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Presidential Address: Fr. Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., 1911-1990: Vir Catholicus Et Totus Apostolicus

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**FR. JUNIPER B. CAROL, O.F.M., 1911-1990:
*VIR CATHOLICUS ET TOTUS APOSTOLICUS***

Early Franciscans delighted in regarding their Seraphic Founder, the Poverello of Assisi, as *Vir Catholicus et Totus Apostolicus*.¹ Down through the centuries, the spiritual descendants of St. Francis have striven in varied and sundry modes to be likewise men "catholic and wholly apostolic." Today, as the 42nd convention of the Mariological Society of America honors the memory of its venerable founder, the "Poverello of Havana," Fr. Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., we thank God to count him par excellence *Vir Catholicus et Totus Apostolicus*.

On one occasion several years ago, my friary at St. Hyacinth College and Seminary, in Granby, Massachusetts, hosted Juniper's diligent sleuthing through our 16th-, 17th-, and 18th-century collection of Scotistic commentaries. Innocently, I made the offer of photocopying any pages that Juniper would like to garner for his personal library. Long after he hopped his train for Florida, weeks and *thousands* of photocopied pages later, I posted packet upon packet to this "apostolic" bibliographer without peer. His prompt "thank you" note was signed "Scotistically Yours, Juniper." In the practical working out of his Franciscan call to be *Vir Catholicus et Totus Apostolicus*, Juniper looked with the poet Hopkins to the medieval friar John Duns Scotus (d. 1308) as the one "who of all men most sways my spirits to peace."² Juniper's

¹Fr. Iulianus de Spira, "Officium S. Francisci, 'Antiphonae Ad I Vesperas,'" in *Analecta Franciscana sive Chronica Aliaque Varia Documenta*, Tomus X (Ed. a Patribus Collegii S. Bonaventurae; Quaracchi, 1926-41), 375.

²Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Duns Scotus's Oxford," in *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie, eds. (4th ed.; London, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, pb. ed.), 79.

apostolate, like that of Scotus, would be to discipline the intellect wholly in service to Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom; to Mary Immaculate, the Seat of Wisdom; and to the Church, the house that Wisdom built.³ Was there ever a convention of this Mariological Society of America at which Juniper Carol did not give new flesh to Hopkins' description of Scotus:

Of realty the rarest-veinèd unraveller; a not
Rivalled insight, be rival Italy or Greece;
Who fired France for Mary without spot?⁴

Juniper, through this Society which he founded in 1949, "fired" America "for Mary without spot."

Born in Cuba in 1911, Fr. Juniper developed a love for Havana cigars at an early age. Memories of Mariological Society conventions over four decades are perfumed by the smell (I dare not say "stench") of Juniper's cigars. The bigger the better, his cigars served to punctuate Juniper's strong opinions and engaging arguments. And while the smoke would settle, ever the wise albeit forceful leader, Juniper would never cut off free discussion—unless, that is, the clock struck time for shifting to another topic. While we may chuckle at Juniper's penchant for banging a glass five minutes before a speaker's 40-minute time limit would expire, noting that the banging would continue non-stop if the speaker dared exceed the limit; while we might marvel at how persons of great eminence would quake at the audacious tone of Juniper's banging glass: we realize that his strong, inspired leadership truly enabled the Mariological Society to survive in America, especially during the years of the Council, when it might have disintegrated as other national mariological societies did. Fr. Juniper the leader did not merely found our society in 1949; he kept it together through the decades afterward. He served as President from 1950 through 1953, as Executive Secretary from 1954 until

³Cf. Proverbs 9,1.

⁴Hopkins, *The Poems . . .*, 79.

1979, and as President Emeritus from 1979 until his death last year.

Never falsely humble, Juniper's Franciscan *minoritas* had the ring of authenticity about itself. So what if he had a phobia of airplanes, a propensity to misspell names, an intolerance of pettiness. His style was unique. It bore the individuating *haecceitas*—the “this-ness,” inimitable and unrepeatable—that his mentor Scotus described. Such was the style of this *Vir Catholicus et Totus Apostolicus*. It enhanced and lent humble authenticity to his substance.

Fr. Juniper's substance—his intellectual priorities and apostolate—was securely focused on one goal above all: the Primacy of Jesus Christ. Permit me to state it in Juniper's own words:

The absolute and universal Primacy of Christ . . . does embody the ultimate explanation of all things. More precisely: Christ's Primacy . . . necessarily implies that Jesus Christ is the exemplary, meritorious and final cause, the *raison d'être* of absolutely everything which is not God. This Primacy, then, constitutes the only fully satisfactory explanation of any and everything which, in the vast realm of divine operations *ad extra*, has an explanation at all. . . .

Let us look at it this way. The most important thing in our lives is our religion. The most important facet of our religion is Christology. And the most important phase of Jesus Christ, as Man, is His unconditioned predestination, because that is precisely what constitutes Him, as Man, the very heart, center and foundation of the entire universe.⁵

In his ceaseless affirmation of the absolute and universal Primacy of Christ, Fr. Juniper proved himself a Franciscan to the core. He never hesitated to insist that his forebears in the Seraphic Order understood and defined better than any other theological school the central place of Jesus Christ in

⁵Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., Preface to Francis Xavier Pancheri, O.F.M. Conv., *The Universal Primacy of Christ*, trans. and adap. by Juniper B. Carol (Front Royal, Va.: Christendom Publications, 1984), 9.

the work of God, and the logical consequence and corollary of that thesis: the Immaculate Conception of Mary as first proof of Christ's Primacy.

In the 1950s, Fr. Juniper preached at a Holy Hour during the convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America. One of his colleagues took great delight in jesting with Juniper afterward. "Every theologian is entitled to three heresies in a lifetime," he told Juniper with mock seriousness, "but you have used up all three in one hour!" A heretic Juniper was not. His theological credentials as a Friar-Priest-Scholar were impeccable. Having studied at St. Charles Seminary in Havana, Cuba, Fr. Juniper was ordained in 1935. He received his Doctorate of Sacred Theology in 1948 from the Antonianum in Rome. He taught dogmatics at St. Bonaventure University and at Tombrock College, Paterson, N.J. He edited *Marian Studies* from 1950 until 1979. The author of several books and scores of articles, his monumental *magnum opus* WHY JESUS CHRIST?⁶ attempts to document Thomistic and Scotistic arguments in a conciliatory perspective. The first recipient (1952) of what has become The Cardinal Wright Award, Fr. Juniper retained to the end of his life the esteem of his fellow theologians and scholars.

Three salient characteristics are particularly evident in the theological patrimony of our Society's founder: his consistent fidelity to Catholic tradition, his doctrinally-grounded devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his rigorous critical method of scholarship. The main themes that he derived from his rigorous study of the Catholic mariological tradition were: first, the Blessed Virgin's Mediation—which always includes her unique role at the foot of the Cross; and second, her Immaculate Conception—which must be always understood in relationship to the Primacy of Christ. Fr. Juniper's main contributions on these themes would not seem to be in the originality of his analysis but in the integrity of his

⁶Juniper B. Carol, O.F.M., *Why Jesus Christ?* (Manassas, Va.: Trinity Communications, 1986).

synthesis. His work as a bibliographer has provided a basis for deepening our understanding of what we already know regarding Duns Scotus and his followers. Juniper's passion for research, evidenced in the library he collected, bore the stamp of intellectual integrity. Ever attentive to detail, with an encyclopedic mind, Juniper could not tolerate mediocrity or sloppiness in scholarship. Vigilant against such abuses, Juniper would be quick to write letters to various editors. He criticized the writer of a Letter to the Editor in a 1983 issue of the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*. Citing the flawed letter, Juniper declaimed:

He writes: "The Incarnation is not a necessity of the Divine Essence as Scotus maintains . . ." Why no reference? Because none exists! The accusation is simply monstrous and incredible. Scotus happens to be the theologian who most vigorously stressed the freedom of God's will (In Metaphys. IX, 15; Coll. 16, n. 8).⁷

In contemplating the legacy that Fr. Juniper has left to our Society and to the Church, we come to apprehend with him the point at which the Divine Will meets the human intellect. Juniper's legacy challenges us toward sanctification of the intellect through, with, and in a Marian "atmosphere" like that described by Hopkins:

Be thou then, O thou dear
 Mother, my atmosphere;
 My happier world, wherein
 To wend and meet no sin . . .
 Stir in my ears, speak there
 Of God's love, O live air . . .⁸

The substance of Fr. Juniper's "catholic" and "apostolic"

⁷J. B. Carol, O.F.M., "Duns Scotus on the Incarnation" (in Letters from our Readers), *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (June 1983): 4.

⁸Hopkins, "The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe," in *The Poems . . .*, 96-97.

work was grounded in and issued into a love relationship with the Triune God—through, with, and in terms of a love relationship with the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God. Juniper's theology became Juniper's prayer. The sanctification of his intellect became the sanctification of his soul.

Fr. Juniper died on the 1st of April 1990. The final lines of Hopkins last major poem come to mind as an appropriate epitaph:

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,
I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and
This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal
diamond,
Is immortal diamond.⁹

Fr. Juniper, a simple friar, common fellow, whom some might have regarded this side of eternity as a "diamond in the rough," was and ever will remain for this Society that reveres him an "immortal diamond."

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⁹Hopkins, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," in *The Poems . . .*, 106.