1979

Text of an Ecumenical Declaration issued at the International Mariological Congress, Saragossa, October 3-9, 1979

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INTERNATIONAL MARIOLOGICAL CONGRESS,
ZARAGOZA, OCTOBER 3-9, 1979,
ECUMENICAL ENCOUNTER

AN ECUMENICAL DECLARATION*

As in the course of former Mariological Congresses, so in this 8th International Mariological Congress held at Zaragoza from the 3rd to the 9th of October, a group of Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed theologians have met with their Catholic brethren. The theme of the Congress, devotion to Mary during the 16th century, gave the opportunity to discuss fundamental questions relating to the place of the Blessed Virgin in doctrine and prayer. In this way they have discovered many common elements in their approach to the Mother of God, more indeed than they could have expected. They feel able to formulate these common convictions in the following way:

1. We recognize together that all Christian praise is PRAISE of God and of Christ. If we praise the saints, and in particular if we praise Mary as the Mother of God, our praise is essentially to the glory of God, who "in glorifying the saints, crowns his own gifts" (Latin preface of the saints). This praise is expressed in the liturgy, in hymns and in the life of the faithful. In relation to Mary, it corresponds to the words of the Magnificat: "from henceforth all generations will call me blessed." The practice of the praise of the Mother of God has become an urgent question for all Christians.

2. We recognize the importance of IMITATION, as an element which is common to the traditions of our different Churches concerning Mary. As we

* The Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis (Rome) organized the 8th International Mariological Congress and the 15th International Marian Congress in Saragossa, Spain, October 3-12, 1979. During the Mariological Congress (October 3-9, 1979), the President of the Academia, Very Rev. Paul Melada, O.F.M., formed an Ecumenical Commission and asked that it compose a declaration stating our common faith in the mystery of Mary. After several days of frank theological exchanges and clarifications, we came to the text which is presented here in English. The official declaration will appear later (in various translations) in the Acta of the Congress of Saragossa.
find, in particular in the Magnificat, Mary is seen as the humble and most holy servant of the will of God. This invitation involves in a special way the Gospel understanding of poverty before God. The spiritual attitude of Mary was her total response to the Word of God, and thus she became the temple of the Holy Spirit who accomplished in her the Incarnation of the Son of God. (Luke 1, 35-38).

3. This VENERATION of the Mother of God, which is lived in our Churches in the different ways already mentioned is never the adoration which is due to God alone. The distinction made by the Second Council of Nicaea, between the adoration (or worship) of God and the veneration of the saints (proskunesis - latreutike; proskunesis - timetikê) remains vital for all of us.

4. The problem of the INVOCATION and INTERCESSION of Mary was examined afresh in this Congress. We have considered it against the background of the communion of saints. As a Christian can and should pray for others, we believe that the saints who have already entered into the fulness which is in Christ, amongst whom Mary holds the first place, can and do pray for us sinners who are still suffering and struggling on earth. The one and unique mediation of Christ is in nothing affected by this. The meaning of the direct invocation of the saints who are alive in God, an invocation which is not practised in all the Churches, remains to be elucidated.

5. Apart from the theological problems, we understand the psychological difficulties—born of different spiritual heritages as well as of linguistic and cultural differences—which many Christians experience over these Marian questions, and in particular over the use of the word CULT (worship or devotion) in relation to created persons. This phenomenon is not surprising. Indeed, the word cult (in its Latin usage), has a rather complex history. Paradoxically, Saint Augustine had difficulty in using it in relation to God, since it seemed to him to be too profane (or secular). At the point where we are at present, we believe that the reality is more important than the words which we use. This is why we have preferred to speak of the facts in which our worshipping attitude reveals itself.

6. As Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans and Reformed, we were happy to find so many points of convergence, even though there may be members of our Churches who are not yet ready to accept them. Difficulties which are primarily of an affective nature and which have divided our Churches in the past ought not finally to separate us in our efforts towards
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the unity of Christians. This does not resolve all the remaining theological questions, but we wish to continue the dialogue and we have confidence in the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Here at Zaragoza we have been supported by the prayers of many believers. We wish that our ecumenical search will lead towards a common approach to the Mother of the Lord in the communion of the saints.

It is clear that those who sign here, members of the Ecumenical Commission of the Congress, do so on their own behalf, they have however worked with the constant concern to express the faith of their Churches.

They hope that this document can be a contribution to the ecumenical dialogue, and are happy to offer it to the 8th International Mariological Congress being held in Zaragoza.

Zaragoza, 9 octubre 1979.

Johannes Kalogirou, Orthodox  
Peter Meinhold, Lutheran  
A. M. Allchin, Anglican  
Henry Chavannes, Réformé  
Ulrich Wickert, Evangelisch  
John de Satgé, Anglican  
Wolfgang Borowski, Evangelisch  
John Milburn, Anglican  
Dimitrije Dimitrijević, Orthodox  
Max Thurian, Taizé

Candido Pozo, S. J.  
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Enrique Llamas Martínez, O.C.D.  
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Franz Courth  
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