

1995

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Walter T. Brennan

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Recommended Citation

Brennan, Walter T. (1995) "Faith, Mary, Culture," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 46, Article 6.

Available at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol46/iss1/6

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FAITH, MARY, CULTURE

*Walter T. Brennan, O.S.M., Ph.D.**

Introduction

Last year, when we chose "Faith, Mary, Culture" as the topic for this annual meeting, we did not have a clear understanding of how these three words were related. We knew in a general way that they were interconnected. We had what in rhetoric is called a "topic," a place in which to think. We hoped that the conferences of this meeting would indirectly give clarity to the relation among these three terms.

Here, then, I wish to explain these three terms and clarify the way in which they are interrelated. Three reflections are proposed: 1) Faith and Culture: how theological questions arise when faith and culture are seen together; 2) Mary and Faith: how a specific question arises from the general theological problem of faith and culture, a question related to the ongoing need of a theology of Mary for the preservation of the faith; 3) Mary, Faith, and Culture: some conclusions for our time and place, derived from the general and specific theological problems presented. When we seek to understand and explain the meaning of Mary for the Christian life, we meet newly recognized challenges and problems for the life of the Church throughout the world today. We must both recognize these challenges and respond to them if we are concerned about the theology of Mary here and now.

Father Walter Brennan, O.S.M., is president of the Mariological Society of America and director of the Servite Marian Center, 3121 W. Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, IL 60612-2729.

I. FAITH AND CULTURE

Changes have occurred rapidly in every sphere of life in recent centuries. With each passing decade, we become more conscious of these changes and of the reality of change itself. We are more and more conscious of differences in time and place. Change is movement to what is different. It presumes that something stays the same and that something becomes different. The enormity and multiplicity of change and our consciousness of it have led us to recognize that change is constant and that differences are omnipresent. Change occurs within a universe becoming more unified, one in which continuity exists along with separation. Today we are conscious of the implications of change for unity in the Church, unity with its earlier ages and unity among its different cultural groups.

The changes which have occurred during the last century have given rise to two kinds of pastoral problems. Some were the result of changes occurring in Western societies, and others arose as missionaries from Europe and America met non-western societies. Examples of the latter were especially evident in liturgy and catechesis. Church meetings¹ attempted

¹In 1956, the First International Congress of Pastoral Liturgy met at Assisi. Pope Pius XII said in his allocution closing the Congress: "The present day liturgy interests itself also in a number of particular problems concerning, for example, the relation of the liturgy with the religious ideas of the world today, contemporary culture, social questions and depth psychology." Cf. *The Assisi Papers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1957), 236. In 1959, the First International Study Week on Mission and Liturgy met at Nijmegen. The editor of the papers presented, J. Hofinger, S.J., wrote that: "At its conclusion, it was more than obvious that the problems confronting the liturgical renewal demanded a more thorough and comprehensive study. This need for study is due to the great problems and difficulties confronting Liturgical Renewal which is so urgent in the missions today. But it also became apparent that those liturgical needs common to both home and mission were most typically exemplified in the mission field where, *mutatis mutandis*, they could also be most easily and effectively realized." Cf. *Liturgy and the Missions* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 1. In 1960, the First International Study Week on Missionary Catechetics was held at Eichstatt. In the Foreword to the published papers, Clifford Howell, S.J., insisted that the studies were important not only for missionaries but universally as well. Cf. *Teaching All Nations* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1961), ix.

to deal with these problems. At these meetings, the language and methods of the social sciences helped in the planning of solutions for these pastoral problems. The phenomenon of change had been studied by historians and cultural anthropologists. Historians had observed differences in epochs and tried to analyze them; anthropologists had tried to analyze the differences among various human groups. What these fields of study provided to problem-solvers, then, were better insights into what was involved in change—either change that occurred in the same group over time or change required for communicating the same message to different groups of people. “Culture”—as first used in the fields of anthropology, history and sociology—entered the vocabulary of people in the Church who were dealing with new pastoral situations throughout the world. The terms “culture” and “inculturation” began to appear regularly in theological and magisterial documents, although they were not evident there a few decades ago.²

What were the particular problems which gave rise to a new general problem evidenced in this new language? Different economic, political, and socio-cultural institutions had been emerging in the West for several centuries, yet the basic structures of society—its legal, educational, and religious structures—remained the same. There was a unity among Western nations alongside great differences. Societies changed while certain basic institutional ideals perdured. Encounters with non-Western ways of life made the people of the West aware of the differences and similarities within basic human nature. Though languages, customs and ways of thinking differed, a certain basic unity allowed for some understanding. Being unaware of the temporal changes in people’s ways of thinking

²Cf. H. Carrier, *Gospel Message and Human Cultures from Leo XIII to John Paul II*, tr. by J. Drury (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1989), 14 ff. It is interesting to note that various senses of culture derived from the history of Western civilization or from the history and anthropology of world civilizations occur even in recent documents of the magisterium, although the anthropological sense of “a distinct way of human life” is most common today. “Modern culture” or “civilization” often means “Western culture.” Each usage has to be judged in its context.

and living made the transmission of traditional insights impossible. Ignoring differences in people's ways of thinking and living in different societies made understanding, communication and respectful relationships impossible. Differences on the popular level reflected differences on the academic level. In liturgy, catechesis, missiology, the study of Scripture and theology, there were new insights which reflected the ways of thinking and living in the world. An understanding of pluralism, of personal rights, and of cultural distinctions was reflected in the expectations of persons and leaders in the Church. Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* called for a renewal of the Church in order to make the perennial faith present in new cultural circumstances.³

In the Western Church, spatial differences first received attention. Non-Western peoples neither thought nor acted in the same way as the missionaries from the West. The imposition of Western rituals and theology gave rise to problems. The Church was identified as "Western" rather than universal, or, worse, as an instrument of particular Western governments. For the Church to be truly universal (catholic), it had to rise above all cultural differences. It had to be supranational.⁴ The Gospel is not for one people, but for all peoples and persons. The Gospel is not a culture.⁵

The problems faced by Western missionaries in foreign lands—problems in liturgy, preaching, theology, and catechetics—led to the question of preserving unity in faith amid diversity of cultural expressions of faith. Two further problems arose. First, there was an awareness that Western culture was only one culture among many, and, just as any other culture, it was subject to conditions of limitation—even though so much of the temporal existence of the Church had occurred within it. Secondly, there was the recognition that a "time problem," similar to the space problem of

³See especially nos. 1-10, 21, 40, 53-54, 57.

⁴Pius XII, in his discourse for the consistory of February 20, 1946, used the word *soprannazionalità*. Cf. H. Carrier, *Vangelo e culture da Leone XIII a Giovanni Paolo II*, tr. A. Marchesi (Rome: Citta Nuova, 1987), 35.

⁵Pope Paul VI wrote that "the Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures" (*Evangeli nuntiandi*, 1975, 20).

“other cultures,” existed in Western cultural expressions of the faith. Changes in time brought about different expressions of the faith. This was evident from history and from the pastoral need to make liturgy, catechesis, theology, and secondary structures intelligible to the people of modern society. Change was necessary but so was unity within the faith. The problem that emerged was how the Western Church, a part of the universal Church, was to understand its own unity and continuity of development through time. Cultural differences had introduced a variety of differences among the churches of the West. Perhaps this was most evident in the secondary structures of the churches in the West. Many questions surfaced. What was the unifying element of the universal Church? Was it Western? Was it encultured in the non-Western culture associated with the time and place of the historical Jesus and the earliest Church? Were the Scriptural beliefs of Christians above culture or were they to be translated for meaning from culture to culture? What happened in the past? Was there any unity among the differences that had occurred in the Western churches through time?

Therefore, from the liturgical, theological, catechetical, and communication problems related to expressing universal faith in ways adapted to particular cultures, the theological problem that came into focus was the need to explore the meaning and understanding of unity in faith amid diversity of expression. Perhaps no other problem has been so often intimated or directly mentioned in the documents of the magisterium in the last three decades. Before Vatican II, the popes made official declarations about universal respect for all persons and cultures. At Vatican II, the Church declared its desire to respect the goodness of all persons and cultures and to encourage their further development—a task that was not easy. Approval of new cultural forms of expression of the faith—in liturgy or theology or catechetics—was slow in coming. What was sought was a way that unity with the past and with the various churches could be preserved, while expressions of cultural difference were encouraged. This is the problem of faith and culture.

The problem of faith and culture does not stem from any conscious rejection of the Gospel or from a lapse into atheism. Rather, it is ignorance of the Gospel which underlies that prob-

lem and which has much wider and more positive ramifications. If the faith can be expressed in living cultural forms of thought and worship, it can, as Vatican II purposed, be seen as offering something to contemporary people.⁶ The goal of relating faith and culture is a challenge now seen as present in every time and place.⁷ Relating faith and culture can be difficult, but the great benefits which come from meeting this challenge are well worth the effort.⁸

What can the Church offer to all persons of good will in every culture? Primarily, it can offer God's revealed truth, the core of tradition, embodied in the Gospels and carried on through history in the Church's teaching and liturgy. But this is no easily identifiable truth, and herein lies the most specific "problem" of faith and culture. What is the truth of faith that must be present in the various inculturations of the Church in every time and place? What truth is there that is inculturable and necessary in order to have unity through time and place—within differences of appreciation and expression, that guarantees a universal and enduring Church?

The Church's challenge, then, is to relate faith to culture. Some problems are evidence that there are deeper underlying issues. These are the current challenges for theological study. Doctrine must be studied in light of the unchangeable meaning and place it has in the Christian life and how this meaning can be ensured in various cultures. This is the underlying challenge posed by inculturation.

⁶Pope John XXIII insisted on this in his discourse at the opening of Vatican II. In his promulgation of the Catholic Catechism (*Fidei depositum*), Pope John Paul II recalled this teaching.

⁷This "dialogue" with persons of good will, outside and inside the Church (*Ecclesiam suam*, 1964), has emerged into the broad concept of "evangelization" used to express the mission of the Church. Cf. J. Dupuis, S.J., "Interreligious Dialogue in the Church's Evangelizing Mission," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, ed. R. Latourelle, tr. L. Wearne (3 vols.; New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 3:237-263. Also, *Redemptor hominis*, 12.

⁸Cf. T. E. O'Dea, "The Catholic Crisis: Second Chance for Western Christianity," in *The Religious Situation: 1968*, ed. D. R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 288-329; and H. Carrier, S.J., "The Contribution of the Council to Culture," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, ed. R. Latourelle, tr. by L. Wearne (3 vols.; New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 3:442-465.

II. FAITH AND MARY

Here we will consider the deposit of faith and the hierarchy of truths in relation to Marian theology. Is Mary a necessary part of Church doctrine in the process of inculturation? Is she part of the ecumenical dialogues and the re-evangelization of the West? Is Marian theology necessary in catechesis in every culture?

In the next section we will consider what kind of cultural expressions are desirable for inculturation of Marian theology. A certain understanding of the place of Mary within the deposit of faith and the hierarchy of truths of the faith is presumed for the juxtaposition of "faith, Mary, and culture." If faith is one and universal in its Gospel meaning—Christ's revelation to the Church, we must inquire about Mary's place in this unchangeable faith.

A. *The Hierarchy of Truths*

This phrase from Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism* (11) was used in the context of a "fraternal rivalry" in which Catholics and other Christians would be engaged in searching for a deeper understanding of revelation. In comparing doctrines with one another, we have to remember that different truths stand in varying relation to the foundation of the Christian faith.

In the context of ecumenism, this applies to the various inculturations of the Gospel occurring in the Western Church due to the rupture of unity. How can we express the Gospel and the tradition of the Church in Western culture in such a way that we can attain unity with our separated brothers and sisters? We must first agree on what the essential truths of faith are, and we must decide if Mary and the truth about her should necessarily be a part of this project? If so, then, when cultural expressions of the deposit of faith are in question, Marian theology must be part of that project. (We shall consider this matter, and the pluralism of the expressions which have thus far emanated from this project, in the next section of this paper.)

Some theologians have pointed out that there is not only a hierarchy of truths, but there are also "hierarchies" of truth and a hierarchy of order in reflecting on truths. For example, Raymond Brown notes that it is possible to understand a hierarchy of truths as a hierarchy of doctrinal truths (those which

focus on the center of the Christian mystery) or as a hierarchy of devotional (popularly pious) truths. He says that “Marian dogmas, except when primarily christological (e.g., Mary as the Mother of God), would . . . be far down the list, reflecting the application of redemptive grace within the Church to its most prominent citizen.”⁹ He compares their position to doctrines about the ordination of women or about the papacy, which are logically sequential to doctrine about God, Christ, the Spirit, the Church and ministry in general.

Marcello Zago points out that there is also a hierarchy of order among doctrines in catechesis. For example, when in dialogue with Buddhists, one would not put creation first.¹⁰ Cultural ways of thinking affect the hierarchical order of presentation of truths of faith. This is evident in the different approaches used for Jewish and Gentile audiences in the Acts of the Apostles.

While the phrase “hierarchy of truths” has been repeated many times, especially in catechetical documents and studies, it is rarely spelled out.¹¹ Even when it is, this is done indirectly

⁹Cf. R. E. Brown, S.S., *Biblical Reflections on Crises Facing the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 84, 85. He also mentions a hierarchy from the viewpoint of the self-identity of the Christian group.

¹⁰The Chinese catechism does not put creation first since it has a Confucian cultural context. Cf. “Catechesis in a Buddhist Ambient,” in *“Going, Teach . . .”: Commentary on . . . Catechesi tradendae of John Paul II*, ed. C. Bonivento (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1980), 469.

¹¹So, e.g., *The General Catechetical Directory (GCD)*, Pt. 3 (43); *Catechesi tradendae*, 29-31; *Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community* (International Council for Catechesis, 1990), 43, 67; *Doctrinal Responsibilities—Approaches to Promoting Cooperation and Resolving Misunderstandings between Bishops and Theologians* (NCCB; Washington: USCC, 1989), 21; various articles in *“Going, Teach”* (cited above), pp. 44, 93, etc. The National Catechetical Directory for the United States, *Sharing the Light of Faith* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1979), 47, quotes from the *GCD*, 43: “These truths may be grouped under four basic heads: the mystery of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Creator of all things; the mystery of Christ the incarnate Word, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and who suffered, died, and rose for our salvation; the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who is present in the Church, sanctifying it and guiding it until the glorious coming of Christ, our Savior and Judge; and the mystery of the Church, which is Christ's Mystical Body, in which the Virgin Mary holds the preeminent place.”

or in long lists of truths that differ somewhat in emphasis. There is a need to study this matter.¹²

With regard to our question—"What is the role of Marian theology in the hierarchy of truths?"—it is possible to give an indirect and direct answer. Indirectly, the place of Mary in the traditional creeds and in the liturgical tradition has always been necessary, therefore important. Directly, we can say that, with proper theological understanding, all Marian dogmas are essential to the faith as christological truths, because of the theology of the new creation. Christ, the Church, and Christian values were all part of the plan of the Creator, and Mary as Mother and Model of Christians was part of this one eternal "decree" or "plan" of the new creation of Christ.¹³

Mary is necessarily a part of the essential teachings of our faith. Her role in the mystery of Christ and the Church is fundamental to understanding our faith. She sums up and reflects the "most important doctrines of faith" (*Lumen Gentium*, 65). The inculturation of theology which is required by cultural changes in space or time must include the inculturation of the core of Marian theology (i.e., that Mary has a place in the mystery of the eternal plan of the Creator for Christ and the Church).

B. The Deposit of Faith

"Deposit of Faith" is an historical phrase. "Hierarchy of truths" is a logical phrase. The former has to do with the hier-

¹²John Long, "Catechesis in an Ecumenical Perspective," in *Going, Teach* (cited above), p. 281, calls for faculties of theology to advance understanding of this concept and its application to the understanding of faith. Furthermore, as so often seems to happen with Mary in official documents, the U.S. National Catholic Directory, after quoting from the *GCD* on the necessity of Mary in the hierarchy of truths, only speaks of her three times and, in a somewhat condescending way, treats her as the necessary pious afterthought.

¹³Cf. W. Brennan, O.S.M., "Mary in the New Creation: Rethinking Marian Theology," *Milltown Studies* 35 (Spring 1995): 113-129; R. Brown, *Biblical Exegesis and Church Doctrine* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), shows that the Christological character of Marian dogmas may also arise from the Church's reflection on the Scriptures (pp. 44-45). In both *Ineffabilis Deus* and *Munificentissimus Deus* there is reference to the eternal decree of the Creator uniting Mary to the Christ.

archy of truths throughout history. It concerns the historical and cultural expressions of the truths of the faith. Every doctrine and dogma is historically conditioned as an expression of faith. The meaning of the truth we believe in is expressed culturally in each place and time, including the Western past. What was said about the relation of faith and culture applies to Mary and faith. Marian theology has been influenced historically and culturally in various ways. Investigation of past cultural expressions of the truth of faith is necessary to express the role of Mary in faith today. Karl Rahner saw this as an imperative if we are to have a meaningful Marian theology in our day.¹⁴

This investigation has two levels, a general one and a particular one. The first deals with all statements of the faith in the past. The second concerns the statements of truth which involve Mary. First we will consider the general level, and then we will consider the specifically Marian level.

On the general level—which applies to all statements of the truths of faith, including Marian statements—the magisterium relies upon the conclusions of research by theologians. This was evident at the opening of Vatican Council II, when Pope John XXIII said that “the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another.” The *Decree on Ecumenism*, which spoke of “deficiencies in the formulation of doctrine (which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit itself of faith),” went on:

What has already been said about legitimate variety we are pleased to apply to differences in theological expressions of doctrine. In the investigation of revealed truth, East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming divine things. It is hardly surprising then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer than the other to an apt appreciation of certain aspects of a revealed mystery, or has expressed them in a clearer manner. As a result these various theological formulations are often to be considered complementary rather than conflicting.¹⁵

¹⁴Cf. His *Theological Investigations, Volume XIX: Faith and Ministry* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 209-231.

¹⁵*Decree on Ecumenism*, 17; cf. no. 4. See also, *Spiritus Domini*, 72.

Note the terms which stand in opposition: substance, manner of presentation; deposit of faith, formulation of doctrine; theological expressions, doctrine; different methods and approaches in understanding and proclaiming, divine things; apt appreciation of aspects and clearer expression, revealed mystery. *Mysterium ecclesiae* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1973) added the following contrasting notions: incomplete, fuller expressions; ancient dogmatic formulas, new expressions; same meaning, clearer and more complete presentation. This document spoke of earlier statements now considered within the broader context of faith and human knowledge.

This broader context was spelled out more clearly by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975). He wrote that "individual churches . . . have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message, and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language. . . . And the word 'language' should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense one may call anthropological or cultural. . . . their language, their signs and symbols . . . the questions they ask" (63). From that time on, the issue of inculturation in theology has been phrased in terms of Gospel meaning and cultural symbols. In fact, Pope Paul VI, in *Marialis cultus* (1974), recognized changes in time and the consequent differences in expression of Gospel meaning (nos. 32-36).

If updating and inculturation must include the theology of Mary, as we saw above, this process must include a study of the cultural symbols involved in the development of statements about Mary in the deposit of faith. We must become familiar with the cultural symbols used to express the meaning of Mary in the New Testament, in the tradition and doctrinal formulations. Only in this way can we see what that truth about Mary is, which the Church has proclaimed in a variety of ways. This is an integral part of the study of the cultural symbols used to express the truth about Christ and the Church throughout history. Only then, with a grasp of the unchanging truth and meaning about Mary, expressed in a variety of cultural symbols

and ways of doing theological reflection, will we be able to express in ways comprehensible to our culture this same truth.

While this statement seems rather simple in its assertions, it is complex and demanding. Such study has only begun and only on select topics. Contemporary studies of the New Testament and the early Church sometimes include the studies of cultural symbols, as do studies on the history of the liturgy, but few meet the academic criterion of being “anthropological” studies of cultural manners of expressing truth.¹⁶ Some works of this kind have been done in the Marian field as a start.¹⁷

Studies of the past, to discover meaning in the variety of Marian expressions and the persistence of the Gospel truth which is unchanging, must be accompanied—as the Church has insisted in magisterial documents—by studies of the contemporary cultural symbols which can express the meaning of the Gospel today. This task seems to have been started in areas of non-Western cultures in the Church more than in established Western churches. Sometimes we act as if Western theology were the only theology or there were no other acceptable expressions of the same truth in the universal church. Such an attitude sadly obviates the study necessary for a vital Mariology.

¹⁶A model study, done through studying literature and art as cultural religious symbols, is *Interpreting Cultural Symbols—Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990). The analysis of culture and of symbols is a distinct field of research that must be combined with historico-critical analysis and anthropological interpretation. Historical and anthropological research is necessary, along with philosophic and other studies. This is a complex study. Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, et al., eds., *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), esp. 1-20. The type of historical work done by Hugo Rahner or by the authors in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris: Letouzey, 1926) provides good beginning data.

¹⁷Some historical works have concentrated on the significance of symbols in the history of Marian art. Others have analyzed popular symbols in Marian devotions, e.g., L. Maldonado, *Introducción a la religiosidad popular* (Santander: Sal Terrae, 1985); R. Manselli, *Il soprannaturale e la religione popolare nel medioevo* (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1985); Pamela Berger, *The Goddess Obscured: Transformation of the Grain Protectress from Goddess to Saint* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); and *Immaculate and Powerful*, ed. by Clarissa Atkinson, et al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

III. MARY, FAITH, AND CULTURE

Does anything practical happen when we put these three words together—in light of what we have said so far? This is a typical American question and expectation. Yes, there are some conclusions which are of practical importance and related both to ecumenism and American culture.

In recent years, Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have established ecumenical relationships with the Syrian Orthodox Church and with the Coptic Orthodox Church. In the course of these undertakings, both popes have signed, together with the leaders of these churches (i.e., Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Church and Patriarch Mar Ignatius Jacob III), common declarations regarding their unity in faith.

Pope Paul VI met with Patriarch Mar Ignatius Jacob III in 1971. They signed a "Common Declaration" which stated their agreement that there was no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man "even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was professed." In 1973, he met with Pope Shenouda III and said that "past fierce disputes over doctrinal formulae overlooked the substantial agreement in the reality they were trying to express." In 1984, Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I of the Syrian Orthodox Church made a common declaration that "the confusions and schisms that occurred between their churches in the later centuries (i.e., after the Council of Nicea in 325), they realize today, in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools to express the same matter. . . . In words and life we confess the true doctrine . . . notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon." And in his letter of May 30, 1988, to Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Church, Pope John Paul II wrote a brief formula of Christological faith, agreed upon by both, which does not insist on the dogmatic formula of the Coun-

cil of Chalcedon. The words of the past, the different theological interpretations, the cultural differences between Rome and Alexandria and Antioch—three of the great centers called the Pentarchy and involved in the schism for fifteen hundred years—were now seen as not affecting the substance of faith, neither today nor in the past. Adherence to the dogmatic formula of the Council of Chalcedon was not necessary for agreement and unity in the faith.¹⁸

In the past, these churches were regarded as “monophysite” and “heretical.” The announcement from the Vatican today, which takes into account “culture” and the relation between “faith and culture,” shows that through patient dialogue “the partners found consensus in terms that express the substance of our common faith without using formulas that are redolent of past controversy.”¹⁹

Our question is why a similar understanding is not possible with some Protestants who see the role of Mary in the New Testament and Church primarily in terms of symbolic theology but who cannot agree to formulae of the definitions of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption. Both Francis Sullivan and Walter Kasper have posed this question regarding all creedal formulas of the Catholic Church. Both agree that we have not yet reached the point where this is probable today in our relationship with Protestant churches.

But, this is a possibility. And it is due to the emergence of the theological understanding of the relationship between faith and culture. As both Kasper and Sullivan say: the fundamental importance of these events (the agreements with the Coptic and Syrian Orthodox Churches) has not been sufficiently appreciated among us.²⁰

The position of Pannenberg, as commented upon by Raymond Brown, shows one area where this might happen: the meaning of the symbolic truth of Mary in the New Testament

¹⁸See the concise article of Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., “Lessons We Have Learned from the Participation of Rome in Ecumenism,” *Milltown Studies* 34 (1994): 13–30. Our quotations are from this article.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 19. Kasper’s words are cited in this article.

(something some exegetes do not understand because of their unfamiliarity with symbols).²¹

Another small step in this direction is the request already made to Rome by some Catholic theologians to remove from the dogmatic statements of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption the anathemas against those who do not accept them. It is possible for the magisterium to consider it, but patience, time, and the Spirit are necessary for any movement here. This ecumenical work, which includes cultural hermeneutics, is a kind of inculturation and is, as Anscar Chupungco reminds us, always a "risk."²²

My final observation concerns inculturation of Marian theology in the United States. Marian theology shares with all theology the responsibility to follow the Church's directives. Not only scholars in traditional theology, but also people adept in understanding popular culture must be involved in Marian theology's inculturation and updating.²³ Here is the sore point. Not much has been done to investigate the place of popular symbols in theology, especially Marian theology, as was suggested already in *Mariialis cultus* (1974). Such investigation is necessary both for liturgical and theological inculturation.

Ours is a polycultural society. What beauty might be seen if we updated and catechized the various popular symbols in Marian theology and devotion among people with European heritages (Spanish, Irish, Italian, Polish, etc.) and with Afro-American and Amer-Indian cultures. This task remains a challenge. We must do

²¹Cf. R. Brown, *Crises Facing the Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 103-108; L. Gilkey, *Catholicism Confronts Modernity: A Protestant View* (New York: Seabury, 1975), 11, 84 ff.; A. Dulles, S.J., *The Craft of Theology: From Symbol to System* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 178 ff. and *The Survival of Dogma* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), chap. 5. The ecumenical studies, *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) and *The One Mediator, the Saints, and Mary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992) provide material for the possibility of the "reformulation" or new cultural evaluation of Marian dogmas of modern times in ecumenical relations, which would follow the general ecumenical direction of *Mariialis cultus*.

²²A. Chupungco, O.S.B., *Liturgical Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity, and Catechesis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 173.

²³Ibid. Also Dulles, *Survival*, 164.

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the difficult work of inculturation to produce the great variety of beauty that could in truth be ours. Otherwise we shall consider and retain only older symbols and visions. This approach is precisely what the Church's theologians and magisterium say will prevent Mariology from coming alive for the people. Ours is both the challenge and the reward of imparting a magnificent beauty which lies before us as we consider "Faith, Mary, and Culture."