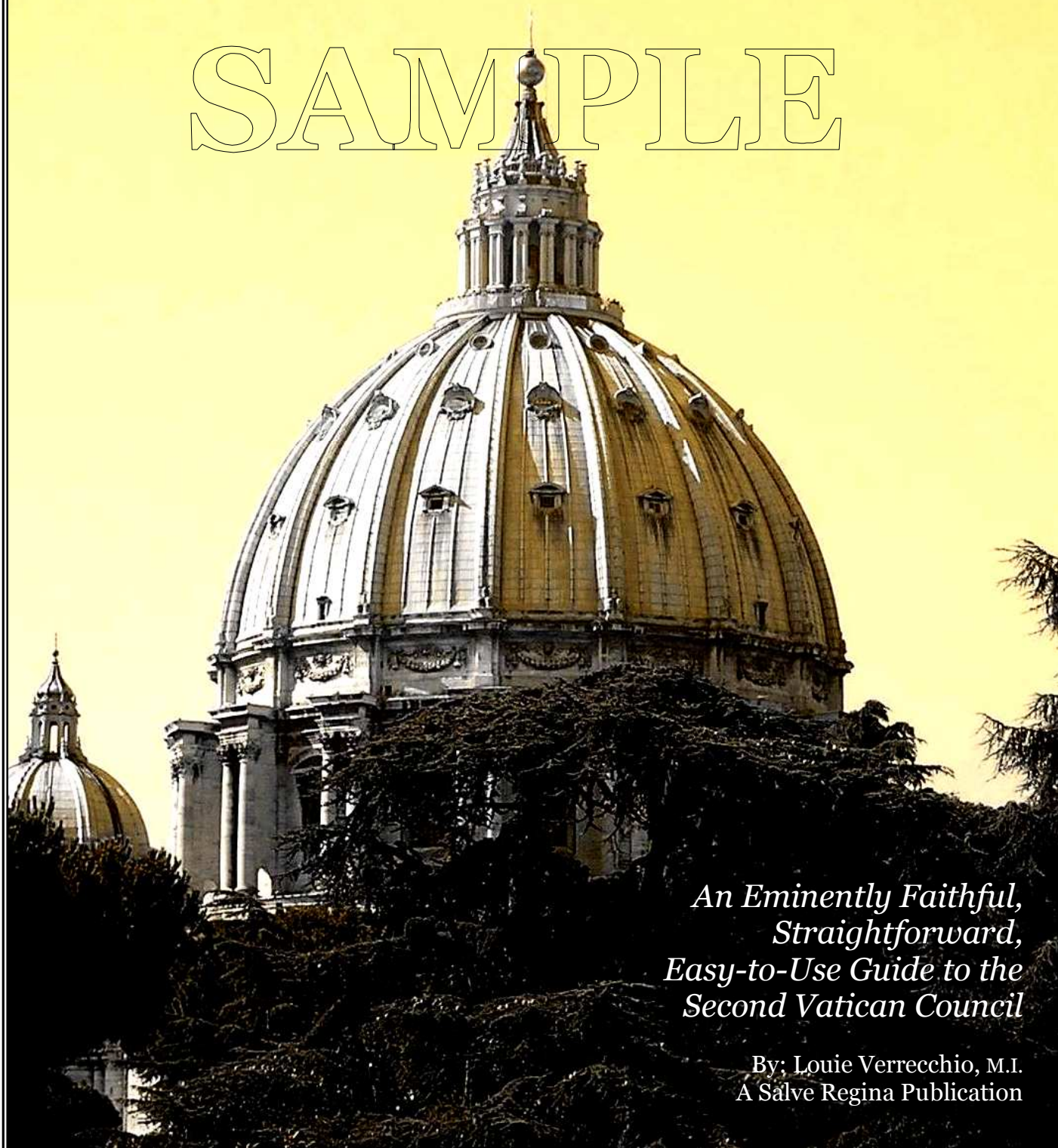


- PART THREE -
Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
- *Lumen Gentium* -

SAMPLE



*An Eminently Faithful,
Straightforward,
Easy-to-Use Guide to the
Second Vatican Council*

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Lesson 5 [SAMPLE LESSON taken from PART THREE]

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church – *Lumen Gentium* - Chapter VIII

Introduction

We began our exploration of the Church in *Lumen Gentium* with “mystery,” and we’ll conclude our study the very same way; exploring the mystery of the Blessed Virgin Mary - Mother of our Lord, Mother of the Church, Mother to all who call themselves Christian...

Honor thy Mother

“The typical Jewish mother nudging her son.” That’s how a deacon with whom I was once speaking described Mary at the Wedding Feast at Cana. (John 2:1-11)

Meaning absolutely no ill will toward either Jewish mothers in general or Mary in particular, he expressed his greatest concern, “People with deep Marian devotion, it seems to me” he continued, “tend to inflate the Mary’s role in salvation history, and it creates unnecessary difficulty for Protestants who might otherwise consider the Church.” Unfortunately, he’s not alone in his thinking.

Since the Council closed, there have been no small number of individuals who have treated Marian devotion as if it is an old fashioned form of piety that is out of step with the “spirit of Vatican II.”

The seeds of this mindset were sown while the Council was still in session. A newspaper headline from 1963 read, “Council Votes to Downgrade Mary.” At issue was the decision to scrap plans to produce a separate document on Mary in favor of including Marian theology in a chapter within the document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. (The chapter we will be covering in this lesson.)

Yet far from being a slap in the face, the Council Father’s decision to address Mary within *Lumen Gentium* was actually a great honor. It was an acknowledgment of Our Lady’s enduring participation in the mission of her Son as it continues through her profound unity with His Body, the Church.

Marian Consecration

Pope John Paul II did much to restore awareness of Mary’s proper place in Catholic devotional life. From his coat of arms featuring a large letter M beneath the Cross, to his motto, *Totus Tuus*, (meaning “totally yours”) the Holy Father proudly lived out his consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary for all the world to see.

While some still maintain that Vatican II impels us to downplay our devotion to Mary, especially in our ecumenical efforts, the Council actually encourages us to do just as John Paul II did; to entrust ourselves to the Blessed Mother, not just privately, but especially in our efforts to share the fullness of the Gospel with others.

“All should devoutly venerate Mary and commend their life and apostolate to her maternal care.” (The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity - 4)

What’s more, as we will see in our exploration of *Lumen Gentium* Chapter VIII, Marian devotion is not just another option among many, it’s a solemn obligation.

Note: To learn more about Marian consecration, visit www.consecration.com – the website for the Militia of the Immaculata, founded by St. Maximilian Kolbe. There you will find a great deal of information about the theology behind this longstanding venerable Catholic tradition.

Mary: Co-Redemptrix of Vatican II?

Now, let’s return to Cana. May I suggest that Mary wasn’t just behaving like the typical mom, she was simply acting as one might expect the *Co-Redemptrix* to behave. As you might imagine, the mere suggestion caused my deacon friend to nearly hit the roof!

“The Council Fathers chose *against* using that title! They decided it was an exaggeration,” he insisted, and he was right. Well, partially at least. The Council Fathers did not invoke Mary under that title.

Before discussing the matter of the Council’s teaching specifically, a definition is in order. *Co-Redemptrix* is a Latin word that simply means, “Woman with the Redeemer;” nothing more, nothing less. It does not imply equality with the Redeemer in any way; rather, it reflects Mary’s unique participation in the work of redemption.

Some Catholics maintain that we should find another title to describe Mary’s unique participation with Christ in the work of redemption since “*Co-Redemptrix*” is just too confusing. This, however, is like trying to put the toothpaste back in the tube; i.e., it’s a little too late. Mary has been invoked as the *Co-Redemptrix* in the Church’s ordinary Magisterium for some time now, including by Pope John Paul II. All of us, therefore, will do well to explore its meaning since it’s not going away and we will very likely be called upon one day, whether by a fellow Catholic or by someone else, to “make a defense for the hope that is within us.” (1 Peter 3:15)

So what did the Council say? Consider this; if I told you that my neighbor went to college for eight years and he works in a hospital diagnosing illnesses and prescribing medications that help people heal, you would know that he’s a physician, even though I never invoked him under that title. Well, as you will see as we conclude our study of *Lumen Gentium*; that is exactly what the Council Fathers did concerning Our Lady as the *Co-Redemptrix*.

Please read *Lumen Gentium* Chapter VIII (articles 52-69) which follows then proceed to the study questions.

NOTE: Lesson 5 has 12 study questions as opposed to the usual ten; an act of self-indulgence on the part of the present writer who owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to Our Lady for Her constant guidance and intercession in his life in general, and in the work you are now reading in particular.

*** The official English language version of each Council document addressed in *Harvesting the Fruit of Vatican II* is reprinted therein by permission of the Holy See. The documents are broken down into segments for each individual lesson making it easy for participants to navigate its text. For the sake of brevity, the Council documents are not reproduced in the SAMPLE LESSONS.**

Study Questions

1. Do the Council Fathers give any indication that they consider Marian devotion an optional expression of the true faith? Explain. [52, 54]
2. Read CCC 485, 490, and 495. Describe the Blessed Virgin Mary's unique relationship with the Persons of the Blessed Trinity? [53]
3. Is it the Council's intention to give an exhaustive treatise on the doctrine concerning the Blessed Virgin Mary? Does the Church even fully understand the mysteries of Mary? [54]
4. When and how was Mary specially prepared by God to give birth to His Son? [56]





5. Did this special preparation strip Mary of Her free will? Why is this so important? [56]

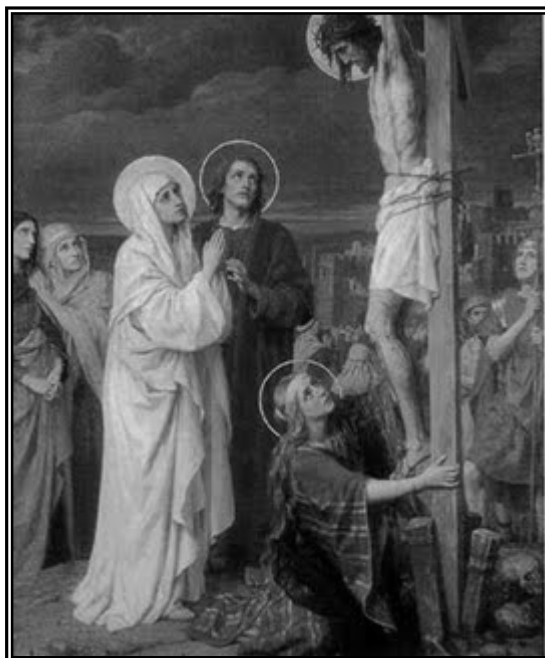
6. Compare and contrast all that we know of Mary with Eve. In what ways is Mary the “New Eve?” (You may find insights into this by comparing Eve as described in Genesis 2:21-22 and Genesis 3:1-5, and Mary in Luke 1:26-42 and John 19:26-27.) [56]

Since before the time of the Council, there has existed in the Church a debate surrounding the wisdom of promulgating a dogmatic definition of the title *Co-Redemptrix* as it applies to the Blessed Virgin Mary's role in God's plan of salvation. This study is not the proper place to engage in such debate, however, given the repeated use of this title in Pope John Paul II's ordinary Magisterium, it is important for us to have a clear understanding of what this title means.

As the Introduction states, *Co-Redemptrix* is a Latin word that literally means "woman with the Redeemer."

Much of the controversy surrounding the title lies in a misunderstanding of the Latin prefix "co," which very specifically means "with," and in no way implies "equality." As we will see in future lessons, Latin remains the language of the Church, and since it is no longer spoken conversationally unlike other languages, its words are not subject to changes in meaning over periods of time. It is, therefore, very precise and will remain so over the centuries.

7. Though the Council decided to refrain from invoking Mary under the title *Co-Redemptrix*, the Council Fathers in LG 56 gave a rather good and concise description of Mary according to the definition of the title. Based on the information above, can you find it?





8. Read Luke 1:46-48 and Luke 11:27-28. In the passage from Luke 11, does Jesus, as some of our separated Christian brethren have been known to imply, downplay or deny the blessedness of His Mother? What exactly is Jesus saying here? [58]

9. According to the Council, in what way is Mary considered the Mother of humankind? [61-63]

10. What are the signs of an authentic devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary? [66]

11. What does the Council have to say regarding the “cult” of sacred images? Do you find this at all surprising? [67] Reminder: “cult” in this context means “religious veneration and deep devotion.”

12. In saying, “Let them assiduously keep away from whatever, either by word or deed, could lead separated brethren or any other into error regarding the true doctrine of the Church,” (LG 67) what do the Council Fathers imply to be they key to exercising ecumenical responsibility as it applies to Catholic doctrine on Mary? [67]



Reflections

1. There seem to be several schools among the faithful - clergy, religious, and laity alike – concerning the Blessed Mother; those who enthusiastically practice Marian devotion, those who are tepid regarding Marian devotion, and those who shy away from Marian devotion. Which best describes you? If you are among those who enthusiastically honor Mary, reflect for a moment – is your devotion more akin to that which treats Mary as a favorite saint, or is it your sacred and solemn duty? [For your Action Plan, consider how you might either initiate, or reinvigorate, your devotion to Mary motivated by a proper sense of holy obligation, acknowledging that Blessed Mother deserves and is worthy of our deepest veneration?]
2. The Council Fathers speak of Mary's life of perfect faith as an example that each of us should follow. In what ways do you actively consider Mary's example of faith in your own life? [For your Action Plan, consider how you might more deliberately consider Mary's example, and seek Her intercession, in bringing Christ into the world as She did.]
3. *Lumen Gentium* begins by speaking of the Light of Christ, and that it is *His* brilliant light which illuminates the face of the Church such that it shines upon all men. Reflect upon all the ways that the light of Christ is being showered on you through the Church. In what ways does this light make you "the light of the world" as well? [For your Action Plan, consider the ways in which you might better reveal this light to others – in your parish; in your home; among your friends, etc.]

Consulting the Catechism

964 Mary's role in the Church is inseparable from her union with Christ and flows directly from it. "This union of the mother with the Son in the work of salvation is made manifest from the time of Christ's virginal conception up to his death"; it is made manifest above all at the hour of his Passion: Thus the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross. There she stood, in keeping with the divine plan, enduring with her only begotten Son the intensity of his suffering, joining herself with his sacrifice in her mother's heart, and lovingly consenting to the immolation of this victim, born of her: to be given, by the same Christ Jesus dying on the cross, as a mother to his disciple, with these words: "Woman, behold your son."

Action Plan

Review your answers to the Reflection Questions and formulate a plan for each one that will help you to make the transition from Reflection to Action. Commit to carrying out one action for each of your three reflections; this week, in the months ahead, and long term.

An action I can carry out this week:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

An action I can carry out this month or next:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Long term goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Mass Intention

Jesus comes to us in the Sacred Liturgy to nourish us with the gift of Himself in both Word and Sacrament, not just as an end unto itself, but that we may “go forth in peace to love and serve the Lord and one another.” Write a brief intention based on your reflections and goals that you will carry to Mass in the week ahead. You may be surprised just how directly your intention is addressed in the hymns, the readings, the homily, the intercessions, etc... Make note of it.

TIP: As the altar is prepared at Mass, ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to take you in Her arms to carry you and all of your intentions to the altar, that you may be joined to the Sacrifice of Her Son and carried to the Father, as once She carried Jesus to the Temple to be presented to His Father in heaven.

Suggested Responses

1. Certainly not; the language used in *LG* 52 is rather strong: “the faithful *must in the first place* reverence the memory of the glorious ever Virgin Mary...” In *LG* 54, the Fathers tell us that they are attempting to outline what they consider the “duties” of the faithful regarding Our Lady. Sadly, some in the Church today seem to view devotion to the Mother of God as a “non-essential” part of the faith. Even those who harbor a deep devotion to Mary must be careful not to view the Blessed Virgin as just one favorite Saint among many. The Council clearly taught that devotion to Mary an obligation incumbent upon all for the simple reason that Our Lady deserves such honor and reverence.

2. The Blessed Virgin Mary, by virtue of being chosen by God and specially prepared by grace to give flesh to His only begotten Son, is the uniquely beloved daughter of the Father; having been overshadowed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, She is the special temple of the Spirit; and having given flesh to the Lord Jesus, She is truly the Mother of the Son.

3. The Council Fathers specifically state that it is *not* their intent to “give a complete doctrine on Mary.” In fact, they continue, “theologians have not yet fully clarified” all that there is to know about the Blessed Virgin. This should give us pause; so glorious are the wonders wrought in Mary’s soul by God, even after nearly 2,000 years of Sacred Tradition, mankind is as yet unable to fully comprehend them. Can anyone who takes a moment to reflect on this remain casual in their approach to Marian devotion?

4. Mary was prepared to bear the Son of God from the “first moment of Her conception.” She was fashioned entirely and uniquely holy, preserved from all stain of original sin, and thus She was created and remains full of grace. (This is the infallibly defined dogma of the Immaculate Conception.)

5. Even though Mary was prepared to bear the Son of God by the singular grace and privilege of the Immaculate Conception, She nonetheless possessed and exercised free-will in accepting Her role as Mother of the Redeemer. This is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, Mary is indeed a child of Adam - a creature like us, and as such a true sister to humankind. Secondly, as *LG* 56 begins, it was the will of the Father that Life enter into the world through the free cooperation of a woman in Mary, just as sin and death entered into the world through the free cooperation of a woman in Eve. It is easy for us to make the mistake of dismissing Mary’s free-will because of Her immaculate condition. The fact is, however, by virtue of her spotless condition, Mary being unencumbered by sin was more perfectly able to exercise Her free-will in true freedom.

6. Among the similarities between Mary and Eve:

- Both Mary and Eve were fashioned in a special way by God - Eve from Adam’s rib, Mary as discussed in question 5.
- Both are called “woman” - Eve in Genesis 2, Mary as prophesied in Genesis 3:15, and by Jesus in John 19:26. (Among other places in Scripture.)

- Both were virgins who were willed by God to actively assist man - Eve to be Adam's helper (Gen 2:18), while Mary was willed by God to be "*used not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating [with Jesus] in the work of human salvation.*" (LG 56)

The parallels become contrasting as we consider how Mary "untied the knot" of Eve:

- Eve was addressed by a fallen angel, the serpent - Mary by the Archangel Gabriel.
- Eve freely chose to act in disobedience; thereby bringing death to herself and to all of humankind - Mary freely chose to act in obedience; thereby bringing Life to Herself and to all of humankind.
- Death was delivered by Eve in the forbidden fruit - Life was delivered by Mary in the fruit of Her womb...

This is by no means an exhaustive comparison and contrast of Mary and Eve. Perhaps the Council summed it up best by quoting various Church Fathers in saying simply, "Death through Eve, Life through Mary."

7. The Fathers defined Mary's role as *Co-Redemptrix* even as they chose not to use the title, in saying: "Embracing God's salvific will with a full heart and impeded by no sin, she devoted herself totally as a handmaid of the Lord to the person and work of her Son, under Him and with Him, by the grace of almighty God, serving the mystery of redemption. Rightly therefore the holy Fathers see her as used by God not merely in a passive way, but as freely cooperating in the work of human salvation through faith and obedience. For, as St. Irenaeus says, she 'being obedient, became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.'"

Read in context with the whole of Chapter VIII, the Fathers convey the degree to which Mary's participation in the work of Her Son is carried out in a singularly profound way. Mary, therefore, is uniquely considered "the woman with the Redeemer."

8. Jesus does not in any way deny the blessedness of His Mother. It is illogical to even consider as much based upon Mary's prophecy as found in Luke 1:48 in which She said, "Henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Maintaining as much is tantamount to accusing the Lord of denying His own word in Sacred Scripture; it is simply not possible. Jesus is not downplaying the fact of Mary's blessedness, rather, He is calling our attention to the *nature* of Mary's blessedness, and *confirming* it. What exactly is He saying? Jesus is communicating - for the benefit of His listeners and for us - the path to holiness, "hearing the word of God and keeping it," as His Mother "was faithfully doing." (LG 58) In other words, Jesus is telling us, "do not simply marvel at the glory which God wrought in the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary, rather imitate Her by keeping and pondering the Truth in your own hearts..."

9. Mary is a mother to all of mankind by virtue of Her unique cooperation in the plan of salvation, thereby restoring life to souls. Mary truly gave birth to the Lord Jesus - He who is the Life for every human person. What is a mother other than one from whom life issues forth? No one but Mary can be said to have given man *the* Life. Her work in bringing life to the fallen children of Adam has not diminished since Her glorious assumption. Like a true mother, Mary

continues to nurture Her children through Her constant prayers of intercession. Additionally, as Mother of the Church, Mary is a mother to all who consider themselves children of the Church.

10. The Blessed Virgin Mary is venerated with a devotion that is unique among the communion of Saints, for She far exceeds every other created person in virtue and holiness. Authentic devotion to Mary, while recognizing Her special place among men and angels, always points to the glory of Her Son. It leads to greater love for, and devotion to, Him and all that He has commanded. Marian devotion, when properly ordered, is not an end unto itself, rather it is always *Christocentric* and leads to a deeper relationship with Him.

11. Given the rather widespread practice of stripping Catholic churches of sacred images and statues, as well as the new construction of churches with somewhat sterile worship spaces in the post-conciliar period in the Church, one might get the impression that the Council ordered as much. Some proponents of an iconoclastic approach to renovating and building churches have even gone so far as to cite the Council in general terms, yet as we will see ever more clearly when we study *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, the Council very clearly calls for the use of sacred images and statues to be maintained. The Fathers are clear enough in *Lumen Gentium* as well, saying “the cult of images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the Saints, [is to be] religiously observed.”

12. The clearly implied key to exercising responsibility in our ecumenical activities with regard to the Church’s Marian doctrines is *knowledge* of these doctrines in the first place: we are urged to avoid “error regarding the true doctrine of the Church.” One cannot hope to avoid error concerning the true doctrines of the faith while remaining ignorant of their content. Notice as well that the Council urges us to specifically avoid *error*, not the topic. Sadly, many in the post-conciliar period in the Church seem to have intentionally de-emphasize the Marian teachings of the Church in their ecumenical fervor, but no matter how well-intentioned this sort of approach may be, clearly it was not an approach encouraged by the Council Fathers.



Summary

In this lesson we learned:

1. The Council Fathers do not attempt to give an exhaustive treatise on the Blessed Virgin Mary. In fact, they make it clear that so profound the glories wrought in Mary's soul by God, theologians do not as yet fully comprehend them.
2. The Council does not in any way attempt to discourage authentic Marian devotion.
3. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is not optional, as though Mary might be considered a favorite Saint among many. Rather, devotion to the Mother of Jesus is an obligation that is incumbent upon all of the faithful.
4. Mary is the New Eve; she who in obedience untied the knot fashioned by the disobedience of Eve.
5. While the Council refrained from addressing Mary under the title *Co-Redemptrix*, the Council Fathers gave us a good working description of how Mary fits that exact role; as one who uniquely and profoundly participates in the work of redemption with and under Christ.
6. The Council makes it clear that authentic ecumenism requires that we not only *know* the true doctrine concerning Mary, but that we *share* it.
7. The fact that Vatican Council II opened and closed on Marian feast days was no coincidence, and it may rightly be considered, as the late great theologian Fr. William Most often pointed out, a *Marian Council*.



