

Q. Are you a Nestorian? By saying that Mary is not the mother of God, are you not guilty of separating the two natures of Jesus?

A. The above questions are the essence of an email I recently received from a Roman Catholic. Referring to my article, "Was Mary the Mother of God?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/motherofgod.htm>), this man said, among many other things, "I smell the stench of Nestorianism!" and "I hope you will recant of the heresy of denying that Mary truly is the Mother of our Lord, the Mother of God." Because the remainder of his email is relatively level-headed and well-argued, and because his position represents the general position of the Catholic Church, I have decided to reproduce below my answer to him.

Before I answer the specific charges you have made, I want to refer to what you say toward the end of your email. You say that you hope I "will recant of the heresy of denying that Mary truly is the Mother of our Lord, the Mother of God." First, you include in your charge that I deny that Mary is the mother of our Lord. I never said this. Elizabeth called Mary "mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43). But "Lord" is merely the English rendering of the Greek word *kurios*. *Kurios*, though it is sometimes used of God, is by no means the equivalent of God. This word is most often used merely as a term of respect, and it can also be translated sir or master. All that we can conclude from Luke 1:43 is that Elizabeth, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, understood that Mary was the mother of someone to whom she owed respect. We might assume further and say that Elizabeth possibly understood that Mary was the mother of the Messiah, the anointed of God. I have no problem with calling Mary the mother of the Messiah. But you are right when you say that I deny that Mary is the mother of God.

The charge of heresy is a serious one, but I want to point out that I do not accept the Catholic Church's definition of heresy. By the Catholic Church's definition, I am a heretic many times over (for example, the Catholic Church would consider me a heretic for not believing in transubstantiation, for rejecting that there are seven sacraments, for rejecting the authority and infallibility of the pope, and so forth), so why should I care about this particular charge? My standard is not the Catholic Church or the pope or, for that matter, the Protestant Reformers. My standard is the Bible. If you would like to read more about what I believe in this regard, I suggest these two articles: <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/endofreformation.htm> and <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/ownpopeQA.htm>.

In my article, "Was Mary the Mother of God?" I said,

Catholics reading this might charge me with separating the two natures of Christ. But I have not separated the two natures of Christ. In Jesus Christ, the God nature and the human nature are united in the one Person, Jesus Christ. All I have done is distinguish His parents as the origins of His natures. God is the origin of His God nature. Mary is the origin of His human nature. Therefore,

God is the Father of Jesus Christ's God nature, and Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ's human nature. In Jesus Christ, these natures are united, so that God is His Father and Mary is His mother. But Mary is not the mother of God.

By saying, "God is the origin of His God nature, and Mary is the mother of Jesus Christ's human nature," I was merely saying, in ordinary language and in the context of discussing how it is that Jesus has two natures, that Jesus is divine because He is God and that Mary is the origin of His human nature. I specifically said that in Jesus these natures are united. Nevertheless, after quoting this, you accused me of Nestorianism.

Nestorianism not only includes the idea that Mary should not be considered *Theotokos* (Greek for "God-bearing") or Mother of God. It also includes the idea of separating the two natures of Christ. As I explained above, I don't really care if I am called a heretic by Catholic standards. But it so happens that I am not Nestorian, as I do not believe in separating the two natures of Christ. Interestingly, as you mentioned, even Nestorius, for whom Nestorianism is named, may not have been Nestorian. In the *Book of Heraclides*, he clearly affirmed of Christ that "the same one is twofold." This contradicts the charges that were brought against him of separating the two natures of Christ. Many modern scholars now think that Nestorius may have been falsely charged by those who were too quick to label him a heretic.

Nestorius did not want to call Mary *Theotokos* because of the way he thought of the word *tokos* that forms the second part of the compound *Theotokos*. He considered that it implied that the creature gave birth to the uncreatable. He is reported to have said, "the Word came forth, but was not born of her," and, "I do not say God is two or three months old." Concerning these points, I agree with Nestorius. While it is true that Mary carried Jesus, the God-man, in her womb and that He came forth from her womb, to say that Mary gave birth to God is hopelessly confusing. It sounds as if, through Mary, God had a beginning or was created. *Theotokos* is not found in the Bible, and I assert that it is also not implied in the Bible. To claim that Mary is *Theotokos* is bad theology. The term Mother of God is also unscriptural and just as bad theologically, if not worse.

It is true that the Bible calls Mary the mother of Jesus. But it never calls her the mother of God. You say that Mary is the mother of God "in the sense that she carried in her womb a divine person—Jesus Christ, God 'in the flesh' (2 John 7, cf. John 1:14)—and in the sense that she contributed the genetic matter to the human form God took in Jesus Christ." But to call a woman a mother merely because she carried someone in her womb is an esoteric definition of mother that does not fit reality. It is now possible for science to implant the fertilized egg of a panda into the womb of a cat. Does this make the cat the mother of the panda? No. Of course, Jesus Christ was a special, one-time case.

Mary was the biological mother of Jesus' humanity. But she was not the mother of Jesus' divinity—His being God. This is because she neither predates God nor is she the source of Jesus' divinity. You virtually admit to this yourself when you say, "Although Mary is the Mother of God, she is not his mother in the sense that she is older than God or the source of her Son's divinity, for she is neither." Your insistence that, the above notwithstanding, Mary is the mother of God is based on what you say in your next sentence: "Rather, we say that she is the Mother of God in the sense that she carried in her womb a divine person—Jesus Christ, God 'in the flesh' (2 John 7, cf. John 1:14)—and in the sense that she contributed the genetic matter to the human form God took in Jesus Christ." Thus, it is apparent that your insistence on Mary being the mother of God is based solely on your and the Catholic Church's idiosyncratic and skewed definition of a mother as someone who merely carries someone in the womb. But the Bible does not use this definition, and the Bible never calls Mary the mother of God. The Bible calls Mary the mother of Jesus, but Jesus was both God and man. In Jesus, God and man are united. Nevertheless, the inspired writers of Scripture referred to Jesus as either the Son of God or the Son of man as best suited the context. Jesus frequently referred to Himself as the Son of man

and affirmed that He was the Son of God. They were not afraid of Catholic theologians accusing them of dividing Jesus' natures because they did not always say "Son of God and Son of man" in one breath. So, while "Jesus" could refer to the Son of God, it could also refer to the Son of Man, and it was the Son of man that Mary was the mother of.

Someone reading what we have said might say that our difference is only a matter of semantics centering on the definition of a mother. I agree that it is semantics, but the semantics of the Catholic Church support the revering of the merely human Mary. The terms *Theotokos*, Mother of God, and Queen of Heaven; the doctrines of the immaculate conception of Mary, her perpetual virginity, and her bodily assumption to heaven; the Marian feasts; the supposed Marian apparitions; and so forth, all promote the idolatry known as Mariolatry.

Using the Bible as our standard, it is not those who refuse to call Mary *Theotokos* or Mother of God who are the heretics. It is those who do apply these terms to her who are the heretics.

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