

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MARY DOCUMENT

Who are the authors of this document?

The text *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*, also known as the Seattle Statement, is the work of the **Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)**, which is the official instrument of theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion. The dialogue, which was first called for by Pope Paul VI and Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Michael Ramsey in 1966, was established in 1970. The first phase of ARCIC's work (1970-1981) resulted in statements on the Eucharist, ministry, and two statements on authority in the Church. ARCIC's second phase of work (1983 to the present) included statements on salvation and justification, the nature of the Church, morals, further work on authority in the Church, and now, on the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the doctrine and life of the Church. The Commission which prepared the Mary document was constituted of 18 members (a full list of Commission members who were involved in the preparation of the Mary document is attached). ARCIC began its work on Mary at its 1999 meeting, and completed the text in 2004.

The Anglican members are appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in consultation with the Anglican Communion Office, while the Roman Catholic members are appointed by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Co-Chairs of ARCIC are the Most Reverend Alexander J. Brunett, Catholic Archbishop of Seattle, and the Most Reverend Peter F. Carnley, Archbishop of Perth and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia. The document on Mary brings to completion the second phase of ARCIC's work. It is anticipated that a third phase of work for ARCIC will be initiated in due course.

What authority does the text carry?

Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ is the work of ARCIC, and is published under the Commission's authority with the permission of the Anglican Communion Office and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It is not an authoritative declaration by the Catholic Church or by the Anglican Communion, who will study and evaluate the document. The authorities who appointed the Commission have allowed the statement to be published so that it may be reflected upon and discussed.

Why was the place of Mary in the Church chosen as a topic to be studied?

The Seattle Statement is the first international bilateral dialogue to take up the subject of the role of Mary in the Church. The opening paragraph of the document indicates that ARCIC was asked to prepare a study of Mary by Anglican and Roman Catholic leaders. While Mary has held an important place in the life and liturgy of Anglicans and Roman Catholics alike, the two Marian dogmas and Marian devotion within the Catholic Church have been seen as points which have separated Anglican and Catholic Churches.

What were Anglicans and Catholics able to say together about Mary prior to the present document?

ARCIC had briefly addressed the subject of Mary once before, in the 1981 statement *Authority in the Church II*. Paragraph 2 of the Seattle Statement outlines the significant degree of agreement about Mary in 1981, then proceeds to quote the earlier text in pointing to remaining differences which the present document sets out to address, focusing in particular on the Marian dogmas: 'The dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption raise a special problem for those Anglicans who do not consider that the precise definitions given by these dogmas are sufficiently supported by Scripture.'

How does *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* set forth foundations from which to address the two Marian dogmas?

Since its inception, ARCIC has sought to carry out a dialogue 'founded on the Gospels and on the ancient common traditions' (*Common Declaration* of Pope Paul VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey, 1966), thus attempting to 'discover and develop our common inheritance of faith' (paragraph 4). This attentiveness to our common foundations gives shape to the first two sections of the document.

The first major section of the document (paragraphs 6-30) traces the place of Mary in the Scriptures. Constituting almost 1/3 of the entire statement, this section could be used independently of the rest of the document, as a study of the place of Mary in Scripture (cf. paragraph 80). The text notes that the Scriptures 'bear normative witness to God's plan of salvation', so they are the natural starting point for ARCIC's reflections. The text concludes by noting that 'it is impossible to be faithful to Scripture without giving due attention to the person of Mary' (paragraph 77). The treatment of Mary in the Scriptures is summarized in paragraph 30:

"The scriptural witness summons all believers in every generation to call Mary 'blessed'; this Jewish woman of humble status, this daughter of Israel living in hope of justice for the poor, whom God has graced and chosen to become the virgin mother of his Son through the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit. We are to bless her as the 'handmaid of the Lord' who gave her unqualified assent to the fulfilment of God's saving plan, as the mother who pondered all things in her heart, as the refugee seeking asylum in a foreign land, as the mother pierced by the innocent suffering of her own child, and as the woman to whom Jesus entrusted his friends. We are at one with her and the apostles, as they pray for the outpouring of the Spirit upon the nascent Church, the eschatological family of Christ. And we may even glimpse in her the final destiny of God's people to share in her son's victory over the powers of evil and death."

The second section of the text deals first (paragraphs 31-40) with Mary in the 'ancient common traditions', that is, in the early Church Councils which are authoritative for both Anglicans and Roman Catholics, and in the writings of the 'Fathers of the Church', theologians of the first centuries of Christianity. The text stresses the central importance of the early Church's understanding of Mary as *Theotókos* (the Mother of God the Word incarnate, the 'God bearer'). The text then proceeds (paragraphs 41-

46) to review 'the growth of devotion to Mary in the medieval centuries, and the theological controversies associated with them', showing 'how some excesses in late medieval devotion, and reactions against them by the Reformers, contributed to the breach of communion between us' (summary from paragraph 77). Finally, the section concludes (paragraphs 47-51) by tracing subsequent developments within both Anglicanism and the Roman Catholic Church, and notes the importance of seeing Mary as inseparably linked with Christ and the Church.

How does the Mary document approach the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (defined in 1854) and the Assumption of Mary (defined in 1950)? What agreement is ARCIC able to reach in this regard? What can we affirm together?

The convergence which is set forward in the first two sections of the text provides foundations within which to approach the two dogmas. The third section begins by looking at Mary and her role in the history of salvation within the framework of 'a theology of grace and hope'. The text appeals to St Paul's letter to the Romans (8:30), wherein he sets forward a pattern of grace and hope operative in the relationship between God and humanity: 'those whom God predestined he also called; those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified' (Romans 8:30).

This pattern is clearly seen in the life of Mary. She was 'marked out from the beginning as the one chosen, called and graced by God through the Holy Spirit for the task that lay ahead of her' (paragraph 54). In Mary's freely uttered *fiat* - "let it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38) - we see 'the fruit of her prior preparation, signified in Gabriel's affirmation of her as 'graced'" (paragraph 55). In paragraph 59, the text links this affirmation to what is being professed in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary:

"In view of her vocation to be the mother of the Holy One (Luke 1:35), **we can affirm together** that Christ's redeeming work reached 'back in Mary to the depths of her being, and to her earliest beginnings. This is not contrary to the teaching of Scripture, and can only be understood in the light of Scripture. Roman Catholics can recognize in this what is affirmed by the dogma - namely 'preserved from all stain of original sin' and 'from the first moment of her conception.'"

In turn, the document proposes that just as grace was operative and the beginning of Mary's life, so too does Scripture offer foundations for trusting that those who follow God's purposes faithfully will be drawn into God's presence. While 'there is no direct testimony in Scripture concerning the end of Mary's life' (paragraph 56), 'when Christians from East and West through the generations have pondered God's work in Mary, they have discerned in faith ... that it is fitting that the Lord gathered her wholly to himself: in Christ, she is already a new creation...' (paragraph 58). Again making a connection between this understanding of grace and hope operative in Mary's life and the dogma of the Assumption of Mary, the text notes:

"**we can affirm together** the teaching that God has taken the Blessed Virgin Mary in the fullness of her person into his glory as consonant with Scripture and

that it can, indeed, only be understood in the light of Scripture. Roman Catholics can recognize that this teaching about Mary is contained in the dogma” (paragraph 58).

The Commission does not entirely resolve the differences between Anglicans and Catholics regarding the two dogmas, for the above conclusions pertain to the Marian content of the dogmas, not the authority by which they were defined. Nonetheless, ARCIC's drafters feel confident in proposing that if the arguments laid forth in the Mary document were accepted by the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church, this 'would place the questions about authority which arise from the two definitions of 1854 and 1950 in a new ecumenical context' (paragraph 78; cf. paragraphs 61-63).

What does the text say about Marian devotion?

The final major section of the document (paragraphs 64-75) addresses the place of Mary in the life of the Church, touching on questions pertaining to Marian devotion. The section begins with a strong affirmation: 'We together agree that in understanding Mary as the fullest human example of the life of grace, we are called to reflect on the lessons of her life recorded in Scripture and to join with her as one indeed not dead, but truly alive in Christ' (paragraph 65). The text stresses that Marian devotion and the invocation of Mary are not in any way to obscure or diminish the unique mediation of Christ. It concludes:

“Affirming together unambiguously Christ's unique mediation, which bears fruit in the life of the Church, we do not consider the practice of asking Mary and the saints to pray for us as communion dividing.... we believe that there is no continuing theological reason for ecclesial division on these matters”.

The conclusion (paragraphs 76-80) pulls together what the dialogue commission is convinced that it has achieved in *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. After reaffirming the agreements that were set forth in the 1981 document referred to above, the text concludes by expressing ARCIC's conviction that 'the present statement significantly deepens and extends these agreements, setting them within a comprehensive study of doctrine and devotion associated with Mary' (paragraph 76).

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