

THE ANGLICAN OUTLOOK ON THE VIRGIN MARY

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Although progress toward full Catholic and Anglican unity has been impeded by tensions caused by the ordination of an openly gay Anglican bishop, the Anglican blessing of some same-sex unions, and the acceptance of women bishops in some Anglican provinces, there is an enthusiastic meeting of the minds regarding the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in salvation history. While the dialog is strained on some considerations, it is rich in reaching a Marian consensus. Yet, as some Traditional Anglicans seek reunion with Rome, significant progress toward full communion is evident

The Anglican perspective on Mary -- and also that of the Lutherans, Presbyterians, and some other Protestant Churches -- has been consistently drawing closer to that of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. This is especially evident in the liturgical and devotional life of these Churches.

A brief, historical overview of Mary's place in Anglican practice clearly attests to this. In the 16th century Reformation, England, previously known as "Our Lady's Dowry," experienced a gradual elimination of devotion to Mary in opposition to Catholicism until almost nothing was left. The few remaining vestiges later enabled a rebirth of interest in Mary when an improved theological climate prevailed.

The movement of the "Caroline Divines" in 17th century England saw a return to many Catholic values. This movement exerted a definite influence, but was not able to make significant changes in the liturgical prayers.

Came the 19th century and the Oxford Movement expressed the desire to enrich the devotional and liturgical life of Anglicanism. Gradually this gave rise to the demand for a complete reform and revision of liturgical texts in the 20th century in the various Anglican Churches, especially in the Church of England. For example, the observance of August 15 was authorized as the principal feast of Our Lady in most Anglican Churches, but the title of the Assumption is avoided.

Several influences have contributed in modern times to this revival and advance. Certainly the change in ecumenical climate, especially since the Second Vatican Council, has been a major factor. In the forefront has been the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary founded in England in 1967, and its counterpart in the United States. The restoration of the ancient and revered sanctuary of Our Lady of Walsingham has played no little role. This shrine is a frequented place of pilgrimage for Anglicans, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics. The revival of sacred art and music to bring Mary to the eyes and ears of Anglican worshippers has also been effective. Even the feminist movement has led to an increase of interest in the figure of Mary in circles not touched by High Church renewal.

The coast is clear in this area of reunion. The Blessed Virgin Mary is most definitely a bridge to reunion among these Churches.

Our goal and prayer: To the greater glory of God and the Virgin Mother of God.