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# Reports on Dissertations, Works in Progress: "Mary in Catechesis: Documents and Religion Textbooks 1956-1998"

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*Mary in Catechesis*

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**MARY IN CATECHESIS**  
**A Comparative Study on Magisterial Catechetical**  
**Documents and Religion Textbooks**  
**for Elementary Schools in the United States from 1956-1998**  
*Sister M. Jean Frisk\**

There are three major sections in this study of Marian catechesis in textbooks: 1) Church documents on catechesis from Vatican II to 1997, 2) the history of textbook catechesis and textbook content, and 3) the shift in focus—from content in the textbooks to the methods used to determine catechetical content—and the consequences.

To set the foundation for Marian catechesis, the study begins by first presenting an historical perspective on the renewed interest in catechetics in the United States (1935-1962). A brief survey includes a search for origins of catechesis in general, definition of terms, and an outline of the evolution of catechesis, in particular the development of the material on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The first section presents the Church documents on catechesis from Vatican II to 1997, including a study of the preparatory material for Vatican II, together with a listing of the Marian teachings in all the documents of Vatican II as well as the Council's mandate to establish a catechetical directory.

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\*Sister M. Jean Frisk serves on the Board of Directors of the Mariological Society of America. This report is an abstraction of her thesis for the Licentiate in Sacred Theology, with a specialization in Marian Studies, presented at the International Marian Research Institute (Dayton, Ohio) in 1998. A member of the secular institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, she wrote the introductions for *Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church: Documents on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2001).

The Marian content in the documents on catechesis in the post-Vatican II period is studied: *Solemnis Professio Fidei*, 1968; *General Catechetical Directory*,<sup>1</sup> 1971; *To Teach as Jesus Did*, 1972, and *Basic Teachings*, 1973; *Evangelii Nuntiandi*,<sup>2</sup> 1975; *Sharing the Light of Faith* (National Catechetical Directory),<sup>3</sup> 1979; *Catechesi Tradendae*,<sup>4</sup> 1979; *Sharing the Light of Faith . . . An Official Commentary*, 1981; *Guidelines on Doctrine for Catechetical Materials*, 1990; a sample of diocesan catechetical guidelines after Vatican II from the Archdiocese of New York Guidelines: 1976-77, 1987, 1990, 1997; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994; and the *Working Document—Office for the Catechism*: "Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*," 1996.

Finally, section one presents the Marian teachings set forth in the documents on catechesis since Vatican II (1964-1997), analyzed in relationship to other Church documents relating to Mary (e.g., *Marialis Cultus*, 1974). For this, a schema was prepared with the following eight major topics and subdivisions:

1) *Mary and God the Father*—Daughter of the Father; Immaculate Conception; Holiness; Mother of God; Mary, Ever Virgin.

2) *Mary and Jesus Christ*—First of the Redeemed by her Son; Mother of Jesus Christ; *Theotokos*, Birth-Giver of Jesus; Educator of Jesus; Handmaid, Associate, Cooperatrix of Jesus; Disciple of Jesus.

3) *Mary and the Holy Spirit*—Overshadowed by the Spirit (the Incarnation); Mary's Whole Existence Fashioned by the Spirit; her Fullness of Grace.

<sup>1</sup>Art. 43: Hierarchy of Truths; Art. 68: Mother of God, Mother and Model of the Church; Art. 78: Infancy and Its Importance.

<sup>2</sup>"Mary, Star of Evangelization."

<sup>3</sup>Art. 47: Norms of catechesis; Art. 77: The Jewish people; Art. 78: The Moslem people; Art. 82: Introduction [Mary is listed among the topics to be discussed]; Art. 87: Son of God, the firstborn of all creation, and savior; Art. 106: Mary, mother of God, mother and model of the Church; Art. 143: Devotions and other forms of prayer; Art. 144: The liturgical year; Art. 147: Sacramentals; Art. 176: Elements of methodology; Art. 177: Infancy and early childhood [birth to age five].

<sup>4</sup>Art. 47: Utilization of Various Places, Occasions and Gatherings; Art. 73: Mary, Mother and Model of the Disciple.

4) *Mary and the Church*—Member, Model, Symbol, and Mirror of the Church; Mary's Mediation and Intercession; the Assumption (Eschatological Image of the Church); Mary and the World (Ecumenism).

5) *The Person of Mary*—The Historical Character of Mary, Her Cultural Background, Her Jewishness; Mary, the Human Person as Free, Faithful, Loving, Joyful, Lowly, Servant, and Woman; Mary's Religious Dimension (Her Growth in Faith).

6) *The Life of Mary*—Mary in Scripture.

7) *Marian Devotion*—Mary in Liturgy; Various Expressions/Forms of Marian Devotion; Marian Apostolate; Other: The Blessed Virgin Mary and Indulgences.

8) *Pastoral and Catechetical Aspects*—Adaptation and Inculturation; "Right Measure"; "Correctness."

Section two of the study examines the Marian content in religion textbooks, 1959-1997. To set the context, the history of religion textbooks for children in the United States is briefly surveyed. The following historically-significant catechisms are reviewed, with special attention to their Marian content: the *Carroll Catechism*, 1793; the *Baltimore Catechism*, 1885; and the *Baltimore Catechism*, 1941. The censorship of catechetical textbooks is noted. Finally, the Marian content in the religion textbooks and teacher's manuals (1956-1997) of William H. Sadlier, Inc., is closely examined.

By using charts and comparative texts, an attempt was made to pinpoint the influence of the Marian sections of catechetical Church documents and other Marian Church documents on the textbooks. The grid of Marian content developed in the study of the Church documents was applied to each Sadlier series. Sadlier's correspondence with the Marian teachings of the catechetical documents was positively determined; "gray" areas in Sadlier's Marian teachings were noted; and Sadlier's Marian themes, unrelated to the documents, were presented. An additional facet of the study covered the manner in which Marian images provide a catechesis of their own.

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The third section of the study presented the conclusions drawn from the examination of over 2000 textbooks, which indicated a shift from emphasis on what is in the textbooks to the focus on who decides what is in textbooks.

My initial discoveries indicated that the Church documents on Mary, other than those offering catechetical guidelines (e.g., encyclicals or pastoral letters), have seldom influenced catechetical documents. This led to understanding the necessity of distinguishing between theological and catechetical documents, in order to properly assess Marian catechetical texts. Although *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 8, provided the most extensive official Marian teaching in the Church to that time, the study showed that few of these teachings actually affected catechesis.

The *Catechetical Directory*, 1971, referred to the order of presenting certain doctrines. The principle of the "hierarchy of truths" required that the organization of Marian doctrine should fall under the headings "Jesus/Mary" and "Church/Mary." This hierarchy was observed in textbook catechesis. However, such headings could also have a detrimental and limiting effect, insofar as educators could conclude that *only* these elements were necessary for the presentation of Marian doctrine. The trinitarian perspective could be and often was omitted, as well as the dimensions or approaches suggested in *Marialis Cultus* (trinitarian, Christological, ecclesiological, scriptural, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological).

Section three continues with special consideration of the Marian teachings in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, based upon, but not including all, the elements of *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 8. Of particular concern are the American catechetical texts, including the current guidelines for evaluating catechetical texts, which omit reference to Mary's active presence in the Church.

Surprisingly, in the textbooks themselves, while Marian doctrine has not changed considerably in the post-Vatican II period, Marian devotion and images have changed. The textbooks con-

sistently reflect the Marian doctrine in the catechetical documents, and the textbook publishers incorporate Scripture and an anthropological approach to Marian teachings. The textbook publishers also incorporate an ecumenical appreciation and a liturgical orientation in their works. The weakness of the textbooks regarding Marian doctrine is the difficulty of explaining Mary's virginity to children.

The study develops several questions concerning future developments in the presentation of Mary, provides questions for future research, and proposes Mary as a living catechism and as a presence of grace among us. The appendices provide samples of the Marian content in the Baltimore catechisms (which contained very little Marian doctrine), a context chart for the Marian articles in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Marian content in the *Guidelines for Catechesis* for the Archdiocese of New York, and the story of Sister Maria de la Cruz Aymes, H.H.S., who made significant contributions to catechesis, including Marian catechesis, in the publications of William H. Sadlier, Inc.

This study was carried out in the hope it would be a contribution to Mary's ongoing *presence of grace* among us—and our children—to help fulfill the teaching of *Lumen Gentium*, 65:

Having entered deeply into the history of salvation, Mary, in a way, unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith: and when she is the subject of preaching and worship she prompts the faithful to come to her Son, to his sacrifice and to the love of the Father. Seeking after the glory of Christ, the Church becomes more like her lofty type, and continually progresses in faith, hope and charity, seeking and doing the will of God in all things. The Church therefore, in her apostolic work too, rightly looks to her who gave birth to Christ . . . in order that through the Church he could be born and increase in the hearts of the faithful.

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