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### American Influence on Conciliar Decision Regarding BVM Schema

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## Appendix VII

### AMERICAN INFLUENCE ON CONCILIAR DECISION REGARDING BVM SCHEMA\*

Members of the Mariological Society of America had, I believe, a decisive influence on the Second Vatican Council's teaching about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I am Father T. William Coyle, a Redemptorist who has been a member of the Mariological Society for most of its years of existence. In 1963, I was teaching Dogmatic Theology at the Redemptorist Seminary at Oconomowoc, Wisconsin; one part of my course was the Mariology section. In 1963 also, I accompanied a newly ordained Redemptorist Bishop to the Council as his theologian, Bishop Thomas William Murphy, C.Ss.R. A classmate of mine, he was ordained priest in 1943 and was named bishop in 1963—bishop of a newly created diocese of Juazeiro, in the State of Bahia, Brazil.

About October 9, 1963, I called an "exploratory" meeting of the English-speaking *periti* and theologians attending the Council to discuss the feasibility of meeting weekly to share information about Council matters. Ultimately it was decided to continue with the meetings, *if* they were approved by the American hierarchy. The approval was obtained. For the program on the next week I scheduled Father Eugene Maly and myself to discuss the, then separate, Marian schema, *De Beata Maria Virgine* (the Balić text). Father Maly, the editor of *The Bible Today*, had given a talk at the Mariological Society's meeting in 1962 on "Virginity in the New Testament." He was asked to dis-

\*Notes from remarks offered by Rev. T. William Coyle at the first discussion during this 1986 Convention which analyzed Chapter 8 of *Lumen gentium*.

cuss the schema in the light of that topic. I dealt with the schema in the light of the teaching of theologians. Some of the American bishops attended that meeting.

About October 22, Cardinal Meyer of Chicago asked Father Barnabas Ahern, C.P., to draw together a panel of American *periti* and theologians to address the weekly meeting of the American bishops on the evening of October 28 at the North American College. This was, I believe, the first time a national hierarchy had invited its theologians as a group to give input or background on a Council document.

Father Ahern asked Father Maly, Father Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., and myself to constitute the panel, along with himself. We met for lunch on October 24 to divide the material: Father Ahern, on the general background of the schema and the Old Testament; Father Maly, on the New Testament; Father Diekmann, on the Fathers and Tradition; myself, on the teaching of the theologians. We agreed that we would urge the rejection of the current schema and favor its incorporation into the document on the Church, because some of the shortcomings of the Marian schema could be more easily modified if it were going to be entirely reworked to fit into the Church schema, rather than if the Marian text were just to undergo a piecemeal amending.

On Monday evening at about 5:00 p.m., the four of us were allowed into the meeting of the American Bishops; following our presentation, some discussion, and a question-and-answer period, we were to leave. Cardinal Carberry (then Bishop of Lafayette, Indiana) said, "These talks were some of the best we have heard during almost two years of the Council. I would like to ask the Fathers to make copies available to all of us." This was greeted with applause. After about forty minutes of answering questions, the four of us left the assembly. None of the rest of the American group were allowed to attend the meeting this first week; in the following weeks all were invited to attend, while a select panel made the presentation. We stayed for the entire session each time, unless it concerned administrative matters.

On Tuesday morning, October 29, the vote was taken on whether the doctrine on the Blessed Virgin Mary was to be treated in a separate schema or whether the document was to be re-

worked as a part of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. The vote was 1,114 for inclusion in the Church document to 1,074 favoring a separate document. Archbishop Binz shook my hand at the *Bar Jonah* coffee bar and said, "Congratulations, Bill. You won the election."

There can be little doubt that the presentations by the theologians had brought about a shift of more than twenty votes on the part of the American bishops. Cardinal Lawrence Shehan of Baltimore in his autobiography, *A Blessing of Years*, states, "As a result of their talks and the discussion that followed, most of us were convinced that it [the doctrine on Mary] should be included in the Constitution on the Church" (p. 155).

Monsignor Vincent Yzermans in his book *American Participation in the Second Vatican Council* (Sheed and Ward, 1967), after reporting the results of the vote, writes:

Observers attributed the results of this vote to the presentation which four American scholars had made before the regular weekly meeting of the American hierarchy on October 28. Their presentation succeeded in convincing a good part of the American hierarchy to vote in favor of incorporating the Marian schema into the schema on the Church. If they had not had the opportunity of making this presentation, perhaps the forty-vote difference in the voting would have resulted in favor of a special Marian decree. . . .

One American bishop called the presentation made by this panel "a masterful job." Another American prelate, commenting on the closeness of this vote, made this observation:

. . . Another factor in the successful vote was the excellent job done by the panel at the meeting of the United States bishops yesterday afternoon. I am convinced that a number of the United States bishops would have voted with the conservatives if they had not had the benefit of the presentation made by this panel on the subject of Mariology. . . . I feel quite sure that at least twenty votes of the United States bishops were switched as a result of that meeting (pp. 25-26).

Michael Novak in his book *The Open Church* (Macmillan, 1964) writes:

The previous night [to the voting on the Marian schema], four American experts had addressed the American bishops at their weekly meeting. . . . These talks, and the men who gave them, made such an impression on the American bishops that afterward many of the latter told the scholars that they now intended to vote for the inclusion of the treatment on Mary in the schema on the Church (p. 200).

A part of the discussion on October 28 dealt with the Mary-Church relationship. This had been the theme for the 1958 convention of the Mariological Society of America. Some of the information from that session of our society, especially the paper of Father Cyril Vollert, S.J., was brought into the discussion.

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