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In this issue:

- Letter from the Director* p. 2
- Presentation of Rosemary Goldie's From a Roman Window.
Five Decades: The World, The Church and the Catholic Laity*
by Donna Orsuto p. 3
- Mary in the Catholic-Assyrian Dialogue: An Assyrian Perspective*
by Mar Bawaï Soro p. 7
- Cumulative Index of the Bulletin «Centro Pro Unione» 1 (1969) — 54 (1998)*
by Daniel Sylvain p. 17

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A Center conducted by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement

Director's Desk

During the Summer we had an excellent group of students for the Summer course which took place from June 29 to July 17. For those interested in taking advantage of our three week course we have included in this issue a flyer with all of the information regarding the course. For the course this Summer we were very pleased to have welcomed Dr. Teresa Francesca Rossi, Sister Lucy Thorson, nds and Sister Roberta Cusack, osf as part of the teaching faculty.

This year is a special year for the Society of the Atonement -- it is our 100th anniversary of foundation by Father Paul Wattson and Mother Lurana White. To conclude our anniversary celebrations, the **Centro Pro Unione** will inaugurate an annual lecture in honor of the Founders of the Society of the Atonement. The first annual Lecture will be given on December 10th, 1998 by Enzo Bianchi, prior and founder of the Monastic Community of Bose (Italy). His lecture is entitled "Ecumenismo -- Profezia della vita religiosa". In addition to this lecture the Friars and Sisters of the Atonement will close with a eucharistic celebration of thanksgiving at the Sisters of the Atonement's church in Rome on December 15th. His Eminence Edward Cardinal Cassidy will be principal celebrant and homilist. The festivities will conclude at the **Centro Pro Unione** with an exceptional musical event: a violin concert presenting N. Paganini's "Twenty-four capricci" interpreted by Pasquale Farinacci. We are most grateful to our friend Maestro Serguej Diatchenko for arranging this special event.

The results of the 5 week study program we organized for the University of Uppsala is now published. Edited by Bosse Temnéus, it is entitled *The Wisdom of Rome. Report from a Field Study to Rome 1998* [Uppsala: The Swedish Institute of Missionary Research (coll. "Occasional Papers in Mission Studies", II), 1998. ISSN 1400-6545]. Speaking of publications, the acts of the International Symposium on the Petrine Ministry and the Unity of the Church we sponsored in December 1997 will be available through The Liturgical Press (Collegeville, USA). An Italian translation is published by the journal *Studi Ecumenici* (Venezia).

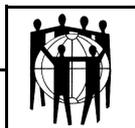
Activities to be held at the **Centro** this autumn in addition to the first Wattson/White lecture include lectures by Bishop Mar Bawai Soro (Assyrian Church of the East) on "Mary in the Catholic-Assyrian Dialogue: An Assyrian Perspective", Prof. Isaiah M. Gafni (Professor of Jewish History, the Hebrew University) on "Jewish Communities in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Leadership and Authority Structures" and by Prof. Sotirios Varnalidis (Dean of theology at the University of Thessalonica) on "Il ruolo del Patriarca Ecumenico di Costantinopoli all'interno della Chiesa Ortodossa: primato della carità e della diaconia".

In this issue we are pleased to offer two texts: the presentation of Rosemary Goldie's book entitled *From a Roman Window. Five Decades: The World, the Church and the Catholic Laity* that was made by Prof. Donna Orsuto, Directress of the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas and the Vincent Pallotti Institute and the lecture of Bishop Mar Bawai Soro on the Marian Dialogue between the Catholic and Assyrian Churches. Lastly we publish a cumulative index (by author and title) of the articles and bibliographies appearing in our Bulletin «Centro Pro Unione» since the first issue. This work was done by a confrere, Bro. Dan Sylvain, sa, during the Summer and we are most grateful for his help.

We have begun work on our web site and we hope to be able to send out our address in the Spring Bulletin. The site will give access to our library as well as to the full texts of the agreed statements of the bilateral and multilateral official dialogues. In addition we will have the revised edition of the Directory of ecumenical research and study centers.

I cannot close this letter without conveying to our readers the sad news of the death of an Affiliate of the Friars and friend of the Centro, Don Frank Pogson Doria Pamphilj on October 2, 1998. To his wife, Donna Orietta and family, on behalf of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement and the staff of the **Centro Pro Unione**, we convey our sincerest condolences.

James F. Puglisi, sa
Director





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Centro Conferences

Presentation of Rosemary Goldie's *From a Roman Window Five Decades: The World, the Church and the Catholic Laity*

by

Donna Orsuto

Professor, Institute of Spirituality, Gregorian University and Director, Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Wednesday, 27 May 1998)

From a Roman Window is a book that needed to be written and Rosemary Goldie is probably the only person who could have done it. The "Roman window" refers to her office that looks out into the square of Santa Maria in Trastevere, but as you read this book you realize that Rosemary has not been sitting in her office for the last fifty years merely admiring the view. She has often been right in the heart of the action and thus she is in a position to offer us an "inside story" of many of the changes that occurred in the Church during these years. Personal and in some sense subjective, yet scrupulously accurate and well documented, this book offers a panorama of lay participation in the church during the last fifty years. In this presentation, I will not attempt to summarize it because I hope you will sit by your own Roman window and read it yourself. Instead, I will highlight what I consider five of the main contributions that this book makes.

1. Vatican II as both a point of arrival and departure for renewal in the life of the Church

Probably the most significant contribution of this book is that it documents pre-Conciliar developments which show that the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the laity is as much a point of arrival as a point of departure. As Rosemary notes, "...the decisive contribution of Vatican II in giving a new sense of belonging and responsibility to laity did not just happen. The impression is often given that, before the Council, lay people were all passive - called only to pray, pay and obey — and that after the Council, by some miracle, they jumped into action"¹. *From a Roman Window* demonstrates how untrue that notion is.

In surveying the various congresses and international meetings leading up to the Council and following it, we see

¹ Rosemary Goldie, *From a Roman Window. Five Decades: The World, the Church and the Catholic Laity*, Blackburn: HarperCollinsReligious, 1998, 5. ISBN 1-86371-697-1. Hereafter all page references will appear in the text.

"milestones marking progress" in both the quantity and quality of lay involvement in the mission of the Church (p. 3). The First World Congress of the Lay Apostolate, in 1951, illustrating the diverse forms of lay activity and exploring openings for common action at a world level, gathered together women and men of different races and nations. Vittorino Veronese, a layman, was the initiator of the Congress and had a major influence on the laity up to and after Vatican II.

As the Congress considered what kind of lay Christians were needed for what kind of world, the participants emphasized that in order to embrace the political, social and cultural challenges of "a world becoming one", lay people needed a proper formation. The conclusions of the Congress were drafted by a commission of thirty members, mainly laity, with valuable input from Gérard Philips of Louvain and Pietro Pavan who eventually became *periti* at the Second Vatican Council.

One of the fruits of the Congress was the establishment by Pius XII of the Permanent Committee for International Congresses of the Lay Apostolate (Comitato Permanente dei Congressi Internazionali per l'Apostolato dei Laici - COPECIAL for short). If you have trouble remembering the title, be consoled. Even Pope John XXIII had problems with the name and once at a general audience he extended his warm blessing on "The Committee, the committee... (with a despairing gesture] ...it ends with laici" (p. 23). The purpose of COPECIAL was to prepare lay apostolate congresses at world, continental and regional level, to undertake studies and to gather documentation on the lay apostolate.

The secretary of COPECIAL, Vittorino Veronese was accompanied by a group of outstanding women (I am saying this not Rosemary). The original team included Maria Vittoria Donadeo (now a member of a small oriental-rite Russian monastery here in Rome), Maria Carosi (from Italian Catholic Action), Sara Alonso (from Argentina and a member of a secular institute), and Rosemary Goldie were the original

team. They were eventually joined by others. When Joseph Cardijn, the founder of the Young Christian Workers, visited COPECIAL for the first time in 1952, he had hoped to find a more impressive group than just “these women” assisting Veronese, but he cooperated nevertheless, and met along with others to evaluate the First World Congress and begin planning for the Second. The process of planning the Second Congress on lay formation raised many seminal questions about the nature of the lay apostolate, its particular form, and the relations between the Hierarchy and the laity in different fields of the apostolate. All of these questions, raised already in 1955, would find their way eventually in the debates of the Council.

During this period, Catholic laity were already living internationally and were operating within the Church and making the Church’s presence felt in society. There were numerous Catholic International Organizations like the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organization (WUCWO) which included 36 million women from 110 organizations on five continents. Some CIO’s actually date their international life from the 1920’s.

The Second World Congress on “the Laity in the Crisis of the Modern World: Responsibilities and Formation”, which took place in October 1957, gathered the fruits of regional developments and the work of theologians and other experts that were to lead into Vatican II. The challenges of secularization, urbanization, and mobility in modern life required a new style of Christian living and a universal mentality expressed in acts of justice and charity. As Rosemary notes, this world view anticipated the Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution on “The Church in the Modern World”, *Gaudium et Spes*. The emerging theology of the laity of this pre-Conciliar period aimed at a more positive definition of the laity, a more active role of the laity in the Church’s apostolate, and a greater sensitivity to the church in the world.

Between the Second and the Third World Congress, we have the Second Vatican Council where Rosemary was one of the 13 lay women appointed as auditors by Pope Paul VI. She makes no attempt to relate the Council in full, but she does bring out salient points which involved lay people and specifically women. A main point is that once the initial shock of having women present at the Council died down, they became part of the local scene and their contributions were taken seriously in the commission meetings. They were particularly involved in the discussion of Schema 13 which eventually became the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*.

One element of interest for us here in this place is Goldie’s comment that the Lay Auditors’ Conciliar experience had an ecumenical dimension. This included not only one meeting at Foyer Unitas with the wives of the Delegated Observers, but

also an unofficial and confidential meeting between Roman Catholic women, including some of the auditors, and women from the World Council of Churches in Vicarello, Bracciano. The initiative for this meeting came from Msgr. (now Cardinal) Johannes Willebrands, Secretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and from Madeleine Barot, Executive Secretary of the WCC Department for Ecumenical Action. This was the beginning of much fruitful ecumenical dialogue which would become even more open, especially in light of the Conciliar decree on Ecumenism which states “that ecumenism is the responsibility of the whole people of God (5)” (p. 85).

2. *The Ecumenical Dimension of the Third World Congress*

The second important contribution this book makes is with regard to documenting some previously unacknowledged ecumenical history. For example, the Third World Congress, which took place from 11-18 October 1967 under the title “God’s People on Man’s Journey” was not only a significant moment for the laity in the Church, but also an ecumenical event. To her credit, Rosemary has carefully documented not only the diligent planning by the small COPECIAL and CIO staffs who literally traveled all over the world to prepare for this Congress, but also its ecumenical dimension. Among the 88 ecumenical observers-consultants was Hans-Ruedi Weber who, when addressing the Congress, compared this experience with his previous one at the Second World Congress in 1957 where he was the only Protestant “disguised as a journalist” among the 2000 Catholics (he got in on a press pass through the help of the Jesuit Father Augustin Bea who eventually became the Cardinal President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity). Weber continued, “This time, we Observer-Consultants have felt almost totally at home, so much so that we speak no more about *your* Congress, but about *our* Congress... You have now accepted us fully as participants and brothers in Christ. This time, the world has provided the agenda...” (p. 104).

3. *Asking the Hard Questions*

The third contribution that Rosemary Goldie makes is that she challenges us to grapple with some of the hard questions and difficult issues which face the Post-Conciliar church. Years of activity in the Church and reflection at her Roman window enable her to ask hard questions. First, she leads us into the thorny problems surrounding the description of the laity and the meaning of ministry. Then, she challenges us to future research and exploration, especially with regard to Yves Congar’s pre-Conciliar insights on lay secularity and his post-Conciliar approach to a diversity of ministries within the Church as communion (p. 118). Third, in light of the Conciliar teaching on the lay apostolate, she warns that we

should pay attention to *Apostolicam actuositatem* V, which spells out lessons from experience about “the importance of unity and coordination among groups, always tempted to rivalry; different relationships to the hierarchy according to the nature of different groups, the supporting roles of clergy and religious...[and] the dynamic and prudent cooperation with other Christians on the basis of the ‘common heritage of the Gospel and the common duty of Christian witness’. On the basis of ‘common human values’ there can also be cooperation with ‘those who do not profess Christ’s name, but acknowledge these values’ (AA 27)” (pp. 121-122). The complexity surrounding the emergence of new movements in the Church leads her to ask what exactly we mean by the term “ecclesial” movement and to consider carefully their relationship with the local Church. She questions the inflation of charisms within the church today. She raises these questions in the context of five decades of service in the Church and experience at an international level and I think they should be taken seriously.

Involved in the Post-Conciliar commission on the Lay Apostolate (1966), Rosemary saw and experienced the inner workings that led to the creation of the *Consilium de laicis* (Council on the laity) in 1967. The aim of the *Consilium* was to work for the service and promotion of the lay apostolate, a task similar to that undertaken in earlier years by COPECIAL. As one of the two lay under-secretaries appointed, Rosemary Goldie became the first woman to have such a position in the Vatican. The wide ranging activities of the *Consilium* during these experimental years brought much theological insight. One of the most significant contributions of Rosemary Goldie at this time was her commitment to ecumenism, which she never tires to point out, is “the concern of the whole Church”. Sometimes dubbed as “Rosemary’s baby”, ecumenism became an integral dimension of the *Consilium*’s work. *From a Roman Window* also describes how the *Consilium*, after a ten year experimental period, was restructured. I will not go into that here because of lack of time, but I encourage you to read chapter 9 for more details. Her experience over the years has led her to see the value of regular Consultations with lay men and women, similar to the one organized in 1975 under the heading “Towards the Year 2000...along the Way of the Gospel” and the 1987 consultation in preparation for the Synod of Bishops on the Laity. She suggests that this sort of representative meetings “could be the best way of involving lay people in responsibility for the life and mission of the universal Church”. They would “not take the place of a department, staffed by competent lay people”, but they could be a more flexible and more open way to proceed (p. 148).

4. *Laity continent by continent*

The fourth part of this book is valuable because it shows the

breath and depth of the work of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in organizing a series of continental meetings which brought together bishops responsible for the lay apostolate, priests, religious and representative lay women and men. Held in Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Central America, and Oceania, these meetings (held from 1979-86) were important not so much for the content of the discussions but the fact that they happened and what they signified about the shared responsibility of pastors and laity of every race and culture. The ground for such consultation had already been prepared by those pioneers who had gone before. Rosemary herself had been jetting around since 1953, when she attended the First Leaders Meeting of the Apostolate in Africa. At that time she also explored the possibility of an Asian meeting for the Lay Apostolate which led her to India, Ceylon, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and even a visit down under to Australia and New Zealand.

5. *Women in the Church*

The fifth and final view from Rosemary’s Roman Window takes a look at women in the Church. Chapter eleven entitled “I am not a feminist, but...” provides a context for her approach to women’s issues. Her understanding of women is influenced by her experience in the Grail and especially by the teaching of its Jesuit founder Jacques Van Ginneken. The example of many Grail women also influenced Rosemary’s approach to women’s issues.

When speaking about women, Rosemary turns again to her ecumenical experience and describes the work of the Woman’s Ecumenical Liaison Group, which was intended to follow-up the ecumenical consultation held at Vicarello during the Council. WELG held four important meetings which dealt with three major projects. The first was intended to test the ecumenical scene through case studies of various situations. The second was a conference on the Image of Women in the Mass Media and the third was a co-sponsored meeting with SODEPAX on “Women’s Role in Peace Education”, held in Cyprus 1972.

For various reasons, including tensions due to a lack of clarity, nothing more was done with WELG after June 1972. Instead, on the Catholic Side, a Commission on Women in Church and society was set up by Paul VI in response to a recommendation from the Synod of Bishops of 1971. This Study Commission which actually started work in May 1973 consisted of twelve lay women, two women religious, one member of a Secular Institute, seven ecclesiastics and three lay men. Enrico Bartoletti, formerly Archbishop of Lucca, and General Secretary of the Italian Bishops’ Conference was the president of the commission. Rosemary aptly uses the subtitle “Clouds on the Horizon” to describe the daunting task of this Study Commission’s work in the context of the radical changes

on the role of women in the Church and society. The commission began its work in this period of great change and complexity. In this mixed group of women and men, it was difficult to find a language in which to dialogue. Many of the women who were voicing questions which emerged in feminist and ecumenical circles were not prepared to dialogue with theologians who used a traditional theological language. A major problem was that only one of the fifteen women was a theologian. Other organizational problems abounded as well which were even drawn to the attention of Paul VI. The final session, in January 1976, led to a dossier the commission would submit to the Holy Father. Though five members of the group produced a "Note of the Minority", it was decided by the assembly not to include it in the dossier, but to indicate problems that remained "open", that could not find a solution within the limits of the Commission. Unfortunately, more than ten years later in 1987, this "Minority" published this "Note" in *Pro Mundi Vita*. Taken out of context, the report offers a negative image of a group of women and men who had done useful work under difficult circumstances. We can be grateful to Rosemary for offering us a more balanced presentation of that Commission.

In her chapter on "*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, the Ordination Debate", Rosemary brings out the positive elements of the early debate on the ordination of women. First, it obliged theologians to consider complex questions that before might have seemed unanswerable or unimportant. Second, it gave impulse to the theological commitment of women to study theology. Already in 1973, when Archbishop Bartoletti presented to the Synod of Bishops the Recommendations from the Study Commission on Women, he stressed the necessity to give intelligibility to the norm that excludes women from the ministerial priesthood. Using a quote from Avery Dulles describing this period as a decade of confusion, Rosemary argues that many Catholics in good faith became convinced that the Church could overturn her earlier practice. In light of John Paul II's Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and the recent interpretation of infallibility by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, she notes:

The definitive statements issued by the Holy Father and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith must not be seen as putting an end to discussion of the questions involved. They should rather be a stimulus to the search for intelligibility. Indeed, their definitive character underlines the necessity for an overall view of the Church's ministerial activity in order to make women - religious and lay - more effectively present at all levels, up to the ordained diaconate (p. 226).

Even leaving the diaconate aside, Rosemary argues that every possibility open to lay people - including women - in the 1983 code of Canon law should be put to good use. Quoting the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, she stresses that "the *acknowledgment in theory* of the active and responsible presence of women in the Church must be *realized in practice*" (CL 51).

An attempt at intelligibility is not only a Roman Catholic challenge, but also an ecumenical one. This book offers its own non-polemical attempt at intelligibility in light of the fact that it is unlikely that the norm of women's exclusion from ministerial priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church will be changed. Rosemary Goldie argues that even if it could be changed, it would not be an enrichment for the Church. She suggests that such a change would deprive the Church, not only of a rich diversity but, more deeply of a full expression of the symbolic meaning of the Christian priesthood, as preserved in the Catholic tradition. Some may not be able to accept all of her arguments, but this attempt at intelligibility is certainly worthy of careful consideration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as we look back through Rosemary's window, we see that the fifty years that she documents have been a period of tremendous growth and progress for the laity in the Church. Granted the growth has not always been steady (sometimes as Rosemary notes it has been two steps forward and one step backwards), often it has not even been visible, and certainly it has not been as quick as one would hope. Without a doubt, there were conflicts and misunderstandings along the way, but through it all, precisely by looking back, we see God at work in the most unpredictable ways, often writing straight with very crooked lines. As we look back through Rosemary's window, we are encouraged, in the words of Pope John Paul II "to cross in hope the threshold of the third millennium".

For many of us here, Vatican II is something we read about in history books and the time before the Council seems part of a pre-historic period not far removed from the Dinosaur age. Many of the younger students here were born long after the Council and for them this book opens a window into an exciting and unexplored horizon. For some, who lived through the excitement of the Council years and the post Conciliar confusion, they may take courage from looking back through Rosemary's Roman window and seeing the developments. For all of us, we are encouraged to go forward into the next Millennium not only with tremendous hope, but also with the sort of honesty, humility and humor that is reflected in this book.



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Centro Conferences

Mary in the Catholic-Assyrian Dialogue: An Assyrian Perspective

by

Bishop Mar Bawai Soro, Assyrian Church of the East
Secretary General for the Commission of Inter-church Relations and Education Development

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Monday, 26 October 1998)

Introduction¹

The condemnation of Nestorius and his teachings at the Council of Ephesus (431) declared a fissure in the lives of our churches for centuries. Today this seemingly insurmountable theological rupture has been overcome by the “*Common Christological Declaration*” of November 1994. No longer will the cries of *Theotokos* be used as a source of division; and now the appellation *Christotokos* can finally have its proper dignity.

This centuries long antagonism between the Greco-Roman Church and the Church of the East grew out of a dispute which arose over the proper employment of Marian terminology, namely, “*Theotokos*” and “*Christotokos*”, in describing the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, it was an ecclesio-political dispute between the Sees of Alexandria and Constantinople that eventually manifested itself in the theological contention and personality clash between Cyril of Alexandria and Nestorius of Constantinople, at the Council of Ephesus (431). This dispute ignited one of the most disruptive and destructive controversies in Christendom, which spread throughout the entire Church in the Persian Empire. This horrible history indicates the importance of our subject matter and the need to treat differing views with charity and the need to seek understanding of the divergent formulations used by different peoples in different cultures and places.

As we seek to address the place of Mary in the Catholic-Assyrian Dialogue this ancient dispute is but one facet of the

rich Christian Apostolic Tradition that both churches represent. Realizing the paucity of western literature on the Mariological devotions, spirituality and liturgical life of the Church of the East, I shall endeavor to present a brief overview of this tradition, realizing the limits of this talk. The accentuation will be placed upon the distinct traditions of the Church of the East while also dealing with specific points of convergence and divergence with modern Catholic Mariology.

Introductory General Overview

In general, for the Church of the East, the implication of venerating Mary “within the limits of orthodoxy” is that no matter how or when she is venerated through her devotions, feasts and memorials, the Virgin Mother is never to be elevated above her Son, or even equated with Him (I Tim 2:5-6). The Church of the East, in and through her liturgical celebrations, proclaims God's providence as made known in the Gospel, so that the Person and works of Jesus Christ are made prominent and glorified. This emphasis is given to preserve and make clear a distinction between Mary as mediator between God and men in prayer for help and comfort, which is encouraged among the faithful, and the uniqueness of Christ's role in mediating our redemption.

The forms of veneration of the Virgin and the theological language that expresses them, though frequently similar, are not always (or necessarily) the same in East and West. Yet in spite of that, the common origins of the shared apostolic heritage are demonstrated, in that we may discern a profound affinity with the contemporary understanding of Mary in the West. Today both churches could agree on honoring Mary's relationship to God, and to us, in three ways:²

1. *Trinitarian Relationship*: Liturgy and popular piety in both

¹ This paper has been a collaborative effort. I would like to thank sincerely the Very Reverend Chorbishop M.J. Birnie (of Seattle, Washington) for the English translation of the Aramaic texts and for his overall comments. By the same token, I would like to also offer my personal gratitude to the Venerable Archdeacon Younan Y. Younan (of London, England) for verifying the relevancy and the theological authenticity of the same cited Aramaic liturgical texts from the Chaldean sources used in this paper.

This conference was co-sponsored by the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Rome Branch.

² For the Catholic position in support of the three “ways” of honoring Mary, see LG 53; and for the Assyrian position, see the Book of “*Khodra*”, “Common Prayer for the Feasts of our Lady”, vol. I, Trichur, India: Mar Narsai Press, 1962, 608-609.

Churches venerate Mary in terms and concepts that are the same as, or similar to, “*Handmaid of the Father*”, “*Mother of the Son*”, and “*Temple of the Holy Spirit*” (Lk 1:38; Lk 1:30-35).

2. *Christological Relationship*: Mary is the mother of Jesus; and, both of our traditions affirm that misunderstandings about this fact have had profound negative implications for relations between our two churches since the time of the Christological controversies of the fifth century. However, this situation has been overcome with the signing of the “Common Christological Declaration”.

3. *Ecclesiological Relationship*: According to the Gospel of John, Mary and the beloved disciple are brought together at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus defines their new relationship as “mother and son”. In this Scriptural context, Mary is seen to be forming, with John, the first Christian family — each seeing Christ in the other — thus, having a profound relationship to the rest of us, the Church (Jn 19:26-27).

I. Who is Mary for the Church of the East?

Let us now examine briefly the way the Church of the East conceptualizes Mary in her worship and the portrayal she attributes to her role in the Mystery of salvation. Regarding the spirit of devotion to the Virgin, there is little difference (except, perhaps, in emphasis) in the honor generally bestowed upon her in either the East or the West. In fact, the tradition of venerating Mary finds its origins in the Christian East, although the West has, throughout many centuries of reflection, developed its own particular theological thinking about the Mother of our Lord. However, following the axiom, *Lex Orandi Lex Credendi*, by making use of Church of the East “*Book of Prayer*”, “*Khodra*”, particularly the liturgical anthems of the Feasts of our Lady, we will be able to gain some insight into the ways this tradition honors the Blessed Mother and the practice by which its adherents pray to her.

I will now quote from the common liturgy that is celebrated in the Church of the East for three of our Lady's feasts, namely, in January, May and August, to clarify her depiction. These words are directly from the liturgy:

holy and the fount of divine holy things. She is splendid and fair and the ark of spiritual mysteries. She is renowned in virtue and holy exploits, a treasury of grace and storehouse of heavenly riches. Our lady, Mary, is more exalted and sublime than [any] name. She alone, among all the daughters of Eve is the one [whom God] chose to be a ‘Temple for the Holy Spirit’ and a ‘Mother for the Son of the Highest’. [Yes, indeed], she is the temple of the Holy Spirit and mother of the Son of

God³.

The prayers and hymns of the liturgy also venerate with the highest marks of respect Mary's intimate and active participation in the mystery of the Incarnation. These festive prayers continue as follows:

In her womb she bore fire; in her body she carried the Shekinah⁴. Within her soul the Spirit brooded, and [Mary] became, all in all, a heaven. Do not reproach me, O reader, because I have designated [Mary] a ‘heaven’. And, as I think, [Mary is] more excellent, sublime, and exalted than heaven⁵.

Furthermore, the Church of the East Fathers never tired of extolling Mary in terms that could not be applied to any other human being⁶. Among their numerous glorious epithets for her, the most significant is the title “*Second Heaven*”. The liturgical hymn expresses it this way: “From the Second Heaven, the Ever Virgin, [Christ] shone forth temporarily for our salvation”. This indicates that Mary deserves the honor of being called “*Heaven*”, since the eternal Lord of all, the Only Begotten Son of God, whose eternal dwelling-place is in Heaven, did, in the fullness of time (at the Incarnation), descend to the world and make the womb of the Virgin his dwelling-place, truly a “*Second Heaven*”. Mary is therefore named Heaven because of God's unique relationship with her, whose womb became the Sanctuary of his Son.

On the matter of Mary's *perpetual* virginity, although there is no clear reference in the New Testament, the church Fathers, as early as the fourth century, began developing this dogma — a matter of tradition that has been received in both churches, thus engendering no disagreement. Instead, it is a firm point of convergence and source of harmony between the

³ *Ibid.*, I, 608-609.

⁴ Shekinah is the Hebrew concept of divine presence; it is a word that is also used in the Aramaic Syriac literature.

⁵ *Khodra, op. cit.*, I, 609; 593.

⁶ For a similar concept in Catholic theology, see LG 66. Mary is singled out and set above all humanity, keeping in mind that Jesus Christ was human, but also God.

two sides of dialogue⁷. Moreover, it can be used as a demonstration of the universality of a doctrine as being held in all places by all people for all times.

For the Assyrian Church, the mysteries of Mary's virginal conception of Jesus and her perpetual virginity are taken in their literal sense, both theologically and pastorally, in order to avoid a mere symbolic approach to describing God's intervention in human history. The church affirms that, as guided by the Holy Spirit, the catholic and apostolic Church has, since its early formation, understood Mary's role in God's providence, and did so in such a way that conclusions about her virginity were read out of the Scriptures and interpreted in accord with the living tradition. So, in the Catholic-Assyrian dialogue, both of these teachings have been considered as points of convergence rather than divergence, since both traditions utilize biblical texts and receive the common tradition of the early Church upon which they base their acceptance. This acceptance is without any hesitation; for they have been affirmed, and are manifested in liturgical texts and in the writings of private theologians.

The New Testament texts like Matthew 1:16-25 and Luke 1:26-38 clearly show that Mary's perpetual virginity was due to the total dedication of her life to the will of the Father and to the mission of her Son⁸. In this fashion, Mary becomes for the Church of the East, as for all Christians, a figure of great spiritual significance, both as a model Christian believer to the secular world, and as an example of holiness for those of the faithful who desire to consecrate their lives to virginity and

celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom⁹.

In summary, the faith of the Church of the East in the blessed Mother is inspired by the conviction that she was the unique vehicle through whom the Father chose the Incarnation to take place. A broad synthesis of this church's liturgical and theological sources would immediately make available to us the intimate kinship between the Son of God and his Mother, which in part will lead us to discern two further miraculous occurrences. (i) *That God's grace must have preserved Mary, in a unique way, from any possibility or actuality of sin throughout her earthly life.* (ii) *At the end of her earthly life (at her death), the sinless Mary, in the totality of her being, through the redemptive act of her Son, realized the fruits of renewed instantaneously, just as believers will realize them at the Second Coming of Christ.*

This broad overview presents us with a concise foundational understanding of Mariology as viewed by the Church of the East. There are still further considerations to be entertained, specifically regarding points for dialogue, which from the surface appear as divergent teachings. Our analysis will treat three specific areas. The first area will focus upon the issues of Theotokos and Christotokos by presenting the differences and the resolution achieved by signing the Common Christological Declaration in 1994. This resolution can serve as a model for the other points in the agenda of dialogue. The second area will focus upon the dogmatic declaration of the Immaculate Conception. Finally the third area will treat the dogmatic declaration of the Assumption.

II. The Dialogue on Mary

Theotokos/Christotokos: divergent views as model for discussion

So now, let us look at a synopsis of the various factors involved in the Theotokos/Christotokos controversy. Theologically, both the Catholic Church and the Church of the East have insisted upon acknowledging the two natures, divine and

⁷ The seventh century theologian, Mar Babai the Great, in his Memras, "On the Union", stated the received tradition in the Church of Persia thus: "... he went out by the power of the Godhead which was united in him from within the womb through the bound and virginal gates of natural protection, while those natural seals, the keepers of holiness, were not destroyed, forever confirming by a token the testimony of chastity for ever", Babai the Great, *Liber de unione*, ed. A. Vaschalde, Louvain: L. Durbecq (coll. "Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores syri", 79-80) 1953 [1st ed. 1915], 188.

⁸ The text of Mt 1:25, however, is significant in the fulfillment of the Old Testament's ancient prophecy in Is 7:14.

⁹ Unlike the Latin tradition, the Church of the East's liturgical literature does not have any significant mention of Joseph, the husband of Mary. This might well be due to this church's wish to emphasize Mary's virginity before and after the birth of her Son. The Latin tradition, as influenced by St. Augustine, would agree strongly with the Assyrian Church's position but without excluding Joseph from the familial context of Mary and Jesus, for it attributes to him the role of guardian over Mary and Jesus, as the Father's instrument to protect His Son during his early years on this earth. St. Augustine states the following: "Every good of marriage was fulfilled in the parents of Christ: offspring, loyalty, and the sacrament. We recognize the offspring in our Lord Jesus Christ himself; loyalty, in that no adultery occurred; and the indissolubility because of no divorce. Only conjugal intercourse did not take place", *De nupt. et concup.* XI, 13, in PL 44, 421, cited in Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Dublin: Dominican, 1982, 234.

human, in one *Person* of Christ from the beginning of the dispute. In this they have always been in agreement. Where the differences came about was in accounting for a terminology that most fully expresses the union of those two natures in the *person* of Christ in relationship to Mary. The western Church adopted the term *Theotokos*, as articulated by the Councils of Ephesus and later as confirmed at the Council of Chalcedon (451). Meanwhile, the Church of the East continued to use the title *Christotokos* — a term of an older period that in the West was deemed inadequate for the purpose of accounting for a true *metaphysical* union of the natures.

The political isolation of the Church of the East under Persian — and later Arab, Mongol, and Turkish — rule made the resolution of this conflict almost impossible. The separation was not only ecclesial, but geographical, political, cultural, and linguistic. And, similarly, this division was greatly exacerbated from the thirteenth century on by the near destruction of the Church in the East and the loss of its educational and monastic institutions. Nonetheless, the intention behind this Marian dispute, though noble in that it was aimed at venerating and praying to the Blessed Mother aright, has led our two churches over the past 1500 years to much frustration, mutual suspicion, and discord.

As a result of this adverse condition, the image of the Church both in the East and West has been hampered, in the eyes of the non Christians, especially in the Islamic world which uses this split as polemical argument against Christianity. Throughout all these centuries, the reactions and feelings of those outside the Church, those to whom we must make our appeal to “repent and be baptized”, has, as a result, been one of scorn for us because of our lack of love for one another. They did not in the past, and do not now, *see* Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or “*Church of the East*” Assyrians; they *see* only professed *Christians*. What we aspire for them to discern in us is an image of Christ, if only “as through a glass darkly”, but this image appears to them murky because of our self-assertion.

This unfortunate situation continued up to very recent time. It wasn't until after the Vatican II Council that ecumenical relations began to improve between the two churches. On November 9, 1984, the present Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Dinkha IV, made his first official visit to the Vatican and expressed to Pope John Paul II his desire that the ancient misunderstanding be resolved between the two ecclesial bodies. It was becoming clear that both churches had long felt that the scandal of alienation had to be removed, so that the Church of Christ could present a common witness to the modern world.

In joy and hope the two leaders set in motion a process of theological dialogue aimed at bringing understanding and clarity to the issue under dispute. Between 1984-94 *five*

meetings took place between members of the Pontifical Council, then the Secretariat, for Promoting Christian Unity and representatives of the Assyrian Patriarchate, in a spirit of understanding and mutual charity¹⁰. A sincere desire on each side to understand the other's linguistic and cultural traditions and presuppositions led to the process which culminated in the setting forth of a “*Common Christological Declaration*” exactly ten years later, in November 1994. This new conformity removed mainly Christological ambiguities, which had for so long been the source of suspicion and distrust.

When Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV met for a second time and signed the Declaration on 11 November 1994, there was mutual agreement on, and reciprocal recognition of, the ancient Marian terms bearing Christological implications, “*Theotokos*” and “*Christotokos*”. The two heads of our churches declared:

[T]he same God the Word, begotten of his Father before all worlds without beginning according to his divinity, was born of a mother without a father in the last times according to his humanity. The humanity to which the Blessed Virgin Mary gave birth always was that of the Son of God himself. That is why the Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as “*the Mother of Christ our God and Savior*”. In the light of this same

¹⁰ The following three points describe the basis on which the meeting of the two traditions for dialogue has been established. They do not differ from the principles of other dialogues within the ecumenical movement. (#1) Each theological or historical position should be presented in its entirety without watering down any of its content or glossing over its substance. An agreement achieved without full and candid discussion will inevitably prove false — one which instead does harm to the unity of faith and obscures the true meaning of doctrine. (See UR 11). (#2) Because the Catholic and the Assyrian Churches have been in physical isolation from one another from their beginnings, and in disagreement over Christology for the last fifteen centuries, each of the two participants in the dialogue should have a desire to deepen its knowledge and understanding of the other. Dialogue should not only enlighten each church about the attitudes, doctrine, and practice of the other, hopefully leading to mutual understanding, collaboration and affinity, but it should be carried out in charity, as should be the case always among all followers of Christ. (#3) No member of the Mixed Committee for Theological Dialogue on either side should presume that one person or one side alone possesses all truth. (See K. Rahner & H. Vorgrimler, *Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., NY: Crossroad, 1985, 125). Every member ought to be open to the other. Each should strive to acquire a fresh perspective on every subject addressed in the mixed committee as the meetings and programs of the dialogue unfold and progress. At times, the members will even need to be seriously critical of their own tradition and genuinely anxious to enrich their understanding through the heritage of the other church, so that, they can discover in one another the Christ of their shared faith, the Christ in whom they dwell. For further commentary see A. Dulles, *The Survival of Dogma*, NY: Crossroad, 1971, 170.

faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as “the Mother of God” and also as “the Mother of Christ”. We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety¹¹.

The central piece of this Christological Accord was a mutual agreement on Marian titles. Both titles, for long centuries, have in their respective traditions been held with utmost veneration in the minds and hearts of faithful. But through coming together in dialogue and through clarifying Marian theology, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Catholic Church affirmed their unity in the faith despite past suspicions on both sides. In light of this harmony, both the Pope and the Patriarch declared that “the controversies of the past led to anathemas ... [and the] divisions brought about in this way were due in large part to misunderstanding”¹².

It was clear that by this declaration both heads of the respective churches were actually bringing to an end one of Christianity's oldest Christological conflicts and thus effectively initiating a process whose ultimate aim is to heal a wound that has persisted for more than fifteen centuries in the Church, the Body of Christ. The humility that our churches have expressed in dialogue is born out of the recognition of our part in the long-standing disunity of Christ's body, and it reflects acknowledgment on our part that we have inflicted, as well as received, wounds that the body bears.

It evidently shows that in emphasizing in a dramatic way the place that veneration for the Blessed Virgin, and recognition of her unique place in the salvation history, can have great effect in drawing together those who love her Son. For, this accord has become the starting-point for the transformation of relations between the Catholic and Assyrian-Chaldean churches.

On the Immaculate Conception of Mary

Our Lord promised the Church, not new revelations, but an ever-deeper penetration into the Deposit of Faith. This is the teaching of the Catholic Church, a teaching congenial to the thought of the Church of the East. The teaching on the Immaculate Conception, which was defined by Pope Pius IX

as dogma in 1854¹³, has been offered as a striking example of this truth. Was the concept of the Immaculate Conception so clearly present in Scripture so that without any assistance one could easily discern it? Not really! Accordingly, it is suggested that, with the Church's assistance one might come to understand that this reality is implied in the words of God to the serpent in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed”. It is suggested that the Immaculate Conception may be similarly implied in the greeting of the archangel to the Virgin Mary: “Hail full of grace” (Luke 1:28¹⁴)¹⁵. If Mary is the true subject of the prophetic pronouncement of Genesis, and she was never under the dominion of Satan, being in a perpetual state of enmity with Satan, the inference is drawn that she was immaculately conceived. Similarly, her being “full of grace” may imply, from this point of view, the grace of the Immaculate Conception. Regardless, we would still need assistance to be sure of these implications and inferences¹⁶. Let

¹³ DS 1641; “... the most blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, by a singular act of grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits granted of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stains of original sin”.

¹⁴ “And the angel went in to her and said to her, ‘Peace to you, O full of grace’” Luke 1:28, Peshitta. The rendering “highly favored”, which would render this interpretation problematic, is preferred by many exegetes, today, and the translation of the verse is therefore a matter of dispute.

¹⁵ It should be noted that there is debate about the interpretation of Genesis 3:15. Exegesis in the Church of the East usually stops at identifying the “you” as Eve and the “your seed” as humanity in general. See Isho‘dad of Merv, *Le Commentaire sur Genèse-Exode 9,32 du manuscrit (olim) Diyarbakir 22*, ed., L. Van Rompay, Louvain: E. Peeters (coll. “Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum syri”, 483-484), 1986, 42-43.

¹⁶ Even in the West, the road towards a dogmatic definition was not very smooth. Since both Scripture and the Fathers of East and West were unclear regarding Mary's immaculateness, there was room for denial. And denial came from a surprising source: St. Bernard of Clairvaux. In the twelfth century, Bernard, who was so fond of devotion to Mary, clearly denied her Immaculate Conception. Beginning with St. Bernard, then, most of the major theologians of the Middle Ages, including even St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Albert and St. Bonaventure denied the Immaculate Conception, stating that since Mary was conceived the natural way, she was not exempt from the law. The tide began to turn with the help of Duns Scotus (c. 1265-1308). According to him, the status of Immaculate Conception did not eliminate Mary's need for redemption — for only God is not in need of redemption. Yet, due to the Immaculate Conception, God redeemed Mary by preserving her immaculately from the stains of Original Sin at the moment of her conception, while for the rest of us — who are stained with Original Sin — God also redeems us, not by preservation, but by liberating us from Original Sin through Baptism. The difference between preservation and liberation respectively is the difference

¹¹ Editorial, “Common Christological Declaration between Catholic Church and Assyrian Church of the East”, *L'Osservatore Romano*, (Vatican City) 16 November 1994, weekly edition in English, 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

us now examine some prayers from the Liturgical Hours of the Church of the East used both by the Chaldeans and Assyrians for the feasts of Our Lady. Hopefully, they will shed some light on the question of the *Immaculate Conception*.

1. All the ground was dry, and [Gideon] wrung out the dregs [from] the fleece.
2. This was Mary, and much greater than this.
3. For as the fleece was dry, just so Mary was pure.
4. Lust did not entangle her, nor was she steeped in sin¹⁷.

Therefore clearly the texts cited above illustrate that Mary's freedom from sin has been extolled in the liturgies of the Church of the East and has been a part of the theological reflection of the church's Fathers from earliest times. They often spoke in glowing and sweeping terms about Mary's holiness, sinlessness, and grace.

However, it must honestly be said that the teaching of Immaculate Conception is problematic for the Church of the East, not for any reasons that could dispute the truth that Mary was preserved from sin, but exactly for the manner in which she was. This divergence in theology demands a corollary conversation concerning the meaning of "*original sin*", and of its impact upon the teaching of the Immaculate Conception. For the Church of the East, the idea that Mary was free from sin, and that therefore her conception must have been preserved from the taint of Adam's sin through the Immaculate Conception, is insignificant. Her Fathers did not believe that sin is inherent in, or a property of, the nature of man¹⁸. On the contrary, they stressed the goodness of man's nature. For them, Mary's holiness, sinlessness, and grace did not require an Immaculate Conception, but only a recognition of God's

between those who have the potentiality to sin but are preserved from it, and those who have the potentiality and do so, but are subsequently liberated from its consequences and power. Gradually the Church in the West began siding with the arguments for the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The result was that a century and a half before the definition of the Immaculate Conception, the whole western Church had come to believe the doctrine. For further reference see F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, London/NY: Oxford University Press, 1997, 3rd ed., entry for "Immaculate Conception", 692f.

¹⁷ *Khodra*, *op. cit.*, I, 594.

¹⁸ The *Synodicon Orientale*, the compilation of canon law in the Church, records this condemnation: "... it was reported in our presence that there are some ... who are doubtful in their mind concerning the true faith of orthodoxy. ... Sometimes they say that sin is implanted in nature, and some of them say that the nature of Adam was created immortal at first. (...) Again, we ... alienate from our fellowship all who hand down or say that sin is implanted in nature and that men do not sin by their own choice, and all who say that the nature of Adam was originally created immortal", J.-B. Chabot, ed., *Synodicon Orientale ou recueil des synodes nestoriens*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1902, 196, 198-199.

special preservative act. This argument finds its original formulation in Theodore of Mopsuestia and can be seen as so divergent from Augustine's own concepts, which are the basis of the two churches' subsequent theological explanations of grace.

The sixth Century Church of the East Fathers treated the subject of "original sin" in a different way which is more dynamic and personal. This theology arose from a debate between Bishops of the Church of the East and Kh'nana who was a professor from the school of Edessa, who taught that we did not have free will to choose whether or not to sin due to the fact that original sin was an inherited character of our human nature after the fall. The effects of these teaching were realized by parallel parochial and diocesan structures thus threatening the unity of the church. The Bishops countered by asserting that all men have a tendency to sin because of their perception of their own mortality and limitations, not because sin was passed down to them through the "genetic code". Sin is not inherent in man's nature, but is a consequence of choices, namely, of the exercise of will. It is a property of will, not of nature. Therefore, for them, there was no imperative that the Virgin's birth be "preserved" from Adam's sin, though it is still possible that God would preserve the Virgin from willful sin during her entire lifetime.

As we have seen from the Church of the East's liturgical texts, they venerate Mary as a sign of sanctity and grace, peace and reconciliation. That God purposely preserved her and kept her from every sin to make her more pure than all humanity is an idea, again, which is not uncongenial to us. That she therefore was made ready for the King of kings and the God of all to dwell in her would not be a matter of dispute. It is apparent that the Church of the East, in accord with the Apostolic tradition, has not stopped at ascribing to Mary a "*special holiness*" — one which may be attributed to the saints and to the righteous ones, moreover it goes beyond that ascription to extol her "*complete holiness*". If it was necessary for John the Baptist, the precursor of our Lord, to be pure and filled with the Holy Spirit, how much more would it seem necessary for Christ's Mother to possess holiness and grace?

St. Paul calls our Lord "a New Adam" — the new head of our race, who reverses the damage resulting from the sin of the first Adam. The Church of the East Fathers add that Mary shares in that work, reversing, as it were, the harm resulting from the disobedience of the first Eve, through her perfect obedience¹⁹, thereby becoming "a New Eve". Further, although sinless, holy and pure from the womb of her mother, the blessed Mother was subject to the consequences of the first fall, namely, she was a recipient of physical pain and bodily

¹⁹ "And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be for me according to your word'" (Lk 1:38).

death, and her humanity was therefore in need of the redemption her Son's death procured for all created things. Yet, God preserved Mary from sin, filling her with his grace, while for the rest of us — who are stained with sin²⁰ — we are in need of renewal *and* of liberation through Baptism.

Thus there is considerable evidence of the convergence of the truth taught by the Church of the East and by the Papal pronouncement of the Immaculate Conception. True there are distinct differences in philosophical and terminological constructs used to convey this theological and dogmatic truth. These differences can be ascribed to our human limitations and perhaps they are not totally irreconcilable, especially since both traditions hold that the sinlessness and the holiness of Mary are due to a unique preservative divine act.

On the Assumption of Mary into Heaven

Let us now consider Pope Pius XII's Dogmatic ex-Cathedra proclamation of Mary's Assumption in the year 1950²¹. Within this definition of Mary's Assumption into Heavenly Glory, there are contained three other Marian teachings, namely, the Immaculate Conception, divine motherhood and the Ever Virginity of Mary. I shall now treat only some of the prayers of the Hours that the Fathers of the Church of the East for the Feast of the "Departure" which offer liturgical proclamations and then, we will examine the relationship with the teaching of the Heavenly Assumption, as defined by Pius XII.

The first prayer used in the Assyrian Khodra states:

1. Christ, who for the honor of the repose of the Virgin Mary
2. Sent watchers from on high,
3. And they came to meet her in great dignity,
4. Which was appropriate for the holy body of his mother²².

This second prayer is used in the Chaldean Khodra, it states:

5. On the day of the departure of her soul from her pure body
6. The angels of heaven came for her honor with appropriate solemnity.
7. She was borne upon the clouds and carried by spiritual beings

²⁰ A prayer at the preparation of the host for the Eucharist proclaims concerning man's state before God "no man living is pure indeed"! Though the church has not recognized the doctrine of "original sin", it nonetheless recognizes a universal sinfulness into which all men fall by virtue of their choices.

²¹ DS 2333; " ... We pronounce, declare, and define that the dogma was revealed by God, that the Immaculate Mother of God, ever Virgin Mary, after completing her course of life upon earth, was assumed to the glory of heaven both body and soul ... ".

²² *Khodra, op. cit.*, I, 608.

8. And among the orders of heavenly beings she is ever extolled²³.

This third prayer also from the Chaldean Khodra states:

9. Angels from on high descended to honor her as they were commanded.
10. The thrones recited her glory; seraphim deemed her body blessed.
11. Cherubim sang praise with their hymns when they saw that she entered among their ranks.
12. Through her prayer there came help for all the sick at the hour of her repose.
13. She entered and flew on the clouds, and with her were companies of attendants²⁴.

If Liturgy has an important role in the development of Church teachings, then, Church of the East Fathers are very clear in the exercise of that role. Due to Mary's obedience, unique status and role within the life, ministry, passion and glorification of her Son, she is portrayed in this text as having a *unique ending* of her earthly life, namely, at the time of her death. Their description of her repose (assumption, passing, or dormition) is one of glorification by the angels and of exaltation, namely, being taken up, into heaven. However, clear terminology mentioning Mary's "body and soul", as in Pius' dogmatic definition, are not easily traceable in the liturgical tradition of the Church of the East.

But what the 13th century Father of the Church of the East, Shlimun of al-Basra, writes on this subject can be considered to complement this church's liturgical tradition and show convergence with the Catholic tradition. For Shlimun's statement makes clear how the church moves from liturgy to theology in forward action towards a deeper understanding of divine truth, already present and experienced in the various parts of the one apostolic and catholic church of Christ²⁵. In the

²³ The texts cited here are from the Khodra which is used by the Chaldean Church for the Feast of Assumption. See *Breviarium iuxta ritum syrorum orientalium id est chaldaeorum* [= "Book of Khodra"], Rome: Apud S. Congregationem "Pro Ecclesia Orientali", 1938, III, 364.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 517.

²⁵ By the end of the 13th century, the teaching of Assumption of Mary into Heaven was already strongly held in both the Catholic and the Orthodox traditions.

section cited from his work "The Book of the Bee"²⁶, Shlimun seems to be speaking of teachings that were already known and accepted by the church of his times.

1. The giving of Mary by our Lord to John the son of Zebedee.
2. He said to her, Woman, behold, your son,
3. and he said to John, Behold, your mother.
4. From that hour he took her away with him and took care of her,
5. and following the ascension of our Lord she lived twelve years.
6. The total years that she lived in the world was fifty eight years,
7. though others have said sixty-one years.
8. She was not buried in the earth, but angels transported her to Paradise
9. and angels bore away her bier.
10. All the Apostles were gathered together on the day of her death
11. and they bowed to her and were blessed by her.
12. But Thomas was in India, so an angel carried him and brought him
13. and he discovered the angels bearing her bier in the air.
14. Then they brought her bier to Thomas
15. and he bowed down and was also blessed by her²⁷.

We observe that, according to Shlimun, the object of Mary's being taken up into heaven was that she might be glorified in her total personhood, and exalted to an even more intimate relationship to the presence of God's Mystery. The tradition that Mary was not buried in the earth finds a strong affirmation here. Thus, for Shlimun, through her death, the Virgin has already reached a state of perfection where she eternally and immaculately exists beyond the limits of time and space. Furthermore, the emphasis of the apostolic witness in Shlimun's account is crucial, in that it shows that the author believed that the death and assumption of Mary was a belief that bore the seal of apostolic origin and authority.

It seems to me that both traditions affirm that an explicit mention of the assumption provides clear emphasis on the idea that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ has made

²⁶ For definite reference, see *The Book of the Bee* by Solomon of al-Basra, edited by E.A.W. Budge, Oxford: Clarendon (coll. "Anecdota Oxoniensia. Semetic series", 1,2), 1886. This author was born near Lake Van (in South-East Turkey) at the end of the 12th century and died in the year 1240. He was made the Archbishop of al-Basra during the first quarter of the 13th century. *The Book of the Bee* includes both theological and historical treatises written specifically for Solomon's friend, Narsai, the Bishop of Koni-shapour. For further details, see A. Abouna, *Adab Al-lu'gha Al-Aramia*, Beirut: Dar Al-Machreq, 1996, 395-396.

²⁷ *The Book of the Bee*, op. cit., 110f.

resurrection available for the rest of us, not as a possibility but as an actuality that subsists. And all the more here, since Mary herself was preserved from sin, the fruits of the redemption achieved by her Son on the cross were applied to her immediately without having to wait for the Judgment and Second Coming of her Son, Jesus Christ. In the mind of the Church of the East Fathers, the mystery of the Blessed Mother should be situated in relation both to Christ and to us, the Church. For them, as for the Latin Fathers, Mary is the archetype of the risen Church. I therefore hold that although we may not have the same definitive formulation of this dogma, however, our teaching and faith is clearly identical. Once again pointing to the need to allow dogmatic truths to be formulated in different words while maintaining faith in the same divinely revealed truth.

III. Four Observations on Divergence

Let us now look at the following four observations accounting for the variant development of theological approaches in general, and the Marian teachings in particular:

1. Certain theological orientations peculiar to dissimilar geographical, cultural and linguistic contexts²⁸ have shaped differently the human mind in each tradition, thus having a profound influence on an individual's understanding of God, self and the other. On the one hand, an Oriental's mind contemplates God mystically and would not venture to think of God as less than an impenetrable Mystery, one who cannot be fully comprehended, but one to whom awe and worship are unquestionably due. On the other hand, generally speaking, a Western individual's mind tends toward the analytical, and though also understanding God as a Mystery, yet he or she

²⁸ The social progress and philosophical development of each of our separate traditions may be affected by the following three factors. *Geography*: since the beginning the Common Era, the two traditions in Christendom farthest separated were the Latin tradition in the extreme West, and the Church of the East tradition in the extreme East. Due to the significant distance between their lands, almost all types of communication, especially in times of crisis, were not possible (or only barely so). *Culture*: as people in each tradition freely sought to understand the terms of their relationship with God and to effect their earthly progress, the spiritual, political, literary, social and economic aspects of their lives were developing in distinctly different ways. Thus, since the evolution of each culture was distinct, the ways in which the Christians living within each culture communicated conventional symbols and ideas were distinct. *Linguistics*: the historic language of the Catholic tradition has been Latin, while for the Church of the East it has been Aramaic (or Syriac). The fact that the former is an Indo-European language while the latter is Semitic has posed a problem of translating complex philosophical and theological ideas from one language to the other. Furthermore, a third language, Greek, was often utilized as a verbal medium to translate ideas and communicate concepts from the Latin tradition/language to the Aramaic, and vice versa.

will seek to deepen a personal understanding of God through more intense inquiry as represented in Saint Augustine's concept: *faith seeking understanding*.

2. This difference in emphasis — and the resultant conceptual differences — between the two approaches to the Mystery of God was even more enlarged after two major historical events in the lives of our two traditions: (a) the alienation of the Church of the East from the Church in the Roman Empire during the 5th century's Christological controversies, especially following the Council of Ephesus (431); (b) the 16th century division within the Church of the East which saw one segment of the Church (subsequently known as the Chaldean Catholic Church) establish full communion with the Roman See. Other non-theological factors have for centuries also played a significant role in making dialogue, rapprochement and the establishment of full communion virtually impossible, though people of good will from both sides might have wished otherwise. Thus the development of Marian dogma in the Catholic Church over this long period of isolation came to be viewed by the Church of the East as reason for suspicion and, therefore, as an obstacle to reconciliation, since such theological development had been virtually unknown in her.

3. Since the end of the 13th century, due to the affects of the Mongol invasions and the systematic eradication of many Near East cultures — including the near annihilation of the Church of the East — the faithful in today's Church of the East have, to a great extent, lost contact with their own patristic and theological tradition. The lack of any ecclesial educational institute in the church today reflects the poverty and weakness to which this church has been reduced, and suggests the main cause of the loss of continuity with that tradition. The nineteenth century introduction of Protestant missions among the Assyrian people also did much to further confuse them, especially as regards the issue of Marian teaching. Certainly, theological dialogue and reconciliation between churches of apostolic origin are pursued wisely only when all of the concerned partners in dialogue have lived with fidelity to, and understood with clarity, their own particular theological and ecclesial heritage.

4. When Popes Pius IX and Pius XII pronounced the two new Marian dogmas in 1854 and 1950, respectively, what was implied, at least from the perspective of the Orthodox and Protestant Churches, was not only a development in dogma concerning the Blessed Virgin, but the affirmation of a developed ecclesiology of papal primacy as well. As a result, one may reasonably assume that if disagreement should be prolonged, even after a dialogue has achieved satisfactory results, the real reasons for the prolonged separation may not

be related to Mariology so much as to differing conceptions of ecclesiology.

Despite these four causes of divergence, there is no doubt that, like the Catholic Church, the Church of the East firmly believes that the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of our Lord and God, was involved in a unique way in the fulfillment of the mysteries of Christ, her Son. This is why, with the rest of the early Church, both in the East and in the West, the church Fathers exalted Mary above all angels and men. They endowed her with glorious titles and profound epithets, and endorsed, within the limits of the orthodox faith, many forms of piety through which the faithful might venerate her.

In my opinion, the Assyrian Church of the East has in its liturgical and theological tradition enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that its teaching on Mary is in harmony with the *theological essence and interpretation* of the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption. I find no conflict in the way both traditions hold the Mother of our Lord in relation to the proclamation of the Gospel and the Kerygmatic preaching of the Resurrected Christ. Therefore, in the Catholic-Assyrian Dialogue, the teaching on Mary has been an aid. But even more, I am convinced that when we gather around her in veneration and prayer, we shall be blessed with her memory. And she will pray for us and for our churches as they seek communion in the name of Mary's Son.

In the light of insights such as these, when we realize that Marian teaching has not been a serious source of division, it should be clear to every believer that it is our own sinfulness and lack of charity toward one another that has transformed the holy memory of the Virgin into occasions for disputes and confrontation. Thus, we cause the Body of her Son, the Church, to be inflamed with divisiveness and a lack of Christian charity and witness in the world.

IV. Concluding Observations

It seems that the real essence of Mariology is not what and how each tradition believes concerning the Blessed Mother, but it is a question of dogmatic discussion between our two Churches. Such an exchange would implicitly involve a secondary discussion of theological hermeneutic, in which case, these dogmas are contextualized and received by the local churches seeking the restoration of full-communication. I thus shall conclude with three insights into the significance of reconsidering certain proposals that have arisen from discussions of Marian dogmas.

1. The continuous ecclesiological and cultural relevance of dogmatic expressions is increasingly seen as crucial if in fact the Assyrian Church would be asked to accept the linguistic formulation of the two Marian dogmas as a necessary condition for restoring communion with the Catholic Church.

A determinative element in the reception process of these two recent dogmas, by Assyrian Church, would be its relatedness to the inner faith of the Assyrian believer. Here a characterization is necessary to attract our attention: *the distinction between doctrine and devotion*. A critical method of approaching matters of faith should make clear to us that devotion varies from church to church, age to age, and from culture to culture, but doctrine should be stable and necessarily the same. Unless we can have a dogmatic formulation without the discrimination of space and time, from age to age, and from culture to culture then the linguistic dogmatic formulation could become a serious obstacle in ecumenical relations. Realizing that we are always bound in time and space we must allow for the diverse *formulations with a plurality of expression of the core of our Christian faith in a way that can be effective in the life of individual believers and their communities for the United Church of the future*.

2. In the course of things, the formulation and declaration of Marian dogmas have elevated Mary, in the eyes of many lay people, to such an extent that she is no longer considered, by some, a mere human being. Instead, she now approaches much more closely to the Divine than to the rest of us. This criticism can equally be applied to elements in the theologies of both the Church of the East and the Catholic Church. A more moderate approach to Mariology should, therefore, depict Mary's position as genuinely both close to God (her Son) and to the Church (to us, her sons and daughters in Christ). *A balanced approach to Mary should maintain both dimensions of her relationship, namely, the Christological and the ecclesiological; and, therefore, this should be sought for in the formulation of a Mariology for a United Church of the future*.

3. Are the two Marian Dogmas as significant as the dogmas of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation?²⁹ The answer is obviously, no! There is already a unity existing between our two theological traditions. This unity will be more precisely appreciated when truths of Christianity are weighed rather than merely enumerated. If both our traditions have for centuries held foundational belief in the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, then they can only be sure that other revealed truths may not be of the same importance, particularly for salvation. *For the sake of ecumenism, a distinction must be made between truths pertaining to the end of salvation and others related to the means*³⁰. *This is said in spite of the fact*

²⁹ See William Henn in the entry "Hierarchy of Truth", in J.A. Komonchak, M. Collins & D.A. Lane, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991, 465.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 466.

*that all truth of our faith revealed by God must be believed the same way. But, there seems to be an ecumenical consensus that for the sake of Christian unity, we need to recognize the concept of a hierarchy of truth*³¹ — *a teaching articulated at Vatican II Council in 1964. (UR 11)*

Finally, if our general agreement has been shown to exist on the level of the *essence*, namely, the content and meaning of the Apostolic faith, does it mean that also the dogmatic expressions of both Churches necessarily must be linguistically expressed the same? In this regard, as far as the MCTD is concerned, is the question of uniformity of dogmatic expression or symbolic form one of the prerequisites for restoring communion? Can the Assyrian Church of the East confess what is already preserved in her tradition concerning the Blessed Mother, without officially accepting new formulations?

May a humble recognition of our own feebleness prompt among all Christians a sense of closeness to God, and a zeal towards the faith and works required to prepare for the coming of God's Kingdom into our lives.

A Prayer

Now we stand at the door of opportunity, with the challenge of Christian love set before us. It is ours to take hold of the opportunity that the Catholic Assyrian dialogue affords us and to speak to one another as brothers seeking mutual understanding. Christ himself will surely be with us in this task until it is finished, for it is he who instituted his Church, poured out his unifying Spirit on his disciples and their followers, and prayed for their constant oneness. Our Lord has already blessed his with the unity which already exists in her confession of the Nicene faith, in her common hope of the resurrection, in the veneration of the Blessed Virgin, and in the charity she strives to demonstrate in his name, as well as in the sacraments of faith she administers in Baptism and Eucharist, and in the apostolic succession which she preserves intact. There already exists an "imperfect" unity among our churches. Therefore, let us strive, through dialogue the grace of God and the guidance of his Holy Spirit, to an ever more "perfect" unity.

³¹ As indicated earlier in this lecture, a possible hierarchy of Marian Dogmas could be established in descending priority in the following manner: (i) Theotokos/Christotokos; (ii) Virginal Conception of Jesus; (iii) Perpetual Virginity of Mary; (iv) Mary's Assumption into Heavenly Glory; (v) the Immaculate Conception.

Cumulative Index

Bulletin «Centro Pro Unione» 1 (1969) — 54 (1998)

INDEX BY AUTHOR

- Ablondi, Alberto.** La forza della Parola nel cammino ecumenico. 44 (1993) 21-25.
- Angell, Charles.** Current Activities of the Centro Pro Unione. 22 (1982) 2; 23 (1983) 2; 24 (1983) 2; 30 (1986) 2.
From the Director. 14 (1978) 3; 15 (1979) 3; 16 (1979) 2; 17 (1980) 3; 18 (1980) 2; 19 (1981) 2; 20 (1981) 2; 21 (1982) 2; 26 (1984) 2; 27 (1985) 2; 28 (1985) 2; 29 (1986) 2.
- Arns, Paulo Evaristo.** Social Questions and the Churches in Brazil. 40-41 (1991-92) 45-47.
- Beffa, Pierre.** Le Œcuménisme et les bibliothèques: Un engagement en faveur d'une recherche œcuménique vivante. 44 (1993) 16-20.
- Bent, Ans J. van der.** The Centro Pro Unione and the Ecumenical Movement. 14 (1978) 4-6.
Une ère d'œcuménisme élargi s'est ouverte. 4 (1972) 14-22.
- Brown, Douglas.** The Response to ARCIC I: The Big Questions. 40-41 (1991-1992) 41-44.
- Brusselmans, Christiane.** Christian Initiation: The Initiation of Children into the Eucharist. 13 (1978) 20-24.
- Cassidy, Edward Idris.** Il Cardinale Agostino Bea a 25 anni dalla scomparsa. 45 (1994) 3-12.
The Catholic Church and Ecumenism as We Approach the Third Christian Millennium. 39 (1991) 11-20.
The Revised Ecumenical Directory of the Catholic Church; A Valuable Instrument for Continued Ecumenical Commitment and Cooperation. 44 (1993) 26-32.
Ut Unum Sint and the Great Jubilee Year 2000. 49 (1996) 3-8.
Vatican II and Catholic Principles on Ecumenism. 50 (1996) 3-10.
- Cavalletti, Sofia.** Comparative Catechesis I: Christianity and Judaism. 13 (1978) 27-28.
- Chullikal, Anthony.** The Christian Community as Reconciler: Development of World Peace and Social Justice. 9 (1976) 5-10.
The Life and Personality of Gantama Buddha: Inspiration for the Interior Life of Buddhism. 12 (1977) 25-27.
- Colosi, Lorenzina.** La méthode dans le renouveau catéchistique: matériel et techniques. 13 (1978) 24-27.
- Comba, Aldo.** Église et société. 10 (1976) 6-8.
- Cranford, Stephen.** An Overview of Recent Bilateral Interchurch Conversations. 14 (1978) 7-33.
- Davis, Rex.** Tensions Within the Church: Parties and Polarizations. 7 (1975) 3-6.
- Dillon, William & James Puglisi.** Colloquium Internationale: Oecumenicum: "The Decree on Ecumenism - Ten Years After" - A Summary Report. 7 (1975) 19-28.
- Dubois, Marcel.** Jacques Maritain et les relations judéo-chrétiennes. 8 (1975) 3-13.
La voie intérieure dans le Judaïsme. 12 (1977) 12-25.
- Faley, Roland.** Practical Implications of Reconciliation in the Field of Social Justice. 9 (1976) 18-24.
- Fallacara, Gabriella.** L'image de femme. 11 (1977) 5-8.
- Faricy, Robert.** Realistic Ecumenism and Christian Unity. 8 (1975) 21-26.
- Findlow, Irina.** La devozione alla Madonna nella Chiesa Ortodossa. 4 (1972) 33-35.
- Fisher, Michael.** Franciscan Community Life in the Anglican Church. 4 (1972) 27-28.
- Franzoni, Giovanni B.** Tensions et polarisations dans l'Église. 7 (1975) 6-10.
- Froelicher, Mary Peter.** A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Dialogues. Seventh Supplement. 40-41 (1991-1992) 3-35.
Eighth Supplement. 43 (1993) 32-62.
Ninth Supplement. 45 (1994) 27-56.

- Tenth Supplement. 47 (1995) 8-44.
 Eleventh Supplement. 49 (1996) 9-37.
 Twelfth Supplement. 51 (1997) 10-39.
- Froelicher, Mary Peter & Loredana Nepi.** Thirteenth Supplement, 53 (1998) 3-37.
- Fuchs, Lorelei F.** The Reading of Ecumenical Texts. 46 (1994) 3-5.
- Fujihara, Fidelis.** Some Thoughts on Christian Identity in the Context of the Ecumenical and Interreligious Situation in Japan. 4 (1972) 19-22.
- Garijo-Guëmbe, Miguel.** Catechesis and Liberty: The Relation between Evangelization and Justice-Liberty. A Problem of Fundamental Theology. 13 (1978) 33-45.
- Gaspar, Diogo de.** Why Is There a *Third World* When There Should Only Be *One World*? The Problem of Exploitation. 9 (1976) 3-5.
- Gassmann, Günther.** Bilateral Conversations - Problems and Possibilities. 4 (1972) 8-14.
 The Search for Christian Unity and Common Moral Orientations: Three Case Studies. 51 (1997) 3-9.
 Towards the Common Confession of the Apostolic Faith; An Ecumenical Investigation into the Fundamentals of the Faith. 11 (1977) 38-44.
- Gerdes, Egon W.** Ecumenical Spirituality: A Protestant Perspective. 5 (1973) 31-35.
- Giorgi, Sante di.** The Church, People of God: Not a Perfect Society But Koinonia in Christ. 8 (1975) 26-33.
- Graves, Charles.** Conference on the IOB (International Ecumenical Bibliography). 6 (1974) 3-6 (eng), 6-10 (fr).
- Greenacre, R.T.** Diversity in Unity: A Problem for Anglicans. 39 (1991) 4-10.
- Häring, Bernard.** Teologia morale: un soggetto per il dialogo interconfessionale. 2 (1970) 5-7 (it), 9-11 (eng).
- Henn, William.** Santiago de Compostela's Vision of Koinonia in Faith. 45 (1994) 13-20.
- Hoekendijk, Hans.** About Structures and Ministries. 2 (1970) 15-19.
- Horgan, Thaddeus.** La prière: force interne pour l'Unité des chrétiens. 5 (1973) 28-31.
- Houtepen, Anton W.J.** The Faith of the Church Through the Ages: Ecumenism and Hermeneutics. 44 (1993) 3-15.
- Hurley, Michael.** Christian Initiation: Baptism in Ecumenical Perspective. 13 (1978) 9-17.
- Joos, André.** The Ecumenical Way: A Spiritual Sign for the Church Today. 9 (1976) 10-18.
 Is There an Ecumenical Dimension to the Holy Year? 6 (1974) 13-18.
- Kilmartin, Edward J.** A Catholic Response to Lima 1982. 27 (1985) 8-16.
- Kinnamon, Michael.** The Emerging Consensus on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. 23, (1983) 3-24.
- Komonchak, Joseph A.** The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Preparation of Vatican II. 50 (1996) 11-17.
- Legrand, Hervé.** Le dialogue catholique-orthodoxe; quelques enjeux ecclésiologiques de la crise actuelle autour des Églises unies. 43 (1993) 3-16.
- Lescrauwaet, J.F.** Trends in Theological Education. 3 (1971) 7-10.
- Long, John F.** Catechesis in Ecumenical Perspective. 13 (1978) 3-9.
- Mackie, Steven G.** Ministry in Protestant Local Communities. Recent Trends in Theology and Practice, with Special Reference to the Third World. 3 (1971) 15-20.
- Mallon, Elias.** The Cosmic Powers and Reconciliation: Phil 2:6-11, Col 1:15-20, and Eph 1:3-14. 6 (1974) 18-22 (eng), 22-26 (fr).
- Mancini, Italo.** Convergences dans le dialogue chrétien-marxiste. 8 (1975) 13-21.
- Marafini, G.** Éléments d'une mentalité œcuménique - résumé. 1 (1969) 28-29 (fr), 29 (eng).
- Mascall, Eric.** The Canterbury Statement, 1973: An Anglican Comment. 6 (1974) 11-13.
- Mbiti, John.** The Theology of Liberation in South Africa. 10 (1976) 3-6.
- McGinn, Daniel.** Non-Christian Faith and Theology in our Universities. 4 (1972) 28-33.
- McMorrow, Kevin.** From the Director. 31-32 (1987) 2, 45; 37 (1990) 2; 38 (1990) 2; 39 (1991) 3.
- Meyer, Harding.** The Augsburg Confession as a Catholic and Lutheran Confession of Faith: A Way Towards Christian

- Unity? 18 (1980) 3-13.
- Moltmann, Jürgen.** The Image of God and Human Rights. 11 (1977) 15-22.
- Murphy, Francis X.** The Ecumenical Meaning of the Recent Synod of Bishops. 2 (1970) 11-15 (eng), 21-23 (fr).
- Nasr, Seyyed Hossein.** The Interior Life in Islam. 12 (1977) 37-41.
- Nelson, J. Robert.** Convergence - Resurgence - Emergence: Three Lectures. 1 (1969) 29-36 (eng), 36-42 (fr).
- Nepi, Loredana & Mary Peter Froelicher.** A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Dialogues. Thirteenth Supplement. 53 (1998) 3-37.
- Neunheuser, Burkhard.** Christian Initiation: Confirmation. 13 (1978) 17-20.
- O'Collins, Gerald.** The Fearful Silence of Three Women. 33 (1988) 3-8, 23.
- O'Leary, Paul.** New Testament Foundations for Primacy. 30 (1986) 44-51.
- Orsuto, Donna.** Presentation of Rosemary Goldie's *From a Roman Window. Five Decades: The World, The Church and the Catholic Laity*. 54 (1998) 3-6.
- Polya, La vie intérieure dans le Bouddhisme.** 12 (1977) 27-33.
- Puglisi, James F. & William Dillon.** Colloquium Internationale: Oecumenicum. "The Decree on Ecumenism - Ten Years After". A Summary Report. 7 (1975) 19-28.
- Puglisi, James F. & Sever Voicu.** A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues. First Supplement. 28 (1985) 3-37; Second Supplement. 30 (1986) 3-43.
- Puglisi, James F.** A Continuing Bibliography for the Study of Interchurch Dialogues. 15 (1979) 3-24; 17 (1980) 3-29; 19 (1981) 3-21; 21 (1982) 3-32; 23 (1983) 3-24; 25 (1984) 9-31.
Director's Desk. 40-41 (1991-1992) 2; 42 (1992) 2; 43 (1993) 2; 44 (1993) 2; 45 (1994) 2; 46 (1994) 2; 47 (1995) 2; 48 (1995) 2; 49 (1996) 2; 50 (1996) 2; 51 (1997) 2; 52 (1997) 2; 53 (1998) 2; 54 (1998) 2.
L'homme: un aperçu. 11 (1977) 3-5.
Le radici sono nell'eterno. Il rinnovamento, dono del giubileo. 52 (1997) 18-21.
On the Path to Christian Unity: Will Words Alone Suffice? 50 (1996) 18-23.
- Quattrucci, Alberto.** Questioni ecumeniche sulla giustizia, la pace e la salvaguardia della creazione. 48 (1995) 15-21.
- Raiser, Konrad.** Thirty Years in the Service of the Ecumenical Movement: The Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. 48 (1995) 3-8.
- Ramachandra, Major.** Comparative Catechesis: Catechesis in Hinduism. 13 (1978) 28-33.
Interior Way of Hinduism. 12 (1977) 4-11.
- Ricca, Paolo.** Liberation, Salvation and Developing Nations. 10 (1976) 8-11.
- Rinaldi, Bonaventura.** To Evangelize the Poor and Liberate the Oppressed. 10 (1976) 15-20.
- Riva, Clemente.** Il Sinodo romano e l'ecumenismo. 42 (1992) 6-9.
- Roberson, Ronald G.** Catholic-Orthodox Relations in Post-Communist Europe: Ghosts from the Past and Challenges for the Future. 43 (1993) 17-31.
- Rötting, Gerhard Jean.** La vita di fraternità oggi. 5 (1973) 22-27.
- Rosalen, Ennio.** L'insegnamento della religione e la catechesi in prospettiva ecumenica. 46 (1994) 6-21.
- Rossi, Teresa Francesca.** All'ombra del "Botafumeiro": la "koinonia" delle Chiese Cristiane. 45 (1994) 21-26.
- Savary, Louis M.** Man and His World. 11 (1977) 8-15.
- Segre, Augusto.** Alliance libératrice de Dieu avec l'homme. 10 (1976) 11-15.
- Shih, Joseph.** The Interior Way in Taoism. 12 (1977) 33-37.
- Smythe, Harry Reynolds.** The Canterbury Statement, 1973: A Comment. 6 (1974) 10-11.
Some Notes Toward the Definition of the Office of Bishop in the Church of God. 3 (1971) 20-25.
- Soro, Mar Bawai.** The Church: A Reconciled Community through the Eucharist? 52, (1997) 11-17.
Mary in the Catholic—Assyrian Dialogue: An Assyrian Perspective. 54 (1998) 7-16.
- Spidlik, Thomas.** Le cœur de l'homme dans la spiritualité orthodoxe. 12 (1977) 3-4.

- Spinks, Bryan D.** Anglican Liturgy: Present State and Some Current Projects in the Church of England. 42 (1992) 3-5.
- Stewart, Richard.** Reception: What Do the Churches Do with Ecumenical Agreements? 25 (1984) 2-8.
- Stransky, Thomas.** Protestant and Catholic Fundamentalists. A Case Study: Political Zionism and the State of Israel. 52 (1997) 3-10.
- Sullivan, Emmanuel.** Le mouvement de Pentecôte peut-il renouveler les Églises? 5, (1973) 4-16.
- Sullivan, Francis A.** The Significance of Vatican II's Decision to Say of the Church of Christ Not That It "Is" but that It "Subsists in" the Roman Catholic Church. 29 (1986) 3-8.
The Vatican Response to ARCIC I. 40-41 (1991-92) 36-41.
- Swidler, Leonard.** The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue. 24 (1983) 10-18.
- Sylvain, Daniel.** Cumulative Index. 54 (1998) 17-25.
- Thils, Gustav.** Uniformité et pluriformité du message chrétien. 2 (1970) 23-32.
- Thomas, Ralph.** Grass Roots Ecumenism in America. 1 (1969) 27 (eng), 27-28 (fr).
- Thurian, Max.** The Ministry of Unity of the Bishop of Rome to the Whole Church. 29 (1986) 9-14.
- Vercruyse, Jos E.** Luther's Theology of the Cross: Its Relevance for Ecumenism. 35 (1989) 2-11, 19.
Questionnaire on the Teaching of Ecumenics: An Evaluation of the Responses. 46, (1994) 22-24.
- Vikström, John.** The Porvoo Common Statement from the Lutheran Point of View and the Statement's Significance for the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue. 47 (1995) 3-7.
- Voicu, Sever & James Puglisi.** A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues. First Supplement. 28 (1985) 3-37; Second Supplement. 30 (1986) 3-43.
- Voicu, Sever.** A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues. Third Supplement. 31-32 (1987) 3-47; Fourth Supplement. 34 (1988) 2-51; Fifth Supplement. 36 (1989) 2-43; Sixth Supplement. 38 (1990) 3-30.
Ecumenical Dialogues: Bibliographical Problems and Forthcoming Publications. 22 (1982) 10-14.
- Wachter, P. Christophe von.** La testimonianza comune e il servizio misto di Sodepax. 5 (1973) 16-19.
- Wainwright, Geoffrey.** Do Methodists (Think They) Stand in the Apostolic Tradition? 48 (1995) 9-14.
The Eucharist as an Ecumenical Sacrament of Reconciliation and Renewal. 7 (1975) 10-19.
- Werblowski, Zwi.** Gerusalemme città santa di tre religioni. 9 (1976) 24-32.
- Willebrands, Johannes.** The Ecumenical Dialogue and its Reception. 27 (1985) 3-8.
La problématique œcuménique actuelle. 1 (1969) 13-20 (fr), 20-27 (eng).
- Williams, Bruce.** Ethics: Ecumenical Stumbling Block? 37 (1990) 3-10.
- Zizioulas, John.** The Theological Problem of "Reception". 26 (1984) 3-6.

INDEX BY TITLE: ARTICLES

- About Structures and Ministries.** Hoedendijk, Hans. 2 (1970) 15-19.
- Alliance libératrice de Dieu avec l'homme.** Segre, Augusto. 10 (1976) 11-15.
- Anglican Liturgy: Present State and Some Current Projects in the Church of England.** Spinks, Bryan D. 42 (1992) 3-5.
- Attività dell'anno.** 2 (1970) 3 (it), 7-8 (eng), 19-20 (fr); 3 (1971) 3 (eng), 3 (fr), 4 (it); 4 (1972) 3-4 (it), 4-5 (eng), 5-6 (fr); 5 (1973) 3 (it), 3-4 (eng), 4 (fr)
- The Augsburg Confession as a Catholic and Lutheran Confession of Faith: A Way Towards Christian Unity?** Meyer, Harding. 18 (1980) 3-13.
- A Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues.** Puglisi, James & Sever Voicu. First Supplement. 28 (1985) 3-37; Second Supplement. 30 (1986) 3-43. Voicu, Sever. Third Supplement. 31-32 (1987) 3-47; Fourth Supplement. 34 (1988) 2-51; Fifth Supplement. 36 (1989) 2-43; Sixth Supplement. 38 (1990) 3-30. Froelicher, Mary Peter. Seventh Supplement. 40-41 (1991-1992) 3-35; Eighth Supplement. 43 (1993) 32-62; Ninth Supplement. 45 (1994) 27-56; Tenth Supplement. 47 (1995) 8-44; Eleventh Supplement, 49 (1996) 9-37; Twelfth Supplement. 51 (1997) 10-39; Froelicher, Mary Peter & Loredana Nepi. Thirteenth Supplement, 53 (1998) 3-37.
- Bilateral Conversations - Problems and Possibilities.** Gassmann, Günther. 4 (1972) 8-14.
- Books received.** 10 (1976) 20; 11 (1977) 22; 12 (1977) 41; 13 (1978) 45-46; 14 (1978) 34-38; 18 (1980) 14-18; 20 (1981) 44-52; 22 (1982) 15-23; 24 (1983) 10-18; 27 (1985) 17-22; 29 (1986) 15-20; 33 (1988) 9-23; 35 (1989) 12-19; 37 (1990) 11-16; 39 (1991) 21-27; 42 (1992) 10-20.
- Una breve veglia biblica per l'unità, "Vi Do Un Comandamento Nuovo".** 4 (1972) 35 (it), 35-36 (eng).
- The Canterbury Statement, 1973: A Comment.** Smythe, Harry Reynolds. 6 (1974) 10-11.
- The Canterbury Statement, 1973: An Anglican Comment.** Mascall, Eric. 6 (1974) 11-13.
- Il Cardinale Agostino Bea a 25 anni dalla scomparsa.** Cassidy, Edward Idris. 45 (1994) 3-12.
- Catechesis and Liberty: The Relation between Evangelization and Justice-Liberty. A Problem of Fundamental Theology.** Garijo-Guëmbé, Miguel. 13 (1978) 33-45.
- Catechesis in Ecumenical Perspective.** Long, John F. 13 (1978) 3-9.
- The Catholic Church and Ecumenism as We Approach the Third Christian Millennium.** Cassidy, Edward Idris. 39 (1991) 11-20.
- Catholic-Orthodox Relations in Post-Communist Europe: Ghosts from the Past and Challenges for the Future.** Roberson, Ronald G. 43 (1993) 17-31.
- A Catholic Response to Lima 1982** Kilmartin, Edward J. 27 (1985) 8-16.
- Centro Pro Unione - Brief History and Purpose.** 1 (1969) 2-4 (it), 4-6 (fr), 6-8 (eng); 2 (1970) 3 (it), 7-8 (eng), 19-20 (fr); 3 (1971) 3 (eng, fr, it); 4 (1972) 28 (it, eng, fr); 5 (1973) 2 (it, eng, fr); 6 (1974) 27 (eng, fr); 7 (1975) 29 (eng, fr); 8 (1975) 2 (eng, fr); 9 (1976) 2 (eng, fr); 10 (1976) 2 (eng, fr); 11 (1977) 2 (eng, fr); 12 (1977) 2 (eng, fr); 13 (1978) 2 (eng, fr); 14 (1978) 2 (eng); 15 (1979) 24; 16 (1979) 2; 18 (1980) 2
- The Centro Pro Unione and the Ecumenical Movement.** Bent, Ans J. van der. 14 (1978) 4-6.
- Centro Pro Unione: primo anno di attività.** 1 (1969) 8-10 (it), 10-11 (fr), 11-12 (eng).
- Changes and Additions to the Ecumenical Directory: Ecumenism around the World.** 4 (1972) 37-38.
- The Christian Community as Reconciler: Development of World Peace and Social Justice.** Chullikal, Anthony. 9 (1976) 5-10.
- Christian Initiation: Baptism in Ecumenical Perspective.** Hurley, Michael. 13 (1978) 9-17.
- Christian Initiation: Confirmation.** Neunheuser, Burkhard. 13 (1978) 17-20.
- Christian Initiation: The Initiation of Children into the Eucharist.** Brusselmans, Christiane. 13 (1978) 20-24.
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