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## Marian Studies--Ecumenism

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## MARIAN STUDIES—ECUMENISM

Frederick M. Jelly, O.P.\*

### Introductory Remarks

Originally I was to present this paper on the occasion of the 1999 annual national convention of the Mariological Society of America (MSA), held during May in Washington, D.C., to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary. But illness prevented my doing so. Consequently, the following considerations constitute the substance of the topic assigned to me, namely, an overview of what our society has contributed to Marian doctrine and devotion in the context of the quest for unity.

My reflections are based on the various papers and addresses recorded in *Marian Studies* (MS), the proceedings of our annual national conventions for the past half-century since 1950, when the MSA held its first convention in Washington, D.C. There are five sections in this presentation: 1) three presidential addresses (1962, 1978, 1997); 2) several papers dealing with our topic, appearing in the 1964, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1988, and 1990 issues of MS; 3) the surveys of recent mariology by Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., who, in each issue of MS since 1964 (with the exception of 1972), has brought to our attention the various publications (books, articles, etc.) about Mary, including ecumenical works; 4) the entire issue of MS (1997), devoted to Mary in ecumenical perspective; and, 5) the MS (1996) Proceedings which widens the parameters of the ecumenical movement to embrace the interreligious dialogue, by seeking unity through relating Marian spirituality with the great religions of the world.

### 1. Three Presidential Addresses

1. Rev. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J. (MS [1962]:5-12)—Fr. Burghardt's address, "The Mariologist as Ecumenist," was delivered while Vatican Council II was preparing to meet, a few years before it issued its Decree on Ecumenism (Nov. 21, 1964). And so it was indeed a most timely topic to prepare for the MSA's participation in the official role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ecumenical Movement that had already been launched by the Orthodox Churches as well as the Anglican and Protestant ecclesial communions earlier in the century, especially with the World Council of Churches. He pointed out the various levels on which efforts to promote unity and reunion were operating, namely, the pontifical, the episcopal, the theological, and the grass-roots

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levels. Of course, the mariologist, while certainly concerned with the pontifical, episcopal, and popular levels, makes his/her special contribution on the theological. By profession, the ecumenical efforts of the mariologist aim to restudy those doctrinal themes regarding Marian teaching which have proved divisive and to determine where we really differ from our separated brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as to clarify why such differences need be Church-dividing.

According to Fr. Burghardt, we must focus upon the problem of development or, more precisely, how Scripture has developed into dogmas and earlier dogma into later dogmas which have vexed Protestants, particularly the Roman Catholic development of Marian dogmas. He also emphasized the special challenge to the mariologist-as-ecumenist based upon the fact that, after the concept of the Church, the Catholic vision of Mary is the most neuralgic theological issue in the dialogue. We might add here that Fr. Burghardt also had the foresight to show that ecumenical dialogue about Mary leads to the *solas* of the Protestant Reformation, such as *sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone), which raises questions about the Catholic concepts of Tradition in relationship to Scripture, in public revelation, as well as the role of the Magisterium or the infallible teaching authority of the Church in proposing dogmas of our divine faith. The first ecumenical problem, therefore, that the mariologist must confront is a theory of development, i.e., to explain how a certain dogma is implicit in the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.

This first problem about a viable theory of dogmatic development gives rise to two others, namely, the nature and expression of divine revelation and whether or not all of divine revelation is contained in Sacred Scripture. In other words, can the self-manifestation of God be confined to propositions divorced from non-logical signs, such as the gestures of Christ or the person of Mary with all its relationships? And, finally, is our whole vision of Mary, along with our dogmas of faith, generally contained in the Old and New Testaments? If so, is it there in clear propositions or only implicitly? If not, is it in apostolic tradition and just what does that mean? This leads us to mariologists, Fr. Burghardt concludes, to the *de facto* development of Marian doctrine for which he considers us uncommonly competent, because our members in the MSA include exegetes, biblical theologians, patrologists, systematic theologians, and so forth. Previous conventions had concentrated on a particular prerogative of Mary regarding doctrinal development, and this spadework of tracing the stages from "Hail Mary, highly favored" to "Hail, holy Queen, our life, our sweetness, and our hope" is precisely where we mariologists could make our distinctive contribution to ecumenism, by explaining to other Christians how the Marian dogmas have authentically developed from God's word.

2. Rev. Frederick M. Jelly, O.P. (MS [1978]:12-25)—My presidential address, "Mary, the Mother of Unity," was given during the decade following Vatican II, when a variety of very encouraging ecumenical developments had transpired which included Marian doctrine and devotion. I chose the title "Mother of Unity" from Pope Paul VI, who had used it in his address on February 2, 1965, to a group of those who would take part in the Fourth International Mariological Congress to be held during March of that year in the city of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He must have been inspired to call her "Mother of Unity" by the Decree on Ecumenism that had been issued only a few months before (November 21, 1964). In retrospect, regardless of the difficulties still remaining, we can say that his hope would prove prophetic. The Mar-

iological Congress at Santo Domingo, March 18-22, 1965, had for its theme: "Mary in the New Testament," a most basic ecumenical issue. The three other international congresses held prior to my 1978 address were: 1967, in Lisbon; 1971, in Zagreb; and 1975, in Rome (during the Holy Year). Many members of the MSA took part in these congresses, each one of which was divided into theological considerations for about a week and the more devotional aspects of mariology for a few days. In addition to papers delivered by Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant participants, a number of us Roman Catholic mariologists were invited to engage these persons in ecumenical dialogue, particularly regarding the problems arising from the invocation, intercession, mediation (etc.) expressed in our devotion to Mary and the saints in heaven.

Another international agency in which several of us have been active is the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (ESBVM). Founded in England during 1967, to promote ecumenical devotion and the study at various levels of the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church, under Christ, it has provided frequent testimony to the truthfulness of Mary's title, "Mother of Unity." On the average of every other year or so, it has sponsored international conferences in England. The ESBVM has been instrumental in bringing closer together many English Christians, especially Anglicans, Methodists and Roman Catholics. During the mid-1970's, an American Branch of the ESBVM was organized, in which many of our members have contributed papers and some of us have been co-founders and officers. My address mentioned these ecumenical activities beyond the MSA, because our Society had both helped their efforts on behalf of unity in Christ through Mary and also itself had been significantly influenced by them in planning its annual convention programs (as will be evidenced in the other parts of this paper).

The theological foundation for Mary's title as "Mother of Unity" is the dogma of our faith defined at the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431), that she is the *Theotokos* or "Birth-Giver of God," really and truly (literally and not just metaphorically) the mother of God's own Son in his human nature, assumed at the instant of the Incarnation. Since motherhood is the relationship of a woman with the child conceived and brought forth by her that terminates in the person so begotten, Mary's unique relationship is to the Word-made-flesh from her virginal womb. In his apostolic exhortation issued on February 2, 1974, *Marialis Cultus* (MC), Pope Paul VI clearly singles out this dogma, which is even more Christological than mariological since it is a testimony to the mystery of the Incarnation, as the doctrinal basis of our hope for reunion with the Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant Reform Churches (MC, 32). Mary as *Theotokos* and the spiritual mother of us all in Christ is also taught by our American Bishops in the Pastoral Letter, *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*, issued on November 21, 1973, in the composition of which two of us in the MSA had a hand (*Behold*, 109). Marian dogmas must be understood and applied in the context of Vatican II's "hierarchy of truths," as taught in the Decree on Ecumenism (no. 11). They are revealed to us primarily to throw greater light on the truths about the Trinity, Incarnation and our Redemption by Christ alone, the sole Savior of the world.

My presidential address concluded with some prospects and proposals for our contributions to the future of Mary's place in the ecumenical dialogue. I called to the attention of our MSA members the contribution of the outstanding Anglican theologian, John Macquarrie, towards contemporary interpretation of the Immaculate Conception as a defined dogma that has developed in the Roman Catholic tradition (particularly in his book of 1975, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity*). His re-conceptualization

of sin as alienation and of original sin as corporate alienation proposed that through the redemptive activity of her Son's "active righteousness," he had bestowed upon Mary a perfect "receptive righteousness" or fullness of grace, rendering her capable of receiving God in the gift of the Incarnation. Recalling Fr. Burghardt's presidential address, this indeed helped open the way for us mariologists to enter the ecumenical dialogue about the development of this Marian dogma.

Finally my own address made several proposals among which were: 1) that we further the dialogue about the special relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary with the help of our Orthodox colleagues; 2) that we explore more deeply the relationship between Scripture and Tradition through a careful scholarly study of the "New Eve" image of Mary found in the early Fathers of the Church; 3) that we widen the horizons of Marian ecumenism to include what is authentic in the Women's Liberation Movement, in order to present Mary as a realistic model for the truly fulfilled Christian woman today; and, 4) that we relate Mary's exemplarity to all the ministries in her Son's redeemed-redeeming Body, the Church.

3. *Rev. George F. Kirwin, O.M.I. (MS [1997]:9-15)*—Fr. Kirwin's presidential address, "Conversion and Ecumenism," emphasized the pertinent parts of Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter on Ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint* ("That They May Be One"), which inspired the main theme of the MSA's 1997 national convention, with which the fourth section of this paper will deal. Fr. Kirwin pointed out that our Holy Father identified the underpinning for any truly ecumenical venture as conversion, a change of heart, which can take place only through fidelity to the gospel or to Jesus and his Holy Spirit.

He then appropriated and applied Bernard Lonergan's profound insights into the process of conversion, in order to reflect upon its basic role in ecumenical endeavors. In his *Method in Theology*, Lonergan speaks of intellectual, moral, and religious conversions. The first is not intended to terminate in truths as mere abstractions but in a judgment grasped as real, most especially in the realm of our divine faith, that seeks to attain not just words or creedal formulas but the reality of the triune God himself. Moral conversion embraces values and takes truth a step further into decision. On the spiritual level, it is rooted in humility, in wanting to be what one is, namely, dependent on God and in constant need of redemption. In ecumenical dialogue, one does not try to prove the other wrong, but seeks only truth in love—God's truth wrapped in mystery. This is the setting for religious conversion, when we are grasped by the God of mystery and experience the ultimate instance of self-transcendence.

The total process of conversion begins with the divine initiative, with God who speaks a definitive word in Jesus Christ. Our leap into mystery is not blind; it is the ultimate actualization of our human capacities, transformed by the eye of love that is faith. The ecumenical implications of such a rich notion of conversion are illustrated here and there in the remainder of this paper, particularly as we identify the problems in the dialogue.

## 2. Presentations on Mary and Ecumenism Appearing in *Marian Studies* over the Years

In the 1964 issue of *MS* there are two pertinent papers: "The Development of Marian Doctrine as an Ecumenical Problem: (pp. 27-47), by Bishop Austin B. Vaughan, and

"Our Lady's Coredemption as an Ecumenical Problem" (pp. 48-86), by Robert E. Hunt. Each one takes up Fr. Burghardt's challenge, given two years earlier in his presidential address. It is indeed well beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of such presentations in this section. Bishop Vaughan carefully concludes that development in depth in Marian doctrine would not necessarily widen the gap between us and other Christians, and even where new problems might be posed, they would serve to carry the discussion into deeper areas. On the other hand, however, developments in some directions and definitions might well widen the gap temporarily, by apparently manifesting an ecumenical insensitivity. By January 1964, Vatican II had already indicated its intention to avoid new definitions, wishing rather to apply the doctrines we already had in order to renew the Church in our contemporary world. As we reflect upon the Council's work some thirty-five years later, its teaching about Mary was wholeheartedly ecumenical and developmental.

Robert Hunt's paper on coredemption was also most timely, as we witness the debate during recent years about the dogmatic definability of Mary as Coredemptrix (as well as Mediatrix of all graces and Advocate). His presentation summarized the many questions that still require theological consideration before these titles could be defined as dogmas of our divine faith on the authority of the revealing word of God. Also, even if these titles do develop to such a determination in the judgment of the Church's Magisterium, there is still the question of whether or not it would be timely or opportune to do so and, here, Bishop Vaughan's criteria of prudence and faith in divine providence are applicable. It does seem that at present such a definition would be unecumenical.

In the 1975 issue of *MS*, two papers appear: "Ecumenical Problems in Mariology," by Fr. Bertrand de Margerie, S.J. (pp. 180-203), and "Mariology as an Ecumenical Problem," by Dr. Ross Mackenzie (pp. 204-220), who was then an ordained Presbyterian and a seminary professor of history. Fr. De Margerie proposed a series of questions, regarding prayer *to*, *with*, *of*, and even *for* Mary in the context of her heavenly intercession, that could contribute to the dialogue with other Christians about the mysteries that are involved. Dr. Mackenzie offered many reasons why Mary had been lost from Protestant consciousness, such as: 1) because she belonged to the "Catholic heritage," which has meant (for them) going contrary to Scripture truth; 2) Protestant biblicism which had lost sight of the mystical; 3) since Mary seemed quite minimal in the N.T., Marian doctrine and devotion was "catholicized" along with the primitive faith generally during the patristic period (against which Harnack had written); 4) the strongly individualistic conception of salvation in Protestantism had often gone beyond a Christocentric view of Mary to a Christomonism; and, 5) Protestantism has inculcated an androcentric and even aggressively masculine society, one solely connected with its repudiation of virginity and celibacy. At the same time Mackenzie challenged us Catholics to purge Marian devotion of bad habits that disfigured Mary and distorted her true relationship to Christ and all the members of his Body the Church or communion of saints to which she also belonged.

In *MS* (1976):17-40, appears my paper, "Marian Dogmas within Vatican II's 'Hierarchy of Truths,'" which was inspired to a great extent by the fact that Fr. Avery Dulles, S.J., had proposed that the Church lift the anathemas attached to the rejection of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. We were fortunate to have him present as the respondent to my paper. After explaining just how this teaching of Vatican II's

Decree on Ecumenism seemed to help the dialogue about these two Marian dogmas as they developed in the Catholic Tradition (by shedding further light upon the central mysteries of our faith regarding Redemption), I concluded that Fr. Dulles' proposal was quite acceptable as long as it would be made clear to the faithful that in no way was the essential teaching of these two Marian dogmas being removed or reduced to a theological note short of definition as matters of our faith. For it appeared to me that the conciliar teaching on the "hierarchy of truths" is ecumenically a "two-edged sword." On the one hand, it places the so-called "secondary" or "peripheral" dogmas of our faith in proper perspective (for the sake of our salvation achieved principally through a living faith in the Holy Trinity and Christ, our one redeemer); on the other hand, however, it also emphasizes the fact that the conceptual content of such secondary dogmas cannot be dismissed without inducing more serious errors.

In his paper "New Testament Roots to the Theotokos," Dr. Reginald H. Fuller, an Anglican N.T. scholar who collaborated on the ecumenical task force that produced *Mary in the New Testament* (published in 1978 by Paulist & Fortress presses), showed how the dogma of Mary as *Theotokos*, defined at Ephesus (431), developed primarily from the N.T. Conception and Pre-existence Christologies (*MS* [1978]:46-64). Indeed, it was a masterful presentation of how dogma can develop from the Bible, remaining both faithful to revelation and at the same time proclaiming something not found explicitly in the Scripture.

My presentation at the Marian Year MSA national convention, "Ecumenical Aspects of *Redemptoris Mater*" (*MS* [1988]:115-129), commented upon Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Mother of the Redeemer*, in the context of his ecumenical reflections. He paid special tribute to the Marian devotion of the Orthodox Church and the ancient churches of the East, especially as celebrated in their liturgical worship and expressed in their inspiring icons (*RM*, 31-33). He particularly held her up as the model of the "obedience of faith" leading us all back to Christ in the unity of his Spirit. Clearly, our Holy Father longs for the reunion of the East and the West, when the Church can begin to breathe fully once again with her "two lungs" (no. 34). He perceives the basic agreement among the churches about Mary's motherhood of the Lord and her spiritual motherhood of all her Son's disciples, and that reunion with the East would be a great asset in the ecumenical movement of the West. There are many ecumenical implications in this encyclical, such as an approach to Marian doctrine and devotion congenial to the three reformation *solas*: *sola Scriptura* (scripture alone), *sola Fides* (justification by faith alone), and *solus Christus* (Christ alone as the one Mediator of redemption). At the conclusion of this paper, just how a balanced Marian doctrine and devotion responds to these Protestant principles will be briefly pointed out.

In *MS* (1990):8-30, Fr. Roderick Strange (from England) presented the paper "Newman on the Blessed Virgin Mary: In Search of Christian Unity," which is the final one considered in this section of our overview of the MSA's contributions to Mary and ecumenism. He singled out Newman's appeal to the Fathers of the Church, such as Saints Ambrose and Augustine in the West as well as Saints Athanasius and Cyril in the East; the way Newman brings out the distinction between doctrine and devotion while showing their relationship; his attention to Mary's holiness and his opposition to excess regarding Mary—all are points of significance for ecumenical dialogue. Fr. Strange concluded his paper with a reference to Archbishop Michael Ramsey who held up Newman's spirit, one of "scriptural holiness," as the basis of Christian unity when the

Archbishop of Canterbury opened a Symposium in Newman's honor at Oxford College, Oriel, in 1966.

### 3. Ecumenical Publications in Fr. Eamon R. Carroll's Recent Surveys

In our brief sampling of Fr. Carroll's "Surveys of Recent Mariology," in this third section of our resume, we shall limit our considerations to *MS* (1996):118-143), (1997):138-162, and (1998):141-165. Under the title of "Ecumenism" in the 1996 issue, he calls our attention to *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus*, by Beverly Roberts Gaventa (published in 1995, by the University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, SC), as part of the series *Studies on Personalities of the New Testament*. Dr. Gaventa, a Protestant professor of New Testament Literature and Exegesis at Princeton Theological Seminary, uses literary analysis to depict Mary according to Matthew, Luke-Acts, John, and the *Protoevangelium of James*. Her approach differs from the historical-critical studies that seek what lies "behind" the accounts, as well as the theological developments that go "beyond" the narratives, in order to get at the "governing principle" of the work itself. Fr. Carroll proceeds to provide a summary of the publications coming out of the ESBVM, both in England and in our country. Mary and the Communion of Saints, as an ecumenical issue, seems to have been an especially noteworthy topic. He himself had delivered the public lecture, "Mary in Ecumenical Perspective," that appeared in the Carmelite publication *The Sword* 55 (1995/1 & 2):47-62. Two further titles mentioned in this issue were: *Faith in Christ and the Gospel: Select Spiritual Writings* (edited by the Lutheran scholar, Eric W. Gritsch), which includes Luther's commentary on the Magnificat; and, *Newman on Mary: Two Studies in Development* (by Hermann Geissler and Roger Jupp; ESBVM, September 1996).

In *MS* (1997), Fr. Carroll's survey pays special attention to *Mary Is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, edited by William McLoughlin, O.S.M., and Jill Pinnock; it contains papers given at a number of international congresses of the ESBVM, with good representation from all the Christian traditions. Lastly, in this section of my paper, I want to highlight, from the 1998 issue of *MS*, *A Protestant Pastor Looks at Mary* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1996), by Rev. Charles Dickson (who is also the author of "Mary Teaches Us the Power of Pondering," *Spiritual Life* 43 [Winter 1997]).

### 4. *Marian Studies* (1997)—The Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Icon of the Church, Intercessor: Ecumenical Perspectives

The theme of the Society's 1997 national convention was inspired by Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter on our commitment to ecumenism, *Ut unum sint* (issued in 1995, no. 79). The keynote address was delivered by Msgr. John A. Radano, head of the Western Section of the Pontifical Council for Promotion of Christian Unity. It was entitled "Toward the Great Jubilee 2000: Mary and the Search for Christian Unity"; in it, he described in some detail the ecumenical and Marian dimensions of preparations for the Year 2000. Then he explained the developments that have taken place in the international multilateral dialogue of Faith and Order, as well as the renewed relations between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic "Sister Churches," adding the recent Christological agreements with the Ancient Churches of the East that had not accepted the teachings about Mary and Christ at the Councils of Ephesus and



Chalcedon. He concluded on a note of great hope for the future of Mary and Ecumenism as we find ourselves on the threshold of the third millennium.

Dr. Ross Mackenzie's paper, "Mary: Intercessor on Our Behalf, One with Us in the Communion of Saints, and Witness to What We May Become in Christ," shared many profound insights with us, enriched particularly by the Presbyterian Reformed and Eastern Orthodox traditions. Bro. Donald Boccardi, S.M., in his "An Ecumenical Portrait of Mary at End-of-the-Century America," shared results from his doctoral dissertation (earned at the International Marian Research Institute in 1995). Those surveyed were clergy and laity of eight Christian churches in the U.S.A.: Orthodox, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, and Assemblies of God (Pentecostal). The scope of the questions asked mainly covered the areas of Mary in Scripture, liturgy, patristics, Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, ministry, devotion and ecumenism. This report of survey results is indeed very helpful, providing a much more concrete perception of Mary and ecumenism.

A series of three papers follow in response to the theme of the 1997 convention: 1) a Baptist perspective by the Rev. Dr. Larry Bethune; 2) a Lutheran ecumenical response by the Rev. Dr. Mark E. Chapman; and, 3) a Roman Catholic ecumenical response to the theme by myself, which provided an overview of *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII* (edited by H. George Anderson, et al., Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992). As a participant in that bilateral, U.S.A., I commented upon the "Catholic Perspectives" as the context of the Communion of Saints and upon "Catholic Reflections" as clarifications and concerns about the ecumenical issues involved, as well as the convergences and divergences concerning Mary and ecumenism in the "Agreed Statement."

### **5. *Marian Studies* (1996)—Marian Spirituality and the Interreligious Dialogue**

As already indicated in the introductory remarks of this paper, its very brief concluding section extends "ecumenism" to consider Mary in the dialogue with some of the great world religions. The 1996 issue of *MS* contains a general paper about such dialogue by John Borelli, Director for Interreligious Relations at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in Washington, D.C. Other papers dealing with the theme are "Maria-Kannon: The Mother of God in Buddhist Guise," by Dr. Maria Reis-Habito, from Southern Methodist University, and "The Sources for the Marian References in the Qur'ān," by Chorbishop Dominic F. Ashkar, from Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C., who has made a specialty of comparing Mary in the Syriac Christian Tradition and in Islam. The presidential address was delivered by Fr. Walter Brennan, O.S.M., on "World Religions, Symbolism, and Marian Theology," which helped set the stage for the other papers and discussions at the convention.

### **Concluding Comments**

As we briefly glance back at this summary of reflections upon the MSA's contributions to Mary and ecumenism, based upon various papers and addresses recorded in *Marian Studies*, one conclusion that may be drawn is the great influence of Fr. Burghardt's presidential address of 1962, "The Mariologist as Ecumenist." Clearly, it pointed us in the right direction by identifying and explaining the main ecumenical

issues involved in Marian doctrine and devotion. The three principal problems—development of the Marian dogmas from the Scripture and earlier dogmas, the nature and expression of revelation, and whether or not all of divine revelation is contained in the inspired biblical word of God—have been given serious consideration, in one way or another, at many of our annual conventions.

In addition to a Catholic response to the *sola Scriptura*, attention has been given also to *sola Fides* (justification by faith alone), and to *solus Christus* (Christ as the sole Mediator of redemption). Many times in our ecumenical dialogue, the completely gratuitous character of Mary's fullness of grace has been affirmed, as well as the entirely subordinate status of her mediation, of her intercession with its total dependence upon Christ.