

That Mary Is The Mother Of God

From the writings of Saint Alphonsus Liguori.

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From "THE HISTORY OF HERESIES, AND THEIR REFUTATION"; OR, "THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH."

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF Saint ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BY THE REV. JOHN T. MULLOCK, OF THE ORDER OF Saint FRANCIS, in 1847.

MARY IS THE REAL AND TRUE MOTHER OF GOD.

1. The truth of this dogma is a necessary consequence of what the Church teaches on the subject of the two Natures; for if Christ as man is true God, and if Mary be truly the Mother of Christ as man, it necessarily follows that she must be also truly the Mother of God. We will explain it even more clearly by Scripture and tradition.

In the first place the Scripture assures us that a Virgin (that is the Virgin Mary) has conceived and brought forth God, as we see in Isaiah (7:14): "Behold a Virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a Son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which is interpreted (says Saint Matthew), God with us." Saint Luke, relating what the angel said to Mary, proves the same truth: "Behold you shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, and the Holy which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God" (Luke, 1:31-35.) Mark the words: "shall be called the Son of the Most High," "shall be called the Son of God," that is, shall be celebrated and recognized by the whole world as the Son of God.

2. Saint Paul proves the same truth when he says: "Which he had promised before by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. Concerning the Son who was made to him in the seed of David, according to the flesh" (Romans 1:2-3); and, writing to the Galatians, he says: "When the fulness of time was come God sent his Son made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). This Son, promised by God through the Prophets, and sent in the fulness of time, is God equal to the Father, and this same God, sprang from the seed of David, according to the flesh, was born of Mary; she is, therefore, the true Mother of this God.

3. Besides, Saint Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Ghost, called Mary the Mother of her Lord: "And whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke, 1:43). Who was the Lord of Saint Elizabeth, unless God? Jesus Christ himself, also, as often as he called Mary his Mother, called himself the Son of Man, and still the Scriptures attest that without the operation of man he was born of a Virgin.

He once asked his disciples: "Whence do men say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13), and Saint Peter answered: "You are Christ, the Son of the living God;" and our Saviour answered:

"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven."

Therefore, the Son of Man is the true Son of God, and, consequently, Mary is the Mother of God.

4. In the second place, this truth is proved from tradition. The Symbols or Creeds are quoted against Nestorius, proving that Jesus Christ is true God, and they also prove that Mary is the true Mother of God, since they teach, "That he was conceived of the Holy Ghost from the Virgin Mary, and was made man." The decree of the Second Council of Nicaea (787 A.D.) even declares, if possible, more clearly, that Mary is the true Mother of God, using the words 'properly and truly' is she called the Mother of God.

5. Mary has been called the Mother of God by all the Fathers. I will merely refer to a few who wrote in the early ages previous to Nestorius who in 431 was condemned for denying such a title to Our Lady.

Saint Ignatius the Martyr, in his letter to the Ephesians,

Saint Justin in his Apology and in his Dialogue with Trypho,

Saint Iræneus,

Saint Dionysius of Alexandria in his letter to Paul of Samos,

Saint Athanasius, in his third Oration against the Arians,

Saint Gregory of Nazianzen, in his 51st "Oration",

Saint John Chrysostom, in his second Homily on Saint Matthew's Gospel,

are some of the Greek Fathers I can enumerate.

Among the Latin Fathers, we will refer to a few.

Tertullian,

Saint Ambrose in his Epistle number 63,

Saint Jerome in his Treatise against Helvidius,

Saint Augustine, are some Fathers who spring to mind.

6. I omit other authorities, and will confine myself to only one, that of John, Bishop of Antioch, who wrote to Nestorius in the name of Theodoret, and several other friends of his, on the name of the Mother of God, as deserving of special remembrance. We may as well mention that Saint Cyril wrote to Pope Saint Celestine, informing him, that so deeply implanted was this belief in the hearts of the people of Constantinople, that when they heard Dorotheus, by order of Nestorius, pronounce an anathema against those who asserted that she was the Mother of God, they all rose up as one man, refused to hold any more communication with Nestorius, and from that outburst would not go to the church of Nestorius, even though he was their bishop if he would not maintain this title of Mary's, a clear proof of what the universal belief of the Church was in those days.

7. The Fathers adduced several reasons to convince Nestorius. I will only state two:

First: It cannot be denied that she is the Mother of God, who conceived and brought forth a Son, who, at the time of his conception, was God. But both Scripture and Tradition prove that our Blessed Lady brought forth this Son of God; she is, therefore, truly the Mother of God. This point was clearly made by Saint Cyril.

Here is the second reason: If Mary be not the Mother of God, then the son whom she brought forth is not God, and, consequently, the Son of God and the son of Mary are not the same. Now Jesus Christ, as can be readily seen from scripture, has proclaimed himself the Son of God, and he is the

son of Mary; therefore, the Nestorians must admit, either that Jesus Christ is not the son of Mary, or that Mary, being the Mother of Jesus Christ, is truly the Mother of God.

THE OBJECTIONS OF THE NESTORIANS ANSWERED.

8. First, they object that the word for 'Mother of God', (Theotokos) is not used either in the Scriptures or in the Symbols or Creeds of the Councils; but we answer, that neither in Scripture or Symbols do we find the word Christotokos, Mother of Christ; therefore, according to that argument, she should not be called the Mother of Christ, as Nestorius himself calls her. But we will give even a more direct answer. It is just the same thing to say that Mary is the Mother of God, as to say that she conceived and brought forth God; but both Scripture and Councils say that she brought forth God, they, therefore, proclaim her, in equivalent terms, the Mother of God. Besides, the Fathers of the first centuries, as we have referred to earlier, constantly called her the Mother of God, and the Scripture itself calls her Mother of our Lord, as Elizabeth, when filled with the Holy Ghost, said: "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"

9. They object, secondly, that Mary did not generate the Divinity, and, consequently, she cannot be called the Mother of God. We answer, that she should be called the Mother of God, because she was the mother of a man, who was at the same time true God and true man, just as we say that a woman is the mother of a man composed both of soul and body, though she only produces the body, and not the soul, which is created by God alone. Therefore, as Mary, though she has not generated the Divinity, still, as she brought forth a man, according to the flesh, who was, at the same time, God and man, she should be called the Mother of God.

10. They object, thirdly, that the Mother ought to be consubstantial to the Son; but the Virgin is not consubstantial to God, therefore, she ought not to be called the Mother of God. We answer, that Mary is not consubstantial to Christ as to the Divinity, but merely in humanity alone, and because her son is both man and God, she is called the Mother of God. They say, besides, that if we persist in calling her the Mother of God, we may induce the simple to believe that she is a Goddess herself; but we answer, that the simple are taught by us that she is only a mere creature, but that she brought forth Christ, God and man. Besides, if Nestorius was so scrupulous about calling her the Mother of God, lest the simple might be led to believe that she was a Goddess, he ought to have a greater scruple in denying her that title, lest the simple might be led to believe, that as she was not the Mother of God, consequently Christ was not God.

REFUTATION OF THE HERESY OF NESTORIUS, WHO TAUGHT THAT IN CHRIST THERE ARE TWO PERSONS.

1. Nestorius is not charged with any errors regarding the mystery of the Trinity. Among the other heresies which he combated in his Sermons, and to punish which he implored the Emperor Theodosius, was that of the Arians, who denied that the Word was consubstantial to the Father. We, therefore, have no reason to doubt that he acknowledged the Divinity of the Word, and his consubstantiality with the Father.

His heresy particularly attacked the mystery of the Incarnation of the Divine Word, for he denied the hypostatic or Personal Union of the Word with the humanity. He maintained that the Word was only united with the humanity of Jesus Christ, just in the same way as with the Saints, only in a more perfect manner, and from the first moment of his conception. In his writings he explains this point over and over in different ways, but always only as a simple moral and accidental union between the Person of the Word and the humanity of Jesus Christ, but he never admits a hypostatic

or personal union. At one time, he said it was a union of habitation, that is, that the Word inhabited the humanity of Christ, as his temple; next, it was, he said, a union of affection, such as exists between two friends. He then said it was a union of operation, inasmuch as the Word availed himself of the humanity of Christ as an instrument to work miracles, and other supernatural operations. Then that it was a union of Grace, because the Word, by means of sanctifying Grace and other Divine gifts, is united with Christ. Finally, he teaches that this union consists in a moral communication, by which the Word communicates his dignity and excellence to the humanity, and on this account the humanity of Christ should, he said, be adored and honoured, as we honour the purple of the Sovereign, or the throne on which he sits. He always denied with the most determined obstinacy, that the Son of God was made man, was born, suffered, or died for the redemption of man. Finally, he denied the communication of the Idioms, which follows from the Incarnation of the Word, and, consequently, he denied that the Blessed Virgin was truly and properly the Mother of God, blasphemously teaching that she only conceived and brought forth a mere man.

2. This heresy saps the very foundation of the Christian Religion, by denying the mystery of the Incarnation, and we will attack it on its two principal points, the first of which consists in denying the hypostatic union, that is, the union of the Person of the Word with human nature, and, consequently, admits that there are two Persons in Christ the Person of the Word, which dwells in the humanity as in a temple, and the person of man, purely human, and which does not ascend to a higher degree than mere humanity.

The second point consists in denying that the Blessed Virgin is truly and properly the Mother of God. This we have refuted in what we have written above. So let us refute the first point in the following paragraphs.

IN JESUS CHRIST THERE IS BUT THE ONE PERSON OF THE WORD ALONE, WHICH TERMINATES THE TWO NATURES, DIVINE AND HUMAN, WHICH BOTH SUBSIST IN THE SAME PERSON OF THE WORD, AND, THEREFORE, THIS ONE PERSON IS, AT THE SAME TIME, TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN.

3. Our first proof is taken from all those passages in the Scripture, in which it is said that God was made flesh, that God was born of a Virgin, that God emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, that God has redeemed us with his blood, that God died for us on the Cross. Every one knows that God could not be conceived, nor born, nor suffer, nor die, in his Divine Nature, which is eternal, impassible, and immortal; therefore, if the Scripture teaches us that God was born, and suffered, and died, we should understand it according to his human nature, which had a beginning, and was passible and mortal. And, therefore, if the Person in which the human nature subsists was not the Divine Word, Saint Matthew would state what is false when he says that God was conceived and born of a Virgin: "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the Prophet, saying: Behold a Virgin shall be with child and bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted, is God with us" (Matthew, 1:22-23).

Saint John expressly says the same thing: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John, 1:14.) The Apostle Paul also would have stated a falsehood in saying that God humbled himself, taking the form of a servant: "For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men and in habit found as a man" (Phil, 2:5-7.)

Saint John would also state what is not the fact, when he says that God died for us: "In this we have known the charity of God, because he has laid down his life for us" (1 John, 3:6); and Saint Paul says: "The Holy Ghost placed you Bishops to rule the Church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood" (Acts, 20:28); and speaking of the death of our Redeemer, he says: "For if they had known it, they never would have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinth 2:8.)

4. Now it would be false to speak of God in that manner, if God only inhabited the humanity of Jesus Christ accidentally, as a temple, or morally, through affection, or was not united hypostatically or personally, just as it would be false to say that God was born of Saint Elizabeth, when she brought forth the Baptist, in whom God inhabited before his birth, by sanctifying grace, and it would be false to say that God died stoned when Saint Stephen was stoned to death, or that he died beheaded when Saint Paul was beheaded, because he was united to these Saints through the medium of love, and of the many heavenly gifts he bestowed on them, so that between them and God there existed a true moral union. When, therefore, it is said that God was born and died, the reason is because the Person sustaining and terminating the assumed humanity is truly God, that is the eternal Word. There is, therefore, in Christ but one Person, in which two Natures subsist, and in the unity of the Person of the Word, which terminates the two natures, consists the hypostatic union.

5. This truth is also proved, secondly, from those passages of the Scriptures in which Christ-Man is called God, the Son of God, the only begotten Son, the proper Son of God, for a man cannot be called God or Son of God, unless the person who terminates the human nature is truly God. Now Christ-Man is called the supreme God by Saint Paul: "And of whom is Christ according to the flesh, who is over all things God blessed for ever" (Romans 19:5). We read in Saint Matthew that Christ himself, after calling himself the Son of Man asked his disciples whom do they believe him to be, and Saint Peter answers that he is the Son of the living God: "Jesus says to them, but whom do you say that I am? Simon Peter answered and said: You are Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answering, said to him: Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona, because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew, 16:15-17).

Then Jesus himself, at the very time that he calls himself man, approves of Peter's answer, who calls him the Son of God, and says that this answer was revealed to him by his eternal Father. Besides, we read in Saint Matthew (3:17), Saint Luke (9:13), and Saint Mark (1:11), that Christ, while he was actually receiving Baptism as man from Saint John, was called by God his beloved Son: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Saint Peter tells us that in Mount Thabor the Eternal Father spoke the same words: "For, he received from God the Father, honour and glory; this voice coming down to him from the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I have pleased myself, hear ye him" (2 Peter 1:17). Christ, as man, is called the only begotten Son of the Eternal Father, by Saint John: "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (John, 1:18). As man alone, he is called God's own Son: "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). After so many proofs from the Holy Scriptures, who will be rash enough to deny that the man Christ is truly God?

6. The Divinity of Jesus Christ is proved from all these passages of the Scriptures, in which that which can only be attributed to God is attributed to the Person of Christ-Man, and from thence, we conclude that this Person, in which the two Natures subsist, is true God. Jesus, speaking of himself, says: "I and the Father are one" (John, 10:30); and in the same place, he says: "The Father is in me, and I in the Father" (verse 38). In another passage, we read that Saint Philip, one day speaking with Jesus Christ, said: "Lord, show us the Father," and our Lord answered: 'So long a time have I been

with you, and have you all not known me? Philip, he that sees me sees the Father also. Believe you all not that I am in the Father and the Father in me'?" (John, 14:8-11). By these words, Christ showed he was the same God as the Father. Christ himself said to the Jews that he was eternal: "Amen, amen, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am" (John, 8:58); and he says, also, that he works the same as the Father: "My Father works until now, and I work for what things whatsoever he does, these the Son also does in like manner" (John, 5:17). He also says: "All things whatsoever the Father has are mine" (John, 16:15). Now, if Christ was not true God all these sayings would be blasphemous, attributing to himself what belongs to God alone.

7. The Divinity of Christ-Man is proved from those other passages of the Scriptures, in which it is said that the Word, or the Son of God, became incarnate: "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John, 1:14); "For God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son" (John, 3:16); "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for all of us" (Romans 8:32). Now, if the Person of the Word was not hypostatically united that is, in one Person with the humanity of Christ it could not be said that the Word was incarnate, and was sent by the Father to redeem the world, because if this personal union did not exist between the Word and the humanity of Christ, there would be only a moral union or habitation, or affection, or Grace, or gifts, or operation, and in this sense we might say that the Father and the Holy Ghost became incarnate also, for all these sorts of unions are not peculiar to the Person of the Word alone, but to the Father and the Holy Ghost, likewise, for God is united in this manner with the Angels and Saints. God has frequently sent Angels as his ambassadors; but, as Saint Paul says, our Lord has never taken the nature of angels: "For no where does he take hold of the angels, but of the seed of Abraham he takes hold" (Hebrews 2:16).

Thus, if Nestorius means to assert that unions of this sort are sufficient to enable us to say that the Word was incarnate, we should also say that the Father was incarnate, for the Father, by his Graces and his heavenly gifts, was united with, and morally dwelt in, Jesus Christ, according to what our Lord himself says: "The Father is in me . . . the Father who abides and remains in me" (see John, 14:10). We should also admit that the Holy Ghost became incarnate, for Isaiah, speaking of the Messiah, says: "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding" (Isaiah, 11:2). And in Saint Luke, it is said, that "Jesus was full of the Holy Ghost" (Luke, 4:1). In fine, according to this explanation, every Saint or holy person who loves God could be called the Incarnate Word, for our Saviour says: "If any one love me my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (John, 14:23). Thus Nestorius should admit, either that the Word is not incarnate, or that the Father and the Holy Ghost are incarnate. This was the unanswerable argument of Saint Cyril.

8. I might here add all those texts of Scripture in which Christ is spoken of as only one Person subsisting in two Natures, as in Saint Paul: "One Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things," (see 1 Corinth 8:6 for the full passage), and several other texts of like import. If Nestorius insisted that there were two Persons in Christ, he makes out not one, but two Lords, one, the Person of the Word which dwells in Christ, and the other the human Person. I will not detain the reader, however, by quoting more Scriptural authorities, for every proof of the Incarnation upsets the whole structure of Nestorianism.

{We have omitted the abundant footnotes which Saint Alphonsus supplied when quoting the Fathers of the Church, in order to allow Alphonsus' argument to flow smoothly. Those readers who would like to consult them, are urged to read the original work in an English translation, such as at:

<http://www.freewebs.com/wallmell/LiguoriHistoryHeresies.pdf>

This extract is from pages 257 to 259 and 252 to 255.}
