

DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU

208th OSM General Chapter

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NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. From Rome, where we are celebrating our 208th General Chapter, we wish to address first of all the brothers and sisters of the Order who share with us the grace and the joy of being called to be Servants of Mary. We also respectfully address ourselves to the local Churches where our Order is present and in which it offers its service in cooperation with the bishops, priests and laity, bearing its specific witness. For a number of reasons which we shall mention shortly, we would like to establish a dialogue most particularly with the dozens of religious families of men and women who live their consecration to Christ looking to Mary as the example which guides their lives. Finally, we wish to include in our dialogue any disciple of Jesus who, like ourselves, venerates in the Blessed Virgin the “Mother of the Lord” (Lk 1:43) and any man or woman, believer or non-believer, who acknowledges Mary of Nazareth to be a “great protagonist of history”¹ because of the breadth and value of her “presence” in human civilisation. All of you can offer us the enlightenment of your faith or the witness of your culture, and in return, our humble words can be an opportunity for renewed attention to the Mother of Jesus.

2. The Year of Grace 1983 is for us a “Jubilee Year.” It is the 750th anniversary of the foundation of our Order in Florence in 1233 by seven merchants of that city. “These seven men,” as the most revered document on our origins tells us, “had been engaged in trading and negotiating earthly things according to the merchant's art before they joined together as a group. But when they discovered the pearl of great price, or rather, when they discovered from Our Lady how to obtain that pearl, namely, our Order...they not only gave away to the poor all they possessed, selling their goods according to the evangelical counsel, but they also made the happy decision to pledge themselves to faithfully serving God and Our Lady.”²

We are indeed grateful to Our Lord for the great many initiatives that have arisen within our Order for this anniversary. All of us, friars, nuns, sisters, members of the Secular Institutes, lay men and women, have felt the need to ensure that the celebration of the Jubilee Year not remain merely the commemoration of a historical event, but should be an occasion for spiritual renewal, the gift of the Spirit of the Risen Christ and the fruit of a generous response to the promptings that come to us from our Seven Holy Fathers and to the appeals which the contemporary Church is making to us all.

In particular, we have given serious thought to the “Marian dimension” of our vocation. Our Constitutions state: “In order to serve the Lord and their brothers and sisters, the Servants from their origins have dedicated themselves to the Mother of God, the Blessed One of the Most High. They have turned to her on their pilgrimage to Christ and in their task of proclaiming him to the world. From the fiat of the lowly servant of the Lord, they have learned to receive the Word of God and to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit. As Mother, sharing in the redemptive mission of her son, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, she has taught them to understand and alleviate human suffering.”³

Faithful, therefore, to our charism of service, we do not want to cease our study of “ the significance of the Virgin Mary for the modern world.”⁴ In our hearts burn the humble and gospel values which Mary incarnates and the devotion which the Church renders her.⁵

In speaking of “our communities,” we feel obliged to add the following: we are well aware that our Order is but one tiny portion of the Church in which numerous religious institutes with a marked Marian spirituality are present. For this very reason we have asked ourselves: Why not involve in our reflections those brothers and sisters who profess the same faith in Christ and who have embraced the same kind of life, animated by the very piety we have towards the Mother of Our Lord ? Why not share our own considerations about devotion to the Blessed Virgin with the local Churches with whom we are in daily contact ?

We are convinced that common commitment founded in our convergent ideals and intentions is destined to bear abundant fruit in our institutes and overflow from them with greater effectiveness among the many faithful who desire to live the Marian spirituality of our families as individuals and as groups. This, then, dear brothers and sisters, is the immediate reason which has led us to offer you the results of our reflections and to open this fraternal dialogue with you.

3. In this letter we do not intend to treat of the person and mission of Our Lady in the history of salvation in an organic and doctrinal way. This is not the place, and we are not qualified to do so. But presupposing a correct reading of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent magisterium of the popes, particularly the Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, and taking account of the most well-founded findings of modern Mariological research, we should like only to hold a cordial dialogue with you on a number of duties which, in our view, await religious institutes and local Churches in relation to promoting devotion to the Mother of the Lord.

THE NATURE AND AMBIT OF THE CRISIS IN MARIAN DEVOTION

4. In order to identify and better understand these duties we feel it necessary to examine the recent crisis which has manifested itself in the area of Marian devotion and which has been felt to varying degrees within our institutes and local Churches. It began toward the end of the 1950's and in 1975, the Holy Year of Reconciliation, a solution was in sight.

5. If we take a dispassionate look at that period, we see that as far as the magisterium of the Church was concerned, there was no crisis or lack of attention to Marian devotion. Indeed, it was during those years that the Second Vatican Council (1962- 1965), Paul VI (1963-1978) and several episcopal conferences produced some of the finest and most important Marian documents in the history of the Church. ⁶ Neither was there a crisis in the liturgical field because, as Paul VI himself affirmed, “the post-conciliar renewal has...properly considered the Blessed Virgin in the mystery of Christ and, in harmony with tradition, has recognised the singular place that belongs to her in Christian worship as the holy Mother of God and the worthy Associate of the Redeemer.” ⁷ Neither was there a crisis in the devotional attitudes of the majority of the faithful, who continued to lovingly revere the Mother of Christ, and to appeal with confidence to her motherly intercession. It is important to emphasise that there was no crisis or lessening of Marian devotion in the Eastern Churches; any proposal that their ancient and intense veneration of the glorious Theotokos should be in any way minimised in theory or in practice would rather have caused surprise and astonishment.

6. This crisis was above all intellectual in character. It was also a kind of “rejection crisis”: the progress that had been made in biblical and patristic research, the emphasis placed on certain aspects of Mariology (anthropological, ecumenical, ecclesiological and pneumatological) as well as the change in some ways of approaching the figure of the Blessed Virgin, such as the preference given to service rather than privilege, to considering her as a member of a community rather than as

an individual, were not always properly understood and applied. In not a few cases, this led to a rejection of authentic “Marian values” which were over-hastily deemed to be outmoded and stale. We believe that all that was needed for these “values” to take on renewed splendour would have been to place them in a renewed theological framework. The lack of any calm and thoughtful bridge between the critical reflections of scholars and the immediate expectations of pastors gave rise to many painful consequences in the field of worship. For example:

— The danger of doctrinal maximation was rightly denounced, even by the Supreme Pontiffs,⁸ but this only led many to neglect the truths of the faith concerning the Blessed Virgin and thus made them incapable of perceiving that “having entered deeply into the history of salvation, Mary...unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith.”⁹ This denunciation led to a doctrinal and practical minimalism which was wholly sterile for the life of the spirit.

— Also denounced were the risks inherent in any change regarding the central axis of Christian worship namely, to the Father through Christ in the Spirit. This led many people to the idea that devotion to the Blessed Virgin was a marginal matter, or even a more or less evident deviation from genuine Christian piety. Such people did not perceive that devotion to Mary, the woman open to the Spirit, the faithful disciple of Christ, ever ready to do the Father's will, finds its true significance and genuine expression only within the context of “Christian worship”; neither did they grasp the fact that Marian devotion, because of the Blessed Virgin's radical involvement in the event of the Incarnation of the Word and in the Paschal Mystery, is not only not a marginal matter, but is an intrinsic element of worship, as Paul VI declared.¹⁰

— Many shortcomings were pointed out in the expressions of Marian devotion which are inevitably subject to the wear and tear of time and changes in the cultural environment; but with very few exceptions, little was done to replace the outmoded forms with more effective and contemporary ones. With regard to pious Marian prayer forms, expressions of liturgical piety and those of popular piety were set up in contradiction to one another rather than harmonised;¹¹ devotional practices and exercises that still contained perennial values were abandoned on account of their formal deficiencies. It is not an exaggeration to say that in this field, there has been uprooting without planting, pulling down without building up.

— Stress was placed on the need to face up to the most urgent needs of the modern world, even in terms of worship and according to its own structures: the evangelisation of peoples and working for peace, the struggle against all forms of oppression and injustice, illiteracy and poverty, unemployment and hunger, racism and the alienation of women, the iniquitous discrepancies between rich and poor nations, and the exploitation of poor countries by wealthier ones. Justly, emphasis was placed on the fact that genuine Christianity cannot fail to heed the groans of the suffering and the cries of the oppressed. But some wrongly took this to mean that devotion to the Mother of the Lord distracted the Christian from these primary commitments; that is to say, they failed, at least initially, to grasp the prophetic value of the figure of the Blessed Virgin in relation to the Church's commitment to the authentic liberation and development of all people.

7. Because of its intellectual nature, the crisis in devotion to the Blessed Virgin also affected the religious institutes with a Marian tradition and spirituality, sometimes quite seriously. The Marian features of the tradition of the various institutes were inevitably caught in the crosscurrents of criticism that we have already mentioned: devotional exercises that often dated back to the origins of the institutes were questioned, currents of spirituality that had guided the life of generations of religious were challenged on the grounds that they did not fit in, it was said, with the ideas expressed in the Council's documents; the “Marian character” of apostolic action became less incisive and sermons on the Blessed Virgin less frequent; exhortations to imitate Our Lady's

example and manifestations of joy at the realisation of being her children were more restrained. Some smirked at the “Marian practices” that gave a rhythm to the life of the community and supported the personal piety of individual members. Sometimes the very name of the institute was rejected because it was considered too “devotional.” Other examples could be given. Not all of these criticisms were without foundation, but often no way was found to confront the rightful claims of tradition and the demands of renewal. This led to tensions, created a malaise, caused many religious to become discouraged and in some cases even provoked an identity crisis.

8. We have already pointed out that the difficulties relating to Marian devotion did not affect the vital structures of the Church: the magisterium, the liturgy, the feelings of the faithful. The powerful opposition of these structures to the onslaught of the crisis was confirmation of how firmly rooted was the ancient and vital insight of the Church according to which the figure of Mary, while not the centre of Christianity, is central to it: she is at the very heart of the mystery of the Incarnation and at the heart of the Hour of the Paschal Mystery. This, not in virtue of self-persuasion on the part of Christians, but because of the Father's omniscient plan and Christ's own desire. She stands at the heart of the Incarnation

9. The doctrine is well known. In the Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, we read: “The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in bringing about death, so also a woman should contribute to life. This is preeminently true of the Mother of Jesus, who gave to the world the Life that renews all things.”¹² There is no other Christ the Saviour but the Word-made-flesh, Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary through the work of the Spirit. The Christ who rules over history, who has brought peace between heaven and earth through his blood shed on the cross (see Col 1:20) and who “shall come to judge the living and the dead” when he last appears,¹³ was born of woman (see Gal 4:4): a true man who, like every other man, must thank his mother for the gift of life on earth.

This is why Paul VI, reflecting on the mystery of the Incarnation, was able to speak the following grave and seemingly bold words: “If we really wish to be Christians, we must be Marian. In other words, we have to acknowledge the essential, vital and providential relationship that unites Our Lady to Jesus and which opens up for us the path that leads to him.”¹⁴ These remarks were in reply to a precise question: “How did Christ come among us?”¹⁵ This was asked after having made the point, in harmony with the Bible, that he “came to us from Mary; we have received him from her...! He is a man like us; he is our brother through the ministry of the motherhood of Mary”¹⁶ and after having examined the nature and the importance of the fiat of the Blessed Virgin who was not a purely passive instrument in God's hands, but cooperated in the salvation of humanity with a free faith and obedience.¹⁷ If we examine these words carefully, they are not so much praise of the Blessed Virgin as they are a warning to believers not to subvert the facts of the Father's plan of salvation, not to detach the blessed Fruit from the holy Root, and not to separate the eternal Word from the womb which accepted it and from the heart that sheltered it.

Because of her radical participation in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, the Blessed Virgin is intimately related to the whole history of salvation. As the holy monk John Damascene wrote, “Just the name, Theotokos, Mother of God, sums up the whole mystery of salvation.”¹⁸

She stands at the heart of the Hour of the Paschal Mystery

10. The Gospel account is well-known to all of us: when Jesus was on the point of leaving this world to return to the Father (see Jn 13:1) he said to his Mother who stood at the foot of the cross, “Woman, behold your son” (Jn 19:26b). Then addressing the beloved disciple who represented all

the disciples, he said, “Behold your mother” (Jn 19:27a). With these words, forming part of a typical “revelation scheme,” Jesus proclaimed that his mother was also our mother. From that Hour, the Hour of the Paschal Mystery, the disciple accepted the Mother of Jesus “among his own,” as the Greek original states. That is, he received Mary not only to offer her lodging in his home, but above all because he saw in her one of the “values” of his own faith, one of the paramount spiritual “goods” which the love of the Master had bequeathed to the community of disciples. During the past thirty years, biblical exegesis has often dwelt on this passage from St. John's Gospel, and has placed great stress on its ecclesial relevance. But this had already been highlighted by a living tradition which since at least the third century¹⁹ has been gradually enriched down to the present day.²⁰ Many sources could be quoted in this connection, but we limit ourselves to the words of St. Sophronius of Jerusalem (+683): “The great [disciple] took the sinless Mother of God into his home as his own mother...he became the son of the Mother of God!²¹

The organic bond which unites the Church to Mary was authoritatively restated by the Second Vatican Council when it decided to place the treatise on the doctrine of the Blessed Virgin as the conclusion and crowning touch to its reflection on the Church in the famous Chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium*. The Council's choice in itself allows us to conclude that the Church does not exist without Mary, and conversely, that Mary cannot be properly understood except “in the mystery of Christ and the Church,” as the very title of Chapter VIII of *Lumen gentium* expressed it.

11. In our view, the ultimate reason why the crisis in Marian devotion has been overcome lies in the respect which the Church owes to God's free, omniscient plan. The Church cannot add or subtract anything from the action of divine grace in Mary; the Church must only adore God's merciful design for the woman who is “blessed among women” (Lk 1:42). It can only proclaim her unconquerable faith (see Lk 1:45) and acknowledge that the Most High has wrought “great things” in her (see Lk 1:49) because of Christ and the community of the faithful and rejoice in the fact that God has placed her in the Church as the *mater misericordiae* ²² and *ministra pietatis* ²³

Overcoming the crisis in religious institutes

12. Just as happened in the Church in general so also religious institutes have now to a great extent overcome the crisis in Marian devotion, for they have managed to face and respond to the problems of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, drawing on their own tradition and on the renewal started by the Council.

Following the specific instructions of the Apostolic See religious institutes have undertaken a far-reaching revision of their constitutions in the years since the Council. To carry out this revision, the Council provided them with a benchmark of paramount importance: the “supreme rule” is to follow Christ as proposed by the gospel.²⁴ This meant the institutes had to compare themselves with the gospel, and from this living contact they were given an abundant new outpouring of genuine religious spirit. The process of revision undertaken in obedience to the Church by these men and women united in the name of the Lord Jesus has to be seen as the work of the Spirit. With regard to Marian devotion, this work of revision provided a reflective pause and consequently a clearer vision. It thus enabled religious to distinguish the truly valid criticisms of Marian devotion from unfounded objections.

But revision proved to be providential for another reason: since it involved a great deal of archival research, the publication of sources and monographic studies, wide ranging consultation and detailed enquiries, it enabled the institutes to describe with greater security their original charism, to distinguish the essential elements of their Marian spirituality from secondary and derived aspects, and to learn the living tradition or *sensus* of their institutes in relation to their specific Marian piety based on reliable evidence.

13. The outcome of this process of revision is consoling. In nearly every instance, a comparison of

the texts reveals that the renewed constitutions contain more numerous and significant Marian elements than the preconconciliar ones. The main thrusts of the institutes' Marian spirituality are now set out more clearly and in much broader terms; they are supported by a much more rigorous biblical foundation and are documented with appropriate references to original sources. We do not feel that enough has been made of this fact which has vast ecclesial implications. A great many institutes have joyfully confirmed the “Marian character” of their specific way of following Christ and of being religious in the Church.

The “Marian character” has generally been very clearly and boldly expressed in the constitutional texts with an amazing variety of content. Just to cite a few examples, the Blessed Virgin is described in her relationship to religious as a loving Mother caring for her sons and daughters, and a Sister who shares with us the human condition and discipleship; she is Teacher of the spiritual life and Model of the evangelical virtues; the Guide leading towards the heights of holiness, and the shining Image who in herself anticipates the reality of grace which the consecrated life seeks; the Custodian of the great gospel values, and the Inspiration for new forms of consecrated life, being the one who, trusting in God, faced up to new and highly hazardous situations; the Patron who defends and protects the institute and its individual members, the Queen and Lady to whose service of love religious consecrate themselves in order to conform themselves more fully to Christ.

14. But because of the bonds of communion and friendship which unite religious to the laity, when the constitutions were drawn up the religious often reflected on the significance of the figure of Mary for the brothers and sisters who follow Christ as lay persons. Reading these new legislative texts, one can see the commitment to foster Marian devotion among the faithful, or the intention to help them discover in Mary's responses to God's plan the “gospel responses” most appropriate to their life, or the desire to celebrate Mary's feasts with them. In general, since the Marian devotion of religious almost always has its roots in their home backgrounds, one can at times see the intention of learning from lay persons the example of a devotion to the Blessed Virgin which is simple yet strong, tempered by self-denial and suffering.

15. Reflection on the wealth of Marian elements in many renewed constitutions has led us to two preliminary conclusions:

— With few exceptions, the complaint which is still heard at times that the new legislative texts pay less attention to the figure of the Blessed Virgin is simply the result of a lack of information. This is often said, perhaps subconsciously, more because of a nostalgia for former historical, social, and ecclesial situations than because of genuine zeal for devotion to the Blessed Virgin. This attitude also reveals an inability to grasp the deep-seated reasons for sound renewal and to accept the new things which the Spirit raises up in the Church. Lastly, there is the risk that this become a negative attitude, belittling the work so seriously done in obedience to the Apostolic See which has set its seal of approval on it.

— The “Marian elements” set forth in these various legislative texts, taken as a whole, form a considerable summa of “Marian experiences,” and a kind of compendium of valid guidelines and effective stimuli for the progress of the members of our institutes along a path of life which is itself a holy sacrifice and spiritual worship acceptable to God (see Rom 12: 1), animated by a profound apostolic commitment, and permeated by the thirst for God and the quest for holiness. What we are trying to say is this: our founders and foundresses, men and women guided by the Spirit, sensed and experienced within themselves that the Virgin Mary, because of the purity and intensity of her response to God and because of the role she plays in the Church, is a most effective and many faceted point of reference in living under the sign of perfect consecration to the Lord and generous self-giving to our brothers and sisters.

16. In the “Marian elements” contained in their constitutions, religious institutes today have at their disposal an immense wealth of stimuli for the sanctification of their members and their apostolic ministry. If we endeavour to put into practice what we have committed ourselves to do, devotion to Mary of Nazareth will become an urgent and welcome opportunity to become, every day more consciously, genuine worshippers of the Father in Spirit and Truth (see Jn 4:23-24), men and women of a joyful and responsible fiat repeated day by day (see Lk 1:39). The same devotion will be an opportunity to proclaim the Good News “with haste” (see Lk 1:39) and bring Christ, generated and borne in our hearts, to our brothers and sisters and plead for the gift of the Spirit in communion with the bishops and the brothers and sisters of the Lord scattered throughout the world (see Acts 1:14), so that Pentecost may reign forever in the Church.

II

MARY AND CONSECRATED LIFE : A PROFOUND HARMONY

17. After having examined the recent crisis in Marian devotion and the way it has been virtually overcome in the Church and religious institutes, we think it useful to continue our reflection by looking at Mary from our particular existential viewpoint as religious and in terms of the service which we can render to the local Churches. The Blessed Virgin Mary is a “good” which belongs to the entire Church and to all generations. She performs her maternal ministry on behalf of all those who believe in Christ and on behalf of all men and women. Because of the purity of her acceptance of the Father's will and the Son's message, she offers herself to everyone - men and women, bishops, priests and deacons, religious and laity - as a perfect image of the faithful disciple of Christ. The patristic Church expressed its conviction that the life of the Blessed Virgin was a model for all the disciples of the Lord.²⁵ According to the tradition and unbroken experience of the Church, therefore, it is not possible for religious to arrogate the “Marian model” to themselves.

A historical responsibility

18. According to the exegetes, the New Testament (particularly the gospels of Luke and John) shows definite traces of veneration of the Mother of Jesus by the first Christian communities. Patristic scholars point out that the writings of the second and third centuries contain not a few references to the Church's increasing attention to Mary expressed in respectful honour of her dignity as the Mother of Christ and the new Eve. Archaeologists have also unearthed evidence of Marian devotion in various excavations, dating back to the second and third centuries, mainly in Palestine and Rome. We therefore have a variety of evidence that assures us that in the pre-Nicene period (before organised forms of “religious life” emerged) there existed in the Church a fairly well defined veneration of the Mother of the Redeemer. Yet there can be no doubt that in both the East and the West, later developments of Marian doctrine and devotion were largely due to the insight, commitment and love of men and women consecrated to God in religious life. In the patristic age this occurred among the groups of ascetics, during the Middle Ages in the monastic foundations and communities of the new orders dedicated to the evangelical-apostolic life, all of which had a marked veneration for the glorious Virgin. In the modern and contemporary periods, this occurs in numerous congregations and institutes with a more clearly defined apostolic commitment in which the Marian charism is often forcefully asserted. A glance at the saints, men and women, who were outstanding for a particular “Marian feature” in the eyes of the faithful or according to the judgment of history reveals that most of them were religious.

19. It was in the monasteries that the superb icons were painted, resplendent with that mysterious “presence” of the Theotokos and bearing a message of beauty and doctrine. Here, too, the great

Marian hymns and homilies were written and a number of the important feasts of the Blessed Virgin were established as well as the practice of dedicating Saturday to her. The practice of greeting the Blessed Virgin at the end of the canonical hours and in particular the solemn prayer to the Regina misericordiae which concludes the daily offices, the Angelus at daybreak, noon and evening, and the diffusion of the little offices of St. Mary are linked with these monasteries. Most of the leading scholars of the figure of the Blessed Virgin and many of the most fervent defenders of her privileges were religious. Virtually all the treatises on Marian spirituality and the most commonly practiced Marian exercises came from the “religious” context. Many shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin were and are entrusted to religious who have also been the promoters of countless Marian associations.

We religious have to view all this not as a reason for foolish and sterile praise of ourselves, but as a historical fact to be reflected upon, an invitation not to squander this “family legacy” and as an incentive to further the work that our predecessors began many centuries ago.

20. Since the pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878), the Supreme Pontiffs have frequently spoken out in the exercise of their universal magisterium to safeguard and foster Marian devotion among the faithful. Many bishops of local Churches have followed the example of the bishops of Rome. This is primarily their responsibility. But without fear of falling into rhetoric, we can affirm that religious, not because of doctrine or pastoral responsibility but because of a centuries' old tradition, have the “historic responsibility” to be faithful trustees of devotion to the Mother of the Lord and to promote its correct development. This responsibility is one that we do not intend to shirk and is a burden which, like the “yoke” of the law of Jesus (see Mt 11:30), we find easy and light.

A profound harmony

21. We have already mentioned that Mary's life can be taken on by all the disciples of the Lord according to the norms of the evangelical life. Nevertheless, because of her unique and unrepeatable vocation lived in very particular circumstances, the role of model which is Mary's as true mother and perfect virgin is seen in different ways according to the various states of life; she is seen in one way for example in the life of those who live in matrimony and in another way in the life of those who have embraced celibacy for the Kingdom. John Paul II has stated that “marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with his people.”²⁶ Virginity and matrimony are two distinct expressions of the same necessary following of Christ.

The family of Nazareth as model

22. Those who are united in holy matrimony feel that Mary and Joseph, because of their communion of faith, affection and life, are a shining point of reference for them. The birth of Jesus, son of God and son of man, took place within a family established according to the law of the Lord and made up of a just man (see Mt 1:19) of the house of David (see Mt 1:20; Lk 1: 27) and a divinely favoured woman (see Lk 1:28). After Joseph, following the command of the angel, took Mary into his home as his wife (see Mt 1:20, 24), their life seems marked by profound wedded communion: together, they faced the hardships brought on by the census decreed by Augustus Caesar (see Lk 2:1-5); together, they lived the salvific event of the birth of Jesus in joy and in poverty (see Lk 2:7); together, they are seen in the fulfillment of the sign given to the shepherds by the angel (see Lk 2:16); together they carried out the rites prescribed by the law of the Lord: the circumcision of the child and the giving of a name (see Lk 2:21), the presentation of the newborn in the Temple (see Lk 2:27) and “their purification” (Lk 2:22); after the words of Simeon (see Lk

2:29-32), together “the child's father and mother marvelled at what was being said about him” (Lk 2:33) and together they were blessed by the old holy man (see Lk 2:34); together, they faced the difficult trials of the persecution by Herod and the flight into Egypt (see Mt 2:13-15); after returning to Nazareth, together they “used to go every year to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover” (Lk 2:41); with the same feelings of sorrow they lived through the prophetic episode of the loss of Jesus (Lk 2:48)- together they sought him, found him and were astonished; Jesus returned to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them as their son (see Lk 2:51); together, they lived a humble, hidden and active life in such a way that Jesus was considered to be “the son of the carpenter” (Mt 13:55) or simply “the carpenter” (Mk 6:3).

Because of all this, the home in Nazareth has remained in the memory of the Church as the example of where we learn “what the family is and what communion in love is its austere and simple beauty, its sacred and enduring character.”²⁷ In particular Mary, because of her physical motherhood and educational role in the life of the child Jesus, is celebrated as the model for Christian mothers. At this point we permit ourselves to express a two-fold hope:

— That those who live in matrimony or are preparing to celebrate it will attain their desire for communion and love also in light of the married life of Joseph and Mary. That life seems characterised by two elements: it was lived “according to the law of the Lord” and it expressed a mutual willingness to face together, as we have seen, the great and small events that confronted them. Further, thinking of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph, Christian spouses will be able to understand the ultimate meaning of sexuality (which was also lived by Mary and Joseph, though in a unique way)²⁸ and experience their mutual giving of self as a moment of profound communion and participation in the mystery of life within the context of the plan that comes from the Lord.

— That after the many voices (usually those of celibate theologians) which have described the various aspects of the motherhood of Mary throughout the centuries, it be described also by women who have lived the same human experience.

Supreme model of consecrated virginity

23. And yet this woman Mary, so truly mother, has since the second century been considered the “virgin” par excellence, the “Virgin of the Lord.”²⁹ Very early, Christian thought understood the dogmatic implications of her virginity and beginning in the third century Mary was primarily presented as the model or most excellent image of consecrated virginity. Why was this? Why is there this singular connection between “Marian devotion” and “religious life” which we spoke of earlier? Vatican II provides an answer rich in implications: the evangelical counsels that religious freely embrace “have the power to conform the Christian man or woman more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself and which his Virgin Mother embraced also.”³⁰ There is, therefore, a profound consistency between the evangelical essence of the “religious life” and certain fundamental aspects of the “life of the Virgin” as described in the gospel. This consistency explains the age-old, cordial relationship between “Marian piety” and the consecrated life. By living in essence the same “kind of life” as Mary, religious have a more immediate grasp of certain “values” of the figure of the Virgin and are better equipped to gain an existential appreciation of the nuances which wholly escape others.

24. In the light of historical experience and this recognised “profound harmony” between Mary's “kind of life” and the consecrated life, we can say without making an axiom of it, that wherever the gospel-inspired religious life is lived with commitment, genuine devotion to the Mother of Jesus flourishes. Conversely, wherever there is sound devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the most favourable conditions for the growth of consecrated life are found. This perhaps explains what is happening in some groups of men and women in the Reformed Churches. They have rigorously restored the forms and structures of life that belong to the monastic-religious tradition, including celibacy for the

Kingdom, and at the same time they have rediscovered the significance and value of the figure of Mary in relation to the “Christian life.”

The model of our vocation and consecration

25. Because of her civil status Mary is a “lay woman” even if she belongs to a consecrated people (see Dt 14:2). Yet reflecting on the gospels, the tradition of the Church presents Mary as the epitome of the “consecrated woman,” as the most pure and the greatest example, after Christ, of personal consecration to God and the cause of salvation. Being consecrated by the sanctifying action of the Spirit from her Immaculate Conception and, subsequently, by the ineffable presence of the Word in her virginal womb, Mary freely and totally consecrated herself to God in generously responding to his call.³¹ In the light of the New Testament we can say that by virtue of her singular consecration, everything in Mary's life is in reference to God, everything expresses a relationship with the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and everything is oriented to the salvation of humanity.

26. The exegetes tell us that the text of the Annunciation in St. Luke's Gospel (1:26-38) is not to be read solely as a typical “announcement of birth” but also as a typical “account of vocation,” the vocation to be the mother of the Messiah but a vocation understood always as a “personal call” that demanded a “personal response.” The same exegetes point out that no account of vocation contains such a detailed dialogue with so much respect for a person's freedom as does the encounter between Gabriel and Mary. Furthermore, no other account ends with such an expressive formula of wholehearted acceptance of the Lord's will as the one used by the Blessed Virgin in accepting the divine plan: “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

27. Following the teaching of the Fathers, religious have meditated at great length on these words spoken by the Blessed Virgin. Through the ages, they have thoroughly examined the significance of Mary's fiat and have shown that it is an echo of the word spoken at the beginning of time (Gen 1:3,26); that the fiat was spoken to enable the Spirit to form Christ, the true Light and the true New Man, in her virginal womb; that it was the obedient response counteracting Eve's doom-laden denial; that it echoed the formula of the “Sinai covenant” (see Ex 19:8) and to a certain extent was its first manifestation in the economy of the new Covenant. Religious have seen that the fiat is the wonderful encounter between the word spoken by the Son as he enters the world (see Heb 10:5-7; Ps 39:8-9) and the word spoken by the Virgin as she welcomed him into her womb (see Lk 1:38). It was a “consent to marriage” in that after the fiat the Word indissolubly united his divine nature to our human nature in Mary's womb. It was the paradigm of all motherhood of grace in the Church which can only take place in faith and in the Spirit. It was the word of unconditional acceptance which, by accepting a message of liberation (see Lk 1:31-33), became a pledge to serve. It was a word of mercy which the Virgin - privileged daughter of Adam, yet united to all men and women - spoke on behalf of all.³² Obviously, not all these “readings” of Mary's fiat can be drawn from the literal sense of the biblical text, but they do bear witness to the attention which the Church and religious of all ages have paid to that decisive word.

28. We are certain that you, bishops, priests and deacons, and you, brothers and sisters of the laity, can understand us. We religious, following a longstanding and solid tradition and without any claim that we monopolise the model, interpret the vocation to the “consecrated life” (personal call from God and the following of Christ in a chaste, humble and obedient life at the service of the Church...) in the light of Mary's vocation. We therefore hold that God extends certain aspects of Mary's vocation in the vocation of virgins and religious. What in Mary's case was the vocation to become the mother of the Messiah, to beget Christ in heart and in flesh, becomes the religious' call to a

virginal fecundity in the Spirit which generates Christ in accepting the Word and fulfilling the will of the Father (see Mt 12:49-50).

We also interpret our “religious consecration” in the light of Mary's consecration: the radical way in which she “devoted herself totally as the handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption, by the grace of Almighty God.”³³ She stands before us as the norm for living out the commitment of love we have made to Christ and our fellow men and women and for remaining true to the pledge we have given.

An extension and a sign of a presence

29. The pilgrim Church on earth lives with the consoling assurance of its Lord: “I am with you always, to the end of time” (Mt 28:20b). The risen Christ who sits in glory at the right hand of the Father is constantly present in the Church, his spouse. Indeed, we know that being united to the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ (see Rom 6:3-11) all baptised Christians have been transformed in Christ; Christ lives in them (see Gal 2:20) and they become Christ's dwelling (see Jn 14:23).

Similarly, the Blessed Virgin assumed into heaven, who reigns in glory beside her son, the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rev 19:16), is effectively present in the life of the Church. The Second Vatican Council, making its own the perennial tradition of the Church, spoke with force and clarity: “Taken up to heaven, [Mary] did not lay aside this saving office, but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brothers and sisters of her son who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led to their blessed home.”³⁴ Contemporary theology is reconsidering the doctrine of Mary's mediation, without rejecting its traditional content, in terms of the exercise of her spiritual motherhood and referring to the Fathers of the Church it speaks clearly of the “presence” of Mary in the life of the Church.³⁵ In the same way, Paul VI and John Paul II have frequently used the expression “active presence” in their teaching to show the actual and hidden way in which the Virgin who already possesses “the glory of the celestial bodies” (1 Cor 15:40) and is therefore unconstrained by time and space shares in the activities and life of the Church in its earthly and temporal stage.³⁶

30. The many different ways Christ is present in the Church are manifested through a variety of signs. These are all well known and the Fathers of the Church, theologians, and the bishops of Rome have written many eloquent pages on them.³⁷

But are there any signs of the presence of the Blessed Virgin in the Church? We believe there are.³⁸ And we ask ourselves if among these signs we should not include religious who by free choice are specially bound to the Mother of Christ, and who draw their inspiration from her as the model for their own lives. We want to respond with great caution, asking the help of the reflection of our brothers and sisters

31. Christ alone is the source and supreme model of religious life. He alone presents the divine and human realities of a life whose essence is infinite love for the Father and total self-giving to his brothers and sisters with absolute unity and absolute depth. But we know that despite their personal fragility, religious, because of the state they have embraced, place themselves in relationship to Christ as an extension and sign. As Vatican II exhorts: “Let religious see well to it that the Church truly show forth Christ through them with ever-increasing clarity to believers and unbelievers alike - Christ in contemplation on the mountain or proclaiming the Kingdom of God to the multitudes, or healing the sick and maimed, and converting sinners to a good life, or blessing children, and doing good to all, always in obedience to the will of the Father who sent him.”³⁹

32. Our Lady does not generate grace. She has no light of her own. She reflects the light of Christ as the moon reflects the light of the sun, as a metaphor well known to the Fathers of the Church has it. She is merely the face which most resembles the face of Christ, the splendour of the glory of the Father (see Heb 1:3). Not knowing sin, the Virgin already represents the new heart, the docile heart, which is required for the new Covenant which God was to make with his new people (see Jer 31 :31-34). She already possesses the “pure heart” which her son proclaimed blessed and capable of “secing God ” (see Mt 5:8).

By virtue of the quality of her response to the gift of grace and the mission she received from God, the Blessed Virgin appears to the Church as the model of mysterious holiness. 40 The Church loves to contemplate Mary to draw from her words and attitudes inspiration for the responses it must make to its Lord in the various events of history so that it can experience a foretaste of its destiny of glory. Religious, too, love to contemplate Mary; it is their habit to look to the Blessed Virgin to learn from her how to live fruitfully their consecrated virginity, their voluntary poverty and their generous obedience.

33. But we have to clarify this still further. The exemplary character of the Blessed Virgin is in itself an effect of her “active presence” in the ecclesial community; it is the strength that is released by her person, already glorified and consumed in love, which leads the faithful to conform themselves to her in order to conform themselves more fully to Christ. In this way, through the action of the Spirit and according to structures of grace that cannot be codified the faithful conforming themselves to the model reproduce it, in reproducing it they extend it, in extending it they make it present among men and women.

A great symbol of Christianity

34. The Blessed Virgin is certainly one of the greatest symbols of Christianity; by the term “symbol” we mean a historical reality which embodies a set of ideal attitudes and hence is not limited by the confines of fleeting time and which extends its saving function to all generations in the economy of salvation and is susceptible to becoming ever better known, but whose mystery will be wholly revealed only at the end of time.

The founders and foundresses of many religious families took their inspiration from the Blessed Virgin, this inexhaustible reality-symbol. Some concentrated their attention on the great event of the Incarnation of the Word and hence on Mary's fiat, full of obedience and faith, whereby she became through the action of the Spirit, the Mother of God made man and the sacred dwelling of the Word. Drawing out the full significance and value of the expression “I am the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38), they felt the urgent need to put it into practice by making their own lives a service of love to God, the Church and all men and women.

Others were attracted by the salvific content of the episode of the Visitation in which Mary, the new ark of the New Covenant, brought the Saviour to John and proclaimed the great things that God had done for her and for Israel. Accordingly, these founders and foundresses desired to make themselves Christ-bearers to all peoples and through their lives extend the song of thanksgiving and liberation.

There were others still who saw the wealth of meaning in the episode of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple and desired to take it as the paradigm for their lives. They placed before the eyes of their followers as a constant example Mary and Joseph's loving observance of the law: the humility of the pure Virgin, the ransom paid with two turtledoves for the Firstborn Son who was to redeem all men and women with the price of his blood (see 1 Pt 1 :19; Rev 5 :9); the meeting of the Messiah with his people in the Temple (not however with the guardians of the Temple, but with the poor, the anawim (Simeon and Anna); above all, the prophetic words which greeted Jesus, “a light

to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel” (see Lk 2:32), and which announced to his mother her participation in the passion of her son- the sword of sorrow (see Lk 2:35).

Others proposed that their sons and daughters should draw their inspiration from the operative silence of the home in Nazareth in which Mary, at Joseph's side, was both the mother and the disciple of Jesus, faithfully keeping and pondering in her heart the words and events relating to their son (see Lk 2:19, 51) and not fully understanding the significance of some of his actions (see Lk 2:50), but giving herself wholly to pure faith.

Others proposed to concentrate on living their lives in terms of the event of the Hour of the Paschal Mystery - the event of pain and glory, of death and life - in which important prophecies seem to find fulfillment in Mary: the prophecy of the Woman (see Gen 3:15) who, as she stood by the tree of life, was to be called to work with the new Man for the salvation of the human race, and the prophecies relating to the Daughter of Zion, mother of all peoples (see Zep 3:14; Zech 2:14; 9:9; Ps 86 [87]:5-7). Mary personifies the Daughter of Zion, standing by the side of Christ who draws all peoples to himself as he is uplifted on the Cross (see Jn 12:32) and gathers together in the Church (see Jn 10:16) “all the children of God who are scattered abroad ” (Jn 11:52). In that Hour, the necessary condition for becoming a true disciple of Christ is fulfilled also for Mary: to follow him even to the Cross (see Lk 9:23). By contemplating the mystery of Calvary, these founders and foundresses discovered the means of exhorting their sons and daughters to be present as Mary was at the crosses of their brothers and sisters in whom the passion of Christ is extended. Others strongly desired their communities to be so many Cenacles where religious, gathered together with “Mary, the Mother of Jesus” (Acts 1:14) and in communion with the successors of the apostles and all the Lord's brothers and sisters, would be united in constant prayer to implore the unceasing gift of the Spirit for the Church.

Lastly, there were others who found inspiration for their lives in certain events of grace which God worked in Mary and which form part of our profession of faith: the Immaculate Conception, in which the Church acknowledges her own secret beginning and sees her image, as in a spotless mirror, as the Spouse without wrinkle or blemish (Eph 5 27);⁴¹ her Assumption into heaven, in which the Church contemplates the fulfillment of the glorious destiny that awaits her; or the fruitful virginity which the Church accepts as a means of keeping the faith whole, and preserving her love for Christ exclusive and watchful.

35. These are but a few examples, yet they are far from secondary. They refer to existential experiences that have gradually enriched the life of the Church and that concern considerable numbers of groups within the Church. They are experiences that have been raised up by a founding charism, useful in “building up the community” (1 Cor 14:12) and recognised as such by the Apostolic See; experiences that have produced, and continue to produce, fruits of holiness.

* * * We are now in a better position to answer the question raised earlier: religious who live an evangelical life inspired expressly by Mary, by virtue of their stabile commitment rooted in a charism raised up by the Spirit, extend the “ active presence” of the Virgin in the Church and they manifest that same presence. They are a sign of that presence.

The Blessed Virgin, assumed into heaven, is still at the service of the work of salvation and keeps watch over the Church, visiting it, comforting it,⁴² and performing her maternal duty through the words, deeds and hearts of religious who have consecrated themselves to her.

Mary, the witness of Christ

36. We should not be afraid that the attention paid by religious to one or other episode relating to the Blessed Virgin and taken as the inspiration for their consecrated life might distract them from their fundamental commitment of following Christ and serving the Church. It can be noted that all these episodes relate first and foremost to Christ. And they are episodes that have profound

implications for the Church and, therefore, necessarily relate to the Church. We can truly say that there is no episode relating to Mary in the gospels which cannot be read in terms of the mystery of Christ and of the Church.

37. Like John the Baptist (see Jn 1:29-31), Andrew (see Jn 1:41-42), Philip (see Jn 1:45) and Peter (see Jn 6:68-69), Mary is a witness of Christ, and like them the Blessed Virgin refers all to him, the new lawgiver, and to his precepts: “Do whatever he tells you” Jn 2:5). By virtue of this “commandment” of the Blessed Virgin, in which some exegetes notice echoes of the formulae of the covenant,⁴³ we find that Christ is the only absolute, the only way that leads to the Father (see Jn 14 :6). This is the function of Marian devotion. It is clearly expressed in the iconographic concept of the *odighitria* of the Blessed Virgin: she points towards Jesus who is the Way. But even Jesus, in a certain way, directs us towards his mother, for when we contemplate Christ in his real-life human and saving existence, from the cradle to the cross, we see Mary at his side. When he was a child, the Magi from the East were presented with the sight of “the child with Mary his mother” (Mt 2:11); when he died on the cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to John, saying, “Behold your mother” Jn 19:27). In the monastic-religious tradition, these words and actions of our Lord have been interpreted as an indication of a path leading to him.

III

SOME OF THE TASKS AWAITING LOCAL CHURCHES AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTES IN PROMOTING DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN

38. After having commented on the recent crisis in devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the overcoming of this crisis (Part I), and having shown the way in which the life of Mary and religious life are so profoundly in harmony (Part II), we wish to continue our reflection pointing out some of the duties which, in our opinion, are incumbent upon local Churches and religious institutes so as to promote devotion to the Mother and Handmaid of the Lord.

You bishops, our fathers and friends, you fellow religious, and all of you brothers and sisters: please understand us. We are perfectly aware of the fact that ours is a small voice but one that finds confidence in your kind consideration and courage in our common love for the Virgin.

Studies

39. Deep knowledge alone permits deep love. We therefore feel that the first task to be faced in fostering the sound development of devotion to Mary among ourselves and among the Christian people is to acquire a thorough knowledge of the figure of the Virgin “in the mystery of Christ and of the Church” and of her mission in the work of salvation. This task is perfectly in harmony with the charism of our institutes and it is extremely useful, if not indispensable, in our relationships with the local Churches in which we carry out our service.

The Father who keeps the secrets of the Kingdom hidden from the wise and learned and reveals them to children (see Mt 11:25) can certainly lead those persons who entrust themselves to him in filial simplicity to a thorough knowledge of Mary. But this is a path which is reserved to the free gift of God. Most of us who are called to bear witness to the figure of the Virgin in a society which often fails to see her significance need to acquire a reflective knowledge of Mary of Nazareth. This can only come about through rigorous and systematic study, tailored to the conditions of each individual and adapted to the various periods of formation.

40. We must be honest: many priests, many religious and many other pastoral workers are still ill-informed both as regards fundamental documents of the magisterium on the Blessed Virgin and

about the more significant developments that have taken place in the various areas of Mariology which scholars have calmly accepted for years.

This lack of information has many repercussions: preaching on the Virgin has not been renewed and has not presented in an incisive manner the meaning of the figure of Mary of Nazareth for contemporary men and women; essential and irrevocable data of the magisterium and tradition risk not being accepted because they are being taught in terms which are no longer current in theological language; the guidelines and prospects set out in *Lumen gentium* are finding difficulty in making headway; biblical sources are being neglected and people are being nourished by the remnants of pious traditions and uncertain visions; the wealth of our patristic heritage is being ignored and people are repeating commonplaces coined in periods of less theological rigour; contrasting positions based on mutual suspicion are maintained with a kind of “hardness of heart” (the “conservatives” and the “progressives” as was said in the not too distant past) when all that is needed to dispel this is a calm and open examination of the data of Sacred Scripture and holy tradition without preconceived ideas and in the light of the magisterium; the ecumenical movement for its part is suffering delays; there is still the lack of coordination, referred to earlier, between the research of scholars and the urgent needs of pastors; Mary of Nazareth is placed on the edge of life and devotion simply because she is not known.

We hope we have not painted too gloomy a picture of the situation. As we have already indicated, this is limited to certain situations and to those brothers and sisters who demonstrate a persistent and objective lack of knowledge. But this is still a lack which is too widespread for those like you and ourselves who share a common love for the Church and for the Blessed Virgin.

41. In this connection, we Servants of Mary, men and women, wish to express our gratitude and admiration for those friars who, at the end of the 19th century when our Order was considerably reduced in numbers, so boldly and farsightedly founded the Collegio Sant'Alessio Falconieri in Rome (1896) and entrusted to it the task of fostering studies on the Blessed Virgin. In so doing, they laid one of the most solid foundations for the rebirth of the Order and provided it with the means it required to serve the local Churches and the Apostolic See itself more effectively. In 1901, the rector of the Collegio Sant' Alessio, Fra Alexis M. Lépicier, professor of dogmatic theology at the Urbana University (future Prior General and member of the College of Cardinals) published his *Tractatus de beatissima Virgine Maria Mater Dei*, thereby restoring the place and dignity of study of Our Lady in Roman scholastic circles.⁴⁴

Fra Alexis M. Lépicier's example was followed by several other friars of whom we should like to mention Fra Gabriele M. Roschini (+ 1977) who worked efficiently to foster thought and interest in Mariology. It was from the Collegio Sant'Alessio that the “Marianum” Theological Faculty eventually came into being. May we, at this point, express our gratitude to Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI for their paternal concern and encouragement of the development of our Faculty, to the extent of creating the Doctorate in Theology with specialisation in Mariology (7 March 1965) and of honouring the Faculty with the title “Pontifical” (1 January 1971).

Our Order maintains the activities of the “Marianum” Faculty as its apostolic service in the field of theological research. And the Faculty itself, with its teaching structures, specialised Library and its review *Marianum* which endeavours to make a contribution to Mariological discussions, is committed to “promoting the knowledge, teaching and scientific and pastoral progress of Christian thinking about the Mother of God, in accordance with the Order's mission in the Church.”⁴⁵ Before the local Churches, religious institutes and men and women of culture, the teaching staff and students of the Faculty wish to cooperate in a spirit of fraternity with scholars and others who wish to share its institutional objectives.

42. It is precisely because of the attention we devote to the study of Mariology that we are able to understand that the contribution of our Order in this field is merely a humble offering alongside that of many other religious institutes. Even knowing that this will be an incomplete list, we cannot fail

to mention the work being carried out by the Order of Friars Minor to whom is entrusted the direction of the Pontificia Accademia Mariana Internazionale (Rome); the Conventual Friars Minor who support the Accademia dell'Immacolata (Rome); the Society of Mary (Marianists) who promote, among other things, the Marian Library (Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A.); the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who publish the prestigious review *Ephemerides Mariologicae* (Madrid); the Salesians of St. John Bosco who created the Accademia Mariana Salesiana (Rome); the Company of Mary (the De Monfort Fathers) who established the Centro Mariano Monfortano in Rome and publish the excellent magazine *Cahiers Marials* in Paris; the Marist Brothers who founded the Marian Spirituality Centre in Belo Horizonte (Brazil); the theologians belonging to the Benedictine, Jesuit and Dominican Orders, the two Carmelite Orders and many other institutes who are present in Mariological research through their publications; the Society of St. Paul whose publications include so many works on Mariology. We must also mention the way in which so many religious share in the activities of the Mariological societies which abound in many countries and who frequently lead them. And lastly, we wish to recall the scholars of the Prelature of the Holy Cross who publish the important review *Scripta de Maria* (Zaragoza).

Since we understand the commitment of persons and means needed to maintain these works, we would like to express our admiration and thanks to these brothers and sisters and, if necessary, offer them our encouragement to continue singlemindedly and rigorously with the work which has brought them great esteem in the Church.

43. The importance of studies for promoting devotion to the Blessed Virgin is such that one conclusion is certain: we must everywhere foster the study of Mariology and the institutions which make this study possible at all levels among the laity, religious, and ministers of the Church. "Christology is also Mariology," said a recent document of the S. Congregation for Catholic Education.⁴⁶ We can endorse this by adding that ecclesiology and pneumatology are also Mariology.⁴⁷ Anyone who considers the doctrinal issues relating to the figure of the Woman whom our Eastern brothers and sisters call the "Crown of Dogma" and the pastoral value which stems from genuine Marian devotion knows that Mariology is a discipline which is worthy of the closest attention.

Proclamation of the Word

44. The last words spoken by Jesus to the eleven apostles, "go and make disciples of all the nations, baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19), indicate not an ending but a beginning: the beginning of the universal mission of the Church. These words have been engraved on the heart of the Church and throughout its history they have prompted, supported and guided its missionary commitment. Throughout the centuries disciples of the Lord, men and women, have felt the urgent need to proclaim the Good News as did Paul: "Preaching the gospel is not the subject of a boast; I am under compulsion and have no choice; I am ruined if I do not preach it!" (1 Cor 9:16). Reflecting on the missionary activity of the Church from our present point of view - the responsibility of religious in promoting Marian piety - we have to emphasise two facts:

— First, the missionary endeavours of the Church presently are carried out primarily by religious institutes. The Church has entrusted this task to them and they have accepted it as a valid expression of their institutional charism. In fact, there are few religious institutes that do not have some missionary activity and many were formed with the primary purpose of bringing the light of faith to those who still live in darkness.

— Second, many missionary institutes have a "Marian reference" in their names; they place their work of evangelisation under the protection of the Blessed Virgin and they openly state that in her they find an example and inspiration for carrying out their specific apostolic service.

In our opinion, these two facts are significant: they reveal once more how Mary is intimately tied to the mystery of Christ, the primary object of evangelisation, and to the mystery of the Church, the active agent in evangelisation. They demonstrate, too, how the Blessed Virgin in her role as Mother and model anticipated the mission of the Church: to receive and proclaim the Word.

The first to be evangelized and herself an evangeliser

45. The ultimate reason for which Mary is honoured as the Guiding Star of evangelisation 48 is not devotional but strictly biblical. According to the scholars of the Sacred Scriptures, some gospel episodes contain important indications of Mary's relationship with the Church as model in its reception and proclamation of the Word. Mary is the first person to be evangelised. The Virgin of Nazareth, as future mother of the Messiah and personification of the Daughter of Sion, is the first to receive the joyful Good News: the Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High, will come upon her and she will bear the Saviour of the nations (see Lk 1:26-38). With faith Mary receives this word of the Lord and faith becomes “ in her case the gateway and path to divine Motherhood.” 49 Mary is the first person to evangelise. The word received into her inmost being breaks out in proclamation, song and prophecy. In the hill country of Judah, Mary, overshadowed by the Spirit and bearing the Word, proclaims the great things done for her by the Almighty and brings the Saviour to John (see Lk 1:39-56). In this episode, some exegetes note a distant echo of the rejoicing at the news of the liberation of Jerusalem: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation, and saying to Zion, 'Your God is King! ’” (Is 52:7).

They found the child with Mary his mother

46. In the episode of the Magi who come from the East to offer homage to the Messiah (see Mt 2:1-12), we see not only the call of all nations to the faith but also the function of the Church following the example of Mary: to present Christ to all peoples and to become a place of encounter with him. It is probable that the evangelist Matthew, when writing the episode of the adoration of the Magi, took inspiration from Isaiah 60:1-9, the song which celebrates Jerusalem as centre of the universe; but in preparing his account he made significant changes; Jerusalem, the City-Mother upon whom the glory of the Lord shines (see Is 60:1-2), is replaced by Mary-Mother on whose knees sits the Child; in place of the Lord to whom all the nations offer homage (and who is already the Messianic King according to pre-Christian Jewish texts) there is the child Jesus who receives the homage and adoration of the Magi. In place of the kings and princesses who according to the prophecy “bowing to the ground will worship you and lick the dust at your feet” (Is 49:23; cf 60:14) and the rich merchants who arrive in Jerusalem with caravans of camels “bearing gold and frankincense” (Is 60:6) there are the Magi who “on entering the house, found the child with Mary his mother; they prostrated themselves and did him homage; then they opened their coffers and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh” (Mt 2:11).

This meeting and adoration, however, do not take place in the old Jerusalem whose leaders rejected the Messiah (see Mt 2:3; 23:37-38) but in the “house” of Bethlehem which seems to be an image of the Church. It is important to note that according to Matthew when the Magi - the first fruits among the pagans - open themselves to faith and encounter Jesus, they also see Mary: “they found the child with Mary his mother” (Mt 2:11); the same thing happens every time men and women come to Christ and enter his house, the Church: they encounter him with Mary his mother.⁵⁰

The revelation at Cana

47. We have already remarked on the importance of the risen Lord's words to the Eleven regarding

the Church's responsibility for evangelisation: "Go and make disciples of all the nations...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19). It should be noted that these words are spoken within the context of a "theophany": the apparition to the Eleven in Galilee on "the mountain to which Jesus had summoned them" (Mt 28:16). The evangelist describes the scene following the pattern of the theophany on the Sinai mountain where the Old Covenant was concluded (see Ex 19:1-9).

In Matthew's mind, the mountain of the apparition in Galilee (Mt 28:16-20) is the Sinai of the New Covenant. Jesus, glorified by the Father, is given the titles and prerogatives of the Lord of the Old Testament: universal dominion (see Mt 28:18b-19a; Ex 19:5d); adoration (see Mt 28:17a; Ex 3:12; 29:1, 9-11); the revelation of a new Law ("... everything I have commanded you" in Mt 28:20a and "... all that the Lord had ordered him" in Ex 19:7b).

It follows that the commitment taken on by the people of Israel with regard to the Law of the Lord ("Everything the Lord has said, we will do," Ex 19:8) now becomes the vocation and prerogative of the new people of God formed around Jesus and made up of disciples from all nations: "Go and make disciples of all nations...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19a,20a).

As some exegetes note, the "revelation at Cana" (see Jn 2 :1 - 12) was also written with the "theophany of Sinai" in mind (see Ex 19:1-9). It would be difficult not to see the special affinity which exists among the promise of Israel ("Everything the Lord has said, we will do" in Ex 19:8), the command of the risen Lord to the Eleven (to teach disciples to carry out all that he had commanded in Mt 28:20a) and the words addressed by Mary to the servants at the wedding at Cana ("Do whatever he tells you" in Jn 2:5b).

What John places on the lips of the Mother, Matthew presents as a task given by Christ to the apostles, to the Church: Mary and the Church are united in leading men and women to obedience to the gospel of Christ. Both Mary and the Church refer back to the only Law that saves: the words of Jesus (see Jn 6:68).

With Mary awaiting the Spirit

48. In this reflection on "Marian devotion and the proclamation of the Word" we must consider one other text, Acts 1:13-14, which describes the apostles together with "some women...and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers" (Acts 1:14), awaiting the fulfillment of the Lord's promise: "Within a few days you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5; see Lk 24:49). It has often been pointed out that the same evangelist, Luke, wrote the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus (the first two chapters of the third gospel) which is a fundamental document on the Word made flesh and also the Gospel of the Infancy of the Church (Acts of the Apostles) which is a precise description of the spreading of the Word (see Acts 6:7): from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to the ends of the earth. It seems that Luke saw an important parallelism between the events of the Annunciation-Visitation (third gospel) and those of Pentecost and the spreading of the Word (Book of Acts): the Word-Spirit first received in private (by Mary in the house in Nazareth and by the apostolic community in the "upstairs room" [see Acts 1:13] of a house in Jerusalem) must be proclaimed, by the power of the Spirit, well beyond domestic walls: to all generations without limits of time or space.

For her part, Mary - upon whom the Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High (see Lk 1:35), had descended - felt the need to proclaim the "great things" the Almighty had done for her; she left the house in Nazareth and went into the hill country to a town of Judah (see Lk 1:39). On the day of Pentecost, the apostles upon whom the "power from on high" (Lk 24:49) had descended and who were "filled with the Holy Spirit" began to speak in foreign tongues (Acts 2:4) to "devout Jews of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5); they left their seclusion and strengthened by the Spirit announced openly the work of salvation accomplished by God in the death and resurrection of Christ (see Acts 2:14-39; 4:3 1).51

Mary and the Church are at the service of the Word. For both, “the works of God are to be made known with due honour” (Tb 12:11). But here again, the Virgin Mother Mary preceded the Virgin Mother Church: the faith, openness to the Spirit, gratitude, courage and concerned solicitude of the first will be examples for the latter, committed until the end of time to making known to all nations “God's manifold wisdom...in accord with his age-old purpose, carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:10-11).

* * *

49. In light of the relationship which exists between the mission of the Virgin and the proclamation of the Word, it is not difficult, brothers and sisters, to arrive at certain pastoral conclusions:

— It is not possible to exclude Marian piety from missionary endeavours. An enlightened devotion to Mary must make us aware of the serious and urgent problems related to the proclamation of the Word; it must urge us to take on the attitudes of Mary of Nazareth in relationship to the Word: full acceptance in faith which does not end in personal possessiveness but which expresses itself in zealous proclamation.

— It is necessary that the expressions of our Marian devotion be permeated, more than they are presently, by themes related to the evangelising mission of the Church.

— We must use to advantage the missionary methodology which brought excellent results in the past and clearly present the unique role of Mary in the history of salvation from the very beginning of the proclamation of the faith.

— It is necessary that in our work of evangelisation, we reproduce the attitude of the Church towards each of its apostolic works: looking to the Virgin who “ in her life... has been a model of that motherly love with which all who join in the Church's apostolic mission for the regeneration of mankind should be animated.”⁵²

Fidelity to the liturgical reform

50. Our General Chapter is coming to an end as the Church is preparing to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* promulgated on 4 December 1963. That document had a tremendous effect on the life of the Catholic Church of the Latin Rite: from it came the post-conciliar liturgical reform which must be considered one of the greatest ecclesial events of the twentieth century.

Our Order lived this reform intensely: with joy, with hope and with tension. Our mention of the liturgical Constitution is not merely commemorative. We refer to it because we believe that its principles are valid and effective and need only to be implemented. The Constitution has permitted the renewal of our liturgy and our Marian devotion: its important article 103 had a significant effect on Chapter I of our Constitutions.⁵³ The document is important, too, because it is impossible to speak about Marian piety without placing it in the wider liturgical context.

Popular piety

51. Before beginning our reflection on the relationship between Marian devotion and the liturgy, we have to make some mention of popular piety. It has at times been scorned and been cause for serious reservations; for example, popular piety was described as one of the “places” in which a dangerous separation of religion and faith could occur.

In the 1960's popular piety was the object of numerous studies and was discussed by various episcopal conferences and the bishops of Rome. From these studies and discussions has come a

consensus on the nature of popular piety and its value: “It manifests a thirst for God that only the simple and the poor can experience; it makes persons capable of generosity, sacrifice and even heroism when the faith has to be witnessed; it creates an acute sense of the fundamental attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence; it gives rise to interior attitudes rarely seen to the same degree: patience, the meaning of the cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion.”⁵⁴ But popular piety does have its limits and its risks. “It is frequently open to penetration by various distortions of religion, even superstition. Often it remains at the level of cultic action without an authentic commitment in faith.”⁵⁵

52. In the context of popular piety, the faithful easily understand the bond that exists between Christ and Mary. With simplicity they venerate Our Lady as the Immaculate Mother of God; with joy they recognise her as Mother of all and enjoy their relationship with her as an affectionate one between mother and child. They are keenly aware of the meaning of Mary's poverty and suffering; they learn patience and gentleness from her but they know that Mary during her life was a strong woman who was not on the side of the powerful. The faithful know that the Mother of Jesus is kind and lives with her son in heaven and they therefore seek her intercession and aid with confidence; they therefore love to celebrate her feasts, go on pilgrimage to her shrines and sing in her honour.

53. We religious often come into contact with cultures different from those of our native countries. When this happens and we are faced with popular Marian devotion, we must assume an attitude of respect and esteem for the “ culture” in which the devotion is rooted. It is necessary then to understand both the cultural roots which support the “popular” (in the sense of “this particular people”) image of Mary and the cultural expressions with which it is manifested. Only in this way can the values of popular Marian devotion be brought to light and the work of “purification” be accomplished; this “purification” is desired by all but often it is not done or is done in the wrong way: rejecting everything and consequently confusing individuals and humiliating the culture of a people.

In the specific area of Marian piety, rather than opposing the liturgy to popular piety we must foster mutual and fruitful exchange. In this way the liturgy can channel with clarity and prudence the vitality and values of popular piety; for its part, the religion of the people, because of its symbolic and expressive richness, can supply the liturgy with stimuli and material for creativity.⁵⁶

54. Strictly tied to the discussion of popular Marian piety, though not identical to it, is the subject of pious Marian exercises (there are, in fact, some exercises that are so erudite that they have no popular roots).

Almost ten years ago the Apostolic See offered religious a clear invitation to renew the exercises of Marian piety: “It is now up to episcopal conferences, to those in charge of local communities and to the various religious congregations prudently to revise practices and exercises of piety in honour of the Blessed Virgin, and to encourage the creative impulse of those who through genuine religious inspiration or pastoral sensitivity wish to establish new forms of piety.”⁵⁷ Besides the invitation, orientations, criteria and principles able to give new life to these pious exercises were offered.⁵⁸

It seems to us that we must ask ourselves how this invitation has been accepted. What has been done ? We do not have sufficient information to offer an adequate answer. Certainly, some institutes wisely renewed the expressions of their own Marian piety but the impression remains that in the greater number of cases this has not been done. But the invitation remains valid, without time limits, and can be accepted at any time.

We cannot enter into the problem of the complex coexistence of pious exercises and liturgical actions. We limit ourselves to two observations:

— We do not believe that our devotional practice has been sufficiently affected by the conciliar norm that states that pious exercises “should be so drawn up that they harmonise with the liturgical seasons, accord with the sacred liturgy, are in some way derived from it, and lead the people to it, since in fact the liturgy by its very nature is far superior to any of them.”⁵⁹ We ask ourselves if our “pious Marian exercises” always respond to this norm. Are they an introduction, an echo or a prolongation of liturgical actions? Unfortunately, one has the impression that these exercises flourish on the fringes of the liturgy.

— In our opinion, the future of pious Marian exercises will greatly depend on their quality and their ability to accept valid forms from the past and, even more, to respond to the new needs which continuously emerge in the life of the Church.

— There is a legitimate distinction between popular religious devotion and liturgy. But this must not be taken so far as to exclude a 'popular' dimension for liturgy, leaving it intentionally or not as an elitist expression of cult. This would be against the intrinsic nature of liturgy, which must be essentially 'popular', belonging, that is, to the entire People of God and adapted to the variety of its members.

Marian piety in the liturgy

55. Since we now want to speak directly about “liturgy and Marian piety” it seems necessary to remind ourselves that the liturgy is the natural and most appropriate environment for venerating the Mother of the Lord. On many occasions and in many ways liturgical celebrations are themselves ritual memorials of the Blessed among women.

a. In the worship of the Blessed Trinity. In the celebration of the divine mysteries, the veneration of the Blessed Virgin flows into and almost loses itself in the worship we offer to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this worship, the beautiful voice of Mary is joined to our unworthy voices in order to glorify with us the glorious Trinity.

b. In the celebration of the Paschal Mystery. In carrying out liturgical actions, Marian piety is immersed in the celebration of the Paschal Mystery and becomes a waiting for the gift of the Spirit. Every authentic liturgical celebration is, in various ways and degrees, a making present of the Paschal event of the Lord and the pouring forth of the grace of the Spirit.

c. In the history of salvation. In the liturgy, Marian piety finds its most appropriate setting: the history of salvation condensed and lived by the Church in the sign of the liturgical year. In this way, in the annual celebration of the mystery of Christ from Advent to the Parousia, the memorial of Mary is at times a prophetic proclamation in the words, figures and events of the Old Testament; at other times it commemorates active presence of the mother together with her son in events of great salvific importance (Incarnation-Christmas-Epiphany and Easter-Pentecost); finally, the memorial at times becomes a dynamic projection towards the final realities which have already been accomplished in Mary.

d. In listening to the Word. In liturgy, Marian piety encounters the divine Word. The celebration of the sacred mysteries through the power of the Spirit is the most privileged context for proclaiming and interpreting the biblical texts related to Mary of Nazareth. Since in the Bible every text is related to all the others and because in the cyclic rhythm of each year ancient interpretations are joined to new insights, the Marian texts are seen in the light of all of revelation.

e. In the Communion of Saints. In the liturgy, Mary is not celebrated in isolation but within the Communion of Saints. She appears as vitally linked to those who came before her, the patriarchs and prophets; to the apostles and other biblical witnesses; to the martyrs, virgins and innumerable disciples who have witnessed to Christ through the centuries. In this context, the Blessed Virgin appears as a daughter of Adam, our sister and the mother of disciples; her image takes on its proper proportions, her mission is emphasised in what makes it unique and exclusive, and her relationship to the Church is presented from a variety of viewpoints. We will say even more: the entire cosmos

is linked to Christ, everything comes from him (see Jn 1:2; Col 1:16), by him and in him everything has been saved, and everything must return to him so that he can offer it to the Father (see 1 Cor 15:23-28). For the liturgy, Mary is a small part of the cosmos which the Spirit has already returned to Christ: she is definitively united to Christ “the first born of every creature” (Col 1:15), but she is tied, too, to all the rest of creation which the Spirit is leading back to Christ through the very celebration of the sacred mysteries.

f. In awaiting the Parousia. In the celebration of the holy mysteries Marian piety acquires an essential dimension of the liturgy: the eschatological. Liturgy is, in fact, irrepressible projection towards the “final realities”; it is vigilant expectation of the Lord who came, comes today and will come again. In the liturgy, one frequently hears the last entreaty of Revelation: “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rv 22:20). Viewed from this eschatological perspective, the Blessed Virgin appears as Mary of the threefold Advent: she awaited the coming of the Messiah in the fullness of time which for her coincided with her giving birth (the birth of Christ); she awaited the coming of the Spirit which was accomplished in the Pentecost event (birth of the Church); she awaited the glorious coming of Christ which for her was realised in the assumption of her virginal body and soul into heaven (birth of Mary to heavenly life).

56. In light of the liturgy's extraordinary capacity to place the expressions of veneration of Mary in an effective and meaningful context, one can understand the conciliar exhortation to foster “the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin”;⁶⁰ and on the contrary, one cannot understand the lack of attention given to the liturgy by many persons working in the pastoral field who want to foster Marian piety. We would like, brothers and sisters, to fully explain our thought about this matter: the present reawakening of Marian devotion could prove to be a deviation if it ignores the liturgical framework.

We would like to express our adherence to two proposals advanced by some bishops and various scholars:

— The first is that in the Roman liturgy of the Easter Triduum explicit reference be made in a discreet and prudent way to one of its intrinsic elements: the participation of the mother in the passion of her son.⁶¹ This is in conformity with the very nature of liturgy which is the celebration of salvific events in their entirety; it is in conformity with the gospel account (see Jn 19:25-27) which is understood by many exegetes to be a biblical statement of the spiritual motherhood of Mary; it conforms to liturgical tradition if one considers the particular celebrations of the Byzantine Rite and other Eastern rites;⁶² finally, it responds to the expectations of the faithful. Not to accept this desire could lead to accentuating the distance between liturgy and popular piety in precisely those areas where possible and legitimate exchange is hoped for.

— The second proposal is that the particular character of the Fifty Days of Easter be maintained. In the liturgical ordering of the days that fall between the two outpourings of the Spirit (see Jn 20:19-23 and Acts 2:1-12), this is the time of the Paraclete: the reverberation and prolongation of the mysteries celebrated during the most Sacred Night, the contemplation of the risen Christ and his glory at the right hand of the Father, the living memorial of the Pentecost event. During Easter Time, Marian devotion must not even indirectly serve as an occasion to distract the attention of the faithful from these saving mysteries. It must, if anything, demonstrate the power of Christ's Resurrection and the gift of the Spirit that are operative in Mary. It is to be hoped that the Easter liturgy, following the lead of the biblical accounts (see Acts 1:14) can develop in the context of worship the mysterious relationship existing among the Spirit, the Church and Mary.⁶³

Silence of the Blessed Virgin and liturgical silence

57. With these notes we have certainly not exhausted the description of the complex relationships

between “liturgy and Marian piety.” We only wanted to demonstrate the necessity of remaining faithful to the spirit of the liturgy and the principles of the reform promoted by Vatican Council II. Precisely to remain faithful to the liturgical reform we want to speak briefly about something it emphasised: the value of silence in manifestations of Marian devotion, both liturgical and extraliturgical.⁶⁴ We are urged to do this by the spiritual profile of the Blessed Virgin, the authentic nature of liturgy and the genuine style of religious life.

58. The style of the Blessed Virgin. We are of the opinion that expressions of devotion to Mary should have, so to speak, the same style as the Blessed Virgin: a style marked by listening, silence and reflection.

The Fathers of the Church liked to say that the eternal Word was generated from the infinite silence of God and, further, that from the silence of the Virgin's heart there came the word fiat, the human premise of the incarnation of the Word. The double mention of Mary's reflective silence (see Lk 2:19, 51b) has been the object of diligent study by contemporary exegetes and of loving attention by spiritual men and women of all times.⁶⁵ These texts offer profound insights into the interior life of the Blessed Virgin. In her silence, she appears as the woman of wisdom who, in light of the Paschal event, remembers and keeps before her, interprets and compares, the words and facts of the birth and infancy of her son, questions herself about the meaning of obscure phrases overshadowed by the cross (see Lk 2:34-35; 48-50) and accepts the silences of God with her own adoring silence. In silence, the heart of the Blessed Virgin appears as the ark in which the “memories” of God's interventions in the history of Israel are conserved; it is the place where the times of “before” (of Adam, of Abraham, of David) are recalled in reflection and flow together, and where the time “after” (Christ and the Church) begins; it is the earth in which good seed has been sown and will bear much fruit; it is the coffer in which sayings which the Spirit will gradually make clear to the Virgin herself and to the Church are treasured and in which the law of the Lord is held as light and norm for life.

59. The value of the Blessed Virgin's reflective attitude as a model in the Church's task of penetrating the Word has already been well expressed: “the 'mute Mother of the silent Word'...prefigured that long ceaseless effort of memory and intense rumination which constitutes the heart of the Church's Tradition.”⁶⁶ But we can extend this value as model to the celebration of the divine mysteries: here, the Church proclaims the Word of God, but it can be vitally understood only in attentive listening and penetrating reflection; here, the Church celebrates the events of our salvation behind the veil of sacred signs, but this veil can be lifted only if the mind is open to Mystery, the will is one with the plan of God, the voice is in harmony with the heart.⁶⁷

60. In the liturgy, silence is not inactivity, but rather a structural element of celebration: it favours the concentration that leads to personal prayer; it permits the oration of the one presiding to truly and authentically become the prayer of the entire assembly; it facilitates assimilating the Word proclaimed and listening to the voice of the Spirit. Silence is the sacred environment conducive to adoration and praise of God: *Tibi silentium laus* according to a biblically rooted prayer.⁶⁸ But there is more: liturgical celebration is celebration “in the Spirit” and silence - a biblical and liturgical sign of the Paraclete⁶⁹ - is a way to communion with the Spirit operative in the divine mysteries, and, through him, to communion with the participants in the worshipping assembly.

61. Silence has always been considered a characteristic element of monastic-religious life and an especially effective means in the journey toward identification with Christ. There is no monastic rule or constitutional text that does not make reference to the importance of silence. In legislative texts we find, for example, that “we must seek in the silence of our cells to deepen our knowledge of self, to free ourselves from selfishness and to grow in that love for God and creatures which is the goal of our religious pilgrimage.”⁷⁰ The contemporary magisterium of the Church, however,

affirms that “the search for intimacy with God involves the truly vital need of a silence embracing the whole being, both for those who must find God in the midst of noise and confusion and for contemplatives.”⁷¹ Therefore, the silence which religious must never abandon in their various activities must surround them even more when they participate in the sacred liturgy.

62. From these various suggestions we can draw a two-fold conclusion:

— The Virgin of silence and attentive listening represents an invitation to internalise the Word and celebrate the liturgy by entering into mystery.

— We men and women religious are called upon to give to our Marian celebrations a tone and a style that favour reflective silence; to wrap them, so to speak, in that holy sign of silence which allows intimate presence to the transcendent, attentive listening to the whispering of the Spirit, and personal experience of the presence of the Word.

The way of beauty

63. Discussing the ways in which we religious can contribute to qualitative rather than quantitative promoting of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, we wish to indicate another which is not new, but rather is part of our “family heritage”:

— To make of Marian devotion a holy time and an opportunity favourable to the contemplation of uncreated Beauty, God, of his divine-human splendour, Christ, and of the principal work of the Spirit of Beauty, the Virgin Mary.

— To make of Marian devotion an environment favourable to the festive gathering of all the expressions of artistic creation.

64. God, living and holy, is supreme Beauty. His word is poetic, that is, creative: from nothing he draws out being, from chaos, harmony, from darkness, light; the works of his hands are “beautiful and good” according to the fullest sense of the term used in the biblical account of creation (see Gen 1 :9, 12, 25, 31);⁷² and when, through his Holy Spirit, he speaks to men and women in their own language, his word is itself poetry and often takes the most brilliant literary forms. We would like to pause to contemplate the beauty of Christ, brothers and sisters, but our reflection must be brief. We limit ourselves to contemplation of his beauty in its essence as the reflection of the Father's glory and the representation of his being (Heb 1:3) and in the splendour of the light that surrounds it (see Mk 9:2-3). Following the lead of the holy Fathers of the Church, we recall that the praise given to Wisdom is to be referred to Christ: “fairer than the sun” (Wis 7:29) and “the refulgence of eternal life, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of his goodness” (Wis 7:26). The same is true of the praise of the features of the Loved One which cause the Bride to exclaim, “Ah, you are beautiful, my lover” (Sg 1:16) and of the celebration of the appearance of the messianic king: “fairer in beauty are you than the sons of men, grace is poured out upon your lips, thus God has blessed you forever” (Ps 44 [45]:3).

65. Before the heavenly beauty manifest in the Blessed Virgin, the Christian is gripped by wonder: “O pure and holy Virgin, how can I find words to praise your beauty?” the liturgy asks.⁷³ Not without emotion, every year in the office of Holy Thursday we read an ancient text, the Easter homily of St. Melito of Sardis (+ c. 190) which describes Christ as “the mute lamb, the slain lamb, the lamb born of Mary, the fair ewe.”⁷⁴ With joy, we recall that our brothers and sisters of the East who are so sensitive to the mystety of beauty call the Holy Spirit the divine Artist and hold that the masterpiece “icon” of God is the glorious Theotokos. Gregory Palamas (+ 1359) wrote: “Wanting to create the image of absolute beauty and manifest to angels and mortals the power of his art, God truly made Mary totally beautiful. In her he brought together the individual beauty distributed among other creatures and set her up as the adornment of all beings, visible and invisible.”⁷⁵ Coming to our own times in the Latin Church, we can listen to the voice of the Bishop of Rome,

Paul VI (+ 1978); as is well known, he invited students of Mariology not to ignore “the way of beauty.”⁷⁶ He saw in Mary “a masterpiece of human beauty, not seen as a formal model, but as realised in her intrinsic and incomparable capacity to express the Spirit in the flesh, the divine likeness in the human face, invisible beauty in bodily form.”⁷⁷

Serious ascetic commitment

66. At this point we must add some observations to complete our reflection.

First of all, it is necessary to dispel every perplexity about the nature of the *via pulchritudinis*: it is not an intellectual exercise nor is it a path reserved only to refined or cultured persons.

The “way of beauty” is a serious ascetic commitment: *Filocalia* or “love of beauty” is the significant title of one of the most well-known ascetical books of the Christian East. The discovery and enjoyment of beauty presuppose the victory within ourselves (often with great effort) of truth over falsehood, goodness over evil, love over hatred; they imply overcoming divisions and healing wounds so that our inmost selves reflect unity and harmony.

Beauty is the splendour of goodness and truth. Therefore Mary is beautiful: when she accepts the will of God with humble heart (*bonitas*) and truthful word (*veritas*) and lets herself be possessed by the Spirit of peace; when, in her womb, unity is restored between God and humanity, earth and heaven; when, with her simplicity and humility, she destroys ancient deceitfulness and foolish pride.

Mary is beautiful because the Spirit has taken her from the dominion of sin; the title of All Holy One typical of the Eastern tradition and that of *Tota pulchra* of the Roman liturgy describe the same reality and have the same motivation: in Mary there is no trace of sin.⁷⁸

The “way of beauty” is a path of enlightenment and a search for clarity; it is a struggle against sin in which the Fathers of the Church and the liturgy see the greatest ugliness; it is a progressive liberation from sin and increasing penetration of the truth and sanctity of God. For all these reasons the “way of beauty” becomes the “way of salvation.”

Fidelity to the Word

67. It should be pointed out that the “way of beauty” when faithful to the Word permits the harmonious integration of the gospel description of Mary and the dogmatic statements that refer to her. As Paul discovered in Jesus “born of a woman and born under the law” (Gal 4:4) the new Man (see 1 Cor 15:45) and the Lord of glory (see 1 Cor 2:8) so, too, the Church has seen in Mary of Nazareth, the humble woman, the new Woman prepared by God for Christ and all humanity. In Mary, the “real woman” and the “ideal woman” coincide. Supported by the faith, the Christian sees in Mary the realisation of his or her loftiest religious and human ideals:

- in her and in her Immaculate Conception, humanity is seen as restored to its original innocence and beauty and the symbol of the “virgin earth” finds its fulfillment;
- in her and in her faithfulness to God, the spiritual summit of Israel is seen in the image of the unbroken Covenant;
- in her and in her openness to the Spirit, one contemplates the ideal of discipleship and sees the clearest outline of the dialogue between God and humanity, the harmonious relationship of nature and grace;
- in her and in her virginal maternity, one sees the realisation of the ideals of faithful Bride, perfect Virgin and fecund Mother; one admires an impossible desire become real: the union of the glory of virginity with the joy of motherhood;⁷⁹ and one is amazed to- see in the offspring of this maternity the realisation of another wonder: God in humanity and humanity in God;
- in her and in her natural devotion, one sees fulfilled the hope of every person wounded by pain and evil: to find again the embrace of a mother who accepts, understands and restores; -

— in her and in her glorious Assumption, the Christian contemplates the fulfillment of the most intimate hope, overcoming death in life, and perceives a sign of “hope accesible to all.”⁸⁰

68. This “image” of the Blessed Virgin is not, as is sometimes said, the result of unconscious externalisation of the deep aspirations of humanity nor is it the fruit of a systematic Christianisation of pagan myths; it is an “icon” designed by the Spirit to illustrate a gift of God to humankind. It is an easily understood demonstration of the way in which God who made man and woman in his own image (see Gen 1:26-27) responds to the needs of their hearts. Finally, this image is a transcription of the facts of Sacred Scripture in the language of faith and poetry.

In this field, brothers and sisters, we must beware of literary fiction which separates itself from the Word and remains sterile and deceptive. But we must also appreciate, as did the Fathers of the Church, poetic vision supported by faith and directed toward the Word. This vision, both intuitive and penetrating, becomes poetry which allows the faithful to hear the nuances hidden in the divine Word.

69. It seems important to emphasise again that “Mary as image” does not keep for herself the vision and the words directed towards her; she refers them to “Christ as image,” to “Church as image,” to the divine Artist:

— To Christ, the only perfect “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), the only one who achieves perfect harmony.

— To the Church, because “Mary as image” is an anticipation of the “Church as image” which God designs and completes in the course of salvation history. In this way, looking towards the image of Mary, Mother of the Light, is extended to looking towards the “Woman clothed with the sun” (see Rv 12:1), the Church which brings forth the members of the total Christ. In the same way, vision directed towards Mary, the Virgin Bride resplendent in beauty, continues in the contemplation of the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church “coming down out of heaven from God, beautiful as a bride prepared to meet her husband” (Rv 21:2).

To the divine Artist, since every disciple of the Lord, who is accustomed to deducing from the beauty of creation the inexpressible beauty of the Creator, in contemplating the mysterious beauty of Mary will be led to glorify the unfathomable beauty of God.

70. Finally, it seems that we religious, because of our tradition, must actively cooperate in the effort to put into practice some of the demands of the *via pulchritudinis*:

— the reevaluation of symbolic language and biblical poetics, the fostering of poetic vision and artistic taste, the use of intuition and the speedy reconciliation of art with faith - in this way, the “mystery of worship” will once again enrich artistic expression;

— the elimination from the signs through which we express our Marian piety (such as places, words, songs, colour) of all that is ugly and unoriginal, repetitious and false.

The way of sons and daughters

71. We said, brothers and sisters, that the “way of beauty” is not a path reserved to specialists; it is “a way accessible to all, even the simple,”⁸¹ above all to the pure in heart who grasp the beauty “of the lilies of the field” and with Jesus understand that “not even Solomon in all his splendour was arrayed like one of these” (Mt 6:29). We would add that it is a path to be preferred by religious whom St. Augustine described at the end of his Rule as “lovers of spiritual beauty.”⁸² Finally, the “way of beauty” is the “way of sons and daughters.” Children, because of a shared experience of life and of love, discover in their mother signs of profound beauty which remain hidden to others. Since, together with Jesus “the first born of many brothers” (Rom 8:29) we call Mary “mother” (though in different ways), we think we can make our own the words of B1.

Amadeus of Lausanne (+ 1159) who has the Son say in praise of his Mother: “You are all beautiful, my mother, and there is no blemish in you’ (Sg 4:7). You are beautiful, he tells her: beautiful in thought, beautiful in word, beautiful in action; beautiful from birth until death; beautiful in the virginal conception, beautiful in your divine maternity, beautiful in the sufferings of my passion, beautiful above all in the splendor of my resurrection.” 83

Choice of the poor

72. Christ is our true and supreme wealth and the most abject misery is being without Christ. Before him and the demands of the Kingdom, everything is of secondary importance - father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, wealth and even life itself (see Lk 14:26, 33). Anyone who places any one of these values before the supreme value - Christ and his Kingdom - cannot be a disciple of the Lord. Since attachment to worldly goods hardens the heart to the point of being closed even to the person of Christ himself (see Lk 18:18-27) and makes it insensitive to the needs of our brothers and sisters (see 1 Jn 3:17; Jas 2:14-16; Lk 16:19-21), one can well understand why the gospel and the letters of the apostles so insistently and firmly warn disciples to be aware of the danger of placing wealth at the centre of their lives. For when this happens, one falls into a serious form of idolatry: in place of God, the Love which is poured out in human hearts (see Rom 5:5), one adores the idol of gold and silver, “ill gotten wealth” (see Lk 16:9), which is sterile and closed in dark selfishness. One can well understand why the apostle warns: “Love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim 6:10).

73. Jesus did not condemn the goods of this world in themselves. But in contrast to the forms of life dominated by the thirst for wealth, he chose for himself a life marked by a radical poverty. The event of the Incarnation itself, in which the Word took on the “form of a servant” (Phil 2:7), is seen as a mystery of poverty and kenosis. When the apostle wrote to the Corinthians, he explained the ultimate meaning of Christ's poverty. “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you may become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). We do not have to look far in the gospels to discover Christ's poverty; it springs to our eyes at once. He was born in poverty (see Lk 2:7), lived in poverty (see Lk 9:58), and died in poverty (see Mk 15:24); he made the proclamation of the Good News to the poor the sign by which to recognise the coming of the Messianic Kingdom (see Lk 7:22); he proclaimed the poor in spirit blessed, saying that theirs was the Kingdom of Heaven (see Mt 5:3); he wanted the heralds of the Kingdom not to acquire gold, silver, copper or a bag for their journey (see Mt 10:9-10).

74. Likewise, the gospel account of the life of the Mother of Jesus reveals her as a poor woman, whose life was marked by a twofold poverty: poverty in the sociological sense, and poverty in the sense of the Kingdom. Both merged harmoniously in her.

75. Mary's sociological poverty immediately stands out for one who reads the gospels: Mary was born poor in the despised region of Galilee - the semi-pagan “Galilee of the gentiles” (Mt 4:15) - at Nazareth, an obscure hamlet that counted for nothing in the history of Israel (see Jn 1 :46; 7:52); she was betrothed to Joseph, a simple carpenter (see Lk 1 :27; Mt 13:55); she gave birth to her son in a grotto-stable and placed him “ in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn” (Lk 2:7); she redeemed him with the offering of the poor (see Lk 2:24); when her son was persecuted by the powerful, she had to flee into a foreign land where she experienced the hardships of exile (see Mt 21:3); and after returning to Nazareth, she lived the life of the poor for many years in obscurity; during the public life of her son, nothing altered her state as a simple woman of the people while her participation in the mystery of the “sign of contradiction” increased; she felt the hostility of her fellow citizens towards her son: “ they rose up and put him out of the city and led him to the brow of the hill...that they might throw him down” (Lk 4:29); she realised that even her relatives could

not understand: "his family went out to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out his mind...'" (Mk 3:21); she lived through the drama of her son's death, crucified between "two criminals, one on the right, and one on the left" (Lk 23:33).

76. But Mary stands out most of all because of the intense manner in which she lived the spirituality of the "poor of the Lord." The Blessed Virgin "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him." 84 This because she was a woman delighted to serve the Lord (see Lk 1:38,46-48), faithful in observance of the Law (see Lk 2:22-24,27,39), open to the will of God (Lk 1:38); she was concerned about Elizabeth in offering her aid, rejoicing with her for the gift of motherhood and proclaiming the gratuity of God's gifts (see Lk 1:39-56) She was a woman who was blessed for her faith (see Lk 1:55), blessed for the fruit of her womb (see Lk 1:42), exemplary for her confidence in the fulfillment of the promises made to the Fathers (see Lk 1:45). She was the woman of the sanctifying greeting (see Lk 1:40-41, 44), of the hymn of gratitude (see Lk 1:46-55), of the decisive word (see Lk 1:38, Jn 2:5), of silent reflection (see Lk 2:19, 51b). She was the woman who shared the fate of her people (see Lk 1 :54); she stood by the meek in heart - Simeon and Anna, the shepherds and the wise men who had come from afar - and by the oppressed (see Lk 1:52 -53; Mt 2: 16- 18); she was attentive to the needs of her neighbour (see Jn 2:3), and concerned for the new community of Jesus' disciples (see Jn 2:1-12; Acts 1:14). She was the woman of the humble, simple heart that trusts in God (see Lk 1:48) and, having received mercy, she proclaimed the mercy of the Lord and exalted his liberating power (see Lk 1:51-53).

77. We know that the credibility of local Churches and religious institutes depends to a great extent on the authenticity of their witness to evangelical poverty. No one is dispensed from this witness; all the disciples of the Lord are called to it, though in different ways. We religious know that "on this point...our contemporaries question [us] with particular insistence."85

After contemplating the gospel figure of Mary, the "poor woman," we feel that it, too, urgently invites us to take a clear stand in favour of the poor and to make a serious effort to live a sober life, free of possessions and power, sharing the sufferings of real poverty. As far as Marian devotion is concerned, our reflection has led us to conclude that if devotion to the Blessed Virgin is not to be lost in abstractions or be restricted to the purely individual sphere, it must be presented with the content of the gospel message of poverty. In other words, it must be an opportunity for us to preach to the sociologically rich and the sociologically poor the sole evangelium paupertatis, namely, the subordination of the goods of this world to the values of the Kingdom and the essential destination of these goods to human service and development. Marian devotion must proclaim the message of the Magnificat and the beatitudes by rejecting every "compromise with any form of social injustice" 86 and by denouncing every form of oppression of the poor; it must be a moment of prayer that lifts discouraged hearts to God "who raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap" (Ps 113 [112]:7) and who listens to the "cry of the poor" (Job 34:28) which is "more pressing than ever [because on personal distress and collective misery]." 87 Our devotion must be a warning not to present certain social situations as "the will of God" when they are merely the effect of the sin of humankind. Mary of Nazareth has preceded us in this worshipful attitude of faith in God and denunciation of injustice. Her hymn of thanksgiving is by no means a proclamation of earthly messianism, or a cry for social revolution; but neither is it a disembodied prayer. It is a song of liberation springing from faith, a recalling of God's interventions in history, a word spoken in the name of "those who neither passively accept the adversities of their personal and community lives, nor are simple victims of 'alienation', as is said today, but rather those who proclaim with her that God is the 'avenger of the humble', and where necessary, the One who 'casts down the powerful from their thrones.'" 88

THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

78. “God sent forth his Son, born of woman” (Gal 4:4), writes Paul, probably intending to allude to the way in which the Word lowered himself in taking flesh and becoming wholly like us, except in sin (see Heb 4:15). “Mary is a woman,” write the Latin American bishops, certainly intending to emphasise the fact that in Mary God has uplifted the feminine condition to a sublime dignity.⁸⁹ During the almost two thousand years that have elapsed between these two statements, the “feminist issue” has a long and troubled history in civil society and within Christianity. In this reflection, certainly, we can neither retrace the stages of its historical development, nor deal with the many serious problems that are raised today in relation to the status of women in society and the Church. We only wish to mention a number of points that come from various quarters and use them to ensure that Marian devotion, while conserving its own specific character and purposes, can also be an opportunity to make a valid contribution to the cause of women's advancement.

79. The gospel texts speak of Mary's poverty, but they never give any hint of her social situation as a woman. Nothing, however, authorises us to think that she did not share the same lot of the women of her time and country: they were the servants of their husbands, their way was barred to the slightest chance of cultural advancement, they found themselves without a voice in social or political issues, and they felt that their unhappiness in being women was some kind of ancient curse.⁹⁰

Yet God turned to this marginated woman, throwing down as it were the structures of the Jewish culture and men's judgments, to work “great things” in her (Lk 1:49) and make her his worthy partner in the culminating moment of the dialogue of salvation. In God's action we see a way of acting and a method that we cannot ignore. Interpreting this in terms of the presuppositions of the faith, the “Nazareth dialogue” emerges as the most meaningful and the most sublime moment of feminism in the history of salvation.

This marginated woman was called to be in the Church “a presence and a sacramental of the maternal qualities of God” as the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate has put it.⁹¹ The Puebla document continues: “In her, the gospel has penetrated femininity, redeeming it and exalting it...Mary guarantees the greatness of the feminine, indicating the specific way of being woman with her vocation to be the soul, the gift, capable of spiritualising the flesh and embodying the spirit.”⁹²

80. We have said that we cannot examine the feminine situation in the contemporary world. It varies widely from one place to another: in some under-developed regions the situation of women has not changed greatly since the time of Mary of Nazareth; in others, especially in the industrial countries, women appear in theoretical or legal terms to have been released from much of the former oppression, but in reality age-old prejudices and constraints still weigh heavily on them. Simplifying the details of the question, we can affirm that everywhere the objectives of “emancipation” and “liberation” of women are still valid, albeit for different reasons, and that the “feminist” movement, so varied in its expressions and in its cultural and philosophical connotations, still has a reason to exist in order to attain its objectives.

Marian piety and the advancement of women

81. At this point, we feel that the way we look to our sister Mary of Nazareth in prayer should be extended to an examination, with great respect and concern, of the state of oppression in which so many women still live. Marian devotion cannot take on demagogic tones or positions in this, or indeed, any other field; but neither can it ignore a question which John XXIII already deemed to be an urgent proposal of the “signs of the times.”⁹³ We therefore believe that Marian devotion, based

on the data of the faith, can effectively find its due place in the process of the advancement of women.

82. First of all, Marian devotion is called to restore the Christian view of woman and woman's mission wherever these have been clouded over:

— to illustrate the significance, the beauty and the fecundity of virginity consecrated for the Kingdom;

— to joyfully repropose the profound values of the vocation to motherhood understood as a mysterious sharing in God's plan of creation in which nature receives again its life-giving breath, as a responsible partnership in the creation of life at the service of humanity and the Church, and as the selfless realisation of one's own personality;

— to foster in woman the sense of her dignity, of her “functional difference, albeit with an identical nature... from man,”⁹⁴ of her fascinating originality, and of her ability to fulfill herself;

— to give woman a “sense of history” which will help her to shake off a feeling of inferiority and to recognise herself as a protagonist of so many memorable events of progress, freedom and holiness throughout the history of humanity and the history of salvation.

83. Secondly, Marian devotion, according to its own specific structures (the power of prayer, the profound convictions that gradually take shape in people's hearts and are then put into deeds...), can foster the full recognition of women's civil rights on a par with those of men and the practical experience of those rights in professional, social and political life.⁹⁵ We know that the question is delicate, but we believe that we must not reject out of hand listening to the proposals advanced by the feminist movements, even those that are not specifically Christian. We have to discern with apostolic wisdom (see 1 Thess 4:22) what is acceptable in them from the point of view of revelation and what is not in accordance with the divine word. Even if we cannot accept certain radical proposals that sprout up here or there (for example, the rejection of the institution of marriage), we can nevertheless share in denouncing the many subtle ways in which women are being commercialised by the consumer society.

Within the Church

84. Mariological research and Marian devotion are, we feel, destined to promote within the Church the advancement of women to functions and duties from which they have hitherto been partly or completely excluded, not for doctrinal reasons but for historical or cultural ones. This has already come about in the ambit of thousands of vitally important pastoral services which do not touch the hierarchical structure of the Church. But even in these pastoral services, the relationships between men and women still seem to be fashioned more according to the models of the male-dominated society than according to the innovative proposals of the gospel message.

In this connection, it seems necessary to note within the Church a certain delay in recognising the capacity of women to receive the ministries (lectors, acolytes...) which do not belong to the Sacrament of Orders, but are simply ecclesiastical institutions. This lack of recognition seems to have been overcome by changing events, however, because in fact women are already performing these ministries everywhere either because of established practice or because of lawful conferral by ecclesiastical authorities, but always as “extra-ordinary.”

The problem of women's entry into the ministries is especially felt by female religious in some countries. In this regard, we would make our own the desire expressed by the S. Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples: “... we can hope that those in authority will respond to the offers of consecrated women with positive esteem in the whole range of possibilities.”⁹⁶ Further, we would hope that this problem, after thorough study from the doctrinal point of view, will be faced in a spirit of cooperation and service rather than contrast and vindication.

While we are on this same subject, we might note how ecclesiastical authority often takes on a rather protectionist attitude toward the religious institutes of women and how, in not a few cases, it tends to channel the services of these institutes toward subordinate tasks dependent on male ecclesiastical organisations. We note that not always are all the practical consequences drawn from the fact that with regard to the essence of “consecrated life” men's and women's religious institutes are perfectly equal.

85. We are happy to agree with you, our religious sisters, that women's institutes of consecrated life, taken as a whole, have contributed much to foster the authentic advancement of women. At the origins of your institutes and throughout their histories we often find gentle and strong women, genuine disciples of Jesus, boldly moving ahead of their times and knowing how to liberate themselves and their sisters from the restrictive constraints that weighed heavily on women in their day. This work of “promoting,” whose real effectiveness was not always recognised by the protagonists themselves, was meant, in turn, to foster the advancement of the lowly: spreading culture through many teaching institutes; bringing help to the needy through many works of charity in which advancement was always part of their welfare work; enlightening the spirit by announcing the gospel message. For all of these reasons, we believe that the history of the emancipation of women must be written with an eye on women's religious institutes of consecrated life, despite the presence of flaws within them at times.

As far as our reflection here is concerned, it is not hard to see that underlying all this “promotional” work, after the love for Christ, there has nearly always been an insight and an impulse deriving from the Marian piety of so many of your great mothers and sisters.

Marian piety and evangelical virtues

86. Marian devotion is nourished by faith, and in turn it radiates the content of that faith. This makes it a particularly valid instrument for the propagation of the gospel: “Among our peoples,” declared the Puebla document, “the gospel has been taught by showing the Virgin Mary as its highest achievement.”⁹⁷ This demands of our institutes and the local Churches very careful attention to ensure that Marian devotion fully reflect the whole Christian message, without becoming one-sided, and that it be capable of responding with facts to certain recurrent objections. It is claimed that Marian devotion has contributed to:

- creating a type-cast “Christian woman” who is submissive and resigned;
- relegating women to the domestic and private sphere and doing this with more or less openly declared intentions;
- giving Christian spirituality a “feminine” sentimentality.

These are major objections. Any exhaustive response to them would require a historical analysis that we cannot provide here. We shall therefore limit ourselves to a few comments.

87. First, these deviations - where and to the extent that they have arisen - are to be attributed to degenerative processes and one-sided and limiting interpretations of Marian piety; they are certainly not necessary results. Marian devotion suffers as a result of these deviations. They work against and not for it. But we also know that almost no chapter of the faith and Christian worship has been immune from more or less serious deviations. If one thinks, for example, of the deviations that Eucharistic piety has suffered in certain times and places it can be concluded that those which Marian devotion has suffered are considerably less important. It is evident that these changes in Eucharistic devotional practices are by no means inherent in Christ's original institution, but are the fruit of human frailty or ignorance.

88. The virtues that are often emphasised in Marian devotion (such as humility, obedience, meekness, trustingly giving oneself wholly to God, patience), being virtues with profound

biblical roots and for which Christ proposed himself as model (see Mt 11:29; Jn 13:14-15), are valid for all disciples of the Lord - men and women alike. Imagining them to be “reserved” to women alone reveals a male chauvinist mentality, and viewing them as “passive virtues” betrays a view of reality that is far from being in line with the gospel. Neither can one find any evidence in the gospel accounts relating to Mary which shows that the optimal way for women to fulfill themselves is in the domestic household; this can be a lawful personal choice and an opportunity and a right to be protected by appropriate legislation,⁹⁸ but it cannot be presented as the “Christian vocation” which takes priority over other choices. What is required is to carefully follow the research of exegetes and theologians who cannot by any means be considered to be Mariological extremists. Their research into the background of the gospels has revealed that “for Jesus, Mary was not simply a 'mother' in the usual sense of the term; she played such an important role during the life of her son that she exercised her influence also within the first Christian communities; from the historical point of view, we can view Mary as a leading personality.”⁹⁹

Fostering life

89. With the author of the Book of Wisdom, we proclaim that God is “the Lord, the lover of life” (11:26); with John, we delight in professing that in the Word “was life, and the life was the light of all” (1:4) and that Christ who came that we might “have life and have it more abundantly” (19:10) is himself life (see 14:6) and resurrection (see 11 :24). With the Church we confess our faith “in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.”¹⁰⁰

Since the Blessed Virgin bore Christ the Life and with her motherly love cooperates in the birth of the faithful into the life of grace,¹⁰¹ we can well understand how the liturgical texts so joyfully greet her as “mother” and “source of life” and invoke her as “our life, our sweetness and our hope.”¹⁰²

90. We would point out that the praise of the Source of Life is also a warning to us to stand on the side of life, and ensure that Marian devotion is also an avenue for the communication of the message of life which Christianity is required to proclaim in every age of history. In our times, the tension between light and darkness (see Jn 1:5) and between love and hatred (see 1 Jn 2:8-11) is like a vast struggle between the culture of life and the culture of death.

91. The culture of death includes “the aggression of war, violence and terrorism” and the frightening “build-up of weapons, particularly atomic weapons, and the scandalous trafficking in weapons of war of all kinds.”¹⁰³ While we add our humble voices to the recent condemnations of nuclear warfare made by John Paul II,¹⁰⁴ the VI Synod of Bishops, the United States Episcopal Conference and other conferences of bishops,¹⁰⁵ we also feel that our faith in Christ, the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5) and our devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the Queen of Peace, urge us to follow the only path in accord with the gospel: that of non-violence, encouragement of disarmament and conversion to peace.

92. The culture of death includes contempt for life demonstrated in so many criminal deeds, the scandalous state of hunger which causes many millions of men, women and especially children to die of hunger or fall gravely ill, the lethal action taken against the unborn, the aged and the incurably sick, and the curse of drug addiction. It is neither our task nor our intention to deal with the moral issues connected with these often tragic human situations. We merely wish to show that the tradition of Marian devotion is an invitation to us to take a firm, calm stand on the side of life. The image of the pregnant Virgin, invariably depicted with great delicacy and piety by artists,¹⁰⁶ seems to urge us to consider every pregnant woman with the utmost respect; to view every delivery as a reflection of Mary's whereby the Man-God entered human history and there came forth the messianic shoot from the root of Jesse (see Is 11:1); to do everything to protect life from its origins; and to be understanding and merciful to those women who for diverse reasons (injustice of society,

violence suffered, lack of faith...) are tempted to choose death for the fruit they bear in their womb. The image of the Virgin suckling her Infant, and the liturgical texts which so beautifully and movingly tell how Mary "with a little milk, nurtures him who satisfies the universe" 107 (over and above the doctrinal and aesthetic message) issue an urgent appeal: it is not right that children die of hunger. Conversely, Marian devotion must lead to providing care for orphans, bread for hungry babies and education for the young, as it already does in an exemplary manner in so many cases. In the same way, the figure of the Virgin of Sorrows is our stimulus and guide in approaching the mystery of suffering and death with the vision of faith that sheds the light of life on this mystery. Confronted with these realities we have no rational explanations to offer, we can propose only the experience of faith: the Paschal Mystery of Christ, death swallowed up by life (see 1 Cor 15:54), and the assurance that God in his mercy will transform "the pain of suffering into a means of salvation. ",108 Mary experienced this with her son. For this reason, Marian devotion opens us to hope and urges us to adopt "solutions of life" even when pain is raging and death opens its doors.

93. The vastness and seriousness of the symptoms of the culture of death (such as the danger of nuclear war, hunger in the world, the scourge of war, racism, the extermination of peoples) appall us and transcend us; before them we feel that we can count on nothing but the power of faith (see Mt 17:19; Lk 17:6), the effectiveness of prayer, and the example of the woman who believed in the words of Gabriel: "nothing is impossible with God" (Lk 1:37)

PROMOTING THE CAUSE OF ECUMENISM

94. In 1974, Paul VI stated: "Because of its ecclesial character devotion to the Blessed Virgin reflects the preoccupations of the Church herself. Among these especially in our day is anxiety for the reestablishment of Christian unity. In this way devotion to the Mother of the Lord is in accord with the deep desires and aims of the ecumenical movement, that is, it acquires an ecumenical aspect." 109

Those persons responsible for the local Churches and religious institutes which we are fraternally addressing certainly share our conviction regarding the necessity of Marian devotion being sensitive to the issues of ecumenism and becoming a force to promote unity among Christians. But some readers may ask themselves: Is there not a contradiction between the frequent requests for a correct (as we have almost always written) development of Marian devotion and the invitation to use it to promote the ecumenical cause? Is not the Marian doctrine and devotion of the Catholic Church one of the major obstacles to unity among Christians?

95. Without a doubt some points of Catholic doctrine concerning the blessed Virgin and some aspects of Marian devotion cause negative reactions in other Churches, especially those of the Reform. But we must not idly continue to think that nothing has changed in this field from the beginning of the ecumenical movement until today. A non-Catholic voice has declared: "Today, rather than a cause of division among us, christian reflection on the role of the Virgin Mary has become a cause of joy and a source of prayer." 110 We are persuaded that the various Christian Churches are- asking themselves more or less anxiously and explicitly: How is it possible that we who are united in confessing Christ as the only Lord and only source of salvation are divided with regard to his mother? We are also persuaded that the Spirit is suggesting to the Churches that they not avoid, but face with serious study, the significance of the figure of the Virgin in the life of the Church.

With regard to us, we want to offer first of all to ourselves, the brothers and sisters Servants of Mary, some indications for improving our contribution to the cause of ecumenism from the point of view of Marian piety.

Profound conversion of heart

96. Above all, our words are meant to be an invitation to a profound and personal conversion of heart: the ecumenical movement will make little progress among us Catholics if in regard to Mary we limit ourselves to waiting for the "return" of our separated brothers and sisters, their "conversion" from Mariological "errors." Rather, what is necessary above all is the conversion of our hearts to humility, dialogue and mutual respect. Probably, for many of our brothers and sisters and for many of the laity who frequent our communities, an ecumenism ad intra still has to be promoted: certainly not to dissipate the patrimony of our faith but to remove the mistrust and suspicion, the prejudices and misunderstandings which have accumulated over the centuries and have nothing to do with faith at all. Conversion of heart and the capacity to listen are the necessary conditions for beginning together a journey toward Christ under the guidance of the Spirit and the judgment of the Word.

Purification of our vision

97. To conversion of heart must be added what we will call the purification of our vision: it is necessary that our attention be so fixed on the divine Word that it constantly cleanses (Jn 15:3) our vision. The teaching of the Fathers, the example of the great monastic legislators,¹¹¹ and the admonitions of the Church's magisterium¹¹² all refer us back to the Word.

The Word forms the context in which we want to place our theological discussion. The Word urges us to proceed with our doctrinal reflection on Mary and expressions of Marian piety in reference to the mystery of Christ and of the Church: Christ, through whom and for whom "everything in heaven and on earth was created" (Col 1:16) and the Church, the body of Christ who has put all things under him and has primacy in everything (see Eph 1:22; Col 1:18). Mary in the Church. In authentic Catholic tradition, this is the only position which permits a solid and profitable doctrinal discussion of Mary. The Church of Rome has often recalled this in authoritative documents: only in view of Christ, in reference to him and in dependence on him can the person and mission of the Blessed Virgin be understood.¹¹³

Mary in the Communion of Saints. It is this affirmation which is the basis of the Roman Church's most classical expression of Marian piety as found in the Roman Canon: "In union with the whole Church we honour Mary, the ever virgin mother of Jesus Christ our Lord and God."¹¹⁴ In the context and light of the Word we find Orthodox, Anglicans, Evangelicals and Catholics largely united. We recognise, however, that the salutary acceptance of this "common ground" does not immediately resolve all the questions: important differences regarding the problem of the "interpretation of the Word" remain. This is due to different ecclesial traditions or to differing existential situations.¹¹⁵

An attitude of understanding

98. In this kind of "ecumenism ad intra," besides conversion of heart and purification of our vision, there must also be an attitude of "understanding" toward our separated brothers and sisters and the difficulties they experience with regard to certain aspects of the Marian doctrine and devotion of the Catholic Church. This "understanding" is not to be confused with a certain strategy of "hiding the problems" which is one of the worst enemies of true ecumenism.¹¹⁶ This "understanding" faces the controversial questions, but strives to comprehend the reasoning of others.

At the level of doctrine, "understanding" becomes a willingness to reconsider, from the Catholic point of view, our own dogmatic statements in order to distinguish the essential nucleus of the faith from what only reflects historical and cultural conditions: this is a delicate theological task, but its legitimacy has been recognised by the ecclesiastical magisterium.¹¹⁷

At the level of devotion, “understanding” implies a willingness to accept the existence of diverse ecclesial traditions and diverse sensitivities in expressing devotion to Mary. For example, with regard to Churches that do venerate the Mother of the Lord but find difficulty in accepting invocations directed to her, we who believe this invocation to be legitimate and who practise it daily will not assume an attitude of disapproval. On the one hand, we will remember that there was a time when such invocation, though widely practiced in the Eastern Churches, was very little used in the liturgy of Rome; 118 on the other hand, we will make the effort to present the reasons which, in our opinion, validate this invocation.

Eastern Churches

99. Among the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church there is broad and substantial convergence regarding the doctrine on the Blessed Virgin 119 and full consensus as to the necessity of not forgetting the figure of Mary in theological reflection. A well known Orthodox theologian writes: “There is no Christian theology without constant reference to the person and role of the Virgin Mary in the history of salvation.” 120

With regard to Marian piety it can be said that not only is there a broad convergence among the Churches of the East and the Church of Rome but that it constitutes a common patrimony. In fact, not only does the Catholic Church appreciate and admire the devotion of the Eastern Churches to the Theotokos but it considers this expression of piety to be its own since it is celebrated by millions of her own faithful - Christians fully united to the Catholic Church either because their communion was never interrupted or because it has been reestablished.

As is well known, Eastern Marian devotion is expressed above all in liturgical worship with forms marked by great lyricism and profound doctrine. We can say even more: the liturgical celebrations, in which the faith and the life of every Church are concentrated, make constant reference to the All Holy One in all of their elements (style, structure, content, iconography). This is not surprising since in the Eastern liturgies everything is expressed and interpreted in the light of Christ and the Spirit; everything then becomes contemplation and praise of the role played by the Blessed Virgin in the Incarnation of the Word through the power of the Holy Spirit

100. It seems to us that because of the important role the Eastern Churches play in the ecumenical movement they can make a decisive contribution to the clarification and deepening of the Christian meaning of Marian piety.121

In the first place, they have remained on the fringes of the controversies that have arisen among the Catholic Church and the Churches of the Reform regarding devotion to the Blessed Virgin. The witness of Marian piety which comes to us from the East is ancient and serene, neither suspect nor polemical, and it is rooted in the tradition of the Fathers of the Church and, through them, in the divine Word.

Then, too, the Marian devotion of the Eastern Churches has never known “deviations” (separation of liturgical and popular piety, attempts to ignore the devotion, loss of symbolic meaning) which have been present - in varying degrees and for various reasons - in the Churches of the West. On the whole, the rich doctrinal and liturgical patrimony of the Eastern Churches presents itself to the Western Churches as a secure point of reference so that Marian devotion can respond to some of the needs typical of our times. For example, it can assure that the necessary attention given to the anthropological dimension not be at the expense of the irreplaceable and dominant theological dimension; that the rightful demand for equality between men and women not degenerate into a deleterious masculinisation of woman; that interest in changing cultural situations not lead to forgetting the permanent value of tradition.

Since the cause of Christian unity must always be dear to our heart, we would hope that all of us, brothers and sisters, keep in mind the admonition of the Council: “Everyone should realise that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the rich liturgical and

spiritual heritage of the Eastern Churches in order faithfully to preserve the fullness of Christian tradition, and to bring about reconciliation between Eastern and Western Christians.”¹²²

Churches of the Reform

101. There are, however, important points of contrast among the Catholic Church and Churches of the Reform: the significance and importance of Mary's cooperation in the work of salvation; the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the physical Assumption into heavenly glory; the value of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary; the meaning and extension of the intercession-mediation of the Blessed Virgin; the legitimacy of invoking Mary in prayer. A difficult dialogue among the theologians of the various Churches is under way. We want to participate in that dialogue through humble and persistent prayer so that the Lord might clarify the profound meaning of a tradition which Rome believes to be a concrete expression of the life of the Word and the Spirit in the Church.

We are happy to note that many points of convergence exist among the Catholic Church and the sister Churches of the Reform with regard to Mary of Nazareth: because of a Christological requirement, together we recognise that Mary is the glorious Theotokos who, by power of the Spirit, gave birth to Christ, Son of God, our Saviour; together we praise God for the “great things” he has done for his servant (see Lk 1:49); together we salute Mary “filled with divine favour” (see Lk 1:28) and in her we contemplate the disciple always willing to do the will of God (see Lk 1:38); we esteem her prophetic words and the witness given to Christ; we praise her faith, obedience, humility and patient courage but we realise that this praise remains sterile if not followed by active imitation; together we profess her role as example for the Church in listening to the Word and serving the Lord and others; together we listen with respect to the words spoken by Christ to “the disciple whom he loved...Behold your mother” (In 19:26-27); together we believe that Mary is in the presence of God, at the side of her son who “forever lives to make intercession” on our behalf (see Heb 7:25) and that she, first among the saints, prays with them “for us sinners who struggle and suffer on earth;”¹²³ together we believe that our communities, like that of the apostles (see Acts 1:14), can pray with her and invoke the Spirit.¹²⁴

102. In our reflection on promoting the ecumenical movement beginning with Marian devotion we have limited our dialogue to ourselves, brothers and sisters Servants of Mary; the topic is very delicate and we do not feel we have the right to extend our discussion to others. But if what we have written should come to the attention of brothers and sisters of the Churches of the Reform, we would like our words to be understood as a respectful invitation to a two-fold reflection: — If perhaps the moment has not arrived to end what some evangelical theologians call the “concealment of the Marian topic” in the Churches of the Reform. This concealment was not begun during the time of the great reformers; it began only with the beginning of the Enlightenment.¹²⁵ — If Marian devotion, in the light of the Word, might not represent a possibility and an opportunity offered by God and rooted in the Bible for the development of the Christian faith.
* * *

103. Let us return to ourselves. To the three directives we have given ourselves - conversion of heart, purification of vision, attitude of understanding - we feel we must add cordial participation in the efforts of various Churches working together that are being made in various places to prepare the way to unity, especially the commitment to prayer with Christ and through Christ, with and in the Church. It is in Christ and in the Church that we will discover again the prayerful voice of the woman who is invoked as Virgin of reconciliation even outside the Catholic communion.

Communion in the faith of Abraham

Our Jewish brothers and sisters

104. In our reflection on the mystery of the lack of unity among the Churches we cannot ignore another painful division: that between Christianity and Judaism. A recent document states the following: “Although Christianity sprang from Judaism, taking from it certain essential elements of its faith and divine worship, the gap dividing them was deepened more and more, to such an extent that Christian and Jew hardly knew each other.”¹²⁶ After the conciliar declaration *Nostra aetate* of 28 October 1965, however, several initiatives were begun “to open or to continue a dialogue with a view to better mutual understanding.”¹²⁷ We unite ourselves to these initiatives and would like to make a modest contribution to this dialogue from our current point of view - Marian devotion. But before continuing we would like to join our voice to those of so many sincere Christians in deploring the persecutions to which the Jews have been subjected during the centuries and in particular the horrible massacres suffered “in Europe just before and during the Second World War.”¹²⁸

105. According to Christian faith, God, in his mercy, willed that his Word become incarnate in a Jewish woman, Mary of Nazareth. Because of her and Joseph his foster father Christ was truly a Jew in his humanity, born of the house of David: in him, all of the promises made to Abraham and the patriarchs were fulfilled (see Lk 1:54-55). He is, in the fullest sense, “the glory of Israel” (see Lk 2:32) as Simeon called him and “the Son of David” as he was acclaimed by the people (see Mt 21 :9). Christ cannot be fully understood unless attention is given to his Jewish roots. He is the new and universal Man who came to denounce every form of racism and social discrimination and to break down “the wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14) between Jews and pagans. He was a “rabbi” intensely involved in the life and destiny of his people: he loved its institutions and its laws which he did not wish to abolish but to bring to fulfillment (see Mt 5:17). In his preaching we hear words taken from the prophets beside those heard from his Father (Jn 8:26). He limited his public activity to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). He wept for Jerusalem because of the threats made against it and its refusal to follow “the path to peace” (Lk 19:42) which God had offered it in his person. He who began the worship of the Father in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:23) without temples or boundaries told the Samaritan woman that “salvation comes from the Jews” (Jn 4:22).

106. By analogy, we must say the same of Mary: we cannot fully understand her person and mission without taking into consideration her status as a Jewish woman. This is not so much because of the information provided by social anthropology and other sciences which help us to situate the life of Mary in a precise social and historical context, but rather because only a knowledge of Jewish spirituality allows us to grasp the spiritual make-up of Mary of Nazareth. Her faith is rooted in the faith of Abraham (see Gn 15:6). Her fiat prolongs and culminates the confidence with which so many Israelites accepted the will of God in their lives. Her love for the “Law of the Lord” is a compendium of Israel's attachment to the commandments of God which “are right, rejoicing the heart...are clear, enlightening the eye” (Ps 18 [19]: 9). Her humble condition as “servant of the Lord” (Lk 1:38, 48) sums up the condition of the people of Israel which recognises itself as the “servant of the Lord” (see Is 49:3). Her hymn is an echo and synthesis of many prophecies: it exalts and thanks God because “he has upheld Israel his servant, ever mindful of his mercy, even as he promised our fathers, promised Abraham and his descendants forever” (Lk 1:54-55).

107. What for Christianity is Mary's greatest glory - to be the virginal mother of Jesus, “Word incarnate, Messiah and Saviour - is for Judaism an insuperable difficulty. We believe that it will be overcome at a time and in a way that only God can foretell. Our responsibility is one of prayer and the obligation to profess with Paul and the Christian tradition that ” God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (Rom 11:2), to remember that “if the first fruits are consecrated, so too is the whole mass of dough and if the root is consecrated so too are the branches” (Rom 11:16) and to

testify that the Jews “in respect to election are beloved by God because of the patriarchs and because God's gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom 11:28-29).

108. In the light of faith, and using the words of the Jewish woman Elizabeth, we see in the young woman Miriam - mother of a child named Jesus - the “Mother of the Lord” (see Lk 1:43), a woman in whom various prophetic predictions and images converge. Guided by this conviction, Christian reflection has seen prophetic representations of Mary of Nazareth in the great female personages of Israel: its “mothers” (Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Lia), its heroines (Miriam the sister of Moses, Deborah, Judith, Esther, the mother of the Maccabees) and its daughters favoured with the gift of extraordinary maternity (Hannah the mother of Samuel, the mother of Sampson). In referring to the unique event of her virginal and divine maternity, the Church has applied to Mary in its liturgical celebrations some of the most treasured images of Israel: the tabernacle, the ark, the temple, the burning bush, the city-mother...; in Mary of Nazareth the Church recognises the personification of the “Daughter of Sion” to which many important messianic prophecies are related (see Zep 3:14-18, Zec 2:14-17, 9:9, Jl 2:21-27).

In a word, Christian reflection has recognised that Mary represents the summit of Israel and the beginning of the Church. It has seen in her the moment of passage when the twelve tribes become the Church of the Lamb founded on the twelve apostles. Gerhoh of Reichersberg wrote that “the virgin Mary is the achievement of the synagogue and the most special daughter of the patriarchs; after her son, she is the beginning of the Church and the mother of the apostles.”¹²⁹

We understand that our Jewish brothers and sisters cannot follow us in this “Marian reading” of many important pages of our sacred Book, but we would like them to see in this a sign of the respect and love of the Church for the People of Israel, the holy root from which was born Mary of Nazareth.

109. An enlightened devotion to the Blessed Virgin who is so often addressed in the liturgy as the “Joy of Israel” and the “Daughter of Sion” cannot permit the persistence among Christians of more or less hidden forms of anti-Semitism; rather it should give rise to an attitude of respect and esteem for the Jewish people. It must foster love of the Hebrew Scriptures and reject the lack of attention on the part of many of the faithful to this section of the Bible. It must influence religious education “at various levels...so that in the instruction of children and adolescents Jews and Judaism are presented not only honestly and objectively without prejudice and offending no one, but also with an alive awareness of a common inheritance.”¹³⁰ Finally, Marian devotion must become an expression of active expectation of that day when “all peoples will call on God with one voice and 'serve him shoulder to shoulder’” (Zep 3:9) ¹³¹

Our Muslim brothers and sisters

110. We must say a word about our Muslim brothers and sisters. The conciliar declaration *Nostra aetate* stated that “they worship God who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth... they strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan...and although not acknowledging him as God, they worship Jesus as a prophet, and his virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke.” ¹³²

In Christian Marian devotion the information of the Koran regarding the Blessed Virgin has either had no influence or only a limited one; one can understand the reasons both historical (centuries of animosity between Christians and Muslims) and doctrinal (serious contrasts in the importance given to respective Sacred Books, the Bible and the Koran).

However, it seems to us,-brothers and sisters, that the Marian texts of the Koran deserve greater attention than that which we usually give them. In fact, the scholars tell us that the Sacred

Book of the Islamic faith “assigns to Mary...an exceptional and privileged position - a position unique and important.” 133

Chosen by God to be the mother of Christ and exceptionally favoured by him, Mary is, together with “her son, a sign for all creatures.” 134 She is a woman made pure by a unique divine intervention. She is a virgin and also truly a mother. She is intimately associated with her son and shares his same destiny. She is a woman “chosen from among all women of creation.” 135 Mary is not only a sign to be admired, but also an “ideal to be achieved and a model to be reproduced” 136 because of her faith, her piety and her discretion.

111. With regard to Mary, the points of convergence between Christianity and Islam are numerous; but the points of contrast are many and serious, beginning with the denial of the divine maternity. Nevertheless, we believe that our Marian devotion should become an occasion to remember frequently and with esteem our Muslim brothers and sisters. It represents an opportunity to forget - as hoped by Vatican Council II - a history marked by not a few disagreements and animosities.¹³⁷ It presents the possibility of rejoicing together and seeing realised among us - Christians and Muslims - the prophetic words of the Blessed Virgin, “all generations will call me blessed” (Lk 1:48). Finally, our Marian devotion offers a valid reason to overcome certain uncertainties in devotion which have arisen among us with regard to the Blessed Virgin; it would be strange if we Christians who have greater reason to venerate her had less devotion than do the Muslims toward her who “believed the word of her Lord and in his Books.” 138

CONCLUSION

112. When one reflects at length on a topic it can happen that the subject becomes so large in one's eyes that it dominates the vision and hinders seeing other objects. This may have happened to us. But it is evident that for us brothers and sisters Servants of Mary and for all religious, the essential direction of piety is that of the universal Church itself: to the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit. It is a piety whose necessary and central point of reference is the Paschal Mystery of the Lord celebrated in the Eucharist, the other sacraments and in the Liturgy of the Hours.¹³⁹ It is a piety to which our condition as religious adds another motivation for feeling ourselves committed to offering God, like every disciple, the “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1-2) of a holy life. In this environment, Marian devotion finds its reason for existence, its meaning and its value.

113. Reflecting on the historical development of Marian devotion we think we can affirm that it is part of the Christian experience: its ultimate motive is found in the saving will of God; its immediate foundation is the written Word; its earliest proofs are in the apostolic community described in the writings of Luke and John; its purpose is the glory of God; its advantage is growth in love; and the reason for its development is deepening of knowledge and love of Christ. We have found few expressions that translate our conviction as well as does a statement of Zwingli: “The more the love and honour of Jesus Christ grow among people, the more the honour and esteem of Mary will grow because she has generated for us such a great loving Lord and Redeemer.”¹⁴⁰

114. We have permitted ourselves to enter into dialogue with you our brothers and sisters in the Order, with you our brother and sister religious, and with you our friends, bishops, priests, deacons and laity, regarding some questions related to devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

We have reflected together on a recent crisis and how it was overcome; also about the profound points of contact between the life of Mary and religious life; finally, about some tasks which in our opinion await us if there is to be a correct development of Marian piety. If at times (and this was not our intention) our treatment went beyond the usual forms of spoken reflection and friendly conversation, we ask your pardon. We would like to tell you, however, that in considering

your legislative texts, the studies of your theologians and the testimony of your history, we have learned much about how to understand and live Marian devotion. For this we are profoundly grateful.

Mary and her Servants

115. Now permit us to say a word about the Marian devotion of our Order. It was formed in the patterns of Christian worship as practised in the West during the thirteenth century. It drew from the Marian tradition of monasticism (in particular, it seems, from that of the Cistercian monks) and also from the Marian “customs” of other orders of the evangelical-apostolic life born before our own. The proofs of the Marian devotion of our first Fathers, fervent and sober at the same time, are numerous, authentic and consistent. For them, the Blessed Virgin was most loving Mother, glorious Lady and secure Refuge; they professed to be her humble servants because of their “exceptional love” for her.¹⁴¹

We believe that Marian devotion is a charism of our Order constantly present throughout the centuries and faithfully passed on from one generation of religious to the next.

This devotion was expressed above all in terms of service which has biblical roots and at the time of our Fathers had taken on particular sociological connotations.

Like the Seven Holy Founders we serve Mary in order to better serve the Lord; like her and with her we want to serve others, our brothers and sisters.

To the Blessed Virgin, we offer numerous acts of homage, both ancient and modern; but we believe that devotion to Mary consists primarily in taking on her evangelical style of life.

We want the expressions of our devotion to be simple, humble and the result of fraternal communion. Since religious must witness to the sanctity of beauty, we want our forms of devotion to be clear and harmonious.

We celebrate the entire mystery of the Blessed Virgin; but according to a living tradition, we look to her especially as the Virgin of the Annunciation and the Sorrowful Virgin at the cross of her son in order to learn “to receive the Word of God and to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit”¹⁴² and to live as she did the Paschal event of the Lamb in which “love is consummated and life comes forth.”¹⁴³ Recognising that we are sinners, we often call upon Mary as Queen of Mercy.

We do not understand Marian piety that does not lead to praise of God and prayerful and compassionate assistance to our needy brothers and sisters.

This is the Marian spirituality which prompted St. Philip Benizi, a disciple of the Seven who continued their work, to describe our vocation in the Church with the words:

“We are servants of the glorious Virgin.” 144

116. We the friar capitulars of the 208th General Chapter of the Order feel ourselves to be the heirs and witnesses of this Marian patrimony together with you, brothers and sisters Servants of Mary. We want to protect and increase this patrimony through this letter and reflection. Because of it, and in communion with so many other brothers and sisters in so many religious institutes, we thank God from whom every good thing comes; to him be honour and glory for ever.

FOOTNOTES

1 Tercera Conferencia General del Episcopado Latino-americano, *La evangelizacion en el presente y en el futuro de America Latina* (Celam, 1979), n. 293. We will refer to the statement as the Puebla Document.

2 *Legenda de origine Ordinis*, n.17, in *Monumenta OSM*, vol. I (Brussels: Soci t  Belge de Librairie, 1897) pp. 72-73.

3 *Constitutionis OSM*, art. 6.

4 *Ibid.*, art. 7.

5 *Ibid.*

6 From the pontificate of Paul VI (1963 - 1978), the following Apostolic Exhortations should be noted: *Signum magnum* of 13 May 1967 in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967) pp. 465-475, and *Marialis cultus* of 2 February 1974 in

- Acta Apostolicae Sedis 66 (1974) pp. 113-168. Among the documents of episcopal conferences, we note the following: Nederlandse Bisschoppen Konferentie, Pastorale brief De Bisschoppen van Nederland of 5 October 1968 in Ephemerides Mariologicae 24 (1974) pp. 98-103; Conferencia Episcopal de Chile, Una señal radiante de esperianza of 12 July 1972 in Marianum 36 (1974) pp. 363-365; Conferentia Episcopalis helvetica, Die Muttergottes im Heilsplan Gottes of 16 September 1973 in Marianum 36 (1974) pp. 365-369 National Conference of Catholic Bishops U.S.A., Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith of 21 November 1973 in Marianum 36 (1974) pp. 370-411; Conferentia Episcopalis Polonensis, Pastoral Letter on the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Most Holy Virgin Mary of 8 December 1974 in Marianum 37 (1975) pp. 507-511; Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, Ang Mahal na Birhen, Mary in Philippine Life Today: a Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary of 2 February 1975 in Marianum 38 (1976) pp. 407-434. "
- 7 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus*... for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Acta Apostolicae Sedis 66 (1974) pp. 113 - 168, n. 15. English translation : published by the Vatican Polyglot Press in 1974.
- 8 See Pius XII Encyclical *Ad caeli Reginam* in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 46 (1954) p. 637; John XXIII, "Address to the Roman Clergy" (24 November 1960) in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 52 (1960) p. 969.
- 9 Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 57 (1965) pp. 5-71, n. 65. English translations of this and other conciliar texts are taken from Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1975).
- 10 See *Marialis cultus*, n. 56 and the Introduction.
- 11 Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 56 (1964) pp. 97-138, n. 13; *Marialis cultus*, n. 31.
- 12 *Lumen gentium*, n. 56.
- 13 Council of Constantinople I, Profession of Faith in *Enchiridion Symbolorum*..., ed. H. Denzinger and A. Schonmetzer, S.J., 33rd ed. rev. (Rome: Herder, 1965), n. 150.
- 14 "Homily to the Faithful of Sardinia, at the Sanctuary of Nostra Signora di Bonaria" (24 April 1970) in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 62 (1970) pp. 300-301.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 *Lumen gentium*, n. 56.
- 18 *De fide orthodoxa* III, 12, in PG 94, 1029 C.
- 19 See Origin, Commentary on the Gospel of John I, 4, in SC 120, p.58.
- 20 See T. Kohler, " Les principales interprétations traditionnelles de Jn 19, 25-27 pendant les douze premiers siècle," in *E'tudes Mariales* 16 (1959) pp. 119-155; H. Barré, "La maternité spirituelle de Marie dans la pensée médiévale," *E'tudes Mariales* 16 (1959) pp. 87-104; B. Duba, "'Ecce mater tua' (Jo. 19, 26-27) in documentis Romanorum Pontificum," in *Maria in Sacra Scriptura*, vol. 5 (Rome: Pont. Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1967) pp. 235-289.
- 21 *Anacreontica*. XI. In *Ioannem Theologum*, nn. 77-87, in PG 87, 3, 3789.
- 22 The title *Mater misericordiae* is used with some frequency in the Roman liturgy. Other than in the famous antiphon *Salve Regina*, it is present in the hymn *Salve, mater misericordiae* (Liturgy of the Hours, Presentation of the B. Virgin Mary, 21 November, Office of Readings). The origin of the title seems to be linked to the writings of St. Odone, abbot of Cluny (+ 942). The title indicates both that Mary is the mother of Jesus, mercy incarnate, and that she herself is the most excellent merciful mother.
- 23 *Ordo coronandi imaginem b. Marine Virginis*, editio typica (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1981) n. 41, p. 28. The title is linked to the biblical expression "Handmaid (ancilla, ministra) of the Lord" (Lk 1:38). As such, Mary "devoted herself totally...to the person and work of her son, under and with him, serving the mystery of redemption" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 56), that is, she was at the service of the *mysterium pietatis* (see 1 Tim 3:16).
- 24 Vatican Council II, Decree on the Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life, *Perfectae caritatis*, in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 58 (1966) pp. 702-712, n.2a.
- 25 For a summary of the texts, see J. A. de Aldama, S.J., " Los origenes del culto mariano de imitacion" in *Estudios Marianos* 36 (1972) pp. 75-93.
- 26 John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*...Regarding the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 74 (1982) pp. 81-191, n. 16. English translation published by the Vatican Polyglot Press in 1982.
- 27 Paul VI, "Talk at Nazareth" (5 January 1964), in Acta Apostolicae Sedis 56 (1964) p. 168.
- 28 To clearly distinguish it from genitality, sexuality here refers to the fact that every human being, male and female, is profoundly influenced not only in body but also in his or her psychological and spiritual life by his or her own sex, male or female. This means that every person, because of sexual make-up, is placed in a particular relationship with his or her own self, with individuals of the same sex and with those of the other sex.
- 29 "Natività di Maria o Protovangelo di Giacomo" IX, 1, in *Los Evangelios Apocrifos*, ed. S. Otero, BAC vol. 148 (Madrid: La Editorial Catolica, 1963) p. 152. For a study on the meaning of the expression "Virgin of the Lord" see J. A. de Aldama, S.J., *Maria en la patristica de los siglos I y II*, BAC vol. 300 (Madrid: La Editorial Catolica, 1970) pp. 342-356.
- 30 *Lumen gentium*, n. 46.

31 See *ibid.*, n. 56.

32 This interpretation is frequent in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: the fiat of the Virgin, over and above being an expression of the loving acceptance of the will of God, is a word of mercy (*verbum miserationis*) spoken in favour of men and women. See, for example, St. Bernard, *Hom. IV*, 8 in *Opera omnia*, vol. 4 (Rome: Edit. Cisterc., 1966) p. 53.

33 *Lumen gentium*, n. 56.

34 *Ibid.*, n. 62.

35 See St. Germanus of Constantinople, *Oratio I in Dormitionem sanctae Dei Genetricis* in PG 98, 344 D and 345 BC.

36 Here, we limit ourselves to citing a significant text of John Paul II: "... Mary is present in the Church to stimulate the sanctity of her better children and to direct them on the heroic path of evangelical and missionary self-giving in favour of the poor, the lowly, the simple, the suffering and those who await the message of Christ." ("Talk to Workers in the Central Administration of the Church," n. 31, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 72 (1980) p. 664).

37 See the excellent summary of Paul VI on the variety of signs with which the presence of Christ is manifested in the life of the Church: *Encyclical Mysterium fidei*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) pp. 762-764.

38 Many theologians hold that Marian shrines where many faithful come to venerate the memory of Mary and seek her intercession and where the Word is proclaimed, the call to conversion is heard and the sacrament of penance is celebrated, are to be considered "signs" of the maternal presence of the Blessed Virgin in the life of the Church. The same must be said of the authentic "apparitions" of Our Lady: these supernatural manifestations, when they have ecclesiastical approval and produce good effects in Christian life, are a special testimony of the love with which the Blessed Virgin already glorified in heaven accompanies her children still pilgrims on earth. Also the liturgical year, cyclically re-proposing and celebrating the salvific events of the life of Christ to which the Blessed Virgin is intimately linked (see *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 103) becomes a "sign" of the presence of Mary in the life of the Church.

39 *Lumen gentium*, n. 46.

40 See *Lumen gentium*, n. 64.

41 See Roman Missal, Preface of the Immaculate Conception, 8 December.

42 "You visit and watch over all, O Mother of God. Even if our eyes cannot see you, O Holy One, you dwell among us and show yourself in various ways to all those who are worthy of you" (St. Germanus of Constantinople, *Oratio I in Dormitionem sanctae Dei Genetricis*, PG 98 345A). For its part, the Roman liturgy prays: "*Veni iuvamen saeculi, / sordes aufer piaculi, / ac visitando populum / poenae tolle periculum*" (Liturgy of the Hours, Visitation of the B. Virgin Mary, 31 May, Office of Readings, hymn *Veni praecelsa Domina* from the twelfth century)

43 This "reading" has been substantially accepted by the magisterium of the Roman pontiffs. See *Marialis cultus*, n. 57; John Paul II "Homily for the Angelus" (17 July 1983) in *Osservatore Romano*, 18-19 July 1983, pp. 1-2.

44 The first edition of Fr. Lépicier's *Tractatus* (Paris, 1901) was followed by four others; the fifth (Rome, 1926) was greatly enlarged.

45 *Statuti della Pontificia Facoltà Teologica "Marianum"*, n. 2b.

46 Circular Letter Concerning Some of the More Urgent Aspects of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries (Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1980) p. 23 (Part II, par. 4).

47 These remarks are not meant to be read in the sense that the study of Christ, the Spirit and the Church are necessary for a knowledge of Mary of Nazareth, but rather in the sense that a careful study of the Christ event, of the action of the Spirit, and of the nature and mission of the Church cannot avoid considering the role of the Blessed Virgin.

48 See Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii nuntiandi*, on Evangelisation in the World of Today in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 68 (1976) pp. 5-96, n. 82.

49 *Marialis cultus*, n. 17.

50 Since the fifth and sixth centuries, the Roman liturgy in proposing Isaiah 60:1-9 and Matthew 2:1-12 as readings for the solemnity of Epiphany has understood this relationship. The exegesis proposed here, which sees an image of the Church in the "house of Bethlehem" (see Mt 2:11) is attracting increasing attention from scholars. It is not, however, new. The essential nucleus is already found in Irenaeus according to whom the house to which the Magi are led to meet Emmanuel (ad Emmanuel) is "the house of Jacob," obviously the Church (see *Adversus Haereses III*, 9, 2 in SC 211, p. 106). This passed to the medieval theologians; we find it, for example, in Rabanus Maurus (+ 856): "According to the mystic sense, the three Magi signify the Gentile people descended from the three sons of Noah which comes to belief in Christ from the three parts of the world. The star, then, signifies the words of the prophets which point without error to the birth of the Lord. Herod is the type of the devil who knowing of the birth of the Saviour tries to persecute him and prepare for his temporal death. The Magi distance themselves from Herod when the peoples abandon idolatry and come to the house in which Christ is present, that is, to the Catholic Church which, while remaining virgin, generates children of God every day." (*Commentaria in Matthaeum I*, ca. 2 in PL 107, 760 D)

51 The active presence of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of the Word and in the event of Pentecost was seen as a reciprocal relationship by Vatican Council II: see *Lumen gentium*, n. 59 and the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) pp. 947-990, n. 4.

52 *Lumen gentium*, n. 65.

53 See art. 7.

54 *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 48.

55 *Ibid.*

56 See Puebla Document, n. 465.

57 *Marialis cultus*, n. 40.

58 See *ibid.*, nn. 25-37.

59 *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 13.

60 *Lumen gentium*, n. 67.

61 E. Manfredini, Archbishop of Bologna, writes: "Noting that the new *Ordo lectionum* assigns the same readings to the memorial of the Sorrowful Mother as it does to Good Friday...and therefore suggests that we draw from the dramatic event celebrated on that day the meaning of the celebration of the Mother of Sorrows, we spontaneously ask ourselves if it might not be opportune...to find a proper way and a specific form to present with greater clarity to the people of God the participation of Mary in the mystery of the Cross of Christ on the very same *feria sexta in passione Domini*. Such an emphasis, rather than diminishing the understanding of the unique sacrifice of Jesus on Good Friday, would aid to interiorise it according to the authentic understanding of the faith which the ecclesial community progressively manages to assimilate when it approaches the mystery of the Cross associating itself to this mystery with the same attitude of Mary on Calvary." "Analisi tematica del lezionario per le celebrazioni mariane" in *Il Messale Romano del Vaticano II; Orazionale e lezionario*, vol. II (Leumann-Torino: LDC, 1981) p.130. See M. Magrassi, O. S.B. *Maria e la Chiesa una sola madre* (Noci: Edizioni 'La Scala', 1977), p. 22; J. Castellano, O.C.D., "La Vergine nella liturgia," in *Maria mistero di grazia* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Spiritualità del Teresianum, 1974) pp. 104-108; A. Bergamini, *Cristo festa della Chiesa: Storia-teologia-spiritualità-pastorale dell'Anno Liturgico* (Rome: Ed. Paoline, 1982) p. 395 and note 2; T. de Urkiri, C.M.F., *Para avanzar en la pastoral liturgico-mariana* (Madrid: Editorial Alpuerto, 1980) pp.28-45.

62 See S. Salaville, "Marie dans la liturgie byzantine ou greco-slave," in *Maria: étude sur la Sainte vierge*, ed. H. Du Manoir, vol. 1 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1949) pp. 266-271, A. Kniazeff, "La Theotokos dans les offices bizantine du temps pascal," in *Irénikon* 34 (1969) pp. 21-44.

63 " ... it should certainly be hoped that [in the Roman liturgy] a remembrance of the Virgin also appear in the Easter and Pentecost celebrations. " Magrassi, *op. cit.*, pp. 22 -23.

64 See *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 30. On the function and value of silence recognised in various liturgical documents and in the rituals published between 1968 and 1973, see D. Sartore, C.S.J., "Il silenzio come 'parte dell'azione liturgica'" in *Mysterion: nella celebrazione del Mistero di Cristo la vita della Chiesa* (Leumann-Torino: LDC, 1981) pp. 289-305.

65 For a precise listing of contemporary studies on Luke 2:19, 51b, and for an anthology of texts from the third century up to our own times, see A. Serra, *Sapienza e contemplazione di Maria secondo Luca 2:19, 51b* (Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 1982).

66 H. De Lubac, *Meditazione sulla Chiesa* (Milano: Edizioni Paoline, 1963) pp. 426-427.

67 One of the more prominent insights of *Marialis cultus* is that of presenting " Mary as a model of the spiritual attitude with which the Church celebrates and lives the divine mysteries" (n. 16). The Apostolic Exhortation observes: "That the Blessed Virgin is an exemplar in this field derives from the fact that she is recognised as a most excellent exemplar of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ" (*ibid.*). This text, however, does not explicitly mention the reflective attitude which is without a doubt one of the most noteworthy aspects of Mary as model in the area of worship.

68 "To you, Lord, be silent praise." For the origin and meaning of this prayer which comes from a Masoretic reading of Psalm 64[65]:2, see I. Cecchetti, "Tibi silentium laus" in *Miscellanea liturgica in honorem L. Cuniberti Mohlberg*, vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni Liturgiche, 1949) pp. 521-570.

69 As is well known, in the celebration of some sacraments (confirmation, ordination of bishops, priests and deacons, anointing of the sick), the imposition of the hands which precedes the invocation of the Spirit takes place in absolute silence. Many biblical symbols of the Holy Spirit are "silent": breath and breeze, oil and the perfume of ointment shadow and dew...

70 *Constitutions OSM*, art. 31.

71 Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life, Evangelica testificatio*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 63 (1971) pp. 497-526, n. 46. English translation taken from *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing, 1975).

72 The Hebrew term *tob* which describes each of the acts of creation (see Gn 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31) is translated in the Septuagint with the adjective *kalon*: "it was good" which includes the meanings of "good," "well done."

73 *Liturgy of the Hours, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 1 January, Office of Readings, 2nd responsory.*

74 N. 71, v. 513, in SC 123, p. 98.

75 *Homilia XXXVII, In Dormitionem Deiparae semperque Virginis Mariae* in PG 151, 468 A.

76 See "Address to the Participants of the 7th International Mariological Congress" (Rome, 16 May 1975) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 67 (1975) p. 338.

77 "Homily in St. Peter's on the 10th Anniversary of the Conclusion of Vatican Council II" (8 December 1975) in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol.13 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975) pp. 1493-1494.

78 Well known in this regard is the antiphon " *Tota pulchra es, Maria et macula originalis non est in te*" (*Liturgy of the Hours, Immaculate Conception, 8 December, Evening Prayer II, antiphon 1*).

79 From the more well known texts we can cite the antiphon "*Genuit puerpera Regem, cui nomen aeternum, et gaudia matris habens cum virginitatis honore; nec primam similem visa est, nec habere sequentem*" (*Liturgy of the Hours, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, 1 January, Morning Prayer, antiphon 3*).

- 80 Paul VI, "Homily in St. Peter's for the Celebration of the Centennial of Italian Catholic Action" (8 December 1968) in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol 6 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1968) p. 632.
- 81 Paul VI, "Address to the Participants of the 7th International Mariological Congress" (Rome, 16 May 1975), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 67 (1975) p. 338.
- 82 *Regula ad servos Dei*, VIII, n. 48, in *The Role of Our Holy Father St. Augustine*, trans. R. .P. Russell, O.S.A. (Villanova: Province of St. Thomas of Villanova, 1976).
- 83 Huit homélie mariales. Hom. VII, 234-239, in SC 72, pp. 198, 200. It should be noted that B1. Amadeus sees the beauty of the Blessed Virgin in her attitudes (in her thoughts, words and actions) and in her participation in the salvific events in the life of Christ (birth, death, resurrection). During periods of decadence in theological thought, the beauty of the Blessed Virgin will be sought in physical characteristics imagined and described according to personal fantasy.
- 84 *Lumen gentium*, n. 55.
- 85 *Evangelica testificatio*, n. 16.
- 86 *Ibid.*, n. 18.
- 87 *Ibid.*, n. 17.
- 88 John Paul II, "Homily to the Mexican Faithful at the Sanctuary of Zapopan (30 January 1979), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 71 (1979) p. 230.
- 89 Puebla Document, n. 299.
- 90 On the conditions of women in the biblical world see L. Zucker, "Woman" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 16 (Jerusalem: 1971) col. 623-628, C. Gancho, "Donna" in *Enciclopedia della Bibbia*, vol. 2 (Leumann-Torino: LDC, 1969) col. 998-1002.
- 91 Puebla Document, n. 291.
- 92 *Ibid.*, n. 299.
- 93 See the encyclical *Pacem in terris* in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 55 (1963) pp. 267-268.
- 94 Paul VI, "Talk Given to the Catholic Jurists of Italy" (7 November 1974) in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, vol. 12 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975) p. 1248.
- 95 See *ibid.*, p. 1249.
- 96 Document on the Role of Women in Evangelisation (19 November 1975), in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, vol. 5 (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1979) n. 1572.
- 97 N.282.
- 98 See *Familiaris consortio*, n. 59.
- 99 A. Muller, *Discorso di fede sulla Madre di Gesù: un tentativo di mariologia in prospettiva contemporanea*, *Giornale di Teologia* 146 (Brescia: Queriniana, 1983) p. 49.
- 100 Council of Constantinople I, Profession of Faith in *Enchiridion Symbolorum...*, ed. H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer, S.J., 33rd ed. rev. (Rome: Herder, 1965) n. 150.
- 101 See St. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 6, in PL 40, 399; *Lumen gentium*, nn. 53, 61.
- 102 Liturgy of the Hours, antiphon *Salve Regina*. The use of the term *vita* in reference to the Blessed Virgin caused the disappearance of this famous antiphon in the Churches of the Reform. In effect, this term which strictly speaking can be applied only to Christ (see Jn 14 :6) can cause misunderstanding when referred to the Blessed Virgin. The significance and value of its application to Mary was well understood by the first commentator of the *Salve*, the Cistercian abbot Godfrey of Auxerre (+ c. 1188). According to him, the Blessed Virgin is life for us because of the value of her witness as model for us: " life, in the example of perfect conduct and total sanctity; life, if we imitate her life notwithstanding our fragility; our life, in educating us for life." (In *Nativitate b. Virginis Sermo IV*, in *Salve Regina misericordiae*, ed. J. M. Canal [Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1963] pp. 212-213)
- 103 Sixth Synod of Bishops (1983), *Message to the World*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 October 1983, p. 1.
- 104 See "Address to Scientists and Representatives of the United Nations" (Hiroshima, 25 February 1981) in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. IV/1 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981) pp. 540-549; "Homily at Coventry Airport" (30 May, 1982) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74 (1982) pp. 926-931; "Message to the Second Special Session of the United Nations on Disarmament " (7 June 1982) in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. V/2 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982) pp. 2131-2143; "Address to the European Centre for Nuclear Research" (Geneva, 15 June 1982), n. 9, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 74 (1982) pp. 1010-1012.
- 105 Pastoral Letter *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* of 3 May 1983; Letter of the Bishops of the Netherlands, *Peace in Justice*, 5 May 1983; Letter of the Belgian Bishops, *Disarmament to Build Peace* of July 1983; Letter of the Bishops of Japan, *Hope for Peace, the Evangelical Mission of the Japanese Church* of 9 July 1983; Letter of the French Bishop, *Winning the Peace*, 8 November 1983.
- 106 See G. M. Lechner, O.S.B., *Maria Gravida, zum Schwangerschaftsmotiv in der Bildenden Kunst* (Munich-Zurich: Verlag Schnell und Steiner, 1981). We would like to recall here the fresco of Vitale of Bologna "The Virgin Awaiting Childbirth" (1355) which is found in the Basilica of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna, one of the oldest churches in the Order.
- 107 Liturgy of the Hours, Christmas, 25 December, Morning Prayer, hymn.
- 108 *Proprium Officiorum O.S.M.*, Solemnity of the Sorrowful Mother, 15 September, Evening Prayer I, antiphon 1.
- 109 *Marialis cultus*, n. 32

- 110 Dr. Ross Mackenzie, Presbyterian. Statement reported by R. Laurentin, "Bulletin sur la Vierge Marie " in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques* 65 (1981) pp. 330-331.
- 111 For them the Sacred Scripture is the book which the monk must untiringly meditate upon, "reading day and night, studying every syllable and every letter" (St. Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo* 131, in *CCL* 78, p. 274); it is the rule and mirror upon which one's life is to be modelled; it is food for nourishment almost like the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. For a synthesis of the use of the Bible among monks, see G. M. Colombas, O.S.B., *El monacato primitivo*, BAC 376 (Madrid: La Editorial Catolica, 1975), vol 2, *La espiritualidad*, pp. 75-94.
- 112 " In the first place, let them [religious] have the Sacred Scripture at hand daily, so that they might learn 'the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus' (Phil 3:8) by reading and meditating on the divine scriptures" (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 6).
- 113 " In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him. It was with a view to Christ that God the Father from all eternity chose her to be the all-holy Mother and adorned her with gifts of the spirit granted to no one else" (*Marialis cultus*, n. 25)
- 114 Roman Missal, Eucharist Prayer I or Roman Canon, "Communicantes."
- 115 Each of us, when we approach the "Marian texts of Sacred Scripture, brings to the reading a certain previous understanding which comes from our intellectual formation; but we note, too, diverse predispositions which come from the Christian Church to which we belong and our existential situations. For example, we Friars Servants of Mary - religious, Catholics, originating in the context of the medieval evangelical-apostolic movement, custodians of a "Marian heritage" - will find in these texts echoes and nuances that easily escape readers of different spiritual traditions.
- 116 See Vatican Council II, Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 57 (1965) pp. 90-112, n. 11; Secretariate for Christian Unity, Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters, Part II, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 62 (1970) pp. 705-724, n. 76c.
- 117 See S. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Declaratio circa catholicam doctrinam de Ecclesia contra nonnullos errores hodiernos tuendam*, especially n. 5 (*De notione infallibilitatis Ecclesiae non corruptenda*), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 65 (1973) pp. 402-404
- 118 It is sufficient to recall that in this same period - the end of the fourth century - in which the Syriac liturgy through the efforts of St. Ephrem and his disciples had already introduced numerous hymns as direct praise of the Blessed Virgin, the Roman liturgy still had not introduced similar texts into its offices. This will happen only in the seventh century.
- 119 The differences pertain only to the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, body and soul, into heaven. More than doctrinal content, the disagreement has to do with the process of definition on the part of the bishops of Rome (Pius IX in 1854 and Pius XII in 1950) in a situation in which the Churches were divided.
- 120 N. Nissiotis, "Maria nella teologia ortodossa" in *Concilium* 19 (1983) n. 8, pp. 66 (1260).
- 121 Orthodox theologians recognise that in the ecumenical field "because of excessive fear of creating further causes of division and scandal on the part of colleagues and brothers and sisters of other Christian traditions" they have been too careful in speaking of the Blessed Virgin. Today they seem to be abandoning this attitude, precisely for ecumenical reasons: "An ecumenically oriented theology that does not make reference to Mariology is an individualistic, anthropocentric and distorted theological reflection because it is incapable of penetrating minds and hearts which search for unity in Christ through the power of the same Spirit based upon a fully ecclesiological approach." N. Nissiotis, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-68 (1261-1262).
- 122 *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 15.
- 123 Ecumenical Declaration of the International Mariological Congress of Saragossa (9 October 1979), n. 4, in *Marianum* 42 (1980) p. 305. It must be noted that those who signed the Declaration did so in their own name, even though they declared that they worked always with the intention to express the beliefs of their own Churches (see the note added before the signatures).
- 124 See the Ecumenical Declaration of the International Mariological Congress of Malta (15 September 1983), n. 5, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 September 1983, p. 2.
- 125 See J. P. Gabus, "Point de vue protestant sur les études mariologiques et la pieté mariale", in *Marianum* 44 (1982) pp. 475-509, especially pp. 480-482.
- 126 Secretariat for Christian Unity, "Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews (n. 4) (1 December 1974) in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 67 (1975) p. 73.
- 127 *Ibid.*
- 128 *Ibid.*
- 129 *De gloria et honore Filii hominis* X, 1, in *PL* 194, 1105.
- 130 John Paul II, "Address to the Delegates of the Episcopal Conferences for Relations with Judaism " (6 March 1982), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* vol. V/1 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982) p. 746.
- 131 Vatican Council II, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966) pp. 740-744, n. 4.
- 132 N. 3.
- 133 N. Geagea, O.C.D., "Maria, segno ed esempio secondo il Corano," in *Acta Congressus Mariologici-Mariani Internationalis in Croatia anno 1971 celebrati*, vol V (Rome: Pont. Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1972) p. 369.

- 134 The Koran, sura XXI, 91.
135 Ibid., sura III, 42.
136 N. Geaga, op. cit., p. 381.
137 See Nostra aetate, n. 3.
138 The Koran, sura LXVI, 12.
139 See Constitutions O.S.M., art. 24.
140 Cited in J. P. Gabus, op. cit., p. 481.
141 Legenda de origine Ordinis, n. 18, in Monumenta OSM, vol. 1 (Brussels: Société Belge de Librairie, 1897) p. 73.
142 Constitutions OSM, art. 6.
143 Vigilia de Domina, ufficio dei Servi a Santa Maria (Rome: Curia Generalis OSM, 1980) p. 61. English translation, Vigilia de Domina: A Marian Prayer-Watch of the Servants of Mary (Chicago: Friar Servants of Mary, 1982) p. 46.
144 Legenda beati Philippi n. 8, in Monumenta OSM, vol. 2 (Brussels : Société Belge de Librairie, 1898) p. 71.