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# Report on the North Palm Beach Convention

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## REPORT ON THE NORTH PALM BEACH CONVENTION

For the second time in the history of our Society, the annual convention was held at Our Lady of Florida Retreat House, operated by the Passionist Fathers in North Palm Beach, Florida. This time the two-day meeting took place on Monday and Tuesday, January 3 and 4, 1977, and there were about fifty delegates present.

The first session began promptly at ten o'clock in the morning with the presidential address by the Very Rev. Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., Prior and professor of theology at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. The keynote speaker was Fr. James M. Reese, O.S.F.S., professor of Sacred Scripture at St. John's University in Jamaica, N.Y. He treated the *Historical Image of Mary in the New Testament* as a hermeneutical question. Starting with the notice of Mary's presence in the primitive community in Acts 1:14, he showed how to approach the texts in order to capture her role in God's plan. A comparison of themes common to Luke's account of the finding in the Temple and John's Cana narrative shows that Mary accepted Jesus' invitation to transcend their physical relationship. She identified with His obedience to His Father's will in faith, the door of salvation, and became model for all believers.—The reactor to Fr. Reese's paper was Fr. Paul Zilonka, C.P., whose observations appear elsewhere in this volume.

The afternoon session began with the election of new members to the Board of Directors. On behalf of the Nominating Committee, Fr. Roger M. Charest, S.M.M., submitted the following names: Very Rev. Kilian J. Healy, O.Carm. (who had been previously elected to a one-year term, replacing Msgr. Low), and Rev. Msgr. Austin B. Vaughan, Rector of St. Jo-

seph's Seminary in Yonkers, N.Y., to replace Fr. Philip J. Donnelly, S.J. There were no further nominations from the floor, and the candidates were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Following the election, the delegates heard a scholarly dissertation on *Criteria of Doctrinal Development in Marian Dogmas* by Prof. William H. Marshner of the University of Dallas, Texas. It contained a severe critique of various methodologies which have become widespread in certain theological quarters, and which can be easily traced back to the errors of Henri Bouillard and the *nouvelle théologie*. Among other things, the speaker noted some of the absurd consequences that would result if Fr. Raymond Brown's views on virginal conception were accepted. Father Juniper Carol, O.F.M., who served as discussion leader, asked Prof. Marshner to comment on Fr. Avery Dulles' claim that the Faith comes to us embedded in concepts which are historically conditioned and ever changing, which explains how dogmas get to be "reformable." Prof. Marshner answered: "When a theologian attempts to take the Faith embedded in old concepts and restate it in new concepts, the Magisterium must judge whether it is the *same* Faith that is being stated. But the question is: The *same* as what? If the Faith is articulable only in concepts, and the concepts are not the *same*, then what *is* the same? Only, apparently, something that cannot be articulated! In other words, there is no way the Magisterium can do what Dulles asks it to do, if his theory of conceptuality is correct."

At 4:45 P.M. most of the delegates concelebrated a Holy Mass in the beautiful chapel of the Retreat House, with Fr. Jelly as homilist, and Fr. Zilonka leading the music.

The Board of Directors met at 7:30 P.M. in order to deliberate on next year's convention and other matters of interest to the Society. The meeting lasted about three hours.

On the second day of the convention, which began at 9:30 A.M., the Rev. William J. Finan, O.P., of the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. read a paper entitled, *Impact*

*of Mariology on Christian Ethics.* The speaker began by drawing a sharp distinction between moral theology and Christian ethics. The former is often reduced to cataloguing what is and what is not a sin. The latter is the Faith-inspired study of the activity of the Christian person in its principles and in its norms. The New Law of grace is central to Christian living, and Mary, as the one who is full of grace, can and should orient our daily lives to their goal of being perfectly attuned to the divine will. The speaker also pointed out the tremendous impact which Mary's example could have on those who suffer innocently and on our lonely senior citizens. We can also learn much about Christian attitudes toward unwed mothers. Mary herself was an unwed mother—Fr. Finan said—and in Faith she accepted her condition with its potential shame. He asked: Would Mary, in her condition, be warmly and openly welcomed in our American Catholic parishes?—Fr. Matthew F. Morry, O.P. led the discussion following Fr. Finan's paper and made some thought-provoking remarks.

After a ten-minute break, the delegates gathered again in the general assembly hall to hear a lecture on *The Sensus Fidelium in the Development of Marian Doctrines* given by the Rev. John Ford, C.S.C., professor of theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The topic was examined exclusively in the context of Cardinal Newman's teaching. In his essay *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, Newman cited the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception as a principal argument in support of his view that the laity ought to be consulted before a doctrine is defined. In Newman's presentation, the Immaculate Conception exemplifies the *sensus fidelium* at work in the contemporary Church, and parallels the role of the faithful in defining Marian doctrines in the patristic age. Moreover, the *sensus fidelium* fits well with Newman's view of the Gospel as an idea developing from apostolic times to the present; the *sensus fidelium* is one aspect of this developing idea. However, more critical

examination is needed, according to the author, concerning the existence of the *sensus fidelium* and its relation to non-homogeneous theories of doctrinal development.—Fr. Alban A. Maguire, O.F.M. served as discussion leader, and his reflections are appended to Fr. Ford's paper.

The afternoon session featured the traditional *Survey of Recent Mariology* offered by Fr. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., professor of theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. The subsequent exchange of views was led by Fr. William J. Cole, S.M.

The business meeting began at 2:30 P.M. with a brief financial report read by Fr. J. Armand Robichaud, S.M., treasurer. After that, Fr. Jelly, president, announced that the next convention would be held (tentatively) in Kansas City, Mo. on Wednesday and Thursday, January 4 and 5, 1978. If the Kansas City plans do not materialize, the meeting will be held in Baltimore, Md. The president also gave a summary of the responses to a questionnaire he had sent to our members in 1976 concerning the place of Mariology in the seminary curriculum. The result of his questionnaire, he said, would be incorporated in his presidential address.

Before closing the meeting, Fr. Jelly extended the sincere thanks of all to Archbishop Coleman Carroll for inviting us to his Archdiocese; to His Eminence, John J. Cardinal Wright, our Episcopal Chairman; to the Very Rev. Stanley Matuszewski, M.S., Editor of *Our Lady's Digest*, and to Fr. Ladislaus Pelczynski, M.I.C., for their generous donations. Fr. Jelly also thanked the Passionist community in North Palm Beach, especially Fr. Brendan Breen, Director, and his associates, Fr. Kilian McGowan and Fr. Paul Zilonka, for their warm hospitality and smooth handling of the convention. Finally, he expressed the gratitude of those present to the various speakers and reactors for their valuable contributions. The president adjourned the meeting with a prayer at about 2:45 P.M.

We would like to point out that the paper entitled *The*

*Report on North Palm Beach Convention*

9

*Blessed Virgin and the "Debitum Peccati,"* which appears in this volume of MARIAN STUDIES, was not read during the convention. It is being published at the request of its author, through the courtesy of the Board of Directors.

REV. J. B. CAROL, O.F.M.  
*Secretary*