

“Something About Mary”

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The Madonna in Sorrow

While I hope I can be forgiven for flagrantly using this popular movie title for my own gain, it lends itself nicely to a question commonly encountered within Anglo-Catholic theology, namely, how should one view the Blessed Virgin Mary within the context of Anglican thought and devotions. While this question may make many of our Evangelical brethren run for cover, it might be surprising to know what the original fathers of the Oxford Movement (and by extension, the Anglo-Catholic Movement) thought of this question and how one can approach the Blessed Mother and still stay true to Anglican thought.

Dr. Edward B. Pusey, perhaps the most scholarly of the group of men that would later be known as the Tractarians, considered this question in several of his writings and sermons. A compilation of these thoughts are as follows:

Why do we speak of St. Mary as “The Blessed Virgin”?

There are certainly two and all-sufficient reasons. First, because the Angel Gabriel addressed her as “highly favoured; the Lord is with thee, and blessed art thou among women.” Again he tells her, “Thou hast found favour with God, and the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest overshadow thee. Therefore, also, that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” She is then declared to be blessed among women by the angel; and must be

blessed, indeed, among and above all women, above all souls, and all creation under God, as the Mother of our Lord and Saviour Christ.

Being then the Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, what sublime title has been truthfully and reverently given to her?

“ ‘The Mother of God.’ The doctrine expressed by that great title ‘Theotokos’ is a matter of faith, an essential part of the doctrine of the Incarnation.”¹

Do not some persons object and protest against this title?

Yes; and their objection springs from their misbelief, or disbelief, in the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

How so?

As the “Te Deum” expresses it: Christ, the King of glory; the everlasting Son of the Father; when He took upon Him to deliver man, He did not abhor the Virgin’s womb. As Article II. expresses it—“The Son, which is The Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of The Father, the Very and Eternal God, and of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin of her substance, so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in One Person never to be divided.”

Our Blessed Lord is a Divine Person from all eternity, and when He became Incarnate He did not cease to be the person He was before; for then He could not have said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” The nature He took of the substance of His Mother was human; He who took it—the Person who was born—was Divine.

“It would of course be absurdity, heresy, and blasphemy, to say that the Virgin was the Mother of our Lord’s Godhead, implying that The Eternal had no existence till born of her; but the Human Nature which God the Son, by the operation of the Holy Ghost, assumed of her substance, was so united to the Divinity that the Person born of the Virgin was God as well as man.”—See Blunt’s *Dictionary; Article, “Theotokos.”*

The Catholic doctrine is this—Jesus, who is God the Son, decreed from all eternity to take our Nature upon Him, and to be born of a pure Virgin.

This, the Incarnation of the Son of God, took place by the operation of the Holy Spirit, and He was made very Man of the substance of the Virgin Mary. He was born of her, and so He became her Son, and so she became His mother. To say that the title "Mother of God" may not be given to the Virgin, is to say that He who took human nature of her substance and was born of her was not God.

If by the operation of the Holy Ghost, the Blessed Virgin only became the mother of a good and holy man, then God is not our Saviour; the Jews did not crucify the Son of God; we are yet in our sins, and the whole world unredeemed.

But thanks be to God for ever and for ever, "the Son of Mary is not a distinct human person mysteriously linked with the Divine Nature of the Eternal Word."—Liddon's *Bampton Lectures*, chap. v.

Isaiah 49:26: "All flesh shall know that I the Lord am thy Saviour and thy Redeemer, the mighty One of Jacob."

Isaiah 7:14: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Emmanuel: God with us."

What of the objection that Jael, the wife of Heber, who killed Sisera, was declared to be blessed among women?

Except that such an objection has been made, and is often repeated by serious persons, the absurdity and irreverence of it would deprive it of all claims to notice; the Virgin's transcendent honour was prophesied long before her birth.

Jael killed a man in his sleep, and thereby rid a country of its oppressor, after his army had been routed and himself worn out in flying for his life.

The Virgin bare Him who is the Saviour of the whole world, the Healer of the nations, the Prince of Peace.

Did not our Lord Himself say: "That they who hear the Word of God and keep it, are blessed, rather than his own Mother"? (Luke 11:27).

Yes; and no doubt the greatest privileges bear with them the greatest responsibilities. The twelve Apostles were specially blessed by our Lord; they were to sit on twelve thrones with Him. Yet one, Judas, fell and lost his blessing. The Virgin did not only have the glorious ineffable honour of being

our Lord's Mother, but she also did most humbly and faithfully ever hear the Word of God and keep it (Luke 1:45; 2:19–51).

And to the end of Her Son's suffering life on earth she was faithful, and was found at the foot of the Cross. So she had the blessing that all faithful disciples have, and being also the Mother of our Lord, and never speaking or acting so as to forfeit the blessing of that sublime honour and privilege, truly she was, is, and ever will be "Blessed indeed among women."

"For God in all eternity pre-ordained her who was to be Theotokos, or the Mother of God; He endowed her with all those qualities with which it was fitting she should be endowed. God raised her to a nearness to Himself above all choirs of Angels or Archangels, dominions or powers; above the Cherubim who seems so near to God; above the Seraphims with their burning love, close to His Throne."¹

"It is self-evident that she stood single and alone in all creation, in all possible Creations, in that in Her womb, He who in His Godhead is substantial with the Father, deigned as to His Human Body to become consubstantial with her."²

Blessed indeed among women!

How does the Church of England honour the Blessed Virgin?

On February 2nd she commemorates the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, a Festival commonly called the Purification of the Virgin.

March 25th: The Festival of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the Calendar on July 2nd, she has the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; on September 8th, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the table of lessons for Holy days, "The Annunciation of our Lady"; the *Magnificat* is in the daily Evensong.

In Article II. "The Blessed Virgin."

In the Homily for Whitsun Day she is spoken of as the "Blessed Virgin."

In the Homily on Obedience, "the Holy and Blessed Virgin Mary" is set forth as an example of obedience.

In the Homily on the right use of the Church, “the Blessed Virgin Mary” is quoted as an example of zeal and fervency in Divine worship.

In the Homily on Repentance, pt. i., “took our nature of the undefiled substance of the Blessed Virgin.”

In the Homily against Peril of Idolatry, after saying that the greater the opinion is of the majesty and holiness of the person to whom the image is made—to images of God our Saviour Christ, the “Blessed Virgin Mary” is mentioned.

In the Sermon on the Nativity she is called “the Blessed Virgin.”

In the Homily against Wilful Rebellion, pt. ii., “the excellent example of the Blessed Virgin Mary” is set forth, saying also “that in comparison with her, *we are most base and vile.*”

How does the good old Puritan, Bishop Hall, speak of the Virgin?

“Blessed Mary! he does not honour Thee too much, who maketh not a Goddess of Thee.”—Quoted from Bishop Forbes *on Nicene Creed*, p. 194.

How does Bishop Pearson speak of the Virgin?

“What expressions of honour and admiration can we think sufficient now that Christ is in Heaven and that Mother with Him! We cannot bear too reverent a regard unto the Mother of our Lord, so long as we give her not that worship which is due unto the Lord Himself. Let us keep the language of the Primitive Church. Let her be honoured and esteemed; let Him be worshipped and adored.”

Should we think of the Blessed Virgin as above all the Angels, above all Saints, above all the Company of Heaven, and closest to the throne of God?

It is not an Article of faith that the Blessed Virgin is in the Highest Heaven now, but whatever Paradise is, wherever She and the Saints of God are now, She surely must be chief and brightest of all. And after the great Day of Judgment, all who love Jesus must expect now, as a matter of course, to see her then far above all, who will rejoice for ever in God their Saviour.

“Who is she, on whom those Divine eyes, radiant with His Godhead, which survey all things in Heaven and on earth, must rest with an especial love, with the love of a Son to His Mother? What must be the love and humility of that highest being of the heavenly Hierarchy, whether it be St.

Michael or any of the Seraphim, belonging to those ranks which never fell, that he adores the condescension of God, not only in taking into Himself our Nature, but in placing nearest to Himself the God-Man, His purely human Mother above himself, above every possible creature! For, grand and magnificent and highly-endowed as may be any the highest creature which God could create, none could have the nearness of her, the Mother of God.”¹

“Plainly we could not love too much her from whom Jesus vouchsafed to receive a mother’s care, who loved Him, the All-Holy, and her Redeemer too, as no other mother could love her Son, whom He loved with a Divine, but also with Deified human love; love with which no other son could love his mother. The love of the Mother and Son, were essentially different from all other love, because He was her Son after the Flesh, but also Almighty God. And that same love must continue on now, only that her God-enabled power of love, in the beatific vision of His Godhead, must be unspeakably intensified.”²

Do not some persons object to the true Catholic doctrine relating to the Blessed Virgin?

Alas! “There is a diseased dread of any reverent mention of her who was taught by the Holy Ghost to say, ‘All generations shall call me blessed,’ which threatens very serious evil, and even heresy. For the thought of her is inseparable from meditation on the true doctrine of the Incarnation that our Lord was ‘God, of the substance of His Father, before the world, and Man of the substance of His Mother, born in the world.’ To deny the word Theotokos, is, of course, heresy; to shrink from it then, is to be ashamed of the truth of God; to shrink from dwelling on the doctrine conveyed in it, that He ‘abhorred not the Virgin’s womb,’ is secretly to have entertained some heretical counterfeit.”³

Is it lawful and right in any way for Christians to honour or worship, the Virgin, as they do God, or to pray to her, as they should do to God only?

It would be a terrible sin to do so.

What are we to think of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin?

This doctrine is to the effect that from the very first moment of the conception of the Virgin in the womb of her mother, she, the Virgin, was, by the grace of God, preserved free from original sin. The Church of England does not teach this doctrine; she teaches as in her Article XV., that Christ alone is without sin, and not so “all we the rest.”

Whether the Virgin was conceived in sin or not, she teaches that Christ was made very man of her substance, and that without spot of sin. And that He took upon Him our frail nature in the Blessed

Virgin's womb, and that of her undefiled substance. "That He was born of a pure Virgin."—*Homily on Repentance*, pt. i.

Without less veneration to the Mother of our Lord than any Communion in Christendom, she is content with the declaration of the Angel Gabriel to the Holy Virgin, "Hail! thou that art highly favoured. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women. The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."^[1]

¹ *Eirenicon*, pt. ii. p. 21.

¹ *Eirenicon*, ii. p. 24.

² *Id.* p. 24.

¹ *Eleven Addresses*, p. 26.

² *Eirenicon*, ii. p. 412.

³ *Preface to Awill on Advent*, p. lx.

^[1] Arthur Brinckman and E. B. Pusey, *Notes and Questions on the Catholic Faith and Religion, the Notes and Answers Compiled Chiefly from the Works and in the Words of Dr. Pusey*. (London: A. D. Innes & Co., 1891). 197-210.