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VI. ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE



MARIOLOGY AND ECUMENISM—REFLECTIONS UPON 1965-1990

FREDERICK M. JELLY, EMMITSBURG, MD

During the past twenty-five years or so since the conclusion of Vatican II, some remarkable developments have transpired regarding the role of Mary in the ecumenical movement. On February 2, 1965, Pope Paul VI gave an address to a number of those who would be participating in the Fourth International Mariological Congress that was to be held the following month in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. He shared with them his hopes that the participants would help to clarify the pure founts of Marian devotion in Scripture, the Fathers of the Church, the liturgy, the theological reflections of scholars in the sacred sciences, and the traditional teaching of the Eastern and Western Church. And with the promulgation on the previous November 21, 1964, of both the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and of the *Decree on Ecumenism* still fresh in his mind, the Holy Father voiced his prayerful wish that Mary would assist, as "The Mother of Unity," in bringing about the reunion of all Christians.

When one reflects even briefly upon the ecumenical events of the past quarter-century in which Mariology or the theology of Mary has had a significant part to play, then the prayerful wish of Pope Paul VI indeed becomes prophetic. God has shown her to be "The Mother of Unity" during this post-conciliar period. We do not say this as though there were not still several profound difficulties concerning Marian doctrine and devotion which must be resolved before complete reunion of the Christian churches can be realized. At the same time, the progress that has apparently been made should provide us with signs of hope for the future.

In this essay, the first section provides an overview of the more significant developments in Mariology and ecumenism during the past twenty-five years since Vatican II (1965-1990). It is indeed a fitting topic, for Fr. Theodore Koehler, whom we are honoring in this Festschrift, and I have often had a hand in this progress; hence many of the accounts are those of an eye-witness to the events. The second section offers a few theological reflections about the signs of hope and the difficulties that remain and

require resolution regarding Mary before complete unity in the one Church of Christ can be enjoyed. This part of the paper includes a report about the common statement called "The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary" that was just completed between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics on February 17, 1990, after seven years of study and dialogue in the American Bi-lateral between the two churches.¹ The third and final section of this essay explores some prospects for the future in light of the foregoing reflections, with a view towards clarifying those aspects of Marian doctrine and devotion which will deserve special attention in the ongoing ecumenical dialogue.

AN OVERVIEW OF MARIOLOGY AND ECUMENISM SINCE VATICAN II

The single event that seems to have had the greatest influence upon the place of Marian doctrine and devotion in the quest for Christian unity actually transpired during the Council itself. On October 29, 1963, the conciliar fathers at Vatican II decided by a very close vote to make the schema about Mary a part of that on the Church.² And so its principal teaching about her became Chapter VIII of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium)*, "The Blessed Virgin Mary, God-Bearer, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." The very title clearly shows that Mary was being placed in close relationship to her Son (a christocentric Mariology) as well as with his Mystical Body the Church (an ecclesiotypical Mariology or one in which she is portrayed as the Archetype, i.e., preeminent exemplar of what it means to be a member of the Church). This emphasis is completely in accord with the N. T. portrait of Mary, especially that of St. Luke's Gospel, which reveals her as the perfect disciple of Christ, and of the Fourth Gospel, which manifests Mary as the woman of faith *par excellence*. Such an approach has also helped to develop a post-conciliar Mariology that is more "sharing-oriented" than "privilege-centered." Even the special graces and unique privileges given to Mary through her Son's redemptive activity are not to be interpreted as though she were above his Body the Church. Although her calling to be the *Theotokos* (God-bearer) and the Immaculate Conception are unique, she is still a member of the Church as one of the redeemed, albeit a preeminent one, and her special graces have much to reveal about God's redeeming love for us all.

¹ This Common Statement is to be published by the end of 1991, along with papers on the topic of the round in a book from Augsburg/Fortress Press.

² See F. M. JELLY, O.P., "The Theological Context of and Introduction to Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium*," *Marian Studies*, 37 (1986), esp. p. 50-61.

The ecumenical significance of the Council's close decision is that it helped place Mary in proper perspective within the Christian faith as a whole, i.e., in relationship to the central mysteries of our belief in Christ—namely, the Trinity, Incarnation and Redemption—in the “hierarchy of truths” according to Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio)*.³ It was no accident or mere coincidence that both of these conciliar documents, on the Church and on ecumenism, were issued the same day (November 21, 1964), since we must look to the former for the latter's theological foundation. The teaching of the constitution on the Church at Vatican II gave prominence to a “*communio*” ecclesiology, i.e., a theology of the Church emphasizing the truth that she is primarily a communion of the people of God—a communion of faith, hope, love, worship and witness. Only then can we contemplate properly the secondary aspect of her mystery as a Pilgrim Church upon earth, namely, her hierarchical structure—papacy, episcopacy, presbyterate, diaconate, laity, religious men and women—since such a structure, although essential, exists in order to signify and effect as a sacrament the grace of Christ in this world. This emphasis in ecclesiology has favored ecumenism, because the Church as a sacramental communion of Christian faithful stresses what the different ecclesial communions hold in common, e.g., Baptism, the Sacred Scriptures, faith in Jesus Christ as the sole Savior of the world, etc., and not what still separates them, such as papal primacy and infallibility, the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption as defined by two popes, etc. *Lumen gentium* has related Mariology more intimately with this ecumenical ecclesiology and has thereby helped to distance it from the main obstacles to reunion. The whole mystery of Mary is manifested more in the context of the mystery of the Church as a communion, since the God-bearer is contemplated primarily as the greatest expression of her Son's saving grace.

Fr. Yves Congar, O. P., the outstanding French ecumenist and ecclesiologist who was so influential at the Council, has commented that the little preposition “in” of the title of Chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium* has a big meaning. It emphasizes that Mary is very much a part of the mystery of the Church as a redeemed communion, as her Son's Body won by his redemptive activity. This has helped communicate more clearly the authentic Roman Catholic teaching about Mary's role in our redemption to our brothers and sisters in the other ecclesial communions. Only Christ is our redeemer. Although we believe that Mary is a recipient of that redemptive righteousness in a unique way by her Immaculate Conception, still she is not to be considered a co-redemptrix in the sense that our salvation is due to her, as it is due to his redeeming work culminating in the paschal mystery. Vatican II, indeed, deliberately did

³ See F. M. JELLY, O.P., “Marian Dogmas within Vatican II's Hierarchy of Truths,” *Marian Studies*, 27 (1976): 17-40.

not call Mary "Co-redemptrix," precisely to avoid any misinterpretation of Mary's role in our redemption, which is entirely subordinate to and dependent upon her Son. Of course, this has not cleared up all ecumenical difficulties in such a sensitive matter. For instance, Karl Barth interpreted the Mariology of Vatican II as a continuation of the Roman heresy on "cooperating grace." As we shall consider in some detail in the second section of this essay, the principle of the Protestant Reformation, *sola fide* or *sola gratia*, i.e., justification through faith alone, as entirely the work of God's grace without any role for the cooperation of human freedom, finds a special difficulty in Marian doctrine and devotion. There an explanation will be attempted to clarify the ecumenical issue further. Despite such difficulties, however, it can be asserted that Vatican II, particularly in *Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*, did make possible whatever progress has been made in Mariology and ecumenism during 1965-90.

The theme of the 1965 Mariological Congress in Santo Domingo was "Mary in the New Testament," which is the only place where an ecumenical dialogue can begin about the Mother of Jesus. Since then, there have been six more international congresses on Mary which have been held at various centers of Marian devotion around the globe: 1967 in Lisbon, Portugal; 1971 in Zagreb, Yugoslavia; 1975 in Rome during May of the Holy Year; 1979 in Zaragoza, Spain; 1983 in Malta; and, in 1987 at the Marian Shrine of Kevelaer, Germany. The themes of the Mariological congresses have been the developments that have taken place in Marian devotion during particular periods of the Tradition. The last one led us to the threshold of Vatican II and the next one, in 1992 (the location will be Huelva, Spain), should be addressing the conciliar teaching on Mary as its theme. Those of us who have participated in these congresses of Mariologists from around the world can clearly testify that the ecumenical aspects of the different themes have been carefully considered. Theologians of the Eastern Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant traditions have been a part of each program, and representatives from the various ecclesial communions have entered into dialogue with a group of Roman Catholic theologians during special sessions.

Ecumenical statements have resulted from these conversations, and the two from the International Mariological Congresses at Zaragoza (1979) and Malta (1983) seem to deserve special attention.⁴ The twenty-two of us who signed the ecumenical declaration at Zaragoza, including Fr. Koehler and myself, agreed that there are psychological difficulties associated with the term "cult" (literally translat-

⁴ See Stefano DE FIORES, S.M.M., "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," in *Vatican II-Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-Five Years After (1962-1987)*, ed. by R. Latourelle, S.J. (3 vols.; New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988-89), 1: 494-496.

ed from the latin "*cultus*") when it is used in reference to the veneration of Mary or any created person. And so we preferred to speak about "the facts in which our worshipping attitude reveals itself." Since another essay in this *Festschrift* deals in detail with the International Congresses, this one considers the ecumenical declarations but briefly. At Zaragoza (1979), there was agreement that: 1) all Christian praise, including that of Mary and the saints, is praise of God and Jesus Christ; 2) imitation is an important aspect of devotion to Mary, particularly of her spiritual attitude in responding with complete openness to the Word of God; 3) the distinction between the veneration due the Mother of God and the adoration due to God alone remains vital for all of us; and 4) while the precise meaning of invocation, not practiced in all the Christian churches, is in need of further elucidation, there is a common belief that those in the communion of saints in glory, among whom Mary holds the first place, do pray for us sinners upon earth—which intercession in no way affects the unique mediatorship of the risen Lord. At Malta (1983), there was added in the ecumenical statement the consensus that Mary prays *with* the Church, as she once did in preparation for Pentecost (Acts 1:14), and we are to unite our prayers with those of the heavenly liturgy, especially *with* Mary's prayer.

On the international level, other efforts to include Mary in the ecumenical movement during the past twenty-five years began with the establishment of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (ESBVM). Founded in London (1967) by the Roman Catholic layman Martin Gillett to promote ecumenical devotion and study at the various levels on the place of Mary in the Church under Christ, this organization alone has given us good reason to invoke Mary as "Mother of Unity."⁵ Getting underway at a time when most Christians would have thought it much too soon to involve Mary in the ecumenical dialogues, ESBVM has been able to help bring much closer together many members of the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic Churches especially, as well as members of a number of others. Since 1971, ESBVM has sponsored an international conference in England on the average of every other year or so. H. Martin Gillett, the Founding Father of the society, was the first General Secretary and indeed an inspiration to all of us members until his death in 1980. Not only has ESBVM spread throughout England but to other countries as well. The American society was started in 1976, at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in the nation's capitol, through the special efforts of a number of us; it continues to meet twice each year. Like the English society which helped to parent it, the ESBVM in the U.S.A. places emphasis upon devotion as well as doctrine and always includes a prayer service as part of its meetings. Publications of the English

⁵ See F. M. JELLY, O.P., "Mary, the Mother of Unity" (Presidential Address), *Marian Studies*, 29 (1978): 12-25.

ESBVM have appeared in special issues of *The Way* (1975,1981) and *One in Christ* (1979), in single pamphlets and review articles made available to members, and in books and compilations which have contributed significantly to Mariology and ecumenism since Vatican II.

The Mariological Society of America has devoted special attention to the scientific study of the ecumenical aspects of the theology about Mary during the same post-conciliar period. Founded in 1949, each year—beginning in 1950—the MSA has published *Marian Studies*, the proceedings of its annual national convention. These papers and presidential addresses have frequently shown our society's keen interest in and theological concern for the place of Mary in the ecumenical quest.⁶ Fr. Eamon R. Carroll, outstanding Carmelite Mariologist and member of the MSA over the years, has been giving a paper entitled "A Survey of Recent Mariology" since 1967 (except 1972), and each year he always includes a significant section about the ecumenical writings in reference to Our Lady. During the past fifteen years or so, the MSA has formed a number of regions in various parts of our huge country to reach many more interested people with its rich resources. Currently there are four regional organizations. The one in New England meets annually at Providence College, Providence, R.I., under the special leadership of Fr. Matthew Morry, O.P.; Msgr. Francis Wear-den and Fr. Charles Neumann, S.M., have guided the activities in Houston-San Antonio; Fr. Alfred Boeddeker, O.F.M., and Bro. John Samaha, S.M., have been responsible for developments on the West Coast (centered in San Francisco); and in New Jersey, Fr. Frederick Miller and others have been holding annual meetings in recent years. Ecumenical topics in Mariology are also discussed at these meetings.

Over the years Mary has become more prominent in the ecumenical dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian communions. Having served on three of these bilateral conversations in the U.S.A. nationally—namely, the ecumenical dialogues with the Anglicans, the Southern Baptists, and the Lutherans, I can testify from my own experience that the Marian issues help make more concrete the most basic ecumenical questions. For instance, our Roman Catholic belief about the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption must also address the basic question of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition in the teaching of the Church and the witness of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*). The proper interpretation of Mary's free and complete consent at the Annunciation also makes more evident just what is being discussed in the dialogues about the grace of our redemption

⁶ For example, see Walter J. BURGHARDT, S.J., "The Mariologist as Ecumenist" (Presidential Address), *Marian Studies*, 13 (1962): 5-12; Dr. J. ROSS MACKENZIE, "Mariology as an Ecumenical Problem," *Marian Studies*, 26 (1975): 204-220; F. M. JELLY, O.P., "Ecumenical Aspects of *Redemptoris Mater*," *Marian Studies*, 39 (1988): 115-129.

through her Son as a completely unmerited gift of God. These observations are verified very clearly in the ecumenical dialogue between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics in America which, during February 1990, just finished a seven-year round on the saints and Mary in relationship to the unique mediatorship of Christ. Suffice it to say here that the previous round of the dialogue on justification by faith led into that on the saints and Mary which, in turn, has led into a new round on the use of Scripture and the development of doctrine in the Tradition. The second section of this essay addresses the ecumenical issues involved in considerable detail.

The American Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue has considered Mary and ecumenism in the context of "Images of God: Reflections on Christian Anthropology."⁷ The primary purpose of this study, which eventuated from many working papers, was to provide for our churches a proper frame of reference for a number of challenging ecumenical issues including Marian doctrine and devotions, the immediate context of which is the Communion of Saints in our common Christian creeds. Doctrinally, once we go from the *Theotokos* to the Marian dogmas of Mary's perpetual virginity, Immaculate Conception and Assumption, then the interpretation of the Tradition is quite different. The sense in which the Anglicans are prepared to accept these dogmas is not in complete accord with their Roman Catholic meaning. Although understanding Mary's Immaculate Conception in terms of her predestination and calling by God to be the *Theotokos* is indeed true, it does not extend far enough to include her preservative redemption from original sin from the first instant of her human conception, by reason of the foreseen merits of her Son's redemptive work. Devotionally, there are also the difficulties regarding the practice of venerating Mary and all the saints by invoking them, which the Anglicans as well as Protestants find objectionable. The International Commission of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (ARCIC) in its 1982 Final Report seems to sum up the current situation:

We agree that there can be but one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and reject any interpretation of the role of Mary which obscures this affirmation. We agree in recognizing that Christian understanding of Mary is inseparably linked with the doctrines of Christ and the Church. We agree in recognizing the grace and unique vocation of Mary, Mother of God incarnate (*Theotokos*), in observing her festivals, and in according her honor in the communion of saints. We agree that she was prepared by divine grace to be the mother of our Redeemer, by whom she herself was redeemed and received into glory. We further agree in recognizing in Mary a model of holiness, obedience and faith for all Christians. We accept that it is possible to regard her as a prophetic figure of the Church of God before as well as after the Incarnation. Nevertheless the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assump-

⁷ See *Called to Full Unity—Documents on Anglican-Roman Catholic Relations, 1966-1983*, Joseph W. WITMER, and J. Robert WRIGHT, eds. (Washington, D. C.: USCC, 1988), p. 308-327.

tion raise a special problem for those Anglicans who do not consider that the precise definitions given by these dogmas are sufficiently supported by Scripture.⁸

This statement speaks clearly for the general status of our ecumenical conversations with Protestants and Anglicans. Despite the difficulties remaining, considerable progress toward unity has taken place. In the so-called Scholars' Dialogue between Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics, the greater mutual understanding and respect with reference to Marian doctrine and devotion that has ensued is summarized this way in a joint reflection, after a decade of dialogue on many matters: "Catholics have come to appreciate the sincere problems Southern Baptists have with Marian devotion, and Southern Baptists have come to feel the depths of devotion and affection for Mary among Roman Catholics."⁹

While there is significant substantial agreement between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches regarding Marian doctrine and devotion, still difficulties abide about the Immaculate Conception and Assumption *qua* dogmas of faith. It does not seem that our brothers and sisters in the Orthodox churches reject the sinlessness and all-holiness of Mary nor the revealed truth that she has been reunited with her Son "body and soul" in glory, but the ecumenical issues apparently involve their problems with the papal primacy and infallibility that form the authority behind both defined dogmas, as well as their different theological interpretation of original sin in connection with the dogmatic formulation of Mary's Immaculate Conception. Roman Catholic understanding is conditioned considerably by St. Augustine's *theologoumenon* about the sin of human nature inherited from our first parents through the instrumentality of the marital act.¹⁰ Objectively speaking, however, as is the case with ecumenical questions generally, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics are closest concerning the place of Mary in the Church.

At Nairobi in 1975, the World Council of Churches strongly recommended a future study "on the significance of the Virgin Mary in the Church."¹¹ It appears providential that on the 5th of November the very same year the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education approved the International Marian Research Institute as an American branch of the Roman Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum to be located at The Marian Library, the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio. And how fitting that our honoree, Fr. Theodore Koehler, S.M., was most instrumental in bringing about this affiliation! IMRI enables students to prepare for the licentiate of sacred

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 280-281.

⁹ "How We Agree/How We Differ" in *Understanding Each Other*, No. 39 (Spring 1989) of *The Theological Educator*, p. 100.

¹⁰ See F. M. JELLY, O.P., *Madonna-Mary in the Catholic Tradition* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. 1986), p. 108-110.

¹¹ DE FIORES, "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," p. 489.

theology (S.T.L.) and the doctorate of sacred theology (S.T.D.) with specialization in Mariology, to earn a certificate in Marian Studies, or to work toward a master's degree in religious studies with specialization in Mariology from the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Dayton, offered in a joint program. At its disposal for research is The Marian Library, the world's largest and most comprehensive collection devoted to Marian studies. And among the special topics researched, taught, discussed, and dealt with in dissertations is "Mary and Ecumenism." Those of us who have been serving on the faculty of IMRI during the past fifteen years or so can readily attest to its special contribution towards the development of Mariology in an ecumenical era.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS UPON THE CURRENT STATUS OF MARIAN ECUMENISM

After a relatively brief historical overview of the relationship between Mariology and ecumenism since Vatican II, let us now turn our attention to its theological significance, in light of the developments that have transpired until this final decade of the second millennium. Indeed, we do seem to be on the threshold of a new millennium not only chronologically but also soteriologically. We Christians hope, pray, and strive towards a new "*kairos*" in the salvation history of our time, whereby greater unity will be made manifest in the Pilgrim Church upon earth for the genuine good of the whole world. And we believe that Mary has been given an essential role in this ecumenical and interreligious quest to promote the human rights of every person through divine means, the only way in which they will ever be protected and promoted. In this second section of the essay, the theological analysis will reflect upon the three ecumenical difficulties regarding Marian doctrine and devotion which still challenge us in the quest, as well as the three signs of hope which help inspire our continuous collaboration for unity.¹² Then, some comments upon the common statement of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in reference to Mariology and ecumenism should provide a clear picture of the current status.

Appropriately enough, each one of the three ecumenical difficulties about Marian doctrine and devotion poses an apparent opposition between the three basic principles of the Protestant Reformation (*sola scriptura, sola fide, solus Christus*) and the beliefs and practices of Catholics. The first principle, "scripture alone" means that, unless a doctrine is clearly and explicitly taught in the inspired word of God or the canonical Sacred Scriptures, it may be proposed by a Christian church as a pious

¹² See Eamon R. CARROLL, O.Carm., *Understanding the Mother of Jesus* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, Inc. 1979), p. 43-47.

belief or practice, but never imposed as a dogma of faith necessary for salvation or essential to the unity of the entire Church. Obviously, the defined dogmas of Mary's Immaculate Conception and Assumption appear to contradict this Protestant principle, since they are not clearly and explicitly revealed in Scripture. Roman Catholic official teaching itself does not claim this, but does seek to show that there is a biblical basis for both and that the dogmas developed in the Tradition, especially as a fuller meaning of God's inspired word began to unfold; especially in the Liturgy of the Word in the Eucharist. Although Mary's perpetual virginity does not seem to be church-dividing in precisely the same way as these two dogmas, still in our own time there appears to be widespread among Anglicans and Protestants the rejection of a literal interpretation, i.e., the fact that Mary remained a virgin throughout her life after the virginal conception of Christ. Even the pneumatological conception is controverted among Protestants, e.g., Karl Barth affirmed it to safeguard the divinity of Christ, whereas Tillich and Pannenberg denied it to defend his humanity. Of course, such interpretations regarding Mary's virginity are contrary to the Roman Catholic teaching and faith (*sensus fidelium*) by reason of the universal ordinary magisterium and not the solemn magisterium by which the dogmas of Mary as the *Theotokos*, the Immaculate Conception, and the Assumption were defined. Still the literal meaning of Mary's virginity goes beyond a purely symbolic interpretation in Roman Catholic dogma. Certainly, the virginal conception has a clear explicit testimony in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke as well as in the ancient Christian creeds. Mary's perpetual virginity as a fact in salvation history does seem to contradict the New Testament references to "brothers" and "sisters" of the Lord, which have been understood in the Catholic Tradition as really meaning his cousins.¹³

Sola fide, the second principle of the Protestant Reformation, is translated most clearly as justification through the gift of faith alone and not through any merits on the part of the redeemed recipient of saving grace. This appears to be opposed by the traditional view of Mary in the Roman Catholic Church as the one among us redeemed People of God who cooperated most fully with divine grace, especially when she uttered her "*fiat*" at the Annunciation. The principal ecumenical difficulty here seems to be an apparent attributing to Mary of the "meriting" of the Incarnation which has never been Roman Catholic teaching and belief, at least officially. St. Thomas Aquinas, the Common Doctor in the Catholic Tradition, clearly taught that no one, not even Christ himself, could have "merited"—in the strict sense of the term—the utterly gratuitous divine grace of the Word-made-flesh or the hypostatic union.¹⁴ To

¹³ Cf. John McHUGH, *The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Co., Inc., 1975), p. 223-254.

¹⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.2, a.11.

do that, Jesus Christ would have had to precede himself as the Son of God incarnate in Mary, which is a contradiction. Besides, just as grace itself is the principle of all merit, so the Incarnation is the source of all grace. In this issue of profound theological and ecumenical concern, there is really no division between the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches and the Protestant and Anglican churches regarding our Christian conviction that the grace of justification can in no way be merited (in the sense of condign merit). Where the difference enters the picture is in belief regarding the human ability to cooperate with the grace of Jesus Christ once we have been justified. The fact that grace makes possible and actual the right use of our human freedom does not make it any less voluntary on our part. And so Mary's "fial" flowed from the fullness of grace with which she had been favored by God, but was still a free and responsible action of wholehearted consent to the Father's will, which divine predestination had made a necessary condition for the redemptive Incarnation but not its meritorious cause. As pointed out previously in this essay, here we have another good example of how Mariology serves to make more concrete some of the most basic ecumenical issues, such as justification by the grace of faith alone and the Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic position on synergism or the divine-human dialectic between the cooperating of our finite freedom and the infinite freedom of God's saving grace.

The third ecumenical difficulty concerns devotion more directly than doctrine, but is based upon a doctrinal interpretation of the way in which one interprets the "merits" of Mary and the saints in the heavenly Church. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox interpretation appears to go contrary to the third principle of the Protestant Reformation, namely, *solus Christus*, or that Christ alone is the mediator between the triune God and redeemed humanity. To attribute mediation and intercession to Mary and the saints in glory appears to render superfluous the unique mediatorship of Christ, the sole Redeemer of all. And the practice of our invoking their intercessory prayer on our behalf is not only without scriptural support but is also very confusing and likely to lead, as it often has in popular piety, to the motive of directly "praying to" Mary and the saints because their merits make such a claim upon divine favor that God cannot refuse them—and so they seem to become the source of the blessing instead of God through Christ—or because the intercession of the saints, especially of Mary, is necessary before Christ, the Just Judge, will respond mercifully to us sinners. Surely such abuses have crept into devotional beliefs and practices, but *abusus non tollit usum*, i.e., the abuse of a good thing does not render its right use impossible. It is true that Martin Luther and John Calvin wanted to purge the Roman Church of these abuses, but they unfortunately did not reform the Church from within. One extreme led to its opposite, that of minimizing the role of Mary and saints in the devotional life of the Church. Even though, unlike the first

two ecumenical difficulties, this third obstacle on the path to unity does not involve us directly in dogmatic differences as such, still it is a formidable barrier because it touches so intimately the prayer life of the people in our churches. After a glance at the common statement of the Lutherans and Roman Catholics on the saints and Mary in relationship with Christ as our sole mediator, we will take a brief look at ways of addressing it.

Now let us turn to consider three signs of ecumenical hope which have arisen out of the developments in Marian doctrine and devotion since Vatican II. Although the parallelism is not perfect, we might observe from the outset that each sign seems to counteract its corresponding difficulty. The first, for instance, is the common study of the Sacred Scriptures which has been done both individually and collaboratively by scholars from the different Christian churches. The work of an ecumenical task force of twelve scholars from various traditions appeared in 1978, under the title, *Mary in the New Testament*, and is an excellent example of just what such close collaboration can produce after several years of regular meetings. These scholars carefully applied the historical-critical method in their joint study and were able to conclude to substantial agreement about the New Testament revelation regarding the mother of Jesus. There was a consensus among them that Luke/Acts portrays Mary as the perfect disciple of Christ, and that John's Gospel depicts her as the woman of faith *par excellence*, the woman standing alongside of the "beloved disciple" at the foot of the cross. Although their method did not permit them to draw any definite conclusions about Mary's membership in the family of disciples prior to her Son's resurrection, they did not hesitate to judge that she must have belonged to this eschatological family after it, as is revealed in Acts 1:14. It was not within the scope of their work to address the Marian developments in the Tradition in any detail, but they did examine certain "lines of development" out of the New Testament portrait of the mother of the Lord in the earliest patristic period. These scholars testified to the most ancient post-biblical image of Mary, the "New Eve" typology of the early Fathers, Sts. Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, as well as to Mary's virginal conception of Christ and her perpetual virginity as beliefs in the Tradition of the undivided Church before the schismatic split between the East and the West.

It is the mutual study of this period of the undivided Church that constitutes the second sign of ecumenical hope regarding Mariology. The renewed interest in the early Christian writers—especially the great Fathers of the Eastern Church such as Sts. Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzen, John Chrysostom, John Damascene, etc., and of the Western Church such as Sts. Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory the Great, etc.—brings Christians into closer contact with these special witnesses to our common patrimony, the apostolic faith. Even before Mary, the Church was called the New Eve by these ancient writers, since she

had been created from the side of the New Adam “asleep” (dead) on the cross when he was pierced by a lance, whence water (Baptism) and blood (Eucharist) flowed forth. And, as the Church came to understand Mary more deeply, she came to penetrate her own mystery more profoundly. In the undivided Church, the Fathers were fond of saying in one way or another that Mary conceived Christ in her heart by faith before she bore him in her womb (*prius in corde quam in carne, in mente quam in ventre*). Faithful to the New Testament portrait of Mary, they contemplated her as the woman of faith *par excellence*, which is most congenial to the Protestant principle of *sola fide* as well as with Vatican II’s expression “pilgrimage of faith” (*LG*, 58), used to describe her entire life of union with Christ.

A rediscovery of the Marian writings of the Reformers, even after their departure from the Roman Church, provides us with a third sign of ecumenical hope. Martin Luther’s commentary on Mary’s *Magnificat* is a magnificent source of meditation upon the spiritual meaning of this beautiful canticle which is part of our Evening Prayer each day in the Liturgy of the Hours. John Calvin also sang her praises, and Zwingli defended her Assumption into heaven. Although these three classical reformers were deeply concerned about the abuses in Marian devotion and the beliefs behind them, they did not relinquish everything about their Christian faith and piety regarding the mother of the Redeemer. Rather, they retained much which in our ecumenical era may well form a renewed foundation for further dialogue, particularly in connection with the veneration of Mary.

The recently completed common statement by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Bilateral in the U.S.A., “The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary,” is an outstanding ecumenical document to test the validity of the difficulties and signs of hope just discussed. Approved unanimously by the members of both teams after seven years of joint study and dialogue, it is the fruit of careful analysis of many working papers prepared by the members especially for the topic of that round, which will also appear with the common statement that went through a number of drafts before being refined into its final form. There are two principal parts to the document: the first entitled “Issues and Perspectives” begins with the problems of the sixteenth century, proceeds with Lutheran and Catholic perspectives on the critical issues involved, and then concludes with an examination of the divergences (inquiring whether these need be church-dividing) as well as of the church-uniting convergences on the topic; the second part of the common statement provides the biblical and historical foundations of the study, from the scriptural to contemporary teaching; and, finally, Catholic and Lutheran reflections conclude the statement. The following very brief summary of the common statement concentrates upon the divergences, convergences, and concluding reflections in the context of the contents as a whole.

The divergence between Catholic and Lutheran teaching on the intercession of saints as a church-dividing ecumenical issue is best considered in the context of the invocation of Mary and the saints in heaven. Although Vatican II continued the traditional Catholic teaching that it is "supremely fitting" to invoke the saints and have recourse to their prayers (LG, 50), it has never been the doctrine of any council or pope that individual Catholics *must* venerate or invoke saints. The precise ecumenical problem, however, does not concern private devotion but public or liturgical worship in the Catholic Church. Even though it is very rare to invoke Mary or the saints directly in the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy—e.g., the litany of the saints during the Easter Vigil Mass and at ordinations or the first of penitential rites ("I confess ...")—the practical question still remains whether or not Lutherans would be expected to respond at such times. The members of the dialogue were of the opinion that they would not be so obliged since such veneration and invocation is optional, although greatly encouraged by the Church, even for Roman Catholics. Consequently this issue need not be church-dividing; but whether or not invocation of saints is legitimate and beneficial does remain a substantive issue upon which the dialogue was not able to reach agreement. Catholics defend the practice as not being idolatrous or injurious to the honor due Christ the one Mediator. The Catholic members of the dialogue also recognized that there have been abuses in the matter and that the common Christian doctrine of the sole mediatorship of Christ is one critical principle for identifying abuses. And so this issue does not separate the Lutheran and Catholic Churches as long as Lutherans would not be obliged to practice invocation and providing they would not regard Catholics who do practice it as idolatrous or opposed to the sole mediatorship of Christ. The issue remains ecumenically substantive and sensitive, however, since, as we have seen, the Lutherans still consider the practice of invocation of Mary and the saints in glory as without scriptural support (*sola scriptura*) and as prone to competing with the role of Christ as the one Mediator (*solus Christus*), and also as inclining to make their intercessory prayers meritorious of divine favor (*sola fide* and *sola gratia*). At the same time, Protestants and Anglicans generally seem to acknowledge that Mary and the saints do intercede for our intentions globally, without hearing our prayers addressed to them specifically.

The divergences between Lutherans and Catholics concerning Marian doctrine, according to the members of the dialogue, mainly refer to the defined dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption. Since Mary's mediating role in heaven is not a dogma, it may be understood as differing only in degree from what has been discussed as the intercession and invocation of all the saints in glory. And so, similarly, it need not be church-dividing. But regarding the papally defined dogmas of 1854 and 1950, only if Lutherans would be free not to accept them could there be a

closer future fellowship between them and Roman Catholics. At the present time, however, the link between papal infallibility and these two Marian dogmas makes complete consensus unattainable, according to the members of the dialogue. Once again the ecumenical issues involved are substantive, since these two dogmas seem to oppose *sola scriptura* and even *solus Christus*—if Mary's Assumption were to imply that her mediation virtually replaces that of Christ—instead of enhancing it without adding to or detracting from his sole mediatorship, as Vatican II clearly teaches (cf. *LG*, 60). Likewise, were her Immaculate Conception to be interpreted as exempting Mary from the need for a preservative redemption mediated by her Son, then the dialogue could not continue in good faith. Sufficient clarifications were made, however, in such essential matters of our Christian faith as Christ being the sole Mediator of redemption for all, including his own mother, that both partners in the dialogue still have hope that these divergences between us can be overcome.

A total of nineteen church-uniting convergences were identified which may be summarized as follows: 1) our ultimate trust is only in God's promise and saving work in Christ; 2) Christ is the sole Mediator in God's plan of salvation; 3) the risen Christ continuously intercedes for us; 4) the Holy Spirit is God's advocate with us and also intercedes for us; 5) Christ's grace is mediated to us in the ministry of word and sacraments; 6) the Holy Spirit acts in ministers to bring the means of grace to sinners; 7) given in Baptism, holiness is confirmed, preserved, and deepened by word and sacrament; 8) the term "saint" is used in both traditions for all justified by the grace of Christ; 9) all the sanctified constitute a communion of saints with Christ who sanctifies; 10) there is a solidarity of the church on earth with the church in heaven; 11) we are promised eternal life as members of this community of saints; 12) this fellowship includes the hope of resurrection; 13) in the fellowship of living and departed saints we are inspired to greater holiness; 14) we show honor to the saints by thanking God for them, by having our faith strengthened through their response to God's grace, and by imitating their faith and other virtues; 15) among the saints, Mary is especially to be honored as "God-bearer" and as the pure, holy and most blessed virgin; 16) prayer to God in its many forms has divine command and promise and is an integral part of the Christian life; 17) saints on earth ask one another to pray to God for each other through Christ, and are neither commanded nor forbidden to ask the saints in heaven to pray for them; 18) devotion to Mary and the saints should not be practiced so as to detract from the ultimate trust to be placed in Christ alone; and 19) what is normative for both the Catholic and Lutheran traditions is that doctrine (*lex credendi*) and worship (*lex orandi*) together should promote the unique mediatorship of Christ.

The common statement concludes part one with a brief section about the next steps to be taken by both churches in their ongoing dialogue. Despite the numerous

convergences that unite them, both churches are still separated by differing views on the invocation of saints and the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary. One step would be Lutheran recognition "that the Catholic teaching about the saints and Mary as set forth in the documents of Vatican II does not promote idolatrous belief or practice and is not opposed to the gospel." Another step would be a Roman Catholic acknowledgment "that in a closer but still incomplete fellowship, Lutherans, focusing on Christ the one Mediator, as set forth in Scripture, would not be obliged to invoke the saints or affirm the two Marian dogmas."

"Catholic Reflections" in the common statement start off by commenting how clear it has become from the dialogue that the intellectual and dogmatic differences over the topic "are rooted in deeply felt patterns of life and spirituality." The Catholic Tradition maintains "that Jesus Christ is never merely alone." He is always to be found in the company of his friends, the holy people both living on earth and the faithful departed. The veneration, invocation, and imitation of the saints is a significant aspect of Catholic spirituality which does not view their secondary mediation as in conflict with Christ the one Mediator. This section of the statement, however, does strongly insist upon the need for continuous purification of abuses in devotion to the saints and Mary, especially in accord with the principles and guidelines laid down by Pope Paul VI in *Marialis cultus*, his 1974 Apostolic Exhortation on renewing Marian devotion.

"Lutheran Reflections," after identifying how much is held in common between the two churches on the topic, raise the basic ecumenical question: "Does spirituality involving the saints and Mary in any way undermine assured faith?" This final section of the entire common statement (it is to be published as a whole, even though certain portions of it were done by Lutherans only or by Catholics only, since there is an integrity in it which has been approved by all the participants in the dialogue) asserts that the question of Scripture and Tradition (topic for the upcoming round) is behind much of what still separates Catholics and Lutherans regarding the saints and Mary. And so this next round will have to reflect upon invocation of Mary and the saints and the two Marian dogmas of 1854 and 1950 in light of the further dialogue to determine more clearly for the Lutherans whether or not such beliefs and practices "in any way undermine assured faith." The ecumenical dialectic between Christ as the sole Mediator (Lutheran emphasis as the criteriological principle of what is "assured faith") and the dependent subordinate mediation of Mary and the saints (Catholic emphasis as a criteriological principle of participated mediation on the part of Christ's redeemed holy ones) requires much further clarification to decide how these beliefs can correlate within the one Church of Christ.

FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR MARIOLOGY AND ECUMENISM

The common statement from the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the U.S.A. clearly indicates the challenging issues regarding Mary that yet confront us on the road to full communion. Concerning the two ecumenically controversial Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption, much more must be done to show how these developed in the Tradition from the biblical revelation. Likewise their content and special significance for contemporary Christians must be further explored and explained in light of Vatican II's teaching about the "hierarchy of truths in Catholic doctrine," contained in the *Decree on Ecumenism* (cf. *UR*, 11). We Roman Catholics serving on the various national and international dialogues must be prepared to point out how these two Marian dogmas should shed further light upon the central mysteries of Christ and the Church as a redeemed community.¹⁵ There has been some speculation as to whether or not those Christians separated from the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the definition of these dogmas of faith (in 1854 and 1950), such as the Lutherans, would be obliged to accept them in a reunited Church. Some would argue that it is not necessary, since the Catholic Church considers herself united with members of her own Church who did not accept the Immaculate Conception, even such outstanding saints and scholars as Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure. The authentic development of dogma in the Catholic Tradition, however, can and does call for acceptance in matters of faith and morals, teachings that had not yet become explicit in her faith-understanding in the past. And so the parallel does not seem to stand. But, more substantively, we must interpret Vatican II's "hierarchy of truths" as a two-edged sword ecumenically: it cuts one way in clearly identifying what is basic in our common Christian creed—the Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption; it can cut in the opposite direction if it is shown that such secondary truths of revelation as the two Marian dogmas might make explicit an aspect of the central mystery of God's redeeming love in Christ in its fullness. If our separated brothers and sisters in the other Christian churches reject them even in this context, then we must question whether or not adequate unity of faith has been attained.

This very important ecumenical issue was raised back in the 1950s by the renowned Dominican theologian, Yves Congar.¹⁶ He questioned the claim that, while there are differences between Roman Catholics and Anglicans and Protestants in ecclesiology, and especially in Mariology, still there is nothing separating us in our common ad-

¹⁵ See JELLY, "Marian Dogmas ... Hierarchy of Truths" (n.3 above).

¹⁶ Cf. YVES CONGAR, O.P., *Christ, Our Lady and the Church* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1957).

herence to Chalcedonian Christology. Perhaps, he argued, the differences regarding the faith about the Church and Mary are rooted in an interpretation of the humanity of Christ whereby Protestants do not accept it as the conjoined instrument of our redemption. And so, the difficulties with mediation in reference to Mary and the Church might be based upon, not a denial of God's human nature in Christ (monophysitism) but of that nature's mediating role in redemption (monoenergism). This requires further clarification in the context of the Ephesian Christo-Mariological dogma of the *Theotokos*, the foundation for any mediating role to be attributed to Mary and, consequently, the Church. After such a central clarification, I am confident that we can come to accept Mary together as the masterpiece of Christ's new creation in the Holy Spirit. And so we can more clearly address the issue of *sola fide* and its apparent contradiction in our awarding cooperation with grace to Mary's *fiat*. In Mary, there ought to be developed a soteriology according to which she is contemplated as offering no resistance to grace precisely because of her Son's merits. In her, all is grace—*sola gratia*. In a mysterious manner, but in a way similar to us all, her freedom is totally immersed in grace, which made it possible for her actually to utter her "*fiat*" of complete consent at the Annunciation and continuously to say "yes" to God's word to her throughout life.

Although the common statement between the Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the American Dialogue does not consider Mary's virginity to be church-dividing, it is difficult to see how it really is not divisive ecumenically. Since it appears that most Protestant scholars interpret even the virginal conception as a *theologoumenon* in Matthew and Luke, one wonders whether or not there could be substantial unity of faith without accepting this creedal doctrine. And, while her perpetual virginity has never been the formal object of a definition by the Roman Catholic magisterium, it still has the status of dogma by reason of the constant preaching and teaching of the Church as well as the witness of the faithful. Worship (*lex orandi*) and doctrine (*lex credendi*) indeed come close together here, e.g., in the reference of the Roman Canon or Eucharistic Prayer to Mary as "ever-virgin." Suffice it to say in this essay that the mystery of Mary's virginity in its various aspects must be addressed in much greater detail in the ecumenical dialogues.¹⁷

In conclusion, the Roman Catholic ecumenist has the special responsibility of reinterpreting Mary's mediation and intercession. A detailed account of one attempt may be studied elsewhere.¹⁸ It is important to address this ecumenical issue in light

¹⁷ Cf. Theodore J. WEEDEN, Sr., "Mary: A Protestant Perspective," *Chicago Studies* 27, 1 (April 1988): 80-95; the entire issue is devoted to Mariology.

¹⁸ See F. M. JELLY, O.P., "Mary's Intercession: A Contemporary Reappraisal," *Marian Studies*, 32 (1981): 76-95.

of the third roadblock to unity discussed in the previous section of this paper, namely, that Mary's mediation and intercession appear to go contrary to the Protestant principle of Christ the sole Mediator. As Vatican II teaches (cf. *LG*, 60), there does seem to be a way of showing that her dependent and subordinate mediation only enhances his unique mediatorship as our risen Lord. Their distinct mediating roles in heaven cannot be placed on the same level of distributing the fruits of redemption or the grace of Christ, nor may Mary be portrayed as mediatrix of all grace to mean that she is like a bridge between us and a remote Christ. This is to miss the most significant aspect of the Incarnation, namely, that in Christ the Son of God has truly become one of us without losing his divinity. In Christ, the triune God has been revealed as near to each one of us and as approachable through him. Truly this is Mary's real grandeur, that she was chosen to mediate this Incarnation of God to the sinful world for its redemption and recreation in grace. Least of all are we to insinuate that devotion to her on the part of us sinners is necessary so that she may placate her Son, the Just Judge, who is made merciful only through her intercession. Indeed, Mary realizes most profoundly among all of us redeemed People of God that her Son, the Son of God, is infinite mercy incarnate! There are many other observations to be made about the future of Mariology and ecumenism, but they are well beyond the scope of this essay to develop—such issues as Mary and the feminist movement, with its ecumenically sensitive issue of the ordination of women, or Mary and inculturation, with a wide variety of ecumenical concerns about our Christian witness to unevangelized cultures or to Hispanics in the U.S.A. who have a long tradition of Marian piety and who will probably constitute half of the Catholics in America by the new millennium. One significant aspect that requires much further theological discussion and ecumenical dialogue is the special relationship between Mariology and Pneumatology.¹⁹ First, the tendency to make Mary a surrogate for the Holy Spirit, e.g., in attributing to her the divine action of forming Christ in our souls, must be rectified. More positively, Mariology should help us to discern the true Spirit of God through the application of Pneumatology to the many movements within the Church and society at large, such as the liberation movement for women and minorities generally.²⁰ All this must eventually become a common concern in our ecumenical quest, since we prayerfully strive toward the one Church of Christ for the sake of the salvation—true liberation—of the whole world.

¹⁹ See *Mary, the Spirit and the Church*, Vincent P. BRANICK, ed., (N.Y./Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1980).

²⁰ Cf. Alexander SCHMEMMANN, "Our Lady and the Holy Spirit," *Marian Studies*, 23 (1972): 69-78.