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MARY IS FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

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Introduction

From an ecumenical point of view,[1] it is quite possible that no area of contention between Catholics and Protestants is today as vehement and fraught with emotion as that concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus. This being the case, it might be helpful to know that the Christian churches' understanding of, and attitude towards, Mary has actually had a chequered past.

At the time of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Mary was not as disputed as other theological subjects were. Luther, Zwingli

[1]Throughout this paper, the term "ecumenism," following the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* of the Second Vatican Council, will refer to "the initiatives and activities encouraged and organized ... to promote Christian unity" (n. 4); henceforth cited as *UR*. *Pace* Hans Küng: "...we have less reason than ever today for understanding ecumenism in a narrow, constricted, ecclesiocentric fashion: Ecumenism should not be limited to the *community of Christian churches*; it must include the *community of the great religions,* if ecumenism – in accordance with the original meaning of *oikumene* – is to refer to the whole 'inhabited world'." Cf. Küng, et al., *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1986), xiv.

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and even Calvin for the most part held "catholic" beliefs about Mary. All three certainly took for granted her perpetual virginity and held her motherhood of Christ in high esteem. "Mary was not a central or prominent issue in the sixteenth-century Reformation," writes David Wright.[2] Why not? First of all, because most of the Marian doctrines at that time were taken for granted and accepted. Secondly, because the reformers' Marian concerns were more related to devotion than to doctrine. "The Reformers' teachings about Mary were to a considerable measure a critique of piety and liturgy."[3] Pastoral considerations were almost always paramount, so much so that Luther would write in 1523: "I could wish that the cult of Mary would be completely abrogated, solely because of abuse."[4] It is this attitude of the later Luther which has largely determined post-Reformation developments within Protestantism. By the mid-20th century, it has become common fare for Protestants to state that Mariology sums up all that is heretical in Roman Catholicism.[5]

Significantly it was in that same century that the ecumenical movement began to pick up speed. More than 1500 years after the first disastrous break in the Christian communion (when the Oriental Orthodox churches did not accept the Chalcedonian definition), 900

[2]David Wright, *Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), 161.

[3]Ibid., 162.

[4]*WA* 11.61.

[5]E.g., Roger Mehl: "C'est pourquoi nous ne pouvons opposer à la mariologie prise dans son ensemble qu'un non résolu. Nous sommes persuadés qu'elle constitue une sorte d'engrenage mortel pour la foi évangelique. En elle se rejoignent toutes les héresies du catholicisme...." *Du Catholicisme Romain. Approche et Interpretation* (Neuchâtel-Paris, 1957), 91; cited by Heiko Oberman, "The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 1 (1964): 282. Or the statement Jason Byassee attributes (unreferenced) to Karl Barth: "In the doctrine and worship of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest." Cf. Byassee's article, "What About Mary?" in *Christian Century* (December 14, 2004): 28-32, at 28.

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years after the division between the Christian East and West, and 400 years after Western unity itself was shattered, finally there was a concerted attempt to come to terms with Jesus' prayer, "That they may all be one…" (John 17:21). The ecumenical movement could echo St. Augustine's poignant words concerning the Donatists in North Africa:

> If they say, "Why do you seek us? What do you want of us?" we should reply: You are our brothers. They may say, "Leave us alone. We have nothing to do with you." But we have everything to do with you, for we are one in our belief in Christ; and so we should be in one body, under one Head.[6]

In addressing the place of Mary, Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* (1974) decreed that honor shown to her is to be biblical, liturgical, anthropological, and *ecumenical*. In 1995, Pope John Paul II matter-of-factly wrote: "At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church committed herself *irrevocably* to following the path of the ecumenical venture…."[7] In the same encyclical, John Paul listed five areas which require fuller theological study "before a true consensus of faith can be achieved." One of these is "the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ's disciples and for all humanity."[8]

If all this fails to give sufficient warrant for an ecumenical study on Mary, one can cite a growing number of recent publications, both popular and scholarly, written by Protestants.[9] Three ecumenical study

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[6]Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps. 32 (33)*, 29; cf. Office of Readings, Tuesday of Fourteenth Week in Ordinary Time.

[7]Encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint*, 3; hereafter cited as *UUS*.

[8]*UUS* 79.

[9]Cf., among others, Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds., *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, MI & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2004); Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia Rigby, eds., *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox, 2002); John Macquarrie, *Mary for All Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990); John de Satgé, *Down to Earth: The New Protestant Vision*

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groups or ventures deserve special mention. In 1967 the "Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary" was formed in London, its *raison d'être* being "to promote ecumenical devotion and the study, at various levels, of the place of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church, under Christ."[10] In 1978 the same group of scholars that had previously studied the complex NT picture of Peter came out with *Mary in the New Testament*, jointly contributed to and edited by Roman Catholic and Protestant exegetes.[11] The year 2002 saw the publication in English translation of *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints* by Le Groupe des Dombes, a French-speaking group of ecumenists who have been meeting annually since 1937 to discuss various theological issues.[12] The Dombes study group asserts:

> We need to remind ourselves forcefully that Mary has never been a cause of separation among the churches. On the contrary, she has become a victim and even a virulent expression of such separations. A number of other factors of disunity are polarized around her and made visible in her. This is why the [Dombes] Group has decided to deal with this individual who is emblematic of the Christian faith and tradition….[13]

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of the Virgin Mary (Wilmington, NC: Consortium, 1976); Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London & New York: Cassell, 2000); Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996).

[10]Cf. John Macquarrie, *Mary for All Christians*, ix-x. Cf. the ESBVM's publications, notably: *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue* (Occasional Papers of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1970-1980), ed. Dom Alberic Stacpoole (Slough, England: St. Paul, 1982); *Mary is for Everyone,* eds. William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 1997); *Mary for Earth and Heaven: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, eds. William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2002).

[11]Raymond Brown (ed.), et al., *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress; New York: Paulist, 1978).

[12]Alain Blancy & Maurice Jourjon, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (New York & Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2002).

[13]Ibid., 11.

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This paper is intended to contribute to an irenic, responsible and convergent way of relating with the mother of Jesus, both doctrinally and devotionally. Its focus is theological and pastoral rather than historical. The essay does not intend to seek an ecumenical *rapprochement* in all the doctrinal and devotional differences concerning Mary among the main Christian traditions of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism, but it seeks to offer approaches to her which, if not completely satisfactory to all Christians, would serve to mitigate animosities and mutual intolerance. It presupposes that an ecumenical approach to Mary is not only possible and desirable but even necessary; that Christians from various traditions have much to learn from one another concerning a healthy Mariology (for lack of a better term which would be more acceptable to Protestant and Orthodox Christians); and that the remaining differences in doctrine and devotion, while creating distinctions, do not necessitate separation.[14]

Being "ecumenical" does not necessarily mean being "church-neutral"; the writer of this paper therefore writes from his own Roman Catholic perspective, all the while striving to maintain a respect and even admiration for other Christian traditions. He invites his Protestant and Orthodox readers to share the same spirit of mutual courtesy and openness to learn from and to understand one another. He intends his Catholic readers to appreciate the urgency of the ecumenical moment; to learn how to think of, speak of, and love better the Blessed Virgin; and to avoid excesses in doctrine and devotion, indeed anything that will be suggestive of "Mariolatry."

This latter concern is of particular relevance in the Philippines, in which Marian devotion is markedly "omnipresent."[15] In this "only

[14]At the end of their discussions, the Dombes study group offers this summary statement: "As members of the Dombes Group, and in light of the proposals for conversion with which our journey ended, we no longer consider the described differences such as to separate us. At the end of our historical, biblical, and doctrinal study *we do not find any irreducible incompatibilities, despite some real theological and practical divergences*" (Ibid., 129; emphasis added).

[15]This writer is here borrowing Alexis Kniazeff's description of Mary's place

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Christian" country in Asia, in which approximately 85% of the population is Roman Catholic, Mary has been given an exalted place not only in ecclesiastical practice but also in popular culture. She is the patroness of the entire archipelago; an astonishing number of parishes are named in her honor; much popular and folk religiosity revolve around her person and the belief in her powerful intercession; and countless Filipina women have been christened with Mary's name or with one of her titles and attributes.[16] It is precisely in such a context of ardent devotion that pastoral concern is called for. Instruction in and renewal of devotion would then lead to that *true devotion* which (in the words of Vatican II) "consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain vain credulity. Rather it proceeds from true faith, by which we are led to know the excellence of the Mother of God, are moved to a filial love toward our mother and to the imitation of her virtues."[17]

This paper, then, addresses the ecumenically important, though often neuralgic, question of Mary and the quest for Christian unity.

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in Orthodox faith and spirituality; cf. his *La Mère de Dieu dans l'Eglise Orthodoxe* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).

[16]According to the pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on the Blessed Virgin Mary *Ang Mahal na Birhen: Mary in Philippine Life Today* (February 2, 1975), the most popular Marian names for girls are: Concepción, Natividad, Purificación, Dolores, Asunción, Rosario, Guadalupe, Pilar, Carmen, Lourdes, Paz, Socorro, Remedios, Consuelo, Victoria, Nieves, Milagros, Candelaria, Mercedes, Salvación, Estrella, Amparo, Fatima, etc. Cf. note 11 of the said pastoral letter.

In contrast to this, Nora Lozano-Diaz writes that "most Hispanic Protestant families would never name their daughter 'Maria' or 'Guadalupe.' They would feel proud of the names of other biblical women but not that of Mary." Cf. Lozano-Diaz, "Ignored Virgin or Unaware Women: A Mexican-American Protestant Reflection on the Virgin of Guadalupe," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary*, 85-96, at 87.

[17]Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 66; henceforth cited as *LG*.

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We begin by clarifying the ecumenical differences in belief about Mary, not by way of listing all doctrinal agreements and disagreements, but by seeking to understand the theological presuppositions and emphases, as well as the sensibilities and mindsets, in the Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant traditions, respectively.[18] We do this for two reasons.

First, taking our cue from Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism, we wish to appreciate that "some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church itself, can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church…."[19] To recognize what the various historic churches and ecclesial communions have emphasized can be a salutary check on one's own theological stance, as a way of ensuring that the "fullness of faith and life" which one claims for one's church is truly so. Pope John Paul II once asked: "Why did the Holy Spirit permit all these divisions?" His reflection was: "Could it not be that these divisions have also been a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ's Gospel…?"[20] If we consider the divisions in the Church – however tragic and grievous – in a *positive* light, we might be able to affirm the salubrious ways in which the different traditions "discover the untold wealth" of Christ.

Second, by understanding where the other dialogue-partner is "coming from," we are less likely to engage immediately in polemic

[18]It must be admitted that the following characterizations are, by necessity of the constraints of a brief academic paper, broad generalizations. This writer does not intend to convey the impression that the three traditions of Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism are each monolithic blocks of uniform thinking. The most elusive is that of the "Protestant" theological ethos. Short of a very detailed exposition which space does not allow, this paper contents itself with "broad strokes" descriptions which, it is the writer's hope, are fair and adequate for this paper's purposes.

[19]*UR*, 3.

[20]John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 152, 153.

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and debate. We will be more "quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20).

In the second part, this paper examines the ecumenical differences in devotion to Mary. The relationship between doctrine and devotion, between "official teaching" and "popular religiosity," will need to be addressed. It will be argued that doctrine and devotion are distinct but inseparable; that doctrine which does not lead to devotion is arid and lifeless; that doctrine must guide and govern devotion which, in its turn, if cast off from solid theological moorings, will frequently run amok.

As this paper will make clear, doctrinal differences between Catholic and Orthodox Christians revolve much more around the legitimacy of dogmatic pronouncements and the perceived "imposition" of Western, Augustinian categories – for the Orthodox, it is the spectre of Roman "authoritarianism" *redivivus*. But in matters of devotion to Mary, Catholics and Orthodox are in great accord. It is a much more serious matter of contention between Catholics (and Orthodox) on the one hand, and Protestants on the other. This section ends with the hope that Catholic and Orthodox Christians would respect the Protestant reticence in honoring and especially in praying to Mary, while Protestants would acknowledge that Catholics and Orthodox might well have good reasons to do so – reasons which render them innocent of "Mariolatry."

This paper will then conclude with its most original section; it will offer some ecumenical proposals and guidelines in the hope, not perhaps of resolving all disagreement, but of lessening it and making some headway in mutual respect and understanding. It might be the case that the most that can be hoped for is courteously to "agree to disagree." But in seeking the path to fuller unity among Christians, one is perhaps allowed to hope that agreement will gradually far outweigh disagreement, and that the agreement will be in truth and in love.

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Ecumenical Differences in Belief About Mary

Orthodoxy

What are the distinctive theological emphases of Orthodox Christianity? First of all, Orthodoxy has not experienced the artificial and disastrous separation of theology and spirituality to the extent that the West has, and from which the latter is now only recovering. The East has always prized theology as doxological, and prayer as theological. Writes Jason Byassee:

> Theology is certainly an intellectual endeavor for the Orthodox, but it is more pronouncedly doxological. Theology is a loving word of praise to the God who first speaks his Word to us in Christ and by the Spirit draws us into the church. […] For the Orthodox, theology is simply commentary upon the saints' commentary on scripture for the sake of the church's worship.[21]

To speak of "the church's worship" is to refer to the liturgy; the East has preserved a strong liturgical tradition, and this is something shared with Catholicism. Bishop Kallistos Ware asserts:

> Our belief as Orthodox concerning the Mother of God is expressed above all through the medium of prayer and worship. *Lex orandi lex credendi*: our faith is disclosed through, and conditioned by, the way in which we pray. […] In the words of Archpriest George Florovsky, Christianity is first of all a worshipping community. Worship comes first, doctrine and discipline second. If this is true of Orthodox theology in general, it is true in a special sense of the Orthodox approach to the *Theotokos*. The mystery of the Mother of God is *par excellence* a liturgical mystery.[22]

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[21]Jason Byassee, "Looking East," *Christian Century* (December 28, 2004): 24.

[22]Kallistos Ware, "The Mother of God in Orthodox Theology and Devotion," in *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue: Occasional Papers of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1970-1980)*, 180.

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A second characteristic (and this is once again a trait shared with Western Catholicism) is the appeal to the early Church Fathers, whose authority over doctrinal matters is unquestioned. "The Orthodox Church would not be what it is if it had not had St. Cyprian, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great. No more could the Roman Catholic Church do without St. Athanasius, St. Basil or St. Cyril of Alexandria."[23] In turn, the Fathers' doctrinal expositions undergird and often include devotional flourishes. The famous homilies of St. John of Damascus *On the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God* are a good case in point.[24] Theological assertions about Mary's holiness, perpetual virginity, death and glorification, are freely and seamlessly woven into the fabric of panegyric. The praise of Mary leads to the praise of Christ; powers and privileges normally predicated of Christ are also predicated of Mary; there is a profusion of scriptural types said to be fulfilled in the person and office of Mary; and so forth. The Orthodox acceptance of these assertions must ultimately be attributed to (what Catholics call) the *sensus fidelium*, but one must admit that the scales are tipped considerably because of the authority and prestige of the Damascene.

In other words, both Orthodoxy and Catholicism share a high regard not only for Scripture but also for Tradition. According to Louis Bouyer, once we begin to relate to both as not only distinct but as *separate* things, we have already taken apart their necessary unity and complementarity:

> The inspired expression of the Word of God in Holy Scripture is the kernel, or better the heart, of this tradition. […] Scripture itself is

[23]Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge & London: James Clarke, 1957), 12.

[24]According to Brian Daley, these homilies were likely delivered *in situ*, near the traditional site of the burial and assumption of the Virgin. Cf. Daley's excellent translations and notes in *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998).

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> the central element of tradition, but it is also part of it. Inversely, a Christian tradition isolated from Scripture would be a body from which the essential organs had been removed. By its nature, which flows from its origin, Scripture is not only incomprehensible but also devitalized as soon as it is isolated from the tradition of living truth in which it originated and in which alone it can be preserved as a Word of Life.[25]

A third, classical feature of Orthodox theology is its stress on God's ineffability, what is often called *apophatic* or negative theology. Vladimir Lossky refers to the two possible theological ways distinguished by Pseudo-Dionysius: The positive (or *cataphatic*) approach proceeds by affirmations; it leads to some knowledge of God, though imperfectly. "The perfect way, the only way which is fitting in regard to God, who is of His very nature unknowable, is the second…."[26] This is the *apophatic* way. It is not a mere plea of ignorance but an invitation to union. "God no longer presents Himself as object, for it is no more a question of knowledge but of union. Negative theology is thus a way towards mystical union with God, whose nature remains incomprehensible to us."[27]

Orthodox reticence in perhaps saying "too much" about God has contributed to the relatively slow development of Orthodox theology. There is no "Scholastic" period in Orthodoxy comparable to that which flourished in medieval Catholicism. This is also reflected in its approach to Mary. One of the most striking convergences *and* divergences between Orthodox and Catholic Marian beliefs is that, while both assert the total sinlessness of the all-holy Virgin and her glorification in heaven, Orthodoxy steadfastly refuses to go the way of

[25]Louis Bouyer, *The Decomposition of Catholicism*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1969), 92.

[26]Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 25.

[27]Ibid., 28.

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dogmatization.[28] Bishop Kallistos shares an anecdote which illustrates well the Orthodox approach to Mary:

> In 1950, when Pope Pius XII was about to proclaim the dogma of the Assumption, members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in France approached Metropolitan Vladimir, head of the Russian Archdiocese, and they enquired what the belief of the Orthodox Church might be in this matter. In reply the Metropolitan recommended them to read the service for 15 August in the Orthodox liturgical books; and he said that he had nothing to add to what was written there. Such is precisely the Orthodox approach.[29]

Catholicism

As already mentioned, Catholic theology presupposes the unity of Scripture and Tradition, and the liturgy as a *locus theologicus*. These have to do with the "sources" of theology, but there is, as well, a "worldview" which often becomes the tacit substructure of Catholic theology, indeed, of the Catholic "mind." The lines separating the "Catholic mind" and the "Protestant mind" (if such phenomena exist) are not easily drawn, chiefly because neither is a monolithic reality and because the differences are often a question of emphasis, not outright contradiction. While the following contrasting characteristics might be validly offered, one must remember that these are general tendencies and that exceptions may be found on either side.

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[28]Orthodox reserve about the two modern Marian dogmas has to do partly with terminology ("dormition" is preferred over "assumption"), partly with a demand for scriptural support (no explicit biblical testimony on Mary's "immaculate conception"), and partly with a non-acceptance of an Augustinian interpretation of "original sin" and Duns Scotus' solution of Mary's preservation from original sin by anticipation of Christ's redemption. Moreover, Orthodox Christians are unhappy with Rome's perceived tendency to "dogmatize" unilaterally, defining doctrines without any external circumstances which would make such a definition necessary, and making such magisterial actions after the separation of 1054 without any concurrence from the East. Cf. Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 96-97.

[29]Ware, "The Mother of God in Orthodox Theology and Devotion," 180.

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We begin with an observation of the American sociologist-priest, Andrew Greeley:

> Catholics live in an enchanted world, a world of statues and holy water, stained glass and votive candles, saints and religious medals, rosary beads and holy pictures. But these Catholic paraphernalia are mere hints of a deeper and more pervasive religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the Holy lurking in creation. As Catholics, we find our houses and our world haunted by a sense that the objects, events, and persons of daily life are revelations of grace.[30]

In other words, the Catholic "religious sensibility" sees the transcendent God suffusing creation with his immanent presence. In contrast, Protestantism (very likely in protest against an excessive immanentism and sacramentalism) emphasizes an immanent God who is radically different from his creation. The outstanding Reformed theologian Karl Barth has repeatedly stressed the dissimilarity and asymmetry between Creator and creation.[31] More recently, John Webster has described the difference in the primary theological criterion of both Catholicism and Protestantism in terms of, respectively, "plenitude" and "purity." For Webster, the critical question is "whether the Protestant zeal for purity – in the doctrines of God, Christ, the church and elsewhere – leads to a segregation of the divine from the creaturely, which in turn inhibits grasp of the [Catholic appreciation of the] plenitude of God's self-communication."[32]

What might be a more fundamental theological reason for this difference in worldview or sensibility? Yves Congar has argued

[30]Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 1.

[31]One must, however, remember that, for Barth, God's transcendence does not mean his absence or distance. In fact, according to Barth, it is transcendence that makes possible an immanence without confusion.

[32]John Webster, "Purity and Plenitude: Evangelical Reflections on Congar's *Tradition and Traditions*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7/4: 399-413, at 402.

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persuasively that it is a question of how one appropriates and approaches the utterly unique event of the Incarnation. "The Incarnation is the key to the whole mystery of the Church and the sacraments," he wrote in his first major book on ecumenism. "In the degree to which Protestantism can school itself in a profound and realist contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation will it return to the sphere of apostolic Christianity and prepare itself for reunion in the Church."[33] While contemporary ecumenism has moved beyond the language of "reunion," Congar's insight remains valid. In other words, Catholics and Protestants "do different things with the Incarnation." For Catholics, the Incarnation opens up a whole new way of looking at the universe, at physical creation, at God's relation with human beings, etc. Thus undergirding Catholic teaching on the Church, sacraments, Mary, the human person, and so forth, is the so-called *incarnational principle*. It will most likely be around the theology of the Incarnation that Protestants and Catholics find a more convergent view of Mary.

Another Catholic principle of theological reflection is the idea of the *development of doctrine*. This has become central in post-Reformation debates: Does doctrinal amplification extend the biblical norms of Christian belief without sufficient warrant? This is the Protestant challenge. The Catholic claim and response is, because there is a continuum of inspired understanding (that is, Sacred Tradition) between early and later interpretations, the emergence of later normative doctrine is integral to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The debate is a continuing one, and is far from simple. Writes John McDade:

> For many modern writers, "development" may be an unavoidable way of designating the issue, but neither it nor any other single analogy can be an adequate characterization of the process. Can the *continuity* between "then" and "now", and all points in between, be adequately described by a single category (e.g. development, homogeneous evolution, logical

[33]Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Catholic Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. M. A. Bousfield (London: Geoffrey Bles/Centenary, 1939), 274-5.

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> implication, implicit knowledge becoming explicit) and still respect the elements of *discontinuity* and transformation that history introduces? To treat the process as linear and cumulative, without any significant variation or change, is to write an unrealistic history. The challenge of any theory of development is to see historical change as the matrix within which Christian identity is consistently reappropriated in a living stream of tradition.[34]

Closely related to this is the principle of the *analogia fidei*, the analogy of faith. It is a matter of becoming aware of a revealed truth, although not affirmed explicitly in Scripture, from other truths which are formally taught and which contain it implicitly. Explains Jacques Bur: "Plenary revelation forms a global whole, the revealed truths of which are linked together in the indivisibility of a single revealed mystery, that of the economy of salvation." Applying this to Mary, "one can emphasize the deep parallels between all her privileges: motherhood, virginity, association with the saving work of Christ her son, and her assumption." The analogy of faith does not consist in "logical deductions," but recognizes a harmony and "fittingness" in the global revelation of salvation realized in Jesus Christ, born of Mary.[35]

Already one might see how these theological emphases and principles of Catholic theology explain much of how Mariological developments take place. It is a complex synthesis of liturgical accretions (which are themselves reflections of beliefs); an approach to Scripture which is decidedly not *sola scriptura* but which seeks validation and expansion in Tradition; and a recognition that the mystery of Christ, although revealed once and for all in "the mighty Christ event" (to borrow Oscar Cullmann's felicitous phrase), takes time for the human mind and the believing community to understand in its blessed fullness. In his published reply to the Anglican canon Edward Pusey, John Henry Newman wrote:

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[34]John McDade, "Development of Doctrine," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings, et al. (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 163.

[35]Jacques Bur, *How to Understand the Virgin Mary* (London: SCM, 1994), 82-83.

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> I begin by making a distinction which will go far to remove [a] good part of the difficulty of my undertaking, as it presents itself to ordinary inquirers – the distinction between faith and devotion. I fully grant that *devotion* towards the Blessed Virgin has increased among Catholics with the progress of centuries; I do not allow that the *doctrine* concerning her has undergone a growth, for I believe that it has been in substance one and the same from the beginning.[36]

When Newman avers that doctrine concerning Mary "has been in substance one and the same from the beginning," behind that assertion lies the great weight of the Catholic regard for doctrinal development.

One final comment on the Catholic religious sensibility: a propensity to dogmatize, as with the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950). Orthodoxy complains: why formalize and define as divinely revealed, and therefore obligatory to faith, what has long been regarded as "pious" opinions and beliefs? To this Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) has an attractive answer. He points out that, especially with the two modern Marian dogmas, the dogmatic element in Catholicism becomes the vehicle for devotion. The dogma of the Assumption, for example,

> was promulgated for the honor of the Son, for the glorification of the mother, and for the joy of the entire Church. This dogma was intended to be an act of veneration, the highest form of Marian praise. What the orient achieves in the form of liturgy, hymns, and rites, took place in the occident through the form of a dogmatic proclamation, which was intended to be, so to speak, a most solemn form of hymnology. This is how [the Assumption] is to be understood. It distinguishes the last two Marian dogmas in a certain respect from the earlier form of ecclesial confessions, even though the doxological element always played a more or less accentuated role.[37]

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[36]John Henry Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, no publication date; subtitled "Being a Letter addressed to Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., in 1864"), 34. By "growth" Newman means in this context any haphazard and alien addition, like a mutation, to the original "substance."

[37]Joseph Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's Marian Belief*, trans. John McDermott (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1983), 73.

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Protestantism

We have already seen (admittedly in broad strokes) a major difference between the Catholic and Protestant worldviews regarding the Creator-creature relationship. One might say that Catholic theology posits a greater continuity between nature and grace, whereas Protestant theology stresses the discontinuity. We must also keep in mind the fundamental difference between the Catholic construal of the Incarnation, and that of some Protestants. Expressed differently, the way a tradition approaches and makes use of the Incarnation – which is the absolute meeting point of the divine and the human – shapes the rest of its theology. For Catholics, the Chalcedonian description of the Incarnation is extended *analogously* to the Church, the scriptures, sacraments, and the like.[38] Catholic theology makes much use of the "incarnational principle," in which the unity of the divine and the human in Christ invites application to human realities. Many Protestants, however, regard the Incarnation as the boundary line beyond which absolutely no comparison or analogy to human realities may be made; the Incarnation's uniqueness and non-repeatability need to be vouchsafed at all cost.

Besides this, we must remember the three classical *solas* of Protestantism: *sola scriptura*, *solo Christo*, and *sola fide*. These could be described as the "pillars" of Protestant theological reflection, and they have a direct bearing on any doctrine of and devotion to Mary. *Sola scriptura* requires every Marian doctrine to be explicitly taught in the Bible. Truth is therefore seen to be not served and even affronted when a Marian teaching not explicitly found in Scripture is elevated to the status of divine and catholic faith.[39] The principle or doctrine of

[38]Cf., for example, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8: The Church is "one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element. For this reason the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate Word."

[39]Jacques Bur, a *peritus* at Vatican II, admits that "Holy Scripture says nothing about the assumption of Mary. Whereas the resurrection of Jesus is attested to us by the accounts of his appearances, the assumption of Mary is not mentioned by any explicit scriptural testimony. […] The constitution *Munificentissimus Deus*

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solo Christo underlines the all-sufficiency of Christ in redemption; it is also related to the great Protestant appreciation – surely admirable and praiseworthy – of the awesome majesty and sovereignty of God. Some Protestant proponents of this doctrine would rule out any notion of human "cooperation" in salvation; in its extreme position, *solo Christo* would deny any role to human freedom. Much Marian doctrine and devotion would therefore be seen to be a threat to Christ's singular dignity and sufficiency. Finally, the fundamental Reformation battle cry of *sola fide* (often combined with *sola gratia*) allows the sinner's justification "only by grace through faith." This is the most important Lutheran principle, foundational for the churches of the Reformation, "the Pauline principle by which 'the church stands or falls' but which also makes it possible to judge every particular doctrine."[40] By this principle, strictly interpreted, the Catholic dogma of Mary's Immaculate Conception is unacceptable.[41]

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of Pius XII does not resort to any biblical text as a basis for an explicit attestation of the assumption of Mary. Nor does it appeal to an oral tradition." (Bur, *How to Understand the Virgin Mary*, 79).

[40]Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 76.

[41]The Catholic response to this objection is that *sola gratia* still applies in Mary's case. Like the rest of humankind, Mary is redeemed by the grace of her Son, Jesus, the unique savior of the world. The Franciscan Duns Scotus (the "subtle doctor," d. 1308) supplied the answer to the vexing question, "How could this have happened?" The redemptive action of Christ, he responds, is extended to Mary by anticipation, in order to preserve her from original sin. Mary was indeed redeemed (by anticipation, by a preservative grace), but *meliori modo*, in a better (perhaps even the best) way. According to Scotus, preservation from original sin is the most perfect form of redemption, so it was fitting that Christ should have redeemed his mother in this way. Vatican II echoes this teaching: "Redeemed in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her son and united to him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of the Mother of the Son of God, and therefore she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth" (*LG* 53).

As for how *sola fide* might apply to Mary, Catholics could point to the scriptural

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While these *solas* can be interpreted and accepted in a Catholic sense, in the mind of the Reformers and their theological descendants today they spell all the difference between what may be said about Mary and what may not. The Protestant critique that much of Catholic Mariology fails to meet the standard of explicit biblical attestation is valid, but only if *sola scriptura* denies the necessary role of tradition. Catholics (and Orthodox) stand by the principles of *sola fide* and *sola gratia*, but not to the exclusion of human and ecclesial mediation, which is understood to be *not* in opposition to divine grace.[42] And the universal *Christian* instinct that "to God alone be the glory" might mean different things depending on whether one is Protestant or Catholic/Orthodox: for the former, it means a decided antipathy to accord (too much) honor on any human person; for the latter, it means that God is honored when his creatures are honored.

Louis Bouyer has argued that these pillars of Protestant theological reflection are in fact part and parcel of the common Christian

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witnesses to her remarkable faith, expressed in her readiness to obey (Luke 1:38) and in her discipleship which led her to the foot of the cross (John 19:25) and the upper room (Acts 1:14). However, whether *sola fide* could be reconciled with the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is a complex question which is beyond the scope of this paper.

[42]"The Catholic Church has always held that in God's plan this essential tie lies in Jesus Christ himself, God made man, and since his ascent to the right hand of the Father, [it lies] in the joint action of the Holy Spirit, and his representative the Apostolic College. […] The essential tie then is simultaneously divine and human, the invisible spirit, soul of the Church and effective source of its life, and the visible framework of its organization, the priesthood and the sacraments, by which truth and grace are mediated to mankind. The radical criticism of the Reformers abolished or changed precisely these means in order to make salvation exclusively an act of God's grace only. […] The opposition of Protestants to the Catholic tradition on this point arises out of the historic debate concerning the question of man's co-operation in his own salvation. The question is of capital importance" to any ecumenical dialogue on Mary. Cf. Yves Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church: A Study in Eirenic Theology*, trans. Henry St. John (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1957), 7, 16.

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patrimony.[43] Put differently, they are thoroughly "catholic" instincts which were perhaps sidelined in the course of the centuries and which the Reformation could be said to have called the entire Church to recover once more. Seen positively, might not the grievous and scandalous divisions of the 16th and following centuries be, in a mysterious way known only to God, "a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ's Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ? Perhaps all this wealth would not have come to light otherwise…."[44]

Ecumenical Differences in Devotion to Mary

At the present moment, Christians are separated, not only by what they think of or believe about Mary, but also by how they relate with her. The simplest way to put this is: while Catholic and Orthodox Christians relate with Mary a lot,[45] Protestant Christians do not. "So fearful have we been of what seems to us excessive attention to Mary in Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions that Mary is virtually absent among us," confess Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Cynthia Rigby.[46] And Nora Lozano-Díaz writes: "Given that the Virgin Mary is so central to Catholicism, she became also a casualty of this anti-Catholic perspective. The Protestants, in an effort to differentiate themselves from the Catholic Church, rejected and dismissed even the biblical Mary. They did this simply by ignoring her."[47]

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[43]Cf., for example, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*, trans. A. V. Littledale (Westminster: Newman, 1956).

[44]John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, 153.

[45]Even if individual Catholics and Orthodox Christians might not have a personal devotion to Mary, her "omnipresence" (again borrowing Alexis Kniazeff's word) in the liturgy would be unavoidable.

[46]*Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary,* 1.

[47]Nora Lozano-Díaz, "Ignored Virgin or Unaware Women: A Mexican-

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From the outset this paper has championed the notion that Mary is for all Christians. We will need to clarify what this means before we end, but before we proceed with proposing some constructive ways of moving forward in an ecumenical regard for Mary, we will attempt a phenomenology of devotion, as distinct from doctrine. In this matter, our guides will be John Henry Newman and Yves Congar.

"Faith and devotion are as distinct in fact as they are in idea," wrote Newman to Pusey in 1864, "We cannot, indeed, be devout without faith, but we may believe without feeling devotion."[48] Newman was writing as an Englishman; this is no racist or cultural slur, for Newman earlier admitted to preferring English habits of belief and devotion to foreign ones.[49] His statement that belief may not necessarily be expressed in devotion is true enough, but in many other cultures besides his own (such as the Philippines) such a devotionless belief-system would sound very strange. But that is not Newman's main point. He wishes to describe the nature of devotion as distinct from doctrine, and he proceeds with several illustrations. "For instance, a great author, or public man, may be acknowledged as such for a course of years; yet there may be an increase, an ebb and flow, and a fashion, in his popularity. And if he takes a lasting place in the minds of his countrymen, he may gradually grow into it, or suddenly be raised to it."[50] Newman gives the example of Shakespeare. Today one might think of public figures who are lionized by the media one day and vilified the next, or candidates for canonization who are finally recognized for who they were and raised to the Catholic Church's altars. Such examples, writes Newman, illustrate the difference between doctrine and devotion, a difference which is like the distinction between objective and subjective truth.

American Protestant Reflection on the Virgin of Guadalupe," in *Blessed One*, 87.

[48]Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 34.

[49]Ibid., 29.

[50]Ibid., 35.

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> The sun in the spring-time will have to shine many days before he is able to melt the frost, open the soil, and bring out the leaves; yet he shines out from the first notwithstanding, though he makes his power felt but gradually. It is one and the same sun, though his influence day by day becomes greater; and so in the Catholic Church it is the one Virgin Mary, one and the same from first to last, and Catholics may have ever acknowledged her; and yet, in spite of that acknowledgment, their devotion to her may be scanty in one time and place, and overflowing in another.[51]

Newman observes that devotions, like life, are irrepressible. Life has the same right to decay as it has to wax strong, and so it is with devotions, for example, to the Blessed Virgin Mary. They too have their propensities either to burst out in heedless vigor or to wither away. "You may stifle them; or you may refuse them elbow-room; or again, you may torment them with your continual meddling; or you may let them have free course and range, and be content, instead of anticipating their excesses, to expose and restrain those excesses after they have occurred. But you have only this alternative; and for myself, I prefer much wherever it is possible, to be first generous and then just; to grant full liberty of thought, and to call it to account when abused."[52]

Even with his English reserve, Newman can appreciate the extravagant passions generated by belief. "Religion acts on the affections; who is to hinder these, when once roused, from gathering in their strength and running wild?"[53] He also points out the extremely private nature of (true) devotion.

> What mother, what husband or wife, what youth or maiden in love, but says a thousand foolish things, in the way of endearment, which the speaker would be sorry for strangers to hear; yet they are not on that account unwelcome to the parties to whom they are addressed.

[51]Ibid., 36.

[52]Ibid., 85.

[53]Ibid.

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> Sometimes by bad luck they are written down, sometimes they get into the newspapers; and what might be even graceful, when it was fresh from the heart, and interpreted by the voice and the countenance, presents but a melancholy exhibition when served up cold for the public eye. So it is with devotional feelings. Burning thoughts and words are as open to criticism as they are beyond it. What is abstractedly extravagant, may in particular persons be becoming and beautiful, and only fall under blame when it is found in others who imitate them. When it is formalized into meditations or exercises, it is as repulsive as love-letters in a police report.[54]

The Dominican theologian Yves Congar distinguishes between "theology proper" and what he calls "spiritual theology." This distinction is equivalent to what we have been calling "doctrine" and "devotion." Spiritual theology, or devotion, does not aim at "limiting various aspects of the mystery under consideration to their due proportions within the whole. Its object is rather to give the greatest possible weight to a particular aspect of the mystery because it has been the basis of a religious experience of a specially vital kind, and one calculated to stimulate fervor."[55] In other words, devotion is by its very nature single-minded in its purpose; indeed there is a very thin line separating devotion and fanaticism. Devotional literature (writings, hymns, prayers and the like) are written in the light of a particular spiritual experience, and with a view to increasing fervor towards that experience.[56] "The governing principle of a theology [better: devotion] of this kind is, in consequence, to raise the value of everything which subserves this particular end, while keeping, at least negatively, within the limits of orthodoxy."[57]

It is the role of dogmatic theology to counter this tendency in devotion towards fanaticism. "It is a function of intellect to watch

[54]Ibid., 86.

[55]Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church*, 78.

[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid., 78-79.

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over abuses of sentiment, especially when the latter present a travesty of thought itself."[58] In other words, devotion is always answerable to doctrine, and doctrine is always answerable to "the sovereign rule of the objective data of Revelation, proclaimed and interpreted by the Apostolic preaching, the life of which is perpetuated in the magisterium and tradition of the Church."[59]

Let us summarize this phenomenology of devotion: Doctrine is chiefly the activity of the intellect; as such it can afford, indeed demand, to be analytical and dispassionate, maintaining an objective distance from the object of its scrutiny. No such clinical reserve can be asked of devotion, which is chiefly the activity of the affections. By definition it is akin to love, and Newman says he "would not give much for that love which is never extravagant, which always observes the proprieties, and can move about in perfect good taste, under all emergencies."[60] To express this symbolically: it is the difference between the head and the heart; each is master of its own domain, one needs the other, and neither is superior or inferior. The heart must listen to the head, and the head must concede a certain freedom to the heart. In the same way, the extravagance of devotion is not a license to error; devotion must always answer to correct doctrine. But doctrine, for all its certitude and correctness, must let devotion express itself with freedom, with passion, and sometimes with exaggeration. Again, Newman's words are apropos: "For myself, I prefer to be first generous and then just; to grant full liberty of thought, and to call it to account when abused."

In devotion as much as in doctrine, there are denominational differences of approach. Catholics and Orthodox Christians are united in a much more affective and symbolic approach to religious reality and experience; they are much more open to emotion, more prone to hyperbole, and less squeamish about praise of the creature. Protestant

[58]Ibid., 82, quoting J. Guitton, *La Vierge Marie* (Paris, 1949), 104.

[59]Congar, *Christ, Our Lady and the Church*, 82.

[60]Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 86.

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Christians tend toward caution and concern for correctness; after all, the *raison d'être* of the Reformation was to correct doctrine and to purify devotion. According to Greeley, Protestants are most alarmed by the risk of superstition and idolatry, and "there is solid instinct in the Reformation's resistance to superstition. Metaphors can easily be abused. There was and is still abuse of the Mary metaphor. But one need not throw out the baby's mother with the bathwater."[61] If Protestant reserve towards Mary can be likened to the "head," then Catholic and Orthodox exuberance can be compared with the "heart." In this neither is superior or inferior, one is not preferable over the other, each one completes and corrects the other.

"Praying to Mary" is particularly troubling to Protestants.[62] Writes Jason Byassee:

> This is precisely the point at which Protestant theologians get most nervous. Such a request of prayer from Mary smacks of an effort to gain divine favor by some route other than Christ – the height of idolatry. To prop the door open here even an inch threatens to bring back the medieval system of veneration of scores of saints in an effort to earn the favor of a distant and foreboding Jesus. Hence we slam the door shut. To honor Christ, the saints must be excluded.[63]

Byassee is himself sympathetic to a new Protestant outlook on praying to Mary and the saints. He therefore cites Robert Jenson as emblematic of such openness. Jenson recently argued that it has long seemed plain to him that praying to the saints for their prayers "must be possible and if possible surely desirable." He draws the analogy of

[61]Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 99.

[62]Protestant anxiety partly arises (sometimes with good reason) from a cavalier, unconscious and uncritical use of the phrase "praying to Mary." The more theologically apt phrase, of course, is "asking Mary for her intercession before God," thus making clear that it is God who saves, forgives, heals, guides, etc. Used indiscriminately, "praying to Mary" suggests that it is she herself who saves, forgives, heals, and so forth.

[63]Byassee, "What About Mary?," 31.

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asking a fellow Christian still living to pray for him. "If death severed the fellowship of believers, I could not of course ask a *departed* fellow believer to pray for me."[64] But death does *not* sever the fellowship of believers (the "communion of the saints" of the Apostles' Creed), hence justifying asking even a departed fellow Christian for his or her prayers. Jenson concludes: "And if I *can* do it, there will certainly be contexts where I *should* do it. Thus there should be no problem about asking Mary in her capacity as *sancta*, Saint Mary, to pray for us."[65] For a Catholic or Orthodox believer, this argument is hardly new. But the novelty is that some Protestants are now advocating this perspective. Adds Byassee: "Each saint's particular graces can be seen as reflections of the grace of Christ, whose greatness grows in our eyes as we attend to the saints' individual stories. The strengthening of the bonds of the body of Christ, stretching as they do across the divide between earthly life and death, should bring tribute to Christ rather than discredit."[66]

However, the French-speaking, ecumenical study group of Dombes has a more sober assessment of Marian devotion, especially at the point where "veneration turns into invocation and invocation into prayer to Mary."[67] For some Protestants, the veneration given to Mary ("hyperdulia") is enough cause for anxiety; to begin to invoke her aid and intercession is simply too much.[68]

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[64]Robert Jenson, "A Space for God," in *Mary, Mother of God,* 49.

[65]Ibid., 49-50.

[66]Byassee, "What About Mary?," 31.

[67]Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 81.

[68]Enrique Gonzales, a Mexican Methodist pastor, writes: "Doctrinal statements in Roman Catholicism talk clearly about the veneration (*doulia*) [better: *hyperdulia*] of Mary, not the worship (or adoration, *latreia*) of Mary. In any kind of academic, theological arena, Catholic theologians will emphasize the word 'veneration' rather than 'adoration.' Yet the practical theology in the life of Catholicism in Latin America promotes the adoration of Mary. It promotes not only adoration

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> Here again, when Protestants are unable to address any prayer to Mary or the saints, Catholics can only agree inasmuch as, strictly speaking, no prayer or praise can be addressed to anyone but God alone and, more specifically, to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. Catholics have recourse to Mary and the saints only to ask that they intercede for them with God, not because such intercession is necessary or more efficacious, but simply in order to enter together with them into the great intercession that is as it were the constant expression of the solidarity among believers which even death cannot end. Intercession is thus the everlasting conversation of believers with their God in their concern for one another. It is within these limits that Catholics can legitimately turn to Mary and the saints, as they do in the Angelus or the rosary, in which they simply ask Mary to pray for them. Protestants who reject such prayer out of fear of confusion or excess must nonetheless be on guard not to forget to praise God for Mary and for the saints he has given them.
>
> May we not humbly ask, not that those who invoke Mary should cease to do so nor that those who evoke her should invoke her, but rather that both should, in their understanding of the faith, be brotherly witnesses to the convictions of their brethren? These convictions would no longer be a cause of separation and an admission of differences within a unity "already given."[69]

Note the theological care with which the intercession of Mary and the saints is explained and defended. Where proper catechesis on the intercessory role of the saints is lacking, all the more Protestant fears of "Mariolatry" might appear to be justified. Notice, too, that this statement of the Dombes group goes beyond a mere "agree to disagree" policy when it advocates being "brotherly witnesses" to one another's convictions.

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of her as a person but the adoration of the doctrines of Mary…." Cf. his brief article, "The Problem with Mary," *Christian Century* (December 14, 2004): 33.

[69]Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 81.

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Brief Excursus: The Philippine Situation

In the Philippines, Mary is both venerated and invoked; venerated by Filipinos out of their filial love for her who is mother to their Savior and who is also now their own spiritual mother, she is likewise invoked out of a strong belief in her powerful intercession. Among her many honorific titles, two are especially prominent in Philippine religious culture: the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of the Rosary.[70] In 1975, the Catholic bishops could assert that Filipinos very often address Mary as "Ang Mahal na Birhen" (the Holy Virgin).[71] One could argue today the dominance of the more familiar address, "Mama Mary."

From an ecumenical standpoint, Mary is still considered a dividing issue among Filipino Christians. The 1975 pastoral letter noted that Marian devotion is not exclusive to Filipino Catholics, for even the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* (popularly known as the "Aglipayan" church) has certain Marian practices and the Philippine Episcopal Church observes some Marian feast days.[72] In response, one could argue that the Aglipayan and Episcopalian communities differ not so much theologically from Roman Catholicism as from historical and political reasons. In point of fact, Marian doctrine and practices are what continue to fuel the animosity of Filipino evangelicals, fundamentalists, Pentecostals, and other groups towards the Catholic Church.[73]

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[70]Cf. the CBCP 1975 pastoral letter on Mary, no. 9.

[71]Ibid., no. 53.

[72]Ibid., no. 23.

[73]With regards to these denominational labels, some explanation might be in order. Evangelicals in the Philippines would see themselves as theologically "fundamentalist" but would prefer not to call themselves by that name because (1) over the years, "fundamentalist" has come to connote one who is divisive, intolerant, anti-intellectual, and unconcerned with social problems, and (2) *because* evangelicals adhere to the "fundamentals" of faith, to call themselves fundamentalists (in addition to being evangelical) would be redundant. In other words, "evangelical" (in the Philippine context) *means* "fundamentalist" – but

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What are some of the most common Protestant objections to Marian doctrine and devotion? One could cite three: (1) Mary is perceived to surpass or supersede Christ; (2) Mary is seen to be pitted against Christ; (3) Mary is thought to be worshipped or treated as someone divine. The upshot of all this is that Mary seems to be loved, remembered, turned to and invoked more than Christ. Her statues and images proliferate and are handled in such a way as to evoke suspicions of superstition and idolatry. To the casual observer, Mary, invoked under her title of "Mother of Perpetual Help" or "Succor of Christians," appears to be far more popular and powerful than Jesus himself.

It might be relatively easy to deny the charge of "Mariolatry" in these instances on the grounds that the official teaching of the Catholic Church is very clear on these points; it would be harder to affirm that the average Filipino Catholic is well catechized and sufficiently nuanced on these same points. It is one thing to argue that Filipino Catholics, in remembering Mary, do not forget Christ; it is quite another not only to assert but to prove that they in fact love Christ, follow Christ, and obey Christ. Cardinal Newman recounts a memorable saying by a holy Jesuit priest in Rome: One could not love Mary too much if one loved Jesus a great deal more.[74] That is indeed an excellent rule of thumb, provided the "if" is well-attested and faithfully lived out.

Popular Marian hymns sung in the Philippines often say nothing about Christ; thus Mariology is divorced from its necessary connection

not the other way around. Then, there are Protestant "fundamentalists" of the born-again, anti-Catholic and separatist sort; e.g., the Association of Baptist Churches of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao (ABCLVM). Finally, there are Christian "Pentecostal" and "Charismatic" groups which would not necessarily call themselves Protestant; e.g., Jesus Miracle Crusade. Cf. Averell Aragon, "The Philippine Council of Evangelical Churches," in *Chapters in Philippine Church History*, ed. Anne Kwantes (Manila: OMF, 2001), 367-89.

[74]Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 29-30.

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to Christology.[75] One song has the words: *Inang sinasamba, ang Diyos sa 'yo nagpala* (Mother who is worshiped, God has blessed you). The words "Mother who is worshiped" are defended on the grounds that, first, the Filipino language has no word to express hyperdulia; second, the song is intended to express extravagant and exaggerated love of someone; and third, it is written in the style of a *kundiman* (traditional Filipino love song) so that the genre justifies the word's usage. But the questions remain: Is the *sinasamba* said of Mary so patently clear and self-explanatory as to rule out "Mariolatry" and to justify its continued use? Does the appeal to the Filipino sensibility and cultural value of extravagant filial love for Mary exonerate composer and singers alike from the misunderstandings and confusions among Catholics and non-Catholics alike which this song perpetuates?

Where, then, does one draw the line between what one may say about Mary, and what one may not? At what point can it be said that a particular devotional statement has crossed the line from acceptability to heresy? Some errors are so egregious as to be clearly "out of bounds"; some examples cited by Newman are: that the mercy of Mary is infinite; that God has resigned into her hands his omnipotence; that it is safer to seek her than to seek her Son; that the Blessed Virgin is superior to God; that our Lord is subject to her command; and so forth.[76] For the rest, it is not easy to decide where to draw the line. Newman admits that "Burning thoughts and words are as open to criticism as they are beyond it."[77] Words uttered in prayer must be taken in context. Devotional language is especially susceptible to historical fallout. What was acceptable, even admirable, a century or decades earlier, can today sound strange and trite at best, and heretical

[75]One fine exception is the Filipino Marian song, "Mary, Mother of All" which, besides focusing on Mary's virtues of faith and motherly love, points beyond Mary to God himself in the refrain: *Be our yes to God as we offer our all / To the Father Creator / To the Son the Redeemer / To the Spirit Consoler.*

[76]Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 115.

[77]Ibid., 86.

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at worst.[78] One must have the prudence and courage to set aside (to "retire") quietly such outdated and unbalanced devotional literature and songs, not only in the name of ecumenical sensitivity, but also for the sake of doctrinal integrity – not to mention sometimes for aesthetic purposes!

Ecumenical Proposals

After having examined the varying doctrinal standpoints and devotional approaches of the three main groupings of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christianity towards the Blessed Virgin Mary, this paper is now ready to make the following proposals and recommendations.[79] These are divided into two parts. The first

[78]Once again Newman expresses this in his usual fine prose: "And so again certain statements may be true, under circumstances and in a particular time and place, which are abstractedly false; and hence it may be very unfair in a controversialist to interpret by an English or a modern rule, whatever may have been asserted by a foreign or mediæval author. To say for instance, dogmatically, that no one can be saved without personal devotion to the Blessed Virgin, would be an untenable proposition; yet it might be true of this man or that, or of this or that country at this or that date; and, if that very statement has ever been made by any writer of consideration (and this has to be ascertained), then perhaps it was made precisely under these exceptional circumstances. If an Italian preacher made it, I should feel no disposition to doubt him, at least if he spoke of Italian youths and Italian maidens" (Ibid., 107).

[79]This paper presupposes and therefore will not repeat the recommendations found in such magisterial or authoritative documents as: Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary *Marialis Cultus* (February 2, 1974); Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Ang Mahal na Birhen*, nos. 63ff.; John Paul II, On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987), esp. nos. 29-34; Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy: Principles and Guidelines* (December 2001).

Special mention is due to the Dombes study group's *Mary in the Plan of God*, esp.

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suggests more ecumenically-sensitive principles in speaking of Mary and in relating with her. (It must be noted that being "more ecumenically-sensitive" does not mean compromising the more "maximal" approach of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions. If anything it means having a more correct and healthy approach purified of excesses and exaggerations. As the Dombes study group expresses it, the aim is to give Mary "the place that belongs to her in the Christian faith – her full place, of course, but also nothing but her place."[80]) The second part proposes ways by which Christians of different traditions can enter into more amicable and fruitful dialogue with one another concerning the mother of the Savior.

Ecumenical Principles of Marian Doctrine and Devotion

1. "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3).

Christians can be united to the extent that Christ's lordship is proclaimed and lived out in their lives. When Christ becomes more and more the center of their theology and spirituality (not just in theory but in actual practice), the more he becomes the point at which the various Christian communions can meet in fraternal love and solidarity. One Lutheran friend of this writer remarked that he would have no problem

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the chapter entitled "Toward the Conversion of the Churches." The Group calls for a mutual conversion in attitude, in doctrine and in devotion. Not surprisingly, the injunction upon Catholics is to apply the Vatican II principle of the "hierarchy of truths" to Marian doctrines, to strive for correct and responsible preaching and catechesis, and to be especially vigilant in Marian hymnology and statuary. Likewise, Protestants are urged "to restore to Mary a proper place, both doctrinal and liturgical, in the mystery of salvation and the communion of the saints. By doing so, they will make a useful contribution to the quest for communion among [the] churches and will better situate themselves within the great tradition of the entire church" (Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 127).

[80]Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 114.

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if, when speaking of Mary, one began with Jesus, continued on with Mary, but ended again with Jesus. This Christocentric rule of thumb applies just as well to theology as to spirituality. John Macquarrie recalls the "fundamental principle that has always been acknowledged in the Church, though it may sometimes have been obscured – that all our devotion, including any that has been inspired by Mary, is ultimately devotion to God in Christ."[81] Or again, quoting Newman: one could not love Mary too much if one loved Jesus a great deal more.[82]

2. "And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother" (Mt 2:11).

Marian doctrine and devotion must always be clearly aligned with Christology. It is somewhat easy to affirm (although this affirmation is not stated often enough) that the Marian doctrines are at root Christological: they say something, primarily and not simply tangentially, about Christ. Thus *all* truths about Mary (her motherhood of the Son of God, her holiness, her faith, her special privileges, etc.) need to be taught in express relationship with Christ, the sole Redeemer.

However, this principle cuts both ways. Many Christological affirmations can and must be related to Mary, she who is not only the means by which the eternal Logos became incarnate, but also the one who best represents humanity as the addressee of revelation and the beneficiary of redemption. Joseph Ratzinger asserts somewhat paradoxically that "only when [Christology] touches Mary and becomes Mariology is Christology itself as radical as the faith of the Church requires."[83] He gives the example of the Nestorian controversy in the fifth century. Nestorianism, which opposed the title *Theotokos*, involved the fabrication of a Christology from which the human mother and

[81]Macquarrie, *Mary for All Christians*, 133.

[82]Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 29-30.

[83]Ratzinger, *Daughter Zion*, 35.

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the human birth are removed – a Christology without Mariological consequences. "Precisely this operation, which surgically removes God so far from man that nativity and maternity – all of corporeality – remain in a different sphere, indicated … that the center of Christ's mystery was endangered, if not already destroyed. Thus in Mariology, Christology was defended."[84]

Both Catholicism and Orthodoxy also insist on relating Mary with the Church; she who provided the material of his human body may not be separated from his *entire* body, from the "whole Christ." Protestant Christians must surely welcome this. The fact that Vatican II incorporated its teaching on Mary into the constitution on the Church is highly significant (although the affirmative vote won by only a slim margin – just 17 votes, the narrowest majority and the lowest favorable vote in the entire history of the council).[85] In classical Eastern icons, Mary is never represented by herself, but always with Christ or with other believers. Writes Bishop Kallistos: "When we speak of Mary, we must speak of her relationship with Jesus: we must keep in view her role at His Incarnation and her place as a member within His Mystical Body. There can be no 'Mariology' as such: 'Mariology' is a facet of Christology or of ecclesiology."[86]

3. "I am the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1:38).

It must be remembered that Mary, for all her excellences, is a human being and a creature of God. Karl Barth's insistence on the radical asymmetry between God and creation is always theologically and pastorally relevant. It is significant that Mary's response in the Lucan

[84]Ibid., 35-36.

[85]Michael Hurley, "Ecumenism and Mariology Today," in *Mary for Earth and Heaven: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism*, eds. William McLoughlin & Jill Pinnock (Gloucester, England: Gracewing, 2002), 188.

[86]Ware, "The Mother of God in Orthodox Theology and Devotion," 169.

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narrative identifies herself not simply as a human creature but as a female slave (*doulē*, feminine of *doulos*). There is something appropriate that he who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant" (Phil 2:7) should be born of a handmaid. Remembering that their Protestant brethren are most allergic to any suggestion of divinity ascribed to Mary, of divine favors expected of Mary as if she were the source, Catholic and Orthodox Christians will do well to keep her complete humanity in mind. Like her Son, she is fully human; unlike her Son, she is *only* human. Her assumption into heavenly glory is no apotheosis. It may surprise some people that Louis de Montfort, often seen as a Marian devotee of the first degree, would write:

> I avow, with all the Church, that Mary, being a mere creature that has come from the hands of the most High, is in comparison with his infinite majesty less than an atom; or rather, she is nothing at all, because only he is He Who Is … Jesus Christ, our Savior, true God and true Man, ought to be the last end of all our devotions, else they are false and delusive. If then we establish solid devotion to our blessed Lady, it is only more perfectly to establish devotion to Christ … When we praise her, love her, honor her or give anything to her, it is God who is praised, God who is loved, God who is glorified and it is to God that we give, through Mary and in Mary.[87]

4. "What does the scripture say?" (Rom 4:3; Gal 4:30).

Pope Paul VI reminded his readers: "Today it is recognized as a general need of Christian piety that every form of worship should have a biblical imprint."[88] The more the Bible becomes the basis (and canon) of Christian doctrine and devotion, the more it serves as the common language of all Christians. Certainly this ecumenical principle is easier said than done. There are numerous issues relating

[87]Louis de Montfort, *True Devotion to Mary* (Tan Books, 1985), 11, 37-38, 105; cited by Macquarrie, *Mary for All Christians*, 133.

[88]Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 30.

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to scriptural interpretation and the role of tradition which make this a complex principle in actual practice. But in the end, all Christians stand to gain from a fresh and concerted reassessment of the scriptural portrait of Mary. "What she lacks in quantity of appearance in scripture she makes up for in quality."[89] All Christians can be united in appreciating her as the disciple *par excellence* whose "fiat" not only changed the course of human history but who is also a perennial model of complete surrender to God. Without diminishing their regard for her as "intercessor," Catholics and Orthodox will serve their Protestant brethren well by meditating on her "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Heiko Oberman says that in seeing Mary as "the light of the beacon pointing away from herself to Jesus Christ, Protestants and Roman Catholics can join in hailing her as 'the Mother of God'."[90] Writes the Lutheran nun, Basilea Schlink, with a touch of ruefulness: "When Martin Luther bids us to praise the Mother Mary, declaring that she can never be praised enough as the noblest lady and, after Christ, the fairest gem in Christendom, I must confess that for many years I was one of those who had not done so, although Scripture says that henceforth all generations would call Mary blessed (Luke 1:48). I had not taken my place among these generations."[91]

5. "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up" (1 Cor 10:23).

The Second Vatican Council has decreed that Catholics must "carefully refrain from whatever might by word or deed lead the separated brethren or any others whatsoever into error about the

[89]Byassee, "What About Mary?," 29.

[90]Oberman, "The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective," 298.

[91]Basilea Schlink, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1986), 114-5.

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true doctrine of the Church" regarding Mary.[92] St. Paul in his letter to the bickering Corinthian Christians offers the criteria of *helpfulness* and *edification*: whatever helps in mutual respect and understanding, and whatever builds up the faith and unity of the Church, are to be given priority.

The vital difference between doctrine and devotion must be kept in mind. The members of the Dombes study group testify that as they engaged in their common task they could discuss things all the more serenely because they had been able to differentiate between "what faith demands and what devotion allows." It is important, they say, "to distinguish between devotional freedom (within the limits set by the rule of faith) and the one thing necessary."[93]

Marian doctrines and devotions must somehow be judged upon the bar of ecumenical sensitivity. *Is this devotional practice helpful, or potentially scandalous, to our separated brethren? How can we understand and explain this Marian belief in a more ecumenically acceptable manner?* The story is told of a curé in a predominantly Protestant village in France who wanted to dedicate its new parish church to Mary. His reason was that Catholics should not hide their beliefs but rather give witness to them. His parish committee, on the other hand, wished to dedicate the church to Christ the Redeemer or Christ the King. Cardinal Bea, when asked for his advice, sided with the parishioners (adding, diplomatically, that perhaps one of the principal side altars in the church might be dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary). This is ecumenical sensitivity at work.[94] Another telling example is of more recent vintage. About four million Catholics, including some 500 bishops and 42 cardinals had petitioned Pope John Paul II to have the Marian titles of "mediatrix," "co-redemptrix" and "advocatrix" solemnly defined. Seeing that such a definition would

[92]*LG* 67

[93]Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 11-12.

[94]Hurley, "Ecumenism and Mariology Today," 198-9, citing H. du Manoir SJ, *Maria* (Paris, 1964), xii.

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be an added obstacle to the pursuit of Christian unity (not to mention the theological and pastoral problems these titles would present), the Vatican disapproved the petition.[95]

6. "Test everything, hold fast what is good" (1 Thes 5:21).

There is a need for ongoing vigilance, renewal, and purification of Marian doctrines and devotions. Not to do so would indeed *dishonor* Mary, not to mention Christ. Thérèse of Lisieux, herself a devotee of the mother of Jesus, remarked that "we ought not to say things [about Mary] which are improbable or which we do not know…. We know indeed that the holy Virgin is Queen of heaven and earth, but she is more a mother than a queen, and we ought not to say that because of her prerogatives she eclipses the glory of all the saints, just as the rising sun makes the stars disappear. Dear Lord, what a strange thing to say!"[96]

Christians of the various traditions must also recognize the extent to which their own church or ecclesial community presupposes and emphasizes certain distinctive theological approaches. They must seek for balance in their presuppositions and mindsets, for one can easily succumb to an unhealthy and imbalanced theological posture, such as by emphasizing distinctives rather than points of unity. Jaroslav Pelikan has expressed the hope that "Evangelical," "Catholic" and "Orthodox" might no longer in the first instance be labels of denominations or doctrinal positions, but "mutually reinforcing norms" in the praise of Mary.[97] This vision of Christians of all hues united in their praise

[95]Ibid., 188.

[96]St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, *J'entre dans la vie. Derniers entretiens* (Paris: Cerf/ Desclée De Brouwer, 1973), 140-1, cited by Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 158 (footnote 19).

[97]Jaroslav Pelikan, "*Most* Generations Shall Call Me Blessed: An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Liturgy," in *Mary, Mother of God*, 18.

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of the mother of Jesus in a manner that is evangelical, catholic and orthodox (note the lower-case adjectives) is an attractive one.

Heiko Oberman's proposition that "Protestantism … searches to find the *via media*, to avoid not only Marian excesses at the right but also Marian minimalism at the left" is a welcome statement of Evangelical openness to self-critique and flexibility in its quest for a "middle way."[98] One might ask if this "middle way" between excess and deficiency can also be the goal of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. In theory, yes, but perhaps not in practice. Can one find an objective "midpoint"? Can "balance" be quantified, measured, or even agreed upon by broad consensus? The notion of a *via media* in theology usually works better in theory than in practice; one only has to remember Newman's idea of an Anglican *via media* before he completely renounced the idea in 1843. But the challenge remains for each of the historic Christian churches and traditions to exercise self-critique and self-policing in order to separate the wheat from the tares.

John de Satgé, an evangelical Christian, delicately asks "whether the Reformers were as right in their denials as they were in their affirmations; and whether their struggle for the truth as they saw it led them to overstate their case, imparting to it an exclusivism which need not have been there."[99] To be more specific, he questions whether the three great Protestant *solas* need to remain so trenchantly *sola*: "Is it necessarily the case that, if you take away the exclusive 'only', the nerve of the gospel is irretrievably cut?" It is a pertinent question. When the Reformers thundered "Scripture alone" or "justification by grace alone and through faith alone," the "alone" was not merely a restatement or recovery of gospel truths, it was a declaration of war. Almost five hundred years after the 95 Theses, can these vaunted Reformation ideals be restated in a way which both guards the truth and offers tokens of peace?

[98]Oberman, "The Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective," 294.

[99]De Satgé, *Down to Earth: The New Protestant Vision of the Virgin Mary*, 135.

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Recommendations for Ecumenical Dialogue on Mary

It is perhaps unrealistic to expect that ecumenical dialogue should lead to complete agreement in all matters.[100] A full century – the twentieth – of progress in ecumenism still bequeaths to the present-day Church many unresolved disagreements. Apropos to this Michael Hurley asks whether so much ecumenical effort has been spent on issues of "faith and order" (doctrine, discipline, church structure), while so little on "the problem of charity and mutual forgiveness."[101] In other words, there has been too little of the "dialogue of love." Hurley recommends that, whereas doctrinal unity would have to wait and be worked hard for, here and now the exercise of mutual charity could and must begin.[102] And he quotes John Wesley's striking line in his famous *Letter to a Roman Catholic*: "If we cannot as yet *think alike* in all things, at least we may *love alike*."[103]

This call for mutual respect and fraternal charity even in the face of disagreement is not new. Scripture instructs us to "above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14), and a common patristic dictum has been "*In necessariis unitas, in*

[100]With insight and humility Joseph Ratzinger comments on Paul's enigmatic phrase "there must [*dei*] be factions" (1 Cor 11:19): This could mean that "even if schisms are to begin with the work of men and women and their fault, nevertheless there is in them a dimension that corresponds to God's disposing. Hence it is only to a certain point that we can repair them through repentance and conversion; but it is only the God who judges and forgives who decides entirely on his own when the point is reached that we no longer need this split [among Christians] and that the 'must' drops away." Cf. Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 139.

[101]Hurley, "Ecumenism and Mariology Today," 196.

[102]Ibid.

[103]Ibid.; cf. Wesley, *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, ed. Michael Hurley (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), 56.

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dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas" (that is, unity in necessary things, liberty in doubtful things, and love in everything).

Christians dialoguing with one another about Mary should strive to focus more on what unites them, rather than on what divides them. Beginning with this position of unity and consensus about Mary, they can then discuss the differences (some not insignificant) that remain. Discussions about Mary across denominational lines must be characterized by a "quickness to hear, slowness to speak, slowness to anger" (James 1:19). One must also "seek first to understand, rather than to be understood." The late Jesuit ecumenist, Edward Yarnold, once wrote: "The greatest assent I can hope to have won from someone who is not already committed to [the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption] is the judgment that they are not unreasonable, that they may well be true; but articles of faith – that is another matter."[104] That seems to be a fair and wise position for all Christians to take.

Conclusion

At the close of this paper, the question, "How can Mary be *for all Christians*?" still requires an answer. It is perhaps inadequate (and ecumenically impertinent) simply to recall the title which Pope Paul VI conferred upon Mary in 1964, "Mother of the Church," for this will neither please nor satisfy everyone.[105] But surely there are a few

[104]*Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue: Occasional Papers of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1970-1980)*, 129.

[105]While both the Anglican theologian John Macquarrie (cf. *Mary for All Christians*, 26f, 92f, 114) and the Evangelical John de Satgé (*Down to Earth*, 117, 138) approve of this Marian title, seeing in it an advance in an ecumenical appreciation of Mary, they are perhaps the exception rather than the rule. Among Orthodox theologians, Alexis Kniazeff is deeply troubled by the same title; cf. *La Mère de Dieu*, 203-5.

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other ways in which it is both meaningful and inoffensive to make such an assertion.

Mary is for all Christians because of her unique dignity as "the one who bore the one who is God."[106] This singular privilege of bearing Jesus Christ (in other words, her divine maternity) is the "fundamental idea" of both Catholic and Orthodox teaching on Mary.[107] Christ, the only Son of God and sole Savior of the world, is without parallel "for all Christians," indeed for all human beings. But without obscuring or diminishing the unique mediation of Christ[108] and neither taking away anything from nor adding anything to his dignity,[109] Mary too can be seen as being "for all Christians" by virtue of her special role in the economy of salvation.

Because of this, Mary is for all Christians to thank for her generous and courageous *fiat*, her consent to the Father's invitation to be, by the power of the Spirit, the human mother of his incarnate Son. Although specific practices of veneration or devotion to Mary will vary greatly among Christians, it behoves all to thank God for his gift of this woman whose "Yes" made her the mother of our Savior. Even Karl Barth could give her superlative praise: "There is one here who is greater than Abraham, greater than David, and greater than John the Baptist, greater than Paul and greater than the entire Christian Church; we are dealing here with the history of the Mother of the Lord, the Mother of God himself. This is a unique and unparalleled event."[110] Cautions the

[106]This is the literal rendering of her title *Theotokos*, conferred upon her by the ecumenical council of Ephesus in 431.

[107]Kallistos Ware insists that *Theotokos* "provides the key to the whole Orthodox understanding of Mary"; cf. "The Mother of God in Orthodox Theology and Devotion," 170. See also Newman, *Mary, the Mother of Jesus*, 69ff.

[108]*LG* 60.

[109]Ibid., 62.

[110]Barth, "Quatre études bibliques," *Foi et Vie*, nos. 85-86 (1936): 487, cited by

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Dombes Group: "Protestants who reject [Marian devotional practices of Catholics and Orthodox] out of fear of confusion or excess must nonetheless be on guard not to forget to praise God for Mary and for the saints he has given them."[111] To honor Jesus rightly, it is unthinkable to refuse to honor his mother.

Mary is for all Christians as a biblical model. "What she lacks in quantity of appearance in scripture she makes up for in quality."[112] Scripture presents us with many men and women who, though imperfect and flawed, nevertheless respond with valiant and praiseworthy faith to God's action in their lives. To be sure, their response is possible because of God's grace, yet we honor and strive to imitate them. Christians do not have to share an identical belief in Mary's holiness and sinlessness before they can agree (with Reformed theologian Daniel Migliore) that

> the biblical stories of Mary are testimonies to the grace of God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. They are stories of Mary as witness to God's sovereign, electing grace. They are stories of the zeal of this woman of faith for the coming of God's righteousness and mercy to transform the whole creation. They are stories of Mary's and our need for continuous reform by the word of God. They are stories of what it means to live faithfully as women and men ordained to ministry under the cross of Christ, commissioned by him to bear one another's burdens and to serve God's work of reconciliation. They are stories of a woman who prays and waits with the whole people of God for the coming of God's Word and Spirit to empower us for ministry and mission.[113]

Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 123.

[111]Blancy, et al., *Mary in the Plan of God*, 81.

[112]Byassee, "What About Mary?," 29.

[113]Daniel Migliore, "Woman of Faith: Toward a Reformed Understanding of Mary," in *Blessed One: Protestant Perspectives on Mary,* 129.

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All Christians then can revisit the scriptural data on Mary and, with minds not prejudiced either to unwarranted adulation or to unthinking rejection, come to appreciate together the biblical portrait of her as a disciple and servant – one who "hears the word of God and keeps it" (Luke 11:28). Mary can be for all Christians as a model of faith and obedience.

Finally, Mary can be for all Christians a way to Jesus her Son. Again this must be understood, first and foremost, in terms of Mary's motherhood in the order of history, and her exceptional example of Christian discipleship as glimpsed in the Gospels. Christians of different traditions will of course regard the phrase "Mary as a way to Jesus" with denominational pre-understandings which are, in themselves, not necessarily exclusive. Orthodox Christians will recall immediately the "Holy Theotokos" and will unblushingly sing:

> It is truly worthy
> to proclaim you magnified, O Mother of God,
> eternally blessed and immaculate
> and Mother of our God.
>
> More venerable than the cherubim
> and incomparably more glorious than the seraphim,
> You who without stain has given birth to God the Word,
> You, true Theotokos, we magnify you.[114]

Protestants might evoke Mary's words at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5), as a measure of her self-effacement and humility, pointing to her Son as her Lord and our Lord; as the one who alone deserves our obedience. As for Catholics, many might recall the slogan, *To Christ through Mary* – a time-honored yet admittedly ambiguous phrase which demands proper catechesis. A responsible Catholic catechesis striving for both ecumenical sensitivity and doctrinal integrity must make clear that the slogan, properly understood, does

[114]Kniazeff, *La Mère de Dieu*, 23.

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not mean that one cannot go to Jesus directly, nor that Mary herself mediates salvation because (as it might be wrongly thought) only by her mediation can one arrive at the Savior.[115] Beyond the ambiguities and denominational pre-understandings which still remain, might we be allowed to hope that Mary can come to be appreciated by all Christians as *a* way to Christ who is *the* Way?

As a conclusion, it is perhaps fitting to quote Pope Benedict XVI, who recently issued his first encyclical letter *On Christian Love*.[116] He ends his reflections by invoking Mary, in a manner that is ecumenically sensitive, theologically sound, and devotionally sincere:

> Holy Mary, Mother of God,
> you have given the world its true light,
> Jesus, your Son – the Son of God.
> You abandoned yourself completely to God's call
> and thus became a wellspring
> of the goodness which flows forth from him.
> Show us Jesus. Lead us to him.
> Teach us to know and love him,
> so that we too can become
> capable of true love
> and be fountains of living water
> in the midst of a thirsting world.

[115]The preposition "through" (in the phrase *To Jesus through Mary*) in particular requires considerable nuance, similar to the Marian title, "Mediatrix." Concerning the latter, Vatican II teaches that, while Mary is so invoked in the Catholic Church, such an honorific (but not infallibly declared) title "neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one Mediator" (*LG* 62).

[116]Benedict XVI, On Christian Love *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005).

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