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Letter from the Congregation for Catholic Education (Rome, 25 March 1988)

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Letter from the Congregation for Catholic Education*
Rome, 25 March 1988

**THE VIRGIN MARY IN INTELLECTUAL
AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

INTRODUCTION

1. The Second Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which was held in 1985 for "the celebration, verification and promotion of Vatican Council II" (1) affirmed that "special attention must be paid to the four major Constitutions of the council" (2) in order to implement a programme "having as its object a new, more extensive and deeper knowledge and reception of the Council" (3).

On his part, His Holiness Pope John Paul II has explained that the Marian Year is meant "to promote a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church" (4).

In the light of these developments the Congregation for Catholic Education addresses this present Circular Letter to theological faculties, to seminaries and to other centres of ecclesiastical studies in order to offer some reflections on the Blessed Virgin and to emphasize that the promotion of

*For the benefit of the members of the Mariological Society of America and other readers of *Marian Studies*, it seemed most appropriate to reproduce this document published during the Marian Year.

(1) Synodus Episcoporum, *Ecclesia sub Verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi. Relatio finalis* (Civitas Vaticana 1985), I, 2.

(2) *Ibid.*, I, 5.

(3) *Ibid.*, I, 6.

(4) Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Litt, Enc. *Redemptoris Mater* (25 Martii 1987) 48: AAS 79 (1987), 427.

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knowledge, research and piety with regard to Mary of Nazareth is not to be restricted to the Marian Year, but must be permanent since the exemplary value and the mission of the Virgin are permanent. The Mother of the Lord is a “*datum* of divine Revelation” and a “maternal presence” always operative in the life of the Church (5).

I. THE VIRGIN MARY: AN ESSENTIAL *DATUM* OF THE FAITH AND THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The wealth of Marian doctrine

2. The history of dogma and theology bears witness to the Church's faith about, and constant attention to, the Virgin Mary and to her mission in the history of salvation. Such attention is already evident in some of the New Testament writings and in a number of pages by authors in the sub-apostolic age.

The first symbols of the faith and, successively, the dogmatic formulas of the Councils of Constantinople (381), of Ephesus (431) and of Chalcedon (451) are evidence of the developing appreciation of the mystery of Christ, true God and true man, and at the same time of the progressive discovery of the role of Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation, a discovery which led to the dogmatic definition of Mary's divine and virginal motherhood.

The attention of the Church to Mary of Nazareth runs through the centuries, with many pronouncements about her being made. Without underestimating the blossoming which Mariological reflection produced in earlier periods of history, here we draw only on the more recent.

3. We recall the doctrinal importance of the dogmatic Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854) of Pius IX, the Apostolic Constitution *Munificentissimus Deus* (1 November 1950) of Pius XII, and the dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (21

(5) Cf. *ibid.*, 1, 25.

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November 1964), chapter VIII of which is the fullest and most authoritative synthesis of Catholic doctrine about the Mother of the Lord ever to have been compiled by an ecumenical council. Also to be remembered for their theological and pastoral significance are other documents such as *Professio Fidei* (30 June 1968), the Apostolic Exhortation *Signum Magnum* (13 May 1967) and *Marialis Cultus* (2 February 1974) of Paul VI, as well as the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (25 March 1987) of John Paul II.

4. It is also important to remember the influence of several "movements" which in several ways and from various points of view raised interest in the person of the Virgin and considerably influenced the composition of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*: the biblical movement, which underlined the primary importance of the Sacred Scriptures for a presentation of the role of the Mother of the Lord, truly consonant with the revealed Word: the patristic movement, which put Mariology in contact with the thought of the Fathers of the Church so that its roots in Tradition could be more deeply appreciated; the ecclesiological movement, which contributed abundantly to the reconsideration and deepening appreciation of the relationship between Mary and the Church; the missionary movement, which progressively discovered the value of Mary of Nazareth, the first to be evangelized (cf. Lk 1:26-38) and the first evangelizer (cf. Lk 1:39-45), fount of inspiration in her commitment to the spreading of the Good News; the liturgical movement, which initiated a rich and rigorous study of the various liturgies and was able to document the way the rites of the Church testified to a heartfelt veneration towards Mary, the "ever-Virgin, Mother of Jesus Christ, our Lord and God" (6); the ecumenical movement, which called for a more exact understanding of the person of the Virgin in the sources of Revelation, identifying more exactly the theological basis of Marian piety.

(6) Missale Romanum, Prex Eucharistica I, *Communicantes*.

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The Marian teaching of Vatican II

5. The importance of chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* lies in the value of its doctrinal synthesis and in its formulation of doctrine about the Blessed Virgin in the context of the mystery of Christ and of the Church. In this way the Council:

—allied itself to the patristic tradition which gives a privileged place to the history of salvation in every theological tract;

—stressed that the Mother of the Lord is not a peripheral figure in our faith and in the panorama of theology; rather, she, through her intimate participation in the history of salvation, “in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith” (7);

—formulated a common vision for the different positions about the way in which Marian matters are to be treated.

A. In relation to the Mystery of Christ

6. According to the doctrine of the Council, the relationship between Mary and God the Father derives from her role in relation to Christ. “When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman . . . so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5) (8). Mary, therefore, who, by her condition, was the Handmaid of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:38, 48), “received the Word of God in her heart and in her body, and gave Life to the world”, becoming by grace “Mother of God.” (9). In view of this unique mission, God the Father preserved her from original sin, enriched her with an abundance of heavenly gifts and, in the plan of his Wisdom, “willed that the consent of the predestined mother should precede the Incarnation” (10).

(7) *Lumen Gentium*, 65.

(8) *Ibid.*, 52.

(9) Cf. *ibid.*, 53.

(10) *Ibid.*, 56.

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7. The Council, explaining the participation of Mary in the history of salvation, expounded, first of all, the multiple aspects of the relationship between the Virgin and Christ:

—she is “the most excellent *fruit* of the redemption” (11), having been “redeemed in an especially sublime manner by reason of the merits of her Son” (12); thus the Fathers of the Church, the Liturgy and the Magisterium have called her “daughter of her Son” (13) in the order of grace;

—she is the *mother*, who, accepting with faith the message of the Angel, conceived the Son of God in his human nature in her virginal womb through the action of the Holy Spirit and without the intervention of man; she brought him to birth, she fed him, tended him and educated him (14);

—she is the faithful *handmaid* who “devoted herself totally . . . to the person and work of her Son, serving under him and with him, the mystery of redemption” (15);

—she is the *cooperatrix* with the Redeemer: “She conceived, brought forth and nourished Christ. She presented him to the Father in the Temple, and was united with him in suffering as he died on the cross. In an utterly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the Saviour’s work of restoring supernatural life to souls” (16);

—she is the *disciple* who, during the preaching of Christ “received his praise when, in extolling a kingdom beyond the calculations of flesh and blood, he declared blessed (cf. Mk 3:35; Lk 11:27-28) those who heard and kept the word of God, as she was faithfully doing (cf. Lk 2:19,51)” (17).

(11) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103.

(12) *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

(13) Cf. *Concilium Toletanum XI*, 48: Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (Barcinone 1976), 536.

(14) Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 57, 61.

(15) *Ibid.*, 56.

(16) *Ibid.*, 61. Cf. *ibid.*, 56, 58.

(17) *Ibid.*, 58.

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8. The relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit is also to be seen in the light of Christ: “she is, at it were, fashioned and formed into a new creature” (18) by the Holy Spirit, and, in a special way, is his temple (19); through the power of the same Spirit (cf. Lk 1:35) she conceived in her virginal womb and gave Jesus Christ to the world (20). During the Visitation the gifts of the Messiah flowed through her: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Elizabeth, the joy of the future Precursor (cf. Lk 1:41).

Full of faith in the promise of the Son (cf. Lk 24:49), the Virgin is present, praying in the midst of the community of disciples: persevering with them in one accord, we see Mary “prayerfully imploring the gift of the Spirit, who had already overshadowed her in the Annunciation: (21).

B. In relation to the mystery of the Church

9. For Christ, and therefore also for the Church, God willed and predestined the Virgin from all eternity. Mary of Nazareth is:

—“hailed as a pre-eminent and altogether singular *member* of the Church” (22) because of the gifts of grace which adorn her and because of the place she occupies in the mystical Body;

—*mother* of the Church, since she is Mother of him who, from the first moment of the Incarnation in her virginal womb, unites to himself as Head his Mystical Body which is the Church (23);

—*figure* of the Church, being virgin, spouse and mother, for the Church is virgin because its fidelity is whole and

(18) *Ibid.*, 56.

(19) Cf. *ibid.*, 53.

(20) Cf. *ibid.*, 52, 63, 65.

(21) *Ibid.*, 59.

(22) *Ibid.*, 53.

(23) Paulus PP. VI, Allocutio tertia SS. Concili periodo exacta (21 Novembris 1964): *AAS* 56 (1964), 1014-1018.

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pure, spouse by its union with Christ, mother of the innumerable children of God (24);

—virtuous *model* of the Church, which is inspired by her in the exercise of faith, hope and charity (25) and in apostolic work (26);

—through her manifold acts of intercession, continuing to obtain the gifts of eternal salvation for the Church. By her maternal charity she cares for the brethren of her Son on their pilgrim way. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked by the Church with the titles of *Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix* and *Mediatrix* (27);

—assumed body and soul into heaven, “the *eschatological image* and first flowering” of the Church (28) which sees and admires in her “that which she herself wholly desires and hopes to be” (29), finding in Mary “a sign of sure hope and solace” (30).

Post-Conciliar Marian developments

10. During the years immediately following the Council, work by the Holy See, by many episcopal conferences, and by famous scholars, illustrating the teaching of the Council and responding to the problems that were emerging gradually, gave a new relevance and vigour to reflection on the Mother of the Lord.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* and the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* have made a particular contribution to this Mariological reawakening.

This is not the place to list completely all the various sectors of post-conciliar reflection on Mary. However it seems useful to illustrate some of them in summary as example and stimulus to further research.

(24) Cf. *ibid.*, 64.

(25) Cf. *ibid.*, 53, 63, 65.

(26) Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

(27) Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 62.

(28) Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

(29) *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103.

(30) *Lumen Gentium*, 68.

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11. Biblical exegesis has opened new frontiers for Mariology, ever dedicating more attention to the inter-testamental literature. Some texts of the Old Testament, and especially the New Testament parts of Luke and Matthew on the infancy of Jesus and the Johannine pericopes, have been the object of continuous and deep study, the results of which have reinforced the biblical basis of Mariology and considerably enriched its themes.

12. In the field of dogmatic theology, the study of Mariology has contributed in the post-conciliar debate to a more suitable illustration of dogmas brought about in: the discussions on original sin (dogma of the Immaculate Conception), on the Incarnation of the Word (dogma of the virginal conception of Christ, dogma of the divine maternity), on grace and freedom (doctrine of the cooperation of Mary in the work of salvation), on the ultimate destiny of man (dogma of the Assumption). This has required critical study of the historical circumstances in which these dogmas were defined, and of the language in which they were formulated, understanding them in the light of the insights of biblical exegesis, of a more rigorous understanding of Tradition, of the questions raised by the human sciences and with a refutation of unfounded objections.

13. The study of Mariology has taken great interest in the problems connected with devotion to the Blessed Virgin. There has been research into the historical roots of the devotion (31), study of its doctrinal foundation, of its place in the "one Christian devotion" (32), evaluation of its liturgical expression and its multiple manifestations of popular piety, and a deepening appreciation of their mutual relationship.

(31) Six International Marian Congresses, organized by the Pontificia Accademia Mariana Internazionale, held between 1967 and 1987, systematically studied manifestations of Marian piety from the 1st to the 20th centuries.

(32) Paulus PP. VI, Adh. Ap. *Marialis Cultus* (2 Februarii 1974) Intr.: AAS 66 (1974), 114.

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14. Mariology has also been especially considered in the field of ecumenism. With regard to the Churches of the Christian East, John Paul II has underlined “how profoundly the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and the ancient Churches of the East feel united by love and praise of the Theotokos” (33); on his part, Dimitrios I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, has noted that “our two sister Churches have maintained throughout the centuries unextinguished the flame of devotion to the most venerated person of the all-holy Mother of God” (34), and he went on to say that “the subject of Mariology should occupy a central position in the theological dialogue between our Churches . . . for the full establishment of our ecclesial communion” (35).

With regard to the Reformation Churches, the post-conciliar period has been characterized by dialogue and by the thrust towards mutual understanding. This has brought an end to the centuries-old mistrust, and has led to a better knowledge of respective doctrinal positions; it has also led to a number of common initiatives in research. Thus, at least in some cases, it has been possible to understand both the dangers in “obscuring” the person of Mary in ecclesial life, and also the necessity of holding to the data of Revelation (36).

During these years, in the area of inter-religious discourse, Mariology has studied Judaism, source of the “Daughter of Sion”. It has also studied Islam, in which Mary is venerated as holy Mother of Christ.

15. Post-conciliar Mariology has given renewed attention to anthropology. The Popes have repeatedly presented Mary

(33) *Redemptoris Mater*, 31.

(34) Dimitrios I, *Homily given on 7th December 1987 during the celebration of Vespers at St. Mary Major* (Rome): *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng. Ed. 21-28 Dec. 1987), p. 6.

(35) *Ibid.*, 6.

(36) The Ecumenical Directory provides guidelines for a Mariological formation which is attentive to ecumenical needs: *Secretariatus ad Christianorum Unitatem Fovendam, Spiritus Domini* (16 Aprilis 1970): AAS 62 (1970), 705-724.

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of Nazareth as the supreme expression of human freedom in the cooperation of man with God, who “in the sublime event of the Incarnation of his Son, entrusted himself to the ministry, the free and active ministry of a woman” (37).

In the convergence of the data of faith and the data of the anthropological sciences, when these turn their attention to Mary of Nazareth, one understands more clearly that the Virgin is both the highest historical realization of the Gospel (38) and the woman who, through her self-control, her sense of responsibility, her openness to others and to the spirit of service, her strength and her love, is the most completely realized on the human level.

For example, the necessity has been noted:

—of drawing out the relevance of the human reality of the Virgin to people in our own time, stressing the fact that she is an historical person, a humble Jewish girl;

—of showing forth the permanent and universal human values of Mary in such a way that discourse about her throws light on discourse about man.

In this context, the subject of “Mary and women” has been treated many times, but it is susceptible of many different approaches, and it is a long way from being exhausted and from yielding its finest fruits; and it awaits further developments.

16. New themes and treatments from new points of view have emerged in post-conciliar Mariology; the relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary; the problem of inculturation of Marian doctrine and forms of Marian piety; the value of the *via pulchritudinis* for advancing in knowledge of Mary and the capacity of the Virgin to stimulate the highest expressions of literature and art; the discovery of the signifi-

(37) *Redemptoris Mater*, 46.

(38) Cf. III Conferencia General del Episcopado Latino-Americano (Puebla 1979), *La evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de America Latina* (Bogotá 1979), 282.

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cance of Mary in relation to some urgent pastoral needs in our time (pro-life, the option for the poor, the proclamation of the Word . . .); the reevaluation of the “Marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ” (39).

The Encyclical “Redemptoris Mater” of John Paul II

17. In the wake of *Lumen Gentium* and of the magisterial documents which followed the Council comes the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* of John Paul II, which confirms the Christological and ecclesiological approach to Mariology that clearly reveals the wide range of its contents.

Through a prolonged meditation on the exclamation of Elizabeth, “Blessed is she who believed” (Lk 1:45) the Holy Father thoroughly studies the multiple aspects of the “heroic faith” of the Virgin, which he considers “a kind of key which unlocks for us the innermost reality of Mary” (40), and he illustrates the “maternal presence” of the Virgin in the pilgrimage of faith according to two lines of thought, one theological, the other pastoral and spiritual:

—the Virgin was actively present in the life of the Church— at its beginning (the mystery of the Incarnation), in its being set up (the mystery of Cana and of the Cross) and in its manifestation (the mystery of Pentecost)—she is an “active presence” throughout the Church’s history, being “at the centre of the pilgrim Church” (41), performing a multiple function: of cooperation in the birth of the faithful in the life of grace, of exemplarity in the following of Christ, of “maternal mediation” (42);

—the deed by which Christ entrusted the disciple to the Mother and the Mother to the disciple (cf. Jn 19:25-27) has established the very closest relationship between Mary and

(39) *Redemptoris Mater*, 45.

(40) *Ibid.*, 19.

(41) Title of part II of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.

(42) Title of part III of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*.

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the Church. The will of the Lord has been to assign a "Marian note" to the physiognomy of the Church, its pilgrimage, its pastoral activity; and in the spiritual life of each disciple, says the Holy Father, a "Marian dimension" is inherent (43).

Redemptoris Mater as a whole can be considered the Encyclical of the "maternal and active presence" of Mary in the life of the Church (44): in the pilgrimage of faith, in the worship of the Lord, in the work of evangelization, in progressive configuration to Christ, in ecumenical endeavour.

The contribution of Mariology to theological research

18. The history of theology shows that an understanding of the mystery of the Virgin contributes to a more profound understanding of the mystery of Christ, of the Church and of the vocation of man (45). Similarly, the close link of the Virgin with Christ, with the Church and with humanity means that the truth about Christ, the Church and man throws light on the truth about Mary of Nazareth.

19. In Mary in fact "everything is relative to Christ" (46). In consequence, "only in the mystery of Christ is her mystery fully made clear" (47). The more the Church deepens her appreciation of the mystery of Christ, the more it understands the singular dignity of the Mother of the Lord and her role in the history of salvation. But, in a certain measure, the contrary is also true: the Church, through Mary, that "exceptional witness to the mystery of Christ" (48), has deepened its understanding of the mystery of the kenosis of the "Son of God" (Lk 3:38; cf. Phil 2:5-8) who became in Mary "Son of Adam" (Lk 3:38), and has recognized more

(43) Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 45-46.

(44) Cf. *ibid.*, 1, 25.

(45) Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 65.

(46) *Marialis Cultus*, 25.

(47) *Redemptoris Mater*, 4; cf. *ibid.*, 19.

(48) *Ibid.*, 27.

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clearly the historical roots of the "Son of David" (cf. Lk 1:32), his place among the Hebrew people, his membership in the "poor of Yahweh".

20. Everything about Mary—privileges, mission, destiny—is also intrinsically referable to the mystery of the Church. In the measure in which the mystery of the Church is understood the more distinctly does the mystery of Mary become apparent. Contemplating Mary, the Church recognizes its origins, its intimate nature, its mission of grace, its destiny to glory, and the pilgrimage of faith which it must follow (49).

21. Finally, in Mary everything is referable to the human race, in all times and all places. She has a universal and permanent value. She is "our true sister" (50), and "because she belongs to the offspring of Adam she is one with all human beings in their need for salvation" (51), Mary does not disappoint the expectations of contemporary man. Because she is the "perfect follower of Christ" (52) and the woman most completely realized as a person, she is a perennial source of fruitful inspiration.

For the disciples of the Lord the Virgin is a great symbol: a person who achieves the most intimate aspirations of her intellect, of her will and of her heart, being open through Christ in the Spirit to the transcendence of God in filial dedication, taking root in history through hardworking service of others.

As Paul VI wrote, "Contemplated in the episodes of the gospels and in the reality which she already possesses in the City of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary offers a calm vision and a reassuring word to modern man, torn as he often is between anguish and hope, defeated by the sense of his own limitations and assailed by limitless aspirations, troubled in his mind and divided in his heart, uncertain be-

(49) Cf. *ibid.*, 2.

(50) *Marialis Cultus*, 56.

(51) *Lumen Gentium*, 53.

(52) *Marialis Cultus*, 35.

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fore the riddle of death, oppressed by loneliness while yearning for fellowship, a prey to boredom and disgust. She shows forth the victory of hope over anguish, of fellowship over solitude, of peace over anxiety, of joy and beauty over boredom and disgust, of eternal visions over earthly ones, of life over death" (53).

22. "Among all believers she is like a 'mirror' in which are reflected in the most profound and limpid way 'the mighty works of God' (Acts 2:11)" (54), which theology has the task of illustrating. The dignity and importance of Mariology, therefore, derive from the dignity and importance of Christology, from the value of ecclesiology and pneumatology, from the meaning of supernatural anthropology and from eschatology: Mariology is closely connected with these tracts.

II. THE VIRGIN MARY IN INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Research in Mariology

23. The data expounded in the first part of this Letter show that Mariology is alive and active in relevant questions in matters doctrinal and pastoral. However it is necessary that the study of Mariology, together with attention to the pastoral problems which are emerging gradually, attend to rigorous research, conducted according to scientific criteria.

24. The words of the Council apply: "Sacred theology rests on the written word of God, together with sacred Tradition, as its primary and perpetual foundation. By scrutinizing in the light of faith all truth stored up in the mystery of Christ, theology is most powerfully strengthened and constantly rejuvenated by that word" (55). The study of the sacred Scriptures, therefore, must be the soul of Mariology (56).

(53) *Ibid.*, 57.

(54) *Redemptoris Mater*, 25.

(55) *Dei Verbum*, 24.

(56) Cf. *ibid.*, 24; *Optatam Totius*, 16.

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25. Further, the study of Tradition is essential to research in Mariology because, as Vatican II teaches, "sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God, which is committed to the Church" (57). The study of Tradition shows how particularly fruitful in quality and quantity is the Marian patrimony of the various Liturgies and of the Fathers of the Church.

26. Research into Scripture and Tradition, conducted according to the most fruitful methods and with the most reliable instruments of critical enquiry, must be guided by the Magisterium since "the task of authentically interpreting the word of God, whether written or handed on, has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the Church" (58). This research must also integrate and be strengthened by the more secure fruits of learning in anthropology and the human sciences.

The teaching of Mariology

27. Considering the importance of the Virgin in the history of salvation and in the life of the People of God, and after promptings of Vatican Council II and of the Popes, it would be unthinkable that the teaching of Mariology be obscured today: it is necessary therefore that it be given its just place in seminaries and theological faculties.

28. Such teaching, consisting of a "systematic treatment" will be:

a) *organic*, that is, inserted adequately in the programme of studies of the theological curriculum;

b) *complete*, so that the person of the Virgin be considered in the whole history of salvation, that is in her relation to God; to Christ, the Word incarnate, Saviour and Mediator; to the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier and Giver of life; to the

(57) *Dei Verbum*, 10.

(58) Cf. *ibid.*, 10.

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Church, sacrament of salvation; to man—in his origins and his development in the life of grace, and his destiny to glory;

c) *suited* to the various types of institution (centres of religious culture, seminaries, theological faculties . . .) and to the level of the students: future priests and teachers of Mariology, animators of Marian piety in the dioceses, those who are responsible for formation in the religious life, catechists, those who give conferences, and the many who want to deepen their knowledge of Mary.

29. Teaching thus given will avoid one-sided presentations of the figure and mission of Mary, presentations which are detrimental to the whole vision of her mystery. Sound teaching will be a stimulus to deep research—in seminaries and through the writing of licence and doctoral theses—into the sources of Revelation and the documents. Mariological study can also profit from interdisciplinary teaching.

30. It is necessary, therefore, that every centre of theological study—according to its proper physiognomy—plan that in its *Ratio studiorum* the teaching of Mariology be included, having the characteristics listed above; and, consequently, with the teachers of Mariology being properly qualified.

31. With regard to this latter point, we would draw attention to the Norms of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* which provide for licences and doctorates in theology, specializing in Mariology (59).

(59) This Congregation has been pleased to note the dissertations for the licence or doctorate in theology which have treated Mariological themes. Persuaded of the importance of such studies and desiring their increase, in 1979 the Congregation instituted the “licence or doctorate in theology with specialization in Mariology” (cf. Ioannes Paulus PP. II, Const. Ap. *Sapientia Christiana* (15 Aprilis 1979) Appendix II ad art. 64 “Ordinationum”, n. 12: *AAS* 71 (1979), 520. Two centres offer this specialization: the Pontifical “Marianum” Faculty of Theology in Rome, and the International Marian Research Institute, University of Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A., which is linked to the “Marianum”.

Mariology and pastoral service

32. Like every other theological discipline, Mariology has a precious contribution to make to pastoral life. *Marialis Cultus* affirms that “devotion to the Blessed Virgin, subordinated to worship of the divine Saviour and in connection with it, also has great pastoral effectiveness and constitutes a force for renewing Christian living” (60). Also, Mariology is called to make its contribution to the work of evangelization (61).

33. Mariological research, teaching and pastoral service tend to the promotion of the authentic Marian piety which should characterize the life of every Christian, especially those who are dedicated to theological studies and who are preparing for the priesthood.

The Congregation for Catholic Education draws the attention of seminary educators to the necessity of promoting an authentic Marian piety among seminarians who will one day be principal workers in the pastoral life of the Church.

Vatican II, treating the necessity of seminarians having a profound spiritual life, recommended that seminarians “should love and honour the most Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as a mother to his disciple by Christ Jesus as he hung dying on the cross” (62).

For its part, this Congregation, conforming to the thought of the Council, has underlined many times the value of Marian piety in the formation of seminarians:

—in the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* the Congregation requests the seminarian “to have a fervent love for the Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ, who was in a special way associated with the work of Redemption” (63);
 —in the *circular letter concerning some of the more urgent aspects of spiritual formation in seminaries* the Congrega-

(60) *Marialis Cultus*, 57.

(61) Cf. *Sapientia Christiana*, 3.

(62) *Optatam Totius*, 8.

(63) Congregatio Pro Institutione Catholica, *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (Romae 1985) 54 e.

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tion noted that "there is nothing better than true devotion to Mary, conceived as an ever more complete following of her example, to introduce one to the joy of believing" (64), which is so important for anyone who will spend the rest of his life in the continual exercise of faith.

CONCLUSION

The Code of Canon Law, treating of the formation of candidates for the priesthood, recommends devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary so that, nourished by the exercises of piety, the students may acquire the spirit of prayer and be strengthened in their vocation (65).

34. With this Letter the Congregation for Catholic Education wishes to reaffirm the necessity of furnishing seminarians and students of all centres of ecclesiastical studies with Mariological formation which embraces study, devotion and life-style. They must:

a) acquire a *complete and exact knowledge* of the doctrine of the Church about the Virgin Mary which enables them to distinguish between true and false devotion, and to distinguish authentic doctrine from its deformations arising from excess or neglect; and above all which discloses to them the way to understand and to contemplate the supreme beauty of the glorious Mother of Christ;

b) nourish an *authentic love* for the Mother of the Saviour and Mother of mankind, which expresses itself in genuine forms of devotion and is led to "the imitation of her virtues" (66), above all to a decisive commitment to live according to the commandments of God and to do his will (cf. Mt 7:21; Jn 15:14);

c) develop the *capacity to communicate* such love to the Christian people through speech, writing and example, so that their Marian piety may be promoted and cultivated.

(64) Id., *Circular letter concerning some of the more urgent aspects of spiritual formation in seminaries*, II, 4.

(65) Cf. *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 246, par. 3.

(66) *Lumen Gentium*, 67.

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35. There are numerous advantages to be derived from an adequate Mariological formation in which the ardour of faith and the commitment to study are harmoniously composed:

—on the *intellectual level*, so that the truth about God, about Man, about Christ and about the Church are understood the more in understanding the “truth about Mary”;

—on the *spiritual level*, so that such formation will help a Christian to welcome the Mother of Jesus and “bring her into everything that makes up his inner life” (67);

—on the *pastoral level*, so that the Mother of the Lord may be strongly felt as a presence of grace among the Christian people.

36. The study of Mariology holds as its ultimate aim the acquisition of a sound Marian spirituality, an essential aspect of Christian spirituality. On his pilgrim way to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13), knowing the mission which God has entrusted to the Virgin in the history of salvation and in the life of the Church, the Christian takes her as “mother and teacher of the spiritual life” (68); with her and like her, in the light of the Incarnation and of Easter, he impresses on his very existence a decisive orientation towards God through Christ in the Spirit, in order to express by his life in the Church the radical message of the Good News, especially the commandment of love (cf. Jn 15:12).

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, Reverend Rectors of Seminaries, Reverend Presidents and Deans of Ecclesiastical Faculties, we trust that these brief guidelines will be responsibly received by teachers and students and will bring forth welcome fruits.

Wishing you the abundance of God’s blessings, we remain,

Yours devotedly in Our Lord,

William Cardinal Baum
Prefect

Antonio M. Javierre Ortas
Tit. Archbishop of Meta
Secretary

(67) *Redemptoris Mater*, 45.

(68) Cf. *Marialis Cultus*, 21; *Collectio missarum de b. Maria Virgine*, form. 32.