

2-1-1955

# Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes Toward the Divine Maternity

Kenneth F. Dougherty

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dougherty, Kenneth F. (1955) "Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes Toward the Divine Maternity," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 6, Article 13.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol6/iss1/13](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol6/iss1/13)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [frice1@udayton.edu](mailto:frice1@udayton.edu), [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu).

**CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN PROTESTANT  
ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DIVINE MATERNITY**  
**(A Survey Report of the Opinions of 100 Protestant  
Ministers of 17 Denominations)**

INTRODUCTION

During the Marian Year Protestants in America expressed a variety of attitudes concerning Mary the Mother of God. These ranged from the awesome bewilderment of the Baptists to the fervent devotions of Anglo-Catholic Religious in their convents and monasteries. Twentieth century Protestantism in America is highly variegated in its attitudes toward Our Lady. Episcopalians build churches and hospitals in honor of St. Mary. High Church congregations recite the rosary that they may obtain favors through the intercession of Our Blessed Mother. Other Episcopalian parishes regard all this as "papish superstitions" and affirm that Mary is simply a holy woman to whom no cultus is owed because she is the mother of Christ and not the Mother of God.

There are some Lutheran pastors who say the *Angelus* and fervently believe in Mary the Mother of God, whereas others pay her no homage because there is only "the one mediator between God and man, Our Lord Jesus Christ." Baptists in general are also of this latter opinion, and very often regard Mariology as "Mariolatry." Presbyterians, Methodists and the smaller sects believe that Mary is the mother of the man Jesus Christ, but not the Mother of God. They believe that the Catholic teaching on the divine Maternity of Our Lady is unscriptural and a human invention. Unitarians and Congregationalists in particular regard Mary as a good woman, but their denial of supernatural religion prohibits them to affirm

that she is the Mother of the God-Man, Who is the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity.

There is no one formula that can sum up Protestant opinions concerning Mary, the Mother of God. Whereas the Protestantism of the sixteenth century was unanimous in its revolt against the cult of Our Lady, one can hardly plead the cause that the sects have always and everywhere continued to develop in the direct line of these protestations. The contemporary High Church Anglican would be repelled at the Calvinistic anti-Marian sermons of the Elizabethan clergymen of the same national church. On the other hand, a contemporary Missouri Synod Lutheran pastor would no doubt be quite in accord with Luther's *Sermon on the Nativity of Our Lady* in which he opposed any devotion to Mary because he believed that it would put Christ in the background.<sup>1</sup> The Catholic who defends the cult of Mary against a Protestant charge that Catholics do adore Our Lady, could expect to receive substantially the same reply from a Presbyterian minister of our times as was given by Calvin in his *Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel*. Calvin taught that the distinction made by Catholics between *latria* and *hyperdulia* is purely a verbal frivolity.<sup>2</sup>

A more or less general observation of Protestant thought and practice in America testifies that American Protestant ministers are for the most part opposed to devotion to Our Lady. One might also be inclined to say that, in the main, American Protestants oppose the title: Mary, the Mother of God. One would hesitate, however, to distribute these opinions in terms of individual sects in their present state of confessional beliefs, and to say what this or that minister actually believes on this question without special studies. Very often Catholic apologists are satisfied with a more or less general

<sup>1</sup> *Opera Lutheri*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe; vol. 10, Weimar, 1883, c. 313.

<sup>2</sup> *Opera Calvini*, in *Corpus Reformatorum*, Breauschweig, 1827; Op. 45, Corp. 73, 136.

estimate of the present position of Protestant confessional beliefs in America or in specific appraisals of Protestant theologians such as Barth or Brunner. The excessive personalism and inherent relativism of Protestantism is especially repugnant to the scholastic academic training of the Catholic apologist and begets a certain impatience when the latter is faced with the multiplicity and fluid character of Protestant trends of thought.

In the encyclical *Humani generis* Pope Pius XII counsels Catholic theologians to know the teachings of non-Catholic thinkers.

All this, evidently concerns our own Catholic theologians and philosophers. They have a grave responsibility for defending truth, both divine and human, and for instilling it into men's minds; they must needs acquaint themselves with all these speculations, to a more or less extent erroneous; they must needs take them into account. Nay, it is their duty to have a thorough understanding of them.<sup>3</sup>

In the *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention of The Catholic Theological Society of America*, Father Gustave Weigel, S.J., presented a paper entitled: *A Survey of Protestant Theology in Our Day*. This was a unique attempt on the part of a Catholic theologian in America to present an objective study of contemporary Protestant thought here and abroad. Father Weigel notes the difficulty of the Catholic theologian to discover the Protestant mind.

The immediate problem is where can he find a synthetic but authentic expression of the Protestant mind? This problem is most vexing and Protestants themselves have different answers.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Pius XII, *Humani Generis*, Aug. 12, 1950, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 32, 1950, pp. 563-4.

<sup>4</sup> G. Weigel, *A Survey of Protestant Theology in Our Day*, in *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention*, The Catholic Theological Society of America, Baltimore, Maryland, 1953, p. 44.

The first problem, therefore, that this research encountered was where to acquire source material. There are no works *ex professo* on our topic. Occasional articles in magazines and special tracts written in America during the Marian Year against Catholic beliefs about Mary were not of sufficient importance to base our research on them.

A recent article by Paul Palmer, S.J., entitled *Mary in Protestant Theology and Worship*, in *Theological Studies*, presented a penetrating analysis of sixteenth century Protestant opinions on Our Lady by "the Reformers" and certain contemporary Protestant theologians as Tillich, Brunner, Barth, Thurian.<sup>5</sup> Our concern, however, is with current beliefs concerning the divine Maternity in the American Protestant denominations as held by their ministers rather than simply by this or that eminent Protestant professor of theology.

It became obvious that if this article were to be actualized, the source material would have to be furnished by contacting the subjects of this study. This was achieved by sending out a questionnaire to 270 ministers of 17 denominations in 29 States and the District of Columbia. One hundred replies were received which constitute the basis of this research. The original responses are filed in the library of the Atonement Seminary, Washington, D. C.

These 100 replies from ministers of 17 denominations are not to be taken as a representative statistical sample of the many thousands of ministers representing more than 265 sects in America. It is reasonable to affirm, however, that the study can offer some insight into contemporary attitudes of Protestant ministers toward Mary the Mother of God.

#### *Method of the Research*

A simple questionnaire posted to the subjects of the research was the only method of contact used in this study. The

<sup>5</sup> Paul Palmer, *Mary in Protestant Theology*, in *Theological Studies*, vol. 15, Dec., 1954, pp. 519-540.

*Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes* 141

author had absolutely no concept of the fruitfulness of this means of communication before it was employed. There was no knowledge of a similar project conducted by a priest known to him as a guide for his course. In view of the novelty of the method, and also because of personal experience of a definite hesitancy by the ministers to manifest their credal affirmations to priests, it was decided to appeal to the ministers with the assurance that no personal names would be used in this survey. Many ministers did not sign the questionnaire in their response and their only identification was their particular denomination. The following is a reproduction of the questionnaire:

The Reverend  
Kenneth F. Dougherty, S.A.  
145 Taylor St., N.E.  
Washington 17, D. C.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR:

I am composing a study concerning American Protestant beliefs about Mary, the Mother of God. Would you be kind enough to answer the questions on the remainder of this letter and post it to the address on the envelope enclosed. No personal names shall be mentioned in this study.

With kindest regards to you,

Sincerely,

K. F. DOUGHERTY, S.A.

Do you believe that Mary is the Mother of God?.....  
(Yes—No).

What reasons do you give for this belief or disbelief?

(A space followed for the answer—many of the ministers gave ample replies which extended on the other side of the letter.)

If you believe in Mary as the Mother of God, what devotions, if any, do you have in her honor?

The denominations covered in this survey are the following: Episcopalians, Northern and Southern Baptists, The United

Lutheran Church of America, Evangelical Lutherans, Lutherans of the Missouri Synod, Presbyterians, Methodists, Church of the Latter Day Saints, Evangelical and Reformed Church, Disciples of Christ, Universalists, The Church of Christ, The Seventh Day Adventists, Quakers, Unitarians and Congregationalists. Responses came from ministers in Washington, D. C., New York, Illinois, New Jersey, Kentucky, Texas, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Arkansas, Tennessee, Ohio, Virginia, Maryland, Iowa, Missouri, Washington, California, Connecticut, Minnesota, Maine, Utah, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Idaho, Georgia, New Hampshire and Colorado. Most of the replies came from rural and urban ministers. Some came from professors in seminaries.

Addresses of the ministers were procured from denomination Year Books, Directories and *Who's Who* Digests obtainable at the Library of Congress. The mailing began in April, 1954, and the returns continued to come in until the following September. The author was aided by members of *The Father Paul Guild*, Washington, D. C., in this task. A few letters were returned unanswered by the ministers and a few more could not be identified in respect to the denomination of the minister replying. These were not used in the study. Some ministers did not explicitly affirm or deny their belief in Mary as the Mother of God. When their affirmation or denial, however, could be easily inferred from their statements in the content of their reply, these letters were included accordingly as affirmative or negative in the survey report. When their position was uncertain either from context or from alleged ignorance of the question, this fact was separately noted in the general tabulation.

Very few letters were overtly abusive. Such letters expressed a fear of "Roman intrigue", and the belief that Catholics were blaspheming in calling Mary, "the Mother of God." The manner of address caused some concern. A High Church

Episcopalian complained that he should be addressed as "Father", and a Church of Christ minister desired to be addressed merely as "Sir" instead of "Reverend and Dear Sir." There were instances of missionary zeal to convert Catholics to "Biblical Christianity". For the most part, however, the letters were objectively written simply with the purpose of answering the questions asked. Some ministers were especially grateful that they had been asked to participate in the survey. A few desired information on Catholic Mariology but when this was offered to them, the correspondence stopped on their part. The 100 replies out of 270 ministers contacted are considered a good return.

#### *General Survey of Replies*

In answer to the question: Do you believe that Mary is the Mother of God? the following answers were received from ministers of the particular sects surveyed:

<i>Name of Sect</i>	<i>Total of Responses</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Position Uncertain</i>
Episcopalians .....	18	11	7	
Baptists .....	16	2	9	5
Lutherans .....	21	5	12	4
Presbyterians .....	9		9	
Methodists .....	21	3	14	4
Smaller Sects .....	15	1	12	2
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>15</b>

In the classification of the smaller sects we include: Mormons (The Church of the Latter Day Saints), Evangelical and Reformed Church, Disciples of Christ, Universalists, Church of Christ, Seventh Day Adventists, Quakers, Unitarians and Congregationalists.



In response to the question: "If you believe in Mary as the Mother of God, what devotions, if any, do you have in her honor?" eleven Episcopalians affirmed that they had such devotions as the rosary and the *Angelus*, novenas in her honor as well as Masses and offices of the breviary. One Lutheran minister said that he recited the *Angelus*; another Lutheran said that he kept Candlemas, the Feasts of the Annunciation and "other Bible-founded festivities of Our Lady". A Northern Baptist minister affirmed that he said the rosary privately. Eighty-six ministers reported no devotions to Mary.

The common reason why 63 ministers in this survey denied that Mary is the Mother of God is to be found in their belief that the Catholic Church divinizes Our Lady by this title. Frequently throughout the letters received there was evidenced a definite attempt to give scriptural evidence for the humanity of Mary and also to prove that she belonged to fallen human race. The ministers appealed to the testimony of the Scriptures that there is only one Saviour and Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus, and that Mary cannot be for us another saviour and mediator. They argued, furthermore, that Mary's maternity is simply human in that she is only the mother of Christ the man and not the Mother of God, because God cannot have a beginning, as the Scriptures repeatedly remind us. In this respect one might label their error for the most part Nestorian, but in general their reason for denying the divine Maternity of Mary is more broad than the Nestorian denial of the *Theotókos*.

In general the reasoning employed in these negative replies showed a lack of correct information concerning Catholic teaching on the divine Maternity. The charge that the Church divinizes Our Lady and regards her as a saviour is certainly a product of gross misunderstanding. These ministers assumed that this is traditional Catholic doctrine, and proceeded to disprove its conformity to Scripture by establishing the hu-

manity of Mary and the belief that Mary is simply the *Christotokos*, the mother of Christ the man. This mode of reasoning was deficient in definition of terms employed, such as, "person" and "nature". The conclusion was generally reached by the assertion that the Bible does not literally call Mary the Mother of God, but the Bible has ample literal proofs that she is human like any one of us.

There was no concern shown in the negative replies concerning the Christological dualism that resulted from such a position. The fact that their conclusion is not compatible with the Hypostatic Union in Christ in their affirmation of Mary as the mother of the human nature of Our Lord, but not the Mother of the Son of God, was not explicitly brought out in the general replies. Their main concern was a protest against an alleged Roman invention, namely, the divinization of Mary and the addition of another saviour for mankind.

It would be more accurate to classify these negative replies for the most part as "Fundamentalist", as opposed more or less to "Liberal" or "Modernist", although there were some of these latter trends evidenced in the replies, especially from the Unitarians and the Congregationalists. These Fundamentalists believed that the Son of God is truly a divine Person according to the Scriptures, but they held that the Scriptures do not affirm that Mary is the Mother of God. For the sake of a word, we can say that the majority of the replies are conservative in the Protestant sense. The conservatives in Protestant thought, as Andrew Kerr Rule has so well pointed out in *Religion in Twentieth Century America*, are a mixture of many things: ". . . they really are conservative, but they are partly inclined toward fundamentalism, or modernism, or liberalism. . . ." <sup>6</sup> In this survey the negative replies were principally conservative in the Fundamentalist sense.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Kerr Rule, *Conservative Protestantism*, in *Religion in the Twentieth Century*, edited by V. Ferm, N. Y.: Philosophical Library, 1948, p. 217.

It is not so much our main task to put labels on the various brands of opinions expressed, nor even to develop apologetical replies to the contrary positions that are recorded. Rather it is our principal aim to present some insight by way of information into what contemporary ministers believe concerning the divine Maternity of Mary. In the following exposition of the replies by denomination certain characteristic attitudes of ministers according to denomination are noted. It is not our intention, however, to present these trends as the only trends characteristic of a denomination. Some insight has been gained by this survey, but it is by no means a conclusive report.

*The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States*

One retired bishop, two seminary professors, five Religious and ten ministers in parishes responded to our questionnaire.<sup>7</sup> Out of these eighteen, eleven affirmed that Mary is the Mother of God, seven dissented. The retired bishop from a Southern State said that the divine Maternity was "a medieval teaching" and preferred to call Our Lady "the Mother of Jesus" and not the Mother of God.

A seminary professor from Berkeley Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut, affirmed that Mary is the Mother of God because: "Our Lord is the Divine Son of God. Therefore, the Blessed Virgin, His Mother, can rightfully be called "Mother of God": "Theotókos". A seminary professor from Western Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, wrote: "The term 'theotókos' is meritable as applied to the Blessed Virgin as a safeguard against Nestorianism."

Episcopalian Religious in their replies were unanimous in their affirmation of the divine Maternity. An Episcopalian Sister from a convent at Peekskill, New York, observed: "It is

<sup>7</sup> Their names were taken from *The Living Church*, Morehouse-Gorham, 1950.

the only reasonable thing one can think, if one believes in the Incarnation, which is the foundation of the Catholic faith." These and other Episcopalians quoted the Church Councils, the Scriptures and tradition in favor of the revealed truth that Mary is the Mother of God.<sup>8</sup> The seminary professor from Evanston, Illinois, pleaded that this was Anglican Church doctrine: "You know of course that the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 is accepted by the Anglican Church."

The seven dissenting ministers would not agree with this opinion of the Evanston professor. A typical negative reply came from a minister at Princetown, New Jersey:

Mary is a child of God (hence a creature) who was chosen by Him to bear and deliver to the world the Child, the Son of Man, the human nature of the Second Person of the Divine Trinity, in the Incarnation. She is therefore of Time and Space, historically speaking. But the Son, who is God, was begotten of the Father before all worlds.

It is difficult to understand how the Princetown minister can speak of the Word made flesh and yet deny the divine Maternity of Our Lady.

The title "Mother of God" to his mentality seems repugnant to the creaturehood of Mary. He establishes an opposition between time and eternity. Mary is in time, the humanity of Christ is in time but the Word is eternal. Therefore, Mary is the Mother of Christ the Man but not the Mother of the Son of God. Obviously, he is addressing the reformation theory that the Roman Catholic Church divinizes Mary by the title "Mother of God". This divinization, of course, is not and never has been Catholic doctrine. But what is Catholic doctrine is that Mary is the Mother of God because the Divine Word was made flesh. In the Princetown minister's manner of

<sup>8</sup> *Luke* 1:35; *Gal.* 4:4; *D.B.* 113, 148, 218.

speaking one can hardly speak of an Incarnation, but of a divine inhabitation, a sort of moral union of the divine and the human in Christ. In his opposition to the divine Maternity of Mary he has gone the way of the Nestorian by dividing the God-Man into two persons, the Son of God and the son of Mary.

The intimate relation between the doctrines of the divine Maternity and the Incarnation is clearly shown in the *Summa Theologica*:

Conception and birth are attributed to the person and hypostasis in respect of that nature in which it is conceived and born. Since, therefore, the human nature was taken by the divine person (of the Word) in the very beginning of the conception, it follows that it can be truly said that God was conceived and born of the Virgin Mary.<sup>9</sup>

These dissenting ministers exhibited an ignorance of the real meaning of the Incarnation of Our Lord and this led them to a false concept of Mary's motherhood. A minister from Canton, Maine, manifested this further:

If it means (the title: Mother of God) that God, the Creator of the ends of the earth . . . had a Mother. . . No, I believe nothing as silly as that. If you mean, was Mary the Mother of Jesus, with all the many and varied connotations of that fact, yes I believe that, but it is quite different from what the Roman Catholic Church teaches in its Mariolatry.

Letters of this sort which were composed no doubt with sincere conviction, inform us of the great task that remains here in America in the apostolate of spreading correct information concerning Catholic doctrine and practice. However, it is one thing for the Protestant minister to disagree with us,

<sup>9</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, P. III, q. 35, a. 4, c.

but in all fairness he should correctly state our position. The charge of Mariolatry is one that could be corrected by investigation at the Catholic Church in the locality where the minister lives.

On the other hand, Catholics are very often mistaken in their estimation of the Episcopalians and their beliefs concerning the divine Maternity of Mary. As our survey indicates, it is incorrect to say that all Episcopalians believe in the Blessed Virgin as the Mother of God. This recovery of a doctrine by some in a denomination that once persecuted the followers of any Marian devotion is by no means widespread throughout all Episcopalian or Anglican communities. As the Anglican E. L. Mascall has said in *A Symposium on the Mother of God*:

. . . this recovery has as yet affected only a tiny portion of the Anglican Church and has received neither encouragement nor understanding from the ecclesiastical authorities in these islands, who have, almost without exception, condemned it as dangerous, ignored it as irrelevant or, when all else has failed, connived at it as an eccentricity. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Although the Episcopalian replies did not show a unanimity, they are noteworthy in their disparity. It would be impossible for us to distinguish their affirmative replies from Catholic answers. These affirmative answers read as if they were taken from our own theological manuals on Mariology. On the other hand, their dissenting replies were in the traditional Protestant character. And yet all of this within one and the same denomination.

### *The Lutherans*

The Lutherans in the United States are divided into twenty groups. From these we have selected three for our survey:

<sup>10</sup> E. Mascall, *A Symposium on the Mother of God*, London: Dacre Press, 1949, p. 48.

the United Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran, and the Lutherans of the Missouri Synod.<sup>11</sup> The United Lutherans are the largest. They were established in 1918 and comprise about a third of the Lutherans in the United States. The Evangelical Lutheran Augustana Synod was founded in 1860. The Missouri Synod began in 1847. It sprang from descendents of immigrants from Saxony in Germany, the cradle of Lutheranism. It is known for its strict confessionalism.

Luther himself in his treatise on the *Magnificat* (1521), composed during his sojourn at Wartburg, shows great devotion to Mother Mary and begs her intercession.<sup>12</sup> In 1522 Luther expressed the fear that to honor Our Lady would derogate from the worship of Our Lord.<sup>13</sup> In the Formula of Concord (1579), however, we read a glowing tribute to Mary, the Mother of God:

By reason of this hypostatic union and the communion of natures, Mary, that Virgin most worthy of praise, brought forth not only a man but such a man as is truly the Son of the Most High God, as the archangel Gabriel bears witness. He, the Son of God, showed forth His majesty as well in that He was born of a virgin, her virginity inviolate. And this she is, truly theotokos, and yet remained a virgin.<sup>14</sup>

Twenty-one replies were received from the Lutheran ministers in general. Out of these, five held beliefs in conformity with the Formula of Concord. Twelve denied that Mary is

<sup>11</sup> *Evangelical Lutheran Year Book*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1953. *Lutheran Missouri Synod Annual*, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953. *United Lutheran Church of America*, Lutheran Publishing House, 1953.

<sup>12</sup> *Luthers Werke*, vol. 7, Weimar edition, 1883-, c. 546, 601.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 10, c. 113.

<sup>14</sup> *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, Second edition, Göttingen, 1952, p. 54.

the Mother of God, and four made no explicit reply to the question. In general these dissenting replies were grounded in the belief that the Roman Catholic Church had found in Mary another mediator between God and man, and that Mary has displaced the unique dignity and office of Our Lord as the one mediator.

Two seminary professors, one from Northwestern Seminary in Minneapolis, of the United Lutheran Church, and the other from Southern Lutheran Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina, a United Lutheran, answered in the affirmative. Two ministers, seminary professors of the same denomination, one from Hamma Divinity School, Springfield, Ohio, the other from Chicago Lutheran Seminary at Maywood, Illinois, denied that Mary is the Mother of God.

The professor from Southern Lutheran Seminary gave the following reason for his belief in the divine Maternity.

On account of the personal union of the divine and human natures in the unique person of Jesus Christ, and because of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the Virgin Mary did not give birth to a mere man, but to such a man [Who, though] truly human, was at the same time truly the Son of the Most High God. . . . We properly call Mary the Mother of God.

Among the dissenters, the professor from Hamma Divinity School saw in the title "Mother of God" a kind of deification of Mary: ". . . The New Testament presents her as any other woman. . . . It all suggests a Holy Quartet instead of a Holy Trinity." From Augustana Theological Seminary at Rock Island, Illinois, a seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, came the negative reply: "He who was God from eternity did not become God through birth by a human mother." Thus in twentieth century America we note the present state of the Lutheran theologies as they have evolved from the original



152 *Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes*

confessional beliefs of the sixteenth century. There remains within contemporary Lutheranism no uniformity of doctrine.

A minister from the Missouri Synod responded to the survey with a pamphlet entitled: "Was Mary Born Without Sin?" The pamphlet speaks of "the Protestant position" on Mariology. It is difficult, however, to justify the writer's use of the singular in this case. The pamphlet opposes the Roman Catholic doctrine of divinizing Mary without, of course, any factual evidence to support the charge. The pamphlet attributes the divine Maternity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Our Lady to papal inventiveness.

The Lutheran replies, as distributed in the three sects surveyed, show the following responses:

<i>Sect</i>	<i>Affirmative</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Position Uncertain</i>
United Lutherans .....	3	4	1
Evangelical Lutheran .....		5	2
Missouri Synod .....	2	2	1
	—	—	—
Total .....	5	11	4

A Lutheran minister from Little Rock, Arkansas, whose affiliation with one of the groups named above could not be identified, replied negatively. This brought the total of the Lutheran responses up to twenty-one with twelve negative replies. The five replies classified as uncertain did not explicitly answer the questions asked and one could not infer with certainty whether these ministers affirmed or denied the divine Maternity of Mary.

There was no recovery of belief in the divine Maternity of Our Lady noted among the Lutherans such as was recorded among some of the Episcopalians. On the contrary, the contemporary Lutherans in America manifest no trend to introduce the cult of Mary into their churches such as we witness

in the High Church Party of the Episcopalians. Our survey simply reports some ministers who have maintained belief in Mary, the Mother of God, but for the most part the ministers feared the cult of Mary as a distraction from the one mediator between God and Man, Our Blessed Lord. These ministers denied the divine Maternity and, like the negative Episcopalians, affirmed a Nestorian view of the physical constitution of Christ. These ministers were not aware that Catholic doctrine and practice subordinate Mary to Christ.

### *The Methodists*

The Methodists in the United States constitute the largest constituent body of the Federal Council of Churches in America. There are twenty-two independent varieties of Methodists. In this survey it was not possible to identify the ministers according to their specific affiliation in Methodism. Twenty-one ministers answered our questionnaire.<sup>15</sup> Fourteen replied negatively, three affirmatively and four gave no explicit reply to the questions.

The general reason for denying that Mary is the Mother of God was similar to what has already been stated concerning Episcopalian and Lutheran denials. The dissenting Methodists believe that the Catholic Church is attempting to divinize Our Lady and they say that this is unscriptural. A minister from Dallas, Texas, gave a typical reply:

To say that Mary is the Mother of God is to take something from God. The Scriptures plainly state that she was "the Mother of the Son of God". The Scriptures also reveal that she had relatives here on earth just as any one of us might have. . . .

A professor from Iliff School of Theology, Denver, Colorado, attributes this Catholic doctrine to a development in

<sup>15</sup> Their names were taken from *Methodists' Who's Who*, Chicago: Marquis Co., 1952.

Christian doctrine: "The Theotókos doctrine, as I suspect you are aware, was among the later developments in early Christian doctrine." There is no attempt made by the professor to say who invented this doctrine, at what time and in what place.

A minister from Victor, New York, in his denial of the divine Maternity posits a unique explanation of the physical constitution of Our Lord. The explanation is modernist, the first that we record in this survey.

Mary was the mother of Jesus,—the earthly mother. Jesus is the Son of God, Our Lord, but he is not God. . . . He and God are one in spirit but not in substance.

The Dean of the School of Religion of the University of Southern California affirmed that Mary is the Mother of Jesus but not the Mother of God. "Although she was the mother of Jesus, the Christ, I see no justification for holding that she is thereby constituted the Mother of God." A minister from Evanston, Illinois, claims that the doctrine of the divine Maternity is based more on ". . . goddess worship of pagans than upon a true Christian view of God."

The ministers who affirmed belief in Our Lady's divine Maternity gave scriptural reasons for their position, but they distinguished their position from Catholic Mariology, which they believe has divinized Our Lady. A minister from Atlanta, Georgia, after affirming belief in Mary, the Mother of God, added:

I fail to see any grounds to believe the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception. I think the notion of the assumption of Mary is a piece of preposterous Mariolatry.

The Methodist ministers' replies were characterized by an individuality of terms and doctrinal positions. Fundamentalists, Modernist and Liberal trends were all represented. The

ministers who affirmed the divine Maternity cannot be classified as members of a pro-Roman group, as in the case of some Episcopalians, nor could they be said to be individually striving to recapture a confessional creed of sixteenth century Protestantism as in the case of some Lutherans. They were simply stating individual interpretations of the Scriptures. In the main the dissenting replies appear to be more Fundamentalist than anything else.

### *The Baptists*

The Baptist family numbers some twenty-four denominations. Since 1950 the Baptists are the largest Protestant group in the United States. In this survey we refer to the Southern Baptist Convention and the American (Northern) Baptist Convention.<sup>16</sup> Sixteen replies were received. Ten replies came from the Southern Baptists. One minister asserted his belief in Mary, the Mother of God. Five replied negatively and four made no explicit reply. We shall consider the Southern Baptists first.

A minister from Linden, Texas, affirmed belief in the divine Maternity because it is a scriptural truth. Five ministers were in disagreement with this position. They believed that this dogma was invented by the Catholic Church. On the part of God, they argued, God could not have a mother, and on the part of Mary, this is repugnant since Mary is a creature.

The New Testament nowhere affirms that Mary is or was the Mother of God. Several reasons could be given for believing that Mary was not the Mother of God. I refer, however, to only one scripture found in John 1:5. In the beginning was the Word,

<sup>16</sup> *Northern Baptists Year Book*, Philadelphia: American Baptist Publishing Society, 1940. *Annual of the Southern Baptists Convention*, Nashville: Executive Committee, Southern Baptist Convention, 1952.

and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. . . .

The way that Word was made flesh or incarnated was through the instrumentality of a woman, Mary, but before He was made flesh, as was seen, He was eternal. . . . With our denomination Mary is not divine.

It is interesting to note how recurrent the Nestorian error is in these responses from the various sects. The inability to grasp the meaning of the Hypostatic Union, the undue division of the divine from the human, the invisible from the visible, which so pervades Protestant thought, is evidenced in these negative replies. The *locus theologicus* of the reasoning is said to be scriptural; actually it is reason attempting to interpret Scripture privately and without the guidance of the *magisterium* of the Church.

Six Northern Baptists replied to the questionnaire. One minister affirmed that Mary is the Mother of God, four denied this title as unscriptural, and one gave no explicit reply to the question. Their answers followed the pattern of the Southern Baptists. The one affirmative reply came from a minister in Mount Vernon, New York. He responded cautiously:

I prefer to use the term "Mother of Christ" in speaking of the Blessed Virgin. Frequently in private devotions I make use of the regular Roman Catholic rosary formula (Mother of God).

The Baptist replies offered no new insight into Protestant attitudes toward Our Lady. As in the case of the other sects, they showed no unanimous opinion concerning the divine Maternity. They manifest the most Fundamentalist set of responses in the survey and regard Mariology as an independent doctrinal development in the Roman Catholic Church and in some instances as the central Catholic dogma. The need

for correct information concerning the authentic Catholic teaching regarding the divine Maternity was especially evidenced in their responses.

### *The Presbyterians*

The Presbyterians have eleven denominations in the United States. Nine replies were received from their ministers.<sup>17</sup> Presbyterians were the most difficult to contact. It was impossible to identify the minister according to the particular affiliation in the Presbyterian family. Nine negative replies were received.

A professor from Bloomfield Theological Seminary, Bloomfield, New Jersey, wrote:

Mary never claimed the title (Mother of God). Jesus never conferred the title on her. No such recognition in the New Testament. (It is a) Late development of Christian theology. Mistaken belief leads people to lay greater stress on Mary than on Our Lord Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation. None of the contemporaries of the Lord Jesus Christ believed in Him because Mary was the Mother of God.

A professor from Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, repeated this belief that the New Testament gives no evidence for the divine Maternity and regarded this teaching as a Roman invention ". . . Romanism has forsaken Christian theology. . . ." A minister from Washington, D. C., affirmed: "Deity did not derive from her . . . she could not give Him Godhead or make Him to become God. Mary cannot be His Mother as God therefore."

The Presbyterians repeated the Nestorian concept of Our Lord and Our Lady already dealt with in the negative replies

<sup>17</sup> Names were selected from the *Yearbook of American Churches*, Washington, D. C., National Council of Churches, 1953.

of the other sects. Their replies were Fundamentalist and showed a manifest anti-Roman character. Some of them seemed to regard Mariology as the central teaching in Catholic Theology and even as the motive for belief in Our Lord. As in the case of the other surveys made, we can only speak within the context of the replies received, but these seem to be noteworthy of a trend of thought in contemporary American Presbyterianism.

*The Smaller Sects*

By the Smaller Sects we mean the Mormons, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the Quakers, the Disciples of Christ, the Universalists, the Church of Christ, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Congregationalists and the Unitarians. Fourteen replies came from these sects. It is surprising that the Jehovah Witnesses would make no reply to the questionnaire. A Church of Christ minister in Washington, D. C., professed belief in the divine Maternity. Eleven ministers replied negatively and two gave no explicit reply.

In this group Liberal and Modernist trends of thought were noted especially among the Quakers, Congregationalists and the Unitarians. A Quaker in Washington, D. C., wrote the following:

Quaker theologies are concerned with the Fatherhood of God, with the Christ as God incarnate and with the historic Jesus in Whom the Christ appears fully. . . . The divine seed of the Christ is available for growth in every person to develop as much as his surroundings, himself, and the Grace of God permits. Since the seed developed to fullness in Jesus, His mother Mary is noteworthy. . . . However, your question otherwise remains meaningless to me.

This reply is in keeping with George Fox's teaching concerning "that of God in every man." Quakers have no doc-

trine of the Communion of Saints. The immanentism of their religious experience stresses "the Inner Light," the Divine Spirit, whose fullness is in Jesus. Mary is noteworthy in an exemplary manner as the mother of Jesus.

A Modernist reply came from a Unitarian minister of Tufts College:

The belief suggests the divinity of Jesus to which I could not give assent as a rational idea (my views of epistemology would not include a dogma of superimposed revelation). The belief would appear to be quite inconsistent with the nature of God.

This letter was among the few explicit denials of the divinity of Christ noted in this survey.

A Liberal reply came from a Congregationalist minister in Washington, D. C.

The anthropomorphism which inheres in the assumption of the question (Do you believe that Mary is the Mother of God?) appeals either to the uncritical philosophic mind or the resigned spirit. The strength of this comparatively recent (Beginning with the fifth century) dogma lies in the need of resignation which one sees in the modern authoritarian personality.

These Liberal and Modernist replies were by no means characteristic of the replies from the Smaller Sects in general. Their replies were in the main Fundamentalist. A typical answer of this kind came from the Seventh Day Adventists in an article in their magazine entitled: "Who honors Mary Most," *Signs of the Times*.

If Mary is the Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, she is sinless and immortal, if she has the power to save, as claimed by some, then she is inescapably a God herself, or part of God.



These teachings are attributed by them to the Catholic Church. They are stated in half truths and repeat errors already treated in the survey.

*American Protestant Ministers and Devotion to Our Lady*

Out of the 100 replies received, fourteen ministers professed to practice some form of devotion in honor of Mary. These were eleven Episcopalians, two United Lutherans and one Northern Baptist. The Episcopalians reported they have Masses and Offices in her honor on special Feasts and on Saturdays, except in Advent and Lent. They recite the rosary and the *Angelus*. An Episcopalian Religious at West Park, New York, wrote that his community has the following devotions:

Breviary antiphons after offices, rosary; Saturday Mass and Office (except Advent and Lent); private devotions according to individual taste.

A United Lutheran minister from Minneapolis explained: As a Church we observe the New Testament grounded festivals (Candlemas, Annunciation, Presentation). I hold and teach that the Blessed Virgin must have been an unusual character; else God would not have chosen her for the important function that became hers. I hold also that she be regarded as the highest example for Christian womanhood.

The ministers who practice no devotions to Our Lady did so generally because they do not regard her as the Mother of God and they deny the doctrine of the Communion of Saints in its traditional Catholic meaning. Some ministers, however, although they affirmed that Mary is the Mother of God, professed no devotion to her because they denied the doctrine of the Communion of Saints and feared that any such devotion would distract from the one mediator between God and man, the Lord.

In the solidarity of divine Catholic faith we know that the faithful do not dishonor Christ by honoring His Mother, as Saint Pius X has said in the encyclical *Ad diem illum laetissimum*:

It is plain, then, that we are far from attributing to the Mother of God the power to produce supernatural grace, since this power belongs to God alone. . . . Can anyone say that we have erred in declaring that, to come to the knowledge and love of Christ, her help is most bounteous and efficacious? Only too clearly is Our claim justified by the lamentable condition of those who are deceived . . . and as a result, assert that they can do without the Virgin and her help.<sup>18</sup>

A minister of the Congregationalist denomination from New Hampshire wrote:

However, I do feel that Protestantism in general has leaned over backwards in its attempt to avoid certain facets of Mariological devotion—and I cannot but feel that there are elements in Mariology that Protestantism might do well to recapture.

### *Conclusion*

In the encyclical *Fulgens corona* proclaiming the Marian Year our Holy Father declared of Mary Immaculate:

Therefore, the infinite dignity of Jesus Christ and His office of universal Redemption is not diminished or lowered by this doctrine; on the contrary it is greatly increased. Non-Catholics and Reformers often find fault with and even condemn our devotion to the Virgin Mother of God, on the grounds that it withdraws something from the worship due only to God and Jesus Christ. The very opposite is true. The honor and reverence we pay to our heavenly Mother actually increases the glory of her Divine Son, not only because all graces and gifts have in Him their

<sup>18</sup> St. Pius X, *Ad diem illum laetissimum*, in *Mary and the Popes* (edited by Thomas Burke), New York: America Press, 1954, pp. 56, 57.

162 *Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes*

origin and source but also because "parents are the glory of their children" (*Prov. 17:6*).<sup>19</sup>

There is a distinction between the adoration that is given to God (*latría*) and the reverence given to the creature (*dulia*). This *dulia* can be civil, such as is given in English cities to His Lordship, the Mayor, or it can be religious, the honor and reverence given to the Saints and to Our Lady. Because of Mary's unique privilege of being the Mother of God, the reverence given to her is unique. It is called *hyperdulia* which means that it is "above" that which is shown to the ordinary Saints. Catholics do *not* adore Mary.

When Catholics speak of the worship of Our Lady, non-Catholics are prone to make a great case about it and to see in the word "worship" a positive evidence of their claim that Catholics have made a goddess out of Mary. It is all a case of defining concepts and the supposition of terms, a semantic difficulty. Beyond this difficulty over the word "worship," which seems to be particularly offensive to some American ears, there remains the manifold reasons in Protestant theologies why they cannot honor Mary as the Mother of God. In our survey we have noted two principal reasons: The Nestorian view of Jesus and Mary (held by the Fundamentalists surveyed), i. e. the belief that there are two persons in Christ and that Mary is only the mother of Christ the man, a belief that is at least implicit in the vast majority of the negative replies in this survey; and the belief held by a few Modernist ministers in the survey that Jesus is not divine and that Mary is a good woman, the mother of the man Jesus.

The terms "Fundamentalist," "Modernist," "Liberal" are affixed simply to the reasons given by a minister concerning the denial of Mary's divine Maternity. Beyond this context the term is not intended to be used.

The intimate relation of Jesus and Mary is negatively

<sup>19</sup> Pius XII, *Fulgens corona*, in *Mary and the Popes*, p. 12.

shown in this survey. He who attacks the Son attacks the Mother, and he would attack the Mother attacks the Son. It is quite possible to identify the distance of any one sect from the Church by measuring its distance from Catholic Mariology. The Mystical Christ and Mary Our Spiritual Mother are closely related.

One might speak of *children of Mary* in the various sects in a special sense, namely, those who still adhere to the revealed truth that Mary is the Mother of God. We have noted twenty-two ministers who profess belief in the divine Maternity in this survey. Although by no means in the majority, there are, no doubt, many more ministers such as these who believe in the Mother of God and who pray to her for aid. Many of them are very distant from belief in the Roman Catholic Church. Father Paul of Graymoor was once amongst their number as an Episcopalian minister. The daily recital of Mary's rosary was for him a certain way back to his Father's house. These children of Mary are in truth amongst a strange company in the sects. There are signs of intensified protests against Our Lady evoked by controversialists in the sects. It may so happen that these controversies will be a way of light for the defenders of Mary in the sects, a way back to the Church of her Son.

The Catholic apologist has much to accomplish in spreading correct information concerning Mariology to the Protestant ministries. The survey has shown a large area of misinformation. Beyond correct information there is the task of identifying the contemporary errors concerning Our Lady in the formal systems of present day Protestant thought. The Catholic theologian would do well to note these and answer them in his manuals.

REV. KENNETH F. DOUGHERTY, S.A.,  
Atonement Seminary,  
Washington, D. C.