

# The Blessed Virgin Mary— An Evangelical Point of View

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I AM DEEPLY grateful that I should have been invited to write this paper.<sup>1</sup> I have no special qualifications, except an acute sense of the tragedy of the rift between so-called 'Protestant' and 'Catholic' Christians. Of all the divisions between us, that of our different attitudes to the Blessed Virgin seems to me the most difficult to bridge. If we can make some progress in this matter, it will be great gain. But it is a matter of extreme delicacy, since it concerns not only our heads, but the deep places of our hearts, and I should greatly regret causing pain through an insensitivity of approach.

It seems to be part of our make-up that we become closely attached to symbols, and when the symbol appears to be threatened, we feel that the thing symbolised is being attacked. To take a simple example: a great and godly zeal for the Lord is sometimes expressed by a violent anti-Protestantism or by a violent anti-Catholicism. Protestantism has been portrayed at its worst and the godly man has a zealous hatred of this ungodly thing; or Catholicism has been portrayed at its worst, and the godly man has a zealous hatred of that ungodly thing. The zeal is good, but the symbol on which the zeal has fastened is based on a very imperfect understanding. But it may be a long and quite painful process to wean the good man from his symbol and to lead him to a better way. It is my belief that some of the devotion shown to the Blessed Virgin is devotion that rightly belongs to her Son, and sometimes it is in fact a devotion to the Son which has been attached to the wrong symbol.<sup>2</sup> But I realise that it may seem very insensitive and misguided to question what is the object of sincerest devotion. I can only beg you to believe that I am very anxious not to cause unnecessary pain. But I think that the truth is only to be promoted by the completest honesty, and the truth itself has nothing to fear from honest enquiry.

*The Doctrine of Revelation*

IN order to approach this matter from an Evangelical point of view, it is necessary to give careful attention to the doctrine of revelation. God made himself known at various times and in various ways in pre-Christian times and the record of his revelation has been preserved in the Old Testament. His final word was spoken in his Son. A personal knowledge of God is received when the Holy Spirit brings someone to believe in and to commit himself to Christ. This inward work of the Spirit enables the believer to recognise the gospel for what it is—not a mere word of man, but the word of the living God. Those who have become Christ's sheep recognise the Shepherd's voice. In practice this means that the inmost spirit of the Christian thrills to the Word of God as it is made known by spoken word, by sacrament or by the written word. The Holy Spirit within the human spirit bears witness to the divine revelation enshrined in the biblical record.

Now the gospel is never mediated completely uncontaminated nor in perfect fulness and balance. The intrusion of human error may not force itself upon the Christian's attention as long as his faith is nurtured in a single tradition. But as soon as he is confronted with partially contradictory traditions, he is compelled to try to sift the divine truth from the human error. It is no longer adequate simply to accept uncritically all that he is taught. He has got to ask what degree of authority is to be accorded to his various sources of information. The Evangelical believes that the biblical tradition has a different status from all other traditions. As far as the Old Testament is concerned, this is explicitly taught by our Lord. Quotations from or allusions to the Old Testament are attributed to our Lord in at least three hundred places in the gospels and there is a complete consistency in the view of Scripture which these presuppose. Jesus regards its history as true, its teaching as authoritative, its very words as inspired. The teaching of Scripture in all its parts is the Word of the Living and True God, who cannot lie.<sup>3</sup> Once this notion of Scripture has been grasped with regard to the writings of the Old Covenant, it is an easy step (which has been endorsed by the whole of the historic church) to extend it to the writings of the New Covenant. The concept of canonicity implies that the canonical scriptures are true and authoritative and are uncontaminated by human error, because God himself claims their teachings as his own. Thus far the whole of the pre-liberal Christian tradition is essentially one.

Divergence begins to appear over the relation between the authority of Scripture and the authority of other traditions. In the West, if I understand the position aright, the Roman Church is committed to the infallibility (and hence irreformability) of certain dogmas, including those of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The extra-biblical teachings of the Roman Church which are held to be infallible

have never been listed, and there is room for heated debate as to what may be regarded as irreformable and what not; but I think that it would be very difficult for the Church of Rome to maintain her identity if she were ever to abandon the 'dogmatic principle'—the principle that there are infallible dogmas, which carry the divine imprimatur as fully as the canonical scriptures. To this the Evangelical feels bound to say: while I see pellucidly clear reasons in the teachings of our Lord himself for regarding the scriptures as infallible, I see no such reasons for so regarding ecclesiastical traditions. Indeed, the church in all its manifestations from the time of Abraham to the present-day has been prone to such monstrous distortions of the truth, that its utterances always merit careful examination in the light of the revelation enshrined for us in the scriptures, which provide the God-given norm by which everything said and done by the Church must be judged.

In the East, there is, I believe, no such clearly conceived 'dogmatic principle'. The Eastern Church never had to face the full impact of the Protestant Revolution, and it never had to face seriously the question of whether Scripture and Tradition might in fact be in contradiction. For a long time Luther himself (the formal decrees of the Council of Trent and the Creed of Pope Pius IV as yet being unformulated), did not imagine that he would find any ultimate conflict between his understanding of Scripture and the official teaching of the Church. It was a dread and terrible moment when he felt compelled to back his understanding of Scripture against the judgment of his ecclesiastical superiors. He was made to face what is in fact the ultimate question, which the whole Church must eventually face: How are we to judge whether the Church is right or wrong? It would seem to me that the Orthodox answer would be: If the Church is true to Orthodox tradition, it will of course be true to Scripture; and, since the great river of Orthodox tradition is so much broader and fuller than the apostolic stream from which it developed, tradition is in practice a better guide than Scripture. In particular the richness of tradition with regard to the Blessed Virgin is incomparably greater than what can be gleaned from Scripture, and its veracity is guaranteed by the continuity of Orthodox life.

These are of course huge and difficult issues. The Reformation principle of the Right (or, better called, the Necessity) of Private Judgement is open to hideous abuse. Any body of Christians which lightly regards the authority of the Church is heading for trouble, and for the fissiparity which has been the bane of the churches of the Reformation. Yet equally a church which is not seeking to live by Scripture is also heading for trouble. To accept any extra-biblical dogma as absolute is in effect to add to Scripture, and so to upset the balance of Scripture and so ultimately to produce a church far removed from the apostolic model. To accept tradition as, for all practical purposes, absolute is to invite ossification. It is to become bound hand

and foot by rules and regulations which God never ordained.

### *Scripture and Tradition*

IT seems to me that an understanding of the true value of tradition should be a great help in preserving the Church from schism, in keeping her true to the apostolic model, and in preventing her ossification. Tradition must take second place to Scripture; it must be examined in the light of Scripture and not be allowed to stand in the way of necessary reformation. But, although tradition takes second place, it is still an important place. For clearly the testimony of the Church to what Scripture means is itself weighty *prima facie* evidence as to what it does in fact mean. At least this is so when the Church as a whole is united and when it is consciously seeking to be loyal to Scripture. When, however, the Church is divided in its testimony, other criteria must be sought for judging which view is right; or, when the Church ceases to try to conform herself to Scripture and becomes busy trying to justify her vested interests, the value of her testimony melts away. But even at its most corrupt the traditions of one branch of the Church may preserve truths lost by another branch. In my own upbringing 'angels, archangels and all the company of heaven' played a very minor role in my concept of God's world, and it was C. S. Lewis who made me realise that the world of the Bible is humming with spiritual beings good and bad. This element of biblical teaching had lost vitality in my own ecclesiastical tradition. Had I been brought up in the Holy Orthodox Church, I should doubtless have had this tradition deeply in my consciousness from the start. The function of tradition therefore is to point the Church back to the sources of revelation and to remind her of elements in revelation which might otherwise have been overlooked.

The doctrine of the Blessed Virgin provides a classic example of divergent traditions. The place of the Mother of our Lord in the thought of the churches of the Reformation is plainly very different from that of the Roman Church and of the Eastern Churches. The great question is: Have the Protestants overlooked elements in the biblical teaching, or have the pre-Reformation churches allowed to creep into their traditions unbiblical beliefs which need to be reformed by the Word of God? (Of course it could well be a little of both. But in this case the divergences are so great, that something more than the introduction of minor modifications on both sides seems necessary if Rome and the Reformation are to be brought together. It is difficult to conceive of a *via media* which does not involve the abandonment of its basic principles by one side or the other.)

*The Development of Doctrine*

I CAN only declare myself honestly and say that I at present believe that the main structure of medieval and modern Mariological belief is not something which can be properly deduced from Scripture, but is the result of the importation of ideas which are inconsistent with Scripture. I am not in the least averse—indeed I am wholly committed—to the principle of the development of doctrine. But a true development is a development in the understanding of doctrine which is already present in Scripture, but which has not hitherto been systematically articulated. Thus there was the progressive elucidation of the doctrine of God, of the Person of Christ, of Grace (by Augustine), of Atonement (by Anselm), and (I would hold) of Justification, of the work of the Holy Spirit and of the Church by the Reformers; (and I hope that we may see an elucidation of the doctrine of Revelation in our own day). Rome sees a similar development in Mariological doctrine, which she holds to be an elucidation of truths which were already implicit in Scripture. It seems to be generally agreed that belief in the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption comes from her understanding of Scripture and not from an extra-biblical oral tradition which was preserved in the early church. (For this there is no historical evidence.) By simple steps there was a natural (or at least a plausible) development from the quite scriptural idea of the Blessed Virgin as Bearer of God to that of Mother of God, to belief in her Sinlessness, to belief in her Immaculate Conception, to belief in her incorruption at the end of her earthly course and to belief in her mighty ministry of mediation and intercession for the living and the dead.

*Mary's Sinlessness?*

But does all this really exist in germ in the New Testament, or is it the result of importations from outside? Having had my earliest training in science, I have learnt to be very wary of deductive reasoning, unless the deductions can themselves be tested. And in this case it certainly seems strange that neither the New Testament nor historical tradition contain any direct evidence of belief in the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption or the heavenly mediation of Mary in the apostolic or sub-apostolic age. But this in itself is not completely decisive. So many strange things are allowed in God's world, that it would be unwise to rely on an argument from silence—especially when so great a weight of later tradition points another way. What does seem to me to be decisive is the clear teaching of the New Testament that all have sinned (Rom. 3: 23)—all, that is, except Jesus. Our Lord is specifically excepted from the charge of sinfulness (2 Cor. 5: 21; Heb. 4: 15; John 8: 46), but the Mother of our Lord is not. If this is

granted, then it seems to me that the whole later dogmatic structure is undermined.

It is true that some of the texts that are usually quoted to show that the Blessed Virgin was morally imperfect are not decisive. But, taken in conjunction with the general statement that 'all have sinned', they do amount to a considerable body of confirmatory evidence. The burden of the Infancy Narratives is the coming of the Saviour through whom remission of sins is to be preached to all peoples. He is called Jesus—Jehovah Saves—for it is he who is to save his people from their sins (Mt. 1: 21). It is in this context that Mary rejoices in 'God my Saviour' (Lk. 1: 47). It is possible to think of God as her saviour from enemies, or even as her saviour from potential sins; but it is most natural to take it as the rejoicing of one who has felt the sorrow of actual sin and the joy of release from it.

Again, it seems difficult to regard her anguished question: 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously' (Lk. 2: 48), as that of a person with perfect trust in God. It was indeed the altogether natural reaction of a harassed mother. But was it the reaction of one who had learnt perfectly to be anxious for nothing? Our Lord's own reply was the gentlest of rebukes: 'Did you not know that I must be in the things of my Father?'. His words at Cana of Galilee sound like another gentle rebuke: 'Woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come' (Jn. 2: 4). At Mark 3: 32, in view of their proximity in the context, many commentators identify our Lord's mother and brothers and sisters with οἱ παρ' αὐτοῦ of vs. 21. If this is so, it was his family 'who went out to seize him, for they said that he was out of his mind'. Unless dogma forbids us, we cannot rule out the possibility that under stress his mother for a moment doubted him.

### *Early Tradition as a Guide to the Interpretation of the New Testament*

IT is conceivable that 'all have sinned' means 'all have sinned, except Jesus and Mary', though it is strange that the one exception should be explicitly and repeatedly made, while the other—the far less obvious exception—should not be even hinted at. But for this understanding of the text to have any plausibility, we should need to have very strong evidence in the earliest post-New Testament tradition. Early tradition can be very important; it is not of the same authority as the God-breathed Scriptures, but it can be of great importance as a guide to the interpretation of Scripture. The classical example of course is the question of Gnosticism. The answer to the question, Is the Gnostic interpretation of Scripture right? was sought by appeal to the tradition of the great churches in different parts of the world which had been founded by the apostles. Their testimony was a proof that the Gnostics

were innovators. Tradition is a guide to the interpretation of the superficially similar injunctions: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (1 Cor. 11: 25) and 'You ought to wash one another's feet' (Jn. 13: 14). It is tradition which causes us to take the first literally and to celebrate a weekly Eucharist (in spite of the fact that the Passover is an annual festival), and it is tradition which causes us to take the second metaphorically and not to include foot-washing among the sacraments. Or again, how are we to decide as to whether or in what sense the Fourth Commandment is binding upon Christians? It is tradition which proves that the extreme Puritans and the Seventh Day Adventists have misunderstood the Bible at this point.

This is a proper and a necessary use of tradition. But does the tradition which has close links with the apostolic age bear witness to the sinlessness of the Mother of our Lord and to her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption and her heavenly intercession? The answer is quite clearly 'No'. These things are comparatively late, falling on this side of the great watershed caused by the conversion of Constantine.<sup>4</sup> The development of Mariology was roughly contemporaneous with the development of monasticism. It began to show signs of vigorous life in the fourth and following centuries. When we think of the fourth century we are inclined to regard this as quite early tradition, forgetting what a very long time 300 years really is. Think of the changes that have taken place in Methodism over 200 years. Would not John Wesley be incredulous if he were to come back and see the difference between the Methodist tradition which he delivered to his followers and Methodism today? Or, think of the changes which have taken place in the Anglo-Catholic movement in a mere 100 years. To use tradition as an interpreter of Scripture, it must be shown to be consistent and weighty in the very early period, say before AD 200. As time goes on and more and more extraneous ideas come to have an influence on Christian thinking, it becomes more and more essential that the Written Word of God be used to test tradition, and less and less possible to use tradition as a direct test of the meaning of the Written Word.

### *Mary, Blessed Among Women*

BEING then unable to reconcile the doctrine of the sinlessness of the Mother of our Lord with the New Testament and being unable therefore to accept the great body of tradition which has grown up round this doctrine, what does an Evangelical believe about her? It is certainly very different from the Mariological doctrine of Rome, but it is by no means wholly negative. Once relieved of the necessity of trying to reconcile Scripture with the later dogma, one finds the biblical picture full of interest and instruction. Mary occupies a comparatively

small place in the New Testament—the Infancy Narratives and a dozen other brief references. But her position is unique, and she is described under the impulse of the Holy Spirit as ‘Blessed among women’ (Lk. 1: 41f.). And with reason, for her Son was the One through whom this whole vast, marvellous universe was made, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten before all worlds. For nine months she carried in her womb the Incarnate Son and then gave him to the world. It was an unspeakable privilege, shared by no other human being who has ever lived. She is indeed ‘Blessed among women’ and all generations shall call her so.

She also had the further privilege of bringing her son up in his role of perfect man. Doubts have recently been cast on his psychological normality. For this there is no shred of evidence and it would not seem to be compatible with a belief in his perfect manhood. A quite different and most interesting suggestion has also recently been put forward, which would make even more unreasonable the idea that our Lord was celibate because he was sexually abnormal. The Jewish tradition always maintained that our Lord was immorally born. The facts and references are set out in E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (London, 1960). ‘In a Jewish genealogical table for the period before 70, Jesus appears as “the bastard of a wedded wife” . . . The later rabbis, without further ado, call Jesus the son of the adulteress, the son of the prostitute . . . Celsus’s Jew knows as early as 160 all sorts of gossipy tales about Mary and the Roman legionary Panthera. Amongst the Samaritans and Mandaeans also, Jesus is designated offensively as the Son of Mary’ (pp. 24f.). There is evidence that this belief goes right back into the time of our Lord’s ministry. The innocent-sounding expression ‘Son of Mary’ is used in Mk. 6: 3, and Stauffer makes clear that by it the Jews meant: ‘Jesus is the son of Mary, and of Mary alone, not of Joseph’. And may not the scornful remark: ‘We were not born of fornication’ (Jn. 8: 41) be intended to carry a barbed innuendo? W. Childs Robinson (*Christianity Today*, May 13, 1966, p.10) has suggested that this ugly tradition goes right back into the days of his childhood. We could picture the heart-broken boy coming home from school one day, asking his mother to deny the filthy lie about Joseph not being his father. Then she and Joseph begin to tell him the truth. Gradually over the years, as he is able to bear it, they tell him all that we know in the Infancy Narratives; and he grew up knowing Gabriel’s message by heart:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High (his unique Sonship);  
 and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David (his Messiahship),  
 and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever;  
 and of his kingdom there will be no end (his eternal Dominion).  
 The Holy Spirit will come upon you,



and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God (Lk. 1: 32-35).

This throws a flood of light on the perplexing question of how our Lord in his humanity came to an understanding of his own being and mission. The Holy Scriptures, the teaching of his mother and his own deep communion with God provide all the necessary antecedents to account for his teaching. It was Mary who taught him that he was the Son of God; that God, not Joseph, was his Father. Thus it was that she should have known better than anyone that he must be about his Father's business.

It was an unspeakable privilege, not only to bear, but to bring up the Holy One, the Son of God. All generations must acclaim her: 'Blessed among women'.

### *Mary our Example*

BUT also, she was a wonderful example. To me she epitomises the ideal of womanliness given in the First Epistle of St. Peter. Indeed St. Peter must have known her most intimately and she may have inspired his description. She was 'reverent and chaste', a woman 'of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious' (1 Peter 3: 2,4). In spite of her supreme privilege, she seems altogether self-effacing. She is there with the apostles and the rest in prayer (Acts 1: 14), but she never assumes the role of speaker or leader. And Scripture itself seems determined not to draw the conclusions which our frail human logic could so easily draw concerning her who bore the Incarnate Son. The glory of obedience is set even higher than the glory of being θεοτόκος: 'A woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that you sucked!" But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"' (Lk. 11: 27f.). "'Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hands towards his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister and mother"' (Mt. 12: 48-50, cf. Mk. 3: 33f., Lk. 8: 21). We may infer that Mary's blessedness lay even more in her 'Let it be to me according to your word' (Lk. 1: 38), than in her conception of the Lord.

### *Mary Ever-Virgin?*

IT does not seem to me to be a natural reading of the New Testament to regard the Mother of our Lord as ever-virgin. Joseph 'knew her not until she had borne a son' (Mt. 1: 24), implies that after the birth of

Jesus they lived a normal married life. It is true that 'ad ('until') in Hebrew is sometimes used without the implication that the action ceases when the 'until' has been reached. For example, the promise to Jacob: 'I will not leave you until I have done what which I have spoken to you' (Gen. 28: 15) does not mean that after the promise had been fulfilled God would leave him. But when 'until' is so used, its meaning is perfectly clear from the context. If the context does not indicate otherwise, 'until' must be taken in its normal sense. The saying, 'she gave birth to her first-born son' (Lk. 2: 7) would not necessarily imply the birth of further children, if it was stated in a context which was specially concerned with the privileges of the first-born. But in a factual piece of narrative as here, it would naturally suggest that he was not the only child. Finally we are specifically told that Jesus had four brothers and some sisters (Mk. 6: 3). It has been argued either that these were the children of Joseph by a former wife—which does not readily fit into our picture of the journey to Bethlehem, of the birth, and of the flight to Egypt and back. Or, it has been argued that they were cousins. Some languages have no concise word for 'cousin', and were our gospels written in some other language the explanation might be plausible. But St. Mark was written for Gentiles in Greek, which was the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire; and Greek has a perfectly good word for 'cousin' which is found not only in the New Testament (Col. 4: 10), but also in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (Num. 36: 11), in Tobit (7: 2), and in the Jewish writers, Philo and Josephus. (See Arndt-Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*.) It seems strangely misleading to speak of 'brothers and sisters', if 'cousins' is meant.

Nancy Blamires (for whom and for whose husband I have great respect) wrote an article in the *Church Times* (April 3, 1964), entitled 'Blessed Among Women'. She brought out some of the implications of Mary's supposed virginity in these striking words:

For all our admiration and love we cannot suppress an infinitesimal feeling of pity for her in the life she was called upon to lead. To be legally married and yet remain a virgin; to go through the long tedium and distortions and the final protracted throes of parturition, and yet know nothing of the God-given joy of physical love-making which forms the obverse side of the coin, seems a deprivation and a frustration which we would scarcely wish on our fiercest enemy.

It is one thing deliberately to choose chastity as a way of life, as a positive renunciation of the flesh in order to give one's whole attention to the things of the spirit. Even to put up a front of uncomplaining resignation when life so falls out that no suitable partner is forthcoming is an act of humility no less worthy because it is hidden under a cheerful demeanour. But to bear the stigma of pregnancy whilst still unmarried, and to be saddled with all the responsibilities of motherhood whilst still a maid—is this the perfection of fulfilment, or is it the ultimate in heroism? Because to be such a mother was

to be the mother of Christ, it was perfection. But surely, of all the gigantic burdens any woman would conceivably be called upon to accept, both positive and negative, the demands made upon the Blessed Virgin were the most stupendous in history.

When to this is added a married life of twelve or more years without the natural expression of her love to Joseph, it seems to give a strangely distorted picture of the ideal Christian home.

I believe in fact that the truth was quite otherwise, and that Mary was the joyful mother of a big and bouncing family, and thus that she knew all the joys and trials of womankind—in childhood, adolescence, courtship, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, married life and love, and the toils and exhaustion of managing her many children. She knew what it was to be a great-hearted mother, a devoted wife and a lonely widow. She knew what it was to see her most precious son hideously crucified, when Simeon's prophecy was fulfilled that a sword would pierce through her own soul (Lk. 2: 35). At first this may sound shocking, but I verily believe that this reading of the gospels shows us Mary as a more truly helpful example than the Virgin of so much Christian art and tradition, who is idealised in a way which divorces her from the hurly-burly of the real world in which we live.

### *Mary our Forerunner*

FINALLY I see Mary as our forerunner in heaven. I cannot quite accept the dogma of the Assumption as promulgated in 1950, but I can very nearly. I do not think that there is evidence that her earthly body saw no corruption—I find it very difficult to believe that she suddenly disappeared and that this amazing miracle was not widely known in the Early Church—but I do believe that clothed in her spiritual body, she in her full humanity was taken into heaven.

It would take us too far afield to explore the question of the intermediate state, which is one of the very difficult things in the New Testament, on which Evangelicals have no common mind. It raises the question of time and eternity. I am not altogether happy with the idea of timelessness, which seems to be a Greek rather than a biblical concept. The Bible knows well that we cannot think without time and space images, and it does not attempt to picture heaven as timeless. But it seems that heavenly time and earthly time are different. This, I think, explains the apparent inconsistency between the truth that at death the believer goes to be 'with Christ' (Phil. 1: 23) (which surely is heaven) and the truth that the believer's body must wait the resurrection day (1 Thes. 4: 16; 1 Cor. 15: 44). The first is looking at it from the point of view of heaven, the second from the point of view of earth. This also explains why there is nothing in the New Testament which clearly teaches an intermediate state. Whichever way we look at it,

there is an immediacy about our transformation. Looked at from the heavenly point of view, the believer—in New Testament terminology 'the saint'—goes at death to be with Christ, to be 'at home with the Lord' (2 Cor. 5: 8); the criminal, with no time for amendment of life, is promised Paradise that very day (Lk. 23: 43); those who die in the Lord rest from their labours (Rev. 14: 13). The redeemed sinner can go to heaven, not because he is good enough, but because he is in Christ and has Christ's righteousness granted to him. Or, looked at from the point of view of earthly time, the one who is alive at the Second Coming, is changed in the twinkling of an eye; he puts on the imperishable, he puts on immortality; in one mighty moment 'Death is swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor. 15: 51-54). 'When he appears we shall be like him,' pure 'as he is pure' (1 Jn. 3: 2,3)—not because we are good enough, but because we are in Christ and have Christ's righteousness granted to us.

To me it is a blessed truth that the Mother of our Lord is in heaven as our forerunner, and it is an even more blessed truth that all who love and trust her Son go to join her there. 'When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death, thou didst open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.' What the Church of Rome affirms dogmatically of one special believer, we hold to be true of all believers.

It would seem to me that it is in these directions that the Lord will lead us if we accept the supreme and final authority of the Scriptures which he has given to the Church. But I am only too conscious of my ignorance and fallibility. May God correct us all and lead us step by step into a unity of truth and love.

<sup>1</sup> It was read at the Mariological Conference at the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.

<sup>2</sup> If it is true that there is a deep human desire for a female image, it would seem that amongst Christians of New Testament times this was met by the symbol of the Church as the spotless Bride (Eph. 5: 27, 1 Cor. 11: 2, Rev. 19: 7; 21: 2), or as the Woman clothed with the sun, with a crown of twelve stars on her head (Rev. 21: 1). But in course of time these symbols were transferred from the Church to the Mother of our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> The argument is set out in some fulness in my monograph, *Our Lord's View of the Old Testament* (IVF, 1964), and the idea that he endorsed some parts of the OT and criticised others is shown to be fallacious.

<sup>4</sup> This was the first time in the history of the Church that it had been easy and profitable for people to become Christians. Heathen, whose baptism was more evident than their conversion, began streaming into the Church. It ushered in many changes and (all would agree) it led to the growth of superstition. This is not to pre-judge the question whether the Mariological developments were good or bad. It is merely to call attention to the precariousness of using information from this period as evidence for the meaning of the New Testament.