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Mary and Catechesis: Transmission of the Faith and Christian Initiation in/by the Family

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MARY AND CATECHESIS: TRANSMISSION OF THE FAITH AND CHRISTIAN INITIATION IN/BY THE FAMILY

M. Jean Frisk, STL

This presentation is built on my own catechizing experience and on the extensive research behind my STL thesis that shows the place of Mary in catechetical materials from the mid-1950s to the turn of the millennium. It is intended to provide scholars of Mary with an overview of the catechetical side of current Marian trends in the United States and, ultimately, to the Marian content in the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults (July 2006, fourth printing, September 2000), and to the current efforts to train catechetical leaders nationally and on the local levels of diocese and parish.

Pre-Vatican II and Post-Vatican II Catechizing

To begin, it seems helpful to give a brief summary of attempts to promote Marian *and* family catechesis from the mid-twentieth century till now. Likely, those of us who “learned our catechism” in pre-Vatican II times recall the well-worn theme of being taught surely and securely by means of the so-named *Baltimore Catechism*. The discussion *ad nauseam* in post-Vatican II critique mourns the loss of doctrinal security and places the blame on adventurous textbook companies who sought to improve their texts with lovely pictures and attention-

getting techniques, games, projects, and fluff. Elementary school teachers spent a great deal of time getting those projects ready.

After Vatican II, the question-and-answer memorization approach was no longer the favored methodology, but it had been the experience (sometimes terror) of all of us. I recall how, when I was seven or eight, our country priest brought my mother back and our family to the Catholic Church. I had not so much as even been in a Catholic church when this good Father saw to it that I was enrolled in the summer two-week session of morning religion classes taught by the black-robed Sisters, with their huge black veils, who came from Lower Michigan to teach religion to the farm kids. Sister gave each of us a child's *Baltimore Catechism* during class, but asked us to put them in the desk drawer. These books were collected at the end of class, since they needed to be used by the afternoon sessions in the neighboring town.

When Sister asked us the inevitable prime question: "Why did God make us?" I was terrified! We all sat there, feet dangling from the big kids' chairs. No one said a word. She waited. I had left the drawer open a couple of inches, and, like all the other kids, kept my head down hoping she would not call on me. But, lo and behold, the text was open to the answer—right there! I read it, raised my hand, and proudly repeated it. I will never know if Sister really believed I knew that text. I just knew that we all breathed in relief. And, I learned that there were books that taught about God.

In the 1960s, as a very young teacher in a Catholic elementary school and not having been trained by Sisters in the then-usual methods, I relied heavily on those new religion books—supplied with their accompanying workbooks, coloring pictures, and sometimes handouts for parents. How was I even to notice that essential things might be missing?

Slowly but surely, questions were being raised—often by parents: “What are we supposed to believe now?” “How come the Perpetual Help devotion stopped on Tuesday evenings?” “Don’t the kids have May crowning anymore?” “A whole rosary?—the kids can’t take that!” Documents started to be published “in the spirit of Vatican II.” I would read them, but, honestly, how was I to apply them? I stuck with the new textbooks and the journals for religion teachers, which tried to concentrate on the importance of the child and of teaching methods, seldom concentrating on doctrinal truths. I treated the big documents as *suggestions*, which I did not know how to apply and, therefore, put them aside, relying solely on the textbooks and the lesson plans provided.

Then, from Rome, came the first big document for teachers, *The Catechetical Directory* of 1971. Again, nice thoughts, but for me and the other grade school teachers, this directory was more like spiritual reading than anything formative. It certainly was not a source of concrete information that would inform our teaching and, mostly certainly, was not considered a mandate or measuring rod of content. Since by then I was a much-too-young school principal, I trusted solely on what the diocesan guidelines told us to teach—if anything. Who could read and figure out those documents! We simply trusted whatever was in those pretty textbooks.

Next came the important document *Behold Your Mother*, from our own U.S. bishops. In the case of our young Schoenstatt community, focused on a Marian spirituality (with our very first American vocations just finishing their training and beginning their teaching careers), we were especially proud to see an entire American document devoted to Mary. We even started to read it at table, but never finished it. Parts of *Behold Your Mother* seemed to repeat itself, and I found parts I did not quite agree with; and, again, it was like a spiritual reading that took me nearly a year to finish. There were no practical consequences for

religion teachers, no guiding matter for elementary and high school teaching. We just stuck with the existing textbooks, made sure we had Marian devotions and prayers, and kept the decorations fresh in the classroom corner devoted to Mary.

And so it went for many of us at the time. Who knew that the *Directory* was a document to be taken seriously, that the “Basic Truths” were really teaching mandates, and that there were basic new ways to think about how to teach doctrine? Or, for that matter, that this *Directory* determined what doctrine was essential, or that it provided good advice and excellent spiritual reading, if you really took it seriously?

Then came more documents from Rome and also what seemed to be the same sort of documents from the Bishops’ conference—sort of translations of the publications from Rome. However, years later—when I graphed their Marian content, I found unique differences (which will be demonstrated later here). Truthfully, at the time, much more appealing were the catechetical journals and the ever more beautiful textbooks that stressed love of neighbor and nature, moral truths, and how wonderful it was to be Church and breathe the new spirit (Spirit).

But we were in fact losing ground. Unless a family was deeply rooted in steadfast church attendance or in such things as meal prayers or even the rosary, less and less of the teaching was doctrinally formative. Those Mary chapters usually were the last ones for most textbook companies—likely because of the then-leftover notion that the last month of the school year, May, was dedicated to Mary. But what if you did not get that far! As for those prayers to learn by heart? In the 1970s and 80s, it became rare to find them in *any* elementary textbook of religion, and next to never in a high school text.

Post-Vatican II Deficiencies in Doctrinal Teaching on Mary

Please note that in this survey article, I will omit full documentation. Precise indications are available in my STL

thesis (“Mary in Catechesis: A Comparative Study on Magisterial and Catechetical Documents and Religion Textbooks for Elementary Schools in the United States from 1956-1998”), now available in full text under Theses and Dissertations on the University of Dayton Libraries’ eCommons. Here, then, are a few examples of what I call significant omissions: For over twenty years, the words “Immaculate Conception” only appeared (if at all) in lists of Holy Days of Obligation. There also were no substitute terms to explain this dogma. The same holds true for the dogma of Mary as “virgin” and, least of all, “ever virgin.” It was clear, of course, that Joseph was the foster father of Jesus, but otherwise rarely was an attempt made in catechesis to explain the conception of Jesus as God and man (the Incarnation)—even in high school texts. Hence, the title “Mother of God” appeared seldom. “Mother of Jesus” was considered easier for children to understand.

Teaching on Mary seldom occurred past third grade, which means official teaching on Mary stopped with eight-year-olds for nearly twenty years. One series never mentioned Mary’s name in its teaching on the birth of Jesus, but they did have a lovely picture of all the animals gathered around the manger. In that series, not one image of Mary appeared throughout.

Devotions and, usually, the saints were unequivocally gone. Well, that might not have been too bad. In “the old days” how did the good Sisters teach about the Immaculate Conception and our national patronage? By telling the children (in the textbooks) that Mary told Bernadette her (Mary’s) name was Immaculate Conception. No further explanation was offered for Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) students (those who attended non-Catholic schools) who used the magazine *Hi-Time*. An editor (consulted at the time of my studies in the 1990s) ruefully acknowledged that no article or booklet had been published which included Mary in the previous thirty years.

Not everything or everyone was so grim, but these examples do signify the norm. A notable exception actually appeared shortly after the publication of *Behold Your Mother*, produced by the William H. Sadlier Company. The Bishops Conference commissioned Sadlier to publish age-appropriate booklets devoted to teaching about Mary. When I worked on my thesis, Sadlier sent me the series. The texts are filled with much content that could still be used today, but I had never come across them in all my teaching experience. When these Sadlier booklets were printed, they were sent to Washington, DC, where they were stored in the crypt of the basilica. Sadly, the good priest in charge of the distribution passed away. The books sat there all those many years with no one taking over the task to distribute them. Monsignor John T. Myler found them there.¹

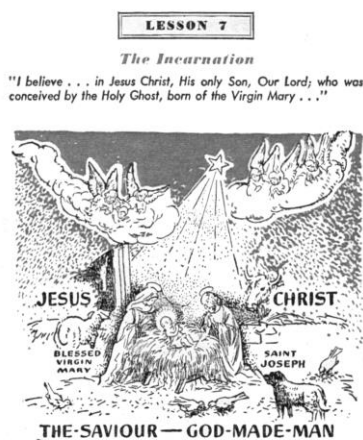
For the next phase, the 1980s, Father Johann Roten, SM, then Director of the International Marian Research Institute (IMRI), made a survey of Marianist high school students. His analysis aptly voiced the situation of the 1980s: “A Faceless Madonna: Young People Love the Blessed Mother, But Do Not Know Her Very Well.” When I came on board at IMRI—from a catechetical background—he patiently directed me to look into the issue of Mary in textbooks of religion. My agenda was heavily laden with preconceived notions. I came with all the gossip and prejudices of my past experience. I had to learn the tedious process of backing up proposals and beliefs with evidence. Notion-after-notion bit the dust. Let us briefly debunk some of those ideas.

¹ See Msgr. Myler’s dissertation, “Mary, the U.S. Bishops and the Decade of Silence: The 1973 Pastoral Letter “Behold Your Mother, Woman of Faith,”” (STD, Dayton, OH: International Marian Research Institute, 2017).

First, we challenge the belief that the *Baltimore Catechism* was the only trustworthy text, faithfully unchanged since 1885.

Fact: Several companies published the Baltimore document, which—in the revised 1941 manual—consisted of 38 lessons with 515 questions and answers (the original version had 421). In fact, close to 200 different published manuals contained the Baltimore list.² Each publisher added its own devotional and supplementary materials, such as images or saints' stories.

The artistic renditions were modernized; for instance, comparing those from the 1942 to the 1961 issues of Father McGuire's *Baltimore Catechism No. 1*: proof enough that change was underway.



² See: Mary Charles Bryce, "The *Baltimore Catechism*—Origin and Reception," in *Source Book for Modern Catechetics*, ed. Michael Warren (Winona, MN: Christian Brothers Publications, 1983), 140-145.

LESSON 19

The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Commandments of God



LESSON 19

The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Commandments of God



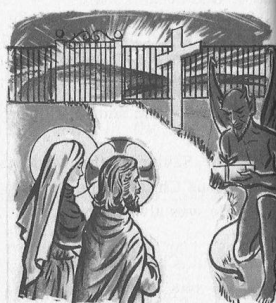
As for the trustworthiness of the content, my favorite example comes from *The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co, © 1965-1962), p. 52. Examine these images from the perspective of doctrine.

LESSON 8 — The Redemption

"I believe . . . in Jesus Christ . . . who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead . . ."



A. GOD'S COMMAND: "My Son is to die on the Cross to show men I love them" (See John 3, 16; 10, 18).



B. TEMPTATION: The devil said to Mary, and then to Christ, "God's will is too hard. Do what you want instead."



C. VICTORY: Mary, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Luke 1, 38).

Christ, "Father, Thy will be done" (Matt. 26, 42).



D. REWARD: "Jesus has . . . entered . . . into heaven itself to appear now before the face of God on our behalf" (Hebrews 9, 24).

This victory reverses the defeat of Adam and Eve. (See page 33.)

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Please note that images A, C, and D are authentic scripture quotes. Image B attempts to look like the other three images, but nowhere in Sacred Scripture do we find quotes of the devil speaking to Mary. Whatever the devotional thought or reason, this image is not doctrinally correct.

The point has been made. Changes were already underway, and when looking back with a researcher's eye, the need for more conscious scrutiny is evident.

As time went on, especially in the 1980s, my charting provides proof in numerous instances where textbook writers and publishers were indeed becoming more conscious of the directives coming from Rome and the guidelines from the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops. Publishers created the so-called scope and sequence charts, showing that basic doctrine was indeed included in the texts as mandated. With these charts, buyers of textbooks and teachers were invited and began to be trained to review the doctrinal content at a glance. If something was missing—like the mention of Immaculate Conception—I could be certain it was also missing in the official catechetical directories of the time. As my study proceeded, it became clear that in the majority of cases (I refer here to the twenty-two publishers of catechetical materials at the time), there were *no* grounds for the challenges of randomness arbitrarily determined by the textbook writers.

In fact, the *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD) of 1971 could have—should have—set in motion a marvelous way to think about Church and Mary's place therein. It promised, if you will, a type of examination of conscience; that is, if we catechists were attentive to it, it showed how the Church could/should teach about Mary—in classrooms, in seminaries, etc.

In article 43, "Hierarchy of Truths to Be Observed in Catechesis," we find Mary mentioned in this document for the first time, but so amazingly significant as to take one's breath away. The article begins by using the expression "hierarchy of

truths,” from *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the Decree on Ecumenism:³

In the message of salvation there is a certain hierarchy of truths which the Church has always recognized when it composed creeds or summaries of the truths of faith. This hierarchy does not mean that some truths pertain to faith itself less than others, but rather that some truths are based on others as a higher priority, and are illumined by them.⁴

Mary is named in the context of this “higher priority” which helps to illumine other truths.

The 1971 Directory explains this hierarchy, that is, the truths which illumine the entire spectrum of what we believe, as “four basic heads,” as it calls them. The four heads given in the *General Catechetical Directory* are the mystery 1) of the Trinity, 2) of Christ, 3) of the Holy Spirit, and 4) of the Church. Two of the four “heads” integrate Mary:

The four divisions: “The mystery of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Creator of all things; the mystery of Christ the incarnate Word, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and who suffered, died, and rose for our salvation; the mystery of the Holy Spirit, who is present in the Church, sanctifying it and guiding it until the glorious coming of Christ, our Savior and Judge; and the mystery of the Church, which is Christ’s Mystical Body, in which the Virgin Mary holds the preeminent place.”

³ *Unitatis Redintegratio* [UR 11], *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 32 (1965): 90-107; *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 452-470.

⁴ GCD 43.

Here, I want to show a few differences between American catechesis and the universal directory from Rome. I selected examples I felt might be significant to this assembly. See, for instance, in the graphs below, the easily missed differences between the Rome Directory (1971) and our U.S. version (1973).

Table 1. Sources for the Marian Doctrine in *Directorium Catechisticum Generale* (1971)

Marian Texts, 1971	Sources
Title: "Mother of God, Mother and Model of the Church." ⁵	Paul VI, Mother of the Church
68 Mary is united in an ineffable manner with the Lord,	cf. <i>Lumen Gentium</i> (LG) 53: "united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie"
being his Ever-Virgin Mother,	In LG 52: ever Virgin Mary; LG 69: ever virgin, see below
who "occupies in the Holy Church the place which is highest after Christ and yet very close to us" (LG 54).	Origin: Paul VI, 4 Dec 1963, AAS 56 (1964): 37
The gift of Christ's Spirit is manifested in her in an altogether singular manner, because Mary is "full of grace" (Luke 1, 28), and is "a model of the Church" (LG 63).	cf. LG 56: unique holiness; LG 63: stands out in eminent and singular fashion as exemplar both of virgin and mother; See also Paul VI's <i>Solemnis Professio Fidei</i> (SPF, 1968) 14: singular election
In her, who was preserved from all stain of original sin,	LG 56; <i>Ineffabilis Deus</i>

⁵ GCD 68.

Marian Texts, 1971	Sources
who was freely and fully faithful to the Lord,	To combine freely, faithful and add fully is new; see below.
and who was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory,	<i>Munificentissimus Deus</i>
the Holy Spirit has fully manifested his gift.	cf. LG 56: fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature
For she was completely conformed “to her Son, the Lord of lords, and the Conqueror of sin and death” (LG 59).	
Because she is the Mother of God and “mother to us in the order of grace” (LG 61), the type of the virginity and motherhood of the total Church (cf. LG 63-65),	
and the sign of a secure hope and solace for the pilgrim People of God (cf. LG 69),	The teachings in this block are not evident in SPF.
Mary “in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith,” and	No other catechetical document takes up this quote of LG 65.
She “summons the believers to her Son and to his sacrifice, and to love for the Father” (LG 65).	
Therefore, the Church who honors the faithful and the saints who are already with the Lord and are interceding for us (LG 49, 50), venerates in a most special way Christ’s Mother, who is also her mother.	Paul VI, Mother of the Church

The Marian content of the *General Catechetical Directory* directly quotes *Lumen Gentium* five times, makes two comparisons to *Lumen Gentium* and lists *Lumen Gentium* once as source without using quotation marks. There are three concepts that differ somewhat or are more spelled out than they are in *Lumen Gentium*.

The concept of Mary's virginity is stressed, at least in the English language presentation, by the hyphenated and capitalized title, Ever-Virgin Mary. The title, written this way, Ever-Virgin Mary, becomes a noun. In *Lumen Gentium* the "ever" is descriptive as in LG 50, "the glorious Mary ever virgin" and LG 52, "the glorious ever Virgin Mary" from the canon of the Mass, and LG 69, "Mother of God, ever virgin."

In discussing Mary's unity with Christ, the terminology "united in an ineffable manner" differs from *Lumen Gentium*'s "united by a close and indissoluble tie." *Ineffable* means *too overwhelming and awesome to express, a manner most sacred*. *Lumen Gentium* directly defines the unity as *close and indissoluble*.

By running together concepts found in *Lumen Gentium*, there is one sentence in the *General Catechetical Directory* that becomes new to catechesis: *who was freely and fully faithful to the Lord*. *Lumen Gentium* 56, 57, 58, and 62 incorporate texts explaining Mary's freedom, using *freely* to describe her actions. *Lumen Gentium* 58 and 62 speak of Mary's faithfulness. But these references do not express Mary's freedom quite in the same manner that the *General Catechetical Directory*: *In Mary ... who was freely and fully faithful to the Lord ... the Holy Spirit has fully manifested his gift*.

Hence, Mary's freedom, her faithfulness, her choice for the Lord, are the manifestation of the Spirit within her. This personal, human action on the part of Mary, in her response to the Spirit's gift of the fullness of grace, is what constitutes her as a model for the Church.

There is one additional article in the *General Catechetical Directory* which refers to Mary: Article 78 in Part V, which discusses catechesis according to age levels. The subtitle is, “Infancy and Its Importance.”

Table 2. Sources for the Marian Doctrine in *Basic Teachings (BT)* for Catholic Religious Education (NCCB) (1973)

Marian Texts, 1973	Sources
24. Mary, Mother of God, Mother and Model of the Church	
The Gospel of Luke gives us Mary's words: "My spirit finds joy in God my savior, for he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed" (Luke 1, 47-48).	Luke 1, 47-48: not in GCD
Religious instruction should lead students to see Mary as singularly blessed and	cf. LG 63 and GCD above.
relevant to their own lives and needs.	This concept is new in the catechetical documents.
Following venerable Christian tradition as continued in the Second Vatican Council, the teacher should explain	<i>Venerable tradition</i> is taken from LG 55.
the special place of the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation and in the Church. ⁶	place of Mary in the history of salvation, cf. LG 55. <i>(Note that BT globally footnotes this teaching as LG)</i>

⁶ The paragraph is footnoted 105: cf. *Constitution on the Church* of the Second Vatican Council, #52-69.

Marian Texts, 1973	Sources
The “ever-virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God,” ⁷	This is the only direct quote from the Canon of the Mass.
she is in the Church in a place highest after Christ, and also is very close to us as our spiritual Mother.	Paul VI quote, used in LG 54; this text appends the original quote by explaining Mary’s closeness as spiritual motherhood.
In religious instruction there should be explanations of her special gifts from God (being Mother of God,	cf. GCD
being preserved from all stain of original sin,	cf. LG 56; wording as in SPF 14 and GCD 68
being assumed body and soul to heaven.)	cf. Lg 59, 62; cf. GCD which uses <i>heavenly glory</i> vs. <i>heaven</i> .
The special veneration due to Mary — Mother of Christ,	LG 54
Mother of the Church,	Paul VI
our spiritual Mother — should be taught by word and example.	cf. Paul Vi’s <i>Signum Magnum</i> (SM), 13 May 1967), Intro., 4, 33 ⁸

In my licentiate thesis I graphed the content and compared similarities and differences. A point in the majority of the 1970s and early-1980s textbooks has, ultimately, to do with mediation. What appears to be missing in *Basic Teachings* (the U.S. document) is direct reference to Mary’s active and ongoing presence and work in the Church. Although she is called our

⁷ Footnoted, 106: First Eucharistic Prayer of the Mass [LG 52].

⁸ See also SM, Intro., 2: “spiritual Mother of the Church, that is to say, of all the faithful and of the sacred pastors.”

spiritual mother, there is no direct reference to her intercession. The Hail Mary prayer and rosary are recommended and these assume that Mary's intercession is requested; but in the American document we learn *who* Mary is, whereas in the Roman document we learn both *who* she is and *what* she does.

Following the chronology, *Marialis Cultus* comes on the scene in 1974. As rich as it is and so valuable for purposes of teaching and evaluation of Marian *devotion*, sadly, it took nearly a quarter of a century for this document to make any impression on American catechesis. An exception is one minor reference in one Sadlier Teacher's Manual, suggesting that *Marialis Cultus* would be worthwhile reading.

Perhaps the word *devotion* versus the word *doctrine* is the significant point here. In catechesis one tries, as succinctly as possible, in a very short amount of time to teach as much doctrine as possible. Devotion is considered a private matter, open to subjective sensibility and interpretation.

Likely well known to you are the two synods that directly challenged and changed the perspectives on catechetical teaching within the Church: the synods on evangelization and catechesis. In my thesis, I trace the influences in and beyond Vatican II that led to these synods.

The summary documents of these synods gave us some Marian treasures that caught the hearts of Catholic educators:

- The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [On Evangelization in the Modern World], 1975, gave us the title: Mary, Star of Evangelization. [Pope Francis seems to like this expression.]
- The Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* [On Catechesis in Our Time], 1979, brought forward St. Augustine's idea of Mary as disciple. It also picked up on Mary as "mother and model of catechists," even as a "living catechism" [which originated from our own

Cardinal Carberry, who was a longtime member of the MSA].⁹ Nonetheless, so-to-say, in the grassroots of practical education, the tender references to Jesus sitting on Mary's lap and listening to her throughout the hidden life at Nazareth—that he “was formed by her in human knowledge of the Scriptures and of the history of God's plan for his people”—truly hit home. Mary was important to Jesus and therefore important to us, and she can do the same for us, that is, be an educator of the faith. These concepts began at least to find their way into the teachers' manuals of mainstream textbooks.

Of course, the life and devotion of Saint John Paul II had a major influence on the devotional elements of catechesis. As we know, he seldom omitted mention of Mary in his writings.

Another *new* element appeared in American catechesis in 1979: *Sharing the Light of Faith*, our first national catechetical directory. This came out in March, about seven months before *Catechesi Tradendae*. The doctrinal content to be taught about Mary presented in *Sharing the Light of Faith*, mainly article 106, corresponds with *Basic Teachings* and *The General Catechetical Directory* with few exceptions. *Sharing the Light of Faith* remained the major catechetical document for the United States until the publication of *Guidelines on Doctrine for Catechetical Materials* in 1990 and the English edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in 1994. For at least eleven years *Sharing the Light of Faith* set the norm for textbook writers in the U.S. Mary Charles Bryce wrote in 1979, “In one

⁹ John Joseph Carberry, “The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Catechetics,” in *Synod of Bishops, 1977: Message to the People of God and Interventions of the U.S. Delegates* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1978), 23.

sense, the directory's crowning honor is that it exists, that it has come to be in 1979, fourteen years after the last session of Vatican II. That is remarkable in itself—that a church so widely diversified and scattered could produce this document is indeed notable.”¹⁰

Just paging through this document, you sense the spirit of the times. Images are prominent and indeed most telling: No other official directory since then has had illustrations throughout. There are numerous black and white photographic illustrations on nearly all of its 182 pages. The photographs represent:

- People interacting (general): 151
- People participating in liturgy: 15
- Priests celebrating Mass: 12
- Sacraments: baptism 4, confirmation 1, penance 1, other (except liturgy) 5
- Christ: 3 [tiny icon in background, p. 81, neck cross, p. 83, outdoor cross, p. 93]
- Mary: 1 [tiny Hodegetria icon in the background, p. 81]
- Structures: church 1, bridge 1, psalm page 1, saint 1, stereo knobs 1.

¹⁰Bryce, “Sharing the Light of Faith: Catechetical Threshold for the U.S. Church,” in *Sourcebook for Modern Catechetics*, ed. Michael Warren (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1983), 272. Her article showed the strengths and the shortcomings in the directory. The Marian sections were not treated in her discussion.

The tiny Marian icon in the background of the photograph reproduced here is approximately one centimeter square. The partner icon in the background is one of the three Christ representations in the document. The thrust of

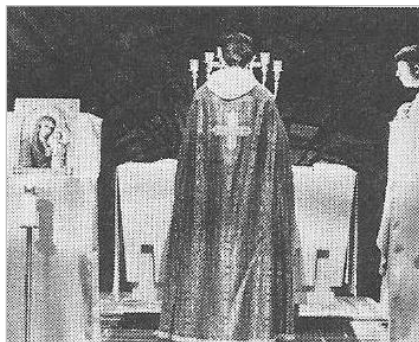


Photo by Robert H. Davis

catechesis at the time, as can be noted by the illustrations, was to build the human community of the Church, the People of God. It would take another decade before the icons of Jesus and Mary would be taken out of the shadows in the background.

Eleven years after *Sharing the Light of Faith and Catechesi Tradendae*, the United States National Council of Catholic Bishops [NCCB] published a document in 1990 that provided a set of guidelines for “doctrinally sound catechetical materials.”¹¹ The guidelines recall the mandate of the Second Vatican Council in *Christus Dominus*, 13 and 14, particularly the bishops’ responsibilities regarding “the use of publications and ‘various other media of communication’ that are helpful in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ.”¹²

This set of guidelines is specially directed to publishers of textbooks,¹³ to assist them in writing and evaluating their own materials before submitting these materials to the local bishop

¹¹GDCM, *Origins* 20:27 (Dec. 13, 1990): 429 (Introduction).

¹²GDCM, 429 (Preface), quoting *Christus Dominus* (CD) 13.

¹³It is perhaps for this reason that there seems to be no discussion of the document in secondary literature; It may have been considered an item internal to publishers.

for review. There are eighty-seven articles using a wide range of documents from the post-Vatican II period as sources. For the Marian articles, the *Guidelines on Doctrine for Catechetical Materials* (GDCM) used *Lumen Gentium*, the *General Catechetical Directory*, and *Sharing the Light of Faith*.

The guidelines were meant to secure doctrinal soundness. The document defines *doctrinal soundness* by presenting two principles from which flow several criteria. These also apply to the Marian teaching. The following is a direct quote:

Principles and Criteria of Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials¹⁴

- 1. The first principle of doctrinal soundness is that the Christian message be both *authentic* and *complete*.** For expressions of faith and moral teachings to be authentic they must be in harmony with the doctrine and traditions of the Catholic Church, which are safeguarded by the bishops, who teach with a unique authority. For completeness, the message of salvation, made up of several parts that are closely interrelated, must, in due course, be presented in its entirety, with an eye to leading individuals and communities to maturity in faith. Completeness also implies that individual parts be presented in a balanced way according to the capacity of the learners and in the context of a particular doctrine.
- 2. The second principle in determining the doctrinal soundness of catechetical materials is the recognition that the mystery of faith is *incarnate* and *dynamic*.** The mystery of the divine plan for human salvation,

¹⁴GDCM, p. 432-433.

revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and made known in the Sacred Scriptures, continues as a dynamic force in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit until, finally, all things are made subject to Christ and the kingdom is handed over to the Father “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:29). ...

In essence, as you can see by the tone, the *Guidelines* come across with a sense of mandatory authority, not simply good suggestions (as previously mentioned).

The summary chart follows:

***Marian Content in Guidelines on
Doctrine for Catechetical Materials, 1990***

Mary and the Saints

Doctrinally sound catechetical materials:

34. Explain the sacramental meaning of “communion of saints,” linking it to the eucharist, which bringing the faithful together to share the “holy gifts” is the primary source and sign of church unity.

35. Explain the biblical basis for the liturgical cult of Mary as mother of God and disciple par excellence; and describe her singular role in the life of Christ and the story of salvation (*Lumen Gentium* 66, 67).

36. Foster Marian devotions and explain the church’s particular beliefs about Mary (e.g., the immaculate conception, virgin birth, and assumption) (GCD 68; NCD 106).

37. Explain the church’s teaching on angels and its veneration of saints who intercede for us and are role models in following Christ. (GCD 68).

Articles that could indirectly mean to include Mary:

42. Explain the liturgical year, with special attention to the seasons of Advent-Christmas, Lent-Easter (NCD 144c).

44. Explain the Catholic heritage of popular devotions and sacramentals so that they serve as a means “to help people advance toward knowledge of the mystery of Christ and his message” (*Catechesi Tradendae* 54).

73. Integrate biblical themes and scriptural references in the presentation of doctrine and moral teaching, and encourage a hands-on familiarity with the Bible (NCD 60a).

75. Maintain a judicious balance between personal expression and memorization, emphasizing that it is important both for the community and themselves that individuals commit to memory selected biblical passages, essential prayers, liturgical responses, key doctrinal ideas and lists of moral responsibilities (*Catechesi Tradendae* 55; NCD 176e).

76. Provide for a variety of shared prayer forms and experiences that lead to an active participation in the liturgical life of the church and private prayer (NCD 145, 264).

81. Reflect the catholicity of the church in art and graphics by presenting the diverse customs and religious practices of racial, ethnic, cultural and family groups (NCD 194, 164).

86. Help teachers and catechists distinguish between church doctrine and the opinions and interpretations of theologians (NCD 264).

Notice here, as in the previous documents, the word dogma is not used. Instead: “explain the church’s particular beliefs about Mary (e.g., the immaculate conception, virgin birth and assumption).” However, there is a great deal here that is indeed fresh! Mary is not isolated as object and subject in itself. She is consistently referred to “in the communion of saints.” She is now to be taught in conscious awareness of the biblical

background and her relationships to the Christ, Church, and Eucharist, that is, Eucharistic celebration.

Number 86 became an influential light in the dark: “86. Help teachers and catechists distinguish between church doctrine and the opinions and interpretations of theologians (NCD 264).” In the post-Vatican II euphoria, every theological opinion, about anything, suddenly seemed to present a table laden with choices. A catechist who oversaw selection of materials for military parishes put it this way: “Believe whatever you want or don’t believe anything because “they” don’t agree upstairs anyway.” Pope Benedict would later call this “relativism.” Catechesis needs to be taught concisely with surety and simplicity.

Major revisions were now underway in textbooks. Sadlier, for instance, began to put a face on its consultants in the various disciplines; someone who could say “the buck stops here.”] Clearly, Marian teaching improved. Then came the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. I will not attempt to analyze that document here, but will share the consequences of the *Catechism* for American catechesis: that is, the establishment of the **Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church**. The Bishops’ Conference saw improvements due to the previous guidelines, but now the great *catechism* had to be taken into consideration. The doctrine in the textbooks also had to match up as nearly as possible to the wording in the *catechism*. To do this, a set of guidelines were published in 1996, this time under the title *Protocol of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

So, we have here yet another tool for textbook writers. But this time, not only a tool, but also now a new mandate. In order for a text to be approved for use in a Catholic institution, there now had to be **two inspections**. [By the way, this is also supposed to apply to Catholic universities.] As before, the *Nihil Obstat* was required of the bishop in whose diocese the text was

to be printed, *and* each text was to be submitted to the ad hoc committee for approval. This approval also has to be listed in the forward pages, such as: This Teacher Guide has been judged to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* by the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism. Educators were to look for this twofold approval.

Sounds wonderful, and in truth it is wonderful. For those of us in the field of Marian catechetics, however, and in light of all the wonderful developments in *Lumen Gentium* and thereafter in the various directories and in the exhortations, encyclicals, etc., here in the U.S. we hit a plateau that takes us, so-to-say, back to pre-Vatican II doctrinal catechesis, but this time without the devotions.

Marian Teachings in the Protocol of the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church 1996

Evaluative Points of Reference for Authenticity and Completeness

- 5. I Believe in Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God (422-682)

(495) teach that Mary is truly “Mother of God,” *theotokos*.

(508) teach that from among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be mother of his Son. “Full of grace,” Mary is “the most excellent fruit of redemption”; from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.

(509) teach that Mary is truly “Mother of God,” since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.

(510) explain that Mary “remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing

him at her breast, always a virgin”; with her whole being she is “the handmaid of the Lord.”

- 6. I Believe in the Holy Spirit (683-1060)

(744) explain that in the fullness of time the Holy Spirit completes in Mary all the preparations for Christ’s coming among the people of God. By the action of the Holy Spirit in her, the Father gives the world Emmanuel, “God-with-us.”

(973) explain that by pronouncing her “fiat” at the Annunciation and giving her consent to the Incarnation, Mary was already collaborating with the whole work her Son was to accomplish. [Note: omitted from this *In Brief* article: “She is mother wherever he is Savior and head of the Mystical Body.”]

(974) teach that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son’s Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body.

- 8. The Sacramental Celebration of the Paschal Mystery (1135-1209)

(1195) teach that by keeping the memorial of the saints—first of all the holy Mother of God, then the apostles, the martyrs, and other saints—on fixed days of the liturgical year, the Church on earth shows that she is united with the liturgy in heaven.

In the eight articles or partial articles above, seven of them are from the *In Brief* sections of the *Catechism*. Article 973 omits the final sentence of the *In Brief* statement, “She is mother wherever he is Savior and head of the Mystical Body.” The *Protocol* selects the four main Marian teachings: free of original sin and lifelong sinlessness, Mother of God, always a virgin, and assumed in heaven body and soul. It points out that Mary was chosen by God and was already a fruit of the redemption at her

conception. The *Protocol* also explains the action of the Holy Spirit in her, and it requires that Mary's collaboration with Christ's entire work be taught. Finally, catechetical materials are also to teach that Mary's presence in heaven means she shares the glory of her Son's Resurrection and thereby anticipates the destiny of all the members of his Body [IN SHORT: THE FOUR MARIAN DOGMAS].

Although the *Protocol* asks that the catechetical materials "should evidence fidelity to the basic structure of the *Catechism* and the hierarchy of truths" and "should reflect the four pillars of the *Catechism*,"¹⁵ there is no mention in the prayer section of the *Protocol* about including Marian prayer in the catechetical materials.¹⁶ There is also not a distinct mention of Mary's relationship to the Church— not as model, nor as mother, nor regarding her continued work within the Church. Article 974 teaches that her presence in heaven indicates what the members of Christ's body are promised in the resurrection of the body, but the article does not speak of Mary's continuous active presence within and her relationship to the Church. Although liturgical memorials are to be kept, no devotion to Mary or veneration of her is mentioned.

The *Protocol* does not reflect the post-conciliar development in seeing Mary as a woman of faith, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does in numerous paragraphs. The Working Document asks for, among other items, "trinitarian

¹⁵Working Document, p. 2.

¹⁶CCC *In Brief* 2682: "Because of Mary's singular cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church loves to pray in communion with the Virgin Mary, to magnify with her the great things the Lord has done for her, and to entrust supplications and praises to her."

organization, christological centrality, ecclesial context.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* works toward a harmonious whole with regard to integrating Mary in these areas, as well as in the discussion on the commandments and prayer. The *Protocol* **has** taken the trinitarian elements and christological centrality regarding Mary into account. As for the ecclesial context, Mary is a sign of the eschatological destiny of all the members of Christ’s body, but any mention of her active presence and her spiritual motherhood within the Church has been omitted.¹⁷ Regarding Mary in terms of the anthropological perspective desired by the *Protocol*, the *In Brief* Marian articles discussing Mary’s freedom, that is her free faith and free consent (511 and 975), have also been omitted.

The Working Document states that, “Since the *Catechism* should not be reduced to its ‘In Brief’ sections, catechetical materials should evidence the wider context of teaching from which the ‘In Brief’ sections are drawn.” In this light, since all the *Protocol*’s Marian items, with the exception of *Theotokos*, are precisely taken from “In Brief” articles, it is clear from the context that the *Protocol* is meant to be the *minimal* expectation of catechetical materials and does not in any way discourage fuller development of the teachings. It is not clear why the *In Brief* article 973 was shortened to omit Mary’s spiritual motherhood and her active presence in the Church. The same hold true for the *In Brief* article 975, which teaches that Mary continues her maternal role toward us, but by all other indications, that is, taking the document as a whole, it does not

¹⁷CCC *In Brief* 973: article has been shortened to omit, “She is mother wherever he is Savior,” CCC *In Brief* 975: article omitted: “We believe that the Holy Mother of God, the new Eve, Mother of the Church, continues in heaven to exercise her maternal role on behalf of the members of Christ” (Paul VI, CPG § 15).

appear to be the intention of the *Protocol* to curtail this teaching. However, it does indicate that the barebones teaching on Mary in the catechetical stratosphere means that **all we are required to teach are the dogmas and to recognize that Mary is essential to the “whole work her Son was to accomplish.”** Right! But what does that really mean, especially if you do omit the rest of the *In Brief* article?

And that seemed to be the situation when I was ending my licentiate research. I like to use the image of railroad tracks. The rails are parallel. In our case, one rail consists of the great documents of Vatican II and the follow-up exhortations, encyclicals, etc., comprising a marvelous fullness of doctrine and of faith. The other rail bundles the directories and the “must teach” lists. Would the two never meet?

Yes, finally in 1997, twenty-three years after the great *Marialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI’s *Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, we find a crossover to catechesis. Another new *General Directory for Catechesis* is published by the Congregation for the Clergy (1997). On page 185, under the heading “Catechesis and popular devotion,” we find:

196. Multiple forms of devotion to the Mother of God have developed in different circumstances of time and place, in response to popular sensibilities and cultural differences. Certain forms of Marian devotion, however, because of long usage, require a renewed catechesis to restore to them elements that have become lost or obscured. By such catechesis the perennial value of Marian devotion can be emphasized, doctrinal elements gleaned from theological reflection and the Church’s Magisterium assimilated. Catechesis on the Blessed Virgin Mary should always express clearly the intrinsic Trinitarian, Christological and ecclesiological aspects of mariology. In revising or drawing up materials for use in Marian piety account should be taken of biblical, liturgical, ecumenical and anthropological orientation.

At last norms were given for the pastors who sought to **reconcile Marian devotion with Marian devotions**. Finally, we have a tool on how to update devotions into a language that gives us all the gifts of Vatican II. Finally, we have tools for RCIA that integrate our dear Blessed Mother throughout the initiation process, if we can just get teachers to read the directory chapter prayerfully and thoughtfully with a prism that does not isolate Christ our Savior, but allows him to once again be part of his own dear family and the communion of the saints that he established.

After all this background, you justifiably could critique this presentation by saying: Why not start right here? Well, it goes back to the image of the train tracks. Those involved in lofty theological study with all its richness and beauty do hope that *something* will trickle down to those in the pews. I believe that unless we make a conscious effort to see that it does trickle down, it will not happen. Remember how long it took for the guidelines of *Marialis Cultus* to reach the ground level! Now that we are in the twenty-first century, we have yet another great and helpful tool. It is the recent *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005. The Marian content is rich. Not only is it doctrinally extensive, but also devotion to Mary as expressed in the arts receives excellent leads for additional study.

Finally, there is the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (2006). Initially I questioned why we needed it and I admittedly did not read through it until recently. We already had the CCC, and it is so rich in Marian content! Was that not enough?

Looking at this *Adult Catechism* (AC) from the point of view of instructing both newcomers and the generation of Catholics in the United States who got little authentic instruction, this truly American-flavored text is, to find no better expression, simply grand! Even though I am entirely allergic to such terms as American Catholic Church (as opposed to the Catholic Church

in America), this text is gently, humbly, extraordinarily well written for precisely an American audience.

I mentioned above the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), and indirectly with that I am mentioning **family catechesis**, the ultimate purpose of this paper. For nigh on forty years, those who have led RCIA programs and programs for hungry generations, especially Millennials, have been asking for something, anything, in hand to structurally teach about Mary. For many converts, she is the big stumbling block. For young families sincere about studying the faith and for seekers on all levels, the *Adult Catechism* provides a teaching tool that works, and the Mary chapter is not the tail end or footnote of this book. It is written on a simpler level than the texts of the CCC, and it includes a component of reflection questions, a teaching method currently favored.

Many parishes are conducting family catechesis at least twice a year. Parents (or a family representative like grandma) accompany the child and through an interactive program learn doctrine together. I have had the privilege of conducting three such family trainings on the topic “Prayer in Communion with Mary.” The children—and parents—learned that the Hail Mary prayer includes words of the Bible and represents real events. Here I want to mention and thank Father Jim Phalan and Father Peyton’s Family Theater for their kind assistance. We showed clips of the 1950s films on the Annunciation and the Visitation. These old clips have the words of the Hail Mary as we know them in the prayer. The families were spellbound and, because the material was introduced as “vintage,” there were no complaints. Afterwards the children playacted out the scenes themselves. Most assuredly, the families gained a new understanding of this beloved prayer.

There is another development in Marian catechesis I have experienced. Recently, I was given an assignment, a challenge, to prepare materials for the USCCB Leadership Institute of the

Committee for Evangelization and Catechesis to develop a teaching on Prayer in Communion with Mary (AC, p. 470 and CCC, no. 2682) for catechists. This presentation was the first of a catechetical series to be devoted to integrating Marian topics *per se* into the official offerings of the USCCB for such training. The leadership institute with these catechetically focused presentations was established in 1997 and went online in 2010. It is such a joy to see that our dear Blessed Mother is now part of those leadership trainings for the United States Conference.

Conclusion

After all these years of poverty and silence, I believe that we are at a new place for this country's recuperation, if you will, of learning about our dear Mother and Queen. We are now poised to go beyond devotion and devotions. We are ready to address Mary's "official and objective" place in the Church. We are ready to address Our Lord's work of salvation as he intended it for all times. As the founder of Schoenstatt, Father Joseph Kentenich, expresses it: Mary is the official and permanent associate and helper of the Lord in the *entire* work of redemption. Jesus, with his mother—Jesus, with *the woman* (as John's Gospel tells us)—teaches us, with love and dignity, what it means to be his mother, sister, daughter, friend, and relative: other Marys at Christ's side in the loving drama of salvation history.

Finally, for your reflection and your files, I wish to leave with you something from Saint John Paul II. Hopefully, you will have time to read it, to savor its wisdom in light of the theme of this conference, and to apply it to bringing Mary's active presence consciously into family life.

Catechesi Tradendae (Apostolic Exhortation of John Paul II, October 16, 1979)

In the Family

68. The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council. Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. But that is not enough: Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere. The fact that these truths about the main questions of faith and Christian living are thus repeated within a family setting impregnated with love and respect will often make it possible to influence the children in a decisive way for life. The parents themselves profit from the effort that this demands of them, for in a catechetical dialogue of this sort each individual both receives and gives.

Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis. Furthermore, in places where anti-religious legislation endeavors even to prevent education in the faith, and in places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, "the church of the home" remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis. Thus there cannot be too great an effort on the part of Christian parents to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal. Encouragement must also be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person-to-person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task: The service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price.

Author's Biography

A member of the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, M. Jean Frisk has rich teaching experience on all levels and has worked with a variety of catechetical programs, including family formation. She spent twelve years in Germany with a focus on Marian devotion and pilgrimage. During that time she provided catechetical training, pilgrimages, and retreats for NATO military personnel and their families. Upon return to the U.S., she obtained an MA and an STL in Mariology from the International Marian Research Institute. For her licentiate, she studied nearly 2,000 textbooks to research what was taught about Mary. She has authored award-winning devotional works and is a catechetical consultant for Marian content in William H. Sadlier textbooks.