

Our Lady, Ecumenism, and the Dogma: Theological and Pastoral Experiences

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The subject of this anthology is of such profound importance that it behooves us all to redouble our efforts to remove any and all obstacles to the action of the Holy Spirit that persist in ourselves and in the whole community of the Church. By the grace of God we have received from the Second Vatican Council some enlightenment and clarification on the Blessed Virgin Mary, on her function in the Plan of salvation and on her relationship with the Church. These teachings are to be found at the end of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) following upon the teachings on the mystical and hierarchical nature of the Church and teachings on the Laity and Religious. The Holy Spirit obviously influenced many theologians and especially the Fathers of the Council to promulgate these teachings on Our Lady to the People of God. I have continued to express my thanks to the Blessed Trinity for the gift of this teaching.

However, while I deeply respect the very valuable work and effort that the Fathers put into the Council, with all due deference to them I must confess that I found it difficult to repress feelings of dissatisfaction and a sense of something seriously lacking in the procedures and circumstances leading up to the final document. For that reason I was all the more delighted when I heard, two years ago, about the *Vox Populi* movement. With a grateful heart I regard this movement as God's Providence acting to make up for the insufficiency of the teaching on Mary, the cause of which is to be found in the excessive caution of the Council Fathers. As human beings we cannot completely understand the will of the Holy Spirit. It must be said therefore that being human, with all the limitations that it entails, even though they were Council Fathers nonetheless they could not interpret the will of the Holy Spirit in a perfect and faultless manner. What I have to say now is premised on that assumption. I have already pointed out that I was dissatisfied with the document on Mary both in its content and in the procedures by which it was approved and promulgated. The following are the reasons for my dissatisfaction:

1. First of all, the draft prepared by the Preparatory Theological Commission was presented to the Council in the form of a separate and independent Constitution on the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, having been subjected to many vicissitudes of fortune, it was finally reduced to forty articles and tacked on, so to speak, to the Constitution of the Church. (The vote for and against its integration with the Constitution on the Church was 1,114 FOR, 1,074 AGAINST, and 5 INVALID). Normally, near consensus of over 90% was achieved in the voting on most issues brought before the general assembly of the Council, but I have heard that this was the first time since the inauguration of the Council, that the voting was split down the middle. I personally felt a sense of great loss that the document on the Blessed Virgin Mary designed by the Preparatory Theological Commission as a separate and independent Constitution was not so decided on and promulgated.

2. Secondly, looking at the document which was finally promulgated; I was saddened when I heard the details of how the use of the title of Mediatrix for Our Lady was decided upon. It was reported that it was with great reluctance that the title Mediatrix was recognized, to say nothing of the title of Coredemptrix.
3. Finally, in spite of Pope Paul VI's clearly and strongly expressed desire that the title of Mother of the Church should be given to Mary, his wish was ignored by the Council Fathers. Because of this, the Pope himself, on November 21, 1964, on the last day of the third session of the Council, on the feast of the Dedication of the Basilica of Mary, having solemnly approved and promulgated the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, he then, at that same location by his *Motu Proprio*, formally declared Mary to the Mother of the Church. I clearly remember the displeasure I felt towards the Council Fathers when I received the news of the Pope's action.

It is abundantly clear that the reason for the hesitant and conciliatory attitude of the Council Fathers was the fear that the doctrine that Jesus is the sole Mediator might be compromised and that strong emphasis of Mary's role in our redemption might prove to be a handicap, then certainly a cause of bad feeling among our separated brethren.

As far as the Korean Catholic Church is concerned there is absolutely no problem with the first point, namely that Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator between God and humankind. There is not one single Korean Catholic who harbors any doubts about this basic doctrine. I would go further and question the possibility that there could exist a single Catholic on the face of the earth who would deny or doubt the truth of this revelation. If the Council Fathers were apprehensive on this point, then it must be said that such apprehension was groundless. It is a fact that the right and fitting guidance of the Magisterium is always necessary but throughout two thousand years of history the people of God have never doubted that Christ is the sole Mediator nor have they ever affirmed that Mary is a Mediatrix on an equal basis with Christ. In my view, therefore, the excessive caution on the part of the Council Fathers was due primarily to their fear of irritating or alienating further the members of the Protestant churches. It was regarded as basic common sense not to introduce anything of an inflammatory nature into the conversations, which must take place to promote Christian unity.

However, when it comes to Marian doctrine and devotion, no matter how much one strives to be careful and polite, no matter how much one brings a conciliatory attitude to the dialogue, the result is fruitless. This statement of mine is based on over ten years of involvement on my part with the movement for Christian unity in Korea. The question must be asked – how much have the anemic and vague presentations about the role and titles of Mary contributed to the movement for Christian unity? Conversely, if the Council Fathers, united in their conviction about the true role of Mary, had given her the titles that are her due, who is to say that the movement for Christian unity would be adversely affected? It is precisely this point that I wish to emphasize here today. The Catholic Bishop's Conference of Korea has put me in charge of the Committee for Promoting Dialogue among Christian churches. Naturally what I have to say here is confirmed to the movement for Christian unity in Korea.

According to the 1995 statistics on the population of South Korea, out of the total population of 44,850,000 people, Catholics number 3,600,000 or 8%, over 20 mainline Protestant churches and 170 Protestant sects together number 8,760,000 or 20%. Those participating in the movement for Christian unity in Korea, apart from the Catholic Church, are the Salvation Army and the Anglican, Evangelical, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox and Presbyterian churches and they meet once a week for a prayer liturgy during Church Unity Week. In addition, there is a sporadic

cooperation in human development and social projects. Dialogue with them towards unity in the strict sense of the word is practically non-existent. Rather, the emphasis is on promoting the orthodoxy of each one.

In Korea, a deep gulf separates the Catholic Church from the Protestants. The misunderstandings, ignorance, prejudice, and bad will on the part of the Protestants for the doctrine, Sacraments, Liturgy, devotions and practices of the Catholic Church are extremely serious. Our doctrines and traditions concerning Our Blessed Lady as well as the Papacy, constitute an enormous stumbling block to them. They vehemently deny our doctrines on Mary and are forever critical of Catholic devotions. It is not a question of their being merely ignorant or our claims and teachings. Protestant theologians and instructors are able to precisely outline the four Dogmas on Our Lady to their members, before systematically attacking them one by one. And so it is that Korean Protestants are *a priori* opposed to the Blessed Mother and they accuse the Catholic Church of Mariolatry. They label us a Marian religion and even regard as heretics. Therefore, as far as the Korean Catholic Church is concerned, the movement for Christian unity is nothing but mere talk. The Protestants say that our teachings are not found in the Bible and are therefore complete fabrications by the Catholic Church. Nothing short of our complete disavowal of the total body of doctrine on Mary and the Liturgy and devotions that follow on it, will silence the never-ending and noisome criticism from the Protestants. It can be seen therefore that in spite of the considerable efforts at care and restraint on the part of the Council Fathers when discussing the various roles and titles of Mary, the movement for Christian unity in Korea was not helped in the slightest way, as a result. On the contrary, it is certain that if full and clear expression of the glories of Mary had been made with all due emphasis, there would have been no change for the worse as far as the unity movement was concerned. Even though the Catholic Church were to completely disavow the four doctrines on Our Lady, this would not bring the Protestants one inch closer nor would it serve to create good will or friendly relations with Catholics. On the other hand, I am convinced that even if we can achieve our goal of having our Holy Father, the Pope, solemnly define the Maternal Mediation of Mary as Auxiliary Redemptrix, Mediatrix, and Advocate, the ecumenical movement in Korea will not be adversely affected in the slightest manner.

Meanwhile, there is a united sensus among Korean Catholics that Mary is not only their Advocate before God but is also the Mediatrix of all grace and is the one human being par excellence, who played and who continues to play a unique, auxiliary role in our redemption. In Korea the only people who would not give public support at this time to the *Vox Populi* movement would be only a few bishops and some priests who did their studies in Europe. But I have no doubt that they too will readily accept the official teaching when the Pope proclaims it *ex cathedra*. As a matter of fact, no dogma of the Church ever had 100% support prior to its official promulgation. The Fathers of the Church and the theologians never had prior, complete agreement. But the unified acceptance on the part of the general body of Catholics presents no problems. It is my feeling that the movement that we are promoting, reflects the already formed sensus fidelium, if not physically then certainly morally, not only of Korea but also of the whole world.

We are now living in the Age of the Holy Spirit and of His Bride, Mary. The unification of the Christians is the task, not merely of us humans but primarily of the Holy Spirit and of Mary, His Bride. I have this innate intuition formed by my long experience with the movement of Christian unity, that the Holy Spirit does not wish to act alone in granting the gift of unity. We must ask the question how much real Christian unity has taken place since the second Vatican Council in spite of the enormous amounts of time, money, and energy that have been expended. My reply has to be negative. The Holy Spirit will not act apart from Mary in effecting this work or any other work that is connected with us. Pope Paul VI described Mary as the “permanent dwelling

of the Spirit of God” (Marialis Cultus, 26). St. Maximilian Kolbe, a pioneer in the field of modern Mariology, has said: “The union between the Immaculata and Holy Spirit is so inexpressible, yet perfect, that the Holy Spirit acts only by the most Blessed Virgin, his Spouse. This is why she is the Mediatrix of all grace given by the Holy Spirit” (Letter to Father Mikolajczyk, July 28, 1935). I am convinced that it is the will of God that Christian unity be brought about through the joint action of the Holy Spirit and Mary. If that sacred will of God is opposed and Mary is not properly treated, how can we receive the grace of Christian unity? Based on this, it would appear that unity among those Christian churches which honor Mary along with the Holy Spirit can be easily achieved, relatively speaking, whereas unity with those churches adamantly outside this group, will be impossible.

A Korean saying has it that “Like cures like.” If the difficulties encountered by the Christian unity movement arise because of Mary, then rather than weakening Mary’s position, the solution to those difficulties must be sought from Mary herself. As an example of the truth of the saying “Like cures like” I can cite a story related to the tears of blood shed by Our Lady in Naju. Naju is a town in the Archdiocese of Kwangju, which is situated in the southwest of Korea. It is the place where a statue of Our Lady has been shedding tears of blood on numerous occasions for the past twelve years. It has not yet been formally approved by the Ordinary of Archdiocese but already the Madonna of Naju, weeping tears and blood, has become widely known throughout the world and pilgrims from home and abroad are making their way there in increasingly large numbers. Interspersed among these pilgrims are a number of Protestant leaders who, for one reason or another, have visited there and, wonderful to relate, a miraculous change has taken place in all of them. They still remain in their churches but at the risk of being ostracized or dismissed from their job, they are reciting the Rosary every day and quietly spreading the word about Our Lady. One of them, a Protestant minister, has recently published a pamphlet entitled “We are One in the Holy Mother.” Another who was a women elder in the Presbyterian church, was converted to the Catholic Church and then in turn converted her husband and twenty of her family and relatives.

The West mobilized its political, diplomatic and military strength against the former Soviet Union, but most Catholics are in agreement with the Pope that it was Our Lady of Fatima who brought about the sudden collapse of Communism. So why can we not claim that the seemingly impossible task of Christian unification can also be brought about through the help of that same Blessed Mother?

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, has stated that he regarded the work of Christian unification as one of the priorities of his pontificate. And indeed he has clearly given proof of this through a variety of actions, measures, and decisions that he has taken. His efforts have brought much fruit and it is our fond hope that his sincere desire for unity in Our Lord Jesus Christ will be achieved at the earliest possible date. It is our hope and prayer that the Pope’s efforts will go well and, to this end, the movement of the *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici* must achieve its objective, namely the solemn proclamation of this new Marian dogma by the Holy Father. When that day comes, the Holy Spirit of unity, along with His Bride, now publicly revered under her new titles, will face all Christians and call out with one voice “Come.” For such a grand culmination I humbly hope and pray.