



Mary, Bearer of Life By Christopher Cocksworth

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Reviewing this book in Advent was for me a reminder that it is chiefly or perhaps only, at this time in the church's year that, as a rather traditional Anglican, I think a lot about Mary, the Mother of Jesus. My mainstream Anglican tradition makes me usually a bit nervous of the regular and distinct devotion to Mary found in some other church denominations and traditions, or in the Orthodox Church.

This book, written by Christopher Cocksworth when he was, until recently, Bishop of Coventry and moreover, considering the subject, a theologian from an Evangelical background, is a refreshing and stimulating corrective to any such caution.

Cocksworth opens up a rich and rewarding understanding of Mary in ways that all Christians may appreciate, from whatever tradition. This includes an eloquent analysis and reflection on the significant role and influence of Mary on the life and ministry of Jesus. This illuminates and gives a fresh perspective on much activity and events in the Bible that I had not fully appreciated before.

He also shows Mary's significance for Christian faith and discipleship generally and how Mary can show and encourage us in, *how* to be a disciple of Jesus. As he points out in answer to the question of what Mary can do for us that Christ cannot do, he comments: "Jesus could not bring himself to human birth without her. Mary shows us *how* to be a disciple of her son — Jesus can *teach* us how to be disciples but he cannot be a disciple of himself. Mary can and has." (my italics)

Drawing on a very wide range of material including scripture, church history and traditions, world cultures, other faiths and religions, he shows how a deeper understanding and appreciation of Mary can help us come to a deeper relationship with Christ through her.

The book reflects on Mary under five chapter headings: Chosen, Called, Redeemed, Fulfilled, and Loved. The first four chapters are appended by case studies on contemporary ethical issues; namely abortion, ethics for education, nuclear weapons and the environment. These suggest ways in which an enhanced appreciation of Mary can illuminate each issue. I found these interesting but not essential. For me at least, the main content of the book alone was fully rich enough.

Cocksworth's background research is wide ranging but the writing is not heavily academic at all. The book is as much a personal reflection which, along with the author's sensitive spiritual and pastoral approach, makes it an accessible and rewarding read.

Peter Wright (Reader)