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Editor's Preface

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Mariological Society of America

Mary and Popular Devotion

In recent years, meetings of the Mariological Society of America have been devoted to scriptural, doctrinal and ecumenical issues, and the conciliar and postconciliar documents, especially those which influenced Marian studies. The last three meetings (1990-1992) dealt with the role and presence of the Virgin Mary throughout the entire liturgical year. However, this was the first meeting devoted to the study of Marian popular devotion.

There are many reasons why Marian popular devotion has not been previously studied. Popular devotions and the apparitions which have given rise to some of them were not usually among the topics given serious theological study. Devotions fell under the broad category of nonliturgical "pious exercises," not on the same plane with the liturgy and other officially sanctioned practices; apparitions were considered part of "private revelation" given to individuals, to be carefully distinguished from "public revelation" which was meant for the whole Church.

Yet, what was not treated in theology classrooms had and continues to have great influence on the lives of many. Those involved in pastoral care know the place which popular devotion retains with many individuals. The media well knows that there is a great interest in apparitions, both on the part of sincere believers as well as those who are simply curious. Popular devotion has been studied by historians, sociologists, psychologists, but rarely by theologians.

Popular devotions were only indirectly and briefly alluded to in the documents of Vatican II. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy said that "pious exercises should be consistent with the liturgical season, should be derived from the liturgy, and should lead to the liturgy, *which by its nature exceeds popular devotion* (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, no. 13; emphasis added). *Marialis cultus* (1974) again indicated that popular devotions should be derived from and lead to the liturgy, while, at the same time, admitting that the application of this norm "was not at times easy."

It was the call for evangelization at the Synod of 1974 which produced a new interest in popular devotions. *Evangelii nuntiandi* spoke of them as "particular expressions of the search for God and for faith, both in the regions where the Church has been established for centuries and where she is in the course of becoming established." Popular piety has many positive qualities: it manifests "a thirst for God which only the simple and poor can know. . . . It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence. . . . Furthermore, it engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the sense of Cross in daily life, detachment, openness to others, devotion." When well-oriented, this popular devotion can provide "a true encounter with God in Jesus Christ" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 48).

Popular devotion can be studied from many viewpoints and in different ways. This meeting of the Mariological Society of America wished first to consider the relation of popular devotion to biblical revelation, then to examine the criteria for evaluating and verifying apparitions and private revelations, and, finally, to outline significant ecclesial values manifested in two Marian apparitions—Fatima and Guadalupe.

In the keynote address, "The Bible, Revelation and Marian Devotion," Fr. C. Gilbert Romero showed that a message or the images of the Bible have been communicated with a new poignancy through a popular Marian devotion. In "Discerning the Miraculous: Norms for Judging Apparitions and Private Revelations," Fr. Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., outlined the

process for approving apparitions or private revelations. In "The Significance of Fatima: A Seventy-Five Year Perspective," Fr. Frederick L. Miller, director of the World Apostolate of Fatima, spoke of the original Fatima message, its reception in the United States, and the spirituality of Fatima as outlined by Pope John Paul II. Dr. Sixto Garcia delivered the last conference devoted to the program's theme, "Our Lady of Guadalupe: A Sign of Ecclesial Unity." The message of Guadalupe as revealed by Juan Diego is both sign and symbol of God's salvific will, manifested at a specific moment of salvation history through the Virgin Mary.

The Mariological Society thanks all who contributed to this year's program, especially the four speakers who responded to the Society's request for these studies on Mary and popular devotion.

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