

also that He has exalted her above all Seraphim. The angels can only qualify as servants of the Son of God, the creatures and workmanship of his hands; but the holy Virgin is not only the servant and the creature but also the Mother of this great and living God." (cited in Thurian, page 89)

Max Thurian concludes:

"The Lutheran and Reformed traditions which have retained the credal beliefs in Christ, true God and true Man, born 'of the Virgin Mary, blessed mother of God, humble handmaid of the Lord, our example of faith, obedience and saintliness' have not

believed that the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (though admitted in a certain sense by Luther) or the 'corporeal Assumption' of Mary (though admitted by the Reformer, Bullinger) must be held in the same fashion....

"[On the biblical material:] There is even a danger in insisting on a state of sinfulness for Mary, because sanctity then is in danger of appearing as a kind of contradiction of true humanity, and belief in Christ's humanity is altogether compromised since there can be no doubt that He did not know sin in Himself....As far as [Mary] is concerned, according to the Gospel, she is the expression of grace in its fullness and of God's infallible and predestined choice which causes His earthly mother to become the symbol of the Church's motherhood. There is nothing further in regard to Mary with which revelation is in the least

concerned; we can assert nothing other than this, for this is the most as well as the least that we can state to those who on the one hand would wish to speak of Mary as if she were sinful or on the other as separated from our condition as human creatures. We do not see how either the one or the other can be legitimately proved from the Gospel. Mary, full of grace, Daughter of Zion, the Mother of God Incarnate, the symbol of Mother Church is holy because in her the Gospel sees the living sign of a unique and predestined choice of the Lord, the response of faith from a perfectly human creature, but one who was also totally obedient." (*Mary, Mother of All Christians*, page 204 [endnote], and page 24, 25, from the chapter "Full of Grace")

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Protestant Reformers and the Immaculate Conception



Max Thurian (1921-1996) was a Reformed/Calvinist theologian and author, and the subprior of the Taizé community, an Ecumenical monastic community in France. During the Second Vatican Council, he was invited by Pope Paul VI to participate in the liturgical reforms of the Catholic Church. On May 12, 1988, Thurian became a Roman Catholic and was ordained a priest.

His book, *Mary: Mother of All Christians* (Herder, 1963) was written as an ecumenical Marian study, primarily a biblical exegesis of the NT passages, and OT types on Mary with chapter titles such as "Daughter of Zion," "Full of Grace," "Poor Virgin," "Dwelling of God," "Handmaid in the Faith," "Mother of the Lord," etc.

The quotes from the Protestant Reformers come from this book. Thurian's sources are listed as Tappolet's *Das Marianlob der Reformatoren* (1962), and R. Stadler's "The Holy Virgin in the Reformers" in *Choisir* (13 May 1962), pages 17-20; along with Martin Luther's *Works* (Weimar edition); Huldrych Zwingli's *Collected Works* (Berlin); etc.

"In regard to the Marian doctrine of the Reformers, we have already seen how unanimous they are in all that concerns Mary's holiness and perpetual virginity. Whatever the theological position which we may hold today, in regard to the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary it is right to know, perhaps to our great surprise, that these two Catholic dogmas were accepted by certain Reformers, not of course in their present form but certainly in the form that was current in their day." (Max Thurian, *Mary: Mother of All Christians*, page 197)

Martin Luther, the German founder of the Lutherans, certainly believed in the sinlessness of the Virgin Mary, and some argue he accepted the Immaculate Conception as well:

"...above all it is necessary for us to see what original sin is in order to be able to understand how the holy Virgin Mary was released from it...as to the conception of the Virgin Mary whose body was procreated in the fashion of other children, until the soul was infused, it was not necessary that she should be conceived as was Christ; for she

was able to be brought forth under the law of original sin, up to the time when her soul was bestowed. But, in that which concerns the other conception [the *passive* conception], that is to say the infusing of her soul, one believes with devotion and holiness that she was brought forth without original sin, in such a way that at the moment of her soul being infused she was also similarly purified from original sin, and at the first instant in which she began to live she was without sin, adorned with the gifts of God." (Sermon on the Day of the Conception of Mary, Mother of God, 1527; cited in Thurian, page 197)

Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss Protestant Reformer, does not see (unlike some Calvinist arguments) in the assertion of Mary's perfect sanctity any violation of Christ's humanity:

"He who was about to remove our sins but not to make all men holy, must be himself holy. Hence God sanctified his mother: for it was fitting that such a holy Son should have a likewise holy mother...."; "I have never thought, still less taught, or declared publicly, anything concerning the subject of the ever Virgin Mary, Mother of our salvation, which could be considered dishonorable, impious, unworthy, or evil...I hope this is sufficient to have made plain to pious and simple Christians my clear conviction on the matter of the Mother of God: 'I believe with all my heart according to the word of holy gospel that this pure virgin bore for us the Son of God and that she remained, in the birth and after it, a pure

and unsullied virgin, for eternity." (*Annotationes in Evangelium Lucae*, and sermon on "Mary, ever virgin, Mother of God" in 1524, cited in Thurian, page 23, 76)

Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), "*who represents the second generation of the Reformation and a kind of stabilization of Reformed doctrine*," and who was Cranmer's brother-in-law, and Zwingli's successor said:

"What pre-eminence in the eyes of God the Virgin Mary had on account of her piety, her faith, her purity, her saintliness and all her virtues, so that she can hardly be compared with any of the other saints, but should by rights be rather elevated above all of them..."; "...And if she who was wholly pure from her birth did not disdain to be purified, that is to say to receive the blessing of purification, is this not all the more reason why those who fall under the yoke of the law by reason of their real impurity should observe the same?"; "...we believe, that the pure and immaculate embodiment of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, that is to say her saintly body, was carried up into heaven by the angels..." (cited in Thurian, page 89, 197, 198)

French Reformed pastor **Charles Drelincourt** (1595-1669), "*who well represents the Reformed tradition of the 17th century*":

"We do not simply believe that God has favoured the holy and blessed Virgin more than all the Patriarchs and the Prophets, but