
MEDITATIONS
ON MARY,
OUR MOTHER

St. John Henry Cardinal Newman



Meditations on Mary, Our Mother by St. John Henry Cardinal Newman

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

St. John Henry Cardinal Newman's conversion to the Catholic Church in 1845 needs little by way of introduction. Most Catholics who know anything at all about Newman are familiar with his journey from Anglicanism to Rome. What may surprise them is the key role that devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary played in that conversion.

Apart from the Papacy, devotion to Mary is perhaps the greatest stumbling block for the majority of Protestants. Yet, Newman had already developed a devotion to Mary and a defense of some Catholic doctrines on the subject even while he was still a Protestant. This requires some context.

In Newman's day, the "liberal" movement in theology was particularly strong. This liberalism rejected dogmatic principles as the basis of religion because they were independent of individual judgment. For early 19th century liberalism, the individual along with his interpretations and experiences was the standard of judgment in religion. In the early 20th century, this system of thought made its assault on the Catholic world, and received a new name: Modernism.

Nothing could be further from Cardinal Newman's thought, both as an Anglican and later in life as a Catholic. Newman's religion, as an Anglican, was based on the principle of dogma, that there are revealed truths to which the believer must adhere. These were the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, Predestination, and the Lutheran

Apprehension of Christ (justification by faith). As time went on, Newman rejected the last, but he would remain steadfast with the first three throughout his life, even as a Catholic.

His acceptance of the Incarnation is the most important for his developing views on Mary. Christ became incarnate in time through a woman—who was this woman? Could she really be an insignificant figure? Moreover, as a student of history, Newman was well aware of early Christological controversies and early heresies in regard to the Incarnation. He was able to see clearly that they all received their death-blow when the Council of Ephesus had declared her to be *Theotokos*—Mother of God. The contrast in the Fathers between the old Eve and Mary as the new Eve made the matter quite clear, and served as a foundation for his developing and accepting further Marian doctrine, although he was still a Protestant. He even had no fear of proclaiming, as an Anglican minister, to his Anglican audience:

Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be the Mother of Christ? If to him that hath, more is given, and holiness and Divine favor go together (and this we are expressly told), what must have been the transcendent purity of her, whom the Creator Spirit condescended to overshadow with His miraculous presence? What must have been her gifts, who was chosen to be the only near earthly relative

of the Son of God, the only one whom He was bound by nature to revere and look up to; the one appointed to train and educate Him, to instruct Him day by day, as He grew in wisdom and in stature? This contemplation runs to a higher subject, did we dare follow it; for what, think you, was the sanctified state of that human nature, of which God formed His sinless Son; . . .? (*Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. ii, Sermon 12)

As his Marian doctrine and devotion grew, Newman ran up against a great road-block. In general, as the Tractarian controversy raged, and he was dissatisfied with the rejection of what he saw as historic Christianity by his own Church. He began to have a greater love, even longing for Rome, the mother of English Christianity. He felt, however, that whereas he had a logical, dogmatic based view of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Catholics went too far and said too much. Time, reading and prayer, however, would convince him otherwise, and he was able to say in his letter to the Anglo-Catholic Dr. Pusey (who had many of the same objections Newman once had):

Only this I know full well now, and did not know then, that the Catholic Church allows no image of any sort, material or immaterial, no dogmatic symbol, no rite, no sacrament, no Saint, not even the Blessed Virgin herself, to come between the soul and its Creator. It is face to face, "solus cum

solo,” in all matters between man and his God. He alone creates; He alone has redeemed; before His awful eyes we go in death; in the vision of Him is our eternal beatitude.

Thus, Newman’s journey to the Church can said to have been guided by Our Lady, toward the kindly light which he was to rest in.

In honor of his canonization, this present volume draws together Newman’s Marian writings into an anthology, and organizes them topically. We have drawn both from works that are doctrinal and apologetic, as well as devotional meditations, so as to show both sides of Newman’s character. On the one hand, his profoundly logical, deep, and intellectual bearing, and on the other, the profound love that permeated his heart. Together, they show the great depths of Marian doctrine from the Church’s treasury with which Newman has so powerfully permeated his own pages. In some places we have made minor edits for archaic language, as well as to tailor the readings for the purpose of this anthology.

—*Gastonia, NC*

*Holy the womb that bore him,
Holy the breasts that fed,
But holier still the royal heart
That in His passion bled.*



MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

MY SOUL DOTH
MAGNIFY THE LORD

The Angel began the salutation; he said, "Hail, thou that art highly favored;¹ the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women." Again, he said, "Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God; and, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest." Her cousin Elizabeth was the next to greet her with her appropriate title. Though she was filled with the Holy Spirit at the time she spoke, yet, far from thinking herself by such a gift to be equal to Mary, she was thereby moved to use the lowlier and more reverent language. "She spoke out with a loud voice, and said, *Blessed art thou* among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And how is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" ... Then she repeated, "Blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Then it was that Mary expressed her feelings in the *Magnificat* we read in the Evening Service. How many and complicated must they have been! In her was now to be fulfilled that promise which the world had been looking out for during thousands of years. The Seed of the woman, announced to guilty Eve, after long delay, was at length appearing upon earth, and was to be born of her. In her the destinies of the world were to be reversed, and the serpent's head bruised. On her was bestowed the greatest

honor ever put upon any individual of our fallen race. God was taking upon Him her flesh, and humbling Himself to be called her offspring;—such is the deep mystery! She of course would feel her own inexpressible unworthiness; and again, her humble lot, and her weakness in the eyes of the world. And she had moreover, that purity and innocence of heart, that bright vision of faith, that confident trust in her God, which raised all these feelings to an intensity which we, ordinary mortals, cannot understand. *We* cannot understand them; we repeat her hymn day after day—yet consider for an instant how differently *we* say it from how she first uttered it. *We* even hurry it over, and do not think of the meaning of those words which came from the most highly favored, awfully gifted of the children of men. “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For He hath regarded the low estate of His hand-maiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.”

—*Parochial and Plain Sermons, II*

MOTHER OF THE CREATOR

This is a title which, of all others, we should have thought it impossible for any creature to possess. At first sight we might be tempted to say that it throws into confusion our primary ideas of the Creator and the creature, the Eternal and the temporal, the Self-subsisting and the dependent; and yet on further consideration we shall see that we cannot refuse the title to Mary without denying the Divine Incarnation—that is, the great and fundamental truth of revelation, that God became man.

And this was seen from the first age of the Church. Christians were accustomed from the first to call the Blessed Virgin “The Mother of God,” because they saw that it was impossible to deny her that title without denying St. John’s words, “The Word” (that is, God the Son) “was made flesh.”

And in no long time it was found necessary to proclaim this truth by the voice of an Ecumenical Council of the Church. For, in consequence of the dislike which men have of a mystery, the error sprang up that our Lord was not really God, but a man, differing from us in this merely—that God dwelt in Him, as God dwells in all good men, only in a higher measure; as the Holy Spirit dwelt in Angels and Prophets, as in a sort of Temple; or again, as our Lord now dwells in the Tabernacle in church. And then the bishops and faithful people found there was no other way of hindering this false, bad view being taught but by declaring distinctly, and making it a point of faith,

that Mary was the Mother, not of man only, but of God. And since that time the title of Mary, as *Mother of God*, has become what is called a dogma, or article of faith, in the Church.

But this leads us to a larger view of the subject. Is this title as given to Mary more wonderful than the doctrine that God, without ceasing to be God, should become man? Is it more mysterious that Mary should be Mother of God, than that *God* should be *man*? Yet the latter, as I have said, is the elementary truth of revelation, witnessed by Prophets, Evangelists, and Apostles all through Scripture. And what can be more consoling and joyful than the wonderful promises which follow from this truth, that Mary is the Mother of God?—the great wonder, namely, that we become the brethren of our God! That, if we live well, and die in the grace of God, we shall all of us hereafter be taken up by our Incarnate God to that place where angels dwell! That our bodies shall be raised from the dust, and be taken to Heaven; that we shall be really united to God; that we shall be partakers of the Divine nature; that each of us, soul and body, shall be plunged into the abyss of glory which surrounds the Almighty; that we shall see Him, and share His blessedness, according to the text, “Whosoever shall do the will of My Father that is in Heaven, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother.”

—*Meditations on the Litany of Loretto
for the Month of May*