

PREFACE

The simple sound of the name 'Mary' opens up very different scenarios in people's hearts and minds. For some Christians, she is what the New Testament says she is: a young Jewish woman, chosen by God to supernaturally conceive and give birth to Jesus, thus being part of the way in which the Son of God became a man. This biblical portrayal indicates that she was also a member of the first community of men and women who followed him, though not without doubts and setbacks. She is soberly respected, yet not occupying centre stage in their Christian experience. For others, Mary deeply shapes their whole spirituality and entire life. They pray to her and venerate her person. She is surrounded by a vast array of 'Marian' devotions, such as rosaries, processions, and pilgrimages. The titles conferred on her (e.g. Heavenly Queen, Mediatrix, Advocate) resemble those ascribed to her son, Jesus Christ. She looks like an altogether different person to how the previous group perceived her.

Phonetically, the name 'Mary' is the same. Historically, she is the same first century Jewish woman. Theologically though, there is a chasm between these two pictures of Mary, almost as if they referred to two different people. Why is there such a difference? How can we account for the difference historically, theologically, and spiritually? These are the opening questions that this book will tackle in presenting its basic argument. It will then embark on a whirlwind-type journey, from the biblical portrait of Mary to the idealized form she was transformed into by sectors of the Christian Church over the centuries. This will illustrate the reasons and 'logic' that undergirded the Mariological developments through which the Mary of the Bible was transformed into the Mary of the Church. Attention will then be given to various aspects of Marian devotions and practices, in terms of their impact on Roman Catholic spirituality as a whole, and the specific ways in which they have influenced recent Popes, especially Pope Francis who is a strong Marian devotee. In wrapping up, we will ask, where do we go from here? What theological issues are at stake in the inflated Mariology? How can we appreciate and honour the memory and example of Mary in more biblical ways?

This book was mainly researched and written in the library and office of newly-acquired premises for the Istituto di Cultura Evangelica e Documentazione in



Although this book will focus mainly on Roman Catholic Mariology, Eastern Orthodox traditions and churches also have a deeply entrenched and highly sophisticated Mariology.

central Rome. Although this evangelical study centre in the heart of the Eternal City has yet to reach its full potential, it has already served what I hope will prove a worthy cause. May God grant that more valuable and useful pieces of research will be written, from this place, to promote gospel truth around the world, especially regarding evangelical discernment towards Roman Catholicism. To all those who have contributed to making the dream of a study centre dedicated to Protestant scholarship in Rome come true, I extend sincere and deep gratitude. In preparing this book for publishing, my friend, Jason Davis, was extremely helpful in reading the manuscript and suggesting improvements.

I dedicate this book to the memory of Kyra Karr (1984–2015). Kyra was taken in a tragic car accident while her family was spared. (You can read about her story and legacy at kyrakarrfoundation.com.) I do not know why God allowed the death of this young and precious sister in the Lord, faithful wife of my dear friend, Reid, and caring mother of three girls. Yet I thank God for showing us a glimpse of what it means to be absorbed in Christ, in and through Kyra. She was so near to Christ that his aroma transpired through her. Nobody knows what Mary looked like, yet I like to think that Kyra embodied what Mary would have looked like. Kyra invested the gentle, meek, and gracious person she was, and the gifts God had given her, among us. Certainly, echoing Mary, she would have said, 'I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38).