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Mary Patricia Tyrrell Mulligan

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THE VIRGIN MARY AND THE CATECHETICAL MOVEMENT

Mary Patricia Tyrrell Mulligan*

Introduction

In his apostolic exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, John Paul II claims, "There are good grounds for the statement made in the synod hall that Mary is 'a living catechism' and 'the mother and model of catechists.'"¹ He uses the image of Mary as Jesus' catechist, the one to whom he listened, "the only Son from the Father," full of grace and truth, [who] was formed by her in human knowledge of the Scriptures and of the history of God's plan for his people, and in adoration of the Father,"² and establishes Mary as integral to the thrust and dynamism of catechesis. John Paul II cites Mary as "the first disciple above all else because no one has been 'taught by God' to such depth."³ *Catechesi Tradendae* provides us with a very positive, constructive framework for a discussion of Mary and catechesis.

However, it is not uncommon to hear both favorable and negative comments from people who reminisce about their catechetical and liturgical experiences of Mary and Marian devotions.⁴

*Mrs. Mulligan is Director of Theological Field Education and Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, OH. She has three children and one grandchild.

¹John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT), October 16, 1979, 73.

²CT 73.

³CT 73.

⁴Over twenty years ago, Rev. Mathew F. Morry, O.P., presented a paper to the Mariological Society of America at the 1971 meeting. Many of the concerns he noted then are still in evidence today: "Mary and the Contemporary Scene," *Marian Studies* 23 (1972): 133-153. The immediate postconciliar period has been referred to as "the decade without Mary," and the tendency was to "place her in parenthesis and marginalize her." Stefano De Fiores, S.M.M., "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, René Lautourelle, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 474.

For some, their childhood catechesis has been sustained and perhaps even nurtured. For others, the Marian catechetical thrust has been rejected. Some people have gone through a period of "Marian suspension," a kind of limbo, a distancing or alienation, and are now searching for a Marian theology and spirituality that frees Mary from narrow stereotypes and presents her in a way that feeds the individual's theological reflection and life of prayer.

Within this century, Mary and Marian devotions have had a pendulum swing from intense popular piety to relative obscurity, from high praise to anonymity, to what today appears to be an emerging, renewed curiosity and interest in Mary: the Woman of Faith, the Faithful Disciple. It is encouraging to hear the questions being asked and to witness the searching for knowledge of the Mother of God. At the same time, there is a distinct realization that, for many people, there has been a "catechetical gap," and the Church is presented with a situation that demands an awareness of the need for evangelization and catechesis surrounding Marian theology. The theology has been present through the ages; Mary has been integral to the tradition. The contemporary experience calls the Church to reiterate her message and carry out her basic teaching mission in a very intentional manner concerning the role of Mary as she is known through theology and the tradition.

Procedure

Given those challenges, this study proposes to examine the catechetical movement specifically as it relates to the role of Mary within catechesis. A brief background of early catechesis leading up to the catechetical movement will be noted. Certain themes emerged from the catechetical movement which still impact catechetical methodology. Concurrent with catechetical revision, the Church also experienced a paradigm shift as a result of Vatican Council II, and these implications will be examined. Recent catechetical and Marian documents and their relationship to Marian catechesis will be reviewed. Specific Marian themes and their applicability to the catechetical endeavor will be proposed. Finally, a direction will be suggested for the implementation of further catechesis concentrating on Mary.

Early Catechesis

It is an undisputed fact that catechesis is one of the principal ways in which the Church exercises her mission.⁵ Teaching and preaching are primary pastoral tasks, which have been integral to the communication of the Christian faith.

We are aware of the oral transmission of the "Good News" and the credal and liturgical focus necessary for baptismal preparation in the early stages of Christianity. The preaching of the apostles, the emergence of the written gospels, the writings of the early Fathers—all provide us with a profile of the early catechetical methods. The message of Christ was central. Preaching conveyed the fundamental convictions, and the life and work of Jesus Christ were recounted. God had intervened in human history; the scriptures had been fulfilled; all were invited to accept the invitation to repent and believe the "Good News" of salvation.⁶

Further catechetical developments during the early centuries can be traced to the Church's need to respond to the threats of heresy, especially surrounding the Christological questions. Particularly significant for Marian catechesis is the use of the title *Theotokos*, "Mother of God," and the concurrent teaching that ensued.⁷ The early allegorically exegetical sermons, the liturgy and poetry expressed the concepts which would have been the catechetical foundations.⁸ Essentially, the doctrine surrounding *Theotokos* is a Christological dogma. Yet it communicates to us the mystery which is integral to our faith and our understanding of Mary. It is the foundation upon which catechetical reflections have continued to elaborate.

⁵CT 18: "Catechesis cannot be dissociated from the Church's pastoral and missionary activity as a whole."

⁶CT 10, 11, 12.

⁷For a detailed history of the early teaching and images used to clarify the Marian theology, see Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Vol. 1 (2 vols.; New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963).

⁸Around the time of the Council of Ephesus, for example, Cyril of Alexandria reportedly preached during a sermon: "Hail, Mary Theotokos, venerable jewel of the whole earth, never-extinguished lamp, crown of virginity, sceptre of orthodoxy, never-destroyed sanctuary, vessel of the Incomprehensible, Mother and Virgin . . ." (Graef, *Mary*, 1:111).

In the Middle Ages, catechesis was found in the homes, in the liturgical setting and customs of the local churches, and within the communities which were strong Christian influences. The Christian environment was highly formative since it encompassed the whole experience of life, and this provided the context for the Church's teaching. The catechetical efforts were a mixture of many elements derived from the tradition, combined with peculiar beliefs and practices contributed by converts through the centuries.⁹ As Walter Kasper points out, "proofs from Scripture and tradition," as we understand the concept, were not needed by the medieval Christian. "[M]edieval Christianity lived its tradition and had no need of proofs."¹⁰ Formal catechesis revolved around set formulas, primarily the Lord's Prayer and the Creed.

Interest in Mary arose from many of the legends and stories of her early life, the family life of Jesus, and the "privileges" bestowed upon Mary. Since medieval society was very hierarchical in nature, Mary's place as Queen of Heaven influenced the cult and the catechesis.¹¹ During the later medieval centuries prior to the Reformation, Mary's role expanded from mother to that of mediator and placater; for, from her privileged position in the heavenly realm, her association with Christ and the Church gave her a unique universal role.¹²

The period after the Reformation necessitated a more concentrated effort to insure accurate teaching of Catholic doctrines. In light of the publication of Luther's Catechism and the Catechism of the Council of Trent, catechisms giving clear and concise summaries of Catholic beliefs began to dominate the

⁹Thomas Martin, *The Challenge of Christian Marriage: Marriage in Scripture, History, and Contemporary Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

¹⁰Walter Kasper, *The Methods of Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, Deus Books, 1969), 34.

¹¹Rosalind and Christopher Brooke, *Popular Religion in the Middle Ages* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 31-33; Graef, *Mary*, 1:259-264; Michael Whalen, "Preaching and Teaching Mary in an Ecumenical Age," *The Living Light*, 25 (1988): 46.

¹²René Laurentin, *The Question of Mary* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 41.

catechetical efforts.¹³ As the catechism became an institution, there was also a shift from family and community providing the religious formation to a more structured framework designed for both children and adults. Previously, the adults were the recipients of the instruction, and the catechesis for the children was centered within the home, the family circle. During the Post-Reformation period, schools and specific religious institutions emerged which provided catechesis for children and adults.¹⁴

At the time of the Reformation, devotion to Mary was characterized by many superstitious notions and sentimentality.¹⁵ These phenomena, together with the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura*, made it imperative that Marian doctrines be clarified. Catechetical teaching about Mary was linked to the conception and birth of the Redeemer. The title "Virgin Mother Mary" was significant. Teachings about Mary were centered in the celebration of her major feasts: her birth, the Annunciation, Purification, and Assumption.¹⁶

The Catechetical Movement

For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on the catechetical movement as it has unfolded in this twentieth century. The significant circumstances leading up to and subsequent to the Vatican Council II have given rise to a new depth of theology and pastoral concern in many areas. The concern here will focus on the integration of the understanding of Mary into the lives of the People of God in a way that is true to the

¹³Jacques Audinet cites the catechisms of Luther in 1529, Canisius in 1556, Belarmine in 1598, and Council of Trent in 1566 as works by "pioneers intent on the living word of God and a christocentric approach" ("Catechesis," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum*, Karl Rahner, ed. [New York: Seabury Press, 1975], 174).

¹⁴The general history is detailed in Joseph Andreas Jungmann, *Handing On the Faith: A Manual of Catechetics* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), 1-64; Gerard S. Sloyan, ed., *Shaping the Christian Message: Essays in Religious Education* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1963); Michael Warren, ed., *Sourcebook for Modern Catechetics*, Part One: "Historical Studies" (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 1983), 23-198.

¹⁵Laurentin, *Question*, 49.

¹⁶Jungmann, *Handing*, 391.

tradition of the Church and is in dialogue with the needs of contemporary persons.

After World War I, in some instances based upon experiences with military personnel, there was recognition that catechesis had to have a long-term effect on the individual and had to have some relationship with life experience and a Christian life to be lived in the world.¹⁷ Since life in the community was contributing less to the Christian formation of persons, and since the family itself was providing less direct catechesis, new methods were sought for the teaching of religion. Children were to be taught the doctrine in such a way as to foster and make clear the connection between the content, the liturgy, and Christian life.¹⁸

What is specifically termed the "Catechetical Movement" had its beginnings around 1900 in both Munich and Vienna. Due to a desire to improve methods of catechesis so that both memory and understanding were integrated into the child's learning process, the "Munich Method" was devised. It incorporated techniques whereby the text of the catechism was developed and understood, not just memorized. Josef Jungmann, an Austrian Jesuit, was the primary initiator of the new method. He advocated a return to the biblical sources so that the history of salvation recounted in the scriptures could be applied systematically to the doctrinal and liturgical life of the Church. This was an attempt to recapture the formative elements present within the religious life of the community during the Middle Ages. The religious activity of the children, in particular, was to be given expression and fostered through oral instruction and participation in the liturgy. The summation of the methodology was presented at the Catechetical Congress in Munich in 1928.¹⁹

The reform of European catechisms was initiated. What emerged from the study and revisions was the "kerygmatic"

¹⁷Specifically noted in the work of F. H. Drinkwater and the "Sower Scheme" ("little and often"); Jungmann, *Handing*, 55-64; R. M. Rummery, *Catechesis and Religious Education in a Pluralist Society* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1975), 8.

¹⁸Jungmann, *Handing*, 33-34.

¹⁹Jungmann, *Handing*, 32-37; Rummery, *Catechesis*, 10-12.

method which focused on the biblical and liturgical roots of the Christian understanding of doctrine. It was a systematic structuring of the "message," the "good news," the *kerygma*. Therefore, doctrinal statements and moral imperatives were presented within the framework of Sacred Scripture and the significance of God's saving action.²⁰

According to E. F. Malone, this kerygmatic theology, as promulgated primarily by Josef Jungmann and Hugo Rahner, is "*historical*" in that it recounts the moments of salvation as revealed in the Old and New Testaments. "It is *Christocentric*, setting forth God's providential purpose and plan to prepare for and manifest Jesus Christ." It is "*reasonable*" because it is systematic in its method of presentation. It is a theology of "*value*," as it arranges particular truths and reinforces the dominant value. Value is highlighted by the consistent systematic use of Scripture, as well as by symbolism that is pertinent for the psychological and cultural needs of the individual.²¹

During this period of time, the people's general understanding of Mary was also changing. At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, devotion and dedication to Mary was growing and developing. Apparitions at Lourdes, La Salette, and Fatima helped to feed the interest in Mary and to develop the spirituality of the faithful. Home and parish-related devotions were common, and a great value was placed upon popular Marian piety. Immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical concerns created some obstacles for the various forms of Marian devotions. Concurrent were concerns for biblical and liturgical renewal and how Marian piety and devotional life coincided with the perceived areas for renewal. Based on the Christocentric emphasis already determined for the Council and the ecumenical

²⁰For more complete descriptions of kerygmatic theology: see Johannes Hofinger, S.J., *The Art of Teaching Christian Doctrine* (Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1957), 1-9; Jungmann, *Handing*, 398-405; E. F. Malone, "Kerygmatic Theology," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1967); Eberhard Simons, "Kerygma," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, Karl Rahner, ed. (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

²¹Malone, "Kerygmatic Theology," in NCE 8:169.

roadblocks, Mary's role in relationship to the pastoral and pious practices of the Church came into serious question. Although the biblical movement was giving Marian devotion a context with solid references,²² the general perception of the populace was that Mary's position for veneration was being threatened. Through Chapter VIII in *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers attempted to situate Mary into the total salvific plan and to establish her clearly as "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church." Mary was officially acknowledged for her unique place in salvation history and for her unique role within our personal history.

Vatican Council II—Paradigm Shift

The conciliar choice to treat the Marian schema within the document on the Church gave formal expression to the ecclesiological context within which Mary would be considered. The inclusion of the treatise on Mary within the document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, clearly created a paradigm shift for Mariology. Rather than presenting a separate, complete doctrine about Mary, the Council highlighted her role and participation in both the mystery of Christ and the Church.²³

Edward Schillebeeckx attests that the Council Fathers wanted "to avoid both minimalism and maximalism in matters of mariology" but, in so doing, two types of Marian theology were present. He describes one as "a church or church-theological mariology" whereby Mary is recognized as "our sister, an eminent and model member of the church's community

²²Subsequent biblical scholarship concentrates on the Marian texts: see Raymond Brown, Karl Donfried, et al., eds., *Mary in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; and New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Bertrand Buby, S.M., *Mary, the Faithful Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) and his *Mary of Galilee: Vol. 1, Mary in the New Testament* (New York: Alba House, 1994); Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*, trans. Bertrand Buby, S.M. (New York: Alba House, 1992).

²³For background concerning the inclusion of the Marian schema as Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*, see Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., *Madonna: Mary in the Catholic Tradition* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1986), 7-9; Otto Semmelroth, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church," *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 1:285-286.

of faith." The second type, according to Schillebeeckx, is "a christological mariology" in which, because of her relationship as mother of Jesus, Mary is also called "mother of the church." This type places Mary alongside Christ, head of the redeemed church.²⁴

Subsequent documents and writings have tended toward development of the patristic teaching on Mary as "the type of the Church"²⁵ and the connection between ecclesiology and Mariology. Mary is no longer one-dimensional. Rather she is characterized as a model of communion and solidarity. This is in contrast to what Elizabeth Johnson cites as "a patron-petitioner model" which was a previously predominant form of veneration and perception of an individual's relationship with Mary.²⁶ As Hans von Balthasar notes, "And if Mary is now handed over to John and thus to the apostles and to the Church as their mother, we see her then praying together with the assembled Church for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14)." He goes on to recognize that, at Pentecost, Mary "becomes the center and focus of the Spirit-enlightened Church." Her perfection is seen as something genuinely human. According to Balthasar, "What is unique about her is that the Spirit of Pentecost basically does nothing other than to present to her the content of her own experience as her memory had retained it: a memory that contains all the central dogmas of revelation in their complete unity and interwovenness."²⁷

The inclusion of the Spirit, the pneumatological dimension, as it receives increased attention, releases Mary from constricting analogies, from maintaining an image that is fixed for all time. According to Otto Semmelroth, consideration of Mary as a "type" of the Church "enables us to avoid both *mar-*

²⁴Edward Schillebeeckx and Catharina Halkes, *Mary: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1993), 16.

²⁵*Lumen Gentium* (LG), 53.

²⁶"Saints and Mary," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, eds. (2 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 2:160.

²⁷Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary For Today*, trans. Robert Nowell (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 39-41.

iological mysticism that tends not to see Mary as a member of the redeemed Church, and also the *mariological naturalism* that forgets that she has been raised up to the position of a daughter of God through grace."²⁸ Rather, drawing from the biblical and ecclesial tradition, the experience of faith within history and culture enables Mary to maintain her identity as the icon of the Church through all time. To further clarify the manner in which Mary's relationship within the Church is stated, De Fiores proposes the following postconciliar tasks of ecclesiology:

... "reflection on the understanding of Mary in an ecclesiological key, and of the Church in a mariological key"; clarifying marian typology, with particular attention to the use of metaphor; and carrying out an in-depth study of the title "Mater Ecclesiae," which was discussed at the Council and proclaimed by Paul VI.²⁹

These tasks are compatible with the general aims and goals of catechesis, which are to clarify beliefs and educate persons of faith so as to build up the Body of Christ.³⁰ The intimate connection between Mary and the Church is understood in light of Mary's relationship to Christ. Confusion about Mary's role as "the type of the Church" becomes an impediment for the catechetical task.

Criteria for Catechesis

Concurrent with postconciliar theological and Mariological reflections, catechetical shifts were also taking place. Kerygmatic theology, stimulated by increased biblical scholarship which became generally accessible, set new waves in motion for catechesis. A series of documents, beginning with the *General Catechetical Directory* in 1971, have been written as

²⁸Cited in Stefano De Fiores, "Mary in Postconciliar Theology," in *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives*, René Latourelle, ed. (3 vols.; New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 1:481.

²⁹Ibid., 482-483.

³⁰CT 1, 19.

guidelines for those involved in the teaching mission of the Church.³¹

The *General Catechetical Directory* treats Mary in the section "Hierarchy of Truths to Be Observed in Catechesis." There, she is included in "the mystery of Christ the incarnate Word, who was born of the Virgin Mary, . . ." and "the mystery of the Church, which is Christ's Mystical Body, in which the Virgin Mary holds the preeminent place." The directory also has a separate section dedicated to "Mary, Mother of God, Mother and Model of the Church" which presents a mosaic of quotes from *Lumen Gentium*.³² The other early documents, written between 1971 and 1979, reflect the "Marian silence" period. The catechetical thrust proposed is certainly biblical, Christological, liturgical, and ecclesial. However, when catechetical guidelines concerning Mary are included, they are not in an inclusive Christological or ecclesiological context. Scripture may be included as a proof text, but the exhortation is not kerygmatic. In *To Teach As Jesus Did*, the intent of the bishops is to present a pastoral message on Catholic education. The purpose of the work is not to present guidelines concerning catechetical content. Rather its focus is on the teaching mission of the Church and how it is to carry out its task. The only mention of Mary is to ask for her intercession as they confront the challenges of the educational ministry.³³ *Basic Teachings of Catholic Religious Education*, too, tries to use conciliar language, but the examples are post-tridentine in their catechetical approach.³⁴ The Bishops' Synod in 1977 concentrates on the definition and execution of catechesis itself. An oral inter-

³¹Specific documents relating to catechesis: *General Catechetical Directory* (GCD) (Rome, 1971); *To Teach As Jesus Did* (TTAJD) (NCCB, 1972); *Basic Teachings of Catholic Religious Education* (BT) (NCCB, 1973); *Message to the People of God* (1977 Synod) (Bishops, Synod on Catechetics, 1977); *Sharing the Light of Faith: The National Catechetical Directory* (NCD) (NCCB, 1979); *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) (Rome, 1979); *Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials* (*Guidelines*) (NCCB, 1990); *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome, 1992).

³²GCD 43, 68.

³³TTAJD, 155.

³⁴BT 24.

vention, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Catechetics," is included in the document *Message to the People of God*.³⁵

In *Sharing the Light of Faith: The National Catechetical Directory*, there is a separate section for "Mary, mother of God, mother and model of the Church." The language is similar to that of the previous documents. While Mary is listed within the "principal elements of the Christian message for catechesis,"³⁶ the contents relating to Mary are not placed within the extensive Christological or biblical sections. This would indicate the still-developing understanding of the conciliar theology and its relationship to Mariology. Naming Mary as mother and model of the Church is consistent theologically. However, for catechetical purposes, it would present a stronger message to have the theology of Mary incorporated into the sections of the guidelines that apply more specifically to Christology and ecclesiology.

The catechetical documents cited have been the criteria in the United States for the published catechetical textbooks and related materials. Much effort has been exerted by publishers to focus on a scriptural and Christological presentation of theological content, and this has been a consistent, constructive shift. At the same time, though, the result has been that—due to the ambiguity of the catechetical documents—from a catechetical perspective, Mary's role within the Church and her influence on people's lives have also remained ambiguous.

This is not to say that catechetical guidance has not been available from other, later, sources. Both *Catechesi Tradendae* and the *Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials* are more specific and reflect the ongoing theological reflection.³⁷

In 1973, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the pastoral letter *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*. The bishops are clearly concentrating and elaborating on the statements in *Lumen Gentium* and address Mary from the biblical,

³⁵1977 Synod, 23-24.

³⁶NCD, Chap. 5.

³⁷CT 72, 73; *Guidelines* 35, 36.

liturgical, ecclesial, and ecumenical traditions. The elements for a catechetical and pastoral process are included as the bishops elucidate not only the need for and the content of a renewed Mariology, but also highlight how Mary is related to priests, persons in religious life, families, youth, and single persons.³⁸

The following year (1974), using scriptural foundations, the apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* demonstrates how the Council's teaching is integrated with the liturgical life of the Church. At the Annunciation, Mary is "*the attentive Virgin*" as "she listens, accepts, proclaims and venerates the word of God, distributes it to the faithful as the bread of life and in the light of that word examines the signs of the times and interprets and lives the events of history."³⁹ "*The Virgin in prayer*" is exemplified through scriptural accounts of the Magnificat and Cana. "*The Virgin Mother*" and "*the Virgin presenting offerings*" are known through the stories of the nativity and the presentations both in the Temple and at Calvary.⁴⁰ Paul VI is calling all the faithful to a renewal of devotion to Mary. He asks "episcopal conferences, local churches, religious families and communities of the faithful to promote a genuine creative activity and at the same time to proceed to a careful revision of expressions and exercises of piety directed towards the Blessed Virgin." The Pope strongly encourages the bishops to "put forward some principles for action in this field."⁴¹ *Marialis Cultus* provides a fertile field for catechists seeking a direction and a means to have Mary more closely integrated into pastoral activity. The images alone prompt the imagination to ask the further questions as to how the understanding and awareness of Mary deepen one's faith and encourage it to fuller maturity.⁴²

John Paul II, in his *Redemptoris Mater* (1987), also presents theological themes that are a workable framework for

³⁸*Behold Your Mother*, 119-146.

³⁹MC 17.

⁴⁰MC 17-20.

⁴¹MC 24.

⁴²Whalen, "Preaching," 49, proposes the use of "new and fresh images" which could serve as "complements (and sometimes, correctives) to prominent traditional titles. Thus, it is essentially a question of complementarity rather than replacement."

catechetical integration: Mary's pilgrimage of faith, her entrance into the mysteries of Christ's life, and her presence in the Church. Mary's personal, yet universal, journey, her intimate relationship with Christ and the accompanying mysteries, and, finally, her unique presence in the Church as a witness to the mystery of Jesus establish a historical and anthropological foundation for creative approaches to a renewed catechetical and authentic devotional dedication to Mary.⁴³

Foundations for Marian Catechesis Today

John Paul II states that "the specific aim of catechesis is to develop, with God's help, an as yet initial faith, and to advance in fullness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old."⁴⁴ The Pope calls for a systematic catechesis which deals with essentials and is sufficiently complete. He acknowledges the various developmental stages and diversity of needs among people, and he expresses the hope that there will be catechetical attempts to serve all persons.⁴⁵ He encourages both catechesis and evangelization to "bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures."⁴⁶ For the purpose of this particular study, we need to apply these principles to evangelization and catechesis as they relate to Marian theology.

As we understand Mariology in light of Vatican Council II, whereby it is intimately related to the Christocentricity to be communicated through catechesis, I will draw some analogies from the directives in *Catechesi Tradendae*. John Paul II speaks of saying "yes" and surrendering to the word of God and then, "at a later stage, endeavoring to know better and better the profound meaning of this word."⁴⁷ Is there not a comparison to be made with the Virgin Mary who said "yes," surrendered to and trusted the word of God? Only after her profound *fiat* do we

⁴³For additional reflections on the document and specific Marian images, see Agnes Cunningham, *The Significance of Mary* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1988).

⁴⁴CT 20.

⁴⁵CT 21, 35-45, 51.

⁴⁶CT 53.

⁴⁷CT 20.

hear her proclaiming a deeper understanding of the significance of that word through the Magnificat. Does this not reflect the initial stages of evangelization which are called to go further, to a deeper understanding provided by catechesis? Is this not a way to demonstrate the development of the initial faith which is called to fullness? By speaking a daily *fiat* and proclaiming the Magnificat daily, do we not have the potential to "nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old"?⁴⁸ The Mary we know from scripture invites us on a catechetical journey, a pilgrimage of faith, which will be systematic; will include the essentials; will invite us more deeply into the Christian mystery as revealed through the kerygma; and will be "an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life."⁴⁹

Proposed Catechetical Themes

Certain themes keep emerging as potential foundations for a developing catechesis about Mary. I will cite four. First, John Paul II's "Marian dimension" becomes an overall perspective, a lens with which to view catechetical content. Second, Mary's "yes," her *fiat*, which leads to her Magnificat proclamation, is another foundational category for catechetical review. Third, as the ecclesiological theme arises again and again as primary in understanding Mary's relationship to us as Mother of the Church, then a catechetical thrust for an "ecclesial attitude" is worth examination. Finally, the importance of Marian images is offered as a catechetical value.

Marian Dimension

For young and old alike, this is the time to re-visit Mary. It is a time to re-think old patterns of understanding; or, for those who have been part of the Marian "silent period," it is a time to get acquainted with Mary in a way that is conducive to theological and spiritual enrichment. It is a time to confront the "Marian dimension" of being a disciple, of being a Christian,⁵⁰

⁴⁸CT 20.

⁴⁹CT 21.

⁵⁰*Redemptoris Mater*, 45, 46.

and the significance of that as the individual proceeds on the pilgrim journey in relationship to Christ and his mother. The "Marian dimension" of which John Paul II speaks invites the catechist and those to be catechized into solidarity with the one who engaged in much praise of God, much "heart pondering" and considerable contemplation of the mystery.⁵¹

The theological categories will be classified as biblical, liturgical, Christocentric, and ecclesial. The actual catechetical experience will be one of knowing Mary as the first, the perfect disciple. Mary, the first believer and therefore a woman of strong faith, is a model for all Christians, women and men alike. Mary is the model because of who she is as the mother of Jesus; and, as one contemplates Mary, one enters into the mystery of the Incarnation and into the mystery of the Trinity. Her faith, her discipleship, her enthronement in glory—all direct us to her Son, intimately ensconced within the Godhead.

Mary's Fiat

Much is being written about the lack of commitment within contemporary society. Teaching the Magnificat in a systematic, intentional manner may be a catechetical starting point. Mary's profound and complex "yes" confronts us with a commitment statement that is a cornerstone for a catechetical approach. Balthasar views Mary's "yes" as a "figure of concreteness," a cornerstone for Christology. Another theme related to Mary which he uses is that of "totality," whereby he refers to his trinitarian theology. To be invited into the mystery of the Trinity through Mary, to become aware of the inner life of the Trinity as the Father sends the Son in the Spirit, is another captivating catechetical possibility. The third way Balthasar sees Mary acting as catalyst is through "affirmation," which represents the ecclesial attitude which filled her. The themes used by Balthasar invite the individual into a living, active faith and challenge the individual to a deepening maturation of that faith.⁵²

⁵¹For a theological probing of Mary's significance as a christological source from a contemplative perspective, see William M. Thompson, "The Virgin Mary as a Christological Source," in his *Christology and Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

⁵²Johann G. Roten, "Hans Urs von Balthasar's Anthropology in Light of His Marian Thinking," *Communio* 20 (Summer, 1993): 310, 320.

Ecclesial Attitude

Another catechetical concern revolves around ecclesiology. Adrienne von Speyr cites Mary as having "the perfect Catholic disposition; the attitude of 'feeling with the Church' has its source in her." Other Christians can possess this attitude only by following the example of Mary. "Her most personal and private feelings about the Son are used by him to be objectified in the Church, and she receives her whole self anew from the Son in this transformed ecclesial form." Mary does not have to change who she is. Rather the Son says to her, "Remain who you are, but be so for everyone."⁵³ Balthasar, too, speaks of an "ecclesial attitude" and, according to him, as the individual takes on ecclesial responsibility, so more and more deeply does the person feel a part of the Church. This then is the attitude that must have filled Mary "since she is the embodiment of the Church as a lived reality." This attitude is the attitude of "Ecclesia-Mary, as the handmaid of the Lord, to whom it is done according to the word of the Lord, who ponders in her heart all the words of the Lord in order to nourish herself on them, who sits at the feet of Jesus and has chosen the best part, who breaks her urn of ointment so that it may serve the Bridegroom as oil to anoint him, and who stands silently under the Cross in order to be led into the mysteries of all fruitfulness."⁵⁴

An ecclesial attitude, one which stresses Mary's role as archetype of the Church, can be a catechetical element to awaken the teaching and learning Church so that its people may draw closer to saying "yes": together, with Mary, they proclaim the greatness of God.

Importance of Marian Images

Another proposed catechetical approach is aimed both to rediscover and discover images and symbols that communicate a significant Mariology. Images take on different configurations—some are artistic images (such as paintings, symbols,

⁵³Adrienne von Speyr, "Mary in the Church," *Communio* 20 (Summer 1993): 451.

⁵⁴Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Razing the Bastions: On the Church in This Age*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V. (San Francisco: Communio Books, Ignatius Press, 1993), 93-94.

icons, and so on); others are particular to cultural and life experiences of specific people.

Every liturgist, aware of the power of symbols, is faced with the ever-recurring questions: What do these symbols say about God, about Mary, about this celebration, about this sacred space? Today there is a growing interest in icons, particularly Marian representations. Religious symbols fascinate the imagination and provide a broader space for theological reflection and catechetical integration. "Images distill the essential: vision, conviction and commitment."⁵⁵ The Marian images are catechetical tools to communicate the invitation, the "yes," the motherhood, the drama of discipleship, the timelessness of Mary the Mother of God. A catechetical search into the artistic representations, the Marian archetypes presented through history, is clearly a way to break the "Marian silence" and reintroduce the conversation, the articulation, of the theology of Mary.

Another type of image resides within the life experience of people. The richness of cultures is being explored more actively today. One example is the pastoral letter of the Hispanic bishops of the United States, *The Bishops Speak with the Virgin* (1981). The title of the pastoral presents the image of a dialogue, a symbol of a relationship with Mary. The document calls for catechesis to take the Hispanic American tradition into account, so that growth and maturation in Christian commitment is facilitated. The document is rich with symbolic expressions designating values of that particular culture. Other cultures use other catechetical symbols to express the same Christian reality, and this further substantiates the importance of cultural symbols. These cultural symbols arise from the life experiences and memories of people. As Roten notes, some of the "collective memories" may "tend to generate cultural clichés and ethnic stereotypes." More importantly, though, "memories are lifelines from which people and peoples draw inspiration for the building of ever new futures."⁵⁶ Much of that

⁵⁵Johann G. Roten, S.M., *Deep Memories: A Marianist Icon* (Dayton, OH: International Marian Research Institute, 1993), 6.

⁵⁶Roten, *Deep Memories*, 4.

which is both positive and negative concerning the piety and devotion surrounding Mary has arisen from the cultural roots. Catechesis, theologically rooted, is in a position to draw from the cultural foundations to nurture an alive and active faith.

The official liturgical feasts present another "image" source. A study of the liturgical expressions in the sacramentary and lectionary containing the masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary could also serve as a catechetical resource.⁵⁷ Many images are incorporated in the prayers related to the feasts cited within the liturgical year that foster knowledge and piety consistent with the long-standing understanding and tradition of the Church.

Summary: A Call to a Life of Faith and Discipleship

A person's religious development is a lifelong process. As Mary served as the prime catechist for Jesus by teaching him the Scriptures, so she serves as a primary catechist for us. Just as Mary grew into an awareness of her intense living faith, her vocation, her mission, so we are challenged to follow her example. We learn discipleship from our catechist, Mary the mother of Jesus. What we know of our model we learn from the scriptural accounts and the subsequent reflection on her through the ages by the Church. The Church's dogmatic corpus, the titles distinguishing Mary, the images we have experienced artistically and culturally—all enhance and enrich the New Testament narratives.

Today, as society questions and seeks understanding for situations which seem to have no easy solutions, I would suggest that catechists recapture some of the enthusiasm of the early kerygmatic movement. Grounded in the biblical sources, we have Mary, our catechist, teaching us as she considers her response to the angel. We rejoice with her as she proclaims the wonders of God as she meets Elizabeth. Her canticle, the Magnificat, elaborates for us the "message," the foundation of the faith we learn and profess. With her, we experience liturgy and

⁵⁷National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (2 vols.; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992).

community, both in the Temple and the Upper Room. We note the outreach she extends at Cana.

The kerygmatic "values" cited earlier coincide with the post-conciliar directions which placed Mary clearly as intimately related to the mystery of Christ and the Church. The scriptural and liturgical expressions present within our tradition, expounded upon through conscientious catechesis, substantiate Mary's role as "a living catechism" and "the mother and model of catechists."⁵⁸

Contemporary catechesis is searching for a concrete, systematic, symbolic religious dimension. Mary—the mother of Jesus, the woman of faith, the disciple who communicates the "message"—grounds the catechetical endeavor as she consistently guides us to her Son, who, in turn, draws us into communion with the Father and the Spirit.

⁵⁸CT 73.