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# Observations on the Paper by Fr. Jelly

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## OBSERVATIONS ON THE PAPER BY FR. JELLY

It is a privilege and a pleasure for me to respond to this paper by Fr. Jelly. Since the end of the Second Vatican Council, Fr. Jelly has devoted himself professionally to ecumenical questions, especially as they relate to Mariology. His expertise in these questions is reflected by the clarity and ease which marks the paper he has just read to us. His grasp of the Protestant-Roman Catholic Marian problematic has obviously been enriched and deepened by his service as a member of both the Lutheran-Roman Catholic and the Southern Baptist-Roman Catholic dialogues.

I have divided my response to the paper into two parts: 1) five questions, and 2) two invitations to further reflection.

My first question refers to a statement in your paper: "The Pope perceives fundamental agreement among the churches and ecclesial communities regarding Mary's motherhood of the Lord and her spiritual maternity in relationship to his disciples."\* I ask if this is actually the case? Is there not a continuing difficulty for many Protestants with the idea of the *Theotokos*? And even more so, is there not considerable difficulty with the idea of the spiritual motherhood on the part of the Reformation Churches?

Second question: How helpful really is it ecumenically to distinguish Mary's mediation from Christ's by describing it as "maternal"? Will Protestants perceive it as a helpful distinction? Would it not be better to speak of her "presence"—as the Pope also does—and stress the communion of saints?

Third question: You refer several times to a bridge to be built between the Catholic Church and the East, so that the

\*See p. 118 in the preceding article.

Church may “breathe with both lungs,” to use the Pope’s phrase. What new ecumenical possibilities would this create, in your opinion, for better dialogue with the Reformation Churches?

Fourth question: Towards the end of your paper, when speaking of the theological position of the East, why do you say that the East “seems to believe in the same Marian mysteries,” that “they seem to share the Catholic faith that Mary is the all holy one,” and—concerning the Assumption—that they “apparently believe in the total glorification of Mary’s human personhood”? Why these hedged affirmations, this hesitancy on your part to see that the Orthodox Church does affirm these truths about Mary?

And, finally, my fifth question: In the section that explicitly treats ecumenism, the Pope devotes only a short space to the Reformation Churches and a considerably larger space to the East. Why is the Pope so reticent to go more specifically into ecumenical questions between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformation Churches?

And now, two invitations to further reflection.

First, it seems to me ecumenically significant that the Pope chose to reflect so closely on scripture, to proceed phenomenologically without neo-scholastic terminology (perhaps this causes some pain to a Thomistic heart!), to make little mention of traditional Marian privileges and not to stress the so-called Marian dogmas, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. Would you care to reflect further on the significance, ecumenically-speaking, of this Pope’s unique approach to Marian doctrines?

And secondly, concerning the East, you quote the Pope who praises its “lyrical hymns” to Mary, its “poetic phrases” about her, its “images and icons.” It seems to me fair to say that one of the reasons the East wishes not to have Marian dogmas is that in the West, and particularly in the Roman Catholic dogmatic tradition, the East perceives not dogma but “dogmatism,” not systematic theological reflection but rationalism—that is, an inability to realize sufficiently that divine revelation is more to be imaged and symbolized than

defined and explained. To the extent that this criticism of Western Catholic theology is warranted, do you not think that a very fruitful avenue of dialogue with the East would be a greater sensitivity on our part to the limitations of dogmatic statements? Does not the East remind us that at the basis of our doctrines is divine revelation that is best responded to first in worship and in art—that, in a word, orthodoxy is first rightful praise. . . ? None of this emphasis, of course, eliminates the value of dogmatic formulations; it does, however, stress their limitations.

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