

Ann Loades, *Grace Is Not Faceless: Reflections on Mary* (ed. Stephen Burns; London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2021), pp. 130. ISBN 978-0-232-53420-7.
doi:[10.1017/S1740355321000188](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1740355321000188)

Ann Loades's range and significance as a theologian need no introduction, and many will connect her immediately with feminist theology and sacramental theology, which she has interpreted with immense originality in conversation with spirituality and the arts. Her writings on Mary may be less familiar. As Stephen Burns explains in his illuminating introduction to this collection, the period from 1990 to 2009 saw the appearance of several substantial essays for a variety of audiences. These, together with a previously unpublished assessment entitled 'Mary for Now', two sermons, and an enchanting commentary to accompany a special issue of Royal Mail Christmas stamps, are brought together in *Grace Is Not Faceless*.

The title borrows a phrase coined by the Dominican, Cornelius Ernst. Professor Loades notes that the sources which inform the latter part of Chapter 1 ('The Virgin Mary and the Feminist Quest') 'would edge us towards a meaning for that phrase rather more incarnated in women's lives than theology has so far been prepared to concede' (p. 34). This is a clue to the richness and the trenchancy of the book's approach. Not only does it display the author's expert knowledge of Marian doctrine and familiarity with discussions in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox communions, it also draws on the work of women theologians who write from within their traditions, and those who have renounced ecclesial belonging. It takes seriously Mary's place in the scriptural record, reading this with more care than it sometimes receives. It also examines historical and archaeological contributions to placing Mary in context as a real woman, living out the demands of others like her in a community where women's lives involved hard work.

Chapters addressing ecumenical concerns and drawing on ARCIC and papal statements welcome the shift away from the guilt imputed to all women, who can never aspire to Mary's perfection, and the recognition of women's changing role in the world of work. This affords an opportunity to introduce Eve, and following Tina Beattie, Mary is presented as her advocate, not her antidote. Yet some stereotypes are more intractable. Against the conventional depiction of Mary as always a recipient, passive, obedient, Professor Loades proposes a courageous, independent Mary, capable of making choices. Most often, it has been the poets who have recognized this Mary, a point made particularly well in a chapter on 'The Nativity in Recent Poetry' (p. 421). In this connection, attention to Joseph as the one who stands by Mary as she makes her decision and supports the family they raise is welcome and overdue.

The Feasts of Mary are considered in Chapter 3, 'Regarding Mary and the Trinity: The Anglican Position'. Not only does Professor Loades encourage new attention to the ancient marking of the Assumption and the implications of the glorification of human flesh for all humanity, she also urges proper recognition of Mary in the narrative of Pentecost. Orthodox iconography has always depicted Mary in the midst of the disciples as the tongues of flame descend. She is the only human being twice graced by the Spirit and there is a strong case for seeing her in close connection with the Trinity.

The newest addition to the discussion, 'Mary: For Now', considers what the lives of particular women, and some recent departures in scholarship, can contribute. This brings together two writers, Evelyn Underhill and Dorothy L. Sayers, who exemplify between them the recovery of Marian devotion for Anglicans, economic independence, single motherhood and imaginative treatment of Mary as dramatic subject. Alongside them, we find Margaret Barker's explorations of 'The Great Lady' in the Temple tradition and its vestiges in Orthodox worship, and Karen O'Donnell's writings on trauma theology brought to bear on the rupture of the body which the Annunciation and Incarnation entail. These vignettes propose a continuing agenda, which promises much for the Churches, the academy, and the lives of all human beings.

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