

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:

### THE MOTHER OF JESUS IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS— CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCHES

A recent issue of *L'Osservatore Romano*, June 2, 1966, had two addresses of Pope Paul on the front page. One was from the general audience of June 1, when the Pope spoke on the words, "I believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins," and said that baptism makes all Christians members of the one Church. The other was the message of May 31 to Mexico for the sending of the Golden Rose to the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe.<sup>1</sup> It is not hard to imagine the bewilderment of our Protestant brothers looking over such a front page as this, not difficult to overhear them saying to each other in charity that Guadalupe is a family matter where other Christians must tread lightly, and reminding each other of the correctives the Council supplied for Marian devotion and also of the Pope's recent address (May 28) to the Cursillistas on the centrality of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

In this address I propose to put before you what the Council said on our Lady in the communion of saints and some first Protestant reactions to the conciliar views. In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* the Marian eighth chapter follows by design the new seventh chapter that was added to the original draft of the constitution. Chapter seven is on the eschatological nature of the pilgrim Church and its union with the Church in heaven. In other words, chapter seven concerns what Catholics understand by the phrase, the communion of saints.

The inter-connection between chapter seven and chapter eight has not yet been sufficiently noticed by commentators. I share Father George Tavard's concern lest chapter eight be printed separately, and read and explained apart from its proper place in the

<sup>1</sup> The address at the general audience began with the words, *Voi forse sapete*; the radio message to Mexico with the words, *En la fiesta litúrgica*.

<sup>2</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, May 28, 1966: *Quien sois vosotros*.

entire *Lumen Gentium*.<sup>3</sup> Chapter seven not only opened the way to the incorporation of chapter eight into the document on the Church, it also joined the Church on earth to the Church in heaven, linking the earthly members of Christ, the people of God of this world, with the saints who are already one with the Risen Christ. According to the Council the Church has always believed that the martyrs and apostles have been joined more closely to us in Christ, and together with them Christian cult has honored the Blessed Virgin and other saints. The Council says: "Just as Christian communion among the wayfarers brings us closer to Christ, so fellowship with the saints joins us to Christ; from him, as from the wellspring and head, proceeds every grace, and the life of the People of God itself."<sup>4</sup>

Catholic veneration of the saints includes many elements. A first element—we share this with our Protestant brothers—is the perduring good example of fidelity to Christ, most anciently in the martyrs "who gave the loftiest testimony of faith and charity by shedding their blood,"<sup>5</sup> then through all the saints, for in "the lives of those who share our humanity and yet are most perfectly transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18), God vividly manifests his presence and his countenance to men. In them he himself addresses us and furnishes us with a sign of his kingdom, to which we are strongly drawn, having such a cloud of witnesses over us (Heb 12:1) and such testimony to the truth of the gospel."<sup>6</sup>

The Council insists on more than the lasting good example—it insists on the dynamic, living fellowship with the saints, a fellowship that joins us to Christ. Using the words of Trent, Vatican II says: "We humbly call upon the saints and seek the help of their prayers to obtain favors from God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is our only Redeemer and Savior."<sup>7</sup> As so often in Vatican II, the liturgy is proposed as the model:

<sup>3</sup> In Father Tavard's review of *The Question of Mary* by René Laurentin, in *The National Catholic Reporter*, July 21, 1965, page 9.

<sup>4</sup> The translation of *Lumen Gentium* here used is that by John Drury which was published in *The Pope Speaks*, vol. 10 (1965) 4 pp. 359-400, chapter 8, 394-400. This reference, paragraph 50.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

Our union with the heavenly Church is made real in the noblest manner when we join exultantly in celebrating the praise of God's majesty, especially in the sacred liturgy, where the power of the Holy Spirit works on us through sacramental signs. In the liturgy, all of us who have been redeemed in Christ's blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (cf. Ap 5:9), and assembled into one Church, glorify God, one and three, with one canticle of praise.<sup>8</sup>

This is especially verified in the Eucharist:

And so, celebrating the Eucharistic sacrifice we are most closely united with the worship of the heavenly Church, as we join together and honor the memory first of all of the glorious and immaculate Virgin Mary, then of Blessed Joseph, of the blessed apostles and martyrs, and of all the saints.<sup>9</sup>

"Regarding this living fellowship with our brothers who are in the glory of heaven or still being purified after their death," Vatican II "again sets forth the decrees of the sacred Councils of Nicea II, Florence, and Trent."<sup>10</sup> Yet *ecclesia reformatanda* is also a consideration. "At the same time," continues chapter seven, "because of its own pastoral concerns this Council urges all those concerned to take steps to remove or correct any excesses, abuses or defects which may have crept in here or there, and to restore all things to a fuller praise of Christ and God."<sup>11</sup>

Chapter seven showed that in the celebration of the Eucharist we are united with the worship of the heavenly Church, as we join together and honor the memory first of the glorious and immaculate Virgin Mary. Chapter eight opens on the same note. In the Church, the body of Christ, the divine mystery of salvation is revealed to us and continued. "In the Church the faithful, adhering to Christ the head, and being joined in fellowship with all his saints, must also venerate the memory 'first of all, of the glorious and ever-Virgin Mary, mother of our God and Lord Jesus Christ.'"<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> No. 51.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> No. 52.

For the Fathers of the Council Mary's role in the communion of saints is her present place in the mystery of the Church, and her place in the Church now is her spiritual motherhood in its heavenly exercise. The value the Council attaches to Mary's present role, her significance for the people of God on earth, runs up against the inevitable difficulty of transferring our temporal words to the eschaton. We can only plead the analogous character of language here, admitting the inherent drawbacks of such terms as "now" and "present," but insisting all the same, as do the Council documents, on the union that obtains between all stages of the family of God. There is a co-incident between our time-measured worship of God in the body of Christ and the timeless hymn of praise of the blessed.

A real need of our theology is for a better understanding of the baffling relationship between our present time-space-measured situation and that other world where we believe the blessed are already happily joined to the Risen Christ. The doctrine of the Assumption points up these eschatological questions. Along with the anthropological factor of the body-soul dichotomy, "that seems," according to G. C. Berkouwer, "presupposed in the assumption doctrine," "there is" also "the problem of the relationship between time and eternity; if eternity, as is contended in some Catholic writers, is not infinitely extended *time*, how does the assumption of the human Mary fit into the new ideas on what eternity is?"<sup>13</sup> Here cult offers us more than technical theology, but many of our questions go unanswered—should they also go unexplored? The historical origins of the cult of the saints need a careful study; the fifth international Mariological Congress to be held next year, 1967, August 2-8, in Portugal has for its theme the origins of the cult of Mary.

After the procedural debate on our Lady in the second session the Fathers promulgated the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. In the liturgical year they link Mary to the mysteries of Christ and propose her as a spotless model to the Church. They say she "is inseparably joined to the saving work of Christ."<sup>14</sup> Chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* explores in detail this inseparable conjunction of the

<sup>13</sup> G. C. Berkouwer (trans. Lewis B. Smedes), *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1965, p. 245.

<sup>14</sup> No. 103.

Mother of Jesus to the saving mission of her Son—both on earth, as described in the Scriptures and as understood by later Christian authors, and in association to the everlasting intercession of the Risen Christ.

Here are two examples from chapter eight; they could easily be extended. Early in the chapter we read: "Taught by the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church shows filial devotion to the Virgin Mary as a most loving mother."<sup>15</sup> "Taught by the Holy Spirit" is an appeal to the Church's own life, an appeal that recurs in the explanation of Mary's cooperation: "The Church does not hesitate to attribute a subordinate role . . . to Mary. It experiences this role constantly and commends it to the loving attention of the faithful so that they, supported by this maternal help, may adhere more closely to the Mediator and Savior."<sup>16</sup> Protestant commentators have called this appeal to the Church's experience an apparent substitution of a new criterion in place of the revealed word of God.<sup>17</sup>

Another example from *Lumen Gentium* is: "When she was assumed into heaven, Mary did not lay aside her salvific role; rather, by her constant intercession she continues to obtain for us the gifts of eternal salvation. In her maternal love she looks after her Son's brethren who are still wayfarers, still beset with dangers and difficulties, until they reach their blessed homeland."<sup>18</sup>

I have not been able to find many Protestant comments on Mary and the communion of saints written since *Lumen Gentium*. Even the excellent book by G. C. Berkouwer, a Dutch Reformed theologian, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, though published in English translation in the spring of 1965, was written before the third session. Berkouwer gives a full chapter to "Mary," and anticipates many of the conciliar conclusions. But there is a careful short chapter of commentary by the American Lutheran Dr. Warren A. Quanbeck in the book, *Dialogue on the Way*, published last summer (1965), and edited by Dr. George Lindbeck.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> No. 53.

<sup>16</sup> No. 62.

<sup>17</sup> As Carl A. Braaten, in *Dialog*, 4(1965) 136-139.

<sup>18</sup> No. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Published by Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis.

Berkouwer makes the observation that each side, Rome and the Reformation, suspects the other of creeping docetism. He explains:

Each accuses the other of giving inadequate weight to the real humanity of Jesus Christ. According to Catholic Mariology (both minimalist and maximalist) the Reformation refused to allow the complete implications of the incarnation to come to fruition; and this is why the Reformation has never been able to recognize the value and legitimacy of a proper veneration of Mary. The Reformation theologians have accused Rome of giving Mary such a prominent role in the Church that she appears to duplicate the work of the Savior at important points.<sup>20</sup>

For Berkouwer, the question is not whether Mary deserves honor and praise or not.

The issue here is whether the humanity of Jesus was adequate for the *work* of redemption, and whether the assistance of Mary was necessary or not. . . . The real issue lies in the *kind* of praise given her. . . . The Reformation *is* not docetic or unhistorical; it knows how to preach on Christmas. The difference lies in the *function* ascribed to Mary, and this difference defines the difference in the respect paid her.<sup>21</sup>

Citing the writings of recent Catholic authors such as Hans Küng, A. Müller, H. M. Köester, Berkouwer says:

There has been a noticeable effort on the part of Catholic theologians to remove the foreign quality that non-Catholics sense about Marian doctrine. To do this, a critical eye has been turned on the development of Marian devotion. It is admitted that popular devotion has sometimes taken bizarre forms. And the objections to it on the part of non-Catholics are conceded as justified. In fact much criticism of Marian devotion within Catholicism today sounds like an echo of Protestant objections in the past.<sup>22</sup>

Warren A. Quanbeck, writing after *Lumen Gentium*, says that in this sensitive area of Mariology Protestants and Catholics

seem to inhabit different worlds, or at least move about in quite different atmospheres. Here the common tradition of the

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 246-247.

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 223-224.

past does not seem effective [would Dr. Quanbeck include the communion of saints?], and both parties to the discussion must walk warily in order to avoid offending the other unnecessarily. The Roman Catholic suspects that the Protestant lacks realism and depth in his theology; the Protestant fears that the Roman Catholic has confused Christological, ecclesiological, and Marian theological themes and as a result is in real danger of drifting into idolatry.<sup>23</sup>

The Protestant wonders "what essential relation" there is between the dogma of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption and the Ecumenical Creeds. . . . The differences seem so vast, the common elements so few, that it seems a waste of time to even contemplate discussion. What common ground is there to provide a base for dialogue?<sup>24</sup>

Quanbeck finds three areas of agreement: (1) the New Testament presentation of Mary. "From annunciation and nativity, through the childhood and manhood of Jesus, through the crucifixion and resurrection and into the early Christian community, Mary is an example of and stimulus to faith in Jesus the Christ."<sup>25</sup> (2) the Church's confession of *theotokos*, concerning which Quanbeck notes: "The churches that remember their theology continue to offer it as a touchstone of Christological orthodoxy."<sup>26</sup> (3) "There is a true and proper commemoration of the saints in the Christian Church."<sup>27</sup> However abusive the pre-Reformation cult of the saints may have been,

God is not praised when the story of his wondrous works among men is suppressed and forgotten . . . Mary's role in the work of redemption should not be overlooked or understated, not because her feelings are sensitive, but for the praise of God who did such wonderful things through her.<sup>28</sup>

Even more strongly he writes:

The neglect of Mary's true role in the history of salvation

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Quanbeck contributed to *Dialogue on the Way* the chapter, "Problems of Mariology," pp. 175-185; this reference, p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>26</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>27</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>28</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 178.

may well contribute to the loss of realism in Christology, and understatement of the humanity of Jesus Christ, with resultant abstraction and aridity, or by way of reaction, a false mysticism and shoddy emotionalism.<sup>29</sup>

Along with points of ecumenical agreement in chapter eight Dr. Quanbeck notes certain weaknesses; these are the categories of exegesis and theological method. Under exegesis, he questions the drawing of "dogmatic conclusions from traditional spiritual interpretations," stating that

to move from devotional language to dogmatic assertions is dubious theological method. By it Mary is transformed from a most eminent member of the church, having indeed a unique role in the history of salvation and chosen to be called blessed by all generations, to a heavenly figure who at times absorbs the role of her Son, the church, or the Holy Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

As to weaknesses in theological method, Quanbeck points out that chapter eight defines neither the role of Mary in redemption, nor the meaning of devotion offered to her, contenting itself rather "with the negative delimitation of Mary's role in relation to Christ."<sup>31</sup> As he puts it,

the Protestant reader is left with the disquieting sense that neither the dogmatic nor the liturgical caveats are sufficient. For Mary is ascribed a role which goes far beyond that attributed to any other saint, and which at times shades into that of her Son. And the very promotion of the cult of Mary maintains a pressure toward a more extensive and more precise definition of her soteriological role.<sup>32</sup>

Chapter eight is therefore "a late and not altogether satisfactory beginning of an effort" of "various church groups" to "even understand each other, to say nothing of making common progress in theological studies," "but in our ecumenical poverty even a beginning is an occasion for thanks to God."<sup>33</sup>

The recently published (spring, 1966) volume of *Concilium* on

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 185.



ecumenical theology, edited by Hans Küng and others and titled *Do We Know the Others?* offers a number of post-conciliar reactions. In the essay, "What Would Calvin Say to Present-Day Catholics?" French Reformed Pastor Jean Bosc writes: "If he [Calvin] repudiates the intercession of the saints, it is because he sees in it a manner [using Calvin's words] 'of attributing now to this one, now to that one, what is proper to God and Jesus Christ.'"<sup>34</sup> Considering Calvin's "rigorous Christocentrism" and rejoicing that theological thinking within the Roman Church is showing more of a christocentric current, Bosc says:

It remains to ask ourselves whether this Roman Catholic trend is as rigorous and as widespread as Calvin invites us to make it . . . whether . . . we have really gone to the end of the line? Above all, are there not very many expressions of doctrine and piety, secondary but nonetheless extremely significant, which require a critical and christocentric examination?<sup>35</sup>

At the meeting of the French Mariological Society held in August, 1963, Pastor Bosc had dealt with the "Mariology of the Reformers." He pointed out that they wished to say no more than the Scriptures did and also that they evolved in their own attitudes, though retaining a positive attitude lost to a great degree in the anti-Catholic polemic of a later time. Luther, he says, preached the exemplary value of Mary's receptivity before God, stressing the divine *respexit* rather than the human *humilitatem*.<sup>36</sup>

There appeared in 1962 the book, *Marie, Mère du Seigneur, figure de l'Eglise*, by Brother Max Thurian, subprior of the Calvinist monastic community of Taizé, and observer at Vatican II—a biblical study on our Lady. The American printing of the British translation makes the title, strangely, to come out, *Mary, Mother of All Christians*, a doctrinal change surely alien to the author's mind.<sup>37</sup> It is clear not only from Thurian's other writings before and after his scriptural study but also from what is *not* said in this book that he

<sup>34</sup> P. 31.

<sup>35</sup> Pp. 31-32.

<sup>36</sup> "La mariologie des Réformateurs," in *Études Mariales*, 20(1963). pp. 17-26.

<sup>37</sup> Herder and Herder, New York, 1964.

does not view Mary's place in the communion of saints as Catholics do.

In a report prepared for the Faith and Order Conference held at Lund, Sweden, 1952, and published in advance under the title *Ways of Worship*, Thurian explained why he could not as a Reformed Christian accept the Roman Catholic position; he wrote: "The doctrine of the spiritual motherhood of Mary is directly based on the doctrine of grace, and on a physical participation of the Church and of the Christian in the life of grace."<sup>38</sup> According to Thurian, "For the Protestant, if Mary is figure of the Church she is so insofar as she is *in* the Church; Mary cannot be called mother of the Church," and he italicizes the prepositions *in* and *of*. Both the French Dominican LeGuillou of the ecumenical centre Istina and the English Dominican C. Ernst put to Thurian the pressing question: what does Mary mean *now*? In Catholic understanding the *communio sanctorum* extends to our Lady and the other blessed; it is not limited to the *communio fidelium*, the holy fellowship established by the *communio baptismalis* and developed by our sharing in the other holy things, especially the Eucharist.

Cornelius Ernst, English Dominican, asks,

What for Thurian is the connection between Mary in her Scriptural monument and Mary *now*, in her present reality? The answer is not clear. Mary *was* undoubtedly an historical personage, her life undoubtedly *was* of the saving significance which Thurian finds in her scriptural monument . . . but it is not clear whether that saving significance which she possessed as a personage in saving history is *now* actual in her person as a heavenly reality. . . . We must say not only that the Church now, as a whole in heaven and on earth, is Mary's re-presentation, as embodying the saving significance which the Church in its self-interpretation can read of Mary in the Bible; we must also say that Mary now, as a heavenly reality, actually possesses that saving significance in her own person.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> S. C. M. Press, London, 1951; edited by P. Edwall, E. Hayman and W. D. Maxwell; New York edition by Harper, 1951; p. 310.

<sup>39</sup> "Mary: Sign of Contradiction or Source of Unity?" in *Clergy Review*, 49 (1964) 549.

M.-J. Le Guillou, O.P., puts the question: "Why does M. Thurian's book stop as if paralyzed before the question of the evolution from Mary, Mother of God and figure of the Church, to Mary, mother of the faithful?"<sup>40</sup> LeGuillou's own suggested answer is that the problem is the interpretation of Scripture. He thinks many Catholics nowadays tend to magnify Protestant thought on Mary and to minimize Catholic thought. We must never forget that the expression, Mary, figure of the Church, does not have the same meaning for our Protestant brethren that it has for us. "For us the image is the exemplary cause, prototype and full realization of the Church." It is not the same for Protestants. LeGuillou's words sound harsh here: "That is to say there is in Protestantism a grave deficiency—linked to the deficiency on the very nature of grace—with respect to the true conception, in the Catholic sense of this word, of the divine maternity."<sup>41</sup> He denounces false sentimental ecumenism that misunderstands true dogmatic problems.

The same frankness on the Protestant side is found in the new book by Rudolf J. Ehrlich, *Rome, Opponent or Partner?* Ehrlich protests what he regards as H. Küng's unwarranted optimism about basic agreements between Trent and Reformed Theology on justification. The matter of Mary is the touchstone of difference. Because of Mariology Ehrlich holds that not even H. Küng is free from the Roman doctrine of *gratia creata*, which implies a necessary reciprocity between Creator and creature, between Redeemer and redeemed. Ehrlich writes, "We believe that it is true to say that the doctrine of *gratia creata* finds its fullest and final expression in the Roman teaching about the Virgin Mary, especially when she is seen as the archetype of the Church."<sup>42</sup> Dr. Ehrlich's words warn us against naïve hopes that Vatican II's insistence on Mary as model of the Church is immediately acceptable to other Christians. For Ehrlich,

If Christ is the personification of *gratia increata*, Mary is the

<sup>40</sup> "Mariologie et Protestantisme," in *Études Mariales*, 20 (1963) 12.

<sup>41</sup> "Mouvement Marial et mouvement oecuménique: convergences et divergences," in *Études Mariales*, 21 (1964) 5-15; this reference, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Rome: Opponent or Partner?*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1965; some of the chapters were first published in the *Scottish Journal of Theology*; this reference, p. 133.

personification of *gratia creata*, of that cooperation with grace which, since redemption is impossible without it, is in fact co-redemption. . . . Everything that is said by Roman theology of *gratia creata* can be predicated in an absolute sense of the Virgin Mary.<sup>43</sup>

### Conclusion

The Virgin Mary in the communion of saints remains a challenge that the Christian Churches still have to face. Up to now Mariology has not played a significant role in the ecumenical movement associated with the World Council of Churches. The Orthodox theologian S. Boulgakov, introduced the Virgin Mary in the communion of saints at the first Faith and Order Conference at Lausanne in 1927. Under Orthodox pressure a section of the second Faith and Order meeting at Edinburgh, 1937, concerned itself with the communion of saints, leading to the rather tame resolution: "The place of the Mother of Christ was considered by this section, and all agree that she should have a high place in Christian esteem. We commend further study of this question to the Churches." Boulgakov was not pleased; he remarked, "The question of the Communion of Saints belongs with us to our doctrine on the Church; it is an ecclesiological question. In the section it was not discussed dogmatically, but only practically." The Lutheran delegate, C. A. Nelson, said that with this subject of the *Theotokos* they felt they were "at the centre and heart of the ecumenical movement."<sup>44</sup>

When the day comes for Faith and Order within the World Council of Churches to give full attention to the communion of saints and Mary's place, it may be the role of Orthodoxy to mediate to the entire West, the Roman West as well, a rich liturgical understanding of our Lady. Victor de Waal, giving an Anglican comment on *Lumen Gentium* in a recent number of *One in Christ*, says that the Mariology of chapter eight points encouragingly toward the sense of participation with the whole Church triumphant found in the Eastern Churches. Christ is the one Mediator, but our Lady is the

<sup>43</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>44</sup> These quotations come from Thomas Sartory, *The Oecumenical Movement and the Unity of the Church*, Newman, Westminster, Md., 1963, pp. 19-20, 178.

sign that all the people of God are called to participate in the work of their redemption.<sup>45</sup>

Symptomatic of so much that divides Christians, especially in the West, Mary's place in the mystery of Christ and his Church cries for realistic and mutual investigation. Because of the burgeoning of Marian studies and the flowering of devotions especially this past century, even Catholic scholars unfamiliar with this field presuppose that little more is to be done. The direction Vatican II has given to studies on Mary's role in the Church, our lately-realized sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's work in other Christian Churches, the now conscious need of truly historical theology—these are factors that challenge Catholic theologians to examine a whole range of important questions. I will name some by way of example. Firstly, we need good studies of the doctrine of the communion of saints in relationship to the cult of the saints. Father Paul Molinari's recent book, *The Saints: Their Place in the Church*,<sup>46</sup> is a good beginning but touches only in passing the specific question of the cult of Mary. It is encouraging to note that the next meeting of the Mariological Society of America, January, 1967, is to deal with Mary in the communion of saints, and that Dr. Arthur Piepkorn, of Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis, is to read a paper at it.

We must be careful, however, not to appeal too quickly to what we call "our mutual creedal inheritance" of the communion of saints. Stephen Benko in a recent book, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio*, argues at length, if not all-persuasively, for a neuter sense to *sanctorum*, so that the correct meaning would be a sharing in holy things, a common partaking of the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. J. N. D. Kelly holds to a personal meaning for *sanctorum*—that is, the "fellowship of all who are sanctified in Christ, be they living or dead"—therefore that the phrase is in apposition to the words, holy, Catholic Church, in the creed.<sup>47</sup> There is no necessary

<sup>45</sup> "De Ecclesia: An Anglican Comment," in *One in Christ*, 2 (1966: 1) 31-43; from the ecumenical gathering held at Chevetogne, September 2, 1965, and reported originally in *Irenikon*, 1965, n. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Sheed and Ward, New York, 1965.

<sup>47</sup> S. Benko, *The Meaning of Sanctorum Communio*, S.C.M. Press, London, 1964; Allenson, Naperville, Ill., 1964. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Longmans, London, 1960.

clash between the two meanings, and the Reformation tradition also honors the personal meaning, even though it tends to limit it to the fellowship of the saints on earth.

Dr. Albert C. Outler, American Methodist who was an observer at Vatican II, reflects on the communion of saints in the Guild edition of the conciliar documents.

The emphasis upon the living link between the Church militant and the Church triumphant (in chapter VII) gives fresh meaning to the old phrase "communion of the saints"—and rescues eschatology from its conventional preoccupation with the sweet bye-and-bye. Finally, the identification of the Blessed Virgin (in chapter VIII) as the foremost of all those who have shared in, and who still enrich, the communion of saints may well have the effect, among other things, of recalling Protestants to an important aspect of Christian faith that they have tended to underestimate in their reaction to what was deemed the excesses of conventional Mariology.<sup>48</sup>

Secondly, we must pay most special heed to the advice of the *Decree on Ecumenism*:

Furthermore, in ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians, standing fast by the teaching of the Church, yet searching together with separated brethren into the divine mysteries, should do so with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists an order or "hierarchy" of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.<sup>49</sup>

Oscar Cullmann has called this passage

the most revolutionary to be found, not only in the Schema *de oecumenismo* but in any of the Schemas of the present Council. In accordance with this text, it will be possible to place dogmas concerning the primacy of Peter or the ascension of Mary (without denying them of course) on a different plane from dogmas concerning Christ and the Trinity . . . a

<sup>48</sup> *The Documents of Vatican II*, edited by W. M. Abbott, S.J., and Joseph Gallagher, Guild Press, America Press, Association Press, New York, 1966, p. 105. See also R. A. Newman, "A Protestant Note on St. Mary," in *The Ecumenist*, 2 (Jan.-Feb., 1964) 26-28.

<sup>49</sup> No. 11.

point of departure for ecumenical developments which justify every hope.<sup>50</sup>

Within the *Decree on Ecumenism* the place of Mary figures in a significant application of the principle of hierarchy of truths. In the section on the separated Churches and ecclesial communities of the West, and precisely in the paragraph on the "confession of Christ" which uses the New Delhi formula we find reference to our Mariological differences:

Our thoughts are concerned first of all with those Christians who openly confess Jesus Christ as God and Lord and as the only mediator between God and man for the glory of the one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We are indeed aware that there exist considerable differences from the doctrine of the Catholic Church even concerning Christ the Word of God made flesh and the work of redemption, and thus concerning the mystery and ministry of the Church and the role of Mary in the work of salvation.<sup>51</sup>

Vatican II makes the most of our agreement—our common Christian confession of Jesus Christ as God and Lord, as the one Mediator. Then in descending order the Council mentions Christ in his Person and work, the mystery of the Church and her ministry, and finally Mary and her place in the work of salvation.

The "revolutionary" character of the paragraph of the *Decree on Ecumenism* is evident from a comparison with previous Roman pronouncements, e.g., with *Mortalium animos*, encyclical of January 6, 1928, in the wake of the 1927 meetings of Faith and Order and of Life and Work. The document took a hard line, discouraging, even forbidding Catholic participation in ecumenical gatherings with Protestants. The spectre of modernism and indifferentism still hung over the Church. *Mortalium animos* took special exception to the distinction between "fundamental" and "non-fundamental" teachings of the faith, as if all must accept the fundamental teachings, and seek union between the Churches here, but leave "non-fundamental" doctrines to free option.

<sup>50</sup> O. Cullmann, "Comments on the Decree on Ecumenism," in *The Ecumenical Review*, 17 (April 1965: 2) 93-95; this reference, p. 94.

<sup>51</sup> No. 20.

Pius XI wrote,

All true followers of Christ will believe the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God with the same faith as they believe the mystery of the august Trinity, the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff defined by the ecumenical Vatican Council with the same faith as they believe the Incarnation of our Lord.<sup>52</sup>

Vatican II has not sanctioned any specious distinction of articles of faith into "fundamental" and "non-fundamental," for what is of faith rests on divine authority, not on human selection. Vatican II has gone deeper, putting the foundation of faith in Christ himself, and admitting that some truths have a closer connection with Christ, that is, with Christ revealing in his Person, acts and words the saving indwelling love of the Triune God. Other truths concern various means of salvation given us by Christ and confided to his Church. It is important—Vatican II tells us we are obliged to do it—to put before our separated brethren the authentic hierarchy of realities here. It is after the "mystery and ministry of the Church,"—within the Church—that the Council considers Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church, the role of Mary who is inseparably joined to the saving work of Christ.

In 1928, nearly forty years ago, *Mortalium animos* made much of the differences that divide us, including the cult of Mary. *Unitatis redintegratio*, the decree on ecumenism, makes more of the sacraments and faith that unite us, yet without brushing over the real difficulties. *Mortalium animos* closed with a plea for the return to the one fold of the straying sheep and Pius XI appealed to our Lady to intercede for the goal of unity in Christ, calling her Mother of divine grace, help of Christians, conqueror of all heresies.

We can still pray the versicle, "*Dignare me, laudare te, o virgo sacra*," but we should be very careful of our identifications if we essay the response, "*Da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos.*" As Colman O'Neill, O.P., put it so well,

When Catholics are speaking to other Christians, they dare not say that anyone who believes in Christ has missed the point. Catholics were, perhaps, too ready to speak like this in

<sup>52</sup> *A.A.S.*, 20(1928) 5-16.



the past, relying over-confidently on their exclusive possession of the truth. If a convinced Christian is embarrassed by Roman insistence on the prerogatives of Mary, then it is time for Catholics to consider whether we are not seeing her in the wrong perspective.<sup>53</sup>

Father O'Neill wrote this at the beginning of the third session, which was to conclude with the promulgation of the *Decree on Ecumenism* and the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*.

The closing words of *Lumen Gentium* are:

Let all faithful Christians offer urgent prayers to the Mother of God and Mother of men in order that she may intercede with her Son in the communion of saints, until the whole family of nations—whether they bear the honored name of Christian or still do not know their Savior—may be joyfully assembled into a single people of God, in peace and harmony, to the glory of the most holy and undivided Trinity.<sup>54</sup>

EAMON R. CARROLL, O. CARM.  
*Whitefriars Hall*  
*Washington, D.C.*

<sup>53</sup> C. O'Neill, "Concessions for Unity," in *Doctrine and Life*, 14 (December, 1964) 590.

<sup>54</sup> No. 69.