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## The Mother of Jesus

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## The Mother of Jesus\*

PEDRO S. DE ARCHÚTEGUI, S. J.

It would be an unpardonable exaggeration to say that in the Catholic Church the Virgin Mary has fallen out of favor at the very time when Protestants and Aglipayans are beginning to turn towards Mary. However, no survey is needed to show that many forms of Marian devotion have fallen into disuse while others are taking an uncertain course.<sup>1</sup> As somebody so aptly put it, "Many older forms of devotion have been dropped and nothing put in their place. Many people feel they have been asked to change horses in the middle of the stream only to discover there is no other horse."<sup>2</sup>

Some make Vatican II responsible for the present situation. But Vatican II in no way downgraded the devotion to Mary. In fact Chapter 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, is a beautiful spiritual shrine built in our century as other ages have erected shrines, cathedrals and temples in her honor. What the Council has said is that devotions of piety should harmonize with the liturgy, not be suppressed.

We have witnessed the fact that from an exuberant display of statues an almost complete and sudden vacuum has followed. However, it would be good to realize that this vacuum is not necessarily the expression of rejection. It may manifest a perplexed situation, or simply reflect a transition period in the

\*Paper delivered at the Marian Congress in Naga City on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the canonical coronation of Our Lady of Peñafrancia.

<sup>1</sup> *Behold Your Mother Woman of Faith*. USA National Conference of Catholic Bishops (USPL), No. 91 and 92.

<sup>2</sup> *Marian Studies*, XX, 1969, p. 47

life of some or many Christians who had become disoriented regarding the place they should give to Mary in their faith, in their thoughts, in their prayer.

When asked about the decline of Marian devotion, Karl Rahner declared that the special temptation that today affects Catholics and Protestants alike, is the "temptation to turn the central truths of the faith into abstractions, and abstractions have no need of mothers."<sup>3</sup>

It is surely a law in all love for Mary, as it is in all enthusiasm, to be always, in intention, a little beyond itself. It is only when it goes beyond its territory that this enthusiasm is open to criticism. It is open to criticism too when it concentrates solely on its particular object, taking no account of the whole picture of which the Virgin Mary forms a part.<sup>4</sup>

This is true. But it is also true that the reaction against the excesses of a misplaced or perhaps too sentimental devotion may end up in turn in another excess when it tends to place in the shadow the person of Mary. "Admittedly, many churches and chapels are in need of artistic reform; but one wonders at the severity of judgment that would find no place for a fitting image of the Mother of the Lord."<sup>5</sup>

While admitting the crisis (but crisis is not the same as a "spiritual landslide") it is important to realize that Marian devotion is not based on sentiments but on revelation on the one hand, and on the other that the Church is today in the process of renewal. No one has expressed this better than the Holy Father in his recent Apostolic Exhortation on Marian Cult:

"Certain practices of piety that not long ago seemed suitable for expressing the religious sentiment of individuals and of Christian communities seem today inadequate or unsuitable because they are linked with social and cultural patterns of the past. On the other hand, in many places people are seeking new ways of expressing the unchangeable relationship of creatures with their Creator, of children with their Father. In some

<sup>3</sup> USPL, no. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Laurentin, *The Question of Mary*, p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> USPL, no. 92.

people this may cause temporary confusion. But anyone who with trust in God reflects upon these phenomena discovers that many tendencies of modern piety (for example, the interiorization of religious sentiment) are meant to play their part in the development of Christian piety in general and devotion to the Blessed Virgin in particular."<sup>6</sup>

It is within this frame that I will approach the subject of Marian devotion today. The context in which the present talk is being given is the Golden Jubilee of the Canonical Coronation of Our Lady of Peñafrancia, patroness of Bicolandia. My role, however, is not to enter into historical niceties regarding its origin and development which are well-known to all of you, nor to elaborate on the relationship of the family, the youth and the clergy to Our Lady of Peñafrancia. These aspects will be dealt with by more competent speakers.

My task here is of a more general character. And since theologians are labelled as "people living up on the clouds" I will try to live up to this label, precisely by trying to lift you up to, or even beyond, those clouds, perhaps even to outer space and then try having a happy landing near the shrine of Our Lady of Peñafrancia. I will concentrate on two points:

- I. The meaning of Mary for the Christian today;
- II. The meaning of Mary for the Filipino Christian today.

#### I. THE MEANING OF MARY FOR THE CHRISTIAN TODAY

If one stops at the devotional practices in honor of Mary he will see only half the picture, only the phenomenon. Beyond it is the theological reality, a reality which is only partially reflected in the devotional practices of popular religiosity. There is an interplay between devotion to Mary and theology; one nourishes the other. A theological structure stands behind popular piety.

#### THE PROPER PLACE OF MARY

An important principle to keep always in mind in order to understand the proper place of Mary is that the veneration of the

<sup>6</sup> *Marialis Cultus* (MC), Introduction, p. 10.

Mother of God should be developed in harmonious subordination to the worship of Christ, and should gravitate towards Him as to its natural and necessary point of reference. "In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon Him."<sup>7</sup>

This Christological aspect will contribute to making piety directed towards the Mother of Jesus a more solid and effective instrument for attaining to full knowledge of the Son of God, and will also contribute to increasing the worship due to Christ himself.

Mary is the attentive Virgin who receives the word of God with faith, Mary is also the Virgin in prayer. In her visit to the mother of John the Baptist Mary pours out her soul in the *Magnificat*, Mary's prayer *par excellence* the song of the messianic times mingling the joy of the ancient and the new Israel. She prayed at Cana. The last description of Mary's life presents her as praying. The apostles were praying together with several women including Mary, the Mother of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> Here we have the prayerful presence of Mary in the early Church.<sup>9</sup>

Hence "it is also necessary that exercises of piety with which the faithful honour the Mother of the Lord should clearly show the place she occupies in the Church: 'the highest place and the closest to us after Christ.' The liturgical buildings of Byzantine rite, both in the architectural structure itself and in the use of images show clearly Mary's place in the Church. On the central door of the iconostasis there is a representation of the Annunciation and in the apse an image of the glorious Theotokos. In this way one perceives how through the assent of the humble Handmaid of the Lord mankind begins its return to God and sees in the glory of the all-holy Virgin the goal towards which it is journeying. The symbolism by which a church building demonstrates Mary's place in the mystery of the Church is full of significance and gives grounds for hoping that the different forms of devotion to the Blessed Virgin may everywhere be open to ecclesial perspectives.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Acts 1:14.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. MC, no. 18.

“The faithful will be able to appreciate more easily Mary’s mission in the mystery of the Church and her preeminent place in the Communion of Saints if attention is drawn to the Second Vatican Council’s references to the fundamental concepts of the nature of the Church as the Family of God, the People of God.”<sup>10</sup>

Vatican II in fact achieved a re-conversion, with the Mother of Jesus seen again in the fellowship which is the Church.

In this sense, it is particularly significant that the decision of the Fathers in Vatican II to integrate the declaration on Mary into the dogmatic constitution of the Church avoids the danger of isolating Mary from the People of God. Chapter 8 of *Lumen Gentium* has brought into light the unique role of Mary following two essential lines: The principle of exemplarity, Mary being the model of the Church and Christians, and the principle of maternity, expressing her exceptional mission in the formation and life of the Church and in her closest proximity to the human race. It is in this perspective of Mary’s relationship to Christ and to the Church that the devotion to her should be renewed.

Medieval paintings and statues of Mary represent her as offering the Infant Jesus to the world; the Infant Himself extends His hands outwardly, open to the world, giving Himself to it. By contrast, the Renaissance’s statues and paintings emphasize the aspect of “possession” by His mother, as if she would want to keep Him to herself, as if He belonged to her, instead of her giving Him to all to possess, so that all may be saved by Him.

#### RENEWAL OF THE DEVOTION

The Church expresses in various attitudes of devotion her relationship to Mary: profound veneration, trusting invocation, loving service, zealous imitation, profound wonder, attentive study.

Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation, calls attention to certain attitudes of piety which are incorrect. The Second Council of the Vatican denounced exaggerations of content and form that falsify doctrine, such as small-mindedness obscuring

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 28.

Mary's figure, devotional deviations, credulity, or substituting external practices for serious commitment. In particular, sterile and ephemeral sentimentality or one-sided presentations of Mary's figure that stresses one element, thus compromising the overall picture, are to be avoided.<sup>11</sup>

Thus we will avoid turning, in practise, Marian devotion into Marian religion. When the tendency of a certain kind of Marian piety goes to extremes, the Hierarchy must make every effort to moderate such excesses and to place the veneration to Mary in the proper general Catholic framework.<sup>12</sup>

The devotion to Mary must be solidly based. This means that the study of the sources of Revelation and the documents of the Magisterium should prevail over the search for novelties or the craving for extraordinary phenomena. "Everything that is obviously legendary or false must be eliminated" and the devotion solidly grounded on its objective historical basis.<sup>13</sup>

This may make it necessary at times to alter or modify certain long-standing customs so that the objective of our Christian worship may be seen in its proper theological and historical perspective.

Another element must be taken into consideration. Various circumstances of time and place, different sensibilities of peoples and their cultural traditions are responsible for the many forms that the veneration to Mary has taken along the centuries. Paul

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 38.

<sup>12</sup> "In this context — writes the Pope — we wish to mention two attitudes which in pastoral practice could nullify the norm of the Second Vatican Council. In the first place, there are certain persons concerned with the care of souls who scorn, *a priori*, devotions of piety which, in their correct forms, have been recommended by the Magisterium, who leave them aside and in this way create a vacuum which they do not fill. They forget that the Council has said that devotions of piety should harmonize with the liturgy, not be suppressed. Secondly, there are those who, without wholesome liturgical and pastoral criteria, mix practices of piety and liturgical acts in hybrid celebrations. It sometimes happens that novenas or similar practices of piety are inserted into the very celebration of the Eucharist Sacrifice. This creates the danger that the Lord's Memorial Rite, instead of being the culmination of the meeting of the Christian community, becomes the occasion, as it were, for devotional practices." (*Ibid.*, no. 31)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 38.

VI speaks about the "ravages of time" various forms of devotion are subject to. Hence the need to distinguish those elements that are transient from those that are permanent, the incidental from the substantial. Theological reflection will help both the revision of expressions and exercises already existing and the promotion of genuine creativity respecting a wholesome tradition while being open to the mentality and desires of the people of our time.

The Church "does not bind herself to any particular expression of an individual cultural epoch or to the particular anthropological ideas underlying such expressions. The Church understands that certain outward religious expressions, while perfectly valid in themselves, may be less suitable to men and women of different ages and cultures."<sup>14</sup>

#### MARY AND THE MODERN WOMAN

The devotion to Mary must also pay attention to the findings of human sciences. This will help to eliminate certain difficulties in the devotion to Mary, namely, the discrepancy between some aspects of this devotion on the one hand, and modern anthropological discoveries as well as profound changes in the psychosociological field on the other.

It is obvious that Mary's picture as presented in a certain type of devotional literature cannot easily be reconciled with today's life style, especially the way women live today: at home woman's equality and corresponsibility; in politics important positions in public life; in the social field working in different employment; in the cultural sphere so many possibilities open for intellectual activities.

Hence it is to be expected that some will become disenchanted with devotion to Mary as they understand and practise it; they think that Mary's life was too restricted while today woman's life is open.<sup>15</sup>

#### A. General answer

(1) It is important to note in this respect that Mary is proposed

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 36; cf. also no. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 34

to us as a model to be imitated not precisely in the type of life she led, and still less for her socio-cultural background. She is worthy of imitation because she was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples.

(2) Moreover those difficulties are related to certain aspects of Mary's image as presented in popular writings; this is not the gospel's image of Mary nor is it warranted by doctrinal data. Today in a different socio-cultural context we may express our sentiments about Mary in a way and manner different from the way and manner of the past which reflected their own age. Past generations found in Mary as Virgin, wife, mother the outstanding type of womanhood, their exemplar and model. Mary's image, however, should not be bound to any particular expression of individual cultural epoch or to particular anthropological ideas.<sup>16</sup>

(3) Hence we must compare our own anthropological ideas with Mary's figure as presented in the gospel. We will see then that in the New Testament Mary does not appear as exclusively concerned with her son but involved in helping others: Elizabeth in the mountain of Galilee, the newlyweds in Cana, the apostolic community in Jerusalem.

### *B. Two concrete problems*

(1) *Reaction against an excessively "domestic" image of Mary.* Mary has frequently been looked upon as a sweet but spiritless lady, not as a woman who was actually strong and active. Mary was so often put on the shelf out of reach. She was taken down on occasion and dusted off, even joined in a procession, but then very quickly she was restored to her glass case so that nothing would happen to her.

Today advocates of the Women's Liberation Movement have reacted strongly against the image of Mary confined to the home, enclosed within her own maternal sentiments, since this would be to close the horizon to any role in the development of society.

If we look closely, however, we will discover that the messianic

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, no. 35, 36.

maternity offered to Mary was oriented towards a most open liberation of men and women alike. Cana and Calvary where Mary is twice specifically called by Christ Himself not mother but "woman" indicate the role of Mary, and, hence of the woman, in the work of evangelization that opened solemnly in Cana and of redemption consummated at Calvary.

Mary therefore must be contemplated not simply within the limits of a noble maternal affection or a humble domestic existence but in collaboration with Christ for the birth of a new humanity, thus becoming in her own right the image of an authentic woman working for an authentic liberation.<sup>17</sup>

In the past it has been too easy to ignore certain scriptural passages and over-emphasize Mary's relationship with Christ according to the flesh and not bring out in full light her relationship to Him in the order of faith.

(2) *Reaction against an excessively "privileged" image of Mary.* The desire of presenting Mary as the ideal woman has resulted in emphasizing her greatness by insisting on those privileges that are exclusively hers, making her different from the rest of humanity, hence too far away from the everyday conditions of an ordinary Christian.

It may be said, then, that in that sense this projection of Mary has gone in an opposite direction from the mystery of the Incarnation. While her maternity should bring into relief how deeply human the Incarnation was, she herself has been depicted with an aureola that transforms her into a celestial being. In answer to this, it should be emphasized that the very privileges of Mary, her immaculate holiness, her perpetual virginity, her assumption into heaven have a meaning only as gifts for her to fulfill her mission as the first disciple of Christ and the first member of the Church. Within the limits of our own call all of us must also strive after union with God in holiness and purity, and to attain the eschatological goal she has already attained.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt that a modern woman is anxious — and

<sup>17</sup> *La Civiltà Cattolica*, art., cit., May 4, 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

entitled — to participate actively in the decision-making power regarding affairs of the community. She should then see how Mary, in dialogue with God, gives her active and responsible consent in the Annunciation, involving herself not in the solution of a small or contingent problem, but in the very Incarnation of the word, the “event of world importance,” the event *par excellence*.<sup>19</sup>

In particular the modern woman who is truly Christian will find that involvement in the social dimension of the apostolate is open to her as it was open to Mary. Mary showed an awareness of people, not only in Nazareth but in the help she extended throughout her life to the ones who were in need: to Elizabeth before she gave birth, to a poor couple embarrassed during their wedding day because of the scarcity of wine, on Mount Golgotha by giving moral strength to her own Son and to those mourning with her, in the Cenacle praying with the Apostles on the day of Pentecost — truly a profound concern for people in circumstances of material or spiritual need. Here, Mary may also become a model for the modern woman.

Mary was not a submissive woman, nor one whose piety did “hesitate to proclaim that God vindicates the humble and the oppressed, and removes the powerful people of this world from their privileged positions.”<sup>20</sup> Her *Magnificat* may be labelled a pious but revolutionary hymn.

“The modern woman will recognize in Mary, who ‘stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord,’ a woman of strength, who experienced poverty and suffering, flight and exile.<sup>21</sup> Those are situations that cannot escape the attention of those who wish to support, with the Gospel spirit, the liberating energies of man and of society.”<sup>22</sup>

The devotion to Mary then has a special function in exalting the dignity of woman and in fostering respect for her person. It is remarkable that the last official dogma proclaimed by the

<sup>19</sup> *MC*, no. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:51—53.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mt. 2:13—23.

<sup>22</sup> *MC*, no. 37.

Church about Mary regarding her Assumption is both the glorification of woman and her oldest liturgical feast. As early as the 5th century Christians celebrated a "memorial of Mary" patterned according to the "birthday into heaven" of the martyrs' anniversaries.<sup>23</sup>

It is thus clear that in the proper Gospel perspective Mary appears as the perfect model of Christ's disciples for our times for men and women, a model in building up the earthly city, in working for justice, in freeing the oppressed, in assisting the needy; in short, an active witness of concrete Christian love. The ultimate purpose of the devotion to Mary is to glorify and lead Christians to commit themselves to God's will.

"She is held up as an example to the faithful rather for the way in which, in her own particular life, she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God,<sup>24</sup> because she heard the word of God and acted on it and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions."<sup>25</sup>

## II. THE MEANING OF MARY FOR THE FILIPINO CHRISTIAN TODAY

### POPULAR RELIGIOSITY

Our starting point is a fact — the Christian fact that the immense majority of the Filipinos are baptized. The Church in our country acknowledges this multitude as her own children. The Filipinos are a people with their own popular cultural expressions which demand an attitude both of respect and of understanding. The blending of the cultural, of the popular and of the religious has produced the *Filipino Christian* with his own special characteristics. In order to understand him therefore, it is necessary to take into account the spirit of our population which is fundamentally healthy and sound, and the many rich energies latent in the religion of the humble ones.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. USPL, no. 58.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:38.

<sup>25</sup> MC, no. 35.

*The Problem*

Theologians and pastoral experts are trying to evaluate this popular religiosity and to extract from it directives that may have a bearing on the religious life of the people. Here we are particularly interested in Mary in the context of Filipino Christian life.

In order to understand the meaning of Mary for the average Filipino Christian today, we must dwell for a while on the concept and values of what is known in religious sociology as *Popular Religiosity*.<sup>26</sup> Popular religiosity in our case refers to that form of conceiving and practising Christianity that is predominant among the masses of the people even if it is not limited to them nor present in all its members. Even if it is often more devotional than sacramental, it is a true participation in the Word and in the cult.

The formation of popular religiosity takes place through a double process:

1. The first process is the *selection* of particular religious forms conditioned by a series of factors (environmental, socio-economic, historical) of their own world. This demands that on the one hand we *respect* the cultural experiences of the people, without trying to impose on them radical changes that belong to other cultural worlds; and on the other hand we subject these experiences to *questioning* in order to help them evolve in accordance with the new world which is being brought to life today.

2. The second process in the formation of popular religiosity is the *re-interpretation* of the official religious forms of the Catholic religion, adding to, or changing, their meaning:

- a. By *adding* other meanings, popular religiosity guarantees that the majority of its expressions (beliefs, rites, organization) besides the specifically religious ones, fulfill also psychological

<sup>26</sup>The best work on Popular Religiosity known to the author is the *Encuentro Latino Americano de Religiosidad Popular Documentos*. Santiago: Universidad Catolica de Chile, December 1973, 227 p., mimeographed. No study on Popular Religiosity can prescind from this publication.

and perhaps even economic and sociological functions. Here we find in particular the typical phenomenon of the patronal feasts, the religious rite more universally shared by Filipinos.

b. By *changing* the meaning of the official religious forms popular religiosity may become, unfortunately, somewhat syncretist.

We should not expect (still less require) that the expressions of popular religiosity manifest cultural patterns of some specific and highly reflective level. These expressions should authentically respond to the values that are lived and felt by the people — values and expressions that may not reach intellectual heights but are truly profound and valuable in the eyes of God.

I say so because there is a danger today that the predominantly sociological investigation of popular religiosity may lead us to give a greater importance to man's action and interpretation in the art of handling the problem of human religiosity than to the action God Himself carries out so mysteriously in man. The silent but fecund action of the Church, today often relegated to oblivion, should be also acknowledged.

Time and again, especially of late, we have heard that "each individual must make a lucid, free, and conscious option of his faith, a faith which is total and committed." While the emphasis on the "lucid" and the "conscious" may be a theoretical ideal, the *over-emphasis* on this requirement, however, carries with it the serious risk of beheading all popular religious manifestations or expressions of our people.

It is undeniable that popular religiosity has a value of its own. It creates in the person who lives by it a totality of dispositions, of mental-emotional forces that can be called "psychological conditions" and a series of "motivations" that orient him towards action. Such dispositions are both deep and permanent, giving a stable character to the popular experience that has been called "the religious feeling of the people."

This value of popular religiosity should not be measured by its rites, but by the role it plays in the solution of the fundamental problems of the "meaning of life." In this respect, our people possess a basic social personality more stable and firm

than other peoples that may be economically more developed but have lost the religious meaning of existence.<sup>27</sup>

### *Fiestas*

The peak of these manifestations of popular religiosity is often the celebration of the patronal feasts, the classical *fiestas* with their mixture of feast and fete, always remaining, however, a *religious* event. The fact of a multitudinous solidarity in great celebrations constitutes a real testimony that it is the "People of God" who, as such, celebrate publicly its faith, living the fundamental truths of the catechesis in a common and Christian solidarity of life.

Christian faith, in response to God's call, becomes incarnate in the religious manifestations of the people in their different moments and stages of their formation and evolution. The celebration of the patronal feasts are positive actions with fruitful results. They indicate the intuitive perception by the people of God's action through Mary or the saints, as well as the acceptance of fundamental Christian truths and values by them.

People celebrate their fiestas as more intense and vigorous moments of the spirit in their collective life, desirous to live in joy the immense riches of our faith. Fiestas should, therefore, constitute a privileged encounter with God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, the People of God. The people can thus escape from their daily tasks and concerns, foster a relaxed joy whose social value cannot be denied, and become closer to one another even in the external expressions of their religious needs.

We should not allow that the religious sentiment of the people be ever extinguished with the pretext of giving the fiestas a more human and more authentic spiritual expression. What is import-

<sup>27</sup>It is obvious that the expressions of popular religiosity should be gradually oriented with firm prudence and profound pastoral sense towards the authentic Christian cult — particularly in the liturgy — towards a personal and ever-growing maturity of faith and customs, towards the integration of the masses of the people into the life of the Christian communities. Another question would be *how* to obtain His goal. But this belongs rather to pastoral experts.

ant and necessary is to give back to the religious celebrations a real content of faith, placing the life of Mary and the saints in the light of the mystery of Christ. It is therefore not simply a question of eliminating certain abuses, but of *rediscovering* together the ever-present riches of the religious celebrations, and to celebrate them in the context of the liturgical cycle as transcendental moments in salvation history.

### Shrines

The culminating event of the popular fiesta we celebrate today is the focus, even on a national scale, on the Shrine of *Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia*, on this 50th anniversary of the canonical coronation of her image. Today, the *Santuario* of *Nuestra Señora de Peñafrancia* is the center of gravity of the devotion to Mary in the Philippines. This national shrine shares today in a special way in the mission which God Himself, through the instrumentality of popular religiosity, gives to our shrines.

A shrine is the place where God's presence among us, the presence of the Risen Christ, appears with special transparency. In Christian life a shrine is a meeting place, a place of communion, a place of theophany for the pilgrims — the pilgrim People of God. It has a providential mission for the spiritual welfare of the Church. A shrine is the center of convergence for the flocking of pilgrims from the masses of the people, and the people feel they have in them their most proper and legitimate forum for their religious expressions. The pilgrim achieves here a greater communication with God and with his fellowmen, a growth in the process of his own personalization. Shrines are places of education where the pastoral action will help the pilgrim to develop as man and thus also as Christian. The pilgrim will find in this shrine a stimulus to commit himself more to a history that becomes "salvation history."

Properly oriented shrines occupy a prominent place in Christian, and particularly popular, religiosity; they have an irreplaceable mission for the development of Christian life and

spiritual renewal of the faithful. They are, to use the expression of Pope Paul VI, "clinics of the spirit."

APPLICATION TO THE VENERATION OF THE BLESSED  
VIRGIN MARY IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

The Marian question poses itself as a problem which sallies forth from the simultaneous presence of elements that are properly theological, and elements that are devotional and more or less popular. We are concerned at present with the latter.

The Philippine Church is historically Marian. This fact has an important bearing on Philippine pastoral activity. Depth psychology shows the radical and original value of man's maternal experience, an experience that must be considered and wisely directed by the educators of people and peoples.

There is a latent pedagogical force and vigor in the profound devotion of our people towards Mary. This veneration and love for Mary is a gift of God, and it would be impossible to elaborate on any system of authentic Filipino pastoral activity if this devotion is not properly evaluated and appreciated. Such a veneration of Mary creates a family spirit and atmosphere. At the same time, because Mary is the model of vital intimacy with Christ and of apostolic collaboration in his work, this veneration helps the formation and development of a vital, profound and dynamic faith which may lead the faithful to an authentic Christian commitment to face the problems confronting the church in the world today, and particularly in our country.

The Blessed Virgin Mary plays an important part in Filipino popular Catholicism. A careful and respectful approach by authentic pastoral theologians will be able to grasp and to show that there exists in the Filipino people a movement towards Mary which is characteristic. There exists a clear sound logic in that movement towards Mary that comes repeatedly both in time and in various places over the Islands. But a reflection on that Marian piety is in order.

A Marian piety which would be purely typological is just a pastoral illusion. In order to make Mary's charism truly fecund

it is important that the Marian "consciousness" (which is pedagogically prior) lead to the Marian attitude, to the imitation of Mary (which is entitatively prior).

Thus in order to avoid a deficient Christology in the pastoral field, we should present an image of Christ capable of sharply marking the two poles of tension in His mysterious divine-human existence: the Father, and Mary. This Marian aspect will constitute a guarantee for the proper understanding of the Incarnation, of historicity, of humanity.

At the same time the people feel that in Mary they are understood and properly interpreted. They perceive that Mary is genuinely interested in everything that is vital and human, and that this is a characteristically feminine charism found in her in a preeminent way. An enlightened popular pastoral will acknowledge that the people need signs, images, illustrations. In this respect Mary illumines and makes tangible what true faith in Christ is, since she was a witness to Christ's resurrection, and has already shared in Christ's second coming because of her Assumption. She is the great sign of hope of the pilgrim people. Mary is the sign of Christ's humanity.

Mary has a great role to play within the popular pastoral in the Philippines. It is, however, extremely important to effect a revision and reformulation of the theological *locus* where she is placed, namely, in the proper Christological, biblical and liturgical context. The love of the people for Mary is a sure means for a growing and personal faith in Christ. This will be a sure guarantee for the education of the faith.

The pastor who would know how to welcome and understand our people as a religious people will have the best opportunities to deliver the revealed message efficiently. The pastor who either despising or misunderstanding this religiosity rejects those who profess it, or chides them for their beliefs or imperfect expressions, loses in many cases the opportunity to convey the revealed message and make it acceptable.

The image of Our Lord, the Cross, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, as well as many religious gestures leave always behind themselves encouragement, hope, and a certain amount of inner

joy to all, but particularly to the simple people. Thus *processions* become, and are, the sign of the pilgrim Church moving towards Christ's paschal mystery: they are a testimony of faith and an element of grace. In this sense the people participating in processions in honor of Our Lady are eschatologically-oriented. *Pilgrimages* to her shrines also hold an important place in the piety and religion of the Filipino Christian people, and help in conserving a beautiful tradition of faith. They should always be full in their meaning and content. This will prevent them from being marred by superstition and affected by a false or deviated piety.

It is against this background of the traditional devotion of the Filipinos towards Mary, of the value of popular religiosity, and of the role of the shrines, that the relevance of the re-enactment of the crowning of Our Lady of Peñafrancia is brought into full light, springs up into full life. The Philippines is a Marian country. Its Christian pulse is felt in Bicolandia. Its heart is beating in Peñafrancia.

#### CONCLUSION

I started this talk by alluding to a certain slackening in the veneration of Mary among some Christian groups or individuals. However, I refuse to accept this as a universal phenomenon. I like to think that while the branches are being lashed at by the storm the tree is deeply sinking its roots.

Whatever may the case be in other countries, the Philippines still remains Marian territory. Peñafrancia is not only a witness but also a symbol. During the fluvial procession of the image of Our Lady, little children are seen sending flying kisses to Mary, the Mother of Jesus and their own mother. All of us are Mary's children. Today as a sign of our deep love to Mary, in our own name and as representatives not only of the Bicol region but also of the whole Philippines, we are sending to Our Mother the flying kisses of the devotion of the Filipino people to Our Mother. We love our Mother in heaven.