

1-24-1964

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Recommended Citation

Vaughan, Austin B. (1964) "The Development of Marian Doctrine as an Ecumenical Problem," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 15, Article 6, Pages 27-47.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol15/iss1/6

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF MARIAN DOCTRINE AS AN ECUMENICAL PROBLEM

When the history of the twentieth century is written, it may well record as the great and lasting contribution of Pope John XXIII to the Church the great new impetus he gave to the Ecumenical Movement. It was an impetus rooted in the very mission of the Church, in her duty to bring salvation to all men, but one that seemed to set out in two new directions: a) an intense effort to work toward the healing of the age-old divisions within Christianity; b) in the course of this, an attempt to establish fruitful contacts that would permit a freer flow of the full message of Christ to those who are Christian brothers despite their separation from the Church and who are likely, barring an unforeseen event of cataclysmic proportions, to die (and hence to have worked out their salvation) outside the Church. The early successes of such contacts were probably due to two main factors: a) the anxiety for unity that had grown in Christian circles outside of the Church during the previous half-century, and more specifically during the previous fifteen years; b) the magnetic and outgoing personality of John XXIII himself who succeeded so readily in conveying warmth and interest and stirring up sympathy and trust in return.

The early actions of Pope Paul VI made it clear that the Church is now firmly committed to this path. His current trip to the Holy Land with its prospective meeting with Patriarch Athenagoras is the most spectacular evidence of this, but the fact itself has been clear from the beginning. The one special topic of current interest in the Church that was singled out for lengthy treatment in his Coronation address was reunion with the Eastern Churches, and less than two months later, in a visit to the Eastern Rite Monastery at Grottaferrata, this theme ap-

peared again. His attitude toward the Observers at the Council has paralleled that of his predecessor, and the prospects for reunion have reappeared in subsequent talks as well. Hence the Catholic theologian must set his sights on the new ecumenical horizons that the Church is marking out for him. But almost immediately, problems—and great ones at that—arise.

The Presidential Address to the Mariological Convention of two years ago, in dealing with the problems that Ecumenism was posing for Catholic theologians, laid down the twin propositions that "the single theological issue which most effectively strangles the ecumenical dialogue is the Catholic vision of Mary," and "the theological effort from the Catholic side must center on the problem of development."¹ Both notions—the difficulties raised for ecumenical contacts by Marian doctrine, and the key role of development—had already been verified even prior to the Church's renewed interest in Ecumenism from 1959 on; Protestant reactions to the definition of the dogma of the Assumption in 1950 would be a case in point, and so would the famous statement issued by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. in June, 1955 under the title of "The Marian Cult," which singled out the development of the Catholic Church's teaching on Mary and even more that of popular devotion to her as an issue that affected "the very core of the Christian religion," and one that "constitutes a challenge to all evangelical Christians."²

The problem is one that arises partly from sharp differences over the doctrine which has been developed and partly from even sharper ones over the method in accordance with which this development has taken place. Since Protestant belief covers a wide spectrum, the extent of the differences will vary a good deal, but there is scarcely a single aspect of accepted Catholic teaching on Mary that would not be questioned in

¹ Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., *The Mariologist as Ecumenist*, in *MS* 13 (1962) 5-12.

² *The Marian Cult*, in *The Christian Century* 72 (1955) 756-758.

some quarters. The title Mother of God that set the seal on the Church's teaching about Christ's humanity and divinity would be accepted by most Protestants, but shunned by some, despite its use by Luther and Zwingli, because of its association in their minds with Catholic "exaggerations" in this area. The virginity of Our Lady in and after the birth of Christ would be contested by many or regarded as uncertain, while some would be inclined to move a step farther and consider the virginal conception of Christ as at least possibly a myth, and in any case certainly not to be accorded the same doctrinal force of belief as is given to Christ's Lordship and Resurrection. The Immaculate Conception and Assumption are almost universally rejected as not Scriptural and indemonstrable. While Catholic teaching universally agrees in according Mary the title of Queen of the Angels and Saints which singles her out as the greatest of created persons, and that of Spiritual Mother of Mankind which signalizes her intimate relationship to the salvation of mankind, most of those outside of the Church would regard both titles with fear and uneasiness. Catholics are agreed in general on Our Lady's right to the title of Co-Redemptrix and on her unique role in the mediation of graces, while differing on the exact content and extent of each of these doctrines; both are regarded with suspicion by Protestants. And even the Orthodox, who are inclined to accept many of these doctrines, are reluctant to attribute the same force to them as the magisterium of the Church has in recent times.

The problem is an even thornier one when the process of development itself is considered, for Protestants see in this whole glorification of the "humble maid of Nazareth" during the centuries a substitution of a creation of the Church for the Scriptural revelation entrusted to us by the Apostles, and even the Orthodox regard the official statements on it as declarations from an authority that can no longer speak as the "oikumené" with the force of the Church of the first seven Councils.

From this point of view alone, the problem is a huge one, but actually it reaches even deeper, for the differences in Mariology are in almost every instance symptoms and expressions of more deep-seated divisions. The Presbyterian declaration of 1955 implied that Marian doctrine and Marian devotion had become focal-points around which all Catholic theology and devotion tended to revolve. I don't think that this has ever been true. But, it is true that Catholic doctrine on Our Lady is vitally bound up with the central notions of revelation, and that it focuses interest on the key issues that divide us from other Christians, in much the same way that the title Mother of God used by the Council of Ephesus did more than affirm a Marian privilege; it set a seal on the orthodox formulation of the doctrine of the Incarnation. For this reason, it has been said at times that that title was Christological rather than Mariological; the distinction is a poor one, since Mariology is intimately and organically bound up with Christology, but if it were to be carried through, then we might say that our teaching on the Immaculate Conception is anthropological, pointing up the nature of original sin and man's elevation and the relationship of subsequent human beings to Adam; that on the Co-Redemption and Mediation of Graces is soteriological, pointing up the way in which Christ's redemptive action works and the role assigned to redeemed mankind in redemption; that on the Assumption is eschatological, crystallizing the reward of the life to come as it has been achieved in a human person; and that on the Spiritual Maternity is ecclesiological, indicating the intimate union that binds all of the redeemed in their progress toward salvation. Each of these titles represents an area where, at least in the past, there have been profound differences of view between Catholics and Protestants. And finally, the whole process whereby the Church through her meditation on the truth of Scripture as explained and handed down by Tradition has come to perceive the picture of Our Lady that now presents to the faithful and to the world, poses the whole

problem of the relationship between Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium and that of the differences between our position and those of other Christians in this regard—and it poses it in its simplest and most obvious form. In short, the division between Catholics and other Christians on Marian doctrine is deep and the difference on development of doctrine is just as deep and even more fundamental. This obviously creates a major problem for ecumenical discussions.

In his talk two years ago, Fr. Burghardt pointed out four areas where Catholic scholarship had to resolve issues on this problem of development, if it were to speak meaningfully to non-Catholics.³ The first was whether or not dogmas that are implicitly contained in revelation are always *logically* implicit or rather contained in some vital, dynamic way that does not yield to a process of deduction; the second, closely related, was whether or not revelation itself is contained wholly in propositions, or rather goes beyond this to involve some kind of personal contact with the Incarnate Word; the third was whether or not all revelation is discoverable in Scripture; and the last, which he listed as the proper work of the Mariologist, was the question of tracing the "*de facto* development of Marian doctrine, the factual evolution whereby the Church has read progressively in the initial deposit the full truth which the revelation of God intended to include in His message to mankind."

In many senses, that talk might be regarded as a challenge to anyone taking up the topic assigned to me, and yet today I intend to turn aside from it and not attempt a synthesis of the development of Marian doctrine in the light of the ecumenical movement for two reasons: a) Despite the fact that some of the spadework for such a study has been done, as Fr. Burghardt indicated, much still remains to be done, and, more to the point, it will not be possible to put together a completely accurate picture of the development of Marian doctrine until the three previous questions he mentioned on the nature of revelation

³ *Op. cit.*, 9-11.

and the course of development in general, all of which are now sharply disputed, have been settled. b) More importantly, I think that there is a more urgent and more basic question to be asked about the development of Marian doctrine as an ecumenical problem at the present moment: Is there agreement among Catholics on the question of whether or not development of Marian doctrine is an aid to Ecumenism or an obstacle to it, and as to whether or not Ecumenism as currently practiced is an aid to the development of Marian doctrine and devotion or an obstacle to it?

The problem is a critical one for a number of reasons. The Catholic position on Marian doctrine up to now has been that Mary's position in Catholic theology is vital, and that it is well-founded. Monsignor Philips has made both these points clear in his penetrating introduction to the massive study *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo*.⁴ The Protestant position in general has been that Mary's position in Catholic theology is exaggerated and changed from the accidental role assigned to her in Scriptural accounts to something essential, and this position assigned to her is not a well-founded one. The Catholic reply is that this judgment that Mary's position has been exaggerated is based on a misunderstanding of many other basic doctrines. The reason for saying that the Catholic position is not well-founded is itself a misunderstanding of the elements that go to make up a true and full presentation of the message of Christ in the present century: Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium, Liturgy, "Sensus Fidelium." Unfortunately, but factually, this reply is likely to fall on deaf ears as it has so often in the past, for the simple reason that this is, as we have seen, an issue that so sharply divides us and that has emotional overtones. In the face of an urgent desire and need to promote contacts with other Christians, what course is Catholic theology to take: a virtual ignoring of Mary's position which it has

⁴ Gerard Philips, *De Mariologia in contextu hodiernae theologiae*, in *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo* (Rome, 1962) 3-30.

come to regard as vital, acting as if she were not there, with a consequent possible harm to Catholic faith and devotion and an obscuring of dogmatic truths? or instead a strong affirmation of it at a time when it has become the sign of contradiction, with a consequent possible strangling of further ecumenical efforts? The problem is a vital one and one that is beginning to affect Catholic theology sorely as recent writings and events evidence.

A number of Catholic writers, the best known of them being Hans Küng,⁵ have expressed the hope that there would be no new Marian definitions forthcoming from the Council, on the general grounds that such action would widen the gap existing between ourselves and separated brethren and thus defeat the over-all purposes of the Council. A number of other writers have implied that this amounts to ignoring the providential role of Our Lady in the Church, downgrading devotion to her and failing to carry out the Church's mission of preserving and proposing the whole of her revealed doctrine. There can be no doubt of sincerity on both sides, but the disagreement has lasted: e.g., Galot, writing in the *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* for May of this year:

At the present time, the aim of Catholic theology of Mary must be to pursue the deeper penetration of doctrine to which it has dedicated itself in recent years, rather than to call for the definition of new dogmas, whose usefulness is anything but clear and which would be a hindrance to ecumenism.⁶

And Michael O'Carroll, writing in *The Homiletic and Pastoral Review* for May, 1962 on the same question:

The Catholic Church will gain nothing from compromise on doctrine. What has been given to us as divine revelation we must proclaim; how to explain it to those outside is the secondary

⁵ Hans Küng, *The Council, Reform and Reunion* (New York, 1961) 125-28.

⁶ J. Galot, S.J., *Marie et certains protestants contemporains*, in *NRT* 85 (1963) 478-95.

problem. The order should not be inverted. We should not be asked to study the mentality of the outsider, to determine what we are obliged to hold.⁷

Perhaps the most graphic illustration of this division was the most dramatic single event of the second session of the Council. On October 24th, Cardinals Santos and König respectively presented positive and negative arguments on the question of dealing with the topic of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a separate Council schema, as opposed to making it a final chapter added to the schema on the Church. Previous efforts to settle the matter in the Council's Theological Commission had evidently failed. According to the official report, Cardinal Santos listed seven arguments which are reducible to three for a separate schema: a) It would be difficult to incorporate the matter on the Blessed Virgin into the *De Ecclesia* schema at this late date without extensive revisions in the latter, and its presence there would endanger the progress of the whole schema since the matter on the Blessed Virgin was controversial in its own right; b) There are many aspects of doctrine on Mary that do not readily fit into *De Ecclesia*, since they refer to her relationships to Christ directly rather than to those she has with the Church; c) The good of the faithful and true progress of the ecumenical movement call for a clear and complete spelling out of the Church's doctrine on Our Lady. Cardinal König gave ten reasons under four headings (Theological, Historical, Pastoral and Ecumenical) for incorporating the material in the schema on the Church; they can be reduced to two: a) The doctrine on Our Lady fits in logically with that on the Church which is the main concern of the Council; b) Separate treatment will give the impression of an intention on the Council's part to define new Marian dogmas, of a tendency to separate Mariology too much from Theology and to use words in different senses in Mariology than in other

⁷ Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., *More Marian Dogmas?*, in *HPR* 62 (1961-62) 769-74.

tracts; none of the doctrine on Mary must be hidden, but at the same time it must be expressed in terms of the current needs and goals of the Council, and in a way in which the Orientals and many Protestants will more easily recognize the Mary they know. The vote was taken on the following Tuesday, October 29th: 1074 Fathers voted in favor of a separate schema; 1114—a margin of 40—voted in favor of its incorporation into *De Ecclesia*. The newspapers headlined the results as "Church Liberals Win Vote Over Paper on Mary"⁸ and "Vatican Council Bars Emphasis on Mary in Separate Document."⁹ But, in terms of eventual effects, the margin was probably more important than the actual result, since the narrowness of it pointed to a very obvious division among the bishops on this matter. With such a margin, a separate schema on Our Lady might well have found it impossible to pass; but with *De Beata Maria Virgine* now incorporated into it on the basis of such a vote, the schema *De Ecclesia*, which has already been the subject of some controversy by itself, may have great difficulty in passing.

Even this is probably not as significant and important as the fact that the vote may well indicate a deep division within the Church, not on the question of Marian doctrine, obviously, or even of devotion to Mary—the Council Fathers were clear on this—but rather on the question of the attitude that should be adopted toward Marian doctrine and devotion in the light of the Ecumenical movement. Is Mary and Marian doctrine a wall of separation dividing us from other Christians—no Catholic of course would give any credence to the belief occasionally expressed by others that she is a wall separating us from Christ or from God—or is she rather the heart of the ecumenica movement, the one providentially intended by God to bring about reunion? Is the advocating of no further Marian definitions and a de-emphasizing of some aspects of Marian devo-

⁸ *New York Journal-American*, October 29, 1963, 1.

⁹ *New York Times*, October 30, 1963, 1.

tion a step in the direction of Christian reunion, or rather a false irenicism that will benefit no one? Should development of Marian doctrine be pursued? Have past developments at times been unfortunate and driven Christians farther apart? Should development be shaped by the need and demands of the ecumenical movement? Or, would this result in a muzzling of our theology to its detriment? These are key questions in an area where understanding among Catholics is of vital importance if any true progress is to be made—and in an area where few attempts seem to have been made up to the present to promote understanding. The problem in short is this: Ecumenism seems to involve laying stress on points we have in common with those outside the Church. Development of Marian doctrine seems to involve an accentuation of our differences. In the light of this, is Marian doctrine a help to Ecumenism or an obstacle? If it is an obstacle, is further development of it to be sacrificed for the sake of a greater good? Would such a sacrifice itself be a greater evil? Finally, can Marian development benefit in some way from the Ecumenical movement?

Strangely enough, here again, Marian doctrine is a symptom of deeper problems—of a concern on the part of some Catholics that we will, as a result of clannish subservience to old ways, miss the present opportunity to further the kingdom of God by reuniting all Christians or at least drawing them closer together, and of a fear on the part of others that basic principles are being unwittingly sacrificed in a vain attempt at compromise. For, those who are afraid of a false compromise in the area of Mariology are often even more afraid of unintentional compromises on moral issues that now divide us from others—family life, recognition of authority, objectivity of the moral law.

We might also remark that this same set of fears will almost certainly beset the sincere Protestant or Orthodox believer who feels the anguish of Christian separation and realizes that this

is a scandal that must be removed, and who yet fears that steps in that direction may involve a compromising of the basic principles that he holds so dear.

I have no confidence in my ability to supply completely satisfactory answers to all the questions raised, but they are questions that must be asked, and that must be asked now at the very beginning of the Church's intensive ecumenical effort, if that effort is not to be crippled right from the very beginning and meet with only half-hearted support both from the faithful and from many theologians. If the present paper does nothing more than promote discussion of this matter, it will have served its purpose.

In an attempt to clarify the issues at stake, I would like to first outline the various types of development of Marian doctrine and the characteristics of the ecumenical approach initiated by Pope John and encouraged by Pope Paul, and then take up the specific matters that seems to be dividing Catholics in terms of three questions: 1) Have Mary, Marian doctrine and development of Marian doctrine constituted a wall between us and other Christians or do they rather serve as a bridge? 2) A more general question: are specific developments of dogma at times untimely and unfortunate? 3) Can Ecumenism be of benefit to development of Marian doctrine in any way? In each instance, I will attempt to draw some practical conclusions from the answers offered.

Development of doctrine can take place in various directions: a) a deeper penetration of the connection of current doctrine with the fonts (e.g., the Scriptural picture of Our Lady being clarified in the light of new studies of Biblical theology, and in the light of application of new principles such as the *sensus plenior*); b) a closer study of the relationship of one current doctrine with others, to see the light they cast upon each other (e.g., Mary's Co-redemption in relationship to the unique Mediatorship of Christ, Mary's relationship to the Church); c) a deeper penetration of an existing truth to spell out its implica-

tions (e.g., Mary's Co-redemption spelled out in terms of the types of causality involved). It might be remarked that those interested in furthering Ecumenism are not generally opposed to all forms of development; they would favor the first two above but tend to regard the third as not helpful to the ecumenical movement in the current environment. (Since new definitions would be likely to be in this area, they do not favor such definitions because of their harmful effects on ecumenism.) A key question in this area is the extent to which these various types of development can be kept apart, since one of the main purposes of a deeper study of the fonts and of connections with other doctrines is to provide a more penetrating view of the doctrine itself. They probably cannot be separated completely, so it would be a question of one being stressed more than others.

The ecumenical approach encouraged by Pope John is an attempt to draw closer to Christian individuals and Christian churches outside the Catholic Church, with the eventual aim of reunion of all Christians. It is based on the sharing of a common heritage and a common belief in many but not all respects, on a sincere desire to realize the goals set for the world by Christ, and hence a sincere desire to work for the salvation of all men and to do what we can and give what we can to achieve it. The demands it makes of both sides are prayer, a sympathetic interest in the salvation of others, an attempt to understand the positions of others and the reasons for them, a stress on elements we have in common (without any false compromise in the form of denying differences that really exist), a recognition of the good and positive values to be found in the doctrines of others—Paul VI indicated in his opening talk to the Second Session of the Council that our common heritage has been not only preserved but in part well developed by those separated from the Church¹⁰—and finally an effort to give what we have to give that others are willing

¹⁰ Cf. *OR*, September 30-October 1, 1963, 1-2.

to take. This approach has opened up two enormous vistas that seemed beyond imagination just a few years ago: a) the possibility of eventual reunion of all Christians, as remote as it might be; b) the immediate possibility of fruitful exchanges that will allow the Church's message to be heard to an extent by those who were cut off from it before, and allow the Church in turn to benefit from the insights of those who share in the grace of Christ. The problems and difficulties it poses will have to be measured against these immense benefits.

With these notions in mind, we are prepared to approach the questions posed earlier.

I. Have Mary, Marian Doctrine and Development of Marian Doctrine been a Wall or a Bridge?

When the question is asked about Mary herself, the dogmatic answer for a Catholic has to be that she can only be the bridge and not a source of separation. In her role as Spiritual Mother of Mankind, as Mediatrix of Graces, as Co-Redemptrix, she shares in her Son's work of leading all mankind to salvation, and she can only be the most perfect and willing instrument in that plan. The reason for mentioning this first is to separate it from the question of whether or not Marian doctrine can be an obstacle. When some Catholic authors say that Mary is the wall dividing us, they are normally referring to doctrine on Mary, and when others strongly affirm that she cannot be a wall of separation, they are usually speaking of Mary herself, so that the two positions do not come to grips with each other. Mary herself, through her example and her intercession, is working constantly for reunion, and it is certainly in this sense that so many of the recent Popes have called upon her to help bring about that Reunion.

Is Marian doctrine a wall or a bridge? In the light of so many clear-cut Protestant declarations that this poses the biggest theological obstacle for them in Catholic doctrine, with the single possible exception of the doctrine on the Church itself,

it would be foolish to regard it as other than a dividing factor. And yet here again, one qualification might be made. Marian doctrine might well be described as the wall that can serve as a foundation for the bridge (or at least for one end of it). What I mean by this is that, as we have seen earlier, Mariology is the area where differences that really exist in other areas of theology come more sharply into focus. By this very fact, it indicates the areas that must be explored more thoroughly in search of a common understanding of the revealed truth, e.g. the nature of original justice and of original sin, the meaning and consequences of justification, the role of redeemed man in the salvation of the world. Ecumenical studies of this kind will not ordinarily be carried on in the field of Mariology directly, but rather in the related area where there is more of a common basis for discussion. Adopting such a procedure is not a compromise of principle but simply a use of the practical apologetic method of finding a common basis for discussion and beginning from there.

Has development of Marian doctrine up to now been an aid or an obstacle to Ecumenism? I think that the answer here would have to parallel the one above. In the proximate sense of accentuating the lines of division, it has created new obstacles, but obstacles which, by that very clearing of the ground, can well serve as the basis for outlining a more fruitful future contact. The definition of the Assumption might well be a case in point in this regard. A number of criticisms were launched against it between 1950 and 1955 because of the harm it had done to attempts to promote better understanding between Catholics and Protestants, but, in the light of subsequent events, current ecumenical discussions on the relationship of Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium would not be as sure ground as they are if this definition had not spelled out clearly in its consequences just how vital each of these elements is to the Catholic notion of development of doctrine.

We might add that the type of development of Marian doc-

trine that would be involved in a deeper study of the fonts, especially the Biblical ones, in search of the data they supply on Our Lady, and the development involved in a closer look at the relationship of Catholic doctrine on her to other doctrine such as the mediation of Christ, would not be regarded by non-Catholics as obstacles, but rather as aids to ecumenical endeavors.

The practical consequences of these answers would seem to be: fostering of the Ecumenical Movement does not mean reduction of devotion to Our Lady as the Mother of unity; it does not mean an ignoring of Marian doctrine and the development of it; it does mean that stress should be laid on responding to the need of those outside the Church for a clearer picture of the relationship of Marian dogmas to those with which they are more familiar from their own belief. And all of this is to be undertaken in a sympathetic, non-polemical fashion, but without compromising doctrine, as Pope Paul VI pointed out to the Council.¹¹

II. *Are Specific Developments of Dogma Sometimes Untimely?*

The reason this question is raised is that some writers have, as we have seen, implied that some Marian definitions have been unfortunate in their consequences and that more now would be too. They feel that there have been times when the Church might have been better off without certain definitions since they were one-sided in their presentation—and better off without having certain points spelled out, since this simply aggravated existing divisions. Others find this attitude offensive and savoring of a false irenicism. The matter comes to a head in the question of whether more Marian developments and definitions *now* would widen the gap between us and other Christians and be harmful, or whether a failure to develop and define would constitute an unjustifiable compromising of

¹¹ Cf. *OR*, September 30-October 1, 1963, 2.

the truth received from God. We will consider the questions one by one briefly.

Are developments in general, and definitions specifically, sometimes untimely and unfortunate? We cannot give an *a priori* answer to this question, unless we can establish that Divine Providence would exclude the possibility of this happening; instead, the history of the Church with its vicissitudes has taught us to be cautious in declaring that Divine Providence could not possibly permit any particular type of misfortune. The correct answer would probably be a complex one: both developments and definitions may at times be unfortunate in their consequences for one particular historical situation viewed by itself, but they always involve some kind of advance in the Church's conscious possession of truth or in her proposing of it, and hence they always contribute to clarifying the message of Christ in the order of knowledge, aside from the emotional impact they may have on others. (The only way in which they could do harm in the order of knowledge would be if they inspired complacency by encouraging the belief that they exhausted a truth completely, and thus discouraged further efforts, but this would be the fault of the individuals who failed to move on from them to a deeper penetration of truth, and not the fault of the development of the direction itself.) At times, developments and definitions may pose new intellectual problems—that of the Assumption certainly did—but these lead to a greater penetration of the mystery of revelation.

A related question is that of whether or not we would be better off without some definitions and without having matters spelled out in some instances. This problem is suggested by a number of considerations: Max Lackmann, a Lutheran who is very active in the Ecumenical Movement, has suggested that Lutherans might have a great deal of difficulty with the definitions of Trent, but not with a broader Scriptural statement of the same doctrine. Again, the Anglican Church has often regraded itself as a bridge church between other communions

partly as the result of an attitude of tolerating a variety of interpretations on many points of dogma, while keeping the matters that are to be clearly spelled out to a minimum. Finally, there has been a tendency to down-grade the Council of Trent in some statements by Catholics recently on the grounds that it was one-sided in its presentation of doctrine on grace and the sacraments, and steered subsequent theological speculation in one narrow direction. This is the implication in the often-heard statement that the era of Counter-Reformation Theology has finally come to an end.

The answer in this case would seem to be this: 1) Where lack of definition is a substitute for vagueness and for admitting opposite opinions that are not compatible with revealed truth, then we are better off without precise definitions. 2) Where a desire for no definition would reflect nothing more than a desire for freedom to use terms that approach the same truth or related truths from different aspects, then we might or might not be better off with a definition in a given case. (The Church herself seems to follow the general policy of not multiplying definitions where there is no demand for them.) Even in this latter case, however, the fact that a doctrine is defined in one set of terms certainly does not exclude its expression in other legitimate ways, and so it is not easy to see exactly what harm a definition might do. 3) Finally, in a case where the main effect of a definition would be to antagonize other Christians unnecessarily, then in an ecumenical context, we are probably better off without a definition.

This whole question of vagueness leads us into one of the real problems involved in ecumenical discussions—distinguishing between differences that are merely ones of terminology or approach on the one hand, and substantial differences on the other. A Catholic can admit the usefulness of re-stating a defined doctrine in other terms, but only within certain bounds. To point up the general boundries within which a Catholic theologian must work in this regard, we might mention the

following principles that have been clarified in discussion and pronouncements in recent years: 1) Revealed truth cannot be expressed in terms of *any* system of thought at all. 2) The expression of it in definite terms in any one period do not lose their validity with the advent of new philosophical currents. 3) On the other hand, revealed truth must be proposed to each generation and group in a language that it can understand. 4) Individual expressions of dogma are adequate for what they state, but they do not encompass all aspects of a dogma, and hence they are subject to development in the light of other truths. The first two principles indicate the absolute aspect and stability of dogmatic formulas, the latter two the sense in which they are relative and subject to change.

To sum up on this: we are not better off with vagueness, but our definitions may leave some things to be desired in the sense that they may leave out some aspects of a doctrine and hence leave the way open for complementary teaching, or they may have to be translated into a language that will be more readily understandable to a particular group to whom they are to be communicated.

To apply this to our matter, have developments and definitions in Marian doctrine been unfortunate? I think the answer would have to be: in the sense that the matters involved would have been better left vague, no, as far as we can see;—in the sense that some other doctrines were not properly stressed (e.g. the unique mediatorship of Christ) and thus a false impression was given? While this might be theoretically possible, there is no clear indication that this has been true inside the Church, and no clear indications that false impressions would have been avoidable outside the Church either with or without the development.

This brings us to the more immediate problem of whether or not developments and definitions *now* in Mariology would widen the gap between us and other Christians. The answer here again would have to be that developments in depth in

doctrine would not widen the gap really and ultimately; even where they proposed new problems, they would be carrying the discussion into deeper areas. But developments in some directions and definitions might well widen the gap temporarily, in the sense that they might be interpreted as a deliberate lack of concern for the feelings and the needs of other Christians and for efforts at unity at a time when both need special attention. This is one of the matters that has been at issue in two different approaches to the work of the present Council—one that it should concentrate on applying the doctrines we have and thus renewing the life of the Church while ignoring further definitions, the other that there can be no renewing of the life of the Church without a deepening of doctrine that will come in particular from spelling it out in terms of definitions; the mind of the Council at the moment and of the Pope seems to be to avoid definitions except where absolutely necessary; this is evidenced in the declaration that the matters in the Constitution on the Liturgy and the Decree on Communications Media are to be regarded as authentic doctrine but not defined. (We might add one remark here: it is conceivable that as a result of the workings of Divine Providence, definitions might not actually widen the gap, even in cases where all had expected they would. The definitions of Papal Infallibility and of the Assumption might well be put into this category, but here we are dealing with an imponderable.)

As a final question, would a failure to develop Marian doctrine in any one particular direction amount to false irenicism? The answer here is probably that it would, if it amounted to shutting our eyes to doctrine and acting as if it did not exist, but that it would not, if this meant simply approaching the same doctrinal point from a new angle that would make it more intelligible to those outside the Church.

Our practical conclusions on the question of untimely definitions would be these: Development of dogma and even definitions always make a positive contribution to the Church ulti-

mately, but in some individual instances more harm may be done by development in certain directions and by definitions than would be justified under the circumstances. Failure to develop in these directions does not mean a loss for Marian doctrine or for the Church if we keep in mind that it is salvific doctrine, revealed not for the sake of satisfying speculation but rather to move men to salvation. On this basis, an approach that will open the way for it to exert its salutary effects on millions of Christians whose minds and hearts have remained closed to it to a large extent will confer a great benefit on Marian doctrine that will far outweigh some temporary failure to develop in a certain direction. One final note: even the answer supplied here by human prudence—that a given definition is inopportune on the basis of the harm it is likely to do—may turn out to be inaccurate in the long run as a result of the action of Divine Providence which can bring unforeseen and unforeseeable good out of definitions.

III. *Can Ecumenism be a Benefit to Development of Marian Doctrine in Any Way?*

Development of doctrine in the light of ecumenism is based on two principles: recognition of good elements in the doctrines of others, and laying of stress on points we hold in common, along with an effort to gradually expand the scope and extent of these common beliefs. In the course of this work, Catholic doctrine cannot change in the sense of rejecting any doctrine previously affirmed in the Church, but it can change in the sense of rounding out previous definitions by a clarification of complementary matters (e.g. Primacy and the Role of Bishops in the Church, the Clergy and the Priesthood of the Laity, Tradition and the Bible, the Sacraments and Preaching), and it can change in the sense of re-stating definitions in other (e.g. Biblical) language. Development along these lines will benefit Mariology by giving new depth to its perception of the ties between current doctrine and the fonts, and those between

Marian doctrine and the other organic parts of dogmatic theology.

The practical conclusion is that Mariology should embrace Ecumenism wholeheartedly, adapt its efforts to the new pastoral needs being traced out in this area and expect to benefit richly from the new studies that will be stirred up on this basis.

*Summary and Conclusion: On Our Approach to
Marian Development and Ecumenism*

Our responsibility is to preserve the truth handed down to us and to penetrate it. But this truth is a salvific doctrine, not a body of purely speculative propositions, and so it must be *carried* to people. Hence, we must give some thought to the ways in which Marian doctrine can be made intelligible and acceptable (at least more so than at present) to non-Catholics so that it may exert its salvific influence upon them as well (while they are still non-Catholics). Catholic development of Marian doctrine should continue, but it must take into consideration the *positive* needs of the non-Catholic as well as the Catholic community in this regard. The result of this may well be development of our doctrine on Mary in directions not completely foreseeable at the present time.

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