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## Presidential Address: The Future of Mariology

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## **PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: THE FUTURE OF MARIOLOGY**

Two years ago the then-president of our Society, Father James O'Connor of the Archdiocese of New York, wrote in our name to the Holy Father Pope John Paul II. While pledging our filial cooperation, the letter congratulated the pope on taking Mary and Marian devotion to the world in his latest encyclical, *Redemptoris mater*, which is the pope's own synthesis of Vatican II's teaching on Mary (especially Chapter 8 of *Lumen gentium*).

It is no doubt true that the pope wrote this encyclical to commemorate the anniversary of the birth of Mary and in preparation for the bimillenary celebration of Christ's birth in the year 2000 A.D. However, it is equally true that the Holy Father published this letter of his to promote devotion to Mary. We all know, of course, of the pope's desire that devotion to Mary should be spread, especially by the celebration of the Marian Year.

Following the lead of the pope to spread devotion to Mary, The Marian Library sent a letter to all the dioceses of the U.S.A. and Canada which asked that an account of what was done for the Marian Year be sent to The Marian Library. More was done than was reported, but there were few responses received. The twenty-three percent who replied seems like a meager reply. Perhaps the story is different in your diocese or among your friends. (I know that the reply percentage was greater than for "Behold Your Mother," a work on Mary written by the American bishops a number of years ago.)

Here are the results of the request for Marian Library materials: letters sent out requesting information on how the

Marian Year was celebrated—221; replies received—50; percentage of replies—23.6%.

We have another source for making a judgment about the state of Mariology at the present time—our own Mariological Society, especially our own meetings year after year (this is our fortieth meeting). Each year we have outstanding talks on Marian matters which usually precede our *pièce de résistance*—a report which gives us excellent bibliographical work done by our confrère, Fr. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., and which has been presented every year since 1967. For further information on the talks one should consult the presidential address of Fr. Charles Neumann, in *Marian Studies* 25 (1974), and the index prepared by Mrs. Cecilia Mushenheim, in *Marian Studies* 31 (1980).

And yet we all know that we are in a period, as far as things Marian are concerned, where a particular shrine of the Virgin—not Lourdes or Fatima, but Medjugorje—receives all the publicity, and there are many who associate Mary and Marian devotion only with these various appearances, and even imaginary ones.

When I address this group, I cannot help but think of the joint statement of two former presidents—not this time of our society, but of the United States—Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. “We see two Americas . . . a land of opportunity for most and (or) of idle hopelessness for too many. A nation of prosperous or of poor . . . and in between are middle Americans.” I say that this statement makes me think of the state of Mariology right now. In the implied comparison, in all humility, we have to admit that we are blest with a knowledge of Mary’s role in the salvation of all men and women. But what about the “middle American” in the Church? It is true that we have a number of talks on Mary (which are published almost a year later), but we have to admit that they make little impression on the general public, who simply are not reached. How about the homilies in our parishes? How often in the average parish is there a sermon or homily on Mary? I can almost hear the answer: Any time there is a feast of Mary which is a holy day of obligation. Be

that as it may, what is to be done today to try to realize the pope's dreams, and, I might add, ours too?

Along with a good many of you, I suspect the difficulties connected with the state of Mariology are a problem of Catholic education. A letter (March 25, 1988) from the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education seems to agree that here, indeed, is the root of the problem. In a message addressed to bishops, seminary rectors, and presidents of theological faculties, it urged greater attention to Marian studies in seminaries and theological faculties. It gave as a reason one that should appeal to our Marian ears: Mary is an "essential datum of the faith and of the life of the church." From this premise, it draws the logical conclusion that Marian research, knowledge, and devotion are essential components of intellectual and spiritual formation. This document was considered so important that it was published in its entirety in the latest *Marian Studies* 39 (1988), after the official account of our meeting.

This letter is thinking of the condition of Marian studies throughout the world. But can our country consider itself exempt from the implied criticism of the Sacred Congregation? In how many of our seminaries do we find that a complete study of the Virgin Mary—based on Scripture, Church history, and the Magisterium—is an integral part of the theological curriculum? But that is exactly what the Sacred Congregation prescribes. Use of the anthropological sciences to relate Marian dogmas and other theological truths to current issues is suggested. Advanced theological studies with specialization in Mariology are also encouraged (Two centers for these studies are specifically mentioned and the International Marian Research Institute [Dayton] is one of them). The congregation further recommended the development of a sound Marian spirituality as part of religious formation.

Now where does *Marialis cultus* fit in with all of this? Well, as you know, *Marialis cultus*, which we will discuss at our convention this year, was written by Pope Paul VI in 1974. It was really an attempt by the late Holy Father to "rightly order Marian doctrine and devotion." We all know

that the present pope has a like solicitude. The aforementioned document of the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, likewise, has the same orientation. It asks that the desires of two popes be realized, and that the study of the Blessed Virgin Mary's role in salvation history be a part of the curriculum for every future priest.

If it is true that *nemo dat quod non habet*, then all that the Sacred Congregation said makes sense and is really the solution for our problem with Marian theology at the present moment. The last contention of the congregation is in accord with our MSA Constitution. The constitution says, "the object of this Society shall be to promote an exchange of views on Marian doctrines and to further studies and research in Mariology" (Article I). The Sacred Congregation, near the very end of its letter, attempting to improve a Marian devotion which always exists in the Church, expressed the wish that a complete and exact knowledge of Mary might lead to a spirituality which would nourish a love that, in its turn, would foster devotion and commitment to Christ and the work of evangelization.

Our Mariological Society of America finds in this text not merely a solution of current mariological problems, but also a program for future conventions.

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