

MARIAN PIETY AND ECUMENICAL CONVERGENCE: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

In the Catholic world, the year 2017 is marked by the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Apparitions of Mary in Fátima, Portugal. Although the field of the devotional and popular Marian piety might be a field of misunderstandings and fuel to feed prejudice on how different Christians relate with each other, namely on the understanding of Mary, it should be taken as a pastoral opportunity and an ecumenical challenge. This paper looks into the different Roman Catholic documents that since the Vatican II presents Mary's role in the history of salvation and her place in the church and how they denote an ecumenical dimension and concern. Following it proposes to analyze the declarations on Mary of the North-American Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission, the French Dombes Group and the Anglo-Roman Catholic International Commission. These ecumenical consensuses express a reception from Vatican II's contribution on Mary, and manifesting a more positive tone regarding the popular Marian piety and devotions; they challenge all the Christians from the pastoral and ecumenical point of view.

KEYWORDS: Mary, Ecumenism, ARCIC, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Vatican II, Devotions, Popular Piety.

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was marked by the establishment and development of different ecumenical convergences among Christians. Numerous examples can be counted: from spiritual ecumenism to doctrinal debates, from multilateral to bilateral dialogues, as well as in the diversity of methods and models. Among the doctrinal debates, especially between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations, is the understanding of Mary, which is a challenging case study. In looking particularly into the diverse practices and devotional lives of the different Christian traditions in a certain place and how these are expressed, the ecumenical convergences may have already been achieved.

In the Catholic world, the year 2017 is marked by the centenary of the Apparitions of Fatima, in Portugal. The three young shepherds' experience of encountering the Virgin Mary through her apparitions to them from May 13 until October 13 of 1917 had since then made its own way to become an important devotion for the Roman Catholics, especially where there are Portuguese influences or presence. Macao is

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one of those places. The devotion to the invocation of Mary as Our Lady of Fatima, besides being one of the most important among the Catholics of Macao, is also one of the most visible due to the annual May 13 procession that replicates the one that traditionally happens in Portugal.

This annual practice therefore raises several questions that need to be investigated in order to highlight the topic of Marian piety and ecumenical convergence: Could the gathering strength of this devotion have a divergent effect on ecumenism? What are the Roman Catholic Church documents on Mary and its devotions that deal with ecumenism and Christian unity? How did the different bilateral ecumenical dialogues involving the Roman Catholic Church dealt with Mary? In what ways do the documents produced by these diverse bilateral ecumenical dialogues on Mary reflect a convergence? What are the challenges and opportunities these documents that touch on Marian piety and Mary's role in the economy of salvation offer for ecumenism and Christian unity?

These are the questions this study will attempt to discuss and explore. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to look into some of the documents that contain ecumenical convergence and consensus on Mary. The first part will look into the ecumenical concern of the development of the Marian doctrine in the Roman Catholic Church in the twentieth century. The second part will evaluate the influence of this development in some documents of ecumenical agreement about Mary, in which various groups and other Christian denominations were involved. The goal of this exposition is to evaluate the reception and impact of such documents in a local church in Asia, like the one of Macao. However, an acknowledgment of an apparent lack of familiarity about the existence of such important texts among the local faithful has necessitated that this study begins with a presentation of these texts and a brief theological evaluation of each from a Roman Catholic perspective.

I. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ECUMENICAL CONVERGENCE(S) ABOUT MARY

Among the stereotypes other Christians use to identify the Roman Catholics are the papacy and the universe of Marian devotions: the Rosary, apparitions of the Virgin, processions, prayers and songs. However, the stereotypes might hide someone's real face. In many ways, the twentieth century had become a decisive moment for the Roman Catholic Church. Like many other doctrinal matters, the way that the Roman Catholic Church looks into Mary cannot be made without considering the other Christian denominations.

THE SECOND COUNCIL OF THE VATICAN, AN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL IN ITS INCEPTION AND RECEPTION

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF LUMEN GENTIUM

The closing chapter of the Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, is about the Virgin Mary. However, this presentation of the

Catholic understanding of the doctrine about the Mother of God within the doctrine about the Church itself was the result of intense debates, which Elizabeth Johnson called as “the Clash of the Titans.”¹ The development of the Marian piety during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century already led to the proclamation of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption, as well as to the advent of some problematic titles given to Mary, such as “co-redemptrix” or “mediatrix.”² Different theological sensitivities about these Marian titles or “privileges” were at stake within the participants of the council and their advisers, among them some were particularly concerned with the ecumenical implications of any decisions to be made.³

The tensions did not emerge only at the Council. The “Marian Age” and some of its proposals in the Catholic Church’s theology and devotional practices provoked strong reactions from Karl Barth and other Protestant theologians.⁴ As Brian Daley affirms, these critics “certainly played a role in leading twentieth-century Catholic theologians to reexamine the role Mary had played in forming the Catholic synthesis through the centuries.”⁵ Henri de Lubac, Otto Semmelroth, Hugo Rahner and Yves Congar were among those who made proposals to understand the role of Mary from the perspective of the history of salvation as well as, based on the understanding of the Fathers of the Church, looking at Mary as “type” of the Church.⁶

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¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints*, New edition (New York; London: Continuum, 2006), 123; see also Jan Grootaers, “The Drama Continues Between the Acts: The Second Preparation and Its Opponents,” in *History of Vatican II*, ed. G. Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. II (Maryknoll, NY; Leuven: Orbis; Peeters, 1997), 480-481; Alberto Melloni, “The Beginning of the Second Period: The Great Debate on the Church,” in *History of Vatican II*, ed. G. Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, vol. III (Maryknoll, NY; Leuven: Orbis; Peeters, 2000), 95-98.

² Ann W. Astell, “Remembering 1854 in 1958. O’Connor Edited Collection on the Immaculate Conception as ‘a Sign of the Times’,” in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, eds. John C. Cavadini and Danielle M. Peters (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 245-263.

³ The major issue was to decide if the role and status of Mary should be treated in a separated document or within the document about the Church. Cardinal Rufino Santos of Manila presented the arguments in favor of the first position; Cardinal Franz König of Vienna presented four arguments in favor of the second position: theological, historical, pastoral and ecumenical – See *Acta Synodalia* II/3, 338-345.

⁴ Brian Daley, “Sign and Source of the Church. Mary in the *Ressourcement* and at the Vatican II,” in *Mary on the Eve of the Second Vatican Council*, 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41-44. It was during the debates about the inclusion of the doctrine about Mary in the constitution about the Church that the title *Mater ecclesiae* appeared, later on being assumed as a Marian title invoked by the Catholic Church. The title was proposed by a Franciscan from Croatia, Karl Balic, in a document that circulated among the participants of the Council. See *Relationes circa schema constitutionis dogmaticae de Beata Maria Virgine, Matre Ecclesiae (sub secreto)* ([Vatican City]: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1963). In the closing speech of the conciliar session of 1963, Paul VI mentioned that the debate about the way should present the doctrine about Mary and use the expression *Mater ecclesiae*. See Paul VI, *Sollene Chiusura della Seconda Sessione del Concilio*, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/la/speeches/1963/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19631204_chiusura-concilio.html, accessed 4 May 2017. In the closing session of 1964, the pope consecrated the title. See Paul VI, *Sollene Chiusura della Se-*

Although the Dogmatic constitution about the church is not strictly an ecumenical text, it contains various elements that can lead us to some signs of convergence with the other Christian denominations. The closing chapter about Mary is one of these signs as it reveals an ecumenical concern. One the aspects related to this ecumenical concern is given in the introduction referring Mary as a member of the Church and her unity to those who are to be saved.⁷ The affirmation of the unique mediation of Christ is another element of ecumenical convergence.⁸ It is also in the context of the affirmation of the unique mediation of Christ that some difficult Marian “titles” or “privileges” are presented under the notion of Mary’s role in cooperating with the redeeming work of Christ: “the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix. This, however, is so understood that it neither takes away anything from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the One Mediator.”⁹ Another element to be considered is the method used in the text to present the different dimensions of the Marian doctrine, its departure point is the Scripture and the tradition of the church.¹⁰ A final aspect of ecumenical convergence that can be mentioned is the cult. The document presents the origins of the special veneration that the Church dedicates to Mary relating it to the progressive affirmation of her title as “Mother of God”. But it also distinguishes the Marian cult from the cult of adoration that given to the Trinity and each of the Trinitarian persons.¹¹ In the same context, the document also challenges the theologians and preachers to present the “gifts and privileges of the Blessed Virgin” in a way that always refers to the central and salvific role of Christ, as well as having in mind the separated brethren: “They (theologians and preachers) should sedulously avoid, both in what they say and in what they do, anything that might lead our separated brothers and sisters or any other people into error concerning the true teaching of the church.”¹² But this responsibility is also given to all the faithful when the document alerts about what must be considered “true devotion”, which “consists neither in sterile and passing feelings nor in an empty credulity, but that it arises out from true faith.”¹³

The affirmation of the unique mediation of Christ is a key to understand and to present all Marian gifts and privileges in *Lumen Gentium*. This theological statement affirms simultaneously the ecumenical potential and challenge on the debates about Mary with the other Christian denominations.

conda *Sessione del Concilio*, accessed May 4, 2017, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/pt/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html.

⁷ *Lumen Gentium* no. 53.

⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 60 and no. 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 66.

¹² *Ibid.*, no. 67.

¹³ *Ibid.*, no. 67.

MARIALIS CULTUS (1974): THE LITURGICAL REFORM AND ECUMENICAL CONVERGENCE

The reception of the council had been analyzed in different moments, by different authors and from different perspectives.¹⁴ The understanding of the role of the Virgin Mary is a curious perspective. The theological, historical, pastoral and ecumenical factors were among the reasons given by Cardinal König to justify the inclusion of the text about the Blessed Virgin Mary in *Lumen Gentium*.¹⁵ When the apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, was published in 1974 these different concerns were present.

In its introduction echoing the liturgical reform enhanced by the council with the Dogmatic Constitution about the liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the apostolic exhortation for the right ordering and development of the cult of the blessed Virgin Mary affirms the true worship of the Church together with the unique mediation of Jesus Christ: “This devotion fits—as we have indicated above—into the only worship that is rightly called ‘Christian,’ because it takes its origin and effectiveness from Christ, finds its complete expression in Christ, and leads through Christ in the Spirit to the Father.”¹⁶

At the core of *Marialis Cultus* is the affirmation of the need to establish a Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological framework to understand the true Marian devotion in the Catholic Church.¹⁷ It is the Trinitarian doxological dynamics present in the liturgy that all exercises of piety addressed to the Blessed Virgin Mary should express.¹⁸ The Marian devotions should not be an end in themselves, but should clearly orient to the mystery of Christ. One of the important ways to affirm this Christological centrality is the way that the document presents the cult of Mary and the saints in the Church: “worship is rightly extended, though in a substantially different way, first and foremost and in a special manner, to the Mother of the Lord and then to the saints, in whom the Church proclaims the Paschal Mystery, for they have suffered with Christ and have been glorified with Him.”¹⁹ This affirmation of the Paschal Mystery as the hermeneutical key to present and to live the cult of Mary and the saints in the Church is a reception and an application of the liturgical reform enhanced by *Sacrosanctum concilium*.²⁰ The reform was not just a proposal to change

¹⁴ As the available literature is abundant, these titles are just among those considered to give a good overview on the periodization of the history of the reception of the Second Vatican Council and the diverse issues at stake within this same reception for the contemporary Catholicism. See Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012); Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015).

¹⁵ *Acta Synodalia* II/3, 342-345.

¹⁶ Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, “Introduction”, accessed May 4, 2017, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 25-28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 5-6.

forms and formulas. The affirmation of the Paschal Mystery as the key to understand the whole life and prayer of the Church, besides being the culmination of different renewal moments within the Catholic Church that led to the Second Vatican Council,²¹ is also a huge change regarding the theological reasoning and method.

The document also proposes that the Christological dimension of the Marian piety should open to an understanding of the “person and work of the Holy Spirit.”²² This attention to the Pneumatology is a direct consequence of the centrality of the Paschal Mystery but also reveals an attention to the different theological “sensitivities” at stake when dealing with the other Christian denominations.²³

One final remark regarding *Marialis Cultus* is its ecumenical scope. The proposal of the Blessed Virgin Mary as model of the Christian life and the constant attention to the need to correct some doctrinal deviations in some popular presentations of Mary at the light of the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are signs of an implicit ecumenical concern of the document.²⁴ Explicitly the document refers that the ecclesial character of the Marian devotions must reflect the care and concern for the restoration of the Christian unity. It continues by identifying some common understandings of the mystery of Mary with the Orthodox Christians, the Anglicans and the Reformed Churches.²⁵

REDEMPTORIS MATER (1987): THE RECEPTION OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL'S DOCTRINE ON THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The Jubilee of the celebration of the second millennium of the birth of Jesus led Pope John Paul II to propose in 1988 a Marian year.²⁶ It was an important moment in the history of the reception of the Second Vatican Council, when after the extraordinary synod of 1985 the affirmation of the paradigm of communion to read and interpret the major texts of the Council happened. The encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* allows us to see the reception of chapter eight of *Lumen Gentium* and its ecumenical concern.

Quoting and assuming the teachings of *Lumen Gentium*, the text of *Redemptoris Mater* also intends to present the understanding of Mary in the mystery of Christ and

²¹ John W O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

²² See Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, no. 26.

²³ A groundbreaking text to understand the importance of the Holy Spirit in the relationship between the Catholic tradition and other Christian denominations, especially how the question was so relevant at the discussions during the Second Vatican Council, namely among the observers from other Christian traditions is the one from: Yves Congar, “Pneumatology or ‘Christomonism’ in the Latin Tradition?,” in *The Spirit of God: Short Writings on the Holy Spirit*, eds. Susan Mader Brown, Mark E. Ginter, Joseph G. Mueller, and Catherine E. Clifford (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 162-96.

²⁴ See Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, no. 33-34.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 32.

²⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 3 and 48.

in the mystery of the Church. In its first part, *Redemptoris Mater* relates Mary with the mystery of Christ,²⁷ its second part, the document assumes the pilgrim condition of the Church as a hermeneutical key to relate Mary to the mystery of the Church,²⁸ and its third part the encyclical presents the “maternal mediation” of Mary.²⁹

Although this encyclical is not an explicit document of ecumenical convergence, the attention to the sensitivity of the other Christian denominations regarding the role and understanding the Blessed Virgin Mary is present. A first ecumenical trait of this document is the use of Scripture as major source in presenting the relationship between the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the Church and Mary. Another trait is the presentation of Mary as a model of believers and her particular role explained as being the “first to believe”, as well as the first one to have the experience of being filled by the Holy Spirit.³⁰ The journey of faith is what puts into parallel Mary and the Church:

Now, at the first dawn of the Church, at the beginning of the long journey through faith which began at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Mary was with all those who were the seed of the "new Israel." She was present among them as an exceptional witness to the mystery of Christ. ... Mary belongs indissolubly to the mystery of Christ, and she belongs also to the mystery of the Church from the beginning, from the day of the Church's birth. At the basis of what the Church has been from the beginning, and of what she must continually become from generation to generation, in the midst of all the nations of the earth, we find the one "who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk. 1:45).³¹

The interrelationship between Mary and the Church is also crucial to the ecumenical dialogue between the Catholic Church and the other Christian denominations according to *Redemptoris Mater*. The document distinguishes between the “Churches and Christian communities of the West”³² and “the Orthodox Church and the Ancient Churches of the East.”³³ Assuming the aim of the ecumenical dialogue is a unity of the Church that must be based on a unity of faith,³⁴ the encyclical assesses that in the relationship with the western Christian communities the understanding of the mystery of the Church and the role of Mary in the work of salvation are object of

²⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 7-24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 25-37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 38-50.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 27.

³² *Ibid.*, no. 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

progressive convergence as “two inseparable aspects of the same mystery of salvation.”³⁵ Regarding the relationship with the Eastern and Orthodox Churches, the document appeals to the dogmatic definitions of the “ecumenical councils held in the East” but also to Marian traditions developed in the liturgical worship.³⁶ The document, therefore, assumes that the relationship with the other Christian traditions is differentiated. The issues at stake imply different approaches and methods, although the encyclical presupposes the Blessed Virgin Mary as model of “obedience of faith” and sign of hope to overcome the differences with the different dialogue partners.

The third part of *Redemptoris Mater* might raise some eyebrows if taken carelessly from the ecumenical point of view. The encyclical presents the “maternal mediation” of Mary. The expression “mediation” however is subordinated to the unique and only mediation of Christ and the adjective “maternal” is decisive to justify and found this theological difference. Mary is presented as a mother fulfilling the plan of God’s salvation as the “handmaid of the Lord” since the Annunciation until the foot of the Cross:

In effect, Mary’s mediation is intimately linked with her motherhood. It possesses a specifically maternal character, which distinguishes it from the mediation of the other creatures who in various and always subordinate ways share in the one mediation of Christ, although her own mediation is also a shared mediation.³⁷

Besides being an important concept to subordinate the role of Mary to the unique and only mediation of Christ, Mary’s motherhood together with her virginity are proposals that make her a “permanent model” to Christians of all times.³⁸

After this brief overview of *Redemptoris Mater* seen through some “ecumenical lens”, we can verify that the document echoes the eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* as well as its redirection to *Unitatis Redintegratio*. This latter document, in using the following indices, reveal a certain attention to ecumenical care: the subordination of the “maternal mediation of Mary” to the unique and only mediation of Christ, the biblical background of the different ways to propose the understanding of the role of Mary in her relationship with both the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Church, and the proposal of regarding the Mother of Christ as a “model” to all Christians.

However, it has to be understood that not all the formulations in the above-mentioned Catholic Church documents, can be easily accepted by members of other Christian traditions. The concepts and the words can have different theological understandings and meanings. This differentiated understanding on the way faith is

³⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 38.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 42.

lived and expressed, has become one of the major challenges for the ecumenical dialogue.

ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE (2002): THE ROSARY AND ECUMENISM

The encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995) enumerated Mary as one of the doctrinal issues that requires an ecumenical attention.³⁹ When Pope John Paul II proclaimed the year of the Rosary, less advised people could have considered it as a possible source of complication regarding the ecumenical dialogue on Mary. It was the Pope himself who deblocked such consideration in the document itself:

... there are some who fear that the Rosary is somehow unecumenical because of its distinctly Marian character. Yet the Rosary clearly belongs to the kind of veneration of the Mother of God described by the Council: a devotion directed to the Christological centre of the Christian faith, in such a way that “when the Mother is honoured, the Son ... is duly known, loved and glorified”. If properly revitalized, the Rosary is an aid and certainly not a hindrance to ecumenism!⁴⁰

This revitalization of the rosary implies three important theological principles that are related with the ecumenical dialogue: the centrality of Christ, the subordination of Mary to the affirmation of Christ, and the importance of the Scriptures. In fact, the Apostolic Letter proposes that the contemplation of Christ has an incomparable model in Mary,⁴¹ and invites all to have this “face to face” encounter with Christ in order to be conformed to him.⁴² It is in this process of being conformed to Christ in the Rosary that the Pope recalls some of the statements from *Lumen Gentium* that denoted an ecumenical concern: “she who is both the Mother of Christ and a Member of the Church”⁴³ brings all to Christ through her maternal intercession. Such a statement emphasizes the unique mediation of Christ and Mary’s proper role.⁴⁴ In his practical proposals on how to pray the rosary and in explaining its different moments, the Pope insists explicitly and implicitly in the unicity of Christ’s mediation: announcing each mystery;⁴⁵ the “Our Father” in which the Son leads us closer to the fulness of a relationship with the Father;⁴⁶ the ten “Hail Marys”, where the gravitational center is the name of Jesus and in spite of its Marian character emphasizes its Christological character;⁴⁷ the “Glory be”, which is the Trinitarian doxology accentuating that

³⁹ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* no. 79.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, *Rosarium virginis Mariae* no. 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

⁴² *Ibid.*, no. 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 32.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 33.

“Christ is the way that leads us to the Father in the Spirit;”⁴⁸ and the beads, as it is, is a reminder of how they “converge upon the crucifix.”⁴⁹

The importance of the Scriptures is given by the introduction of a change of the “traditional pattern” of the mysteries of Christ meditated in the recitation of the rosary.⁵⁰ Besides the joyful, the sorrowful, and the glorious, the Pope proposed the “mysteries of Christ’s public ministry between his Baptism and his Passion.”⁵¹ The Apostolic Letter recalls that the origin of the prayer of the rosary is based on the number 150, the number of Psalms in the Psalter, which serve to introduce the mysteries of Christ for meditation; and the reason for adding the mysteries of light is to “bring out fully the Christological depth of the rosary.”⁵² Likewise, the Apostolic Letter recommends the possibility of reading the passage of the Bible that directly refers to the mystery to be meditated.⁵³

Although *Rosarium virginis Mariae* is an Apostolic Letter addressed to the Roman Catholic Church, it contains different elements that express an ecumenical concern, such as the proposed method of meditation that aims to deepen one’s relationship with Christ and offers possible ways of listening to the Word of God. It is also one more document showing how decisive the debate on Mary at the Second Vatican Council is still today. To look at the other Christians as brothers and sisters implies a necessary change and conversion in overcoming prejudice that creates all kinds of caricatures about one another’s faith practices. Now is the moment to see how this new atmosphere brought about by the eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* has influenced different bilateral dialogues between the Roman Catholics and other Christian denominations.

II. BILATERAL ECUMENICAL DIALOGUES AND THEOLOGICAL CONVERGENCES ABOUT THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

The eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* likewise had a benign effect in the ecumenical exchanges between the Roman Catholic Church and the other Christian denominations regarding the blessed Virgin Mary. Although the Marian issues were not among the first ones to be discussed and debated upon within the different official bilateral dialogues in which the Catholic Church was engaged, the role and the understanding of Mary in the life of the Christian communities was an important matter that was considered. A case in point was in England. As David Carter comments, Martin Gillet was a prophetic figure when he formed the Ecumenical Society of the

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 19.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, no. 31.

Blessed Virgin Mary in 1967 in England.⁵⁴ Under the leadership of M. Gillet and continued by other members of the Society, the different Marian issues were approached and proposed not as a divisive matter, but having the aim of developing “an irenic ecumenical understanding of Mary.”⁵⁵

In the panorama of the different bilateral dialogues in which the Roman Catholic Church is involved, there are some major documents that can be considered: the first is the result of the dialogue between the Lutheran churches and the Catholic church in the United States of America;⁵⁶ the second, written by Michael Evans, was the outcome of the British Roman Catholic-Methodist dialogue;⁵⁷ the third is the report of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission II;⁵⁸ a fourth one to be considered is the statement of the Evangelicals and Catholics together in the United States of America.⁵⁹ Another important document is the result of the French unofficial ecumenical group of Dombes.⁶⁰

All these different documents are the result of intense theological debates, as well as from a profound desire for unity expressed in a common prayer lived by all the participants. The texts are also very rich from the theological perspective as they synthesize historically the doctrinal stand points of the different Christian traditions

⁵⁴ Cf. David Carter, “Mary in Ecumenical Dialogue and Exchange,” in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, ed. Sarah Jane Boss (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 345-346. The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary among many other activities organizes also International Conferences. The proceedings of those international gatherings are published and are an important source for the ecumenical research about Mary. See Alberic Stacpoole, ed., *Mary’s Place in Christian Dialogue* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse Pub Co, 1983); Alberic Stacpoole, ed., *Mary and the Churches* (Dublin: Columba Press, 1987); Alberic Stacpoole, ed., *Mary in Doctrine and Devotion: Papers of the Liverpool Congress, 1989, of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Blackrock: Liturgical Pr, 1990); William McLaughlin and Jill Pinnock, eds., *Mary for Earth and Heaven* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2002); William M. McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock, eds., *Mary for Time and Eternity: Papers on Mary and Ecumenism Given At International Congresses of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Woldingham (2003) and Other Meetings in 2005* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2007). Christopher O’Donnell summarizes, from the perspective of the method, the achievements and challenges to the different Christian traditions that the Congresses of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary had been addressing. See Christopher O’Donnell, “Issues of Method at EBSVM Congresses,” in *Mary for Time and Eternity*, 25-48.

⁵⁵ David Carter, “Mary in Ecumenical Dialogue and Exchange,” in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, 345.

⁵⁶ H. George Anderson and J. Francis Stafford, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, ed. Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Pub, 1992).

⁵⁷ Michael Evans, ed., *Mary, Mother of the Lord, Sign of Grace, Faith and Holiness: Towards a Shared Understanding* (Peterborough: Catholic Truth Society, 1995).

⁵⁸ ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ Revised and Expanded New Edition*, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Continuum, 2006).

⁵⁹ A Statement of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, “Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life,” *First Things*, November, 2009, accessed May 6, 2017, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2009/11/do-whatever-he-tells-you-the-blessed-virgin-mary-in-christian-faith-and-life>.

⁶⁰ Alain Blancy, Maurice Jourjon, and Dombes Group, *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints: Toward a Common Christian Understanding* (New York, NY; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002).

involved. They are also simultaneously an arrival and a departure point. This analysis is part of that new stage on the existence of each document, which reflects on this question: where does every Christian tradition involved stands regarding the reception of these documents?

We will now examine in greater detail at some of these documents, but in particular try to evaluate their impact on the lives of Christian communities.⁶¹

LUTHERANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS IN DIALOGUE ABOUT THE VIRGIN MARY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The dialogue between the Roman Catholics and Lutherans in the United States is an important and pedagogical round bottom flask regarding ecumenical convergences between both traditions, as well as a learning process for the present and future of ecumenism. The Common Statement, *The One Mediator, the Saints and Mary*, is another document produced by the North American theological mixt committee⁶² assuming this premise: “in many instances we are dealing not only with doctrines but also Catholic and Lutheran thought structures as well as expressions of worship and piety.”⁶³

THE ONE MEDIATOR, THE SAINTS, AND MARY: THE CONSCIENCE OF THE “DIFFERING THOUGHT PATTERNS”

The document, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, is divided into two parts. The first part, after proposing a historical analysis about the development of the problem in the sixteenth century, presents the Catholic and the Lutheran perspectives on this matter in order to re-examine the issue today. This re-examination allows the

⁶¹ We will not analyze the text of the British Roman Catholic Methodist dialogue as we were not able to have access to it on time. In order to know more about this specific document, we consulted David Carter. See David Carter, “Mary in Ecumenical Dialogue and Exchange,” in *Mary: The Complete Resource*, 350-354. In order to establish the standing point of both traditions regarding Mary and the communion of saints, we consulted the digest of the nine reports published by the Methodist Roman Catholic International Commission in 2011, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the dialogue between the two traditions, there and quoting the Report of Denver 1971, it is referred the importance of the Marian piety for the Catholics for their Christian experience and “life in the Spirit”, as well as the difficulties that the Methodists have with the Catholic Marian dogmatic formulations. See *Together to Holiness: Forty Years of Methodist - Roman Catholic Dialogue*, no. 182-184, available here: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/3025/roman-catholic-dialogue-synthesis-report.pdf>, accessed May 6, 2017.

⁶² Regarding this debate about the understanding of the unique mediation of Jesus Christ and its relationship with the cult of the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the members of the mixt committee addressed the different perspectives and issues since the 37th session (16-19 September) until the 50th session (15-18 February 1990). See Chronological Listing of Sessions and Papers in H. George Anderson and J. Francis Stafford, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, ed. Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Pub, 1992), 15. Some of the papers presented and discussed are published together with this common statement. *Ibid.*, 135-338.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 5, 22. From now onwards we will refer to this edition of the document as *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, followed by the page number of this edition.

awareness of these divergences between the two traditions: the understanding of the term “saint”, the understanding of the intercession of the saints, the invocation of them and, to conclude the Marian doctrine, in particular the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church. It is from the awareness of these issues that the document discusses their divisive character and dimension. The first part is concluded with a presentation of a list of “Church-Uniting convergences”⁶⁴ and a proposal of some steps in order to overcome the divergences and to achieve a higher degree of communion among both traditions.⁶⁵ The second part of the document presents the relationship between Christ, the saints and Mary from its biblical foundations and historical developments in the Christian traditions. The historical periodisation proposed assumes that the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches were united until the sixteenth century⁶⁶, an important premise to assume a common heritage, and presents the divergent development of both traditions since then until the present. This second part is concluded with two different sections, one presenting the Catholic and the other the Lutheran perspectives on this matter assuming the contributions of the document and the debates that led to its redaction.

The document assumes that the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran churches affirm undoubtedly the only and unique mediation of Jesus Christ in the salvific plan of God and analyses the divergences between both traditions having in mind the “differing thought structures” specific to each tradition, a method already used previously in the debate about the understanding of the justification.⁶⁷ The different ways of thinking can lead us to see how the Lutherans, for instance emphasize more a Christological dimension of Christ’s Mediation and the Roman Catholic an ecclesiological.⁶⁸ This difference implies different ways of understanding, for instance the sacraments, ecclesiological structures and the authority in the church and, as the common statement shows, the understanding of Blessed Virgin Mary and the cult of the saints. The common statement doesn’t have the intention to solve all the divergences. It proposes some steps for both traditions to pursue their path towards unity: proposing to the Lutherans to be aware that the Catholics, based on the teachings of the Second Council of the Vatican and its reception, do not worship the Blessed Virgin Mary, as well as do not understand the cult of the saints, in an idolatrous manner; it proposes to the Roman Catholics “to acknowledge that, in a closer but still incomplete fellowship, Lutherans focusing on Christ the one Mediator, as set forth in the Scripture, would not be obliged to invoke the saints or to affirm the two Marian dogmas (Immaculate Conception and Assumption).”⁶⁹

Although we can present many of the different doctrinal statements from both traditions and debate about them, one of the most crucial fields is the popular piety

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 83-100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

and its expressions. *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* refers it in some occasions, namely to refer that can be a difficult issue regarding some of the Roman Catholic ways of expressing and living it: “As our dialogue sessions have made clear and as the preceding considerations reflect, the most neuralgic difficulty over the issue of the “The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary” lies especially in the area of piety. Our different mentalities have interpreted “Christ alone” in different thought patterns, and this had practical consequences in shaping pious practices.”⁷⁰ In spite of being one of the most sensitive fields in the dialogue between both traditions, it is also one of the most challenging for both of them. It is on the field of popular piety that a lot has to be done in order to purify each tradition, as well as where both have a lot to learn from each other.

THE ONE MEDIATOR, THE SAINTS, AND MARY: ITS RECEPTION AND THE POPULAR PIETY

In the aftermath of the publication of the document, the Lutheran liturgist Maxwell E. Johnson was one of the voices criticizing the common statement in its lack of audacity, from the Lutheran position, to point out more convergence between both traditions regarding the intercession of the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary.⁷¹ His studies about the Virgin of Guadalupe are an important and influential contribution to realise that, at least regarding the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches, the devotional world and imagination of the Catholics is not forcibly a rift between both traditions.⁷² Some American Protestant theologians were invited to analyse and to react to the growing importance of the devotional universe of the Virgin of Guadalupe not only to the American Roman Catholics, but to all American Christians due to the impact of migrations in the American continent in the shape and constitution of the Christian communities in the northern part of the American continent.⁷³ The different contributions express the theological convergence that is behind the devotion of the Virgin of Guadalupe from the different doctrinal and ecclesial codes and languages. In the Introduction Maxwell E. Johnson assumes that the protestants can celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe based on three premises: “she proclaims the Gospel,” “she embodies for us God’s unmerited grace,” and “she is a type and model of what the church is to be in the world.”⁷⁴ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, a Presbyterian theologian, analyses the work of Virgil Elizondo⁷⁵ and the Guadalupan devotion, as he demonstrates that Elizondo’s interpretation of the Guadalupan tradition “is compatible with

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷¹ Maxwell E. Johnson, “The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: A Lutheran Reflection,” *Worship* 67, no. 3 (May 1993): 226–238.

⁷² Maxwell E. Johnson and Virgil Elizondo, *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

⁷³ Maxwell E. Johnson, ed., *American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe*, First Edition ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

⁷⁴ Maxwell E. Johnson, “Introduction: Can Protestants Celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe?,” in *American Magnificat*, loc. 116-487 of 4052 of kindle edition.

⁷⁵ Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

a Reformed Protestant Christocentric theology”⁷⁶ and opens a space to establish an important ecumenical statement regarding the Guadalupan or other Marian devotions, noting that “while not every Christian community need to embrace the Guadalupan devotion, every Christian community can broaden its understanding of God by listening to what Guadalupe teaches us about creation and liberation.”⁷⁷ The texts of the Methodist Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric⁷⁸ and of the Lutheran José David Rodríguez⁷⁹ also reveal the theological compatibility between different doctrinal traditions and languages regarding the understanding of the Virgin of Guadalupe and its ecumenical potential.

There is a huge difference in the ecumenical landscape between the periods before and during the Second Vatican Council and today. The common statement, *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary*, was an important moment in the transformation of the ecumenical landscape: the assumption that we have different thought patterns, an ironic and objective look into the history of the divergences between both traditions and, most importantly, a sincere desire of promoting unity as an answer to what is the exigence of Christ himself to all Christians. The converging effect is no longer just at a doctrinal level. Even at the liturgical and devotional levels, as a result of a deep transformation of all Christian communities in North America, we can realize signs and manifestations of an ecumenical convergence between the Roman Catholics, Lutherans and other Christian denominations.⁸⁰

THE DOMBES GROUP, A MARK ON THE WAY TOWARDS ECUMENICAL CONVERGENCE ON THE VIRGIN MARY

The *Groupe des Dombes* was founded by Paul Couturier, a priest from the Diocese of Lyons in 1937, as an ecumenical prayer group and evolved into an important reference in the ecumenical dialogue between Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians.⁸¹ Although this French ecumenical group is not an official commission of

⁷⁶ Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, “Beyond Word and Sacrament: A Reformed Protestant Engagement of Guadalupan Devotion,” *American Magnificat*, loc. 1624-2223 of 4052 in kindle edition.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 1999 of 4052 in kindle edition.

⁷⁸ Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric, “Wesleyans and Guadalupans: A Theological Reflection,” in *American Magnificat*, loc. 2228-2670 of 4052 in kindle edition.

⁷⁹ José David Rodríguez, “The Virgin of Guadalupe from a Latino/a Protestant Perspective: A Dangerous Narrative to Counter Colonial and Imperialistic Power,” in *American Magnificat*, loc. 2674-2932 of 4052 in kindle edition.

⁸⁰ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 163-194.

⁸¹ The Group takes the name from the former Cistercian Abby of Dombes, in the Ain department in France; since 1997 the group had been having its regular meetings in the Benedictine Abby of Pradines. For more detailed information about the history and importance of the Group and its texts for the ecumenical dialogue. See John Fitzmyer, “Foreword,” in *Mary in the Plan of God*, 1-5 and Catherine E. Clifford, *The Groupe Des Dombes: A Dialogue of Conversion* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005).

the ecumenical dialogue between different Christian communities, its importance and influence are undeniable.⁸² Since 1956 the group started to discuss and present ecclesiological topics to the public and it is active until today.⁸³ From 1991 until 1997 the debates were about the Blessed Virgin Mary, which resulted in the publication of the document, *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints*.⁸⁴

THE DOCUMENT *MARY IN THE PLAN OF GOD AND IN THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS*

This document appears after the one that we saw previously from the North American Lutheran-Roman Catholic theological commission and both texts can be considered groundbreaking documents for the ecumenical dialogue on the subject of the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Saviour.⁸⁵ But both texts are also important milestones in the reception of the eighth chapter of *Lumen Gentium* and in the confirmation of its ecumenical dimension and prospective.

The document of the Dombes Group is divided into two parts: the first one presents some “Lessons of History,”⁸⁶ followed by the presentation of the testimony from Scripture about Mary but with a framework of the three articles of the profession of

⁸² The “authority” of the documents produced by the Dombes Group was analysed by Catherine Clifford. See Catherine E. Clifford, *The Groupe Des Dombes*, 119-126.

⁸³ From 1956 to 1970 the group published a series of “theses”, from 1971 to 1998 published another series of “documents”. In 1987, the earlier “theses” and documents were published in one volume – *Pour la communion des Églises: L’apport du Groupe des Dombes (1937-1987)* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1988), an English translation of the series of “documents” was published in 2010: Groupe des Dombes, *For the Communion of the Churches: The Contribution of the Groupe Des Dombes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010). A second volume was published in 1991: *Pour la conversion des Églises: Identité et changement dans la dynamique de la communion* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1991), translated into English: Groupe de Dombes, *For the Conversion of the Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993). In 1997 and 1998 two booklets about Mary were published: *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints: I. Dans l’histoire et l’Écriture* (Paris: Éditions Bayard/Le Centurion, 1997) and *II. Controverse et conversion* (Paris: Éditions Bayard/Le Centurion, 1998). A second edition gathered both booklets into one single book entitled *Marie: Dans le dessein de Dieu et dans la communion des saints* (Paris: Éditions Bayard/Le Centurion, 1999), with the English translation Alain Blancy, Maurice Jourjon, and Dombes Group, *Mary in the Plan of God and in the Communion of Saints: Toward a Common Christian Understanding* (New York, NY; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002). In 2005 the Dombes Group published a document about the doctrinal authority of the church: Groupe des Dombes, *Un seul maître: L’autorité doctrinale dans l’Église* (Paris: Bayard Jeunesse, 2005), translated into English by Catherine Clifford - La Groupe des Dombes, *“One Teacher”: Doctrinal Authority in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010). In 2011 the group published another document about the Lord’s prayer: *Vous Donc, Priez Ainsi: Le Notre Père, Itinéraire Pour La Conversion Des Églises* (Montrouge: Éditions Bayard, 2011).

⁸⁴ We are using the English translation referred above: Alain Blancy, Maurice Jourjon, and Dombes Group, *Mary in the Plan of God*. From now onwards we will refer the document as *Mary in the Plan of God* with the number of the paragraph between parenthesis and the page number of the publication after, e.g. *Mary in the Plan of God* (8), 17.

⁸⁵ Joseph Famerée, “Marie à l’épreuve de l’oecuménisme,” *Revue Théologique de Louvain* 29, no. 4 (1998): 506-518; Jared Wicks, “The Virgin Mary in Recent Ecumenical Dialogues,” *Gregorianum* 81, no. 1 (2000): 25-57.

⁸⁶ *Mary in the Plan of God* (8-119), 17-55.

faith;⁸⁷ the second part presents the disputed questions⁸⁸ followed by a proposal of conversion to the Catholic and to the Protestant Churches.⁸⁹ In the preface to the first booklet the reason given to justify its publication without waiting for the completion of the second part was “due to a disordered revival of ill-informed Marian piety that is only aggravating the tensions already existing between the churches in regard to the place of Mary, or even tensions arising within one and the same church.”⁹⁰ It is from that awareness and urgency that the methodological premises are presented: an attention to the history and to what Scripture offers to understand Mary in the economy of salvation, as well as her place in the mystery of the church; the exigence of call to conversion to all churches; and the primacy of the rule of faith over the numerous devotional expressions.⁹¹

The second part of the document, *Mary in the Plan of God*, is an outstanding and ecumenical presentation of the doctrine about the Virgin Mary. Shaped upon the Trinitarian structure of the rule of faith, it summarizes what the Scriptures affirm about the Virgin Mary. In her relation with God the Father, the document presents Mary as a creature, woman and daughter of Israel.⁹² The second article allows to present Mary as the Mother of Jesus, but the real core and scope of her maternity is to reveal the mystery of Jesus Christ, Son of God⁹³: “When the ecumenical councils of the fifth century give the name *Theotokos*, “Mother of God”, to the servant of the Lord who brought him into the world, they do so not in order to glorify her but primarily to confess that he who was of her according to the flesh is her Lord and her God.”⁹⁴ The third article allows the document to present “Mary in the Communion of the Saints”⁹⁵, however it is introduced by the conclusion of the previous part: “Mary, who was so close to the human Jesus as his mother, had to experience the passion and death of her son in order to become a disciple in the church. She thereby warns Christians that they cannot bypass the cross and the resurrection in entering the community of their Lord.”⁹⁶ In fact, Mary lived the paschal experience like every disciple of Jesus: she recognizes him as the Christ and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit, becoming this way his church, a communion of saints.⁹⁷

The centrality of the rule of faith and the Scriptures is crucial to discuss the disputed questions. It is from the articulation of these two poles that both traditions must discern what is essential and structural for the lives of their communities. However,

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, (120-203), 52-72.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, (204-288), 85-113.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, (289-333), 114-126.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, “Preface for Part I”, 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁹² *Ibid.*, (122-135), 52-58.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, (136-189), 58-69.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, (170), 65.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, (190-202), 69-72.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, (189), 69.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, (192), 70.

the Dombes Group appeals to a discernment made upon the application of the “hierarchy of truths”, a concept consecrated in the Second Vatican Council decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* (no. 11).⁹⁸

The primacy of the rule of faith in articulation with the scriptures and the principle of the “hierarchy of truths” are essential keys in the ecumenical dialogue, namely regarding doctrinal disputed questions. This document presents a very stimulating example discussing the two Marian dogmas proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church.⁹⁹ But these two essential keys must also be present in the tensions that always arise in the relationship between piety, especially in its more popular expressions, and doctrine.

PIETY AND DOCTRINE

The tension between popular devotion and doctrine is presented in its different configurations throughout history.

In its analysis of the early Christian church, the document realizes that:

... popular devotion sometimes anticipated doctrine when it came to praying to Mary. We note only that in the West popular piety has not found its way into the authentic prayer of the people of God, namely liturgical worship, which alone is in question in the adage ‘the law of prayer is the law of faith (*Lex orandi, lex credendi*).’¹⁰⁰

It is also within the presentation of the early Christianity that the apocryphal literature is analysed and the reason given is their importance not only to understand the doctrine regarding from the theological, historical and liturgical point of view, but their crucial role in feeding the popular piety and its imagination.¹⁰¹ However the document also refers to the need being cautious with some of the apocryphal presentations of Mary, as these texts can put into jeopardy the Christology of Chalcedon.¹⁰² The Marian piety had a big increment in the Middle Ages, but it is also during this period that the Western and the Eastern churches started to diverge.¹⁰³ Likewise during this period, there began some theological debates that led to the establishment of the Marian dogmas by the Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as other theological “privileges” such as *mediatrix*. However, these developments also led to some exaggeration and excesses which led the document to conclude its presentation of the Middle Ages with this affirmation: “These excesses became increasingly popular and increasingly less controlled by theology. At the

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, (296), 117.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, (295-302), 116-118; (321-327), 124-126.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, (29), 23.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, (38), 26.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, (40-43), 26-27.

dawn of the Renaissance they would be stumbling stones in the way of the various efforts at reform.”¹⁰⁴

The document then presents the position of the Protestant Reform regarding Mary. It presents briefly the positions of Martin Luther, Uldrych Zwingli and John Calvin to demonstrate that their position “was an ambivalent one: on one hand, they defended a polemical position in regard to the Marian piety of the Middle Ages; but on the other, they developed a positive interpretation of the person of Mary.”¹⁰⁵ The subsequent part of the document presents the developments of the different churches after the Reform, triggered by the Council of Trent in the Roman Catholic Church and in the other Protestant churches. It emphasizes in two different periods of the history the development of the Marian piety within the Roman Catholic Church with diverse results regarding the Protestant churches: first it corresponds to the end of the seventeenth century and during the eighteenth century, even called by a few in the text as “a Marian century”,¹⁰⁶ later from 1850 to 1950 “a new Marian century”, but this time adding to the pious expressions some doctrinal claims, with the corollary of the proclamation of the Dogmas of the Immaculate conception of Mary (1854) and the Assumption.¹⁰⁷ The chapter presenting the “Lessons of History” concludes with the twentieth century. Overall, the document tries to show how the developments of the Marian piety can lead to some exaggerations. But it is especially the term, “new Marian century” that made appear some doctrinal claims contributing to an increase on the gap between both Christian traditions.

The tension between piety and doctrine reappears in the presentation of the disputed questions, namely in the evocation about the history of the two Marian dogmas proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰⁸ The tension is also present in the discussion about the cult of Mary and the saints. Taking from the Tradition, especially from the Second Council of Nicaea (787), the difference between *douliá* (veneration) of icons and images and *latría* (adoration), which is reserved to the persons of the Trinity,¹⁰⁹ after this doctrinal statement the document remembers one of the major poles of conflict between Protestants and Catholics about Mary: “Above and beyond this common practice, disagreement remains between Catholics and Protestants on the idea of prayer to Mary understood as a prayer through Mary, that is, a request to Mary that she intercede with God for us.”¹¹⁰ However, the text proceeds in presenting possibilities of confluence between both Christian traditions regarding the cult of Mary and the saints, namely discussing an understanding of intercession based on the idea of communion that could create a space of convergence without eliminating

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, (51), 29-30.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, (51), 30.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, (71), 36.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, (89-90), 42.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, (235-236), 96; (244), 98.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, (276), 109.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, (277), 109.

the differences in order to overcome separation.¹¹¹ If that consensus could be attained, the text raises the question:

If this were the case, would not the contradiction and incompatibility between the Catholic and Protestant positions tend to diminish, while theological and pastoral vigilance would prevent both excess and narrowness? Then different types of piety could live side by side, without suspicion or obligation, and not be the cause and effect of division.¹¹²

In a natural manner the tension between doctrine and piety, especially in its more popular expressions, is present in the chapter proposing a way of conversion to both traditions. To the Catholic Church, the conversion is proposed in three aspects: attitude, doctrine and the Marian devotion. The triadic structure is repeated in the proposal made to the Protestant tradition with some small differences: attitude, a doctrinal and the recognition of Mary in the Christian prayer and worship. In the proposal made to the Catholic Church the members of Dombes Group propose four directions to be taken regarding Marian devotion based on what Pope Paul VI reflected on *Marialis cultus*: biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological.¹¹³ Then, the document applies these four directions to some situations in which the Catholics can hurt the Protestant sensibility: prayers such as the Rosary and the *Angelus*, the apparitions, the preaching and the catechesis.¹¹⁴ To the Protestant churches the document urges a change of attitude that makes justice to the place that Mary occupies in the history of salvation, not as the result of an “ecumenical compromise”, rather “a return to the Mary of the Gospels and the mark of a greater fidelity to the Scriptures.”¹¹⁵ This doctrinal reevaluation of Mary by the Protestants must have also an expression in the prayer of the church.¹¹⁶

III. THE ANGLICAN AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES DIALOGUE ON THE VIRGIN MARY

The dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church started in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. When Dr. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Pope Paul VI met in March 1966, they established the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) to enhance a theological dialogue that could lead to the overcoming of divergences between both ecclesial traditions in order to achieve full communion. The dialogue concluded two phases already, ARCIC I (1970-1981) and ARCIC II (1983-2005).¹¹⁷ Since 2011

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, (287), 112.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 112.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, (306), 119-120.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, (307-314), 120-124.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, (319), 123.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, (329-331), 127.

¹¹⁷ The common declarations are available at “Pontifical Councils”, The Roman Curia, accessed May 12, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/sub-index/index_anglican-

there has been a third stage that is an ongoing process.¹¹⁸ The common statement of Seattle, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, was the last one to be published of the second stage in 2005. It is not an authoritative declaration and, regarding its reception, it is on the stage that Paul Murray designates as “initiating reception”, although there is a study guide of the document that makes us look at a possible stage of “local reception”.¹¹⁹

A THEOLOGY OF GRACE AND HOPE AND A DEMAND OF RE-RECEPTION

The existing doctrinal divergence since the very beginnings of the dialogue is one of the tasks at hand. The “Malta Report” (1968) of the Preparatory Commission refers to it, and ARCIC I in the statement, *Authority in the Church II* (1981), also presents the degree of agreement and the still remaining differences about Mary between both churches.¹²⁰ It was in Mississauga (2000) that the ARCIC was asked “to study Mary in the life and doctrine of the church.” The process took five years and benefited from other ecumenical dialogues, but it also realized the importance for a methodological change.¹²¹ Until the Seattle statement, the dialogue was concerned about overcoming the divergences, identifying its origin in the past and analysing its

[comm.htm](#). In 2000 and motivated by the celebration of the Jubilee, both churches gathered in Mississauga, Canada, evaluated the achievements of the different the ARCIC in its different stages. This evaluation made both partners of the dialogue became aware of “the serious obligation to intensify the reception of those agreements at the local level”. See “Statement: *Communion in Mission* no. 4,” International Meeting of Anglican and Catholic Bishops, May 14-20, 2000, accessed May 12, 2017, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/angl-comm-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20000519_iarccum-mississauga_en.html. This meeting also established the conditions to launch the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission and open a new stage regarding the understanding of the reception of the ecumenical agreements in terms of *receptive ecumenism*. See Mary Tanner, “From Vatican II to Mississauga – Lessons in Receptive Ecumenical Learning from the Anglican-Roman Catholic Bilateral,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, eds. Paul Murray and Luca Badini Confalonieri (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 258-270; Paul Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning – Establishing the Agenda,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning*, 5-25; Paul D. Murray, “Introducing Receptive Ecumenism,” *The Ecumenist. A Journal of Theology, Culture, and Society* 51, no. 2 (2014): 1-7.

¹¹⁸ Paul D. Murray, “The Reception of ARCIC I and II in Europe and Discerning the Strategy and Agenda for ARCIC III,” *Ecclesiology* 11 (2015): 199-218.

¹¹⁹ Paul D. Murray distinguishes three stages on the process of ecumenical reception: “initiating reception”, “local reception” and “formal reception”. The first is at the level of the ARCIC itself and resulting in the documents approved to be published and discussed; the second corresponds to situations in which can be identified application of the proposals on the documents on the different local communities; the third stage corresponds to the degree of authority that is given to the documents by the governing bodies of the churches. See Paul D. Murray, “The Reception of ARCIC I and II in Europe and Discerning the Strategy and Agenda for ARCIC III”, 203-205.

¹²⁰ ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, (1-4), 8-12. We will indicate between parentheses the number of the paragraphs as it is presented in the document and ahead the page numbers in the edition that we are using.

¹²¹ Charles Sherlock, “The Journey: an Anglican Perspective,” in ARCIC, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, 210-226.

developments. In this document, appeals to eschatology are made in order to overcome the divergences; thus this methodology, as Charles Sherlock puts it, means that issues are well considered to be “driven by seeing things from the future backwards, rather than from the past forwards.”¹²²

The document is composed of four parts. The first presents Mary according to the Scripture; the second portrays Mary in the Christian tradition; the third looks into Mary within the pattern of grace and hope; and the fourth looks into Mary in the life of the church. It is in the first and third parts that the methodological shift is more influential. It is in the light of a “theology of divine grace and hope” that the document proposes to understand the role of Mary in the history of salvation and in the life of the church.¹²³

A theology of grace gives primacy to God’s initiative. The economy of salvation is a “Yes” of God to humankind that capacitates an answer, which makes humankind walk and live into the fulness of a relationship with the triune God. The document proposes the episode of the Annunciation as an example.¹²⁴ Likewise, as “a trajectory of grace and hope” the document is going to summarize the history of salvation from creation, the constant call of the people to a covenant, to the call of particular persons, like David, Elijah, Jeremiah and Isaiah.¹²⁵ The culmination of this trajectory is in the obedience of Jesus Christ. It is in this Christological context that the document proposes to understand Mary: “The birth of Mary’s son is the fulfilment of God’s will for Israel, and Mary’s part in that fulfilment is that of a free and unqualified consent in utter self-giving and trust.”¹²⁶ The document continues applying the “pattern of grace and hope” to the different biblical references about Mary in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and Revelation 12.¹²⁷

It is in the third part of the Seattle document that we can see the methodological shift proposed and its theological roots. The understanding and exploration into the role of Mary is based on the Pauline anticipated eschatology:

For Paul especially, what it means to be fully human, the ‘last Adam’, as opposed to what we had become in the old Adam.... We thus view the economy of grace from its fulfilment in Christ ‘back’ into history, rather than ‘forward’ from its beginning in fallen creation towards the future in Christ. This perspective offers fresh light in which to consider the place of Mary.¹²⁸

¹²² Charles Sherlock, “The Journey: an Anglican Perspective,” 217.

¹²³ *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, (4), 12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, (5), 12-13.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, (8-10), 15-18.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, (11), 19.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, (12-29), 15-34.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, (52), 55.

The eschatological perspective allows us to understand the particular womanhood of Mary: as mother and virgin,¹²⁹ and as the “faithful disciple fully present with God in Christ.”¹³⁰ It permits us to affirm that “Mary may be seen both as a type of the Church, and as a disciple with a special place in the economy of salvation.”¹³¹ It is from these premises that the two Marian dogmas, proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are going to be re-read and considered as creeds that are in accordance with Scriptures by the Anglican Communion.¹³² The document also proposes this eschatological perspective as the key for both traditions to look at the two Marian dogmas referred not as a source of divergence, but as a possible way of reconciliation:

We now suggest that the adoption of an eschatological perspective may deepen our understanding of the place of Mary in the economy of grace, and the tradition of the church concerning Mary, which both our communions receive. Our hope is that the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Communion will recognise a common faith in the agreement concerning Mary that we here offer. Such a re-reception would mean the Marian teaching and devotion within our respective communities, including differences of emphasis, would be seen to be authentic expressions of Christian belief.¹³³

The methodological shift expressed on the call to view Mary from an eschatological perspective based on the Pauline theology, is going to imply also an ecumenical category: the notion of re-reception.¹³⁴ It is not only on the doctrinal field that the task

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, (54-55), 57-58.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, (56), 60.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, (57), 60-61.

¹³² *Ibid.*, (58-59), 61-64.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, (63), 68-69.

¹³⁴ The notion of reception in theological studies appeared with the seminal studies of Yves Congar and Aloys Grillmeier and related with the way that the conciliar decisions are assumed by the churches. I became an important notion to analyze the impact of the second council of the Vatican as well as to evaluate the assumption by different churches of the ecumenical consensus. Lately its usage had extended into the development of the doctrines in the church and it is also on the basis of the development of the notion of “receptive ecumenism”. See Yves Congar, “Reception as an Ecclesial Reality,” *Concilium* 77 (1972): 43–68; Aloys Grillmeier, “Konzil und Rezeption: Methodische Bemerkungen zu einem Thema der ökumenischen Diskussion der Gegenwart,” *Philosophie und Theologie* 3 (1970): 321–352; Thomas P. Rausch, “Note: Reception Past and Present”, *Theological Studies* 47 (1986): 497-508; Gilles Routhier, *La réception d'un concile* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1993); Ormond Rush, *The Reception of Doctrine: An Appropriation of Hans Robert Jauss' Reception Aesthetics and Literary Hermeneutics*, (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 1997); Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church's Reception of Revelation*, Reprint edition. (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016); Ormond Rush, “Receptive Ecumenism and Discerning the *Sensus Fidelium*: Expanding the Categories for a Catholic Reception of Revelation,” *Theological Studies* 78 (2017): 559-572.

of re-reception is going to be required,¹³⁵ but also on the liturgical life of the churches, with the necessary re-evaluation of some of the devotional popular expressions.¹³⁶

THE MARIAN PIETY AND THE CHALLENGE TO LEARN FROM EACH OTHER

In its presentation of the historical development of the Marian traditions in both churches, the document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, reveals for those who are not familiar with history some important data to overcome mutual prejudice. It shows a common history and shared traditions since the early developments of Christianity until the dawn of the Reformation.¹³⁷

The aftermath of the Reformation brought the separation between the Anglican and the Roman Catholic Churches; even though there was still a strong reaction against Marian devotions and piety that emphasized Mary as *mediatrix*, the Mother of God, these remained present in the liturgical life of the Anglican churches.¹³⁸ The criterion of the Scriptures led to the exclusion of the August 15th liturgical feast of the Assumption from the liturgy, but kept the feasts of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Nativity of Mary, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Purification/Presentation. The devotion to Mary decreased but never disappeared totally in the Anglican churches and the usage of the *Magnificat* in the evening prayer is proposed as a sign of this continuous reverence to Mary, and in a way started a process of “re-reception” from the 17th century onwards.¹³⁹ The culmination of this “re-reception” is the process of reintroducing Mary’s name in the eucharistic prayers, the celebration of the Assumption and other Marian feasts.¹⁴⁰

The process of “re-reception” is also present in the Roman Catholic Church regarding the Marian devotions and spirituality. The key moment is the Second Vatican Council and its treatment of Mary in *Lumen Gentium*, followed by the publication *Marialis cultus* in 1974.¹⁴¹ The affirmation of the centrality of Christ’s mediation and the different features of the liturgical renewal applied to Marian piety and devotions led to a “re-reception of the teaching about Mary” in the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁴²

In its fourth part, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* uses and applies the theological category ministry to Mary. It is based on that category that the one and unique mediation of Christ is affirmed and not affected by the intercessory prayer of all Christians, “on heaven and earth.”¹⁴³ This ministry is proposed as distinctive based on the

¹³⁵ See *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, (63), 69.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, (47), 50-51; (50), 53.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, (31-43), 35-47.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, (45-46), 48-50.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, (46), 49.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, (49), 52-53.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, (47-48), 50-52.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, (50), 53.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, (68), 74.

motherhood of Mary: “she is believed to exercise a distinctive ministry of assisting others through her active prayer,”¹⁴⁴ as well pointing all to Christ.¹⁴⁵ As the Mother of Christ she points and guides all to the recognition of her Son.

It is also the theological category ministry that is used to illustrate the different ways each tradition appropriated the example of Mary:

Whilst both traditions have recognized her special place in the communion of saints, different emphases have marked the way we have experienced her ministry. Anglicans have tended to begin from reflection on the scriptural example of Mary as an inspiration and model for discipleship. Roman Catholics have given proeminence to the ongoing ministry of Mary in the economy of grace and the communion of saints.¹⁴⁶

This difference, however, is no longer a reason for divergence but an opportunity for both traditions to learn from each other.

The document also mentions the Marian apparitions as possible place for divergence.¹⁴⁷ However it recalls that they are private revelations not requiring an assent of all believers and the criterion to evaluate such experiences and the devotions related is the orientation towards Christ.¹⁴⁸

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Second Vatican Council was a key turning point for the Roman Catholic Church. One of the many debates marking that period is the one about the approach on dealing with the role of Mary. The decision of concluding the Dogmatic Constitution on the church, *Lumen Gentium*, with a chapter about Mary did not only close a debate among the participants in the conciliar aula but also opened an ecumenical horizon full of possibilities. This gave Pope Paul VI an opportunity to keep presenting and exploring the issue of the role of Mary with the decisive *Marialis Cultus*, and which John Paul II continued with his different contributions. From the various documents, it is clear that Mary does not replace Christ nor is she considered equal to him. Rather, the Mother of Christ is presented as a member of the church and her ministry is to point all to her Son. It is from these premises that Roman Catholics engaged in their dialogue with those from other Christian traditions.

The different documents of bilateral dialogue that were analyzed correspond to different situations and manifest a variety of proposals and methods. However, all of them express the importance of the Scripture as the root of all theological debate,

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, (71), 77.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, (72), 78.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, (66), 70-71.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, (73), 78-79.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, (79), 86.

the relevance of having knowledge of the history of the Christian traditions involved in the dialogue, and the positive understanding of the popular Marian piety and devotions. Likewise all the documents are considered reception moments of what was started with the last chapter of *Lumen Gentium*. The ecumenicity of the council must be also be evaluated in the bilateral documents of agreement between the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations.

In spite of the positive tone of the different ecumenical consensus on Mary regarding the popular Marian piety and devotions, the devotional world is one of the major challenges for all the Christians. In Macao the Marian devotions are very important for the Roman Catholic faithful. Although they are a strong and visible mark of identity and belonging to the Roman Catholic Church they can also be a pastoral opportunity and an ecumenical challenge. In the spirit of the different documents on Mary, the Marian piety must be rooted on the Scriptures and subordinated to the one and unique mediation of Christ, and all the diverse popular Marian devotions are a great possibility to explore and to propose the understanding of Mary in the history of salvation and her relationship with all disciples of Jesus Christ of all times. But these different Marian devotions with their public dimension and potential to gather together the Christian communities can also be a good occasion to promote the acknowledgement, and study of the ecumenical consensus on Mary, in order to enhance a “local reception” of such documents and also to establish basis to overcome the prejudice that different Christian denominations have quite often regarding each other. In a certain manner Mary challenges the Christians in Macao to be creative and generous from the pastoral and ecumenical point of view.

To know the other is an opportunity to know our own selves better and differently. The ecumenical dialogue expresses this reality. It implies the rediscovery of the other Christian as a brother or sister and thus calls for a conversion of attitude, not only at a personal level but also at the communitarian level. The ecumenical debates about Mary are both a chance and an occasion to fortify the bonds of unity among Christians as they lead to an affirmation of the one and unique mediation of Christ.

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