholic Marian doctrines in mind, such as the Immaculate Conception and Bodily Assumption, they would doubt that biblical authority permits any advances at all. Certainly, there is opposition to anything like the Catholic position, for as Oberman points out, 'an independent Mariology cannot do justice to the biblical presentation of the figure of Mary, the mother of Jesus'.¹⁰ According to Gottfried Maron, 'In the strict sense *there cannot be a Protestant "Mariology"* as an independent topic, because Mary has no value in herself, and can only be rightly seen in relation to her Son.'¹¹

Yet, in Scripture, Mary as the mother of Jesus has a pivotal role in the story of salvation; she is singled out for

special attention by Jesus on the cross, and she is described as 'full of grace' (Luke 1:28), 'favoured by God' and 'blessed' (Luke 1:42). The argument is that if evangelicals are to be faithful to their principles of biblical authority, they should not give Mary any less attention than Scripture does.

In this paper I propose to examine some examples of recent evangelical thinking on Mary. But I will not pay much attention to the Virgin Birth. This is a doctrine which has been a hallmark of evangelicals especially since the era of Fundamentalism and there is much in common among evangelicals on this topic. However, it is not so much about Mary herself as it is part of our Christology.

Mary does, of course, sometimes figure strongly in the Christmas preaching and celebrations of Protestants, but simply as part of history or narrative and without any special independent theological importance. Another context in which evangelicals are likely to focus on Mary is in association with family matters, especially the virtues of motherhood and celebrations of Mothers' Day. While a focus on the family is praiseworthy, there is no particular biblical basis for Mother's Day and, as Daniel Migliore¹² points out, associating Mary with this rather sentimental emphasis is probably the product of a romantic 19th century liberalism rather than anything else.

9 In Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (editors), *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 100f.

10 Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, p. 29f.

11 Gottfried Maron, 'Mary in Protestant Theology' in Küng and Moltmann (editors), *Mary in the Churches*, p. 46.

12 Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (editors), *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), p. 119f.

Biblical exegesis

There is plenty of scope for evangelicals to give more attention to Mary if typical commentaries and theological books are any guide. Evangelical thinking about Mary, as for any other topic, needs a biblical basis and is confined by biblical authority. This, of course, contrasts strongly with the Catholic tradition where church tradition and official teaching are so evident.

This biblical orientation is one powerful factor limiting the extent of evangelical interest in Mary because there is so little data available. The biblical material is limited mainly to the birth narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and a few references to Mary and the family in the other sections. The Gospel of John has only two references—the miracle at Cana in chapter 2 and the scene at the foot of the cross with the beloved disciple in chapter 19—but does not identify her by name (only as ‘the mother of Jesus’)! Not only are there relatively few references to Mary in the New Testament compared with other great heroes listed in the ‘hall of faith’, but what is said in these references is either limited or open to interpretation. Evangelical biblical scholarship as seen in commentaries reflects this situation.

Luke 1:28ff

Leaving aside the first Gospel with its main focus on Joseph rather than Mary, David Wells points out that the key doctrinal text used by Roman Catholics to support views on Mary (excluding those relating specifically to the virgin birth) is Luke 1:28ff; ‘Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!’¹³ Most evan-

gelical commentators take this text in its straightforward historical and literal sense, without seeing in it any justification for an exalted view of Mary. Thus, in his popular exposition of Luke’s Gospel, David Gooding¹⁴ expounds it as part of a simple historical narrative with no special interest for Marian issues. Similarly, Leon Morris, in the student oriented Tyndale New Testament Commentary,¹⁵ comments, ‘It is, of course, complete misunderstanding which translates the words, “Hail Mary, full of grace”, [derived from the Vulgate translation which has influenced Catholic thinking] and understands them to mean that Mary was to be a source of grace to other people. Gabriel is saying simply that God’s favour rests on her.’

13 David F. Wells *Revolution in Rome* (London: Tyndale, 1973): ‘Mary—an unresolved problem’, pp. 111–119. See also Elliott Miller and Kenneth R. Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 32–34; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I.2.139f. warned concerning the Christological context of Marian teaching in the NT, ‘In this category is to be put the well-known *kecharitomene* of Lk. 1:28, which, translated *gratia plena*, has given rise to so many mariological speculations, against which it ought to have contributed a serious warning.’ The NIV rendering is, ‘Greetings, you who are highly favoured.’ The Roman Catholic RSV translates as ‘Hail, full of grace’, while both RSV and RC-RSV relegate the poorly attested ‘blessed are you among women’ to the margin, although of course it is found in Luke 1:42.

14 David Gooding, *According to Luke* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

15 Leon L. Morris, *Luke* (TNTC) (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974).

At a more technical level, John Nolland¹⁶ documents two alternate meanings for the 'quite rare Hellenistic verb' in use, viz., either it means the 'intrinsic qualities for which a person is to be commended' or it means 'the receipt of special graces or privilege by a benefactor'; he concludes that the second meaning is 'undoubtedly to be preferred' in this case, where Mary's privileged role has already been set forth,¹⁷ thus supporting the evangelical position. I.H. Marshall¹⁸ reinforces this conclusion by noting that 'There is no suggestion of any particular worthiness on the part of Mary herself'. But he also points out how Catholic views have been influenced by the Vulgate reading, *gratia plena*. This, he says, is open to misinterpretation by suggesting that grace is a substance with which one may be filled, and hence that Mary is a bestower of grace. He goes further and dissociates the initial word *chaire* from the messianic links often given to it by Catholic commentators (e.g., Zeph. 3:13, 9:9), preferring instead to regard it as 'the normal form

of address in the NT and in Greek usage'.¹⁹

Revelation 12:1-6

Likewise evangelical commentators do not give any credence to a Marian reference to the vision of the woman, the dragon and the male child in Revelation 12:1-6. Morris, for example, does not even mention the idea, instead indicating that the 'woman clothed with the sun' is Israel, an image which appears several times in the OT; in Revelation 12 it is possibly set in contrast to the goddesses of the pagan culture familiar to the first readers of the book.²⁰ Robert H. Mounce²¹ takes the same approach, but states explicitly, 'The woman is not Mary the mother of Jesus but the messianic community, the ideal Israel,' while W. Hendrick-

19 See also Mary J. Evans, *Women in the Bible* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1983) 58, who rejects this link also. Note that the Catholic *Jerome Bible Commentary* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968) focuses merely upon 'the source of goodness rather than upon its effects', noting that Mary is 'the object of God's grace and favor' with the participle indicating that she 'has been chosen for a long time past'. It also points out Mary's unique position because 'in her, more than in anyone else, God's messianic fulfillment is achieved' and that accordingly 'she has received more... than anyone else in the OT or NT'. Overall, the greeting signifies 'a particular office or special prerogative' (p. 122).

20 Leon L. Morris, *Revelation* (TNTC) (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1969), pp. 155ff.

21 Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 236.

16 John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary: Luke 1-9:20* (Dallas: Word, 1989), p. 50.

17 BAGD, 879 offers only one meaning: 'to bestow favour upon, favour highly, bless' (i.e., endorsing Nolland).

18 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1978), p. 65.

sen²² speaks specifically of the woman as the church, emphasizing, as Mounce does, that 'the Church in both dispensations is one'. Similar positions are adopted by other commentators such as Michael Wilcock²³, Philip Edgcumbe Hughes²⁴, and G.E. Ladd²⁵

John 19: 26, 27

However, the passage in John 19 dealing with Jesus' words from the cross to and about Mary is the most difficult Marian text. This is because it is part of a book which is recognized to be replete with deliberately intended double meanings, and so it may have symbolic meaning itself. But evangelical commentators are generally agreed that such a possibility does not exist in this case. In the words of Mary J. Evans, 'there is no particular indication in the text that the incident is meant to be seen as symbolic and no hint of such a concept can be found elsewhere in the New Testament'.²⁶

Donald A. Carson offers a detailed explanation of the reasons for rejecting

the kind of symbolic meaning that is proposed by Raymond E. Brown.²⁷ Not only does Carson consider such a view 'anachronistic', but he argues that it is contrary to the plain historical meaning and 'without adequate contextual control,' if it were to be symbolic, he argues, the interpretation could not be arbitrary but should be 'in line with the historical reading' (emphasis original) and thus controlled by Johannine (and possibly Synoptic) themes; but there are none that are relevant. G. Beasley Murray does consider the possibility of symbolism in this passage but limits it to the idea of Mary receiving what she had sought earlier at the wedding in Cana through the agency of the beloved disciple.²⁸

The Witness of the Gospels

Overall, therefore, the literal hermeneutic prevails. Together with the Synoptic texts that relate to Mary and her family (Matt. 2:23; Luke 2:41-52; Mark 6:3 pars), the evangelical tradition is left with an adequate foundation for the commonly held views about Mary. She fulfilled a unique function in salvation history through the miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit, but having given birth to Jesus in a non-miraculous manner, lived a normal

22 William Hendricksen, *More Than Conquerors* (London: Tyndale Press, 1940), p. 135.

23 Michael Wilcock, *I Saw Heaven Opened* BST (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), p. 118.

24 Philip E. Hughes, *The Book of Revelation—a Commentary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), p. 135.

25 G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 166f.

26 Mary J. Evans, *Women in the Bible*, 60; but contrast *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) p. 585 which is sympathetic to the symbolic view.

27 D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), pp. 616-8; for Brown's comments, see *The Gospel according to John* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966).

28 G. Beasley Murray, *John* (Word Biblical Commentary) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), pp. 349f.

human and family life.²⁹

So, as Mary J. Evans has it, neither 'by implication or by definite assertion' does the NT build on the narratives about Mary in a doctrinal sense, which 'means we must be very wary of asserting that Mary has any further significance, other than as a witness and an example'.³⁰ It should also be noted that any tendency to exalt Mary for her role in the incarnation on the basis of Lukan texts is emphatically qualified by the account in Matthew, where Mary plays no part at all in the Annunciation.

Furthermore, the other element in these theological conclusions, Mary's exemplary role, is reinforced by two other New Testament passages (Luke 8:19-21; 11:27-28) which emphasize the virtue of obedient faith on the part of disciples. Mary is included in this group of disciples, which rules out the possibility of any special status in consequence of Mary's physical relationship with Jesus. Even so, as Wright points out,³¹ Mary's insight into the

role and ministry of her son was not always so exemplary as Catholic piety might wish because it is evident from some gospel texts (Luke 2:50; Mark 3:21; Mark 6:4) that there was a degree of tension between Jesus and his family. Wright can even suggest that 'Mary was herself "the hated mother," perhaps for most of Jesus' three-year ministry'. The scene at the cross (John 19:25-27) represents a definite turning point in this respect, which is confirmed by the fact that Mary joined with the other disciples in the Upper Room awaiting the blessing of Pentecost. (Acts 1:14).

Therefore, although Marian devotion did arise early in the history of the church, from an evangelical perspective, there is no exegetical or theological basis for it to have grown so strongly. What Donald G. Dawe points out for classical Reformed theology is also true for evangelicalism in general, 'Mary's function was historically complete in the virginal conception and bearing of the Saviour. She had no ongoing function in the *ordo salutis* which is the work of the Holy Spirit alone.'³² Thus, as already noted, there can be no independent Protestant Mar-

29 See Joel B. Green (editor), *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove/Leicester: InterVarsity, 1992) pp. 70-72, 884f., and ISBE 3:269f for typical critical treatments along these lines. Note that there is nothing in the NT data to suggest Mary remained a virgin, so evangelicals generally reject the Catholic belief in the perpetual virginity.

30 Mary J. Evans, *Women in the Bible*, p. 58.

31 David F. Wright (editor), *Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), p. 26; see also G.W. Bromiley in ISBE 3:270, W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Principles of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), p. 226, and Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus* (Cam-

bridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 99, who notes that 'all four Gospels to one degree or another indicate both that Jesus' mother failed at some point to completely understand or honour her Son... and that Jesus distanced Himself from her in the process of distinguishing His physical family from His spiritual one'.

32 Donald G. Dawe, 'From Dysfunction to Disbelief' in Stacpoole (editor), *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, p. 146.

iology, or Marian cult, but at most 'petitionless praise of the Virgin'.³³

Insights from the Narrative approach to Scripture

Against this traditional approach, it is interesting to examine a sample of the new narrative approach to Scripture, as presented by Joel B. Green.³⁴ The value of the narrative technique for the readers is that it is potentially more engaging than the traditional grammatical-historical approach which typically yields only factual and doctrinal data. That is, 'As narrative, Luke-Acts invites its readers into its discourse as participants, ready to be prodded, and encouraged, challenged and formed.' Thus instead of the interpreter trying to 'make sense' of the text, Green suggests the value of the text lies in the way it presents Mary as an 'accessible exemplar'. The text opens to us 'a new way of seeing the world' and it 'invites us to join Mary in that work to which [Luke] repeatedly draws attention—namely the sort of pondering that allows for previously unimaginable interpretations of the events and world around us' (Luke 2:19, 51).³⁵

Green commences with Luke 11:27-28 where an unnamed woman from the crowd addressed Jesus, and praised his

mother Mary by saying, 'Blessed is the womb that bore you'. Jesus' reply, however, deflects attention away from Mary and any virtue she might possess, and also from her physical and family links to him. He says, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!' (v 28). Here Jesus asserts that blessedness is found in obedient faith, not in religious or social status or family connection.

This radical reinterpretation of traditional virtues is what Green argues is at the heart of Luke's portrayal of Mary: 'Mary's appearance in the Lukan narrative assaults the theological imagination of its readers, subverting conventional wisdom....' as is illustrated by her lowly social status and the theme of Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), which reflect a radical 'inversion of social realities'. Mary, who 'seems to measure low on any status scale... turns out to be the one favored by God, the one who finds her status and identity ultimately in her embrace of God's blessing to her'.³⁶ Thus 'the character of the people of God is reevaluated in the light of the newly found understanding of God's purposes in the good news'.³⁷ Thus, it is evident that instead of providing any information that might lead to an exalted view of Mary along the lines of Catholic piety, Green's exegesis shows Mary as an 'exemplar of one who life is in sync with God's saving plan'.

This approach is therefore a more engaging version of the common evangelical approach to Mary as an ideal disciple, rather than anything more.

33 George H. Tavard, *The Thousand Faces of the Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 127.

34 Joel B. Green, 'Blessed is she who Believed' in Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (editors), *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 9-20.

35 Green, 'Blessed is she', pp. 10-11.

36 Green, 'Blessed is she', p. 14.

37 Green, 'Blessed is she', p. 10.

Undoubtedly, she had a special role to play in salvation history as the mother of Jesus, for which the terms 'favoured' and 'blessed' are entirely appropriate. But they carry no further doctrinal significance. Mary must be seen as a woman of humble faith, enabled by the grace of God to fulfil her calling, like so many others in the story of salvation history.

Theology

In line with the biblical witness as revealed by our inspection of evangelical exegesis, standard evangelical theology text books give very little attention to Mary apart from discussions of the Virgin Birth itself. For example, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* has articles on the Virgin Birth and the main Catholic teachings such as the Bodily Assumption, Immaculate Conception and Mother of God. Its article on Mary is limited to a terse listing of biblical data and the observation that Roman Catholics:

have venerated Mary as entirely sinless and as the most glorious of God's creatures. Feeling that this detracts from the centrality of Christ Protestants have often neglected her unduly. Radical biblical criticism in doubting the infancy narratives' historicity often further this neglect. However, the increasing importance of women's issues has spurred new interests in Mary among both Protestants and Catholics alike.³⁸

*New Dictionary of Theology*³⁹ is similar, containing two articles on the topic by the same author—the first, 'Mary', is, as its introduction suggests, only a discussion of the 'Roman Catholic doctrine of Mary', while the second is devoted to an evangelical understanding of the virgin birth (i.e., virginal conception). Neither article attempts to offer any positive theology of Mary. The authoritative *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*⁴⁰ has no entry at all on Mary but includes a brief factual statement of the NT data about her in a general article on 'Women'.

Introductory textbooks in systematic theology represent only a modest advance over the reference material. For example, the popular *Know the Truth*⁴¹ by the Baptist theologian, Bruce Milne, treats Mary in Christological context only, which contrasts with a comparable Roman Catholic volume which devotes more than a chapter to her.⁴² From an Anglican perspective, *Christian Theology: an Introduction*⁴³ from the prolific contemporary evangelical, Alister E. McGrath, offers only a descriptive historical treatment of Mary, with no reference to the virgin birth.

³⁸ Walter A. Elwell, (editor), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (EDTh) (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), pp. 696-670.

³⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright (editors), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988).

⁴⁰ *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp. 70-2, 884f.

⁴¹ Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), p. 138f..

⁴² Jesus Maria Cavanna, *Basic Christian Doctrines* (Manila: Carmelo and Bauermann, 1986), pp. 38-44.

⁴³ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 45, 51, 53.

In the case of Reformed theology, Donald G. Dawe points out that there was a decline of interest in Mary following the first generation of Reformers, resulting in only 'the most scattered and peripheral mention of Mary in formal theology' until the end of the 19th century and later; at this time, the critical issue became the defence of the virgin birth over against liberal denials.⁴⁴ This trend can be seen in works by Charles Hodge⁴⁵, L. Berkhof⁴⁶ and J.O. Buswell⁴⁷. Arminian theologians are in general agreement with their Reformed counterparts on Mary and the Virgin Birth.⁴⁸

As might be expected, the views of

Pentecostals are similar to those of evangelicals as a whole. Jerry Sandidge's conclusion has been noted above.⁴⁹ As a participant in the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogue, he found little positive material on Mary from a Pentecostal perspective, concluding that there was only a 'negative' (ie, a polemical) theology, focusing on the rejection of perpetual virginity, immaculate conception, bodily assumption and veneration. In the ensuing dialogue, agreement emerged on the belief in the virgin birth (at least as understood as virginal conception), the validity of the term *theotokos*, and Mary's holiness and her role as an example of piety. But in terms of dialogue, this was as far as the Pentecostals could go in the direction of a positive theology of Mary.

A similar situation exists in the case of the systematic theology of the charismatic Presbyterian, J. Rodman Williams. He strongly rejects the Roman Catholic dogmas in a series of comprehensive footnotes. At the same time he emphasizes in the main text of his work the personal piety of Mary as seen in her 'humble and receptive faith',⁵⁰ and her unique historical role in the incarnation as the mother of Jesus.

Amongst the recent Baptist theo-

44 Dawe, 'From Dysfunction to Disbelief' in Stacpoole, *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, 146. In this connection, see the classic works on the subject by James Orr and J. Gresham Machen.

45 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 3 vols (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1981 reprint).

46 L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), pp. 334-6.

47 James O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (2 vols in 1) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962, 1963) Vol 2, pp. 40, 44f..

48 Charles W. Carter, Ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (2 vols) (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press/Zondervan Publishing House, 1983); Benjamin Field, *The Student's Handbook of Christian Theology* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1883); John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (2 vols) (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989 reprint from 1893 edition); W.T. Purkiser, R.S. Taylor and W.H. Taylor, *God Man and Salvation* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), *ibid*, *Christian Theology*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952) vol 2, pp. 177, 148;

49 Jerry L. Sandidge, 'A Pentecostal Response to Roman Catholic Teaching on Mary', *Pneuma* (Fall, 1982), pp. 33-42.

50 J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from a Charismatic Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House 3 vols in one, 1996), pp. 344-350, p. 347.

gians, James Leo Garrett⁵¹ stresses the Virginal Conception, but has little to say on Mary herself. The late Stanley Grenz is similar.⁵² Millard J. Erickson's popular text book follows the same line, but in the process of explaining the doctrine of the virgin birth, it does refer to the role and significance of Mary herself, even if this is somewhat negative.⁵³ He says, although 'Mary manifested qualities which God could use, such as faith and dedication', she had no unique qualities of her own that would mark her out from other young women of her day as the one who would give birth to the Saviour; furthermore, she was unable to conceive without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

In other parts of his work, Erickson also makes brief reference to Christological heresies and their implications for the role of Mary, and the relationship between the virgin birth and the general acceptance of the miraculous and the supernatural.⁵⁴ Surprisingly however, in his full scale Christology, *The World Become Flesh*, he places less emphasis on the Virgin Birth and Mary

than in his earlier book, despite the fact that he had pointed out how some theologies have seriously neglected the topic.

Wayne Grudem approaches the Virgin Birth from a biblical rather than a theological point of view, asserting that it is the mechanism of Jesus' sinlessness; this means that for him, belief in the Virgin Birth is a test of faith 'in the God of the Bible'.⁵⁵ It is only in a footnote expressing his strong rejection of the immaculate conception that Grudem alludes to any possibility of a positive appreciation of Mary herself. In a defensive mode, he concedes that 'the New Testament does highly honor Mary' (by calling her 'blessed' and 'favored' by God), but points out that such honour is not in terms of special grace or sinlessness; however, he offers no discussion of what might be an appropriate form of honour in strict NT terms.

It is left to Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest amongst the Baptists (and indeed most other evangelicals) to propose a positive theology of Mary. In their innovative 'Integrative Theology',⁵⁶ they devote a whole section within a lengthy treatment of the incarnation to the topic because of concern about over-reaction by evangelicals to

51 James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) (vol 1), pp. 584-597.

52 *Theology for the Community of God*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994), pp. 409-423; see also his *Revising Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993) and *Created for Community: Connecting Christian Belief with Christian Living* (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 1996).

53 Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Barker, 1998 2nd edition), p. 757f..

54 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pp. 694, 713f, 727, 304.

55 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 532.

56 Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Academie Zondervan Publishing House, vol 2, 1990), 275-8. They also include a 'Josephology', being a summary of the biblical narrative and the presentation of Joseph as a model of a spiritual and devout foster father- 2/277f..

Roman Catholic abuses. They argue that 'An effective Protestant corrective to an unbiblical Roman theology of Mary is not lack of thought about her. The antidote is a biblically founded theology of Mary!' They propose that the virgin birth is 'optional evangelistically' (i.e., not necessary for salvation) and agree that 'Mary may be honored as the most favored woman in history'. However, they firmly reject any further development on biblical grounds: 'The biblical teaching indicates that the moral miracle at his conception by the Holy Spirit freed Jesus, not Mary, from a sinful nature. The child, not Mary, is "the holy one"' (Luke 1:35). Thus Mary was 'not the bestower of divine grace but the recipient' and therefore cannot be 'worshiped as sinless or divine'.

Again on biblical grounds, they reject the popular or literalistic use of the title, 'Mother of God' since 'God, being eternal and self-existent, can have no mother'. However, in line with the qualified, technical use of the term *theotokos*, they do concede, 'Mary was the mother of Jesus' humanness, begotten supernaturally from the Holy Spirit', which accounts for the 'honorific' use of the ascription, 'Mother of my Lord' in Luke 1:43.

But, in contrast to many other evangelical theologians, they make an attempt at articulating a theology of Mary. They itemise this theology under a series of points, including the classical evangelical emphasis on the 'God-given dignity of women', the virtue of her devout piety and faith and the importance of marriage and family values. In addition to noting the unique role of Mary in the history of salvation, they point out that in her faithful obedience to the divine will 'she exempli-

fies God's strategy of using human agents and women in particular in the accomplishment of his holy and loving purposes'. In short, they focus on a feature of interest to feminist theologians: 'a Protestant theology of Mary emphasizes God's great esteem for a devout woman in bringing to pass the greatest event in history—the incarnation of God's eternal Word'.

While several features of this approach are purely traditional and conventional, the final synthesis does represent a positive recognition of the unique role of Mary without conceding any of the points with which polemic evangelical theology is concerned. Yet it still remains as a factual statement which does not imply any further consequences of a theological or practical nature about Mary. That is, there is an acceptance of the unique historical role of Mary and a recognition of her piety and example, but no potential beyond this for the growth of a developed Protestant Marianism.

Historical Development

Evangelicals are not influenced by two key points in history which have provided impetus for the development of Catholic devotion to Mary. The first was the patristic idea of a symbolic connection between Mary and Eve. Thus Justin Martyr in his work, *Dialogue with Trypho*, states, 'Christ became a man by a virgin to overcome the disobedience caused by the serpent... in the same way it had originated.' Playing on the meaning of Eve derived from the Hebrew verb 'to live' and the idea that Eve was presumably a virgin at the time of the temptation, the parallel is made between the virgin

who brought disobedience and death and the virgin who conceived the one who is Life. Mary therefore becomes a New or Second Eve. Thus Irenaeus wrote, 'The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosened by Mary's obedience. The bonds fastened by the virgin Eve through disbelief were untied by the virgin Mary through faith' (*Adv. haereses*, 3:22).

Despite firm adherence to the Adam/Christ typology (expounded in Romans 5 and 1 Cor. 15:21-22), evangelicals reject this Eve/Mary symbolism as an invalid transference of the typology away from Jesus and Adam, contradicting and going beyond Scripture. Thus, whatever virtues Mary may have possessed as a woman of faith and whatever position she may have held by God's grace in salvation history, there is no justification for elevating her in the way the Eve/Mary symbolism does.

The second instance is more complex—the use of the title 'Theotokos' to refer to Mary. In the historical context of the 5th century when the title was affirmed by the 3rd council of Ephesus, it was entirely reasonable. From a Christological point of view, it was necessary to affirm that Mary was the bearer of the one who was not only fully human, but also fully divine, thus countering the Nestorian heresy. But in popular use, the translation of *Theotokos* as 'Mother of God' carried with it the implication that Mary was coeternal with God (or even more) and existed before Jesus and even God himself. Thus Calvin warned, 'To call the virgin Mary the mother of God can only serve to confirm the ignorant in their

superstitions.'⁵⁷

Evangelicals therefore typically acknowledge the truth of the title as a precise, highly nuanced Christological statement (she bore the one who is divine), but reject its popular usage, 'mother of God', wishing that some other simple translation could be used. They regard it as a summary Christological confession, 'an auxiliary Christological proposition',⁵⁸ if one is needed, from the perspective of Mary. They certainly reject the Catholic view that this is the beginning point for an independent Marian theology and piety, as stated for example in a popular Catholic book of belief in this fashion:

Protestants do indeed regard her as the Mother of God [i.e., the Mother of Jesus who is divine], but that is as far as they go, and that is the point at which the Catholic Church commences. Her dignity as Mother of God is the starting point for a very special devotion, and for all the prerogatives with which the Church endows her.⁵⁹

The 'cascading piety' of Marian theology and devotion

The steady development of Marian

⁵⁷ Quoted in 'The Blessed Evangelical Mary in Evangelical Perspective', in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (editors), *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 110.

⁵⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2.138.

⁵⁹ John Greenwood (editor), *A Handbook of the Catholic Faith* (New York: Image Books, 1956), pp. 238

devotion referred to here shows how much 'Mariology belongs to tradition, not to scripture'.⁶⁰ It developed first in the East as a matter of living piety, but then in the West as a matter of dogma. A great number of factors have been identified as contributing to this phenomenon which contrasts so strongly with the evangelical approach, controlled as it is by the authority of Scripture. One important factor contributing to this 'cascading piety'⁶¹ is the use of Scripture not as 'source, but resource, not authoritative evidence but elucidating example'⁶² and the corresponding ideas of development of doctrine and the teaching authority of the Church. Closely related to this is the way popular practice becomes 'an authority for faith instead of its activation'⁶³ which is well illustrated by the fact that popular Marian devotion ultimately

led to the papal definitions of the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption, contrary to any explicit biblical teaching. It is important also to note that a significant impetus for the development of Marian devotion derived from heretical groups in the early centuries, while its documentary sources were mostly non-canonical. In the modern period, one of the major factors has been the content of apparitions of Mary.⁶⁴

This strong tendency to elevate Mary beyond the historical role ascribed to her in the New Testament indicates that in the absence of the restraints imposed by biblical authority, there were other powerful factors that drove the development of Marian devotion. There was, for example, the growing attraction of asceticism, especially the virtues of virginity, and the attraction of the maternal characteristics of the feminine deities of other religions⁶⁵ which involved 'a pre-disposed yearning for a mother-queen goddess figure'.⁶⁶ Another important factor was

60 G.W. Bromiley, 'Mary the mother of Jesus', *ISBE*, 3:272; see also 3:271 where he notes Mariology involves a 'refusal plainly to face up to the biblical data'.

61 John Reumann, 'Mary', in M. Eliade (editor) *Encyclopaedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 9:251.

62 Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, pp. 5-8; contrast the historical exegesis of Reformed theology in which *communio sanctorum* is the context, and tradition is the resource (6).

63 Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, p. 2; cf also E. Ann Matter, 'Marian Devotion' in Gordon S. Wakefield (editor), *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM, 1983), p. 259: 'The history of devotion to the Virgin shows the consistent pressure of popular belief on hierarchical definitions.' Bromiley in *ISBE*, 3:272: '... in the later period at least the theological definition seems to be a product of popular demand rather than the contrary.'

64 See Miller and Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin*, pp. 79-135.

65 D.G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Saviour and Lord* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), p. 110 quotes S. Benko to show a link between the worship of the goddess Artemis at Ephesus and the later decision of the 3rd Ecumenical Council in the same city to affirm the title *Theotokos*.

66 Miller and Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin*, p. 65; 'The phenomenon of modern marian devotion shows that the need for a female, specifically maternal, figure in Christian spirituality is an enduring part of the tradition', *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, p. 258f; Frederick W. Norris, *The Apostolic Faith* (Collegeville, Minn., The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 63.

a growing emphasis upon divine transcendence which led to a need to provide a softer, more approachable image of the godhead and additional ways of mediation.

According to G.W. Bromiley, a more important and decisive factor is the issue of anthropocentricity, that is, the 'constant urge and need to fashion our own religion, to achieve our own salvation, to be our own god'.⁶⁷ This, he argues, explains why Marian devotion could absorb the non-Christian and heretical features mentioned above and why it developed so strongly at a time when evangelical doctrines were neglected. Other commentators discuss this issue in terms of the doctrine of grace. As T.N. Finger puts it, 'most Mariological excesses... spring from overestimating the human role in redemption. This ancient theological issue may be *the most fundamental one surrounding Mariology*'.⁶⁸

As already noted, Mary is seen in evangelical theology as strictly the obedient recipient of grace. But it is regularly observed that Catholic teaching adopts a semi-Pelagian position, in which Mary's virtue or merit is that she cooperates with God in an act of congruous merit on behalf of all people as the new Eve in giving consent to the incarnation.⁶⁹ According to this view,

her cooperation can also be seen throughout her life as mother of Jesus, especially at the cross when 'she united herself with a maternal heart to His sacrifice, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim which she herself had brought forth'.⁷⁰ As Weston observes, 'Mary cooperates in the work of redemption, and so epitomises the view that human ability enables man to have some part in his own salvation'.⁷¹

It should be noted further that Mary's cooperation in redemption necessarily involves, as Barth points out, 'a relative rivalry with Christ'⁷²—not only in devotion but also in the status reflected in the titles which seem to parallel the attributes of Christ himself. Accordingly, evangelical theology, with its Christocentricism and adherence to the principle of *sola gratia*, rejects any role Mary may be given as source (co-redemptrix) or channel (mediatrix) of grace.

More generally there has been what Oberman, refers to as the 'Anselmian rule', according to which one should ascribe to the Virgin Mary 'so much purity that more than that one cannot

67 Bromiley, *ISBE*, 3:272f; *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 9:251.

68 *EDTh*, p. 686.

69 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 494 quoting Irenaeus, 'Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race' *Lumen Gentium* #56, 'cooperating in the work of human salvation through free faith and obedience'; #57 'This union of the Mother with the Son in the work of salvation'.

70 *Lumen Gentium* # 58.

71 Keith Weston, 'Mary: an evangelical viewpoint' in Stacpoole (editor), *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, p. 164.

72 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I.2.145 'For it is to the creature creatively co-operating in the work of God that there really applies the irresistible ascription to Mary of that dignity, of those privileges, of those assertions about her *co-operatio* in our salvation, which involve a relative rivalry with Christ.'

possibly imagine except for God'.⁷³ Closely related to this is the principle that 'one can never say too much about Mary' (*de Maria nunquam satis*) which as Maron states, 'was a stimulus to ingenious intellectual speculations'.⁷⁴ Another powerful factor in the development of Marian teaching, especially regarding such extra-biblical notions as the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption, is the principle expressed in the words: *potuit, decuit, fecit*: God could do a thing, it was fitting that God should, therefore God did it.⁷⁵

The operation of these principles in the historical development of Mariology helps to explain why there has been a 'predisposed ambition' to add to the biblical record concerning Mary, a process which has puzzled evangelicals.⁷⁶ These principles also offer some explanation for the pervasive feeling expressed in the sayings attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, 'Let him who fears the Son seek refuge in Mary' and 'Everything through Mary', which are so much at odds with evangelical

Christology and spirituality.⁷⁷

Thus at the Reformation, it was not surprising that biblical authority was brought to bear, severely curtailing Marian devotion and calling in question the underlying theology, although the Reformers themselves were uneven in their individual attitudes.

In the period since, the polemic situation has been aggravated, leading to the point now where Evangelicalism has sometimes been defined by what it rejects about Mary in particular (as well as other matters) rather than what it believes in an affirmative sense. However, there is some justification for a negative position, given the developments in Catholicism since the Reformation at both popular and official levels (especially with the official papal definitions of the doctrines of Immaculate Conception in 1854, the Bodily Assumption 1950, and Mary as 'Mother of the Church' 1964). The overall influence of prominent Catholics, especially the previous and present popes, has made it harder for Protestants to take an even-handed view despite the efforts of those who want to overcome this significant ecumenical barrier. But even so, some evangelicals have tried to do so. Over time, there have been several attempts

73 Oberman, *The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective*, p. 7.

74 Gottfried Maron, 'Mary in Protestant Theology', *Concilium, Mary in the Churches* pp. 40, 46; illustrations of this principle at work may be seen in John de Satgé, 'The evangelical Mary', in Stacpoole (editor), *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue*, p. 28, and also in P. Toon, 'Appreciating Mary today' in Wright (editor), *Chosen by God*, p. 224f., who both express a need to say more about Mary than the biblical text indicates.

75 *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 9:251; Miller and Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin*, p. 38f..

76 Miller and Samples, *The Cult of the Virgin*, p. 44.

77 *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 9:251; Jesus Maria Cavanna, *Basic Christian Doctrines*, 41; this idea is described by Pope Paul VI in his letter *Signum Magnum* of May 13, 1967 as 'the general norm.'

to revisit Mary⁷⁸, but let us examine some quite recent examples.⁷⁹

Recent Contributions

Timothy George

One of the most articulate is the prolific Timothy George of Beeson Divinity School, a Reformation theologian, who has written on the 'Blessed Evangelical Mary'.⁸⁰ Apart from acceptance of the Virgin Birth and of the title *Theotokos*, which is typical of evangelicals generally, George refers first to Mary in her place in the line of pious women and mothers in the Old Testament. She appears at the intersection of the old and the new covenants as a 'culminating' figure (p. 104). He also goes further and sees her as 'the kairoic representative of the eschatological and redeemed people of God: Israel itself' (p. 105). He thinks evan-

gelicals 'have much to learn from reading Mary against the background of Old Testament foreshadowings' especially due to a Marcionite over-emphasis on the New Testament.

But as we have seen, there is little exegetical justification for such a view, and, as he concedes, this kind of reasoning has been used by Catholicism to develop the Eve/Mary typology. Yet he also concedes a 'note of dissonance' exists (p. 106), because there is also in the Old Testament the idea of the unfaithful bride. This is welcome, because, as we have noted above, the NT shows that Mary herself and her family do not always accept what Jesus stood for in his ministry.

This picture of Mary in relation to the Old Testament, therefore, does not take evangelicals much farther, but George's attempt to reinstate Mary further by referring to her as 'the mother of the Church' is even less successful. Using the scene of Mary at the foot of the cross (John 19) as a lonely but faithful believer, he focuses on Mary as the 'archetype of the remnant church' (p. 119). The figure of the persecuted mother of Revelation 12 allows him to speak of Mary's witness to 'the pilgrim church' (p. 120). He also calls again upon Mary as a 'bridging figure' between the old and new covenants, and between the ministry of Jesus and new age of the church, since she was portrayed as among the last at the cross and the first in the upper room at Pentecost (p. 119).

However, George's references in support of this idea are all to Roman Catholic usage and lack any exegetical or theological basis. In truth, it is Jesus himself who is the faithful believer, the one goes to the cross in humble obedi-

⁷⁸ See, for example, David F. Wright, *Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1989), and A.T. Robertson, *The Mother of Jesus: Her Problems and Her Glory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925).

⁷⁹ Another fruitful example could have been D.G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Saviour and Lord* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), pp. 107-120, who devotes an special appendix to his chapter on the Virgin Birth to "The role of Mary".

⁸⁰ 'The Blessed Evangelical Mary in Evangelical Perspective', in Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson (editors), *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 100-122, and a simplified version in *Christianity Today* (December 2003), Vol. 47, No. 12, 34; on-line <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/012/1.34.html>

ence to the will of the Father and who, as the risen Lord, bestows the Spirit on his disciples. The New Testament assigns no role to Mary in salvation history or the church apart from her call to be the mother of Jesus. There is no justification to link her with the church, apart from being one of the disciples. George draws support for his perspective from the decision of the Second Vatican Council not to produce a separate treatise on Mary but to treat her in the context of the church. However, this is of dubious value in itself, since if Vatican 2 was to effect proper reform in this area, it would have been necessary to restore discussion to Mary fully and exclusively to the Christological context, as was done in the 5th century adoption of the title, *Theotokos*.

George has more success from an evangelical perspective in interpreting Mary as the 'handmaiden of the Lord' (Luke 1:38) in terms of the Reformation principles of *sola gratia* and *sola fide*. He explains that she is the object of divine *grace* in her call to be the mother of Jesus, and she responds to this call in exemplary humble *faith*. George concludes that she should therefore be 'highly extolled in evangelical theology and worship'. He blames the fact that she is not on 'the pruning effect of the Scripture principle' (p. 116)—that is, that there is no explicit exhortation to extol her and to do so would likely detract from the place of Christ. Secondly, he claims that the polemic situation in the post-Reformation period required evangelicals to downplay Mary to avoid any hint of compromise. But, as mentioned above, there is nothing specially unique about Mary's call and response,

so there is no necessity to give her more attention than any of the other heroes of faith listed in Scripture.

This contribution to the thinking about 'the blessed evangelical Mary' appears to be strained. Part of the problem is that it is not a spontaneous expression of evangelical piety, such as the drive for evangelism, the pursuit of holiness or exalting the lordship of Christ. Instead, it is mainly an attempt to find something positive to say in response to an invitation to address a conference on the theme.

Daniel Migliore

In the second example, Daniel Migliore of Princeton Theological Seminary, is also responding to a theme, but does so from a more positive and principled basis.⁸¹ He has the conviction that 'Reformed theology should make its own distinctive contribution to contemporary rethinking of the significance of Mary for Christian faith and theology' (p. 118). By this he means the principles of grace, biblical authority, the gospel and its transforming power (p. 122).

In developing this approach, Migliore joins with Timothy George and other evangelicals in referring to the Annunciation as a demonstration of 'Mary's pilgrimage of faith', showing her as an 'exemplary witness' (p. 123). The focus is not on Mary herself who is

81 'Woman of Faith: Toward a Reformed Understanding of Mary', in Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia L. Rigby (editors), *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), pp. 117-130.

simply 'favored and chosen by God'. Instead, we praise the 'surprising, unmerited, electing grace of God.' Thus, he argues, we should pay more attention than we have to the mode of election in regard to Mary's role in salvation history. Here again, Mary is seen as an example of faith and discipleship—she is not a unique case, and certainly not one who by some special divine action can dispense grace in any way.

Migliore also sees significance in Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, of Luke 2, as an indication of solidarity with the poor and the 'passionate cry for justice and a transformed world' (p. 125), which is so typical of the biblical witness. Similarly, there is the note of fallibility in Mary's story, a reminder that discipleship includes the necessity of continual reformation, *semper reformanda*. Thus Mary is good example of biblical piety and faith.

In his final points, Migliore makes much better use of two other themes than the traditional Catholic view, so often toyed with by Protestants who are sympathetic to increasing the honour given to Mary. First, the scene at the cross where the beloved disciple and Mary are given into each other's care (John 19:26-27), portrays for Migliore a call to ministry 'with and for others' (p. 128) within the family of God: 'Mary's vocation is not exhausted in her giving birth to the Son of God. She is given the further dignity of ministry in the name of the Son that she bore' (p. 127).

Likewise, he does not link the brief reference to Mary as one of those in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 1:14) with the genesis of the church as many scholars do and thus accord it far

greater significance than the exegesis can possibly justify. Instead, he sees it simply as an expression of her devout spirituality, especially notable in the context of this passage with the events of Pentecost.

Yet even these two passages provide only minimal foundation for any elaboration of a position on Mary. They contribute little to our understanding of Christian ministry and spirituality in comparison with the great amount of material on these topics found in other parts of the Scripture, such as, for example, the gospels and epistles on the nature of Christian ministry, or the much more detailed biographies of heroes of faith such as Abraham, Moses, Paul or even Peter. More importantly, for a theology and practice of spirituality, the material on Mary is minimal indeed compared with the Psalms or the prayers and teaching of Paul and other passages. Furthermore, from a general perspective, Mary plays no great part in the apostolic exposition of the Christian life and salvation history as recorded for example in the narrative of Acts or in key epistles such as Romans, Galatians or Corinthians. This is not to deny, of course, that the narratives of Mary do provide valuable 'testimonies to the grace of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit' (p. 129), as Migliore and others so helpfully point out.

Conclusion

Thus our view of Mary must be determined by the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, as for any other matter of faith and practice. Evangelicals have plenty of spiritual dynamics that drive

them, such as the imperative for evangelism and mission, holiness, even the second coming and biblical authority. However, unlike the Catholic position, there is no driving force within their theological and spiritual system to require them to say anything special about Mary in isolation. She is to be seen and interpreted within the larger context other doctrines of grace, ecclesiology and prayer, but especially in terms of Christ himself whom we must continue to magnify in his unique position as the incarnate Son, and our Saviour and Lord.

However, by the same principle of Scripture we need to rectify the relative neglect and distortions in our view of Mary which have resulted from polemic reaction and readily acknowledge her as one 'favoured' by God and as a 'handmaiden of the Lord'. We can see in her a sign of grace and faith, perhaps in some special measure but not uniquely or exclusively compared with others in the hall of faith. In fact, to avoid tendencies towards the kind of invalid doctrinal and devotional embellishment that have taken place in the Catholic tradition, she is best seen,

as Donald G. Bloesch⁸² urges, in the context of the whole company of faith. Thus we see her as a fellow believer with undoubted personal qualities which perhaps set her apart from others; yet we may warmly acknowledge her privileged role as the mother of Jesus and marvel at God's surprising grace in choosing a lowly, humble person for such a role. This must surely be a highly important lesson for Christian's in today's world!

Truly, we can affirm the words of Mary in her song:

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.... he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away

⁸² Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, p. 118. He pushes the boundaries of this concept to include discussion of Mary's role with the saints in heaven, thus addressing firmly the con-

tentious issue of Mary and prayer. For similar ideas from another evangelical sources, See also Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999) (IVP New Testament Commentary Series), p. 461.