

## **Mariology and Ecumenism**

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Mariology presents us with an ecumenical difficulty. Up to this point Mariology cannot be said to have constituted one of the principal themes of ecumenical dialogue, but it is inevitable that, in the course of engaging the doctrinal positions that surface prominently in ecumenism, Mariology should come under consideration.

We cannot here dedicate ourselves to this engagement. We will instead limit ourselves to briefly citing convergences and divergences, with the aim of bringing into relief the reasons behind each, as well as possible avenues of mutual approach.

It has frequently been noted that Catholic theologians tend to view ecumenism as being primarily a matter of fraternal relations with Protestants, as well as an effort to comprehend various objections of reformed theology. Yet in reality relations with the orthodox are no less important. We are much nearer to the orthodox in matters of Mariology, and the ecumenical issue confronts us very differently in the two cases. We will here examine these two ecumenical situations in succession.

### **Mariology in the Orthodox Churches**

#### 1. *Worship and doctrine*

The orthodox churches are manifestly and profoundly marked by the Virgin's presence.<sup>2</sup>

It is important firstly to underscore that Mary's place in the work of salvation is realized very vibrantly in worship, as the orthodox churches have retained the tradition of the Byzantine church. "The *cultus* of the Theotokos, beginning with the proclamation of the dogmas at Ephesus and Chalcedon, underwent in Byzantium a prodigious advance, which placed Mary on the highest plane in the Church's piety... the veneration of the

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by John Mark Miravalle from the Italian, *Maria: La Donna nell'Opera della Salvezza*, in consultation with the French, *Dieu et la Femme*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. M. Köster, *Die Eigenart der orthodoxen Mariologie, Maria in Sacra Scriptura [MSS]*, 6, 37-56; D. Stiernon, *Théologie mariale dans l'Orthodoxie russe, Maria* 7, 239-238; B. Schultze, *La Mariologie sophianique russe, Maria* 6, 213-239.

Theotokos has maintained the same fullness in the piety of the contemporary Orthodox Church.”<sup>3</sup>

The orthodox theologian who makes this claim adds, “Nonetheless, orthodox theology, like the rest of byzantine theology, has not yet made precise the exact meaning of this cult of the Mother of the Savior, and has not generally defined the place and significance of Mariology within the broader whole of the truth taught by the Church.”<sup>4</sup> An attempt at doctrinal elaboration has not, therefore accompanied the intense Marian piety that is one of the essential characteristics of orthodox piety.<sup>5</sup>

One might say that, due to this piety, there is a profound agreement between Catholics and orthodox regarding the value of Mary’s presence in Christian life. This agreement carries over into matters of faith in certain fundamental truths about Mary. Although Marian theology is not developed in a systematic way in the orthodox world, it is centered on certain essential affirmations wherein their unity of faith with the doctrine professed by the Catholic Church is vividly apparent.

What are those truths which the orthodox regard as pertaining to the Christian faith? “That which is required, as dogmatic doctrine, for all Orthodox believers,” says the Orthodox theologian, A. Stawrowsky, “are the following definitions of the Church on the Most Holy Virgin Mary:

1 – She is the Mother of God, not only the Mother of Christ – *Theotokos*, according to the definition of the third ecumenical council at Ephesus in 431.

2 – She is the Ever-Virgin – *Aeiparthenos*: Virgin before and after the birth of her only Son, born of her and of the Holy Spirit, according to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formula and according to the definitions of the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Kniazeff, *La place de Marie dans la piété orthodoxe, Etudes Mariales [EtM]* 19 (1962) 123.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Kniazeff presents his own study on the place of Mary within Orthodox piety as “one of the first efforts of Orthodox theology” to remedy this lacuna. He “attempts to determine the chief lines of what might be to the eyes of an Orthodox theologian as much as justification for the veneration of the Virgin, as an explication of the different aspects of her cult in the Church” (*art. Cit.*, 124).

3 – She is the intermediary on behalf of humanity before her Son, according to the definition of the fourth ecumenical council.

Besides these three doctrinal points, it must be observed that according to the unanimous opinion expressed by the majority of the Church's Holy Fathers, the faithful must believe that the Virgin Mary was, from her birth to her dormition, free from every voluntary sin, whether mortal or even venial."<sup>6</sup>

We have reproduced this list of dogmatic points on account of its clarity and precision: it indicates what an orthodox Christian may not refuse to believe, and what held by faith in common with catholic belief. Nevertheless, as M. J. Le Guillou has noted, from the ecumenical point of view it is important to “discover Orthodox Marian theology from within, since despite its unsystematic appearance it possesses an intuitive sense of mystery, and vigorously unites the living unity between the mysteries of the Incarnation, Mary's maternity, virginity and sanctity, the divinization of Christians, and the renewal of all things at the end of time.”<sup>7</sup>

## 2. *Essential Doctrinal Teachings*

In doctrine as in worship, Mary is held to be the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God. It is the divine maternity that has, so to speak, fascinated the gaze of the Christian easterners. It is indissolubly linked to the contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation. Such is St. Gregory Nazianzus' early emphasis when he says, “if anyone does not accept Holy Mary as *Theotokos*, he is separated from divinity.”<sup>8</sup>

By attributing a particular importance to the feast of the annunciation, the liturgy has progressed from the doctrine to an appreciation of the importance of Mary's consent to the mystery. While considering first of all the greatness of the divine work which is effected in Mary, eastern theology has not neglected to underscore Mary's active part in the realization of this design. “The Incarnation of the Word,” says Nicholas Cabasilas, “was not only the Father's work, of His Power and His Spirit... but also the work of

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<sup>6</sup> Stawrowsky, *La Sainte Vierge Marie. La doctrine de l'Immaculée Conception, Marianum [Mar]* 1973, 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> M. J. Le Guillou, *Les caractères de la théologie mariale orthodoxe, EtM* 19 (1962) 92.

<sup>8</sup> *Epist.* 101, PG 37, 177 C. Cf. Le Guillou, *Les caractères*, 120.

the Virgin's faith and will. Since without these this design could not have been realized, it was impossible that the project could have been effected without the involvement of the will and faith of the all-holy woman."<sup>9</sup>

United to her Son, Mary participated in his sacrifice. Mary's suffering at the foot of the cross is feelingly recalled by the Byzantine liturgy. "It was necessary that she should be associated with her Son in all that pertained to our destiny. Just as she gave him her flesh and her blood, receiving in return the communication of his graces, so was it necessary for her to participate in all his sufferings, in all his afflictions. He, on the cross, received a strike from the lance in his side, while she was pierced by a sword in her heart, as Simeon had foretold."<sup>10</sup>

This association in his sacrifice was followed by an association in Christ's glorious triumph. We have shown how the faith in the Assumption developed first in the East. The Virgin, who in heaven shares in the glory of the risen Christ, stands before all Christians as "the image of every beauty," in the phrase of Gregory Palamas.<sup>11</sup>

With respect to the theme of spiritual maternity, it has been "much less reflected on by orthodox theology," as Kniazeff notes. But "it is felt strongly at the level of liturgy and piety. In fact, the title of 'Mother' is much more frequent in prayers and hymns than that of 'Queen.'"<sup>12</sup> Marian devotion testifies to the faith of orthodox Christians "in all the Virgin's power of intercession." Moreover, "if Orthodox theologians have not concerned themselves much with Mary's spiritual maternity, they are nevertheless wholly agreed in seeing her maternity as being proclaimed in John 19:25-27."<sup>13</sup>

We must stress too the way in which eastern theologians have been willing to see in Mary a new destiny for humanity. The Holy Virgin is called *Theotokos* "Not only with respect to the nature of the Word, but also with

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<sup>9</sup> N. Cabasilas, *In Dormitionem*, 12, PO 19, 508.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Homil.* 37, PG 151, 468 A.

<sup>12</sup> *Marie dans la piété orthodoxe*, 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* On Orthodox commentaries on the Johannine text, cf. B. Schultze, *Sriechische und russische orthodoxe Theologen über Maria im Johannesevangelium*, *MSS* 5, 363-404. It appears in this study that the spiritual maternity is professed by A. Makrakès, S. Bulgakov, A. Kniazeff, G. Florovsky.

respect to the deification of humanity,” says St. John Damascene.<sup>14</sup> Orthodox Marian devotion implies a strong relationship between Mariology and the doctrine of the transfiguration of the world through the action of the Holy Spirit. It employs this mode of biblical typology in applying it to Mary, and thus shows that “in Mary, who is a witness of the Incarnation and Redemption, the Kingdom of God must first be accomplished, since it is in its essence a new order of things, that is a transfiguration – through the Holy Spirit – of the old order of things.”<sup>15</sup>

### 3. *The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption*

The agreement between the orthodox and catholic churches ends, unfortunately, once we reach the two dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.

While taking solace in the absence of any dogmatic definition on these doctrinal points in the orthodox church, Stawrowsky nevertheless refers to a situation of nearly unanimous opposition: “One notes on the part of the orthodox such strong opposition to these dogmas, that at this point we cannot see any contemporary orthodox theologians who might be considered followers of Catholic Marian doctrine, nor even those would qualify as sympathizers. This despite the evident fact that devotion for the Virgin has been and remains today extremely fervent in the orthodox east, perhaps even more fervent than in the Catholic west.”<sup>16</sup>

The opposition to the Immaculate Conception takes various forms and includes a range of arguments: at times it can become radical, as in T. Spassky, who holds that this doctrine runs counter to the dogma of Chalcedon, basing his position on the conciliar definition’s silence on the matter.<sup>17</sup> At times opponents limit themselves to characterizing the Immaculate Conception in terms of private opinion, and denying that it binds as a matter of revealed doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *De fide orthodoxa*, 3, 12, PG 94, 1032 B.

<sup>15</sup> Kniazeff, *Marie dans la piété orthodoxe*, 138.

<sup>16</sup> *La Sainte Vierge*, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. D. Stiernon, *L’Immaculée Conception dans la théologie russ-contemporaine*, *Ephemerides Mariologicae [EMar]* 6 (1956) 284.

<sup>18</sup> Such is the case with J. Kolemin; cf. Stiernon, *ibid.*, 290-291.

We may however cite the opinion of the Russian theologian V. Iljin, who does not hesitate to take a favorable position to the dogma: “Just as the church is infallible and impeccable both in her beginnings and in history, which is to say that she cannot have sin in her origin nor in her historical life, so too the Virgin, Mother of God, who bears the same name as the church cannot have, *a fortiori*, either original nor actual sin. From the beginning, she is the Vessel of the Incarnation.”<sup>19</sup>

Without getting too deeply into the maze of controversies, or examining the statements of opposition to the dogma,<sup>20</sup> we may simply point out that the current negation by the orthodox stands in contrast to the doctrine of the great Byzantine doctors who affirmed Mary’s immaculate sanctity from the beginning of her existence; consequently, the contemporary negation constitutes a rupture with eastern tradition. It seems that among the deep motives for this negation, one must suggest a certain protestant influence, and a hostile reaction to the pope’s power and to every pontifical definition.<sup>21</sup>

Let us cite Stawrowsky’s opinion, since he, as an orthodox theologian, has made a noteworthy effort to understand the Catholic doctrine, “To our way of thinking, the rejection of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary on the part of contemporary orthodox theologians – not on the part of the orthodox church, which has not yet pronounced in an authentic manner on this issue – is merely a misunderstanding, an erroneous interpretation of the Catholic dogma’s infelicitous formulation, even though the dogma itself is quite right and true in its essence..., but badly defective in its formulation. Finally, there has also crept in a polemical desire to triumph dialectically over the enemy which the orthodox have shamefully and for centuries seen as the Catholic Church.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> As cited by Stiernon, *ibid.*, 271.

<sup>20</sup> Ten principle statements are collected by Stawrowsky, *La Sainte Vierge*, 43-44.

<sup>21</sup> With respect to the Russian orthodox church, A. Wegner shows that for over a century (1650-1750) the doctrine of the immaculate conception was professed at Kiev, but was then abandoned following the nomination of Patriarch Theophan Prokopovitch, a theologian who adopted the majority of protestantism’s principal theses (*L’Eglise orthodoxe russe et l’Immaculée Conception, Virgo Immaculata [Vim]* 4, 196-215).

<sup>22</sup> *La Sainte Vierge*, 111.

Certainly, Catholic theology cannot regard the dogma's formulation as defective. However, it is true that Mary's sanctity is expressed therein only in its negative aspect: the preservation from the original stain. Catholic theologians need to take the eastern doctrine into account – since the latter has reflected instead the positive aspect of Mary's holiness – and show the harmony of both points of view. In acknowledging Mary to be she who is full of grace, they attribute to her an essentially positive perfection. It is this perfection that, by being complete, implies the preservation from original sin from the first moment.

A return on the part of the orthodox to their own tradition, namely, a reflection on the totality of that holiness that Mary must have possessed, could open the pathway to a rapprochement.

One may also hope for progress towards union in the case of the Assumption. The pontifical definition has aroused opposition among orthodox towards the dogma, but the opposition is focused primarily against the authority by which the dogma was defined.

To again reference Stawrowsky: “The Orthodox Church, in the feast of the Holy Virgin's Dormition, celebrated since antiquity, has always taught that the Virgin did not remain under the power of death, nor did she undergo corruption, but was raised up by the power of her Son and was brought body and soul into heaven, where she reigns with her Son over the entire universe. This doctrine, which in the east was not elevated to the level of a dogma of faith, is considered established doctrine by the Orthodox Church. As we see it, therefore, there is no reason to oppose the fact that the Catholic Church has found it proper to proclaim this doctrine as a dogma of faith.”<sup>23</sup>

This doctrinal rapprochement is all the more desirable insofar as it would correspond to the fundamental convictions that animate Marian devotion within the orthodox church. From the Catholic perspective, this devotion on the part of the easterners remains an important witness to the place which Mary must occupy in Christian life and thought.

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<sup>23</sup> *La Sainte Vierge*, 112.

## Mariology and the Protestant Churches

### 1. *A fundamental opposition.*

What is the ecumenical situation of Mariology with respect to Protestantism?<sup>24</sup>

In the Protestant churches one often encounters an attitude that is quite critical towards Marian veneration and doctrine. Certain protestant theologians have expressed their radical opposition to Mariology. Speaking of the significance of Mariology, Roger Mehl holds it to be a “field entirely extraneous to the thought of the Reformation,” but “extremely revelatory of the structures of Catholic theology, in particular of its manner of conceiving the action of divine grace.”<sup>25</sup> He expresses various critical reflections on the perpetual virginity, an affirmation which he sees as deriving from the positing of a link between sexuality and sin; he thinks that the proclamation of Mary as Mother of God has had disastrous effects on the development of Mariology; he condemns the attribution of universal mediatrix of all graces, the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the

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<sup>24</sup> Among the studies on this theme, cf. G. Philips, *L'opposition protestante à la mariologie*, *Mar* 11 (1949) 469-488; J. Hamer, *Mariologie et théologie protestante*, *Divus Thomas* (Freiburg) 30 (1952) 347-368; *Marie et le protestantisme à partir du dialogue oecuménique*, *Maria* 5 983-1006; Th. Sartory, *Die Hintergründe der Katholisch-protestantischen Kontroverse über Maria, Theologie und Glaube [TG]* 49 (1959) 279-298; B. Leeming, *Protestants and Our Lady*, *Irish Theological Quarterly [IrTQ]* 27 (1960) 91-110; K.F. Dougherty, *Our Lady and the Protestants*, in J.B. Carol *Mariology*, 3, Milwaukee 1961, 422-439; A. Brandeburg, *De mariologia ac de cultu venerationeque Mariae apud christianos disiunctos protestanticos hoc tempore vigentibus*, in *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo*, Rome 1962, 479-516; E. Lamirande, *La "Theotokos" et les travaux du mouvement oecuménique "Foi et Constitution"*, *EMar* 13 (1963) 77-105; *Prises de position au sujet de Marie chez des non-catholiques canadiens*, *ibid.*, 287-294; J. Galot, *Marie et certains protestants contemporains* *Nouvelle Revue Théologique [NRT]* 85 (1963) 478-495; G.A.F. Knight, *The Protestant World and Mariology*, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 19 (1966) 55-73; F.W. Künneth, *Maria im Glaubenszeugnis der Kirche Evangelisch-Lutherischer Reformation*, *MSS* 6, 5-14; M.D. Koster, *Reformierte und Katholische Grundansichten über den Marienkult*, *MSS* 6, 15-36; W. Cole, *Scripture and the Current Understanding of Mary among American Protestants*, *MSS* 6, 95-161; A.M. Allchin, *Maria in der anglikanischen Theologie und Frömmigkeit*, *Una Sancta* 24 (1969) 272-285; P. Emonet, *Un problème du dialogue oecuménique avec les Protestants: la Mariologie*, *Esprit et Vie* 81 (1971) 225-236; D. Flanagan, *Mary in the Ecumenical Discussion*, *IrTQ* 40 (1973) 227-249; R. Mackenzie, *Mary as an Ecumenical Discussion*, *EMar* 27 (1977) 27-36; E. Doyle, *The Blessed Virgin Mary and Dialogue with Evangelicals*, *Clergy Review* 64 (1979) 347-357.

<sup>25</sup> *Du catholicisme romain. Approche et interpretation*, Neuchâtel-Paris 1957, 78.



Assumption, and he fears the definition of Mary's coredemptive role, which he sees as an attempt to revitalize the theme of the fertility goddess, a theme typical of a multitude of pagan religions.<sup>26</sup> He reacts against this kind of "lateral Christianity," "which is potentially sustained by all popular superstitions."<sup>27</sup> "Certainly," he admits, "Mary has a place in the economy of salvation, but for all its singularity it is a position which remains analogous to that of all witnesses, namely, to be an instrument in the Lord's hands, to say the 'yes' of faith to God's initiatives, to be a witness to God's great works."<sup>28</sup> He also adds that by withdrawing Mary from the story of sin and affirming her immaculate conception, Mariology renders nugatory, for her, the cross of Jesus Christ and so imperils the mystery of the Incarnation, in addition to excising Mary from the common condition of humankind.

He ends with the following categorical judgment: "Therefore we cannot do otherwise than respond to the whole of Mariology with an absolute 'no.' We are persuaded that it constitutes a lethal apparatus against the evangelical faith. Within it converge all the heresies of Catholicism: the autonomous power granted to the tradition, the doctrinal magisterial authority arbitrarily granted to the supreme pontiff and to the bishops, the equivocations of the doctrine of merit, the exploding of the unique grace of the Father which is then is fractured into particular graces giving man the possibility of acquiring merit, and the negation of Christ's unique mediation. The Reformers thought that 'sola fide' and 'sola gratia' were the only foundations upon which the peace of consciences could be built. Today it is necessary to add that a universal rejection of the whole of Mariology is the only means by which confidence in Jesus Christ can be secured on behalf of conscience."<sup>29</sup>

It is immediately evident how unqualified is this attitude of rejection, how it does not limit itself to a protestation against certain excesses: it comes from a reaction against essential elements of catholic doctrine. One sees within it a hostility towards everything in the work of salvation that entails a true collaboration of man with God, a cooperation of the church and of Christians with Christ, namely: the contribution to the exploration and formulation of revelation, which becomes manifest in the role of

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-86.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

tradition and the doctrinal magisterium; collaboration in sanctification, which finds its expression in the doctrine of merit; Mary's cooperation in the work of redemption and participation in Christ's mediation. This opposition involves, therefore, the foundational principle of the covenant between God and humanity, insofar as it manifests an effective contribution on man's part to the work of salvation. Mariology is rejected because it attributes an active role to Mary, an extremely important one, in this work.

This doctrinal hostility is accompanied by an absence of Marian devotion: the absence of Marian devotion is the indication of a quite different mentality than which finds expression in the Catholic Church. One sees the profound difference of attitude in the terms employed by Pastor Pierre Murray: "The uninterrupted development of Marian doctrine and devotion seems to us to signal, more strongly than ever, the impossibility for us in conscience, not only of reunion, but even of a contemporary profound mutual approach with the roman church on doctrinal and spiritual grounds. Of course, I realize that Catholicism wants to distance itself, both dogmatically and in its devotions, from every idolatry to a creature, including that unique creature who is the Mother of God; I know that their doctors explain themselves by saying that in divine-human cooperation everything always comes from grace, and that the human intermediaries in no way detract from the divine sovereignty whenever it grants them the grace of being secondary causes. Nonetheless, despite all these explanations and all these theological expositions, we cannot avoid the conclusion that at the level of popular piety, these sophisticated doctrines do not prevent our wretched humanity from suddenly changing the religion of grace (which allows us to merit) into a religion of merits, nor do they prevent the devotion of hyperdulia rendered to Mary from degenerating into the most idolatrous of superstitions... is it not inevitable then that we ask ourselves whether in the system itself, and not merely in its concrete manifestation, there lies a principle of falsity and error?"<sup>30</sup>

Maury adds that the biblical Gospel teaches us "that we must live *only* for God's glory." "And it is for this reason that, confronted with the Catholicism of Mary, we say: *non possumus*."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *La Vierge Marie dans le catholicisme contemporain*, in *Le protestantisme et la Vierge Marie*, Paris 1950, 65-66.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

## 2. *Avenues of mutual approach*

While acknowledging a prevalent opposition to Mariology, we must not that there are signs, beginning more than twenty years ago, of a change of attitude on the part of certain protestants. The anti-Marian attitude is yielding, in certain able theologians, to a more well-rounded attitude, one more interested in coming to know in what the true Catholic position consists,<sup>32</sup> and one more open in its investigations and analyses of Mary's role in the divine plan of salvation.

### *a – The return to the teaching of the reformers*

Among the reasons for this greater openness, an outstanding one is the rediscovery of the teaching of the first reformers. In opposing themselves to the Marian devotion and theology of Catholics, Protestants were often convinced that they were following in the steps of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. But these figures were a far cry from having adopted a purely negative attitude towards Mary. One Protestant, W. Tappolet, has published an anthology of texts entitled *The Praise of the Reformers for Mary*.<sup>33</sup> The author tells his readers that in the course of the research and compilation of these texts, he discovered that he had been mistaken in thinking that the beginnings of the reformation had rejected Marian

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<sup>32</sup> R. Mehl, for example, seems to have a rather imperfect and superficial knowledge of Catholic Mariology. Indeed, he traces the proclamation of *Theotokos* to Chalcedon and explains it with other affirmations of that council, even though the title was defined at Ephesus. Nor does he seem to account for the fact that, according to the doctrine of the immaculate conception, Mary owes all her sanctity to the merits of the Redeemer, since, as he sees it, this doctrine makes Christ's cross irrelevant to Mary (*Du catholicisme*, 87-89).

<sup>33</sup> *Das Marienlob der Reformatoren*, Tübingen, 1962. The anthology was put together with the collaboration of a catholic theologian, A. Ebner, who had already underscored the positive elements of Luther's marian doctrine: *Martin Luthers Marienbild*, in *Orientierung*, 20 (1956), 77-79, 85-87. We must also point out the prior work by R. Schimmelpfennig, *Die Geschichte der Marienverehrung im deutschen Protestantismus*, Paderborn, 1952. Begun under the impulse of Fr. Heiler and according to the ecumenical objective of *Una Sancta*, this investigation shows the Marian devotion maintained by the reformers and in German Protestantism up until our own time. One may further consult K. Algermissen, *Mariologie und Marienverehrung der Reformatoren*, *TG* 49 (1959) 1-24; H. Hennig, *Kie Lehre von der Mutter Gottes in den ev.-luth. Bekenntnisschriften und bei den lutherischen Vätern*, in *Una Sancta*, 16 (1961) 55-80; E. Stakemeier, *De Beata Maria Virgine eiusque cultu iuxta reformatores*, in *De Mariologia et Oecumenismo*, 423-477.

doctrine and devotion. In particular, Luther's Marian devotion, while not without its limits, is an incontestable fact, and one which merits attention: "it is beyond all reasonable doubt that Luther *loved* and *venerated* (honored or praised) Mary personally, and *imitated* the evangelical virtues he saw displayed in her life. Likewise, no one can doubt that he wished all Christians to follow him along these lines."<sup>34</sup>

The numerous attacks launched by Protestants against Mary's perpetual virginity appear to be a clear deviation from the first positions of the Reformation: the reformers unanimously affirmed her virginity.<sup>35</sup> Along with her virginity, Luther and Zwingli affirm Mary's purity and sanctity in such clear terms that is worthwhile to contrast them with the modern Protestant opinion which relegates Mary to the order of sinners. "I firmly believe, according to the words of the holy Evangelist," Zwingli declares, "that this pure Virgin for us gave birth to the Son of God and that she remained, both during the birth and afterwards, a pure and intact Virgin for all eternity."<sup>36</sup> In so saying, Zwingli defends himself explicitly from those who would accuse him of having thought Mary to be a sinner like other human beings. He had already cited the passage in which St. John Chrysostom attributes to Mary the weakness of self-love, but Zwingli made clear that he found this opinion unsatisfactory: "I have never said anything," he avers, "attributing dishonor or sinfulness to the pure Virgin Mary."

In citing Zwingli's very definite position, Max Thurian notes, "Let us take note in passing how much this Marian doctrine of the most humanist, most 'Protestant' amongst the Reformers, can overthrow the established opinions on the subject of the 'Reformed Tradition'."<sup>37</sup>

It is not without a certain surprise that one encounters various opinions, held by diverse reformers, which seem favorable to the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The pontifical definitions of these two prerogatives have stirred up vehement protestations among separated Christians. In an age when the Immaculate Conception had not

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<sup>34</sup> This is the conclusion of W.J. Cole, at the end of the lengthy study *Was Luther a Devotee of Mary? Marian Studies [MSt]* 21 (1970) 94-202. Nonetheless, after this affirmation (p. 201), the author adds that Luther ultimately rejected every mode of invocation to Mary (202).

<sup>35</sup> Tappolet, *Marienlob*, 41-54, 170-173, 240-249, 319-321.

<sup>36</sup> Tappolet, *Marienlob*, 235.

<sup>37</sup> *Mary, Mother of All Christians*, trans. Neville B. Cryer Herder, New York, 1963, 77.

yet become a dogma, and met with opposition in certain Catholic theologians, one is still startled to find Luther acknowledging Mary's exceptional privilege, justifying it with the principle that "The Virgin Mary lies between Christ and other men."<sup>38</sup> As far as the Assumption goes, Luther did not deny it; he believed that Mary was taken up into heaven, but he said nothing concerning her bodily destiny.<sup>39</sup> One finds an explicit affirmation of the bodily Assumption in Bullinger's discourses, who was Zwingli's successor in Zurich.<sup>40</sup>

The Reformers not only preserved such important elements of Marian doctrine; they also to a certain extent continued and promoted Marian devotion. Without admitting Mary's mediation or intercession, they desired devotion which consisted in praise and, above all, imitation. Mary is chiefly presented as a model of faith; the greatest praise that could be rendered to Mary is to follow her example in following Christ and God with the greatest possible fidelity.<sup>41</sup>

This is not to suggest that there is no concrete sign of devotion in the form of images. To those who wished to destroy all images, Luther responded that for his part he desired to preserve the crucifix and the image of Mary.<sup>42</sup> From sufficiently reliable testimony, we know that in the great Reformer's room a picture representing the Virgin with the Christ-child hung from the wall.<sup>43</sup>

The indisputable attestations to the Marian devotion of the reformers are of such a nature as to prompt reflection in contemporary Protestants.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Werke* (ed. Weimar), 17, 2, p. 228 (Homily of 1527 for the Feast of Mary's Conception).

<sup>39</sup> *Werke*, 52, p. 681. Cf. Tappolet, *Marienlob*, 56ff.

<sup>40</sup> *De origine erroris libri duo*, c. 16, Neustadt 1600, 79. Cf. Tappolet, *Marienlob*, 327.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Tappolet, *Marienlob*, 58-65, 104-126, 190-202, 256-260, 328-331.

<sup>42</sup> *Werke*, 18, 70. Cf. Tappolet, *Marienlob*, 146.

<sup>43</sup> *Werke, Tischreden* 5, 623, n. 6365; 2, 207, n. 1755. Cf. Ebnetter, *art. cit.*, 87, in which the author observes that if the first text might leave some doubt, the second is perfectly clear.

<sup>44</sup> At the conclusion of a presentation on the Mariology of the reformers, pastor J. Bosc writes, "The theology of the reformers plainly reveals an attention to Mary, to her role and significance, that is definitely positive, and which contrasts with the reticence or even silence with which later protestantism avoids the virgin in anti-Catholic reactionism..." He maintains that the "positive directions of this

In their doctrinal affirmations on the Ever-Virgin Mother of God, and in the hints they provide regarding the praise and devotion she deserves, one finds pervasive indicators of a profound personal conviction. Even Calvin, who has the reputation of being more coolly reticent than the rest on this matter, does not neglect to describe the way we should live as being “disciples of the Virgin Mary,” and “holding fast to her teaching.”<sup>45</sup>

b – *Analysis of the Scriptural data*

The divergence between Protestants and Catholics with regard to Marian doctrine results in large part from a moral general divergence concerning the communication of revealed truth. Protestantism claims to find this truth uniquely in scripture, *sola Scriptura*, while Catholic theology affirms the presence of this truth in the Church’s living faith, the present faith which comes from a tradition that must be taken into account, and which is based on Scripture as the privileged witness of the original tradition. In the field of Mariology the doctrinal development of the tradition has been considerable, and as a result the distance between Protestantism and Catholicism is correspondingly considerable.

How might this distance be reduced? It is not irrelevant to point out that a better awareness of the teaching of the reformers could open the path to a certain respect for the tradition, since the reformers themselves remained faithful to the tradition of the first centuries, at least in its essentials.<sup>46</sup> If in certain cases they interpreted the dogma of the divine maternity proclaimed at Ephesus as well as that of the virginity in their own way, according to the basic orientation of their own doctrine, they were still careful to preserve the heritage of the patristic tradition. In point of fact, they did not, in their opinions about Mary, base themselves only on Scripture, and their respect for the primitive tradition was such as might possibly promote the broadening of protestant views.

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Mariology could and should be more realistically assessed in ecclesial life” (*La mariologie des Réformateurs, EtM* 20 (1963) 26).

<sup>45</sup> *Opera*, 46, Brunswick 1891, 122.

<sup>46</sup> “Whatever may be the position theologically that one may take to-day on the subject of Mariology,” writes M. Thurian, “one is not able to call to one’s aid ‘reformed tradition’ unless one does it with the greatest care... the Marian doctrine of the Reformers is consonant with the great tradition of the Church in all the essentials and with that of the Fathers of the first centuries in particular.” (*Mary*, 77).

But this broadening might also arise from a more profound analysis of the scriptural data. The evangelists have only reported a few of the episodes of Mary's life. But these episodes furnish us with a vaster doctrinal richness than might appear at first sight, if only it is closely examined and placed within the context the Old Testament preparation. Once this attitude, which is foundational for the reception of the scriptural data, is in place, then the exploration of those biblical passages having to do with Mary proves very fruitful.

One might cite, for instance, J. G. Machen, who has made a concise analysis of the gospel testimony concerning the virginal motherhood. He is well aware of the animating principle at work in his research, which is to say that he admits the infallible authority of Scripture. If one rejects the virginal birth of Jesus, which is so clearly attested to in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, then, he declares, "let us cease talking about the 'authority of the Bible' or the 'infallibility of Scripture' or the like."<sup>47</sup> This principled stance propels one further to a more rigorous examination of the evangelical accounts, to their form, their content, and their credibility. With this examination the author shows how the scriptural testimony can be explained only if there was in fact a virgin birth. He also shows the congruence of this fact with the whole of the gospel message, with the supernatural that is made manifest in Jesus, and with the personality of the Son of God.

In order to clarify the gospel texts, A. G. Hebert appeals to the Old Testament.<sup>48</sup> Following in the footsteps of the Swedish theologian, Sahlin, he expounds the way in which a sound exegesis of Luke's Gospel demands that one see in Mary, who receives the angel's message and then sings the Magnificat, the completion of what was said about the Daughter of Zion. The identification of Mary with the Daughter of Zion indicates the extent to which Marian devotion falls directly within the biblical tradition. This devotion is often accused of making Mary a goddess through the influence of the pagan cults; but as Hebert observes, those who make this objection are often unaware that it is the biblical account which presents Mary according to the outlines of the Daughter of Zion.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> J.G. Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, New York, 1932, 386.

<sup>48</sup> *The Virgin Mary as the Daughter of Zion*, *Theology* 53 (1950) 403-410.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 410.

And the biblical portrait of Mary is more complete than this, as Max Thurian lays out in his work, *Mary, Mother of the Lord, Figure of the Church*. This work lays out the essential trajectory for a Mariology founded on scripture. Earlier, the author had expressed an unfavorable opinion towards the Immaculate Conception,<sup>50</sup> and was particularly animated in his reaction against the proclamation of the dogma of the Assumption.<sup>51</sup> Here, without disavowing those positions adopted earlier, he prescinds from them deliberately in order to accept, with maximal liberty and maximal serenity, the Bible's message regarding Mary. The extent of his open-mindedness may be seen especially in his concern to receive the contribution from the work of Catholic exegetes, insofar as they seem to be responding to the text's real significance. There is in all this an ecumenical mindset, but it is one which accords with the desire to discover, as completely as possible, the revealed truth of scripture. The emphasis is placed on those positive elements which flow from the study of scripture, without worrying about which dogmatic expansion they might imply, or towards which they might incline. This mentality is at the opposite end of the spectrum from any polemic against Catholic Marian devotion.

We should add that exegetical study worthy of the name normally demands some doctrinal reflection. This reflection is elaborated in a two-fold direction: that of the mystery of the Incarnation and that of the relations between Mary and the church.

If we begin from the perspective of the mystery of the Incarnation, the gospel, for all practical purposes, poses the question about Mary's role in the economy of salvation. Therefore, it is due to the requirements of the Incarnation that Karl Barth reacted against the strong tendency among a certain number of protestants to deny the virgin motherhood.<sup>52</sup> While an anti-Marian polemic derives from positing a one-sided competition between Jesus and Mary, a consideration of the mystery of the Incarnation forces one to adopt the alternative perspective of seeing a solidarity between Jesus and Mary and an integration of the Virgin within the mystery of the Word made flesh.

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<sup>50</sup> "Mariology," in *Ways of Worship*, London 1951, 301-311.

<sup>51</sup> *Le dogme de l'Assomption, Verbum Caro* 5 (1951) 2-41.

<sup>52</sup> *Dogmatique*, vol. I, *La doctrine de la Parole de Dieu. Prologomenènes à la Dogmatique*, II, 1 (tr. F. Ryser, Geneva 1954), 172ff.



We have already mentioned that another principle, that of the relationship between Mary and the church, results from the scriptural data and have contributed to the clarification of the meaning of Marian doctrine and devotion.

3. *Doctrinal opinions favorable to Mariology*

a – *The divine maternity*

Many Protestants have abandoned belief in Mary's divine maternity. We may cite a revelatory statistic regarding this belief in the United States. In response to the question, "Do you believe that Mary is the Mother of God?" presented to Protestant ministers of various denominations, only twenty-two out of one hundred respondents answered in the affirmative.<sup>53</sup> The reason for this denial is sometimes ascribed to Nestorianism, which refuses to admit that Jesus Christ is God.<sup>54</sup>

One should therefore have the greater appreciation for Karl Barth's reaction in showing the legitimacy of the title "Mother of God" as attributed to Mary over the course of a long tradition by Lutheran and reformed orthodoxy. "It matters – and this is a kind of indication that people know how to rightly interpret the Incarnation—that the Christian or the evangelical theologian unreservedly recognize that the title Mother of God as applied to Mary is perfectly justified within Christology, despite those abuses present in roman catholic Mariology."<sup>55</sup>

By 'abuses' Barth means everything in Catholic doctrine that attributes to Mary "even a merely relative independence or eminence which could serve as a basis for Marian dogma."<sup>56</sup> He rejects such dogma insofar as it implies a recognition of Mary's cooperation at the level of salvation.

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<sup>53</sup> K.F. Dougherty, *Contemporary American Protestant Attitudes Towards the Divine Maternity*, in *MSt* 6 (1955) 143. The results of the survey with regard to the Lutheran participants (five out of twenty-one of whom responded in the affirmative) were contested by the publication of the Lutheran Church, *The American Lutheran*, 38 (1955) 6, which claimed that all Lutherans believe that Mary is the Mother of God. Indeed, all of them should believe it as a matter of Lutheran orthodoxy, as the survey demonstrated (cf. S.J. Bonano, *Mary and United States Protestantism*, in *EMar* 6 (1956) 401ff).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. For example R. Niebuhr's position in *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, New York 1947, 70 (cf. Bonano, *Mary*, 374).

<sup>55</sup> *Dogmatique*, 127.

<sup>56</sup> *Dogmatique*, 128.

“The creature who is graced in virtue of its own consent: such is the real theme of Mariology.” It is not therefore simply Mary as an individual who is involved, but the more general principle of the creature’s collaboration in salvation. According to Catholic theology, Mary is actively engaged in the divine plan as she gives her consent to the Incarnation in the name of humanity; this consent opens her fully to grace and renders her capable of positively assuming her task as Mother of God. She prefigures the church, which must also cooperate with Christ. Barth laments this fundamental principle: when he criticizes Marian dogma, he wants to reject “the idea according to which the human creature collaborates (*ministerialiter*) in its own salvation, on the basis of prevenient grace.”<sup>57</sup> He maintains that such cooperation betrays Christ’s sovereignty; certainly, Christ acts with and through his Church, “but nonetheless still in such a way that at every stage He is and remains Lord... and so no reciprocity, no exchange, no transmission of power may be countenanced, even with the most careful qualifiers.”<sup>58</sup>

On the one hand, Barth must be given credit for defending the title of “Mother of God,” as linked to the mystery of the Incarnation. On the other hand, his dogmatic vision of grace and the church makes him deny Mary any true and active collaboration in salvation, and so tends to empty the divine maternity of any content. Nor is “Mother of God” the only thing at risk of being devalued; the mystery of the Incarnation itself is at stake, since this mystery makes sense only within the context of human nature’s cooperation with God. Elsewhere, Barth himself became aware of deficiency in his presentation of the mystery of the Incarnation, and attempted to modify it by placing more attention on the importance and the role of Jesus’ human nature, stating in particular that “as true man” Jesus Christ is “God’s faithful partner.”<sup>59</sup>

The principle of a real human collaboration entailed by the Incarnation could be applied to Mary as an integral part of that mystery, but the reformed theologian did not reach this point; his doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of grace appears to cut him off from following that path.

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<sup>57</sup> *Dogmatique*, 133.

<sup>58</sup> *Dogmatique*, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *L’humanité de Dieu*, Geneva 1956, 21.

The German protestant Hans Asmussen has responded to the fundamental objection as laid down by Barth, saying “In our Church one may speak freely of the sole efficacy of grace, and one is right to do so.” Nonetheless, it must not be forgotten that “grace works only in those human beings who cooperate. And Mary is the clear sign within human history that only grace is at work, but indeed precisely in those members of humanity who cooperate.”<sup>60</sup>

The whole of the mystery of human history, from Adam to Christ, implies a community of God with men, a community in which men open themselves to grace and do that which God does, in such manner that what grace does within them and what they themselves do cannot be separated. This mystery of cooperation appears clearly in the Incarnation. The child in the crèche at Bethlehem is the work of God, of the Holy Spirit who was at work in Mary’s womb; but, Asmussen adds forcefully, this baby is also Mary’s work, and bears the traces of likeness to his Mother. But behind Mary stands the entirety of humanity which provided this likeness; there culminates in Mary the cooperation of all those generations of humanity from Adam to the Incarnation.<sup>61</sup>

This is the sense in which Asmussen declares, “One has no Christ without Mary.”<sup>62</sup> What is essential about the Savior is that he is ours; if he were not truly ours, he could do nothing for us. And he unites himself to humanity through Mary.

Mary’s contribution is therefore an essential element of the Incarnation; it represents the contribution of all humanity to that mystery. Asmussen maintains that if Protestants are willing to grant so little to Mary’s role, it is because they think of her too exclusively as an individual and not as the link between Jesus Christ and humanity. If one has to do with Christ, one has to do with us, and it must be a real man that offered the redemptive sacrifice so that we offered it in him. If it was simply God who carried out the sacrifice, it would not have benefitted mankind.

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<sup>60</sup> *Maria die Mutter Gottes*, Stuttgart 1951 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 15. A third edition was published in 1960. A good presentation of Asmussen’s Mariology was made by C.S. Napiórkowski: *Le Christ avec Marie ou le Christ sans la Vierge? Le Pasteur Asmussen et la Sainte Vierge*, *Mar* 38 (1976) 97-114. Asmussen was born in 1898 and died in 1968, and was an observer at Vatican II.

<sup>61</sup> *Maria*, 16.

<sup>62</sup> *Maria*, 13.

Humanity can see itself in Christ thanks to Mary; thanks to her, it is the “Son of Man” who has saved us.<sup>63</sup>

Thus Mary’s consent at the Annunciation must be regarded as a decision that enlists the whole human race. “Only if humanity enters into Mary’s decision can this decision be their salvation.”<sup>64</sup> The decision taken by the Virgin in the name of humanity manifests the positive, principal role she enacts in the Incarnation.

In his book on Mary, Thurian likewise underscores these requirements of the Incarnation. When speaking of Calvin’s reticence with respect to the title “Mother of God,”<sup>65</sup> he attributes it to a certain Nestorianism. He notes that many Protestants are disposed to this current of thought; they prefer to speak of a manifestation of God in Jesus, rather than affirm that Christ is God. Thurian himself is of the opinion that there ought to be a rehabilitation of Nestorius.<sup>66</sup> But in point of fact he distances himself quite clearly from Nestorian views insofar as he detects, for the most part, all that is implied by the Incarnation, and he states himself to be firmly in favor of the title “Mother of God”: “If God has truly taken flesh in the Virgin Mary, and if the two natures of Christ are really united in one person, Mary cannot be only the mother of the humanity of Christ as if that could be separated from his divinity. She is the mother of one single

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<sup>63</sup> *Maria*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Maria*, 18.

<sup>65</sup> Calvin admitted the Council of Ephesus’ definition, but habitually abstained from making use of the title “Mother of God,” and tended to disregard the particular importance of Jesus’ humanity, and, in consequence, of the divine maternity (Cf. B. Dupuy, *La mariologie de Calvin*, in *Istina* 5 (1958) 486-490). J. Bosc cites a text from the *Institutes* in which Calvin calls Mary “Mother of Our Lord,” but also cites a passage from a letter to the community in London where he says, “To be fraternally candid with you, I must not hide that it is terrible that this title be ordinarily attributed to the virgin in homilies, and, for my part, I know not how such language can be either good, or decent, or fitting. . . . To say Mother of God about the Virgin Mary can accomplish nothing except to solidify the ignorant in their superstitions.” Bosc does not consider this to be a case of nestorianism, since Calvin explicitly rejects Nestorius’ heresy, but thinks instead that the title “Mother of God” is avoided due to pastoral concerns. (*La mariologie*, 19-20).

<sup>66</sup> *Le dogme de l’Assomption*, 33.

person, the Mother of God made man, of the Only Christ, true God and true man.”<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, if the Incarnation requires that Christ be God and Mary be the mother of God, this also demands that he be truly man; the reality of his humanity means that Mary is “a truly human mother and not only an instrument to permit God’s appearing on earth.”<sup>68</sup> Here Thurian is distancing himself from Barth: Mary is not simply an instrument for God’s sovereign agency: her motherhood carries with it “a relationship of mother to son in the full sense, physical, psychological and spiritual.”<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, Mary made her personal contribution to the birth and development of Jesus. This contribution is revealed in her role as educator: “if Christ truly became man like ourselves He was a child and thus had to be brought up and educated like us.”<sup>70</sup> Mary carried out her mission as educator in faith. Jesus’ submission to his parents attests to this surprising aspect of the mystery, and guarantees “the Incarnation of the Son of God, the reality of his humanity.”<sup>71</sup>

Asmussen insists on Mary’s physical cooperation in the formation of the child, and on her decision at the Annunciation in the name of the human race; Thurian places his emphasis on her moral cooperation in Jesus’ development, in “the human conditions in the domestic, social and religious sense of the life of Christ,” which is an essential element in the Incarnation.<sup>72</sup> With a Protestant meditation on the mystery of Mary, one can also highlight the personal responsibility Mary assumed with her consent, which is an “essential element,” in the plan of salvation.<sup>73</sup> These are the various aspects of a collaboration which is not added to, but rather integrated within, the mystery of the Incarnation.

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<sup>67</sup> *Mary*, 78-79. Thurian cites the reformed pastor Charles Drelincourt (1595-1669) who in his treatise *De l’honneur qui doit être rendu à la Sainte et bienheureuse vierge Marie*, accepts, much more positively than Calvin, the title Mother of God.

<sup>68</sup> *Mary*, 79.

<sup>69</sup> *Mary*, 79.

<sup>70</sup> *Mary*, 81.

<sup>71</sup> *Mary*, 83.

<sup>72</sup> *Mary, Mother of the Lord*, 80.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

This is the reason why, in reference to the sparse attention given Mary in Protestantism, pastor A. Brémond confesses “Our protestant Christianity is at times too disincarnated.”<sup>74</sup>

b – *Virginity*

Barth’s stance on Mary’s virginity, like his stance on Mary’s maternity, is such as to attract attention. While the prevailing tendency within Protestantism is to deny the virgin birth of Jesus, Barth has revived the affirmation of the Credo: *natus ex Maria Virgine*, a formula which he maintains “absolutely unequivocally.”<sup>75</sup>

This fact entails a miracle, a sign immediately effected by God that illuminates our sense of the Incarnation. While highlighting the importance of this sign, the reformed theologian nevertheless will not grant Mary’s virginity, any more than her maternity, a status that rises above the purely negative in terms of human collaboration. In this virginity he sees a sign of the exclusion of the sexual, sinful life from the origins of Jesus Christ’s human existence.<sup>76</sup> And, even more profoundly, he sees this sign to be a judgment on man and on the incapacity of human nature to raise itself to the level of “fellowship with God.”<sup>77</sup> Mary’s virginity indicates that the event is brought about by God, and that the creature must merely submit to Him and receive Him. The virginity implies a negation “of the possibilities and of the aptitude of man to know and attain to God. However,” adds Barth, “If man is able to be endowed with God – as is evident in Mary – that means, strictly and exclusively, that he receives God, that he is entrusted with Him.”<sup>78</sup> Mary’s virginity therefore signifies the passivity of the creature, who allows God to act within her.

Thurian too highlights the sovereignty of the divine decision expressed in Mary’s virginity. He considers this virginity to be a consecration, a setting apart in which the predestination of Mary’s virginity is implied. In explaining this virginal consecration, he states, “Mary is alone with God in order to receive Him, that the fullness of the Lord may dwell in her and nothing other might be able to fill her. It is essential that this

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<sup>74</sup> C. Booth, *Marie la mère de Notre Seigneur*, in *Dialogue sur la Vierge*, Lyons 1950, 65.

<sup>75</sup> *Dogmatique*, 172.

<sup>76</sup> *Dogmatique*, 178.

<sup>77</sup> *Dogmatique*, 174.

<sup>78</sup> *Dogmatique*, 176.

fullness should be received without any other human help, and in the poverty of the Virgin of Israel...”

As a sign of consecration, this virginity is consequently and at the same time a “sign of solitary powerlessness, which gives glory to the fullness and the power of God.”<sup>79</sup>

Nevertheless, in contrast to Barth, Thurian does not relegate to Mary’s virginity a merely negative role; while it expresses humanity’s incapacity, this virginity is not totally passive. It is a “sign of poverty,” but of a poverty which is actively consented to, a poverty brought about by humility, one of attentiveness to God, total fidelity, service to the Creator.<sup>80</sup> It therefore presupposes a positive attitude, one deliberately willed and deliberately sustained. This is an attitude of openness to contemplation and love, since the virginity is “a state in which the creature may lovingly contemplate his Creator.” “Because Mary in view of the Messiah’s birth, does not know any other love than that of God, and her unique communion with Him, she is entirely turned toward Him and waiting readily for His response.”<sup>81</sup> She has had a contemplative life, of which we discover definite indications in the Gospel.

One should also add that this virginal attitude entails an *aspect of novelty*, in which a new human liberty, transformed by grace and the new order of things, is affirmed. Thurian observes that “The fact of free renunciation of marriage points out that from the coming of Christ the creative order is not necessarily unavoidable; the law of creation can be broken by the new order of the kingdom.”<sup>82</sup> Mary’s virginity is the fullness of love, the sign of the resurrection and of the future world. It is thus that the Virgin Mary introduces into the world, “the novelty of the Kingdom of God which makes its appearance with Christ.”<sup>83</sup>

The three aspects of Mary’s virginity which Thurian elucidates, he then goes on to apply to celibate monasticism: “a sign of consecrated obedience, contemplative poverty, and eschatological newness.”<sup>84</sup> One might well

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<sup>79</sup> *Mary*, 31.

<sup>80</sup> *Mary*, 31ff.

<sup>81</sup> *Mary*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> *Mary*, 33-34.

<sup>83</sup> *Mary*, 35.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

imagine that the author, through his own experience of monastic life, would be better able to grasp the meaning of Mary's virginity, just as at one time the institution of consecrated virginity was an illumination for the Church with respect to the reality and the value of the Virgin of virgins' first virginal consecration, which is the model for all others.<sup>85</sup> The monk's commitment to chastity is by its nature such as to enable the profound recognition of that first commitment by the Virgin.

Based on the fact that he understands virginal consecration from the inside, Thurian is led to acknowledge Mary's perpetual virginity. The New Testament texts do not of themselves suffice for making an absolute affirmation of virginity after Jesus' birth, but the doctrine of the perpetual virginity results from three characteristics of virginity itself: a sign of consecration to the Lord, of contemplative poverty, and of the eschatological newness of the Kingdom. This consecration is total only to the extent that it is definitive; her poverty is what enables Mary to have received everything by receiving Christ; she cannot be any more completely filled, and must contemplate only that which she possesses; the newness of the Kingdom has as its sign a perpetual celibacy (Matthew 19:12). Thus the belief in Mary, ever-virgin, which is found in the Church's tradition and in the thinking of the Reformers, assumes a solid coherence.

In her virginity Mary is a sign of the church. Asmussen presented Jesus' virginal birth as the initiation of the new birth of the Christian;<sup>86</sup> Thurian does more to highlight the nature of the personal commitment of virginity, with its ecclesial implications. "Mary is in her virginity the sign of the creature who is set apart and dedicated by the Lord, is filled with all the fullness of God, and has nothing more to await than the final completion when the Kingdom of God should be revealed, of which she already, in a hidden and anticipatory way, sees the fulfilment. She is the sign of the Holy Church which only awaits and looks for the return of Jesus Christ."<sup>87</sup>

*c – Holiness*

With respect to Mary's holiness it is interesting to compare the two successive stages in Thurian's thought. When reporting the teaching of reformed theology, Thurian explained why it rejected the idea of Mary's

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<sup>85</sup> *Mary*, 36-37.

<sup>86</sup> *Maria die Mutter Gottes*, 17-21.

<sup>87</sup> *Mary*, 40.



perfect sanctity, and especially any privilege of an immaculate conception. He contrasted the Catholic notion of grace, according to which man is physically transformed by the Holy Spirit and physically placed in communion with Christ with the Protestant notion that defines grace instead as a habitation of the Holy Spirit in a nature which remains sinful, and which while serving as an instrument of God in His work of sanctification, remains attracted to rebellion. The Immaculate Conception, as understood by Catholicism, is Mary's predestination understood as a physical preparation for the divine maternity. Protestantism, on the contrary, does not understand this predestination in terms of sanctification, but as God's sovereign decision which leads a sinful, pardoned soul towards the goal chosen by Him. It is God's glory that is made manifest in beings who can lay claim to no dignity of their own: such is Mary, "the humble and sinful handmaiden who has found favor before God." Though a unique personality in history, she "remains a wretched sinner who needs her Son's forgiveness."<sup>88</sup>

With this divergence arising from his doctrine on grace, Thurian notes that there is an opposition to any exaltation of Mary, which might seem to make of her a divine personage. Reformed theology accuses Catholicism of separating Mary from the church, from the society of sinful human beings like us: the virginity and the Immaculate Conception and the assumption widen the gap between the situation ascribed to Mary and the conditions of life within the Church.<sup>89</sup>

But in his work on Mary Thurian reconsiders the problem from a new angle: Scripture. He analyzes the title given to Mary by the angel – "full of grace" – and discerns therein a predestination to the messianic maternity which prepared Mary for her mission and which affected her life by the infusion of sanctity.<sup>90</sup> With this move he overcomes the antagonism assumed by Protestantism between a predestination which is the sovereign act of God and an interior, "physical" preparation of human nature; in effect scripture indicates that the divine predestination is made concrete in an intimate sanctification.

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<sup>88</sup> *Mariology*, 310-312, cf. 301, with regard to the purification: "She is a sinner like others."

<sup>89</sup> *Mariology*, 312-313.

<sup>90</sup> *Mary*, 22.

With respect to the accusation that there is a separation posited between Mary and the rest of humanity, Thurian shows it to be ill-founded. The accusation should pertain to her virginity as well; but the evangelists, who affirm the miracle of the virgin birth, do not compromise the mystery of the Incarnation in the process – nor can they be accused of docetism. And, like her virginity, Mary’s holiness does not contradict the humanity of Christ: “on the contrary, sanctity is the authentic quality of true humanity. Christ would not have been more human if He had been a sinner; nor therefore would He have been more human had He been born of a woman who was a sinner. The Son of God became true man because He was born of a true woman...”<sup>91</sup>

Thurian identifies the danger of insisting on Mary’s sinful state: holiness risks appearing as “a kind of contradiction of true humanity,” and faith in Christ, the man who knew no sin, is quickly compromised.<sup>92</sup> One sees once more the solidarity between Mother and Son: to reject Mary’s perfect holiness as inhuman is to wed oneself to unbelief in the humanity of the Word made flesh.

Moreover, one might well fear that the negation of Mary’s sanctity would entail an offense against Christian sanctity. The monk of Taizé has realized that, in the area of holiness as in that of virginity, there is a link between the Virgin and the deportment of Christians today: “It might be asked if the denial of Mary’s sanctity, of which the only source is in Christ, is not accompanied by a naturalistic view of the Christian life which would exclude asceticism, contemplation and sanctification since these are seen as achieving greater sanctity in God only by escaping the ordinary conditions of human nature. The anti-ascetic or anti-monastic reaction found in a certain type of Protestantism is not altogether removed from the anti-Marian reaction.”<sup>93</sup>

Consequently, the doctrine of Mary’s holiness is best seen in relation to the doctrine of the Church’s holiness. “The Church,” states Thurian, “will no more be ‘human’ because we may speak of it as sinful.” Certainly the church recognizes sin within her, since it is a society made up of human beings. But it is necessary to see Christ’s Body, the community instituted by

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<sup>91</sup> *Mary*, 24.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

the Lord and animated by the Spirit, within her, and for this reason the church is holy. “The Church is not truly the Church except in so far as she is holy in her vocation and ministry as Mother of the Faithful, ordained for the proclamation of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments, for ‘the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ’ (Ephesians 4:12).”<sup>94</sup>

Holiness is therefore not something that estranges Mary from the Church. Thurian places no restrictions on Mary’s sanctity; nonetheless, he does not affirm the Immaculate Conception, and he restricts himself to criticizing “those who wish to speak of Mary as if she were sinful or on the other [hand] separated from our condition as human creatures.”<sup>95</sup> But meditation on the scriptural words “full of grace” has enabled him both to avoid those common objections which Protestantism poses to the privilege of the immaculate conception, as well as to look with new eyes at the issue of the Mother of God’s sanctity.

d – *Spiritual maternity and mediation*

Protestant critics often become agitated when presented with the spiritual maternity and mediation attributed to Mary by Catholic theology. Indeed, inasmuch as this involves her current role in the economy of salvation and the communication of grace, according to Protestantism it seems that Mary is usurping a place that belongs exclusively to Christ, the one mediator.

Still, even in this field, certain contemporary Protestants have taken on a less negative attitude. Thus, in the meditation he published on “the Virgin, Image of the Church,” where he comments on the Calvary scene, Pastor Jean de Saussure does not hesitate to say that Christ gave Mary as mother to each of his beloved disciples. He concludes with these lines, which in their conciseness comprehend the whole theology of spiritual maternity: “Lord, we give you thanks for having given us so exalted a Mother! After all, in Your mercy you have been pleased to make us Your brethren, so is Your Mother not to be our Mother? And more profoundly still, since she was Your Mother, how could she not be ours as well, for we are members of Your Body, we who are united in the same spirit with You.”<sup>96</sup> These final

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<sup>94</sup> *Mary*, 24-25.

<sup>95</sup> *Mary*, 25.

<sup>96</sup> *Dialogue sur la Vierge*, 104.

words reprise the deep connection which obtains between Mary's maternal function and the intimate reality of Christian grace, from belonging to the church to union with Christ. The spiritual motherhood reveals itself to be the prolongation of the divine maternity, since Christ, who lives within the Christian and bestows his Spirit, is the Son of Mary.

Max Thurian too, in a detailed analysis of the words of the dying Christ to his mother and his beloved disciple, wants to demonstrate that there is in Mary a personification of the church's motherhood: Mary is the image of the Church-Mother. Then he considers Mary's motherhood within the Church: Mary is "the spiritual mother *par excellence* of the beloved and faithful disciple, of the brother of Jesus, which every Christian is called to be."<sup>97</sup>

This spiritual motherhood raises the issue of mediation. Protestantism has generally abandoned the idea of Mary's mediation, as it more generally and more universally abandons every teaching on the mediation of the saints along with any corresponding forms of devotion.

Already in the report prepared for the congress on "Faith and Constitution," Thurian declared himself opposed to this exclusion of devotion to the saints. He stated that this devotion "does not in any way detract from the love which is due only to Christ, from the adoration and obedience which belong only to him, and nothing from his sacrifice and his intercession; it is he who is loved in his saints, who is adored in veneration to them, who is obeyed when we follow their example."<sup>98</sup> The true Christocentrism of Christian worship is therefore maintained: "The remembrance of the saints in the Church is to love and imitate Christ, and it is further the action of grace through those gifts made manifest in them, through his power of resurrection and regeneration."<sup>99</sup> Such is his response to Protestantism's most common criticism, namely, that devotion to Mary is an offense to the worship that belongs to Christ. In reality, love and imitation of Mary means love and imitation of Christ.

In addition, Thurian underscores the extent to which devotion to the saints is demanded by love for the church. A piety that devalues the

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<sup>97</sup> *Mary*, 170.

<sup>98</sup> *Marie dans la Bible et dans l'Eglise*, in *Dialogue sur la Vierge*, 118.

<sup>99</sup> *Marie dans la Bible et dans l'Eglise*, 119.

communion of the saints, he points out, yields to individualism or to sectarianism. According to the Lord's precept, "one cannot love God only in oneself. It is necessary to love Him in His brethren, in the Church, in His saints." And this love for the brethren must be extended to the whole of Catholicity throughout space and time, and therefore to all the saints of the tradition. And, hence, also to Mary.<sup>100</sup>

Thurian reaffirms this truth in his work. The mention of the saints in the liturgy causes us to "realize that we are not alone in adoration and intercession for men." "The Communion of Saints unites all Christians in one and the same prayer, in one and the same life, in Christ; it unites the Church to-day with that of all ages, the Church militant on earth with the Church triumphant in Heaven."<sup>101</sup> This communion of saints builds up the Church's faith, hope and charity.

And Mary has a role to play in this communion: "And Mary, the Mother of the Lord and type of the Church, has her place in this immense community of the Saints, a place of pre-eminence as the first Christian woman, filled with grace. She is all the more for the Church a symbol of her sorrowful motherhood which gives birth to the faithful by the risen life. She is an example of faith, obedience, constancy and saintliness: the Church militant, considering the Church triumphant, sees there Mary, a symbol of her certain victory."<sup>102</sup>

Thus is Mary's place in the liturgy justified. Thurian supports the celebration of the three liturgical feasts which Luther never stopped observing: the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Purification, all of which have a biblical foundation. Thurian desires too the preservation of the feast of August 15, not explicitly in honor of the bodily assumption, which Protestants contest, but at least as the feast of Mary's entrance into God's rest. The ultimate meaning of this liturgical veneration is "asking for grace to follow the example of the Virgin Mary."<sup>103</sup> Christ is deprived of none of his rights, for Mary's presence in the Church is for the sake of "being loved and so leading to the love of Christ, and of being imitated and so leading to the imitation of Christ..."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Marie dans la Bible et dans l'Eglise*, 117-119.

<sup>101</sup> *Mary*, 184.

<sup>102</sup> *Mary*, 185.

<sup>103</sup> *Mary*, 188.

<sup>104</sup> *Marie dans la Bible*, 119.

Asmussen also insists on the need to create a devotional space for Mary, since a failure to acknowledge the divine blessing of which Christ's Mother is the beneficiary would risk making Christ himself an idea outside of time, and would therefore risk failing to render proper glory to Mary's Son.<sup>105</sup>

The German Lutheran theologian poses the issue of mediation in these terms: is Mary to be placed on the side of God or of men? "We are convinced," he says, articulating the Protestant opinion, "that she is to be found solely on the side of men."<sup>106</sup> But is this position so certain? Does it not presuppose an overly absolute separation between God and men, a separation that contradicts the very mediation of Christ? The character of this mediation "is not just that Christ participates in the human, but that we too participate in what belongs to him."<sup>107</sup> We are brought into Jesus' life as he enters into ours. We become partakers of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). We die and we live with Christ and we are therefore able to cooperate with God. From this point of view we find ourselves on the side of God as we confront the world: "in the gift of Jesus Christ Christians are placed next to God."<sup>108</sup>

This truth becomes more apparent when we consider the task, imposed on every Christian, of being the servant of the Gospel. It is a priesthood through which the Christian sees himself as being entrusted with the administration of the grace that he himself has been given. Now, through this priesthood and through this power, man finds himself on the side of God when confronting humanity. It is in this way that Christ must show himself to the world through the apostle.

One cannot therefore act as though there is a radical separation between God and men. "From the point of view of the world, God and his saints form a unity."<sup>109</sup> Christians must incorporate themselves into this unity and so place themselves on the side of God.

From this it follows that if it is true that Mary is with all of us, one must also grant that she is to be found, along with all the saints, alongside

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<sup>105</sup> *Maria die Mutter Gottes*, 61.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

God in the engagement with the world. It does not therefore suffice to think solely of Mary's consecration to God, nor simply to see her as an object for reflection or a subject of speech; it is also necessary to discern her role of service to humanity in salvation history, to acknowledge her as someone with something important to say about us and about the world, who expresses this truth before the throne of God.<sup>110</sup>

This does not entail assigning Mary a position as secondary mediatrix along with Christ. The Protestants do not support the notion that it is necessary that there should be a mediation between Christ and us. But, on the other hand, Asmussen adds, they have oversimplified the issue of the one mediator. One must in practice admit the mediation of Christians, since we grant their priestly function, and since without mediation any priesthood would be bogus.<sup>111</sup>

In which case one must acknowledge this Christian mediation in Mary's case as well. Nevertheless, Mary is not a mediatrix along with Christ; she is mediatrix *in* Christ, as is the case of Christians.<sup>112</sup> A mediation *in* Christ would not offend against his honor. While being unique, this mediation does not preclude others from entering into it and becoming colleagues; it is the sign that Christ's mediation is bearing fruit. Mary is not only the earthly mother of the Lord, she has become his disciple, in his Kingdom, and in following him she takes part in his mediation.<sup>113</sup>

Thus does Asmussen underscore, more clearly than Thurian, the active aspect of Mary's mediation. For the monk of Taizé, Mary is revered above all as the example we are called to follow. For Asmussen, Mary plays a role of intercession. The Lutheran theologian does not go so far as to say that we should invoke Mary,<sup>114</sup> but he does attribute to her an intervening role from God for the benefit of humanity. This intervention does not diminish Christ's unique mediation, since it is a participation within that mediation.

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Asmussen criticizes the Catholic doctrine of Mary's mediation alongside of Christ, especially in the article *Dem Unbefleckten Herzen Mariä geweiht?*, *Gloria Dei* 9 (1954): 202-210, written on the occasion of the consecration of Germany to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Cf. Napiórkowski, *Le Christ*, 109-110.

<sup>113</sup> *Maria die Mutter Gottes*, 51.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

#### 4. *Anglican Positions*

In the Thirty-Nine Articles that constitute the essential profession of the Anglican Church, nothing is said in favor of Marian devotion. Article Twenty-two describes invocation of the saints and angels as “vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture, but rather repugnant to the Word of God,” and the main thrust is hostile to any prayer directed to the Virgin. The anti-Catholic reaction is conveyed in an opposition to Marian devotion.

Nonetheless, this negative attitude is not shared by all, and one may observe within the Anglican tradition various witnesses to a Marian doctrine that affirms the divine maternity, the perpetual virginity, a unique position within the economy of redemption, and at times the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.<sup>115</sup> We must note that with respect to the divine maternity, the fidelity to this affirmation is based on the recognition, within the Anglican Church, of the authority of the first four ecumenical councils.

In certain Anglican circles one finds, recently, a renewal of Marian devotion, and in certain theologians one ascertains a noteworthy ecumenical energy in the sense of a more profound study of Marian doctrine.<sup>116</sup> It is thus that E.L. Mascall, professor of historical theology at the University of London, has not only confirmed the importance pertaining to the title *Theotokos*, but has emphasized the value of the consent given by Mary to the divine project. He moreover accepts favorably the title of co-redemptrix, highlighting that it implies a subordination to Christ the Redeemer. “Mary,” he says, “was redeemed in a special way in the body of the Church and is associated in a special way with the Mediator and so is become the mother of all his members.”<sup>117</sup> He invokes St. John’s text in order to affirm Mary’s universal motherhood: “Mary is the mother of Jesus and of those who are incorporated into him, the mother of the Church which is his Mystical Body...”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> S. Cwiertniak, *La Vierge Marie dans la tradition anglicane*, Paris 1958; A. M. Allchin, *Our Lady in Seventeenth-Century Anglican Devotion and Theology*, in *The Blessed Virgin Mary* (ed. E. L. Mascall – H.S. Box), London 1963, 53-76.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. G.M. Papini, *Teologia ecumenico-mariana in Occidente*, *Mar* 35 (1973) 150-176; J. De Satgé, *Toward an Evangelical Re-appraisal*, in *The Blessed Virgin*, 103-114.

<sup>117</sup> *Theotokos: The Place of Mary in the Work of Salvation*, in *The Blessed Virgin*, 19.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.



Also worthy of mention are two brief studies by H.S. Box on the Immaculate Conception and on the Assumption. These two privileges are not admitted to be dogmas of faith, but rather secondary religious truths, possessing a high degree of plausibility, which merit a place in Christian devotion.<sup>119</sup>

Nor are expressions of Marian devotion absent from contemporary Anglicanism: there are signs of popular devotion to Our Lady.<sup>120</sup> The Anglican religious communities, some of which bear the name of the Virgin Mary, venerate Jesus' mother with various pious practices.<sup>121</sup>

##### 5. *Obstacles and Points of Mutual Approach*

Despite the opinions of certain protestant or Anglican theologians which are more favorable to Mariology, one should not underestimate the obstacles in the reformed churches that, up till now, have blocked the path of the development of Marian doctrine and devotion.<sup>122</sup>

Among the most crucial doctrinal reasons which are invoked in the Protestant setting against Catholic Mariology are the uniqueness of Christ's mediation and the doctrine of the sovereignty of God's action. The basic response on the part of Catholic theology is that Christ's mediation, in its omnipotence and its governance over all humanity, is most fully expressed when it gives rise to mediations within creatures, mediations which are entirely derived from his and receive their efficacy from his. God's sovereignty in grace does not consist in reducing the human being to passive acceptance, but to promoting an active collaboration that enlists all the resources of the human personality in the work of salvation. In the role attributed to Mary there is, in particular, a promotion of the feminine personality: during a time in which such emphasis is placed on women's liberation, Mariology is responding to a profound aspiration of this movement, showing how God was the first to liberate woman and entrust

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<sup>119</sup> *The Immaculate Conception*, in *The Blessed Virgin*, 76-88; *The Assumption*, *ibid.*, 89-100.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. J. C. Stephenson, *Popular Devotion to Our Lady and Christian Unity*, in *The Blessed Virgin*, 115-120.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. K. F. Dougherty, *Our Lady and Christian Unity*, ME 10, 209-236.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. S. C. Napiórkowski, *Le mariologue peut-il être oecuméniste? Du rôle de la mariologie contemporaine dans le dialogue oecuménique des protestants et des catholiques*, EMar 22 (1972) 15-76.

her with a mission of primary importance within the economy of redemption.

The absence of Marian devotion in the Protestant religion indicates an absence of woman: a certain number of Protestants have taken cognizance of this privation. On the other hand, this absence has not encouraged any attachment to Christ, declarations of principle notwithstanding: it must be granted that the faith in Christ the Son of God made man has been maintained better among the Orthodox, who have an intense Marian devotion, than among the Protestants. Mary's doctrinal solidarity with Christ, which is made manifest in the proclamation of the *Theotokos* at Ephesus, continues to be confirmed in the history of Christian theology.

Opposition to Mariology among Protestants is tied to a deep hostility towards the infallible magisterium as understood by Catholics, and also seemingly to the rejection of the importance of the tradition in the development of what is implicitly contained by scripture.<sup>123</sup> We are dealing here with a difference in conceiving revealed truth, truth which, for Protestants, is enclosed with scripture and which, for Catholics, is expressed from scripture in the living tradition of the Church. Mariology testifies, especially through the affirmation of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, to the great role which this tradition plays. It must be grasped that the ecumenical issue of Mariology demands the solution of a much vaster problematic which results from opposed conceptions about revelation and its transmission.<sup>124</sup>

All the same, the greater proximity which has been achieved on the part of certain theologians remains a reason for hope. Mary, who was the first to commit herself in Christian hope, leads the Church on the path of this hope, and more particularly on the path of ecumenical hope.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Cf. J. Vodopivec, *La Vierge Marie: obstacle et Espoir de la reunion des chrétiens. Les incidences ecclésiologiques de la mariologie dans la perspective oecuménique*, *Maria et Ecclesia [ME]* 10, 143-180.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. A. Farrer, *Mary, Scripture and Tradition*, in *The Blessed Virgin*, 27-52.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. C. Boyer, *Marie, espérance pour l'unité chrétienne*, *ME* 10, 181-193; A. Morris, *Our Lady and Reunion of Christendom*, in *The Blessed Virgin*, 121-131.