

# Marian Studies

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## Official Welcome

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## OFFICIAL WELCOME

His Eminence Cardinal Spellman has asked me to be his voice today to welcome you and greet you. While he gives his blessing to you, individually, to the Society and to this meeting he is convinced that your meeting brings a blessing to the Archdiocese. The mere repetition of the name of Mary as often as it is bound to be uttered here during these next two days is a guarantee of innumerable graces that will descend upon our city.

We have always liked to think of New York's devotion to Our Blessed Mother. The Lady Chapel of our Cathedral is famed throughout the world: enshrined there is the statue known as *Our Lady of New York* before which thousands each week renew their love for her and send their petitions to God through her hands: it inspired His Eminence to write a poem on it dedicating our communal life and effort to her tender maternal solicitude.

In the Archdiocese there are 109 parishes dedicated to Our Lady under her various glorious titles. There are 58 in the three boroughs of the City of New York that are in the Archdiocese: and if we cross the bridge to the two boroughs in the Diocese of Brooklyn we will find there another 58 parishes bearing the name of Mary, making a total for the city of 116 parishes where Mary is honored as the special protectress of the flock of Christ.

And you will find every church crowded to overflowing whenever it is announced that the faithful are to come together to offer her praise.

That devotion everywhere in our land so much in evidence, that brings its undoubted blessing on our people, will be enriched and deepened and widened by studies such as it is the object of this Society to promote. This is a theological society:

it is given to the exact precision of a science: in its discussions there will be no exaggeration and while there will be undoubtedly beauty of expression, never will there be the passing of the bounds of strict definite truth.

It is a fact attested by history and particularly theological history, that inexact exaggeration tends to drive people from devotion instead of attracting them. What have been contemptuously dubbed dry as dust discussions worthy only of a sneering rejection have in fact added to cult and practice rather than detracting from them. In the nineteenth century you had literary lights such as Carlyle ridiculing the discussions about Christ's person, repeating with derision "homo-ousion, homoiousion" as though it were all a philosophy concerned only with a syllable, a letter, a sound. But what happened? Only those who were interested in such "hair-splitting" and followed it, perhaps vicariously, retained their devotion and loyalty to and appreciation of the person of Christ. Those who despised the exactness of theological thought, who made theology an emotion instead of a science have come, and perhaps quite logically, to a neglect of the person of Christ. They who said of the theologians, "They have taken away the body of my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him," have come to the point where they do not care where He is laid and will not search, until one of their spokesmen has lamented "There are no leaders among us because there are no theologians."

One can never understand why harmful exaggeration is necessary in speaking of Mary. Using strict, sharp-cut theology we find ourselves impelled to call for a kind of super-superlative language. It is always like the coining of the word hyper-dulia. Merely very great dulia, or a very high, a supreme dulia was never enough: it had to be a term so special, so significant that it could refer to her alone.

The topic you have chosen for this meeting serves as a



pertinent example of the contribution the exactness of theology makes to Catholic cult and life.

Archbishop Borgongini used to say in class that the Church has spoken better than the Angel, for in the prayer it has added to the Angelic Salutation it hails Mary with her most glorious title, "Mother of God."

All that has been implied in the Incarnation has been expressed by St. Paul in his symbolism of the Head and the Body. We are all one body of which Christ is the head, and whatever belongs to the Head, whatever is of goodness or grace or glory is destined to be shared by the members. It is here in this divine economy that we find the firmly based assurance that Christ is our Brother and as Head of the mystical body can act on our behalf and gain for us our inheritance. All of this would be that exaggeration which we decry, all of it would be phantasy, empty, noise-making sound, were it lacking that real, factual foundation which Mary's motherhood alone provides. With that we see it as true objective, factual, a reality although a mystical reality. Only a man who was born of a woman is truly our brother according to the flesh: only such a one has true kinship, a blood relationship, a consanguinity with all the children of men. Without that real motherhood of Mary the plan of salvation in Christ as the Head of His mystical body would not have been.

When Christ on the cross spoke the words "Son behold thy Mother," He was not then making Mary our Mother, He was only declaring, proclaiming, stating the fact which derives from Mary's relationship to Christ, and His relationship with us.

Mary is in entire, mystical reality our Mother. This is as factual as to say that the sun is shining or that two plus two equals four. She is our Mother because she has begotten us unto eternal life. Together with Christ she is the cause of our being children of God in so far as it is possible for her to be

the cause. Mary is our Mother because she co-operated in making possible and in effecting the work of redemption.

Mary's co-operation in the work of redemption lay in her voluntary and free consent to become the mother of the Redeemer and in her share in offering the sacrifice of the cross.

"Our Lady did not conceive the Son of God merely in order that He might receive a human nature from her and thus become man: but in order that by means of the nature He took from her He might become the Savior of men." In that precious and sacred moment when she said "*Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum*" Jesus united to Himself His spiritual, His mystical body, and in that moment as she conceived Him, she conceived in that same instant spiritually the complete and integral Christ, all the members of His mystical body.

She conceived us then: but she gave birth to us at the foot of the cross, not in the joyous and painless process of a Christmas night but, because we came to this birth through a desert of sin, our spiritual birth was a process in pain and sorrow. She gave us our life by her compassion and her participation in offering the sacrifice of Calvary.

See how much has been developed from these exact and factual, objective considerations. See how out of your science comes an opening up of long vistas of grandeur in the work and person of Christ in its multiple aspects and activities: of His mystical body and our part and responsibilities in it: of the Blessed Virgin's share in the scheme of salvation and the tender, all-embracing character of her motherhood.

If this brief and superficial observation of your topic as a title has tempted us to joyful contemplation, to soaring admiration and praise, to dedicated action in union with the suffering and consecration of a calvary, to what ends will the scholarly and exhaustive papers of your conferences not lead us?

May your minds be blessed with keenness, your hearts with

charity and your lips with clarity as your proceedings progress; may you develop truth in faithfulness to accuracy; may the guidance of the Holy Spirit lead you; and may you come to a greater knowledge of and esteem for the prerogatives and person of Our Lady and of her divine Son.

Monstra te esse matrem  
Hodie sis lumen caecis.  
Bless us Mary Mother mild  
Bless us too Thou Holy Child.

RIGHT REV. MSGR. JOHN M. A. FEARNs, P.A.,  
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