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Frederick M. Jelly

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## RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS RAISED BY FR. HEFT

May I begin my response to the penetrating questions raised by Fr. Heft with a word of thanks for his very kind and encouraging remarks in reference to my special ecumenical efforts regarding Mariology. I am also grateful to him for this opportunity to clarify my paper further by attempting to respond to his probing questions and perceptive comments.

For the sake of clarity and brevity, I should like to start with Fr. Heft's second question, then proceed to his first, and finally address together questions 3, 4, and 5 which mainly concern the ecumenical dialogue between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches. In conclusion, I shall make some very brief comments in accepting his "two invitations to further reflection."

As my paper indicates, Pope John Paul II's use of the image "maternal" to describe Mary's heavenly mediation is best interpreted as a "motherly *presence*" in the Pilgrim Church whereby she exercises a salutary influence upon our Christian discipleship (cf. pp. 125 & 126 of text). Now, although the Holy Father does not make an explicit connection between the mystery of her heavenly mediation and the image/concept of *presence*, it does seem valid to infer, from what he says in other parts of his encyclical as well as in his other writings generally, that Mary's mediation may be imagined and conceptualized as a "motherly *presence*" which helps enlighten and inspire us to a deeper faith in and firmer commitment to her Son. This also has the ecumenical significance of avoiding the image of her mediation as making her a "go-between" or a bridge between us and a remote Christ which only distorts his unique mediatorship.

In response to the first question, I believe that the Pope

does not intend to teach here that the Roman Catholic and Reformation Protestant traditions interpret Mary's motherhood of the Lord and her spiritual maternity in relationship to his disciples in precisely the same way, but that there is sufficient basis for both, in the biblical revelation and in the ancient ecumenical councils of the undivided Church, to provide a firm foundation for the dialogue to build upon in the quest for unity. Our Holy Father's meditation upon the appropriate New Testament texts would seem to reflect his mind in the matter. And so, while agreeing with Fr. Heft's observation, especially about the Protestant difficulty with the Catholic interpretation of Mary's spiritual maternity, still the Pope's general remark can be defended in its context.

Specifically in reply to the third question, I believe that a reunion of the East and West would bring much more clearly and abundantly into our dialogue with the Reformation Churches certain ways of formulating Marian doctrine and celebrating Marian devotion that would be "less offensive" and more meaningful to our Protestant and also Anglican brothers and sisters in the Lord. For instance, the tradition of the great Eastern Fathers regarding Pneumatology, the process of divinization in individual Christians called to cooperate freely with God's grace (synergism), the centrality of Mary as *Theotokos*, and similar considerations, should provide categories of theological thought that would help get us in the West beyond divisive thought-forms and formulations of our faith into the heart of the revealed mystery.

This leads into the fourth question raised by Fr. Heft in which he inquires why I used such phrases as "seems to believe" and "apparently" with reference to Eastern Orthodox faith and the controversial dogmas of Mary's Immaculate Conception and her Assumption. First, I am hesitant about affirming whether or not they believe in the Immaculate Conception as we do, since their whole understanding of original sin is quite distinct from ours; I am not certain that they would accept the dogma as it came to be defined in the Roman Catholic Tradition by Pope Pius IX in 1854. I realize that they are effusive in their praise of Mary as the

all-holy one, but am not sure that they would exempt her from original sin as they conceive that mystery. Concerning Mary's glorious Assumption, I am confident that they believe in her total glorification as a human person in heaven, but that they refuse thus far to accept it as a dogma of Christian faith causes me to question whether or not they do actually believe in the mystery as defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950. Perhaps I am being overly cautious here, but I cannot honestly dispense with such limiting qualifiers until an ecumenical dialogue clears up my doubts in the matter. Finally, I find Fr. Heft's fifth question difficult, if not practically impossible, for me to answer. It is certainly clear enough and a valid question to pose, but I can only suggest that Pope John Paul II has chosen to concentrate his ecumenical efforts upon dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Churches since that appears to him the most effective way of eventually facing the thorny problems with the Reformation Churches, especially about Mary. At the same time, we know that we have his blessing and approval upon our many national and international bi-lateral dialogues with the Reformation Churches.

To pursue in any depth the further reflections to which Fr. Heft invites us would mean the presentation of at least another paper, and, indeed, I submit that we should plan to do just that sometime in a future convention of our society. Suffice it to say here and now, however, that the Pope's phenomenological approach is not only more congenial to much of contemporary ecumenical dialogue, but even to a "developmental Thomism" which is always open, in the authentic spirit of St. Thomas Aquinas, to whatever will render the truths of revelation more intelligible. In the same spirit, we in the West have much to learn from the inspiring modes of Marian doctrine and devotion, especially liturgical, in the East.

FREDERICK M. JELLY, O.P.  
*Mt. St. Mary's Seminary*  
*Emmitsburg, Maryland*