



**Paper by
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On the ARCIC Statement; Mary- Grace and Hope in Christ .**

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The Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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MARY: GRACE AND HOPE IN CHRIST

THE SEATTLE STATEMENT IN BRIEF

This Agreed Statement on the place of Mary in the life and doctrine of the Church expresses the common faith about Mary the Mother of the Lord as held by the Anglican and Roman Catholic Communions. It is based on 'a careful ecclesial and ecumenical reading of the Scriptures, in the light of the ancient common traditions' aimed at elucidating 'the place of Mary in the economy of hope and grace'.

It reaffirms and extends the agreements reached previously in *Authority in the Church II*:

- that any interpretation of the role of Mary must not obscure the unique mediation of Christ;
- that any consideration of Mary must be linked with the doctrines of Christ and the Church;
- that we recognize the Blessed Virgin Mary as the *Theotokos*, the mother of God incarnate, and so observe her festivals and accord her honour among the saints;
- that Mary was prepared by grace to be the mother of our Redeemer, by whom she was redeemed and received into glory;
- that we recognize Mary as a model of holiness, faith, and obedience for all Christians;
- that Mary can be seen as a prophetic figure of the Church.

This Statement expresses the conviction that any understanding of these beliefs must be rooted in the written Word of God; each passage about Mary in the New Testament being interpreted in the light of the Old Covenant and Sacred Tradition.

A growing convergence has allowed a fresh approach to the questions about Mary which our two Communions require us to answer. (paras 52-57).

The Commission believes that the following agreements offer a significant advance in our consensus regarding Mary. It affirms:

- that the belief that God has taken the Blessed Virgin Mary in the fullness of her person into his glory is consonant with Scripture. (para 58);
- that in view of her vocation to be the mother of the Holy One, Christ's redeeming work reached 'back' in Mary to the depths of her being and to her earliest beginnings (para 59);
- that the teaching about Mary in the two definitions of the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception, understood within the biblical pattern of the economy of hope and grace, can be said to be consonant with the teaching of the Scriptures and the ancient common traditions (para 60);
- that this agreement, when accepted by our two Communion, would place the questions about authority which arise from the two definitions of 1854 and 1950 in a new ecumenical context (para 61-63);
- that Mary has a continuing ministry which serves the ministry of Christ, our unique mediator,
- that Mary and the saints pray for the whole Church and that the practice of asking Mary and the saints to pray for us is not communion-dividing (para 64-75).

The Commission believes that this agreement is the product of a *re-reception* by Anglicans and Roman Catholics of doctrine about Mary and points to the possibility of further harmonization, in which issues of doctrine and devotion to Mary need no longer be an obstacle to further growth in fellowship. This agreed statement is now offered to the respective church authorities for ratification.

MARY: HOPE AND GRACE IN CHRIST
SWINDON **OCTOBER 2005**

I have been asked to present a Roman Catholic response to this important Agreed Statement of the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission. The Statement begins:

‘In honouring Mary as Mother of the Lord, all generations of Anglicans and Roman Catholics have echoed the greeting of Elizabeth: Lk 1:42.

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.

Yes, we honour Mary precisely because she is *the Mother of the Lord* and the closest of all human beings to Jesus, our Saviour. n.1.

This Document is the fruit of a five year ‘study of Mary in the life and doctrine of the Church’. A previous document *Authority in the Church II* (1981) had already shown a significant level of agreement between our two traditions but there were some outstanding differences yet to be considered, in particular the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. n.2

Having a special interest in Marian theology, I eagerly awaited this publication and now that I have had a chance to study it I am impressed by the depth and breadth of its scholarship. n.3.

When we examine the doctrines of the Church there are three questions to be asked:

What do the scriptures say?

What does the Church say?

What do the People of God say?

What do the Scriptures say? Part A, n.6-30

All doctrine must have a basis in scripture as interpreted by the Church whether it be explicit as for the virginal conception of Jesus, or implicit

as in the case of the Immaculate Conception where it only becomes clear after long reflection that a certain text supports a concept that has developed over time, e.g. Romans 8:28-30 which I will explain later.

In this document we find that the Commission have made a deep study of the Marian texts and have come up with some interesting insights.

What does the Church say? Part B, n. 31-51

All doctrine must be supported by *Sacred Tradition*. The scriptures themselves arose out of an oral tradition. The Catholic Church teaches that ‘tradition and scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church.’ DV. n.10. This corrects the notion of *scriptura sola* as formulated by the Reformers of the 16th century.

From its beginnings ARCIC has engaged in a ‘serious dialogue . . . founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions’.

The Common Declaration,

Pope Paul VI and Abp of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey , 1966.

They gave us a very fine exposition of the nature of Sacred Tradition in a previous report; *The Gift of Authority* [1999 n.14-31] and continue to explore our ‘ancient common tradition’ in Part B of this document highlighting essential themes such as the debate about the nature and personhood of Christ, Mary as the New Eve, Mary and the Church, her holiness, her virginity, and devotion to Mary, to mention just a few.

Tradition with a capital ‘T’ means the apostolic deposit of faith as interpreted by the teaching of the Fathers, as found in the Creeds, the formal statements of Ecumenical Councils, the ordinary collective teaching of the bishops in union with the pope, and specific papal teaching.

What do the People of God say? n.62, 73,

All true doctrine should be seen to have been *received* by the people of God.

Here we look at the *Liturgy of the Church* and *popular devotion* on the principle of *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, which may be interpreted loosely as *we pray as we believe*. I will not be developing this aspect today.

In *The Gift of Authority* ARCIC considered the concept of *reception* and concluded that “when the Church receives and acknowledges what it recognises as a true expression of the Tradition, once for all delivered to the Apostles, this reception is an act both of faithfulness and freedom.”

The Church has a responsibility to transmit to succeeding generations the truths it has received from the Apostles, but over time “some element of the apostolic Tradition may be forgotten, neglected or abused. In such situations, fresh recourse to Scripture and Tradition recalls God’s revelation in Christ.” ARCIC have coined the term *re-reception* to describe this process and suggest this is what they have been engaged in. n.3

Development of doctrine is a concept first enunciated clearly by John Henry Newman in 1845¹. The original deposit of faith given by Christ to the apostles is subject to a continuous stream of explanation and elucidation with an unfolding, over time, of the meaning of the revealed truth recorded in scripture. In other words, our human capacity and readiness, to both receive and articulate the fullness of God’s Self-revelation, grows and changes with time under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This has particular relevance to the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.

As we look briefly at the four main dogmas of the Church concerning Mary, bear in mind that *the formal teachings of the Catholic Church about Mary are fundamentally statements either about Christ, or about the Church and our final destiny* n.31.

The Virginal Conception of Jesus. n.18, 33 also n.12-13.

¹ Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine.

... is a fundamental teaching explicitly stated in the gospels of Luke and Matthew and affirmed in the Creed: Jesus was “conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary.”

The origin of the human body of Jesus is wholly and entirely the work of the Holy Spirit, and owes nothing to the active intervention of any man.

It was created out of the substance of Mary’s body and is therefore human, but if God is the Father of the Child, it will of necessity share his nature, therefore Mary’s son is divine. Jesus is by nature both God and man.

As this doctrine has never been seriously challenged – at least until the age of the Enlightenment – it has never been formally defined, but it has been authoritatively affirmed by the early general ecumenical councils and papal teaching.

In this consideration of Christ’s virginal conception it is assumed that virginity means physical integrity and an absence of sexual intercourse, but I want to draw your attention to another aspect of virginity mentioned in n.37: virginity “as an interior disposition of openness, obedience, and single hearted fidelity to Christ which models Christian discipleship and issues in spiritual fruitfulness” pointing to Mary’s holiness.

We speak of the virgin earth. Virginity is a capacity to be made fruitful and by implication, an openness to God’s grace, a state of receptivity.

This is I suggest a most important consideration in any discussion about Mary as ‘Ever-Virgin’ and the manner of Jesus’ birth.
Mary is the God-bearer – Theotokos n.34

The early Church had to work out exactly who and what Jesus Christ is. They came to understand that Christ was by nature both God and Man but as a person was he one or two?

The Council of Ephesus (431) used the title *Theotokos*, God-bearer, to affirm the oneness of Christ's person by identifying Mary as the Mother of God incarnate.

Anglicans and Catholics accept both of these teachings about Mary which are in reality statements about her Son.

The Immaculate Conception of Mary. n.42, 59

The definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary as a dogma of the Church in 1854 has created a difficulty for Anglicans. This formal definition was made after a long period of reflection and is a perfect example of the development of doctrine – a story too long to repeat in detail.

In n.38 we read: 'Other Fathers from West and East, appealing to the angelic salutation and Mary's response (Lk 1:38), support the view that Mary was filled with grace from her origin in anticipation of her unique vocation as Mother of the Lord.' The church has always been convinced of Mary's holiness and indeed of her sinlessness. John the Baptist was sanctified in the womb so it was fitting that Mary should likewise have been sanctified from her very origin. But if Mary had been conceived without original sin, would this not detract from Christ as the redeemer of all humankind?

Mary, as a daughter of Adam, was in need of redemption. It was John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) who saw that a preventative redemption, in anticipation of the merits of Christ, guaranteed the perfection of His redemption – to prevent something was a more perfect deed than putting it right. Jesus was the perfect redeemer therefore it was a necessity that at least one person should be preventatively redeemed, and this was accomplished in favour of His Mother.

Mary was perfectly redeemed, by the perfect redemption, of the perfect Redeemer from the first moment of her existence.

The Eastern churches have traditionally addressed Mary as *Panagia – the all-holy one* – without saying when she was sanctified. They also celebrate her *Presentation in the Temple* as a sign that from her earliest days her proper place was to be in the House of God.

The Assumption of Mary n.56

This doctrine is more difficult to justify as there is no biblical account of how her life ended – it tends to rely on legend and a principle of fittingness. However there is the precedent of Elijah and Enoch who were taken up into heaven. Enoch Gen 5:23-24 and Elijah 2 Kings 2:1-18.

Mary was closely associated with Jesus in our redemption. He died and rose again so it is perhaps fitting that Mary should also be taken up into heaven body and soul. If indeed Mary was always fully graced and never sinned there was no barrier to her being united with her son in heaven. It is a logical consequence of her Immaculate Conception.

In the Creed we say that we ‘believe in the resurrection of the body’. ARCIC put it this way: ‘Within such a pattern of anticipated eschatology, Mary can also be seen as the faithful disciple fully present with God in Christ. In this way she is a sign of hope for all humanity.’

I want to draw your attention to n.10 which deals with the calling by God of particular persons to perform a particular task who are specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to enable them to accomplish God’s purpose. This prevenient grace is attested by Paul when he speaks of those who are “called according to God’s purpose,” affirming that | those whom God “foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son And those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.” Romans 8:28-30.

“predestined . . . called . . . justified . . . glorified”

This is a key passage in understanding the role of Mary. Christ and His mother were predestined in the one and same decree.² She is pre-eminent among those called and what God does in Mary, He does for the sake of Christ.

² Munificentissimus Deus n.40.

Her justification and holiness lead to her glorification. The Immaculate Conception and Assumption are thus situated in this ‘trajectory of grace’. For me this was a new and exciting insight. n.54

The Papal Definitions are dealt with in n.58-59 and in n.60 ARCIC concludes that:

We have agreed together that the teaching about Mary in the two definitions of 1854 and 1950, understood within the biblical pattern of the economy of grace and hope outlined here, can be said to be consonant with the teaching of the Scripture and the ancient common traditions.

The Hierarchy of Truths n.63

Anglicans have asked whether it would be a condition of the future restoration of full communion that they should be required to accept these two definitions. Section 63 hints at the *hierarchy of truths* when it says that ‘the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception of Mary must be understood in the light of the more central truth of her identity as *Theotokos* which itself depends on faith in the incarnation.’

A possible answer to this question may be to invoke the *Decree on Ecumenism* n.11 which, for the first time, allowed that there is a so called *hierarchy of truths*:

. . . in ecumenical dialogue, catholic theologians. . . . When comparing doctrines with one another, *they should remember that in catholic doctrine there exists an order or “hierarchy” of truths, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the christian faith.*

The Catholic theologian Richard McBrien says:

‘No one could reasonably hold that the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are so central to Christian faith that the faith itself would disintegrate without either or both. Such would be the case, on the other hand, if one were to deny the

divinity of Jesus Christ or the redemptive value of his life, death, and resurrection'.³

Conclusion n.80

This Statement has sought to deepen our common understanding by a process of 're-reception' and open the way to further reconciliation. It believes that the 1854 and 1950 definitions need no longer be seen as *communion-dividing*.

For my part I hope that by further prayer, reading and study we will come to a real understanding of these truths and that the truth will indeed set us free so that together we may participate with Mary and all the saints in the unending praise of God.

Desmond Miller.

³ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, Harper San Francisco, 1994, p. 1102.