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MARIOLOGY: AN UNRECOGNIZED ENTRÉE TO ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

W. PAUL JONES*

SOME months ago a Roman Catholic theologian approached me with the request for an extended discussion of Mariology or, more specifically, the place of Mary in Christian theology. That a Roman Catholic thinker would be concerned with Protestant thinking at all, let alone on this issue, is one of the most significant expressions of the new Catholic spirit symbolized by the present Vatican Council. The "efficient cause" of such a request, however, was even more surprising: a paper assigned for a national gathering of Catholic theologians on "Mariology: A Catholic-Protestant Ecumenical Concern." This is not an isolated instance of either the "new spirit" or of its concern. Rather, it is symptomatic of a larger dual intent of considerable breadth and significance.

In the first place, there would seem to be an earnest desire for more precise formulation and understanding of central theological issues, with Scripture serving as norm. As one Roman Catholic theologian expressed it recently, "The last thing we need now is more Thomism. What we need is a clear-headed investigation of Scripture, and here our two persuasions find a common ground." Indicative is the increasing Catholic interest in the writings of Barth. Arthur C. Cochran's appraisal of Barth makes the point: "The greatness of Karl Barth consists as much in being an expositor of Holy Writ as in being a systematic theologian."[1] And from such a Roman Catholic thinker as H. U. von Balthasar, a related estimate: "We must enter into discussion with Barth because in him real Protestantism finds a—finds its—fully consistent statement."[2] The second intent is evidenced in a desire, while clarifying theological issues, to avoid formulations that will be needlessly "offensive" or "embarrassing" to Protestants.

As a result, it is not unfounded to imagine that Protestant thinking can exert an important influence on the theological task which the Roman Catholic church is setting for itself. Such a situation should not, of course, be misconstrued as a dissipation of Protestant-Catholic differences. Far from it. It means, rather, the possible beginning of intelligent and intelligible theological relations for the enrichment of both, if not by bequest at least by deeper self-discovery. If ecumenicity should lead eventually to more than this, so be it, but the path will be the same.

In the near future it is the subject of Mariology which Catholic thinkers must face squarely, for it is pivotal to most of the issues requiring clarifica-

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tion and precision. As in the case of certain other doctrines, the elevation of Mary through the dynamic of popular piety now makes imperative a clear theological scrutinizing. This is the meaning of the insistence by certain Catholic thinkers that extreme care must be shown especially at this time lest emotional or careless theological expression encouraged by certain piety might commit Catholicism to an unfortunate doctrinal position. As one such thinker expressed it, "If in this matter we do not keep clearly in mind the larger theological issues at stake, we are liable to find ourselves committed to a position that might take several hundred years to undo." It is with such an awareness as this in mind that we can best understand the growing Catholic desire for Protestant dialogue. The issues must be clearly seen.

As this "invitation" to dialogue is beginning, however, it is the unfortunate situation that modern Protestantism not only is lacking in any "doctrine" of Mary but is almost totally delinquent in any positive consideration of the matter. D. D. Williams' *What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking,* for example, makes not so much as a mention of Mary in its pages.[3] Rather, the Protestant attitude toward Mary has been overwhelmingly negative, as though Mariology and Mariolatry are necessarily identical. Those concerned with the issue at all tend themselves to transmute Mary into a symbol standing for Roman Catholic perversion.

Encouragement to this Protestant attitude was given by the doctrinal adoption of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. As early as the thirteenth century, the Franciscans had insisted that Mary was to be elevated above the normal processes of birth, and to this the Jesuits later brought strong support and action. Although the eventual promulgation was the first papal dogma declared *ex cathedra,* the bishops previously consulted showed themselves in full agreement. It was declared that "the Blessed Virgin Mary in the first instant of her conception was by the unique favor of Almighty God . . . preserved immune from every taint of original sin."

There is strong historical evidence that what occurred here was parallel to the formulation of the meaning of the Mass. In 836 the monk Radbert, drawing heavily from popular understanding, suggested a view of the Lord's Supper anticipating the later medieval doctrine of transubstantiation. He was challenged by the monk Ratramnus, speaking for many Catholic thinkers, insisting on a more Augustinian view (spiritual presence). By the eleventh century, however, the view of Radbert had so won the day in the popular mind that, when Berengarius of Tours reaffirmed the understanding of Ratramnus, he was forced to retract. R. L. Calhoun appraises the situation in this fashion: "We have here an instance of a dogmatically significant view which arises out of popular habits of thought, rather than out of clear theological reading of the initial revelation. Eventually the view emerging out of the background of folk belief finds theological support and justification."[4]

It is at this very point, the initiating and directive impact of popular piety, that the emotional reaction of Protestants finds its real foundation. Such extraordinarily competent and objective scholars as Philip Schaff and Rein-

hold Seeberg become passionate on reaching this point. Schaff puts it this way:

> [The dogma of the Immaculate Conception] fortifies that Mariolatry, which is the very soul of its piety and public worship. We may almost call Romanism the Church of the Virgin Mary—not of the real Virgin of the Gospels, who sits humbly and meekly at the feet of her and our Lord and Saviour in heaven, but of the apocryphal Virgin of the imagination, which assigns her a throne high above angels and saints. This mythological Mary is the popular expression of the Romish idea of the Church, and absorbs all the reverence and affection of the heart. Her worship overshadows even the worship of Christ. His perfect humanity, by which he comes much nearer to us than his earthly mother, is almost forgotten. She, the lovely, gentle, compassionate woman, stands in front; her Son, over whom she is supposed still to exercise the rights of her divine maternity, is either the stern Lord behind the clouds, or rests as a smiling infant on her supporting arms. By her powerful intercession she is the fountain of all grace. She is virtually put in the place of the Holy Spirit, and made the mediatrix between Christ and the believer. She is most frequently approached in prayer, and the "Ave Maria" is to the Catholic what the Lord's Prayer is to the Protestant.[5]

This indignation, however, is vent not merely on practice but on the encouragement of such practice since the Middle Ages:

> It is almost incredible to what extent Romish books of devotion exalt the Virgin. In the Middle Ages, the whole Psalter was rewritten and made to sing her praises, as "The heavens declare thy glory, O Mary"; "Offer unto our lady, ye sons of God, praise and reverence!" In St. Liguori's much admired and commended "Glories of Mary," she is called "our life," the "hope of sinners," "an advocate mighty to save all," a "peace-maker between sinners and God." There is scarcely an epithet of Christ which is not applied to her. According to Pope Pius IX, "Mary has crushed the head of the serpent," i.e., destroyed the power of Satan, "with her immaculate foot!"[6]

Regarded in this context, however, what we may be seeing at the present time is the conviction by certain Roman Catholic thinkers that any doctrinal development from and understanding of the 1854 and 1950 (the Bodily Assumption) Dogmas be done *now* "out of clear theological reading of the initial revelation" rather than arising "out of popular habits of thought." In this there is an attitude not unlike the Protestant. As one Roman Catholic theologian expressed it privately, "It seems in conversations with certain Protestant thinkers that, although differing, we are more deeply united as though before a common foe."

Protestant thinking in this matter, however, has been shaped negatively not only in reaction to certain aspects of Catholicism but at least equally by predominant concerns of nineteenth-century Protestant theology itself. This theology is best characterized as the attempt to enter into meaningful dialogue with the monumental non-religious thinking of the century and/or to break with the dogmatic sterility of Protestantism scholasticism.

In the realm of practical religion, the reaction emerged as Pietism and revivalism. This movement was largely hostile or at least indifferent to theological issues, stressing instead immediate, personal experience. With such men as Zinzendorf, devotion to the person of Jesus had become near mystical, rivaling the "cult of Mary" in its emphasis on experienced grace, growth toward perfection, and intense moral effort. The sentimental, emotional additions, still evidenced in certain Protestant hymns, made it in many instances nothing short of a "cult of Jesus-worship." Here the reaction to Catholicism was not so much "righteous

indignation" as it was the rivalry of parallel piety. Barth links them both with the appellation, "deification of the creature."[7]

In the theological realm, however, it was the thought of Kant that marked the "ground rules" according to which the dialogue between religion and culture was to take. His supposed destruction of the traditional proofs, coupled with his stress on religion as other than the domain of pure reason, forced Protestant thinkers to the shaking awareness that they no longer knew what revelation was. Dogma was without rational prolegomena and defense.

This "shaking" was reinforced in two further domains. First, an "infallible Scripture" and an "infallible science" were fast coming to odds on such issues as the creating of the world, man, and miracle. Second, documentary criticism of the Bible disclosed not only textual errors but factual errors, contradictions, and rival doctrines and interpretations. The all-too-human quality of Scripture was a fact.

What was at stake was the authority of Scripture and, ultimately, the meaning of revelation, for the traditional understanding of the Bible as infallible revelation could no longer stand. Thus posed, it was Schleiermacher's answer that was to set the pattern. Revelation is not doctrine, moral code, or miracle, but a unique, immediately experienced relation to God. Dogma and creeds are nothing more than human interpretations of this experience evoked through the figure of Jesus. Scripture, then, is not revelation. Its authority is as a profound record of religious experience, an authority to be examined by the norm of Christian experience. Consequently, when Schleiermacher came to such doctrines as the Trinity, his response was clear: this doctrine is not "an immediate utterance concerning the Christian self-consciousness." In like manner, while affirming the sinlessness of Jesus, he denies that it requires a virgin birth.[8] The uniqueness of Jesus' life is a "miracle," yet the divinity in him is not the addition of a faculty not present in other men, but the perfection of a faculty common to all. By thus placing " 'archetypal humanity' rather than the personal Incarnation of God at the centre of his view of Christ,"[9] religion could be preserved while permitting the inviolability of scientific law. As a result, however, such doctrines as the Virgin Birth, Resurrection, and Ascension became accidental to faith.

Albrecht Ritschl represents the second nineteenth-century Protestant answer to Kant. He followed Kant in insisting upon the removal of all metaphysics from theology and in seeing religion as essentially a moral enterprise. Valid Christian knowledge consists of value judgments evoked by the New Testament portrait of Jesus, made real as never before by the findings of biblical criticism. From the norm of "moral worth for us," then, certain "difficult" doctrines are eliminated—the Trinity, two-nature Christology, certain aspects of the Resurrection, and the Virgin Birth. What is unrelated to our experience and which cannot be exhibited in the earthly history of Jesus, is unimportant religiously. The Virgin Birth especially is to be eliminated, for this would bequeath a uniqueness to Jesus that would make his moral greatness unavailable to believers. More than this, "Where there is mystery," Ritschl states, "I say nothing."

Adolph Harnack carried this ap-

proach further, stripping the "husks" of primitive setting from the "kernel" until the "simple truths" of the teachings of Jesus were seen self-evidently in their timeless validity. For a whole epoch of scholars, biblical criticism was regarded as an objective tool by which "the historical Jesus" could be discovered behind the increments and subjective interpretations of the synoptic writers.[10] Armed, more than they knew, with the norm of scientific "law," the Virgin Birth fell quickly as a "subjective," later addition to the primitive sources. What alone was empirically plausible tended to remain.

The third answer to Kant was philosophical but nonetheless influential—that of Hegel. Using the Trinity as a religious symbol for the philosophical truth of the Absolute coming to completion through a tripartite dialectic, Jesus became no longer the God-man but the first to perceive the universal truth that God and man are one. In Hegel, Christianity obtained the status of absolute faith, but at the expense of both its grounding in history and the transcendence of its revelation. Religious doctrine as such received the secondary status of symbol to philosophical concepts.

Over against this liberal Protestant wrestling with the serious problems of an age in transition were seen two representative forces of reaction. The first was the Roman Catholic church, doggedly closed to these major influences dominating the Protestant theological scene. To the Protestant mind, Catholicism refused to enter the modern world, trying to pretend out of existence the crucial problems of contemporary religion. In the face of modern philosophy, Catholicism proceeded as though Descartes and Kant had never written. Even in our own day, the Catholic Anton C. Pegis, speaking as well for Étienne Gilson, insists:

> Not only did St. Thomas Aquinas not know the problems of Descartes and Kant, but his philosophical outlook could not be directed toward their problems. . . . If this problem [of knowledge] is an authentic one, Thomism as a philosophy is worse than out of date; it is dead. If the problem is not an authentic one, no one gains by proceeding as though it is.[11]

Refusing to consider "an unreal philosophical problem," the traditional view of revelation and dogma was persistently maintained. In the face of modern science, Roman Catholic opposition was vigorous in the defense of miracle and the literal interpretation of Scripture. In the face of biblical criticism, however, Protestant-Catholic divergence was radical. In 1906, for example, the Vatican Biblical Commission discounted the major findings of biblical critics in regard to the Pentateuch and Synoptics, while Pope Pius forbade the method of historical criticism in regard to Scripture.[12] For many a Protestant, the concluding portion of *The Syllabus of Errors* (1864), rather than being a defense of faith was a damning indictment of Catholicism: all were declared in error who insisted that "the Roman pontiff can and ought to reconcile and adjust himself to progress, to liberalism, and to modern society."

To the Protestant, it was the developing Mariology both in dogma and in common-day encounter that was seen as exemplifying, symbolically and/or literally, this whole Catholic stance. That is, two of the three central dogmas proclaimed during the past two centuries attempt to provide theological justification for the "extra-biblical" elevation of the Virgin that withdraws

rather than engages the believer with his times.

The second representative force of reaction to literal Protestantism emerged out of its own internal wrestlings. The symbol of this opposition again was the Virgin. Fundamentalism emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, having as its aim the defense of Christianity against these same three influences. This defense centered in the insistence on biblical authority as rooted in the literal inerrancy of Scripture. Certain "fundamentals" were extracted as the *sine qua non* of faith, stressing miracle against the liberal stress on Divine activity through natural processes. In the heat of conflict, however, it was the "fundamental" of the Virgin Birth that became dominant, for on it the Incarnation and Deity of Christ was made to rest. The proof of Divine Sonship was his miraculous origin, confessed with utter literalness.

In this fight, it is not difficult to see why *opposition* to the Virgin Birth tended to become the *sine qua non* of liberal Protestantism. Such men as Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich are still waging something of this same battle. For Bultmann, such matters as the Virgin Birth are vestiges of the primitive three-story world in which the existential truth of Christianity has been couched.[13] It is the false stumbling block that must be cast utterly aside; the truth of Christianity must be "lifted out of all temporal limitations" that it may "take place in any present moment."[14] In related fashion, Tillich insists on doctrine as symbolic, its truth measured by its power to evoke religious awareness. On this basis, the Virgin Birth becomes a historical "rationalization"[15] that must be purged of its "supernaturalistic interpretation."[16] But when this is done, Tillich is prepared to give to the Virgin Mary the same revealing power as Apollo: "Revelation through these two figures has come to an end."[17]

From this portrait of the past century, we may characterize the liberal Protestant "understanding" of the Virgin Mary in this fashion: (1) it has been predominantly negative, as a reaction to Catholic and Fundamentalistic developments; (2) it has been made a representative symbol, standing connotatively for much more than the concrete issues involved in the doctrine itself; (3) it has been taken as objectively false, on the basis of scientific law and the internal evidence of biblical criticism; (4) it has been regarded as religiously irrelevant in terms of the human needs to which the nineteenth century desired answer. In a real sense, the fate of the Virgin Mary during the nineteenth century is a microcosm of the internal dynamic of Protestant theology.

So, too, one would expect this doctrine to reflect the radically new theological developments of the twentieth century. With Barth's second edition of *Der Roemerbrief* in 1922, we have the beginning of the modern Protestant theological renaissance, best understood as "neo-Reformation." Six characteristics of the new theological situation made it possible to transcend certain dead-end answers of the nineteenth century. First, the search for the "historical Jesus" had ended in failure. It is impossible to separate "naked fact" from meaning-interpretation, either in the object or in the "observer." Despite all efforts to the contrary, religion is a matter of "faith," not "sight." In the end, the "objective" Jesus of nineteenth-century discovery was a nineteenth-

century Jesus. Second, a working relation between religion and science was emerging. Scientists were beginning to regard scientific "laws" as no longer normative but descriptive. Since such "laws" were matters of relative probability, they no longer served as foundation for a priori judgments on scriptural events. Theologians, on the other hand, were coming to see that religion is concerned with meaning, not analytic description. Despite "how" something occurs, its meaning is quite another matter. Is the Virgin Birth, then, an analytic description or an affirmation of meaning? Third, with the demonic aspects of man and creation emerging on a global scale, the nineteenth-century optimistic view of human nature proved insufficient. Christology understood in terms of the "divine" qualities of the human could no longer stand. The new options were radical, Divine initiative or nihilism. Fourth was the related awareness that revelation is meaningless unless it is Divine address as over against human discovery. *The* revelation is Jesus Christ, not Scripture. Yet as *the* medium through which revelation is identified, the Bible possesses unparalleled authority, even in its human form. Fifth, the increasingly apparent dangers of subjectivity in religious experience brought a fresh appreciation of doctrine and the cognitive aspects of historical revelation. Faith, by its very nature, meant faith-seeking-understanding. Finally, the period of defensiveness against both Catholicism and Fundamentalism was giving way. The emotional battles had been waged, from which was emerging a theological maturity able to enter meaningfully into an ecumenical enterprise. A fresh beginning required a return to the common sources.

It is important that we see this theological revival as centered in the two key tenets of the Reformation: (1) the universal and tragic fallenness of man, exposing pride and guilt as the inner dynamic of society; (2) man's only hope as the radical inbreaking of the transcendent God through Jesus Christ. Life is by grace alone—God's gracious acceptance of man fully unworthy of it, who through no effort of his own can ever become deserving of such love.

It is obvious that such a change in theological climate stands to have significant implications for understanding the place and meaning of the Virgin Mary. Insight into the implications of this new Protestant self-discovery for this doctrine is best gained from the Reformers themselves who, contrary to expectations, grasped profoundly the positive theological meaning of the Virgin Mary.[18] For Luther, Mary stands forever as the expression of the true relation between Divine and human—the life of humility. The whole meaning of the Magnificat rests for him in Mary's free acknowledgment of "undeserved grace." In his own perceptive words, "The more we attribute deserving merit to her, the more we take away from divine grace and lessen the truth of the Magnificat."[19] Luther's estimate of Catholic art speaks well the Protestant warning to Roman Catholic thinking: "The masters who so depict and shape the Blessed Virgin for us as to leave nothing despised in her, but only high things,—what do they do but confront us with her alone, and not her along with God."[20]

What Luther is insisting upon here is a rigorous regard to Scripture as norm for theological thinking. In the Madonna of a Raphael, for example, one has not the portrayal of Christian

truth but the elevation of human perfection. Reminiscent of liberal Protestantism, what truth can one seen here except witness to the divine qualities of perfect humanity? Supposed theological foes are in the end disclosed as unacknowledged compatriots! Against Roman Catholic tendencies, as reflected in such art, the warning of Barth against the "liberals" applies: "It is impossible to speak of God simply by speaking of man in a very loud voice."

Against all this is the witness of Scripture. To Mary, the work of the Holy Spirit is clear: "The power of the Most High will *overshadow* you" (Luke 1:35). But here is the mystery of the paradox of grace, that in the Divine humbling is utter joy: "My spirit rejoices in God my Savior, *for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden*" (1:47–48). Here is expressed in its fulness the dynamic structure of faith—the humility expressed as simple trust. The purity of faith that Kierkegaard so admired in Abraham[21] is here drawn to the apex of intensity. That the barren Sarah should yet conceive is one thing; that she who knew no man should bring forth the very Son of God, is this not yet another? Is faith anything than this, that before the scandal marked by human reason one affirms, "With God nothing will be impossible" (1:37). In all this Mary lives by one thing alone—the Word of God: "Let it be to me according to your word" (1:38).

Elizabeth's regard for Mary is in its own way an elevation—"Blessed are you among women." But she has in no way made the fatal mistake of seeing in Mary any *intrinsic* merit. What she sees is what Paul knew, that it is *faith* which is imputed to one as righteousness. In Elizabeth's words, "Blessed is she who *believed* that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (1:45). Mary's response will permit us no other interpretation, for only the words of Hannah after the "impossible" saving of her son had the power to convey Mary's lived awareness. Hannah's beginning words are prophetic indeed: "There is none holy like the Lord, there is none beside thee; there is no rock like our God. Talk no more so very proudly, let not arrogance come from your mouth" (I Sam. 2:2–3). The whole thrust of Mary's words are the abrogation of all pride and arrogance: "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" (1:51). The grace of God is such that it "exalted those of *low* degree: he has filled the *hungry* with good things, and the *rich* he has sent empty away" (1:52–53). Over this whole portrait are writ large the words of Paul: " 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.' For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends" (II Cor. 10:17–18). This Mary knew.

With such an interpretation Calvin is in full agreement. As he says, "God has looked upon her, however disregarded and despised she was. From which follows that all those are false honours not due to Mary, which do not solely praise God's omnipotence and undeserved kindness."[22] With Kierkegaard's courageous knight of faith is well placed Mary, the humble handmaiden of faith.

Certainly it is with reason that Visser't Hooft labels as "gulf" the contrast between Rembrandt's *ancilla domini* of the Reformation tradition and "the *regina coeli* of the Roman Catholic liturgy, this 'king's daughter desired for her beauty's sake,' who in Roman

Catholic theology is declared 'far more beautiful not only than the daughters of men, but also the angels.' "[23] But rather than the Reformers "robbing Christendom of the Virgin," as Mâle accuses, to them "the Virgin was dear . . . because she was the visible proof that 'God hath chosen things which are not, to bring to nought things that are.' "[24]

In moving from the Reformation to the present "neo-Reformation," however, one is surprised to find little awareness of this positive dimension of the doctrine. The mark of defensiveness is clearly evident, perhaps because the "liberal-neo-orthodox" conflict is far from over. There are some who, despite a more radical reappraisal of man, still operate on the basis of the general nineteenth-century methodology. But even among those of the "neo-Reformation" tradition, a negativity persists, centering around the Virgin Birth. Brunner, for example, who is often perceptive concerning the religious meaning of an event, rejects the Virgin Birth completely, as does Aulen, as an unnecessary piece of "rationalizing," an illicit probing into the mysteries of the Incarnation. Speaking from the perspective of both the Epistles and John's Gospel, Brunner states: "None of them says anything about 'how' the Incarnation took place: they simply witness to the fact of the Incarnation."[25] All that goes beyond this, such as "the so-called 'Virgin Birth' of Jesus," is "useless speculation"[26] that "does not belong to the Kerygma of the Church of the New Testament."[27] Brunner, who usually silences human questions before the freedom of God in his "mighty acts," declares, surprisingly, that "the question here is: is it *necessary* that this 'wonderful' Birth of Jesus should be a Virgin Birth?"[28] This strange defensiveness is further apparent when he insists: "We believe in the divinity of Jesus and in the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God, in spite of Matthew 2 and Luke 2, but *not* because of these two passages."[29] The result is that for Brunner Mary has no theological significance whatsoever.

Brunner's opposition to the Virgin Birth as "rationalizing" is certainly not unfounded, for used to "explain" the sinlessness of Jesus one might be logically driven to a string of Immaculate Conceptions stretching to Adam, until religious meaning is dissipated in the process. But H. R. Mackintosh, while granting this, is right in insisting that "the point of importance is positive rather than negative; not the absence of a human father, but the overshadowing presence of the Divine Spirit."[30] Miracles do not prove revelation; revelation discloses the miraculous. The "Virgin Birth" is no magical fact that proves Incarnation, nor is it of use in any way in coming to faith or in rendering it logical. It is not the *sine qua non* of Incarnation, as though everything else rested upon it. The declaration is not "God must" but "God did."

If the end of Jesus' life is declared by Resurrection to be Divine, the transcendently qualified beginning pointed to by Virgin Birth is not inappropriate. What is at stake here is a theological meaning that bickering over the physical "how" destroys. Is the meaning of the event that is Mary's engagement with God restricted to a literal reading of physical miracle? This is the real question, for the doctrinal question remains, however the critical problem is developed.[31]

Consequently, it is in coming to Barth that one feels for the first time the

freshness of free and uninhibited dialogue with Scripture on the theological meaning of Mary. Here is to be found a contemporary beginning for vigorous and productive dialogue between Catholicism and the richness of the Reformation perspective. As far back as 1946 Barth's fertile mind was involved with this question, seeing the doctrine as revealer of "the true Incarnation of the true God achieved in His historical manifestation."[32] Recognizing this doctrine as "*the* place at which . . . offence has been taken," Barth distinguishes between the Incarnation as *the* event, and the birth by a virgin as "sign" of that event. The two should not be confused, Barth states, but they can be no more separated than form from content. The sign is the declaration that in this central event, the male is utterly excluded. This is a "divine judgment," for in "what is to begin here man is to contribute nothing by his action and initiative."[33] Man is there, but the scene is not his; his role is the part of a powerless Joseph.

Therefore what was chosen of God was not man in his pride and defiance, but "man in his weakness and humility, . . . in the weakness of his nature as represented by the woman."[34] Through Mary, man is revealed—in the encounter "the creature says 'Yes' to God." This is faith, the acceptance "of the great acceptance which comes to man from God."[35] The meaning of this event is so crucial, Barth claims, that "every time people want to fly from this miracle," they "conjure away the mystery of the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ, the mystery of God's free grace."[36]

In these last three words, "God's free grace," the meaning of Mary for the Reformers has been rediscovered. In his *Church Dogmatics* Barth grasps this point even more firmly and drives it centrally into the heart of his thought. We see this particularly in what appears at first to be a contradiction, namely, his insistence at one point that the central doctrine and error of Catholicism is the "analogia entis,"[37] and, at another, that it is the Dogma of Mary.[38] To Barth these are expressions of the same basic understanding of the God-man relation. Mary, for the Catholic, is "the principle, the primal image, the sum, of the human creature who in his redemption serves co-operatively on the ground of prevenient grace, as she is also the principle, the primal image and the sum of the Church."[39]

Barth seems to be pointing to the doctrine of Mary as the point at which the problems of the "analogia entis" and the doctrine of the church merge. On the one hand, the elevation of Mary is implicitly and symbolically an elevation of the human agent *in general* in the dynamics of grace. The issue here is the sovereignty of grace versus the creature's own assent to grace as that qualification necessary for its reception.[40] On the other hand, the elevation of Mary is an element of *particular* humanity elevated to transcendent dimensions so as to explicitly demand necessary location as mediatrix in the Divine structure of grace. The issue here is the freedom of grace versus the human custodianship of grace. This ambivalence of intention runs throughout the history of this doctrine, in its own way providing the circle (vicious or otherwise) which drives toward the increasing elevation of Mary. One can even detect this ambiguity of intention in the prayer contained in the new Mass and office for the festival of the Conception:

O God, who, by the immaculate conception of the Virgin, didst prepare a *worthy* dwelling for thy Son: grant, we beseech Thee that, as thou didst preserve *her* from every stain, in anticipation of the death of thy Son, so *we also* may, *through her intercession* appear purified before thy presence.[41]

It is because this development of Mariology expresses increasingly that in her capacity as creature she is a mediatrix of grace, by means of human co-operation, that Barth calls it the central Catholic doctrine "in terms of which her [Catholicism's] decisive positions must be regarded and with which they stand or fall."[42] Barth's Reformation reply is clear: "Faith is not some sort of an act of reciprocity, but the act of acknowledging the one Mediator, besides whom there is no other."[43]

It is the greatness of Barth, however, that despite the firmness of his questioning of Catholic Mariology his primary intent is neither defensive nor negative. He is speaking from a positive understanding, one that insists on the appropriateness of the appellation, the "Mother of God,"[44] as well as the Virgin Birth as of such a unique character that is rivaled only by the empty tomb.[45] It is refreshing that the "how" is of little concern to Barth. What is important is the meaning to which it points. It is the *declaration* of mystery, not its unraveling; it is the standing sign that the Christ-event is not on man's terms but is beyond man's arbitrary interpretation. As such, it drives the believer to the "spiritual understanding" of the God-man, for God's own work must be "seen in God's own light."[46] When such a life is begun and ended in "miracle," man must be silent in the full acknowledgment that here "God himself, and God alone, is directly the Subject."[47]

This does not mean, however, that Mary in her own right is not profoundly important for Christianity. The Virgin Birth is the sign identifying the nature of God's relation to man. If miracle marks the chasm, there can be no talk of Mary or of man as "God's fellow worker."[48] All talk of "synergism" and "monism" is silenced by this mystery. The exclusion of sexuality is God's "gracious judgment," the sign marking human limitation.[49] *The* miracle is the mystery of grace, that this member of disobedient mankind "receives a capacity for God she does not possess."[50] What is such Divine choosing but the act of Divine forgiveness? Redemption is not to choose God but to be chosen by him. This is the truth indelibly imprinted here that none may remove or modify it, that man has indeed a part to play that the form of the *virgo Maria* reveals: not to accomplish and create by sovereign will, but to "merely receive, merely be prepared, merely let something happen to him and with him."[51]

Perhaps Barth expresses the matter best by declaring that "the positive element which occupies the space singled out by the *natus ex virgine* is God Himself in the inconceivable deed of creative omnipotence . . . in which he completely adopts the creature, and in such a way that he imparts and grants to him nothing less than his own existence."[52]

Whether or not the Protestant agrees with Barth, it is difficult not to see here an earnest theologizing concerning a doctrine that involves the soul and substance of the kerygma. Is this not what grace is all about, that though man is in no way worthy to receive, God in his graciousness nevertheless gives? "We love, because he first loved us" (I John

4:19). If the radical priority of the Divine initiative in its graciousness is undercut, minimized, questioned, or compromised, by the elevation of human capacity in general and/or the interposing of a human medium in particular, what is at stake is the heart of the Gospel, that is, the nature of grace and the status of man before God. Mary stands at the very inception of Christian revelation as sign and representative of the human context in which the Christ-event is received, then and now.

There is little question about the direction which Catholic piety and, belatedly, dogma have taken. But there is likewise little question that self-consciousness and theological clarity with some openness on such matters are being called for. No cause is served by a Protestant negativity that writes off as "pagan" and "incredibly naïve" the wrestlings of his brother Christians. If ecumenicity means anything, is it not the spirit of Christ as evidenced in a "superhuman" patience, concerned not with victory but with loyal sharing of truth, that none may "put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ" (I Cor. 9:12). It is with this problem of Mary that at this time in Christian history we stand to learn again that "the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith" (Rom. 1:17).

NOTES

1. Arthur C. Cochrane, "Translator's Preface," in Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), p. 13.

2. H. U. von Balthasar, *Karl Barth* (Köln: Jakob Hegner Verlag, 1951), p. 31.

3. Daniel Day Williams, *What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952).

4. Robert L. Calhoun, *Lectures on the History of Christian Doctrine* (privately printed, 1948), p. 257.

5. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1877), I, 111. For a similar estimate see Reinhold Seeberg, *The History of Doctrines,* trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1952), II, 463. Paul Tillich declares that for modern Catholic devotion the Holy Virgin has surpassed all three *personae* of the Trinity (*Systematic Theology* III [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963], 292).

6. Schaff, *op. cit.*, I, 112. For a thorough treatment of the text, history, criticism, and Catholic defense of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, see pp. 108–28.

7. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* I/2, p. 151.

8. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), pp. 398–99. Even as conservative a theologian as Gustaf Aulen in our own times holds that "Schleiermacher's exposition of this problem is still valid" (*The Faith of the Christian Church,* trans. Eric Wahlstrom and Everett Arden [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1948], p. 222).

9. The appraisal of H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1937), p. 90.

10. The classic history and eulogy of the movement is Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1948).

11. Anton C. Pegis, *A Gilson Reader* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1957), Introduction, pp. 12–13.

12. Although there were the beginnings of a "modernist" movement in Catholicism, with the condemnation by Pope Pius X it was effectively halted unless the present should show otherwise.

13. The classic statement here still remains Bultmann's essay published in H. W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1961), pp. 1–44.

14. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 295. Friedrich Gogarten has stated the position well: "History is something that happens in the present" (*Ich Glaube an den dreieinigen Gott* [Jena, 1926], p. 83).

15. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* II (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 127.

16. *Ibid.,* p. 149.

17. *Ibid.,* I, 128.

18. For this awareness and for some of the citations from the Reformers that follow I am indebted to W. A. Visser't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel* (New York: Meridian, 1960), esp. pp. 45–46. One finds here a perceptive and revealing comparison of Mary portrayed in the Baroque style of the Counter Reformation with that achieved from the Reformed perspective by Rembrandt.

19. Luther, *Selected Works* (Calwer), p. 90.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
21. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling,* trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941).
22. Calvin, *Commentary* on St. Luke 1:48.
23. Visser't Hooft, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67 (quotation from Émile Mâle, *L'Art religieux depuis le Concile de Trente,* p. 30).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
25. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption,* trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), p. 351.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 352.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 354.
28. *Ibid.* (Italics mine.)
29. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
30. H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 532.
31. Mackintosh's appendix is perceptive in sorting out such matters (*ibid.*, pp. 527–34).
32. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline,* trans. G. T. Thomson (London: S.C.M., 1949), p. 95.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* I/1, p. vii; II/1, pp. 275, 658.
38. *Ibid.*, I/2, p. 157.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 153–60.
41. Published September 25, 1863. (Italics mine.)
42. Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* I/2, p. 157.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 152.
45. *Ibid.*, esp. p. 195.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 194.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 206.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 220.