

SERVANTS OF THE MAGNIFICAT

210th OSM General Chapter

1996

Introduction (1-3)

The Metaphor of Dawn (4-5)

Section One

The reasons for a profound harmony (6-27)

The Blessed Virgin Mary, A Maternal Presence (6-23)

Mary, woman consecrated by the Spirit (7-8)

Mary, woman faithful to her vocation (9-12)

Mary, first and perfect disciple (13-18)

Mary, woman consecrated for the mission (19-23)

Conclusion (24-27)

The typology of a relationship (28)

Mother (29-31)

Patron (32-34)

Queen and Lady (35-39)

Teacher (40-43)

Guide (44-46)

Model (47-49)

Sister (50-52)

Conclusion (53-58)

Section Two:

A REFLECTION ON CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE MAGNIFICAT (59)

The gift of the Magnificat (60-67)

A Gift Joined to Other Gifts (61)

A Gift to Receive, Live and Pass On (62)

A Gift That Leads into Mary's Story (63)

A Gift for Our Prayer (64-67)

Section two

The charism of service in the light of the Magnificat (68-114)

A Difficult Service To Speak of God to the Men and Women of Today (69-72)

The Service of Praise (73-76)

At the Service of the "New Evangelization" (77-83)

Sharing without delay (79-80)

The new in continuity with the old (81-82)

Icon of evangelization (83)

At the Service of the Cause of Women (84-95)

The Visitation (85)

Jesus and women (86-88)

Suggestions (89-95)

At the the Service of Human Liberation (96-100)

At the Service of Life and God's Works (101-110)

Threats to life (103-107)

The Blessed Virgin and the Cosmos (108)

In the storehouse of our tradition (109-110)

At the Service of Ecumenism (111-114)

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. The celebration of the Order's 210th General Chapter is a special time of grace and fellowship. It is also an occasion for writing to you, brothers and sisters, so that "our joy may be complete" (1 Jn 1:4). Indeed, cause for joy are a number of events. First, the chapter itself, which makes it possible for us, as earlier for our First Fathers, to experience the force and comfort of our fraternal bonds: "How good it is, and how pleasant, when brethren dwell at one" (Ps 133:1).¹ Second, the erection of the Mexican province, which brings to conclusion a long journey begun in the years 1947-1948 when the first two Servite friars, Fr. Clemente M. Francescon (+1986) and Fr. Lorenzo M. Boratto (+ 1988), were sent to Mexico City. Third, the celebration of the jubilee year of St. Peregrine Laziosi (1265 ca.-1345 ca.), who is venerated as patron saint of the infirm for the heroic witness he offered in his own illness and whose intercession is sought for the gifts of healing and hope.² Fourth, the fraternal reflection on the state of the Order in view of preserving and promoting our "spiritual heritage"³ - our commitment to follow Christ and to give witness to the Gospel through fraternal life in community, service of others, a humble and penitent life, and devotion to Our Lady, "Mother and Servant of the Lord" and "abiding inspiration" of our lives.⁴

2. Just as the Chapter of Rome in 1983, so too the Chapter of Mexico City has decided to write a capitular letter to the Order. This letter is meant to be the continuation and development of the earlier one, *Do Whatever He Tells You* (16 November 1983). It is a *continuation*, because the letter aims at carrying forward the reflection begun there on the profound harmony that exists between consecrated life and the Blessed Virgin Mary (Part I), and it is a *development*, because the letter, faithful to the tradition of the Order and attentive to the present historical and ecclesial context, wants to deepen our insight into the Servite charism in the light of the Virgin of the Magnificat (Part II).

3. We address our letter, first of all, to all of you, friars Servants of Mary. Our first obligation as capitulars is to be of service to you through decisions and deliberations that can help you to live our common vocation with reassurance and renewed enthusiasm .

We turn then to all who, for historical reasons and common ideals, form with us the vast Servite Family - nuns, sisters, members of the Secular Institutes and the Secular Order, and all other lay groups.

We also have in mind the bishops of the dioceses in which communities of Servite men and women live and work. May the bishops, commissioned by the Spirit to "tend the church of God" (Acts 20:28), see this letter as an expression of our appreciation for their pastoral concern and as evidence of our desire to be "a sign of fraternal fellowship"⁵ through generous apostolic cooperation in every local church.

Encouraged by the good reception accorded the letter *Do Whatever He Tells You*, we also address this letter, with feelings of friendship and gratitude, to the men and women who follow Christ in institutes of consecrated life with a distinctive Marian charism. This time, however, as you will easily note, more than writing of our own experience, we have chosen to listen to their

reflections and to give careful consideration to their proposals. We have learned much. They will find here many elements concerning the relationship between Mary and consecrated life that their institutes have noted, given depth to and put into practice.

The metaphor of dawn

4. “As the third millennium of the new era draws near...” 6 With these words John Paul II begins his apostolic letter on “preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000.” Like the entire Church, the Order too must prepare for this jubilee celebration, so that the commemoration of the two thousandth anniversary of Christ's birth will be for us Servite men and women a grace-filled and inspiring occasion.

In his letter *On the Coming of the Third Millennium*, the Holy Father has given the whole Church, including the institutes of consecrated life, several suggestions for a fruitful preparation of the jubilee year. He distinguishes two phases in the preparatory period 7 and points out that “the best preparation for the new millennium” will be “renewed commitment to apply ... the teachings of Vatican II to the life of every individual and the whole Church.” 8 He also says it is right for the Church, at the threshold of the new millennium, to encourage “her children to purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and slowness to act.” 9 He draws attention to the need for apostolic activity in specific areas and insists on the need for a new evangelization and for an increased ecumenical commitment. 10 He recalls, too, the urgent pastoral needs of the family and young people. Lastly, he explains that the mystery of Christ is the center of the jubilee of the year 2000 and that consequently his Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, will have to be fittingly associated with the celebration of her Son: “It was in her womb that the Word became flesh! The affirmation of the central place of Christ cannot therefore be separated from the recognition of the role played by his Most Holy Mother.” 11 All of these suggestions should find cordial reception in our communities.

5. After these references to the letter *On the Coming of the Third Millennium* we want to pause to consider the symbolic value of the term *dawn* that recurs often in connection with the year 2000 and that is also present in the title of our Part I. Dawn means the first light in the heavens after the darkness of the night. It is the awe-inspiring hour of Christ's resurrection. It is the time of awakening from motionless sleep to vigilant action, a time for offering the first prayers of the day, a time filled with hope and purpose. It is the hour in which the earth is bathed in dew, a symbol of the Spirit's permeating, fruitful activity.

The cosmic symbol of dawn has been used since ancient times for the relationship between Christ, true Sun of Justice (cf. Mal 3:20) and universal Savior, and Mary of Nazareth who, coming before Christ, is appropriately hailed as “the dawn of hope and salvation.” 12

The wish that the symbol of dawn inspires in us is that the year 2000 be for the Order, through a gift of the Spirit and our generous response, a time of reawakening and an hour of hope. It is what we need. And we fraternally address this wish to every institute of consecrated life and to every society of apostolic life.

Section one

The reasons for a profound harmony

The Blessed Virgin Mary: a maternal presence

6. All institutes recognize in Mary of Nazareth a maternal presence which enhances the bonds of fellowship among their members. She is also a source of inspiration for their way of life and an exemplary model of what it means to follow Christ radically. 13

The experience of Mary's maternal presence in religious communities is universal and ancient, yet we continue to be struck by this fact when we remember the existential context in which the life of Mary of Nazareth unfolded: she was a married woman and the mother of a family. This is very different from the shape of consecrated life, which includes the choice of celibacy for the Kingdom (cf. Mt 19:10-12) and community life lived according to a rule and under the leadership of a member of the community. There is no doubt, for example, that the married love of Mary and Joseph of Nazareth was of a different kind than the love which unites the brothers or sisters of a community animated by true charity. The same is true for the experience of motherhood. Mary had a child born of her own flesh; this is an experience not shared by those who embrace consecrated life and offer their virginity to the Lord.

This diversity of contexts, however, does not trouble those who have chosen consecrated life. They know that paradoxes are not unusual in Christianity and that God with infinite wisdom wonderfully brings together what appears contradictory to human eyes. In our case, she who was greeted as ever *virgin* is proposed to the faithful as exemplary *mother* of a family

At this point it must be asked: What brings us to see such a profound harmony between consecrated life and the Mother of the Lord, despite the difference in existential context? Today, it seems to us, the following reasons stand out.

Mary, woman consecrated by the Spirit.

7. Every form of consecrated life exists and is defined in reference to Christ, “whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world in a supreme way (cf. Jn 10: 36).”**14** Jesus, upon whom the Spirit rested (cf. Is 11:2; 61:1; Mt 3:16; Lk 4:17-18), is indeed God's Anointed One: “... because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor” (Lk 4:18). In Christ “all the consecrations of the ancient Law are summed up” and in him and through him “the new people of God is consecrated.”**15**

The Lord's disciples are immersed in the Paschal mystery of Christ in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and become sharers in the gift of Pentecost. They are a *consecrated* people, fully empowered to offer to the Father, through Christ and in the Spirit, the spiritual worship pleasing to God (cf. Rm 12:1). At the same time they are “ enabled to live in all fullness the demands of discipleship and mission. ” **16**

But the Lord grants to some, in view of the good of all, the gift of a special consecration which empowers them to follow Christ through the profession of the evangelical counsels. This special consecration “is deeply rooted in their baptismal consecration and is a fuller expression of it.” **17** There are various opinions on the nature of religious consecration, and although it is not our intention to enter into this theological debate, from the pronouncements of the magisterium, liturgical texts **18** and the writings of theologians on consecrated life there emerges the conviction that two elements, each in its own way, come together harmoniously to give form to religious consecration: the action of the Spirit and the human will sustained by grace.

8. Consecration is essentially the Spirit's work. From this fact there derives one of the principal reasons for the intrinsic relationship between consecrated life and the Blessed Virgin: Mary is preeminently a consecrated person.

Because she was “molded, so to speak, by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature,”**19** Mary's consecration coincides with the very first moment of her existence. She is filled from the very beginning with “the abundance of all heavenly gifts.” **20** Sanctified by the Spirit and totally dedicated to God, Mary became temple of the Lord, bridal chamber of the Word, repository of the Spirit.

But it was especially in the Incarnation that Mary was consecrated by the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you” (Lk 1:35). The Spirit is the divine breath, the creative and consecrating power of the Most High, the richly abundant anointing that enfolds and permeates Mary, consecrating her fully, bringing life to her virginal womb, and dedicating her to the incomparable

mission of being Mother of the Savior. Through the “descent of the Spirit” Mary became the “*most sacred Virgin*,” as the liturgical tradition calls her; she is “the *one most fully consecrated to God*, consecrated in the most perfect way.” **21**

Members of institutes of consecrated life love to contemplate Christ, the Consecrated One, whose every thought and gesture are directed uniquely to the glory of the Father and the salvation of the human race. This contemplation is for them a cause of gladness and a source of inspiration for their lives. In their reverent contemplation they then discern beside Christ the figure of Mary, the woman consecrated by grace. They see that she, too, is totally dedicated to doing the Father's salvific will. They thus come to understand more clearly that their own religious consecration is, like baptism, grace, gift and action of the Spirit, a holy anointing by which the Spirit continues in their hearts what it worked in the heart of Christ and in the heart of Mary.

Mary, woman faithful to her vocation

9. Jesus is the Son of God, and just as he is the supremely Consecrated One, he is also the one most highly called. His calling is to the highest possible mission, namely, to accomplish the salvation of the human race by restoring its lost divine image and by renewing our intimacy with God. He responded to this call through absolute adherence to the Father's will: “When he came into the world, he said ... 'Behold, I come to do your will, O God'” (Hb 10:5.7; cf. Ps 40: 7-9). In the key moments of his salvific mission, Jesus renews his full assent to the Father's plan and the Father confirms his filial identity (cf. Mt 3:17; Mk 1:11; Lk 3:22; Jn 12:23-24.28).

But it is also true that every Christian has received a most high vocation: to become, in Christ, by the grace of the Spirit (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:14-16), a child of God (cf. 1 Jn 3:1-2). For this reason, every Christian, in the words of the Apostle, must live “in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience” (Eph 4:1-2). Furthermore, the vocation to become a child of God is identical with the “universal vocation to holiness,” as Vatican Council II **22** and other documents of the magisterium **23** have reminded us. Every disciple of the Lord is in fact called to bring this vocation to complete realization and maturity, “to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

In the language of the Church, however, the term “vocation” is not ordinarily used in reference to the baptismal call, but rather in connection with the call to ministry and consecrated life. The reason for this is probably that for most of us the baptismal call did not involve, at the moment of baptism, a conscious, existential experience. Through pure grace and the loving care of the Church and our parents we were baptized in the first days of our life. Then, as our intelligence gradually opened to knowledge of truth and our heart to the experience of love, we learned to recognize and call upon God as “our Father” (Mt 6:9).

10. The experience of being called to consecrated life is much different. In the dialectic of call and response we experienced something paradoxical: in the veiled language of events we perceived clearly that God was calling us to consecrated life, but we were aware, too, that God was waiting for a “free” response to which we felt “obliged” out of the obedience owed to the self-revealing Lord (cf. Rom 1 5; 16:26). We also understood that our response had to be total and definitive, a strictly personal response of faith, yet at the same time a response in need of the community's acknowledgment and the Church's guaranty.

From earliest times reflection on what this response involves has lead those called to consecrated life to look to Sacred Scripture to find authentic models of adherence to God's call. In the Old Testament they found the heroic response of Abraham (cf. Gn 12: 1-4), the prompt reception of the Word by the youthful Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 3:1-10), the unselfish bent of Isaiah (cf. Is 6:8), the anguished assent of Jeremiah (cf. Jer 1:410), and the immediate departure of Elisha from his father's house to follow Elijah (cf. 1 Kgs 19:19-21). In the Gospel we find the prompt response of Simon and Andrew, James and John (cf. Mt 4:18-22), Philip of Bethsaida (cf. Jn 1 :43-46), Matthew the publican (cf. Mt 9:9) and many others. All of these biblical figures have become

examples and vocational models of great value for the men and women who, down through the centuries, have felt themselves called by the Lord.**24**

11. Members of institutes of consecrated life, nonetheless, have found in Mary of Nazareth their loftiest vocation model (Lk 1:26-38). Mary's vocation to become the virgin mother of the Savior Son of God is extraordinary. Extraordinary, too, is her answer, the purest and most intense "yes" ever pronounced by a creature in response to a plan of the Creator.

Few pages of the Gospel have been studied and meditated as much as this Lukan passage. It is, all in one, a birth announcement, a narrative with elements characteristic of covenant formularies, and a vocation story.**25** It has been a widely used source of inspiration for the liturgy, homilies, hymns, spiritual writings, and art

In these many expressive forms, members of institutes of consecrated life have explored especially the multiple facets of the Virgin of Nazareth's *fiat*. They have seen it as an expression of freedom and sapient discernment (cf. Lk 1:34). Mary's *fiat* is also seen as empowered by God's grace; only a heart illumined by the Spirit and sustained by energy from on high (cf. Lk 1:35; 24:49; Acts 1:8) was able to utter the word that introduced the Eternal One into time and made of the Son of God the Son of man. Mary's *fiat* is virginal, springing from a heart unacquainted with infidelity and falsehood (cf. Ez 36:26-27). It is a nuptial *fiat*, whereby the womb of the Daughter of Zion became the bridal chamber in which the divine Word and human nature were joined. It is the "filial and maternal" **26** *fiat* of a woman who is aware that she is a daughter of God and that her consent will result in her becoming the Mother of the Messiah (cf. Lk 1:30-33). As covenant response, Mary's *fiat* is the fulfillment of Israel's *fiat* at Sinai (cf. Ex 19:8) **27** and the beginning of a new pact between God and humanity that was to be ratified in the blood of the Lamb (cf. Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; Mt 26:28; 1 Cor 11:25; cf. Ex 24:8). Mary's *fiat* is also seen as an assent that is both total, for it includes her body, soul and spirit, and definitive, for it extended throughout her life, to Calvary (cf. Jn 19:25-27) **28** and the Pentecostal fullness of Easter (cf. Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4). Her *fiat* carries within it allgenerations; as the friar theologian Thomas Aquinas explains, it was pronounced in the name of all humanity. **29** Mary's *fiat* is also creative, an essential moment of the new creation; it is related to the formation of the New Man, Jesus Christ, head of our renewed humanity. Mary's *fiat* is also an obedient *fiat*, an authentic expression of the spirituality of "the poor of the Lord." **30** It cancels out the primordial act of disobedience (cf. Gn 3:1-6) with a word of gentle love. It is also a *fiat* of peace, a word bringing together heaven and earth and reconciling the Creator with the creature. **31** It is, last of all, a merciful *fiat*, a gesture of compassion toward humanity wounded by sin that is performed by a privileged daughter of Adam in solidarity with her brothers and sisters. **32**

We understand, consequently, why the Church, seeing "her unconditional response to the divine call," proposes the Blessed Virgin as "model of ... total self-giving to God." **33** Candidates to consecrated life make a total and definitive commitment, in freedom and love and under the influence of grace, to follow Christ radically and to dedicate themselves fully to the Kingdom. For this reason they turn to the Virgin of the Annunciation and see in her the loftiest example of a woman faithful to her vocation.

12. In the Servite Family, as in all institutes of consecrated life, the Virgin of the Annunciation is the object of reverent love and contemplation.

The image of the Annunciation is connected to the very origins of the Order. The Blessed Virgin in the famous Florentine fresco, with her indefinable beauty and receptive bearing, is for all Servite men and women a reminding sign that recalls the eventful word, the salutary *fiat*. Her *fiat* is the response that we would like to have springing continually from our own hearts and always on our lips to express our commitment to God's plan for us. There is abundant evidence of the Servites' constant love for the Virgin of the Annunciation: the numerous churches of the Order dedicated to this mystery, the statement of the Constitutions that recalls how "from the fiat of the lowly servant of the Lord, [the friars in every age] have learned to receive the word of God and to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit," **34** the prayer that Servite men and women address to the "Virgin of

the Fiat” in the celebration of the *Vigilia de Domina*,³⁵ and the renewed *Angelus Domini* devotion.
36

Mary, first and perfect disciple

13. The theological foundation of consecrated life is Christ himself - his person, message and way of life. As Vatican II teaches, “the pursuit of perfect charity by means of the evangelical counsels traces its origins to the teaching and example of the Divine Master.”³⁷ Without that teaching and without his example, the special way of Christian living that we call consecrated life would have never arisen. Like that of every baptized person, consecrated life is patterned on Christ in terms of discipleship and following. It is a following of Christ that aims at being total and radical. Religious strive to make their own, as much as possible, the existential project that the Lord lived in his own earthly life as he proclaimed the Kingdom and accomplished the work of salvation. This project has as its basic traits the choice of a virginal life lived in voluntary poverty and in loving obedience to the Law and the word of the Father, and the creation of a community of disciples united in fraternity (cf. Mt 23 :8), mutual service (cf. Jn 13:14-15) and the building up of the Kingdom.

14. In the last thirty years, theologians and exegetes have taken up a patristic motif in their reflections on the Blessed Virgin ³⁸ and highlighted the theme of Mary as disciple of the Lord. Paul VI was a forerunner here. In his famous closing address to the third session of Vatican Council II he said that Mary “in her earthly life realized the perfect figure of the disciple of Christ.” ³⁹ And in his exhortation *Marialis cultus* he proposed the Blessed Virgin as the “first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples.” ⁴⁰ There are numerous texts of John Paul II in which Mary is called disciple. Two of them can be mentioned here. The first is in the exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, in which the Holy Father points out that the Blessed Virgin was “the first of his disciples. She was the first in time, because even when she found her adolescent son in the Temple she received from him lessons that she kept in her heart (cf. Lk 2:51). She was the first disciple above all else because no one has been 'taught by God' (cf. Jn 6:45) to such depth.” ⁴¹ The second text is from the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*. Here the theme of discipleship is explicitly connected to the following of Christ: “... in a certain sense Mary as Mother became the first 'disciple' of her Son, the first to whom he seemed to say: 'Follow me,' even before he addressed this call to the Apostles or to anyone else (cf. Jn 1:43).” ⁴² We can also recall that on 15 August 1987 a votive Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin was promulgated with the title “Mary, Disciple of the Lord.” ⁴³

15. Mary's features as disciple of the Lord are those we find in the Gospel portraits of her. For members of institutes of consecrated life committed to the radical following of Christ, Mary as disciple is example, reminder and counsel on how to follow Christ along the way of the Gospel. Here we are again faced with one of those paradoxes or apparent contradictions that characterize the figure of Mary of Nazareth. The Church proposes her as supreme model in the following of Christ, yet she is a woman who, unlike the apostles and other women - Mary Magadalen, Joan, Susana and many others (cf. Lk 8:2-3) - did not follow the Master as “he journeyed from one town and village to another, preaching and proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God” (Lk 8: 1). It seems in fact that during the years of his public life Mary was with her Son only at the beginning, in the messianic manifestation at Cana in Galilee (cf. Jn 21-12), and at the end, when the hour came for Jesus “to pass from this world to the Father” (Jn 13:1;cf. 19:25-27). There is one other episode at which Mary seems to have been present even if it's difficult to interpret in terms of her journey of faith. This is when Jesus' relatives went looking for him thinking he was “out of his mind” (Mk 3:21). ⁴⁴ In any case, the fact that Mary did not accompany her Son in his ministry means that the physical following of Christ, even if it was important at the beginning for defining the figure of the disciple, does not constitute the intimate essence of discipleship.

16. Mary's exemplarity as disciple is seen especially in the journey she travelled in her commitment to the Father's plan regarding her Son Jesus and in her acceptance of Jesus' preaching,

in which, "extolling a kingdom beyond the concerns and ties of flesh and blood, he declared blessed those who heard and kept the word of God (cf. Mk3:35; Lk 11:27-28) as she was faithfully doing (cf. Lk 2:19, 51)."**45**

It was a long journey that embraced the Blessed Virgin's whole life, a difficult journey in which she advanced only with "a particular heaviness of heart."**46** It was a journey of great and heroic faith**47** marked by violent persecution (cf. Mt 2:13-18) and incomprehension for her Son's actions (cf. Lk 2:48-50). Mary had to forego the acknowledgment of her own motherhood (cf. Mt 12:46-50; Mk3:31-35; Lk 11:27-28; Jn 2:4) and accept the mystery of the sword that pierced her heart in Jesus' excruciating death (cf. Lk 2:48-50; Jn 19:33-34). There was also the time of waiting after her Son's resurrection (cf. Lk 24:49; Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-6) and more suffering due to the persecution to which the early Church was subjected (cf. Acts 4:1-31; 6:8-8:3; 12:1-18; 28:2).**48**

It can be said without exaggeration that the Church proposes Mary as the first and perfect disciple because her life is an incomparable expression of the meaning of discipleship. Discipleship, first of all, requires *faith* (cf. Jn 14:1), which was such in Mary that she was identified simply as the one "who believed" (Lk 1:45). Her faith was also the cause of her beatitude (cf. *Ibid.*) and motherhood; "she conceived by believing."**49** Discipleship also includes *self-denial* (cf. Mt 16:24; Lk 14:26-27) and this was part of Mary's life insofar as she, unmindful of herself, served others (cf. Lk 1:39-45) and attended to the needs of her neighbor (cf. Jn 2:1-5). Discipleship also means *acceptance of the Word* (cf. Lk 1:38; 2:19, 51; cf. 11:27-28) and this was a characteristic attitude of Mary, "the Lord's poor one," raised in love and observance of the Law (cf. Lk 2:22-24, 27, 39, 41). Two other identifying marks of Jesus' friends (Jn 13:14-15) are *mutual service* (cf. Mk 10, 42-45; Mt 20, 24-28; Lk 22, 24-27) and *dedication to the cause of the Kingdom*, and Mary "devoted herself totally, as handmaid of the Lord, to the person and work of her Son."**50** As disciple, Mary also *shared in the destiny* of the Master (cf. Jn 15:20) and was inseparably bound to her Son in love, suffering (cf. Lk 2:34-35) and glory. Discipleship includes the *experience of the cross* (cf. Mt 16:24; Lk 14:27) and this experience reached its height when Mary stood full of faith at her Son's side and accepted the words of the dying Savior (cf. Jn 19:25-27). Lastly, active and prayerful vigilance (cf. Mt 24:22-44; Mk 13:33-37; Lk 21:36) is a characteristic of discipleship which we see in Mary, member and icon of the Church, as she waited for the coming of the Spirit (cf. Acts 1:14) and lived in ardent desire of the Lord's final coming: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'" (Rv 22:17).

17. Members of institutes of consecrated life are disciples who focus their attention on living out the *following of Christ* radically and wholeheartedly. Vatican II states that the evangelical counsels have "the power to conform the Christian more fully to that kind of poor and virginal life which Christ the Lord chose for himself."**51** Then, and not without a certain boldness, it adds "and which his Virgin Mother embraced also."**52** In making this affirmation the Council does not refer to any biblical text; rather it simply gives expression to an early insight which through the centuries became matured conviction and ecclesial experience. The values of discipleship verified in the life of the Blessed Virgin justify the conciliar affirmation. The immediate existential context apart, we can say that Mary embraced that "kind of life" which Jesus chose for himself and which serves as a demanding and challenging model for members of institutes of consecrated life. This makes the Blessed Virgin especially close to all men and women who follow the Lord in the way of consecrated life. Each one can say: Mary of Nazareth is my companion and my sister in the *sequela Christi*.

18. Sisters and brothers, Servants of St. Mary, the closeness of Mary the Disciple to our own lives as disciples is not simply a source of encouragement and legitimate spiritual delight. It is first and foremost a call to coherence, an admonition to authenticity and a summons to self-examination.

A call to coherence. This means faithfulness to one's vocation, persevering even in times of misunderstanding and at the hour of the cross, faithfulness "until death," as we say in the profession formula, **53** a faithfulness founded like Mary's on the Word as ground and purpose of our life commitment: "Lord, trusting in your Word, / I give you my word."**54**

An admonition to authenticity. We strive for authenticity, so that our following of Christ be genuine and all-embracing, giving unity and meaning to our lives despite the multiple activities in which they are involved and in which they seem to get fragmented. In this way our following of Christ, free of worldly compromises and irresponsible banalities, will be evangelical yeast, courageous witness, service of the Kingdom, and prophetic anticipation of the new heavens and new earth (cf. Rv 21:1).

A summons to self-examination. Here there are several points to be considered, First, with the Blessed Virgin's life as a mirror, we can see whether we live celibacy for the Kingdom (cf. Mt 19:12; 1 Cor 7:7-8) in such a way that our heart, free of worries for "the things of the world" (1 Cor 7:33.34), is inflamed with love for Christ and all God's children; whether, as "singular source of spiritual fertility in the world," **55** celibacy is understood as full availability for apostolic service; whether it is seen in daily life as a space for the solitude that facilitates dialogue with God; and whether, in eschatological perspective, it is lived as orientation to meeting the Bridegroom who is coming (cf. Mt 25:6).

Second, we have to see whether we offer our witness of poverty, as necessary as it is difficult, in the style of the Blessed Virgin, a woman of modest conditions (cf. Lk 2:24; Lv 12:8) and "profoundly permeated with the spirit of the poor of Yahweh" **56**; whether our poverty is conformed to the evangelical beatitude (cf. Mt 5:3; Lk 6:20); whether we feel sorrow and indignation for the unmeasured growth of poverty in the world and for the multiple forms of social injustice; whether, sensitive to "the cries of the poor" (cf. Jb 34:28; Prv 21:13; Jas 5:4), we, like the Blessed Virgin (cf. Lk 1:51-53), raise our voices in protest on their behalf and share with them the fruits of our labor through a simple and sober life style; **57** and whether we are persuaded that social justice will be obtained only by preaching to both rich and poor, without mystification, the "Gospel of Poverty."

Third, we are called to see whether our obedience is above all, like that of the humble Servant of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:38.48), acceptance of the Word; **58** whether it is a listening to the interior voice of the Spirit and availability for fraternal service (cf. Lk 1:39.45); and whether it is reverence for the Law of the Lord (Lk 2:22-24.27.39.41) - which means for us love of the Church and the community, respect for civil institutions (cf Lk 2:1-5) and dedication to the cause of the Kingdom.

Fourth, we must examine whether our fraternal fellowship, the pivot of our lives and precious inheritance from our First Fathers, **59** is modelled on that of the singular pre-Pentecostal community, whose members, with Mary at the center, "devoted themselves with one accord to prayer" (Acts 1,14), and on that of the early Jerusalem community (cf. Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35). We must not forget that we have made our own the life style of the primitive community through our acceptance of the *Rule of St. Augustine*. **60** It is a primary source of inspiration for our living "with one heart and one mind in prayer, listening to the word of God and breaking the eucharistic bread and the bread earned by our own labor watchful expectation of the Lord who is coming." **61**

Mary, woman consecrated for the mission

19. The teaching of the magisterium, theologians' reflections on consecrated life and the legislative texts of the various institutes, especially those founded after the Council of Trent (1545-1563) all shed light on the intrinsic relationship between consecration and mission. The *Instrumentum laboris* of the IX Synod of Bishops points out clearly the christological basis of this relationship: "As Christ was consecrated and sent into the world (cf. Jn 10:36), making his whole life a salvific mission, in a similar manner consecrated persons, called to reproduce in themselves the image of the first-born Son (cf Rom 8:29) through the action of the Spirit, must make their whole life a mission." **62**

We mention here the analogy which the synod recognizes between Christ, who was consecrated and sent in to the world, and consecrated persons, because Mary of Nazareth is the first

and highest expression of the relationship between consecration and mission. We are convinced of this and Sacred Scripture, when read in the light of the experience of consecrated life in the Church, confirms our conviction.

20. Mary's consecration and vocation were basically related to her messianic motherhood (cf. Lk 1:30-33). Her mission was to give birth to the Messiah and Savior. That she be his mother, she was called; that she be his worthy mother, she was consecrated. In the gospels, Mary of Nazareth is the "mother of Jesus" (Cf. Mk 3:31-32; Mt 2:11, 13-14, 20-21; Lk 2:33-34.48.51; Jn 2:1.3.5.12; 19:25-26).

Mary did for her Child what every mother does for her own child. She performed those very human, natural acts, such as clothing and feeding. She also performed the religious acts common to all the mothers in Israel, such as presenting the newborn in the Temple. But in the view of the gospels these deeds of the Blessed Virgin are not actions that pertain only to the private sphere; they always have a universal and perennial symbolic character that is valid for all times and for all of the Lord's disciples. In other words, they have salvific value. **63** Vatican II noted this explicitly: "She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented him to the Father in the temple.... Thus, in a wholly singular way she cooperated by her obedience, faith, hope and burning charity in the work of the Savior in restoring supernatural life to souls." **64**

The Church, in time, guided by the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 14:26; 16: 13- 15) and enriched by the patient research of exegetes and the insights of the mystics, has identified other missions of the Blessed Virgin that are closely connected to her messianic motherhood and follow from it: cooperation in the work of salvation (*Socia Redemptoris*), universal motherhood (*Mater viventium*), maternal mediation (*supplex Mater*), exemplarity in relation to the spousal, virginal and maternal characteristics of the Church (*typus Ecclesiae*) and in relation to the Church's holiness (*exemplar virtutum*). It is not our task here to treat each of these chapters of Church doctrine on the Mother of Jesus, but it will be instructive to show with one example that is abundantly illustrated by scholars how in the case of the Blessed Virgin mission flows directly from consecration.

21. Consecrated and overshadowed by the Spirit (cf Lk 1 :35), the Blessed Virgin, bearing in her womb the Son of God, carried out her first mission. She brought Christ the Savior to "the house of Zechariah" (Lk 1 :40), a priest of the Jerusalem temple, and of the elderly Elizabeth, who was carrying in her womb John the future Precursor. Jesus, thus, in the womb of his Mother, undertook a salvific journey, from Nazareth to a city of Judea (cf. Lk 1:39). And this journey was in a way a prelude to the great journey (cf. Lk 9:51-19:27) he would make from Galilee to Jerusalem to offer his life for the salvation of the human race.

The Visitation is a first pentecost, an outpouring of the Spirit. Mary, the new ark carrying the Mediator of the new Covenant, is also the sacred temple, the dwelling place of the Spirit. Each action and each word of that saving event has its source in the grace of the Spirit. The concern with which Mary hastens to make the journey draws its origin from the Spirit (cf. Lk 1:39) - St. Ambrose says that "the grace of the Holy Spirit knows no obstacles that slow its pace." **65** John's leap of joy in the womb of his mother (cf. Lk 1 :40.44) and Elizabeth's greeting of blessing to Mary (cf. Lk 1:41-42) come from the Spirit. It is the Spirit who makes it possible for Zechariah's wife to see in Joseph's spouse "the mother of the Lord" (cf Lk 1 :43) and for John to perceive the presence of the Messiah. And from the Spirit originates the grace that sanctifies the prophet and prompts the canticle that arises from the Blessed Virgin's heart (cf. Lk 1 :46-55).

Present day commentators of the Visitation are accustomed to call Mary the first evangelizer or the protomissionary. These titles do not seem exaggerated if you consider the salvific content of that grace-filled event, the people to whom it is directed, the form of the event - a journey by the Blessed Virgin that recalls the journey of the ark (cf. 2 Sm 6:11 15) - and its paradigmatic value. In all this we see Mary of Nazareth as the prototype, after Christ, of dynamic consecration and mission rooted in the Spirit.

22. The same is true of the Church. The disciples stayed on in Jerusalem and waited for "the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4; cf. Lk 24:49), i.e., to be "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts

1:5), and “they were all in one place together” (Acts 2:1). But when the Spirit, in the form of a strong driving wind and tongues of fire, descended on the first community, they opened the doors of the house and announced to the Judeans and to all who were in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 2:14), “devout Jews from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5), the mystery of the crucified and risen Lord (cf. Acts 2:22-24.36) and the good news of the Kingdom.

After being anointed with the Spirit the disciples began to announce the Kingdom to all peoples. Sharers in the ancient beatitude (cf. Is 52: 7), they went out into the world in obedience to the Lord's command: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19-20). The Spirit of Jesus is indeed “the principle agent of the whole of the Church's mission.” **66** The Spirit guides the mission and provides the interior energy that enlivens and supports it; and it is the Spirit “who sows the 'seeds of the Word' present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ.” **67**

23. The same is true of us Servants of Mary. Baptism and the anointing with chrism have made us partakers in the messianic mission of Christ with its prophetic, priestly and royal dimensions. But a special mission comes to us from our distinctive consecration to follow Christ in the Servite Family. The Servite Constitutions give expression to the relationship that exists between the Holy Spirit and our consecration and mission: “Urged on by the grace of baptism, the stirring of the Holy Spirit and our religious consecration, we Servants of Mary set out to witness Christian love. Desiring to express the charism of the Order, we give ourselves in service to others and so prolong the active presence of the Mother of Jesus in the history of salvation.” **68**

Our mission is therefore:

— “to witness Christian love”: a demanding commitment but the only one which responds to the teaching of Jesus, the example of the primitive Jerusalem community, the *Rule of St. Augustine*, and the spiritual patrimony of our First Fathers.

— to “give ourselves in service to others.” The Servite charism is to serve. Sent to Serve is the title the Prior General gave his letter to the Order for the fifth centenary of the evangelization of the Americas. **69** We are called to serve God, Our Lady, the Gospel, the Church, and all our brothers and sisters, whom, according to the admonition of John (1 Jn 4,20), we are to love and serve in a visible, concrete way.

— “to extend [our] fraternity to the people of today, who are divided by reason of age, nationality, race, religion, wealth and education.” **70** In this we follow the very example of Jesus who “was sent by God the Father to gather those who were divided into the unity of brothers and sisters.” **71**

— to “prolong the active presence of the Mother of Jesus in the history of salvation.” This expression requires a word of clarification, so that it doesn't sound like an intolerable presumption. How can we be a perpetuation of the active presence of the Blessed Virgin in the history of salvation? In God's plan of salvation Mary is a prayerful and effective, maternal and compassionate presence in the Church. **72** It is in fact the perennial doctrine of the Church that the Blessed Virgin, assumed into heaven, did not lay aside her salvific mission, but carries it forward on behalf of “the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home.” **73** In the context of Christ's unique mediation, the glorified Virgin is present in the Church fulfilling her “maternal mission of intercession and forgiveness, of protection and grace, of reconciliation and peace.” **74**

At the same time, Mary, the perfect disciple, is also a source of inspiration for all who have embraced consecrated life. We are convinced that many consecrated persons, drawing inspiration from the Blessed Virgin for their following of Christ, reproduce in a certain sense in their own lives the attitudes, way of life and spiritual features that were hers. In this way they make her present. **75** By God's grace and mercy, we hope to be counted among these consecrated persons. It is to this that we committed ourselves in solemn profession. **76** From our consecration, then, there derives for us the mission of prolonging in the Church today the active presence of the Mother of Jesus. This

means prolonging her salvific *fiat* (cf. Lk 1:38) through our readiness to be “aware of the call of the Spirit and to know life in the hearing of the Word.” **77** It means prolonging her song of thanksgiving and freedom (cf. Lk 1:46-55) through our commitment to “energetically support individuals and society in their struggle to be free.” **78** It means prolonging her compassionate mindfulness of others (cf. Jn 2:3) **79** through an habitual attitude of understanding and sympathy. **80** Lastly, it means prolonging her presence at the cross of Christ (cf. Jn 19:25) through the commitment to stand beside the numberless crosses where the “Son of Man is still being crucified.” **81**

Conclusion

24. At the dawn of the third millennium, despite the difficulties of the present time, **82** consecrated life appears rich in seeds of hope. **83** The reason for this is Christ who is Lord, Teacher and Bridegroom. In him consecrated life has its origin, meaning, inspirational force, supreme norm and eschatological promise. But after Christ and because of him, the future of religious life appears in the evangelical icon of the Blessed Virgin, in the value of her witness as disciple, in her gracious intercession, and in the maternal influence with which she sustains and accompanies the various institutes.

Consecrated life is an intrinsic, charismatic component of the Church. **84** Like the whole Church, institutes of consecrated life look to Mary, “sign of certain hope,” **85** to see in her, as in a most pure image, that which they strive to become in all their members.

At the end of this first section we can synthesize briefly the elements that have emerged in the course of our reflections. The Blessed Virgin is at the origin of consecrated life; the existential image of Mary is reflected in the life of consecrated persons; and there are serious reasons for asserting the harmony that exists between her and consecrated life.

25. In the course of history various persons such as Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist have been considered initiators of religious life. There are a number of reasons for this: their choice of celibacy, their austere, penitential lives, their search for the absolute, their radical service of the God of their Fathers, and the fact that they had disciples. But reflection on the figure of Mary led the Church to see eminently realized in her, because of the values of consecrated life she incarnated, the beginning of religious life in the Church. Theologians have noted the various senses in which this assertion is true.

It is true in a *chronological* sense, because Mary of Nazareth, as Vatican II notes in an already quoted text, was the first to embrace the “kind of poor and virginal life” that her Son, Christ the Lord, chose for himself. **86** She was thus the first to live, despite the different existential context, the form of discipleship that today we call consecrated life.

It is true in a *historical* sense, because the figure of the Mother of Jesus is certainly related to the rise, especially in women's ascetical circles, of the first organized forms of consecrated life.

It is true in a *causal* sense, first of all, because the Blessed Virgin, in virtue of her spiritual motherhood, is active in the birth and formation of those forms of life in the Church which we call institutes of consecrated life. Second, by her example she draws believers to the radical following of her Son: “Mary...with her example,” Leandro of Seville (+ 600) wrote to consecrated virgins, “*generated* you; ... with her witness she gave birth to you.” **87** Third, by her intercession she helps the faithful make their decision to respond to the Lord's call. It is the opinion of a number of theologians that the Mother present at the baptismal font where her children were born to the life of grace stands, too, at the altar where her children make their commitment to consecrated life.

We can conclude this paragraph with a carefully pondered statement of St. Thomas Aquinas: “Even though the full intensity of grace resided perfectly in Christ, still an inchoative full intensity was in his mother before Him. So with the keeping of the counsels under God's grace. This was done perfectly in Christ but as a prelude by his Virgin mother.” **88**

26. In a striking text Vatican II exhorts the members of institutes of consecrated life to “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.” **89**

By analogy and with due distinctions made, it can be said that one of the ways the Church today presents the Blessed Virgin to believers is through those institutes of consecrated life that make explicit reference to her evangelical witness. In their actions and attitudes the characteristics of Mary live on in the world today: the faith and obedience that were Mary's in her acceptance of God's plan for her, the concern she showed as bearer of grace in going to her relative Elizabeth, her faithful keeping of the Word, her trusting acceptance of the experience of sorrow, misunderstanding, refusal and persecution, her maternal presence at the cross, and her practice of constant prayer in oneness of mind and heart with the apostolic community as they awaited the Spirit.

From this viewpoint the institutes of consecrated life are, taken together, a kind of incarnate memory and living exegesis of the Mother of Jesus.

27. In the foregoing pages we have reflected on the reasons underlying the profound relationship that exists between Mary of Nazareth and consecrated life. We have highlighted four reasons: the consecration of the Blessed Virgin by the Holy Spirit and her total gift of self to the Lord through the power of the Spirit (n. 7-8); her fidelity to the vocation she received (n. 9-12); her condition as the first and perfect disciple of Christ (n. 13-18); and her consecration in view of mission (n. 19-23). Consecration, vocation, radical discipleship, mission: four values and four notes common to Mary and to the Church; and of these four notes the institutes of consecrated life are a visible memory.

The typology of a relationship

28. After having examined the reasons underlying the relationship between the Blessed Virgin and consecrated life, we can look next at the ways this relationship takes shape in the various institutes of consecrated life. This will help us gain a vital understanding and balanced view of the bond which unites us to Our Lady. Our selection of themes does not have, as they say nowadays, a scientific character; rather, we have simply chosen a few themes found in the various texts we examined - constitutions, documents of the magisterium, historical sources, scholarly studies, ascetical writings, and so forth. The results are nonetheless significant.

Mother

29. Vatican Council II sees in Mary of Nazareth the woman in whom the symbol of Eve, “the mother of all the living” (Gn 3,20), **90** comes to fulfillment in the order of grace. The Council recalls that “the Catholic Church taught by the Holy Spirit, honors her with filial affection and devotion as most beloved mother.” **91** The Council, furthermore, understands Mary's cooperation in the work of salvation in terms of a maternal role: the “motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she joyfully gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect.” **92**

Vatican II is a reliable and trustworthy interpreter of the ecclesial tradition and the *sensus fidelium* with regard to this chapter of mariological doctrine. Included among the faithful are the members of institutes of consecrated life and they declare in unison: Mary is our mother, mother of the individual members and - they often add - mother of the institute as such. **93**

30. The spiritual motherhood of Mary with regard to members of institutes of consecrated life is not essentially different from her motherhood with respect to all believers. Why, then, do consecrated persons, when they speak of themselves in relationship to the Blessed Virgin, emphasize the mother-child relationship? This is due, in our opinion, to several factors.

First, the doctrine of Mary's spiritual motherhood developed historically in the context of monastic theology. St. Augustine (+ 430) was a monk and his treatise on Holy Virginity, addressed to consecrated virgins, is considered one of the most important texts in the history of this doctrine. Mary, he says, "has co-operated by charity that the faithful, who are members of that Head [Christ], might be born in the Church." **94** Then some of the great representatives of Benedictine monasticism come to mind. Abbot Ambrose Autpert (+ 784) calls the Virgin "mother of the elect," "mother of believers," **95** and "mother of the nations." **96** St. Anselm of Canterbury (+ 1109) regularly speaks of Mary as "our mother" **97** and addresses her as "mother of the justified, the reconciled, the saved." **98** Rupert of Deutz (+ 1130), in his reflection on the salvific meaning of Mary's presence at the cross (cf. Jn 19,25), calls her "mother of us all." **99** It is thus a kind of family treasure that monasticism has passed on to later forms of consecrated life, which have accepted it cordially and have continued to enrich it.

Second, the celebration of the liturgy and the *lectio divina* offer members of institutes of consecrated life numerous opportunities for turning their attention to the Mother of the Lord. They contemplate her maternal activity toward Jesus, her firstborn Son (cf. Rom 8:29), and experience this activity continued in themselves - are they not the brothers and sisters of Jesus? and don't brothers and sisters have the same mother? They also admire her evangelical virtues - and exemplarity, we know, is one element of motherhood. **100** Active contemplation tends to reproduce in the one contemplating - the child or the disciple - the spiritual features of the model - the mother or the teacher. How many institutes of consecrated life have been born from the contemplation of salvific episodes in which the Virgin took part - the Annunciation, the Visitation, her compassionate presence beside the Cross? And how many have been born from the meditation of her virtues?

Third, the founding of an institute is a kind of birth, often accompanied by obstacles and contradictions. When approval is won, it is considered a grace, which the founders almost always attribute to a maternal intervention of the Blessed Virgin. For this reason, they say, Mary is the Mother of the institute and that the institute owes its existence to her. **101**

The recognition of this mother - child relationship gives rise to the frequent exhortation addressed to members of institutes of consecrated life to have a filial attitude toward the Blessed Virgin Mary, an attitude of gratitude and filial love, trust and filial abandonment, prayer and filial imitation. This relationship, moreover, is firmly implanted in the heart of consecrated persons, aware as they are of the Virgin's role in their birth to the life of grace and in their journey of radical Christian discipleship. But the invitation to "filial life" is phrased in careful language that tends to avoid infantilism and the automatic transference to the order of grace of those modalities of the mother-child relationship that are subject to cultural conditioning.

31. Our First Fathers and the first generations of Servites considered Mary, the Mother of Christ, to be their "glorious Lady," whose mercy they confidently sought and to whose loving service they were "singularly dedicated." **102** They felt that the Blessed Virgin was not only "their Lady" but also their "special refuge" and "unique *mother*." **103** There is abundant evidence of the early Servites' custom of addressing Mary as their Mother, but here we recall only the endearing figure of Blessed Francis of Siena (+ 1328). As a young man "Francis chose the glorious Virgin as his *special mother* and Lady," **104** and later as a friar much experienced in the life of the spirit, he prayed to her as "dearest mother," "sweetest mother," "mother of grace and mercy." **105**

"Lady and Mother": the first of these constantly paired terms in Servite spirituality points to the transcendence of the Virgin, assumed into heaven and seated at the side of the King of glory (cf. Ps 24:8-10; 1 Cor 2 8; Ps 45:11-16); the second, to her compassionate closeness to men and women, her children in exile - to use an expression common at the time of the Seven Founders - in a world in need of grace. For Servite men and women it has not been difficult to bring harmoniously

together the loving service to be rendered to the Lady and the filial devotion owed to the Mother.

For Servites, accustomed to pause and contemplate the Mother at the foot of her Son's cross, it has not been difficult to accept what contemporary exegesis, confirmed by the teaching of the tradition and the magisterium, points out with regard to the dying Jesus' words to the beloved Disciple "Behold, your Mother"(Jn 19: 27). Those words express the Redeemer's personal gift of his own Mother to every disciple, who is to accept her with grateful spirit and to bring her "into everything that makes up his inner life, that is to say, into his human and Christian 'I' : he took her to his own home."**106**

Patron

32. Many institutes consider the Blessed Virgin their patron and call on her with an extraordinary variety of titles. On a fixed date they celebrate her memory with special solemnity. For all the members of the institute that day is also a fitting and awaited opportunity for remembering their origins, reaffirming their identity and charism, reinforcing their mutual bonds, thanking God for the benefits granted the institute, and for looking ahead to the future. The patronal feast day becomes in this way a feast of both the Blessed Virgin and the institute.

33. In some institutes, especially those with their roots in the 12th-14th centuries, the term *Patron* has maintained certain values and characteristics connected to juridical and cultural institutions of the Middle Ages. The group of disciples that decided to follow Christ with evangelical radicalness, conscious on the one hand of their own weakness and spiritual unworthiness and aware on the other of the Blessed Virgin's goodness and the efficacy of her intercession, freely entrusted themselves to her, placed themselves under her protection, and dedicated their church and home to her. The Blessed Virgin became the Patron and Advocate of the group and the church was named after her. According to the vassalage structure, she was to protect the group, assume responsibility for its defense and seek for the members of the group both pardon and an abundance of merits. They would be her clients or servants and she would be their Lady. They would repay her protection with their love, acts of homage (*reverentiae*) and praise, and especially their commitment to make themselves pleasing to her Son.

34. Mary as patron of the Servites fits into this typology. Some elements of the typology have not endured, but certain aspects have lasting value: a sense of one's spiritual unworthiness, which precludes attitudes of self-sufficiency and pharisaical self-satisfaction (cf. Lk 18:11-12), confident recourse to the holy Mother of the Lord, devotion to her that gains refined expression in art and poetry and is translated into compassionate service of one's brothers and sisters, and attention to the Blessed Virgin as the new Woman enfolded in the love of God - a view which became the premise for a respectful attitude toward the dignity of all women.

Like the early Servites, we too consider Mary to be our *Patron*. We, too, brothers and sisters of the Servite Family, want to offer her our devout *service*. In the light of our renewed *Constitutions* this service appears as the commitment "to understand the significance of the Virgin Mary for the modern world" **107** and "to know more about Mary, God's Mother and ours, and her mission in the mystery of salvation." **108** Our service also includes doing all that we can, aware as we are of the divisions among Christians, "so that the Daughter of Zion become a symbol of unity for all," **109** for she "shared to the very full in the will of Christ to re-gather the scattered children of God."**110** We are to "propose as a model of the confidence of God's children ... the humble woman who placed all her hope in the Lord" **111** and offer her as an expression of service our life **112** and our apostolate, which, with her guidance, seeks to be generous and compassionate presence to our brothers and sisters who are suffering and in need. **113** Lastly, we serve her through our devotion, "drawing on practices proper to our living tradition and creating others which flow from renewed service to the Virgin." **114**

Queen and Lady

35. Christ, the slain and risen Lamb, is “King of kings and Lord of lords” (Rv 19:16). On earth, though, he was not a king according to the categories of this world (cf. Jn 18:36): he reigned from the cross and with the power of love. Furthermore, the King, paradoxically, was the Servant of his subjects. He washed their feet (cf. Jn 13 :4-5), gave his life for them (cf. 1 Jn 3:16; Eph 5:2; Jn 15:13), and wanted their relationships to be shaped by his example of love (cf. Jn 13:34-35; 15:12.17) and mutual service (cf. Jn 13: 14-15; Mt 20:25-28; Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:24-27).

Mary is Queen and Our Lady because of Christ and like Christ. Vatican II, sanctioning a tradition going back to the fourth century, reaffirmed authoritatively the doctrine of Mary's regality: “when her earthly life was over,” she was “exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son.”**115**

Today there is a noticeable reluctance to apply the title “queen” to the Blessed Virgin. It is judged to belong to a bygone age. Some say it brings to mind more a mariology of privileges than a mariology of service. This discussion has provoked a useful examination of the nature of Mary's regality, its theological basis and the biblical background against which it has to be understood. **116**

36. Despite the contemporary controversy, in present day constitutions the titles “Queen” and “Lady” come up with a certain regularity and have substantially the same meaning. In some cases, perhaps, it is possible to note a difference between them. The title *Queen* is used to indicate, in an almost official way, the final state of the Virgin, seated beside her Son, the King of glory. The title *Lady* is used with a tone and in a context that are more familial; it alludes to her presence as mistress of the place - monastery or convent - where the members of the institute have placed themselves voluntarily at her service and are engaged in the radical following of Christ.

The titles *Queen* and *Lady* and, consequently, the acknowledgment of the Virgin's “dominion,” are very frequent in Benedictine monasticism. Their use underwent a notable development in the Cistercian reform movement and in the orders of evangelical-apostolic life that arose from the beginning of the twelfth century onwards. The famous antiphon *Salve Regina misericordiae*, already known in the eleventh century, is perhaps the most characteristic expression of the way in which the monks and the friars turned in supplication to the Blessed Virgin. But in that era, along with the vigorous affirmation of Mary's regality, her maternal dimension and mediating function are attested with equal conviction. In Mary, the exercise of regality is maternal service of compassion. This thought led, already in the thirteenth century, to modifying the beginning of the antiphon with the inclusion of the term *Mother*: “Hail, holy Queen, *Mother of mercy*.”

From that time onwards the paired terms “Queen” and “Mother” appeared often in liturgical, legislative and ascetical texts of institutes of consecrated life. At times they took on an official character, as in the case of the Carmelite family, for whom the Blessed Virgin is the “Queen and Mother of Carmel.”**117**

37. In constitutional texts today, the title “queen,” though always used with substantially the same meaning, bears various nuances that emphasize one or other aspect of the Blessed Virgin's regality or reflect the situation in which this regality is exercised. Sometimes, for example, the title refers to the glorious destiny and dignity of the Mother of the Lord, now fully conformed to her Son and sharing in his regality. Members of institutes of consecrated life look with joy to this reality of grace and willingly place themselves under the protection of the Queen of mercy. In other cases, attention is drawn to the way she reigns - like her Son, by the power of love alone - and to the domain where she exercises her regality - in the interior domain, *i.e.*, in the person's heart. This is highlighted in the De Montfort tradition where she is called upon as “Queen of hearts.”**118**

At other times the title is related to the eminent way in which Mary of Nazareth practiced the evangelical virtues. She is the Queen of virtues, Queen of humility, Queen of purity, etc. Consecrated persons contemplate her virtues and strive to reproduce in themselves the same expressions of Christian perfection.

As a last example we can note that some religious, identifying themselves with Mary as queen, understand her queenship as primacy with regard to specific categories of persons. She is,

for example, Queen of virgins or Queen of the Apostles. This last title, showing the Blessed Virgin at the center of the nascent apostolic community (cf. Acts 1:14) is especially cherished by institutes with a strong apostolic charism.

38. The use of the title “Queen” for Mary is, we see, frequent in institutes of consecrated life. In conformity with the directions taken in post conciliar mariology, however, there is noticeable concern that it not be understood in such a way as to create a sense of distance between the “glorious Queen of heaven” and consecrated persons, who, as pilgrims on earth, struggle daily to meet the challenges of following Christ radically. When it is purified of every political connotation, the authentic nature of Mary's regality is recognized. We can characterize Mary's regality by saying that it is:

— eminent sharing in the regal condition of the People of the new Covenant (cf. 1 Pt 2:9-10; Rv 1:6; 5:10; Ex 19:6), all of whom are all called to reign with Christ (cf. 2 Tm 2:12; Rom 5:17; Rv 22:5).

— the consequence of the Mother's involvement in the paschal mystery of her Son with its dimensions of humiliation, passion and glory (cf. Phil 2:6-11). It is by reason of this involvement that she who shares in his humiliation shares also in his glory. - the final outcome of Mary's journey of discipleship. At the end of her earthly life she was borne to the Kingdom of her beloved Son (cf. Col 1:13) and received for her faithfulness “the crown of life” (Rv 2: 10; cf. 1 Cor 9:25). This outcome has universal significance because the Blessed Virgin, now having attained fullness of freedom and full communion with Christ, is the regal icon of the advance of the Church and of all of history and creation, as it moves forward toward becoming “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rv 21:1; cf. Is 65:17), God's dwelling, in which “there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain” (Rv 21:4; cf. Is 25:8).**119**

— the exercise of her maternal intercession on behalf of the Kingdom and the progressive annihilation of God's and humanity's enemies. Scripture identifies these enemies in “every sovereignty and every authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24), as well as in the devil (cf. Hb 2:14), sin (cf. Hb 1:3; 9:13) and death (cf. 1 Cor 15:26). Enemies are all and everything that engenders violence, oppression, war, the destruction of nature, racism, and the substitution of the true and holy God with the sinister idols of power, glory and money.

— her ongoing openness to the action of the Spirit. The obedient *fiat* of Mary (cf. Lk 1,38), fruit of the Spirit, has become, in the economy of grace, maternal influence. In their queen, men and women see how they, too, can open themselves to the gift of the Spirit and how the Spirit can create in them, as in her, a new heart (cf. Ez 36,26-27), lead them into the “new creation” (cf. Mt 19,28), and arouse in them the same mind that was in Christ (cf. Phil 2,5). Mary cooperates, in the Spirit, in the consolidation and development of the Kingdom.

— the confirmation of the law of salvation history according to which humiliation is followed by exaltation and disgrace by triumph. Mary is the visible expression of God's constantly acting to scatter the proud and raise up the lowly (cf. Lk 1:51-52). She is as well the full realization of the Lord's word: “Those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Lk 14: 11).

The title Queen, we can note in conclusion, confirms the extraordinariness of Mary of Nazareth's life as “*Servant* of the Lord” (Lk 1:38).

39. For us in the Servite Family, it is customary to call upon the Blessed Virgin as “Our Lady” (*Domina nostra*) and as “Queen of your Servants” (*Regina Servorum*) and to see ourselves, even if unworthy, as her servants. It is our perennial tradition and the charism of our life. The early literature of the Order, as well as its legislative texts, liturgy and iconography, are filled with evidence of how the friars conceived their relationship with the holy Mother of Christ in terms of Our Lady and her Servants. Here it will be enough to recall, for our common consolation, the fragment of the “Constitutions booklet” (*constitutionum libellus*), which contains our first Seven Fathers “profession formula.” Noteworthy are the theological and christological sense they attributed to their service of Our Lady:

Fearing their own imperfection, upon wise counsel, they humbly brought themselves with the most complete heartfelt devotion to the feet of the Queen of heaven, the glorious Virgin Mary, that she, as mediatrix and advocate, might reconcile and commend them to her Son, and filling up their imperfection with her abundant love, might mercifully obtain for them an overflowing fullness of merit.

*Thus it is that, for the glory of God, giving themselves into the service of the glorious Virgin His Mother, they wished henceforth to be called Servants of St. Mary, taking up a way of life upon the counsel of wise men.***120**

The christological sense of service to the Blessed Virgin comes to light in another page of the same text. The author, in interior conversation with the Mother of Jesus, mentions that in the same year, 1233, both the Order and St. Philip were born. He then asks the question: “O most sweet Lady, what are you doing?” In reply to his own question he grasps the precise meaning of Mary's intervention:

You are making your future servant in resemblance of your Son. **121**

For us, as for the First Fathers and so many other saintly brothers and sisters, to serve Our Lady is a source of joy and a claim to glory. **122** Very early in our history the friars of the Order, happy to live in the constant presence of their Lady, understood as addressed to themselves the exclamation that the Queen of Sheba addressed to Solomon. It is an exclamation that for centuries has stood out above the arch of the sanctuary of the basilica of Monte Senario:

Happy these servants of yours Happy are they who stand always before you (cf. 1 Kgs 10:8).

We have already said how we, with creative fidelity to our tradition, understand this service to the Virgin. **123**

The regal and compassionate figure of Our Lady continues to be a source of vital inspiration for us. As we turn our eyes to her, our gaze moves beyond and settles, in wonder and adoration, on Jesus, Servant and King. This is true because the only order that we Servants receive from our Queen is to carry out the commands of her Son (cf. Jn 2:5).

Teacher

40. Jesus is Teacher and Lord (cf. Jn 13:13-14). He is our only Teacher (cf. Mt 23:8.10), a “teacher come from God” (Jn 3:2), “meek and humble of heart” (Mt 11:29), the only one who knows the Father (cf. Mt 11: 27) . Those who believe in him, accept his teaching and follow in his footsteps are his disciples (cf. Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23)

The Teacher, however, wanted his disciples to share in his magisterial role, just as he, “the light of the world,”(Jn 8:12) also wanted them to be “the light of the world” (Mt 5,14). Before ascending to the Father he sent the “eleven disciples” (Mt 28:16) on a universal mission. He ordered them: “Go and make disciples of all nations, *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20). The Church, therefore, is Teacher by its very institution. Vatican II says that the Church is “by the will of Christ the teacher of truth.”**124** The Church has, consequently, the serious task of teaching all people those truths that are the way to heaven. But she is also “experienced in human affairs”**125** and must use this experience to help all men and women to live and defend those values which are seen in the light of the Gospel to be inherent in the human person.

41. Mary of Nazareth is a teacher, too. But her magisterium does not derive from the office of teaching (*munus docendi*) that the Teacher entrusted to the Church. It is rather a charismatic teaching role; she is teacher because she is mother and disciple.

As mother and like every mother, the Blessed Virgin performed on earth the tasks of teacher and educator for her son Jesus. Together with St. Joseph she transmitted to him the values of their Jewish culture and the spirituality of the “poor of the Lord,” in which she excelled.**126** Very probably, Mary was also a teacher of the early Church, *i.e.*, a source of information regarding the events of Jesus' childhood.**127** Reading together Lk 2:19.51 and Acts 1:14, Christian authors spoke of the “school of the Mother,” where the apostles and evangelists, attentive to her teaching (*ipsa*

docente), learned about Jesus and his doctrine.¹²⁸ She continues now from heaven to carry out a magisterial role by her example on behalf of her children in the order of grace. The purpose of this activity is to lead them to the imitation of Jesus: “Just as parents teaching gains in efficacy when matched by the example of a life characterized by human and Christian prudence, so too the gentleness and fascination coming from the noble virtues of the immaculate Mother of God attract souls irresistibly to the imitation of the divine model, Jesus Christ.”¹²⁹ It was through the perfection of her learning as a disciple that Mary became teacher. She was first and foremost a disciple. She learned about her Son and his mission from the angel Gabriel, Elizabeth, the shepherds, the wise men, and from Simeon and Anna. Ecclesial tradition holds that in her long life experience the Virgin assimilated progressively and profoundly both the teaching contained in her Son's words and deeds and the values and practices of the Kingdom. She assimilated them in a wise and personal way, conserving and reflecting in her heart (cf. Lk 2:19,51) on the ancient prophecies and the words she herself heard, as well as on all the ordinary and extraordinary deeds she witnessed. John Paul II notes: “She is the first of those 'little ones' of whom Jesus will say one day: 'Father, ... you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes' (Mt 11:25).”¹³⁰ At the Annunciation the Son was revealed to her and in the years of his hidden life she was “in daily contact with the ineffable mystery of God made man.” This revelation and contact, however, did not dispense with faith; rather her faith was tested in the adversities that accompanied Jesus' infancy and the hidden years of Nazareth.¹³¹

42. Early forms of consecrated life were sensitive to the image of the Blessed Virgin as Teacher. This was true in two settings especially.

First, in the groups of consecrated virgins, to whom Mary of Nazareth was proposed as Teacher almost spontaneously. St. Ambrose of Milan (+ 397), speaking to virgins, calls Mary “teacher of virginity,” ¹³² *i.e.*, of the state of life they profess, and “teacher of humility,” ¹³³ *i. e.* , of the virtue that is traditionally connected to virginity as its defense and guarantee. And since “the first incentive for learning comes from the nobility of the *teacher*,” ¹³⁴ consecrated virgins should not have any hesitation in learning about the ideal they pursue from Mary, “most noble” Mother of God.

Second, in monastic settings, the monks, accustomed to pondering the Word, took Mary of Nazareth as their teacher for the *lectio divina*.¹³⁵ They saw her as a thoughtful woman, a daughter of Israel, accustomed like her people to the unhurried ways of God and to interpreting the present in the light of Scripture, which is both memory and prophecy.

The title “teacher” does not appear often in presentday constitutions, but it is not uncommon to find texts in which members of institutes of consecrated life are exhorted to *learn* from the Virgin how to follow Christ radically and eucharistical texts that ask her to *teach* them one or the other aspect of the life of discipleship.

43. With regard to the metaphor “teacher,” our experience is not dissimilar from others. With important aspects of our life in mind, we too call on her saying “teach us.” ¹³⁶ But there are also texts in which we call on Mary using the title Teacher. In a hymn from the important office of *St. Mary of the Servants*, for example, the Servants' supplication is addressed to the Blessed Virgin with the words “Lady, Teacher, Mother”:

We humbly pray:

Protect your Servants, O Lady,

instruct your followers, O Teacher,

Watch over your children, O Mother. 137

In *Litanies of the Servants of Mary*, in which material from several litanies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has been retrieved, we find the following invocations:

Hail Mary, teacher of holiness

Teacher of humility

Teacher of obedience
Teacher of fortitude
Teacher of contemplation
*Teacher of service.***138**

For all institutes of consecrated life, including our own, the Mother of Jesus is teacher, not for her notions about God, but because of her great faith in God; or, as they used to say in the Middle Ages, more for her wisdom than her learning, more for her experience than her knowledge.

Guide

44. The metaphor *guide*, closely associated to that of shepherd, comes up frequently in the books of the Covenant, both in the first and in the second phase. The Lord is shepherd and guide of his people. In reference to the Exodus epic, deeply etched in the historical memory of Israel is the vision of God who *guides* the chosen people wandering in the desert “The Lord preceded them, in the daytime by means of a column of cloud to *guide* them, and at night by means of a column of fire to give them light” (Ex 13:21; cf. 15 23). Among the most moving and theologically elevated texts of the Hebrew Scriptures are the pages of Ezechiel (34) and Isaiah (40:10-11) on God as the Shepherd who gathers and defends the flock, leads it out to pasture and gently cares for all the sheep. Guide of the whole people, the Lord is also guide of each devout Israelite, as we see in the reassuring twenty-third psalm: “He refreshes my soul. He guides me in right paths for his name's sake” (Ps 23:3).

Jesus, incarnation of the image of the Good Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:11.14), is the guide of the new messianic people. He walks ahead of his own (cf. Mk 10:32; Lk 19:28), showing the way of salvation that leads by the cross. After the resurrection he is both the Lamb and the Shepherd who “will guide them to the springs of life-giving water” (Rv 7:17; cf. Is 49:10).

45. The Christian tradition has applied the title *guide* (*dux*) to the Blessed Virgin, too. This came about especially in two ways. First, the Fathers saw in Mary the new Miriam (cf. Ex 15:20-21).**139** Her Magnificat is the song of the new era and she *guides* the chorus of those who praise God for Christ's definitive victory over Satan, the real murderous Pharaoh. Second, they saw Mary of Nazareth as a woman experienced in consecrated life who *guides* all those who embrace this form of Christian discipleship. Venantius Fortunatus (+ 600 ca.) says that “the Virgin Mary ... *guides* the sheep of the virginal flock of the Lamb”**140** and St. Leander of Seville (+ 600 ca.) calls her “Mother and guide of virgins.”**141**

It is this last sense that predominates in the monastic literature on consecrated life. The Virgin is an experienced guide the summit, reached the shore. For this reason she can guide others on the way that leads . She knows the way, has scaled to the destination, in the ascension to the peak, in the crossing to the port. The destination, the peak, the port, is Christ.

The metaphor *guide* recalls others such as star **142** and carries with it spontaneously the ideas of protection, defense and companionship . Some , among whom the Carmelite martyr Blessed Edith Stein (+ 1942), see the Blessed Virgin as more than a model placed before us or a person walking beside us; rather, Mary takes us by the hand and guides us on the journey toward God.**143**

46. Obviously these images and metaphors are valid not only for consecrated life, but they have in fact found special endorsement in this context. In the constitutions of institutes of consecrated life the Blessed Virgin is presented as guide in the life of contemplation, in the realization of self, in apostolic commitment, and so on.

In our Constitutions the Blessed Virgin is presented as “support and *guide* in our life of prayer.” **144** This is connected to the ancient custom of addressing the Virgin with the angelic salutation before every hour of the divine office. With it we “ask her merciful intercession so that she accompany and sustain our prayer.” **145** It also expresses our desire to pray with her and like

her. There is also the epilogue of the Constitutions, which, without using the term, refers to the Blessed Virgin at the foot of the cross as our guide in our commitment of service. **146** This text is especially cherished by us because it refers to what constitutes our charism- service - and it joins the evangelical image of the *Mother beside the cross* of her Son with the theological image of the *Virgin guide*.

Model

47. For the disciples of Christ there is no model other than Christ himself. For every disciple, whether lay, consecrated or ordained, Jesus is the prototype of holiness. He proposed himself as model: “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:15). His disciples are to follow his example especially through service (cf. Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; Lk 22:27) and love (cf. Jn 13:34-35). Jesus is the supreme model because even in his human condition he is the Holy One of God (cf. Mk 1 :24; Acts 3: 14), the obedient Son with whom the Father is well pleased (cf. Mk 1:11; Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22), the Anointed One filled with the Spirit (cf. Jn 1:32-33; Lk 4:16-21), and the Teacher of truth (cf. Mt 22:16). Since Christ is the model, all his disciples have the duty to imitate and follow him (cf. Mk 8:34; Lk 14:27; Mt 10:38).

According to Vatican II, “the teaching and *example* of Christ provide the foundation” **147** of the religious state, which “constitutes a closer imitation and an abiding reenactment in the Church of the form of life which the Son of God made his own when he came into the world to do the will of the Father and which he proposed to the disciples who follow him.” **148** The imitation of Christ, then, by the members of institutes of consecrated life, seems to have this specific character: it constitutes an intentionally radical attempt to live that “form of life” **149** which Jesus historically chose for himself. This imitation, moreover, is not simple *mimesis*, the reenactment of the transient historical-cultural modalities according to which Christ lived, but the appropriation of the ideal motivations that determined his choice of life style.

48. In the light of Christ, Mary is seen as the *Disciple* and as model for all the other disciples. It is an age-old insight. Already St. Ambrose (+ 397) proclaimed that “Mary was such that her very life is teaching for all.” **150** In the period after the Council the doctrine of the exemplarity of Mary, “who shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues,” **151** has undergone extraordinary development.

With regard to consecrated life it can be said that there is no document of the magisterium regarding her that does not propose her as model, just as there are no constitutions that do not extol the exemplary value of the Mother of Jesus for consecrated life.

Here it will be enough to present, because of its valuable synthesis and characteristic terminology, the text of the working document prepared for the IX Synod of Bishops. Exemplarity is the main category.

Through her unconditional response
to the divine call and
her interior consecration
through the Holy Spirit,
[Mary] is the *model* of vocation and of total self-giving to God.

She lived virginity for the sake of the Kingdom,
humility, evangelical poverty
and a total obedience to God's plan.

She is the first disciple

and the incomparable *example* of following Christ, the Lord.

Through her dedication to the mystery and mission of her Son, she shines as a *model* of apostolic and ecclesial service. In her life, “which is a *model* for all,” the charisms of consecrated life are reflected as in a *mirror*.

Both in the solitude of monasteries and in the midst of the events of the world and society, she is the *model* of spouse and virgin - especially for consecrated women - in her dedication to contemplation and self-sacrifice for the apostolate.**152**

The elements proposed in this remarkable synthesis find rich development in the constitutions of institutes of consecrated life according to their particular charisms. There is no need to insist, but only, if anything, to point out that the term *model* is not to be understood in the sense of an ideal, static reference detached from the context in which consecrated life is lived. It has to be understood rather in the sense of a rich and adaptable source of inspiration for the most varied situations.

This is the experience of institutes of consecrated life with regard to Mary. For centuries they have turned to her and found in her new energy and new life-giving inspiration. It is astonishing how these institutes, with such different structures and charisms, affirm that they find in the Blessed Virgin a fundamental source of inspiration for their life.

49. For us in the Servite Family, too, the Blessed Virgin is a source of vital inspiration. We affirm it in the first article of the Constitutions: “Moved by the Spirit, we commit ourselves, as did our First Fathers, to witness the Gospel in fraternal communion and to be at the service of God and all people, *drawing abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord.*” **153** This means that we turn to Mary, not only occasionally and for marginal matters, but tenaciously and in terms of the essence of our life and charism. From her, Disciple and Servant, permeated with the wisdom of Israel and open to the newness of the Gospel, we want to receive clear guidance for living our vocation of Christian discipleship and service to God and all people.

Several texts of the Constitutions draw attention to particular aspects of Mary's exemplarity. She is “creation's sublime model of prayerfulness” **154** and for this reason we take her as model in our commitment “to live listening to the Word of God” **155** and “attentive to the promptings of the Spirit.” **156** There is also her example of compassion **157** and hope, which urges us to be compassionate and to instill confidence in the hearts of those who are insecure and diffident. **158** We recall, too, her compassion at the cross, which urges us to have a compassionate heart ready “to understand and alleviate human suffering.” **159** In short, nothing in our life and apostolic mission is beyond Mary of Nazareth's exemplary influence.

The Blessed Virgin, icon of Gospel life, draws the attention of her Servants. The early friars used to want to hold their gaze fixed on their Lady, “as the eyes of a maid are on the hands of her mistress” (Ps 123:2). There continues in the Order a rooted tradition of lifting one's gaze to the Blessed Virgin. At times it is supplicant, imploring grace and mercy; at times, contemplative, resting with awe on the holy and glorious figure of the Theotokos; at times, vigilant, moved by the desire to carry out promptly the Lady's orders; and at times it is pure and intense in the vision of the beauty of the beloved Woman.

But as we have already said, our eyes, after resting on Mary, are drawn to and fixed on Christ. They move forward, so to speak, from the Servant of the Lord, the Queen of mercy, the Mother beside the Cross, and settle on the holy Servant Jesus, the Priest who is able “to sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb 4,15), the crucified Son. Attention to Mary always opens to the following of Christ. In the Supplication of the Servants we turn to Mary and pray that she “renew our sacred, timeless commitment to follow Christ.” **160**

Sister

50. Jesus, “born of a woman”(Gal 4:4), son of Mary of Nazareth and son of God the Most High, is the brother of all.

With the Incarnation “the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with every person,” **161** becoming the brother of every man and every woman - “He who consecrates and those who are being consecrated all have one origin. Therefore, he is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Heb 2:11; cf. 2:17). Jesus himself, in the fullness of his resurrection glory, after calling the disciples his friends (cf. Jn 15:15), now calls them “my brothers” (Jn 20,17; Mt 28:10). With Easter the redemption is accomplished. His Father is also the Father of his disciples, and for this reason he calls them his brothers. As St. Paul says, Jesus is “the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom 8:29), “the firstborn from the dead” (Col 1:18).

In Jesus, the bonds of fraternity are not limited to the human race; in the mysteries of creation and the Incarnation they extend to the whole cosmos. In fact, “in him were created all things” (Col 1:16; cf. Jn 1:3) and according to the divine plan all things are to be summed up in him, *i.e.*, related to him as their head (cf. Eph 1:10). The holy humanity of Christ, generated from the Blessed Virgin, is joined as creature to the entire creation. We know that creation, which “was made subject to futility” (Rom 8:20), will also be redeemed and take part in the freedom of Christ in glory. **162**

Therefore, the disciple who looks at reality with the eyes of the Master says of every man and woman, “He is my brother; she is my sister.” And in contemplation of the created world, the disciple experiences a sensation of fraternal kinship with all creatures in Christ.

The disciples who have embraced monastic and religious life, in which fellowship is an essential component, are especially able to experience the joyful reality of “brother Christ” and “sister creation.” And here it is a delight to remember the witness of friar Francis of Assisi. He “surrounded the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love because she made of the Lord of majesty *our brother*.” **163** He experienced as brothers the sun, the wind and fire, and as sisters the moon, the stars and water.

51. “Sister” as a Marian title is ancient, even if not of frequent occurrence. In the early centuries it expressed especially veneration. **164** Today it is used to call to mind the common condition shared by Mary of Nazareth and the disciples of Christ in the orders of both nature and grace. Paul VI had a special liking for the title *sisteri* **165** and used it in doctrinally important texts. **166**

The Blessed Virgin is our sister. Theologians list the reasons for this assertion. She is a creature, part of the cosmos, with our same origin and limits, and she is directed to the same goal as the other creatures. She is a *daughter of Adam*, even if a privileged one, and she thus shares human nature with us, including the experience of suffering, the mystery of death and our irrepressible directedness to the fullness of life, truth and love. She is the *daughter of Sion*; she belongs as such to the descendance of Abraham (cf. Lk 1:55) and acknowledges him, with us but before us, as “our father in the faith.” **167** She is hailed as “*the most excellent fruit of redemption*,” **168** which means that she like us has been redeemed by Christ, albeit “in a more exalted fashion” **169** and in a different way. She is a member of the Church, even if the pre-eminent one. **170** With us and like us, she is daughter and disciple of the Church and shares in the fellowship created by the Spirit.

In the history of religious life the case of the Carmelite Family is noteworthy. In the fourteenth century the Order stressed its Marian spirituality with reference to the term “sister”: they are the “brothers” (*fratres*) of the Mary and she is their “sister.” **171** This was what led them to renew their commitment and foster an increasingly familial relationship with the Mother of Jesus.

At the present time the Marian title “sister” appears somewhat frequently in the literature on consecrated life. It denotes closeness and a sharing of life experiences. Consecrated persons feel that Mary is near them in their faith journey, in their following of Christ, and in their resolve to live in a stable way the rule of fraternal love.

Several monastic communities founded in this century by members of Reformed churches - Taizé (France), Grandchamp (Switzerland), Pomeyrol (France), Upsala (Sweden), Darmstadt (Germany) -are especially sensitive to the view of Mary as sister. **172** These communities' approach to the figure of the Mother of the Lord begins from the Scriptural portrait of Mary. In the *lectio divina* these communities discover in Mary the creature in whom everything, even her fiat, is the work of grace. She is the humble servant in whom God's way of choosing the lowly and revealing God's self to the little ones (cf. Mt 11,25) manifests itself so eminently. In this perspective, Mary appears as the “poor sister” that God has made beautiful and rich through grace. These communities, furthermore, in the light of Scripture, emphasize the Virgin's exemplarity. She is the icon of receptiveness to the Word, openness to the Spirit, and joyful and long-suffering faith alive in wonder and gratitude.

52. In the Servite Constitutions and tradition the title “sister” does not appear. The Order, nonetheless, attentive to the mariological views of our time, has accepted it and acknowledged its value. It uses it in a number of contexts: devotions, documents of various kinds, **173** and liturgical texts:

... in your journey of faith
you are mother and *sister* to us. **174**

... [Mary], most excellent fruit of the redemption,
is *sister* of all Adam's children. **175**

It is probable that the image of the Blessed Virgin as “our sister” will gradually take root among us Servites. It corresponds in fact to our conception of consecrated life and can become a new source of inspiration and a further reason for living our fellowship ever more authentically.

Conclusion

53. We said that in our reflections on the typology of the relationship between the Mother of Jesus and consecrated persons we were going to draw on the studies and experiences of brothers and sisters of other institutes. We are much indebted to them and here we want to express our thanks.

But our gratitude goes before all to God, who, in Mary of Nazareth, has given to institutes of consecrated life a symbol so rich in vital roles and exemplary values to accompany their members on the journey toward the full realization of their vocation, “to the extent of the full stature of Christ” (Eph 4: 13).

At this point it will be helpful if we make a few concluding remarks on the relation between Mary and consecrated persons and synthesize some of the data that have emerged in the course of our reflections.

54. The relationship between Mary and consecrated persons is a reality of grace. It is a gift of God. We can say, therefore, that it is Christian wisdom to accept it with gratitude and to live it with joyful coherence. With respect to God, the gift is always there, always available; with respect

to consecrated persons it is there, in a certain sense, to the extent that they know it and acknowledge it in their lives.

Furthermore, this relationship is not an end in itself. It is a means. It is directed to the achievement of perfect charity and leads back to its origin: to Christ and, through him, in the Spirit, to the Father. In the great metaphor of life as a journey, the relationship between Mary and consecrated persons takes form in terms of accompaniment, support and guidance: the Mother, Teacher, Sister journeys beside the child, the disciple, her brothers and sisters, and guides them to where she dwells immersed in love: the Holy Trinity. In the context of the mystery of the Trinity the relationship between Mary and consecrated persons is seen in all its splendor as well as in its intrinsic relativity. The relationship has its meaning and value always and only in reference to the Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

55. The typology of the relationship between Mary and consecrated persons is not theirs exclusively. Apart from a few aspects that derive from the specific nature of consecrated life, this typology is common to all disciples of Christ, for Mary is mother and teacher, patron and queen, guide, model and sister of all. Nonetheless, the affectionate persistence with which institutes of consecrated life refer to this typology is not without justification. The typology, in fact, often mirrors spiritual experiences lived with intensity and insight in the context of consecrated life. Religious have pondered the typology and demonstrated its efficacy, delineated its profile, and extolled its beauty and symbolic values. It has often been the object of a deliberate choice in constitutions and witnessed to by a living tradition. Finally, it has been popularized to a great extent through the preaching of religious.

The members of institutes of consecrated life cannot boast of any exclusivity with regard to this typology, but, by God's grace, they have taken to it intensely and propagated it energetically.

56. The various relationships between the Blessed Virgin and consecrated persons - mother-child, teacher-disciple, queen- servant - are not incompatible with one another . In constitutional texts one frequently finds paired terms such as "Mother and Queen," "Mother and Teacher," "Teacher and Guide," etc. This is due, on the one hand, to the fact that the Virgin's unique mission of grace with regard to the People of God is refracted in a multiplicity of salutary interventions, and, on the other hand, to the fact that no type exhausts the variety of ways in which consecrated persons relate to Mary.

Every type of relationship is the fruit of doctrinal insights, life experiences, historical factors and cultural conditionings. Nor is it to be forgotten that each type is analogical, which means that while some aspects will agree, others will be different. This prohibits making an absolute of any type. There are, lastly, personal inclinations rooted in one's psychology or culture that orientate a person more toward one than another type of relationship.

Consequently, even when they privilege one or another type of relationship with the Blessed Virgin according to their tradition, institutes of consecrated life respect the personal preferences of their members.

Religious know that in the journey of discipleship toward Christ they are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin. She is present as attentive mother, watchful patron, interceding queen, trustworthy teacher, expert guide, exemplary model and concerned sister.

57. We think a word should be added about what we can call, by analogy with what is said of the Church, the Marian dimension of institutes of consecrated life. It suggests a Marian quality in their *being* and a reference to the Blessed Virgin in their *activity*.

This Marian dimension is ordinarily confirmed on the basis of external, verifiable factors (name of the institute, patronal feast, explicit constitutional passages, heritage of Marian devotion, living tradition). But there are institutes that have neither a Marian name, nor a Marian patronal feast, nor a preference for a particular aspect of the mystery of the Blessed Virgin (the Annunciation, the Visitation, and so forth), nor any special expressions of Marian devotion. They nonetheless claim to note in the life of the community a kind of Marian atmosphere, a meaningful presence of the Blessed Virgin who admonishes, encourages and protects them. To describe this

they take as their own a word of Paul VI on the presence of the Mother of Jesus in the life of the Church: God “has placed within his Family (the Church), as in every home, the figure of a Woman, who in a hidden manner and in a spirit of service watches over the Family 'and carefully looks after it until the glorious day of the Lord.” **176**

58. Today the expression “Mary, icon of consecrated life” is often used. Here we want to offer a warrant for this usage in terms of the major forms of consecrated life - eremitic, monastic, missionary and apostolic. The Blessed Virgin Mary is in fact:

— a woman of silence, who, in solitude and abandonment to the Spirit, ponders “events and words” (cf Lk 2:19.51) she is thus an image of the hermit who meditates in his or her heart on the Word that leads to oneness with Christ and conformity to his thought, feelings and action.

— a woman whom we see living in communion within the nascent Church (cf. Jn 2:11-12; Acts 1:4) and with every church and community that is formed in faith and discipleship; she is thus an image of the cenobite and an impetus to an assiduous and harmonious prayer life. She reminds us that fellowship and the sharing of goods are possible only in the Spirit.

— a woman on the way, who, moved by the Spirit, goes in haste to the house of Zechariah to bring Christ and the good news of salvation (cf. Lk 1:39-45); she is thus an image of that missionary itinerancy in which Christ's disciples, at the Spirit's urging (cf. Acts 2:14), go out to announce the Gospel to the whole world (cf. Mt 28 19).

— a woman of service, attentive to the neighbor's needs; she is thus an image of that service - of compassion, instruction, pastoral assistance - which many institutes exercise in the Church's name to the benefit of the corporally and spiritually needy.

Section Two

A REFLECTION ON CONSECRATED LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF THE MAGNIFICAT

59. In this second part of our letter we propose, with the Lord's help, to meditate carefully on the Magnificat (Lk 1:46-55). Mary of Nazareth's canticle renews our vision and strengthens our incentive for living consecrated life authentically. It can also shed new light on our charism of service.

The beauty and doctrinal richness of the canticle, its liturgical and pastoral value, and the importance the Church gives it have prompted us to choose it for our reflection and meditation. We are sure, sisters and brothers of the Servite Family, that out of love for the Word and devotion to Mary you will agree with this choice.

The gift of Magnificat

60. The Magnificat is a gift, first of all, from God to the Blessed Virgin, then from Mary to the Church and to each one of us. It must be understood and accepted as a gift, otherwise its appeal cannot be grasped, nor its profound meaning disclosed. The words of St. James apply to the Magnificat: “... all good giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (Jas 1:17). With grateful spirit, then, and full of respect for the holy Word, we want to reflect on this canticle that the Lord placed first on the lips of Mary of Nazareth and places now each day on ours.

A gift joined to other gifts

61. The Magnificat, song of the Virgin Mary, “poor woman of the Lord,” is not an isolated canticle. It comes to us along with the canticles of other *anawim* - the Benedictus (Lk 1: 68-79) of

the priest Zechariah and the *Nunc dimittis* (Lk 2: 29-32) of the “righteous and devout” (Lk 2:25) Simeon. There is also the angels' canticle (cf. Lk 2: 14) and the rich hymnody of the Pauline letters **177** and Johannine apocalypse. **178** We can include here, too, the Our Father (Mt 6:9- 13), the prayer par excellence, and the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3- 11), of whose message the Magnificat is in a way a lyrical anticipation.

The Magnificat has its roots in the poetry of the psalms and other Old Testament hymns, especially in the canticles of the women of Israel who extolled the deeds and mercy of God: Miriam, prophetess and sister of Aaron, who led the dancing after the crossing of the Red Sea (cf. Ex 15:20-21); Deborah, judge of Israel (cf. Jgs 4:4), who broke out in a victory canticle after the defeat of Sisera's army (cf. Jgs 5:231); Judith, who intoned a song of praise and thanksgiving to God for the liberation of Bethulia after the victory over Holofernes (cf. Jdt 16:1-17); and Anna, a distressed and humiliated woman, who, after the birth of Samuel, raised up rejoicing a moving canticle of thanksgiving to the Lord who had answered her prayer (cf. 1 Sam 2:1-10).

Miriam, Deborah, Judith and Anna were all courageous, poetic and prophetic women. Their songs are a prelude to Mary's canticle, and the events of which they sang bear a likeness to the salvific events in which Mary took part. The crossing of the Red Sea foreshadows Christ's Passover; the victories over Sisera and Holofernes, the defeat of the Evil One; and the birth of Samuel from a sterile womb, the birth of Jesus from Mary's virginal womb.

A gift to receive, live and pass on

62. The Blessed Virgin's canticle is deeply rooted in her people's history, and Israel's wisdom and poetry stream into it. You can hear the echo of the patriarchs' longing and the prophets' oracles. The Magnificat is indeed a summary of Israel's faith in God as Savior and its vision of history.

The Magnificat has a literal meaning related to the time and context in which Mary first proclaimed it, but it comes to us now with the richness of successive ecclesial readings. The Magnificat has accompanied and nourished the Church's prayer and shed light on its journey. It has made the Church grow and has in turn grown with it. To Mary's canticle can be applied in a special way the exegetical principle formulated by St. Gregory the Great (+ 604): “the divine words grow along with the reader.” **179**

The Word discloses ever new aspects of itself to churches, communities and individual disciples who listen to it and pray over it from within their historical situation. The Word was put in writing, became Scripture, for the good of the men and women of later generations. A reading of the Word, then, detached from one's life situation, does not respond to the text's original, divine intention. It is indispensable, however, that the historical readings of the Magnificat be received with spiritual discernment, according to St. Paul's norm: “test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thes 5:21). This norm is important, for surely not every historical reading is to be retained. **180**

With regard to the Magnificat, our situation is this: the Blessed Virgin's canticle is there, in the opening chapter of the third gospel, in just ten verses, immutable in its every word. It has to be understood in the thought of Luke, the inspired author. At the same time, though, it comes to us enriched by numerous ecclesial readings made under the guidance of the Spirit and accompanied by the prayerful jubilation of innumerable Christian generations. It is there to be read, prayed over, interiorized and lived. It also wants, so to speak, to be enriched by our own life experiences. Today we have to be its readers and interpreters, vocalists and artisans, in terms of our condition as Servite men and women in today's world.

As we said above, the gift must be received and treasured, but it must also be communicated and passed on. In Christianity there is the law of passing on to others what we have received (cf. Lk 1:1-3; 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3). For all of us, it should be a welcome task to hand on to others the gift of the Magnificat, read in the light of our experience and marked with our grateful love.

A gift that leads into Mary's story

63. When we open ourselves to the Magnificat and make it part of our lives, we enter into and become part of the canticle's history. Its history includes all who sang the Magnificat before us and found in it guidance for their journey of Christian discipleship, and all who will sing it in the future and be guided by its illuminating words. The Church, singing it unceasingly, has carefully threaded the story of the “Magnificat of the ages.” **181** We sing it still, as we await the day when Mary's canticle will blend into the final and lasting doxology: “To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb / be blessing and honor, glory and might, / forever and ever” (Rv 5:13).

But there's still more. In the mystery of the communion of saints, the Magnificat, acknowledged and accepted as a gift, makes Mary contemporary to us and us to Mary. Her canticle becomes ours. United to her, we are joined to all she represents: Israel, of which she is sublime daughter; the Church, of which she is figure (*typus*), **182** model (*exemplar*) **183** and eschatological icon (*imago*); **184** and all humanity, for she too is a daughter of Eve.

Just as Mary's *fiat* was spoken in the name of all humanity, so too her Magnificat is a song that includes the rejoicing and praise of all people. Mary is a creature, an individual fragment in whom, after Christ, all is recapitulated and finds expression. What is true of Mary is true of us. We have been renewed in our vocation as fragments meant to form a unity, and in us and in us through us Israel, the churches, humanity and the entire cosmos are united in singing and glorifying the Lord.

A gift for our prayer

64. The Magnificat is a gift of the Spirit. With Mary's canticle the Spirit has come “to the aid of our weakness” (Rom 8:26) and has offered us through Mary, “the prophetess, the mother of the great Prophet,” **185** a text that is both an extraordinary model of prayer and an outstanding text for meditation. Let us consider these two aspects and draw from the Blessed Virgin's canticle suggestions and support for our own prayer life.

65. Model of prayer. When the Constitutions propose Mary as “creation's sublime model of prayerfulness,” **186** they refer especially to the Virgin of the Magnificat.

Mary of Nazareth, a woman overflowing with divine grace (cf. Lk 1:28) and a humble Servant of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:38.48), uttered the Magnificat with the Spirit in her heart and the Son of God in her womb. This shows us how genuine prayer arises from a heart docile to the Spirit (cf. Jude, 20; Rom 8:15.26-27; Gal 4:6) and is carried out in union with Christ (cf. Jn 14:13-14; 15:7.16; 16:23-24.26; 1 Jn 5: 14).

She uttered it in response to Elizabeth's reverent greeting: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45). She then transformed the acclaim addressed to her into praise of God, teaching us thereby how prayer ought to be a response in praise to the Word which has been heard, faith that celebrates grace in song.

She uttered it sustained by faith, generous in charity, strong in the hope that the promises made to Abraham would be fulfilled. She uttered it in fellowship with her people, rejoicing for the coming of the messianic dawn and grateful to the Lord for having looked down on her, the humble servant of God. This shows us how prayer is to be both communion with God and fellowship with our neighbors, both praise of the Most High and service to our brothers and sisters.

In addition to this, the Magnificat is given to us as a model of prayer in terms of both its contents and its formal aspects. It is, all in one, a canticle of thanksgiving and praise, remembrance of the wonderful deeds performed by the Lord, an expression of realism with regard to the present, and attention directed to the future. It is an example of how, when we turn to God in prayer, we sense God's absolute transcendence: God is the Lord, the Savior, the Omnipotent, the Holy One (cf. Lk 1:46-47.49). This is coupled with a sense of God's astonishing closeness: God turns to the lowly

and offers mercy to those who fear God and are mindful of the divine promises (Lk 1:48.54-55). In the Magnificat, the one the theologians call the totally Other is seen as very near to humankind. In the womb of Mary of Nazareth, the unapproachable God of the burning bush (cf. Ex 3:3 5) has become Emmanuel, God-with-us.

66. *Text for our meditation.* With solemn profession we commit ourselves to “live ... listening to the Word of God” (“*in lectio divina*,” according to the Latin original) **187** Although every page of Scripture deserves to be meditated, we nonetheless acknowledge the Magnificat, the song of the Servant of the Lord, as a special gift offered for our *lectio divina*. The Magnificat is the Word of God and is to be *received* as Mary received it, in faith and thanksgiving. It is to be *meditated* under the guidance of the Spirit, just as the Blessed Virgin, guided by the same Spirit, treasured in her heart the memory of all the words and events concerning her Son and the salvation of the human race. The Magnificat is to be *sung* everywhere as an expression of thankful devotion to the Lord and as proclamation of God's mercy, just as the Mother of Jesus sang it in “a city of Judah” (Lk 1:39). It is to be *lived* with coherence and boldness, trusting like Mary in God's goodness and grace.

The Magnificat is thus a text that engages the whole person. Heard, it is taken to heart; then, transformed into song, it comes to vocal expression. It both calls the disciples of Christ to active commitment and sheds light on their journey along the way of holiness and justice.

67. The Magnificat poured forth from a pure and faith filled heart, the only heart able to offer up to God praise worthy of divine glory. Thus we understand the insight of St. Ambrose (+ 397) when he expresses the wish: “Let the soul of Mary be in each one to glorify the Lord, let the spirit of Mary be in each one to rejoice in God.” **188** We understand, too, why the Church has made the Magnificat a climactic moment of the liturgy of the hours, in the East at sunrise and in the West at vespers. The liturgical use of the Magnificat is part of that process of identification between the Church and Mary that was very much felt in the patristic era. **189** Mary and the Church are one person, one voice; the Church at prayer (*Ecclesia orans*) is Mary the prayerful Virgin (*Virgo orans*).

In recent decades, other forms of prayer already known in ancient times have developed in the Servite Family alongside the traditional form of prayer *to* Mary, namely, prayer *like* Mary and prayer *with* Mary. Praying *like* Mary recalls her as example; praying *with* Mary alludes to her prayerful presence in the community of her Son's disciples. **190**

It is a matter of a legitimate development and there is abundant evidence of it in the Order's books of prayer. Contemporary Servites' growing esteem for Mary's canticle has contributed to this development. They have wanted to glorify God and proclaim God's mercy with her and like her. Therefore they pray:

Virgin of hope
and bright promise of a new age,
join us as we sing *your* song of praise
and walk the pilgrim journey ..
May we *too* glorify the mercy of God
and sing his praise
for the gift of life and salvation. **191**

Allow us friars taking part in the General Chapter to formulate the wish that the Servite Family add its own historical reading to the “Magnificat of the ages” as it cherishes, meditates, sings and lives the Blessed Virgin's canticle.

Section two

The charism of service in the light of the Magnificat

68. In this section we propose to reflect attentively on our charism in the light of the Magnificat. We do not at all intend to make an exegetical study of Mary's canticle. Renowned

scholars have already produced excellent commentaries on it. In fact, the Church never dedicated so much attention to the Magnificat as it has recently; reference to it is found in documents of the magisterium, in exegetical and theological works, and in writings concerned with pastoral service, the liturgy and popular devotion.

As we listen to the exegetes and keep in mind the various situations in which the Servite Family lives, we propose to offer some suggestions for making our service, carried out in the light of the Magnificat, pleasing to God, a channel of grace and a means of fellowship.

A difficult service: to speak of God to the men and women of our time

69. The Magnificat is a canticle of praise to God. It is also a discourse on God: **192** on who God is (v. 46-50) and what God has done (v. 51-55). It is a discourse on God formulated by Mary with the ancient words of her own people's religious tradition, yet it concerns a new reality contemplated with new eyes. The Magnificat is truly the "new song" (cf. Pss 40:4; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1) of the new messianic era.

The *new reality* is the Son's Incarnation in the virginal womb of Mary. The Magnificat is closely related to the Annunciation. It is in fact a response to Elizabeth's acclaim (cf. Lk 1:45) of the faith with which the Blessed Virgin heeded the angel's message. The angel had said: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:31-33). The new and astounding fact is that God, the Most High, chose her, a most lowly creature, to be the Mother of the Son, the awaited Messiah. The Magnificat is the song that pours forth from the experience of divine motherhood.

The *new eyes* are those of Mary, the eyes of the humble Servant on whom the Lord's gaze rested (cf. Lk 1:48; Is 66:2). They are pure eyes that see God (cf. Mt 5:8), look up to God - the Holy One, the Omnipotent, the Savior, the Merciful One - then look down with realism on the oppression, hunger and infamy of the people.

The Magnificat, a discourse on God, is also a new revelation of God, for from the Blessed Virgin's canticle "the Church derives the truth about the God of the Covenant: the God who is Almighty and does 'great things' for man."**193**

70. *Necessity and difficulty of speaking of God.* Like all institutes of consecrated life, we, too, are asked to speak of God to the men and women of our time. It is a challenging task, the accomplishment of which is beset by many obstacles.

It is necessary to speak of God to the postmodern person. Although the features of a postmodern mentality are not easily delineated, it can be said that the postmodern person lives with a cultural horizon dominated by pragmatism, apparently closed to the values of tradition and diffident about any kind of utopian idealism. The present, however conditional and transient, is enough; and any talk about transcendence is listened to with skepticism. Relationships with others are valued principally in terms of personal interest and advantage, even if there is also a real sense of solidarity with others in one's immediate surroundings. There is also active concern for bettering the world in which one lives. The postmodern person's world is one in which, under the ashes of ideals which appear to have irretrievably collapsed, there smolder sparks of generosity and a healthy dissatisfaction that can lead to the opening of new horizons.

To this person God must be spoken of: the God of the Covenant, the ineffable God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of whom Mary sings in the Magnificat, the God who is the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 1:2). To this person it must be said that God is a thou, who stands lovingly alongside each person and desires each person's highest good.

We must speak of God to the postmodern person in an understandable language. This means, first of all, that we must exclude every form of judgmental condemnation (cf. 1 Cor 5:12-13; Jn 3:17) and avoid every kind of ostracism. Our love for the person must be seasoned with wisdom,

grace and kindness (cf. Col 4:5-6), and our attitude must be humble and patient (cf. Mt 11:29), “so that the boldness of speech (cf. Acts 4:31) not degenerate into arrogance.” **194** Secondly, we must join to our words deeds of friendship. Relying on the apologetic power of love (cf. Jn 13:35; 17:21) and on the apostolic witness of our lives, we can invite the person to share our experience of faith (cf. Jn 1:39) and show the person our “good works,” which will lead to the discovery of the glory of the Father in heaven (cf. Mt 5:16).

71. But today we find ourselves in the presence of other mentalities, too. The forecasts of an irreversible secularization of society have turned out to be mistaken. Everywhere in fact we see signs of an explicit spiritual quest and of a growing return to the sacred. Unfortunately, it is often a deviant religiosity we encounter and people speak of sects, new religious movements, and cults. It is a vast phenomenon. “All the local churches note the emergence of all kinds of new religious or pseudoreligious movements, groups or experiences.” **195**

The sects seem to offer several things: a *sense of belonging* to those who have strayed and feel uprooted from family or earlier institutional bonds; *simple and ready answers* to those who are beset by the fundamental questions of human existence or find themselves in a complicated life situation; a *satisfying religious experience*, which involves the whole person, body and soul, is strongly emotional, and includes the possibility of spontaneous and creative self-expression; *the opportunity to belong to an elitist group*, with prospects of success and self-development; *easy access to the transcendent*, to the gifts of the Spirit (for example, the gift of tongues or the gift of healing), mystical manifestations and a profound knowledge of Scripture; a *concrete mission for a better world*, with the possibility of sharing in decisions and achievements; and a *sure guide* in the person of the charismatic leader, master or guru.

One can say that adherence to sects, movements or cults constitutes a search for belonging in a situation where “numerous forms of alienation (from self, others, one's own roots, one's culture, etc.) , **196** have taken hold. Hence there is often an emptiness created by family, school, parish and civil institutions. Those who have lost all direction for their lives are really interested in finding their way again.

Such pastoral situations are well known to many Servite men and women who carry out their ministry in cities where the phenomenon of the sects is growing. They deal with these situations respecting the persons involved and following the directives proposed by the local church.

To the men and women of the sects, too, it is necessary to speak of God: the God of the Virgin Mary and the Lord Jesus, the God who does not propose an easy way nor assures immediate communication with the transcendent, nor promises personal worldly success. And when we speak of God we have to point out how Mary of Nazareth adhered to God's plan: in *faith* alone, without any vision and without any beguiling words promising success; and in the most absolute *freedom* and not as the consequence of any kind of imposition. In fact, what bothers most an upright Christian conscience about the sects is the social and psychological manipulation that the new members suffer: “The sects impose their special ways of thinking, feeling, behaving, contrary to the Church's approach which implies a convinced and responsible assent.” **197**

72. To speak of God, theology, is always strenuous and difficult. At times it seems to be a contradiction in terms because it aims at saying what is inexpressible, at speaking of what is ineffable.

As we said above, in the context of a canticle of praise, Mary of Nazareth made a discourse on God. We now want to draw a few points from it for all Servants of Mary, so that our way of speaking of God will be in harmony with Our Lady's.

The Blessed Virgin's discourse on God *starts from faith*. It is the faith of her people in the God of the Fathers and in God's self-revelation in words and deeds in the history of Israel. It is also her own heroic faith, which, like Abraham's, **198** involved her whole existence and meant the unconditional acceptance of God's salvific plan. Secondly, the Blessed Virgin speaks *at the Spirit's urging*. The divine Spirit that had already descended on her so that she became the virgin mother of

the Messiah (cf. Lk 1:35), now moves her heart to rejoicing in God and places on her lips words of revelation about God. The Spirit that “has spoken through the prophets,” **199** the Spirit that, according to Paul, “scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10), now speaks through Israel's last prophetess. Thirdly, Mary speaks of God fully *aware of her own lowliness* (cf. Lk 1:38.48). Her primacy was that of being the most humble. **200** In this way she met the first and indispensable condition for speaking of God correctly, namely, awareness of the infinite distance there is between God and human beings. It is a distance that only *grace* and *revelation* can traverse, bringing God close to human beings and disclosing to the creature the mystery of the Creator. The fourth characteristic of Mary's discourse is its *concreteness*. In the Magnificat, discourse on God becomes right away discourse on human existence. After praising God, Mary turns her attention to human beings: to herself (cf. Lk 1:48-49), to the oppressed, to those who count least in society's eyes (cf. Lk 1:50-53), and to her own people, Israel (cf. Lk 1:54-55). This reminds us that every genuine theology becomes necessarily anthropology, concern for human beings, for all men and women, who are the work of God's hands and God's highest likeness (cf. Gn 1:27; 2:7.18-22).

We draw these few points from the Blessed Virgin's canticle in the hope that our speaking of God, a service that is both difficult and often asked of us, will arise from our bond to the Word and our attention to the Spirit's voice; in the hope, too, that we always speak of God with profound veneration and aware of the insuperable limits involved.

The service of praise

73. “Praise the Lord” is the command that reverberates constantly in the psalms and hymns of the Old Testament. It is addressed principally to the “servants of the Lord” (Ps 113: 1), to those who fear the Lord (cf. Ps 22:24) and to the holy city Jerusalem (cf. Ps 147: 12) . But it is also addressed to “all you peoples” (Ps 117: 1; Ps 148: 11), to the angelic hosts (cf. Ps 144:2) and to the entire cosmos. “Praise and exalt [the Lord] above all forever” is the unceasing refrain repeated from the fiery furnace by Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael. They call out to all creatures to praise God - stars of the heavens, rain and frost, ice and snow, thunder and clouds ... (cf. Dn3:52-90). Mary of Nazareth is one of those who praise the Lord. Hers is the purest and most sublime voice. The Magnificat marks the summit of the Old Testament hymnody that began with the canticle of Moses (cf. Ex 15:1-8) and it inaugurates the hymnody of the New Testament, which culminates in the eschatological song of the Lamb (cf. Rv 15:3-4). Between the Exodus, Passover *in figura*, and the Eschaton, the final Passover at the end of time, there is the era of the Church. The Magnificat, with its own paschal cadence, belongs to the era of the Church and its sacramental celebration of the mystery of the Lord's Passover.

74. “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (Lk 1 :46), that is, my soul exalts, glorifies, praises and blesses the Lord. Mary proclaims the greatness of God who has done “*great things*” in her (Lk 1:49). In her song she discloses what happened in the silence of the Annunciation, what Elizabeth, “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 1 41), understood. The time is fulfilled, the messianic era has begun, the Savior has come. And she, Mary of Nazareth, is his Mother.

The Magnificat is a song of praise and thanksgiving for the “great things” that the Lord, “remembering his mercy” (Lk 1 :54), has done in favor of the servant Mary (cf. Lk 1 :48), and the *servant* Israel (cf. Lk 1 :54). The Magnificat, seen in this light, is a history of salvation in song.

“My soul ... my spirit” (Lk 1 :46-47): the whole of Mary's being, her whole person as thoughtful and ardent woman, **201** rejoices in God the Savior (cf. Lk 1:47). It has been said that “the Magnificat mirrors the soul of Mary.” **202** But others have noted that the Magnificat seems to reflect also the bodily dimension of Mary's existence. When she sings of her joy she uses an expression that indicates the participation of the body in the spiritual impulse of joy. Perhaps the reference is to dancing as in the cases of Miriam (cf. Ex 15:20-21) and King David (cf. 2 Sm 6: 14).

203

75. Mary exults and rejoices in God her Savior. The Magnificat, “the exultant hymn of all the humble,” **204** is the realization of the ancient prophetic summons to rejoice (cf. Zep 2:14-15; 3:14-18; Zec 9:9-10; Jl 2:21-27) and the culminating response to the angel's bidding: “Rejoice, full of grace” (Lk 1:28).

According to Old Testament spirituality, joy accompanies praise of the Lord and the celebration of the Lord's feasts. It crowns the observance of the Law (cf. Ps 19:9; 119:14.16.24.35.77.92.143.174) and is insight and foretaste of the coming fullness of messianic goods. It was directly in reference to the coming Messiah that Jesus said: “Abraham *rejoiced* to see my day; he saw it and was *glad*” (Jn 8:56). With sharp insight St. Irenaeus (+ 200 ca.) caught the connection between the jubilation of Abraham and the joy of Mary: “She says: 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit has delighted in God my Savior.' The exultation of Abraham came down on his descendants who kept watch, saw Christ and believed in him. The exultation turned back and ascended from the children to Abraham who desired to see the day of the coming of Christ.” **205**

For an accurate understanding of the joy of the Magnificat two elements are to be noted: *where* the joy becomes manifest and the *situation* in which it is perceived. The place is “*in God* the Savior” (cf. Lk 1 :47), the unique and holy place from which joy springs peacefully and in which it reaches its fullness. The situation is Mary's *humble condition* (*tapéinosis*) (cf. Lk 1 :48), the only condition, in a biblical view, in which pure delight is possible.

Following the liturgy, which applies to Mary the prediction in Is 61:10, **206** and synthesizing centuries of Christian reflection, Paul VI wrote: “What wonderful reverberation the prophetic words addressed to the new Jerusalem acquire in her individual existence as Virgin of Israel: 'I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul, for he has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels' (Is 61:10). Close to Christ, she recapitulates in herself all joys: she lives the perfect joy promised to the Church: 'Mother full of holy joy.’” **207**

76. We have reflected on the Magnificat as a text that teaches us how to speak of God. **208**

Now we propose to draw from it suggestions on how to praise God. It is necessary above all to praise God in the Spirit, opening one's heart to the Spirit's mysterious voice and letting oneself be enveloped by the Spirit's unfathomable presence. In this way we follow the example of Mary of Nazareth, whose song was an expression of her singular experience of the Spirit. The Spirit moved Zechariah to sing the *Benedictus* (cf. Lk 1:67), Elizabeth to bless the Mother and the fruit of her womb (cf. Lk 1 :41), Simeon to chant the *Nunc dimittis* (cf. Lk 2:26), and, especially, Jesus to rejoice for the wise and astonishing plan of God: “He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: 'I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike’” (Lk 10:21).

Without the Spirit, source of all psalmody, there is no *Magnificat*, no prayer (cf. Rom 8:26) “Abba, Father!” (Rom 8:15; cf. Gal 4:6), no sublime discovery of Jesus' identity (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). Luther (+ 1546) shows very well how the Magnificat gives expression to Mary's spiritual experience.

In order properly to understand this sacred hymn of praise, we need to bear in mind that the Blessed Virgin Mary is speaking on the basis of her own experience, in which she was enlightened and instructed by the Holy Spirit. No one can correctly understand God or His Word unless he has received such understanding immediately from the Holy Spirit. But no one can receive it from the Holy Spirit without experiencing, proving, and feeling it. In such experience the Holy Spirit instructs us as in His own school, outside of which nothing is learned but empty words and prattle. When the holy virgin experienced what great things God was working in her despite her insignificance, lowliness, poverty, and inferiority, the Holy Spirit taught her this deep insight and wisdom, that God is the kind of Lord who does nothing but exalt those of low degree and put down the mighty from their thrones, in short, break what is whole and make whole what is broken. **209**

Praise of God, furthermore, must be done with the joy that is a gift of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:22). The Christian liturgy has been marked indelibly by the Magnificat's jubilation and by Easter's alleluia song. Joy is indeed the liturgy's dominant if not its only note. It is suffused with calm, composed joy, permeated with the "sober inebriation of the Spirit," and open to song, poetry, music and art.

The Magnificat also teaches us to bring together, without any artificial opposition or superficial juxtaposition, praise of God and life commitment. The Blessed Virgin sang the Magnificat just after giving herself over totally to God's salvific plan. She did God's will (*life*) and proclaimed God's greatness (*praise*). The ecclesial tradition adds that in a certain sense Mary "made great" the Lord in herself, the Lord who "cannot receive increase or diminution" and that every person must "make great" the Lord in his or her center. Origen (+ 254) explains that just as Christ is Image of the Father, so our soul is an image of Christ. Through our thoughts, words and deeds the soul grows and thus becomes a "greater" image of Christ and in this way the Lord is magnified or made great in our soul. **210** Martin Luther makes a similar observation: "... Mary says, 'My soul magnifies Him - that is, my whole life and being, mind and strength, esteem Him highly.'" **211**

The entire Church, including us Servites, learns from the Magnificat. We want to praise God as Mary did. We want to sing docile to the Spirit's guidance and brimming with joy. We want to sing of God's mercy and the "great works" God has done in every age and for all people - Israel, Mary, the Church, ourselves, every person. We want to sing, then perform in our lives what we proclaim in our song. We want to be singers in whom memory of the past is joined to expectation of "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pt 3:13).

At the service of the new evangelization

77. Paul VI spoke of Mary as "the star of ever renewed evangelization" **212** and for some time now John Paul II has been proposing to the Church the task of a "new evangelization." He goes so far as to say, "As the third millenium of the redemption draws near, God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity, and we can already see its first signs." **213** We are in the presence of a "new springtime for the Gospel" **214** that bears on the new issues arising in this time of epochal change. Among these issues are the service of life in all its forms, the protection of the environment, the move toward greater unity among all peoples while respecting cultural diversity, the achievement of lasting peace based on truth and justice, the development of interreligious dialogue, and the defense of women's dignity. There have been many responses within the Church to the Holy Father's call for a new evangelization. We would like to recall two of them that are especially striking: the IV Conference of the Latin American Episcopate that was held in Santo Domingo in 1992 and had as its theme *New Evangelization, Human Promotion and Christian Culture*; **215** and, second, the special synod of African bishops held in Rome in 1994 with the theme *The Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000*. **216**

Our Order has given a first and simple but resolute response to John Paul II's call with the letter of the Prior General, Fr. Hubert M. Moons, *Sent to Serve* **217** and with the General Chapter we are now celebrating and whose theme is *The Servants of Mary for the New Evangelization at the Approach of the Year 2000*.

78. A question has come up among us that has also been raised by theologians: to what extent is it legitimate to speak of a "new" evangelization? Let us try to answer this question starting with a premise.

The proclamation of the Gospel is not subject to substantial change. Its object is Christ who "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8) and for this reason Vatican II states that "no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ." **218** At the same time, though, evangelization has to be constantly renewed because of new events in history and new circumstances in individuals' lives. When the immutable word of the Gospel is brought to bear on the signs of the times it discloses ever new meanings that the Spirit suggests to

the churches of every time and place (cf. Acts 2: 17.11.17.29; 3:6.13.22). The daily encounter of “bible and newspaper” gives rise to an endless rereading of the abiding Word. The risen Lord reveals its hidden implications through his Spirit. What Jesus said to his disciples, the Spirit now says to the churches (cf. Jn 14:26;16:12-15). The Church, enriched with the gift of discernment, looks with joy and wonder at the signs of the new springtime that Easter has disclosed in the world. And it is the risen Lord who calls us and teaches us to see: “Behold, I make all things new!” (Rv 21:5).

Mary's canticle, song of the new Covenant, has its place in the new evangelization that is being called for. It offers two suggestions for revitalizing our proclamation of the Gospel in the unsettling but fascinating times we are living in. We see, first, how the Blessed Virgin shares with her own people, eagerly and in continuity with Israel's faith, the stupendous event of the Incarnation that was foreshadowed in the promise of Emmanuel (cf. Is 7:14; Mt 1:23). It was a matter of sharing the Good News without delay and of wisely knowing how to bring together things old and new (cf. Mt 13:52).

Sharing without delay

79. As she listens to the message of the angel Gabriel who speaks to her in the name of God, Mary becomes the first daughter of Israel to be evangelized in the new Covenant that has its ineffable beginning in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word (cf. Lk 1:26-38). Setting out then “in haste” toward the hill country and Zechariah's house, Mary became the new Covenant's first evangelizer. She proclaims the “great things” God has done in her (cf. Lk 1:39-56). **219**

In the biblical tradition, the “great things” of God (*magnalia Dei*) are the wondrous gifts God continuously bestows on the people and the gracious deeds the Lord performs in the history of the Covenant. These wonders of God's love are generally directed to the whole people of Israel, as the psalmist attests: “The Lord has done great things for them” (Ps 126:2). But it often happens that they are performed for the benefit of an individual person, as in the case of Abraham (cf. Gn 12:2), Joseph (cf. Gn 50:20), Moses (cf. Dt 34:10-12, in the Septuagint; Sir 45:2), David (cf. 2 Sm 7:21-22.25-26; 22:51), Solomon (cf. 1 Kgs 1:37.47), Jeremiah (cf. Jer 33:33), Esther (cf. Est 10:3s), Judith (cf. Jdt 15:8.10), and the Baptist's mother, Elizabeth (cf. Lk 1 :58). Even in these cases, though, there is a communitarian or ecclesial dimension to the “great things.” Through the favored individuals the Lord intends to enrich all the people. Since the “great things” of God are ordered to the good of the entire Covenant community, they are therefore to be proclaimed to all. All must be told of the gifts the Lord has deigned to bestow on that family which is the Church of the first and second Covenants.

This is what Mary does. The “great things” the Almighty has worked in her, daughter of Sion (cf. Lk 1:28) and poor servant of the Lord (cf. Lk 1 :48), redound to the benefit of Israel, servant of the Lord (cf. Lk 1:54), and all the poor who put their trust in the Lord (cf. Lk 1:50.52). **220** It is for this reason that in the Magnificat Mary “turns naturally from herself to her people.” **221** She is aware that the “great things” of the mystery of the Incarnation are the supreme gift God has bestowed on Israel and the fullest expression of God's visitation to the people. For this reason Mary is filled with the desire to share this gift. She goes in haste to proclaim the salvific event to the house of the priest Zechariah (cf. Lk 1:5.40). That priestly house represents another one, the whole people of Israel as a “kingdom of priests” for the Lord in virtue of the Covenant ratified at Mount Sinai (cf. Ex 19:6). Through Mary the house of Israel is filled with the presence of God incarnate who has come to dwell among us (cf. Jn 1:14).

80. “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give” (Mt 10:8). This saying, taken together with the words of the Apostle: “woe to me if I did not preach [the gospel]” (1 Cor 9:16), if accepted and lived out faithfully, will enable us to experience “new fervor” for evangelization and a real desire “to touch others with the joy of the faith.” **222**

Encouraging for us Servite men and women should be the fact that since the 1970s we have taken on new evangelization tasks in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. And after the fall of the Berlin wall (1989) the Order quickly returned to several countries of eastern Europe (Albania, Hungary and Bohemia) where our houses flourished before the communist era. In an Order as small as ours, such a missionary and evangelizing effort could be considered imprudent, but as the Prior General, Fr. Hubert M. Moons, observes with confident generosity: “Despite a general crisis of numbers and aging, we are serenely putting our trust in the Word of the Lord, that by giving we shall receive, and by losing ourselves we shall implant the seeds of a new and unexpected Springtime (cf. Lk 6:38; 9:24; Mk 8:35; Mt 10:39).” **223**

Our specific vocation in the Church calls for a further comment. Among the gifts with which we Servites have been enriched there is the Lord's Mother herself. This gift, though, carries with it the commitment to share her with all. The churches of Christ, including those outside Catholicism, should see in our Order a small sister church with the charism of spreading the good news of Mary. Our Constitutions state: “The friars should strive to communicate the significance of the living reality of the Mother of Christ to the people of their time ... For this purpose, they should deepen their knowledge of the Virgin, especially through study, in order to present her to God's people in their lives, words and publications ” **224**

With this responsibility in mind we encourage all Servite men and women to support and maintain the centers that have been established in the various provinces and congregations for the spread of Marian doctrine and the promotion of sound Marian piety. And it is with the same sense of responsibility arising from our Marian charism that we should consider all steps for strengthening the Pontifical Theological Faculty <<Marianum>>, entrusted to us by ecclesial mandate.

The new in continuity with the old

81. The message which Mary brought to Zechariah's house had to do with the most sublime of all the “new things” performed by God in salvation history, the Incarnation of the Son of the Most High, “born of woman” (Gal 4:4)

It is to be noted, however, that this uniquely new reality does not mean a departure from the plan which God was progressively actualizing in previous generations. Mary, in fact, hails the event as the fulfillment of the promises made to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever (Lk 1:55). To interpret the event, Mary draws on Israel's traditions in such a way that the Magnificat comes across as a prayerful synthesis of the major themes of the Old Testament reworked in function of the New. Luke (1:39) notes, for example, that the Virgin sings her canticle “in the hill country.” Numerous commentators, both ancient and modern, see in this detail an echo of Isaiah 52:7 “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings.” The Jewish tradition saw in the “hills” a figure of the Fathers or Prophets of Israel. **225**

In this way Mary sheds light on the new reality of the Incarnation by connecting it to the ancient events that prepared it. This example shows us, furthermore, how the Virgin went about reflecting on all the things she treasured in her heart (Lk 2:19).

82. In Scripture, tradition is understood as looking to the past in order to understand and live in the present. It is this relationship between memory of the past and immersion in the present that should inspire our renewed service to the Word of the Lord.

The person and teaching of Jesus - “the one who is and who was and who is to come” (Rv 1:8) - are an incomparable expression of the dialectic between past and present. In Jesus, past, present and future converge. When we open ourselves to him who is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rv 22:13), we come into communion with all creatures and are contemporary to every event and every person. He is the creator and redeemer, the brother and friend of all and everybody.

Love of the Lord's Word enkindles lively interest in the tradition of the Church, which interprets the Word through the careful attention of the magisterium, the work of exegetes and,

especially, the witness of the saints. And in us Servites, love of Scripture sparks love for the tradition of our Order. Knowledge of our history, in turn, with its prominent Marian character and rich spiritual heritage, becomes an authentic factor in the renewal of our evangelizing work. The seed of the Word planted in the ground of our tradition will then grow into a tree with large branches in whose shade the birds of the sky will take refuge (cf. Mk 4 32; Mt 13:32; Lk 13:19).

Icon of Evangelization

83. We began our reflection “at the service of the new evangelization” by quoting Paul VI's description of Mary as the star of ever renewed evangelization. **226** The metaphor points to the Blessed Virgin as luminous guide in the often arduous and obscure journey of evangelization. But the Virgin of the Magnificat is also an “icon of evangelization,” a model to inspire our evangelizing activity.

John Paul II characterizes the new evangelization as “new in its fervor, its methods and its expressions.”**227** This leads us to take the Virgin of the Magnificat as icon of our evangelization commitment. Her *fervor* is the fruit of her faith and humility and expresses her gratitude and enthusiasm. Her *method*, we have seen, has several elements: generosity in opening herself to the gift of God, eagerness to share the gift, attention to both the tradition and the present, confidence in the future, love for her own people and communion with all peoples, a spirit of service and commitment to the most needy - the lowly and the hungry (cf. Lk 1:52-53). The form of *expression* she chose was a joyful song of praise that was also a deed of gentle boldness and prophetic utterance.

In the house of Nazareth, threshold to the first millenium, it is Mary who carries in her womb the Author of the Gospel (cf. Lk 1:28.56). In the house of the priest Zechariah, it is again Mary who is the minister of grace and messenger of joyful tidings. And in the house of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:14), we see her again, as the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, set out to proclaim to the whole world the saving Word. Missionaries, both men and women, look to these three houses for inspiration and strength in their work of proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples. Servite men and women, too, look to them. The *fiat* of the Virgin (cf. Lk 1:38) inspires the *fiat* they have to pronounce daily and joyfully in dealing with the situations and tasks involved in their evangelizing activity. Mary's “haste” (Lk 1:39) in bringing Christ to John stimulates their own eagerness to spread the Good News. Her praying assiduously and in one accord with the others urges them to pray before proclaiming and to carry out their work in full communion with the Church.

At the service of the cause of women

84. The General Chapter does not intend to speak magisterially about the promotion of women, for such is not its task, nor is it competent to do so. Rather it has simply listened to the teaching of the Church and to women themselves. Women decry in many ways the situation of submission and oppression in which many women live; they give voice to their aspirations and manifest a strong desire for dialogue and equality in society and the Church. What we say here has the sole objective of encouraging Servite men and women to keep the promotion of women in mind in their daily lives and in their pastoral work. We do not want our friars and sisters to be insensitive to this problem, unresponsive to the pronouncements of Church authorities, or conditioned by centuries - old prejudices. It would be truly inappropriate for the Servite Family to show indifference toward what John Paul II judges to be “a history which has *conditioned* us to a remarkable extent. In every time and place, this conditioning has been an obstacle to the progress of women. Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude.” **228** The centuries -old oppression of women is a matter of “universal significance” and its solution is “a central concern of any contemporary mission which seeks to integrate faith and justice.” **229**

To begin our reflection on the promotion of women, let us turn again to the Virgin of the Magnificat. In Mary, God has “promoted” a woman by involving her profoundly in a unique event of grace and salvation.

The Visitation

85. In the story of the Visitation, men - scribes, priests, soldiers, civil officials - have been left out. When the fullness of time comes (cf. Gal 4:4; Eph 1: 10), the protagonists are two women: Elizabeth who is of the tribe of Aaron and the wife of the priest Zechariah (cf. Lk 1 :5), and Mary, of unknown tribe and the promised spouse of Joseph of the house of David (cf. Lk 1:27; Mt 1:18.20). Both are pregnant, Elizabeth by an “act of grace” from the Lord (cf. Lk 1:13.24-25) and Mary through the working of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:34-35). Elizabeth, sterile and aged, carries in her womb the Precursor; Mary bears in her virginal womb the Messiah and Savior.

Elizabeth's is the voice of blessing. Filled with the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:41), she blesses Mary and the fruit of her womb (cf. Lk 1:41). She represents the Israel that is faithful to God and which discovers how the Old Testament, “time of promises,” comes to its conclusion through God's decisive intervention in sending the Awaited One of the nations. Elizabeth seems to take the place of Uzziah and the high priest Joakim, who had blessed Judith for the liberation of Bethulia (cf. Jdt 13:18; 15:8-10). Zechariah's wife blesses Mary for having become the mother of Israel's definitive Liberator: “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Lk 1:42). The blessing then changes into a proclamation of beatitude: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45). This expresses what will be Jesus' teaching on the beatitude of faith: “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (Jn 20:29; cf. 4:48). It is thus a woman who utters the first blessing and pronounces the first beatitude of the New Testament.

Mary's is the voice of prophecy. She speaks out of the depths of her experience of God - a word heard, a gaze come to rest on her, a life mysteriously begun in her womb. Like every prophet, Mary speaks of God's works, recalls God's saving deeds, remembers the promises made to the Fathers, scrutinizes the present and looks ahead to the future. It is thus a woman who speaks the first prophetic utterance of the new Covenant.

In its extraordinary richness the Visitation account is open to numerous readings. Here we have proposed one that highlights two women's trust in God. They were told the secret of the Word's incarnation and entrusted with caring for life. It is of these women that the first act of service in the cause of messianic salvation was asked.

The Lord's attention to Elizabeth and Mary prompts us Servites to adopt an attitude of trust and respect toward women and actively to encourage their promotion. The Lord's attention to them was also an expression of the Lord's concern and care for the oppressed, for such was the condition of women in Mary's time. They were given little consideration and were subjected to many forms of discrimination and injustice.

Jesus and women

86. Many excellent studies on Jesus and women, women in the gospels, and other related topics have made clear that in his words, attitudes and choices Jesus appears as a transgressor in relationship to the Jewish mentality of his day, which marginalized women, kept them out of public life and did not give them access to education. By his deeds Jesus breaks through ancient forms of bondage, transforms bans and prohibitions into opportunities for dialogue and friendship, and affirms the equality of men and women with regard to discipleship and the proclamation of the new messianic Kingdom. John Paul II reminds us that the Church's message regarding women's liberation “goes back to the *attitude of Jesus Christ himself.*” **230** The Holy Father adds that “in the eyes of his contemporaries Christ became a promoter of women's true dignity and of the vocation

corresponding to this dignity.” **231** It would thus be irresponsible of us as disciples of the Lord not to follow the teaching and example of the Master in a matter of such importance for all humanity.

87. Connecting the two themes, the promotion of women and the new evangelization, we can consider several other women present in the gospels besides Mary and Elizabeth who played an important role in the proclamation of the Good News.

The prophetess Anna personifies the devotion of the “Lord’s poor ones”: “She never left the temple but worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer” (Lk 2:37). When Mary came to offer her Son to the Lord (cf. Lk 2:22), Anna “spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38). Anna is thus a figure or image of how our apostolic commitment flows from assiduous prayer and is directed to the proclamation of Christ the Savior.

The Samaritan woman receives personally from Jesus the revelation of the Messiah and the good news that “the hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23). When she discovers the source of living water she leaves her water jar (cf. 4:28) and, the first woman apostle, runs to announce in the land of Samaria the coming of the Kingdom (cf. 4:39). She sows the seed of the Word where the apostles will later gather abundant harvests (cf. Acts 8:1 - 17).

Mary of Bethany gives no heed to social conventions and seats herself at the Master’s feet (cf. Lk 10:39). She claims for herself what was reserved to men, namely, a place as a disciple. She anoints Jesus’ feet with a richly perfumed oil (Jn 12:3), a gesture that Jesus himself interprets as a prophecy of his redemptive death (cf. Jn 12:7). In this way Mary is a figure or image of the disciple and spouse and as such a constant reminder to the Church to listen to the Master always and to love the Beloved without reserve.

Martha of Bethany’s profession of faith in Christ (cf. Jn 11:27) is not less than Peter’s (cf. Jn 6:68-69). She calls her sister Mary to the Master’s side (cf. Jn 11:28), just as Andrew led his brother Peter to Jesus (cf. Jn 1:40-42). Martha is the woman of the house of hospitality, from which goes forth the King to make his messianic entry into Jerusalem (Jn 12:12-15), the Prophet to proclaim every day in the temple the word of life (cf. Mk 11:11; Lk 19:47), the Priest to offer himself in sacrifice on the cross in “expiation for our sins” (1 Jn 2:2).

Mary of Magdala is the first in the group of devoted women who accompany Jesus from place to place on his evangelizing mission. She is the woman who “on the first day of the week” and “early in the morning” (Jn 20: 1) - dawn of the first day of the new creation - ran crying to Simon Peter and the beloved disciple to tell them grieving, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb” (Jn 20:2). And it is Mary who, after meeting the risen Lord, goes again at his command (cf. Jn 20:17), “apostle of the Apostles,” **232** to tell the “brothers” the news that stamps the truthfulness of the Gospel: “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20:18; cf. Mk 16:9-11.14).

All these deeds of women recorded in the gospels bear hidden and rich symbolic meanings that the Church under the guidance of the Spirit (cf. Jn 16: 13) gradually uncovers through unceasing meditation of the Scriptures. They are deeds which in a wonderful variety of ways show women’s service to the Word: listening and treasuring, meditation and correlation, memory and prophecy, salvific announcement and abiding support in the time of sowing the seed throughout the world. From all this John Paul II drew the conviction that Christ entrusted “the divine truths” “to women as well as to men.” **233** And we hope the new evangelization will be the time when women, after having been deprived of it for centuries because of cultural conditionings, will be allowed again their own word in many church endeavors.

88. The women’s issue has come up often in church discussions during the past forty years. At its conclusion (8 December 1965) the Council sent a *Message to women* in which it stated that “the Church is proud ... of having exalted and liberated women, of having brought to light in the course of history their basic equality with men.” The Council entrusted women, believers and unbelievers alike, with the task of reconciling men with life, of restraining “the hand of men who in a moment of insanity would try to destroy human civilization,” and of “saving the world’s peace.”

The conciliar claim regarding the Church's positive role in the liberation and promotion of women was surely justified. The conciliar message overall, however, presented an image of women suggested more by cultural stereotypes than by women's natural distinctiveness. And no mention was made of those gray areas either due to, or not opposed by, church intervention. John Paul II admitted these acts of negligence and lethargy and asked forgiveness of women themselves.

Since the end of the Council, many church documents have come out from various sources: the Holy See, bishops conferences at the regional, national and continental levels, individual bishops, and church groups of various kinds - lay associations, basic communities, institutes of consecrated life. It could be said that there is no pastoral program of a certain length that does not dedicate a chapter to the promotion of women. Of all these documents we can mention the following of Paul VI: several texts during the International Year of Women (1974) and several passages in the apostolic exhortation *Marialis cultus* (2 February 1974); and of John Paul II: the apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (15 August 1988) "on the dignity and vocation of women on the occasion of the Marian year"; important passages of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), the message *Woman: peace educator* (1 January 1995) for the twenty-eighth Day for World Peace, and the *Letter to Women* (29 June 1995) prepared at the time of the fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995)

All these documents together have contributed to making different segments of the Church aware of the importance and urgency of the women's issue. They have unearthed deep-rooted convictions and customs that seemed unshakable and have made better known the centuries - old conditionings that have weighed on women, limiting their freedom, holding back their development and offending their dignity. They have also helped to clarify women's legitimate demands and their rights in the areas of family life, education, work, and social and political life. They sharply denounce the forms of violence that find support in ideologies of which women are still victims in many countries. Scriptural texts that were open to misogynous interpretations are presented correctly, and on the basis of the numerous studies done on women in the bible and Jesus and women offensive clichés are put to rest. The relativity of certain patristic texts and some liturgical practices are also recognized. Lastly, light is shed on the subordinate place occupied by women religious in comparison with that of men religious.

The Church has indeed come a long way in the promotion of women in the last forty years, but the road ahead is still longer because of the centuries - old lag.

Suggestions

89. It is our intention as Servite men and women to be of service in the promotion of women. With this in mind, we want to offer a few suggestions based on experience and, once more, on the Virgin of the Magnificat.

90. Attention to the women's issue. The first act of service we can offer for the promotion of women is to be open and attentive to the world of women, their problems and their aspirations in the Church. How much have we done thus far in this regard? Can we say, for example, that we have taken seriously John Paul II's appeal that "everyone ... make every effort to ensure that women regain full respect for their dignity and role"? **235** The Holy Father himself adds with concern: "As we look to Christ at the end of this Second Millennium, it is natural to ask ourselves: how much of his message with regard to the liberation of women has been heard and acted upon?" **236** And are we sure, just to stay in the context of the Servite Family, that our Servite sisters are sufficiently appreciated for the equal contribution they could make in many areas of pastoral activity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the edification of the Kingdom? **237**

Involvement in the women's issue presupposes the abandonment both of a culpable do-nothing attitude that always involves the risk of complicity in injustice and of a brash radicalism that only irritates the situation. What is required instead is the sincere willingness to change one's

mentality and to abandon age-old prejudices. It is also necessary to let go of the disdainful expressions about women and the harsh judgments that men pass on about them, subtly persuaded that they are not a display of arrogance but “basically” true, a kind of folk wisdom. What is also needed is an attitude of real gentleness arising from a deep sense of respect and the abandonment of every form of paternalism. Primacy must be given to the person without consideration of sex and to the reciprocity and complementarity of the sexes based on their equal dignity.

91. *Free of fear.* Fear, we know, can be paralyzing, can block action and cause immobility. Old fears seem to come forward every time the promotion of women is mentioned. Sometimes there is the fear of accepting that things are different than we thought or the fear of changing when the consequences cannot be foreseen. It is never easy to accept what cannot be fit into our cultural and theological patterns.

But fear must give way in us to discernment, to calm trust in God's plan and God's presence in the life of the Church. More than a few ecclesial experiences show how changes that at first seemed to be precursors of catastrophe turned out to be really positive.

92. *In the light of the Virgin.* With regard to the promotion of women, Mary's life offers many points for reflection and a number of suggestions for our own lives.

The Virgin of the *fiat* is a woman who makes decisions. The Christian tradition has repeatedly pointed to the wisdom Mary shows in her conversation with Gabriel and the importance of her assent for the salvation of the human race. At the Annunciation, Mary shows herself to be capable of autonomous action and able to assume responsibilities that, given the social, religious and cultural context, could have aroused wonder, misunderstanding and scandalized disapproval. The attitude of Mary - autonomous, decisive, open to God's grace - poses the question to us: to make responsible decisions at the natural or supernatural levels do women always need a man's mediation? Do not many men have the tendency, latently or explicitly, to keep control over any decision made by women in church related matters?

The Virgin of the Magnificat sings of God as Savior of the oppressed (cf. Lk 1:51-53) and urges us to take sides with the oppressed, as God did and as she did. This means taking the side of women, for they have been for ages and still are today subject to many forms of oppression and marginalization. But it is not enough to take their side. We have to go further and rid ourselves of the view that the weakness of women is natural (the weaker sex), as if the root of their dependence and inferiority with respect to men were inevitable because natural and not the consequence of ingrained cultural views and historical conditionings.

The demeanor and words of Mary of Nazareth (cf. Lk 1:26-38) in Zechariah's house (cf. Lk 1:39-56), in the marriage hall at Cana (cf. Jn 2:1-5), at the hill of Calvary (19:25-27) and in the upper room before Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:13.14) show her greatness in cooperating with God. The mysterious cooperation between God and the Blessed Virgin is indeed unique and part of the Most High's singular and unfathomable plan. But what is extraordinary in Mary's case should not be taken as justification or excuse for isolating her and setting her apart from other women. In the New Testament economy, Mary is the first but not the only woman who cooperates with God in the realization of the plan of salvation. By her faith and the gift of divine motherhood she is “blessed” (Lk 1:45; cf. 1:42), but not only she. Her blessedness reaches forward, even if in a different way, to all women - and to all men - who do the will of the Father and open themselves to accept Christ as God's living Word (cf. Mk 3:35; Mt 12:50; Lk 8:21).

93. At this point it would be helpful if we conclude our reflection on the exemplary value of the figure of the Blessed Virgin for the promotion of women with a few thoughts which, though not at all novel, are not always sufficiently kept in mind in practice.

It must be remembered that every act of creaturely cooperation with the Creator is a gift of God and is possible only by grace. The Spirit precedes and accompanies the creature's action. The

Blessed Virgin's cooperation in the plan of salvation is not different in nature from that of other women, nor is women's cooperation essentially different or inferior to men's. Mary's "yes" is a model of the faith and love with which every man and every woman must hear and respond to the Lord's call.

Any kind of harmful isolation of Mary from other women must be avoided. This happened at times in the past through an exaltation of the Blessed Virgin that was either doctrinally (for example, in some mariological treatises) or devotionally poorly informed. And according to many witnesses, the result of such exaltation was a feeling of frustration among women themselves. They were being encouraged to imitate a woman who was being presented as unreachable, inaccessible, and as the personification of all virtues and of perfection itself. All of this did not help to move forward smoothly and harmoniously the women's cause and Marian devotion. It must be said against such an orientation, as the Church teaches, that the singular gifts of grace bestowed on Mary and the uniqueness of her mission do not annul her creaturely status. She is indeed privileged, but she is also a daughter of Adam and the sister of all women, with whom she shares the limits of the human condition, the risks and the glory of human freedom, the need to make decisions, and the effort to live by faith.

It is imperative that we reject the recurring and sometimes masked tendency to see in God as Father and in Jesus as Son the most elevated expression of the male sex, and in Mary as woman the highest expression of the female sex, then to infer the implicit superiority of men over women. This is unacceptable. The human distinctions of sex cannot in any way be referred to God. God possesses every perfection to be found in men or women, for all are created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26-27). **238**

Another inexact idea to be excluded, even if it was put forward by some Fathers of the Church, is that Christ is the model for men and Mary the model for women. This is seriously misleading. The Virgin of Nazareth is not the defender of any social-cultural type of female existence. Her exemplarity is situated in the order of grace and is related to her discipleship. The Blessed Virgin Mary is proposed for imitation by the faithful because "in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God (cf. Lk 1:38), because she heard the word of God and acted on it and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and the most perfect of Christ's disciples. All of this has a permanent and universal exemplary value." **239**

4. It can be said, nonetheless, that the Blessed Virgin is prophetically the highest expression of womanhood, **240** the woman par excellence and the personification of "the radical dignity of women." **241** Mary was a woman and it was as a woman, "with all her human and feminine 'I'," **242** that she pronounced the spousal fiat (cf. Lk 1:38). It was as a woman that she conceived and gave birth to a son, Jesus, and as a woman that she nurtured and raised him. In Mary, in her reality as a woman (cf. Jn 2:4; 19:26; Gal 4:4; cf. Rv 12:1), the prophecy regarding the messianic Eve comes to fulfillment (Gn 3:15). It was as the "Mother of Jesus" that she was present at the wedding feast in Cana (cf. Jn 2:1), beside the cross (cf. Jn 19:25) and with the others in Pentecostal expectation (cf. Acts 1:14).

We are convinced that the presentation of the Blessed Virgin as the highest realization of the feminine genius must be done in strict adherence to the portrait of Mary found in the bible and in the patristic, liturgical and magisterial tradition of the Church. It cannot be done on the basis of some ideal woman with more or less mythical traits, on whom are projected the historical and cultural features of different eras. Such a way of presenting Mary not only does not aid the cause of women, but in certain settings it also produces an outright rejection of Mary.

95. *The need for coherence.* Nowadays we often hear statements of principle on the equal dignity of men and women and on the need to put an end to age-old injustices, to endorse the promotion of women, and to entrust them with fitting responsibilities both in civil society and in the church community. These affirmations are made not rarely by highly placed persons. But at the same time we see a serious lag in the practical application of these principles. Situations continue to

persist which in the past accounted for the social and ecclesial marginalization of women.

We must be grateful to God that many institutes of consecrated life, especially the Company of Jesus, **243** have included in their apostolic plans the commitment to work for a structural change in women's status.

And we Servites, out of fidelity to the Gospel, love for the Blessed Virgin - whom we greet as "Our Lady," - and loyalty to the Church's magisterium, must heed several points.

We have to help get rid of atavistic prejudices, fight against arrogant and aggressive male chauvinism as something profoundly contrary to the Gospel, and remove all obstacles to the realization of real equality between men and women.

We should support the demands of groups which, as the Holy Father acknowledges, struggle against "everything in the past and present that has hindered the full appreciation and development of the feminine personality as well as her participation in the many expressions of social and political life. These demands were in large part legitimate and contributed to building up a more balanced view of the feminine question in the contemporary world. The Church, especially in recent times, has paid special attention to these demands, encouraged by the fact that the figure of Mary, if seen in the light of her Gospel life, is a valid response to woman's desire for emancipation." **244**

We should also endorse the activities of those striving to get juridical recognition for the role women in fact play in apostolic, academic, cultural and administrative areas of Church life.

In all our associations, pastoral institutions and schools, we should promote ways of working together based on the fundamental equality and the equal dignity of men and women.

96. At the service of human liberation

96. The Magnificat is the song of definitive, messianic liberation. The Blessed Virgin intoned it after God had "shown might with his arm" (cf. Lk 1:51) and she had conceived in her womb the Messiah and Savior. The liberating power of the God of the exodus (cf. Ex 3:19-22; Dt 26:8; Ps 136:12) came to action again, this time in Mary.

In God's act of messianic liberation, Mary is in fact the first to be liberated. Her "Savior" (Lk 1:47) "looked upon his handmaid's lowliness" (Lk 1:48), just as earlier God had looked down on the people's suffering in Egypt and came to liberate them (cf. Ex 3:7-8; Dt 26:5-7), and just as God had also looked down and saw the humiliation of women who were barren and made them fruitful - Sarah (cf. Gn 16:4-5; 17:19; 18:10; 21:1-2), Leah (cf. Gn 29:31-32), and Anna (cf. 1 Sm 1:11.19-20). God always looks down and cares for those who count least (cf. Pss 102:20s; 33:18-19; 34:16; 138:6). God's preferential option for the poor runs through and characterizes all of salvation history.

The Blessed Virgin feels herself to be a most special object of this option. She, the "lowly handmaid," the Lord's poor one, the least of all, has become the first. She who was insignificant in the world's eyes has become the blessed one of all history: "from now on will all ages call me blessed" (Lk 1:48).

Mary exults but she does not exalt herself. She does not proclaim herself liberator but liberated. God is the liberator. She is a servant, a servant of the Liberator par excellence, a servant in the sense of one who cooperates with God, an instrument in the liberation worked by God. She is a servant, as Abraham (cf. Gn 26:24), Moses (cf. Ex 14:31; Nm 12:7), David (cf. Ps 18:1; 2 Sm 7:8) and the prophets (cf. 2 Kgs 9:7) were servants, and as the Messiah too was a servant, in the very special sense of "Suffering Servant" (cf. Is 42: 1-4; 49: 16; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

97. As we reflect on Mary's journey of kenosis and exaltation we see that humility is the proper disposition (cf. Lk 1:48; Mt 11:29) and that pride is the powerful oppressor from which to be liberated. The Blessed Virgin herself proclaims that God has "dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart" (Lk 1:51). Who are these proud ones for Mary? As for every devout Jew, they are probably for Mary, too, those powerful persons who in the course of history persecuted her people: Pharaoh,

Nebuchadnezzar (cf. 2 Kgs 24:1; Dan 1:1), Antiochus IV Epiphanes, Nicanor (cf. 1 Mac 7:26), Haman (cf. Est 3:1). Mary denounces them not because they were powerful but because they were dominating and disdainful, arrogant in mind and heart.

As Jesus teaches, the root of all domination is to be found in the human heart: "From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly" (Mk 7:21-22). Pride is really our interior dictator. For this reason, a liberation from only the external structures of oppression that does not get at its spiritual roots is not a radical liberation.

And here is a fundamental question for all Servites: how can we liberate the oppressed without being free and liberated in our own hearts? It would be a painful contradiction if men and women who call themselves servants wanted to be domineering "in mind and heart." What kind of liberation could come from such a heart? And there is another question: how would it then be possible to ask in all humility for the liberation that can only come as a gracious gift of the Spirit? Grace is indeed the liberation of our freedom.

98. The Virgin of the Magnificat knows that messianic liberation is holistic. It requires a loving relationship with God and peaceful relationships with all people. The chains of oppression (cf. Is 58:6; 61:1) have to be replaced by bonds of fellowship and solidarity. But human pride continues to find social incarnation in the "powerful" seated on their "thrones" and in the "rich" whose pockets are full (cf. Lk 1:52,53). All these are always ready to trample on the lowly. Mary herself, with her Son and because of him, will be persecuted by the powerful: Herod, Archelaus, Herod Antipas, Pilate, Anna and Caiaphas. With bitter realism we profess in the Credo that her son Jesus "suffered under Pontius Pilate."

But the prophetess of the Magnificat knows that the last word is God's, that the Mighty One throws down the rulers from their thrones and lifts up the lowly (cf. Lk 1:49,52). She knows that God is near to the humiliated and disgraced of this world to give them back dignity and hope. Indeed, Mary of Nazareth courageously denounces social oppression, but most of all she joyfully announces divine liberation.

99. Just as Mary was Servant of the Liberator, so too we Servites want to be servants of messianic liberation. This liberation includes an ethical-social dimension that arises out of its fundamental soteriological significance. 245

As the end of the century approaches, we see that oppression has taken on contours more varied and nuanced but no less serious and scandalous than what we saw in the military and totalitarian regimes of earlier decades. It has taken on the form of social exclusion and has many faces: the worried faces of the unemployed, the unsmiling faces of street children, the anxious faces of immigrants, the expressionless faces of addicts, the worn faces of the aged and the dimmed faces of AIDS victims - all mysterious faces of Christ.

We are not going to consider here those groups of excluded persons whose situation is already well known - women, of whom we spoke above, 246 racial minorities threatened with extinction and ethnic groups that have been persecuted and made the object of humiliating cleansings. John Paul II has noted that all over the world "our cities risk becoming societies of people who are rejected, marginalized, uprooted and oppressed." 247

Among the causes of this dramatic situation created by an excluding society is neo-liberal capitalism. After the failure of marxist socialism, it is intent on spreading another form of totalitarianism, the ideology of the market as an absolute value. It has no concern for the common good and is based on a conception of freedom that is without any ethical-religious reference. 248 At the source of this unjust situation is a social-cultural system that is unacceptable to the extent that it favors every form of individualism - subjectivism, relativism, hedonism. 249

100. What claims do the faces of the excluded make on us as members of the Servite Family? How should we respond? The Virgin of the Magnificat suggests a few basic attitudes that should characterize our Marian and Servite service on behalf of the liberation of today's excluded. 250 Humility. Let us stay humble, like Mary, when we look out at the enormous problems in society

today. Let us not pretend to be the saviors or the reformers of the world. At the same time, though, we want to avoid any kind of social quietism and we want to go to work like the “useless” but hardworking servants in the gospel (cf. Lk 17:7-10). A grain of solidarity weighs more than a mountain of words and dreams. Every effort that turns out well is a star that shines for ever. Every love-inspired deed, no matter how small, is liberating. Only love counts, endures and is the greatest of all (cf. 1 Cor 13:13). 251

Eyes open on the world. In the Magnificat, Mary of Nazareth looks at the world very realistically. She sees clearly the contrasts between the “powerful” and the “lowly,” the “rich” and the “hungry.” This realism puts her in the tradition of the prominent mothers and women who were liberators in Israel: Sarah, the mother of Isaac who was son of the promise (cf. Gal 4:23); Miriam, the sister of Moses who led the victory song after the crossing of the Red Sea and the liberation of Israel; Deborah, the prophetess and conqueror of Sisara; and Esther who saved her people from the decree of extermination. In order to offer an efficacious service, Servite men and women have to assume responsibility like Mary, for “reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” 252 They have to identify the structural causes of oppression and they have to be docile to the Spirit's call to generous commitment. 253

Eyes of mercy. Mary sees a multitude of suffering people and settles on them her “eyes of mercy.” 254 The word “mercy” is heard twice in her song (cf. Lk 1 50.54). It points to the basic motive for God's acting in the history of the world and especially in the history of the Covenant. But what does mercy mean today for us Servites? We want mercy to have the meaning for us that it had for the Blessed Virgin, a Jewish woman nourished by her people's spirituality and their knowledge that “merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in kindness” (Ps 103:8). Mercy means looking at others - the poor, the needy, sinners, the afflicted - with affection and being helpful to them out of a sense of heartfelt solidarity. Mercy means for us, as for all Jesus' disciples (cf LK 6:36), active compassion, warm presence, fellowship with and closeness to all, especially the marginalized and excluded. We want to be a sign and extension of the Blessed Virgin's mercy. 255 And as Mary stood beside the Cross of her Son, so too “we, Servants of his Mother, wish to be with her at the foot of those countless crosses” 256 where Christ is still being crucified in history's victims.

Incarnation. Incarnation means concreteness and the ability to face reality. Mary is the woman involved in the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word. In this event the greatest possible concreteness in the encounter with God is realized. The Word became flesh through her and in her, first in her heart (cf. Lk 1:38; 8:21; 11:28), then in her womb. It is in the context of the Incarnation of the Word, of the life generated in her virginal womb, that Mary performs her service to Elizabeth and sings her canticle.

Like their Lady, Servites cannot lie back and ignore the immense problems of our times. They must rather be ready to reach out sincerely and constructively to their brothers and sisters. They must do so without counting the cost (cf. Mt 10:8) and be ready to serve those considered useless and weak in a society set on efficiency and power - the mentally challenged, the unborn, the aged and the terminally ill.

Opening horizons of hope. The Christian tradition calls the Blessed Virgin “Our Lady of Hope.” The expression has its origin in Mary's demeanor in two events of salvation history in which she is the protagonist. The first is the period of waiting when she was carrying the Word and was about to give birth to Christ, the hope of all humanity. The second is the period of waiting when, filled with faith and hope, she awaited the resurrection of her Son from the tomb to new and immortal life. 257

The Magnificat comes as a song of hope from the heart of the Virgin of hope. It is hope in God's revolution, in God's overthrowing the structures that cause oppression and exclusion. In our day, utopian tension is gradually fading, but Servites must have the courage to hope and to keep alive the tension toward the future. They must nourish in themselves and in others the dream of a new world; they must avoid every form of fatalism and be convinced that they can make a

difference. This is to be done with the same faith as Mary's, who knows that "nothing will be impossible for God" (Lk 1:37; cf. Gn 18:14; Jer 32:27). Our hope like hers is grounded in the God who shows might with his arm and lifts up the lowly (cf. Lk 1:51.52) and who made a promise "to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever" (Lk 1:55) to free us from every form of oppression (cJ. Lk 1:73-74).

Like the prophet who sang of the glory of Zion, every member of the Servite Family must say:

For Zion's sake I will not be silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her vindication shines forth like the dawn
and her victory like a burning torch (Is 62:1).

Servites must nurture every seed of hope encountered along the way. This is to be done in imitation of the Master, to whom the evangelist applies the prophet's word: "A bruised reed he will not break, a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory" (Mt 12:20; cf. Is 42:3).

101. At the service of life and God's works

101. The Magnificat is a hymn to life. Mary sings it because she is carrying "the Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). In her womb "life was made visible" (1 Jn 1:2) in order to be the life and light of the human race (cf. Jn 1:4).

Because the Blessed Virgin is carrying the Word of life in her heart and in her womb, on her lips there appears the canticle to the God of life, a canticle of praise for God's faithful and merciful love that embraces all human history - "His mercy is from age to age" (Lk 1:50), especially for Abraham's descendants, "according to his promises" (Lk 1:55).

For Christians, Mary is Mother by *antonomasia*. With veneration and wonder they contemplate her in the mystery of her divine and messianic motherhood - when she was pregnant with the Savior Messiah, when she adored the Child to whom she had given birth, 258 when she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger (cf. Lk 2:7), and when she fed him at her breast. These are all very human acts rich in symbolism.

Mary is the Mother of Life because from her womb was born "the author of life" (Acts 3:15). 259 The Fathers of the Church and the liturgy greet her in these very terms.

Your birth, O Virgin Mother of God, proclaims joy to the whole world, for from you arose the glorious Sun of Justice, Christ our God; he freed us from the age-old curse and filled us with holiness; he destroyed death and gave us eternal life. 260

Since he who became incarnate in you was God from the beginning and Life from before all ages, it was right that you, too, Mother of Life, went to dwell with Life, and your departing was like a sleep and your assumption like an awakening, for you are the Mother of life. 261

He whose dwelling was in an ever virgin womb assumed to life the Mother of Life 262

Many institutes of consecrated life have made strong and concrete choices in favor of life.

We Servites, too, feel the urgency of the call to be at the service of life and to be part of the "people of life and for life," 263 on whom John Paul II calls repeatedly to promote worldwide the cause of life.

102. We must become, therefore, promoters of life and especially of that life for which Jesus says he came among us: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10). This life is fellowship with God, a sharing by grace in the divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4) and the fruit of baptismal regeneration. It is full, unbounded, eternal life that is to be defended and protected with great care so that the Evil One, "a murderer from the beginning" (Jn 8:44), not extinguish it. It is for this reason that the "Mother of Life" is also "Mother of all the living" (Gn 3:20) Just as the

cradle in Bethlehem points to the cross on Calvary, so Mary's divine motherhood points to her universal motherhood.

103. Threats to life

103. Life, a gift of God, “lover of life” (Wis 11:26), is subject today to serious threats. There stand in opposition to the victorious power of the risen Christ - the rider of the white horse of the apocalypse (cf. Rv 6:2) - other, reckless and crushing powers: violence, injustice and death with all its attendant evils 264 - the fiery red, black and dirty green horses of the apocalypse (cf. Rv 6:4.5.8). Apocalyptic figures today are numerous. Among them are hunger, which is devastating three-fourths of humanity, especially in the southern hemisphere; war, which continues to cause suffering, death and misery in many parts of the world and is fed by avaricious territorial claims, ethnic hate and religious fanaticism; criminal injustice with its deadly fruits: murder, suicide, euthanasia, abortion, usury, and all the forms of exploitation bred in a culture that has lost its love for life and that are prophetically denounced by the Holy Father in the encyclical *Evangelium vitae*; and ecological devastation, which results from the blind anthropocentrism that generates an economic and social system intent on unlimited exploitation of nature, with the consequent depletion of human and natural resources.

104. The scourge of hunger. Each year millions of people die of hunger. There is no need to report the statistics. They are known and frightening, yet they do not communicate the drama of being hungry. Only contact with the poor makes it possible to understand something of the tragedy of hunger, and only such contact provokes unaffected indignation and solidarity with the poor for the sake of their liberation.

Hunger is an affliction paradoxically aggravated by technological progress. If on the one hand modern technology increases the human capacity for producing food, on the other hand it brings about unemployment and through the iron laws of the marketplace pushes many workers to the edges of society.

105. In the Magnificat, Mary of Nazareth ponders another experience. Poor servant of the Lord, she proclaims of the Mighty One: “The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty” (Lk 1:52-53). This suggests that the solution to the problem of hunger is not reserved to economists and cannot be reached by the laws of the marketplace alone. Ethical principles have to be brought to bear, and for this reason the solution to the problem concerns every disciple of Jesus.

The wife of Joseph (cf. Lk 1:27) the carpenter (cf. Mt 13:55) is a “woman of strength, who experienced poverty.” 265 She knows from the experience of her people and from the divine promises that God will satisfy the hunger of the poor (cf. Ex 16; Is 65:13.21-23). She knows too that in the messianic kingdom, begun in her womb, there is “bread” in abundance for the spirit, the heart and the body.

In the Magnificat, Mary anticipates what her Son will do when he announces the Good News along the roads of Palestine. Jesus proclaims that in his Kingdom God will fill the hungry: “Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied” (Lk 6:21). He multiplies the loaves of bread for the crowd that follows after him and is in danger of falling by the wayside for want of something to eat (cf. Mk 6:30-44; 8: 1-10). He orders that “the least” of his brothers and sisters, with all of whom he identifies, be given to eat (cf. Mt 25:35.40). The Son of Mary truly came “that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10).

106. The unavoidable question comes back: can we Servites remain unmoved by the tragedy of hunger that kills millions of people each year? Are we servants of life? We offer a few suggestions to initiate a practical reflection on this matter.

Renew the practice of charitable giving in ways that take into account the situation or context. And do not omit “secret almsgiving” (cf. Mt 6:4) to the needy who knock at our door or whom we meet on the street.

Support human development initiatives, especially those aimed at creating jobs. Work to create in individuals and in our communities a greater awareness of the imbalances in society, so that all will get involved in the struggle for a change of structures and so that consequently the common good will prevail over the good of the individual. The achievements of technology will then no longer be a cause of exclusion; rather they will generate social growth.

107. Ecological devastation. Today the ecological issue worries scientists, politicians and men and women of good will of every nation and creed. It worries the Church, too. 266 It is alarming to witness the increasing devastation of nature as it is subjected to aggressive and disordered exploitation and disfigured in its original beauty.

Theology has shown increasing interest in the ecology issue. It notes how the radical goodness of the created world finds suggestive expression in the words of Scripture: “God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good” (Gn 1:31). Theologians also consider the nature of the dominion men and women are to exercise over the earth (cf. Gn 1:28; 2:15) and try to determine its limits. They reflect on the enigmatic decadence of the cosmos due to sin and because of which “creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:21-22).” 267 Theologians exalt the noble vocation of human persons called to share in God's creative action in the world and insist at the same time on the serious moral responsibility of those whose actions upset the ecosystem, poison the environment, and involve the destruction of vegetable and animal species through reckless exploitation of resources and culpable deforestation. All this has unforeseeable consequences for the health and life of future generations. The ecological crisis is above all a moral problem and John Paul II has warned: “When man turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order. If man is not at peace with God, then earth itself cannot be at peace.” 268

108 The Blessed Virgin and the cosmos

108. Here it will be helpful to present a few points for reflection on the Blessed Virgin and the ecology issue.

The “Mater Creatoris.” In the Litany of Our Lady we invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary as “Mother of our Creator,” through whom “all things came to be” (Jn 1:3; Col 1:16) and in whom all things subsist (cf. Col 1:17). In the psalms and canticles of the Old Testament, we hear the entire creation praise its Creator: the sun, the moon, the bright stars, fire and water, hail and snow (cf. Pss 104. 148. 150; Dn 3:51-90). The New Testament reports the testimony of the visionary of Patmos on creation's praise of God and the Lamb: “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: ‘To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever’” (Rv 5:13-14). But the homage creatures render to the Creator, the incarnate Word, redounds on the Mother. The apocrypha highlight the role creation plays when Mary gives birth. Joseph of Nazareth testifies: “I looked up into the sky, and saw the sky astonished; and I looked up to the pole of the heavens, and saw it standing, and the birds of the air keeping still.... And I saw the sheep walking and the sheep standing still.” 269

Related to the theme Mary “Mother of the Creator” is the association, found especially in the liturgy, of Mary and the biblical Sophia, which is considered to have a cosmic role 270 The “Vertex creationis.” The Christian tradition sees in the Blessed Virgin “the most highly chosen among all creatures” 271 and the “summit of creation” after the most holy humanity of Christ. The expression “summit of creation” refers to Mary's extraordinary perfection as a creature and the

harmony of nature and grace in her life. With the recognition of Mary's eminence, the tradition invented many formulas to express the relationship between her and creatures. For example:

Princeps opus tu cetera inter creata praeinites As first and principal work you shine forth among all creatures. 272

It is a joyful admission, expressed in terms of closeness, fellowship and participation. The Blessed Virgin is the “joy of the world”; 273 through her “every creature is blessed” 274 and the cosmos is renewed - “The heavens, stars, earth, rivers, day, night and all creatures ... rejoice, Mary, because through you they have in a way been raised again to the splendor they had lost and have received new and inexpressible grace.” 275

In creation, radically good and beautiful (cf. Gn 1:31), Mary represents the fullness of beauty - *Tota pulchra* - and harmony. 276 In her, the cosmos recovers its original innocence and for this reason all creatures break out in acclaim before her: “Every creature praises you, Mother of light.” 277 The liturgy takes from creation its loveliest metaphors - moon, star, fountain, rose, shoot, dove - as images of the virtues which adorn the Blessed Virgin and her mission of grace. In addition to this, Revelation 12 represents the Church and Mary as the “cosmic Woman” embellished with the most splendid elements of creation: the sun as her robe, the moon as her footstool, and the stars (the twelve signs of the zodiac) as her crown.

The “undefiled Virgin.” Ecology movements deplore especially the often senseless and foolish violence that people inflict on nature. The Holy Father shared with ecologists a reflection that is useful for us Servites, too, in our desire to be servants of God's creation: I ask myself couldn't the virginal character of human creation (cf. Gen 2:4b-7.22-23) and its recreation in Christ to be a source of inspiration for the present-day ecological movements which censure all the forms of violence inflicted on creation, the deterioration of nature and environmental pollution?

It's the task of theologians to make clear to our contemporaries that in Jesus Christ the ideal of the new and fully realized person has found realization. He is that person and in him God's anthropological plan has reached absolute perfection. In Christ's roots - his conception in the womb of Mary - and in his birth to definitive life from the undefiled tomb - there is a “virginal element” of great significance with regard to his person and his exemplarity for all disciples. 278

Mary of Nazareth never suffered corruption. She never knew any kind of deterioration or pollution. She was the “undefiled Virgin” in body, heart and spirit. Creation sees mirrored in her the fullness and harmony to which it aspires.

109. In the storehouse of our tradition

109. Our Order arose among the evangelical-apostolic forms of religious life that began in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. St. Francis of Assisi (+ 1226), proclaimed patron of ecologists by John Paul II, 279 is a strong and original figure of that era. His life was an admirable example of “genuine and deep respect for the integrity of nature.” 280 St. Francis had a vital sense of the bond existing between humankind and the rest of God's creation. He understood that love for the Creator required respect for all creatures and that peace with God is the basis for peace with the created world. The ecological insight of St. Francis exerted a salutary influence on other religious movements similar to his and founded about the same time and in the same area. In this connection it is a pleasure to recall the story of Monte Senario where our First Fathers decided to settle and begin our Family. It is a story in which admiration, respect and a religious understanding of nature are essential elements. 281

The author of the *Legenda* describes the crest of Monte Senario in a way that reveals what we could call today ecological sensitivity. He says: “They found at the top a delightful level area, a spring of very fine water off to one side and a surrounding grove of trees so well-arranged that it might have been planted by hand.” 282

Centuries later, in 1713, the pine woods are still so dense that friar Francesco M. Poggi (+ 1720) notes with satisfaction that “said woods” are “filled with thick pines” planted “not carelessly and without order as in other woods” but rather lined up like “a well ordered militia.” 283 This is due not to chance but to the detailed and severe instructions found in the Constitutions of the Hermits of the Sacred Hermitage, a text inspired by awe-filled respect for nature.

Father Rector and the Custodian will see to the maintenance of the hermitage's woods by having a good number of pines planted each year. Since no one is allowed to cut wood without permission of the Chapter, so as not to ruin the attractiveness of the place, whoever cuts green trees without the permission of Father Rector or the Chapter will fast on bread and water, once for each tree. 284

The italicized phrase “so as not to ruin the attractiveness of the place” states the purpose of the prohibition to cut down young trees. The love for nature at Monte Senario will be passed on to the other hermitages founded from there. 285

110. It is time to make a few practical suggestions, some of a general nature and others related to the special Marian character of our Family.

As disciples of Christ we cannot be indifferent to the ecology issue. Rather we must acquire an ecological consciousness that includes respect for and attention to nature, as well as solidarity with groups committed to preventing environmental deterioration. 286 That means we have to develop what John Paul II calls a sense of “ecological responsibility.” This includes “responsibility for oneself, for others, and for the earth,” 287 and requires “a genuine conversion in ways of thought and behavior.” 288

As Servites we will draw inspiration for our relationships with all creatures from Mary - “Mother of our Creator,” “Summit of creation,” “Undeified Virgin.”

We have to recall, too, the epilogue to our Constitutions which bids us to “have only relationships of peace” 289 with all creatures. It is the peace which comes as a gift of Christ and the Spirit and which excludes every kind of violence and pollution and all arrogance, vulgarity and banality in our dealings with whatever creature - man or woman, plant or animal, earth or water. Our ways of relating to creation should seek their inspiration in the gentleness and strength of Our Lady. It is not without reason that we ask the Lord: “Give us a deep respect for all creation and the power to resist all who dishonor it.” 290

We are happy to point out that in our Proper there is the office of “Mary, the New Woman” in which the Blessed Virgin's relationship with creatures is commemorated in its many aspects. Mary is seen one time as the highest of all creatures:

...by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit,
you formed the Blessed Virgin
and made her first among all your creation. 291

Another time she is the prayerful personification of the created world:

You are the obedient earth, O Mary,
creation alive in love and adoration. 292

In another text all creation praises her:

Hail, holy Virgin and Mother of light;
all creation praises you. 293

When the liturgy is celebrated devoutly, it exerts a positive influence on our way of relating to the rest of creation.

Lastly, we invite you to meditate and reflect on Mary's place in the created world as its "virginal and fruitful center." "The reason we call upon Mary as Queen of the angels, the stars, the waters, the plants, the flowers, the animals and all people, is to indicate that she, in her archetypal mystery and in her reality in the invisible, is the Gate through which the unique Absolute communicates with all the various creatures, in all of which she is present as virginal and fruitful center."²⁹⁴

The humble Virgin of the Magnificat carries in her womb Jesus, the Messiah, just as the "Woman clothed with the sun" (Rv 12:1), the new Zion, carries the new messianic community. Two mothers, one mother. Both are at the service of Jesus who is Life. And this mystery of Life is threatened from the beginning by the murderous rage of Herod (cf. Mt 2:16-18), by the "huge red dragon" (Rv 12:3) that "stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth" (Rv 12:4).

But the song of the Blessed Virgin is experience and prophecy of the fall of the powerful, including the tyrant of Galilee whose cruel and wicked command provoked in Ramah "sobbing and loud lamentation" (Mt 2:18:cf. Jer 31:15). The Magnificat is like the song of victory that was heard in heaven after the defeat of the "huge dragon ... who is called the Devil" (Rv 12:9):

Now have salvation and power come,
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Anointed.
For the accuser of our brothers is cast out,
who accuses them before our God day and night (Rv 12:10).

We said, brothers and sisters, that we want to be Servants of the Magnificat. This expression has the same meaning as others used for every disciple of Jesus, such as "Proclaimers of the 'Gospel of life'" and "Promoters of a culture of life." We have taken the Blessed Virgin's canticle as the manifesto of our service. This requires that we be aware of the grave threats that weigh upon life in all its forms - supernatural life, physical life, cosmic life. We place ourselves at the service of life, convinced in faith that the defense of life and care for it demand commitment. And at the same time we are certain that the winning arm is humble confidence in the Almighty who does "great things" for his sons and daughters

111. At the service of ecumenism

111. Mary is "the most excellent fruit of redemption,"²⁹⁵ of the redemption that flowed from the open side of the Savior (cf. Jn 19:34) and reunites the dispersed children of God according to the prophetic utterance of Caiaphas: "You know nothing, nor do you consider that it is better for you that one man should die instead of the people, so that the whole nation may not perish.' He did not say this on his own, but since he was the high priest for that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not only for the nation, but also to gather into one the dispersed children of God" (Jn 11:49b-52). From the cross, Jesus draws all nations to himself (cf. Jn 12:32); at the cross, the dispersed children of God are gathered; and at the foot of the cross, Mary becomes the Mother of Jesus' disciples (cf. Jn 19:25-27). Mary is, therefore, inherently ecumenical. To reunite the children of God Jesus came (cf. Jn 10:6; 19:23-24; 21:11), prayed (cf. Jn 17:20) and died (cf. Jn 10:16; 11:49-52; 12:24; 17:19-23; 19:20).²⁹⁶ This is the definitive event which faith proclaims and celebrates in song:

For he is our peace,
 he who made both one and broke down
 the dividing wall of enmity ...
 through the cross ...
 for through him we both have access
 in one Spirit to the Father (Eph 2:14.16b.18).

In Jesus, son of David (cf. Lk 3:31), son of Abraham (cf. Lk3:34), son of Adam (cf. Lk3:38), the entire ecumene is gathered and reconciled.

The enmity that separates is annihilated in all who are conformed by the Easter gift of the Spirit to the thoughts and attitude of the Lord of peace (cf. Phil 2:5). Mary is the perfect icon of all who are conformed to the Lord. Indeed, this conformity reaches its fullness in her. She is the outstanding expression of the unifying action of the Spirit: daughter of Zion, she recapitulates in herself Israel; image of the Church, she recapitulates in herself the Christians of every place and time; daughter of Eve, she recapitulates in herself all humanity past, present and future. Mary is the icon given by Jesus “lifted up from the earth” (Jn 12:32) to the “disciple whom he loved” (cf. Jn 19:25-27). In this icon the Church sees the possibility that God's plan be realized: all humanity gathered in a unity which overcomes every kind of separation but which at the same time incorporates and respects the plurality of languages. The Spirit of Pentecost, Spirit of unity, has conquered ancient Babylon's spirit of division (cf. Gn 11: 1 -9).

112. The ecumenical reading of the figure of Mary is rooted in Sacred Scripture. Contemporary theology in both East and West recognizes her representative value. This insight matches harmoniously an age-old intuition forcefully expressed in the Byzantine Christmas liturgy:

The Lord Jesus was born from the holy Virgin
 and illuminated everything with his light.
 What can we offer you, Lord,
 who are born as man on earth?
 Every creature has come from you
 and offers the witness of its gratitude:
 the angels offer their song,
 the heavens the stars, the Magi their gifts,
 the shepherds their wonder,
 the earth offers you a cave and the desert a manger;
 and we, we offer you a Virgin Mother. 297

As members of the Church we offer to the Son in the name of all humanity the Woman in whom and by whom we are represented. A contemporary Orthodox theologian writes:

On the one hand, tenaciously urged on by God whose will always brings about growth (Col 2 19), humanity was able to offer God through the Blessed Virgin flesh to clothe God and be God's dwelling. On the other hand, through the Blessed Virgin's word humanity made it possible for God to take on this flesh. 298

Mary's very personal yes is in fact the yes of all humanity, just as the offering of her body to the Word is the offering of all humanity. This view is admirably synthesized by Thomas Aquinas when he says, “Expetebatur consensus Virginis loco totius humanae naturae - The Virgin's consent was petitioned ... [and] stood for the consent of all men.” 299 It is a view shared by both East and

West. A contemporary Western theologian explains the cooperation of Mary in the Christ event and concludes his discussion with this statement:

The fiat of Mary must be given universal significance, a breadth that embraces all humanity.³⁰⁰

The same must be said of the Magnificat. In Mary, as we've already noted, ³⁰¹ Israel, the churches and all humanity sing together, each with its own voice. Luther says that Mary "sang it not for herself alone but for us all." ³⁰² It is not by accident, but because of the ecumenical quality of Mary's canticle, that the Christian churches, gathered for the interreligious meeting at Assisi on 27 October 1986, prayed the Magnificat. They recognized its character as a universal prayer, as "something precious" to be shared, along with the Pater noster, with all prayerful humanity. ³⁰³ In both breadth and quality, everything in Mary is ecumenical. In her person, fiat and Magnificat the whole inhabited earth is gathered and represented. In her person the whole ecumene recognizes a way of living in the world: in the amen of faith and in the canticle of praise and thanksgiving. The entire ecumene is the object of God's merciful and saving action. God denies nobody the greatest gift, the Son (cf. Jn 3: 16). The Son finds a place in the house (cf. Lk 1:39-45), in the contemplation (cf. Lk 2:15-17) and in the arms (cf. Lk 2:28) of Israel. With the Magi he finds a place among the nations: "... and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage" (Mt 2: 11).

¹¹³The ecumenical reading of the figure of Mary is not a forced one. It is rather a sign of the times. Ecumenical reflection has made it possible to highlight a prerogative that belongs to her, just as it belongs too to all who make special reference to her name out of a choice of faith and love. Ecumenism is inherent in the name "Servants of Mary," in this name that identifies our Order, priories, convents and each one of us. It is part of the name of men and women, like St. Philip Benizi, ³⁰⁴ who are called to become, following in Mary's footsteps, icons resembling her Son, the ecumenical man par excellence.

All - Orthodox, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, the followers of every religion and those with no religion - must find a place in the hearts of Servants of Mary, hearts that recapitulate and love all in generous self-giving. The Servite Family must be a sign and prophetic manifestation of a way of being together in friendship and openness in the midst of human diversity. Every Servite house must be a place where all, coming from near and far, find upon entering Jesus with his Mother (cf. Mt 2:11). A Servite house must be a house of hospitality, open to Christians of every confession, to pilgrims of the absolute of every religion, and to every creature that comes to the door.

Ecumenical contacts are a sign of the times that has been often noted by the magisterium - from the conciliar decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* (21 November 1965) to the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (25 May 1995) - and in the rich, official documentation of Jewish-Christian and Christian-interreligious dialogues. What the apostolic letter *Oriente lumen* says of the Catholic Church's relationship with Orthodoxy can be extended to cover every kind of ecumenical relationship:

In addition to knowledge, I feel that meeting one another regularly is very important. In this regard, I hope that monasteries will make a particular effort, precisely because of the unique role played by monastic life within the Churches and because of the many unifying aspects of the monastic experience, and therefore of spiritual awareness, in the East and in the West. Another form of meeting consists in welcoming Orthodox professors and students to the Pontifical Universities and other Catholic academic institutions. We will continue to do all we can to extend this welcome on a wider scale. May God also bless the founding and development of places designed precisely to offer hospitality to our brothers of the East, including such places in this city of Rome where the living, shared memory of the leaders of the Apostles and of so many martyrs is preserved. It is important that meetings and exchanges should involve Church communities in the broadest forms and ways. We know for example how positive inter-parish activities such as "twinning" can be for mutual cultural and spiritual enrichment, and also for the exercise of charity. I judge very positively the initiatives of joint pilgrimages to places where holiness is particularly expressed in

remembering men and women who in every age have enriched the Church with the sacrifice of their lives. In this direction it would also be a highly significant act to arrive at a common recognition of the holiness of those Christians who, in recent decades, particularly in the countries of Eastern Europe, have shed their blood for the one faith in Christ. 305

Servite men and women, an integral part of the human-divine phenomenon of monasticism and called to ecumenical conversion both by their very name and by the summons of the Church, will have to review in an ecumenical perspective their monasteries, priories, parishes, sanctuaries and cultural institutions.

Ecumenical contact originates necessarily in an ecumenical heart and leads to a reciprocal knowledge of what is vitally important for the other person. This in turn generates an ever fuller fellowship and the desire to journey together without aiming at annexation and without abandoning one's own convictions. Each is open in a spirit of discipleship to an exchange of gifts with the other, open to every fragment of truth light and beauty coming from the other. Each one is also ready to give an accounting, humbly and gently, and in the way and with the words the Spirit will suggest, of his or her own hope, Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary and is her gift to all. In this way ours will be the joy of sharing with the Christian churches and the religions of the world the retrieval of a kind of universal maternal language that contributes to our active fellowship with every creature.

114. We do not claim to have made a complete presentation of this theme. We simply wanted to extend an invitation to go back to the source of our name, Servants of Mary, to retrieve an aspect of our identity, our inherently ecumenical character. This leads us to a kind of restructuring that touches on numerous elements: prayer, to be done together with other Christians whenever and wherever possible; feelings, leading us to ask the Spirit for the gift of ecumenical ardor; reflection, for which we ask of the Spirit the grace of a generous heart and an ecumenical openness; study, requiring that we make our own the results of all ecumenical and interreligious dialogues; and action, calling us to offer our service for the protection of the created world, the restoration of peace among all peoples and the safeguard of the rights of the poor. Progress in ecumenism will surely bring new vigor, new creativity and new perspectives to our Order and to us as Servants of the Magnificat.

This will be a "wonder of God" that will prompt us as humble Servants of Mary to sing again the Magnificat canticle. It will also mean a renewed fiat in response to the call to conform ourselves to Christ and to make room in our hearts and lives for all that is scattered and separated. All this in the footsteps of Mary, the one who most resembles him who has broken down every barrier of division (cf. Gal 3:28). 306

NOTES

1 *The Legenda de origine Ordinis* (hereafter, *Legenda*) alludes to this verse when it tells how St. Peter Martyr, apostolic inquisitor at Florence in 1244, visited the First Fathers and reported that they "lived in complete peace and harmony": "in omni pace et concordia habitare" (*Legenda*, 51); "habitare fratres in unum" (Ps 133,1). The Latin text of the *Legenda* is published in *Monumenta OSM*, 1 (Brussels: Société Belge de Librairie, 1897). We quote the English translation published in *Origins and Early Saints of the Order of Servants of Mary: Writings of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Chicago: Friar Servants of Mary, 1984), 1-65.

2 Writings occasioned by the anniversary of St. Peregrine's death: the Letter of the Prior General, Fr. Hubert M. Moons, *Get Up and Walk* (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1994); the biography by Aristide Serra, *S. Pellegrino Laziosi da Forlì: Storia, culto, attualità* (Forlì, Italy: Edizioni Santuario di S. Pellegrino, 1995); the devotional booklet *In lode di san Pellegrino Laziosi* (Rome: Centro Edizioni <<Marianum >>, 1995).

3 See *Constitutions of the Order Friar Servants of Mary* (hereafter, *Const. OSM*), 254, in *Rule of Saint Augustine and Constitutions of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary* (Buena Park, California: Servite Provincialate, 1991).

4 *Ibid.*, 1.

5 Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes, *Life and Mission of Religious in the Church* (12 August 1980), in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 7 (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1982), 454.

- 6 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millenio Adveniente ... on Preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000* (10 November 1994), 1, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* [= AAS] 87 (1995): 5-41; here, 5; English translation: Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City, 1994. Hereafter, *Tertio millennio adveniente*.
- 7 See *ibid.*, 31 and 39.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 33.
- 10 See *Ibid.*, 34.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 12 *The Roman Missal: The Sacramentary*, September 8: Birth of Mary, Prayer after Communion (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1974); hereafter, *Sacramentary*. See also the reflection of John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Mother of the Redeemer on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church, Mater Redemptoris* (25 March 1987), 3, in AAS 79 (1987): 361-433; here, 363; English translation: Boston: Pauline Books & Media, n. d. Hereafter, *Redemptoris Mater*.
- 13 See IX Synod of Bishops, *The Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World: Instrumentum laboris* (26 June 1994), 65. English translation: Nairobi, Kenya: Pauline Publications Africa, 1994. Hereafter, *Instrumentum laboris*.
- 14 Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, *Essential Elements in the Church's Teaching as Applied to Institutes Dedicated to Works of the Apostolate* (31 May 1983), 6. English translation: Boston: St. Paul Editions, n.d.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Instrumentum laboris*, 65.
- 17 Vatican Council II, *Decree on the Up-to-Date Renewal of Religious Life, Perfectae Caritatis* (28 October 1965), 5. All documents of Vatican Council II are quoted according to the English translation in Austin Flannery, O.P., ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1981). See Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation ... on the Renewal of the Religious Life according to the Teaching of the Second Vatican Council, Evangelica Testificatio* (29 June 1971), 4, in AAS 63 (1971): 499; and John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Redemptionis Donum to Men and Women Religious on their Consecration in the Light of the Mystery of Redemption*, 7, in AAS 76 (1984): 522; hereafter, *Redemptionis donum*.
- 18 In each of the four prayers of solemn benediction or consecration there is an epiklesis in which the gift of the Spirit is explicitly called down on the professed. *Ordo professionis religiosae Ordinis Fratrum Servorum Beatae Mariae Virginis*, pars I: 67 and 143; pars II: 72 and 159 (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1973). Hereafter, *Ordo professionis*.
- 19 Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 56; hereafter, *Lumen gentium*.
- 20 Pius IX, *Apostolic Letter Ineffabilis Deus* (8 December 1854), Introduction. English translation: Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1946.
- 21 John Paul II, *Redemptionis donum*, 17.
- 22 Chapter 5 of *Lumen Gentium* is entitled "*The universal vocation to holiness in the Church.*"
- 23 See Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes and the Sacred Congregation for Bishops, *Directives for the Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church* (14 May 1978), 4; English translation: Vatican City, 1978; and John Paul II, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici ... on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World* (30 December 1988), 16, in AAS 81 (1989): 416; English translation: Vatican City, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, n.d.
- 24 Various figures from the Old Testament - Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Elijah, Elisha - are mentioned in the *Ordo professionis*, both in the lectionary (pars I: 91.92.93.94; pars II: 98.99. 100.101) and in other parts of the rite (pars I: 67 and 143; pars II: 72 and 159).
- 25 The majority of exegetes see in Luke 1: 26-38 the literary form used in the Bible for the announcement of an astonishing birth. Some exegetes, including A.M. Serra ("*L'annunciazione a Maria* [Lc 1, 26-38]: *un formulario di alleanza?*," in *Parole di vita* 25 (1980) 163-209), perceive in the text structural elements characteristic of covenant narratives. Some, in particular K. Stock ("*La vocazione di Maria: Lc 1, 26-38,*" in *Marianum* 45 (1983) 94- 126), see in the text a vocation story. This last view is especially useful for our reflection. For this whole question, see B. Prete, "*Il genere letterario di Lc 1, 26-38,*" in *Ricerche Storico Bibliche* 4/2 (1992) 55-80.
- 26 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 14.
- 27 John Paul II, Talk at the *Angelus* on 3 July 1983, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English edition, 11 July 1983, p. 5; and *Redemptoris Mater*, 27.
- 28 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 56-58.
- 29 See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 30, a. 1., ed. and trans. T.R. Heath (London: Blackfriars, 1969), vol. 51, p. 71.
- 30 See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 55; and Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, II, 16, in *Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera* (= SAEMO) 14/1, 47.
- 31 See James of Sarug, *Homilia de beata Virgine Matre Dei Maria*, in S. Alvarez Campos, *Cortus marianum patristicum*, 5: 5087-5088 (Burgos: Ediciones Aldecoa, 1970), 16-17.
- 32 The famous antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater* (11th century) contains an excellent witness to this theology: "*Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabrielis ab ore / sumens illud Ave (= assenting to the angel's message, fiat), peccatorum miserere.*"

St. Bernard (+ 1153) calls Mary's *fiat* "word of compassion" (*verbum miserationis*) on behalf of all people. See *De laudibus Virginis Matris*, Hom. IV, 8, in *Opera omnia*, 4 (Rome: Editiones Cistercenses, 1966), 53.

33 IX Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, 65.

34 *Const. OSM*, 6.

35 See *Vigilia de Domina: A Marian Prayer Warch of the Servants of Mary* (Chicago: Friar Servants of Mary, 1982), 44. Hereafter, *Vigilia*.

36 See *Angelus Domini: Celebration of the Annunciation* (Chicago: Friar Servants of Mary, 1986). Hereafter, *Angelus*.

37 Vatican Council II, *Perfectae caritatis*, 1.

38 A well known text of St. Augustine has been important in this renewal: "Didn't the Virgin Mary do the will of the Father ... ? Of course she did. Mary did the Father's will and for this reason it is more for her to have been the *disciple of Christ* than to have been the mother of Christ. There was greater happiness for her in being the disciple of Christ than in being the Mother of Christ," *Sermo* 25, 7, in *Patrologia Latina* (= PL) 46, 937.

39 In AAS 56 (1964): 1016.

40 Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Marialis cultus ... for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, (2 February 1974), 35, in AAS 66 (1974): 147. English translation: London: Catholic Truth Society, n.d. Hereafter, *Marialis cultus*.

41 John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi Tradendae ... on Catechesis in Our Time* (16 October 1979), 73, in AAS 71 (1979): 1277-1340; here, 1339. English translation: Vatican City: Vatican Polyglot Press, 1979.

42 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 20.

43 Congregation for Divine Worship, *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 1: Sacramentary*, formula 10 (New York: Catholic Publishing Company, 1992). Hereafter, *Collection BVM*.

44 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 17.

45 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 58.

46 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 17.

47 *Ibid.*, 18.

48 In the second, alternate form of the seven dolor rosary Servites contemplate as the seventh sorrow of the Blessed Virgin "Jesus, Master and Lord, is Persecuted in His Disciples." *Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows* (Chicago: Friars Servants of Mary, 1986), 127-128.

49 Augustine, *Sermon* 215: *At the Giving Back of the Creed*, 4, in *Sermons*, 3/6, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, New York: New City Press, 1993), 162.

50 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 56.

51 *Ibid.*, 46.

52 *Ibid.* This teaching of the Council reflects the experience of more than a few famous religious. St. Francis of Assisi (+ 1226), for example, wrote to St. Clare to express his last wishes: "I, little friar Francis, *want to follow the life* and the poverty of our exalted Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother," *Fonti Francescane*, 140 (Padua: Edizioni Messaggero, 1980), 136.

53 *Rituale della professione religiosa dei frati Servi di santa Maria*, 211 (Rome: General Cuna OSM, 1993), 128. Hereafter, *Rituale professione OSM*.

54 *Ibid.*, 212, p.128.

55 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 42.

56 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 37. See A. M. Serra, "*Maria, <<...profondamente permeata dallo spirito dei poveri di Jahvé>> (RM 37): Testimonianze biblico-giudaiche sul trionfo fedeltà alla Legge di Dio preghiera-liberazione,*" in *Marianum* 50 (1988): 193-289.

57 See *Const. OSM*, 57.

58 See *ibid.*, 12.

59 The seven Florentine merchants who founded our Order in the thirteenth century were men with the ideal of the early Christian community. They were intent on being "of one heart and mind" (Acts 4:32; see *Legenda* 29 and 51). They gave themselves over completely to the Lord's precept: "This is my commandment: love one another as I love you" (Jn 15: 12). In the annals of Church history we see that the Seven Holy Founders constitute one of the groups that lived with greater fullness the ideal of evangelical fellowship.

60 As is known, the texts of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2:42 48 4:32-35) on the early Jerusalem community were the main source of inspiration for the monastic ideal of St. Augustine and became the basis of his Rule. Following the suggestion of St. Peter of Verona, the Seven Founders adopted the Rule of St. Augustine in the year 1245 (see *Legenda*, 53).

61 *Const. OSM*, 3.

62 IX Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, 62.

63 In this light we can understand how an insignificant fact such as the presentation of a child wrapped in swaddling clothes becomes a sign of salvific events (cf. Lk 2: 12). The Fathers, especially in the East, connect the swaddling clothes in which the newborn Jesus is wrapped and placed in the manger with the burial cloths in which the Lord's lifeless body was wrapped and placed in the tomb (cf. Lk 24:12). The swaddling clothes attest to the reality of the mystery of the Word's Incarnation; the burial clothes, to the mystery of the passion and resurrection of Christ the Savior. For patristic and medieval references, see A. Serra, "... e lo avvolse in fasce...>> (Lk 2,7b): *Un <<segno>> da*

- decodificare*," in *E c'era la Madre di Gesù...: Saggi di esegesi biblico-mariana* (1978-1988) (Milan-Rome: Cens-Marianum, 1989), 225-284, especially 265-278.
- 64 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 61.
- 65 Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam II, 19*, *Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera* 14/1, 50; see Origen, *Homiliae super Lucam evangelistam* VII, 2, in *Patrologia Graeca* (= PG) 13, 1817.
- 66 John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio ... on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (7 December 1990), 21, in AAS 83 (1991): 268. English translation: Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, n.d.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 28.
- 68 *Const. OSM*, 73.
- 69 Letter from the Prior General of the Friar Servants of Mary, Fr. Hubert Maria Moons, *Sent to Serve: "Evangelizing Servants"* (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1992). Hereafter, *Sent to Serve*.
- 70 *Const. OSM*, 74.
- 71 *Ibid.*
- 72 The doctrine of Mary's presence in the life of the Church, based on the dogma of the Communion of Saints and the pneumatic state of the glorified Virgin, has a significant place in contemporary mariological research. The theme is frequent in the magisterium of Paul VI and has become central in the encyclical of John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*. See B. Billet, "Un thème central de l'encyclique "Redemptoris Mater">>," in *Esprit et vie* (16 July 1987): 428-431; S. De Fiores, "La presenza di Maria nella vita della Chiesa alla luce dell'enciclica "Redemptoris Mater,"" in *Marianum* 51 (1989):110-144; B. Mondin, "La presenza di Marianel cammino di fede della Chiesa, popolo di Dio radicato in tutte la nazioni (RM nn. 25-28)," in *Seminarium* 38 (1987): 525-533; A. Pizzarelli, *La presenza di Maria nella vita della Chiesa* (Cinisello Balsamo [Milan]: Edizioni Paoline, 1990).
- 73 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 62.
- 74 *Collection BVM*, formula 30, Preface, 120.
- 75 John Paul II addressed all consecrated persons on the occasion of the Marian Year and said: "And since the Mother of God is constantly present in the life of the Church because of her part in the mystery of Christ, your vocation and your service are an echo of this presence of hers," *Epistula apostolica Litterae encyclicae* (22 May 1988), introduction, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, 12/2 (1988) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989), 1591.
- 76 *Rituale professione OSM*, 211, p. 127. The liturgical text is obviously dependent on *Const. OSM*, 1.
- 77 *Vigilia de Domina*, "To the Virgin of the Fiat," 44.
- 78 *Const. OSM*, 7.
- 79 Vatican II interprets Mary's request on behalf of the newlyweds at Cana in terms of mercy or compassion ("misericordia permota"). See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 58.
- 80 See *Const. OSM*, 52.
- 81 *Vigilia*, "To the Virgin at the foot of the Cross," 46. See *Const. OSM*, 319.
- 82 See IX Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, 25.
- 83 See *ibid.*, 23.
- 84 See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 43-44; IX Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, 67.
- 85 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 68.
- 86 See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 46; and above, note 17.
- 87 *Regula sancti Leandri*, introduction, in *Santos Padres Espanoles*, 2 (Madrid: La Editorial Catolica, 1971 [= Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 321]), 28.
- 88 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 28, a. 4, ad 2, ed. and trans. T.R. Heath (London: Blackfriars, 1969), vol. 51, p. 55.
- 89 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 46.
- 90 See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 56.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 53.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 93 The Dominicans, for example, consider the Blessed Virgin "Ordinis nostri Mater," *Liber Constitutionum et Ordinationum Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum iussu fr. Anicati Fernandez Magistri Ordinis editus* (1969), 189/III.
- 94 *Holy Virginity*, trans. John McQuade, S.M., *The Fachers of the Church: A New Translation*, 6 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1969), 149.
- 95 In Purificatione sanctae Mariae, 7, *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* (= CCCM) 27B, 992.
- 96 *De Adsumptione sanctae Mariae*, 5, CCCM 27B, 1030.
- 97 *Oratio ad sanctam Mariam pro impetrando eius et Christi amore*, 8, in H. Barré, *Prières anciennes de l'Occident à la Mère du Sauveur* (Paris Lethielleux, 1963), 305.
- 98 *Ibid.*
- 99 *In Evangelium sancti Johannis commentariorum libri XIV, XIII*, CCCM 9,744.
- 100 On the efficacy of the Virgin Mary's exemplarity in relation to her spiritual motherhood, see Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Signum Magnum*, in AAS 59 (1967): 465-474, especially part one.
- 101 The Constitutions of the Mercedarian friars, for example, state: "Eam [Mariam] ut 'Matrem nostrum' ... honorent, cum ipsa sit spiritualis Institutrix Ordinis, " *Constitutiones et Normae Ordinis B.M. . de Mercede a Capitolo Generali Speciali exaratae* (1979), 57.

- 102 *Legenda*, 7.
- 103 *Ibid.*, 7-8.
- 104 *The Life of Blessed Francis of Siena*, 6, in *Origins and Early Saints O.S.M.*, 91-108.
- 105 *Ibid.*, 13, p. 99.
- 106 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 45.
- 107 *Const. OSM*, 7; see *ibid.*, 87.
- 108 *Ibid.*, 7; see 87 and 136.
- 109 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 110 Letter from the Prior General of the Friar Servants of Mary, Hubert Maria Moons, *With Mary beside the Cross* (Rome: General Curia OSM 1922), 17. Hereafter, *Mary beside the Cross*.
- 111 *Const. OSM*, 7.
- 112 See *ibid.*, 149.
- 113 See *ibid.*, 319; 208th General Chapter of the Order of Servants of Mary, *Do Whatever He Tells You: Reflections and Proposals for Promoting Marian Devotion*, 115 (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1983), 112; hereafter *Do Whatever He Tells You*; see also *Mary beside the Cross*, 15.
- 114 *Const. OSM*, 7.
- 115 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 59.
- 116 For the theological foundations of Mary's regality there is abiding value in the encyclical of Pius XII, *Ad caeli Reginam* (11 October 1954), in *AAS* 46 (1954), 625-640. For post-conciliar discussions, see S. De Fiores, "*Maria Regina: significato teologico attualizzato*," in *Maria presenza viva del Popolo di Dio* (Rome: Edizioni Monfortane, 1980); D. Sartor, A. Serra, S. De Fiores, "*Regina*," in S. De Fiores and S. Meo, eds., *Nuovo dizionario di mariologia* (Cinisello Balsamo-Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1985), 1189-1206.
- 117 For the Carmelite Order "reference to Mary, Queen and Mother of Carmel, is an intimate part of its spiritual life," J. Castellano Cervera, "*El impacto de la doctrina mariana del Concilio Vaticano II en la familia del Carmelo Teresiano*," in *Marianum* 45 (1983): 479.
- 118 See St. Louis De Monfort, *True Devotion to Mary*, 31-38, trans. F.W. Faber (Bay Shore, New York: Montfort Publications, 1954), 24-25.
- 119 This explains why the liturgy proposes Rv 21, 1-5a as the first reading for several Masses in honor of the Blessed Virgin. See *Roman Missal: Lectionary for Mass*, 613, 708 (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1970), hereafter *Lectionary for Mass*; and Collection BVM, 2: Lectionary, 15, 20, 23, 27, 46.
- 120 *Legenda*, 18.
- 121 *Ibid.*, 11.
- 122 "Blessed be our Fathers, whose hope was in the Lord and whose glory was in the service of Our Lady," February 17: Seven Holy Fathers of Our Order; Evening Prayer 1, Antiphon 2, *The Liturgy of the Hours: Proper of the Order of Servants of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Chicago: Friar Servants of Mary, 1990). Hereafter, *Liturgy OSM*.
- 123 See above, footnote 23.
- 124 Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis humanae*, 14.
- 125 Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter Populorum progressio* (26 March 1967), 13, in *AAS* 59 (1967): 263. English translation of the Vatican Polyglot Press, 1967.
- 126 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 55.
- 127 See A. Serra, *Sapienza e contemplazione di Maria secondo Luca 2, 19.51 b* (Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 1982), 285-298 ("*Maria, fonte di informazione per l'infanzia di Gesù?*") and 309-337 for an anthology of texts.
- 128 See Bruno of Asti (+ 1123), *Commentaria in Lucam, I, II*, PL 165, 355. In a private devotional text going back to the 14th century we find the invocations "Magistra evangelistarum" and "Doctrix apostolorum." See G.G. Meersseman, *Der Hymnos Akathistos in Abendland*, 2 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1960), 172.
- 129 Paul VI, *Signum magnum*, 1.
- 130 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 17
- 131 See *ibid.*
- 132 Ambrose, *De institutione virginis*, 45, SAEMO 14/2, 144.
- 133 Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundam Lucam*, II, 22, SAEMO 9/1, 164
- 134 Ambrose, *De virginibus*, II, 2, 7, SAEMO 14/1, 168.
- 135 "Imitemur et nos, fratres mei, piam domini matrem ipsi quoque omnia verba et facta domini ac salvatoris nostri fixo in corde conservando," Bede the Venerable, *Opera homiletica*, I, 19 (Lk 2, 42-45), *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (= CCL) 122, 139. With reference to Lk 2:19.51 the liturg.v of the Order addresses the Virgin with the title Teacher: "Benigna, clemens, sapiens, / facta cum verbis conferens / Dei secreta penetras: / in te Magistram noscimus," *Liturgia Horarum: Proprium Officiorum Ordinis Fratrum Servorum Beatae Mariae Virginis*, I (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1977), 251. Hereafter, *Liturgy OSM*.
- 136 See *Vigilia*, 44, "To the Virgin of the Fiat," and 46, "To the Virgin at the foot of the Cross."
- 137 *Liturgia OSM*, 1, 251. This hymn from Morning Prayer is not included in the English edition of *Liturgy OSM*.
- 138 *Suppliche litaniche a santa Maria* (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1988), 319

- 139 Gregory of Nyssa, *De virginitate*, XIX, PG 46, 317; Ambrose, *De virginibus*, II, 2. 17, SAEMO 14/1, 178; Jerome, *Epistula XXII*, 41, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (= CSEL) 54, 209; Peter Chrysogonus, *Sermo* 146, 7, CCL 24 B, 905-906.
- 140 *Carmen de virginitate*, 25-26, PL 88, 267.
- 141 Regula sancti Leandri, in *Santos Padres Espanoles*, 2, 30.
- 142 The famous hymn *Ave, maris stella*, composed in a monastic setting in the ninth century, is based on the view of the Virgin as guide of believers in their journey toward the heavenly homeland. She prepares a safe journey (*iter paratutum*) there.
- 143 See Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, trans. F.M. Oben, *Collected Works of Edith Stein*, 2 (Washington: ICS Publications, 1987).
- 144 *Const. OSM*, 24.
- 145 *Ibid.*
- 146 *Ibid.*, 319. The official Italian text speaks of Mary as *conduttrice*, with the root *dux*, guide. The English translation is *model*.
- 147 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 43.
- 148 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 149 *Lumen gentium*, 44, speaks of "form of life"; 46, of "kind of life."
- 150 *De virginibus* II, 2, 15, SAEMO 14/1, 176.
- 151 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 65; see Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 65.
- 152 IX Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris*, 65.
- 153 *Const. OSM*, 1; see *Rituale professione OSM*, 211.
- 154 *Const. OSM*, 24.
- 155 *Ibid.*, 24b; see *ibid.*, 6.
- 156 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 157 See *ibid.*, 52.
- 158 See *ibid.*, 7.
- 159 *Ibid.*, 6.
- 160 *Vigilia*, 47.
- 161 Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, *Gaudium et spes*, 22.
- 162 In the celebration of the Eucharist we ask God to grant us a place in the Kingdom where the "freed from the corruption of sin and death, we shall sing your glory with every creature," Eucharistic Prayer IV, Intercessions, *Sacramentary*, 522
- 163 Tommaso da Celano, *Vita seconda di san Francesco d'Assisi*, 198, in *Fonte Francescane* (Padua Edizioni Messaggero 1988), 711
- 164 For some examples of the title "sister" applied to Mary, see F. Manns, "Le récit de la Dormition de Marie (Vat. grec. 1982): Contribution à l'étude des origines de l'exégèse chrétienne," in *Marianum* 50 (1988): 541-542.
- 165 See T.F. Ossanna, *Maria "sorella nostra": Significato del titolo nel magistero di Paolo VI* (Rome: Miscellanea Francescana, 1991).
- 166 In a talk (10 October 1963) commemorating the first anniversary of the opening of the Council: "Mary, make that this Church, which is his [Christ's] and yours, in defining itself, recognize you as its most elect mother, daughter and sister," *AAS* 55 (1963): 873. In a talk (24 November 1964) closing the third session of the Council: "Sicut et nos, et ipsa est Adae filia, ac propterea etiam nostra soror ob communem humanam naturam," *ibid.* 56 (1964): 1016. And in the talk (8 December 1965) closing the Council: "Is it not perhaps with the settling of our gaze on this humble Woman, our Sister, at the same time our heavenly Mother and Queen, that our spiritual conciliar ascension and this final greeting can conclude?" *Ibid.* 58 (1966): 8.
- 167 *Sacramentary*, Eucharistic Prayer 1, 507.
- 168 Vatican Council II, *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103.
- 169 Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 53.
- 170 *Ibid.*
- 171 See N. Geagea, *Maria madre e decoro del Carmelo: La pietà mariana dei Carmelitani durante i primi tre secoli della loro storia* (Rome: Teresianum, 1988), 564-572
- 172 The community founded in Darmstadt on 30 March 1947 by Mother Basilea Schlink draws its inspiration from the image of Mary as sister. The name of the community is *Evangelical Marian Sisterhood* (*Evangelische Marienschwesternschaft*).
- 173 The *Message to the Servite Family at the Conclusion of the Second International Meeting* (4-10 July 1993) closes with a paragraph in which the Blessed Virgin is called "our sister": "Let us thank God for the journey which we have travelled these past years and let us look to Mary, our sister and companion in faith, our inspiration, our model and strength," UNIFAS, *Accoglienza ispirata a Maria: Nuova sfida alla Famiglia Servitana* (Rome: UNIFAS Secretariat, 1993), 190-192.
- 174 *Liturgy OSM*, 324: September 15: Our Lady of Sorrows, Office of Readings, Antiphon 1B.
- 175 *Proprium Missarum Ordinis Fratrum Servorum beatae Mariae Virginis*, 1, Preface of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1972), 80.

- 176** Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, introduction.
- 177** Scholars distinguish three categories of hymns in the pauline corpus: hymns addressed to God: Rom 11: 33-36; Eph 1:3-14; 2 Tim 1:8-10; Tt 3:4-7; hymns addressed to Christ: Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:20-23; 2:14-18; 2 Tim 2:11-13; and the hymn to love: 1 Cor 13:1-13.
- 178** See Rv 4:11; 5:9-10; 5:12; 5:13; 7:12; 15:3-4; 19:1-8.
- 179** "Divina eloquia cum legente crescunt," *Homiliae in Hiezechielem prophetam* I, VII, 8, CCL 142, 87. A similar expression: "Scriptura sacra ... aliquomodo cum legentibus crescit," *Moralia in Iob* XX, I, 1, CCL 143A, 1003.
- 180** Inadmissible, for example, are those spiritualist readings which see in the "powerful" of v. 52 the demons, the heretics or unbelieving Jews, or those political readings which interpret the overthrow of the "powerful from their thrones" in terms of violent revolution.
- 181** John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 20.
- 182** See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 63.
- 183** See *ibid.*, 53.
- 184** See Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 103.
- 185** Aphraates, *Demonstratio* 14, 33, in Alvarez Campos, *Corpus marianum patristicum*, 2, 1329.
- 186** *Const. OSM*, 24.
- 187** *Rituale professione OSM*, 211; see *Const. OSM*, 154.
- 188** Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* II, 26, SAEMO 14/1, 83-84.
- 189** See A. Muller, *Ecclesia-Mana: Die Einheit Marias und der Kirche* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1955).
- 190** For the theme of the Church that celebrates the divine mysteries *with* and *like* Mary, see Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 11; *Collection BVM*, General Introduction, 12-13.
- 191** *Vigilia*, 45, "To the Virgin of the Magnificat."
- 192** See J. Dupont, "Le Magnificat comme discours sur Dieu," in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 102 (1980): 321-343.
- 193** John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 37.
- 194** See G. Bruni, "Dire Dio agli uomini d'oggi: Linee di discussione," in P. Poupard, ed., *Parlare di Dio all'uomo postmoderno* (Rome: Città Nuova Editrice, 1994), 32.
- 195** The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, the Secretariat for Non-Christians, the Secretariat for Non-Believers, and the Pontifical Council for Culture, *Sects or New Religious Movements: Pastoral Challenge, 1-2*, in *Sects and New Religious Movements: An Anthology of Texts from the Catholic Church 1986-1994*, edited by the Working Group on New Religious Movements, Vatican City (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1995), 65.
- 196** *Ibid.*, 3.
- 197** *Ibid.*, 2, 2.
- 198** See John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 14; S. Muñoz Iglesias, "La fe de Maria y la fe de Abraham," in *Marianum* 50 (1988): 176-192.
- 199** *The Sacramentary*, the Profession of Faith. 200 See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 55.
- 200** See Vatican Council II, *Lumen gentium*, 55
- 201** See I. Goma Civit, *El Magnificat: Cantico de la salvacion* (Madrid: La Editoria Catolica, 1982) 45-50.
- 202** III General Conference of the Latin America Episcopate, *Puebla: Evangelization in the Present and Future of Latin*, 297, in J. Easgleston and P. Scharper, eds., *Puebla and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 1979), 163.
- 203** See A. Bello, *Maria donna dei nostri giorni* (Cinisello Balsamo-Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1993), 87-89.
- 204** Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Gaudete in Domino ... on Christian Joy*, III, in AAS 67 (1975): 297; English translation of the Vatican Polyglot Press, n.d.
- 205** Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV, 7,1, *Sources Chrétiennes* 100,456 and 458. In fact at this point in his text the bishop of Lyons attributes the canticle to Elizabeth, whereas earlier he had attributed it clearly to Mary: "Mary, rejoicing and prophesying proclaimed in the name of the Church, 'My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,'" *Adversus haereses* III, 10, 2, *Sources Chrétiennes* 211, 118.
- 206** Is 61:10 is used rather frequently in Marian celebrations of the Roman liturgy. Examples in *The Sacramentary*: December 8: Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Entrance Antiphon; *Lectionary for Mass*: Immaculate Heart of Mary (Saturday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost), First Reading; Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Reading 1; *The Liturgy of the Hours*, August 15: Assumption, Morning Prayer, Reading; Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Morning Prayer, Reading; Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, Morning Prayer, Reading.
- 207** Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, IV
- 208** See above, footnote 71.
- 209** Martin Luther, *Comment on the Magnificat*, in Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* 21 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 299.
- 210** Origen, *Homiliae in Lucam* VIII, 2, PG 13, 1820.
- 211** Martin Luther, *Comment on the Magnificat*, *Luther's Works* 21, 307.
- 212** Paul VI, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 82, in AAS 68 (1976): 75; English translation: *On Evangelization in the Modern World* (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1976). Hereafter, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.
- 213** John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 86.
- 214** *Ibid.*

- 215** On 10 November 1992 John Paul II authorized the release of the final document of the IV Conference of CELAM held in Santo Domingo 12-28 October 1992.
- 216** See John Paul II, *The Church in Africa: Post-Synodal Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995). With this text the Holy Father approved the results of the synod.
- 217** See above, footnote 69.
- 218** Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum*, 4.
- 219** *Do Whatever He Tells You*, 45.
- 220** See Aristide Serra, *Maria secondo il Vangelo* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1987), 70-82 and 128-131.
- 221** Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Ang Mahal na Birhen: Mary in Philippine Life Today: a Pastoral Letter on the Blessed Virgin Mary* (2 February 1975), in *Marianum* 38 (1976): 432.
- 222** IV Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, *Nueva Evangelizacion, Promocion Humana y Cultura Cristiana. Documento de Trabajo*, 457 (Bogota: CELAM, 1992).
- 223** *Mary beside the Cross*, 18.
- 224** *Const. OSM*, 87.
- 225** See G Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin, 1987), 301
- 226** See above, footnote 76; and Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 82.
- 227** John Paul II, *Address to the Latin American Bishops' Conference* (9 May 1983), III, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, 6/1 (1983), 698.
- 228** John Paul II, *Letter to Women* (29 June 1995), in *AAS* 87 (1995): 804 and in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 July 1995, weekly English edition, p. 1.
- 229** "Jesuits and the Situation of Women in Church and Civil Society," in *Documents of the Thirty-Fourth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995), 171-178; here, 171.
- 230** John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 3.
- 231** John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris dignitatem ... on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year* (15 August 1988), in *AAS* 80 (1988): 1681. English translation of the Vatican Polyglot Press, 1988.
- 232** *Ibid.*, 16. In note 38 the Holy Father gives two significant texts: one of Rabanus Maurus, *De vita beatae Mariae Magdalенаe*, 27, PL 112, 1474; the other of St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioannem Evangelistam Expositio*, c. XX, L. III, 6.
- 233** John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 16.
- 234** In *AAS* 58 (1966): 13-14.
- 235** John Paul II, *Letter to Women*, 6.
- 236** *Ibid.*, 3.
- 237** See "Message to the Servite Family," in *Profeti oggi a servizio della vita*, acts of the international meeting of the Servite Family held at Madonna dell'Arco, Italy, 27 December 1988-4 January 1989 (Rome: General Curia OSM, 1989), 277.
- 238** See John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 6 and 8.
- 239** Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 35.
- 240** See John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 29.
- 241** John Paul II, *Letter to the Bishops of the United States* (3 April 1983) on the role of religious life today, in *AAS* 81 (1989): 1165.
- 242** John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 13.
- 243** See above, note 229 for the important text on women issued by the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.
- 244** John Paul II, Talk at the General Audience of 29 November 1995, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English edition, 6 December 1995, p. 15.
- 245** See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation, Libertatis conscientiae*, 23, 71, 99 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).
- 246** See above, paragraphs 83-94.
- 247** John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 18.
- 248** See John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus annus ... on the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (1 May 1991), in *AAS* 83 (1991): 845; English translation of the Vatican Polyglot Press, 1991.
- 249** *Ibid.*, 39, 4.
- 250** *Sent to Serve*, 61.
- 251** See *Rule of St. Augustine*, 31, in *Const. OSM.*, p. 33.
- 252** Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.
- 253** See *ibid.*, 11 and 44.
- 254** *Liturgy of the Hours*, Night Prayer, Antiphons in Honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Salve Regina.
- 255** See *Const. OSM*, 52.
- 256** *Ibid.*, 319.
- 257** The trusting attitude of Mary in these two salvific episodes has had devotional consequences that are interesting and only apparently in contrast with one another. In the Spanish liturgy the ancient Marian memorial of 18 December, the *Expeccatio partus*, is also known as the feast of "the Virgin of hope." In Seville the famous "Macarena," the Sorrowful Mother who awaits the resurrection of her Son, has as its proper title "the Virgin of hope."

- 258 We are happy to send fraternal greetings from the General Chapter to the community in Reggio Emilia, Italy, which is getting ready to celebrate the fourth centenary of the first miracle (29 April 1596) of the Virgin of the Ghiara portrayed in adoration of her newborn Son: "Quem genuit adoravit."
- 259 *Roman Missal: The Sacramentary*, January 1: Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Opening Prayer.
- 260 *Liturgy of the Hours*, September 8: Birth of Mary, Cantic of Zechariah, Antiphon.
- 261 Germanus of Constantinople, Homily I *on the Dormition of the Mother of God*, PG 98, 348.
- 262 Kontakion of Cosmas the Melodian, in *Anthologion*, 4 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1968), 1037.
- 263 John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae*, 101.
- 264 See U. Vanni, *Apocalisse: una assemblea liturgica interpreta la storia* (Brescia, Italy: Queriniana, 1994), 39.
- 265 Paul VI, *Marialis cultus*, 37.
- 266 On 8 December 1989, for the 13th World Day of Peace, John Paul II sent heads of state throughout the world the thought provoking message *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, AAS 82 (1990) 147-156; and in *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 18-26 December 1989, 1-3.
- 267 *Ibid.*
- 268 *Ibid.*
- 269 *The Protoevangelium of James*, 18, trans. M.B. Riddle, *The Anti-Nicene Fathers* 8, 365.
- 270 The liturgy proposes Proverbs 8:22-31 and Sirach 24:1-2.5-7.12-16.26-30 as readings for the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary. See *The Lectionary for Mass*, 707; *Collection BVM*, 2: *Lectionary*, 21, 24, 32, 36, 37.
- 271 Paul VI, Talk at the general audience, 24 March 1965, in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, 3 (1965), 889.
- 272 *Liturgia Horarum*, August 22: Queenship of Mary, Office of Readings, Hymn. This hymn is not in the English edition of the liturgy of the hours.
- 273 "Gaudium mundi, nova stella caeli... virgo Maria," *Liturgia Horarum*, August 15: Assumption, Evening Prayer I, Hymn. The hymn is from St. Peter Damian (+ 1072).
- 274 "Per te, postquam Christus ex te nascitur, creatura omnis renovatur." This devotional text going back to the twelfth century is in G.G. Meersseman, *Der Hymnos Akathistos in Abendland, II* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1960) p. 186.
- 275 St. Anselm, *Oratio ad sanctam Mariam pro impetrando eius et Christi amore*, in *Obras completas de san Anselmo*, II (Madrid: La Editorial Catolica, 1953 [BAC 100]), 316.
- 276 *Liturgy of the Hours*, December 8: Immaculate Conception, Evening Prayer II, Antiphon 1: "You are all beautiful, O Mary...."
- 277 "Te laudat omnis creatura genitricem lucis." This text of popular devotion goes back to the twelfth century and is in G.G. Meersseman, *Der Hymnos Akathistos in Abendland*, 2 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1960), 191.
- 278 John Paul II, Address to international congress on the 16th centenary of the Council of Capua (24 May 1992), in AAS 85 (1993): 670.
- 279 See John Paul II, *Inter Sanctos*, AAS 71 (1979): 1509-1510.
- 280 John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*.
- 281 In the spiritual interpretation of the *Legenda de origine Ordinis*, Monte Senario is presented as a "new Eden," a place of unspoiled beauty. See A. Serra, "Il Senario, <Monte santo > dei Servi di Maria: Un suggestivo midrash della Legenda de Origine Ordinis Servorum (ca. 1308)," in A. Serra, *Nato da donna.: Ricerche bibliche su Maria di Nazaret* (1989-1992) (Milan-Rome: Cens-Marianum, 1992), 309-355.
- 282 *Legenda*, 41.
- 283 Francesco M. Poggi, *Memorie della vita del Servo di Dio p. Giulio Arrighetti fiorentino... raccolte e descritte (nel 1713) da Francesco M. Poggi* (Pistoia, Italy: Alberto Pacinotti, 1920), 62.
- 284 *Regola del Padre Sant'Agostino e Costituzioni de' Romiti del Sacro Eremo di santa Maria de' Servi de Monte Senario*, 40 (Florence: Stamperia di Bartolommeo Sermartelli, 1613), 121.
- 285 Among these is the hermitage of St. George in Lunigiana, in the construction of which the friars are "all busy as bricklayers and workers.... in an idyllic and Franciscan peace..., in a positive relationship with nature that surrounds them and that they've made their own." O. Jacques Dias, "L'amicizia tra due eremiti dei Servi in una lettera del 1632 sull'eremo di San Giorgio in Lunigiana," *Studi Storici OSM* 34 (1984), 221.
- 286 We wish to express here our solidarity with the Servite friars working in the Amazon who have received repeated death threats because of their defense of the natives and their opposition to the destruction of the forest. See General Chapter 1995, *Message to the Servite Family*.
- 287 John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*.
- 288 *Ibid.*
- 289 *Const. OSM*, 319.
- 290 *Liturgy OSM*, Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, IV: Mary, the New Woman; Morning Prayer, Intercessions, 522.
- 291 *Ibid.*, Prayer, 523.
- 292 *Liturgia delle Ore OSM*, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday III, "Holy Mary the New Woman," Hymn at Morning Prayer (Rome: Commissione Liturgica Italiana, 1978), 622. This hymn is not in the English edition of the Liturgy of the hours.
- 293 *Liturgy OSM*, Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Saturday, IV: Mary, the New Woman, Morning Prayer, Cantic of Zechariah, Antiphon, 521.

- 294** Giovanni Vannucci, "*I Servi e la Vergine Madre*," in *Servitium* 17 (1983): 94.
- 295** Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 103.
- 296** See A. Serra, *Contributi dell'antica letteratura giudaica per l'esegesi di Giovanni 2, 1-12 e 19, 25-27* (Rome: Herder, 1977), 303-429 (= chapter 5: *Il raduno dei dispersi figli di Dio (Gv 11, 52) e la maternità spirituale di Maria (Gv 19, 25-27)*). See also *Mary beside the Cross*, 16-18. 176
- 297** Anatolian stich from Christmas Vespers, in E. Merceter, *La prière des églises de rite byzantin, 2/1* (Chevetogne, Belgium: Chevetogne Editions, 1953), 201.
- 298** P. Nellas, "*Madre di Dio, dimora del Verbo*," in P. Nellas and V. Lossky, eds., *La Madre di Dio* (Bose, Italy: Edizioni Qiqajon, 1994), 8.
- 299** Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae III*, q. 30, a. 1, trans. T.R. Heath, 71.
- 300** A. Muller, "*Marias Stellung und Mitwirkung im Christusergebnis*," in *Mysterium Salutis*, 3/2 (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1969), 445.
- 301** See above, footnote 62.
- 302** Martin Luther, *Comment on the Magnificat*, in *Luther's Works* 21,306.
- 303** See the article on prayer, *La preghiera 'anima' della giornata*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 26 October 1986, 5.
- 304** *Legenda*, 11.
- 305** John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Orientale Lumen ... to Mark the Centenary of Orientalium Dignitas of Pope Leo XIII*, 25, in *AAS* 87 (1995): 771. English translation: Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995.
- 306** "Now to that face which most resembles Christ...," Dante Alighieri, *Paradise*, XXXII, v. 85-86, trans. D.L. Sayers and B. Reynolds (London: Penguin Books, 1962).