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Presidential Address

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, 1981

By

REV. ROGER M. CHAREST, S.M.M.

Your Excellency, my fellow Priests, Brothers, Sisters, members and friends of the Mariological Society of America.

First of all, I would like to thank His Excellency, Bishop W. Thomas Larkin, of St. Petersburg, through his representative Monsignor Brendan Muldoon, for his most cordial invitation to our Society to hold its 32nd Annual Convention in his Diocese. (Those of us from the cold North especially appreciate this invitation at this time of year!)

Next, I would like to thank the Staff of the Franciscan Center, here, for opening up their place to us once again. (If we can judge by past performances, we will be taken care of very well.)

At this time, also, I would like briefly to pay tribute to a few people who have died during this past year and who have contributed significantly to the field of Mariology. First, I must mention Father Cyril Vollert, a brilliant Jesuit theologian, who became the second President of our Society (1954-1955) and whose scholarly research in the fields of theology and Mariology won for him national and international acclaim as well as the Mariological Award for 1957. Among his many contributions to the Society are his three papers which were published in Carol's *Mariology*, vol. II: "The Scientific Structure of Mariology," "The Fundamental Principle of Mariology," and "Mary and the Church."

Another deceased member of our Society is Father Eugene Maly (exegete, professor at the Mt. St. Mary's Seminary of the West in Cincinnati) whose paper on "Virginity in the New Testament" appeared in vol. 13 of *Marian Studies*.

I might mention here that Father de Aldama, who was an active member of the Spanish Mariological Society and its former president, died this past year also. Though not directly involved in our own American Mariological Society, Father de Aldama contributed much to Marian devotion through his work in Patrology.

A fourth person I would like to pay tribute to is Martin Gillett, an English convert to Catholicism, and founder (in 1966) and General Secretary of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary in England. The *London Times* had this to say about him in its obituary notice:

After a long cancer illness, Martin Gillett died on St. George's Day. From 1933, when Cardinal Bourne had inaugurated the Walsingham Slipper Chapel as a Marian national shrine, Mr. Gillett has devoted his life to the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1950 he came to see that a subject so potentially divisive as Mariology should become a great uniter. So, with support from the Cardinals of England and Belgium and Bishop Alison of Winchester, he founded what has blossomed under his general secretaryship as the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with, as its Presidents, Cardinal Hume (from 1976) and Archbishop Runcie (from 1980).

In the 1970s, under Mr. Gillett's leadership, three international conferences were held, and a fourth last September at Westminster /Oxford. Branches of the Society have been established widely in Britain, and a separate thriving "chapter" in the USA: at the invitation of Cardinal Baum of Washington, Mr. Gillett flew over in 1978 to inaugurate it.

Finally, I would like our Society to pay tribute to another layman whose contribution to Mariology and the Marian Apostolate in the Church has been described as "perhaps the greatest single contribution to the century" (Card. Tomas O'Fiaich, funeral oration), Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary, who died in Dublin, Ireland, on November 7, 1980, at the age of ninety-one. Author of at least a dozen books on Mary and the apostolate, Frank Duff was also a brilliant theologian whose insights on Mary's universal mediation and the relationship of Mary and the Holy Spirit, in particular, are worthy of note. It is no secret that in 1920, Frank Duff discovered St. Louis de Montfort's *Treatise on True Devotion to Mary*. He was completely taken up with De Montfort's Marian spirituality. He was later to base his apostolic organization on this Total Consecration of oneself to Jesus through Mary.

Eighty thousand people filed by his open casket as he lay in state in the humble Legion of Mary Chapel on North Brunswick Street, in Dublin. Pope John Paul sent the following message of condolence on the occasion of his death:

The Legion of Mary throughout the world mourns the death of its founder, Frank Duff. I join the members in praying for the repose of his soul. The Association that he founded has made countless lay Catholics aware of their indispensable role in evangelization and sanctification and has enabled them to fulfill that role zealously and effectively. To all the Legionaries, I impart the Apostolic Blessing as a comfort in their loss and encouragement in their future tasks.

And now, if you will allow me, I would like to comment briefly on one aspect of Pope John Paul II's Marian teachings as he travels from one continent to the other highlighting the role and the importance of Marian Shrines.

The more one listens to Pope John Paul II in the light of his Marian approach to the mystery of Christ and His Church, the more one is inclined to describe it as a Mariology based on a Marian Presence, a presence of the Mother of God in our midst. This pastoral approach, it seems to me, is rich in its doctrinal implications as well as in its devotional appeal—and, therefore, worthy of our attention at this time.

In his prayer to Mary Immaculate, delivered at the foot of the statue of Our Lady in Piazza di Spagna, on December 8, 1980, in Rome, he addressed Mary, saying in part:

. . . Receive the expressions of our fervent gratitude for your being with us, meeting us every day, and particularly on this solemn day.

And stay!

Be with us more and more. Meet us more and more often, because we need it so much. Speak to us by your motherhood, by your simplicity and holiness. Speak to us by your Immaculate Conception! Speak to us continually!

And obtain for us the grace—even if we are distant—of not becoming insensitive to your presence in our midst. (*OssR*, Dec. 15, 1980, p. 4)

This, for me, is the key to Pope John Paul II's great attraction to Marian Shrines wherever he goes. Whether it is the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland, Our Lady of Loreto in Italy, Our Lady of Knock in Ireland, Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, Our Lady of Aparecida in Brazil, Our Lady of Altotting in Germany, our Immaculate Conception Shrine in Washington, D.C. — to name but a few — his visits to those places are not just stops on a journey, but the very goal of his spiritual pilgrimages. For, without doubt, he sees and experiences in these "deeply spiritual places" (Oct. 17, 1980) a very special presence of Mary — places where she exercises in a more visible manner her God-given functions of Spiritual Motherhood, Universal Mediation and Queenly powers; places where her children can pour out their hearts to her, as he did, that day in Rome, when he said:

We are again at your feet to testify to you once more our veneration and our love . . . In this place we wish at the same time to speak to you — just as one speaks to one's mother — about everything that constitutes the object of our hopes, but also of our concerns, our joys but also our afflictions, of fears and even of great threats. (*OssR*, Dec. 15, 1980)

On Sunday, August 26, 1979, on the first anniversary of the election of Pope John Paul I, his predecessor, Pope John Paul II blessed a statue that had been brought to the snow-covered top of Punta-Rocca, a peak in the Dolomite Mountains. Again, he referred to Mary's maternal presence:

In memory of the first anniversary of the extraordinary election of Pope John Paul I to the See of Peter, we leave on the land that gave him birth this sign of her maternal presence. We leave this sign, this statue of the Mother of God, here on this circle of mountains, in order that from here she may gaze on the whole of Italy, and that she may look into the hearts of all throughout this land who lift their eyes to her. (*OssR*, Sept. 3, 1979, p. 2)

During his visit to the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in Ireland, in October 1979, the Holy Father described the nature of a Shrine by saying:

I know very well that every people, every country, indeed every diocese, has its holy places in which the heart of the whole people of God beats, one could say, in a more lively fashion: places of special encounter between God and human beings; places in which Christ dwells in a special way in our midst.

And since many Shrines are dedicated to the Mother of God, the Holy Father went on to say: "If these places are so often dedicated to His Mother, it reveals all the more fully to us the nature of His Church." (*OssR*, Oct. 8, 1979, p. 13)

A week later, he came to our own National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. On that occasion, he said in part:

When they [the immigrants] came, they brought with them in their hearts the same love for the Mother of God that was characteristic of their ancestors and of themselves in their native lands . . . These people speaking different languages, coming from different historical and traditional backgrounds, came together around the heart of a Mother whom they all had in common. While their faith in Christ made all of them aware of being the one people of God, this awareness became all the more vivid through the presence of the Mother in the work of Christ and the Church.

Today, as I thank you, Mother, for this presence of yours in the midst of the men and women of this land—a presence which has lasted two hundred years—giving a new form to their social and civic lives in the United States, I commend them all to your Immaculate Heart. (*OssR*, Nov. 5, 1979, pp. 3-4)

From these few excerpts, culled almost at random from some of his talks given at various Shrines around the world, it is quite obvious that Pope John Paul II's Marian teachings revolve a great deal around the basic theme of Mary's maternal presence "in the work of Christ and His Church." He never separates Mary from the work of Christ and His Church. She is present everywhere that Christ and His Church are. She is actively involved in every aspect of the work of Christ and His Church, through the exercise of her Spiritual Motherhood and Mediation.

Pope John Paul obviously believes that a Mariology which

deals only with theories and abstractions has very little appeal for the so-called "average run" of the faithful. On the other hand, a Mariology based on a real presence—the presence of a mother in the midst of her children—is a dynamic force with an irresistible appeal. And this may well be the secret behind Pope John Paul's successful Marian pilgrimages as well as the open sesame to his Marian teachings.

We may do well to explore some of these avenues in our Mariological studies in order to be of even greater service to the faithful who rightfully expect Mariology to lead the way to Jesus through Mary. The subject, for example, of Mary and the Eucharist, which is the theme of the 42nd International Eucharistic Congress of Lourdes this year, is one aspect of this Marian presence "in the work of Christ and His Church." It can be viewed in the light of Mary's relationship with Christ in the Eucharist: Christ as a presence; Christ in His Sacrifice; Christ as our Communion.

But above and beyond developing what we might call Pope John Paul II's favorite theme of Mary's presence in the Mystery of Christ and His Church, we would do well ourselves, both individually and as a Society, to root ourselves ever more deeply in this Marian presence. Surely this has to be the immediate objective of all our Mariological studies, an objective that can only lead us—and many others along with us—to the Divine and Eternal Presence of Christ in our souls, which is the ultimate goal of Mariology.