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III MARIOLOGY PAPER

Father Jean-Marie Tillard presented a paper to the group on the Mariology issues. The following is a summary of the material covered in that paper.

Two prefacing statements: Even in the most rigid Roman Catholic circles the two Marian doctrines (Immaculate Conception and Assumption) are not high in the hierarchy of truth. They are important, however, for the infallibility issue. Even if they are a matter of two solemn decrees of the Bishop of Rome they are not received by Orthodox and Anglicans; the understanding of a personal definition by the Bishop of Rome begins only with Pius IX and Pius XII.

These two dogmas are "special" truths because they are defined in the divided church of God. Here again the implications of the "subsistit in" question are important:

- a) If the Church exists outside the limits of the RC church the voice of others has to be heard in the final definition of dogmas.
- b) What is the first obligatory step for an official definition?

The first step is to evaluate Mary's place in the first traditions of Christianity. Gospel accounts, old Roman creeds, Nicean/Constantinople/Apostles' Creed. We must elucidate the importance of the mentioning of Mary and not Joseph in the Greek creeds. Why, then, this emphasis on Mary as the only human link?

Might we return to the apocryphal gospels despite the mythical details? Myths have an essential part of truth, that truth which is beyond reason. Since the 16th century we identify truth with experiment and history but we now rediscover that truth is also in myths, dreams, poetry grounded in the truth of human memory. Geoffrey Ashen shows that female figures created by the unconscious are very important. We live by dreams as much as by thinking. We approach the matter anthropologically, not only a matter of ratiocination but also of mythology. We should link Biblical Marian tradition to this. It is interesting to study the Gnostic gospels and see there the great emphasis on the motherhood of God. The mystery of his mercy and compassion is part of a God who has no sex but who created humanity in his image.

It is now necessary to disentangle the reformers' principle that only what is in the Bible can be true.

The figure of Mary is a sign, a revelation, an apocalypsis that salvation given in Christ is a radical answer to human destiny.

It would be a mistake to refuse categorically the Marian doctrine and dogmas. Are they not the resumé and synthesis of an essential element of Christian revelation? It is necessary to recognize that these two Marian doctrines bring special light to the mystery of the Church.

- i) The Immaculate Conception expresses Christian truth is a mystical way; it is an apocalypsis of God's koinonia indicating
 - a) the grace of God present before death and resurrection, but already coming from Christ.
 - b) through the power of the Spirit of God, humanity itself is active in its own salvation, not just passive; it belongs to the mystery of covenant; the image of God is associated to the reality of God's design through the action of the Holy Spirit. The "yes" of Mary is the corporate personality of the People of God starting with Abraham; it is the "yes" of faith and not of law.
- ii) Assumption - mainly mythical in expression, but it is the apocalypsis of the resurrection present in our world. Even if the apotheosis of Church and humanity is at the end of history, nevertheless the resurrection is already at work. The seeds of resurrection are a new humanity already at work, another apocalypsis of the mystery of Church.

It is a sign of the deepness of relationship between humanity and Christ. The mystery of the Church of God is not just ethical and juridical communion with Christ; It is koinonia in the body of the Risen Lord. (Robinson, The Body, 'The Church is not like the Body of Christ. It is the Body of Christ.') It is a strong affirmation of Eucharist as the Mystical Body of Christ. The Marian dogma of the Assumption appears as a typos, a sign, a mythical expression of this belonging of humanity to the fullness of the mystery of the Risen Lord.

Mariology as it is understood now in Roman Catholic and Anglican circles is not necessarily an obstacle to unity. The situation is not irreversible. All churches have to build up together an interpretation, an understanding of Mary as the fullness of mystery.

Some discussion followed, indicating some Anglican discontent with popular Roman Catholic devotion to Mary and an insistence on Scripture as the rule of faith and the only source of doctrine. Father Tillard felt the remarks caricatured Roman Catholic devotion and were not an ecumenical way of approaching the problem.