



THAT ALL MAY KNOW MY SON

This is a publication of the USA Province Joint History and Charism Committee, composed of members of the Society of the Divine Savior, of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Savior, and of Lay Salvatorians.

COVER: Computerized restoration of a photograph of the *Mother of the Savior* after the painting of the *Salus Populi* in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome by Fr. Joseph Henn SDS, Milwaukee

THAT ALL MAY KNOW MY SON

A TRIBUTE TO THE
MOTHER OF THE SAVIOR
IN THIS
JUBILEE YEAR
OF THE
SECOND MILLENNIUM

Donald P. Skwor, SDS

Laetare Sunday
April 2, 2000

THAT ALL MAY KNOW MY SON

by
Fr. Donald P. Skwor SDS

In an issue of the *SDS Annales*, dated June 15, 1924, Father Pancratius Pfeiffer, the second superior general of the Society of the Divine Savior, made an historic announcement. He officially declared that the official image of Mary, Mother of the Savior and patroness of the Society, was to be the Madonna venerated in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome as the Welfare of the People. This is also known as Our Lady of the Snows.¹

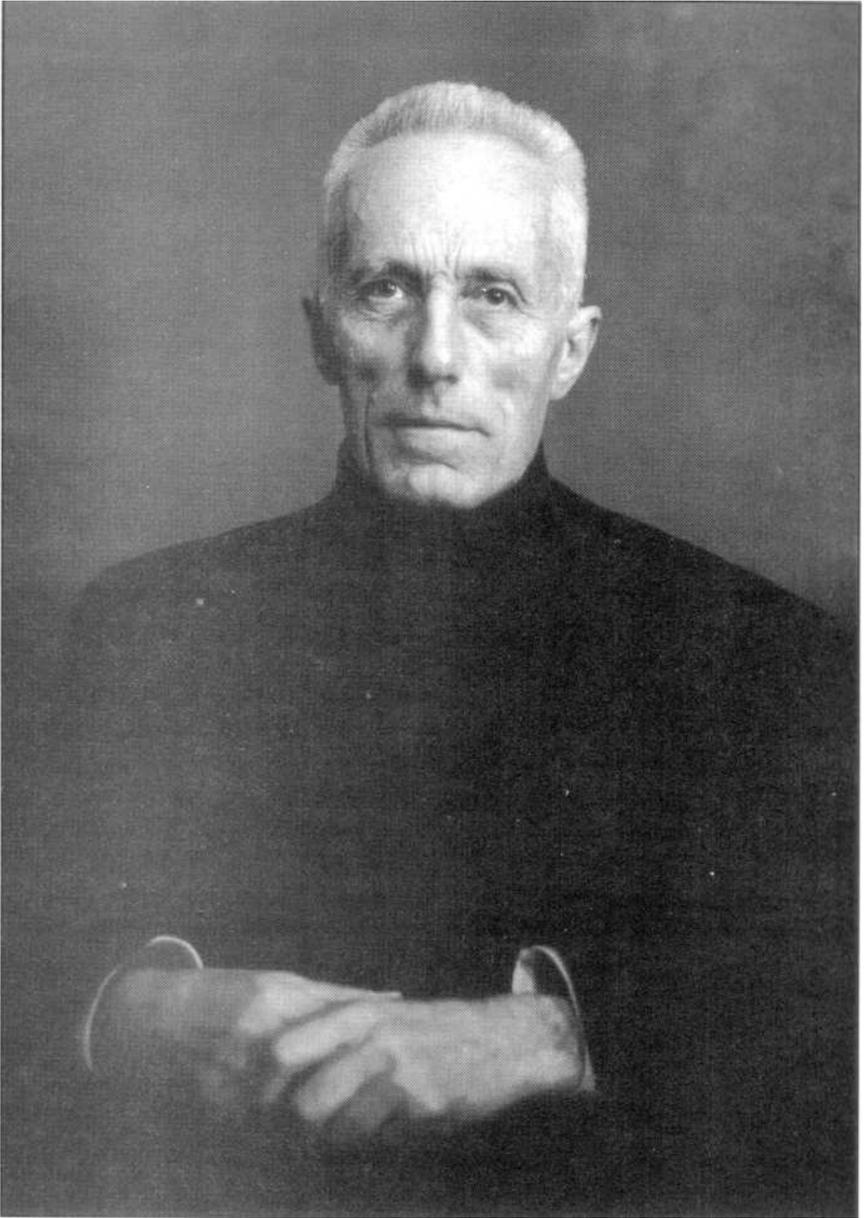
In the article he states that this painting was chosen for three reasons: (1) it is an image which is very old and has been very highly venerated by the Church, especially by the Roman Pontiffs; (2) it represents the Teaching Savior, with the scroll (book) in His hand (Catholic Teaching Society); and (3) the countenance of the Virgin is serene and at the same time amiable; at once inviting and inducing to veneration of the Mother of God.

He noted that plans were being made for a medal proper to the Society to be struck bearing the image of the Divine Savior on one side and this Mother of the Savior on the other.

He also recommended very highly that the members seek to propagate devotion to this image, remembering the words of our Venerable Father and Founder: "Let all cherish a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary". "The spirit of the Society requires us to venerate in a singular fashion, after the Divine Savior, the Virgin, Mother of God (Deipara)".²

¹ *Annales Societatis Divini Salvatoris*, Rome, Italy, Vol. 11, No. V, June 15, 1924, pp. 31-32.

² *Ibid.*



Father Pancratius Pfeiffer SDS, 1872 - 1945, was the immediate successor to the Founder and was Superior General of the Society of the Divine Savior (Salvatorians) from 1915 - 1945. He chose the painting of Our Lady, *Salus Populi*, Welfare of the People, in the Basilica of St. Mary Major, as the official image of the Mother of the Savior on June 15, 1924.

A BIT OF HISTORY

I have often wondered just how many members know of this decision or know about the image of which he spoke. It ranks among the little known facts of Salvatorian history and tradition. I myself was not aware of the fact until I discovered it while I was a student in Rome. At that time I undertook to translate a little booklet from the Italian entitled *Il Piú Grande SANTUARIO e la Piú Ricca Cappella del Mondo a Gloria di Maria*.³ Roughly

translated, it reads: “The Greatest SANCTUARY and the Richest Chapel in the World to the Glory of Mary.” It was never published in English but it describes the history of the Basilica of St. Mary Major and of the image of the “Liberian” Madonna as Canon Pinchetti describes the image. “Liberian” is the name given to the basilica after Pope Liberius (352-366) who commissioned and dedicated it. (Note that the pamphlet was published by the Salvatorian Press located then in the Borgo Vecchio, later to become the Via della Conciliazione where the present generalate house stands.)

The Madonna is known by a variety of names but I will not get into that now. I will retrace the steps later. For Salvatorians she is the Mother of the Savior.



Main façade of the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome constructed by Sixtus III in 432 - 440 over the site of the Church of Santa Maria. It was enlarged by Eugene III in the 12th century and restored by Nicolaus IV in the 13th century. Clement X had the apse façade built in the 17th century and Benedict XIV (1740-58) restored the entire basilica. The bell tower dates from c. 1377. It is the fourth patriarchal basilica.

³ Pinchetti-Sanmarchi, G.M, *Canonico Liberiano*, Roma 13, Collegio Salvatoriano, Borgo Vecchio 165, 1925, pp. 48

To emulate Pope Pius XII, who celebrated his first Mass at our Lady's altar in St. Mary Major as Fr. Eugenio Pacelli, I too celebrated my first Mass at this altar on December 20, 1953, but for different reasons I am sure. It was the day after my ordination in St. John Lateran and the opening of the Marian Year of 1953-54 proclaimed by the same pope. I had holy cards of the Madonna printed to commemorate the event.

I recall that, years later, I wrote an article for the then *Salvatorian Magazine* that appeared in the Christmas, 1961 issue. It was entitled "Christmas In June". In it I described the history of the Basilica and the image. It was a follow-up to an article I had written for the Christmas issue of the *Star*, published by the Salvatorian scholastics (students) in Lanham, MD where I taught theology for one year (thus exercising the Licentiate I had gained in theology while in Rome).

Many years later while editor of Salvatorian Publications at the Salvatorian Center in New Holstein I wrote two articles for the *Hope Newsletter* entitled "Another Birthday...Our Lady, Welfare of the People" (for another Marian Year) and "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary".⁴ In these articles I outlined for Salvatorian friends and benefactors the history of the Madonna and the Salvatorian connection with that image.

And now, still many more years later I find myself addressing the subject again in the post Marian Year in preparation for the Jubilee proclaimed by Pope John Paul II. I think it is fitting to commemorate Mary as Mother of the Savior in this Millennium as a Salvatorian contribution and salute to the Roman Pontiff to whom, as Salvatorians, we pledge allegiance.

But before I embark on this effort I would like to hearken to the advice of modern mariologists.

⁴ *Hope*, A Bi-Monthly Newsletter, Vol. Twenty, Number Four, and Volume Twenty-one, Number Five, Salvatorian Center, New Holstein, WI, 1990.

OLD TRADITIONS

In her introduction to the book, *Mary, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*⁵, Marianne Merckx states that what was once *De Maria, Numquam Satis*, Never enough about Mary, had become the motto “More than enough about Mary”. Scepticism had arisen in the 1960’s about some mariological exaggerations. Veneration of Mary was strongly associated with appearances and miracles.

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John R. Shinnors, Jr. in the book *Mary, Woman of Nazareth*⁶ wrote in his chapter “The Cult of Mary and Popular Belief” that throughout the history of her cult Mary has been portrayed as (1) a restorer of health; (2) as an intercessor between heaven and earth, a mediatrix; and (3) as a social critic or prophetess. The excesses associated with these aspects of Marian cult provide a strong dose of magical religion surrounded by popular devotions. Mary had become everything from a worker of miracles (many unauthenticated) to a second redeemer (even avenger) to an outspoken critic of communism and apocalyptic messenger.

For the first ten or fifteen years after the council (Vatican II) people found it hard to get away from the tradition in which Mary’s glories were celebrated almost excessively. Popular devotion was associated with appearances and miracles. But as a result of the developments of Vatican II, discussion about Mary is in full flow again.

⁵ Schillebeekx, Edward and Halkes, Catharina, *Mary, Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, trans. by John Bowden from Maria, Gisteren, Vandaag, Morgen, New York, NY, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993, pp. 1-11.

⁶ Doris Donnelly, ed., *Mary, Woman of Nazareth, Biblical & Theological Perspectives*, Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1990, pp.161-86

HANDMAID OF THE POOR

Finally, Mary has come to occupy the sober place which scripture shows us. Bishop Sklba reminds of that she is once more the humble “handmaid of the Lord”(Lk.1:38) whose mission was to proclaim the word of Yahweh and announce his dialog with the poor.⁷ In the *Magnificat*, Mary says that God has “ looked upon my lowliness”(1:48). She is a servant of God’s poor, a model for the Church.⁸

The bishop goes on to say:

Perhaps it was Zephaniah in the seventh century BC who most clearly described the lowly as a metaphor for authentic spiritual health. His intention was not that people should be physically poor, but rather that they (and all the people of Judah) should view everything as a gift. In the eyes of Zephaniah, possessions were not really earned nor merited, but simply received....

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In the midst of such a people stood Mary of Nazareth, without pretense or claim to personal achievement, able to be used by God for purposes beyond her wildest dreams, not exploiting others, but rather listening to

her God as attentively as possible.⁹

Mary was truly among the anawim, and addressed as such by the angel who came, not to her alone, but “to a town of Galilee called Nazareth” (Lk. 1:26). In the midst of her people, she was

⁷ Sklba, Richard J., “Mary and the Anawim” in *Mary, Woman of Nazareth*, *op. cit.*, pp.123-32

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-31

acknowledged as radically dependent upon the sovereign will of God. She was open to new beginnings, living with the unexpected, enthralled by the presence of God, reaching out in service to those around, to the human needs of ordinary folks because they were all bound together by the grace of God in history. Mary of Nazareth is a model for the Church. Luke made her a paradigm for the way God's salvation works.

Mary is among the 'anawim, and God does great things for her and for them every time!

Carol Frances Jegen follows up on Bishop Sklba's reflections on the *Magnificat* in her "The Justice Dimension: Mary as Advocate of Peace" in the same book.¹⁰ She compares it with covenantal prayer in Psalm 85. In it she alludes to the phrase "justice and peace shall kiss" and comments on God's past fidelity and consequently awakens hope with respect to the future. She quotes the prominent biblical scholar Arthur Weiser in the following words: "...this is the faith that has prevented the religious values of the (Hebrew scriptures) from being utterly defeated by the manifold obstacles raised in the course of history by the actual state of affairs on earth."

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Jegen rightly maintains that Mary's role in today's global struggles for justice and peace resonates well with the thrust of *Redemptoris Mater*, the encyclical of John Paul II calling us to this Marian Year in preparation for the year 2000.¹¹

¹⁰ *op. cit.*, pp.133-45

¹¹ John Paul II, *The Mother of the Redeemer*, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1996, p.114.

She further notes that in the US Bishops pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace, God's Promise and Our Response*,¹² Mary is explicitly mentioned in the final pastoral section of the document. She infers that the placement of the Marian references in this peace pastoral parallels the position of the Marian teachings of Vatican II in the last chapter of *Lumen Gentium*.

She concludes that Mary as our advocate for peace calls each of us to be genuine disciples of Jesus. Mary calls us to live in such a way that God's justice and peace shall "kiss" in our lives as well as in hers.

MARY, MOTHER OF GOD, AND MODEL OF THE CHURCH

Let me go back now to what Bishop Sklba said about Mary being a model for the Church For this I will have to rely heavily on the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church or Lumen Gentium* as it is better known.¹³ In Chapter VIII, "The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church", the Council Fathers specifically state that "At the message of the angel, the Virgin Mary received the Word of God in her heart and in her body, and gave Life to the world. Hence she is acknowledged and honored as being truly the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer." (53) "She (Mary) is also hailed as a pre-eminent and altogether singular member of the Church, and as the Church's model and excellent exemplar in faith and charity. Taught by the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church honors her with filial affection and piety as a most beloved mother."

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¹² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*, Washington, DC, 1983, No. 27

¹³ Abbott, Walter, M., SJ, Gen. Ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York, Guild Press, 1966, p. 794.

This sets the stage for a new development in mariology. Mary is Mother of God and the Church's model. If I am not wrong, it is the first time since the Council of Ephesus in 431 that Mary is called Mother of God or *Theotokos* in any official church document.

The Chapter is divided into five sections and summarized by Jaroslav Pelikan¹⁴ in the following manner:

1. *The Role of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God, in the Mystery of Christ and the Church:*

Mary by grace surpasses every creature but is still in need of salvation. The Synod however does not want to give a complete doctrine on Mary, nor does it wish to decide on questions that have not been fully elaborated by theologians.

Hence she is
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2. *The Role of the Blessed Virgin in the Economy of Salvation:*

"the blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and loyally persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross".

3. *The Blessed Virgin and the Church:*

"the Blessed Virgin was eternally predestined . . . to be the Mother of God"

"Mary figured profoundly in the history of salvation and in a certain way unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith."

4. *Devotion to the Blessed Virgin in the Church:*

"true devotion consists neither in fruitless and passing emotion, nor in a certain vain credulity".

¹⁴ Pelikan, Jaroslav, *Mary, Through the Centuries*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1966, p. 267

5. *Mary, A Sign of Hope and of Solace for God's People in Pilgrimage.*

“in the bodily and spiritual glory which she possesses in heaven, the Mother of Jesus continues in this present world as the image and first flowering of the Church.

These few paragraphs set into bold relief the future developments in Marian devotion and popular belief. They state in effect that all veneration of Mary must begin and end in Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior of the World.

NEW DIRECTIONS

The burden put on bishops and theologians is that they must always inform popular belief with the centrality of Jesus as the final scope of people's devotion.

Kathleen Coyle in her book, *Mary in the Christian Tradition*,¹⁵ says this about channeling “Popular Piety”;

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The history of popular piety shows that devotion to Mary can become excessive if not checked—and unless religious leaders and liturgists are able to direct such devotions into approved forms of piety. The church hierarchy may not be able to control popular marian devotions effectively but it can channel them toward more legitimate forms of devotion. Devotion at Lourdes, for example, have been given a christocentric focus. Since the shrine was officially approved, the eucharistic celebra-

tion, the anointing of the sick, and the afternoon procession of the

¹⁵ Coyle, Kathleen, *Mary in the Christian Tradition*, Mystic, CT, Twenty-Third Publication, 1996, p. 132

Blessed Sacrament have become highlights of the pilgrimage. Theologians ought to ask what deep human and spiritual needs are being met by such manifestations that seemingly are not being met by community liturgies or celebrations.

Any theological reshaping of the image of Mary must take into account the images of Mary in popular religious imagination. Since all believers embrace some aspects of popular religion in the devotional life, popular piety will need a Mary who is a heavenly healer, intercessor, prophet, comforter, and friend. What theologians ignore, ordinary people will provide: apparition sites such as Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje will be probably always be with us.

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MOTHER OF THE REDEEMER

In his Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Mater*,¹⁶ Pope John Paul gives us a good updating on the more recent developments in marian theology from his perspective as pope.

It is precisely the special bond between humanity and his Mother which has led me to proclaim a Marian Year in the Church, in this period before the end of the Second Millennium since Christ's birth. A similar initiative was taken in the past, when Pius XII proclaimed 1954 as a Marian Year, in order to highlight the exceptional holiness of the Mother of Christ as expressed in the mysteries of her Immaculate Conception (defined exactly a century before) and of her Assumption into heaven.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, Vatican City, Publication No. 159-9, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1996

Now following the line of the Second Vatican Council, I wish to emphasize the special presence of the Mother of God in the mystery of the Christ and his Church. For this is a fundamental dimension emerging from the Mariology of the Council, the end of which is now more than twenty years behind us. The Extraordinary Synod of Bishops held in 1985 exhorted everyone to follow faithfully the teaching and guidelines of the Council. We can say that these two events—the Council and the Synod—embody what the Holy Spirit himself wishes “to say to the Church” in the present phase of history.(48)

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He then goes on to say:

In this context, the Marian Year is meant to promote a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in the mystery of Christ and of the Church, the topic to which the contents of this encyclical are devoted. Here we speak not only of the doctrine of faith but also of the life of faith, and thus of authentic “Marian spirituality,” seen in the light of Tradition, and especially the spirituality to which the Council exhorts us. Furthermore, Marian spirituality, like its corresponding *devotion*, finds a very rich source in the historical experience of individuals and of the various Christian communities present among the different peoples and nations of the world. In this regard, I would like to recall, among the many witnesses and teachers of this spirituality, the figure of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort¹⁷ who proposes consecration

¹⁷ Note: It was from St. Louis Grignon de Monfort that John Paul acquired the motto for his coat of arms: *Totus Tuus*—All Yours (O Mary)

to Christ through the hands of Mary, as an effective means for Christians to live faithfully their baptismal commitments. I am pleased to note that in our own time too new manifestations of this spirituality and devotion are not lacking.

There thus exist solid points of reference to look to and follow in the context of this Marian Year.(48)

The pontiff quotes from *Lumen Gentium*, highlighting this important aspect of marian devotion for Salvatorians:

Let the entire body of the faithful pour forth persevering prayer to the Mother of God and Mother of mankind. Let them implore that she who aided the beginning of the Church by her prayers may now, exalted as she is in heaven above all the saints and angels, *intercede with her Son* in the fellowship of all the saints. May she do so until all the peoples of the human family, whether they are honored with the name of Christian or whether *they still do not know their Savior*, are happily gathered together in peace and harmony into the one People of God, for the glory of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity. (69) (Italics mine)

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In his conclusion, the pope makes this interesting statement:

If (God) has eternally willed to call man to share the divine nature (2Pet. 1:4), it can be said that he has matched the "divinization" of man to humanity's historical conditions, so that even after sin he is ready to restore at a great price the eternal plan of his love through the "humanization" of his Son, who is of the same being as himself. The whole of creation, and more directly man himself, cannot fail to be amazed at this gift in which he has become a sharer, in the Holy Spirit: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn. 3:16) (51)

OUR SALVATORIAN CALLING

All this having been said, we might say that our Salvatorian calling “to make known the Savior” can be further modified by the phrase “in imitation

we might say that our Salvatorian calling “to make known the Savior” can be further modified by the phrase “in imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary” in whom we have an exemplar par excellence: That all may know my Son.

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Thus it becomes our duty to defend Mary’s rightful claim to be Mother of God or *Theotokos* whose honor it is to proclaim that her Son is God and Savior and to whom is owed honor and glory forever. Christ was, is, and ever will be Savior of all mankind: Christ yesterday, today and tomorrow, ever God. We must be convinced that Mary is displeased whenever she is placed before her Son thus taking away from His oneness with God and her submission to Him.

It becomes a part of the HOW of our mission. Mary’s mission is our mission. She is our most powerful aid in helping to make Him known to all nations.

In the beautiful homily delivered in the motherhouse chapel on December 7, 1982, Fr. Gerard Rogowski, former superior general, concluded with these words: “So for us there remains the task of integrating and incarnating Mary, the Mother of the Savior and our mother into our Salvatorian life, according to the will and mandate of our founder.”¹⁸

In his remarks, Fr. Rogowski noted that in the founder’s *Spiritual Diary* he mentions Mary by name more than thirty times plus numerous

¹⁸ Rogowski, Gerard, Homily, Dec. 7, 1982, in *Annales*, Vol. XII, No. 5.

other references to the Mother of the Savior. He notes as the essential elements of the Marian spirituality of the founder: “Never neglect to cherish and foster a childlike devotion to Mary at all times; let her be your advocate in all things. O Mary, take me and accept me as your unworthy servant for all eternity”. (*Spiritual Diary*, p. 68)

It is not my purpose here to quote extensively from the founder’s *Spiritual Diary* or from the *Exhortations and Admonitions*. You can do that for yourselves. But I would like to make reference to an article written by Fr. Juan Carrasquilla entitled “Mary in the Church”.¹⁹ It was written at the request of the International Renewal Commission as part of a series of meditations and reflections on the resolution on Ways and Means. In it he states:

Mary appears as the highest actualization of the Gospel and Church. Paul VI rightly...proclaimed her mother of the Church in 1964...and affirmed that devotion to Mary is an essential element in authentic ecclesial piety and Christian worship . . .

The place of Mary is in the mystery of Christ and the Church, as an active collaborator in the plan of salvation (LG No. 65); glorified in the totality of her being, she is the model of the Church that always aspires to the final communion and the return of her Lord. (LG No. 68)

I would be remiss if I did not incorporate some comments from my paper entitled “Pentecost: Prompted by the Spirit”²⁰, written for the same

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¹⁹ Carrasquilla, Juan, “Mary in the Church”, 1994, in the *Annales*, Vol. XIV, No. 4, pp. 363-65

²⁰ Skwor, Donald, “Prompted by the Spirit”, 1994, in the *Annales*, Vol. XIV, no. 4, pp. 353-358.

purpose as the above article by Juan Carrasquilla. At that time I reflected:

When the Founder exhorted us “to imitate (the apostles) in their expectation of the Holy Spirit... persevering with one mind...” he undoubtedly had in mind the words of the Acts of the Apostles “in the company of Mary, the mother of Jesus”.

His entire life was given over to the care of the Mother of God with childlike trust. And so it was natural that when he decided to found the Apostolic Teaching Society, his thoughts would go directly to her as Queen of the Apostles. It was under this title that he honored her as principal patroness of the Society...When the name of the Society was changed her title changed to Mother of the Savior and Queen of the Apostles.

Fr. Pancratius writes that “We honor the Mother of God as the purest and most chaste Mother. There is a spirit passing through

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the world that threatens to poison everything that is holy and pure. We could say that this spirit is one of the principal causes of the uprising against religion in which she is the powerful protectress of all that is pure and holy. Therefore we take refuge in the Mother of God, the purest and most chaste Mother.....”

We too live in a period of cultural revolution. Old values are being challenged and new ones have not yet emerged. It is a time of change, a time of conflict. Religious knowledge and things of the spirit are being supplanted by technology and

things of technology. Something has to be done to save another generation from becoming godless. It is a time for action.

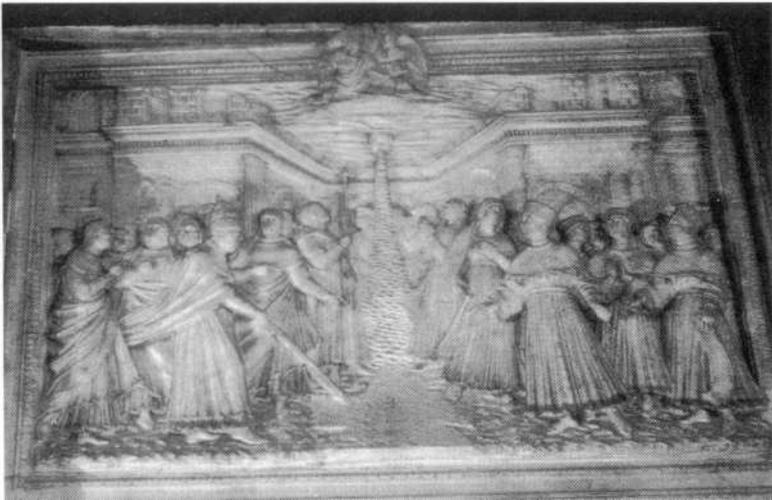
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BACK TO THE IMAGE

After this long disquisition, you may ask: What does all this have to do with Fr. Pancratius and his announcement that the official image of Mary, Mother of the Savior and Patroness of the Society, was to be the painting of the Madonna venerated in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome as *Welfare of the People*?

First we must take a glimpse at its history. The basilica itself was originally dedicated by Pope Liberius and later commemorated the Council of Ephesus in 431 proclaiming that Mary is the Mother of God—*Theotokos*. We have already seen the implications of that proclamation.

It all goes back to the Edict of Toleration in 313 and the famous “Peace of Constantine”. The sacred fires of the temple of Vesta had hardly flickered their last when Pope Sylvester had the first church in honor of the Blessed Virgin erected next to it in the Roman Forum. He called it *Santa Maria Antiqua*.



A bas-relief depicting Pope Liberius (352-366) tracing the outlines of the Church of Santa Maria in what is recorded as a miraculous snowfall on the evening of August 4 - 5. The feast of Our Lady of the Snows is traditionally celebrated on August 5. The Church was later to be rebuilt on a much grander scale by Pope Sixtus III (432-440), now known as St. Mary Major.

Nearly forty years later the *Pontificale* of Pope Liberius records the erection of a church on the Esquiline Hill by the same pontiff, this one named the Basilica of *Santa Maria*. It was frequently referred to as the Liberian Basilica to designate its founder.

In the same book, the *Pontificale*, we find the story of the basilica and the traditions concerning its origins. “It is said” that an old patrician couple, having no heirs of their own to whom they could leave their riches, decided to turn their wealth to good use in the construction of a church in honor of the Virgin.

The accounts reads: “that both Pope Liberius and the couple had a vision during their sleep on the very same night. According to the vision, there was to be a snowfall on the summit of the Esquiline Hill on the evening of August 5-6. The snowfall was to indicate the spot where the Virgin wished that the church should be built. The miracle took place as predicted. The patrician couple joyfully accepted the sign and they met with the Pope who was accompanied by a large following of clergy and people at the site of the miraculous snowfall. The pontiff himself traced the dimensions for the new basilica in the snow and dedicated it to Mary. Thus the church is often referred to as *St. Mary of the Snows*.



Reliquary in which some of the parts of what are purported to be remnants of the manger of Bethlehem are enshrined in the Basilica of St. Mary Major in Rome. The relic consists of five pieces of wood linked together by metal bands dating back to the 7th or 9th centuries. The reliquary itself had been decorated by Arnolfo di Cambio near the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th centuries.

Almost a century after the pontificate of Pope Liberius, the third ecumenical council of the Church was convened at Ephesus in 431. The council condemned the heresy of Nestorius who claimed that Mary was only the mother of Christ's human nature and therefore not truly the Mother of God. As a memorial to Mary's singular victory in the defeat of this heresy, Pope Sixtus III rebuilt the Liberian Basilica on a much grander scale.

Magnificent marble pillars were brought from the ruins of the temple of Juno. A glorious triumphal arch was erected at the juncture of the central nave. The arch itself is decorated with mosaics depicting the Incarnation. The entire project was thus a solemn reaffirmation of the divine maternity of Mary and the church stands today as a monument to the glory of Mary, the Mother of God.

As additional testimony to the divine motherhood of Mary defined in the Council of Ephesus, the remains of the manger of Bethlehem were brought to Rome to be placed in the basilica which commemorates the victory of the Blessed Mother. For some time it had been feared that the relics of Bethlehem and the cave itself might fall prey to the Turks. Over zealous pilgrims to the Holy Land had already carried off a good portion of those remnants which time itself had not destroyed. It was decided, therefore, to transport the remains of the manger and some pieces of the rock from the cave.

No more fitting place could be found than the monument to the triumph of the Mother of the Savior, true God and true Man. Thus the basilica itself from the sixth century on was sometimes referred to as St. Mary's of the Manger (*Santa Maria ad Praesepe*)

The genuine sentiment attached to the basilica by the people was a natural response of their devotion to Mary and the Infant Savior. The popes and the faithful accordingly continued to endow the edifice with costly and resplendent gifts. The basilica thus acquired a reputation for such beauty and such importance that it was finally called St. Mary Major. The Madonna venerated in the basilica was invoked under several titles but the most common and lasting is *Salus Populi*, or *Welfare of the People*.²¹

²¹ For the above note on the history of the Basilica, see Pinchetti, footnote 1.

NOW THE PAINTING.

Though there is some discussion as to the actual age of the painting, all critics agree that it is indeed ancient. The archeologist Armellini attributes it to the sixth century; Marucchi, to the eighth (during which the famous controversy over ikons was raging in the orient). Wilpert, on other hand believes that the present painting is actually a copy of an ancient ikon and places its origin close to the middle of the thirteenth century.²²

However, the *Pontificale* records that Pope Gregory III, who reigned from 731-741, had the frame of the painting adorned with gold and jewels. It indicates the painting as the picture of the Mother of God holding the Divine Savior which was venerated at the manger in St Mary Major. From this evidence then we can establish the existence of the ikon from the middle of the eighth century (731-741)

Other arguments for its antiquity can be derived from the style of the painting itself. The style of the clothing and the delineation of the faces are Byzantine.



The general characteristics are the strongly imposing expression, the large eyes (symbol of the ecstatic vision), the peculiarly impressing note of maternal dignity and the Greek cross painted on the veil cov-

The Pauline Chapel in the left transept of St. Mary Major which houses the icon of *Salus Populi* or *Welfare of the People* (Pauline after Paul V in 611) above the main altar.

²² All of this information on the painting and what follows is likewise from Pinchetti, *ut supra*.



The original painting without the crowns of the Madonna and Child, *Salus Populi* (*Welfare of the People*) is usually dated to the 8th century. The painting was variously known as:

Our Lady of the Snows
Liberian Virgin
St. Mary at the Crib
Queen of Peace
Queen of Victory
Miraculous Image of St. Mary
Immaculate Mother of the Savior

ering the forehead. The inscription in Greek (MP ØY) meaning Mother of God adds confirmation to the other already telling indications of its origin.

Msgr. Giovanni Biasiotti, in a very learned publication on the Image of the Virgin in St. Mary Major (Rome 1915) is of the opinion that this picture is a copy of the one that was originally worked out in mosaic in the center of the apse of the original church built by Sixtus III. That mosaic he maintains was destroyed when Nicholas IV substituted the mosaic of the Coronation of the Virgin which is there now.

The area surrounding the figure of the Virgin (with hands crossed) and Child (whose hand is extended in a blessing in the oriental style) is covered with a silver relief work and jewels. The silver plating, however, does not strictly follow the lines of the figures according to the oriental custom. It forms rather a sort of frame, decorated in an almost baroque manner. Even this, for the past part, is covered up by the *ex voto* offerings attached to it. (An *ex voto* is a delicately wrought piece of silver or other less expensive material usually in the shape of a heart and lavishly decorated with appended floral design. An offering of this type is popular among Italians as a gesture of their gratitude for favors received through the intercession of the Madonna or of a particular saint.)

The glitter of the highly decorative silver plating as well as the ostensive show of the *ex voto* offerings provide a brilliant setting for the age darkened hues of the painting.

VENERATION OF THE POPES²³

Gregory III (731-741) adorned the frame of the painting with gold and jewels and also provided the basilica with candelabra similar to those in St. Peter's. Sergius II (844-847) adorned the altar of the manger and the Virgin with gold plated tablets on which the story of the Incarnation had been engraved. The *Pontificale* speaks of the many gifts of his successor, Leo IV, who was extremely devoted to the Madonna for the many favors received. Gregory XVI (1370-1378) built the present bell tower and gave the basilica

²³ All of this information on the painting and what follows is likewise from Pinchetti, *ut supra*.

the privilege of having a “Holy Door”. Alexander VI (1492-1503) commissioned the artist, Sangallo, to redecorate the ceiling of the basilica, using the first gold brought from America. Julius III (1550-1555) personally presented the gold rose blessed by him on *Laetare* Sunday in 1550 as an act of homage to the Madonna. Sixtus V (1585-1590) renovated the chapel of the Madonna to its present condition. He authorized the execution of marble statues, monuments and a magnificent tabernacle of gold plated bronze. Clement VIII (1592-1605) had the figure of the Madonna and Child crowned with diadems of precious stones set in gold. Paul V (1605-1621) erected the magnificent side chapel which today houses the holy image of the Madonna. The profusion of marbles, frescos and precious stones mark it as the richest chapel in the world. Gregory XVI (1831-1846) presented the gold crowns studded with jewels which presently adorn the image. Pius IX, (1846-1878) refashioned the crypt below the main altar which houses the relics of the manger using rare marble. The work was entrusted to Vespignani. The same pontiff donated a chalice made of the first gold sent to him from California as a gift to the Madonna. St. Pius X (1903-1914) issued a papal brief on December 8, 1907, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Benedict XV (1914-1922), famed for his peace efforts, after the First World War had a monument erected in honor of Our Lady of Peace.

SAINTS AND LEGENDS

Numerous saints had a special devotion to this Madonna. St. Bridget (in whose chapel in the Piazza Farnese the Salvatorians were founded) often visited the basilica and spent hours in prayer before the venerated image. St. Charles Borromeo was ordained priest before the image of the Madonna. St. Luigi Gonzaga made his perpetual vows in front of this painting. St. Stanislaus Kosta and many others had a special devotion to her.

There are many stories of the miraculous interventions of Our Lady, *Salus Populi*, most of which are among the apocrypha or legends surrounding it. One in particular was the saving of the City from the great plague in 593 during the reign of Pope Gregory the Great. It was from this incident that the painting got its name *Salus Populi* or Welfare of the People. But that's another story.²⁴

²⁴ The Pope decreed that he would lead a penitential procession in which the image of the Madonna was to be carried, invoking her intercession. When the procession

It was Pope Pius XI who commemorated the 15th centenary of the Council of Ephesus in his encyclical “The Light of Truth” in which he restored the Mass and Office of the feast of the Divine Maternity of Mary to be celebrated throughout the universal Church on October 11. Salvatorians got a special rescript to celebrate the Mass and Office of Mother of the Savior on October 11 and that of the Divine Maternity on Oct. 12. In the revision of the Roman Calendar the feast of the Divine Maternity of Mary was transferred to January 1, but the Salvatorians were permitted to retain the celebration of Mother of the Savior on the traditional date, October 11.²⁵

Pope Pius XII (1939-59) had a predilection for the Madonna, *Salus Populi*. As a newly ordained priest, Eugenio Pacelli celebrated his first Mass at her altar foreshadowing his special devotion to her after he was elevated to the Papal Throne. As a prelude to the Holy Year which he decreed for 1950 in the Eternal City the pontiff ordered a solemn procession to accompany the holy image from St. Mary Major to St. Peter’s Basilica where he himself received it and had it placed near the Confessio for the veneration of the faithful. As a special mark of his affection and that of the entire Christian world, he inaugurated a special Marian Year extending from December 8, 1953, to December 8, 1954 commemorating the centenary of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. He composed a special prayer in honor of the Mother of God for this Marian Year and recited it for the first time himself before the altar of the *Salus Populi* during the opening ceremonies on December 8, 1953.²⁶

Although not directly linked with the image of the *Salus Populi*, pronouncements of Pope Paul VI clearly affirm that Mary solely as Mother of

was crossing the bridge to the tomb of Hadrian, the pope had a vision of St. Michael the Archangel atop the castle. The archangel was seen replacing his flaming sword back into its scabbard as a sign that the pestilence had been lifted. Today a statue of Michael the Archangel stands above the castle now named Castel Sant’Angelo. cf., Pinchetti, *op cit.*, p.33

²⁵ *Probatum seu confirmatum*, Josephus Cardinal Casoria Praefectus, Prot. n. CD 213/82, CD 1096/83.

²⁶ The crowns seen on the Virgin and Child in the image shown on the cover of this pamphlet were placed on the painting by Pope Pius XII on the occasion of the Marian Year, 1953-54. The original crowns were placed on the painting by Pope Clement VIII in 1597. These crowns, however, were stolen by order of Napoleon when he sacked Rome circa 1800. They were subsequently replaced by Pope Gregory XVI in 1838 and then embellished by Pope Pius XII. The original ikon was not painted with the crowns (Cf. Pinchetti, *op. cit.*, p. 31) as pictured on page 23 in this booklet.

God is deserving of true devotion and honor. In his apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus* he clearly states that:

Certain practices of piety that no so long ago seemed suitable for expressing the religious sentiment of individuals and communities seem today inadequate or unsuitable because they are linked with social and cultural patterns of the past.

He goes on to say:

The Second Vatican Council has already authoritatively denounced both the exaggeration of content and form, which even falsifies doctrine, and ... certain devotional deviations... which substitutes reliance on merely external practices for serious commitment.²⁷

So also Pope John Paul II states in *Redemptoris Mater* that the purpose of his encyclical was “a new and more reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God”²⁸

ENTER FATHER PANCRATIUS

Is it any wonder then that Father Pancratius should have chosen the painting of the *Salus Populi* as the official image of the Mother of the Savior? The preponderance of the historical and theological evidence available to us today is a very convincing argument. But did he know that in our day it would take on special significance? Perhaps not.

But in this time of re-awakening of a proper ecclesial devotion to Mary, it seems more than a little fitting that we renew our interest in the devotion to Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Savior.

With the new understanding we have it seems to me appropriate to close with the official prayer to the Mother of the Savior that comes down to us through our Salvatorian tradition:

²⁷ *Marialis Cultus* (1974), Introduction and pp. 37-38.

²⁸ *Redemptoris Mater*, n. 48

ACT OF CONSECRATION

Immaculate Virgin, Mother of the Savior and Queen of the Apostles, our Mother and most powerful Patroness, in the presence of the Most Holy Trinity and of all the heavenly Court we give ourselves wholly and entirely to you, O most amiable Mother, and we consecrate ourselves to you as your children forever.

Do not despise us, but turn your eyes of mercy toward us, and protect us through your powerful intercession, and defend us and our entire Society from the snares of the devil. We firmly purpose to do all we can to hasten the day when all generations shall call you blessed. O most faithful Mother, make us true followers of your Divine Son, the Savior of the World, and of the holy Apostles, in order that we may faithfully proclaim his Gospel in our lives and ministry. Amen.

Donald P. Skwor, SDS
Baltimore, Maryland
April 2, 2000