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**THE MARIAN DIMENSION
IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS
OF THE DAUGHTERS
OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS.
A THEOLOGICAL STUDY.**



Extract of the Doctoral Dissertation in Sacred Theology
with specialization in Mariology

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This study is dedicated

to *Mary, our Mother and Educator* ...

to *Corazon*, my mother, the first woman
who mirrored to me the solicitous love of our heavenly Mother ...

to every *Daughter of Mary Help of Christians*,
past, present and future, called to become «Mary's living image»
among the young.

My sincerest gratitude

to *Aristide Serra*, true servant of Mary, spiritual father and competent
guide of this study.

And *to you all* who have helped me transform this task into a «labor of
love»,

my heartfelt *thanks!*

INTRODUCTION

The celebration of the Marian Year 1988 was preceded by the encyclical *Redemptoris mater* (March 25, 1987) of Pope John Paul II on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the pilgrim Church. The purpose of the Marian Year was to promote «a new and a more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church. [...] Here we speak not only of the doctrine of faith but also of the life of faith, and thus of an authentic marian spirituality. [...]»¹

Even in the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians a call to deepen the marian spirituality has been echoed by the XIX General Chapter (1990).² In the proposed practical guidelines the marian spirituality, specified as the spirituality of the Magnificat, emerges as the central axis of the renewal of our vocational identity.

With Mary, the woman of the Magnificat, we Daughters of Mary Help of Christians commit ourselves to the new evangelization. Impelled by our educative charism, we want to give a courageous response to the expectations and the situations of poverty of the young women in the different socio-cultural contexts.³

The first point of the practical guidelines is even more explicit in its reference to the marian spirituality:

The new feminine consciousness urges us to a deeper study of and commitment to live the characteristics of marian spirituality proper to our charism in order to promote a new presence of woman in society and in the Church.⁴

¹ Cf JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris mater on the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church*, n. 48, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 79 (1987), 361-433; English version, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1987.

² *Marian spirituality* as used in the documents of the Institute is intended to be the presence and significance of Mary in the life of the Institute and of every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. It refers to a fundamental filial relationship with Mary and includes devotion, pious practices, and imitation.

³ INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Acts of the XIX General Chapter [=AGC]*. September 19 - November 17, 1990, Rome, Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice 1991, 71 [English edition].

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

The themes of Mary and of the feminine question emerge as a singular and constant note in the capitular reflections. Mother Marinella Castagno, 7th Superior General of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1984-1996), writes that:

as a foundation for the renewal to which we are called, we would once again like to highlight our need for an authentically lived marian spirituality. In this we would like to make our modest contribution to the entire Salesian Family, in response to the Rector Major's [Father Egidio Viganò] invitation at the beginning of his term of office.⁵

She reminds us how the XIX General Chapter urges us:

to make our own the attitudes of Mary, the Help of Christians, Mother and Inspirer of the Institute, the new Woman, the Virgin of the Magnificat. Only by beginning with a serious and ongoing study of the marian spirituality will we be able to live a *new style of community of consecrated women* and give life to new educative presences among the poorest youth.⁶

From what has been underlined above, the need to confront the new feminine consciousness with the marian spirituality of the Institute emerges as the line of action taken by the Institute for a renewal of its vocational identity. This «sign of the time» calls for a deepening both of the feminine question and of the specific marian spirituality of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

⁵ AGC XIX, 7; The reference to the marian commitment of the Institute «to be in the Salesian Family the group which should keep alive the flame of love to Mary Help of Christians» was already pointed out by Mother M. Castagno at the beginning of her first term of office as Superior General of the Institute. In the presentation of the Acts of the General Chapter XVIII (1984), she referred to the entrustment to Mary Help of Christians made by the capitulars in the Basilica in Turin. Here, the Capitulars, in the name of the whole Institute renewed the promise «to be a reflection of Mary's presence» in the Salesian Family, in the Church and in the world. M. Castagno also pointed out that without Mary the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians would lose their identity (Cf *Atti del Capitolo Generale XVIII*, 12-13, Italian edition).

Father Egidio Viganò (1920-1995) was the 7th successor of Don Bosco. He guided the Salesian Congregation and Family for seventeen years with wisdom and apostolic intuition in creative fidelity to charism of Don Bosco and to the signs of the times. The XXI General Chapter which elected Father Viganò Rector Major of the Salesians underlined the need to renew the marian dimension of the Salesian vocation. For this reason, the first circular letter of the newly elected Superior became the occasion to invite, not only the Salesians but all the members of the Salesian Family, «to bring Mary Home!».

⁶ *Acts of the General Chapter XIX*, 7.

To realize this task one needs to be attentive to the emerging historical and cultural transformations, particularly to the needs of the new feminine consciousness. Discernment, vigilance, ardor and creativity are needed in this process of inculturation so that it may be realized in fidelity to the evangelical message and to the needs of one's charism.⁷

The study, reflection, and dissemination of information on the feminine question has gained footing in the Institute in the last decade. However, an organic research on the marian dimension of the charism and spirituality of the Institute is still lacking.

This dissertation is being undertaken to initiate a systematic study of the marian dimension of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians taking as its primary source the Constitutions and the Regulations. These fundamental documents of a religious family contain the evangelical and theological principles concerning religious life and its ecclesial dimension. At the same time they present the concrete expression of a peculiar way of following Christ by the members of the Institute and establish the fundamental elements which must be expressed through the members according to the intentions of the Founder/Foundress regarding the nature, end, spirit and character of the Institute.⁸

The value and importance of the primary source of this study lies in its being the reflected conscience of the gift of God to the Institute, which is considered to be its particular charism and experience of the Spirit lived in its origin. While it is true that all the institutes of consecrated life have in common the following of Christ through the evangelical counsels, nevertheless each one of them incarnates and puts them into action in a different way. This difference arises from the specific charism received from the Spirit which determines the particular identity of a religious family.

Every religious institute is born in the Church and is called to enrich her with its peculiar characteristics according to a particular spirit and a specific mission. In the work of cultural evolution and of ecclesial renewal, it is necessary that the identity of an Institute be conserved in order to prevent the danger of a religious being inserted in the life of the Church in an ambiguous way.

⁷ Cf FARINA M., *Dall'icona del pastore alla spiritualità del Magnificat. Linee di una spiritualità educativa*, in CAVAGLIÀ P.-DEL CORE P. (a cura di), *Un progetto di vita per l'educazione della donna*, Roma, LAS 1994, 86.

⁸ Cf *Code of Canon Law*, n. 587.

The call to return to the «sources» or to the original inspiration of the Spirit is complemented by an attention to the «signs of the times» and the necessary adaptation to the actual exigencies of the Church and of the world. This does not mean however, an indiscriminate acceptance of elements and customs of the dominant culture but an intelligent discernment from the historical perspective of charism, a discernment which distinguishes what is essential from that which is contingent.⁹

My original research is divided in three chapters. The first chapter contains a brief history of the Constitutions and Regulations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians while the second chapter presents a synopsis of the marian references in the different editions of the Constitutions and Regulations from its first printed form (1878) to its latest edition (1982). The third chapter is a theological reflection on the essential elements of the marian dimension drawn from the analysis of the Constitutions and Regulations in the light of the existing histographical studies of the Institute and of the appropriate bibliography on the theme.

After a brief synthesis of the first and second chapters, this publication will contain the elaboration of the third chapter of the thesis.

⁹ Cf RECCHI S., *Le Costituzioni rinnovate*, in AA.VV., *Carisma e Profezia. Verso il Sinodo sulla vita consecrata*, Roma, Centro Studi USMI 1993, 89-96.

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INITIALS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AA	<i>Apostolicam actuositatem</i>
AGFMA	<i>Archivio Generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
AAS	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
Art.	Article/articles referring to the <i>Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i>
Chron	<i>Chronicles of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i> (English translation of <i>Cronistoria</i>)
Const.	<i>Constitutions of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i>
Cron	<i>Cronistoria dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
DMHC	<i>Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i> (English translation of «Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice»)
FMA	<i>Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice</i>
FMI	<i>Figlie di Maria Immacolata</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i>
LG	<i>Lumen gentium</i>
Man. Reg.	<i>Manual Regulations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i>
MC	<i>Marialis cultus</i>
MHC	<i>Mary Help of Christians</i>
MD	<i>Mulieris dignitatem</i>
NDM	<i>Nuovo Dizionario di Mariologia</i>
PC	<i>Perfectae caritatis</i>
RH	<i>Redemptor hominis</i>
Reg.	<i>Regulations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i>
RM	<i>Redemptoris Mater</i>
VC	<i>Vita consecrata</i>

I. DOCUMENTS OF THE INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS (in chronological order)

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CHAPTER 1

THE CONSTITUTIONS AND MANUAL REGULATIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS. A SHORT HISTORY.

The Constitutions and Regulations are among the fundamental documents of the charismatic element of a religious family. While the two documents complement each other they are, however, different.

Before being a code of behavior, the Constitutions, as a «rule of life», narrate an experience of life. They are a *memory* of a spiritual event and not simply a document which transmits historical contents, nay, they are a word which brings to the here and now the freshness and efficacy of a past which generates life. The intention of the Founder/Foundress is not so much to transmit norms but to communicate life and a style of life: his/her and that of his/her first companions in the foundation.¹

They are an experience which provokes a new experience that initiates a dialogue with the person who desires to start following Christ along the same path. More than being a message to read or to know, or being a norm to follow, the Constitutions is a dynamic experience from heart to heart, from life to life.²

Considered in its evolution the Constitutions and Regulations express the human and historical effort of the members to keep themselves faithful to the charismatic ideal of the Founder/Foundress. As such these fundamental documents of a religious family are not a static reality. Viewed in this perspective, every legislative text is not only a point of arrival of a juridical and spiritual maturation, it is also a point of departure of an ever deepening journey towards new horizons in harmony with the Body of Christ.

The compilation and elaboration of the constitutional texts, which represent the Rule of life of a religious congregation, has a complex history. It involves a constant revision and re-elaboration of the texts in fidelity to the original project of consecrated life which the Founder/Foundress received, in response to the directives of the Church and in a creative adaptation to a perennially changing world according to the needs

¹ Cf BOSCO V., *La Regola di Vita: Oltre l'Osservanza*, Milano, Ancora 1987, 11-12.

² Cf CABRA P.G., *Essere Religiosi oggi*, Brescia, Queriniana 1980, 40.

of the religious family. The aim is always that of assuring the originality of one's particular evangelical inspiration and of the concrete method of a discipline of life.

In the historical and spiritual itinerary of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from its foundation to the present time, the Constitutions and the Regulations had passed through three fundamental moments of elaboration, re-elaboration and revision.³

Dividing the historical study of the Constitutions and Regulations into two periods, the first one includes the texts elaborated and revised in the first fifty years of the life of the Institute while the second one refers to the years following the conciliar and postconciliar period.

1.1. FIRST FIFTY YEARS OF THE INSTITUTE (1872-1922)

The first period is important for it encompasses the lifetime of both the Founder, St. John Bosco⁴ and Co-Foundress, St. Mary Domenica Maz-

³ Cf POSADA M.E., *Storia delle Costituzioni dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* [pro-manuscript], Corso di Spiritualità Salesiana, Pontificia Facoltà Auxilium, Roma 1994, 8-9;

The *elaboration* of the Constitutions consists in the gathering and distribution of materials with the subsequent formulation of the text. Such process rises from the need of a religious institute to formulate a code of belonging which must be approved by the Church authorities. In the case of the Institute of the DMHC, the elaboration of the primitive Constitutions began from the period immediately preceding its foundation in 1871 to the first printing of the text of the Constitutions in 1878.

The *re-elaboration* of a constitutional text refers to the process of a new gathering and distribution of materials resulting in a new formulation of the text. The Institute had two re-elaborations of the Constitutions, the first one in 1906 and the second one in 1969. Every re-elaboration of a constitutional text is a response to a mandate of the Church by force of specific norms.

The *revision* of the text of the Constitutions refers to the periodic examination necessary to verify its correspondence to a determined criteria set by the Institute or by the Church. It implies modifications and corrections but not a new composition. The texts of the Constitutions which had undergone revision are the following: Constitutions 1885, in reference to the text of 1878; Constitutions 1922, in reference to the text of 1906; Constitutions 1982, in reference to the texts «ad experimentum» of 1969 and 1975.

⁴ St. John Bosco (1815-1888) was born in Becchi (Morialdo) in the region of Piedmont, Italy. He was orphaned of the father at two years old and was educated with energetic motherly tenderness by Margherita Ochiena. This maternal presence would have a lasting and effective influence on the life of this apostle of the young.

At nine years old, he had a prophetic dream which foretold of his priestly vocation and mission to become the father and educator of poor and abandoned young people. In 1854, he founded the Society of St. Francis of Sales to prolong and establish his educative mission

zarelllo⁵ and the beginnings of the original community of Mornese. The texts in this period consist of the original manuscripts and the two printed editions of 1878 and 1885. These documentary sources are the most important which the Institute possesses because they are the first texts of the Constitutions of the Institute and contain the Founder's intention as to the characteristics of foundation. They are also valued as the generating texts, that is, they are a source of life and of vitality for the Institute.

From the spiritual point of view, the Constitutions of 1885 are a «privileged place» to discover the principal contents of the identity of the feminine religious congregation founded by Don Bosco. While it is true that the Constitutions written a century ago could be lacking in certain elements regarding religious life today and even in elements regarding the specific features of a particular religious family, it is possible, however, to point out in the Constitutions fundamental concepts which history would reveal in time and on which the characteristic spirituality of the Institute is founded.⁶

The first re-elaboration of the Constitutions came about after the

among the young boys all over the world. With Mary Domenica Mazzarello, he founded in 1872 the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to be the feminine expression of his educative mission among the poor young girls.

See GIANOTTI S. (a cura di), *Bibliografia Generale di Don Bosco, vol. 1, Bibliografia Italiana 1844-1992*. Roma, LAS 1995.

⁵ St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello (1837-1881) was born in Mornese (Alessandria) near Genoa and died in Nizza, Monferrato. She has a straightforward personality characterized by humility and ardent charity. Aside from the christian and human formation which she received from her parents, she was formed by a wise spiritual director, Fr. Domenico Pestarino who as parish priest of Mornese, promoted a pastoral catechetical renewal as a response to the Jansenistic tendency reigning in this period of history.

Mary Domenica, at eighteen years old, became a member of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. In this lay association, characterized by a strong marian and apostolic dimensions, and with the intervention of Don Bosco, will mature the first nucleus of the future religious congregation called to be the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and of which Mary Domenica would be Co-Foundress and first Superior General (1872-1881).

Cf POSADA M.E. (ed.), *Lettere di S. Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Confondatrice dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Roma, Istituto FMA 1980; CAPETTI G. (ed.), *Cronistoria*, Roma, Istituto FMA, 1974-1978, 5 vol.; MACCONO F., *Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello. Confondatrice e prima Superiore Generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Scuola tipografica privata FMA 1960, 2 vol.; POSADA M.E. (ed.), *Attuale perché vera. Contributi su Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Roma, LAS 1987. This volume contains the bibliographical updates on the Saint as prepared by Sr. COSTA A.

⁶ Cf POSADA, *Storia delle Costituzioni*, 20-22.

death of the Founder and was mandated by the Church through two documents, *Conditae a Christo* (Leo XIII, December 8, 1900) and the *Normae secundum quas* (= *NSQ*, Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, June 28, 1901). The second document, *NSQ*, was the principal source for the re-elaboration of the Constitutions and the text of 1906 appeared to be its copy, revealing the «juridical mind» of the time.

With the emanation and publication of the first *Code of Canon Law* (Sacred Congregation of Religious, June 26, 1917) all religious Institutes were asked to revise their Constitutions on the basis of particular norms, substantially the same as those of 1901. The difference was that the Constitutions were not reduced to purely juridical terms, but were permitted to contain references to the characteristic spirit of the Institute as well as short texts and contents of ascetical and spiritual character. However, the revised Constitutions of the different congregations appeared to be uniform as they followed a common matrix. For the Institute of the DMHC the Constitutions of 1922 remained in use for almost five decades (1922-1969), becoming a historical and spiritual bridge between the first and second generations of the DMHC.

1.2. THE CONCILIAR AND POSTCONCILIAR PERIOD

This is a period of renewal inspired by the ecclesial event of the the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). It included two texts of the Constitutions and Regulations re-elaborated «ad experimentum» (1969,1975) and the final revised edition of 1982.

While it is evident that for the moment a judgement on the value of the final edition of the Constitutions can not be given, however, one can not deny that its intrinsic importance lies in its continuity with the primitive text and in the ecclesial context wherein it was born. If the Constitutions of 1922 were considered to be the bridge between the first and the second generations of DMHC, those of 1982 become the link between the second and third generations. This final edition of the Constitutions brings the Institute towards the third millennium of Christianity. It is a point of arrival and at the same time a point of departure for a renewal so much desired in the Institute and which the Church launched courageously through the pentecostal event of the Second Vatican Council.⁷

⁷ Cf POSADA, *Storia delle Costituzioni*, 53-54.

CHAPTER 2

ITS MARIAN REFERENCES

If one were to examine the texts of the Constitutions and Manual Regulations from its first printed form (1878, 1885) to its definitive edition (1982) one would observe how the marian element is constantly present and faithfully developed even though in different perspectives. In the Institute of the DMHC such an element is constitutive not only because of its historical and charismatic origin but above all because of its identity and mission.¹

The analysis of the various legislative texts of the Institute demonstrates how the marian dimension, a constitutive element of the charism, is constantly present. Dividing the different editions into two groups and taking as point of reference the ecclesial event of the Second Vatican Council, one can note the difference in perspectives, language, articulations and contents of this marian dimension.

2.1. MARY IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND MANUAL REGULATIONS IN THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS OF THE INSTITUTE

This group includes those editions written during the period of foundation and expansion of the Institute and are characterized by a more juridical formulation and a prevalently devotional marian reference. However, some important elements are to be underlined regarding the marian dimension.

¹ From the historical sources and from the spiritual traditions of the DMHC, the reference to the marian character which the Founder desired to imprint in the Institute, emerges with clarity and continuity. When the Institute decided to reflect and express its specific spiritual identity, the oral and written traditions always pointed to the *title* of DMHC and to the explicit intention of Don Bosco in founding the Institute: «[that it] should be the living monument of gratitude of Don Bosco to the great Mother of God invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians».

Maria Marchi launched the thesis of the direct relationship between the educative mission and the marian identity of the Institute. In a study entitled *Il ruolo di Maria nell'azione educativa delle FMA* she affirms that an Institute consecrated to the Christian education of the young, such as ours, could not be but marian. Such affirmation is founded on the fact that a Christian education does not exist without the educative intervention of Mary. See *Madre ed Educatrice*, 161.

2.1.1. *The marian identity in the title* *«Daughter of Mary Help of Christians»*

Among the elements present in the primitive Constitutions the reference to the the name of the Institute *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* is an aspect which is of particular interest to my study for its historical and spiritual significance.² It indicates the nature of the Institute and gives it its explicit and qualifying marian dimension. While such reference is not evident in the body of the Constitutions, it reappears, however, in a significant manner in the texts of the formula and ceremonies of religious profession and entrance into the Novitiate, an emphasis on the importance of the place of Mary in the life of the DMHC.³

² The original manuscripts reports the following titles: *Costituzioni Regole dell'Istituto delle FMA sotto la protezione **** (manoscritto A); *Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle FMA* (manoscritto G); *Regole o Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle FMA aggregate alla Società Salesiana*, Torino 1878 (Testo J); *Regole o Costituzioni per le FMA aggregate alla Società Salesiana*, Torino 1885 (Testo L). See ROMERO, *op. cit.*, 59, 124, 145, 161.

³ The ceremony for entrance to the Novitiate indicates how the role of Mary as Mother and Help is underlined early in the formation of the DMHC. The Superior questions the Postulants, candidates to the Novitiate with the following formula:

Sup. *My daughters, what do you ask?*

Post. *We ask to be accepted among the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and to dress the habit of this Congregation.*

Sup. *Do you know the Rules of this Congregation?*

Post. *Yes, we know them, and with God's help we hope to observe them.*

Sup. *To put on the habit of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians means to renounce to all the vanities and teachings of this world, to dress oneself with a new habit, that is, to practise reservedness, mortification, and especially chastity, obedience and poverty, to consecrate oneself to Jesus Christ and to take as model Mary, His Immaculate Mother.*

Can you practise the virtues mentioned above?

Post. *By ourselves we know that we are capable of nothing; but with God's help and with the protection of the Blessed Virgin we hope to practise these virtues, and to demonstrate with our deeds to be worthy Daughters of Mary.*

Sup. *The Lord be with you; the divine help will not be lacking, and Mary will protect you. Therefore, with a resolute spirit, undress yourself of the habit of this world and put on the religious habit.*

See *Regole o Costituzioni per le Figlie di Maria SS. Ausiliatrice aggregate alla Società salesiana* (Torino 1885). *Formulario per la vestizione e la professione religiosa*, in BOSCO G., *Costituzioni per l'Istituto delle FMA (1872-1885)*. Testi critici a cura di Romero C., Roma, LAS 1983

In 1878 the cover title: «Rules and Regulations of the *Institute* of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians» was changed in 1885 to «Rules and Regulations of the *Daughters* of Mary Help of Christians». This seems to be an insignificant detail but the change from a structural perspective, *Institute*, to a more personal one, *Daughter*, is not an accidental one as other evidences would prove. In the letter of Don Bosco to the DMHC (May 24, 1886) he addressed them as members of an Institute which bears the name of Mary. He marks how the name or the title bears with it the identity of the members: «You belong to a religious family which is totally Mary's... You have the glory of the beautiful title of *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*». In the Manual Regulations of 1908, again the name of the Institute and how the Sisters are to be called: *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* are emphasized.

2.1.2. *The link between the marian identity and the educative mission*

The Manual Regulations of 1908 called for the innate participation of every DMHC in the educative mission of the Institute no matter the task assigned to her; spoke of the specific connotation of the spirituality of the Institute as pastoral-salvific-marian; underlined the essential link between the daily entrustment to Mary Help of Christians and the educative mission of the DMHC among the young.

It reminds the DMHC that «their presence among the young is expressed through a sincere, disinterested, constant and pure love of Jesus Christ, becoming for them *living images* of Mary, welcoming them as solicitous mothers capable of building the family spirit in the community» (art. 284).

However, this important point would be removed from the Manual Regulations of 1929 and would be recuperated only in the postconciliar editions of the Constitutions and Regulations.

2.2. MARY IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS IN THE PERIOD AFTER THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

2.2.1. *A richer theological and spiritual marian doctrine*

This group contains a richer theological and spiritual content as the result of the effort to harmonize not only the renewal promoted by the Council and the present mariological perspectives but also to recuperate

and deepen the peculiar marian values of the Salesian tradition of the Institute. The simplicity and the intensity of the marian devotion ever alive in the history of the Institute is captured in a renewed theological frame making it shine with a new light and depth of motivation.

The conciliar renewal brought a return to the origin of the Salesian spirituality resulting to a newness in the articulation of the contents and in the re-elaboration of various articles. At the same time the conciliar marian doctrine offered a strong and faithful foundation to the marian identity and educative charism of the Institute, helping the Institute to recuperate and reaffirm the ecclesial horizon through which don Bosco envisioned, desired and concretized the foundation of the Institute.

2.2.2. *A focus on Mary as Mother and Model*

The Constitutions of 1969 focused on the relationship of the DMHC with Mary as Mother and Model and re-enforced the marian character of the Institute, a religious family founded by Don Bosco to be a living monument of gratitude to the Mother of God under the title of Help of Christians. For this reason, a peculiar marian dimension characterized the life and mission of the Institute (art.157).

Art.59 referred to the *marian spirituality* of the Institute considering the Holy Virgin as Mother and Teacher and recalls that true devotion proceeds from true faith and arrives at love and imitation (cf LG 67).

The Constitutions are not limited to inviting the DMHC to entrust herself to Mary's intercession (art.12), nor to simply honoring her with prayer (art.42,49) and with celebrating her feasts (art.59), but above all the Constitutions call the DMHC to nourish a filial piety for Mary (art.59). Such attitude is rooted on true faith and sustained by love and imitation. In this manner the marian spirituality of the DMHC will be authentic and profound and will become efficacious in guiding even the young to true and transforming marian devotion (art.59).¹¹

2.2.3. *The singular presence of Mary in the foundation and in the educative charism of the DMHC*

Constitutions 1975 and 1982 focused attention on the singular role and presence of Mary in the foundation (Const.1975, art.1; Const.1982,

⁴ Cf CAVAGLIÀ P., in *Madre ed Educatrice*, 54.

art.1,4) and in the educative charism of the Institute (Const.1975, art.49,57; Const.1982, art.7,63,71). The reference to Mary is not solely motivated by theological and ecclesial reasons but above all by its charismatic and educative root. Mary most Holy, who inspired Don Bosco in the foundation of the Institute, continues to be in its mission, *Mother and Teacher* (Const.1982, art.4,44).

The diachronical analysis of the marian references in the Constitutions and Regulations, from the origin to the present life of the Institute, underlines a consistent and continuous presence of the marian dimension making evident its vital link to the fidelity and growth of the vocational identity and mission of the Institute.

In fact, one can conclude that the DMHC should be, as it has been noted, the living monument of gratitude to MHC (cf Const.1982, 4) as she learns “at the school of Our Lady” how to educate the young (cf. Const.1982, 63). She is aware, not only of being helped by Mary, but is certain of celebrating in her life the presence of Mary, an irreplaceable presence in every educative intervention which proposes to save the human person in the process of a gradual and progressive putting on Christ.

Mary, with her wisdom as Mother, Teacher and Guide will continue to reveal to the DMHC, as she did to Don Bosco, the more effective ways of evangelizing of the present youth culture towards the advent of the third millennium.

2.2.4. *The three emerging themes in the marian dimension of the Constitutions and Regulations*

The diachronical and synchronical examination of the the Constitutions and Regulations shows the following themes to emerge as the essential elements of its marian dimension: the *name* of the Institute, «Daughters of Mary Help of Christians», its *symbol of identity*, «living monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians» and the «maternal, living and active» *presence of Mary* in the life of the Institute and of every Daughter.

Name, symbol and presence constitute the the framework of the theological study of the marian dimension in the *Rule of life* of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Chapter 3

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF ITS MARIAN DIMENSION. A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION.

On the centennial anniversary of the memorable last visit of Don Bosco to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the Mother House, at that time located in Nizza Monferrato (22 August 1885-1985), Mother Marinella Castagno, 7th Mother General of the Institute launched this challenge: “What is our marian face today? Don’t you think that it is time to look at our devotion to Mary to renew the force and joy which renders us courageous, capable of going out of ourselves, to face new situations, to be authentically her “daughters”, to demonstrate to the young how beautiful and joyful it is to give ourselves, like Mary, totally to Christ and be fully available to the brothers?”¹

My research study presents as essential elements of the marian dimension in the Constitutions and Regulations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the name and the symbol of the Institute and the presence of Mary in its history, life and mission. They delineate the marian face of its charismatic identity and of its educative mission yesterday, today and tomorrow.

3.1. THE NAME «DAUGHTER OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS»

On August 5, 1872, the day of the religious profession of the first eleven Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco their founder exhorted them with these words: “*Let your beautiful title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians be your glory...*”.

¹ CASTAGNO M., circular letter 673, 24 luglio-agosto 1985.

Just exactly what Don Bosco intended to mean by these words, nothing is written. However, the fact remains that the first *Daughters*, including the co-Foundress, St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello, incarnated, testified and transmitted with their lives the charismatic project contained in their name.

To discover the significance of the *name* or *title* and its implications to the nature and identity of the DMHC, individually and as a religious family, aside from its references in the Constitutions and Regulations, it is important to examine its charismatic and theological roots.

3.1.1. THE NAME: ITS REFERENCES IN THE CONSTITUTIONS AND REGULATIONS

3.1.1.1. *Name and marian identity*

The awareness among the DMHC of the significance of its name can be noticed in two seemingly insignificant modifications in the Constitutions between the first and the second editions. The first modification refers to the titlepage. The Constitutions received a more personalized marian attribute in the second edition (1885), “Rules and Constitutions of the *Daughters* of Mary Help of Christians” as compared to the first edition (1878), “Rules and Constitutions of the *Institute* of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians”.

The second modification refers to the denomination “Daughters of Mary”, present in the second edition which substituted the expression “servants of the poor” in the first edition. The difference in the two editions regarding such an important marian reference is an expression of the growing awareness of the marian identity of the Institute.

In a more explicit manner, reference to the name of the Institute could be observed in the Manual Regulations of 1908.² In fact, two articles state:

The Constitutions indicate the *name* by which we should be called, that is, *Daughters* and not *Sisters of Mary Help of Christians*, a title dear to us originally given by our Venerable Founder and Father (art.12).

The Sisters should remember that our Venerable Father has always regarded Mary, invoked under the title of Help of Christians, as the Inspirer and the

² ISTITUTO FMA, *Manuale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. Salesiana 1908.

Protectress of his works! In Her, he placed his trust, he loved and honored her with all his heart. He desired that our humble Institute take its name from Mary Help of Christians, nay, that every Sister be called *Daughter of Mary Help of Christians* (art.178).

Even the postconciliar edition of the Regulations (1982) refer to the name of the Institute as the one chosen by the Founder.

The Constitutions refer to the members of our Institute as *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* (official abbreviation FMA), the name chosen for us by our Saintly Founder (art.1).

3.1.1.2. *Name and filial relationship with Mary*

The DMHC is linked with Mary through a filial relationship. This is underlined by the Constitutions:

“We venerate Mary by making our own the *filial sentiments* of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello (Const.1975, art.48)”.

“We cultivate for her a *grateful and filial love* and we commit ourselves to transmit it to the young (Const.1982, art.44)”.

Filial devotion to Mary is expressed through different forms of piety, especially through an act of consecration or entrustment to her, and through imitation of her.

A. In the practices of piety

(i) - The first Constitutions (1878, 1885, 1906, 1922) and Manual Regulations (1908, 1929) refer to honoring Mary primarily through devotional practices, such as the daily recitation of the Rosary³ and the *Angelus Domini*⁴; the Seven Sorrows of Mary (or the Seven Joys during

³ The recitation of the Rosary is inserted in the practices of piety of the DMHC from the origin of the Institute to the present time. It is a marian prayer that is referred to in all the editions of the Constitutions and Regulations from that of 1878 to 1982. The Rosary and the *Angelus Domini* are two marian prayers which have remained part of popular piety in the different cultures and peoples from generation to generation. Pope Paul VI, with the apostolic exhortation *Marialis cultus* (nn.40-55), referred to these prayers.

⁴ The recitation of the *Angelus Domini* began to be prescribed as part of the daily practices of piety of the DMHC in Constitutions 1906 and continued to the latest edition of 1982. *Angelus Domini* is the traditional marian prayer recited by the faithful three times a day -

the Easter period and on Sundays)⁵, the Saturday fast⁶ and the Sunday recitation of the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary; the yearly celebration of the feasts of the Immaculate Conception and of Mary Help of Christians⁷.

morning, noon, evening - to commemorate the announcement of the angel Gabriel to Mary and the incarnation of the Word of God. See, COMMISSIONE LITURGICA INTERNAZIONALE DEI SERVI DI MARIA, *Angelus Domini. Celebrazione dell'annuncio a Maria*, Roma 1982, 13-26.

⁵ The history of the devotion to the Sorrowful Virgin refers to the numerous popular expressions of piety in her regard, widespread among the Christians, especially during the tenth to the eighteenth centuries. Among them are the crown of the Sorrowful Mother, the "Via Matris", the litany of the Sorrowful Virgin etc. For a complete study on the matter, see I. CALABUIG, *La collana "Mariale Servorum"*, in *Primo Convegno internazionale operatori di liturgia OSM (Roma, 15-24 settembre 1987)*, I, a cura di Rosella Barbier, Roma 1989.

In the Institute of the DMHC, the contemplation and recitation of the Seven Sorrows and the Seven Joys of Mary was part of the daily practices of piety among the Sisters, from the time of Mother Mazzarello to the period prior to the postconciliar renewal of the Constitutions and Regulations. In the 1982 edition of the Rule the reference to this pious practice has been omitted. However, the prayer could still be found in the prayerbook of the DMHC. Cf *Le FMA in preghiera*, Roma, Istituto FMA 1984, 172-175.

The marian formation of the Co-Foundress, St. Mary Mazzarello, was marked by a strong devotion to the Sorrowful Virgin and to Mary Immaculate, essential aspects of the Marian mystery very much alive in the piety of the people of Mornese, birthplace of the Co-Foundress, St. Mary Mazzarello and of the Institute of the DMHC. On this regard, a strong spiritual influence could be attributed to two priests: Fr. Pestarino, parish priest and spiritual director of Mazzarello and of the first community of the DMHC, and Fr. Joseph Frassinetti, a well-known theologian of Genoa, friend and spiritual director of Pestarino. See, M.E. POSADA, *Storia e Santità. Influsso del teologo Giuseppe Frassinetti sulla spiritualità di S. Maria Domenica*, Roma, LAS 1992, 99-104.

⁶ In Constitutions of 1906, the day prescribed for the weekly fasting was changed from Saturday to Friday «in honor of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the Sorrows of Mary».

⁷ In the Constitutions of 1906 the principal marian feasts were not only enumerated but specified. The celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception was made solemn by a novena (art.72). This special devotion to Mary Immaculate could be attributed to the particular devotion of Don Bosco himself, of Mother Mazzarello and of the first Sisters of Mornese whose marian devotion was nourished by the spirituality of the Pious Union of Mary Immaculate, the group to which they belonged before becoming DMHC. A «tender and particular devotion to Mary Most Holy» with a commitment to spread such devotion in its ambient was the proposed aim of the association to its members.

The Manual Regulations of 1908 recommended the preparation of the annual feast of Mary Help of Christians with a novena and be commemorated every 24th of the month while the Manual Regulations of 1929 prescribed that the celebration of the month of Mary Help of Christians begins on the 23rd of April and concludes on the 24th of May, possibly with a religious presentation or a marian procession.

They suggest to honor Mary according to local popular traditions, especially on the month of May⁸ or on other months dedicated to her. At the same time, the following concrete expressions of devotion and love are indicated: dedicating to her churches, chapels and altars; venerating her image; distributing her pictures, medals and pamphlets; celebrating the Eucharist on her feasts; inviting the students to wear her medal; making known the Archconfraternity of Mary Help of Christians⁹; spreading the Salesian Bulletin and other publications of marian character.

Other expressions of the marian piety of the DMHC were the following: greeting one another with a «Viva Maria»; praying the Hail, Holy Queen before the weekly confession; making the Act of consecration and prayer to MHC every morning after the meditation¹⁰.

In the Constitutions of 1906, a marian reference can be noted in the vow of chastity. After enumerating all the elements which contributed to the observance of this vow, the article concluded: «... to all these they should have a *filial* devotion to Mary most Holy, loving custodian of the religious» (art.49). The expression *filial* devotion underlined the specific identity of the Sisters, that of being *daughters* of Mary. She is a Mother who follows each one of them as a loving custodian of the religious.

An explicit marian reference in the formula of the renewal of the vows was added for the first time in the Constitutions 1922.

(ii) - In the postconciliar Constitutions/Regulations entire articles are dedicated to marian devotion: Const.1969, art.59; Const.1975, art. 48 and Const.1982, art. 44. It is important to underline that these editions of the Constitutions carried with them the liturgical and marian renewal which the Council had urged and initiated. In fact, the Constitutions insisted that marian devotion should be lived in «relation with the liturgical

⁸ Dedicating the month of May to Mary is a practice among Christians of the Eastern and Western traditions. While in the East it is inserted in the liturgy, in the West, it developed as a devotional popular piety outside the liturgy. See, S. ROSSO, *Mese mariano*, in *NDM*, 935-945; LIPPERT P., *I mesi mariani*, in *Il culto di Maria oggi. Teologia-Liturgia-Pastorale*, a cura di W. Beinert, Roma 1985, 314-325.

⁹ This marian association was instituted by Don Bosco, himself in 1869 aimed to increase the devotion of the faithful to Mary under the title of Help of Christians.

¹⁰ The Act of consecration and prayer to MHC which the Sisters had been saying since 1889, found its first official transcription in a juridical text of the Institute in the Manual Regulations.

cycle» (Reg 1982, art.30). Marian feasts are to be celebrated in the Eucharist, in the Liturgy of the Hours and should extend to daily life.

The marian feasts which the Institute celebrates with solemnity and in fidelity to salesian tradition are the following: Immaculate Conception, Help of Christians and the Assumption of Mary.¹¹ These are moments when the DMHC becomes more aware of her presence as Guide and Mother in the mission to which the Institute is committed for the good of the youth.

Art. 44 (Const.1982) gives an explicit reference to the daily praying of the Rosary as a moment to relive, in communion with Mary, the mysteries of redemption while in art. 41 of the Regulations (1982), the traditional greeting of «Viva Gesù, viva Maria» acquires a more explicit marian motivation as an expression of the common desire to praise the Lord and to walk with Mary, towards Him.

The Marian presence is recognized and celebrated in a particular way during the season of Advent, the months of May and October, the monthly commemoration of the 24th and the weekly Saturday remembrance (Reg 1982, art.24). These moments are considered to have an educative function as «occasions of growth in filial love towards the Virgin» and to spread devotion to her (Reg 1982, art.30).

From the above testimonies, one can conclude that marian devotion in the Institute does not consist in particular practices, but emerges from the sobriety and profundity of the living tradition of the Church, be it liturgical or devotional. It becomes, therefore, the daily «memory» of the presence of Mary expressed in the various acts of piety spread throughout the day and which begins precisely with the act of entrustment to her.¹²

B. In the consecration or entrustment to Mary

The *Act of consecration and prayer to MHC*¹³ was introduced to the Sisters as part of the daily practices of piety of the community by a providential circumstance. Mother Enrichetta Sorbone, Vicar General of the

¹¹ The feast of the Assumption was added as one of the marian feasts of the Institute in the Constitutions of 1969.

¹² Cf CAVAGLIÀ P., *Madre ed Educatrice*, 60-61.

¹³ Cf *Libro delle preghiere e pratiche di pietà ad uso delle FMA*, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana 1889, 34-35.

Institute at that time, while on a trip to Rome stayed as a visitor among the Sisters of St. Anne of Providence. While participating in their daily prayer she observed how, through an act of consecration, they entrusted themselves every morning to St. Anne, their Protectress.

On her return to Nizza she suggested that the DMHC make a similar act of consecration not to St. Anne but instead to Mary, Mother and Inspirer of the Institute. The suggestion was favorably accepted and from then on the DMHC began the day with this filial act of entrustment to Mary, Mother and Help in the maturation of their Salesian vocation.¹⁴

C. *In the imitation of Mary*

In Manual Regulations of 1908, the Sisters were exhorted to honor and love Mary Most Holy in a vital way through the imitation of her virtues, especially humility, purity, modesty, charity, love of sacrifice, zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls (art.179).

The Constitutions of 1969 focused on the relationship of the DMHC as Mother and Model and re-enforced the marian character of the Institute, a religious family founded by Don Bosco to be a living monument of gratitude to the Mother of God under the title of Help of Christians. For this reason, a peculiar marian dimension characterized the life and mission of the Institute (art.157).

Art.59 referred to the *marian spirituality* of the Institute considering the Holy Virgin as Mother and Teacher and recalls that true devotion proceeds from true faith and arrives at love and imitation (cf LG 67).

The Constitutions are not limited to inviting the DMHC to entrust herself to Mary's intercession (art.12), nor to simply honor her with prayer (art.42,49) and to celebrate her feasts (art.59), but above all the Constitutions call the DMHC to nourish a filial piety for Mary (art.59). Such attitude is rooted on true faith and sustained by love and imitation. In this manner the marian spirituality of the DMHC will be authentic and profound and will become efficacious in guiding even the young to true and transforming marian devotion (art.59).¹⁵

¹⁴ See DALCERRI L., *Madre Enrichetta Sorbone, Vicaria Generale delle FMA*, Torino, L.I.C.E. e Berruti 1947, 112-114.

¹⁵ Cf CAVAGLIÀ P., in *Madre ed Educatrice*, 54.

Like Mary, the DMHC, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, offers herself totally to the Father by following Christ more closely in the mission of salvation (Const.1982, art.8). Binding herself by vow she assumes the way of life, chaste, poor and obedient which the Son of God chose for Himself (Const.1982, art.11) and prolongs in her life Mary's attitude of total consecration to Christ (cf Const.1982, art.4).

In chastity, she becomes «the transparency of God's love and a reflection of the maternal goodness of Mary» (Const.1982, art.14); in poverty she witnesses to the radicality of self-giving of the humble handmaid who «has given all to her Lord» (Const.1982, art.18); and in obedience she manifests the «fiat» of Mary who, with her adhesion to the will of God, became Mother of the Redeemer and our Mother (Const.1982, art.32).

3.1.1.3. *Name and educative mission*

The Manual Regulations of 1908 called for the innate participation of every DMHC in the educative mission of the Institute no matter the task assigned to her; spoke of the specific connotation of the spirituality of the Institute as pastoral-salvific-marian; underlined the essential link between the daily entrustment to Mary Help of Christians and the educative mission of the DMHC among the young.

It reminds the DMHC that «their presence among the young is expressed through a sincere, disinterested, constant and pure love of Jesus Christ, becoming for them *living images* of Mary, welcoming them as solicitous mothers capable of building the family spirit in the community» (art.284).

Marian devotion was inculcated in the young through marian associations (art.282,313). The students were encouraged to recite daily prayers like the Office of the Blessed Virgin and the Rosary (art.761,750). Before participating in the recreation, they were invited to turn to our Lady with affectionate desire in order to spend the period of relaxation «under her gaze» (art.819). Among the recommendations of Don Bosco for summer vacation was the daily recitation of an act of devotion and consecration to Mary Immaculate before an image of Mary (art.253,254).

The postconciliar Constitutions underline how Mary, being Mother of Christ, is Mother and Educator of those who belong and dedicate themselves to her Son through a specific charism of education of the

young. For this reason, Mary has a particular role, not only in the Church but in the vocation and mission of those who participate in the salvific work of Christ by helping the young to progressively reach their Christian identity.¹⁶

Mary is «actively present» in the life of those who dedicate themselves «to the apostolic action that inspires hope» to the young (Const.1982, art.44). With «maternal solicitude» (Const.1982, art.7) she accompanies the growth of Christians and in particular of her Daughters «as Mother and Teacher of every Salesian vocation» (Const.1982, art.79).

Thus, reference to Mary is not solely motivated by a theological and ecclesial reasons but above all by its charismatic and educative root.

3.1.2. THE NAME: ITS CHARISMATIC ROOTS AND AWARENESS OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN THE INSTITUTE

With the passing of time, the awareness of the significance of their name has grown in the Institute. In fact, M.E. Posada, a DMHC scholar on the origins of the Institute, observes that when the Institute began to study its specific spiritual identity, research revealed that the oral and written tradition always had recourse to their *title* of «Daughters of Mary Help of Christians» and to the explicit intention of Don Bosco to found the Institute to be the «living monument of his gratitude to the great Mother of God under the title of Help of Christians».¹⁷

She underlines that instead of judging as «common place» the *name* given by Don Bosco to the Institute, it merits a more serious reflection and study that goes beyond the peripheral elements, and is capable of entering deeply into the richness of its significance especially in its relationship with the nature of the Institute itself.¹⁸

3.1.2.1. *In Don Bosco*

The name of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is linked with the inspiration and choice of Don Bosco to spread the

¹⁶ Cf MARCHI M., in *Madre ed Educatrice*, 161.

¹⁷ POSADA M.E., *Elementi caratteristici della Spiritualità delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in M. MIDALI (a cura di) *Spiritualità dell'azione*, Roma, LAS 1977, 287-295.

¹⁸ Cf POSADA, *Elementi*, 289, 291.

special devotion to Mary under the title of Help of Christians.¹⁹ It was not a spontaneous decision of Don Bosco but was the result of several factors including Don Bosco's marian devotion, his deep ecclesial sense, his educative mission for the good of the young and his attention to the «signs of the times».

In 1862, Father Giovanni Cagliero disclosed Don Bosco's plan to build a magnificent Church in honor of the Blessed Virgin, under the title of "Mary, Help of Christians". He recounted having heard Don Bosco remark that:

... our Lady wishes us to honor Her under the title of Mary Help of Christians. The times are so bad that we are in great need of Her help to preserve and safeguard our faith.²⁰

However, for Don Bosco a monument made of stone was not enough to honor and spread devotion to Mary. He wanted, at the same time, a living monument to honor this beloved heavenly Mother. Thus, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was born. On the day of its foundation, August 5, 1872, with the religious profession of the first eleven Sisters and the clothing of four novices, the Founder spoke thus:

You now belong to a religious family that is all Mary's... Let your beautiful title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians be your glory and often think that your Institute is to be a living monument of Don Bosco's gratitude to the great Mother of God under the title of Help of Christians.²¹

Then, in a letter written to the DMHC (May 24, 1886), few years before his death (January 31, 1888), he tells them with paternal affection:

¹⁹ Cf STELLA P., *Don Bosco* II, 147-162; CAPETTI G., *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo*, Roma, tip. privata FMA, 1972, I, 11-33; also in *Cronistoria* I.

²⁰ LEMOYNE G. B., *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, VII, New Rochelle, New York, Salesiana Publishers, American ed. from the original Italian, 1972, 197.

²¹ *Chronicles* I, 303. Father Francesco Cerruti who was for thirty-one years Director General of the Salesian Schools, in the informative process declared to have heard from Don Bosco, whose intimacy he had the privilege to receive from 1857 to his death on January 31, 1888, the following words: «Much and great are our duties of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians. What we are and whatever we had accomplished we owe to her. I, therefore desire to build a perennial monument of gratitude to this great Mother. This monument will be the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians». See SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, Taurinen, *Beatificationis et canonizationis ven. Servi Dei Sac. Joannis Bosco, Summarium super dubio* N.III, Roma, Tipografia Agostiniana 1923, 141.

Today, as we celebrate the solemn feast of Mary Help of Christians in Turin in the presence of an enormous crowd of persons who have come long distances to kneel as children at the feet of their tender Mother, it is a source of comfort to me to express my thoughts to you and to the Institute which bears her name.²²

These references indicate how Don Bosco desired the members of the Institute he founded to be aware that in their name is imprinted their marian identity.

3.1.2.2. *In Mary Domenica Mazzarello*

The feminine religious family founded by Don Bosco and which he desired to be called Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872) was born from a religious association of lay women known as the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (1855).²³ The link with the Immaculate in this historical period is indicative of the fervor reigning, not only in Mornese but also in Valdocco²⁴ and in the whole universal

²² Letter of St. John Bosco to the DMHC (Turin, May 24, 1886), in *Manual of the DMHC*, 1908, LXXII-LXXVII; also in *Cronistoria* V, 91-94; *Constitutions DMHC* 1982, Appendix, 403 (English ed.)

²³ The Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate was founded in Mornese by a group of single women, who inspired by the example of Mary Immaculate, desired to bind themselves together to “work for the glory of God and religion by frequenting the holy sacraments, by loving our Mother, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary”. With the encouragement and guidance of Fr. Joseph Pestarino, Angela Maccagno, an educated young lady of Mornese and member of the Pious Union wrote the first draft of the Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. The draft was passed on to Canon Joseph Frassinetti who corrected, rearranged and completed it but, as he himself said, “in substance adding or subtracting nothing”.

On December 9, 1855, the Sunday after the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the young ladies who had already been practicing the Rules drafted by Angela Maccagno for about three years, formally initiated the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate through an act of consecration to Mary. They were five: Angela Maccagno, Mary Mazzarello, Maria Arecco, Rosina Mazzarello and Joan Ferrettino. Cf *Chronicles* I, 52-60.

²⁴ Dominic Savio, one of Don Bosco's youngest sons, with some of his trusted companions formed the Company of Our Lady Immaculate at Valdocco. In agreement with his friends and effectively helped by Joseph Bongiovanni, he drew up a set of rules which was corrected and completed by Don Bosco.

On June 8, 1856, nine months before his death, with much effort, he read the articles aloud with his friends before our Lady's altar. The last article sums up the spirit of the association: “*The Society is under the protection of the Immaculate Conception whose title we bear and whose medal we carry with devotion. A sincere, filial, unlimited tenderness towards her and a constant devotion will render us superior to every obstacle, tenacious in our resolu-*

Church, for the recent proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, precisely on December 8, 1854.

However, among these young ladies, the devotion to Mary Help of Christians was not something new. It is to be noted that after the historical imprisonment and liberation of Pope Pius VII (May 24, 1814), it was not rare to find a miraculous image of our Lady of Mercy, with the title written as *Help of Christians*. In Mornese, an ex-voto painting of MHC can be found in the street called Via Valgelata, a locality where Mary Domenica Mazzarello, Co-Foundress of the Institute, lived for some years. At the same time in the locality of the Mazzarelli, area where Mazzarello was born, a chapel in honor of MHC was raised as a sign of thanksgiving from the townsfolk for having been liberated from an epidemic of cholera in 1836.²⁵

For this reason, when Don Bosco came to Mornese in 1864, he found the people open and ready to be active collaborators with him in this marian devotion.²⁶

What is common in both religious groups is their title as “Daughters of Mary”. This indicates how the filial relationship with Mary would remain as a characteristic element of the marian identity of the DMHC. At the same time what is specific and characteristic in the religious family founded by Don Bosco is the marian attribute of “Help of Christians”.

Mary Mazzarello’s filial devotion to the Blessed Mother was first inculcated by her parents, then by Don Domenico Pestarino, whose pastoral zeal animated and renewed the parish of Mornese. However, the progressive movement of configuration to Mary came about above all, as she lived the ideal proposed by the Rules of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.²⁷ In Mary Immaculate she found the force to fight against sin, the attraction for purity, the zeal to care and to form the young girls who came to the laboratory and oratory. She refers to Mary in a spontaneous way with creative and vivacious expressions, not in an extraordinary nor episodic manner, but with simplicity,

tions, severe towards ourselves, kind and gentle towards others and exact in everything”. Cf Biographical Memoirs, vol. V, 482.

²⁵ Cf *Chronicles* I, 16-17.

²⁶ Cf *Ibid* 182-184; 201-203.

²⁷ *The first Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (draft of Angela Maccagno) - 1853, in Appendix no.1, Chronicles* 1, 319-322.

continuity and essentiality. In Mary she finds the model of her being and acting.²⁸

The members of the first community of the DMHC in Mornese, eleven professed and four novices, all belonged to the Pious Association of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. The characteristic marian note desired by the Founder, Don Bosco and lived by the Co-Foundress, Mother Mazzarello, was assimilated and owned by the whole community. The Rules given by the Founder to be observed did not require the members something more than the traditional or popular expressions of prayer and devotion to the Blessed Mother: celebrating the marian feasts with solemnity and spreading devotion by distributing images, pamphlets, etc.²⁹ However, it is important to note that the testimonies are unanimous in affirming that it was the spirit of the whole Rule lived in its totality which rendered a true cult to Mary.³⁰

For Mother Mazzarello, as it has been for Don Bosco, true devotion did not consist only in devotional practices but in the living awareness of the maternal presence of Mary in one's life and in the constant effort to model oneself on her. In fact, Mother Mazzarello's marian devotion brought her to fix her gaze on Mary to become what she constantly exhorted the Sisters:

We should reflect Mary's image as Don Bosco would have us do.³¹

For the Co-Foundress and for the first community, the name of "Daughters of Mary Help of Christians" was not only a title but a life project to assume gradually each day as her simple, transparent and at times figurative words would attest:

If we have charity towards one another, if we are mortified and animated by the spirit of sacrifice and remain faithful to our Rules, then we can say that we are truly daughters of our Lady.³²

She stressed this awareness to the missionaries who had the particular responsibility to inculturate the charism of the Institute. She wrote in

²⁸ Cf DALCERRI L., *Maria nello Spirito*, 64; DELEIDI A., *Madre ed Educatrice*, 33-34.

²⁹ On the importance of marian images and pamphlets to spread devotion to Mary, see PEDICO M.M., *La Vergine Maria nella pietà popolare*, Roma, Edizioni Monfortane 1993, 155- 171.

³⁰ Cf DALCERRI L., *Maria nello Spirito*, 47-62.

³¹ *Chronicles* III, 192.

³² *Chronicles* II, 262-263.

one of the letters sent to the Daughters in Uruguay:

We are approaching the feast of our Lady Immaculate, which our holy Rule would have us celebrate with great solemnity. But apart from this it should be one of the most beautiful feasts for us who are Daughters of Mary. We must plant some lovely flowers in our hearts and so have a beautiful bouquet to present to our heavenly Mother, Mary most holy. In these days which still remain to us, we must exercise ourselves in all virtues, especially in obedience and mortification.³³

3.1.2.3. *In the memory and reflection of the Institute*

While the awareness of the significance of its name has grown among the DMHC, a systematic reflection has not been done on its relevance to the nature and the charismatic identity of the Institutes. The following authoritative voices and events echo the call to deepen and to keep alive in one's memory this essential element of the identity of the Institute.

A. Father Filippo Rinaldi and the Strenna of 1927

The Servant of God, Father Filippo Rinaldi who incarnated in himself the fatherly heart of Don Bosco became the fourth Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation. In his love for and guidance of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, he desired that they enter into the mind of the holy Founder. Regarding its beautiful title, he wrote in the Strenna of 1927:

You are the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. *Daughters*, remember well, not Ladies, not Mothers nor Teachers nor Sisters nor Servants. *Daughters!* This name is the dearest to the ear, the sweetest to the heart [...] *Daughters of Mary*. This is the great glory of yours. Jesus is the Son of Mary and you [as Daughters of Mary] are like Him.³⁴

Father Rinaldi wants to emphasize that the name of the Institute revealed not only Don Bosco's devotion to Mary but that he wanted the

³³ MAZZARELLO M.D., *Lettera 27. Alla Direttrice suor Angela Vallese e alle sorelle di case di Montevideo-Villa Colón e Las Piedras (Nizza, 20 ottobre 1879)*, in POSADA M.E. - COSTA A. - CAVAGLIÀ P., *La sapienza della vita. Lettere di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale 1994, 140-141.

³⁴ The words of Father F. Rinaldi were cited by Sr. DALCERRI L., in the book *Monumento Vivo della Gratitude di Don Bosco a Maria SS. Aiuto dei Cristiani*, Roma, Esse Gi Esse 1984³, 59-60.

DMHC to become aware that their primary vocation is to live to the full their filial relationship with Mary.

B. Sr. Giselda Capetti's Open Letter to the XIV General Chapter

Sr. Giselda Capetti, historian and chronicler of the Institute, in an open letter to the members of the XIV General Chapter of the Institute (Turin, August 26 to September 17, 1964), gives voice to many other Sisters who regret the fact that the beautiful title of *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, given by the Founder, was being substituted by other titles such *Salesian Sisters* or *Salesians* in the different languages of the nations where the Institute had taken root. According to her what was worst was that in some countries where the Sisters had been working for quite a time, we are not known as *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. Nor was it less painful to note how this title was completely ignored in recent foundations, in countries where in those years we had recently entered.³⁵

Why such a preoccupation on the name of the Institute? Sr. Giselda, herself, in the open letter stated the reason:

[The name] is the marian identity card of the Institute given us by our holy Founder; the sacred heredity of his grateful love to Mary Help of Christians; the fatherly mandate to perpetuate his love and gratitude to Mary in the Church and in the world.

We desire to conserve it jealously, without letting it weaken so that in the upcoming celebration of the first century of the Institute (August 5, 1972) it could be attested how faithful we had been to Don Bosco's will that we glory in this title of *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*, and how committed we had been in transmitting it intact, synthesis and light of a spirit, to those who will come after us.³⁶

C. Centennial celebration of the Institute (1872-1972)

The centennial celebration gave the Institute a providential and special occasion to reflect on its origin and development in the Church and in the whole world. Mother Ersilia Canta, the Superior General during

³⁵ Cf CAPETTI G., *Lettera aperta*, in *Atti del Capitolo Generale XIV dell'Istituto delle FMA* (Torino, 26 agosto-17 settembre 1964), Torino, Scuola Tip. privata, 1964, 826-829.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 828.

that period, wrote to all the DMHC through a circular letter³⁷ that the main thrust of the celebration was «to discover the finality and the spirit of the Institute, to *renew ourselves* individually and as a community, so that we may respond in fullness to the design of God with regards to our Congregation for His glory, for our sanctification and for the good of the Church.» She continued pointing out the following fundamental ideas that should guide the celebration of the Congregation: to give thanks to God for the innumerable benefits given to the Institute in the course of a century; to discover the specific finality of the Institute and its primitive spirit and to renew the Congregation in this spirit.

It is significant to note how Mother Cantà links the centennial celebration with the marian character of the Institute. First, she reminded every Sister that the animating ideas mentioned above would be recalled in the prayer to Mary, the Help of Christians, composed precisely for this particular circumstance to be recited daily throughout the year, in a spirit of renewed consecration to our Blessed Mother. Then, she gave the motivations for such a gesture.

Our Congregation in fact, is a marian congregation par excellence: we are named after our Lady, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, we are dedicated to her, and willed by our holy founder, Don Bosco, to be his «living monument» of gratitude to such a Mother. Our first commitment of gratitude to the Lord and to Our Lady, therefore, is to become ever conscious of the marian character of our Congregation and to search for its motivation in the history of the Institute. From a more enlightened awareness of being in the Church the prolongation of the mission of Mary, the consequent commitment will be born, that is, to give a new impulse and a more theologically motivated cult to Mary Help of Christians in our houses.³⁸

Father Luigi Ricceri (seventh Rector Major of the Salesians), in a homily given to the DMHC at the beginning of the centennial celebration on the feast of Mary's divine Motherhood (January 1, 1972), reminded the Sisters of the place Mary occupies in the origin and in the development of the Institute and added an important point to the theme of the celebration.

You have chosen this year - with modern expression - a concise and significant slogan: At one hundred years there is a need to be reborn. Very well, I would

³⁷ CANTÀ E., *Lettera Circolare*, n. 542 (24 settembre 1971), Roma, Istituto Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice [pro-manuscripto].

³⁸ *Ibid.*

want to add: *to be reborn, but with Mary*. To be reborn with Mary, to grow and to persevere with her.³⁹

In another circular letter (April 24, 1972), Mother Ersilia Canta underlined that the act of consecration to Mary Help of Christians which the Institute on the 24th of May would solemnly renew as a body aimed to deepen the awareness of its marian spirituality and help the DMHC become *living images* of our Blessed Mother.⁴⁰ Pope Paul VI, the Roman Pontiff during the centenary of the Institute addressed the DMHC on July 18, 1972.⁴¹ After the greetings, he posed a challenge to the Sisters present and through them, to the whole Congregation.

Can your Congregation respond to the expectations of the Church in these troubled times? [...] What are the means through which the original vitality of the vigorous stock planted by your holy Founders may continue to flower in all its fullness?

Among the means to keep the fidelity and the fecundity of the Institute he mentioned the following: sanctity, prayer and the marian characteristic. Elaborating the third point he exclaims:

Oh, how we would love to see preserved among you in all its primitive freshness, this distinctive marian characteristic, which should be the outstanding, unmistakable mark of the spirituality of the DMHC everywhere [...]. Yes, my daughters, as long as you learn from Mary to direct everything to Christ, her divine Son; as long as you keep your gaze fixed on her who is God's masterpiece, the model and ideal of every consecrated life and the support of every apostolic heroism, the well-spring of generosity and dedication, of interior life and fervour, of holiness and grace, which has made you such valuable collaborators with our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls, will never run dry in the Institute.⁴²

³⁹ RICCI L., *Omelia del Rev.mo Rettore Maggiore* (Roma, Casa Generalizia FMA, 1 gennaio 1972), in *Notiziario*. Supplemento, Istituto FMA, Roma, 1 gennaio 1972, 4-8.

⁴⁰ CANTA E., *Lettera Circolare*, n. 549 (24 aprile 1972), Roma, Istituto FMA [manuscript].

⁴¹ PAUL VI, *Words of Paul VI to the FMA* (July 18, 1972), *Special Audience to the DMHC on the centenary of the Institute* (July 15, 1972), in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, X (1972), Roma, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana 1972, 752-754; See also, INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Constitutions and Regulations*, (English translation), Istituto FMA, Rome 1982, 467-475.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 473.

D. Father Egidio Viganó

In the first visit of Father Egidio Viganó, eighth Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco (1978-1995), to the DMHC in the Mother House (Rome) he gave a homily which contained a project of life.

The congregation is born and has grown because our Lady willed it, and it will be renewed in the measure that she returns to occupy the place given her by our charism.⁴³

He concluded asking the Institute of the DMHC to grant him the gift of taking the particular responsibility of renewing and rendering alive the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, in collaboration with the whole Salesian Family.⁴⁴ This call of Fr. Viganó would be a constant refrain in the Institute.

His first circular letter (March 25, 1978) as Rector Major of the Salesians of Don Bosco was entitled *Mary renews the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*.⁴⁵ After citing the suggestive biblical icon of Mary with the Beloved Disciple (cf. Jn 19:25-27) at the foot of the crucified Christ, he invites the members of the Salesian family to renew the marian dimension of the salesian vocation by making «a place for our Lady in our home!».

This letter intended to relaunch devotion to Mary Help of Christians in the entire Salesian family. He elaborated the motivations behind this renewal; explained the marian choice and the characteristic elements of the marian devotion of Don Bosco, as well as the essential link between the Help of Christians and the Salesian charism. At the end he concretized his proposal for a marian renewal with the following lines of action: doctrinal formation, marian cult and piety, the wide horizons of ecclesial commitment and the care for vocations. «For all these reasons»,

⁴³ VIGANÓ E., *La sua presenza fra noi*, in *Notiziario delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* 49 (1978/2), 6-8.

⁴⁴ CANTA E., *Lettera Circolare*, n. 611 (24 febbraio 1978), Roma, Istituto FMA [manuscripto].

⁴⁵ VIGANÓ E., *Maria rinnova la Famiglia Salesiana di Don Bosco*, in *Atti del Consiglio Superiore della Società Salesiana*, 57 (1978) 3-35. The English translation of the document will be cited here.

⁴⁶ SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO, *Acts of the General Chapter XXI*, 94, as cited by E. VIGANÓ, in *Maria rinnova la Famiglia Salesiana*, 12.

Father Viganó noted, «and not without the special influence of the recent General Chapter we are asked to make an explicit commitment to the renewal of the marian aspect of our vocation».⁴⁶ In this letter, he recalled the fraternal visit made by the Mother General, Mo. Ersilia Canta, together with the General Council of the DMHC where they accepted the assignment which the new Rector Major proffered to foster initiatives for the spread of marian devotion throughout the whole Salesian family.⁴⁷

E. Mother Marinella Castagno

Mother Marinella Castagno, eighth Superior General, animated and governed the Institute of the DMHC for two terms (1984-1990; 1990-1996) with the gift of divine wisdom and a deep sense of humanity in a historical moment of an epocal cultural change. Her strong and profound love for the Blessed Mother was concrete and constant. To prove this it is enough to read her circular letters and the interventions she gave during the strong moments of reflection by the Institute in the encounters before, during and after the two General Chapters (XVIII and XIX) which she animated and guided.

In the presentation of the Acts of the XVIII General Chapter (August 24 to September 29, 1984), she reminded the Sisters of the commitment to be in the Salesian family the group that keeps alive the flame of love for Mary Help of Christians as Don Bosco has explicitly desired for the Institute. Then she underlined how Mary is intimately linked with our identity for we cannot be called Daughters of Mary Help of Christians if Mary is not truly our Mother, if we do not perceive her presence alive near us. She reminded the Sisters of how Father E. Viganó, in his first visit to the Sister as Rector Major, reiterated this task of the Institute in the Salesian family with these words: «To you I entrust this responsibility».⁴⁸

The XIX General Chapter (September 19 to November 17, 1990) had a more explicit marian note as could be evidenced by the *Acts* themselves: in the presentation, in the contents and in the practical guidelines.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cf VIGANÒ E., *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ ISTITUTO FMA, *Atti del XVIII Capitolo Generale* (24 agosto-29 settembre 1984), Roma, Scuola tipografia privata FMA 1984, 11-12.

⁴⁹ ISTITUTO FMA, *Atti del XIX Capitolo Generale* (19 settembre-17 novembre 1990), Roma, Scuola tipografia privata FMA 1991, 5-8, 26, 38-39, 48, 54, 63-64, 70-73.

In the presentation, Mother Marinella reiterated the «need for an authentically lived marian spirituality.» She pointed out that responding to this need would be the Institute's modest contribution to the renewal of the marian devotion in the Salesian Family as Father Viganó had explicitly asked us at the beginning of his term as Rector Major.⁵⁰ She concluded her presentation saying that only by beginning with a serious and ongoing study of marian spirituality will we be able to live a new style of community as consecrated women and give life to new educative presences among the poorest of the young.⁵¹

3.1.2.4. *A brief conclusion*

The reflections cited above are important traces which lead to a significant conclusion, that is, the *name of the Institute* is not only a religious formality or a conventional tag to distinguish it from other religious congregations. It *contains and reflects the marian nature of the Institute*. The nature of a religious institute constitutes its identity and includes the specific elements which characterize its charismatic dimension, the spirit which animates it, its style of communion and its mission in the Church.⁵² To affirm that the nature of the Institute is marian does not preclude the other elements equally constitutive of its identity, such as its educative mission with its characteristic method known as the *Preventive System*⁵³, and the particular spirit which animates its life of

⁵⁰ Cf *Ibid.*, 7

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Cf SCRIVO, *La natura educativa dell'Istituto*, in *Atti del Capitolo Generale XVIII*, 10.

⁵³ The «preventive system» is the term used by Don Bosco to refer to his way of educating the young. It represents, in a certain way, the synthesis and concretization of his pedagogical wisdom and constitutes that prophetic message, which he left as a patrimony to his spiritual children and to the whole Church. Cf JOHN PAUL II, *Juvenum Patris*. Letter, January 31, 1988, in AAS 80 (1988) 969-987.

At the center of Don Bosco's educative vision is pastoral charity. The educator is called to love the young, as he is, no matter in what condition he maybe found. He is challenged to bring him to the fullness of humanity which is revealed in Christ and to awaken in him the awareness and the possibility to live as an honest citizen and son of God. The saint summarizes his educative method with the well known trinomial: «reason, religion and lovingkindness». Cf *Il Sistema Preventivo*, in «Regolamento per le case della Società di S. Francesco di Sales», Torino 1877, in BOSCO G., *Scritti pedagogici e spirituali* (a cura di AA.Vv.), Roma, LAS 1987, 166.

prayer and fraternal communion known as the «*spirit of Mornese*»⁵⁴. All these elements are necessary to express the consistency and reality of the particular Salesian charism which the Founder, Don Bosco and the Co-Foundress, Mother Mazzarello incarnated and transmitted as a spiritual heritage to every DMHC.

3.1.3. THE NAME: ITS BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND SALESIAN SIGNIFICANCE

As a world-wide belief, the name of an object, of a person, or a higher being is more than a label or a tag, incidentally associated with the one who bears it. The name is an indispensable part of one's personality. It is in fact, «a power which is very closely associated with the bearer and which discloses his/her nature».⁵⁵

Similarly, a religious name or title is not just a conventional reference to distinguish persons one from another, but it reveals the essence of a being and its destiny (cf Is 1:26). In the biblical sense to give a name is to make something or someone become (cf Gen 1:3-10). A change of name indicates a new life or reveals an important aspect in one's relationship with God. It could also signify a particular mission to be fulfilled. Abram became Abraham to signify his call to be «the father of many nations» (Gen 17:5); Jacob became Israel (cf Gen 35:10), meaning the «the man who sees God»; Simon received the name Peter, the *rock* of Christ's Church (cf Jn 1:42; Mt 16:18).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The *spirit of Mornese* is the feminine incarnation of the Salesian charism which Mary Domenica Mazzarello and the first community of Sisters in Mornese lived and transmitted as a spiritual heritage to every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians from generation to generation. Father E. Viganò referred to it as «an attractive and enthusiastic ideal that characterises every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians» and identifies its main lines under two aspects: mystical and ascetical. See, *Rediscovering the Spirit of Mornese. Letter of Rector Major Fr. E. Viganò for the Centenary of the Death of St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello*, Rome, FMA 1995, 47-48. See also, COLLI C., *The Contribution of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello to the Charism of the Foundation of the F.M.A. Institute* [translated from Italian by AYERS J.], Scoresby, Victoria, St. Paul Publications 1981; ID., *The Spirit of Mornese* [English translation], U.S.A., Don Bosco Publications 1982.

⁵⁵ FRIEDRICH G. (ed.), *The Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. V, Grand Rapids, Michigan, W.M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1967, 242.

⁵⁶ Cf MCKENZIE J., *Dictionary of the Bible*, London, Geoffrey Chapman Publishing 1965, 603-605.

Sometimes biblical names or titles refer not only to an individual but to a corporate entity. For instance *Israel* does not refer only to Jacob but to God's chosen people. The title *Daughter of Zion* which originally referred to the inhabitants of Zion assumed the universal significance of God's people called to salvation in Christ. In the event of the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38), Mary of Nazareth was addressed by God's messenger with a new name, *kecharitoméne* (= *full of grace*; Lk 1:28), instead of her proper earthly name *Miryam* (= *Mary*). In the Gospel of Luke, the message of Gabriel to Mary is an echo of the joyful oracles of the Old Testament prophets Zechariah (2:14-15; 9:9-10), Zephaniah (3:14-17) and Joel (2:21-27) to the *Daughter of Zion*, that is, to Jerusalem and to the whole people of Israel on their return from the Babylonian exile. Luke sees in Mary the personification of the *Daughter of Zion*.⁵⁷

In the fourth Gospel, John refers to Mary, the Mother of Jesus as the *Woman* in two significant episodes, the marriage feast at Cana (Jn 2:4) and at the foot of the Cross (Jn 19:26). The title *Woman* given to Mary by Jesus Himself, testifies that He sees in her the personification of the people of God, Israel in the old covenant and the Church in the new covenant.⁵⁸

It is in this biblical and theological perspective that the title of *Daughter of Mary Help of Christians* finds the root and fullness of its significance. While it is true that historically it was Don Bosco who chose this name for the religious institute he founded with Mary Domenica Mazzarello, nevertheless, over and above the contingent historical circumstances, the inspiration that motivated and guided them came from a supernatural order. The Constitutions of the DMHC, in fact, affirm that the Institute was founded «through a gift of the Holy Spirit and through the direct intervention of Mary» (Const.1982, art.1).

If indeed, as the previous paragraphs have attested, the name of a religious family bears a charismatic significance, one could ask: what then

⁵⁷ Cf SERRA A., «Esulta, Figlia di Sion!». *Principali riletture di Zc 2,14-15 e 9,9a-c nel Giudaismo antico e nel Cristianesimo del I-II secolo*, in *Marianum* 45 (1983) 9-54; ID., *Bibbia*, in *NDM*, 248-249. See also, MORI E.G., *Figlia di Sion*, in *NDM*, 248-249; ID., *Figlia di Sion e Serva del Signore, nella Bibbia, nel Vaticano II, nel postconcilio*, Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane 1988.

⁵⁸ Cf SERRA A., *Contributi dell'antica letteratura giudaica per l'esegesi di Gv 2,1-12 e 19,25-27*, Roma, Edizioni Herder, 402-429, specially 409-410; ID., *Maria a Cana e presso la croce ... op. cit.*, 35-37, 94-100.

is the theological significance and implications of the name of the “Daughters of Mary Help of Christians”?

To answer this question it is necessary to consider two points inherent in the name of the Institute itself. The first one refers to the filial relationship of the members to Mary, that of being “Daughters of Mary” while the second one points to the role of Mary in the history of salvation as the “Help of Christians” and the implications of such role to her Daughters.

3.1.3.1. “*Daughter of Mary*”: *filial relationship with Mary*

The awareness of Mary’s essential relationship with the Church is the fruit of reflection not only of the pentecostal ecclesial event of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which dedicated ample reflection to Mary, the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, in her relationship with the mystery of Christ and of the Church,⁵⁹ but it is also the fruit of biblical and theological studies for almost five decades where the theme of the spiritual maternity of Mary has become of primary interest.

The most important biblical passage regarding the relationship of Mary and the Church is perhaps that of *John 19:25-27*:

Near the cross of Jesus there stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Seeing his mother there with the disciple whom he loved, Jesus said to his mother, “Woman, behold your son”. In turn he said to the disciple, “Behold your mother”. From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care.

In this passage, one discovers that it is Christ Himself who has willed the spiritual maternity of Mary towards the Church when on the Cross He addressed His Mother: «Woman, behold your Son» (Jn 19:26) and the Beloved Disciple: «Behold your Mother» (Jn 19:27).

Origen (185-254), is one of the earliest Church Fathers to comment on the passage of *Jn 19:25-27*. The following citation are his words, considered to be one of the most beautiful and spiritually inspiring reflections on Mary at the foot of the Cross.

⁵⁹ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church November 21, 1964, in AAS 57 (1965) 5-71; FLANNERY A. (ed.), *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, New York, Costello Publishing Company, 1977, 350- 451, nn.1-69

We may therefore venture to say that the flower of all Scriptures are the Gospels, and the flower of the Gospels is that according to John, the sense of which no one is able to receive who has not reclined upon the breast of Jesus, or who has not received from Jesus, Mary to be his Mother also. Yea, such and so great must he need become who is to be another John. As John was, so too must he be shown to be Jesus, by Jesus. For, in the judgement of those whose sentiments are sound concerning Mary, there be no Son of Mary save Jesus, and Jesus says to His Mother, Behold your son, and not, Behold he too is your son, - it is the same as though He said, Behold, he is Jesus whom you brought forth. For whoever is perfect, himself no longer lives, but Christ lives in him: and since Christ lives in him, of him is it said to Mary, Behold your son, Christ.⁶⁰

In the history of Christian exegesis, from Origen to the twelfth century, there are other lines of interpretation of *Jn 19:25-27* aside from the spiritual maternity of Mary.⁶¹ They refer to John as the type of the perfect disciple;⁶² they shed light on the perpetual virginity of Mary who having no other children was entrusted by Jesus to John; they express the filial care of Christ towards His Mother who will remain alone and in need of help; they present Mary as the symbol of the Church.⁶³

⁶⁰ ORIGEN, *In Johannem* I, 4 (23): SC 120, 71.73. The English translation is taken from LIVIUS T., *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries*, London, Burns and Oates 1893, 184.

⁶¹ Cf SERRA A., *Maria a Cana e presso la croce ... op. cit.*, 81-84; ID., *Bibbia*, in NDM, 284-292; ID., *Maria secondo il Vangelo*, Brescia, Editrice Queriniana 1988², 149-172; ID., *La maternità spirituale di Maria a Cana e presso la Croce (Redemptoris Mater*", nn.20-24), in *Seminarium* 27 (1987), 515-524; ID., *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale. Con Maria dalla Pasqua all'Assunta*, Torino, Paoline 1995, 13-37.

⁶² KÖHLER TH., *Les principales interprétations traditionnelles de Jn 19, 25-27 pendant les douze premiers siècles*, in *Études Mariales*, 16 (1959), 119-155; BARRÉ H., *La maternité spirituelle de Maria dans la pensée médiévale*, in *Études Mariales*, 16 (1959), 87-104; THURIAN M., *Maria Madre del Signore, Immagine della Chiesa*, Brescia, Morcelliana 1965², 158-191; AMATA B., *Giovanni 19,26-27 come prova scritturistica della perpetua verginità di Marie: origine e sviluppo di questo esegesi*, in LICCARDO G.-RUOTOLO F.-TANZARELLA S. (a cura di), *XVI Centenario del Concilio di Capua, 392-1992. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di studi Mariologici* (Capua, 19-24 maggio 1992), Istituto Superiore di Scienze Religiose, Capua-Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum, Roma 1993, 107-172.

⁶³ This interpretation, the most consonant to the thought of the evangelist John, sees in Mary the figure of the Church. St. Ambrose, the patristic author who has commented most on the biblical passage of *Jn 19, 25-27*, elaborated his exegesis in three points: (1) takes the passage as proof of Mary's perpetual virginity; (2) considers the words of Jesus as a «domestic testament»; (3) sees Mary, at the foot of the Cross, as the figure of the Church. Regarding the last point St. Ambrose wrote: «There is a mystery in the entrustment of Mary to John, the

In the Medieval times, especially with Ruperto of Deutz (+1130) and followed by others, the theme on the spiritual maternity of Mary gained special interest. It was reduced to second place in exegetical studies during the Renaissance period while continuing at the same time to gain an echo among spiritual writers. However, in the last five decades, one perceives among exegetes a new interest in the theme of the spiritual maternity of Mary. Numerous studies have been done both by Catholic and Protestant biblical and theological scholars on this theme. In addition, it is largely present in liturgical texts and among pontifical documents.⁶⁴

In preparation for the celebration of the marian year (June 7, 1987-August 15, 1988), Pope John Paul II dedicated an encyclical to Mary entitled *Redemptoris Mater. On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church* published on March 25, 1987. This papal document reflected a maturation of biblical and theological studies on Mary's maternal role towards the Church and towards every believer.

Among other things, the encyclical affirmed that Mary is present in the mystery of the Church not only as Model but also as Mother. If the mystery of the Church consists in generating, in the Spirit, sons and daughters to a new life in Christ, in this ecclesial function, Mary does not appear only as a Model but cooperates with *maternal love* in the Church's role of spiritual maternity.⁶⁵

How does Mary cooperate in the spiritual regeneration of God's children in the Church? The encyclical pointed to the words of Jesus to his Mother at the hour of Calvary: «Woman, behold your son» (Jn 19:26) and to the disciple: «Behold your Mother» (Jn 19:27). They are words which determine Mary's place in the life of Christ's disciples and they express the new motherhood of the Mother of the Redeemer: a spiritual motherhood which is born from the heart of the Paschal Mystery of her divine Son. It is a motherhood in the order of grace, for it implores the

youngest of all; and we should not receive this truth with a superficial eye... for it refers here to the mystery of the Church, first united to the old people of God, as a figure and not effectively. After she had generated the Word and sowed Him in the bodies and souls of men through faith..., she - through the command of God - chose the community of the youngest [disciple of Christ]» (*Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* X, 134 CCL 14, 1931); as cited by SERRA, A., in *Maria a Cana e presso la croce*, op. cit., 82.

⁶⁴ Cf DE LA POTTERIE I., *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza*, Genova, Casa Editrice Marietti 1988, 229-231.

⁶⁵ Cf LG 63; RM 44.

gift of the Spirit who generates children of God, redeemed through the sacrifice of Christ, that Spirit whom together with the Church Mary received on the day of Pentecost.⁶⁶

A. *The words of Jesus: Woman, behold your Son...
Behold your Mother*" (Jn 19:26-27a)

One of the important acquisitions of modern exegesis regarding this passage is to have discovered in it a particular literary genre. M. de Goedt published an article on this argument widely accepted by scholars, wherein he demonstrated how *John 19:26-27a* follows a technical formula which he called a *scheme of revelation*.⁶⁷ Such a formula is present four times in the Gospel of John: 1:29.36.47; 19:26-27a. It is composed of four elements namely: persons A and B (there could be others); person A *sees* person B and looking at B, A *says* something of B which begins with the adverb *behold* or *here*; a *title* follows which speaks about, announces or reveals something of person B.⁶⁸

Applying this formula of revelation to our passage we observe that from the Cross Jesus *sees* the Mother and the disciple and *says*: «*Behold your Son... Behold your Mother*» (Jn 19:26-27a). In the fourth Gospel, Jesus is considered the prophet of the Father (Jn 4:19,46; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17), full of the Spirit without measure (Jn 1:32,33; 3:34). With the force of His prophetic office, Jesus reveals to His Mother that all believers in Him, as represented by the disciple at the foot of the Cross, are to become Her children. At the same time, Jesus reveals Mary to the disciple as his Mother. Through the person of Jesus, the maternity of Mary is extended to all His disciples. At that moment, one can say that that the Son generates the Mother. In fact, the words of Jesus «are spirit and truth» (Jn 6,63). Full, as they are, of divine energy who is the Holy Spirit, they *create* what they *say*. As a consequence, Mary is constituted (spiritual) *Mother* of the disciple and the disciple is constituted (spiritual) *son* of Mary.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Cf *RM* 44

⁶⁷ DE GOEDT M., *Un schème de révélation dans le quatrième Évangile*, in *New Testament Studies* 8 (1961-1962), 142-150.

⁶⁸ Cf DE LA POTTERIE I., *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza...*, 232-234.

⁶⁹ Cf SERRA A., *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, *op. cit.*, 15.

Pope John Paul II teaches that Jesus, with His «last testament» to Mary and to the disciple, gives the «foundation of the marian cult» and reveals through John «His will that Mary be received with sincere filial love by every disciple for whom *Jesus Himself has instituted Mary as Mother.*» The Pope underlines that «the importance of the marian cult which the Church has always willed could be deduced from the words pronounced by Jesus on the very hour of His death».⁷⁰

B. The presence and role of the «Woman», the «Mother of Jesus»

At the foot of the Cross, in communion with Jesus, four women (the Mother of Jesus, her sister, Mary of Cleofa and Mary of Magdala) and the beloved disciple were present. However, in this group a preeminent role was assigned to the Mother of Jesus.

The fact that Jesus addressed His Mother first underlined that He intended to make evident the role He was to give her. The role of the disciple appears to be subordinate and dependent on that of Mary.

The priority given by Jesus to Mary is confirmed also by the solemn title, *Woman* addressed to her (Jn 19: 26), as was used in the episode of the marriage feast at Cana (Jn 2: 4). In both cases the title bears a communitarian-ecclesial resonance. In the economy of the new covenant, sanctioned by the paschal mystery, the *Woman*, who is at the same time the *Mother of Jesus*, becomes the personification of the New Jerusalem, that is, of the *Daughter of Zion* to whom the prophets addressed their eschatological prophecies.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Words of Pope John Paul II during the Wednesday General Audience (November 23, 1988), *The last words of Jesus on the Cross: «Here is your Mother...»*, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XI/4, novembre-dicembre 1988, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1991, 1637-1638, n.7.

⁷¹ In the Jewish biblical language, *Jerusalem* is often described with the image of the «woman». See for example, *Ez* 16:8; 23:2-4; *Jer* 2:2; *Ps* 86:5 (LXX); *Ap Bar* 10:7; *IV Esd* 9:38- 10:57... Similarly, the *chosen people* is personified with the figure of the «woman». See, *Hos* 1-3; *Is* 26:17-18 (cf *IQH* III:3-12); *Jer* 31:4,15; *Targum Song of Songs* (entirely); *Targum Ps* 45:11- 17... One can therefore understand why, in the Johannine language, the title *Woman* is addressed to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. She is, in the economy of the New Covenant sealed by the Paschal Mystery, the personification of the New Jerusalem (Mother), that is, the Church (Mother). Cf SERRA A., *Contributi ...*, *op. cit.*, 404-406; *Maria a Cana ...*, *op. cit.*, 100-101; DE LA POTTERIE I., *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza*, *op. cit.*, 238-242.

Here we recognize a transposition of images from Jerusalem to the Mother of Jesus. Jerusalem was the universal Mother of the dispersed children of Israel, gathered in the Temple which rose within its walls. The Mother of Jesus is the universal Mother of the dispersed children of God, united in the Person of Christ, who from her womb was generated by the Holy Spirit with her own flesh.

Being *Mother* of Jesus, at the foot of the Cross Mary is declared *Mother* also of those who are one with Jesus through faith, his disciples. This is the reason why the evangelist in *Jn 19:25-27* does not call the Virgin with her proper name *Mary*, but with the titles *Mother of Jesus* and *Woman*.⁷²

However, the scene of Mary and the disciple at the foot of the Cross should not be interpreted immediately and exclusively in an ecclesiological or communitarian sense. It is not a scene of mere symbols but of historical figures and as such they remain individuals who should maintain their personal and specific significance in the mystery of salvation.

It is important to retain a unity between both the personal and ecclesiological significance of the maternity of Mary. Becoming mother of the disciples of Jesus, Mary becomes mother of the whole Church.⁷³ As an individual person she is the Mother of Jesus, and becomes through the will of the Son the Mother of us all, the Mother of the Church. Her physical motherhood exclusively for Jesus is prolonged in a spiritual motherhood for every believer, personally and as a community, that is, the Church. This spiritual motherhood of Mary becomes the figure and the

⁷² SERRA A., *Contributi ...*, *op. cit.*, 402-429; ID., *Maria a Cana ...*, *op. cit.*, 94-103.

⁷³ At the end of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, on November 21, 1964, during the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, Pope Paul VI officially proclaimed Mary as *Mother of the Church*. The doctrinal commission of the Council, while acknowledging the theological validity of the marian title deemed not to use it in the conciliar documents to prevent any equivocal sense on the terms «mother» and «church» as attributed to Mary. Pope Paul VI, in the introductory discourse, clearly stated why Mary is «Mother of the Church, that is, of the whole people of God, both of the faithful as well as of the pastors». *Mother* is understood in the supernatural sense, in as much as Mary cooperated and continues to cooperate in transmitting the life of grace to every Christian. *Church* does not refer here to the hierarchical structure, nor to its juridical and liturgical order, but to the intimate essence of the Church, as it constitutes the Mystical Body of Christ, embracing all Christians, pastors and faithful alike. For the whole text of the Pope's discourse see: PAUL VI, *Allocutio to the Fathers of the Council on the promulgation of the Conciliar Constitution «De Ecclesia»*, November 21, 1964, in AAS 56 (1964), 1014-1018.

form of the motherhood of the Church. Both maternities are important for the filial life of believers.

To become children of God we must become children of Mary and children of the Church. The prologue of John the Evangelist speaks of the power we have received to become children of God, according to the model of Him who was not generated by the will of man, but who was generated by the will of God:

Anyone who did accept Him He empowered to become children of God. These are they who believe in His name - who was begotten not by blood, nor by carnal desire, nor by one's willing it, but by God (Jn 1:12-13, in singular).⁷⁴

In the measure by which we deepen our faith in Jesus, the only Son of the Father, our life as children of God will grow. That which has been announced in the prologue finds its fulfillment in the spiritual maternity of Mary at the foot of the Cross. Mary, who at the moment of the Incarnation physically conceived and generated Jesus (in a virginal way), at the foot of the Cross prolongs her maternity by spiritually conceiving and generating with the Spirit of God the disciples of Jesus (also in a virginal way).⁷⁵

C. *The significance of the formula*
"the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn 19:26)

Who is this disciple? It has been a noted traditional opinion, from St. Irenaeus⁷⁶ on, that the «disciple whom Jesus loved» is identified with John, the Evangelist, who with particular attention, referred to himself several times in the fourth Gospel in an anonymous way (Jn 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). However, what particularly interests us in this study is not so much his personal identity but the significance of the formula *the disciple whom Jesus loved* and the way Mary was welcomed by the disciple. Modern exegesis retains that the expression *the disciple whom Jesus loved* does not signify a personal preference of Jesus for a

⁷⁴ On the double interpretation of Jn 1:13 (in singular and in plural), cf SERRA A., *Bibbia*, in NDM 1431-1433.

⁷⁵ Cf DE LA POTTERIE, *Maria nel mistero dell'alleanza*, 240-241.

⁷⁶ IRENAEUS, in *Haereses* 3,1.1, identifies John with the [beloved] disciple who reclined on the breast of Jesus: «After [Matthew, Mark and Luke] John, the disciple of the Lord, who also rested on his breast, published in his turn the Gospel, while living in Ephesus in Asia».

particular disciple but the state of him who, observing the evangelical word, finds himself within the sphere of the love of the Father and the Son. *The disciple whom Jesus loved* is therefore the *type* of every other disciple who, through faith, is loved by Jesus.⁷⁷ The beloved disciple is a man of faith who does not have a need for proof (Jn 20:8). He is a witness of the mystery of the Cross (Jn 19:35) and at the foot of the Cross he becomes the son of the Mother of Jesus, as representative of the disciples who, in their relation with God, have become brothers/sisters of Jesus (Jn 20:17). M. Thurian refers to the beloved disciple as the «personification of the perfect disciple, of the true faithful of Christ, of the believer who has received the Spirit.»⁷⁸

D. The significance of the expression: And from that hour the disciple took her [Mary] as his own" (Jn 19:27b)⁷⁹

Verse 27b is of considerable importance for it explains the manner in which the beloved disciple obeyed the will of the Master: «From that hour onward, the disciple took her into his care».

In this verse we need to deepen the significance of three key terms in the Johannine Gospel namely: (i) *lambánein* = *to receive or to welcome*; (ii) *éis tà idia* = *among his own*; (iii) *ôra* = *the hour*.

(i) - «lambánein» = to receive or to welcome

The verb [λαμβάνω = *lambánô/lambánein*], used in this expression has a three-fold significance in the Johannine terminology: (1) *to take*, when used with a direct *object* which is an inanimate thing⁸⁰, or with persons who are in the way of something, who are an obstacle⁸¹; (2) *to receive*, when the object referred to is a *gift*, or a *benefit received*.⁸² Usually it refers to spiritual gifts such as: grace (Jn1:16), a gift for eternal life

⁷⁷ DIBELIUS M., *Joh XV, 13 - Eine Studie zum Traditionsproblem des Johannesvangelium*, in *Festgabe für A. Deissmann*, Tübingen 1927, 178s as cited by SERRA A., *Maria a Cana e presso la croce*, 104.

⁷⁸ THURIAN M., *Maria Madre del Signore, Immagine della Chiesa*, 237

⁷⁹ Cf SERRA A., *Maria a Cana e presso la croce*, *op. cit.*, 112-113.

⁸⁰ For example: Jn 6:11; 12:3, 13; 13:4, 26, 30; 18:3; 19:23, 30, 40; 21:13.

⁸¹ See for example, Jn 18:31: «Take him yourselves and judge him»; Jn 19:1, 6, 40.

⁸² Jn 3:27; 5:44; 6:7; 7:23; 3 Jn 7.

(Jn 4:36), the Spirit (Jn 7:39; 14:17; 20:22), that which is asked in prayer (Jn 16:24; 1Jn 3:22). Finally, the verb signifies also (3) *to welcome* when it is used to a *person* or a *message*. Except for Jn 19:27b, in the fourth Gospel, the verb intended as *welcome* refers always to the person of Christ (Jn 1:12; 5:43; 13:20; cf 6:21), to His words (Jn 12:48; 17:8), or of His witnessing (Jn 3:11, 32, 33; cf 1Jn 5:9).

In the above mentioned cases, *lambánein* is practically synonymous to *pistéuein* (= to believe; cf Jn 5:43-44; above all, 1:12). It should therefore be translated with «to welcome» for it presupposes the interior disposition of the one who receives, an openness towards the person being welcomed.

It is noteworthy to underline, that the only time the verb did not refer to Jesus was precisely in the passage at the foot of the Cross, where the object of the verb *lambanein* was Mary, the Mother of Jesus, instead to Jesus: «And from that hour the disciple *welcome her* [Mary] as his own» (Jn 19:27b).

The *Beloved Disciple*, identified by Christian tradition to be the evangelist John, becomes in this episode the type of every disciple of Jesus.⁸³ While entrusting His Mother to the disciple, the Redeemer at the same time, gives her to him as Mother. The motherhood of Mary is a gift: a gift which Christ Himself gives to every man and woman.

(ii) - *tà ìdia* = *to his own home*

Scholars had underlined that the profound significance of the Greek text *éis tà ìdia* is not often faithfully translated by modern language.⁸⁴ A.

⁸³ For an explanation of the «beloved disciple» as the *type* of every disciple, see pages 68-69 of this study. For a more detailed study on the theme cf: MORENO R., *El discípulo de Jesucristo según el evangelio de S. Juan*, in *Estudios Bíblicos*, 30 (1971), 268-311; DE LA POTTERIE I., *Le témoin qui demeure: le disciple que Jésus aimait*, in *Biblica*, 67 (1986), 343-359.

⁸⁴ There are two different interpretations of the verse in question.

One is of Ignace De la Potterie (professor at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome and one of the known experts on Johannine studies). Cf *La parole de Jésus «Voici ta Mère» et l'accueil du Disciple (Jn 19 27b)*, in *Marianum* 36 (1974) 1-39; «*Et à partir de cette heure, le Disciple l'accueillit dans son intimité*» (Jn 19,27b), in *Marianum* 42 (1980) 84-125. According to him, a great majority of modern commentators do not give the exact meaning of the Johannine verse (Jn 19:27b) when they translate it as: «From that moment the disciple took her into *his home*». Too little! He proposes instead this version: «... welcomed her among *his own goods*»; he wanted to emphasize further that «his own goods» refer to «spiritual goods»

Serra, deepening this Johannine expression in different studies, gives a synthesis of the discussion regarding its present exegetical interpretation.

The «to his own home» (*tà ìdia*) within which the the disciple welcomed the Mother of Jesus could not only be identified with «the house», with the «material dwelling place» which he offered to the Virgin, to fulfill the testament of the Teacher. This first logistic significance, inherent to the true house and the very place where the disciple lived, is not excluded in the significance of the Johannine text. In fact, it presupposes and implies it. However, the verse in question has a richness of theological and spiritual significance, within which the disciple introduced the Mother of Jesus.

Other than the first obvious and basic significance, the evangelist would like us to understand that the disciple welcomed Mary in a kind of a «mystical- spiritual» house, which was «his faith and union with Christ». It was this the interior and spiritual space, the vital ambient which characterized his existence as the disciple of the Lord. In his eyes, the Mother of Jesus constitutes one of the many moral-spiritual gifts which he has received as heredity from Jesus, Master and Lord (cf Gv 13,13).⁸⁵ If Mary, up to that time was only the «Mother of Jesus», from

and not only to «the material house». To underline the spiritual and fuller meaning of the expression he preferred to translate it as: «... welcomed her *into his intimacy*». See *Marianum* 42 (1981), 124.

The other is of Frans Neirynck, an exegete from Lovain, who wrote two articles which partially disagreed with the interpretation of I. De la Potterie. See, *Eis tà ìdia. Jn 29,27 (et 16,32)*, in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 55 (1979), 357-365 and *La traduction d'un verset johannique. Jn 19,27b*, in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 57 (1981) 83-106. On his part, he did not exclude in Jn 19, 27b the possibility of a profound symbolical significance. This however, presupposes and necessitates primarily the existence of a *material house*, where the disciple concretely welcomed the Mother of Jesus.

A. Serra is of the opinion that, notwithstanding some disagreeing points, De la Potterie and Neirynck are substantially in agreement. Cf *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, op. cit., 17.

⁸⁵ Among the *gifts* which Jesus gives to those who welcome him in faith are the following: *the power to become children of God* (Jn 1:12); *living water*, symbol of the *word of Jesus* (Jn 4:10) and of the *Holy Spirit* who dwells in the heart of the believers (Jn 4:14; cf 7:37-39); the *bread*, that is, the *Word of Jesus* (Jn 6, 32-35), and the *eucharistic bread*, which is His flesh for the life of the world (Jn 6:51b); *the new commandment*: «Love one another as I have loved you» (Jn 13:34); *peace* (Jn 14:27; 20:19, 21); *joy* (Jn 15:11; 17:13); *eternal life*, which consists in knowing the Father as the only true God and Him whom He has sent, Jesus Christ (Jn 17:2-3; cf 10:10, 28); the *words of Jesus* (his teachings), which He revealed to us as messen-

that *Hour* (that is, from the moment of the paschal mystery), she becomes also the «Mother of the disciple», who represents all the other disciples. As such, that is, as «his Mother», the disciple welcomes and acknowledges her, in respectful obedience to the will of Jesus.⁸⁶

In the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* (March 25, 1987) Pope John Paul II's awareness of the current theological discussion on Jn 19:27b is clear. He presented a balanced position, acknowledging in the Johannine expression *tà ìdia* both a «material house» and a «spiritual house». He expressed it in the following manner in the encyclical.

Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, like the apostle John, «welcomes» the Mother of Christ «into his own home» and brings 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» (RM 45).

This paragraph is followed by a note which further explains the interpretation of «*éis tà ìdia*» which reads as follows:

Clearly, in the Greek text the expression « » goes beyond the mere acceptance of Mary by the disciple in the sense of material lodging and hospitality in his house; it indicates rather a *communion of life* established between the two as a result of the words of the dying Christ: cf SAINT AUGUSTIN, *In Ioan. Evang. tract.* 119, 3; *CCL* 36, 659: «He took her to himself, not into his own property, for he possessed nothing of his own, but among his own duties, which he attended to with dedication» (RM note 130).

In the light of the present theological studies, one can therefore admit that the meaning of *éis tà ìdia* goes beyond the material lodging and hospitality accorded by the disciple to Mary in his house; it refers to a communion of life established between the *Mother* and the *Beloved Disciple* as a result of the words of Jesus from the Cross.

The marian dimension of the life of a disciple of Christ is expressed in a special way precisely through such a filial entrustment to the Mother of God, begun with the testament of the Redeemer at Golgotha. Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian, as the disciple John, *welcomes* the Mother of Christ «into his own home» and brings her into

ger of the Father (Jn 17:8); the *Holy Spirit* (Jn 20:22)... and among these gifts, there is also the *Mother of Jesus* (Jn 19:26). Cf. SERRA A., *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, *op. cit.*, 24-25.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

everything that makes up his/her interior life. Thus the Christian seeks to be taken into that *maternal charity*, with which the Mother of the Redeemer «cares for the brothers of Her Son», «in whose birth and development she cooperates» in the measure of the gift proper to each one through the power of Christ's Holy Spirit.⁸⁷

This filial relationship, this entrustment of a Son to the Mother does not only have its beginning in Christ, but one can say that is definitively oriented toward Him. It could be said that Mary continues to repeat, to all, the same words she uttered to the servants in Cana: «Do whatever He tells you» (Jn 2:5b). She, who was the first witness of the saving love of the Father through her faith and obedience to the Word of God, acts with her motherly care for all those who entrust themselves to her as her children.⁸⁸

(iii) - *ôra* = *the hour*

The term «hour» has an important significance in the Gospel of John. It is interpreted by the majority of exegetes to mean «the Hour of Jesus», that is, his glorifying passion, in which the decisive events of the work of salvation are fulfilled.⁸⁹

The scene described in Jn 19:25-27 has an analogous structure with the ratification of the Covenant in Sinai and the consequent renewal of the commitments taken (cf Ex 19:8; 24:3,7; Ezr 10:12; Ne 5:12). Two elements appear constant in this literary type: the discourse of the mediator (messenger of the will of God), and the response of the people who express their agreement with such similar formula: «Everything that Yahweh has said, we will do» (Ex 19:8).

The structure of Jn 19:25-27 is interpreted in the same pattern. Jesus, the prophet of the Father transmits His will in a form of a revelation (Jn 26-27a: *Woman, here is your Son. Here is your Mother*); then follows the acceptance of the Word of Jesus on the part of the disciple, representative of all believers (Jn 27b: *From that hour the disciple took Her into his home*).

Welcoming Mary, the disciple responds positively to the will of Je-

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Cf *RM* 46.

⁸⁹ This is the interpretation given by many. See FERRARO G., *L'ora di Cristo nel quarto Vangelo*, Roma, Ed. Herder, 1974, 279-280.

sus. And such a consent (Jn 28: «After this...»), allowed Jesus to transmit the Spirit, the Gift of the New Covenant (Jn 19: 30; cf 7:39).⁹⁰

The biblical and theological reflection on the spiritual motherhood of Mary towards every disciple of Jesus gives light to the title of “Daughter of Mary”. This marian dimension is a constitutive element of every christian life. We can, in fact, affirm that the filial relationship of the DMHC with the Mother of Jesus is a common heredity given by Jesus to every believer.

3.1.3.2. *The title “Mary Help of Christians”*

“*Mary Help of Christians*” (=MHC) is a marian title which did not originate from Don Bosco but has an older history.⁹¹ What is noteworthy to observe is that wherever the cult spread, it assumed an aspect of Mary’s defense of Christianity in difficult times and always with a social, ecclesial and pontifical character. For this reason, it is not surprising why this title, in the particular historical moment of Don Bosco’s time, had a vast and profound resonance on the religiosity of the Italian people and for almost a decade the Catholics lived in the awareness that the great hour of MHC has struck and that the forces of evil would not prevail.⁹²

⁹⁰ See SERRA A., *Contributi op. cit.*, 419-429; ID., *Maria a Cana e presso la croce, op. cit.*, 113-115.

⁹¹ It was first found in the oldest edition of the Litany of Loreto discovered in Dilligen, Germany dated 1558. This shows that the title had been invoked prior to Pope Pius V who, after the battle of Lepanto in 1571 where the Christians triumphed over the Turks, attributed the victory to the powerful intercession of the Blessed Mother invoked under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*. The title already existed even before the battle of Lepanto. What is certain is that after the victorious battle there was a more popular diffusion of the title. Other historical events contributed to the diffusion of the title and cult to MHC. In 1663, in Bavaria after the victory of Vienna, confraternities in honor of MHC were erected. Pope Pius VII, with a decree on September 16, 1815, instituted the liturgical feast of MHC, fixing it on May 24, the date of his unforgettable return to Rome (May 24, 1814), after the liberation from the napoleonic exile. With the restoration of the papal government, the cult to MHC gained a pontifical and social character. The manifestations of the cult in Rome took place in different churches with the veneration of images under this title and with the participation of the same popes in the solemn celebrations.

⁹² The major development of the cult was at the time of the Italian independence during the pontificate of Pius IX (1846-1878) and gained definition as a response to the threats to the pope and on the states of the Church. The center of the diffusion was the Basilica of Holy Mary of Minerva. At the same time, the prodigious apparition of an old and miraculous image

Before examining directly and particularly the motivations behind the choice of the title of *Mary Help of Christians* on the part of Don Bosco, it would be helpful to consider first its biblical and theological roots.

A. Its biblical foundation

The proper readings for the liturgical feast of MHC indicate the biblical foundation of marian doctrine contained in the title.⁹³ In the first reading, the glorious figure of the Mother of God as the «woman clothed with the sun» (cf Apoc 12:1,3a,7-12a,17) is given attention. The history of salvation reveals how God's children are in continuous battle between good and evil; the Blessed Virgin Mary «in the glory which she possesses in body and soul in heaven is the image and the beginning of the Church as it is to be perfected in the world to come. She shines forth on earth a sign of sure hope and comfort to the pilgrim people of God» (LG 68).

In the second reading, the letter to the Galatians Mary is presented as the «woman in the fullness of time» through whom God sent His Son so that we may receive our status as children of the Father (cf Gal 4:4-7).⁹⁴

The Gospel of John narrates the miracle of Cana. In this event Mary is shown as one who collaborates with Jesus, who upon the discreet and opportune intervention of His Mother performed the first miracle, turning water into wine, awakening the faith of His first disciples and gloryfying the heavenly Father. (cf Jn 2:1-12). Here, as in the episode at the foot of the Cross (cf Jn 19:25-27), Mary is addressed by her Son as

of Mary in Spoleto in 1862, officially named *Mary Help of Christians* by Bishop Giovanni Battista Arnaldi, contributed much to its spread in the Papal States and in central Italy.

The devotion to MHC, even before Don Bosco gave it a new tone and popularity was already known in Piedmont. It seemed to be introduced by Cardinal Maurizio of Savoia (+1657) who asked for an artistic altar dedicated to MHC to be included in the construction in the Church of St. Francis of Paul. In the seventeenth century the Pious Association of the Devotees of Our Lady Help of Christians was erected in Turin, first dependent on the groups in Munich but which in 1798 was canonically erected as an independent association. This marked a particular diffusion of the devotion to MHC, especially in the first half of the eighteenth century in Piedmont.

⁹³ For the liturgical texts and formula for the Solemnity of MHC, see SODI M. (a cura di), *Beata Vergine Maria, Aiuto dei Cristiani*, in *Famiglia Salesiana in preghiera*, Roma, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco 1995, 123-136; 504-538.

⁹⁴ SERRA A., *Gal 4,4: una Mariologia in germe*, in *Theotokos* 1 (1993) 7-25 (the whole volume is dedicated to an interdisciplinary reading of Gal 4:4).

Woman, a title which in the Johannine perspective represents a corporate figure, that of the old Israel and that of the new Israel. In Cana, Mary personifies the people of Israel who on Mount Sinai with Moses, accepted the covenant with Yahweh with these words: «Everything that the Lord has said, we will do» (Ex 19:8). Mary, in Cana, addressing the servants to obey Jesus, echoes the words of the Sinai covenant: «Do whatever He tells you» (Jn 2:5). In Jesus, with Mary's maternal collaboration, the new and everlasting covenant is established.⁹⁵

The liturgical formula for the solemnity of MHC exalts with gratitude the work of the heavenly Father who, in His «marvelous plan of salvation» has sent His Son «born of a woman» and has constituted the Virgin Mary «Mother and Help of Christians».

B. Its theological foundation

Mary's place in the history of salvation, as collaborator and *Helper* in God's plan of salvation, was prophetically foreshadowed in the Old Testament in the promise of victory over the serpent given to our first parents after their fall into sin: «I will put enmity between you and woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel» (Gen 3:15).

Some Fathers of the Church have seen in Mary the figure of the *new Eve* at the side of her Son, Jesus Christ, the *new Adam*.⁹⁶ At the same time, Mary as *Daughter of Adam and Eve* is also united to all those who are to be saved. They see her as «not merely passively engaged by God, but as freely cooperating in the work of humanity's salvation through faith and obedience». Through the angel's message, she received the word of God

⁹⁵ Id., *Contributi ...*, op. cit., 139-226, specially 216-226; of the same author see the following: *Maria a Cana ...*, op. cit., 30-37; «Quanto il Signore ha detto, noi lo faremo». Nuove ricerche sugli echi di Es 19,8 e 24,3.7 come formula di alleanza, in *Nato da Donna ..* (Gal 4,4), *Ricerche bibliche su Maria di Nazaret (1989-1992)*, Edizioni Cens-Marianum, Milano-Roma 1992, 97-140 («Il Magistero Pontificio») and 135-138 («Esegesi e Teologi odierni»).

⁹⁶ Among the Fathers of the Church, Justin the Martyr (+ 165) is considered to be the first to explicitly present the parallel Mary/Eve in his book *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*. Cf LAURENTIN R., *Nuova Eva*, in *NDM* 1017-1021. References to Justin and other Fathers of the Church on the Mary/Eve parallel could be found on the volume of BUBY B., *Mary of Galilee. The Marian Heritage of the Early Church. A Legacy of the First 500 Years*, vol. III, New York, Alba House 1997.

in her heart and in her body and gave Life to the world (cf LG 53), so that just as a woman had a share in bringing about death, so also a woman would contribute to life (cf LG 56). For, as St. Iraneaus says, she «being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race»⁹⁷ and in contrast to Eve she is called the true «Mother of the living»⁹⁸ for «death came through Eve, life through Mary».⁹⁹

The theological reflection of the early Fathers shed light on Mary's close and indissoluble association with Jesus Christ, her divine Son, who as the *new Adam* becomes the principle of the new creation. In God's providential design, she as Mother of the divine Redeemer became at the same time His most intimate and faithful disciple and generous *Helper*. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ; she presented Him to the Father in the temple, and shared her Son's sufferings as He died on the Cross. Therefore, «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».¹⁰⁰ For this reason, Mary becomes the Helper and Mother of humanity.

C. *Its salesian note*

The history of the Church in the middle of the eighteenth century was characterized by a «violent conflict between the old and the new, between liberalism and traditionalism, between structures of a society officially Christian and the affirmation of an ever more secularized society».¹⁰¹

Don Bosco, a man of faith, was attentive to the concrete situation of the world and the needs of the Church during his time. As a priest and educator of the young, he perceived with sorrowful attention the special and growing difficulties born in the Church: the serious problems arising with the relation between faith and politics; the fall, after more than a millennium, of the Papal States; the delicate situation of papacy and the

⁹⁷ IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haer.* III, 22, 4, in *SC* 34, 381.

⁹⁸ EPIPHANIUS, *Haer* 78, 18, in *Panarion GCS* III 78, 18, 1-3; *PG* 42, 728.

⁹⁹ JEROME, *Epist.* 22, 21, in *CSEL* 54, 173; Cf AUGUSTINE, *Serm.* 51, 2.3, in *PL* 38, 334-335.

¹⁰⁰ *LG* 61.

¹⁰¹ Cf MARTINA G., *Pio IX, Chiesa e mondo moderno*, Roma, Studium 1976, 7-8.

episcopal sees; the urgent need for a new style of pastoral care and of a new rapport between hierarchy and laity; the incipient ideologies of the masses, etc.¹⁰²

It is precisely in this context that Don Bosco affirmed to Father Cagliero: «Our Lady desires that we honor her under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*; the times are sad and we need precisely that our Blessed Virgin helps us conserve and defend the Christian faith».¹⁰³

*“Mary Help of Christians”: Inspirer, Mother and Guide
of the religious family of Don Bosco*

1. *Factors which led Don Bosco choose the devotion to MHC*

(i) - The marian events of Spoleto (1862), seen by Monsignor Giovanni Battista Arnaldi and of the Catholic press as a manifestation of the Help of Christians remained impressed in Don Bosco's mind. From the very center of Italy, she brought hope in an hour of fear for the Church and for the Pope. Such miraculous intervention recalled her powerful protection during the historical events when the papacy and the Church were in danger.¹⁰⁴

(ii) - In his heart, Don Bosco conserved and continuously meditated on the sense of Mary's presence in his vocation and in the life of the Church. He was aware of Mary's extraordinary presence and protection in his life. He has always considered her as Mother, Inspirer and Guide of his special vocation for the salvation of the young. In the memoirs he wrote he recounted a prophetic dream which he had at nine years old and which accompanied him throughout his life. In this dream Christ revealed to him the mission to care for the poor and abandoned young. To accomplish this difficult task he received from Christ the educative method of using reason, religion and lovingkindness called the “preven-

¹⁰² Cf VIGANÓ E., *Maria rinnova la Famiglia Salesiana*, 17.

¹⁰³ MB 7, 334.

¹⁰⁴ See BOSCO G., *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*, 95-103; BROCARDO P., *L'Ausiliatrice di Spoleto e Don Bosco*, in AA.VV., *L'Immacolata Ausiliatrice*, Torino, SEI, 1955, 239-272; ID., *Maria Ausiliatrice. La Madonna di Don Bosco*, in PEDRINI A. (a cura di), *La Madonna dei tempi difficili*, Roma, LAS 1980, 104-107.

tive system”, and Mary as teacher and guide «without whom all wisdom is foolishness». ¹⁰⁵

(iii) - Finally, the construction of the Basilica of MHC in Valdocco which took only three years could not be considered by Don Bosco as less than prodigious as not to influence his choice of such a title. ¹⁰⁶

Don Bosco, the great apostle of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, saw in this marian title a marvelous synthesis of the mystery of the Blessed Virgin in the plan of salvation operative in the Church. In the booklet entitled, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*, he wrote:

... an experience of eighteen centuries makes us witness, in a luminous way how Mary has continued in heaven and with greater efficacy, what she had began on earth: her mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians. ¹⁰⁷

Father Egidio Viganó, Rector Major of the Salesian Family for sixteen years (1979-1995), had a profound devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Before being elected Superior General of the vast and international religious family of Don Bosco, he was invited as a theologian to participate in the sessions of the Second Vatican Council. For this reason, he had a direct experience in pentecostal event of the Church in the twentieth century.

In a book he wrote entitled *Maria aiuto dei cristiani* ¹⁰⁸ where he deepened in the light of the teachings of Second Vatican Council the history and the doctrine of the title of *Help of Christians*, he affirms:

¹⁰⁵ See BOSCO G., *Memorie dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales*, Torino, SEI 1946, 22-25; see also following articles in PEDRINI A. (a cura di), *La Madonna dei tempi difficili*; AUBRY J., *Apostoli salesiani con Maria*, especially the paragraphs which speak of the extraordinary place of Mary in the life of Don Bosco, 135-141; COLLI C., *Ispirazione mariana del sistema preventivo*, 153-187.

¹⁰⁶ Don Bosco in the marian booklet already cited narrates of the innumerable graces received through the powerful intercession of Blessed Virgin Mother invoked under the title of *Help of Christians*, precisely for the construction of the Basilica of which bears her name. See, *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*, 129-138.

¹⁰⁷ BOSCO G., *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Torino, Tip. dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales 1868. This booklet was written by Don Bosco as a doctrinal preparation for the consecration of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. For this reason, it contains a kind of popular catechesis on the historical and theological foundation of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

¹⁰⁸ VIGANÓ E., *Maria aiuto dei cristiani*, Torino-Leumann, Elle di Ci, 1968.

If there is something new in this Council that refers to Mary, it is precisely her link with the Church, of her ecclesial tipology and of her maternal activity of universal mediation.

He continued thinking of how Don Bosco would have exulted with joy in seeing how the devotion to Mary Help of Christians received in the Council such unexpected deepening of doctrine and of operative Christian actuality.

While he underlined the need to harmonize that devotion with the renewal called for by the Council, he sees at the same time how an authentic devotion to MHC could be a stimulus to this renewal since it implies a strong ecclesial sense and an indefatigable pastoral activity.

The first circular letter he addressed to the whole Salesian Family as Rector Major, entitled *Mary renews the Salesian Family of Don Bosco*¹⁰⁹, is totally dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. The importance of this document to the marian magisterium of Viganò in the Salesian Family can not be overemphasized. For the DMHC, all the Mothers General during the term of his office recalled the necessity to read, study, deepen and actualize the doctrine and the directives contained in this precious letters. In it, Father Viganò traced the following essential points on the doctrine and devotion to MHC: the characteristic elements of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians” and the essential link between the devotion to Mary Help of Christians” and the Salesian charism.

2. *The characteristic elements of the salesian devotion to “Mary Help of Christians”*¹¹⁰

(i) - *A vital relationship with Mary*

The personal presence of Mary is felt concretely by Don Bosco in his own life as an objective reality. It forms a basic element of his vocation, be it for his recipients, for the style of his apostolic mission or for the specific feature of its evangelical spirit. Over and above any title, Mary

¹⁰⁹ I have noted a difference in the title from the original Italian document *Maria rinnova la Famiglia Salesiana* to the title of the English translation *Our devotion to Mary Help of Christians*. I prefer to use in this research a literal translation of the original title *Mary renews the Salesian Family*.

¹¹⁰ Cf VIGANÒ E., *Maria rinnova*, 20-26.

is for him and for his young a maternal presence who collaborates in generating the life of Christ and guides them to maturity.

(ii) - “*Sense of the Church*”

For Don Bosco marian piety is inseparably linked with the «sense of the Church». It consists in an active awareness of being a «member of the Church» committed to live one’s Christian life with a profound spirituality of action. This does not only consist in a constant attitude of generous apostolic activity but in a true and real ecclesial commitment, that is, of an explicit activity guided by a clear consciousness of being and acting as a corresponsable member of the Body of Christ, the Church.

For this reason, Mary remains to be Model and Guide in the difficult art of educating the young, the specific mission entrusted to Don Bosco. The *maternal activity* of bringing forth life is inherent in every educative intervention. It is not moved by abstract ideologies but by vital exigencies; doing all the good it can even if it does not arrive at the best; it cares more for the delicate thread of life than for the elaboration of great programs.

3. *Devotion to “Mary Help of Christians”
and the Salesian charism*¹¹¹

An intimate connection exists between the devotion to the Help of Christians and the Salesian charism. Don Bosco affirmed that the salesian vocation, without the uninterrupted maternal help of Mary is incomprehensible, be it in its birth as in its development and for always.¹¹²

Devotion to MHC permeates the spirit, the spirituality and the mission of the Salesian charism.

(i) - *Its profound link with the Salesian spirit*

Mary is considered to be the Help, the Inspirer and the Model of Don Bosco. The Salesian spirit is centered on the *pastoral charity* of Christ, the Good Shepherd, takes its inspiration from the maternal love of Mary

¹¹¹ Cf VIGANÒ E., *Maria rinnova*, op. cit., 27-30.

¹¹² Cf MB 17, 511; 18, 273.

and is rooted in the maternal love of the Church. It implies a sensitive listening to the initiative of God, a total adhesion to Christ and a full availability to His indications.

It is a spirit permeated with hope born from an interior climate of optimism for the natural and supernatural resources of the human person. It is a spirit characterized with dynamic initiative and with the adaptability necessary to the changing vicissitudes of reality. It is a spirit of goodness and of wholesome familiarity, fruit of a simplicity rooted in sincerity of heart. It is a spirit of magnanimity, as sung in the Magnificat, an expression of a humble zeal to do all the good possible, no matter the risk, guided only by the courage of faith and of good sense, overcoming every form of extremity and perfectionism.

(ii) - Its vital interaction with Salesian spirituality

A spirituality forms an organic whole, where each element has its particular place and function. To change, to put aside or to suppress an element would mean to destroy the whole.

As we have seen up to now, the devotion to the Help of Christians forms an integral part of the Salesian charism. It will have no sense, nay, it will be a fatal attempt to separate our spirituality from the devotion to MHC, as it is not possible to isolate Don Bosco from our Lady.

The devotion to the Help of Christians is, therefore, an essential element of our charism. It permeates its form and revitalizes its components. Without a healthy vitality of the marian dimension, our spirituality will lose its vigor and fecundity; while, on the other hand, a timely attention for a serious and profound renewal of marian devotion will bring forth new life in the whole Salesian family.

(iii) - Its intimate link with the Salesian mission

Mary is the *Pastorella* in Don Bosco's dreams, the one who has inspired and guided him as to the nature, recipients and method of his mission, pointing directly to the field of *youth pastoral*.

It is characteristic of the Help of Christians to open the Salesian mission to the great horizon of the actual socio-political problems, and in a clear choice of service to the universal Church in collaboration with her Pastors.

It is her maternal goodness which inspires the pastoral criteria and teaches the method to be used in approaching the young, that of the Preventive System.

We can conclude that in the life of Don Bosco the devotion to the Help of Christians is the perfect expression of the maturity of his vocation. It is, at the same time, the end point of an itinerary of growth and the point of departure of his vast apostolic project. In the Salesian spirituality it constitutes the concrete synthesis of its varied components and the vital source of its dynamism and fruitfulness. Therefore, what it has been in the hour of foundation should find its rightful place in every period of renewal.

3.1.4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE NAME

TO THE CHARISMATIC IDENTITY AND MISSION OF THE DMHC

Here I would like to underline two elements present in the *name* or *title* of the “Daughters of Mary Help of Christians” which have important consequences on its charismatic identity and mission: that of being (i) “Daughters of Mary” and at the same time (ii) “Helpers with the Help of Christians”.

1.4.1. “*Daughters of Mary*”:

In the beginning, for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, the link between the name and its charismatic identity was more of a living experience rather than a reflected conviction. However, in time, the awareness of its significance has grown in the Institute.

The study of the marian references in the Constitutions and Regulations reveal how the name identifies the filial relationship that should exist between Mary and every DMHC. While the Manual Regulations of 1908 reminded the Sisters that Don Bosco desired that the “Institute take its name from Mary Help of Christians, nay, that every Sister be called *Daughter of Mary Help of Christians*” (art.178), the Constitutions of 1982 affirm, not only that “Mary most Holy was the Inspirer of the Institute and continues to be its *Mother* and Teacher” (art.4), but that every Salesian vocation is born through her maternal and educative intervention (cf art 79). As a consequence, every DMHC should “cultivate a grateful, *filial love* for her...” (art.44).

Filial relationship with Mary is not rooted primarily from the desire and will of the Founder, Don Bosco, but as we have pointed out in the theological reflection of the name, the spiritual motherhood of Mary is an important dimension in the life of every follower of Christ. The biblical passage of *John 19:25-27* reveals how Jesus from the Cross, entrusted every disciple to Mary with these words: “Woman, behold your Son!”. At the same time, His words to the Beloved Disciple: “Behold your Mother!”, reveal His will that every follower welcomes Mary into his life.

We have also seen that as *Daughters of Mary*, the members of the “religious family that belongs entirely to Mary” are called not only to entrust themselves to Mary’s intercession nor to simply honor her with prayer and with the celebration of her feasts. Filial piety towards her is rooted on true faith and sustained by love and imitation. Every *Daughter* is called to be the “living image” of Mary, their Mother.

1.4.2. *Helpers with the “Help of Christians”*

Furthermore, we have demonstrated in the previous paragraphs how the devotion to “Mary Help of Christians” is an integral aspect of the salesian charism. The charismatic identity of every DMHC is not only linked with her filial relationship with Mary, which in fact is a dimension of every christian, but is equally connected with her active participation in Mary’s mission in the Church as the “Help of Christians”.

Seen from the historical perspective, the title of “Help of Christians” has often been connected with Mary’s powerful maternal assistance against the evil forces that attempt to destroy the Church, especially its Head, the papacy. It is rooted on the theological presuppositions of the social dimension of the mission of Mary. Her spiritual maternity and universal mediation, her intimate association with the new Adam and, in other words, all the consequences of her role as the second Eve explain the doctrinal value of the invocation “Mary Help of Christians”.¹¹³

In the context of Don Bosco’s choice of the title, it is important to consider his doctrinal affirmations on it: first, the universal protection of Mary on the pilgrim Church, the Pope and Bishops; second, the maternal

¹¹³ Cf VIGANÒ E., *Maria aiuto dei cristiani*, 58.

assistance and help of Mary to all christians as a people or as particular groups, and to every person in particular, especially in moments of grave needs for the defense of the faith.¹¹⁴

We have seen how for Don Bosco marian piety is inseparably linked with the sense of the Church. As a consequence it forms in every devotee of Mary an attitude of operative ecclesial commitment, a profound spirituality of action. Thus, after a century, Don Bosco's conviction on the powerful maternal mediation of Mary for the salvation of God's people was re-confirmed by the Second Vatican Council with these words:

"Mary who was taken up to heaven did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us gifts of eternal intercession. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." (*LG* 62).

From what had been said on the doctrine of the devotion to MHC, it becomes clear that the charismatic identity of the DMHC is qualified not only by being a "Daughter of Mary" but at the same time by being a "Daughter of the Church".

In the Church, the DMHC is the "living image of Mary", expressing gratitude to this Mother through her life, in an attitude of the "joyous humility of her Magnificat to be helpers, like her, especially among young girls" (C 4).

¹¹⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 63-68.

3.2. THE SYMBOL

«A LIVING MONUMENT OF GRATITUDE TO MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS»

On the day of its birth (August 5, 1872), the Institute received from its Founder, Don Bosco the *name: Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* and the *symbol of identity: living monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians*.

The history of the Institute, from its beginning to the present time, can be seen as a process of realization of the *symbol of identity* received from the Founder as a precious patrimony. The life of the DMHC is the space where this symbol is manifested, the place where the ideal is incarnated as it unveils itself in a dynamic fidelity towards the horizon of the future. And this space is in continuous growth, opening itself to a multicultural horizon.¹

The codification of an identity evolves, the horizons grow and the cultural contexts vary, but the symbol of a *monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians* remains to be always an epiphany of the profound being of the Institute, an all encompassing and vital charismatic ideal of the Founder, a paradigm full of spiritual dynamism and of perennial newness.²

With the renewal urged by the Second Vatican Council, the Institute committed itself to rediscover its identity in the light of the Gospels, in fidelity to its charism and with the attention to the «signs of the times». As was explained in the first chapters through a diachronical analysis of the texts of the Constitutions, the marian dimension has emerged as a constant and essential element of the charism and spirituality of the Institute. One observes how its marian identity is linked not only with its name but also with its symbol.

The *symbol of identity* has been codified in the texts of the postconciliar Constitutions as an essential synthesis of the spiritual patrimony and structure on which the Institute rests. We read in art.4 of the Constitutions:

¹ Ko M., *Monumento vivo di riconoscenza a Maria e come Maria*, in *Madre ed Educatrice*, 81-82.

² *Ibid.*, 76.

Don Bosco wanted us to be a «living monument» of his gratitude to Mary Help of Christians and asks us to extend his thanks throughout all time.³

Explicit references to such a *symbol of identity* are present in the life of Don Bosco but are lacking in Mother Mazzarello. However, she used another expression which has an equivalent significance, that is: *living image of Mary*.⁴

In the Institute the awareness of the *symbol of identity* of the Institute is strong and alive. References to it can be cited in the official encounters of the Institute with the Popes, in the exhortations and writings of the Rectors Major of the Salesians addressed to the DMHC and in the ordinary documents of the Institute, as for example in the circular letters of the Superiors General.

While documents can affirm the constant and growing awareness of the *symbol of identity*, one can question if the comprehension of such symbolism is immediate and clear. This theme has been reflected upon and studied by Sr. Lina Dalcerci (1982)⁵ and Sr. Maria Ko (1988).⁶ These two Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, different in cultural origin: one Italian and the other Chinese, with an age difference of almost half a century, have something important in common: an ardent love for the Institute expressed through a life dedicated to a serious study and dee-

³ This reference is present in the three editions of the Constitutions written after the Second Vatican Council. See art.I of the 1969 and 1975 editions and as cited here, art.4 of the final edition of 1982. It is important to note that such reference is lacking in the earlier editions of the Constitutions.

⁴ Cf *Chronicles* III, 192.

⁵ In the book *Monumento Vivo della Gratitudine di Don Bosco a Maria SS. Aiuto dei Cristiani* (Roma, Istituto FMA 1984³), Sr. L. Dalcerci develops the theme of the *symbol of identity* of the DMHC as «living monument», with appropriate references to the final edition of the Constitutions of the DMHC (1982), to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council contained in the documents *Lumen gentium*, *Perfectae caritatis* and of the latest popes, *Paul VI* and *John Paul II*, to the thoughts and words of Don Bosco, of his Salesian successors, and of Mother Mazzarello.

In the booklet entitled *Maria nello spirito e nella vita della Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Roma, Ist. FMA, 1982), the same author makes a specific marian reflection of the spirituality of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

⁶ Sr. Maria Ko, professor of Sacred Scriptures in the Pontifical Faculty of the Science of Education «*Auxilium*» in Rome, develops the theme of the «living monument» through a more original, biblical and theological reflection with an appropriate reference to the historical roots of the charism in Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. See, KO M., *Monumento vivo di riconoscenza a Maria e come Maria*, in *Madre ed Educatrice*, op. cit., 75-109.

pening of the original charism as it incarnates itself in time and in the different cultures where it has taken and is taking root. The result of their work has helped deepen the significance of the vocational identity of the DMHC as embodied in the *symbol of the living monument of gratitude*.

Can this *symbol of identity* of the Institute as it faces the challenges of contemporary society today be translated in order to penetrate profoundly and wisely the diverse socio-cultural contexts? Herein lies the importance of interpreting wisely the legacy which history has consigned to the present to be understood and realized in time.

3.2.1. IN DON BOSCO

The historical memoirs of the Institute have constantly affirmed Don Bosco's explicit intention to form the DMHC as his *living monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians*. The following sources attest to this affirmation.

During the Informative Process for the Beatification of Mother Mazzarello, Father Francesco Cerruti, who was the Director General of the Salesian Schools for thirty-one years, gave this testimony:

I had the good fortune to know Don Bosco intimately from 1857 until his death on January 3, 1888. I remember him saying: «We owe many great debts of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians. What we are and what we have done, we owe to her. Because of this, I want to dedicate a perennial and an immortal *monument of gratitude to this good Mother*. This monument will be the *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*».⁷

The *Chronicles of the Institute* recounts that on the day the Institute was born (August 5, 1872) and during the first profession of the first group of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians which included Mother Mazzarello, the Founder, Don Bosco addressed them with the following words:

Let your beautiful title of DMHC be your glory and often think that your Institute is to be a «living monument» of Don Bosco's gratitude to the great Mother of God under the title of Help of Christians.⁸

⁷ SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, Aqnen, *Beatificationis et canonizationis Servae Dei Mariae Dominicae Mazzarello, Primae Antistitae Instituti Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis. Positio super virtutibus. Summarium super dubio*, Romae, Guerra et Belli, 1934, 56; See also MB X, 600.

⁸ *Chronicles* I, 303.

Such intention and testimony was cited also by Father Ferdinand Maccono in the biography he wrote on St. Mary Mazzarello.

The Founder, Don Bosco, wanted the new religious to have the beautiful name of DMHC because, as he later explained in moving tones he wanted the Institute of the DMHC to be a monument of perpetual gratitude for the singular favors he had received from such a good Mother.⁹

The sources which I cited above point to Father Francesco Cerruti and to the first DMHC as the primary witnesses of Don Bosco's intention to found the Institute as his «living monument» of gratitude to MHC. Documents and studies of the Institute attest to a constant and growing awareness of its significance in the minds and hearts of the DMHC.

3.2.2. IN MARY DOMENICA MAZZARELLO

How did Mary Domenica Mazzarello, the cornerstone of the Institute, understand and transmit this explicit intention of Don Bosco?

One can find no explicit reference by Mother Mazzarello to the DMHC as a «living monument» of thanks to Mary in her letters nor in her conferences as documented by the *Chronicles of the Institute* nor in the biographies written about her. Instead, there is a similar and equivalent expression that she used to express the same idea, that of being called to be the *living image* of Mary.

In a goodnight talk to the Sisters after some practical and sincere recommendations on the practice of chastity motivated by love for the Blessed Mother, she ended saying that the DMHC should reflect Mary's image as Don Bosco would want us to.¹⁰ This simple expression contains a depth of significance which shows how Mary Mazzarello understood, lived and transmitted not only Don Bosco's desire for the Institute but the particular charismatic design of the Holy Spirit for this religious family which is totally Mary's.

⁹ MACCONO F., *Santa Maria D. Mazzarello. Confondatrice e prima Superiore Generale delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, I, Istituto FMA, Scuola Tip. Privata 1960, 205. Here the author points to the document conserved in the General Archives of the Institute of the DMHC as the source of this testimony.

¹⁰ Cf *Chronicles* III, 192.

The influence of the association of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate enlightened her devotion to Mary and penetrated her being inculcating in her a fundamental attitude of spiritual configuration to Mary. Sr. Lina Dalcerci refers to this spiritual process in Mother Mazzarello as a *vital devotion* which keeps her gaze constantly fixed on Mary to incarnate her interior features becoming her living image. It is a configuration which Mother Mazzarello expressed daily in simplicity, in sensing and living existentially in the living presence of Christ and His Mother. Imitation of Mary was incarnated by her in the daily situations and duties of her state of life making of her life a transparent expression of the love she professed for the young and of the joyful trust she had for them.¹¹

In many different ways, through a simple and concrete language Mazzarello exhorted the Sisters to reproduce in themselves the interior attitudes and virtues of Mary, to be Daughters and living images of her. For example, in a letter addressed to the first missionaries in Villa Colón and Las Piedras, Montevideo, she reminded the Sisters to prepare themselves for the approaching feast of Mary Immaculate.¹² She gave two motivations why the feast should be celebrated with solemnity: because the Rules ask for it, but above all because they were Daughters of Mary. Then she went on to give practical recommendations on how to prepare for the feast. She invited the Sisters «to plant beautiful flowers in our hearts in order to be able to offer to our dear Mother a bouquet on her feast». The flowers she mentioned were the virtues of obedience and charity.¹³ The figurative language she used to encourage the practice of virtues in imitation of Mary is an expression typical of her time and fruit of her earlier formation as member of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.¹⁴

¹¹ DALCERRI L., *Maria nello spirito*, op. cit., 40.

¹² POSADA M.E., COSTA A., CAVAGLIÀ P., *La sapienza della vita. Lettere di Maria Domenica Mazzarello*, Torino, SEI 1994, n. 27, 139-142.

¹³ The Rules of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate proposes as specific aim of the pious union the personal sanctification of the members by the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and by helping in the sanctification of others through the exercise of charity (Cf *Regola FMI*, 1,1; 2,2; 3,5-8). The formula of consecration states: «I, ... being resolved by God's help to observe perfect chastity for life, to practice holy obedience and poverty of spirit, to work for holiness by avoiding especially even the smallest deliberate sin and to exercising charity to my neighbor, promise to observe the Rule of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate». (*Regola FMI*, 4,14).

¹⁴ As member of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate she was nourished by the teaching and writings of Fr. Frassinetti who among other things inculcated

The marian devotion of Mother Mazzarello is *to be a living image of our Lady*, practicing the virtues dear to her: humility, obedience and purity, establishing with her a true and filial confidence, living a simple piety without adding anything but that of doing one's duty at the right time and place. Her marian devotion brings to a true and profound Christocentric life concretized in a continuous and constant sacramental life. This is one proof of how Mary brings every believer and disciple to Christ.¹⁵

3.2.3. IN THE INSTITUTE

After more than a century of life, the Institute has grown in the awareness not only of being sign and instrument of God's love for the young through its educative mission among them but that of being in the womb of the Church, the «living monument» of gratitude of Don Bosco to the great Mother of God, invoked under the title of Help of Christians.

Following a chronological order, one could trace how through the words of authoritative persons in the Institute (Mothers General, Rectors Major) and in the Church (some Popes) have reminded the DMHC of their marian identity recalling Don Bosco's desire that they be his «living monument» of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians.

A. Father Paolo Albera (1910 - 1921)

On the golden anniversary of the consecration of the Basilica of the Help of Christians (Turin, 1868-1918) Father Paolo Albera observed how Don Bosco, aside from the material temple, desired to raise a living and spiritual one. For this purpose he instituted the congregation of the DMHC, to whom he gave the mission of forming young girls to piety and virtue and of propagating in the world the devotion to our powerful patron.¹⁶

among the Daughters the practice of what he called the *Little Garden of Mary*, an excellent way to train the young to the practice of virtues in imitation of the Blessed Virgin. See FRASSINETTI G., *Il Giardinetto di Maria*, in *Opere Ascetiche*, II, Roma, Tipografia «Don Guanella» di Liberati, 455-462.

¹⁵ Cf VALVERDE B., *La devozione mariana di Santa Maria Domenica Mazzarello dalle testimonianze della Cronistoria dell'Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice e dal processo di canonizzazione*, Roma, Pontificia Facoltà «Auxilium» 1987, 39 [pro-manuscripto].

¹⁶ ALBERA L., *Sul cinquantenario della consacrazione del Santuario di Maria Ausiliatrice in Valdocco*, March 31, 1918, in *Circolari di Madre Caterina Daghero 1910-1921* [pro-manuscripto].

B. Father Filippo Rinaldi (1922 - 1931)

On three different occasions, Father Filippo Rinaldi offered his reflections the topic of the DMHC as a «living monument».

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Institute of the DMHC he reminds the Sisters, through a letter addressed to Mother Caterina Daghero that the Institute is destined to present to the entire world «the living monument» which the tender devotion of Don Bosco has willed to raise to the Virgin Help of Christians as a sign of his profound and filial gratitude for the innumerable graces which through her help and intercession assisted them in the accomplishment of his mission.

He also pointed out how Don Bosco desired to model his monument on the Holy Virgin in the imitation of the humility of Jesus, adding that «a DMHC who is not truly humble, will not represent her Mother and will not honor her in the right way». Then he presented how every DMHC should follow in the footsteps of the first DMHC, Mother Mazzarello, who in her simplicity guided the community of Mornese, model of every community of the Institute, in the practice of a true and joyful poverty and in the love for the hidden life.

Father Rinaldi was convinced that Don Bosco wanted him to animate all the DMHC:

to work united and with holy ardor to build this perennial monument of his gratitude, making every house relive its true spirit [...] so that thousands of hearts form one heart, and renders truly dear life in the community and fruitful every apostolate.¹⁷

During a homily for the Holy Hour of August 5, 1922, Father Rinaldi reminded the DMHC of the end to which Don Bosco willed the Institute, that is, to erect a living monument which would testify to the world, throughout the centuries, his gratitude to the Blessed Mother. Concretely such an end is achieved if every Daughter renders Mary «alive», extending her help throughout the world.¹⁸

Finally, in a circular letter addressed to the DMHC, Father Rinaldi explained:

¹⁷ RINALDI F., Lettera indirizzata a Madre Caterina Daghero nell'anno cinquantenario (24 maggio 1922) dell'Istituto delle FMA, citata da DALCERRI L., *Monumento vivo della gratitudine di Don Bosco a Maria SS. Aiuto dei cristiani*, Esse Gi Esse, Roma 1984³, 10-13.

¹⁸ Cf CERIA E., *Vita del Servo di Dio Sac. Filippo Rinaldi, terzo successore di G. Bosco*, Torino, SEI 1951, 294-295.

The thought of Don Bosco in founding the Institute was that every Sister be a faithful copy of Mary, in such a way that seeing her one could exclaim, 'Such would be the way the Blessed among women would have been and would have acted!'.¹⁹

He concluded saying:

Every DMHC should therefore try her best to imitate with the utmost perfection possible the virtues of Mary: her immaculate purity, her profound humility, her heroic spirit of sacrifice and especially her active goodness.¹⁹

C. Mother Luisa Vaschetti (1924-1943)

After reaffirming that Don Bosco founded the Institute with the explicit intention of raising it as a monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians, Mother Luisa Vaschetti highlighted an important consequence of this fact, reminding the Sisters that to be a song of glory and of gratitude to Mary Most Holy their lives should be a faithful imitation and a living copy of the life of the Blessed Virgin Mother.²⁰

In another circular letter she reminded the Sisters:

We are called and we find ourselves in a Congregation particularly protected by the Holy Virgin, in fact, inspired, willed and guided by her step by step. St. John Bosco, in founding our Institute, let us never forget it, has explicitly intended to elevate a monument of gratitude to Holy Mary, our help. As such, every stone - as it was said of the Basilica - should sing the glory of Mary. Each one of us is a stone of this monument [...]. To be a song of glory and of living gratitude to Mary most Holy and Help, we need, dear Sisters, that our life be a faithful imitation and a living copy of her life. Her daughters, shouldn't they be like the Mother, imitating her and living with her same attitudes? Remember that we are called and we are, not Sisters but Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.²¹

D. Mother Angela Vespa (1958 - 1969)

Taking as point of departure the explicit will of Don Bosco that the DMHC are called *to be a perennial monument of gratitude* to the Blessed

¹⁹ RINALDI F., *Strenna alle FMA* 1927, in DALCERRI L., *Un maestro di vita interiore. Don Filippo Rinaldi*, Roma, Istituto FMA 1990, 56-144.

²⁰ VASCHETTI L., *Lettera Circolare*, 24 aprile 1942 [pro-manuscripto].

²¹ ID., *Lettera Circolare*, 24 dicembre 1942 [pro-manuscripto].

Virgin Mary, Mother Angela Vespa concluded, underlining the following points:

- that the mandate to be a *monument of living stones* means to be a vital expression, an incarnation of the filial and grateful love which Don Bosco had towards Mary Help of Christians;
- that gratitude is a continuing thanks, a living testimony of the grace received by Don Bosco as Founder through the maternal intervention of the Blessed Virgin who «becomes a missionary with the Sisters, giving them help, often even miraculous help»;
- that the effect produced in the Institute by living, as Don Bosco desires it, a life full of gratitude to Mary is the construction of the *monument of gratitude* which nourishes among us: the family spirit, an individual and collective serenity, a reciprocal trust that makes of every house the *house of the love of God*; gratitude, a word, a gesture, an attitude of amiability, the love of God and of neighbor which is expressed in generous dedication, sacrifice, cheerfulness, hope and openness, a love of God like that of Mary, that is, an active love, source of joy, of interior and exterior well being and of peace.²²

E. Pope Paul VI (1963-1978)

In a special audience to the DMHC on the occasion of the Centenary of the Institute (August 5, 1972), the Pope told the Sisters:

Is not your Institute the «living monument» which Don Bosco wished to erect to our Lady, as a sign of his unfailing gratitude for the many blessings received from her, and as a symbol of hope for all the graces for which his work would have need in the future, a work so complex and difficult, one could say, a work paradoxically disproportionate to the means available?²³

He continued encouraging and reminding them at the same time of what the Church expected from them:

Yes, my daughters, as long as you learn from Mary to direct everything to Christ, her divine Son; as long as you keep your gaze fixed on her who is God's

²² VESPA A., *Lettera Circolare*, 24 ottobre 1965, in MONTIGIANI P., *Vie diritte* I, Roma, Ist. FMA 1975, 61-64.

²³ PAUL VI, *Special Audience to the DMHC on the centenary of the Institute* (July 15, 1972), in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, X (1972), Roma, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana 1972, 752-754; See also *FMA Constitutions* 1982 (english ed.), 473.

masterpiece, the model and ideal of every consecrated life and the support of every apostolic heroism, the well-spring of generosity and dedication, of interior life and fervour, of holiness and grace, which has made you such valuable collaborators with our Lord Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls, will never run dry in your Institute.²⁴

F. *Father Luigi Ricceri (1965 - 1978)*

During the centenary of the consecration of the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians (1868-1968), Father Luigi Ricceri explained in what sense the DMHC is to be a *monument of gratitude*. He pointed out that aside from the Basilica there existed another temple in honor of Mary Help of Christians, a temple made of *living and chosen stones* as mentioned by the liturgy for the dedication of the Church. He explained how:

Every one of these stone bears a name, reflects a face, seals the heart of every DMHC destined to sing in time and in space a hymn of thanksgiving to the Virgin, Mother of the Church and of the Family of Don Bosco, Mother of the Institute. The Basilica may one day be destroyed, but the song of thanksgiving to the Virgin as willed by Don Bosco will never be exhausted, as long as there will be a DMHC who lives, prays and works in a corner of the world.

Then he indicated the double role of the DMHC: as a religious, she should testify to the close and intimate following of Christ; as a DMHC she should witness a perennial and living gratitude to the Virgin. He ends saying that where the Basilica, made of stones and marble, could not reach, the DMHC, made of *living and chosen stones* could come close to everyone who desires to love and thank the Virgin.²⁵

G. *Mother Ersilia Canta (1969 - 1981)*

In a circular letter, during the centennial celebration of the Institute (1972), Mother Ersilia Canta wrote to the Sisters reminding them that:

Our *Congregation* in fact, is a *marian congregation* par excellence ... we are dedicated to her, and willed by our holy founder, Don Bosco, to be his «living monument» of gratitude to such a Mother. Our first commitment of gratitude to the Lord and to our Lady, therefore, is to become ever conscious of the *marian*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ RICCERI L., *La parola del Rettor Maggiore*, II, Torino Ispettorato Centrale Salesiano 1969, 303-304.

character of our Congregation and to search for its motivation in the history of the Institute. From a more enlightened awareness of being in the Church the prolongation of the mission of Mary, the consequent commitment will be born, that is, to give a new impulse and a more theologically motivated cult to Mary Help of Christians in our houses.²⁶

H. Pope John Paul II (1978 ...)

The Pope, on the occasion of the Centenary of the death of St. Mary Mazzarello (May 14, 1981), reminded the DMHC of the heroic beginnings of the Institute and how the saintly Co-Foundress, of humble origins and little learning, but rich in the Holy Spirit, guided the young congregation to a providential growth with creative fidelity to the educative charism of Don Bosco. At the same time, he underlined the challenges they faced with the responsibility of educating the young people of their time.

He ended his exhortation entrusting the Institute to Mary Most Holy, the Help of Christians:

To Her I entrust all your Family, desired by Don Bosco to be a «living monument» of love for our Lady, and I beg Her to protect you in every moment of your growth and extension throughout the world.²⁷

I. Mother Marinella Castagno (1984 - 1996)

During the Marian year (1987-1988), which coincided with the centennial year of Don Bosco's death (1888-1988), Mother Marinella Castagno took several occasions through her circular letters to speak of deepening the marian dimension of our vocation and of the Institute. With regards to the theme of the «*living monument*» of *gratitude to Mary*, she reminded the DMHC that:

We cannot betray our Founder today! We feel in fact that Mary «continues to be actively present in our life and in the history of the Institute» (art. 44) and transforms us to be *Helpers* of the young (cf art.4). If to be in continuous gratitude to God is the condition of every Christian, to be in continuous gratitude to Mary is a constitutive part of our being DMHC.²⁸

²⁶ CANTA E., *Lettera Circolare*, 24 settembre 1971 [pro-manuscripto].

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Special audience to the DMHC on the Centenary of the death of St. Mary D. Mazzarello* (December 12, 1981), in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, IV/2 (1981), Roma, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1982, 919-923; See also *FMA Constitutions* 1982, 479-480.

²⁸ CASTAGNO M., *Lettera Circolare*, 24 dicembre 1987 [pro-manuscripto].

In another instance she cited that gratitude is a characteristic common to our Founders and becomes a fundamental trait of our style of life and way of educating. She continued underlining that:

If we have hearts full of gratitude to God, like our Founders, we could easily grasp how to harmonize suffering and joy, fatigue and serenity, work and prayer. The heart that opens up with gratitude to the Father can repeat with Mary the song of the Magnificat, knows how to transform one's life into a witness of a credible and attractive christianity, especially among the young.

To be a living thanks presupposes an interior attitude of relationship with God and with Mary, which renders us women of profound faith capable of radiating peace and of communicating true evangelical values.²⁹

Two general lines can be traced from the quoted words of the representative authority of the Church and the Salesian Family regarding the theme on the identity of the DMHC as Don Bosco's «*living monument of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians*»:

(i) that of the «*living monument*» which is translated in the commitment to be in the world, above all among the young, *living images* of Mary Help of Christians;

(ii) that of being a «*monument of gratitude of Don Bosco to the great Mother of God*», that is, the living and perennial expression of the grateful affection towards the Blessed Virgin for her predilection, her powerful and maternal help.

Both lines converge in the fact that gratitude, more than an expression in words and affection, is translated in a life lived *with* and *like* Mary.³⁰

3.2.4. REFLECTIONS OF TWO DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

A. Sr. Lina Dalcerci: «*The DMHC: the “living monument” of gratitude, the spirit of the Magnificat and the presence of Mary*»

In the introduction of the book *Maria nello spirito e nella vita della Figlia di Maria Ausiliatrice*,³¹ Sr. Lina Dalcerci pointed to a providential

²⁹ ID., *Lettera Circolare*, 24 febbraio 1987 [pro-manuscripto].

³⁰ Cf COLLI C., *Patto della nostra alleanza con Dio*, Roma, Istituto FMA 1984, 452-456.

³¹ Cf DALCERRI L., *Maria nello spirito e nella vita della Figlia di Maria Ausiliatrice*, Roma, Scuola tip. privata FMA 1982, 5-8.

coincidence of the birth of the «living monument» of gratitude of Don Bosco to Mary and to the date of the feast of the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome on the 5th of August.³² This historical fact, according to the author, is a sign of the singular marian character of the newborn congregation which the Founder proclaimed to be «a religious family which is truly Mary's».³³ It seals the specific charismatic aspect of the Institute and traces the spiritual itinerary for the configuration and holiness of every member and of the whole congregation.

The author deepened the marian spirituality of the DMHC in these three points: the symbol of the «*living monument*» of gratitude, the spirit of the *Magnificat* and the *presence* of Mary in the Institute.

– *The symbol of monument*

The *monument* refers to an incarnation of an ideal, of a figure to whom one wants to give form and desires to reproduce in oneself. This ideal and figure is Mary, *Mother and Teacher, Inspirer and Foundress* of all the works of Don Bosco. The *monument* referred to is *living* and at the same time a symbolic expression of *gratitude*.

It is a «living monument», in the sense that, it is not made of stones but of persons in dynamic growth, in a vital expansion of the interior force which animates and vivifies it. The DMHC should therefore tend, by the force of her call and charism, to reproduce in herself Mary, to imitate her interior disposition, to be her *living image* as Mother Mazzarello has witnessed and exhorted every Daughter to be.³⁴

The *configuration* to Mary is the reason for being of the DMHC in the Church. It is the original project which is born from the very charism of the holy Founder. The essence of the marian spirituality for the DMHC is all here: Mary should be the *form* of her being and of her acting. She is called to model her spirit on that of Mary because only with and through Mary can she reach to that *conformity* to Christ which in fact is the supreme end of her baptismal and religious consecration. Only

³² The date of the first religious profession of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872) was not originally set for August 5 but some days later. Since Don Bosco could not be present otherwise, the date was anticipated on the feast of Our Lady of Snow, a feast linked with the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major. See *Cron* I, 298.

³³ Cf *Chronicles* I, 303.

³⁴ Cf DALCERRI L., *Maria nello spirito*, *op. cit.*, 47-51.

in the perfect realization of this *configuration* to Mary, the DMHC could realize in fullness the project so dear to the Founder, that is, to be the «living monument» of his thanks to Mary Help.

The «living monument» desired by Don Bosco has a particular end, that is, to express the immense gratitude of the Saint to our Blessed Lady. This end is to be a monument that sings through the centuries the greatness of God in Mary, perpetuating the praise of glory of her Magnificat. The spirit of the Magnificat is a spirit of gratitude and of thanksgiving to God. It is the transparent expression of a joyful soul who remains in awe touched by the incomprehensible divine greatness and merciful love. The DMHC who, becoming humble and small as the Blessed Virgin, should incarnate this *thanks*, transforming herself into a living Magnificat of praise to Mary the Help of Christians.

– *The spirit of the “Magnificat”*³⁵

The spirit of the Magnificat is characterized by a healthy optimism which does not ignore the evil that exists but is intent on discovering God’s design, his beneficent and gratuitous action, a reflection of the good which He radiates towards all His creatures. It is a song of the *poor in spirit* which springs from one’s nothingness, recognizes that all is from and in God and confides in Him totally.

The spirit of the Magnificat is a spirit of service, of self-giving and of total availability. It is a participation in the mystery of the Visitation of Mary who *goes in haste* through the streets of the world to extend help to the needy. The secret is to become like Her, Christ bearer and Christ giver. To be a bearer of Christ means to communicate light, joy and salvation to the persons one encounter.

For this reason the DMHC meditates and reflects in herself the image of Mary in the act of giving Jesus, the image of Mary Help of Christians, the Virgin Mother who does not only indicate the way to Christ but who gives Jesus Himself to those who would welcome Him in their lives. Mary is not only the Mother of Jesus but also of His Mystical Body, the Church. She therefore seals the apostolic service of the DMHC with an ecclesial charism, making her an active participant in the universal mission of the salvation entrusted by the Holy Spirit to the Church.

³⁵ Cf *Ibid.*, 52-55.

Don Bosco has always underlined and witnessed to the ecclesial aspect of the Salesian charism and to the devotion to Mary Help of Christians. For this reason the DMHC, who by vocation belongs to Mary and is called by her name understands Mary's specific function as Mother of the Church. She can not confine herself to a close and selfish interiority but should be open to the universality of salvation translating it in an operative action which makes of her a *Helper* with the *Help of Christians* for all of humanity.

– *The presence of Mary among the Sisters*

What gives foundation, explains and justifies the marian spirituality of the DMHC, as was for Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, is the living sense of the presence of Mary.

In Don Bosco's last visit to the Sisters in the Mother House of Nizza Monferrato in 1885 he told the Sisters who begged him to address them some words:

You desire that I tell you something. Oh, if only I could tell you all that I desire to say. But as you see, I am old ... But I want to tell you that our Lady loves you very much; and she is in your midst [...].³⁶

Mother Mazzarello lived in the awareness of being under the maternal gaze of Mary and recalled her presence often to the Sisters: «Let us behave in everything as if our Lady is present; and we have her with us even if we don't see her».³⁷

This maternal presence is what stimulates the DMHC to model themselves on Mary, to *configure themselves* to Her, to be the *monument* Don Bosco wanted them to be, that *living stone* which forms the physiognomy of the Holy Virgin.

It is necessary that this presence be lived to the full by the DMHC; that there be between her and Mary those continuous *encounters of gaze*. It is important that the DMHC allows Mary to enter her life as a *living person* and allows herself to be counselled, guided and formed by her; with whom she can dialogue, entrust her pains, her difficulties, her satisfactions, her joys; from whom she is sure to receive light, comfort and help.

³⁶ Cf *Chronicles* V, 42-43.

³⁷ *Chronicles* III, 267.

This is how the Constitutions see the relationship between Mary and the DMHC:

Don Bosco wanted us to be a «living monument» of his gratitude to Mary Help of Christians and asks us to extend his *thanks* throughout all time.

Let us be aware of Mary's presence in our lives and entrust ourselves entirely to her, striving to make her dispositions of faith, hope and charity, and her perfect union with Christ, our own. Let us open our hearts to the joyous humility of her *Magnificat* to be helpers, like her, especially among the young (art 4).

Now such a living and operative presence of Mary, acts really as the *form*, impressing little by little on the DMHC the spiritual characteristics of the Blessed Virgin, transforming her, into that *true image* of our Lady, ardently desired by Mother Mazzarello, of whom she became the living *icon*.³⁸

B. Sr. Maria Ko: «DMHC, *Living monument of gratitude to Mary and like Mary*»

In the article entitled *Living monument of gratitude to Mary and like Mary*, Sr. Maria Ko aimed to «demonstrate how Mary herself is the key of interpretation in the comprehension and realization of the identity of the Institute expressed by Don Bosco with the symbol of a «*living monument*» of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians. Mary, the most perfect, living and permanent monument of gratitude to God, is *one of the greatest symbols of Christianity*».³⁹ She affirmed that in order to understand and realize the marian identity of the Institute of the DMHC, it is therefore important to begin from Mary herself, considered as a subject more than an object.⁴⁰

When the DMHC becomes aware of her identity she will perceive how she is similar to Mary. «We are *true images* of our Lady», the convinced affirmation of Mother Mazzarello, who was the cornerstone of the «living monument» of gratitude raised by Don Bosco to Mary Help of Christians, is understandable in this sense.

³⁸ Cf DALCERRI L., *Maria nello spirito*, 43-49.

³⁹ ORDINE DEI SERVI DI MARIA (208 Capitolo Generale), *Fate quello che vi dirà. Riflessioni e proposte per la promozione della pietà mariana*, Leumann (Torino), Elle Di Ci 1985, 34.

⁴⁰ Cf KO M., *Monumento vivo*, 82.

– Mary, «*living monument*»

The title of *monument* referred to Mary can not be found among the various images coined by the patristic-literary tradition nor among marian iconography. However, there are various titles which reflect the image of the temple, throne, etc. This image is valid and efficacious on the level of mariological symbolism because it mediates in an intuitive comprehension the person and mission of Mary by way of analogy. Discovering the mystery of Mary with the help of images and symbols is a fruitful mariological approach. Taking inspiration from the «way of beauty» the author contemplated the figure of Mary from the perspective of the symbolic image of monument.⁴¹ A monument has principally three functions or three areas of significance: as anamnesis, as testimony and as prophecy.

– *Monument as anamnesis: Mary the woman of memory*

Mary is a woman of memory as Pope John Paul II referred to her in a homily on the solemnity of the Mother of God (January 1, 1987).

You are the memory of the Church! Mother, the Church learns from you that to be mother one is to be a living memory, that is, to *conserve and meditate in the heart* the events of men and peoples, both the joyful and sorrowful events [...]. We need to learn from you how to be Church in this passage of the millennium.⁴²

One of the essential characteristics of Mary in the Gospel is the capacity to remember. Twice in the Gospel of Luke reference is made to this interior attitude of Mary: «Mary pondered all these things in her heart».⁴³

⁴¹ Pope Paul the VI, in his encounter with the participants of the VII Mariological/Marian Congress (Rome, May 16, 1975) organized by the International Pontifical Marian Academy, valued the «way of beauty» (*via pulchritudinis*) as a complementary method to the «way of reason» (*via veritatis*) in the deepening of the mystery of Mary. It is a significant perspective which widens notably the horizon of Mariology and permits the integration of biblical, historical, systematic and doctrinal reflection in a harmonious contemplation of the marian mystery. Cf *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIII (1975), Roma, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana 1975, 524. On the *via pulchritudinis* as a method in theology, see BALTHASAR H.U. von, *Gloria. Un'estetica teologica*, 7 vol. Milano, Jaca Book 1975; DE FIORES S., *Maria nella teologia contemporanea*, Roma, Ed. Mater Ecclesiae 1987, 351- 370.

⁴² GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *From Pentecost 1987 to the Solemnity of Assumption 1988. A Marian Year in pilgrimage towards the third millennium*, in AAS 79 (1987) 1449-1453.

⁴³ Luke 2: 19; 51 b. This evangelical expression has been studied and commented throughout history. See SERRA A., *Sapienza e contemplazione di Maria secondo Lc 2,19.51 b*, Roma, Ed. Marianum 1982.

Mary, the listening Virgin (MC 39), is a woman with a heart that remembers and as such exemplifies the primacy of listening and remembering characteristic of biblical spirituality. She is the paradigm of the wise which the book of Sirach praises: «Blessed is he who meditates these things; he who keeps them in his heart will become wise» (Sir 51:28). She incarnates the faith of Israel who keeps in memory the works accomplished by God in the past to make of them a rule of life and a motive of hope.

However, the memory of Mary is greater than that of the people of Israel. For while Israel kept in memory the marvels wrought by God in the history of its people, Mary, instead keeps in her heart the person and mission of Jesus Christ, the center, recapitulation and fulfillment of the history of humanity. In this memory, salvation is condensed and the future of every event is enclosed reflecting the eternal. The story of Jesus, and in Jesus the whole history of humanity has become the story of Mary. Not only! The story of every person has entered in the story of Mary since Jesus from the cross willed to leave as His heredity to every man and woman His Mother as His personal gift.

Entrusting himself to Mary in a filial manner, the Christian like the apostle John, *welcomes* the Mother of Christ *into his own home* and brings her into everything that makes up his inner life (RM 45).

And Mary, welcoming every son/daughter, entrusted to her personally by Christ Himself, brings him/her into her maternal and remembering heart. In this light the words of Pope John Paul II become more understandable: «To be Mother means to be a living memory».

The reflective activity of Mary is alive and dynamic as Luke underlined in the Gospel (Lk 2:19, 51b). The verb *συμβάλλω* («*symbállō*») used in Lk 2:19 signifies *to confront* or *to put together* various elements, of events or of facts, in order to interpret their right and profound comprehension.⁴⁴ The Gospel reveals how Mary *confronts* words and events in her heart, not allowing herself to be blocked by what surprises her or keeps her in awe, but reflects in a wider horizon, in a more profound and dynamic way.

Mary did not understand everything at once but opening up to the mystery she allowed herself to be involved and respected the rhythm of

⁴⁴ Cf *Ibid.*, 139-175.

the historical revelation of God. Her attitude is very different from the disciples, who not understanding the sense of the words of Jesus, remained closed in themselves and did not have the courage «to ask him questions on the argument».

Jesus Himself in the Gospel taught how the passage from not understanding to the understanding in faith is not something automatic and gratuitous but needs the effort to remember. To the disciples: «Men of little faith... don't you remember how the five loaves of bread fed five thousand men?» (Mt 16:9). To the women before the empty tomb after the resurrection: «Why do you search the living among the dead? He is risen! Remember how He spoke when He was in Galilee» (Lk 24:5- 8). The Spirit of truth, He who guides the disciples to the whole truth (cf Jn 16:13), works to keep the memory active as Jesus Himself promised: «The Holy Spirit whom the Father sends in my name will teach you everything and will remind you all that I told you» (Jn 14: 26).

To be introduced to the historical experience of Jesus, to begin the process of reflection in the Spirit toward a wider vision of the salvific design and to adhere to it in faith, entering in a dialogue with God the Revealer, this is the itinerary Jesus taught his disciples in order to grow in communion with Him. And this is the way Mary grew in her pilgrimage of faith.

– *Monument as witness: Mary, the witness of Jesus*

«When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman» (Gal 4:4). In the Pauline expression *born of a woman* reference to Mary is not made with a proper name but with her identity as Mother of the Savior, collaborator in the incarnation of God, fully inserted in the mystery of salvation. The Son of God, consubstantial with the Father and with the Spirit, becomes consubstantial with a woman, and through her, with the whole humanity. With her motherhood Mary becomes the *place* where God encounters humanity in a new and definitive way. She herself is the historical visible monument of the incarnation of the Son of God.

Witnessing to the reality of the incarnation, Mary is the testimony of the whole economy of salvation which begins and realizes itself in her becoming Mother of Christ. God wanted her to be the human beginning and foundation of His being Emmanuel and Savior. And Mary, welcoming the project of God, demonstrated how great the love of God is for humanity.

Mary's testimony to Jesus is not only a true and historical guarantee to its reality. She is involved and participate personally in the event of Christ. Her insertion in the mystery of Christ is strong and inseparable to the point that no episode in her life can be seen outside this relationship. She is actively present in the most important moments of the life of her Son, from birth to death.

Be it for the contemporary of Jesus, as for people of today and for always, Mary is «a singular witness to the mystery of Jesus» (RM 26), «united with Him by a strong and indissoluble link» (LG 53). Mary can be contemplated as a *living and perennial monument* who witnesses to the identity, the life and mission of Jesus as Mother and as Disciple (cf RM 20; MC 37), as Evangelizer made visible by an icon known as *Hodegitria*, the Mother who indicates Jesus, the way.

As a singular witness to Christ, Mary is also the witness to what the Christ event comprises. She is with Christ at the center of the economy of salvation. While she synthesizes and personalizes the past, she becomes the beginning of the new that is born. In her the passage from the time of waiting to the time of reality takes place. She is the sign of the *fullness of time*, the link which connects the Old and the New Testaments, unifies the whole history of salvation with eschatology.

As the microstory of salvation Mary «unites and riverberates the highest facts of faith» (LG 65). She is like the *mirror* that reflects the unconfounding style, the logic strange to human logic, God's way of acting, a logic confirmed and radicalized by Christ and brought to life by the whole Church. It refers to the logic which exalts the lowly and puts down the proud; fills the poor and leaves the rich empty handed (Lk 1:51-53), the logic of the evangelical beatitude, of service, of kenosis and of Easter through the Cross. All these Mary experiences in her life in an intimate union with her Son. Proclaiming the dawn of salvation, Mary could witness to the truth that «God's ways are not men's ways» (Is 55:8) and that the Revelation of God in history is presented as the revolution of history on God's part.

– *Monument as prophecy: Mary, sign of the woman, bearer of God and helper of people*

As witness of the *fullness of time* and reflection of the entire economy of salvation, Mary «is a permanent presence in the whole extension of the

mystery of salvation» (RM 31). Inserted in Christ, she participates in this fullness of presence. Biblical revelation alludes to this through the *sign of the woman* who appears in the beginning and in the end of history.⁴⁵

As *woman of protology*, Mary is the sign of hope, bearer of salvific promise. As *woman of eschatology*, she is a sign of definitive victory of God over Satan, of good over evil, of light over darkness, of love over hatred, of hope over boredom, of joy over sadness and of life over death. Trusting in «Him who is Almighty» (Lk 1:49) Mary becomes the manifestation of the power of God.

The *sign of the woman* is a testimony of a memory which becomes prophecy. Mary manifests with her person and with her singular vocation that the promised salvation from the beginning is already present in Christ and will have the full realization in the eschatological victory of the reign of God, when Christ will have put all things under Him and God will become all in all (cf 1 Cor 15:27-28).

In the Old Testament, the principal function of the prophets is to be messengers of God. At the same time, they participate in the solicitude of God for humanity, make known the will of God in the present reality and in the concrete historical situation; at the same time, as sentinels in the midst of the people, the prophets are vigilant, discern and commit themselves with care to see that divine solicitude is received and that a proper response is made.

Mary takes the role of the prophet in as much as she is *present before humanity as messenger of the will of God, indicating the needs to be satisfied so that the salvific power of the Messiah can be made manifest* (RM 21). Two biblical episodes narrate how Mary exemplifies this role: the Visitation to her relative Elizabeth (cf Lk 1:39-56) and the wedding feast at Cana (cf Jn 2:1-12). She inaugurates in history the style of her Son, that of poverty and service. She is the image of the Church who *scrutinizes the signs of the times, interprets and lives the events of history*, for this, even today, she *mirrors the hopes of the people of our times* (MC 17).

⁴⁵ The woman of Genesis (Gen 3:15) and the woman of the Apocalypse (Ap 12: 3-4) points to the figure of Mary, Daughter of Zion, Mother of Christ and prototype of the Church. Read in the context of the whole history of salvation and considering tradition it is legitimate to interpret these passages in mariological key with an inscindible ecclesiological context. Cf FARKAS P., *La «Donna» di Apocalisse 12. Storia, bilancio, nuove prospettive*, Roma, Editrice Pont. Università Gregoriana 1997.

With simplicity and delicacy, and with the sole purpose of helping persons who suffer the difficulty of the situation, Mary presents the problem to Jesus: «They have no wine» (Jn 2:3), at the same time, solicitous and trustful, she prepares the servants to receive the intervention of Jesus, in whatever way it comes: «Do whatever He tells you» (Jn 2:5), Mary puts herself in the middle. Her solicitude for humanity, her «encountering the needs of people signify, at the same time, an introduction of them in the realm of the messianic mission and the salvific power of Christ» (RM 21). The mediating and prophetic action of Mary is efficacious: she obtains the intervention of Her Son and Savior and the obedience of the servants. The words of Mary to the servants: «Do whatever He tells you» (Jn 2:5), are among the few words of Mary and the only ones spoken to people directly. These words known to be the *testament of Mary* are an echo of the Sinai covenant (cf Ex 19:8; 24:3,7). Mary does not only personify Israel obedient to the covenant, but she inspires obedience, not anymore to the old covenant but to Jesus, from whom a new people and a new covenant begins. Mary, therefore, leads people to the following of Christ, to obey His word and to consider it as the absolute reference of their lives.

John concludes the narration of the wedding feast of Cana with these words: «This is how Jesus initiated his signs in Cana of Galilee, manifesting his glory, and his disciples believed in him» (Jn 2:11). This testimony can be read in reference to Mary and to her role as Mother and Help as John Paul II observes:

At Cana Mary appears to be a believer in Jesus, her faith provokes the first *sign* and helped to enliven faith in the disciples (RM 21).

She who responded to God: «Be it done to me according to your word» (Lk 1:38) is the same person to whom praise was directed: «Blessed are you because you have believed in the word of the Lord» (Lk 1:45), now tells every believer: «Do whatever He tells you» (Jn 2:5).

She who has kept all the signs of salvation in her heart, now disposes the hearts of the disciples to receive a new messianic sign. The first believer enlivens the faith of the disciples; the first evangelized becomes the evangelizer; the first Christian bears Christ and brings to Christ, the first redeemed becomes collaborator, the one perfectly conformed to the will of God becomes bearer of His will, the servant of God is at the service of the salvation of humanity. The woman of memory, the witness of Jesus is always and everywhere the prophet and Help of believers.

– Mary, «living monument» of gratitude

To raise a monument also means to express gratitude. Remembering brings with it awareness and gratitude. In the Gospel the filial relationship between Jesus and the Father is expressed above all through a grateful love (Jn 3:35; 5:26; 7:16,17, 14:6; 18:11). The Father has given to the Son the possibility to making Himself a total gift to humanity and at the same time to be a total gift of thanks to the Father. The Holy Spirit, the intense love between the Father and the Son is expressed in the dynamism of a gift made present to all and always in the Eucharist.

The first one to be involved in this dynamism of divine love is Mary whose existence is a flow of grace and thanksgiving. The one *full of grace* transforms her life into a *song of thanksgiving* to become a *gift of grace* entrusted by the Son to the whole of humanity.

Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places who chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love. (Ef 1:3-4)

In the above cited passage of the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, Pope John Paul II sees the blessing Mary received «in an exceptional way united to Christ and equally loved in this eternally beloved Son» (RM 8). For this divine election in Christ all her life and all the divine project for humanity which in her is realized is placed under the sign of blessing and of gratuitous favor. This is manifested clearly by two aspects of the mystery of Mary: her immaculate conception and her assumption into heaven.

A gratuitous gift corresponds to grateful freedom. The *fiat* and the *magnificat* of Mary correspond to the title *full of grace*.

«Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your Word» (Lk 1:38). Mary responds to God's proposal with joyful assent reflecting the availability of humble service, similar to that of the servant of Yahweh.

Mary defines herself in relation to God because He has decided to establish with her a relationship of freedom, of kindness and of confidence. Her awareness is that of a mysterious servant, loved by God, chosen by Him to fill her with His spirit. Her *fiat* is the logical consequence of her self-awareness before God. The servant of God is at His service. Humble and free, Mary opens herself to gratuity.

Mary is therefore God's yes to humanity, the most convincing proof that He entrusts Himself to people and desires them to be His collaborator, because He has deigned to call a creature, Mary, and in her every creature, to take on the role of *helper of God* in the work of salvation.⁴⁶ At the same time Mary is the yes of humanity to God, the measure of the greatness of people when they open themselves to God's gratuity.

The simultaneous presence of *self-emptying* and of *fullness of grace* in Mary's consciousness makes her explode with gratitude.

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior because He has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid (Lk 1:46-48).

Contemplating in awe the little and humble events of grace which have brightened her life and determined the sense of her whole existence, Mary gathers at the same time the salvific effects which these events produce in the whole view of history. With her song, she gives voice to all those who, like her, open themselves to the gratuitous gift.

In the context of the Gospel of Luke, the Magnificat emerges as prototype of the *new song* of the Christian era which would be prolonged without interruption in the life of the Church. The Fathers of the Church do not hesitate to affirm that the Magnificat is not only Mary's song but that of the whole Church.

St Irenaeus: Mary full of joy shouts prophetically in the name of the Church, «My soul magnifies the Lord».⁴⁷

St. Ambrose: Be in everyone the soul of Mary to magnify the Lord, be in every one the spirit of Mary to rejoice in God [...]. If in fact, according to the flesh only one is the Mother of Christ, according to faith, all souls generate Christ; everyone in fact could welcome the Word of God in himself.⁴⁸

Mary remains always in the Church «Helper of God in the service of humanity and Helper of humanity in blessing God».⁴⁹ Her gratitude of almost two thousand years rises incessantly to God involving Christians of every part of the world and of every generation. She herself is present in the world and in history as *living monument of gratitude to God*, a monu-

⁴⁶ PALUMBIERI S., *Progetto «Maria»*. Risposta di Dio alle attese dei giovani, Napoli, Dehoniane 1985, 53.

⁴⁷ IRENAEUS, *Adversus Haereses* III, 10, 2, in PG 7/1, 873; SC 211, 118.

⁴⁸ AMBROSE, *In Lucam* II, 26, in CCL 120,36.

⁴⁹ PALUMBIERI, *Progetto «Maria»*, 35.

ment which does not become old or consumed by time, but remains to be always beautiful and attractive, with a future and a perennial newness.

– *The Institute of the DMHC,*
«living monument» of gratitude to Mary

The song of the Magnificat sung by Mary involves in a particular way the DMHC, who has Her as Mother and Teacher (cf Const. art.4) in a family that belongs totally to Her. Living radically the following of Christ, they commit to make their own the attitude of Mary, to open themselves *to the joyful humility of the Magnificat* making their daily life an extension of this song of gratitude (cf art.44).

In this way, they fulfill the desire of the Founder Don Bosco who had willed the Institute to be a «living monument» of gratitude to Mary. The thanks to Mary is founded on the thanks of Mary to form a unique, joyful and incessant hymn of gratitude to God.

In the song of the Magnificat, Mary, rejoicing in the *great things* accomplished in her, recognizes her blessedness, a perennial motive for which to bless the Lord: «All generations will call me blessed» (Lk 1:48). She who is the greatest, most beautiful and truest *thanks* to God is also the one to whom, after Jesus Christ, the Church owes gratitude. The Woman of the Magnificat is also the recipient of gratitude of the Church and of the whole of humanity.

As a living monument of gratitude to Mary, the Institute of the DMHC is involved in that flow of «giving thanks and of being a gift of grace» which has characterized the existence of Jesus and His Mother. The DMHC knows that the Institute is a *gift of the Holy Spirit*, born «through the direct intervention of Mary» (art.1), that their vocation is a response to the «Father who in Christ consecrates them, gathers and sends them» (art.8). In an attitude of faith and gratitude, they give their lives to God, «becoming among the young sign and expression of His foreseeing love» (art.1).

The «living monument» of gratitude to Mary is an extension of her maternal presence in the world. This presence is alive and felt in the life of the DMHC (cf art.4, 44). It is an exemplary and effective presence which makes them *like her Helpers* above all of the young (cf art.4).

It refers to a monument modelled on Mary, who is memory, witness and prophecy of the mystery of Christ and of the whole history of salva-

tion. Like Mary, the DMHC are women of memory, transparent images of eternal values.⁵⁰ Rooted in the mystery of Christ, the center of their existence, they learn from Mary to keep in their hearts every manifestation of the love of God, to open their hearts modelling them on Christ, the Good Shepherd (cf art.7, 63) and to «let Christ grow in the heart of the young» (art.7), through a wise educative work.

As Mary, witness of Christ, and of the salvific project of God, the DMHC follows «Christ more closely in His saving mission» (art.8) making her own the way of life which Christ chose for Himself and which his Mother embraced with total dedication. In this way she witnesses the Gospel as a lived memory and announce with joy the *Good News*. Living with radicality the new life of the beatitude (cf art.8), incarnating the preferential love for the young in her apostolic action, especially among the poor (cf art.63, 65), she renders transparent the logic by which God works in history.

By being a reflection of the goodness and maternal solicitude of Mary (cf art.7, 14), the one who indicates the way to Christ and helps to conform every person to Him, the DMHC proposes to be «a response of salvation to the profound hopes of the young» (art.22) rendering the love of Christ present to them (art.11). Ready to sacrifice everything so as to cooperate with Christ in the salvation of the young (cf art.22), she dedicates herself to the integral education (art.69) of the young following the wise pedagogy of the Founder, Don Bosco. This wise pedagogy, ever more recognized as a prophetic message for the Christian education of every time, is transmitted by Mary, in whose school Don Bosco placed himself from his childhood days.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Cf KO M., *Monumento vivo di riconoscenza*, op. cit., 107-109.

⁵¹ GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Letter «Juvenum Patris»*, January 31, 1988, in AAS 80 (1988) 969-987.

3.3. THE MARIAN PRESENCE

«MATERNAL, LIVING AND EDUCATIVE»

Mary, for the DMHC, is not only an object of faith and imitation but as in the lives of the Founders, Don Bosco and Mary Mazzarello, she is a living and active presence. The Institute, in the revision of the Rule of life, had to return not only to the sources of every form of Christian life but to its primitive spirit to rediscover the vital and operative presence of Mary in its history, identity and mission. Only through an awareness of her maternal and loving presence can one establish a profound, active and permanent interpersonal relationship with her which leads to a transforming communion with her.

The Constitutions (1982) refer to Mary's *presence* with the following expressions:

- * her *direct intervention*, in collaboration with the Holy Spirit, in the foundation of the Institute and in the vocational call of the Daughters (cf art.1,4). She continues to be *Inspirer, Mother and Teacher* (cf art.4, 44);

- * her *living presence* in the formation of the Daughters. She is their *Model and Guide* in listening to, docility toward and collaboration with the Holy Spirit who is the primary agent in formation. At the same time she is a *Help* in directing their lives decisively to Christ, helping to make their relationship with Him personal and more authentic (cf art.79);

- * being *with Her* and like Her in prayer, the Daughter learns to persevere and to be docile to the Holy Spirit in order to intensify union with God and openness to Christ, present in persons and in the realities of daily life (cf art.37);

- * her *presence continues* in the Daughters who, like in Mornese, sing with their lives her Magnificat as they live each day in community with joy and charity (cf art.62);

- * her *educative presence*, an expression of her motherly solicitude, becomes for the Daughters a model in their apostolic action as they use the power of persuasion and love in collaborating with the Holy Spirit for the growth of Christ in the hearts of the young girls. They lead them

to discover in Her the welcoming and understanding Mother and the Help who instils security in them (cf art.7,71);

* a *motherly help* for the Daughters to persevere in their vocational call until they reach the moment of the Lord's final coming (cf art.107).

The above list, which points to Mary's *presence* expressed in various terms and in the different parts of the Constitutions, indicates how the Institute has become ever more aware of such a dimension in the mystery of Mary.

The *presence of Mary* seems to be, in the life of the Institute and of every DMHC, as it is in the life of the Church and in the story of every believer, a phenomenon so evident that it does not constitute a problem nor a subject interesting enough to be studied. However, today's cultural and religious sensibility, not satisfied with an emotive or pious attitude in the perception and evaluation of this phenomenon, demands a more conscious reflection with a theological foundation. Pope John Paul II himself expressed this exigency during his visit to the Faculty of Theology *Marianum* (December 10, 1988).

It is urgent, among other things, to study problems and arguments which are important and delicate, such as [...] the nature of the various forms of presence of the Blessed Virgin in the life of the Church.¹

One of the problems to which the deliberations of the XIX General Chapter of the Institute (September 19 - November 17, 1990) called the DMHC to give attention is the need to rediscover the *presence of Mary* in the Church, in the Institute and in their lives as seen in the light of the new feminine consciousness. The capacity to promote a new presence of women in society and in the Church is linked with the deeper study and commitment to live the marian spirituality proper to its charism. Here Mary is considered to be the key to rediscover and promote the feminine identity, dignity and mission.

Pope John Paul II has affirmed this truth in his apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (August 15, 1988).

Mary is the *new beginning* of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every woman (MD 11).

¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Visit to the Pontifical Faculty «Marianum»* (December 10, 1988), in AAS 81 (1989), 775.

In the light of the above considerations, this research will now focus on the significance of the *presence of Mary* in the life of Jesus, in the life of the Church and finally, in the life of the Institute of the DMHC.²

3.3.1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF «*PRESENCE*»

A. *Its anthropological dimension*

Presence is an anthropological idea interested specially in the human person. This concept is at the heart of the personalistic philosophy propagated by contemporary philosophers, among whom are M. Buber, E. Lévinas, E. Mounier, and G. Marcel who have shed light on the interpersonal dimension of man and woman. They have underlined that he/she is «a being for others», one who is in communion with others and who realizes oneself in relation with others.³

It is not easy to give a precise definition of *presence* since it does not signify a mere co-existence of bodies, but the profound intercommunication between two or more persons. It is the opposite of absence. More than space or time, it has a spiritual character; more than physical nearness, it is personal intercommunication. One can sense the absence of persons who live day and night in the same ambient, without communicating among themselves; at the same time, one can experience the presence of persons, separated by space, but who are capable of profound communication which overcomes every distance, even that of death.

Presence is therefore, a personal relationship between an «I» and a «You», an intimate knowing of each other, a mutual understanding and loving of each other. It is more of a spiritual rather than material reality, it is a fully human act which fills the hearts of two persons with joy and peace. It presupposes an interpersonal relationship and creates real inti-

² A. Pizzarelli, in his research entitled *La presenza di Maria nella vita della Chiesa. Saggio d'interpretazione pneumatologica* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milano, Edizioni Paoline 1990), gave to the *presence of Mary* a theological foundation with reference to biblical sources, eastern and western traditions. The specific contribution of his study consists in explaining Mary's presence from the pneumatological and christological dimensions.

³ Cf PIZZARELLI A., *op. cit.*, 182. G. Marcel writes on *presence* particularly in his work entitled: *Le mystère de l'Être*, I, Parigi 1951. See also, RAHNER K., *La presenza del Signore nella comunità di culto*, in *Nuovi Saggi*, III, Roma, Ed. Paoline 1969, 480-481.

macy between two or more individuals. Since it involves the whole person, it is never static but is instead dynamic.

When someone is present to me in a profound and loving way, I become transformed in my interiority and I am reborn to a new life; the presence of the other reveals something of me which up to then remained unknown to me. I am oriented to the other in openness and freedom, not to possess nor be possessed but to become a reciprocal and gratuitous gift to the other, in freedom and in love.

The philosophical concept of *presence* applied to *Mary* can shed light on the interpersonal relationship that exists between her and us, the profound communion and an intimate influence which goes beyond space and time.

B. *Its theological dimension*

It is important to note however, that the *presence* of *Mary* in our life, just as the *presence* of every human person, does not only have an anthropological dimension but also a theological dimension. With the incarnation of the Word, our earthly life was penetrated by the *presence* of God who became man to be with us. God's essence is not solitude, but communion. He is One, in intimate and personal relationship with the Trinitarian life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He has willed to communicate and to make every human person participate in His life. He invites every man and woman to live in communion with Him. In fact, «the greatest reason for the dignity of the person lies in his/her vocation to a life of communion with God» (GS 19).

The intercommunicative existence is an integral part, not only of the essence of man, but also of divine essence. In fact, the history of salvation narrates how God constantly intervenes with his people by communicating to them through words and deeds. One who listens and follows God, understands that in the Son, He has established the «new covenant» and a new way of being in the midst of His people. In the Son «He made His dwelling among us » (Jn 1:14). In the Son He is the «*Emmanuel*, that is, *God with us*» (Mt 1:23). In other words, in Jesus Christ, and in His Spirit, God is *Presence*, a loving and saving *Presence*.

All those who become part of the new life in Christ, crucified and risen, receive the gift of *His presence* whom He calls the *Paraclete* or *Holy Spirit*: «I will ask the Father and He will give you another *Para-*

clete to be with you always; the *Paraclete*, the *Holy Spirit* whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I have told you» (Jn 14:16, 26).

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, was the first to receive the divine *Presence* and the prototype of every participant in the life of the divine Son. With the renewal called for and initiated by the Second Vatican Council, there has been a change of focus in the presentation of the person and mission of Mary. While in the pre-conciliar manualistic theology what was given emphasis were the privileges Mary received from God, such as her divine Motherhood, her Perpetual Virginity, her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption into heaven, today, there is a rediscovery of her *presence* in the history of salvation, underlining the anthropological dimension of her participation in God's saving project.

To contemporary man and woman, strongly divided, within and without, the Church proposes the *presence of Mary*, intimately linked to the mystery of redemption: this *presence* is constantly in communication with each one of us; a *presence* so near and supportive; one which comforts, guides and stimulates to participate with responsible freedom in the construction of the civilization of love throughout history.

The exercise to live in the *presence of Mary*, as it is to live in the *presence of God*, is at the beginning an effort but which with time becomes simple and almost natural. One who has put oneself under Mary's gaze, with coherent commitment and sustained by grace, becomes aware by experience that the holy Virgin lives with him/her. She is near, constantly listening, ready to dialogue and to help at every request, and solicitous for every material and spiritual need of those who turn to her. One who comes into contact with the person of Mary is recreated and discovers in oneself new possibilities and horizons which before were unknown.

One who is in authentic dialogue with Mary knows by experience that her spiritual maternity is not enslaving, but is a liberation from every personal limit leading to the promotion of the person on all levels. One who enters into an intimate relationship with Mary journeys together with her towards God, who is the ultimate end of Christian life. True devotion to the Virgin Mother leads to the fulness of maturity in Christ. For the marvelous effect of her maternal and silent presence will soon be felt, because as St. Louis Maria Montfort affirms: «The more the Holy Spirit

finds Mary [...] in a soul, the more He becomes effective and powerful in forming Jesus Christ in this soul, and this soul in Jesus Christ ».⁴

3.3.2. THE *PRESENCE OF MARY* IN THE LIFE OF JESUS

Divine Revelation through the Sacred Scriptures, especially with the New Testament writings, speaks of the *presence of Mary* in the history of salvation. In fact, the French exegete A. Feuillet notes that:

Whoever desires to deepen the marian doctrine from the biblical point of view, could not do it except through an extensive exploration of the history of salvation. On the other hand, whoever desires to understand deeply the history of salvation, could not but encounter the Mother of the Redeemer, united with indissoluble links to the very center of salvific history.⁵

While Mary is not the center of Christianity, she is however, central to it as Pope Paul VI affirms:

If we want to be Christians, we must be marians, that is, we must acknowledge the essential, vital and providential relationship which unites Mary to Jesus, and which opens for us the way that leads to Him.⁶

A. *A discreet presence*

Reference to Mary in the Gospel is discreet.⁷ However, as A. Serra rightfully explained «the little in quantity is far surpassed by the quality».⁸ The marian pericopes, with the respective unity of which they are composed, appear to be pieces of a huge mosaic. From the Old Testa-

⁴ MONTFORT L.M., *Trattato della vera devozione a Maria*, 37 ed. (trad. di A. Rum), Roma, Edizioni Monfortane 1983, 20.

⁵ FEUILLET A., *L'heure de la femme et l'heure de la mère de Jésus (Jo 19,25-27)*, in *Biblica* 47 (1966) 572.

⁶ PAUL VI, *Discourse in the Sanctuary of our Lady of Bonaria (Cagliari)*, April 24, 1970, in *AAS* 62 (1970) 300-301.

⁷ The following are the marian references in New Testament: *Paul: Gal* 4:4; *Mark* 3:31-35; 6,3; *Matthew* 1-2; 12,46-50; 13:55; *Luke* 1:26-38,39-56; 2:1-52; 8:19-21; 11:27-28; *Acts of the Apostles* 1:14; *John* 1:13 (taken in the singular); 6:42; 2:1-12; 19:25-27; *Apocalypse* 12. For a synthetic explanation of the verses cited above, see the article of SERRA A., *Bibbia*, in *NDM*, 231-311.

⁸ SERRA A., *Bibbia*, in *NDM* 301.

ment the figure and the mission of Mary are enclosed in the shadow of the prophecies and of the institutions of Israel. At the threshold of the New Testament, she rises on the horizon of the history of salvation as the *Daughter of Zion*, the ideal synthesis of the original people of God, and as the *Mother of the Messiah*. Then, little by little as Christ, the «Sun of Justice» (cf Mt 3:20), advances in the firmament of the new covenant, Mary, with increasing faith, follows the path of the Light as Servant and Disciple of the Lord. Christ, at the culminating point of the paschal mystery, proclaims His Mother to be the «Mother» of all His disciples of all times. And from that «hour» the Church has understood that Mary is a constitutive element of its own Creed.⁹ The sober and essential marian references in the Sacred Scriptures do not minimize her person but serve to underline her historical presence as she lived the singular vocation of being Mother of the Son of God in the simplicity of her daily life. Her anthropological reality as a woman of Nazareth brings her nearer to our daily and seemingly insignificant life.

The first New Testament reference on the presence of Mary, though indirect and seemingly accidental, is found in the letter of Paul to the Galatians:

When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son born of a *woman*, born under the law, to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it, so that we might receive our status as His children (Gal 4:4-5).

Here St. Paul does not mention the name of the woman but refers to her maternal function in the historical event of the incarnation of the Son of God, a role which makes her presence an integral part of revelation and of Christian faith.

The *woman*, who is referred to in an anonymous way by the Apostle of the Gentiles, is nominated explicitly in the respective Infancy narratives of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. This fact establishes the historical identity of the Mother of God and consequently, of the Son of God.

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of *Mary*. It was of her that Jesus who is called the Messiah was born (Mt 1:16); [...] the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. *The virgin's name was Mary* (Lk 2:26-27).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 302.

The silent, discreet but significant presence of Mary in the life Jesus accompanied Him not only during His so called «hidden life» but also in His «public life» where the Mother becomes the faithful disciple and active collaborator of the Son (cf Mk 3:31-35; Mt 12:46-50; Lk 8:19-21; Jn 2:1-12; 19:25-27).

B. *A revealing presence*

Mary would be referred to as the Virgin *Mother* of the Lord, that is, her *presence* would essentially be *maternal* and at the same time her being a *Virgin Mother* is a *sign* which indicates the coming of the promised *Messiah*. This is how Matthew in the Gospel interpreted the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 7:14).

All this happened [the evangelist refers to the maternal virginity of Mary] to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: «The virgin shall be with child and give birth to a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel», a name which means «God with us » (Mt 1:22-23).

The virginal maternity, the first evangelical fact of Mary (cf Lk 1:35; Mt 1:18,20), establishes an intimate communion between her and her Son, be it on the physical and psycho-spiritual levels. As for every human mother, during the nine months of pregnancy, all the functions of Mary were oriented towards the creature in her womb and cooperated in a marvelous way in his human formation. Jesus lived, breathed, fed, was nourished, and grew in and through her. The Son of God formed one flesh and one blood with His human Mother. Mary is the Mother of Jesus in the true and authentic sense. Normally, both the father and mother cooperate in the human generation of a child; in the case of Jesus, the human dimension of His being is all Mary's, the Mother who collaborated fully with the miraculous action of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation of the Son of God.¹⁰

The angel told Mary: «The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called the Son of God» (Lk 1:35).

Mary was engaged to Joseph but before they lived together, she was found to be with child through the power of the Holy Spirit... «Joseph, son of David, have no fear about taking Mary as your wife. It is by the Holy Spirit that she has conceived this child» (Mt 1:18,20).

¹⁰ Cf PIZZARELLI A., *La presenza di Maria*, op. cit., 20-21.

The intervention of the Holy Spirit in Mary in the incarnation marks the «fullness of time» (Gal 4:4) and from that moment on the mysterious relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit has never been broken.

The presence of Mary, during and after the birth of Jesus and today, continues to be maternal and sacramental, that is, an effective sign through which humanity encounters Him (cf Mt 2:11,13,14,20,21; Lk 2:12,16,34). Maternity created a profound and permanent communion between Jesus and Mary.

C. A feminine, maternal and educative presence

The human identity and specific vocation of Mary is expressed in the anthropological reality of her being a «woman». Mary of Nazareth, as the Gospel presents her:

is a woman who, while completely devoted to the will of God, was far from being a timidly submissive person or one whose piety was repellent to others; on the contrary, she was a woman who gave her active and responsible consent, not to the solution of a contingent problem but to that event of world importance', as the Incarnation of the Word has been rightly called (cf Lk 1:26-38). She was a woman who did not hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions (cf Lk 1:51-53). She is a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile (cf Mt 2:13-23). She is a Mother not exclusively concerned with her own divine Son but rather as a woman whose action helped to strengthen the apostolic community's faith in Christ (cf Jn 2:1.12) and whose maternal role was extended and became universal on Calvary (cf Jn 19:25-27).¹¹

Mary, woman of Nazareth and Mother of Jesus, is the full realization of «what is characteristic of a woman», of «what is feminine» (MD 5), that is, the capacity to receive with love «the human person whom God entrusts to her in a special way» (MD 30). The Latin American Bishops in the Document of Puebla referred to Mary as «the guarantee of feminine greatness» as she indicates the specific way of being a woman through the «the giftness of self to others», capable of «spiritualizing the flesh and at the same time, incarnating the spirit».¹²

¹¹ MC 37.

¹² TERCERA CONFERENCIA GENERAL DEL EPISCOPADO LATINO-AMERICANO, *La evangelización en el presente y en el futuro de América Latina*, Document of Puebla, CELAM 1979, n.299; Italian translation a cura dell'Ed. Missionaria Italiana, Bologna 1979.

To God who invites her to participate actively in His plan of salvation, Mary responded «*with her totally human and feminine I*» (RM 13) and with her characteristic feminine touch. From the Annunciation she began to exercise an active influence on Christ, her Son, educating and helping Him grow with an integral and balanced personality. In the months of pregnancy, in the event of birth, in the hidden and public life, her feminine and maternal presence contributed significantly to the human growth of Jesus.

In the second chapter of the Lukan Infancy narrative, the exegete A. Serra, sees in the joyful tidings announced by the angel to the shepherds, a parallelism between verse 12: «Let this be a *sign* to you: in a *manger* you will find an *infant* wrapped in *swaddling clothes*», and verse 16: «They went in haste and found *Mary and Joseph*, and the *infant* lying in the *manger*».¹³ The «*sign*» (v.12) is the «*infant lying in the manger*» (vv.12,16). An important element underlined by A. Serra, consists in the parallel between the «*swaddling clothes*» in v.12, and «*Mary and Joseph*» in v.16.

An «*infant wrapped in swaddling clothes*» is a sign that the little one is surrounded with love. Indications of this could be noted in some books of the Old Testament: «In *swaddling clothes* and with constant care I was nurtured» (Wis 7,4); «And who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb; when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its *swaddling bands*?» (Jb 38:8-9). Not to be covered with swaddling clothes is a sign of abandonment, as the prophet Ezekiel notes to the *unfaithful Israel*: «As for your birth, the day you were born your navel cord was not cut; you were neither washed with water nor anointed, nor were you rubbed with salt, nor swathed with *swaddling clothes*» (Ez 16:4).

The infant Jesus wrapped with *swaddling clothes*, is therefore a sign of the parental solicitude with which Mary and Joseph surrounded their little son, in order that «he may grow steadily in wisdom, age and grace before God and man» (Lk 2:52).

A study of the marian references in the New Testament points to Mary as an active collaborator with God and not just as a mere obser-

¹³ Cf SERRA A., *Maria di Nazaret. Una fede in cammino*, Milano, Edizioni Paoline 1993, 23-26.

ver.¹⁴ She did not only collaborate with the Holy Spirit in generating Christ physically nor the Church supernaturally, but hers is a true motherhood which involves her whole being in bringing forth and nurturing life. Her humble and maternal service is a unique and typical presence which has left an indelible mark on the mystery of salvation.

The dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* (n.61) refers to this aspect of the mystery of Mary with these words:

[Mary] was the gracious Mother of the divine Redeemer here on earth, and above all others in a singular way the generous associate and humble handmaid of the Lord. She conceived, brought forth, and nourished Christ, she presented Him to the Father in the temple, shared her Son's sufferings as he died on the Cross. 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. For this reason, she is a Mother to us in the order of grace (LG 61).

An important aspect of the maternal presence of Mary in Jesus is her educative role. Pope Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Signum magnum* (May 13, 1967) affirmed this fact with the following words:

Just as every human mother cannot limit her role to the generation of a new person, but should extend it to the nourishing and educative functions of the child, such was how the Blessed Virgin Mary acted [towards her Son Jesus].¹⁵

To speak of the educative action of Mary is to admit the human evolution in Jesus, who «though in the form of God ... emptied himself, being born in the likeness of men» (Phil 2:6-7). The «I» of the Second Person of the Trinity, in the divine nature, lives as God while in the human nature lives, thinks and feels as man.¹⁶

While one can be aware of the complexity of the argument on the growth of Jesus as man, one cannot deny that Jesus as true man had a human «conscience» similar to every person and was marked by a progressive advancement towards a more enlightened awareness of self and a fuller knowledge of God and of others.¹⁷

¹⁴ On *marian presence* see the study done by A. PIZZARELLI, *La presenza di Maria nella vita della Chiesa*, op. cit., specifically that of Chapter I (pp.15-70), where the author presented a biblical and theological reflection on the presence of Mary in the life of Jesus and in the life of the primitive Church.

¹⁵ *Signum magnum*, in AAS 59 (1967) 467.

¹⁶ Cf FORTE B., *Gesù di Nazareth. Storia di Dio, Dio della storia*, Roma, Ed. Paoline 1981, 195-221.

¹⁷ Cf RAHNER K., *Saggi di Cristologia e Mariologia*, Roma, Ed. Paoline 1965, 199-238.

The interior growth of Christ was nourished by three realities: the mystical intimacy with the Father in prayer; the meditation of Sacred Scriptures and the daily contact with his surroundings and with people, especially with His Mother. The life of Jesus was concretized historically, in a manner dependent on the facts and events of his daily experience. As man He acquired full self-awareness gradually and learned from others through a continuous exercise of His interior and exterior faculties.¹⁸ In this context, one can understand the educative role of Mary in the human growth of Jesus.

However, it is also important to note that the educative presence between Jesus and Mary was reciprocal and in that exists the essential difference between their relationship and all other mother-child relationships. The Son determines the life of the Mother. Jesus was «obedient» to Mary and under her and Joseph's parental care, He «grew up in wisdom, age and grace before God and people» (Lk 2:51-52). However, the awareness of His messianic identity was alive in Him as He revealed through the response He gave Mary and Joseph who were surprised by the unusual behavior of their twelve year old son when they lost Him in the Temple on the occasion of the annual Passover feast of the Jews.

To Mary's astonished remark: «Son, why have you done this to us? You see that your father and I have been searching for you in sorrow», Jesus replied: «Why did you search for me? Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?» (Lk 2:48-49). Mary and Joseph «did not grasp what He said to them» (Lk 2:50). The Mother, who in this occasion and everytime the words and behavior of Her Son became mysterious and incomprehensible, «kept all these things in memory» (Lk 2:51b).¹⁹

In Nazareth, Mary learned to immerse herself in the knowledge of the mystery of Jesus and to place herself in His school to learn how to become His future companion in the work of redemption. For thirty years, in work and in prayer, in joy and in sorrow, in the family environment of His home in Nazareth, the Messiah matured waiting for His

¹⁸ Cf PIZZARELLI A., *La presenza di Maria*, op. cit., 34.

¹⁹ Mary's faith developed through her docility to the action of the Holy Spirit and through her characteristic attitude of «treasuring in her heart» the *enigmatic events, words and gestures* of Her Son Jesus. For an exegetical and theological reflection on the verse, see SERRA A., *Sapienza e contemplazione di Maria secondo Luca 2,19.51b*, Roma, Edizioni Marianum, 1982.

«hour»; at His side, His Mother also matured in the understanding of the same «hour» which would also become hers as the «new Eve» near the «new Adam» in the work of salvation.²⁰

The Virgin is not only the Mother who educates the Son, but also the listening disciple and creature completely open to divine action. Mary penetrated gradually the true identity of Jesus to whom she is linked in body and spirit. Day by day she becomes ever more conformed to the image of the Son (cf Rom 8:29) for, in this case, «the Son is the measure of the Mother and not the Mother the measure of the Son».²¹

3.3.3. MARY'S *PRESENCE* IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Mary's presence is a consoling and unchangeable reality in the bimillennial history of the Church. The mystery of the Visitation (cf Lk 1:39-56) is a perennial experience of humanity since Mary, from the visit initiated at Ain Karim to her relative Elizabeth, has not stopped spiritually visiting the world and continues to offer to each man and woman and to every people of every age Jesus Christ, Her Son, our Brother and Savior.

Pope John Paul II, in the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, referred explicitly fourteen times to the *presence* of Mary understood to be vital communion and an efficacious influence for the salvation of God's people.²² He specified not only that the presence of Mary finds many differ-

²⁰ Cf PIZZARELLI A., *La presenza di Maria*, op. cit., 37.

²¹ SCHMAUS M., *Dogmatica cattolica*, vol. II, Torino, Marietti 1970, 401.

²² References on the *presence* of Mary in *Redemptoris Mater*: as active and exemplary *presence* (n.1); as a *presence* in the midst of Israel... a *presence* so discreet as to pass almost unnoticed ... a unique *presence* of the Mother of Christ in the history (n.3); as discreet but essential *presence* [in the Incarnation and during Pentecost] which indicates the path of the «birth from the Holy Spirit» (n.24); as a continuous maternal *presence* in the Church (n.24); as a *presence* which finds many different expressions in our day, just as it did throughout Church history (n.28); speaking of a specific «geography» of faith and of marian devotion [this refers to all those special places of pilgrimage where the People of God seek to meet the Mother of God] one tries to find a strengthening of their own faith, within the radius of the maternal *presence* of her «who believed» (n.28); as a permanent *presence* in the whole reality of the salvific mystery (n.31).

Referring to the marian icons, they are considered to be images which witness to the faith and spirit of prayer of that people, who sense the *presence* and protection of the Mother of God (n.33). Mary's role as Mother constitutes a real dimension of her *presence* in the saving mys-

ent expressions in our day as it did throughout the Church's history but that it also has a wide sphere of influence:

Through the faith and piety of individual believers; through the traditions of Christian families or *domestic churches*, of parish and missionary communities, religious institutes and dioceses; through the radiance and attraction of the great shrines ... (RM 28).

He referred to the marian sanctuaries as a *specific* geography of faith and marian devotion,

where the People of God seek to meet the Mother of God in order to find, within the radius of the *maternal presence* of her who believed, a strengthening of their own faith (RM 28).

It is in the ecclesial journey or pilgrimage through space and time, and even more through the history of souls, as the Pope underlined,

that Mary is present, as the one who is «blessed because she believed» (RM 25). For in Mary's faith, first at the Annunciation and then fully at the foot of the Cross, an interior space was reopened within humanity which the eternal Father can fill «with every spiritual blessing» (Ef 1:3). It is the space «of the new and eternal covenant» and it continues to exist in the Church, which in Christ is «a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind» (RM 28).

A. A pneumatological presence

Luke, author of both the Gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles, paralleled Mary at Nazareth during the Annunciation where she received the call to become the Mother of the Son of God:

The angel went on to say to her: "Do not fear, Mary. You have found favor with God ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called the Son of God ..." (cf Lk 1, 26-37).

and Mary in the Cenacle during Pentecost:

Together they [the apostles] devoted themselves to constant prayer. There were some women in their company, and *Mary the Mother of Jesus*, and his brothers.

tery of Christ and of the Church (n.38). The Pope, following the orientation of the Second Vatican Council desires to emphasize the special *presence* of the Mother of God in the mystery of Christ and His Church (n.48). In the *presence* of the Mother of Christ we feel that we are true brothers and sisters within the messianic people (n.50). On note 47 a reference is made to the well-known passage of Origen on the *presence* of Mary and John on Calvary.

When the day of Pentecost came it found them gathered in one place...Tongues as of fire appeared, which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:14; 2:1,3-4).

Regarding this parallel, A. Amato comments:

When in Lk 1:35 the Holy Spirit descends on Mary in view of the realization of the mystery of the incarnation, in the Acts he descends on the apostles, in view of the realization of the mystery of the Church, in whose root there is also the presence of Mary, to indicate the indissoluble link of Mary to the Spirit and, through the Spirit, to Christ and to the Church.²³

The spiritual motherhood of Mary continues, without interruption, from her consent at the Annunciation to a consent sustained at the foot of the cross to the eternal fulfilment of all the elect:

Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us gifts of eternal salvation. By her maternal charity, she cares for the brethren of her Son, who still journey on earth surrounded by dangers and difficulties, until they are led into their blessed home. Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix (LG 62).

The tradition of the Church has gradually become conscious of this presence and with the help of some Fathers of the Church, it has been explained in the light of the paschal mystery and the glorification of Mary in body and soul. She is invisible but not absent and therefore it is possible to trace her presence.

One of the Fathers of the Church who has written on the presence of the glorious Virgin is German of Constantinople (+ 733). In one of his writings, he affirmed:

You visit everyone and guard each one, O Mother of God. Even if our eyes can not see you, O Holy One, you live in the midst of us and manifest yourself in various ways to whoever is worthy of you. The body, in fact, is not an impediment to

²³ AMATO A., *Spirito Santo*, in NDM 1332; Cf ID., *Lo Spirito Santo e Maria nella ricerca teologica odierna delle varie confessioni cristiane in Occidente*, in *Atti del 4 Simposio Mariologico Internazionale* (Roma, ottobre 1982), Roma-Bologna, Edizioni «Marianum»-Dehoniane 1984, 9-103. LANGELLA A., in his work *Maria e lo Spirito nella teologia cattolica post-conciliare* (Napoli, Editore M. D'Auria 1993), presents, with particular attention to the postconciliar ecumenical dialogue, the relationship between Mary and the Holy Spirit in the light of two characteristic exigencies of our time: the attention to the personalistic dimension and the symbolic sense.

the power and to the energy of the spirit, who certainly blows where it wants being immaterial. For this we believe that you, O Mother of God, walk in the midst of us. In truth, I repeat it with a joyful and grateful heart: you have left this world, but you did not go far away from the Christian people. You did not abandon this world that perishes, O incorruptible world, but you are nearer to those who invoke you and you make yourself present to those who faithfully look to you.²⁴

Mary's spiritual maternity transcends space and time and belongs to the universal history of the Church because she is always present with her powerful intercession, efficacious example, maternal assistance and solicitude. In fact, the maternal presence of the Mother of God will remain indissolubly linked with the mystery of the Mystical Body, of whose Head it is written: «Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever» (Heb 13:8).²⁵

Don Bosco, in his booklet *Maraviglie della Madre di Dio*, wrote that «[...] an experience of eighteen centuries makes us witness, in a luminous way how Mary has continued in heaven and with greater efficacy, what she had began on earth: her mission as Mother of the Church and Help of Christians».

This is the conviction of innumerable men and women who have experienced the beneficent presence of the Mother of God. Testimonies from vastly different geographical areas and from diverse historical periods affirm how the presence of Mary finds various interpretations in marvelously varying but continuous references, concepts, symbols and terms. While terminology changes and testimonies vary in their value, nevertheless they serve to express the objective truth of the *presence* of Mary in the life of the Church.²⁶

Between the assumption of the Virgin Mother in body and soul and her presence in our life, there exists a link of causality which is impossible to ignore: if Mary had not yet been risen by the Spirit of God to the image of the risen Christ, it would not be possible for her to reveal her living and actual presence in its fullness in the Church.

In our religious language, the word «heaven» is linked with the resurrection of Christ and with the assumption of Mary. What is «heaven»? And what do really mean when we speak of «Mary assumed in heaven»?

²⁴ GERMAN OF CONSTANTINOPLE, *Oratio in Dormitionem B. Mariae I*, in PG 98, 346.

²⁵ PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Signum magnum*, May 13, 1967, in AAS 59 (1967) 474.

²⁶ PIZZARELLI A., *La presenza di Maria nella vita della Chiesa*, op. cit., 71-116

According to A. Serra the biblical tradition of the New Testament confers on the word «heaven» an essentially *Christological* dimension. For us, it is neither a place, nor a space. It is simply a person, the person of the *risen Christ*. He is the center towards which our faith is drawn. Strictly speaking in fact, the Christian does not believe in life, in love, in peace, in death, in the resurrection... but in Christ, who is Life, Love, Joy, Peace: «*I am the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Resurrection, the Bread of life, the Door...*» (cf Jn 14:6; 11:25; 11:51; 6:51; 10:9...). For us Christ is dead and is risen. He is, therefore, our «heaven».²⁷ Two known theologians confirm this view. For L. Boff, «heaven is the situation of all those who find themselves in the love of God and love of Christ»,²⁸ while for J. Ratzinger: «Man is in heaven in the measure that he is in Christ, and he finds the place of his being man in being God's».²⁹

Our intimacy or incorporation with the risen Christ, our Paradise, our «eternal life» begins from the moment we entrust ourselves to Him, welcoming His Word. Jesus, Himself assures us: «This is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ» (Jn17:3).

This truth has an important consequence in our christian ethics. The experience of heaven begins when one opens oneself, in faith, to Christ. While the perfection of our immersion in the risen Lord will come about only in our final exodus from this world, the fact remains that, this experience begins now.

In the light of what has been said above, to speak of Mary's assumption into heaven, is to affirm that she has reached the fullness of life, in Christ and in the Church. The risen Christ is the heaven of Mary. Perfect communion with her glorious Son is her heavenly beatitude. In the previous chapters I have shown how Mary brought forth from her womb and cared for Him whom the heavens could not contain. With the incarnation the new covenant began, God chose to be the «God with us». With His resurrection, Jesus reveals that the Father, from whom He comes and to whom He returns, is the mystical womb who welcomes the entire humanity for eternity. Mary, assumed in heaven, is the exemplary realiza-

²⁷ Cf SERRA A., *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, op. cit., 112-116.

²⁸ BOFF L., *Vita oltre la morte. Il futuro, la festa e la contestazione del presente*, Assisi, Cittadella 1980², 58.

²⁹ RATZINGER J., *Escatologia. Morte e vita futura*, Assisi, Cittadella 1979, 243.

tion of this promise. Mary of Nazareth -daughter of Eve and our sister- was brought by Her risen Son to the heart of the Trinity, in all her creaturely reality.³⁰ The Church also becomes the heaven of Mary, in as much as all humanity, is assembled and united in the risen Christ. His communion with the Father, in the Spirit, is the new Temple where the multitude of God's dispersed children are welcomed. The world then becomes «Church», in the sense of a «reunion-assembly». Once we enter into communion with the risen Christ, the interpersonal links that we have established in our earthly life and the affections which have united us with our loved ones, will not be lost in the world that will come. They will be transformed by the divine Spirit transmitted by the risen Christ.

In the virtue of such fullness, Mary assumed in heaven remains the spouse of Joseph and Mother of Jesus, for all eternity. And the spiritual maternity towards humanity which Jesus conferred on her is enriched by the energy of the Holy Spirit. She is therefore present in all the events, even the most insignificant, of each one of us, her sons and daughters, with ineffable tenderness and with the characteristics of a glorified body. In her apparitions (at least those that have been approved by the Church), we notice how the Blessed Virgin often appears to the little ones with gentleness, with words of encouragement and with a constant message: Christ who is risen calls us to conversion. He, the Living One, desires to share with every creature the gift of eternal life.³¹

The pneumatological presence of Mary assumed into heaven is our anticipation of such a promise for She «shines forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (cf Pet 3:10), a sign of sure hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God» (LG 68). The awareness of the glorious condition of the Virgin should not inhibit the way Christians think of Mary. They should enter into dialogue with her through a simple, filial and persevering prayer: only then the beneficial effects of a marian presence will reverberate in his/her heart. He/she will experience the nearness of the Virgin in the various stages of his/her spiritual itinerary and will assimilate her attitudes, finally reaching an intimate identification with her.

With this identification with the Mother of Jesus a total «Yes» to the Son, docility to the Holy Spirit and filial communion with the Father bursts forth. At the same time, the Christian commits himself/herself in

³⁰ Cf SERRA A., *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, op. cit., 123-124.

³¹ Cf *Ibid.*, 124-125.

his/her historical context: to protest against injustices, to liberate the poor and work for the promotion of the weak, to give attention to the needs of people, and to be openness to life and to transcendent values.³²

B. *Maternal and educative presence*

The tradition of the Church has acknowledged in Mary the the new Eve, «Mother of all the living» (Gen 3,20). In *Jn 19:25-27*, Jesus from the Cross reveals to Mary the call to extend her maternity to every disciple of His. This biblical passage gives the historical frame of the spiritual maternity of Mary towards every believer. In the Annunciation (Lk 1:26-38) and during Pentecost (Acts 1:13-14), Luke underlined the indissoluble link between Mary and the Holy Spirit in the incarnation of Word and in the birth of the Church of Christ. In both instances, the maternal and active presence of Mary mirrors the free and responsible consent of a human person to God's call to collaborate with His plan of salvation.

The Second Vatican Council through the dogmatic constitution *Lumen gentium* explained the Church's doctrine on the relationship of Mary and the Church (cf LG 60-65). Its reflection proceeded with a threefold consideration on this relationship: (a) Mary is *Mother* of humanity in the order of grace (cf LG 60- 62); (b) Mary is the *Figure*, that is the living representation of the essence of the Church (cf LG 63-64); (c) Mary is the *Model* of virtue for the community of the faithful (cf LG 65).³³

After recalling the principle of the unique mediation of Christ, the Council affirmed that the maternal function of Mary for the salvation of humanity co-exists with the unique mediation of Christ and in no way obscures nor diminishes but rather, shows its efficacy (cf LG 60). Mary's salvific function is Christocentric: it is derived from and leads to Christ. In the regeneration of humanity Mary manifests the salvific power of Christ and is at the service of Christ's communion with believers.³⁴

Pope Paul VI, in the postconciliar apostolic exhortation *Signum magnum*,³⁵ continued to deepen the spiritual maternity embodied in the title

³² PIZZARELLI A., *La presenza di Maria*, 205-206.

³³ Cf DE FIORES S., *Maria nel mistero di Cristo e della Chiesa*. Commento al capitolo mariano del Concilio Vaticano II, Roma, Edizioni Monfortane 1984³, 90-145.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

³⁵ PAUL VI, *Signum magnum*. Apostolic Exhortation, May 13, 1967, in AAS 59 (1967) 465-475.

of Mary, *Mother of the Church*.³⁶ In fact, the central theme of his letter was to demonstrate «the indissoluble link between the spiritual maternity of Mary and the duties of the faithful towards her who is Mother of the Church»³⁷. He then demonstrated how the spiritual maternity of Mary is founded on her divine maternity, her close association with Jesus as disciple and collaborator in His salvific mission and her exemplary practice of virtue.³⁸ He specified two ways through which Mary exercises her maternal mediation towards the Church: first, through her «prayer inspired by ardent charity»,³⁹ she intercedes as «Advocate, Helper, Benefactress and Mediatrix» (LG 62) for her children who are still pilgrims on earth;⁴⁰ secondly, through her «example»,⁴¹ for she «shines forth to the whole community of the elect as the model of virtues» (LG 65).⁴²

One of the enrichments of the papal document is to have linked the spiritual maternity of Mary to her educative function. With analogical language, the apostolic exhortation underlines that the role of every human mother cannot be limited to the generation of a new person, «but should extend to the nourishing and educative functions of the child, such was how the Blessed Virgin Mary acted [towards her Son Jesus]».⁴³

³⁶ Cf GREGORIO M., *La maternità spirituale di Maria nell'esortazione apostolica «Signum magnum»*, *op. cit.*, 69-92.

³⁷ *Signum magnum*, in AAS 59 (1967) 446-447.

³⁸ Cf *Ibid.*, 467-468.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 468.

⁴⁰ Mary, as *Mother of the Church*, participates actively in her life. She is not far away, nor is she a static image which we must copy. The category of intercession helps us look at her spiritual maternity, in a way more alive and personal. At Cana, «the third day», the Mother of Jesus shows her solicitude to the spouses whose wedding is a figure of the wedding of Christ-Bridegroom with the Church- Bride. Even today, on the «third day» of the Church who lives and walks in the light of the risen Christ, the Virgin Mother continuous to be attentive and vigilant over her sons and daughters whom Jesus had entrusted to Her from the Cross: «Woman, here is your son». Cf SERRA A., *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, *op. cit.*, 34-36.

⁴¹ Cf *Signum magnum*, in AAS 59 (1967) 468-470.

⁴² A. SERRA, regarding Mary's exemplarity writes: If Jesus indicates in His Mother, the «Woman-Mother» of all His disciples, that means He intends to present Her to the Church as *example-type-form* of evangelical life. Jesus, Himself invites us «look at Her»: «Look [in Greek *ide*] your Mother!» (Jn 19:26). As such the beloved disciple welcomed her. Whoever wants to have the characteristics of the beloved disciple of Lord should do the same. Cf *Id.*, *Dimensioni mariane del mistero pasquale*, *op. cit.*, 32-34.

⁴³ *Signum magnum*, in AAS 59 (1967) 467. On the *presence of Mary in the life of Jesus* I had deepened the aspect of Mary's educative role towards Her divine Son, See pp. 120-124.

Modern anthropological science confirms the above affirmation and underlines that maternity is a complex concept and cannot be reduced to a determined biological behavior. E. Marchisa underlines that:

Not every woman, for the mere fact that she has physically begotten a person can be called a mother. On the contrary, a woman can be called a mother, even if she has not physically begotten a child.⁴⁴

M. Stevani, in the light of some psychoanalytical and interactive-cognitive studies, noted that maternity is not to be taken for granted as something spontaneous in a woman, but is above all a point of arrival in the evolutive process of a woman. She added that:

Maternity, from the psychological point of view, can not be restricted to its biological function, but should be considered in a wider sense to the capacity to generate [life], that is, the capacity to care for others, directly or indirectly; maternity, understood in this sense, is an attitude which promotes life, independently from physical generation, and is capable of expressing the peculiar values of a human culture.⁴⁵

Mary is the spiritual Mother of the faithful not only because she participated in the redemptive mysteries of the life of Christ (LG 61), but continuous, even today to «cooperate with the love of a mother in the generation and formation» of the faithful (LG 63). This signifies that Mary, with maternal affection collaborates with the Holy Spirit in generating the life of Christ in every human person.

Mary does not only cooperate in communicating the life of grace but in her maternal role she accompanies the faithful in the growth and maturation of the same life until Christ becomes fully formed in them (cf Gal 4:19). Mary's motherhood towards every believer, as it was for Christ, is educative. She does not lead the faithful to a state of spiritual infantilism, but aims to help them become adult, responsibly committed Christians.

M. Marchi, in a study on the place of Mary in the educative charism of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, explained that educative

⁴⁴ MARCHISA E., *La donna alla ricerca di se stessa*, in COLOMBO A. (a cura di), *Verso l'educazione della donna oggi*, Roma, LAS 1989, 238.

⁴⁵ STEVANI M., *La maternità in una prospettiva evolutiva*, in *Rivista di Scienze dell'Educazione* 26 (1988), 81.

presence of Mary in the life of every human person is *exemplary, typical* and *efficient*.⁴⁶

Mary is *exemplar* in the educative mission. To take Her as a model of the mother-educator, is an indispensable aspect for every Christian educator, since her educative presence in the life of Jesus and of the Church becomes a *norm* or a *paradigm*: the contents and the method of which should «reproduce» the contents and the method used by Mary in the education of Jesus.

Mary is the *type* of every educator for in Her «the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle (Cf. Eph 5:27)» (LG 65). She is the model of that motherly love which should animate all who join in the Church's apostolic mission (as for example every Christian educator), for the regeneration of humanity (cf LG 65).

Finally, the educative presence of Mary is an *efficient cause*, that is, an active and permanent role in the education of every Christian and of every man/woman. Whether one knows it or not, Mary has an educative role both with the educators and the disciples. However, a difference exists when an educator or a disciple discovers, welcomes and entrusts himself/herself to her maternal help; she will show them the better way to conform and to imitate Her Son.

Marchi concluded stating that to find Mary, as an active subject in education, one must situate her in a pedagogical context where education is considered to be a process of personalization:

Mary educates, personalizes because she is the most powerful in intercession, for She knows what to ask God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to realize the christian personality in her sons/daughters. She is the human person most powerful in interceding because she is the most fulfilled human person.⁴⁷

3.3.4. MARY'S PRESENCE IN THE GENESIS AND IN THE GROWTH OF THE INSTITUTE

It is essential to gather from our tradition the fundamental elements which define the special role of Mary in the foundation of the Institute

⁴⁶ Cf MARCHI M., *Il ruolo di Maria nell'azione educativa delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in *Madre ed Educatrice*, op. cit., 177-179.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

and in the vocation of the DMHC, those elements which have been codified in the Constitutions.

I am speaking here of the singular intervention and the place occupied by Mary in such a vocation, over and above that which is common to every disciple of the Lord. While it is true that «every initial influence of the Blessed Virgin towards humanity is not born from a necessity but from God's blessing» (LG 60), we know however that, presupposing such a divine blessing, «Mary should find herself in the events of the daily life of the Church» (RH 22), and therefore in that of every creature, above all of those who, following Christ more closely, have embraced that «virginal and poor way of life, which Christ the Lord chose for himself and whom His Virgin Mother embraced» (LG 46).⁴⁸

In fact, the document on *Consecrated life* affirmed that

the relationship with Holy Mary, which every faithful has as a consequence of his/her union with Christ, results in being more evident in the life of consecrated persons, [...] In all the Institutes of consecrated life there is the conviction that the presence of Mary has a fundamental importance in consecrated souls, be it for its consistence, unity and development of the whole community.⁴⁹

A. *The Institute was founded «through a gift of the Holy Spirit and the direct intervention of Mary» (art.1)*

The Institute, conceived by the divine action of the Holy Spirit and with the direct intervention of Mary, was born in the womb of the Church through the human collaboration of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello to participate in the salvific mission of Christ, making of every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians a sign and an expression of God's all-embracing love for the young.

The *direct intervention* of Mary is a theological affirmation which permeates not only the nature and mission of the Institute but also the vocation of the DMHC, that is, her being and her action among the young.⁵⁰ It expresses Mary's presence in the genesis and growth of

⁴⁸ COLLI C., *Patto della nostra alleanza con Dio*, Roma, Istituto FMA 1984, 431-465.

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata*, in AAS 88 (1996), n.28.

⁵⁰ Cf POSADA M.E., *Carisma educativo e identità vocazionale della Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in CAVAGLIÀ P. - CORE del P. (a cura di), *Un progetto di vita per l'educazione della donna*, Roma, LAS 1994, 63-64.

the Institute, intimately participating in its life as an integral part of its charism: a singular presence whose significance has not yet been totally understood, but which above all contributes in giving a profound marian mark to the whole Institute, determining a particular style of life and action.⁵¹

The *intervention* of Mary is linked in a peculiar manner to the *genesis* of the Institute. The Constitutions refer to her as *Inspirer, Mother* and *Teacher* (cf art.4). Her maternal intervention is not of the same nature but subordinate to the divine action of the Holy Spirit and moves in a double polarity: the Trinity in whom she lives and moves and humanity in need of help. During the time of the Church, from Pentecost to the parusia and in the different periods of the history of the Church, she intervenes before God and before humanity. Her interventions speak of a specific relationship with the Holy Spirit, who since the incarnation of the Word, has acted in and through her in a singular way.

Mary, dwelling place of the Trinity, collaborated actively in the incarnation of the Son of God at Nazareth and in the birth of the mystical body of Christ in Jerusalem. She continues to intervene directly in those *visible structures* which in the Church are born through a gift of the Holy Spirit. Such is the case of the Institute, founded by Don Bosco to be a «living monument» of gratitude to her.

B. *Mary most Holy was the Inspirer of the Institute ... (cf art.4)*

Don Bosco was not only moved by human motivation in founding the Institute of the DMHC, but as in every other project of his, it was born as a form of service in the Church through God's initiative and Mary's inspiration. Here I would like to recall some aspects related to the marian inspiration of the Institute.⁵²

(i). *Father Francesco Cerruti* (1844-1917), one of the first Salesians who at that time was the General Scholastic Councillor of the Congregation and was responsible for closely following the Institute of the

⁵¹ Cf COLLI C., *Patto della nostra alleanza*, 431-465.

⁵² I have drawn the relevant points regarding the marian inspiration of the Institute from the article of DELEIDI A., *La dimensione mariana della vocazione delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice alle origini dell'Istituto*, in MANELLO M.P. (a cura di), *Madre ed Educatrice*, op. cit., 27-31.

DMHC, testified to have heard Don Bosco recount that in an audience with Pope Pius IX, the Holy Father told him:

You have up to now thought of boys, why don't you do for girls, who themselves are needy, the same thing you are doing for boys? Don Bosco responded to the Pope saying: I have this intention but I wanted to do things, one at a time, first to put in order what was needed for the boys, then take steps regarding the girls; so much more because I feel the urgency to found a religious association which will be named after Mary Help of Christians. We owe so much gratitude to this good Mother: for this reason the Congregation of the DMHC will rise, that it maybe a «living monument» of filial gratitude to her.⁵³

While it is not possible to determine exactly the time when Don Bosco began to think of founding a religious feminine congregation, the tradition of the Institute refers to some *dreams* of Don Bosco as mysterious signs indicative of divine inspiration, pointing to a date around 1862.

(ii). *Father Giovanni B. Francesia* (1838-1930) was one of the first students of Don Bosco who entered the Salesian Society and was distinguished as a writer and spiritual director. He attested that Don Bosco recounted twice that, in a dream, he saw in Piazza Vittorio in Turin, a group of abandoned girls shouting and running after him begging him to take care of them. Don Bosco, while refusing and trying to defend himself, saw a noble Lady appear and as she entrusted them to him said: «Take care of them, they are my daughters».⁵⁴ This dream of Don Bosco was reported only by Father Francesia in the biography of Mother Mazzarello which he wrote and as such is included in the edited *Chronicles of the Institute*, but not in the original manuscript of the *Chronicles*.

(iii). A more documented and significant *dream known as the red horse* (dated July 5 or 6, 1862), where Don Bosco, refusing the proposal of Marchioness Giulia Barolo to take care of the young girls of her institute, declared what he himself desired to do: «I should work that Christ's blood should not shed in vain, be it for boys, as it is for girls».⁵⁵

(iv). This was within the same period of the construction of the *Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco*, the same years when

⁵³ SACRA CONGREGATIO RITUUM, Taurinen, *Beatificationis et canonizationis ven. Servi Dei Sac. Johannis Bosco, Summarium super dubio* N. III, 141.

⁵⁴ FRANCESIA G.B., *Suor Maria Mazzarello e i primi due lustri delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, S. Benigno Canavese, Tipografia Salesiana 1906, 212.

⁵⁵ MB VII, 217-218.

Don Bosco's vocational choice to work for the salvation of young people continued to develop and expand, inserting and involving him evermore in the often dramatic situation of the Church and the new evolving socio-political and religious reality of Italy.

Don Bosco knew several religious institutions in Turin dedicated to the assistance of needy young girls, for instance: the *Rifugio* founded and directed by the above mentioned generous noble lady, the Marchioness Giulia Barolo, and the feminine institution directed by Sr. Maria Luisa Angelica Clarac, a Sister of Charity to whom Don Bosco himself suggested to found a feminine oratory.⁵⁶ In the Process of beatification of Canon Giuseppe Allamano of Turin, Founder of the Fathers and Sisters of Consolation, reference was made to the fact that Don Bosco thought of asking the virtuous Lady Benedetta Savio, penitent of Don Cafasso (from 1849) and Directress of the Pre-School of Pescarmona in Castelnuovo d'Asti (from 1857) to be a possible collaborator for the foundation of the feminine Institute for the good of young girls.⁵⁷

(v). Don Bosco revealed clearly and formally his intention to his Salesians during the Chapter of the Oratory only on April 24, 1871, asking his councillors to reflect, to pray and after a month to express their opinion.⁵⁸

In the meantime, approximately ten years after their first encounter, a significant relationship had been established between Don Bosco and a group of young ladies belonging to the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, born in Mornese under the leadership of Angela Maccagno and promoted by Fr. Domenico Pestarino, parish priest of the place and who, in 1862, was accepted into the Salesian Society. Among the members of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate was Mary Domenica Mazzarello, the one who would become the cornerstone of the marian congregation to be founded by Don Bosco. The Institute of the DMHC was founded on August 5, 1872, feast of our Lady of Snow and also the day commemorating the dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

⁵⁶ Cf STELLA P., *Don Bosco nella storia della religiosità cattolica*, I: *Vita e opere*, Roma, LAS 1979, 189-192.

⁵⁷ Cf TUBALDO I., *Giuseppe Allamano. Il suo tempo, la sua vita, la sua opera*, Torino, Edizioni Missioni Consolata, 1982, 11-12.

⁵⁸ *MB* X, 594.

C. *Mary continues to be «Mother and Teacher»
of the Institute (cf art.4)*

1. *In Don Bosco*

The most profound aspect of the marian devotion of Don Bosco was not the zeal with which he spread the devotion to Mary Help of Christians who assured him of success of his apostolic projects, but his experience in a most singular way of the intervention of Mary as guide throughout his whole life and in the realization of his works. He himself admitted in the maturity of his life as father and apostle of the young that: «Up to now we have walked with certainty. We cannot be mistaken: Mary guides us».⁵⁹

Over and above the titles: Our Lady of Consolation, Mary Immaculate, Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco felt Mary as Mother. This is how Don Bosco's mother, Mamma Margherita inculcated in him the presence of Mary and this is how he transmitted it to his boys, to his spiritual sons and daughters. On his deathbed, it was not the invocation Immaculate or Help which he uttered, but the invocation «Mother, Mother... Mary most Holy, Mary, Mary...».⁶⁰ Precisely because she was felt as the most loving Mother, he nourished towards her an intense affection which was evident and from the tenderness with which he spoke of her.

In the dream of nine years old, Mary most Holy was entrusted to John Bosco and, through him, to all his sons and daughters, not only as *Mother*, but also as *Teacher*. The context of the dream clearly leaves this impression.

To the difficulties raised by little John, who felt himself unqualified for the mission entrusted to him, Jesus replied: «I will give you a teacher, under whose discipline you will become wise and without whom every wisdom becomes foolishness».⁶¹

Don Bosco felt Mary most Holy as a presence, a living person who, from his dream of nine years old when she was entrusted to him by Jesus as the *Teacher* in the art of winning the young «with kindness and charity», never ceased to assist him maternally in the realization of his work.

⁵⁹ MB XVIII, 435.

⁶⁰ STELLA P., *Don Bosco*, II 175; cf MB XVIII, 537.

⁶¹ MB I, 124.

As we consider Don Bosco and his work, we perceive all the more that that which characterized it was not only his mission of evangelization among the young, but his way of guiding them persuasively through the ways of the heart to the conviction of faith. The more we reflect more on his Preventive System, the more we discover through convergent lines that the science, of which Mary is the incomparable teacher, is the science of human heart, especially of the young's soul: the fine art of bringing the young to Christ through the ways of the heart. It is the wisdom, to which she guided him, by means of a discipline; it is the superior wisdom of love, without which every other wisdom becomes foolishness. Don Bosco's experience of Mary's maternal guidance in the mission to bring the young to Christ is prolonged in every son/daughter of Don Bosco, the model from whom one continuously draws inspiration for one's vocation to be a bearer of the love of God for the young, in the Salesian style.

As she was for Don Bosco, Mary should be a living and operative presence for the son/daughter of Don Bosco, enabling him/her to be full of Salesian loving-kindness, that is, full of attention for each person, humble service and generous help. It is a goodness without weakness and a tender affection without sentimental complications; it is great understanding, patience and indulgence.

A presence altogether exigent with the desire for the integral good of the young and not only to concede to what they like; the desire to bring them to Christ and not simply to beg their sympathy and their affection. It is an exigency which is not an imposition from on high nor from outside, but is born in the intimacy of the heart of the young which one gains through affection. It is an exigency which more than with words expresses itself with the testimony of life.

2. In Mother Mazzarello

From the succession of the marian titles which Mother Mazzarello venerated: Mary Immaculate, Sorrowful Mother, Help of Christians, one can see how in her spiritual journey the presence of Mary was deeply felt. Mary was for her a Mother to love, to follow and to whom she could entrust herself as she formed, with the Holy Spirit, Christ in the person of every Daughter. Mary was a Model to contemplate and to interiorize. As a Daughter of the Immaculate she learned from Mary total availabili-

ty to the action of the Holy Spirit; as a Daughter of the Sorrowful Mother, she intimately participated in the suffering of Christ which opened her to a universal spiritual maternity; and as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, she became in the womb of the Church the prolongation of a maternal and universal solicitude for the good of the young, especially the poorest and those most in danger.

However, over and above the titles, Mary was honored in Mornese as in Valdocco as Mother. In fact, the role of the Superior is intimately linked with continuing the maternal presence of Mary. The *Chronicles* narrate that Don Bosco, after the first profession of the DMHC in Mornese, pointed to Mary Mazzarello as the person responsible for the community and told the Sisters that he had nothing to add to their common joy in accepting her as their Superior except that they continue to be dependent on her, to listen and to obey her. Then he expressed the following words which have become part of the living tradition of the Institute and have been codified in the Constitutions. Referring to Mother Mazzarello, Don Bosco affirmed: «For now she will have the title of Vicar because the true Superior is our Lady!» (art.114).⁶²

Such was how Mother Mazzarello considered herself, an attitude which was not born solely from her profound humility but from her faith in the living, maternal and operative presence of Mary in the Institute and in every community. She had a precise conception of the Institute and of the particular role Mary plays in it, and of those who would exercise a service of authority. The Institute was born through Mary's direct intervention and therefore was a religious family where Mary would continue to be Mother and Teacher.

In such a *family* Mary is the *true Superior* because she is the *true Mother*. Whoever exercises a service of authority in it is none other than her vicar, not in the sense that she substitutes the Superior who is absent or who is incapable of exercising the office, but in the sense that the vicar renders visible Mary's presence and maternal action. No wonder Mother Mazzarello continually recommended the need for humility, for loving patience and for the spirit of service to those who would receive the responsibility of authority.⁶³

⁶² *Chronicle* I, 309.

⁶³ Cf COLLI C., *Patto della nostra alleanza con Dio*, 449.

Some testimonies include:

Sr. Enrichetta Sorbone testifies how Mother Mazzarello, considering our Blessed Mother to be the true Superior of the Institute «used to deposit the keys of the house at her feet every night».⁶⁴

After forming carefully those who would become the Superiors of the communities, one of Mother Mazzarello's last recommendations before sending them to their particular mission was to stress the importance of catechism for the young and humility, adding the following words: «Remember that the true Superior is our Lady».⁶⁵

The conviction of Mother Mazzarello that the Superior should be an extension of the maternal presence of Mary among the Sisters and among the young is the fruit, as we have seen in the preceding paragraphs, of a marian formation in her spiritual itinerary, from her childhood years at home, during her youth in the ecclesial environment of the parish of Mornese, and especially through the marian youth group of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

For Mother Mazzarello marian devotion, while in the simplicity of expressions imbibed from the popular religious piety of her times, was not merely an exterior manifestation but an interior configuration to Mary, dwelling place of the holy Triune God, free and conscious collaborator of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. In a conference to the Sisters she reminded them that they were «living images of our Lady»,⁶⁶ and in another conference given a year before her death she recommended: «Let us pray and behave in everything as if we would have our Lady present; and she is present even if we don't see her».⁶⁷

From the testimony of Mother Mazzarello we see how the process of identification with Mary [*we are living images of her*], is generated by a profound, permanent and unifying relationship with her, fruit of a filial attitude and a living faith in her maternal and operative presence.

3. *In the Institute*

In 1885, during Don Bosco's last visit to the Motherhouse of the DMHC, which was transferred from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato, the

⁶⁴ MACCONO, *Santa I*, 310.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁶⁶ *Chronicles III*, 192.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 267.

holy Founder left a very important memory with the Sisters during his conference. Here is how the *Chronicles* recount it:

«I want to tell you that our Lady loves you very, very much and is here among you. I want to say that our Lady is really here in this House; that she is pleased with you and that what she really wants of you is that you continue your present spirit of fervor. This is what our Lady really wishes ... I want to say that our Lady is really here, here among you! Our Lady is walking around in this House and is covering it with her mantle».

Then stretching out his arms and raising his tear-filled eyes it seemed as if he wanted to make us understand that he really saw our Lady all through the House as if it were her own and the whole House was under our Lady's mantle.⁶⁸

What was the spirit like that reigned in Nizza and which our Lady wished to be conserved? Sr. G. Capetti described it:

The house of Nizza, at that time the General House, was the central force of the life of the Institute. The community was composed of forty professed, forty-nine novices and twenty-five postulants who lived together as a big and well-ordered family, gathered together at the same altar and the same meals with the Superiors.

The roles were different but they were guided toward the same end, toward the works of the house and for the general good of the Institute. Even those who cultivate the garden or remained in the sewing room to fix the linen were interested in the boarders and in the formation of the postulants and novices not less than the teachers and assistants and offered sacrifices for them, in unity of mind and work.

During the familiar recreations, Mother shared the news and of urgent needs of the Institute which everyone was ready to commit themselves and to offer their personal contribution. Prayer was truly a perennial praise: there one could hear it being raised, as if in a soft choir, from the laboratory to the kitchen, from the laundry to the garden like waves filled with religiosity which flowed in and out of the house.

Passing to the more interior aspect of the community, one could see how life was marked by a spirit of austerity and of mortification, of simplicity and of joy. Sacrifice was not only welcomed but was searched for, flowered and was covered with a smile.

One lived with a spirit directed totally toward God; with the preoccupation of «remaining constantly in His presence, of growing in His love».

Memories of that time attest to the promptness of obedience, to a vigilant care of mutual charity and of the solicitude to repair the inevitable faults of the day.

⁶⁸ CAPETTI G., *Il cammino dell'Istituto nel corso di un secolo*, I, FMA, Esse Gi Esse, Roma 1972, 51-52.

There was an active commitment to observe the Rules; a high regard for silence.

The house vibrated with a missionary spirit, nourished by the departures for America, repeated year after year and by the letters from the Sisters far away and from Don Cagliero.

The *da mihi animas*, felt profoundly as a personal commitment, sustained them in their work and sacrifices and as they opened their intentions to an ever wider horizon for the reign of the kingdom of God.

And above all as a light of comfort, the filial love for Mary, tender and profound, was felt to be a sweet maternal presence, as Mother Mazzarello in her last conference of 1880 in Nizza: «... let us behave in everything as if we would have our Lady present; and we have her, even if we don't see her».

It could be said, therefore, that the life as it had been lived in Nizza mirrored the characteristics with which Don Bosco on August 15, 1879, at the end of the spiritual exercises in Turin, synthesized, saying: «... life of prayer, of work, of humility, of hiddenness and of sacrifice only for God and for souls, in imitation of the heavenly Mother and in order to participate more largely to her glory in heaven [...]».⁶⁹

On August 5, 1985, the Institute celebrated the centenary of Don Bosco's last visit at Nizza. Mother Marinella Castagno dedicated two circular letters to prepare for and deepen the event. She described four points to remember from the Don Bosco's last visit: the Constitutions, the Cross, doing good by working for the salvation of others, and Mary's presence.

Mother Marinella reminded each one that the presence of Mary would become evident if we continued to live with the same spirit that was so pleasing to her at Nizza. What was the spirit that reigned in Nizza?

In response to that question Mother Marinella launched a challenge: what is our marian face today? She added: «Don't you think that it is time to look at our marian devotion to renew the force and joy which render us courageous, capable of going out of ourselves, to face new situations, to be authentically her *Daughters*, to demonstrate to the young how beautiful and joyful it is to give ourselves, like her, totally to Christ to be fully available to the others?».⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 122-126.

⁷⁰ CASTAGNO M., *Lettera Circolare* 673, 24 luglio-agosto 1985 [pro-manuscripto].

CONCLUSIONS

The end of the eighteenth century to the twentieth century in the history of Church is a period where the presence of Mary was manifested in a special way. Both the new religious families and those of the old reformed orders willingly express their filial devotion to Mary. Around seven hundred feminine congregations founded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries bear the name of Mary. The reference to Mary expresses a spirituality which acknowledges her important role in the formation to sanctity and in the apostolic action as a kind of sacred agreement to collaborate with her in the saving mission of her Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.¹

Among the many religious congregations born within this period, is the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (August 5, 1872), considered by the Founder, Don Bosco «to be a religious Family that belongs entirely to Mary».

1. The *diachronical and synchronical analyses of the marian references in the Constitutions/ Regulations* of this religious institute, from the earliest manuscripts of 1878/1885 to the present edition of 1982, indicate a consistent and continuous presence of the marian dimension in its life and charism, a vital link to the fidelity and growth of its vocational identity and mission.

Notwithstanding the difference in mentality and language, the Constitutions have codified, not in a static sense but through a dynamic inculturation, the essential elements of its charism with the marian character emerging as one of the indispensable elements of its educative charism and spirituality.

References to Mary in the examined texts, specially those written before the Second Vatican Council, appear to be insignificant fragments at first glance but which if gathered together form the marian face of the Institute, that specific identity which characterizes it in the Church and in society.

¹ Cf KOEHLER TH., *Storia della mariologia*, in *NDM* 1398-1399.

As it appears in the Rule of life, the marian face of the Institute is delineated through the *name*, «Daughters of Mary Help of Christians»; the *symbol of identity*, «living monument of gratitude to Mary» and the *presence of Mary*, maternal, living and educative in the personal and institutional life of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

2. The *name* indicates the marian identity of the DMHC. They are «Daughters of Mary». From the beginning of the Institute to the present time this awareness is alive. This affirmation can be attested by some references underlined in this study.

In 1878 the title «Rules and Constitutions of the *Institute* of the DMHC» was changed to a more personalized one in 1885 to «Rules and Constitutions of the *Daughters* of Mary Help of Christians». A second modification in the same period was the substitution of the denomination «servants of the poor» (1878) to «daughters of Mary» (1885).

Two articles of the Manual Regulations of 1908 referred to the consciousness of the significance of the name:

«The Constitutions indicate the name by which we should be called, that is, *Daughters* and not Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, a dear title to us originally given by our Venerable Founder and Father» (art.12); «The Sisters should remember that ... our humble Institute takes its name from Mary Help of Christians, nay, that every Sister be called a *Daughter of Mary Help of Christians*» (art.178).

In the Regulations of 1982, the first article specifically pointed to this:

«The Constitutions refer to the members of our Institute as *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* (official abbreviation FMA), the name chosen for us by our Sainly Founder ...».

In the light of the above mentioned references, one understands the spirit behind the open letter of Sr. Giselda Capetti, archivist and historian of the Institute, to the members of the XIV General Chapter of the Institute (Turin, August 26 to September 17, 1964). Her words are a reminder not to take for granted the name since it is the «marian identity card of the Institute given us by our holy Founder» and the «sacred heredity of his grateful love to Mary Help of Christians». It embodies the «synthesis and light of a spirit» to be lived by all and transmitted to the future generations.

It is true, the filial relationship with Mary or «being a daughter of Mary», is an essential dimension in the life of every Christian as Jesus

Himself revealed from the Cross. To the beloved disciple, representative of every believer in Christ, Jesus directed these words: «Here is your Mother» (Jn 19:26). At the same time, to Mary is revealed the extension of her spiritual motherhood to all disciples of Christ: «Woman, here is your son» (Jn 19:27). From the Cross the mutual entrustment between mother and son/daughter has been established.

If every Christian is called to be a son/daughter of Mary, where lies the specific identity of the DMHC? Her marian face speaks of her also, to be a «living monument», that is, a living memory of Mary's maternal presence in the life of the Church and of every believer. She is to remind every brother and sister in the faith, especially the young, that Jesus gave us His Mother to help us be formed in Him, the image of the Son of God, our true image (cf Jn 1:3; Eph 1:3-5; Rom 8:29).

The *name* does not only identify her with Mary. It also speaks of her call to become like her, helper of Christians and of every human person. Mary continues to be in the Church «helper of God to serve humanity and helper of humanity to bless God». The Constitutions of 1982 expresses the call of every DMHC to follow Mary's example: «Let us open our hearts to the joyous humility of [Mary's] Magnificat» to be helpers, like her, especially among young girls (art.4).

Father Juan Vecchi, eighth successor of Don Bosco, elected Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation in June 28, 1995, addressed the members of the XX General Chapter of the DMHC (Rome, September 18 - November 15) with these words:

In the Salesian Family, the figure of Mary reminds us spontaneously of your Institute and each one of you ... The Institute in fact came into being as Mary's work and has modelled its spiritual image on her. To you is entrusted in an explicit way, the task of reminding us, not only of marian devotion, but of the marian dimension of our charism and of our pedagogy. Each one of you aims at being a «helper» in education.²

He concluded his homily pointing to the newness of Mary as woman and wishing the DMHC with these words:

With this newness we are sure you will do for our family, what Mary did at Cana: watch so that there may be no shortage of wine at the feast of our giving

² VECCHI J., *Homily of the Rector Major at the concelebration concluding the General Chapter XX*, in *Acts XX*, *op. cit.*, 151-152.

to God and to the young, remind us who can give it, and inspire us total trust in Him. We wait to hear from your life and from your lips the encouragement: «Do whatever He will tell you.»³

3. As a «*living monument of gratitude*» to Mary and like Mary, the DMHC becomes the «woman of memory» who while treasuring in her heart the words of Jesus witnesses to the saving action and merciful love of God through her educative action with the young. Like Mary and with her help, the DMHC becomes a prophet who indicates the way to life and denounces the culture which is becoming more and more hostile to God.

In the three postconciliar texts (Const.1969, art.1; 1975, art.1; 1982, art.4), the reference to the *symbol of identity* of the Institute as Don Bosco explicitly desired them to be: «living monuments of gratitude to Mary Help of Christians» was constantly present. However, an important biblical reference to Mary as model of the «woman of memory» present in the Constitutions of 1969 (art.52) was lost in the final edition of 1982. The DMHC «must be diligent in the practice of interior silence, in union with the Holy Virgin who conserved in her heart the mysteries of Jesus» (cf Lk 2:19,51).

4. Both the *name* and the *symbol of identity* could lose their significance if they are not revitalized continuously with the living and operative *presence* of Mary. We have seen in the preceding chapter how her presence in the life of Jesus, in the Church and in the Institute continues to be maternal and educative. This is another constant line in the Constitutions: the link between the marian identity and its educative mission among the young.

The Manual Regulations of 1908 stated that the

... DMHC is the *living image of Mary* whose solicitous *motherly presence* among the young is expressed through a sincere, disinterested, constant and pure love in Jesus Christ (cf art.284).

In the Constitutions of 1982 Mary is referred to as educator and model of the DMHC in their educative mission:

[Our mission] implies a «preferential» love for girls and commits us to become for them in the school of our Lady, signs and mediations of the love of Christ,

³ *Ibid.*, 152.

the Good Shepherd, through the Christian education of the whole person, according to the Preventive System (art.63).

The Preventive System is the hallmark of the vocation of the DMHC in the Church and her «specific spirituality and method of her apostolic action». It consists in an

... educative presence which uses the power of persuasion and love in collaborating with the Holy Spirit for the growth of Christ in the hearts of young girls (art.7).

It is an «experience of pastoral charity» which finds «its source in the heart of Christ Himself». Mary is the «model with her motherly care» (art.7).

The Daughter of Mary Help of Christians is called to prolong in the Church and in society today the maternal and educative role of Mary. Maternal and educative, in effect are not two distinctive roles. They are two faces of the same feminine presence of Mary and of every woman. One cannot become a mother without being an educator and vice versa, every true educator is mother.

The DMHC is called to become like Mary, mother-educator, that is, to generate, to nourish and to let the life of Christ grow in the young (cf art.7) through christian education (cf art.63), for He is the measure of every human person: «Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... who chose us in Him before the world began, to be holy and blameless in his sight, to be full of love. *He predestined us through Jesus Christ to be his sons such was his will and pleasure*» (Eph 1:3-5).

5. From the definitive edition of the Constitutions (1982) to the present time (1998), at the outset of the third millennium of Christianity, the Institute which is incarnated in history follows the footsteps of the Church in the evangelization of peoples. It has grown and is spread throughout the world, incarnating the Salesian charism among peoples of different races, cultures and religions. It has also become more aware of certain aspects of its charism and mission which were not explicitly mentioned in the Constitutions, but which touch the marian dimension of its vocational call.

Among such aspects are the following: the new consciousness of the *dignity of woman* and her role in the humanization of societies and cultures, the *inculturation of our charism* in the different areas of the world

and of the growing sense of *ecumenism* in the conviviality of peoples with different religions.

6. On the *dignity of woman* and of her role in society, one can note a progressive consciousness and reflection in the last twenty years. The Apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem* of Pope John Paul II (August 15, 1988), concrete sign of this new feminine consciousness, suggests the essential lines for a theo-anthropological reflection of this theme. The Pope affirmed that the reality of the *Theotokos*,

the «Woman, Mother of God» is the *reality which determines the essential horizon of reflection on the dignity and vocation of women*. In anything that we think, say or do concerning the dignity and the vocation of women, our thoughts, hearts and actions must not become detached from this horizon. The dignity of every human being and the vocation corresponding to that dignity find their definitive measure in the *union with God*.

Mary, the woman of the Bible, is the most complete expression of this dignity and vocation. For no human being, male and female, created in the image and likeness of God, can in *any* way attain fulfilment apart from this image and likeness (MD 5).

7. Mary, the «Star of Evangelization» (EN 82), continues to guide us in the *inculturation* of the *Gospel* and the evangelization of peoples. The *charism* of every religious family is at the service of the Kingdom of God and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen in the past chapters how Mary intervened directly in the inspiration, foundation and formation of the Daughters of the Mary Help of Christians, guiding them to a creative fidelity to their charism as they become her maternal and educative presence among the young.

The Acts of the XX General Chapter XX notes that

... deeper reflection on our educative mission commits us to being «promoters of a new evangelically inspired feminism»⁴ so that in the Church and in the world we will be credible signs of God's tender care for the whole human race. Like Mary, who was present at the crucial moments of Jesus' life, we believe we must be present, with simplicity and courage where the decisions are made which affect the young and life so that our times may be lived in keeping with the Gospel.⁵

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Discourse to the FMA Capitulars*, in «L'Osservatore Romano» (November 8, 1996), 5.

⁵ INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Acts of the General Chapter XX*, *op. cit.*, 87.

8. In the *ecumenical dialogue*, Mary has an important role to play for she is the «woman» who has incarnated the «prophecy of communion». She is the operative sign of unity of the «dispersed sons of God» (Jn 11:52).⁶ The biblical exegete, A. Serra, comments on the theme seen from the Johannine perspective:

In the economy of the new Covenant, initiated by the paschal mystery, the Mother of Jesus becomes the personification of the New Jerusalem, that is, of the daughter of Zion, to which the prophets directed their prophecies at the end of time. Since in the biblical-Jewish language, Jerusalem, as the elected people, is usually symbolized with the image of the «Woman», then it could be understood why Jesus called His Mother «Woman». In Mary, Jesus sees the personification of the new Jerusalem-Mother, that is, the Church.

Here we have the transposition of the image of Jerusalem to the Mother of Jesus. Jerusalem was the universal Mother of the dispersed who were gathered in the Temple, the womb which rises within the walls. The Mother of Jesus is the universal Mother of the dispersed sons of God, united in the Temple of the Person of Christ, which she has clothed in her maternal womb with her own flesh. Being the «Mother» of Jesus, at the foot of the Cross, Mary is also called «Mother» by those who are one with Jesus because of their faith.⁷

The theme of *Mary as Mother of unity and communion* is a relevant and urgent theme to consider, specially for those who are called to evangelize among peoples, not only different in race but in religion. The DMHC are present all over the world and become like Mary and with Mary «signs of unity and communion». They are aware that Mary is not only the Mother of Christians but of the whole humanity. At the same time, they know that Christ is the center and reason of their presence among the people they are evangelizing. Without Him, who is the «Way, the Truth and the Life» (Jn 14:6), they know their presence could never be a true response to the profound needs and hopes of the human heart.

The Acts of the XX General Chapter of the Institute (Rome, September 18 - November 15, 1996) noted how the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in their journey, illumined and guided by Mary's presence, rediscovered Jesus as the center of their life, the *Door* (Jn 10:7) and the *Temple* (cf Jn 2:19, 21), that opens and leads to communion with the God the Father and with every man/woman as brother/sister. Mary Help of

⁶ SERRA A., *E c'era la Madre di Gesù ...*, op. cit., 285-321.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 295-296.

Christians is our guide and teacher in becoming helpers of life. She made herself totally available to become the Mother of God's Son in his human nature. She the Mother of the Church and the Star of evangelization, gathers us all to proclaim Christ to the young, so that in the third millennium they may passionately proclaim Jesus and his message.⁸

9. Mother Antonia Colombo, present Superior General of the Institute and eighth successor of Mother Mazzarello, in a conference given to the members of the Salesian Family in Rome on January 17, 1998, affirmed that «the way we want to follow, as the Institute of the DMHC, so as to walk according to the Spirit is the same today as it was yesterday». She referred to the

... path taken by Mary, the first follower of Jesus, the specialist of the Spirit from the Annunciation to Pentecost. A creature like ourselves, of the same stock, she leads us with motherly solicitude to receive the action of the Spirit who forms in us, in young people, and in every believer who is entrusted to her, the attitudes of the new creature.⁹

It is at the school of Mary where we can learn as women to educate the human person and humanize culture; to «rediscover the theological and anthropological vision which has enlightened and sustained the implementation of significant and fruitful educative plans for the Kingdom of God by those who have gone before us».¹⁰

She continued saying, that the mediation of Mary is a consoling and maternal presence which accompanies us

... in the experience of being always in the company of Him who has promised to remain with us through his Spirit to lead us to the fullness of life, throws light even today on the dark paths which could frighten one and make one turn back.¹¹

Mary, who continues to be the Mother and Inspirer of the Institute, accompanies and educates her daughters at the threshold of the new

⁸ INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, *Acts of the General Chapter XX*, op. cit., 86-87.

⁹ COLOMBO A., *Alla scuola di Maria, maestra di vita nello Spirito: alcune suggestioni a partire dal Capitolo Generale XX delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice*, in VAN LOOY L. (a cura di), *Riscopriamo con i giovani la presenza dello Spirito nella Chiesa e nel Mondo. Per una spiritualità ispirata al carisma salesiano* (XX Giornata di Spiritualità della Famiglia Salesiana, Roma 16-18 gennaio 1998), Roma, Editrice S.D.B. 1998, 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

millennium how to invoke her Divine Son incessantly for the needs of humanity, specially of the young with her words in Cana: «They have no wine» and at the same time how to respond with faith and love «to whatever He tells» (cf Jn 2:3,5).

10. In conclusion, I wish to underline that this study is an initial attempt to gather and organize in a systematic way the *essential elements of marian dimension* of the Rule of life of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. As such, the author is aware of its limitations. An interdisciplinary study, not only of the Constitutions/Regulations but specially of the charism and spirituality of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is recommended.

This study shows how the *marian dimension touches the identity and charism of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. There is a need to take concrete and constant steps for a more systematic and interdisciplinary reflection of this dimension on the formative and pastoral levels.

There is a need to «take Mary back home» and allow ourselves to be educated by her on how to humanize and evangelize today's society until it becomes a «culture of life». In our communion with Christ, let us give Mary the space which Christ Himself willed, as He revealed to the beloved disciple from the Cross: «Here is your *Mother*» (Jn 19:27) and to St. John Bosco, in his dream at nine years old, He gave her as mother and teacher: «I will give you a *Teacher*, under whose guidance you will learn and without whose help all knowledge becomes foolishness».

TABLE 1
SYNOPTIC COMPARISON OF THE MARIAN REFERENCES
IN THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP
OF CHRISTIANS AT FOUR TIME PERIODS - 1878, 1885, 1906

Marian Themes	Marian Articles in the Constitutions			
	1878	1885	1906	1922
1. Elections of Mother General in the octave of Mary	IV,2	VII,2	none	none
2. Rosary, Angelus, Seven Dolors and Joys of Mary Most Holy	X,6 XVI,1	XIV,5 XIV,3 XVII,1	69* 69* 69* * Here they are nominated as part of the daily practices of piety.	83* 83* 83* * Here they are nominated as part of the daily practices of piety.
3. Office of the Blessed Virgin on Sundays and Feastdays	XI,1	XVII,13	68* <i>*additional phrase: if one is not able to perform the above mentioned practice of piety one has to recite the litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Te Deum</i>	82* <i>* the word Sisters has been substituted with the title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians</i>
4. Principal feasts of the Institute: Immaculate Conception, Help of Christians, should be prepared with a novena, with sentiments of piety and gratitude	XI,7	XVII,10	72	88
	XI,7	XVII, 10	none	89
5. Receive Jesus in the Eucharist every Sunday and holydays of obligation, on the principal feasts of our Lady and on the feast of Mary Help of Christians	none	none	63	76* <i>* adds that such practice be done also on the monthly commemoration of Mary Help of Christians</i>

Continued on next page

TABLE 1 - *continued*

Marian Themes	Marian Articles in the Constitutions			
	1878	1885	1906	1922
7. Marian devotion	XIII,4	III,4	none	56* * with special devotion to Most Holy Mary Immaculate
8. A commitment to testify being [a daughter of Mary]	none	XVIII,2: a <i>daughter of Mary</i>	none	115: a <i>Daughters of Mary Daughters</i>
9. Keep a picture of Mary Help of Christians or Mary Immaculate near the bed	XVI, 15	none	none	none
10. Novices should wear around the neck a medal of Mary Help of Christians or Mary Immaculate	XVI,6	XVIII,12	none	20
11. Prayer of the Rosary for the suffrage of dead Sisters, etc.	XVI, 28	XVIII, 23	96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 105	123, 127, 128
12. Chastity	none	none	49* * filial devotion to Mary Most holy, loving custodian of religious souls	none

TABLE 2A
SYNOPTIC COMPARISONS OF THE MARIAN REFERENCES IN THE CONSTITUTIONS
AND REGULATIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS
AT THREE TIME PERIODS: 1969, 1975, 1982

MARIAN REFERENCES	1969		1975		1982	
	CONST	REG	CONST	REG	CONST	REG
1. IDENTITY	1		1, 2		1, 4, 7	
2. VOCATION	9		9		10, 11	
CHASTITY	12		14, 15		14, 17	
POVERTY	none		22		18	
OBEDIENCE	26, 30		27		32	
3. COMMUNITY LIFE						
PRAYER LIFE	52, 59	92, 93, 94, 96, 97	43, 44, 45, 48, 49	29, 43, 51, 52, 55	37, 39, 44	24, 30, 36, 38, 41
FRATERNAL LIFE	31		30, 34, 42	4	62	
MISSION	62, 66		57, 64, 75	70, 71	63, 71	
4. FORMATION	none		76		79, 107	
5. SERVICE OF AUTHORITY	none		104, 132		114	

TABLE 2B

SYNOPTIC COMPARISON OF MARIAN REFERENCES IN THE CONSTITUTIONS OF THE DAUGHTERS
OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS AT THREE PERIODS: 1969, 1975, 1962

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1969	CONST. 1969
IDENTITY	IDENTITY	IDENTITY
1 The Institute of the DMHC, founded by St. John Bosco, is the monument of gratitude to the Mother of God, under the title of Mary Help of Christians...	1 Through a gift of the Holy Spirit and for the direct intervention of Mary, we, DMHC are called in the Church to be a community of consecrated apostles. St. John Bosco founded our Institute and desired it to be the "living monument" of his gratitude to Mary Help of Christians, Guide and Teacher of his work. 2 With the profession of the evangelical counsels, communitarian life and apostolic mission we desire- with Mary and like Mary- to follow Christ more closely for the glory of the Father, witnesses to his love in the commitment of a personal sanctity at the service of the brethren.	1 Through a gift of the Holy Spirit and with the direct intervention of Mary, St. John Bosco founded our Institute as a response of salvation to the profound hopes of young girls. 4 Mary most Holy was the Inspirer of our Institute and continues to be its Mother and Teacher. We are therefore "a religious Family that belongs entirely to Mary". Don Bosco wanted us to be a "living monument" of his gratitude to Mary Help of Christians and asks us to extend his "thanks" throughout all time. Let us be aware of Mary's presence in our lives and entrust striving to make our dispositions of faith, hope and charity, and perfect union with Christ, our own. Let us open our hearts to the joyous humility of her "Magnificat" to be helpers, like her, especially among young girls. 7 [The Preventive System] is an experience of pastoral charity that has its source in the heart of Christ himself and finds its model in Mary's motherly care.

Continued on next page

TABLE 2B - *continued*

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1975	CONST. 1982
VOCATIONS	VOCATIONS	VOCATIONS
9 In living one's consecration, the DMHC will take as a particular model Mary Most Holy which "shines before the whole community of the elect as the ideal of every virtue". The Virgin Mother, in fact, embraced the kind of life, virginal and poor, which Christ the Lord chose for Himself; She consecrated herself totally to the person and mission of the Word Incarnate putting herself at the service of Redemption and as Help of Christians, she takes care of the brothers of her Son still on their early pilgrimage.	9 In living our consecration we imitate Mary Most Holy, who has loved with total dedication Christ and the Church. In fact, docile to the action of the Holy Spirit, she embraced the kind of life which the Lord chose for Himself; consecrated to the person and mission of the Word Incarnate she served in the mystery of Redemption and, as Mother Help of Christians, she continues to care for the brothers of her Son who are still on the earthly pilgrimage.	10 Trusting in the help of your grace, in the intercession of Mary Help of Christians and of all our Saints, and with the support of my Sisters, I want to live faithfully, for your glory, the commitment that I assume in making my profession. [Formula of the religious profession] 11 Binding herself by vow the DMHC assumes the way of life, chaste, poor and obedient which the Son of God chose for himself, and which his Virgin Mother embraced with total dedication.
CHASTITY	CHASTITY	CHASTITY
12 To preserve the great gift of chastity, to develop it and to make it shine for others, every DMHC... will entrust herself to the intercession of Mary Most Holy and Immaculate.	14 [...] the love and the imitation of Mary Most Holy give force to our chastity. 15 In living our chastity, let us look at Mary, Virgin and Mother, who did not hold on jealously to her Son but with Him gave all to the Father, offering herself as a holocaust for the generation of all men. The contemplation of this mystery nourishes our consecrated virginity and re-enforces its spiritual fecundity.	14 We shall therefore practise this virtue [chastity] in an "eminent degree", expressing it through Salesian loving-kindness, which allows God's love to shine through us and is a reflection of Mary's motherly tenderness. 17 In order to strengthen the gift of chastity the DMHC will cultivate the sense of the presence of God. She will draw strength from her intimate union with Christ whom she meets in his Word, in the Eucharist and in the sacrament of Reconciliation; and will entrust herself with filial love to Mary, the Virgin Mother who gave our Savior to the world.

Continued on next page

TABLE 2B - *continued*

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1975	CONST. 1982
POVERTY	POVERTY	POVERTY
NO MARIAN REFERENCE	22 Mary, who heads the poor of the Lord, animates our humble service with the spirit of the Magnificat.	18 We imitate Mary, the humble handmaid who surrendered everything to her Lord.
OBEDIENCE	OBEDIENCE	OBEDIENCE
26 Docile to the Holy Spirit and following the example of our Lady who "through her obedience became the cause of salvation for all the human race", the DMHC will live her consecration to the Lord in the practice of obedience, observing with the right intention, with fidelity and with love the Constitutions of the Institute. 30 The Virgin Mary, "model of that maternal affection which should animate all those who cooperate to the apostolic mission of the Church", should be considered, according to the mind of Don Bosco and of Mother Mazzarello, as the true Superior. Therefore, among the DMHC, every Superior, should imitate our Lady in her service of authority, and should strive to make the community a true family which reflects the holy Family of Nazareth.	27 Gathered around the Word of God and around the Eucharist, we make our own the "fiat" of Mary who, being obedient, became the cause of salvation for all the human race.	32 Let us live our obedience "in all simplicity" in the Salesian attitude of "I'll go", ever ready to make "any sacrifice asked of us" making our Lady's "fiat" our own, for by her adherence to God's will she became mother of the Redeemer and our mother also.

Continued on next page

TABLE 2B - *continued*

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1975	CONST. 1982
COMMON LIFE	COMMUNITARIAN LIFE	UNITED IN COMMUNITY IN THE NAME OF THE LORD
FRATERNAL COMMUNITY NO MARIAN REFERENCE COMMUNITY OF FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY 31 Every DMHC, consecrating herself to God in the Institute, inserts herself as a living and operating member in a religious family, gathered together in the name of the Lord, animated by the Eucharist and united around Mary Help of Christians and Mother of the Church and of the Institute.	FRATERNAL COMMUNITY 30 [...] our community becomes a sign of authentic communion in the midst of the people of God when, united around Mary, Mother of the Church, is founded in the Risen Christ and manifests the presence of the Spirit. 34 The suffering Sister, while uniting herself to the Virgin Co-Redemptrix, draws hope and comfort from the contemplation of Jesus Crucified. 42 The first community of Mornese is for us an invitation and an encouragement to make our community "the house of the love of God", where the life of every day, becomes with Mary, perennial praise to the Lord.	FRATERNAL LIFE 62 The first community of Mornese is for us an invitation and an encouragement to make our community the "house of God's love", where the girls will feel themselves welcomed, and where the life of each day, lived in charity and joy, is a continuation of our Lady's "Magnificat".

Continued on next page

TABLE 2B - *continued*

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1975	CONST. 1982
PRAYING COMMUNITY 52 [...] To listen more sweetly to this Word, to assimilate it more vitally, and to communicate more effectively its message, one must be diligent in the practice of interior silence, in union with the most Holy Virgin who conserved in her heart the mysteries of Jesus. 59 [The DMHC] will live the marian spirituality of the Institute considering the Holy Virgin as Mother and Teacher. She will think "of her with filial piety contemplating her in the light of the Word made man" so that the Son may be glorified ever more while the Mother is honored. Such devotion will be authentic and profound that could illuminate the girls and the young bringing them to a marian devotion that is true and transforming. They will celebrate with fervor the feasts of our Lady, especially those of the Immaculate and of the Help of Christians, taking such occasion to deepen the mysteries of her life, a reminder that "true devotion precedes from an authentic faith" and reaches to love and imitation.	PRAYING COMMUNITY 43 We will build a praying community which is gathered with Mary to encounter the Lord to be, in his name, faithfully working in the Church. 44 We nourish ourselves assiduously with the divine Word; like Mary we conserve the word in humble and adoring contemplation and available to the will of the Father we communicate the message. 45 The cycle of the liturgical year presents us the Lord Jesus of history and manifests to us in Mary and in the Saints the richness of the mystery of salvation. 48 We venerate Mary making ours the filial sentiments of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. In the Immaculate we contemplate the mystery of the Virgin who lived with undivided love her self-giving to the Lord; in the Help of Christians we recognize the Mother who sustains us in our apostolic work. 49 Our love for Mary urges us to encounter the young - often lost, deluded or indifferent, but always thirsty of love and of the truth - to reveal to them that life is brightened with certainties when we discover near us the presence of the Virgin, our Mother who brings us to Christ.	OUR PRAYER 37 Docile to his [Holy Spirit] grace let us persevere in prayer with Mary and like Mary in order to intensify our union with God and open ourselves to Christ, present in our neighbor and in the realities of daily life. 39 In the stillness of our whole being, like Mary "the listening Virgin" we let ourselves be penetrated by the power of the Holy Spirit who guides us gradually to put on Christ, who strengthens sisterly union and re-awakens apostolic zeal. 44 Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, is actively present in our lives and in the history of the Institute. Trusting in Don Bosco's words: "It is Mary who guides us", let us cultivate a grateful, filial love for her and strive to pass this love on to our girls. In our Lady, the Immaculate Help of Christians, we contemplate the fullness of her self-giving to God and to our neighbor. Let us imitate her openness to God's Word, to live with her the beatitude of "those who believe" and devote ourselves to apostolic action that inspires hope. Let us turn to her in simplicity and confidence, celebrating her liturgical feasts and honouring her in those forms of prayer proper to the Church and to Salesian tradition, especially the daily recital of the Rosary, in which we re-live - together with her - the mysteries of our Redemption.

Continued on next page

TABLE 2B - *continued*

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1975	CONST. 1982
APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY	APOSTOLIC MISSION	OUR MISSION
62 The DMHC... will give testimony to Jesus Christ, the Teacher and will live the motto of the holy Founder: "Give me souls, take away the rest!" which realizes faithfully, according to the method suggested to St. John Bosco by Mary Most Holy "the Teacher without whose discipline all wisdom is selfishness". 66 In their educative labor the DMHC should have in view the integral formation of the young, in the light of Mary Most Holy: "perfect model of spiritual and apostolic life".	57 Inserted in this apostolic project which renders a particular testimony to Jesus the Good Shepherd, we live the "da mihi animas coetera tolle" according to the method suggested to the holy Founder by Mary Most Holy, the Teacher without whose discipline every wisdom is foolishness. 64 We create in the house - particularly - through sacramental and marian life - a climate of supernatural certainties from which spring that diffusive joy which is the fruit of an authentic educative work and favors, in its turn, the efficacy. 75 Responding to the love of the Father, who consecrates us and sends us among the young to announce that the reign of God has come and lives in us, we express with Mary and in Mary our thanksgiving: "My soul magnifies the Lord [...] because He has looked on the lowliness of his handmaid. The certainty of Don Bosco that "Mary had done everything" is for us a daily consoling reality.	63 [Our mission] implies a "preferential" love for girls and commits us to become for them, at the school of our Lady, signs and mediations of the love of Christ, the Good Shepherd, through the Christian education of the whole person, according to the Preventive System. 71 Let us helthem [the girls] to know Mary, the Mother who welcomes and understands them, and the Help of Christians who instils security, so that they will learn to love and imitate her in her openness to God and to her neighbor. This sacramental and Marian life is the basis of Salesian spirituality and pedagogy.

Continued on next page

TABLE 2B - *continued*

CONST. 1969	CONST. 1975	CONST. 1982
FORMATION	FORMATION	FORMATION
NO MARIAN REFERENCE	76 Responding to the call of God and considering Mary as Mother and Teacher, we reach this progressive identification in the evangelical style lived by Don Bosco and by Mother Mazzarello.	79 Formation is above all the work of the Holy Spirit and as such demands listening, docility and collaboration. Our model and guide in this fundamental task is Mary most Holy, Mother and Teacher of every Salesian vocation. In her we find a living presence whose help directs our lives decisively to Christ and makes our personal relationship with him ever more authentic. 107 Completely given to the Father and to our brothers in Christ, we await the Lord's coming, preparing ourselves, with Mary's motherly help, to share Christ's Paschal Mystery in a new and definite way, in the certainty that comes from the Apostle's words: "I know in whom I have placed my trust".
STRUCTURE AND GOVERNMENT	SERVICE OF AUTHORITY	SERVICE OF AUTHORITY
NO MARIAN REFERENCE	104 In the mind of Don Bosco the true Superior is our Lady. That is how St. Mary Mazzarello felt. She is the model of every DMHC called to a service of authority. 132 [The Provincial] in her service of authority will express the prevenient love, strong and gentle of Mary.	114 Mother Mazzarello was of one mind with Don Bosco in his affirmation that we consider our Blessed Lady to be our "real Superior". Like her, let every DMHC called to the service of authority live in an attitude of interior poverty and openness to the Holy Spirit, seeking ways of expressing with the heart of a mother Mary's strong yet tender love and making herself all things to all men.

TABLE 2C
SYNOPTIC COMPARISON OF MARIAN REFERENCES IN THE REGULATIONS
OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS AT THREE TIME PERIODS: 1969, 1975, 1982

REGULATIONS 1969	REGULATIONS 1975	REGULATIONS 1982
R92 All the Sisters will love filially Mary Help of Christians, commit themselves to the spreading of her devotion and will celebrate with particular fervor the month dedicated to her. Every Saturday, the spiritual reading could be substituted by a celebration of the Word and by other related marian reading. R93 During the month of October, and especially on Saturday, the holy Rosary should be recited with a special festive character. R94 The feasts of the Immaculate and of Mary Help of Christians should be celebrated with particular solemnity and possibly also with some external manifestation: procession, plays, etc. R96 In the monthly commemoration of the First Friday, of the First Saturday and of the commemoration of Mary Help of Christians, of St. John Bosco and of St. Mary Mazzarello, the Holy Mass should be celebrated with solemnity. The meditation and the spiritual reading are to be adapted to the circumstance and the prayers are to be recited in common as indicated in the prayer book.	R4 The traditional communitarian greeting is a reminder of the presence of Jesus and Mary among us and expresses the religious sense of our fraternal communion. R29 [The fundamental communitarian prayers] are: The Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours or the traditional prayers, Meditation, Consecration to Mary Help of Christians, Rosary, Angelus, Visit to the Blessed Sacrament (could also be done individually), spiritual reading and Examination of conscience. R43 Faithful to the marian tradition of the Institute, we commit ourselves to spread the devotion to Mary with an adequate apostolic initiatives to make her known, loved and imitated. We celebrate with particular fervor the months of Mary, valuing especially Saturday, the prayer of the Rosary also in different forms. Let us prepare and live the feasts of the Immaculate and of Mary Help of Christians with solemnity, also externally, taking in consideration the local possibilities and situations.	R41 Let our traditional community greeting "Viva Gesù, Viva Maria", be the expression of our common desire to give praise to God and to advance together, with Mary, towards Him. R24 Our daily community prayer, celebrated with the creativity allowed by the Church, consists of: the Eucharistic celebration, Morning and Evening Prayer, meditation, Prayer to Mary Help of Christians, Rosary, recital of the Angelus or the Regina Coeli at the set times, Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, spiritual reading and examination of conscience. The prayer for the Holy Father will be inserted into one of these community acts. R30 The marian devotion proper to our Institute will be lived in relation to the liturgical cycle. The solemnities of the Immaculate Conception and Mary Help of Christians will be prepared for by a novena and that of the Assumption by a triduum. The season of Advent, the months dedicated to our Lady, the monthly commemoration of the 24th and every Saturday will be for us and for the girls opportunities for growth in filial love for the Blessed Virgin. Following the teaching of St. John Bosco let us use all the means and opportunities that present themselves for spreading devotion to our Lady Help of Christians.

Continued on next page

TABLE 2C - *continued*

REGULATIONS 1969	REGULATIONS 1975	REGULATIONS 1982
R97 The following festivities should be prepared with a novena: Christmas, Sacred Heart, Immaculate, Mary Help of Christians, St. Joseph. The following feasts with a triduum: Assumption, St. John Bosco and St. Mary Mazzarello. In such occasions the themes for meditation and the spiritual reading are to be chosen in relation to the feast. The Holy Mass is to be celebrated with major solemnity and, where it is possible with a brief exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.	R51 For the death of the Mother General in office or emerita, every Sister will offer a day of suffrage and the prayer of the entire Rosary. 52 Every Sister [with the death of the Pope or the Rector Major of the Salesian Family] will offer a whole day of suffrage and the prayer of the entire Rosary. R55 On the day of the annual comemoration of the dead the entire Rosary will be recited. R70 For our "marian character" let us value the proposal of the different forms of marian associations and movements: they will favor in the young the knowledge and the filial trust in our Lady, to the point of welcoming her fully in their lives as a presence which could not be substituted. R71 We will orient the young who are more disposed to a progressive "life with Mary" to the point consecration to her for an apostolic commitment in an attitude of service.	R36 For the Sisters of one's own community, the Superiors, the Sovereign Pontiff and the Rector Major the whole rosary will also be offered or the complete Office for the Dead will be celebrated. R38 On the annual commemoration of all the Faithful Departed the whole Rosary will be recited or the complete Office of the day will be celebrated.

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