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THE MARIAN MOVEMENT IN SAN FRANCISCO (CALIFORNIA), 1961 TO 2011

*Bro. Lawrence Scrivani, S.M.**

Précis

In 1961, Father Patrick Peyton led a Rosary Crusade in San Francisco that drew 500,000 people; a remarkable size for any purpose, but especially for a religious gathering. Fifty years later in 2011 another Rosary Crusade in San Francisco on the anniversary of the 1961 crusade achieved very different results. This paper traces the developments concerning Marian expression that occurred among Catholics in the San Francisco region during that fifty year period.¹ Regional popular culture during the same period is well known for the influence of the “Beatnik” and “Hippie” movements and the rise of the New Left which served to complicate the development. Among the Catholic population in this region there emerged parallel but opposed positions concerning the proper place for Mary in doctrine and devotion. One movement proceeded from those

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¹ Most of this study is based on unpublished records and papers in the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco (AASF), principally from the Archbishop's Correspondence File in the folders entitled: “Marian Congresses, Mariology”; “Legion of Mary, 1962-1977”; and “Blue Army.” Also consulted were: “Collection of the Marian Movement in Northern California, 1975-2005”; “Collection A-93.3: Records of the Committee for the Rosary Crusade”; the “Oral History Program: Transcripts of Interviews”; and the “Father Ron Burke Papers.”

Published sources included: “Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary” (Vatican City, February 2, 1974); *Consensus Document of the 1986 Fatima Symposium on the Alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary* (Manila: PCCC,

who professed to have a personal relationship with Mary and who sought to carry out a program for the renewal of Church and society which they believed Mary had communicated through chosen souls. The opposed movement found its locus in the "official Church," identified with chanceries and theology faculties. They cited the Second Vatican Council as their basis for rejecting "devotionist" Mariology of doubtful origin in favor of a refashioned image of Mary as exemplar of social and gender liberation in keeping with contemporary culture. Complicating this contest were newly arrived immigrant Catholics from Asia and from Iberian America with traditions of "miracle-working" Madonnas, as well as the Charismatic Movement and, finally, claims of new "apparitions." Recurring waves of Marian enthusiasm challenged the interpretation given by the official Church to *Marialis Cultus*.² Throughout Church history conflict among interpretations has had the unintended effect of driving the development of doctrine, and so it happened during the time between two public events exactly fifty years apart in the City of Saint Francis.

1. The Great San Francisco Rosary Rally of 1961

The first of these "bookend" events occurred in 1961 on October 7. On that date religion made news in San Francisco.

1987); "Report, Western Region," in *Marian Studies* (1985 to 1989); *Menlo Papers: Mary, Symposium, December 1981, St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, California in observance of the 450th anniversary of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (Menlo Park, CA: Saint Patrick's Seminary, 1981); "Second Franciscan National Marian Congress in Celebration of the Marian Year in Honor of the Centenary of the Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, May 4-9, 1954," *Studia Mariana*, 9 (San Francisco: 1954); Richard Gribble, C.S.C., *American Apostle of the Family Rosary: the Life of Patrick J. Peyton, CSC* (New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 2005); Frederick Jelly, O.P., "Discerning the Miraculous: Norms for Judging Apparitions and Private Revelations," *Marian Studies* 44 (1993); René Laurentin, *When God Gives a Sign: A Response to Objections Made against Vassula* (Independence, MO: Trinitas, 1993), trans. from the French *Quand Dieu fait signe* (Paris: E X de Guibert, 1993); Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp., *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982).

² "Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary" (February 2, 1974).

A crowd estimated at half a million people³ gathered in the polo field of Golden Gate Park; its sheer size alone making it newsworthy. But even more of a marvel was the reason the crowd gathered. There was no entertainment, no free food, no celebrity appearances—nothing other than the public recitation of the Rosary. The headlines from the San Francisco daily newspapers published the next day tell the story. The front page headline of the morning paper read: “Rosary Rally Biggest Ever; A Polo Field Paved with People; 500,000 Jam Stadium in Family Prayer Rites” (*San Francisco Sunday Chronicle*, Sunday, October 8, 1961). The rival evening paper’s front page read: “500,000 Worship at Rosary; Park Jammed; Father Peyton’s Plea Answered” (*San Francisco Examiner*, Sunday, October 8, 1961). An additional feature article appearing on an interior page added: “They began arriving at 7:30 a.m. yesterday at the Polo Field in Golden Gate Park for North America’s largest religious gathering.”⁴ A chancery official from that time, Father John T. Foudy, put his finger on what was the most disconcerting aspect of the event in the perception of people in public life:

The big rally presented a most unusual program. Governor Brown came—it was Pat Brown, Senior. He couldn’t get over what he saw because all it consisted of was people saying the Rosary. There was no special program or anything. He was just baffled by it, as many were.⁵

³ There is some relevance to understanding the geographical extent of the region referred to in this paper as the greater San Francisco Bay Area, because on the fiftieth anniversary of the Rally critics publicly questioned whether a gathering of half a million was even a physical possibility for San Francisco in 1961. Such a crowd size would have made the Rosary Crusade larger than the Woodstock Rock Concert in 1969. In 1961, the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the neighboring Diocese of Sacramento, a co-sponsor of the Rally, between them accounted for all of northern California to the Oregon border.

⁴ June Muller, “Faith in Eyes of Throng,” in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Sunday, October 8, 1961, p. 9.

⁵ John T. Foudy was the archdiocesan superintendent of schools in 1961. His account in this and subsequent quotations is taken from an unpublished typescript at the Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The interview was conducted by Dr. Jeffrey Burns, PhD, on July 7, 1988, at Saint Anne’s of the Sunset Parish in San Francisco (AASF, Oral History Interviews: Msgr. John T. Foudy, p. 16 to 18).

But even more baffling is what came in the years after the Rally, as San Francisco erupted in the counter-cultural revolution against faith and family. Just how does the great San Francisco Rosary Crusade fit into the flow of events? To explain its success, it is perhaps better to look at what came before it rather than look to what came after it. In other words, the Rally of 1961 did not signal what was to come for the Catholic Church; rather, it was the crescendo that ended what had been before it. Father Patrick Peyton's appearance in San Francisco might be understood as the outcome of efforts from the previous decade that peaked with his arrival in 1961.

What were these antecedents before 1961? This is harder to answer for the American Church than might first appear. From those times there is little direct evidence of formal Marian theology in the teaching or preaching practiced in the Archdiocese of San Francisco outside of some of the religious orders. The period from the days of Cardinal Mercier,⁶ in the first quarter of the twentieth century to the death of Pius XII in 1958, is described as a "Marian Age" for the Catholic Church. After Mercier's death in 1926, a graduate of Louvain, Franciscan Friar Karl Balić, O.F.M.,⁷ continued to provide international leadership to the Marian movement until his death in 1977. In San Francisco, Friar Balić, had a faithful collaborator in the person of Friar Alfred Boeddeker, O.F.M.⁸ Boeddeker was a San Franciscan

⁶ Désiré Joseph Cardinal Mercier (1851-1926) was inspired by Louis Marie de Montfort's book on *True Devotion* to launch a whole movement on Mary's universal mediation (Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* [Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1982], 245).

⁷ The Franciscan, Karl Balić (1899-1977), born in Croatia, has been a key figure in the development of Marian theology through international collaboration. Balić organized Franciscan congresses to prepare for the dogma of the Assumption. He founded the Academia Mariana and organized the international mariological congresses from 1950 to 1975. Balić served on the advisory committee of *Munificentissimus Deus*. His contribution to Vatican II was capital (O'Carroll, *Theotokos*, 68).

⁸ Anton Boeddeker was born in San Francisco, California, on August 7, 1903. He was appointed pastor of Saint Boniface Church in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. He served as president of the Franciscan National Marian Commission from 1955 to 1979 and was associate editor of *The Marian Era*, published by the Franciscan Herald Press from 1960 to 1979. In addition, Father Boeddeker was a member of the Mariological Society of America, the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the

native who became a local celebrity by founding the Saint Anthony's Dining Room to feed the homeless of San Francisco. He was no less instrumental as a promoter of Marian theology, but for this he is hardly remembered. In 1954 he established the Marian Center and Library and used it as the basis for organizing the Franciscan National Marian Congress held in San Francisco to observe the Marian Year.⁹ Friar Boeddeker is an example of the many religious of all congregations who promoted theology about Mary according to the means available. He is important to keep in mind for his efforts to promote knowledge of Mary through academic conferences, but these are not the main influence for the 1961 Rally.

The most significant antecedent to the 1961 Rally was a local radio broadcast called the "Rosary Hour" that began in 1951 on a single AM station. Within the first six months the broadcast received 40,000 letters from listeners. By the end of its second year (1953) it was broadcasting on five stations, four of them beaming at 50,000 watts so that the broadcast covered the entire region. The focus of the Rosary Hour was the Fatima message. The man behind the Rosary Hour was Msgr. Alvin P. Wagner, who was no stranger to the Fatima message. In 1952, he proposed to the archbishop a special "May Day Rosary Hour" for which one million listeners were to be recruited in advance. He would ask the listeners to send in their names and addresses to confirm their participation. As prayer intentions for this special May Day Rosary, Wagner proposed: 1) True Peace, 2) Conversion of Russia, and 3) Holiness in all the homes of our land. Wagner concluded his memo with an observation: "This project could result in a Diocesan-wide Rosary rally." He said this in 1952. The observer cannot miss the presence of the Fatima messages in the formula for the Rosary Hour nor the

Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis. He retired in 1980 and died on January 1, 1994, in San Francisco (University of Dayton, The Marian Library, Father Alfred Boeddeker Collection, 2011).

⁹ The proceedings of the San Francisco Marian Congress can be found in "Second Franciscan National Marian Congress in Celebration of the Marian Year in Honor of the Centenary of the Definition of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, May 4-9, 1954," *Studia Mariana* 9 (San Francisco, CA: Franciscan National Marian Commission, 1957).

aspiration that "this project could result in a Diocesan-wide Rosary rally." In 1961, Wagner would serve as the general director for the committee of six priests responsible for organizing the Rosary Crusade rally.¹⁰ The messages of Fatima, promoted by both Fr. Peyton's movement and by the Rosary Hour broadcast, would supply the theological content of that event.

Another important ingredient in the success of the 1961 Rally was the well-ordered diocesan structure then in place. Father Peyton's program required a five-week-long promotion conducted in the parishes according to a rigorous formula: 1) The bishop was to urge his priests to preach on the subject for each of the five weeks before the final rally; 2) During the fifth week, the parishioners were to sign cards pledging to say the family Rosary and the cards were to be collected door-to-door with one man (not a woman) assigned for every five families; 3) Fallen-away Catholics and non-Catholics were to be included; and 4) The chronically ill were invited to offer their sufferings as a "heroic gift" for the success of the undertaking. In those days, the chancery could expect general cooperation from the parishes, with the result that the final count was: Pledges 400,976; Refusals 35,187; Non-Catholics 5,209; and Heroic Gifts 4,715. From the perspective of that time the count could be considered a great success and the cards collected were a corroboration of the size of the crowd that gathered for the Rally. Another great feature of the diocesan organization at this time was its system of Catholic schools throughout northern California. Father Foudy, the superintendent, described it this way:

I reached the conclusion that if every child came, or maybe if 50,000 of them came, and each brought along father and mother and maybe an

¹⁰ For the 1961 Rally, Rev. Alvin P. Wagner held the title of "General Director, Family Rosary Crusade and Rally." He was at the same time pastor of St. Joseph's Church in Alameda and Director of the Rosary Hour in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Wagner served as chief of staff for the Rally project. He was assisted by Rev. Donnell A. Walsh, J.C.D., and Rev. Mark J. Hurley, Ph.D. Fr. John Foudy, Ph.D., as the Superintendent of Schools, organized the participation of the schools. Fr. Patrick Peyton, C.S.C., and Fr. Joseph M. Quinn, C.S.C., directed the Holy Cross personnel involved. This group served under the chairmanship of Auxiliary Bishop Hugh A. Donohoe (AASF: Collection A-93.3: Records of the Committee for the Rosary Crusade).

aunt, we could have a couple hundred thousand people out there with no trouble at all. So that was the thrust of my talk. I would go around, and I'd drive Father Peyton around.

The regular Rosary Hour broadcast, its Fatima message, and the well-maintained diocesan apparatus provided the remote preparation for the Rally, but the catalyst to galvanize the event was provided by the person and program of Father Patrick Peyton, C.S.C. In retrospect, the historical conclusion must be that this event was not the beginning of something to come, but, rather, the end of what had gone before it. There followed only a troubling and confusing departure from everything it represented, known to history as "the Sixties."

2. The Events of "the Sixties"

The 1960s were a time of general disruption for the Archdiocese of San Francisco. One week after the Rosary rally, the archbishop of the previous twenty-six years, John J. Mitty, died. Joseph T. McGucken succeeded to the see on February 21, 1962, only to have his fifty-year-old Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption destroyed by a fire of mysterious origin on September 7, 1962. The loss of the cathedral was a harbinger of what was in store for the new archbishop; along with it went the diocesan culture that had produced the 1961 event. A month after the fire, the first session of the Second Vatican Council convened on October 11, 1962.

Regarding the first session of the Council, two letters found in the archives of local dioceses from this time illustrate well enough the attitudes about Mary that were to inform subsequent events. The first letter came from a Catholic lay woman who gave no evidence of theological sophistication. She wrote to her diocesan newspaper in response to accounts she had read in the local press about the Vatican Council, her point being: "I do hope that the Fathers of the ecumenical council take not an iota away from the honor we give Mary."¹¹ The

¹¹ This letter is found in the Archives of the Diocese of Monterey in California. The letter was written to the *Central California Register*, the official newspaper of what was then the Diocese of Monterey-Fresno.

editor referred the letter to the Ordinary, Bishop Aloysius Willinger, who directed his secretary to send this message, dated October 10, 1963: "What has been published in the secular press in reference to Our Lady is merely a correspondent's viewpoint. The Council will not change in any way the traditional beliefs of the Church." While the bishop's answer is technically correct, it stands as a great misapprehension of what was coming. In reading the signs of the times, the laity was perhaps more perspicacious than their pastors. That there was something to be concerned about emerges more clearly in an exchange of letters a year later between Archbishop McGucken and Friar Boeddeker. The archbishop wrote:

I am sure you must be happy with the Holy Father's declaration naming our Blessed Lady "Mother of the Church." I am annoyed by some of the articles that have appeared, and especially the one in this week's *Commonweal*, indicating that the Conciliar Fathers had voted against this title. No such thing ever happened.¹²

As time would tell, there would be increasing divergence about what the Council had meant and accomplished concerning Mary and her place in doctrine and devotion.

After the Second Vatican Council a certain malaise descended on Marian devotion. Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm., during a frank moment years later, attributed this malaise to "a deep dissatisfaction in the Church with Marian piety, even during the 1950s." Describing the cause of this dissatisfaction he said:

The liturgical, the scriptural and the ecumenical movements developed independently from the Marian movement, sometimes in opposition. Marian devotion was often separated from liturgical piety and seemed motivated by a different spirit. The biblical scholar questioned the scriptural basis for these devotions. The Council chose to favor the biblical foundations on her. After the Council, the uneasiness surfaced and took as its mark one of the most evident features of pre-conciliar Catholicism. Great silence descended on the pulpit about Mary.¹³

¹² Letter dated December 9, 1964, from McGucken to Boeddeker (AASE, Archbishop's Correspondence File, "Marian Congresses, Mariology").

¹³ Eamon R. Carroll, O. Carm., during a lecture presented at the Marianist Formation Center in Cupertino, California, 1984 (Collection of the Author).

From the end of the Council (1965) to the publication of *Marialis Cultus* (1974), the Catholic Church went through a decade without Mary in pastoral practice and exhortation from the pulpit.¹⁴ The absence of Mary was part of a wider confusion among Catholics in the United States about all matters of doctrine and discipline.

Other events during the "Decade without Mary" signaled the great era of change in popular culture for which the late 1960s are known and for which San Francisco is regarded as the stage. This change is associated with the emergence of the New Left in both culture and politics. Ironically, the event described as the birth of that movement happened in the same playing field used by the Rosary Rally six years previously. It was pitched as "A Gathering of the Tribes for Human Be-In" to occur on January 14, 1967. About 20,000 people attended the "be-in," but it led six months later to the "Summer of Love" which gave birth to the "Hippie" movement. The social impact associated with these events greatly affected local Catholics. Until 1968, the civic culture and public morals of the United States had been generally influenced by Calvinistic standards, especially regarding sexual behavior, marriage, and family. The Catholic Church had found ways to navigate comfortably in most matters under this mantle of Protestant hegemony of cultural norms. But the cultural revolution of the Sixties changed all that, and created a test situation for Catholic clergy and laity. Did you still need to be good when the civil law now allowed you to be bad? In the summer of 1968 the "Washington Statement," issued by a group of Catholic priests against *Humanae Vitae*, introduced "theological dissent" into the Catholic Church in the United States, ending for our time the spirit of *communio* and replacing it with an unbridgeable divide.¹⁵

¹⁴ Michael O'Carroll attributes the statement "Decade without Mary" to Ignace de la Potterie at the International Marian Congress at Huelva (Spain), 1992.

¹⁵ "In 1968, something terrible happened in the Church. Within the ministerial priesthood, ruptures developed everywhere among friends which never healed. And the wounds continue to affect the whole Church. The dissent, together with the leaders' manipulation of the anger they fomented, became a supreme test. It changed fundamental relationships within the Church. It was a *Peirasmòs* for many. . . . The

Both the Second Vatican Council and *Marialis Cultus* admonished Catholics to be “open to the legitimate requests of the people of our time.” Disgruntled Catholics could use this admonition as a rhetorical wedge to advance the policies of the New Left by identifying them with the “legitimate requests of the people of our time.” One could then advocate against aspects of Catholic doctrine or discipline from before the Second Vatican Council by identifying them with the “negativity and repression” in society that the New Left opposed. Marian doctrine and devotion were among the aspects of Catholic life to which this strategy of opposition was applied.

3. The Decade without Mary, 1965-1974

An example of these developments in the local Catholic Church is the treatment afforded to the Legion of Mary by some of its clergy during the late 1960s. Archbishop McGucken held the Legion in high esteem, but not all of his clergy did.¹⁶ Legion officers informed the archbishop that commonly heard complaints from his priests were that the Legion was too concerned with Mary and “should be more Christ-centered,” or that it conformed to outmoded social roles for women and amounted to no more than a “women’s sewing circle.” A woman legionary wrote to the archbishop about an assistant pastor under whose leadership the *praesidium* membership at his parish had fallen from fifteen to two. She quoted that priest as saying that the Legion was a dying organization throughout the world, and that if he could he would eliminate the Rosary. More disturbingly she wrote: “Our problem is that any spiritually oriented priest who actively pursues his priestly

generational *communio* of the Archdiocesan presbyterate had been wounded. Pastoral dissent had attacked the Eucharistic foundation of the Church” (citing Cardinal James Francis Stafford, “*Humanae Vitae*: The Year of the *Peirasmòs*, 1968,” Catholic News Agency, February 27, 2012).

¹⁶ In a letter dated February 11, 1963, from Rev. Howard M. Rasmussen to Archbishop McGucken, Father Rasmussen acknowledged his appointment as spiritual director of the Legion and quoted McGucken’s statement: “I have great admiration for the Legion of Mary.” (AASE, Correspondence File, “Legion of Mary” 1962-1977).

ministry is consistently persecuted" [by other priests].¹⁷ Clergy uncomfortable with the Legion or the Rosary could now cite ideological grounds as a justification for their discomfort and propose that by ending the Legion they were acting responsibly to acknowledge the inevitable march of time.

But not everyone in the archdiocese was without Mary during that decade. Some laity and clergy took positive steps to promote her presence. These included Archbishop McGucken and Edith Perry who was the Lay Delegate of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima.¹⁸ Edith Perry saw no contradiction between appropriate Marian devotion and the promotion of the message of Fatima, which she believed to be of supernatural origin affirmed by the Holy See as well as by years of custom. She began, in 1963, by arranging a weekly gathering to pray the Rosary at a convent chapel near her place of residence. By 1969, she had obtained the permission of Archbishop McGucken to approach pastors in an effort to arrange Fatima devotions in parishes. In the face of opposition from some clergy, her *modus operandi* was simple; she sought out pastors who were open to the Fatima message and bypassed those who were not. She would canvas interested pastors and schedule a seasonal tour of the Fatima Pilgrim Virgin statue. Each tour

¹⁷ Letter of January 18, 1967, from Mrs. James J. (Virginia) McGowan to Archbishop McGucken (AASE, Archbishop's Correspondence File, "Legion of Mary"). See also the letter of February 20, 1964, from Rev. Howard M. Rasmussen to Archbishop McGucken, reporting on a meeting of Legion spiritual directors. Present were twenty priests who noted that frequently encountered objections from priests about the Legion of Mary were that: "the devotional aspect of the Legion should be more Christ-centered," and that the Legion is "a women's sodality or sewing circle."

¹⁸ In 1952, Msgr. Harold V. Colgon established the Ave Maria Institute, Inc., National Center of the Blue Army in the United States at Plainfield, New Jersey. The Soviet Union had demonstrated its capacity to build an atomic bomb three years earlier on August 29, 1949. The Blue Army was an informal movement to promote the message of Fatima and to attain world peace through the conversion of Russia by the recitation of the Rosary and the devotion of the Five First Saturdays of each month. Archbishop McGucken described the Blue Army people in his archdiocese thusly: "Most of these are very wonderful Catholic people. I have noticed that once in a while, however, someone gets them a little bit overheated emotionally, and I believe they need a good adviser." (Letter dated June 14, 1965, from McGucken to Father Karl Patzelt, S.J.; AASE, Archbishop's Correspondence File, "Blue Army").

began and ended with the participation of the archbishop. For example, the tour from January 21 to March 8, 1970 began with a ceremony at the cathedral and concluded with another in the campus chapel of the University of San Francisco. These consisted of a concelebrated Mass, Fatima hymns, blessing of the sick, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament—all with Archbishop McGucken presiding. After only the first week of the 1970 tour, Edith Perry reported to the Archbishop that “the attendance and devotion for Our Lady’s Visitation has exceeded our expectations.”¹⁹ In the year following, the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace designated January 1, 1971, as the “World Day of Peace.” In San Francisco, the designated day was honored at the monumental chapel of the University of San Francisco (St. Ignatius Church) with a Latin Mass and the Fatima Pilgrim Virgin devotions.²⁰ Archbishop McGucken continued to be a supporter of Father Peyton’s Family Rosary Crusade and organized a fundraiser for it in San Francisco, even though it had fallen from favor among those of progressive persuasion.²¹

Among the pastors who welcomed a visit from the Pilgrim Virgin was Father John Sweeny²² who, in 1969, was assigned as the second pastor to a parish founded only eight years earlier

¹⁹ “The attendance and devotion for Our Lady’s Visitation has exceeded our expectations; each day—at each church—has been beautiful—the Fatima message preached—and the Rosary prayed all day.” (Letter dated January 29, 1970, from Mrs. Edith Perry to Archbishop McGucken; AASE, Archbishop’s Correspondence File, “Blue Army”).

²⁰ Program announced in the *San Francisco Examiner*, Tuesday, December 28, 1971, p. 8.

²¹ “The All for Her Fund was established, but obtaining not only pledges but actual contributions was much more difficult. . . . Fundraisers were organized by Archbishop Joseph T. McGucken of San Francisco and the Lewis Foundation.” (Richard Gribble, C.S.C., *American Apostle of the Family Rosary: The Life of Patrick J. Peyton, CSC* (New York: Crossroad Publ. Co., 2005), 270).

²² John Sweeny was born in San Francisco on April 3, 1924. He was ordained to the priesthood on December 18, 1948, the same day as his brother Louis, at Saint Mary’s of the Assumption Cathedral in San Francisco. John Sweeny served at a number of parishes in San Francisco and in Santa Clara County. In 1965, Sweeny organized and established Opportunities Industrialization Center West, a job training and placement program for the unemployed and underemployed in East Palo Alto. In June, 1969, he was appointed pastor of Our Lady of Peace parish in Santa Clara where he served until

in suburban Santa Clara County. This parish was not a plum. With about 800 families, a \$500,000 debt and a weekly collection of about \$1,000, it was regarded as "dying." During his first year he began the custom of having a public recitation of the Rosary before each Mass on October 7, the memorial of the Holy Rosary. He did this for two reasons: first, to support the Rosary while other priests were depreciating it, and, second, because he believed it would help with the parish debt. In 1971, October 7 happened to be the First Friday and so Edith Perry arranged the visit of the Fatima Pilgrimage Virgin for that weekend. Sweeny used the visit to inaugurate the practice of all-night vigils before the exposed Blessed Sacrament on First Fridays. Meeting with unexpected success, he extended the vigil nights by stages until they became daily, so that the church came to be open twenty-four hours a day all week long. The practice has continued making it a church that never closes.²³ The Pilgrim Virgin tour in 1972 brought the visiting statue to Our Lady of Peace on July 13. To mark this visit, Sweeny ended Mass with a procession. Beginning from the sanctuary he processed down the center aisle and continued outdoors leading the parishioners in the recitation of the Rosary. The procession eventually returned to the church for a blessing of the sick with the Blessed Sacrament in imitation of the practice at Fatima. It went so well that Sweeny repeated the procession on the thirteenth of the next four months. The original Fatima apparitions had occurred on the thirteenth of each month from May to October. In the following years Sweeny would repeat the procession after Mass on the thirteenth of those months in memory of Fatima. Word spread, eventually attracting people from parishes in the greater Bay Area to the tune of about 2,000 visitors each month. Sweeny had not anticipated the popularity of the Fatima devotions, and it made him wonder how he could attract even more worshippers. One day

the age of 77 when he retired by order of Bishop Patrick McGrath, effective June 2002. He died in 2006.

²³ Interviews by the author with Father John Sweeny and Mrs. Mary Patricia Cervillieri on February 20, 1999, at Our Lady of Peace Church, Santa Clara, California (from the author's collection).

during a conversation he had an inspiration: "I know what I'll do. I'll build a statue 200 feet high: a statue of Our Lady with her arms outstretched welcoming highway travelers to the shrine." The result was the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace and the rebirth of the parish as a pilgrimage destination.²⁴

4. *Marialis Cultus*, February 2, 1974

The "decade without Mary" in the official Church ended on February 2, 1974, with the publication of the "Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* on the Right Ordering of Devotion to Mary." *Marialis Cultus* (MC) described itself as a "treatise" and proposed a complex effort that was to "proceed to a careful revision of expressions and exercises of piety directed towards the Blessed Virgin." At the same time, this revision was to "be respectful of wholesome tradition and open to the legitimate requests of the people of our time."²⁵ The formulation implied a kind of balance between "tradition" and the needs of the "people of our time," while leaving unsaid who constituted this latter group. In a subsequent article, the exhortation calls for "pastoral sensitivity and perseverance" on the part of the leaders of local communities along with a willingness on the part of the faithful to accept guidelines.²⁶ This choice of words implies once again a kind of balance between two groups of the faithful; to wit, those holding office with those in the pews. To this end, the exhortation proposes some "principles for action in this field." According to these principles good Marian devotion must recognize: first, the dependence of Mary on Christ (MC, 20); second, the prominence of the Holy Spirit (MC, 26); third, that Mary occupies in the Church "the highest

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "This shows the need for episcopal conferences, local churches, religious families and communities of the faithful to promote a genuine creative activity and at the same time to proceed to a careful revision of expressions and exercises of piety directed towards the Blessed Virgin. We would like this revision to be respectful of wholesome tradition and open to the legitimate requests of the people of our time. It seems fitting therefore, venerable Brothers, to put forward some principles for action in this field." (*Marialis Cultus*, no. 24)

²⁶ "What is needed on the part of the leaders of the local communities is effort, pastoral sensitivity and perseverance, while the faithful on their part must show a

place and the closest to us after Christ (MC, 28); fourth, the fundamental nature of the Church as brotherhood (MC, 28); fifth, that all devotional forms should have a biblical imprint (MC, 30); sixth, that Marian devotion should reflect an ecumenical preoccupation by avoiding any exaggeration which could mislead other Christian brethren (MC, 32); seventh, that the picture presented of the Blessed Virgin must put her in "the psycho-sociological field in which modern man lives and works" (MC, 34); and finally eighth, that one should avoid incorrect attitudes of piety that include small-mindedness, credulity and ephemeral sentimentality (MC, 38). The exhortation expressed confidence that: "Study . . . will prevail over the exaggerated search for novelties or extraordinary phenomena" and "unworthy self-interest" (MC, 38). The only mention made in the document to a Marian apparition occurred indirectly in reference to the Roman Calendar. To wit:

The restored Roman Calendar . . . includes . . . commemorations connected with local devotions and which have acquired a wider popularity and interest (e.g., February 11, Our Lady of Lourdes; August 5, the Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major . . . July 16, Our Lady of Mount Carmel; October 7, Our Lady of the Rosary).²⁷

The document reduces the four Marian memorials associated with apparitions to "local devotions which have acquired a wider popularity and interest." No mention is made as to why these have gained that wider popularity and interest. The whole matter is relegated to a parenthetical expression with the implication that inclusion in the liturgy is all that should be needed. As a list of "principles for action in this field," *Marialis Cultus* is impressive both in its length and in the difficulty of its demands. Being a treatise, it makes abstract generalizations that are intended to be applied by local officials to specific

willingness to accept guidelines and ideas drawn from the true nature of Christian worship; this sometimes makes it necessary to change long-standing customs wherein the real nature of this Christian worship has become somewhat obscured." (*Marialis Cultus*, no. 31)

²⁷ *Marialis Cultus*, no. 8.

cases. However, the abstract nature of the principles allows great latitude of interpretation when being applied to popular audiences in non-academic settings. Historical events in the San Francisco region would reveal divergences of understanding concerning the proper way to interpret and apply these principles.

Marialis Cultus expressed confidence that: "Study . . . will prevail over the exaggerated search for novelties or extraordinary phenomena" and "unworthy self-interest" (MC, 38). Only three months after the release of *Marialis Cultus*, Friar Alfred Boeddeker, O.F.M., presented a plan to Archbishop McGucken for hosting an ecumenical Mariology conference. With the archbishop's active assistance, Boeddeker organized a seminar entitled "The Virgin Mary in Ecumenical Perspective." Scheduled for May 13, 1974, this seminar did not follow the pattern Boeddeker had used for the 1954 Marian Congress. The new pattern presented a biblically based encounter with Protestants about Mary as a role model. And since it was an encounter among scholars, the conference format better suited the study of the principles listed in *Marialis Cultus*. One moves toward the unknown by starting from the known.

Father Sweeny of Our Lady of Peace Church had begun work on the colossal statue of the Immaculate Heart in 1975, a full year after *Marialis Cultus*. Did he simply ignore its propositions? Not to his thinking. John Sweeny had always focused Marian devotions on the Eucharist and the liturgical calendar. At his parish, Marian devotions outside the liturgy followed the principle of *Marialis Cultus* (no. 33) that they "should somehow derive their inspiration from it [the liturgy], and . . . orient the Christian people towards it" (MC, 31). Critics would take issue with this interpretation and claim instead that the devotions at Our Lady of Peace mixed "practices of piety and liturgical acts in hybrid celebrations," disallowed by *Marialis Cultus* (no. 31). During the 1980s, there would be successive tests for applying *Marialis Cultus*. Immigration from Latin America, East Asia and Southeast Asia introduced sizeable groups of Catholics mostly unexposed to academic theology and attached to the faith through devotional forms that supposed a personal encounter with the numinous. It must be

remembered that migrant populations such as these were classified by the progressive frame of mind as marginalized persons whose culture must be respected as a way of making reparation for the historic injustice of colonialism. Meanwhile, the same frame of mind regarded their forms of piety as outmoded. This divergence occasioned cognitive dissonance that provided another challenge for the application of *Marialis Cultus*. A dramatic example of this occurred in 1980 with the visit of *Nuestra Señora de San Juan de Los Lagos*.

5. Defining the New Mariology

Among the Spanish-speaking Catholics of San Francisco's Mission District there was a lay sodality that sponsored an annual novena to Our Lady of San Juan de los Lagos. This was an image of Mary venerated in the Mexican states of Jalisco and Michoacán. Around 150 devotees attended annually the novena in San Francisco and so attracted little attention. But in 1980, the sodality obtained permission from the Bishop of San Juan in Jalisco to bring the pilgrim statue of Our Lady from Mexico to San Francisco. The pilgrim statue was a copy of the original in the Cathedral of San Juan that was sent to isolated villages to afford them the miracle-working benefits of the image. Now for the first time ever, this pilgrim statue was leaving Mexico and coming to Saint Peter's parish in San Francisco. The result is best described in the words of the pastor at that time, Father Thomas Seagrave:

So up comes the pilgrim Virgin. Thirty thousand people came! It was unbelievable. The church was open all day long. We put her up on the main altar. Pretty soon we had 2,000 candles lit at once. It kind of grew before we know what was happening. I was up in the choir loft and the church was *bot!* It was a happening! It was the most magnificent thing. People came from Chicago, from Texas, chartered bus loads came down from Sacramento and up from Los Angeles. All these people who had made their promises to the Virgin and then couldn't afford to go back down to her shrine; all came to clear their debt with the Virgin.²⁸

²⁸ Thomas Seagrave was ordained for the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1969. He served at Saint Peter's Church in the Mission District of San Francisco during the 1970s. His description of the visit of Our Lady of San Juan de Los Lagos is part of an

The most relevant part of the story, however, was the reaction of the archdiocesan Centro Pastoral when the pilgrim Virgin returned the following year. Again the pastor's account:

That year the Centro Pastoral wanted to help. They thought that maybe it would be good if they could line up speakers. We told them to get lost. We told them to leave the local organizers alone. They had these priests coming from San Juan, and it was a very traditional type of thing. The Centro Pastoral wouldn't have spit on these people before so we weren't going to let them come in and take over their thing.

What had happened here? The persistence of "inappropriate Marian devotion" based on apparitions, on miracle-working statues and on other "dubious sources" not found in Scripture or the Liturgy remained a concern for the professional Church. The question now was what to do about them. In the case of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos it was not politic to suppress the devotion owing to respect of a colonial people. Instead, the proposed solution was to use the devotional gathering to reeducate the devotees by providing a program and speakers. This did not occur, because of the opposition of the local pastor who proposed to protect a simple country people from the impositions of a sophisticated central authority.

An opportunity for corrective action presented itself in December of 1981, when the 450th anniversary of Our Lady of Guadalupe provided an occasion for the major seminary of the archdiocese to convene a "Mary Symposium." The presenters were three Sulpicians: Howard P. Bleichner, Raymond E. Brown, and Frank Norris—all members of the faculty of Saint Patrick's Seminary.²⁹ Their papers were frankly polemical in nature and aimed at a common target described as extreme Mariology.

interview conducted by the archivist of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, Dr. Jeffrey Burns, on February 6, 1989, and subsequently transcribed but not published. (AASE, "Oral History Interviews: Father Thomas Seagrave," p. 27-31 and 45-49).

²⁹ The papers presented were: "Mary in History," by Rev. Howard Bleichner, S.S.; "Mary in Liturgy," by Rev. Frank Norris, S.S.; and "Mary in Scripture," by Rev. Raymond E. Brown, S.S. The papers were printed as a pamphlet under the title, *Menlo Papers: Mary, Symposium, December 1981, St. Patrick's Seminary, Menlo Park, California*,

All three presenters took pains to circumscribe the Old Mariology. Bleichner presented his paper first and made the point that the “Gospels . . . do not tell her story, only the story of Jesus.” But, because of Mary’s “facelessness,” this “absence of historical detail has allowed Mary to act as a mirror in which each successive age could contemplate its own conception of discipleship.” Bleichner then presented a summary of these successive historical images that, by their changing nature, allowed Mary to “stand equally as a symbol to diverse epochs.” He then outlined the various meanings ascribed to Mary by the various ages of Christian history, implying that each had supplanted those previous to it rather than incorporating the former in the latter. This is so because Mary had no story of her own. He described the Mariology of the 1950s as having had two “very pronounced wings”—one favored returning to the biblical and patristic sources, the other simply wished to continue the direction of the Old Mariology. After the Council favored the former, the latter wing “slipped or migrated beyond the bounds of the official Church in the years after the Council.” The result was that “apparitions abounded” and in them the medieval “Mother of Mercies” endured a stunning reversal into “a figure of judgment,” an “apocalyptic figure.” Frank Norris followed Bleichner speaking on “Mary in the Liturgy.” He used his time to argue that the existence of a liturgical feast in honor of a so-called apparition cannot be used in any way to argue for the historicity of that apparition. He specifically mentioned Lourdes and the Sacred Heart. While he was correct in a narrow sense, he advanced his arguments with great emotion centered on why he personally did not have to acknowledge “apparitions.” He offered no positive theology for relating apparitions to either the liturgical celebrations or to the spirituality of those who did accept them. Finally, Raymond E. Brown concluded the symposium by describing “gospel Mariology.” He made the claim that “Mariological devotion is almost

in observance of the 450th anniversary of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Menlo Park, CA: Saint Patrick’s Seminary, 1981). Bleichner was the seminary rector from 1978 to 1988. Raymond E. Brown was at the time of the symposium residing at Saint Patrick’s Seminary.

a bellwether, indicating theological direction." He then applied the strategy of the symposium by defining two extreme positions on Mariology and locating himself between them. He claimed that, "Curiously, the extremely conservative and the extremely liberal are in agreement that Marian devotion is irreconcilable with the theology that has come to the fore since Vatican II." Brown described the extreme liberal as one who proposed to throw out Mariology altogether, while the extreme conservative was one who proposed to throw out the Council. Brown proposed that neither position was proper development because "we have never built our theology by destroying what went before nor have we made theological progress simply by repeating it." Brown concluded by embracing what he called "the New Testament trajectory" that he found in Luke and John, which he said was "not new but it is radical" in that it makes a connection between orthodox Christianity and social concern by translating the Good News into economic terms for the poor and the downtrodden. Because of this connection, the Guadalupe devotion could be accepted on the grounds that it expressed the aspirations of a historically oppressed population and, therefore, was compatible with gospel Mariology.

When Bleichner introduced the Mary Symposium he had said, "Both the name of the symposium and the order of the presentations were chosen advisedly." What he meant by this can be discerned from the way the three papers built on each other to advance a single rhetorical strategy. The goal of that strategy was: first, to detach Pre-Conciliar Mariology from that which followed the Council; then, to identify any survivals of Pre-Conciliar Mariology with extreme positions no longer moored to the official Church; and, finally, to identify the New Mariology with gender and class liberation, which was said to be found in the trajectory of the gospels. The problem of cognitive dissonance occasioned by Hispanic Marian devotions was resolved by declaring these to express the aspirations for liberation of people living under colonial oppression and thus compatible with gospel Mariology. The Mary Symposium revealed that the New Mariology had found a point of purchase for refuting the Old Mariology by associating it with

“devotionism.”³⁰ Those attached to the outdated forms could be described as resisting Vatican II and not thinking with the official Church. The Mary Symposium proposed a resolution for the difficulties of applying *Mariialis Cultus* by simplifying the spectrum of permissible options. Further, the Symposium found a way to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the people of our times by incorporating themes of gender and class liberation into the Catholic faith as “gospel Mariology.” And finally, by applying to Marian devotions the mantle of liberation of non-White and formerly colonized populations, the Symposium resolved the seeming incoherence of accepting Guadalupe but dismissing Lourdes and Fatima. Problems with the methodology of the Mary Symposium were: first, the incorrect identification of all post-conciliar survivals of the Old Mariology with extreme or heterodox aberrations; second, the determination of “gospel Mariology” by applying a novel hermeneutic; and third, the acceptance of some apparitions but not others based on socio-political considerations. The resolution advanced by the Mary Symposium made use of rhetorical manipulation more properly associated with the legal or political professions. As such, it advanced a partisan position of the moment that was not likely to either guide the right ordering of Marian expression or to stand the test of time. It was soon challenged by what came to be known as the “Freeway Madonna.”

Father John Sweeny’s plan to construct a colossus of Mary as part of a pilgrimage site had proceeded under the auspices of the Archbishop of San Francisco to the point of completing the statue. But his plans were disrupted on January 27, 1981, when the Holy See separated the county where his parish was located from the Archdiocese of San Francisco and created the Diocese of San Jose. The new Ordinary, Bishop Pierre DuMaine,

³⁰ One encounters the term “devotionism” without being able to find a formal definition. It appears to be a neologism with its meaning understood consensually among its users. It might derive from the Italian term *devozialismo* which is the quality of a person markedly characterized by religious devotion. The term is often related to “popular religion” and carries the same cautionary connotations. It is not used as a term of approval.

did not share Father Sweeny's enthusiasm for the "Freeway Madonna," called so by its critics because of its location along a highway. DuMaine informed Sweeny that his board of consultants had voted unanimously to reject the statue. They questioned the use of four acres of valuable land for a shrine and the "fitness" of such a statue near a busy freeway. The officials of the new diocese proposed selling the land for development and investing the proceeds.³¹ Meanwhile, sculptor Charles Parks had completed a thirty-foot tall statue at his studio near Wilmington, Delaware, in June 1982. Sweeny describes what happened next:

When the statue was finished, Bishop DuMaine was then the bishop of the newly created Diocese of San Jose. He didn't want the statue. So some place had to be found to park it. It moved to three sites with much delight wherever it went. The final stop, with great irony, was the minor seminary of the Archdiocese of Chicago. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops had chosen Chicago as the meeting site for drafting their pastoral statement on nuclear weapons. The bishops used the seminary grounds for their meeting. Bishop DuMaine arrived there to file in formal procession with the other bishops past the statue and all of this on national television!³²

That was in May of 1983. Five months later, Bishop DuMaine blessed the colossus of Mary at Our Lady of Peace parish and, while doing so, dedicated his new diocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. About 3000 people attended the event on October 7, 1983.³³ Associated with the dedication of the shrine, Sweeney invited Father Peyton to preach a Triduum. Although the days of the Rosary Crusade were over by the early 1970s, Peyton nevertheless had continued to receive invitations to speak at public events in California.³⁴ The Marian

³¹ Interviews by the author with Father John Sweeny and Mrs. Mary Patricia Cervilleri on February 20, 1999, at Our Lady of Peace Church, Santa Clara, California (Collection of the Author).

³² Ibid.

³³ "Moved by faith, ecstasy, Lady of Peace shrine dedicated," *San Jose Mercury News*, October 8, 1983, p. B1.

³⁴ E.g., Fr. Peyton was the principal speaker at the "Mary's Hour" Rosary Crusade held in the Livermore Stadium at Livermore, California, Sunday, May 16, 1976, 3 to 4 P.M., and sponsored by the Legion of Mary of Saint Michael's parish in the Oakland

theology advanced by Peyton on these occasions bore no resemblance to the positions defined for "extreme Mariology" by the Mary Symposium at Menlo Park in 1981. It is important to consider Peyton's position because it is identical to that advanced by John Sweeny at the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace. In the years following the Council, Peyton had had to defend his mission. In doing so he described his Marian theology which might be summarized in these words:

Far from de-emphasizing Our dear Mary, I strike out for Her with all the enthusiasm that ever I had. If there was ever a true charisma, this is mine: To get the world aware of Mary's essential relationship with Christ, our God incarnate, in saving Mankind. When you destroy Mary, you destroy the Incarnation mystery and when you destroy the Incarnation mystery, Christ is gone.³⁵

Regarding the role of the Rosary, Peyton described it as being more than a prayer form; it was more like a program of spirituality:

The Rosary has been my secret. It has been my life my security, my spirituality. It has been the motor which has driven me. It has given me everything a man could want.³⁶

Peyton's words about "Our dear Mary" imply more than a "faceless" person who serves as a mirror in which each age sees itself. She is someone with an identity that derives from

Diocese as a "U.S. Bicentennial event." The program included hymns, the Rosary, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and a talk by Fr. Patrick Peyton of the Family Rosary Crusade. (Promotional brochure: © Mary Houston, 1976: "Our Lady's Rosary Crusade," P.O. Box 941, Orinda, CA 94563; letter from Mr. James J. O'Reilly of Livermore, California, to Archbishop McGucken [AASF: Archbishop's Correspondence File]; also, *The Monitor*, May 13, 1976, p. 6.) For Peyton's preaching appearance at the dedication of the Shrine of Our Lady of Peace, see Gribble, *American Apostle*, 309.

³⁵ "Peyton . . . objected to any reduction of Marian devotion . . . in his mind there was absolutely no need for a new direction, only new methods" (Gribble, *American Apostle*, 256-257).

³⁶ Gribble, *American Apostle*, 265: "He [Peyton] realized that with the ascendancy of social activism in the Church, personal devotions such as the rosary would almost surely be on the wane, but he was confident that the rosary would someday become popular again. . . . The Rosary is like the moon. When the eclipse is over it will be all the brighter."

the mystery of Christ. No Mary, no Christ. Further, she is "dear" because the baptized faithful experience a personal relationship with her through the sharing of spiritual goods in the Communion of Saints. Where does this position fit in the spectrum of Marian theology delineated by the Mary Symposium?

Meanwhile, on the other side of the Santa Clara Valley from the shrine, Friar Boeddeker consulted with two Marianists in Cupertino, Father Bertrand Clemens and Brother John Samaha, to promote Marian renewal through serious study. The result of their consultation was the decision to seek a Western Regional Group (MSA/West) within the Mariological Society of America. The idea was to provide Mariology conferences on the Pacific Coast, since gatherings in the Midwest or the Atlantic states were beyond the reach of many in California. Boeddeker and Samaha were respectively chairman and executive secretary. The MSA/West had a successful but short career of five years (1984 to 1989).³⁷ Before it began operation, the Mariological Society of America (MSA) had only sixteen members on the Pacific Coast. Five years later, that membership had increased to two hundred. In addition, the Western Region issued a newsletter entitled, "Mary Today." If MSA/West was so successful, why did it cease operations after only five years? In his annual reports, Samaha indicated the chronic problems: 1) a lack of affordable meeting places; 2) a lack of funding sources; and, most importantly, 3) a lack of clergy and religious willing to assume leadership. When illness and reassignment removed the initial officers, there were no replacements. The MSA/West had pursued an ambitious program of annual conferences with professional Marian theologians as presenters. The first conference convened in Portland, Oregon, at the Sanctuary of Our Sorrowful Mother on June 7-8, 1984. The largest conference was the five-day "International Ecumenical Conference on Mary, Woman for All Christians," convened in 1988 and co-sponsored with the University of San Francisco. Anglican, Lutheran,

³⁷ The sources for this summary were the annual reports submitted by the secretary of the MSA/West and published in *Marian Studies* from 1984 to 1989.

Orthodox and Catholic presenters addressed an audience of about four hundred. The last formal effort of the MSA/West was the hosting of the national convention of the MSA in 1989, its first on the Pacific Coast. Operations ceased after that, owing to a serious financial loss, the illness of Fr. Boeddeker, and the reassignment of Bro. Samaha. No other religious or clergy stepped forward to assume leadership; the ambitious program proved unsustainable. In retrospect, there is possibly another dimension to its unsustainability arising from the mismatch between its scholarly presenters and its audience, drawn from mixed backgrounds. Only a small part of the audience attended from academic interest, while most were seeking inspiration or pastoral guidance. One participant described the mismatch between the high-power academicians and the general audience as “using a fire hose to water a flower garden.”

6. Sweeping Waves of Marian Enthusiasms in the 1990s

About the time MSA/West ceased operation in 1989, the next great Marian enthusiasm had arrived on the local scene. It had begun in a small way five years earlier when a French-Canadian priest, Robert Bédard, told North American audiences about purported apparitions of Mary in a backwater with a name from a science fiction movie, Bosnia-Herzegovina. In 1989, he visited California for the first time to talk about the “Story of Medjugorje.” This is how he summarized his former attitude about apparitions:

I wasn't anti-apparitions. I just didn't think they were necessary since there was a Church for God to act through. The legitimate spiritual authority of the Church is enough to teach and guide us. I didn't need apparitions.³⁸

³⁸ This quotation is from an informally circulated audio tape cassette of a talk by Robert Bédard. Conferences or public gatherings about Medjugorje began from the practical need to satisfy public demand for reliable information. The tape-recorded talks of Father Robert Bédard were circulated and thus began the practice of conferences. These peaked around 1993-1994 with about 300 hundred annually. The biggest gathering at the University of Notre Dame drew about 10,000 people. By the end of the 1990s, the number had reduced to about 3,000 and the atmosphere was more like a retreat than a conference.

Bédard's attitude was very common among the clergy, perhaps the rule. It is important to note that the existing theology about private revelations was mostly cautionary, concerning how to discern a valid one and how much influence to afford it. There was lacking a positive theology for fitting extraordinary revelations into ecclesiology. In other words: yes, you do not have to believe in one; but if it really were from God and you were indifferent to it what would this say about you? Bédard came to be so moved by his encounter with what he believed to be a sign from God that he ultimately founded an institute of consecrated life, the *Friends of the Cross*, based on the Medjugorje messages. At least in Bédard's case, an extraordinary revelation was linked to the public life of the Church through the theology of vocation. During the years from 1985 to 1987, many Catholics visited Medjugorje as individuals and returned with a sense of calling to start prayer groups or small faith communities. This impulse was personal and not associated with organized promotional efforts. The pioneer leader of the first Medjugorje prayer group in "Silicon Valley" was Anna Maria Angelesco, a resident of Cupertino. Another resident, Bill Jessen, was to earn the name "Mister Medjugorje," owing to his zeal in spreading the messages after returning from a visit there. Together they influenced Father Robert Hughes, S.M., to make a visit; he returned "on fire" to spread the news, eventually earning the title "Medjugorje Priest."³⁹ Might we see in the behavior of these individuals—clergy and laity—a way to link extraordinary revelations (apparitions) to the public life of the Church through the theology of vocation?

In 1987, Hughes and a lay associate, Bernadette Weber, established the San Jose MIR Center. MIR is an acronym for "Medjugorje Information and Research Center." *Mir* is also the word for peace in most Slavic languages. The reference to peace was intended as a direct link to the Fatima messages regarding the way to obtain world peace. The role of the MIR Center was to distribute the messages purportedly given by the Blessed

³⁹ Description of the operations and doctrine of the Medjugorje Centers is from AASE Collection of the Marian Movement in Northern California, 1975-2005.

Mother to the seers at Medjugorje and to support the resulting prayer groups. For example, the MIR Center hosted an annual motivational retreat for prayer group leaders. The prayer groups were informally arranged with no central organization. A group coalesced around anyone willing to act as a convener. The Medjugorje message promoted by the MIR Center can be summarized as: Faith, Prayer, Penance and Fasting which led to conversion and to peace (inner peace and world peace). The recommended regimen was: 1) daily prayer, especially the Rosary; 2) daily Eucharistic adoration and the Mass; 3) daily meditation on the Holy Scripture and on the messages of Medjugorje; and 4) keeping Jesus and Mary together. Messages were issued at periodical intervals by the visionaries at Medjugorje, who presented them as coming from the Blessed Mother. These periodic messages were short and hortatory in nature. The messages were relayed from Bosnia around the world via the internet, with lay volunteers serving as webmasters. Lay volunteers ran everything. Priests served as chaplains, advisors or spiritual directors. The activities of the San Jose MIR Center grew to include major speaking events. The presenters fell into four groups: seers, theologians, pastors, and writers. Among the seers were Christina Gallagher (Ireland), Josep Terrelly (originally from Soviet Ukraine, later exiled to Canada), Vassula Ryden (Switzerland), Matthew Kelly (Australia), and Ivan Dragicevic (Medjugorje). Theologians included the illustrious Fr. René Laurentin (France) on his first speaking tour to the Pacific Coast; Fr. Johann Roten, S.M. (Switzerland) of the International Marian Research Institute; and Fr. Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp. (Ireland). Pastors included Bishop Danylak (Rome) and Bishop Franic (Yugoslavia). Among the writers were the Americans Ted Flynn, Wayne Weibel, Jan Connell, and Michael Brown. The writers were lay Christians, some of whom had extraordinary calls. Weibel formerly was a Lutheran and Brown formerly an agnostic. The MIR Center did not encounter the problems that had bedeviled the MSA/West. It could rely on numerous lay volunteers and donors. Its presenters encountered attentive audiences with whom they shared common ground. The focus of the presentations was pastoral primarily, but informed by doctrine and right reason.

During the 1980s, the Catholic Charismatic movement had mingled to a degree with the Marian movement which produced some volatile results. Father Ron Burke,⁴⁰ the pastor of Saint Bruno's Church in a very ethnically mixed area near the San Francisco Airport, used the model of the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEB or Base Church Communities) which he had learned during his years as a missionary in Central America. He combined all the "supernatural" types in his parish into one weekly gathering. The program began with hymn singing and testimonials in several languages, after which the various groups in attendance separated to hold their proper meetings. Finally, they gathered again for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by refreshments. The group had its own "locutionist," who claimed to be receiving "words of knowledge" from an archangel.⁴¹ Another example of the mingling of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal and Catholic Marian Renewal was the lay-led organization calling itself Saint Raphael Ministries. It described itself as "a non-profit Catholic

⁴⁰ Ronald Burke was born in San Francisco in 1928. He was ordained for the archdiocese on June 11, 1954, at the cathedral of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. During his lifetime, he was assigned to parishes in San Francisco, Oakland, Gilroy, San Jose, and, finally, to San Bruno. He spent nearly two decades in the highlands of Guatemala and the lowlands of Mexico as a participant in the Latin American Mission Program. His efforts there resulted in a paramilitary group putting his name on a "death list." Periodically, Father Burke sent accounts of his activities to *The Monitor* (e.g., see the edition of May 20, 1976). While he was at Saint Bruno's parish (San Bruno, California), the parishioners opened a Catholic Worker Dining Room (around 1996) and overnight shelters to keep people from sleeping in the church, whose doors were open twenty-four hours daily for Perpetual Adoration. Father Burke died June 19, 2010. He was remembered for his missionary work and social work, but not for his Marian expressions (*San Francisco Chronicle* obituary, available at www.sfgate.com).

⁴¹ The following is from a newsletter issued by the "San Bruno Prayer Group" whose address on San Bruno Avenue at the corner of Green Avenue, San Bruno, California 94066, is that of the parish. The newsletter dates from somewhere during 1982-1983, and it describes the program for an "Evening of Recollection" which consisted of: Singing, Testimonials, Singing (Spanish), Talk by Fr. Ronald Burke, Singing (by Tongan Community), Prayer (each group leading in turn: BEC, CCD, English Prayer Group, Legion of Mary, Scripture Class, Spanish Bible Class, Spanish Prayer Group, Spanish Community, Tongan Community), finally, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed by "Refreshments." ("CEBEC Prayer Group," in AASE, R. Burke 2010 Collection, Box 2).

lay apostolate serving the Church in the healing ministry and evangelization through the power of the Holy Spirit, true devotion to Mary, the sacraments, and the works of mercy.”⁴² The Charismatic community provided another example of extraordinary revelations influencing the public life of the Church. Father Ron Burke’s way of incorporating these into parish life provided another example.

Yet another channel of extraordinary revelations active in the San Francisco region during the years 1995 to 1998 was Vassula Ryden and the Two Hearts Alliance. The “Two Hearts” referred to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Vassula was something of an irony because, in her messages, Mary’s intercession was definitely dependent upon and subordinate to that of her Son Jesus. Vassula claimed to receive private revelations from Jesus Christ. Her link with the Marian movement resulted from the cooperation of the MIR Center’s network in promoting her messages and arranging her local public appearances. These had to be held at hotels, because her messages had not received ecclesiastical approval and the local chanceries would not allow Catholic Church property to be used by her. There is further irony in the case of Vassula in that one of her defenders was none other than the great critic of exaggerated Marian devotion in the pre-conciliar years, René Laurentin. An examination of the case for and against Vassula Ryden is beyond the scope of this paper. Of relevance is the case Laurentin made for the role and status of apparitions in the life of the Church as part of the “universe of signs.”

⁴² The following information is also quoted from the web site: “Saint Raphael Ministries, located in Half Moon Bay (San Mateo County) south of San Francisco, developed around 1988 from an impulse to spread information. It was founded by Carlos and Victoria Pontoya, Charismatics at Our Lady of the Pillar parish in Half Moon Bay. They developed a book sales ministry using the internet and make their living from that. Marcia Smith of the San Mateo MIR Center became heavily involved with them” (www.sraphael.com accessed in 2012). Eventually, this ministry coalesced around an annual San Francisco Marian Conference held at the South San Francisco Convention Center.

They are part of the universe of signs. Man, who is a rational animal, needs them. God knows it. This is what gave rise to Revelation and the rites of the Old Testament. Christ gave us the Gospel and the sacraments.

.....
... Besides the objective signs which are the Church and the sacraments, he speaks throughout history by providential signs or extraordinary ones that call for discernment.

These signs have prophetic functions. ... The everyday signs, whether small or great, ordinary or extraordinary, are a viaticum for human weakness. In this way, apparitions are, first of all, a pastoral problem before being a theological or juridical one.⁴³

During these years Laurentin traveled around the world studying purported apparitions while they occurred, at times employing specialists in the physical sciences and medical sciences to conduct tests of seers *in situ*. He understood that private revelations are an area of study separate from Marian devotional forms.

Not all the waves of enthusiasm sweeping through the 1990s were serious or orthodox. Medjugorje was regarded as an uninvited intruder, but it proved to be only the first of many during that decade. A rash of copy-cat apparitions erupted among recent immigrants who would see images of Mary in shadows cast on walls or swirls in the bark of trees. The blending of the Charismatic Movement with the Marian Movement multiplied enthusiasms and alleged mystical experiences. The phony apparitions; the right-wing types aligned with the discredited Bayside, New York group; and the folk religion of peasant immigrants provided a handy screen for ignoring positive developments and dismissing all those involved as the kind of people “who have visions and then tell the bishop what to do.” Father Sweeny struggled to preserve the proper spiritual focus of the shrine against challenges from two directions. He was dismayed by the degree and depth of the opposition he encountered from some in the official Church who employed various stratagems to suppress the devotional

⁴³ René Laurentin, *When God Gives a Sign: A Response to Objections Made Against Vassula* (Independence, MO: Trinitas, 1993), 13-14.

activities and perpetual Eucharistic adoration conducted at the shrine. From the other direction, there was a constant need to instruct the faithful in the right discernment of spirits. The MIR movement similarly was tested with those falling away who were expecting imminent apocalyptic events that did not come. But there was another sign of the times in the transformation of the Marian Movement from one relying on the clergy and religious to one driven by the laity. The transformation had begun during the late 1960s; it gathered momentum during the 1970s and 1980s, while being ignored or brushed aside by the official Church, and finally becoming “neuralgic” for it during the 1990s.⁴⁴ It is important to note that movements such as Medjugorje or the Two Hearts Alliance differed in significant ways from folk manifestations or apocalyptic advocacies. Although they both had a worldwide reach, neither had a central organization. Other common traits included: an interior spiritual commitment expressed in prayer, regular (even daily) attendance at Mass and the sacraments, personal evangelical effort, and proper social relations with others. Underneath the confusion of passing enthusiasms, there was something substantial developing steadily since the days of the Council.

What are we to make of the waves of enthusiasm during the 1990s, the third decade after the Council? *Marialis Cultus* sets as its prime focus “the place that the Blessed Virgin occupies in the Church’s worship.” One gets an impression from the subsequent history of its application that some in the official Church confused Marian devotions with doctrine about Mary, as well as all practical pastoral applications in which Mary is present. These are not all the same thing. The role of

⁴⁴ Diocesan authorities responsible for discerning extraordinary revelations sought the assistance of specialists, including some from among the membership of the Mariological Society of America. Based on his experience with diocesan commissions, Fr. Fred Jelly, O.P., published an article describing the canonical norms and offering advice for applying them. More importantly, Fr. Jelly offered a theological framework for incorporating extraordinary revelations into the life of the Church community. But not all ecclesiastical reaction was as balanced as that offered by Fr. Jelly. See Frederick M. Jelly, O.P., “Discerning the Miraculous: Norms for Judging Apparitions and Private Revelations,” *Marian Studies* 44 (1993): 56-87.

extraordinary revelations in the spiritual life of an individual and in the public life of the Church is a separate matter from "Marian devotion." This distinction had been lacking among some critics of Marian phenomena who interpreted *Marialis Cultus* in a narrow way. *Marialis Cultus* does not address discernment of spirits or the possibility that the Holy Spirit might move among the faithful in extraordinary ways, such as described in New Testament times. For example, the Fatima event is described by *Marialis Cultus* as being a popular devotion, but Fatima is much more than that. There is implicit in its messages a Christian anthropology and a program of spirituality. It is also a prophetic message as understood in the biblical uses of that term. In 1986, a symposium at Fatima (later repeated in Manila) attempted to articulate that theology in a manner compatible with the initiatives of the Second Vatican Council.⁴⁵ When perceived as prophecy, apparitions obtain a place in the life of the Church that is supported by biblical understanding. The Apostle Paul directs the Christian what to do with prophecies: "Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophesying, but test everything; hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 4:19-22, RSV). So the "gospel Mariology" should follow the advice of the Apostle.

7. Toward a Mariology for the Millennium

At the end of the 1990s, after the decade of enthusiasms had passed, a less spectacular development almost missed detection. Climbing from the dustbin of history, to which the progressive clergy of the 1960s has assigned it, the Legion of Mary emerged to a new day. The Legion had never completely gone away; it had only gone unnoticed. During the 2000s, its leadership resolved to sponsor a religious public event each year for

⁴⁵ Held September 14 to 19, 1986, at Fatima, the announced theme was the theology of the Alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Presenters included Ignace de la Potterie, S.J.; Domiciano Fernandez, C.M.F.; Theodore Koehler, S.M.; Michael O'Carroll, C.S.Sp.; Arthur B. Calkins; Anscar J. Chupungco, O.S.B.; René Laurentin; Christoph von Schoenborn, O.P.; and Candido Pozo, S.J.. In lieu of proceedings, the organizers published a *Consensus Document of the 1986 Fatima Symposium on the Alliance of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary* (Manila: PICC, 1987).

the good of the archdiocese. As 2011 approached, some old-time Legionaries remembered Father Peyton's Rosary Rally in 1961, and proposed to organize a fiftieth anniversary reenactment. This was arranged for the Civic Center of San Francisco on October 15, 2011. The Joyful Mysteries were selected for the event and, before the recitation of each decade of the beads, a lector read a lengthy selection from the New Testament describing the mystery. The sound of the readings reverberated among the great government buildings surrounding the Civic Center. The Legion invited Father Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R., to be the keynote speaker. His comments focused on the Fatima message as prophecy and its reaffirmation by John Paul II. Apostoli described our times as a great spiritual battle about which few Catholics were aware. He repeated John Paul II's description of this battle as a great wind that had blown across Europe and America, clouding everything, and that we must bring the faith with us everywhere. He reminded the crowd that John Paul II had said that the Blessed Virgin Mary at Fatima had summarized the history of the Twentieth Century. Apostoli then turned his attention to the Rosary, saying that it is how we learn to pray. The Rosary starts with a prayer of the lips; it moves to the prayer of the mind. Meditation on the mysteries is meditation on the Gospel. Finally, it moves to a prayer of the heart. Estimates of the attendance at the event vary from 2,000 to 7,000, with the lower figure considered more likely. Why the small turnout? Because the antecedents that had produced 1961 were not operative in 2011. Nevertheless, chancery officials were present at the 2011 event. Their conclusion: "We could have done this better . . . maybe this should be an annual event." And so it has become. The official Church and the charismatic Church had come together again.

In the historical past there have been occasions when theological contestation contributed to the development of doctrine. Did these fifty years produce any gain? The apparent resolution in 2011 resulted perhaps more from exhaustion than illumination. The contradictions latent but submerged among Catholics in the United States during the 1950s had finally played out by 2011. We learned that the polar opposite

of sentimentalism and vain credulity in Marian expression is not sound Marian expression but rather academic rationalism, a habit of mind that favors the bureaucratic to the exclusion of the charismatic. The principles of *Marialis Cultus*, stated as abstractions, occasion divergence in application. The solution might better be sought in reading *Marialis Cultus* in conjunction with *Lumen Gentium*, so that the search for a new balance in Marian expression uses the Mary of faith to inform the Mary of prayer. In that way, the relation between praying and believing is restored to its ancient equilibrium, with *lex orandi* once again becoming *lex credendi*. Finally, the events demonstrate that the laity are sometimes more sensitive at reading the signs of the times than their clergy, who tend to live in an insulated environment. One is reminded of Blessed John Henry Newman's careful distinctions about the proper circumstances in which the clergy should consult the laity in matters of the faith.⁴⁶

Summary

San Francisco represents many things to the popular imagination, but none of these is Marian theology. Nevertheless, the Archdiocese of San Francisco, because of historical circumstances during the fifty-year period from 1961 and 2011, can serve as a case study for the development of Marian expression in the United States. The Second Vatican Council proposed a new synthesis for Marian theology which was used by some as a pretext for rejecting the Marian synthesis prevailing until then. The resulting contestation occasioned a practical "Decade without Mary" that ended only with *Marialis Cultus* in 1974. However, the contestation about matters Marian continued because of the way Church professionals applied *Marialis Cultus*, in the spirit of academic rationalism that minimized the personal and the prophetic. During the 1980s and 1990s, inherited Marian expressions were reinforced by the arrival of immigrants and by the merging of the

⁴⁶ John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961).

Charismatic revival with the Marian revival. "Mariophanies" and "apparitions" multiplied to become a continual annoyance to the official Church. Attempts to discourage or redirect apparitional enthusiasm proved ineffectual. Theological reflection on the impasse was largely polemical in nature, borrowing rhetorical strategies from the legal or political professions. The critics of the old forms proposed reinterpreting Mary according to feminist and liberationist images for women which they claimed would bring Marian expression into conformity with "gospel Mariology." Meanwhile, the popular Marian revival acquired a charismatic and prophetic dimension that included social objectives such as world peace, social change through conversion of sinners, stability of the family, and the unity of Christians. There was also a call to evangelize in the circumstances of one's daily life. Finally, it was more by the passage of time than by theological agreement that a degree of resolution came to be achieved when the fiftieth anniversary of the San Francisco Family Rosary Crusade of 1961 brought together the official Church with the charismatic Church in a re-enactment of that historic event.