

2013

## Mary's Spiritual Motherhood: Lumen Gentium and the New Evangelization

Frederick L. Miller

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies)



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Miller, Frederick L. (2013) "Mary's Spiritual Motherhood: Lumen Gentium and the New Evangelization," *Marian Studies*: Vol. 64, Article 7, Pages 36-58.

Available at: [https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian\\_studies/vol64/iss1/7](https://ecommons.udayton.edu/marian_studies/vol64/iss1/7)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marian Library Publications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Marian Studies by an authorized editor of eCommons. For more information, please contact [mschlangen1@udayton.edu](mailto:mschlangen1@udayton.edu), [ecommons@udayton.edu](mailto:ecommons@udayton.edu).

# **MARY'S SPIRITUAL MOTHERHOOD: LUMEN GENTIUM AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION**

*Frederick L. Miller, S.T.D.\**

For nearly half a century the Church has been calling for a *new evangelization* of those Christian cultures where the Catholic Faith has either been extinguished or debilitated. Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) and Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) have addressed the topic. These two pontiffs, along with Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, have spoken frequently and with emphasis on the contemporary need to re-evangelize peoples who have either lost or grown weak in their life of faith. The popes of our times have pointed out that participation in the Church's mission *ad gentes* (that is, missionary outreach to peoples who have never heard the Gospel) as well as the *new evangelization* of formerly Christian cultures is the responsibility of every member of the Church.

Although the pontiffs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have noted the complexity of embarking on this new evangelization, they each have noted two essential components: First, they indicate the need for a fresh proclamation of the Gospel in cultures often hostile to the Church's claim of absolute truth. This proclamation which is the work of the Risen Lord and the Holy Spirit must always be buttressed by the witness of believers. Cardinal Charles Journet in his book

\*At the time of this presentation, Father Frederick Miller, a priest of the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey, was the Chairman of the Department of Systematic Theology at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. In 2014, he began service as the Spiritual Director for the College Seminary of the Immaculate Conception at St. Andrew's Hall at Seton Hall University in South Orange, New Jersey.

*What Is Dogma?* has called the proclamation of the Gospel, that Christ initiated during his public ministry and the Apostles took up with authority on Pentecost, the "prophetic light." The proclamation is prophetic precisely because the Word issues from the mouth of God Himself and is filled with his power. It is a light because it reveals the mind and heart of the invisible God to those who seek him with a sincere heart. As the Word is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit offers those who receive it the gift of faith, that is, the grace to believe that God reveals himself and his will through the preaching of his unworthy ministers. St. Paul, in his First Letter to the Thessalonians explains what makes the knowledge of faith different from all other forms of human knowledge: "We also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers" (1 Thess 2:13). Cardinal Journet calls this interior illumination of the Holy Spirit the "sanctifying light," since it is faith that makes human beings holy and pleasing to God. It is also sanctifying since faith is the trajectory into the love of God. The coming together of these two lights initiates the beginning of a life founded on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.<sup>1</sup>

The imparting of these "lights"—one external, through the proclamation of the word of Christ (Divine Revelation), the other, the internal illumination of the Spirit, is described in the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)* of the Second Vatican Council. Using the words of St. Paul, the Council Fathers define faith as "obedience" to the Word of God, an obedience made possible by the grace of Christ:

"The obedience of faith" (Rom 16:26; see 1:5; 2 Cor 10:5-6) "is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering "the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals," and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him. To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Charles Journet, *What Is Dogma?* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011), 23-33.

the eyes of the mind and giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it." To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation, the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by His gifts.<sup>2</sup>

This brings us to the second essential component of evangelization. The proclamation of the Word of God which elicits the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart is always an act of the Church, which integrates the evangelized person into the community of faith as soon as he or she begins to believe. The Word of God is received and internalized in the womb of Holy Mother Church. Consequently, the *end* of evangelization is not simply a personal and solitary act of faith in the Lordship of Christ, but rather the objective, saving encounter with the Lord that begins in the waters of baptism and comes to full term in his celebration and reception of his Body and Blood in the *ecclesia*. It is precisely the Eucharist that incorporates the beneficiary of evangelization (and catechesis) into Christ's holy body. The seal of the Holy Spirit imparted in the Sacrament of Confirmation equips the baptized to be an active agent of evangelization at the heart of the world.

Surely, the lay faithful will be unable to take up their role in the evangelical mission of the Church unless priests who understand the secular vocation of the laity, as articulated in chapters 4 and 5 of *Lumen Gentium*, form them. Part of the responsibility of the Church is to prepare priests in the seminaries who know how to proclaim the Word of God within the *traditio* that finds its origin and content in Christ himself. Equally important is the ability to foster the *ecclesia* (diocese and/or parish community) in which every evangelized person readily experiences the warmth and welcome of a family. Simply stated, a person's first encounter with the Church should be, at least intuitively, an encounter with the Mother of God whose visage and personality are etched in every aspect of the Church's life.

<sup>2</sup> Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*, Accessed via [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651118\\_dei-verbum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

This Immaculate Church is precisely the place where the Word may be received and internalized in the loving presence of the Mother of God, who herself received the Word of God with joy on the day of the Annunciation and welcomed him to form her into his first and most perfect disciple. Early in his pontificate, Pope Francis noted that the proclamation of the Gospel stands on the foundation of Christian witness and leads the beneficiaries of evangelization into a warm family life centered on the Lord Jesus and his mother. Obviously, candidates for the priesthood should receive and internalize the Word of God in just such an atmosphere in the seminary so as to learn how to foster a similar milieu wherever they are missioned as priests.

Please permit me at this juncture of my presentation to tell you that I have been teaching Mariology, among other courses, in the major seminary since 1992. Presently, I am a professor of systematic theology and a spiritual director at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. For several reasons, I decided to open a window and look into the evangelical spirit that flourishes at the Mount. I am confident that this brief *excursus* into a microcosm of a seminary may give us some insight into the macrocosm of Church life in the United States.

Several factors present at Mount St. Mary's Seminary facilitate the work of formation. They include a strong student culture of Eucharistic adoration, devotion to the Mother of God, and zeal for evangelization. While the administration and faculty support this culture, it is, beyond doubt, a grassroots culture nurtured, I dare say, with the help of the Blessed Virgin by the seminarians themselves who live on Mary's mountain.

Some examples will help you understand the extraordinary zeal for the work of evangelization at the Mount. Among other apostolic ventures, our seminarians organize a retreat each year for over 1,200 high school students. It is inspiring to witness the effort put into this initiative and the startling results it produces. For instance, each February, approximately fifteen to twenty priests hear over a thousand confessions at the Mount Retreat. Prayer groups have sprung up in the parishes as a result of the weekend retreat. After the event, parents of the teens have reported that their sons and daughters follow a

weekly or even daily method of *lectio divina* that they learned from the seminarians on the retreat.

There is an active Legion of Mary in the seminary, made up of more than twenty members. Other seminarians lead a group of St. Maximilian Kolbe's Militia Immaculatae for the University students. Both of these groups are thriving quietly and, in the manner proper to the Legion of Mary and the Militia, doing the works of evangelization—on the University campus, in a local nursing home, and through door-to-door visitation in nearby parishes. These Marian groups tend to understand the place of the Blessed Virgin in the proclamation of the Gospel *kerygma* as well as the dynamic role of her spiritual motherhood in the process of responding to the proclamation on the part of the evangelized. Both groups, with their weekly meetings and other spiritual and social events, provide a kind of *ecclesia* for the mutual support and encouragement of the members.

Several years ago a group of seminarians formed a New Evangelization Club. Although there is a faculty advisor for the group, it is essentially an organization founded and promoted by the students. The members meet throughout the academic year and focus their attention on the theology and praxis of the New Evangelization.

During the fall and spring breaks, approximately twenty-five to thirty members of the New Evangelization Club visit a secular university campus to speak to the college students about their lives and problems, invite them to find meaning and peace in a relationship with Jesus Christ, challenge them to live the Gospel message, and find a place of worship and fellowship in a parish or campus ministry community. The seminarians return to the Mount after these mission trips, as they are called, exhausted but energized and eager to bring the Gospel to people who have never encountered Christ in one of his disciples. Pope Francis' challenge to the clergy to be out on the streets with their sleeves rolled up ready for work finds a hearing among our seminarians.

It is heartening to hear the seminarians reflect on their experiences, some successful, others disappointing. They speak about the power of the proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord and the importance of following this up

with a thorough catechesis on the mystery of Christ. The mission trips convince the seminarians of the importance of sound catechetical formation, a foundation that many of them never received even in the Catholic grade schools and high schools they attended.

On one hand, the seminarians frequently encounter a sincere quest for God and a hunger for prayer among the college students. On the other hand, they also are confronted with the relativism and secularism that has penetrated deeply into the thinking of their contemporaries. In spite of this resistance, they experience the action of the Holy Spirit in their conversations with skeptics and in the responses of those who are open to receive the Word from them. There are indications that these young evangelists already have or are at least developing an understanding of the synergy of grace and human effort in the work of evangelization. These experiences of evangelization on the street help the seminarians envision their future priestly ministry in terms of attracting and forming disciples for Christ.

Hopefully, the experience of the mission trips help the seminarians to grasp that proclamation is not enough. The evangelized person must be welcomed into an ecclesial family that will help him give himself to the Word and the Spirit whom he has inchoately encountered in the initial proclamation. This recognition of the *ecclesia* as the locus of evangelization is often the first intuitive acknowledgment of both Mary's mysterious motherhood in the Holy Spirit and the distinctive and essential Catholic path of evangelization. As I have noted earlier, evangelization reaches its proper term only when the evangelized person is fully incorporated into the Body of Christ by participating in the Eucharistic Sacrifice and receiving the Lord's Body and Blood in Holy Communion.

Several of our students are former FOCUS missionaries (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) and use the discipleship model promoted by this highly successful charismatic movement of evangelization. I should note that the leaders of the New Evangelization group have been invited to several other major seminaries to explain their initiative and form new groups. Similar new movements of evangelization are springing up all over the country among the lay faithful and having

varying levels of success in leading others to Christ and the Church.

In preparing this paper, I decided to open a window into the world of Mount St. Mary's Seminary neither to advertise nor to aggrandize the seminary, since, like all human institutions, the Mount is far from perfect. I frequently tell the seminarians that in order to participate in the new evangelization, they need to be experts in the original evangelization. That means serious study of Scripture, Catholic doctrine and morality, liturgy, Church history, spirituality, etc., which, alas, some seminarians eschew. My colleagues and I often wonder if the students have enough quiet and leisure in their lives in the seminary to assimilate both the doctrine they learn in the classroom and their personal experiences of prayer. Zeal for evangelization has the potential to defeat ardor for serious study and deep contemplative prayer. One legitimately worries about the long-term consequences of what appears to be a new intrusion of American pragmatism into programs of priestly formation. The question has been asked: What will happen if the evangelizers are not themselves sufficiently evangelized and catechized for the mission?<sup>3</sup>

This being said, my intention in speaking about the Mount community is simply to identify the renewed emphasis on evangelization as a significant charismatic movement of the Holy Spirit in the contemporary Church and to point out that it needs to be directed by those charged with the formation of future priests.

In this context, I call attention to what I perceive as an absence or, perhaps better, an *eclipse* of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the current theology and praxis of evangelization in the Church in the United States. In making this observation, I do not accuse Catholic evangelists of lacking love for the Blessed Virgin nor do I claim that they do not have recourse to her intercession or maternal presence in their work. This is certainly not true of the evangelists of Mount St. Mary's Seminary. My sense is that,

<sup>3</sup> Pope Leo XIII's Encyclical Letter *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae* (1899), on the intrusion of Americanism into the attitudes of the Church in the USA, remains apposite today: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/L13TESTE.HTM>.



for lack of a universally accepted Catholic model of evangelization, Catholic evangelists tend either to borrow Protestant methods of evangelization or to create their own models, bringing Mary, for instance, into it to the extent that the evangelist understands her role in the mystery of Christ and the Church.

The same may be said of the Eucharist and the Sacraments. Does the evangelist envision the final end of his work as a personal relationship with Christ in prayer or an objective union with the Risen Lord through faith, baptism, and, most importantly, the Eucharist celebrated in and by the *ecclesia*? The answer to this question, among others, will determine the form and matter of evangelization.

My claim is that many of the well-intentioned men and women who engage in the ministry of evangelization today often do not understand exactly how the Blessed Mother fits into their proclamation of Christ and the precise manner in which Mary is involved in helping the evangelized yield to the graces that bring them into union with him. Because of the dearth of Marian doctrine and spirituality that has sadly characterized the ministry of the Word in its various forms: evangelization, catechetics, liturgical preaching, and the teaching of theology in seminaries and universities, and in catechetical programs at every level of Church life, Catholic clergy and laity are often at a loss to explain Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Church.

Many if not most priests working in USA parishes today did not have a Mariology course in the seminaries they attended. Informed lay men and women would be at a loss to list, let alone explain, the four Marian dogmas or the spiritual motherhood of Our Lady. Many of the faithful, laity and clergy, intuit through their baptismal *sensus fidei* the doctrinal and spiritual role Mary plays in the Christian life. However, they have neither the conceptual knowledge nor the vocabulary to contemplate or explain that role. We, members of the Mariological Society of America can do our part to ameliorate this intellectual and spiritual poverty that impedes or, at the very least, decelerates the work of authentic evangelization.

This leads me to ask and attempt to answer two questions: First, how does the Blessed Virgin fit into the proclamation of the Apostolic kerygma and catechesis? Second, how is the

Mother of God involved at the level of grace in the good work of receiving the gift of justification in Christ through faith and conversion? The answers to these questions are found in Chapter VIII of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, and, in particular, in paragraph 65 of the document, a paragraph that in my estimation has received far too little attention in the discussions of the new evangelization.

First, a word on the context and history of paragraph 65 is in order. Section III of Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium* is entitled, "On the Blessed Virgin and the Church." It is made up of five tightly constructed paragraphs. The intent of the Fathers of the Council was to explain the Blessed Virgin's role in both the redemptive mission of her Son and in the mission of the Church, in short, her role in both the acquisition and the distribution of the grace of redemption in Christ:

- Para. 60 speaks of Christ, the One Mediator and Mary's maternal mediation that serves Christ's unique role as Mediator<sup>4</sup>;
- Para. 61 contemplates Mary's unique cooperation in Christ's work of redemption through the exercise of the gifts she received from him—faith, hope, and charity<sup>5</sup>;
- Para. 62 states that Mary's motherhood in the order of grace begins at the moment of the Incarnation, is solemnly revealed at the foot of the cross (Jn 19:25-27) and continues to operate in the Beatific Vision through her intercession<sup>6</sup>;

<sup>4</sup>"There is but one Mediator as we know from the words of the apostle: 'For there is one God and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a redemption for all' (298). The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power. For all the salvific influence of the Blessed Virgin on men originates, not from some inner necessity, but from the divine pleasure. It flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it. In no way does it impede, but rather does it foster the immediate union of the faithful with Christ."

<sup>5</sup>"In this singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Saviour in giving back supernatural life to souls. Wherefore she is our mother in the order of grace."

<sup>6</sup>"This maternity of Mary in the order of grace began with the consent which she gave in faith at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, and lasts until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this salvific duty, but by her constant intercession continued to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation."

- Para. 63 explains how Mary is the type of the Church's faith, hope, and charity as well as type of the Church as virgin, spouse, and mother who conceives and gives birth to Christ and the faithful through faith<sup>7</sup>;
- Para. 64 describes how the Church conceives and gives birth to the faithful virginally through the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacrament of baptism, and on the virginity of the Church's faith<sup>8</sup>;
- Para. 65 intuitively explains the experience of the spiritual motherhood of Mary in the Church and how the faithful benefit from this motherhood. This paragraph of *Lumen Gentium* might rightly be entitled, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin and Her Spiritual Motherhood in the Church's Mission of Evangelization."

Let us glance briefly at one important facet of the history of this particular section of *Lumen Gentium* (Chap. 8). On September 17, 1964, Cardinal Leo Joseph Seunens proposed an amendment to the text—an amendment that gave an apostolic, or, as we would say today, an evangelical focus to the ecclesiological Mariology of paragraphs 60 to 65 of *Lumen Gentium*. The Cardinal, who was an animator of the Legion of Mary, a lay organization devoted to the work of evangelization decades before Vatican Council II, intervened on the floor of the Council, saying:

The schema fails in an omission of the greatest importance. For nowhere in the text does the bond appear between Mary's spiritual motherhood and the apostolate of evangelization of the world. The motherhood of the

<sup>7</sup> "By her belief and obedience, not knowing man but overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, as the new Eve she brought forth on earth the very Son of the Father, showing an undefiled faith, not in the word of the ancient serpent, but in that of God's messenger. The Son whom she brought forth is He whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, namely the faithful, in whose birth and education she cooperates with a maternal love."

<sup>8</sup> "The Church indeed, contemplating the Blessed Virgin's hidden sanctity, imitating her charity and faithfully fulfilling the Father's will, by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By her preaching she brings forth to a new and immortal life the sons who are born to her in baptism, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God. She herself is a virgin, who keeps the faith given to her by her Spouse whole and entire. Imitating the mother of her Lord, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, she keeps with virginal purity an entire faith, a firm hope and a sincere charity."

Blessed Virgin Mary is the type and exemplar of the motherhood of the Church. So intimate is the bond between Mary's motherhood and today's evangelization. I ask therefore that this bond be clearly indicated, so that Mary not only be an example to be admired, but also that the faithful of Christ be invited to associate themselves actively in some way in her spiritual motherhood, in the service of mankind in today's world. If this is omitted I fear that our schema will have none or little of the practical, vital and pastoral influence that we all wish for it.<sup>9</sup>

As the result of this request, the text of paragraph 65 was amended and received the approval of the Fathers of the Council. Both Cardinal Seunens' intervention and the final redaction of the text of *Lumen Gentium* 65, allow the faithful to contemplate Mary's unique role in the new evangelization. I have broken down this paragraph into three sections. I shall first cite the text of *Lumen Gentium* 65, and then comment on it.

1. But while in the most holy Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she is without spot or wrinkle, the followers of Christ still strive to increase in holiness by conquering sin. And so they turn their eyes to Mary who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues.

Paragraph 65 begins with a reaffirmation of Mary's spiritual motherhood that had been introduced earlier in the text of *Lumen Gentium*. The Church, having already attained to the perfection of charity in the Blessed Virgin, has a human face and a maternal heart—a heart turned in love towards all the faithful who seek to conquer sin in their lives through union with Christ. The People of God on earth look to both Mary assumed into heaven and to the Church to find the grace to die to sin and live by faith, hope, and charity.

The Fathers of the Council here unveiled a deep Marian intuition concerning the Church. During her years on earth and precisely in her intimate union with Christ, the Church finds its pristine beginnings in Mary. Consequently, Mary ever remains in the Church so much so that Mary's personality

<sup>9</sup> *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II, Periodus tertia, 3/1, "Patrum Orationes (cap. VIII de Ecclesia, prosequitur)," 505-506.*

informs the loving response of the Church to Christ. There is a *perichoresis*, that is, an indwelling of Mary and the Church, one within the other—an indwelling analogous to the indwelling of each Divine Person of the Trinity within the other Divine Persons.<sup>10</sup> The rediscovery of this ecclesial Mariology decades before the Council has led some theologians to refer to Mary and the Church in the same breath as Mary-Church.

Because of the mysterious indwelling of the Blessed Virgin within the Church, the Virgin Mother is ever the prototype of both the Church's life of faith, hope, and charity and the Church's mystical identity as virgin-bride of the Lord and mother of his people. As a result of this, evangelizers should expect to find in those who are sincerely attracted to Christ and his Gospel, a similar attraction to the Lord's mother whose freedom from sin and union with Christ, they mysteriously encounter, often without consciously recognizing her, in every authentic experience of ecclesial communion. The opening statement of *Lumen Gentium* 65 corresponds perfectly to the twofold end of evangelization: repentance (conversion from sin) and living faith in Christ.

Suffice it to say that those involved actively in the new evangelization need to be aware of the powerful intercession of the Mother of God, an intercession that draws its power from and shares in Christ's universal desire that all men and women be

<sup>10</sup> Blessed Isaac of Stella, an early Cistercian Father, in his classic texts explains the inherence of Mary in the Church and the Church in Mary: "In the inspired Scriptures, what is said in a universal sense of the virgin mother, the Church is understood in an individual sense of the Virgin Mary, and what is said in a particular sense of the virgin mother Mary is rightly understood in a general sense of the virgin mother, the Church. When either is spoken of, the meaning can be understood of both, almost without qualification. In a way, every Christian is also believed to be a bride of God's word, a mother of Christ, his daughter and sister, at once virginal and fruitful. These words are used in a universal sense of the Church, in a special sense of Mary, in a particular sense of the individual Christian. They are used by God's Wisdom in person, the Word of the Father. This is why Scripture says: I will dwell in the inheritance of the Lord. The Lord's inheritance is, in a general sense, the Church; in a special sense, Mary; in an individual sense, the Christian. Christ dwelt for nine months in the tabernacle of Mary's womb. He dwells until the end of the ages in the tabernacle of the Church's faith. He will dwell forever in the knowledge and love of each faithful soul" (Bl. Isaac of Stella, Sermon 51—from *Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings, Second Saturday of Advent).

saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. When a person expresses sincere interest in knowing more about Christ, there is already evidence of the intercession of Mary and her maternal mediation of grace, an encounter that need not be consciously recognized by the recipient of the grace.

When anyone expresses an initial interest in knowing more about Christ, it may be helpful to simply mention the maternal love of Mary. Those involved in the work of evangelization frequently acknowledge the value of offering the person evangelized a Marian sacramental, such as an image of the Blessed Mother with a prayer imploring her help.

Evangelizers of the caliber of St. Maximilian Kolbe and Bl. Teresa of Calcutta have noted the power of the medal of the Immaculate Conception known popularly as the Miraculous Medal. The medal is called miraculous precisely because of the conversions to the Faith that surround it. One example is Bl. John Henry Newman, who made his final decision to enter into full communion with the Church when the Italian Passionist Father Bl. Dominick Barberi gave him the medal and encouraged him to entrust his life and his future to the Mother of God.

As Christ is proclaimed in the initial evangelization and the subsequent catechesis, it is helpful to bring the evangelized person to recognize the Blessed Virgin's presence and love explicitly and consciously. Intuitive insight into this spiritual reality may be gleaned from the contemplation of the Apostle Peter proclaiming the death and resurrection of the Lord on Pentecost and calling the people of Israel to faith and conversion. St. Luke tells us that many of those who heard the proclamation were "cut to the heart" and said to Peter and the other Apostles, "What are we to do, brothers?"

Is it farfetched to affirm that Mary at that moment was praying for both the evangelizer and the evangelized? Surely, Mary was the model of the Christian perfectly formed that the Apostles carried in their hearts as they traversed the ancient world forming disciples for the Lord. Also, during the first years of the Church's life, Mary surely helped those struggling to be faithful to the Gospel of her Son. She who supported the first evangelization through her maternal presence offers the identical

service from her place in heaven to the agents and beneficiaries of the new evangelization.

2. Piously meditating on her and contemplating her in the light of the Word made man, the Church with reverence enters more intimately into the great mystery of the Incarnation and becomes more and more like her Spouse. For Mary, who since her entry into salvation history unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith as she is proclaimed and venerated, calls the faithful to her Son and His sacrifice and to the love of the Father. Seeking after the glory of Christ, the Church becomes more like her exalted Type, and continually progresses in faith, hope and charity, seeking and doing the will of God in all things.

This section of paragraph 65 of *Lumen Gentium* describes how Mary exercises her spiritual motherhood in the Church. The Fathers of the Council state two remarkable facts: Because the Mother of God has been brought so intimately into the Divine Plan of salvation, she unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith.<sup>11</sup>

This text of *Lumen Gentium* 65 is useful in explaining how the Blessed Virgin is involved in the second stage of the new evangelization, the process that follows the initial acceptance of the proclamation of Christ and his paschal mystery. I shall label this instructional and formational process "evangelizing catechesis." This is the global explanation of the mystery of Christ through the lens of the Creed, the Church's sacrifice and sacraments, the explanation of Gospel morality, and prayer. This complete explanation of who Christ is and what he asks of the Christian takes place either in a formal catechumenate or, according to the mind of the Church, in an environment that includes the major elements of the catechumenate. Catechesis nurtures the initial conversion to Christ and explains the articles of the faith that terminate not only in the knowledge of propositional truths but also in union with the One God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

<sup>11</sup> *Maria enim, quae, in historiam salutis intime ingressa, maxima fidei placita in se quodammodo unit et reverberat, dum praedicatur et colitur, ad Filium suum Etusque sacrificium atque ad amorem Patris credentes advocat.*

For the sake of clarity, allow me to explain how I am using terms: the **evangelizer** is the person who makes the initial proclamation of the *kerygma* and/or presents the global explanation of the mystery of Christ, that is, the **catechesis**. I shall refer to the person who is the beneficiary of evangelization and catechesis as the **catechumen**, whether he is unbaptized or baptized already but weak in the faith. I shall also describe evangelization properly-so-called and the subsequent catechesis as the **proclamation** of the Gospel. It is understood that this proclamation is an act of the Church that aims at integrating men and women into full communion with the Church.

Allow me to enumerate randomly a few of the ways that the inclusion of Mary in the proclamation of the Apostolic *kerygma* and catechesis, an inclusion that has been present, at least inchoately, since the beginning, contributes to the generation and nurturance of the virtue of faith in the catechumen:

- Christians recognize in Mary's Immaculate Conception the absolute victory of God's grace over sin. Because of her freedom from sin, original and actual, and the fullness of grace she possesses, Mary is the *Woman* of Genesis 3:15 (cf. John 19:25-27), Satan's mortal enemy, who crushes the head of the ancient serpent in the lives of her progeny. Mary's original grace empowers her to help her children die to sin and selfishness in all its forms.
- Contemplating Mary's filial relationship with God the Father, her maternal relationship with God the Son, and her relationship with God the Holy Spirit as temple and spouse, the Christian enters into the wonder of the subsistent relationships within the Trinitarian life of the One God. Mary introduces her children to the Divine Persons she knows so well.
- Mary is the Ark of the Covenant (Luke 1:39-45), the Temple of God (Revelation 11:19-12 *passim*) where the Trinity dwells through grace and charity as nowhere else. When a person approaches Mary in humble faith, she leads him into the presence of the Trinity, leading her sons and daughters in the praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Luke 1:46-55).
- Evangelizers help those who are open to the faith find in Mary's *fiat* the power to surrender themselves to God and his will through faith, hope, and charity. The Annunciation account (Luke 1:26-38) ever remains the paradigm of the Christian's self-offering to God through faith.



- Christians recognize in Mary's relationship with the Trinity the source of the unfailing power of her intercession and the source of her fecundity in the order of grace. Explaining the account of the Cana miracle in John 2:1-11, evangelizers help catechumens understand Mary's right to bring all human needs, material and spiritual, into the radius of her Son's messianic power.
- Mary, as the mother of the Divine Person of the Word-made-flesh, is the sentinel of the dogma of the Incarnation. From the first days of the Church's life, she defended her children against every tendency to reject belief in Christ's humanity. Her premier title, Mother of God—*Theotokos*, has ever been and shall always be a powerful affirmation of Christ's divinity.
- Mary's fruitful virginity in conception, in childbirth, and after the birth of Christ is the cosmic sign of the Divine origin of her Son, the icon of her total gift of self to God and His plan of salvation, and the emblem of a spiritual fecundity beyond human comprehension. The Virgin Mother of God has become the Virgin Mother of each Christian *in the order of sanctifying grace*.
- Reflecting on Mary's suffering on Calvary in communion with her Son, the evangelizer helps the catechumen to understand the Pauline teaching that the Christian "makes up in his own flesh what is lacking in the suffering of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church" (Col 1:24). This meditation on Mary's self-offering on Calvary with, in, and through Christ, casts a great light on how the Christian offers himself to the Father with, in, and through Christ in the Eucharistic *synaxis*.
- On Calvary, the crucified Christ definitively revealed that Mary is the spiritual mother of all of his disciples. The evangelizer may appropriately use the text of John 19:25-27 to illustrate that Mary is the mother of each disciple of the Lord. Proclaiming this text, he may encourage each disciple to take her *into his home*, that is, to enter into an intimate, personal mother-son/mother-daughter relationship with her.
- Christians recognize in Mary the dignity of woman, the holiness of virginity, spousal love, and motherhood. The dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God, and, through grace, constituted as a co-worker of God in the order of creation and redemption, is perfectly revealed in her.
- Mary is the image and model of the Church. She is the type of the Church's life of Faith, Hope, and Charity. She is likewise the type of the Church as Virgin-Bride and Mother.

- Mary is the icon of all that each Christian and the whole Church will be in the *eschaton*. Sharing physically in the Lord's resurrection and ascension in the glory of the Beatific Vision, she is a sure sign of hope for all God's people on earth.

*Lumen Gentium* 65 affirms that Mary both helps her children comprehend the faith and turn more radically to Christ. Consequently, to ponder Mary in her relationship with the Trinity and the Incarnate Word, to contemplate her role in the redemptive work of God in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, to consider her fullness of grace and her readiness to cooperate in every way with her Son in his work, her relationship with her Son's disciples in his Church, and the end of her earthly existence and her glorification in Heaven helps the Christian to understand the faith and be transformed spiritually through those mysteries—in the words of *Lumen Gentium* 65: "to become more and more like the Church's Divine Spouse."

The Council Fathers professed that whenever Mary "is proclaimed and venerated she calls the faithful to her Son, His sacrifice, and the love of the Father." This, in my estimation, is the most remarkable description of Mary's spiritual motherhood in Chapter VIII of *Lumen Gentium*. Whenever a minister of the Church helps his people venerate the Mother of God, preaches the "glories of Mary for the sake of her Son," presents a catechism lesson on her role or brings her into personal spiritual direction, the Blessed Virgin becomes present within the communion of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then, with Mary and through Mary, leads the faithful to Jesus, to his sacrifice, and to the love of his Father. Similarly, whenever a lay evangelist helps the person he or she is evangelizing to honor Mary or whenever the evangelist proclaims the Church's Marian doctrine in any form of catechesis, Mary likewise becomes spiritually present and exerts the power of her mediation.

The powerful experience of Mary's maternal mediation remains a perennial phenomenon in the life of the Church. Exactly how the Blessed Virgin herself draws her children to Christ whenever she is venerated or proclaimed demands some doctrinal development. St. Maximilian Kolbe began to

move towards a theological explanation of this phenomenon in his theology of Mary's unique alliance with the Holy Spirit in the distribution of the graces of the redemption. Surely the translation and publication of accurate translations of St. Maximilian Kolbe's writing will foster doctrinal development in the years ahead.<sup>12</sup>

The documents of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent magisterial documents make it clear that evangelization is the work of all those who are incorporated into the Christ through baptism and sealed with the Holy Spirit of Pentecost. However, the documents also affirm that the first (that is, chronologically first) mission of the ordained is to preach and teach the Catholic faith in its entirety and thereby form the laity in their vocation of bringing Christ and his Gospel into every strata of the secular order. Therefore, it is primarily the task of the ministers of the Gospel to explain Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Church and to integrate her properly in the laity's work of the new evangelization.

Bishops, priests, and deacons engage in the new evangelization by forming the laity to be agents of the new evangelization in their homes, their neighborhoods, their professional work, their places of employment and enjoyment, their government, etc. This demands, in my estimation, a close look at seminary curricula and the *ratio studiorum* of programs for the formation of permanent deacons. First of all, it is regrettable that many seminaries in the United States have not implemented the request made by the Congregation for Catholic Education, in 1988, that every institution of higher

<sup>12</sup> In a letter on the occasion of the 1975 International Marian Congress in Rome, Pope Paul VI addressed the topic of the Holy Spirit's relationship with Mary in the work of salvation: "We must keep in mind that the activity of the Mother of the Church in behalf of the redeemed neither substitutes for nor rivals the omnipotent, universal action of the Holy Spirit. Mary's role is rather to impetrate and prepare for the action of the Holy Spirit, not only through intercessory prayer that accords with the divine plan she contemplates in the Beatific Vision but also through the direct influence of her example including the supremely important example of her docility to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it is always in dependence on the Holy Spirit that Mary leads souls to Jesus, forms them in His image, inspires them with good counsel, and acts as a living bond of love between Jesus and the faithful." <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/documents/suenens.html>.

learning offer a required course of Mariology. I might add parenthetically that very few seminaries have a required course in evangelization and/or catechetics. This is difficult to process in light of the Church's call for a new evangelization of cultures that were formerly Christian and a renewal of catechetical instruction to remedy the religious illiteracy in many formerly Christian countries.

The Mariological Society of America would certainly strengthen the work of the new evangelization by helping systematic theologians integrate the Church's Marian doctrine more solidly into the major core courses of the seminary curriculum: Trinitarian Theology, Christology, Ecclesiology, Grace, and Eschatology. Those of our members who are experts in Sacred Scripture would provide immense help by establishing a standard way of interpreting the Marian texts of the New Testament. Helpful in this regard are the Marian catecheses of Pope John Paul II, published by the Daughters of St. Paul under the title *Theotokos*,<sup>13</sup> Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's *Jesus of Nazareth* (vol. 3), and Fr. Ignace de la Potterie's monumental work, *Mary in the Mystery of the Covenant*. Theologians of the spiritual life, in concert with dogmatic theologians, might explore more deeply the alliance of the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of Mary's motherhood in the order of grace. Liturgical theologians might suggest new forms of Marian devotion based on the many theological developments that have taken place at the Council and since the Council. This work of theological integration will insure that the new evangelization is thoroughly Christocentric, ecclesial, and Marian—in short, thoroughly Catholic.

This integration of the Church's Marian doctrine in the ministry of the Word is essential not only in the seminary curriculum but also in college theology programs, religious education programs at every level of the Church's life, in short, in every facet of the Church's ministry of the word. The 1988 document of the Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Blessed Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation* (March 25,

<sup>13</sup> These luminous talks of John Paul II are available online and ready for use in the new evangelization by all: <http://www.ewtn.com/library/MARY/JP2BVM70.HTM>.

1988), stated unequivocally: "It is necessary, therefore, that every center of theological study—according to its proper physiognomy—plan that, in its *ratio studiorum* the teaching of Mariology be included, having the characteristics listed above, and, consequently, with the teachers of Mariology being properly qualified (30).<sup>14</sup>

We now turn to the last section of paragraph 65 of *Lumen Gentium*:

3. Hence the Church, in her apostolic work also, justly looks to her, who, conceived of the Holy Spirit, brought forth Christ, who was born of the Virgin, that through the Church He may be born and may increase in the hearts of the faithful also. The Virgin in her own life lived an example of that maternal love, by which it behooves that all should be animated who co-operate in the apostolic mission of the Church for the regeneration of men.

*Lumen Gentium* 65 ends by situating all of the Church's work of evangelization within the context of the Blessed Virgin's motherhood in the order of sanctifying grace. Every Catholic, in experiencing Mary's spiritual motherhood, is challenged to allow the radiation of that motherhood in the world today through ecclesial acts of charity. Permit me to recall the unforgettable words of Pope John Paul II that are found in his 1988 *Holy Thursday Letter to Priests*. There he explained how the motherhood of the Church is realized in a manly way through the fatherhood of priests.<sup>15</sup> When the Church's minister

<sup>14</sup> <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/resources/documents/intellect.html>.

<sup>15</sup> "The Council sees the Church's motherhood, which is modeled on Mary's, in the fact that the Church 'brings forth to a new and immortal life children who are conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of God.' Here we find echoed St. Paul's words about 'the children with whom I am again in travail' (cf. Gal 4:19), in the same way as a mother gives birth. When, in the Letter to the Ephesians, we read about Christ as the Spouse who 'nourishes and cherishes' the Church as his body (cf. 5:29), we cannot fail to link this spousal solicitude on the part of Christ above all with the gift of Eucharistic food, similar to the many maternal concerns associated with 'nourishing and cherishing' a child.

It is worth recalling these scriptural references, so that the truth about the Church's motherhood, founded on the example of the Mother of God, may become more and more a part of our priestly consciousness. If each of us lives the equivalent of this spiritual motherhood in a manly way, namely, as a 'spiritual fatherhood,' then Mary, as a 'figure' of the Church, has a part to play in this experience of ours. The passages quoted

preaches the Word and administers Baptism, Mother Church conceives and gives birth to new children for the Father. Through the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, she heals the wounds of sin in her children. Through the Anointing of the Sick, she comforts her children who are ill and dying with a mother's tenderness. Through Holy Communion, Mother Church feeds her sons and daughters with the "best of wheat"—the only food that has the remedy for death.

Although the Hierarchy fulfills an essential role in the new evangelization, especially through the proclamation of the Gospel and the spiritual direction they give to the lay faithful, all of the baptized are called to take responsibility for the new evangelization by allowing the love of Mother Church to have an impact in their families and in the society at large through their charity. In a special way, consecrated religious women are living icons of Holy Mother Church, both in their life of hidden prayer and penance and through their various works of charity. John Paul II has astutely pointed out in the Apostolic Exhortation on the dignity and vocation of women, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (21), that Christian women who are spouses and mothers also are called to exercise a true spiritual motherhood in and beyond their homes: "Does not physical motherhood also have to be a spiritual motherhood, in order to respond to the whole truth about the human being who is a unity of body and spirit?" The Blessed Virgin is not only the model of this motherhood but also loves her children in and through the manifold forms of the ministry of the Church.<sup>16</sup>

show how profoundly this role is inscribed at the very center of our priestly and pastoral service. Is not Paul's analogy on 'pain in childbirth' close to all of us in the many situations in which we too are involved in the spiritual process of man's 'generation' and 'regeneration' by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of life? The most powerful experiences in this sphere are had by confessors all over the world—and not by them alone." [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii LET\\_19880325\\_priests.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_19880325_priests.html).

<sup>16</sup>Pope John Paul II brilliantly relates the spiritual motherhood of Mary and the spiritual motherhood of the Church in his encyclical letter *Mother of the Redeemer*: "Mary is thus present in the mystery of the Church as a *model*. But the Church's mystery also consists in generating people to a new and immortal life: this is her motherhood in the Holy Spirit. And here Mary is not only the model and figure of the Church; she is much more. For, 'with maternal love she cooperates in the birth and development' of the

As I noted at the beginning of this essay, for the new evangelization to be supernaturally effective, two elements are essential. First, the clear and unambiguous proclamation of the Apostolic Kerygma and Catechesis—a proclamation that includes the good news of the Blessed Virgin's role in salvation. This complete proclamation should lead to a relationship with the Blessed Mother—a relationship that prepares the Christian to participate in Mary's spiritual motherhood in the evangelical mission of the Church. Second, the beneficiary of evangelization needs to assimilate the Word of God in a Church that he experiences as home—a home having a hearth tended by a Mother—a holy and safe place where light floods the darkness of the world, a home filled with many loving brothers and sisters, a hearth where supernatural life is generated and formed in the souls of those who have found grace through Mary's Son. Only in such an environment, catechumenal in essence,<sup>17</sup> the beneficiary of the new evangelization will grow "from strength to strength" and become himself a powerful agent of the new evangelization.

Commenting on the concluding section of *Lumen Gentium* 65, in the 1986 edition of *Marian Studies*, Fr. Charles W. Neumann, our distinguished brother in the Mariological Society of America of happy memory, brings our discourse to a felicitous conclusion:

And so Cardinal Suenens' insistence paid off royally. His amendment, in closing the Mary-Church section, opens out onto the whole mission of the

sons and daughters of Mother Church. The Church's motherhood is accomplished not only according to the model and figure of the Mother of God but also with her 'cooperation.' The Church *draws* abundantly from this cooperation, that is to say from the maternal mediation which is characteristic of Mary, insofar as already on earth she cooperated in the rebirth and development of the Church's sons and daughters, as the Mother of that Son whom the Father 'placed as the first-born among many brethren'"(44)

<sup>17</sup> The Neo-Catechumenate Movement has an immense amount of experience to share with the Church at large. The charism of the new evangelization is showcased with grace in the Neo-Catechumenal communities around the world that invite all to be transformed in and through the proclamation of the Word in a post-baptismal catechumenate.

<sup>18</sup> Charles W. Neumann, S.M., "Mary and the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, Arts. 60 to

Church *ad extra*, which was the main concern of his that led to the conciliar decision to compose the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The Church looks to Mary as model of a motherhood which they both share. Furthermore, everyone in the Church is to find in Mary the example of that disposition of soul that should animate the apostle, a parental charity whose goal is the birth and growth of Christ in the hearts of others. For of all of them is she Mother, in being Mother of their Brother, the firstborn.<sup>18</sup>

65," *Marian Studies* 37 (1986): 141-142.