Synod on the Word of God:

Mary, “Mother of God’s Word” and “Mother of Faith” *

- The 2008 Synod was “to renew the Church’s faith in the Word of God.” To do so, we need to look to the one in whom the interplay between the word of God and faith was brought to perfection, that is, to the Virgin Mary, “who by her ‘yes’ to the word of the covenant and her mission, perfectly fulfills the divine vocation of humanity.”

- Note the link between Mary of Nazareth and the faith-filled hearing of God’s Word, that is, the relationship between Mariology and the theology of the Word. This could prove most beneficial both for the spiritual life and for theological and biblical studies. Our understanding of the faith tells us that Mary stands at the heart of Christian truth. Mary is the image of the Church in attentive hearing of the Word of God, which took flesh in her. Mary also symbolizes openness to God and others, an active listening which interiorizes and assimilates, one in which the word becomes a way of life.

- Mary’s familiarity with the Word of God is evident in the Magnificat. There we see that she identifies with the Word, enters into it. In this marvelous canticle of faith, the Virgin sings the praises of the Lord in his own words: “The Magnificat – a portrait, so to speak, of her soul – is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate”.

- As we contemplate in the Mother of God a life totally shaped by the word, we realize that we too are called to enter into the mystery of faith, whereby Christ comes to dwell in our lives. Every Christian believer; Saint Ambrose reminds us, in some way interiorly conceives and gives birth to the Word of God: even though there is only one Mother of Christ in the flesh, in the faith Christ is the progeny of us all. Thus, what took place for Mary can daily take place in each of us, in the hearing of the word and in the celebration of the sacraments. ■

Golden Anniversary in the Marian Library

When he came to the Marian Library in August, 1960, the collection stood at about 15,000 volumes. Today, with 90,000 volumes in more than 50 languages and thousands of artifacts that span more than 500 years, the library is a world-renowned resource for religious scholars, thanks in good degree to Bro. Bill Fackovec and his 50 years of cataloging, researching, reading, reviewing and collecting. Bro. Bill represents what was once the model of the classical Librarian — one with familiarity with literature, history, theology, music, art, and facility in several languages (classical and modern, including Slavic languages).

Since August 1960, Bro. Bill has served in the Marian Library as librarian, cataloger, and chief research consultant. At one time, he directed all phases of the library acquisitions and cataloging, as well as the classification of the many auxiliary collections (images, prints). His thorough acquaintance with descriptive bibliography is reflected in his detailed descriptions of rare books, in the informative notes which accompanied book exhibits, and in his lectures on the history of printing as reflected in Marian books.

For several decades, every few years, Bro. Bill visited book dealers in Eastern and Western Europe who specialized in rare and antiquarian books. He maintained personal contact with these dealers, notifying them of his upcoming visits and asking them to set aside books on Marian topics for possible purchase. And, in pre-computer days, he also had to carry with him a recently-typed list of titles already in the library to avoid duplication. His efforts have resulted in the Rare Book Collection of the Marian Library which now numbers about 7,000 books (printed before 1800), of which two thirds are unique items found in no other library.

Bro. Bill contributed to the academic program by translating lectures and class notes of teachers who came from Europe to teach in the summer program. Also, he has shared the community by offering lectures and tours to classes and library visitors and by putting together special exhibitions of unusual books and artifacts.

Bro. Bill, a native of New York City, made his profession in the Society of Mary in 1946. He received the Special Achievement Award by the National Alumni Association of the University of Dayton. And in 2008, he received the Marian Library Medal. At a ceremony on October 14, 2010, in recognition of his contributions and fifty years of dedicated service, the Rare Book Collection of the Marian Library was designated The Bro. William Fackovec Rare Book Collection.

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**Book Notes:**

"Creative Listening" — a Musical and Marian Virtue

Music has a religious dimension: it is most fully itself when created and enjoyed in community. In the Baroque and Classical periods, and also in jazz, live music frequently had a type of interplay or exchange between soloist and orchestra, similar to people speaking to each other through their instruments. In recorded music, this communal sharing is absent and there is no live dialogue between the instrumentalists. There may be receptivity but no participation. Rhythm provides open space, an alternation between sound and silence. The rhythmic subtlety of chant is characterized by alternating between a simple statement and a neumatic development, in which the pattern is determined by the word and not imposed from without.

The Virgin Mary provides an archetype of what I am attempting to say. "Her silence was not merely the absence of words. It was active awaiting; availability, not emptiness. An education in listening to music can be a powerful way to learn Mary's hospitality, the assent to the word of Another who wants to become flesh in us" (Fr. Jonah Lynch, "Music, Science, and Technology," in *Communio*, 36/4 [Winter 2009]: 724-733).
Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help – Green Bay, Wisconsin

On December 8, 2010, Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay, Wisconsin, issued the Decree of the Authenticity of the Apparitions of 1859 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help – Diocese of Green Bay. He made the announcement at the Mass at the shrine that day. The bishop's words fulfilled the desires of many who for the last century and a half were convinced of the authenticity of apparitions given to Adele Brise, the visionary to whom Our Lady confided a mission. In the decree, the bishop stated that "with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the church, ... the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of a supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faith."

In the homily, the bishop explained, "This official declaration is an explicit recognition of what has been going on in the development and expression of people's faith in our Lord Jesus ... I think today is a gift we give back to the Blessed Mother for all the prayers she has answered in this place, for all the solace and comfort she has given to troubled souls." At the same ceremony, the bishop formally designated the shrine's chapel as an official shrine for the whole dioce­se. Bishop Ricken encouraged the people to frequent this holy site as place of solace and answered prayer.

The decree stated that, "After the apparition, Adele Brise began immediately to fulfill the mandate and mission entrusted to her by the Lady, and often at great personal sacrifice she went to the homes of the children to instruct them in the large unsettled and forested area in Wisconsin. ..." Bishop Ricken added that the message Adele Brise received in 1859 to teach children the faith is the same message people are called to today: "We need this message as much as they needed it 150 years ago: the message to proclaim the Gospel, each one of us, in our families and in our workplace."

The bishop's decree came nearly two years after he opened a formal investigation into the apparition on January 9, 2009, by appointing three theologians to study the case. (Their names were not released by the dioce­se.) The theologians were to study the history of the apparitions, all extant documents, letters, and testimonies to determine whether there were inherent contradictions or objections to the veracity of the testimony given by Adele Brise, and whether the accounts were free from doctrinal error and consistent with the Catholic faith. Nothing was found in the person and character of Adele Brise which would question the truthfulness of her account. Her character and conduct after the apparitions were a major factor in favor of the recognition of the apparition. The apparitions and the message given to Adele Brise determined her life's mission, with positive results lasting many years.

The shrine has been a center of prayer for the last century and a half, and all the previous bishops of Diocese of Green Bay have been present for special Masses in honor of Our Lady of Good Help. At the chapel are crutches and other mementoes of thanksgiving for prayers answered. The decree of approbation continued: "Prayers for physical healing are answered even to this day through the intercession of Our Lady of Good Help. Our Lady has lessened or relieved the burdens of the People of God ..."
As "Grez-Daems," Aux premiers Belges, now known Champion (or New Champion and popularly as Robinsonville).

Among the settlers at Champion were Lambert and Katherine Brisse with their children — Adele, Esperance, Isabella, and Vital. On August 7, 1855, they purchased two hundred and forty acres of land in the town of Red River for the sum of one hundred and twenty dollars. Adele, their daughter, was born near Brabant, Belgium, January 30, 1831. While in Belgium, she had decided to dedicate her life to serving in the foreign missions. When her family decided to come to America, she wished to stay in Belgium, but, her confessor told her, "Go with your parents and you will be rewarded for your obedience. If God so wills, you can become a missionary in America."

Life was hard for the immigrants. Clearing the forests of Wisconsin involved dealing with ravines, rock formations; outbursts of cholera took their toll of the physically exhausted. The land was inexpensive, but the clearing presented unforeseen problems while provisions, implements, and clothes had to be purchased. One commentator wrote, "How many immigrants suffer here infinitely more than if they had stayed at home."

The apparitions to Adele occurred in October 1859. The first occurred as she was going to the grist mill at Dykersville with a sack of flour on her head. There she saw the vision which would appear two more times: a lady dressed in white with a yellow sash and a crown of stars, standing between two trees. Adele was frightened; after several minutes the vision slowly disappeared. On the following Sunday, October 9, on the same trail, this time on the way to Bay Settlement for Mass, she now with her sister and a companion had to pass the same place. Again Adele saw the lady, but the other two did not. After Mass, Adele went to confession and also later confided what had occurred to the priest. He advised her that, the next time, she should ask, "Who, in God's name, are you and what do you want of me?"

The third apparition occurred in the same spot on their way home from Mass. As they approached, Adele saw the lady and asked, "In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me."

The response was "I am the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same. You did well to receive Holy Communion, but you must do more. Make a general confession and offer Communion for the conversion of sinners.

If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them... What are you doing here in idleness, while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?"

Then Adele asked, "What more can I do, dear Lady?"

"Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation."

"But how shall I teach them who know so little myself," asked Adele.

"Teach them," replied the visitor, "their catechism, how to sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing; I will help you."

The apparition changed her life. From the time of the vision to the day of her death thirty-seven years later, she devoted herself completely to the work she believed she had been commissioned to do. An observer wrote of her: "With patience and earnestness that never flagged, she persevered in her mission, going from house to house, and helping unsolicited to do whatever work there was to be done in the household – asking only in return that she be permitted to give instruction to the children. Weather conditions, lack of education, fatigue, dangers of the forest and ridicule did not deter Adele's determination to fulfill her duty to Our Lady's request.

Among the first to believe the message of Adele was Lambert, her father, who built a little chapel, ten by twelve feet, on the spot of the apparitions. In 1861, again with the help of Adele's father, the settlers built a larger chapel, twenty-four by forty feet. It was known as La Chapelle, dedicated to Notre Dame de Bons Secours – Our Lady of Good Help. In 1865, Fr. Philip Crud, now pastor of the Belgian colony, encouraged Adele to enlist the work of others and to build a center and school for children. She was joined by several young women who formed a community, but did not profess religious vows. At first they wore the simple cape-bonnet which Adele wore when she witnessed the apparition.

A miraculous occurrence took place on October 8, 1871. The Peshtigo Fire, considered to be the worst
forest fire in North American history, raged through northeastern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, eventually taking between 1,200 and 2,400 lives. It was a devastating sea of fire and smoke, fifty miles in length and twenty miles wide. As it approached the school and chapel, Adele and her companions did not flee, but rather, “filled with confidence, they entered la Chapelle, reverently raised the statue of Mary and bore it in procession around their beloved sanctuary.” The convent, school, and five acres were not touched by the fire.

The school, established in 1867-68, was successful but had its detractors, even among the local clergy. Gatherings at la Chapelle for the celebrations of the Marian feasts, especially August 15, were followed by entertainment with food and drink provided by locale vendors. Those opposed to Adele’s work complained to the bishop led about the commercialization and other “irregularities.” The local merchants let the bishop know that he would not be welcomed if he conducted a personal investigation and tried to curtail the festivities. So, the bishop placed the chapel under interdict and instructed Adele to dismiss the children, lock the doors, and give him the keys. Adele replied that time was needed to send the children back home (but also so that she could secure another property, should she be required to leave this one). Finally, she gave the keys to the bishop, telling him that he would be responsible for the souls lost because of lack of instruction. The bishop was so impressed with her sincerity and dedication that he returned the keys to her.

A new chapel was built in 1880; the trees from the apparition were cut down and placed under the altar. The fourth chapel, dedicated in 1942, with the title “Our Lady of Good Help,” was also built over the stumps of the trees. Pilgrimage to the spot continued, especially on the feast of the Assumption, usually consisting in Mass followed by an outdoor procession with the statue of Mary. Crutches were left behind as evidence of healings which occurred.

By the 1890s, hard times and inability of many to pay the board and tuition of the school left only a few students, with three religious sisters. Adele died on July 5, 1896, at the age of 66. The bishop advised the remaining three to either return to their homes or join the Franciscan Sisters at Bay Settlement, and it was to the Franciscan Sisters that he first confided the work. Sr. Pauline LaPlante, who as a child had known Adele, was the first sister sent to continue the work of Adele.

Sister Pauline recounted many stories of Adele. “So many times we would gather around Adele, and have her tell us of the apparitions of our Blessed Mother. She would always tell us in the self same way how she saw her twice without our Lady saying a word, but the third time she spoke to her and gave her the message of instructing the children in their religion lest they should lose their faith.”

Sr. Pauline also recalled that, “As a young girl I knelt in the dear little Chapel and sang with Adele her favorite hymn in French: Chantons le nom admirable de la Reine des Cieux” (Let us sing the praises of the Admirable Name of the Queen of Heaven). And, it was as “Queen of Heaven” that Our Lady identified herself.

2010 Pontifical Academies Prize: to the Marian Academy in Bangalore

At the annual meeting of the pontifical academies, recognition is given for outstanding scholarly achievement. An award at the December 10, 2011 meeting was given to the Marian Academy of India (Bangalore), described in the pope’s message as “a young and active Mariological center.” The founder and director of the center is Fr. Kulandaisamy Rayar, a student in the International Marian Research Institute program.

Sharing the award was a Portugueese scholar, Luis Albert Esteves dos Santos Casimiro, for his dissertation on the images of the Annunciation in Portuguese paintings from 1500 to 1550. The Medal of the Pontificate was conferred on Gen Verde, an international, all-women performing arts group associated with the Focolare lay movement, for its commitment to artistic endeavors with evangelical themes.

Mariological Society of America

This year’s annual meeting will be May 17-20, 2011, at the Franciscan Renewal Center, Scottsdale, Arizona. This will be ther first of two meetings devoted to the study of the Virgin Mary in American history. Among the speakers are Fr. Emery de Gaál (University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein), Dr. Wendy Wright (Creighton University), and Fr. Richard Gribble (Stonehill College). The program can be found at www.mariologicalsociety.com
On March 17, 2010, the Vatican spokesman Fr. Frederico Lombardi announced that an international investigative commission had been formed to study the reported apparitions of Medjugorje, in the Diocese of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH). The commission is headed by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, the retired Vicar General of Rome, and includes four cardinals: Vinko Puljić (Vrhbosna, BH), Josip Bozanić (Zagreb), Josef Tomko (Slovakia), and Julián Casado (Spain). Other members are Archbishop Angelo Amato, SDB (Prefect of Congregation of the Saints), Tony Anatrella, SJ (psychiatrist), Pierangelo Sequeri (theologian, Milan), David Jaeger (canonist), Zdzisław Jozef Kijas, OFM.Conv. (Congregation for the Saints), Salvatore M. Perrella, OSM (Marianum, Rome); and Achim Schutz (the Lateran). The findings of the commission are to be submitted to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith who will make the final decision.

Never before has such a high-level commission been formed to investigate a Marian apparition – five cardinals, an archbishop, theologians, psychiatrists, canonists. The history of the Medjugorje began in April 1981, when six young people reported that they received visions of the Virgin Mary. Since then, the hamlet has become part of the world circuit of pilgrimages, drawing at least 15 million people. From Medjugorge, prayer meetings and associations of all kinds have started worldwide.

Ordinarily, the bishop of the diocese conducts the investigation and renders the decision concerning a reported apparition. However, because Medjugorje was drawing international attention, in 1986, the Prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith indicated that the decision should be rendered by the Yugoslavian Bishops Conference. In November 27-28, 1990, in Zagreb, the conference issued the following statement: “From the very beginning, the bishops have been following the events of Medjugorje through the local bishop, the bishops’ commission and the commission of the Bishops’ Conference of Yugoslavia for Medjugorje. On the basis of studies that have been made to this moment, it cannot be confirmed that supernatural apparitions and revelations are occurring there.” (The decision was approved in a near unanimous vote, with 19 bishops in favor and one abstaining.) The statement continued that, because of the gathering of the faithful from various parts of world, pastoral activity would be provided so that “a proper sacramental and liturgical life may be promoted, and so that manifestations and contents which are not in accord with the spirit of the Church be prevented and hindered.” The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clarified that, since the apparitions did not receive approval, only private pilgrimages, not officially sponsored diocesan pilgrimages, were permitted.

The statement of the Yugoslavian Bishops Conference was interpreted as provisional (“on the basis of studies that have been made to this moment”), and the bishops were urged by the Congregation to continue the study and make a more definitive pronouncement. With the breakup of Yugoslavia, Mostar became part of Bosnia-Herzegovina (with Sarajevo as capital). Bosnia-Herzegovina comprises one archdiocese and two dioceses.

The previous bishop of Mostar (Pavao Zanić) and the present bishop (Ratko Perić) were not convinced that the apparitions are of a supernatural character. Present from the beginning was the conflict between the diocesan authorities and the Franciscans who were associated with the visionaries. Bishop Perić imposed canonical sanctions on Fr. Tomislav Vlasic, the first spiritual director of the visionaries, and he was later laicized by the Vatican and forbidden, under penalty of excommunication, to make statements on “the phenomenon of Medjugorje.” Nine former Franciscans, dismissed by the Order of Friars Minor and who were suspended ad divinis, continue to function as priests. Other Franciscans lack canonical faculties within the diocese. The Franciscans administer thirty of the sixty-six parishes in the diocese of Mostar.

The formation of the high-level commission appears to be in response to the visit to Medjugorje of Cardinal Christoph Schönborn on New Year’s Day 2010. He celebrated Midnight Mass in St. James’s Church in Medjugorje, met with the Franciscans, and heard confessions. He also joined one of the six seers, Marija Pavlovic-Lunetti, in climbing “Apparitions Hill” where the Virgin Mary is alleged to have appeared. Bishop Perić of Mostar was not informed previously of the Cardinal’s visit (a customary courtesy). He said that the Cardinal’s New Year visit and his statements which appeared to encourage belief in the apparitions had contributed to the “current suffering of the local church.”

The visionaries have continued with their lives. All are now married with families. Of the six visionaries, two – Milka Pavlovi and Ivan Ivankovic – did not have additional visions after 1981. Two continue to have daily visions, among them Ivan Dragicicv who accepts speaking engagements. The messages now over 40,000 – all in Croatian – must be carefully examined for internal consistency and doctrinal content.

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