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### Lumen Gentium, Nos. 66 to 69--Twenty Years Later

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## *Lumen Gentium*, NOS. 66 TO 69— TWENTY YEARS LATER

I can think of no better way to open our reflections upon the fourth section of chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium*, the title of which is "Devotion to the Blessed Virgin in the Church,"<sup>1</sup> than by listening to the exhortation given in April 1979 by the Bishops of West Germany on devotion to Mary:

3. No Christian, therefore, can dispense with the imitation of Mary, nor can this exclude veneration of her person. This veneration should be as simple and direct as the humble servant to whom it is directed. As long as this postulate is fulfilled, veneration of Mary can never impinge upon the worship of God and of Christ, nor be an obstacle to ecumenism.

In contemplating Mary, praying to her and going on pilgrimage to her, the Church is contemplating and praying to its own ideal and pattern. This ideal in turn is nothing more than the open door which both leads and points to Christ and the triune God. But since Christianity dislikes abstractions and prefers the concrete and personal, this door, too, should be embodied in a person. This door is always open, and we are not obliged to think of Mary each time we pray to her Son. But it is meaningful nonetheless to learn afresh from this mother how we can best encounter her Son. Paul, in writing of the church as the Bride of Christ, says that it is "without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Our "yes" to God should also be "without blemish." We may add that there is but one unblemished member of the church: Mary, the church's image and type.

Therefore we invite all the faithful to find in the "Hail Mary" ever fresh access to "the fruit of her womb," and in this prayer to contemplate both Mary's "yes" to God and the Incarnation of God's Son. Meditate on God's saving mysteries in the rosary.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (N.Y.: Guild Press, 1966), p. 94.

These prayers contain nothing ecstatic or fanciful which would distort our view of what is essential: God's being and work. On the contrary, they teach us true Christian meditation, which consists in loving contemplation of God's mysteries and of His incarnate love. Our own loving response is possible only if we allow Mary to draw us into *her* loving response. In this way, we prepare the world for God's kingdom, which is the fulfillment of His loving rule. This is the heart of our Christian faith and the most important reason for venerating the Mother of God. May she, who first gave Christ to the world, open the door once again in our own day to Him who is "blessed forevermore" (Rom. 9:5).<sup>2</sup>

I cite this exhortation at length because it seems to capture the spirit of numbers 66 and 67 of *Lumen Gentium* which give principles and guidelines for the cultivation of Marian devotion in the Church. Indeed, this exhortation captures much of the theology of chapter eight. It is certainly the fruit of a profound reflection upon the teaching of the Council in regard to the place and meaning of Marian devotion within the Church.

From another perspective, we have an even more striking example of a deepening awareness of the significance of Marian devotion in these words of Edward Knapp-Fisher addressed to the London branch of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary last July:

It is the vocation of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary to promote devotion to the Mother of Our Lord, particularly among those who for a variety of reasons regard her cult with suspicion or condemn it as a dangerous aberration. To commend devotion to her to such people requires much sensitivity and care.<sup>3</sup>

Here we have the testimony of an Anglican Bishop regarding what he calls a vocation to promote Marian devotion especially

<sup>2</sup> "Marian Devotion Today: A Pastoral Letter by the Episcopal Conference of the Federal Republic of Germany," trans. by John Jay Hughes, *Catholic Mind* 78 (May, 1980): 52.

<sup>3</sup> E. Knapp-Fisher, "Devotion to Our Lady in an Ecumenical Age" (Wallington, Surrey: E.S.B.V.M., 1985).

among those who have difficulty with it. Unless the Vatican Council had invited serious reflection on Mary's place in Christian worship leading to honest dialogue among Christian communities, such a statement would never have been made. I say this as a preface to our consideration of that section of *Lumen Gentium* which probably had the least to offer in terms of theological development. Most of what we find in numbers 66-67 of the Constitution is a simple statement of fact: the fact, namely, that devotion to Mary has been a long-standing tradition in the Church, that this devotion has taken many forms according to differing cultures and historical periods. It repeats the teaching of II Nicea concerning the veneration of images and describes true Marian devotion as springing from a faith-awareness of Mary's excellence as the Mother of God.

This is not to say that there have been no developments since the Second Vatican Council in the area of Marian devotion. Indeed, we shall see that there have been some important clarifications and insights which have stimulated a movement towards a more "wholistic" approach to our understanding and appreciation of Mary. What these facts suggest to me is that the principles enunciated in this section of the document, as well as the forthright exhortation to "be objective" in these matters of faith, have facilitated a process of theological growth which is beginning to bear some fruit.

#### *Section IV: Devotion to the Blessed Virgin in the Church*

As I view it, there are eight issues briefly touched upon in section IV of chapter eight of the Constitution (nos. 66-67):

- 1) The Christocentric character of Marian devotion;
- 2) The tradition of Marian devotion in the Church;
- 3) Its foci: invocation, imitation;
- 4) Its distinction from and relation to the cult of God;
- 5) The diversity of forms which this devotion has had;
- 6) An exhortation to practice this cult, especially in its liturgical forms;
- 7) General guidelines for this devotion: decrees on veneration of images to be observed, excesses and narrow-minded approach to be avoided;

## 8) Encouragement for a catechesis of Marian truths.

There is a clear interrelationship of each of these issues so that clarifications/developments which have taken place in one area have affected the others. It goes without saying that the contributions made since the Council by serious studies in scripture, patristics, liturgy and catechetics are beginning to have some impact on the practice of Marian devotion in the Church.<sup>4</sup> I propose in this paper to look at these issues to see what has been clarified/developed since the Council so as to make some critical judgments with the hope of furthering the process of dialogue/growth in the area of Marian devotion. I shall then consider the concluding section of chapter eight (nos. 68-69), not unrelated to that on the cult of Mary.

There can be no disputing the fact that the Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, issued in 1974 by Pope Paul VI, has had the greatest influence upon any theological/pastoral developments which are taking place in Marian devotion in the Church.<sup>5</sup> I shall be referring to this document frequently during my reflections upon the Council document, because it has spawned a series of articles on Marian devotion, its nature, its theology and its history, and it has stimulated theologians to pursue further the ideals of the Council in terms of an ecumenical sensitivity.

1) *The Christo-centric Character of Marian Devotion*

One of the more fundamental principles of Mariology is expressed by René Laurentin in his book, *La Question Mariale*:

<sup>4</sup> Since the Council there have been five International Mariological-Marian Congresses each of which has pursued the theme of Marian cult. See: *Maria in Sacra Scriptura* (Santo Domingo, 1965); *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani* (Lisbon, 1967); *De Cultu Mariano Saeculis VI-XI* (Zagreb, 1971); *De Cultu Mariano Saeculis XII-XV* (Rome, 1975); *De Cultu Mariano Saeculo XVI* (Zaragoza, 1979); *De Cultu Mariano Saeculis XVII-XVIII* (Malta, 1984). The acts of these Congresses, through 1975, are published by the Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis (Via Merulana 124), Rome.

<sup>5</sup> *Marialis Cultus: For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Hales Corners, WI: Priests of the Sacred Heart, 1974).

"Mary is totally relative to God; Mary is totally correlative to the Church, in Christ, by Christ and for Christ."<sup>6</sup> This same principle is reflected in *Marialis Cultus* by Pope Paul VI: "In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him."<sup>7</sup>

For Mary to be a valid subject for our theological reflection (and for our veneration) her faith-actions must have an ecumenical import in the sense that in some unique way she contributes to the salvation of the whole world and that she be differentiated from the rest of the faithful without, however, removing her from the Church. The Incarnation is not a mystery of coexistence but rather one of exchange. It is neither the result of a dualism separating humanity and divinity nor a monophysitism dissolving the human into the divine. Mary's fruitful virginity typifies the capacity of the creature under the Spirit's movement and its radical sterility without grace. The economy of recapitulation implies true maternity and true birth; it is not the replacement of one humanity by another. The substance of the mystery of the Incarnation is that God's Son is born of us, that He comes from us. No other human being is linked to this mystery as Mary was through her faith and her consent.<sup>8</sup> This fundamental bond is the indispensable root of the special veneration we have for Mary. Whatever relationship she has with Christ, whatever relationship any human being has with Christ, is the fruit of God's graciousness. If we venerate her, it is because God has first "blessed" her.<sup>9</sup> It is our faith-awareness of her blessedness which leads us to understand something of the mystery of God in Christ; this Christo-centric character of Marian devotion is symbolized for me by her words to the wine stewards at Cana: "Do whatever *He* tells you."<sup>10</sup> She turns us in His direction. Just as our proclamation of Mary as the Theotokos is the touchstone

<sup>6</sup> René Laurentin, *La Question Mariale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963), pp. 101-102.

<sup>7</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, no. 25.

<sup>8</sup> R. Lack, S.M.M., "Mariologie et Christocentrisme," *EtdM* (1964): 31ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:48.

<sup>10</sup> Jn. 2: 5.

of our orthodoxy in regard to our belief in Christ as "true God and true man," so too the fact that our veneration of Mary leads us into the worship of God is the touchstone for the authenticity of our honoring her.<sup>11</sup> It would be difficult to improve upon the statement in *Marialis Cultus* relative to the Christological aspects of Marian devotion.<sup>12</sup>

## 2) *The Tradition of Marian Devotion in the Church*<sup>13</sup>

This cult of Mary is presented simply as a fact in the Church's life. The question of the origin of the title *Theotokos* is a very thorny one. One has to guard against interpolations of this title

<sup>11</sup> The theological significance of the relationship between Mary and Christ her Son has become the subject of much theological reflection in our time. Errors or misconceptions regarding the fact and/or nature of Jesus' identity as Son of God have as a concomitant effect a complete neglect of Mary's role in salvation history. Cf. E. Sauras, O.P., "La Maternidad divina en las nuevas Cristologías," *EstM* 42 (1978): 72-92; V. Branick, S.M., "Mary in the Christologies of the N.T.," *MS* 32 (1981): 26-50; J. O'Connor, "Modern Christologies and Mary's Place Therein," *MS* 32 (1981): 51-75. In his keynote address to the Catholic Theological Society in 1978, "Voices of the Church" (CTSAP 33 [1978]: 1-12), Jaroslav Pelikan has an interesting reflection: "There seems to me to be substantial documentation for the bold hypothesis of Newman: that the Nicene dogma, by affirming the essential oneness of the Son with the Father, declared to be illegitimate any Christian devotion that revered the Son of God as the highest among mere creatures; thereby the language of such devotion was set free to identify Mary as chief among creatures, second only to God, that is, to God the Trinity. Thus the development of trinitarian dogma stimulated devotion to Mary, from which in turn Mariological doctrine would come. That is why Mariology is a good example of how 'the voice of devotion' may eventually shape theology and creed in decisive ways" (p. 5).

<sup>12</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, no. 25: "In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon Him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father from all eternity chose her to be the all-holy Mother and adorned her with gifts of the Spirit granted to no one else. Certainly genuine Christian piety has never failed to highlight the indissoluble link and essential relationship of the Virgin to the divine Saviour. Yet it seems to us particularly in conformity with the spiritual orientation of our time, which is dominated and absorbed by the 'question of Christ,' that in the expressions of devotion to the Virgin the Christological aspect should have particular prominence."

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Kirwin, O.M.I., "Mary in Catholic Prayer Life," *Queen* (Nov.-Dec., 1979): 20-27; (Jan.-Feb., 1980): 13-14.

into early patristic texts. Laurentin and Pelikan<sup>14</sup> consider the first rigorously certain use of this title in patristic texts to be found in a text of Alexander of Alexandria in 363.<sup>15</sup> It is used universally by the end of the fourth century.

There is an ancient version of the prayer "Sub tuum praesidium" wherein we find the title *Theotokos*, but the date of this manuscript is uncertain. The Council actually alludes to this prayer in its note and in the terms with which it paraphrases the practice of the early Church in its prayer life.<sup>16</sup> Thus, when the Council refers to a cult of Mary from "earliest times" it is actually referring to the fourth century.

During the first two or three centuries there is no trace of a cult of Mary, on the one hand, because of the fear that it might approximate the cult which pagans exercised towards goddesses and, on the other hand, because of a sensitivity towards the transcendence of Christ.

The earliest trace of a cult of the saints we find is that exercised toward the martyrs. From the second century on their "Dies natalis" was celebrated. Then this type of celebration was extended to some great ascetics and it is in this context that Mary was first honored. There is mention of her "Dies natalis" which led to the celebration of her dormition from the fifth century on in Jerusalem. She had a place in the Christian liturgy from the fourth century on in the East and slightly later in the West.

In regard to prayers offered to her, the "Sub Tuum" is undoubtedly the most ancient prayer known.<sup>17</sup> In Augustine's writings there is no mention of prayer to her. Yet, Gregory of Nazianzus tells us of a Christian woman, Justina, who was rec-

<sup>14</sup> René Laurentin, *Court Traité sur la Sainte Vierge* (Paris: Lethieulleux, 1967), Note annexe 3, pp. 170-171. J. Pelikan, "Voices of the Church," p. 4: "The first instance of the term *Theotokos* is in the writings of Alexander of Alexandria, and the emperor Julian, writing in 363, chided Christians for incessantly speaking about the *Theotokos*."

<sup>15</sup> G. Philips, "Le sens chrétien de la foi et l'évolution du culte marial," *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani*, II:113-114.

<sup>16</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 66.

<sup>17</sup> A. Malo, O.F.M., "La plus ancienne prière à notre Dame," *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani*, II:475ff.



commended to Mary's prayers.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after Augustine's time, prayers to Mary appear with increasing frequency. The Apocrypha attest to the fact that rather early Mary was the object of popular fervor, at least to some extent. Feasts in her honor were "invented" because of the apocrypha. These historical facts about the cult of Mary help us to understand the reserve of the Council text, and they give us a sense of the meaning of the directions given in the Conciliar text.

The Council mentions the development of Marian cult in the Church as dating from the time of Ephesus. The feasts of Mary became gradually more widespread: her nativity in the middle of the sixth century, her presentation at the end of the seventh century, her holy conception at the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century.

If we look into the reasons behind this developing cult of Mary in the early Church, we can perceive in an initial stage *admiration* and *gratitude*: admiration for God's goodness by which He chose to redeem the world by sending His Son to be born of a woman, to suffer and die for our sins; gratitude towards the woman who in faith responded to God's call. There was an initial perception of this woman of faith as an extraordinary person. Gradually, it seems that a sense of *filial confidence* and *trust* toward Mary arose in the hearts of the Christian faithful based upon an implicit awareness of the significance of her position as Mother of the Redeemer.

*Admiration* toward Mary and veneration of her had as their origin the contemplation of her singular dignity and holiness. The truths of her divine maternity and her holy virginity were deepening in the minds and hearts of the faithful. Mary's virginity, perceived as a total self-gift to God in obedient faith in order to accomplish God's plans for our salvation, became a stimulus for *imitation*. Mary's dignity, her holiness and her intimate union with Jesus in His mission were fundamental factors contributing to her veneration by the people. One final element in the chain of this developing cult of Mary seems to have been rooted in an awareness of her as a compassionate member of the

<sup>18</sup> Philips, "Le sens chrétien . . .," p. 113.

human race, a mother concerned about the brothers and sisters of her Son. It is this awareness which led to prayers offered to her that she might intercede.

This development of the cult of Mary was perhaps sporadic in terms of the individual faithful but through its liturgical cult the Church promoted a much more orderly appreciation of this woman of faith and her role in God's determination to establish His kingdom in the hearts of men and women.<sup>19</sup>

### 3) *Its Foci: INVOCATION and IMITATION*

Two aspects of Marian devotion are factually recorded in this section of *Lumen Gentium*, invocation and imitation. We shall consider invocation when we reflect upon Mary's place within the communion of saints.

From the earliest times the veneration of Mary was expressed in terms of imitation, particularly in the writings of the Fathers on the subject of virginity.<sup>20</sup> Her faith, her holiness, her humility have all been extolled as exemplary, especially in the homilies delivered on the occasion of her feasts. Some further development has taken place since the Council, especially in the exhortation of Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*.<sup>21</sup> The Pope proposes Mary as the model of the Church in divine worship: He speaks of her as the *Attentive Virgin* who by listening to the word of God and responding to it mothers Christ; like Mary, in imitation of her, the Church listens attentively to God's word which then becomes the source of her dynamic action in the lives of the faithful. She is the *Virgin in Prayer* whose motherhood is an exemplar of the Virgin-Church which through her preaching and

<sup>19</sup> The reflections of Carlo Columbo have helped in this section of the paper to delineate the foundations for the cult of Mary in the Church and its expression over time. See "De fundamentis dogmaticis cultus mariani," *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani*, II:183-189.

<sup>20</sup> Melchior a S. Maria, O.C.D., "De Loco Beatae Virginis Mariae juxta Christum in Vita Virginum," *De Primordiis Cultus Mariani*, II:247-265: "Non tantum primordia cultus virginitatis, verum etiam ejus 'primitiae,' id est summus apex seu vertex vel perfectio omnimoda, Christo Virginiq[ue] Mariae tribuuntur, ita ut virgines eos imitari debeant si Deo placere cupiant" (p. 255).

<sup>21</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, nos. 16-23.

baptism becomes herself a mother. She is the *Virgin presenting offerings* to the Father; at the Presentation and on Calvary Mary models for the whole Church an offering of Christ.

Thus we see some fruitful development in terms of the imitation of Mary—this time as a model to be imitated by the whole Christian community at prayer in the liturgy.

#### 4) *The Distinction of Marian Devotion from and Its Relation to the Cult of God*

The Council does not hesitate to say that there is an essential difference. It reserves to God alone the cult of adoration. It tends to consecrate the relatively recent usage of identifying adoration with the cult of latria as something reserved to God. Formerly, the word adoration was used of Mary and it caused much confusion.

The following sentences situate the entirely relative function of Mary in Christian cult: "While honoring Christ's Mother, these devotions cause the Son to be rightly known, loved, and glorified, and all His commands observed."<sup>21a</sup> The principal idea here is that devotion to Mary tends essentially to honor the Son for whom everything exists and to Whom Mary herself is referred as towards her end. Understood in this sense, it aids us in the observance of the commandments. On the one hand, Mary models the response of the creature to God; on the other hand, she prays for our response to her Son: "Do whatever He tells you." There is a deliberate ambiguity in the text as it stands: in a pastoral sense it could be understood to say that it is important that devotion to Mary be authentic; its authenticity is judged by whether it leads us to Christ and the observance of the commandments; if it does not, it is not acceptable to the Church. In an apologetic sense it could mean: this devotion as approved by the Church is acceptable because it leads us to Christ. The Council seeks to avoid hasty condemnations of this cult at the same time as it seeks to avoid superstitious practices.

#### 5) *The Diversity of Forms Which This Devotion Has Had*

Authentic devotion to Mary has been expressed in a variety of ways through the ages. Prayers, hymns, poetry, literature, statu-

<sup>21a</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 66.

ary, paintings, mosaics have all exalted the position Mary occupies in Catholic tradition.<sup>22</sup> These forms both express a wide diversity of devotion and help to promote it. In the Conciliar document there is no mention of any specific devotion. The Council proposed only general principles, calling for esteem towards those devotions recommended over the centuries by the magisterium without mentioning anything specific. Some definitely wanted the rosary to be mentioned since this had frequently been the object of papal approbations, but the Council did not agree because it was thought that to mention one form of devotion would lead to demands that others be included specifically which would cause problems.

In *Marialis Cultus*, the Pope emphasizes the value of the traditional prayers known as the Angelus and the Rosary. The emphasis is upon the contemplative character of these two prayers. The Pope insists upon the fact that the rosary is not a liturgical prayer, even as he says that it should help to lead us to liturgical prayer. Actually, the rosary began to flourish during a period of decline in liturgical piety. Both the liturgy and the rosary contemplate the same mysteries from the same biblical base: the liturgy re-presents these very mysteries of our redemption while the rosary, through the contemplation of these mysteries, leads to the formulation of ideals for Christian living. The reflections found in the Apostolic Exhortation refine and develop further our understanding of the link between liturgical and non-liturgical practices of devotion.<sup>23</sup> One element which is lacking, however, in the discussion of the rosary is a critical reflection upon the difficulty many modern-day Catholics have with this form of prayer.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the role which art plays in the expression of Marian devotion, cf. G. Kirwin, *The Nature of the Queenship of Mary* (Doctoral dissertation; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1973), pp. 68-79.

<sup>23</sup> For a series of helpful reflections upon these matters, cf. J. Hofinger, S.J., "The Practice of Post-Conciliar Marian Devotion," *The Priest* 37 (Jan. 1981): 43-45; (Feb. 1981): 12-15; (May 1981): 38-42. Also, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Behold Your Mother: A Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Washington, D.C.: U.S.C.C., 1973), nos. 91-100.

<sup>24</sup> S. Meo, O.S.M., "La Marialis Cultus e il Vaticano II," *Mm* (1977): 112-131.

6) *An Exhortation to Practice This Cult, Especially in Its Liturgical Forms*

This exhortation is in continuity with the Council document on the Liturgy (no. 103) which expresses the fact and the fundamental reasons for the liturgical celebration of Marian feasts.

In this paragraph we have a transition from doctrine to practice. The liturgical cult of Mary is placed in the forefront. The liturgy is the official prayer of the Church and, as such, it is the norm of all prayer. Liturgical prayer should not, however, lead us to neglect private devotions, especially those which have stood the test of time and have been approved by the Church. Neither liturgy nor private devotions are ends in themselves; they are means enabling us to reach God. Liturgy is one means of developing God's life in us.

It is the express purpose of *Marialis Cultus* to develop a theological basis for the liturgical celebration of Marian feasts and to offer guidelines for that celebration:

We therefore wish to dwell upon a number of questions concerning the relationship between the sacred liturgy and devotion to the Blessed Virgin (I), to offer considerations and directives suitable for favoring the development of that devotion (II). . . .<sup>25</sup>

After examining in detail the place of Mary in the revised Roman liturgy and its meaning, the Pope speaks of the Christological and ecclesial aspects of this devotion. He then reflects at length upon the biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological aspects of Marian devotion, liturgical and non-liturgical. These reflections constitute a profound contribution to the development of liturgical Marian piety.

7) *General Guidelines: Decrees on Veneration of Images to Be Observed, Excesses and Narrow-minded Approach to Be Avoided*

The Council insists upon the value of the cult of images, possibly because at that time there was a tendency or movement to-

<sup>25</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, "Introduction," p. 6.

wards extreme simplicity in regard to the adornment of churches. Some sought to replace all images, statues, etc. The Council did not wish to enter into detail but preferred to inculcate a spirit. The Conciliar document has a reference to both II Nicea and Trent.<sup>26</sup> The text of Trent teaches that the image is not an end but a means, a sensible sign to aid us in our worship of God. The basic principle of iconography is that it be a worthy sign in two ways: a) that it be in conformity to the reality to which it should lead us, b) that it be in conformity with the needs of those to whom it attempts to speak.<sup>27</sup>

There is an on-going demand for the development of an iconography which will meet the needs of the present day. The guidelines given by Pope Paul VI in regard to the renewal of Marian devotion, namely that it be biblical and anthropological, could well serve as a stimulus to this movement.

The same is true of the need for fostering a solid approach to preaching on Mary.<sup>28</sup> The Council's exhortation in this regard is rather general. *Marialis Cultus* lays the foundation for effective preaching on Mary, especially in the sections which speak of the biblical and anthropological aspects of Marian devotion. The biblical-liturgical characteristics of our preaching imply that we draw our inspirations about the meaning of Mary from God's word, especially that word as it is celebrated in the daily liturgies of a given season. There are certainly times when it is particularly appropriate to preach on Mary: Advent, Christmas, and her feast days, and the biblical texts which are now used in the revised Roman liturgy are quite significant for their didactic value in light of recent developments in biblical studies.

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to note the reference to the decrees of II Nicea in the "Ecumenical Declaration on Marian Devotion" at the Mariological/Marian Congress of Saragossa: "(3) This veneration of the Mother of God practiced in our churches in the various forms already mentioned is never worship, which is due only to God. The distinctions of the second Council of Nicea (787) between worship of God and veneration of the Saints (proskunesis-latreutike and proskunesis-timetike) remain vital ones for everyone in any case." See *OssR*, Eng. ed., Nov. 19, 1979, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> DENZ, 1823-1825.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Gaffney, S.M.M., "*Marialis Cultus*: Guidelines to Effective Preaching," *The Priest*, 38 (Dec. 1982): 14-18.

In dealing with the issue of preaching, the Conciliar document had made reference to the encyclical of Pius XII, *Ad Coeli Reginam*, as well as to his radio message addressed to the International Mariological Congress of 1954, wherein he spoke of exaggeration. Pius had not referred to the Fathers or the liturgy as sources of preaching. He had insisted exclusively on the Magisterium as the proximate norm of truth. The Council itself speaks of Holy Scripture, the Fathers, Doctors and liturgies (in the plural). *Marialis Cultus* develops the biblical-liturgical implications of Marian preaching.

The Council also gives an ecumenical direction: not only the separated brethren but all persons must be kept from falling into error regarding Mary. Zeal for Mary must be enlightened and judicious. *Marialis Cultus* expands upon this ecumenical theme.<sup>29</sup> On the one hand, we share beliefs about Mary and devotion to her with many of our separated brethren; on the other hand, we should be clear about what we believe and why we should be honest enough not to water down our faith, especially when preaching. The Apostolic Exhortation develops at some length, far beyond the Conciliar document, the anthropological aspect of Marian devotion. Mary's exemplary significance comes from her perfect discipleship toward Christ. Some of the outward expressions of devotion, fitting for one age, may not be for another. The word must be proclaimed to the people in their own situation.

The last sentence of the Conciliar paragraph (no. 67) gives a golden rule: true devotion does not consist either in fruitless and passing emotion or in a certain vain credulity. Devotion to Mary springs from the faith which must be distinguished from emotion. Feelings are not prohibited but they are given a secondary place in devotion. Vain credulity is a superstitious belief or practice which is actually the corruption of faith. Our love for Mary must spring from the contemplation of a spiritual model whose loving influence will impact upon our lives.

#### 8) *Encouragement for a Catechesis of Marian Truths*

It seems to me that implicit in the Conciliar document is the

<sup>29</sup> *Marialis Cultus*, nos. 32-33.

expression of a need for a catechesis of Marian truths. Not only are we exhorted to teach clearly what we believe about Mary but we are also encouraged to show the link between these beliefs and the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. In a number of ways this seems to be happening. First of all, there has been no attempt to add to the truths we believe about Mary. There have been some excellent studies in the biblical, patristic and liturgical fields relative to her and these have enabled us to refine our understanding of Mary's role in salvation, especially from an ecclesial perspective. Then too, there have been studies centering around the significance of some Marian truths and their interrelationship. The work that continues could be characterized as an effort at integration. And this is contributing to some growth in ecumenical dialogue.<sup>30</sup>

*Section V: Mary A Sign of Sure Hope and of Solace for God's People in Pilgrimage*

In number 68 of the Constitution there are two issues addressed:

- 1) Mary is the image of the Church to be perfected;
- 2) She is a sure sign of hope for us.

Mary is a personalized foreshadowing of our hope: she actualizes the communion of glory which will prolong and expand the communion of grace; it is a communion in the resurrection which prolongs the communion in the sufferings of life here below. The notion of prolongation or continuity between this life and the next is extremely important because it gives meaning to what we do and who we are in this life.<sup>31</sup>

Pius XII was moved by this insight to define the Assumption; he thought that this age had neglected the sense of eschatology

<sup>30</sup> G. Langevin, S.J., "La place de la Vierge Marie dans la catéchèse," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, 35 (1979): 227-234.

<sup>31</sup> E.R. Carroll, O.Carm., "Mary, the Woman Come of Age," *MS* 36 (1985): 146-147.



which is so pronounced in Christian revelation. Our age has been so enamored of progress in the physical, temporal sphere that it has tended to forget the "beyond." Concomitant with this emphasis has often been a sense of deep despair because of the difficulty so many people have to "make it" in this life. The theme developed in this section is, then, useful and to the point but it must be explained carefully. *The* sign of eschatological hope is Christ's resurrection. We are risen in Him; He is our hope. Mary is *a* sign of hope, not the sign of hope. Her place of importance in eschatology stems from the fact that by the grace of her Son she has been given already the fullness of eschatological fulfillment. She participates in the complete victory of Christ. She is the perfect image of what the Church hopes to become in Christ.

In a letter, "On Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology," issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1979, there is an explicit statement in regard to the meaning of Mary's Assumption:

In teaching her doctrine about man's destiny after death, the Church excludes any explanation that would deprive the Assumption of the Virgin Mary of its unique meaning, namely the fact that the bodily glorification of the Virgin is an anticipation of the glorification that is the destiny of all the other elect.<sup>32</sup>

The mention of Mary's place in heaven as a sign of hope tends to tie together the entire chapter, and indeed, the entire document. She is presented as the first flowering of the Church in her destiny to become one in Christ. The same truth was alluded to in the third section of the document on Mary and the Church: "In the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph. 5:27)."<sup>33</sup>

In the definition of the Assumption of Mary in 1950, the culmination of the Assumptionist movement, emphasis was placed

<sup>32</sup> "Letter on Certain Questions Concerning Eschatology" (Vatican City, 1979), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 65.

entirely upon Mary as an individual in the sense that the Assumption was presented as a privilege given to her. The Conciliar document, in alluding to the Assumption and its meaning, gives it an ecclesial sense. Mary is seen to be the image and the type of the earthly Church insofar as she has attained the fullness of glory. She *is* the heavenly Church in its final state. The representative role of Mary, traditionally accorded to her in the Incarnation and at the cross, is verified most truly in her present state of glory. She somehow "contains" within herself the entire heavenly community, even though that community has not as yet attained the fullness of glory through bodily resurrection. And, as such, she is a sign of hope because God has realized in her, and thus in some real way, *in the Church*, the fulfillment of His promises. She as an individual and as a representative of the Church has received the full benefit of the power of Christ's resurrection. In a sense, the last of the Almighty's great deeds have been done in her.<sup>34</sup> The individualist tendencies of the definition of the Assumption were put aside in favor of a far more significant insight, that of the eschatological/ecclesial import of the doctrine, and it is specifically within the context of the evolving doctrine of the Communion of Saints that these insights are beginning to bear fruit, especially in the ecumenical discussion.

Number 69 contains:

- 1) A reference to the fact that Mary is honored by other Christians, especially by Eastern rite Christians;
- 2) A reflection upon Mary's presence in the Communion of Saints;
- 3) Her intercessory role;
- 4) Her role in unifying the Christian community.

The last paragraph is ecumenical in concern; it took a lot of work to produce it and still many had reservations about it. When it was in the process of composition, the authors looked for texts in the encyclicals which had mentioned Mary in the

<sup>34</sup> Cf. D. Flanagan, "Eschatology and the Assumption," *Concilium*, 41 (1969): 135-146.

context of Christian unity, but the style and content of these texts was often abrasive and offensive to non-Catholics and so they could not be used.

The last sentence is an invitation to prayer for unity. One difficulty is that the invitation is addressed to those who are Christian and the prayer is addressed to Mary. Many Protestants cannot accept this, although there is a growing awareness on the part of some Protestants of the meaning of prayer to Mary. The final prayer which closes the entire Constitution is an invitation to all, even to non-Christians, to pray for unity. Mary's intercession is situated here within the Communion of Saints. It is ecumenically significant in that it situates her within the Body of Christ as a member of redeemed humanity.

Since the Council, there has been a consistent emphasis within Catholic theology upon the doctrine of the Communion of Saints as an entry point for dialogue and understanding between Catholics and non-Catholics. In September of 1983, at the International Mariological-Marian Congress held in Malta, the fifteen members of the Ecumenical Commission of theologians issued a joint statement of agreement on the Communion of Saints. Each of the six points is important, but I shall mention here only some of the pertinent elements, signs of great development within ecumenical circles and perhaps of much better mutual understanding and acceptance:<sup>35</sup>

1. We all acknowledge the existence of the communion of saints as communion of those on earth who are united in Christ as living members of his mystical body. The foundation and the center of reference of this communion is Christ, the Son of God made man and head of the church (Eph. 4:15-16), to unite us to the Father and the Holy Spirit.

2. This communion with Christ and among those who belong to Christ implies a solidarity which is expressed in prayer for one another. . . .

<sup>35</sup> *Origins* 13, 18 (1983): 310-11.

4. This is the context in which we should understand the intercession of saints on our behalf, an intercession similar to the prayers which the faithful offer for one another. . . .

5. Mary, the Mother of God, has a place within the communion of saints. It is precisely the relationship to Christ which gives her a singular role in the communion of saints. . . . Further, the prayer of Mary for us should be seen in the context of that worship of the entire heavenly church described in the Apocalypse, to which the church on earth wishes to unite itself in its own corporate prayer. Mary prays within the church, as once she prayed in expectation of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). There is no reason preventing us, even with our confessional differences, from uniting our prayer to God in the Spirit with the prayer of the heavenly liturgy, and especially with the prayer of the mother of God.<sup>36</sup>

That statement is an indication of the growth in ecumenical understanding which has taken place since and most likely because of the Conciliar statements on Mary. There is still hesitation to speak of prayer to Mary because of a concern that she be considered as in some way replacing Christ. Yet the genuine doctrine of the Communion of Saints is respected, and at least some of its implications are surfacing and being accepted.

The Son and the Spirit are sent by the Father to effect in the human community a community comparable to the divine community.<sup>37</sup> The mission of the Church is to remind us of and to call all to unity.

Our Lady is the corporate personality who includes the entire Communion of Saints within herself (something alluded to above when we spoke of Mary as the eschatological icon of

<sup>36</sup> In an earlier Mariological/Marian Congress held at Zagreb in 1971, one of the points of agreement on the part of the Ecumenical Commission speaks of the foundation of Mary's intercessory role in these words: "Intercessory prayers addressed to the Virgin have as a foundation, besides confidence towards the Mother of God which the Holy Spirit has animated among the faithful, the fact that Mary always remains joined to the redemption and thus she is joined to its application throughout all times and places."

<sup>37</sup> I am indebted to Fr. Joseph Cahill, S.J., for most of the material which follows in regard to the Communion of Saints. See his article, "Our Lady's Role in the Communion of Saints," *MS* 18 (1967): 31-45.

hope), because she is the unity to which God calls all men and women. She "includes the entire communion of saints as a terminal state in herself insofar as she sums up completely and perfectly"<sup>37a</sup> that communion.

In Mary there are various levels of unity: a) *psychological* (In her are harmonized various tensions: virgin/mother; totally human/perfect reflection of God's activity; one who has died/yet lives. She proclaims that God is present in the world unifying tensions) and b) *spiritual* (She is perfectly at one with God and with her neighbor. She reminds us that God has already actualized His call to unity in one person. She exemplifies the unifying force available to all on the horizontal level: love. She also testifies to God's power once He has found this love—He can draw out from us our highest potencies. That kind of love is uncovenanted, i.e., not regulated by any law or institution. It is creative and continues to create new situations for mankind—saving situations.).

"As such she [Mary] is the corporate personality manifesting the completeness of God's work while at the same time opening horizons of unity and love among all members of the human community."<sup>38</sup> She does this, or rather, God does this in her, through her prayer. This is precisely the point made by the Conciliar document in its exhortation to unity: "Let them implore that she who aided the beginnings of the Church by her prayers may now, exalted as she is in heaven above all the saints and angels, intercede with her Son in the fellowship of all the saints."<sup>39</sup>

The Council is touching here one of the most crucial issues related to the question of the cult of Mary. It is one thing to honor an individual; it is quite another to believe and to act as though any individual creature has some kind of influence with God, let alone, over Him. Theologians, both Catholic and non-Catholic, have tried since the Council to clarify this pastorally important doctrine. There is talk now of *presence*, the presence of Mary to Christ and to us. Fr. Laurentin spoke of this in the context of the

<sup>37a</sup> Cahill, "Our Lady's Role . . . ," p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>39</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, no. 69.

Communion of Saints and intercession almost immediately after the Council in his summer lectures at Dayton.<sup>40</sup> Fr. Jelly emphasizes this notion of presence in his study of Mary's Intercession.<sup>41</sup> He views her presence in terms of her exemplarity and in this sense he considers Mary's "activity" to be that of disposing us to a more fruitful, docile receptivity towards the sanctifying action of the Spirit.<sup>42</sup>

In his address to the Ecumenical Society of the B.V.M. in 1983, Neville Ward uses the word "presence," though not with the same refinement as his Catholic counterparts. He says:

Is she then just a particularly beautiful metaphor? Or is to invoke her to summon a real being and a presence? The answer is that we believe she is both. She is a word and a reality, her name refers to a network of thoughts and a presence.<sup>43</sup>

How successful this effort has been remains to be seen. But perhaps an incident which occurred a few years ago at a dinner for the members of the American branch of the Ecumenical Society of the B.V.M. will serve as a symbol of hope for a closer unity between Catholics and non-Catholics based in part upon a deeper understanding of Mary, God's Highly-Favored Daughter.

One of those present on that occasion was a renowned Anglican scripture scholar. He, among others, was invited to share something of his experience of the Society's meetings. Among

<sup>40</sup> "Fall or Rise of Mariology," in Summer School lectures (University of Dayton, June-July, 1968), pp. 275-293.

<sup>41</sup> F.M. Jelly, O.P., "Mary's Intercession: A Contemporary Reappraisal," *MS* 32 (1981): 76-95. Cf. Neville Ward, "Mary: Intercessor," *One in Christ*, 19 (1983): 282-290; J.A. Ross Mackenzie, "Honouring the Virgin Mary: A Reformed Perspective," *The Way Supplement* (Summer 1982): 65-77.

<sup>42</sup> Jelly, "Mary's Intercession," pp. 94-95: "Her intercessory role helps create the spiritual atmosphere which disposes us to meet Christ more intimately, whether the Spirit is working in us through the sacraments or not. . . . Thus her intercession not only does not interfere with the mediation of her Son and the sanctification by his Holy Spirit, but even enhances it, by preparing us for more intimate immediate encounters with the triune God dwelling within us and among us."

<sup>43</sup> Ward, "Mary: Intercessor," p. 288.

other things, he said: "To give you some idea of what this has meant to me, last year on December 8th I said the last half of the 'Hail Mary.' " He went on to say that his theology of prayer in relation to Mary would be best expressed as prayer *with* Mary. And he concluded: "Wouldn't you think that a man who has devoted his whole life to New Testament studies would have appreciated long ago the full import of the Greek title addressed to Mary by the Angel: *Kekariomene*?"

The very existence of this Mariological Society of America and the advances in understanding the place of Mary in Christian Churches which it has promoted is perhaps the best testimony to the significance of the contribution made by the Conciliar document on Mary.

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