



Mariology in the Documents of Ecumenical Dialogue and Christian Unity

NAPIÓRKOWSKI ANDRZEJ 

Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow, andrzej.napiorkowski@upjp2.edu.pl

Abstract: Ecumenical dialogue that seeks to bring all followers of Christ closer to unity faces many difficulties. One is the incorrect understanding of ecumenism (doctrinal, spiritual and practical). Also, an obstacle is the lack of distinction between the unity of Christians and the unity of the Churches. This article presents another such difficulty in the path of Christian unity, which is the Mariological (doctrinal) and Marian (worship/devotion) issues. Ecumenical meetings, therefore, do not avoid such complex topics concerning the Mother of God, such as her virginity, immaculate conception, assumption or her role as Mother of the Church. Many Christian traditions have different interpretations of these truths. Catholic and Orthodox communities even consider them an inalienable part of their spiritual heritage, while most Protestant communities have a more nuanced approach and do not accept these truths as binding but reject them. A compilation of the documents to date relating to the Mother of God proves to be a big, positive surprise. Of course, these are writings of varying degrees of validity, as they come as much from international mixed official commissions as from national bilateral bodies or local debates. Nevertheless, both their prominence and impact, as well as their quantity, make it clear that the person and action of the mother of Jesus animate and promote the difficult rapprochement of the followers of her Divine Son.

Keywords: ecumenism, Mary, Christian unity, ecumenical dialogue, ecumenical documents, unity of Churches

Following the indications of the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation *Dei Verbum*, Catholic theology is making a painstaking effort to understand the content of revelation. In this endeavour, Mary and her role cannot be overlooked. The question arises of the indispensability of Mary for the fullness of Christian faith and theology. The mother of Jesus played a vital role in this self-revelation of God in the mystery of the incarnation. The Holy Trinity revealed itself as Father, Son and Spirit through Mary; hence, Christianity is based on Mary's response to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Mariological issues must be present throughout systematic theology to reliably answer the questions of modern theology. It seems that deepening this research will be an ecumenical perspective. Consequently, Mariology becomes necessary not only for Catholic theology but also for ecumenical dialogue among all Christians (McKenna 2016).

In the ecumenical dialogue of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Mariological and Marian issues appeared relatively late. It was preceded by joint debates among Christians regarding ecclesiological issues, Christology, Sacramentology, apostolic succession, the office of ordination or justification (Vaughan 1964).

Hence, this article aims to present the documents of ecumenical dialogue that Christians have recently developed to show their understanding of Mary in the light of their own confessions. The source of analysis will be primarily the documents of ecumenical dialogue produced by the Roman Catholic side with other Christian confessions. However, we will also cite other ecumenical dialogue documents with Mariological and Marian references.

We will then try to pick out some of the more important aspects of Mariology and their influence on working out and reaching a consensus in the pursuit of Christian unity.

1. What Kind of Ecumenical Dialogue?

The pre-conciliar dispute over the mother of Jesus between Catholics and Protestants – after the promulgation of Chapter VIII of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* – took on the character of dialogue, along with the contents of the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*. In 1965, Professor Stanisław Celestyn Napiórkowski published the results of his research on Mariological issues as seen by Protestant theologians. After 50 years, it turns out that this line of theological research laid the foundation for the practice of ecumenical Mariology. As a reliable researcher, Napiórkowski criticised not only certain theses of Protestant Christianity but also certain aspects of the teaching of Catholic Mariology. Consequently, the Professor of Lublin initiated a shift from emotional and prejudiced accusations to an ecumenical dialogue of Christ's followers in the area of Mariology. (Napiórkowski 1988; Pek 2014).

Can reflection on the Blessed Virgin Mary help promote ecumenism? The answer depends, first of all, on what we mean by ecumenism. One definition – paradoxically the most common, though incorrect – sees ecumenism as a process of negotiation between different Churches, where one Church gives up an aspect of its faith and the other partner relinquishes claims to some of its distinctiveness. The process takes place in several stages until the lowest common denominator is reached. The result is a Church or other official collective body with a reduced form of faith and practice to accommodate all members. This was largely the pattern of ecumenism in many Christian communities for most of the last century. It appears that not everyone has understood that this is a massive failure. Mary cannot help this kind of ecumenism. So, how do we understand ecumenism correctly today? It must first be stated that it is not a form of negotiation but a joint and long search for the truth of God's revelation. It begins with the confession that we do not fully grasp God's truth and need to appeal to the work of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith (Napiórkowski and Karski 2003). In this concept, the unity of heart and mind comes not from negotiated

agreements but from all parties recognising and accepting God's objective truth (Howell 2011).

It is well known that marriages do not succeed when each spouse gives fifty per cent but when each gives one hundred per cent. In the same way, the unity of Christians comes from a total commitment to seek difficult truth in a spirit of humility. Ecumenism begins with the recognition that unity already exists in God, that Christ is the centre of unity and that the Holy Spirit is the causal agent in bringing Christians together. It is only with this attitude to understanding ecumenism that Mariology and Marianism can contribute much to the cause of Christian unity.

Ecumenical dialogue is a process of cooperation and conversation between different Christian traditions in order to achieve greater unity in beliefs, practices and understanding of the faith. It is the pursuit of reconciliation and cooperation between various Churches and Christian communities, addressing both theological and practical issues. Ecumenical dialogue is the search for truth in God's revelation and the attempt to understand it in the light of the faith of God's people and the great Tradition of the Church of the triune God. We have serious sources that document interconfessional ecumenical dialogue (Cereti and Voicu 1986; Cereti and Voicu 1988; Cereti and Puglisi 1995; Cereti and Puglisi 1996; Cereti and Puglisi 2006).

Ecumenical dialogue is based on a mutual search for understanding, respect and openness to differences. It involves studying Scripture, theology, history and traditions together to identify shared values and beliefs and understand theological differences and disagreements. It seems that the first goal of ecumenical dialogue is Christian unity, as the unity of the Churches is a much more demanding challenge. The pursuit of unity is based on the understanding that all Christians are one body of Christ, regardless of differences in theology, rituals or Church structures. This form of dialogue aims to break down divisions and conflicts created by different interpretations of the faith and historical events (Jaskóła 2016, 89–98).

In ecumenical dialogue, participants seek to address complex topics such as theological teachings, sacraments, moral issues and structural differences. The goal is to find common ground to build greater unity while respecting the differences and individuality of each tradition (Napiórkowski, Leśniewski, and Leśniewska 2000, 5–6).

In recent decades, dialogue among Christians has borne much fruit, such as joint statements, agreements and mutual recognition of the sacraments and ordination. There is also greater cooperation in social service, social justice and the promotion of peace. However, dialogue is a long-term process that requires time, patience and commitment from all. It also requires openness to the work of the Holy Spirit, which leads to unity and reconciliation (Wicks 2000, 25–57). Its difficulty is revealed especially in the Mariological perspective. Karl Barth, one of the leading Protestant theologians of the 20th century, recognised the centrality of the Marian element. Barth identified the Marian doctrine and worship as “one great heresy” of the Catholic Church, from which all other Catholic heresies arose. He wrote: “In the doctrine

and worship of Mary is revealed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest” (Barth 2004, 143). In particular, he singles out Mary’s human cooperation in redemption as an outstanding example of this alleged Catholic-Marian heresy: “The Mother of God of Roman Catholic Marian dogma is simply the principle, type and essence of the human creature cooperating servilely in her own redemption on the basis of prevenient grace, and to that extent the principle, type and essence of the Church” (Barth 2004, 143).

Hence, there are no grounds today, on the one hand, to fall into uncritical euphoria and practice shallow or false versions of ecumenism and, on the other, to go against the clear indications of the Second Vatican Council and not to promote the letter and spirit of Christian unity. For there is still a long way to go (RELKM 1980, 197–228).

2. Important Documents of Ecumenical Dialogue on Mary

Analysing the documents of the Church, which were edited with ecumenical sensitivity and refer to the Blessed Virgin Mary, it is appropriate to point first to two papers of the Second Vatican Council, namely the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* of 1965. In the section on Christianity and the followers of other religions, Mary is mentioned as a model of obedience and piety. It is also necessary to point to the ecree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio* of 1964. This was another document of the Second Vatican Council focusing explicitly on ecumenism, where issues related to Mary as a common element of faith, helpful in uniting the Churches, were addressed. There are also noteworthy documents from the International Theological Commission, which often address ecumenical dialogue on Mary, such as *Mary in the Life of the Church* from 2004 (Kałużny 2012, 15–18).

Ecumenical dialogue on Mary has produced several important documents that help build ties and understanding between Christian traditions (Gajek and Pek 1993). Let us now proceed to detail the documents that are the direct fruit of this kind of dialogue. Here are some of the most important ones in chronological order as they relate to Mary:

1. The Joint Declaration on Mary, a 1988 document signed by the Catholic and Lutheran theological commissions, entitled *Mary in the Plan of Salvation*. It represents an important step in the dialogue between Catholic and Lutheran traditions regarding the role of Mary in Christian theology and life. The declaration stresses that belief in the immaculate conception and assumption of Mary is not an obstacle to Christian unity, although differences remain in the theological understanding of these dogmas.

2. The Lima Accord expresses a document signed in 1982 by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Although not directly related to Mary, the Lima Accord touches on important issues concerning the Church, sacraments and ministry. It helps build ecumenical ties and understanding in various areas, which has implications for dialogue on Mary.
3. The Commission for Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue in the United States published a joint text in 1992 titled *One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* (Anderson, Stafford, and Burgess 1992). It reveals points of convergence and divergence between the two traditions. *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VIII* is the result of 7 years of dialogue around the issue of Christ as the only mediator, the saints and Mary. The Joint Statement on Mary includes an “Introduction” and two main parts: “Part One: Issues and Perspectives” and “Part Two: Biblical and Historical Basis.” These essentially concern the role of Mary and the saints in the Church. The conclusions presented show that despite the differences in the understanding of Mary’s salvific role, the ways of invoking the intercession of the mother of Jesus and the content of the two later dogmas, there is no basis for talking about significant (Church-dividing) differences in Mariology (Rabiej 2017, 388–89).
4. In turn, the Dombes Group submitted a document entitled *Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints*, published in Paris in 1999. To Catholics, it proposed moving away from maximalist concepts by situating the last two Mariological dogmas in the appropriate hierarchy of truths of faith and shaping the Marian devotion in the spirit of the indications of the exhortation *Mariialis Cultus*. On the other hand, Lutherans were requested to give Mary a proper place in the community of believers, as she cooperated with others for the salvation of others through her active involvement. It is also proposed that Lutherans introduce Mary more widely to the liturgy (Rabiej 2017, 389).
5. Some achievements can be boasted in the area we are discussing by a Lutheran-Catholic group in Germany, which published an agreement entitled *The Church as a Community of Saints*. *The Church as a Community of Saints* of 2000 (BADBKVELKD).
6. Of the documents of the Catholic-Orthodox dialogue, it is appropriate to cite two in particular, *Going Out to Meet Mary* (2000) and *Mary in the Life of the Church* (2004). These studies emphasise the common elements of the Catholic and Orthodox faith concerning Mary but also highlight the theological and cultural differences (Paprocki 1999, 55–68). Recalling Catholic-Orthodox documents, it is also worth pointing out *Koinonia and Synodia* of 1986 or *The Sacrament of Love* of 2006, which indirectly addressed Mariological and Marian themes.
7. The ecumenical documents must also include the achievement of The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), which brings together English-speaking theologians who submitted *Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ*

- (London – New York 2005). Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches have issued a joint 43-page statement, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (the so-called Seattle Statement), on the role of the Virgin Mary in Christianity as a way to sustain ecumenical cooperation despite differences on other issues. The document was issued in Seattle, Washington, by Alexander Brunett, the local Catholic archbishop, and Peter Carnley, the Anglican archbishop of Perth, Western Australia, co-chairs of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) (ARCIC 2004; MKARK 2004, 427–74; CIACR 2004, 100–). It shows the hallmarks of ecclesiotypical Mariology, where Mary is seen in the community of followers of Jesus Christ, endowed with the grace of faith and hope. The theological arguments presented, growing out of scriptural sources, reflect the earlier work of the Dombes Group.
8. Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue documents. In recent years, there have also been documents of dialogue between the Catholic tradition and some Pentecostal Churches. The documents, such as *Mary in Dialogue* (2007), seek to find common understanding points regarding Mary and emphasise her importance as the mother of Jesus and model of faith.
 9. *Consensus and Collisions*, the 2007 Report of the International Baptist-Catholic Commission for Theological Dialogue, which discussed issues related to Mary, such as her role in salvation and her place in the practices and beliefs of different Christian traditions (discussions conducted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Baptist World Alliance).
 10. *Mary in the Context of Shared Faith and Spirituality* is a 2015 document, the product of the International Lutheran-Catholic Commission for Unity, focusing on the differences and similarities in the beliefs and practices of Lutherans and Catholics regarding Mary.
 11. It is also worth citing the Catholic work of the episcopal conferences of countries where concern for Christian unity has a long tradition, as reflected in the texts of local catechisms, such as in the Netherlands, Germany and France. Also, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) was edited with ecumenical sensitivity, where a relatively large portion of the text was devoted to Mariology (Łukaszuk 1996, 69–74). The starting point became the mystery of the incarnation. This allowed discussion of the dogmas of the immaculate conception, the *Theotokos* and the virginity of Mary (CCC 484–511). Meanwhile, the doctrine of the assumption was explained against the background of ecclesiology (CCC 963–75). A certain novelty is the insightful presentation of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary (CCC 721–26).

These documents are examples of significant writing on ecumenical dialogue about Mary. Many other valuable initiatives, publications and statements contribute to this dialogue and provide a basis for building ties between different ecclesial traditions (Galot 2005).

3. What Do Christians Have in Common Regarding Mary?

It is difficult to demonstrate shared elements regarding Mary that apply to all followers of Christ. This is due to other more serious doctrinal differences between Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Protestants. All the more so because the brothers and sisters, presenting the world of the Protestant faith, are themselves quite divided and diverse (Sisto 2013).

Even a cursory analysis of the above-mentioned documents of Christian dialogue reveals a rather diverse degree of rapprochement among the followers of the Divine Nazarene. Nevertheless, the conduct of the dialogue is a serious achievement in itself compared to the situation before Vatican II. Suffice it to recall the sad atmosphere of disqualification and stigmatisation of other Christians created among Roman Catholics by Pius XI's encyclical *Mortalium Animos* [on the promotion of true unity of 1928] or the hostility and falsification of the image of the Roman Church among Protestant brothers and sisters of the same period.

Ecumenical meetings often address issues concerning Mary, such as her virginity, immaculate conception, assumption and her role as the Mother of the Church. Many Christian traditions have different interpretations of these truths and teachings about Mary. The Catholic and some Orthodox communities recognise them as truths of faith, while some Protestant Churches have a more nuanced approach and do not accept them as binding but reject them. However, there has been some progress in ecumenical dialogue regarding Mary in recent years. Exploring the Bible and early Christian writing together, such as the Church Fathers, helps to better understand Mary's role in a historical and theological context. Studying and debating Mary can help find common ground and build ties between traditions.

Today, however, serious theological differences and disagreements exist between Christian traditions, and Mary has become a figure of interest and discussion in ecumenical dialogue. A number of models of unity have even been developed (CCCREL 1984). Let us now list at least a few key aspects regarding Mary's role in ecumenical discussions:

- a. *Common ground*: Mary is venerated to varying degrees in most Christian denominations. Although the level of reverence and theological significance attributed to Mary vary quite significantly, there is often common ground in recognising her as the mother of Jesus Christ;
- b. *Biblical basis*: ecumenical discussions begin with an examination of Mary's place and function in light of the biblical accounts. Mary's significant appearances in the New Testament, especially in the narratives of Jesus' birth in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, provide the basis for dialogue;
- c. *Doctrinal differences*: one of the main obstacles to the growth of Christian unity is differences in doctrine, e.g. the Roman Catholic Church's dogmas of

- the immaculate conception and assumption of Mary are not shared by all Christian traditions. Discussions can focus on these doctrinal differences;
- d. *Intercession and devotion*: the practice of asking for Mary's intercession in prayer, although not inherent to the Marianism of all Christians, is quite widespread, especially in the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches or the Orthodox Church. Research is therefore undertaken on the nature and purpose of intercessory prayer to Mary;
 - e. *Mary as a model*: some Christian dialogue emphasises that Mary is a model of faith and obedience to God. Her response to the angel Gabriel's message: "Let it be done to me according to your word," is seen as an example of perfect submission to God's will, which should be recognised and imitated by all Christians;
 - f. *Joint celebrations*: in some cases, ecumenical meetings and events today even include joint celebrations of Marian feasts or festivals, such as the Feast of the Annunciation or the Assumption of Mary. These events become an excellent opportunity for Christians from different traditions to come together for prayer and reflection;
 - g. *Sustained dialogue*: ecumenical dialogue on Mary is still evolving, and progress can and has been quite slow due to deep-rooted theological differences. A lack of basic knowledge about the dialogue partner is not uncommonly an obstacle. It is also necessary to highlight the difficulties arising from historical differences in mentality and emotion. However, the desire to engage in respectful conversations about Mary and her significance in the Christian faith is essential to the ecumenical movement. Nevertheless, engaging in dialogue is something irrevocable.

Mary is both a sign and an instrument of the unity that comes from the Trinity, as she has a unique relationship with each of its members. In AD 431, the ancient Christian Church defined Mary as the Mother of God because the Church wanted to protect the full divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. This title, Mother of God (or better, God-bearer), ensured that the child in Mary's womb was nothing less than fully God and fully human. However, the title Mother of God has never been, nor should it be interpreted to mean that Mary is the mother of the Trinity. Mary has a clear connection to each member of the Trinity, but she is not the mother of the Father or the Holy Spirit (Howell 2011; Pek 2000).

It is difficult to agree with the assertion that Mary is at the centre of ecumenical conversations since Christians from different Churches have quite different approaches to her. Mariology is overtaken by doctrinal issues of greater gravity, such as Christological and Ecclesiological issues. It seems that Mariological matters must be integrated into Christology and Ecclesiology, as this will make it possible to grasp the figure of Mary and her role in the totality of God's plan of salvation. From this perspective, there is a greater potential for Christian unity.

It should be noted that despite the positive attitude among some Protestant and Anglican theologians regarding Catholic and Orthodox Mariology, one should not overlook the strong opposition among the communities originating from the Reformation. As the most significant obstacles to ecumenical rapprochement in Mariology, Protestants point first to the uniqueness of Christ's mediation and the doctrine of the sovereignty of divine action (Dittrich 1998).

On the other hand, the Catholics proclaim that Christ's mediation, expressed in His omnipotence and dominion over the whole world and humanity, is represented precisely most fully through mediation in creatures. This mediation of Mary, the saints, the blessed and other believers is anchored in Christ. This mediation of creatures comes entirely from Christ and receives its effectiveness from Him. God's sovereignty in grace does not consist in reducing human beings to passive acceptance but in promoting active cooperation that engages all the resources of human personality in the work of salvation.

The role attributed to Mary, in particular, is promoting the feminine personality. This form of Mariology can be beneficial for communicating and giving credibility to the Gospel in times when great emphasis is placed on women's liberation.

Mary plays a vital role in ecumenical dialogue between different Christian traditions when ecumenism is understood correctly. Many Christian communities, such as Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant Churches, give Mary a special place as the mother of Jesus and model of faith. However, there are also differences in the theological understanding of Mary's role, which can affect dialogue between different traditions (Glaeser 2002).

In addition, ecumenical dialogue often emphasises that Mary can be a model for all Christians in terms of faith, obedience to God and participation in the work of salvation. All Christian traditions recognise the importance of Mary as the mother of Jesus and a model of womanhood. It is also essential to respect theological differences and seek common points of understanding during ecumenical dialogue. Talking and seeking agreement concerning Mary can contribute to greater unity among Christian traditions (Galot 2005).

4. Between the Unity of Christians and the Unity of the Church

It should be noted at the outset that in light of the Catholic position, we are looking for the unity of Christians since the unity of Christ's Church has not been lost. It is worth adding that Catholic doctrine points to internal (ontic) unity, which the Church will never be deprived of since it is rooted in the triune God. External unity, on the other hand, is violated, if only in the lack of full ties between the particular Churches.

The Second Vatican Council and many other Roman Catholic documents consistently proclaim that ecumenism is the pursuit of Christian unity since the Church endowed with the attribute of unity exists and persists in the Catholic Church (*UR* 4; CCC 816; 820; *UUS* 11). Hence, we must distinguish between striving for the unity of Christians and the unity of the Church, which she has not been deprived of.

Christian unity is the desire for unity among believers in Jesus Christ, regardless of differences in Christian traditions and denominations. It is the desire for all Christians to be one body of Christ, acting in love, cooperation and mutual respect. On the other hand, Church unity refers to the perfect unity of the entire Christian Church, which should be evident in its structure and organisation. It includes unity of beliefs, sacraments and hierarchy. Ecclesial unity is related to the vision of the Church as a single organism in which the various parts are united.

While related, the unity of Christians and the unity of the Church are not identical. Christian unity is the spiritual desire and aspiration for mutual understanding, reconciliation and cooperation between different Christian traditions. It is a process that takes place at the level of believers, religious leaders, theologians and others involved (Stacpoole 1982).

Ideally, the unity of Christians and the unity of the Church should complement each other. However, due to theological, cultural and historical differences, achieving complete unity is a difficult task. Therefore, the pursuit of Christian unity often focuses on finding common ground, understanding and cooperation to build a bond and mutual rapprochement despite the differences.

It is vital that both the unity of Christians and the unity of the Church be worked out and created with humility, openness and respect for other traditions while maintaining a confessional identity. Ecumenical dialogue and work on unity aim to build bonds within the body of Christianity and witness to the whole world of Christ's love and unity in His name.

Post-conciliar ecumenical dialogue has resulted in a greater emphasis on developing ecclesiotypical (minimalist) Mariology than on Christotypical (maximalist) Mariology. Hence, in recent years, it can be observed that of the two types of Mariology proposed by the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in its eighth chapter, theologians have leaned towards a minimalist presentation of the doctrine of Mary (Rabiej 2017, 381–86).

It is this minimalist attitude that has been revealed, especially among ecumenically oriented theologians. They seek sources for their reflection primarily in biblical and patristic texts. They make it possible to see Mary's role in the community of the Church of believers. Supporters of this direction propose a return to the fundamental principles of Mariology. Among them, it is worth noting the designation of Mary as "the model of the Church" (Otto Semmelroth), "the perfect representative of humanity" (Heinrich Maria Köster), "the crown of creation" (Karl Rahner, Michael Schmaus), "the Mother of salvation" (E. Schillebeeckx). These and still

other Marian titles do not question her closeness to Christ. By referring to scriptural sources and patristic thought (Irenaeus of Lyon, Ambrose), we can rediscover her connection with the community of followers of Jesus Christ. The biblical sources for these Mariological concepts are quite comprehensively discussed by Max Thurian, a Protestant theologian and a member of the ecumenical community in Taizé (Rabiej 2017, 386–92). At the same time, it is necessary to point out the dangers that emerge from such ways of approaching Mariology, which include, for example, a reductionist treatment of Marianity (Thurian 1963).

Today's pervasive global crises underscore the need for all Christians to unite as much as possible. The Catholic Church must also take the call for authentic Christian unity seriously. Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has placed great emphasis on ecumenism, both in words and actions. But how can the Church best achieve true ecumenical progress and advance genuine Christian unity in these troubled times?

Ecumenical efforts since Vatican II have generally led to fruitful forms of common prayer and fraternal dialogue between different Christian traditions, mainly by emphasising what all Christian denominations have in common. But is this enough? Can we really fulfil Jesus' ecumenical prayer "that they may all be one" (John 17:19) by only discussing what all Christians have in common? Has Mary recently not been sacrificed on the altar of ecumenism? Asks Mark Miravalle, the President of the US-based International Marian Association. Is the weakening of Mariology and Marianism not linked to the loss of Catholic ecclesial identity, sometimes at the expense of practising ecumenism at all costs?

The ancient Church called the Mother of God the "Sceptre of the Orthodox Faith," meaning that we see the true faith and meaning of Jesus Christ in the Virgin Mary. Leading the Church on earth as Pope Benedict XVI (2005–2013), Joseph Ratzinger recalled the title used for Mary in the liturgy: "Conqueror of all heresies." Mary plays a decisive role in revitalising the Catholic faith in every space where the life of the Christian faith is distorted and weakened (Ratzinger 1983).

Conclusions

The analysis of the above-cited documents of the ecumenical dialogue that the Roman Catholic side primarily conducts with other Christian denominations on Mariological issues demands a number of detailed distinctions. First, we are talking about the search for unity among Christians and not the unity of the Christian Churches. Second, Mariology and Marianism for Roman Catholics and Orthodox and Eastern Christians do not divide them as much as unite them. Third, the problems of the dialogue documents in the area of Mariology with regard, above all, to

the Catholic view and the Christian communities that grew out of the Reformation movements.

The content of the documents of ecumenical dialogue does not directly discuss the privileges of Mary, which Catholic theology has expressed in the form of Marian dogmas (the Divine Parent, the Ever-Virgin, the Sinless, the Immaculately Conceived or the assumption). Rather, we find in the texts under discussion the question of Mary's mediation and mission in the salvific plan of Jesus Christ.

A more careful analysis of dialogue documents also leads to the conclusion that there are serious discrepancies at the very theological foundations of the parties engaged in dialogue. Namely, there is a difference in the treatment of revelation (Scripture and Tradition against the principle of *sola scriptura*), the exclusive principle of *solus Christus*, the treatment of cooperation in Christ in the work of salvation, and the value of works. Therefore, it is necessary to speak of varying degrees of unity of Christians in Mariology. The unity of Catholic and Evangelical Christians on these issues has a very long way to go, on which the followers of Christ will repeatedly experience both rapprochement and mutual distancing.

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