

Article

Teaching Mariology in Catholic Seminaries in the USA

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Abstract: This article begins by explaining the importance of Mariology for Catholic theology. It provides an overview of a 2015–2016 survey of 32 Catholic seminaries in the USA on how Mariology is covered in the curriculum. It then examines documents of the Congregation for Catholic Education on the teaching of Mariology in Catholic seminaries. It also looks at what the sixth edition of the US Bishops' Program for Priestly Formation (2022) says about Mariology and Marian devotion in seminary formation. The article discusses why some believe Mariology should be covered in Ecclesiology because of Vatican II's choice to integrate Mariology into *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. Whether Mariology can be adequately covered in courses in Ecclesiology is then considered. The article ends with a recommendation for having Mariology taught as a required stand-alone course in all Catholic seminaries.

Keywords: Mariology; Vatican II; seminaries; Congregation for Catholic Education; Program for Priestly Formation

1. Introduction

This article has a narrow but important focus. It seeks to explore the teaching of Mariology in Catholic seminaries in the USA. Mariology refers to the systematic study of the Blessed Virgin Mary within Catholic theology. Although Marian devotion has been part of Catholic life since apostolic times, systematic Mariology only began in the late 16th century with the Jesuit, Francisco Suárez (1548–1617), who has been called “the founder of systematic or scholastic Mariology.” (O’Carroll 2000, p. 334; Bover 1948, pp. 167–68) The actual term “Mariology” first appeared in 1602 with the publication of *Summa sacrae mariologiae pars prima* by Placido Nigido (c. 1570–1650) (Hauke 2021, p. 91; O’Carroll 2000, p. 231). From the 17th century to the present, Mariology has been considered a distinct discipline within Catholic dogmatic theology.

Why is Mariology important for Catholic education? In his 1988 apostolic letter, *Mulieris dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II notes that the Blessed Virgin Mary is at the center of salvation history:

“When the time had fully come, *God sent forth his son, born of woman*”. With these words of his Letter to the Galatians (4:4), the Apostle Paul links together the principal moments which essentially determine the fulfilment of the mystery “pre-determined in God” (cf. Eph 1:9). The Son, the Word one in substance with the Father, becomes man, born of a woman, at “the fullness of time”. This event leads to *the turning point* of man’s history on earth, understood as salvation history. . . . Thus there begins *the central event, the key event in the history of salvation*: the Lord’s Paschal Mystery. . . . A woman is to be found *at the center of this salvific event*. (John Paul II 1988: no. 3)

According to St. John Paul II, the Blessed Virgin Mary is at the very center of salvation history, and, therefore, at the center of the Catholic faith. Is, though, the Blessed Virgin Mary at the center of Catholic education? After the Second Vatican Council, concerns were raised whether Mariology was being given adequate treatment in Catholic institutions of



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higher education and seminaries. From the late 1960s, many Catholic seminaries began to downplay the importance of Mariology as a required course or as a required component of the academic curriculum (Neumann 1972, pp. 12–38). This downplaying of Mariology coincided with a noted decline in Marian devotion. Some saw Vatican II as a victory for ecclesiocentric Mariology, which understood the Virgin Mary in relation to the Church rather than in relation to Christ and the work of redemption. In a book originally published in German in 1980, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger observed that “the immediate outcome of the victory of ecclesiocentric Mariology was the collapse of Mariology altogether” (Ratzinger and von Balthasar 2005, p. 24).

On 25 March 1988, the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE] issued a letter entitled, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. This letter came in the midst of the 1987–1988 Marian Year proclaimed by St. John Paul II and it was addressed to “theological faculties, to seminaries and to other centers of ecclesiastical studies” (CCE 1988: Introduction). It notes that its message is not restricted to the Marian Year. Instead, “the promotion of knowledge, research and piety with regard to Mary of Nazareth . . . must be permanent since the exemplary value and mission of the Virgin are permanent” (CCE 1988: Introduction).

I have been teaching at a major Catholic seminary since 1999, and I teach Mariology as an elective course. I am also a member of the Mariological Society of America (MSA) and the Pontifical Marian Academy International (*Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis*=PAMI). I know that members of both the MSA and PAMI have raised concerns over whether future priests are being given adequate formation in Mariology.

On 16 October 2015, a Marian Forum took place at the International Marian Research Institute in Dayton, Ohio on the theme, “Teaching Mariology in Catholic Seminaries.” I was one of the two speakers along with Fr. Benedict O’Cinnsalaigh, Rector of the Athenaeum/Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. In preparation for the Forum, I began a survey of 35 major (graduate) Catholic seminaries in the USA. The survey was my own initiative. I received no funding or institutional support. As a Catholic seminary professor in the USA, I was aware of what states had major seminaries and which did not. The 35 seminaries I selected for the survey included all graduate seminaries in the USA for training diocesan priests and the graduate seminaries for certain religious orders.

2. The Results of the 2015–2016 Survey on the Teaching of Mariology in US Catholic Seminaries

I ultimately received responses from 32 (Appendix A) out of the 35 seminary deans I contacted (24 replied prior to the 16 October 2015 Forum and 8 afterwards). Of the 32 seminaries, 26 were seminaries for diocesan priests (although 5 of these were affiliated with religious orders). The other six replies came from seminaries/schools of theology with seminary formation primarily conducted for religious congregations (two for Jesuits, two for Dominicans, one for the Congregation of Holy Cross, and one for the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter). The survey consisted of four questions with an optional section reserved for further comments. The first question was:

1. Does your seminary have a required stand-alone Mariology course for all candidates for priestly ordination? If so, how many credits?

Responses: Nine responding seminaries had a required stand-alone Mariology class required for all candidates for priestly ordination. One had a 1-credit required course; two had a 1.5-credit required course; four had a 2-credit required course; and two had a 3-credit required course. One seminary had a 2-credit required course in Mariology for seminarians pursuing the S.T.B. degree but not for the others. Six other seminaries had required courses with Mariology or Mary mentioned in the course title. These courses ranged from 2–3 credits. Two of these had the required course entitled “Ecclesiology and Mariology.” One had “Christology and Mariology.” One had “Mariology and Eschatology”; another had “Mary and the Saints”; and another had “Ecclesiology, Mission, and Mariology.”

The second question was:

2. *If you do not have a single stand-alone required Mariology course, do you have any required courses that cover Mariology? If so, what course or courses in your required curriculum are expected to cover Mariology and how much time is devoted in these classes to Mariology?*

Responses: Of the seminaries that did not have a required course either exclusively on Mariology or a required course with Mariology or Mary in the title, all but two stated that Mariology was treated to some extent in the required courses. Eight stated that the required courses in Ecclesiology cover Mariology with 1–2 classes or 2–4 h expected as the amount of time to be given to Mariology. Five mentioned Mariology as being mostly covered in Christology; another mentioned Mariology being treated in the required course on Liturgy, and another mentioned Mariology being treated in the history of dogma. Others mentioned several required classes in which Marian themes are touched on.

The third question was:

3. *If you do not have a single stand-alone Mariology course requirement, do you have a Mariology elective that seminarians can take? If so, how many credits is this elective and how often is it offered?*

Responses: All but one of the seminaries that do not have a required course in Mariology had electives either in Mariology alone or in classes that treat Mariology (e.g., an elective on the third part of Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*). Most of the seminaries without a required course in Mariology offered a 2–3 credit elective in Mariology once every 2–3 years (so all seminarians will have the opportunity to take an elective on Mariology). Several deans mentioned that most seminarians take the Mariology elective even though it is not required. One dean, in fact, estimated that 95% of the seminarians in his seminary take the Mariology elective. One dean, however, reported that the Mariology elective is offered "rarely," and another said it is offered on "an irregular basis."

The fourth question was:

4. *Does your seminary have any programs or opportunities for Marian devotions to supplement the Marian themes contained within the liturgical calendar and the Liturgy of the Hours? (Examples of such devotions would be communal Rosary recitations, Marian consecrations, novenas, etc.).*

Responses: 22 of the deans mentioned communal recitation of the Rosary being performed in their seminaries or in affiliated houses of formation. In a few cases, these are required during October and May or on certain Marian feast days. Most of the communal Rosary recitations were voluntary, but they were very popular. Eight deans mentioned special devotions connected to the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe; three mentioned the Immaculate Conception as the Patronal Feast of their seminaries; and three noted special devotions connected with the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. Six deans mentioned the recitation of the Angelus as either mandatory (3) or voluntary (3). Four mentioned special Marian processions; two mentioned opportunities for Marian pilgrimages; five mentioned Marian Novenas, and five mentioned communal May crownings of Mary. Three seminaries had Marian groups that seminarians can join (e.g., the Legion of Mary, *Militia Immaculata*). Six seminaries provided programs preparing for the total consecration to Mary according to St. Louis de Montfort on a voluntary basis. One seminary recited the Akathist Marian Hymn on a regular basis, and one seminary participated in Advent Stations that have a significant Mariological component.

Finally, there was an optional section for "further comments." Only a few deans answered this section. Several wished to explain the nature of their curricula and how Mariology is expected to be covered in a variety of courses. Several mentioned they are currently undergoing curriculum review and are considering having Mariology as a required course.

3. Comments on the Survey

The most encouraging result of the survey was the level of participation, which was slightly over 91%. Another encouraging sign was the opportunity for (or requirement of) Marian devotions outside the liturgical calendar or the Liturgy of the Hours. In quite a few cases, though, these devotions seemed to be voluntary or student initiated. With

regard to the teaching of Mariology, only 9 out of the 32 seminaries responding had required stand-alone courses in Mariology, which would be 28%. Another six, though, had required courses with “Mariology” or “Mary” in required course titles, which increases the percentage to 47%. Of the remaining seminaries, all but one had elective courses in either Mariology alone or in classes that treat Mariology extensively. Two of the deans, though, reported that the Mariology elective is offered only rarely or on an irregular basis. In spite of these exceptions, 29 out of the 32 seminaries responding had either required courses or regularly offered electives in Mariology (or electives with extensive coverage of Mariology) in their curricula. This means that slightly over 90% of the seminaries responding provided opportunities for the study of Mariology on a regular basis.

While this might seem to be encouraging, the fact remains that only 28% of the seminaries believe Mariology is important enough to have a stand-alone course in Mariology required for all those preparing for priestly ordination. In terms of the *required* curriculum, most seminaries do not include Mariology—even though it is given some treatment in other required courses such as Ecclesiology and Christology. Nevertheless, 28% in the 2015 survey is an improvement over the 15.4% of the responding seminaries, theological faculties, and theologates that required Mariology as an independent course according to the 1994 survey by Fr. Johann Roten, S.M. (Roten 1994, p. 235).

4. The Expectations of the Magisterium with Regard to the Teaching of Mariology in Catholic Seminaries

In the 1950s, manuals of dogmatic theology used in Catholic seminaries treated Mariology as a distinct topic following Christology. For example, the Spanish Jesuits in their *Sacrae Theologiae Summa* had a distinct *Tractatus* on *Mariologia* authored by P. Joseph de Aldema, S.J., which is 129 pages long (De Aldema et al. 1950, pp. 196–216). Fr. Ludwig Ott, in his *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (first published in German in 1952), likewise treats Mariology in a distinct section following Christology (Ott 2018, pp. 212–33).

After Vatican II, there was the widespread impression that Mariology should not be treated as a separate required course but integrated into other courses, especially Ecclesiology. Such an approach was thought to be more in line with the 29 October 1963 decision made at Vatican II—by a vote of 1114 to 1074—to integrate the Marian schema into the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*). Some theologians believed that Vatican II “saw a danger in treating Mariology too much in isolation” preferring instead to link Mary’s role more closely with the Church, which was “the main theme of the Council” (Dulles 1966, p. 13). This was often accompanied by a similar neglect of Marian devotions. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the USCCB) responded to this de-emphasis on Marian piety by its 1973 pastoral letter, *Behold Your Mother: Woman of Faith*. Paul VI’s 1974 apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, can also be seen as a response to a more widespread decline in Marian devotion in the Church.

In terms of seminary formation, the decline in Marian doctrine and devotion was addressed by the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], which, until January 16, 2013, oversaw seminary formation for the Catholic Church. Since 1980, it has made three important interventions regarding the need for seminaries to give more attention to Marian doctrine and devotion.

The first of these came on January 6, 1980 when the CCE issued a *Circular Letter Concerning Some of the More Urgent Aspects of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries*. This letter underlines “four of the most urgent guidelines which the work of spiritual formation for future priests ought to follow” (CCE 1980: II. Guidelines). One of these urgent guidelines points to the need for a seminary to be “a school of filial love toward her who is the Mother of Jesus and whom Christ gave to us as our mother” (CCE 1980: II. Guidelines, 4). The letter notes that Marian devotion “must not merely be a pietistic and sentimental note attached to spiritual formation” but “an integral part of the formation program of a seminary” (CCE 1980: II Guidelines, 4). The *Letter* also underscores the importance of a proper teaching of Mariology, which is a matter of fidelity to the “Marian mystery” (CCE 1980: II Guidelines,

4). It states that “Christology is also Mariology” and proper devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary “can and must be a guarantee against everything which would tend to eradicate the historicity of the mystery of Christ” (CCE 1980: II Guidelines, 4). In addition to *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II (1964), the *Letter* recommends study of Paul VI’s 1974 exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, and the writings of St. Louis Grignion de Montfort (1673–1716).

The second intervention of the Congregation was the 1988 letter entitled, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. This document was addressed to “theological faculties, to seminaries and to other centers of ecclesiastical studies” (CCE 1988: Introduction). The document sought to implement St. John Paul II’s hope for the Marian Year, especially as expressed in his 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater* [RM] which sought to give an authentic understanding of what Vatican II taught about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and the Church (John Paul II 1987: no. 48).

The 1988 CCE document deserves careful reading. In the present context, though, a number of passages should be emphasized with a few highlighted phrases:

- Considering the importance of the Virgin in the history of salvation and in the life of the people of God, and after the promptings of Vatican Council II and the Popes, **it would be unthinkable that the teaching of Mariology be obscured today: it is necessary, therefore, that it be given its just place in seminaries and theological faculties** (no. 27).

Such teaching, consisting of a “systematic treatment” will be:

- *Organic*, that is, inserted adequately in the program of studies of the theological curriculum.
- *Complete*, so that the person of the Virgin be considered in the whole history of salvation, that is, in her relation to God; to Christ, the Word Incarnate, Savior and Mediator; to the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier and Giver of life; to the Church, sacrament of salvation; and to man—in his origins and his development in the life of grace, and his destiny to glory.
- *Suited* to the various types of institutions (centers of religious culture, seminaries, theological faculties) . . . (no. 28).
- It is necessary, therefore, that every center of theological study—according to its proper physiognomy—plan that, in its *Ratio studiorum*, the teaching of Mariology be included, having the characteristics listed above; and, consequently, with the teachers of Mariology being properly qualified (no. 30).
- With this letter the Congregation for Catholic Education wishes to reaffirm the necessity of furnishing seminarians and students of all centers of ecclesiastical studies with Mariological formation which embraces study, devotion and life-style. **They must: (a) acquire a complete and exact knowledge of the doctrine of the Church about the Blessed Virgin Mary . . . (b) nourish an authentic love for the Mother of the Savior and Mother of mankind . . . (c) develop the capacity to communicate such love to the Christian people through speech, writing and example, so that their Marian piety may be promoted and cultivated** (no. 34).

The third intervention of the Congregation was its 15 December 2008 summary report of the 2005–2006 Apostolic Visitation of the U.S. seminaries and houses of formation. In Section 7 dealing with intellectual formation, the CCE states: “The programs of theology are usually well-thought out. Yet, nearly all Visitation reports noted lacunae in the programs. **Mariology** and Patristics were frequently mentioned as being among these lacunae” (emphasis added). The report goes on to say that “the Congregation realizes that it is sometimes not easy to fit in all required disciplines into the seminary schedule with its many demands . . . Nevertheless, all candidates for the priesthood must have a solid, basic grasp of the **main branches of theology**. If, to allow for **this fundamental teaching**, it should be necessary to prune away some in-depth specialized courses or electives, or to limit the seminarians’ pastoral experiences, then this should be done” (emphasis added) (CCE 2008: no. 7). It is very clear from this report that the CCE considers Mariology

fundamental to the theological formation of future priests. The pruning away of electives is one of the ways recommended by the Congregation for the coverage of Mariology, which was frequently mentioned as one of the lacunae in programs of theology in U.S. seminaries. These comments of the 2008 report manifest a concern regarding the lack of sufficient attention to Mariology in seminary curricula in the USA.

Beginning 4 August 2022, Catholic seminaries in the USA are expected to follow the Sixth Edition of the *Program for Priestly Formation* [PPF], which received recognition from the Congregation for Catholic Clergy on 22 March 2022 (Program for Priestly Formation 2022: x). The PPF in no. 256, following canon law (CIC, c. 246§3; CCEO, 346§2.5), states: “Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and to the saints must be encouraged.” This promotion of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is complemented by the need for the study of Mariology in the core of dogmatic theology. The PPF, in no. 328 states:

In dogmatic theology, the core **must** include theology of the Blessed Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, creation, the Fall and the nature of sin, redemption, grace, and the human person, ecclesiology, sacraments, eschatology, **Mariology** and missiology. A separate course on Holy Orders, with a thorough study of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood including a history and theology of celibacy, is required (emphasis mine).

In the above-cited passage from the PPF, no. 328, there is a footnote (n. 396) following the mention of Mariology. This footnote is to the 1988 letter of the Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*. This 1988 document, therefore, provides the background for the inclusion of Mariology in the core of the dogmatic theology program for Catholic seminaries in the USA. Although the PPF does not state explicitly that there must be a required course in Mariology, the footnote to the 1998 document of the CCE would indicate the need for coverage of Mariology that is organic and complete.

Before moving to a conclusion, two factors should be treated: Vatican II’s approach to Mariology and whether Mariology can be adequately treated when integrated into other courses.

5. How Should Mariology Be Covered in a Catholic Seminary’s Curriculum?

Because the Fathers of Vatican II opted by a vote of 1114 to 1074 to integrate the Marian schema into the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, some Catholics believe that Mariology should be included in ecclesiology courses rather than as a separate required course in seminaries. This approach, though, fails to understand that *Lumen Gentium* considers Mary not only in relation to the Church (nos. 60–65) but also in relation to the economy of salvation (nos. 55–59) and devotion (nos. 66–67). It is also important to understand the reasons for the vote in favor of including Mary in the *Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*. The following reasons should be considered:

1. The vote for the integration of the Marian *schema* into *Lumen Gentium* was actually a return to an earlier plan of integration that was in force from October 1960 until January 1962. The theological commission, however, opted for a separate document after receiving the *schema* from the drafting committee in January 1962. The theological commission approved the *schema* as a separate document on 23 November 1962. In September 1963, seven council Fathers, however, requested a return to the earlier plan for integration. A vote was taken on this request on 29 October 1963 with the option for inclusion being adopted by a vote of 1114 to 1074 (O’Carroll 2000, pp. 352–53). To see the vote for inclusion as a major shift in Catholic Mariology is, I believe, reading too much into what took place at the council.
2. Prior to the vote for inclusion of 29 October 1963, two Cardinals were chosen to present the respective arguments in favor of a separate Marian document and in favor of integrating the Marian *schema* into the Constitution on the Church. Cardinal Santos of Manila argued in favor of a separate document and Cardinal König of Vienna

argued for integration. Both Cardinals agreed that there was a very close connection between Mary and the Church. Cardinal Santos, however, citing St. Bernard of Clairvaux, argued that Mary is not merely a member of the Church but one who freely cooperated in the establishment of the very existence of the Body of the Church. Mariology, moreover, pertains not only to ecclesiology but also to Christology and soteriology. Including the treatment of Mary in the constitution on the Church could give the impression that the council was opting for “Ecclesio-typical” Mariology over “Christo-typical” Mariology. Cardinal König said he had no disagreement with the points made by Cardinal Santos. He noted, though, that the Church was a central theme of the council and integrating Mariology into the constitution on the Church would highlight Mary’s role as “the most sublime cooperatrix of Christ in both the accomplishment and the propagation of the work of salvation through his grace.” The integration of the Marian schema into the constitution of the Church would not, therefore, be an option in favor of an “ecclesio-typical Mariology, in which the Blessed Virgin is only shown as a member of the Church among other members passively receiving the fruits of the Redeemer.” Rather, Mary, with the Church, actively cooperates with Christ in the distribution of the fruits of redemption. The arguments presented by both Cardinal Santos and Cardinal König manifest general agreement. At no point do they ever argue that Mariology should be reduced to ecclesiology. In fact, they both resist this view (*Acta Synodalia* 1972, pp. 338–45; my translations).

3. The Blessed Mother’s intimacy with the Church is based on her intimacy with Christ. Just as we cannot separate Mary from Christ, we cannot separate the Church from Mary. Pope Benedict XVI expressed this understanding in his homily of 8 December 2005 commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the solemn closing of Vatican II. In this homily, he recalls Paul VI’s 21 November 1964 proclamation of Mary as Mother of Church, and he says, “Indelibly printed in my memory is the moment when, hearing his words: ‘*Mariam Sanctissimam declaramus Matrem Ecclesiae*’—‘We declare Mary the Most Holy Mother of the Church’, the Fathers spontaneously rose at once and paid homage to the Mother of God, to our Mother, to the Mother of the Church, with a standing ovation.” He continues by stating that with this title, Paul VI “summed up the Marian teaching of the Council and provided the key to understanding it. . . . Mary is so interwoven in the great mystery of the Church that she and the Church are inseparable, just as she and Christ are inseparable” (*Benedict XVI* 2005).
4. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does not present Mariology as merely a component of ecclesiology. In fact, it treats the Marian dogmas of the Immaculate Conception, divine maternity, and perpetual virginity immediately after Christology (CCC, 487–511).
5. The 43rd edition of Denzinger-Hünermann (2010), following the example of other standard theological manuals, includes Mariology in its systematic index between Christology and soteriology.
6. The perception that Vatican II mandated an “ecclesio-typical” Mariology had a negative impact on Marian devotion and doctrine after the Council. In his co-authored book, *Mary, The Church at the Source*, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger argues that post-conciliar misunderstandings of what Vatican II actually taught about Mary led to some unfortunate results. He points out “that the new, ecclesiocentric Mariology . . . remained foreign, precisely to those Council Fathers who had been the principal upholders of Marian piety” (*Ratzinger and von Balthasar* 2005, p. 24). Paul VI’s declaration of Mary as “Mother of the Church” at the end of the Council “was a conscious effort to answer the crisis that was already looming on the horizon” (*ibid.*). Cardinal Ratzinger then states that “the immediate outcome of the victory of ecclesiocentric Mariology was the collapse of Mariology altogether” (*ibid.*). Paul VI’s 1974 apostolic exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, was an attempt to set in motion a “rethinking” of how the Marian doctrine of Vatican II was being perceived (*Ratzinger and von Balthasar* 2005, p. 25). According to Ratzinger, “we cannot assign Mariology to Christology alone or to ecclesiology alone (much less dissolve it into ecclesiology as a more or less

superfluous exemplification of the Church) . . . Mariology goes beyond the framework of ecclesiology and at the same time is correlative to it" (Ratzinger and von Balthasar 2005, p. 29)

7. In *Lumen Gentium*, 54, we are told that the Council "does not have in mind, however, to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor to decide those questions which the work of theologians has not yet fully clarified." While any class on Mariology must include *Lumen Gentium*, chapter eight, it would be wrong to believe that covering this chapter in an ecclesiology course provides sufficient coverage of Catholic Mariology. In its 1988 document, the Congregation for Catholic Education specifically mentions the importance of covering Paul VI's *Marialis Cultus* and John Paul II's *Redemptoris Mater*. Moreover, there are so many other important documents on Mariology prior to Vatican II that merit study.

6. Can Mariology Be Adequately Covered When Integrated into Other Required Courses?

When Mariology is offered as an elective, not all students are able to fit this elective into their programs. The question, then, is whether Mariology can be adequately covered in the core of required courses without a distinct required course. At my own seminary, Mariology is expected to be chiefly covered in Ecclesiology. Having taught Ecclesiology for some 23 years, I can testify that it is impossible to cover Mariology according to the characteristics listed by the CCE in its 1988 letter (i.e., organic, complete, and suited to the needs of seminarians) as simply part of a course in Ecclesiology.

The study of Mariology, to be complete, must include a systematic investigation of Mary in Sacred Scripture and the development of the principal Marian doctrines (her perpetual virginity, her status as the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception, her Assumption, and her association with Christ in the work of redemption and the life of the Church). Students should know the development of these doctrines and be familiar with the magisterial documents that support them. A course in Mariology should also cover Mary in the liturgical life of the Church. This is especially important for future priests who will be expected to preach on the Marian solemnities and feasts. Likewise, a course in Mariology must cover Marian spirituality and devotion. It is absolutely essential that future priests be trained to guide the faithful in sound Marian devotion, knowing what Marian prayers, titles, apparitions, and devotions have been approved by the Church. Finally, a course in Mariology should show the importance of Marian doctrine for ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and anthropology.

From my experience as a seminary professor since 1999, I think a required Mariology course of at least 2 credits is needed to fulfill the expectation of the Magisterium as expressed by the 1988 Letter of the CCE, i.e., a presentation of Marian doctrine that is organic, complete, and suited to the needs of seminarians. From a pedagogical perspective, having a course devoted simply to Mariology allows a more focused approach. Such a required course in no way isolates Mariology from the rest of dogmatic theology. In contrast, it would allow the students to see how important Marian doctrine is to other fields of study such as Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, anthropology, eschatology, and ecumenism. Having a required course would also commit seminaries to having professors well-trained in Mariology according to the mind of the Magisterium. When Mariology is expected to be covered in diverse classes, there is often a treatment that is fragmented and inconsistent rather than organic and complete. Moreover, not all professors teaching these courses have proper training in Mariology or a sound understanding of Marian doctrine.

7. Conclusions

The 2015–2016 survey of 32 Catholic seminaries in the USA shows some encouraging signs, but the fact remains that only 28% of the seminaries responding at that time required a stand-alone course in Mariology. Although students are given the opportunity to study Mariology either by electives or in other courses that treat Mariology, there are many reasons

to believe that the expectations of the Church expressed in the CCE's 1988 letter, *The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*, are still not adequately being met. Seminaries must always make decisions about required courses according to the best interests of the seminarians and the expectations of the Church. In this regard, the Congregation for Catholic Education in 1988 wrote:

It is necessary, therefore, that every centre of theological study—according to its proper physiognomy—plan that in its *Ratio studiorum* the teaching of Mariology be included, having the characteristics listed above; and, consequently, with the teachers of Mariology being properly qualified. (no. 30)

Because Mary is the Mother of the Church, Catholic seminaries in the USA must give sufficient honor and attention to Mary, who, according to the CCE's letter just cited, "is not a peripheral figure in our faith and in the panorama of theology; rather, she through her intimate participation in the history of salvation, 'in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith'" (CCE 1988: no. 5; *Lumen Gentium*, 65). A required seminary course in Mariology—taught by qualified professors faithful to Catholic doctrine—will insure that future priests can properly instruct and guide the faithful in authentic devotion to Mary, who "occupies a place in the Church which is the highest after Christ and yet very close to us." (*Lumen Gentium*, 54)

The importance of the Blessed Virgin Mary for seminary formation has been noted more recently by the Congregation for the Clergy. In its 8 December 2016 *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis, The Gift of the Priestly Vocation*, the Congregation states: "Seminarians ought to cultivate an authentic and filial devotion to the Virgin Mary, both through her liturgical celebrations and popular devotions, particularly the recitation of the Holy Rosary and of the Angelus" (Congregation for the Clergy 2016: no. 112). The Congregation then cites St. John Paul, who, in 1992 apostolic exhortation, *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, wrote:

Every aspect of priestly formation can be referred to Mary, the human being who has responded better than any other to God's call. Mary became both the servant and the disciple of the Word to the point of conceiving, in her heart and in her flesh, the Word made man, so as to give him to mankind. (John Paul II 1992: no. 82)

Pope Francis has also recognized the importance of Mariology. In his 4 December 2019 Message to the Pontifical Academies, he gave special attention to the work of the Pontifical Marian Academy International, and he described Mariology as "a necessary presence for dialogue among cultures and is capable of nourishing fraternity and peace" (Pope Francis 2019).

In anticipation of the sixth edition of the US bishops' *Program for Priestly Formation*, I wrote to Cardinal DiNardo, then President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB 2022); Cardinal Tobin, then chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations; the other bishops on this USCCB committee; and Cardinal Beniamino Stella, then prefect of the Congregation for Clergy. I was pleased to receive gracious replies from these important prelates. Although I cannot reveal the contents of their letters, I can say they all affirmed the importance of Marian doctrine and devotion in seminary formation. Several seminary deans have also told me of their desire to require Mariology, but they wish to have faculty support before mandating this requirement.

I believe seminarians and seminary administrators are becoming more aware of the importance of Mariology and Marian devotion. In the wake of the clergy sex abuse scandal, Marian devotion seems even more important for future priests. As Pope Pius XII wrote in 1954,

The eminent way to protect and nourish an unsullied and perfect chastity, as proven by experience time and again throughout the course of centuries, is solid and fervent devotion to the Virgin Mother of God. . . . Therefore in a paternal

way We exhort all priests, religious men and women, to entrust themselves to the special protection of the holy Mother of God who is the Virgin of virgins and the “teacher of virginity,” as Ambrose says, and the most powerful Mother of those in particular who have vowed and consecrated themselves to the service of God. (Pius XII 1954: no. 64)

Marian doctrine and Marian devotion complement and reinforce each other. A solid grounding in Mariology will help future priests guide the faithful in healthy and sound Marian devotion. Seminarians should recognize the Blessed Mother as their “Mother in the order of grace” (*Lumen Gentium*, 61) and “the teacher of true theology” (Pope Francis 2014). The Blessed Mother teaches us to ponder the mysteries of the faith in our hearts (cf. Lk 2:51). Catholic education cannot ignore the Mother of God. Seminaries are privileged places of Catholic education, and future priests should be properly trained in Mariology. In this way, they will come to love the Blessed Mother more deeply and come to know how she “unites in herself and re-echoes the greatest teachings of the faith” (*Lumen Gentium*, 65).

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Appendix A. Major Seminaries in USA Responding to the Survey

1. Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (includes the ecclesiastical faculty of the former Weston Jesuit School of Theology that prepares members of the Society of Jesus for ordination to the priesthood)
2. Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (provides academic training for Theological College, Washington, D.C. and for seminarians of various religious orders and institutes)
3. Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C./Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception
4. Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Berkeley, CA
5. Immaculate Conception Seminary, South Orange, NJ
6. Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, CA
7. Kenrick Seminary, St. Louis, MO
8. Moreau Seminary, Notre Dame, Indiana (for seminarians of the Congregation of Holy Cross who receive their academic program from the University of Notre Dame)
9. Mount Angel Seminary, Mt. Angel, OR
10. Mount St. Mary’s Seminary / Athenaeum of Ohio, Cincinnati, OH
11. Mount St. Mary’s Seminary, Emmitsburg, MD
12. Mundelein Seminary / University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, IL
13. Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, LA
14. Oblate School of Theology, St. Antonio, TX
15. Our Lady of Guadalupe Seminary, Denton, NE (for the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter)
16. Pontifical College Josephinum, Columbus, OH
17. Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, MI
18. Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology, Hales Corner, WI
19. St. Charles Seminary, Philadelphia, PA
20. SS Cyril and Methodius Byzantine Catholic Seminary, Pittsburgh, PA
21. SS Cyril and Methodius Seminary, Orchard Lake, MI
22. St. John’s Seminary, Brighton, MA
23. St. John’s Seminary, Camarillo, CA
24. St. John Vianney Theological Seminary, Denver, CO
25. St. Joseph’s Seminary, Yonkers (Dunwoodie), NY
26. St. Mary’s Seminary, Baltimore, MD

27. St. Mary's Seminary, Cleveland, OH
28. St. Mary's Seminary, Houston, TX
29. St. Meinrad Seminary, IN
30. St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, CA
31. St. Paul's Seminary, St. Paul, MI
32. St. Vincent Seminary, Latrobe, PA

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