

## What Can Maria Teach Protestants?

Sophie Bloemert<sup>1</sup>

*Comment by Editor:* The Gospel of Luke provides a “Maria nook.” For Roman Catholics that constitutes a daily feast of recognition, but for Protestants at most something to be considered during Advent. The question of Pastor Sophie Bloemert is what Maria can teach us Protestants.

At crucial moments in Biblical history women appear as leaders and when they do, they never come with an every-day type of message. When the disciples hear from women that Jesus’ grave is empty, they shrug their shoulders and say, “Ah, just women’s talk! Let’s go see for ourselves.” At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke a little “Maria nook” has been established. According to Luke, Maria has a highly revolutionary message: The world will be turned upside down! The leaders, the managers, the kings and presidents, they will fall from their pedestals and will have to surrender their all, while the people who have next to nothing will be showered with the good things of this earth. Maria, the mother-to-be of Jesus, has a song about this revolution. In that song she shows that mother and child are similar to each other and that she is conscious of her position. “I am a part of God’s plan for this world, His plan to reverse the order of things. All generations will consider me blessed because of the great things that God has done for me.” In Catholic monasteries this ode of praise to Mary is still sung daily.

### Candles Burn

Many Catholics, especially women, are accustomed to lighting a candle for Mary. I find that a beautiful custom; it is an expression of devotion. Catholics feel that Mary stands close to the people as well as to Jesus. She is a fellow victim as well as an ally. This does not turn her into a mediator between God and people, but she does have an important function. Just think of the wedding at Cana. When things don’t go the way they should according to Maria, she approaches Jesus. And she urges the workers, “Do whatever Jesus tells you, no matter how absurd it

---

<sup>1</sup>*Sophie*, 4/2013, p. 15. Transl. Jan H. Boer. Bloemert is a pastor in the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands. She works in the predominantly Catholic south of the Netherlands, an environment that is obviously challenging her Protestant verities.

may seem!" She takes her maternal role seriously and in that role she is not without significance.

Sometimes Roman Catholics say to me, "You guys have only the Word! You use only your ears, while we switch on all our senses. We *feel* the host when it is laid on our tongue; we *taste* the wine, we *smell* the incense; we *see* the light in the dark." That's indeed how it is. As Protestants we are primarily rational thinkers. We are inquisitive and eager to learn. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we do so thoughtfully as we express each word, while our Catholic brothers and sisters have long ago said their "amen." I must admit that I sometimes regret that I can interest so few Catholics in joining us in our Bible studies. On the other hand, it is fascinating to observe their strengths. In the Catholic Church education has been given a strong liturgical formation. Indeed, they call upon all our senses.

Words are rather restrictive. A prayer without words can be very effective. The lighting of a candle can strengthen the intention to pray: "I am thinking about you in your difficult situation; I am now leaving the church, but that flame continues to burn, no matter how dark it is." By lighting a candle you perform a deed. That deed is associated with a specific place, with a chapel or a church. For example, you go to the city for shopping, but once in the city, you first spend a few moments in church. Just five minutes. And then you look at Mary, who says, "Don't forget Jesus."

### **Experiential Theology?**

As Protestants we say, "This is nothing but experiential theology," and then we have as it were already eaten and drunk. Karl Barth said at one time, "Experience is nothing! It comes to us from above!" This is what I find so exciting about an ecumenical stance. It can bring your irrefutable convictions near the point of wobbling. And all that by a simple candle in the Maria nook. We make progress together. That is one of my certainties.