



**PASTORAL
INSTRUCTION
ON THE
APPARITIONS
OF THE
BLESSED
MOTHER IN
FINCA
BETANIA**

Pio Bello Ricardo
Bishop of Los Teques

Los Teques, November 21 of 1987

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This Marian Year which we are celebrating by happy initiative of our Holy Father John Paul II, is an appropriate time to issue the present Pastoral Instruction on the apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary in Finca Betania

Los Teques, November 21, 1987

DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENTS

Finca Betania is a farm located twelve kilometers from the town of Cua, in the parish of Our Lady of the Rosary of the Diocese of Los Teques, a district in the vicinity of the State of Miranda, on the border left of the road that joins that town of Valles del Tuy with San Casimiro in the State of Aragua.

In this farm, near the old and modest farm house on the property, rises a hill from which descends a stream. At the foot of the hill there is a small cascade. In this luxuriant forest a tunnel in the vegetation opens its way, which ascends along the course of the stream. Here is where the apparitions have taken place.

The first apparition occurred on March 25, 1976. This apparition was seen only by one person; though others, approximately eighty, present that same day, saw something like a cloud coming out of the hill, luminous phenomena, and gyrations or movements of the sun.

This same person saw the apparition again several times at the same site during 1976 and in the two years following. Besides her, very few people have declared to have seen the apparition during that period; although they have testified to having witnessed other phenomena as: mist coming forth from the hill, brilliant light, a profusion of flowers, singing of an invisible choir, a play of lights, and movements of the sun, etc.

After the first apparition and centered in Finca Betania, a movement of piety and religious formation developed. People in small groups gathered there, especially on weekends and on Marian feast days, to offer prayers and to reflect.

The Bishop of the Diocese at that time, Monsignor Juan Jose Bernal, permitted some liturgical celebrations at the place. He himself administered the sacraments, especially in the favor of peasants of the neighboring small villages. During this period of time no formal ecclesiastical investigation was made regarding the happenings.

This situation, restricted to a relatively small number of participants, changed in the year 1984.

On Sunday, March 25, 1984 a group of approximately one hundred and fifty people met in Finca Betania invited there for the celebration of a Mass at noon. After this liturgical act took place in the old sugar mill, those present dispersed throughout the property to take some refreshments and to rest.

Meanwhile some children were playing near the cascade. Suddenly, they saw the Blessed Virgin appearing over and behind it. It was a very brief apparition and afterward they ran to relay the news to the others who were about one hundred and fifty meters away.

They all hastened to the site of the apparition. They were commenting on what had happened when the Virgin appeared again and all the people who were present were able to see her. During that same afternoon she appeared seven times, each time from five to ten minutes, except the last at dusk, when she appeared for approximately half an hour.

Naturally, the news of these events was spread among relatives and friends of those present. This produced a flood of visitors to the place, especially on weekends. The apparitions continued taking place with noticeable chronology, although generally on Saturdays, Sundays and on days of Marian celebrations. They were especially numerous during the years 1984 and 1985, and more spread out during 1986 and 1987.

ECCLESIASTICAL INVESTIGATION

That same week which began Sunday, March 25th in 1984 the first witnesses spontaneously came to the Diocesan Curia to present to me their written testimonies and an oral declaration of the events.

I received them and questioned them kindly and openly; although, as it is normal for one who has theological and psychological training and knowledge of the history of the Church, I had an interior attitude of doubt and skepticism. Therefore, given the quality of the information and the data the people were relating, I judged the subject had to be seriously investigated. As a matter of fact, I organized the convocation of witnesses and protagonists; not an easy task, since many of them lived in diverse cities and outside the jurisdiction of the Diocese.

I decided to personally conduct the investigation. This made it easier to make appointments with the possible witnesses, something that would have been very difficult to do if I had given this task to a commission, given by the number and dispersion of those testifying and the prolongation of the phenomena.

This option, obviously, obliged me to dedicate much time to this subject, around four hundred to five hundred hours; but I could calmly question approximately two hundred protagonists and collect, study and file 381 written declarations. Some were collective declarations. The number of people who sign those declarations is 490.

In order to examine this kind of phenomena I followed the criteria already classified in the Church. I was interested in determining the credibility of the witnesses, their conditions as human beings, as Christians, their sincerity, their common sense, their capacity for criteria, their critical sense, and their emotional equilibrium.

Once the credibility of the witness was established, I tried to decide how much the witnesses could have been influenced by collective or individual suggestion.

I examined the spiritual or psychological effects on the people, as well as the conduct of the people that frequent the site of the apparitions and especially the characteristics of the group that since the first apparition began developing into a spiritual movement.

During my "ad limina" visit in September of 1984, I was received into the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. I left there a provisional report on the events and was given a document for my private use which was elaborated by the Sacred Congregation in 1978, with the norms and procedures that have to be followed to judge the supposed apparitions or revelations. With satisfaction, I verified that the investigation I had done up to that moment fit the criteria and proceedings pointed out in that document; which, since then, have constituted my work guide.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE APPARITIONS

IDENTIFICATION:

In other apparitions of the Blessed Virgin her figure could be easily identified for she always presented herself in the same way, same features, same dress; which gave rise afterwards to her representation by means of images and paintings.

In the present case, Our Lady has presented herself in different ways, therefore the descriptions vary but are always related to the known Marian titles; she is most commonly seen as "Our Lady of Lourdes" (because she is seen with a white dress and a blue sash, some say that her arms are extended as a sign of welcome or greeting, and with a veil through which you can see her hair), or as "The Miraculous Virgin" (probably for the position of her arms and the rays of light coming out from her hands).

Though these descriptions are the most common, there are other descriptions of the way she has presented herself corresponding to the various Marian titles. People have interpreted this circumstance as a teaching of the Blessed Virgin, as if she wanted to point out that even though she has different titles for her different apparitions, she is only one.

Since her first apparition she presented herself as **RECONCILER OF NATIONS** and this is the title or name by which she is known and venerated in the place.

MESSAGES:

Very few people have declared they have had any kind of verbal communication with the Blessed Virgin or have received any kind of teachings, messages or counsel from her. Generally in the interrogations or declarations people have only declared to have seen her.

With regard to the communications that have been received during the apparitions, the Blessed Virgin refers to:

RENEWAL OF FAITH, as especially urgent in a world where so many deny God and cast off, or practically do away with God and with what is supernatural in their lives.

DEEPENING IN FAITH through the reading of the Word of God in Sacred Scripture and its reflection.

CONVERSION from sin to a full Christian life.

APOSTOLIC COMMITMENT, as a consequence of living a renewed and profound faith.

CALL TO PRAYER, as a communication with God, specifically for the Church, priests, vocations, the conversion of sinners, peace in the world and for the imminent dangers that threaten humanity.

FREQUENT RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS, especially the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

SOLIDARITY, as a call to charity, especially with those most in need, the poor, the abandoned, the sick; insisting on brotherly tolerance and the sense of each one sharing what they have with the rest.

NUMBER OF VISIONARIES:

In other cases the apparitions have been seen by very few privileged people. In this case the number of witnesses since the 25th of March of 1984 is very numerous. That specific day more than one hundred people saw the seven apparitions: at least, one hundred and eight testified so that same day with their signatures.

From that day on the witnesses multiplied. It has been common that in a group of people, only some can see the apparition. March 25, in 1984 was an exception to this. It has also been common that those who on some occasion may have seen the apparition, on other occasions have not had that privilege.

Considering the oral and written testimonies, the information received, the fact that people present in the apparitions are scattered throughout different cities and that it is very difficult to locate and to make an appointment with them; I estimate that to this moment five hundred to one thousand people have seen the apparitions.

QUALITY OF PEOPLE:

What has been usual in the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin is that those privileged with the apparition besides being very few, were poor, non-educated, and generally children or quite young people. In this case, there are of course poor and noneducated, but there are also many middle class professional people as: Doctors, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Engineers and Lawyers. There are also numerous college students from the different universities of Caracas.

There are children and adults, teenagers and elderly people, nuns, although the great majority is lay people.

CHRONOLOGY:

As I pointed out before, the apparitions have not had a predictable or announced chronology, or an established frequency. Although generally they have taken place on Saturdays, Sundays or on Marian liturgical feasts, they have also taken place unexpectedly during other days of the week.

EXPECTATION:

In regard to the chronology; on numerous occasions, the expectations of the people, who have gone to the place on the belief that because it was a Marian Feast day they would see the apparition, were frustrated. On the other hand, apparitions have taken place unexpectedly as in 1984, on a day in which the main purpose was to celebrate an outdoor Mass on the farm, and to enjoy a nice day along a beautiful riverside and a nice rural landscape. In numerous declarations, many people have mentioned as a relevant fact that their experience was a totally unexpected surprise.

The cases of people who have seen the apparition against all expectation, or have gone to Finca Betania for simple curiosity on a weekend picnic, or have gone with great skepticism or mockingly, and have seen the apparition, are not few.

I have also seen cases of people who with no faith went to the site because they had to take a relative or accompany a friend or a member of his family, and have seen the apparition which transformed them.

SENSE OF REALITY:

It is classical in other apparitions for the visionaries to fall in the psychological state of mystical or ecstatic trance. During the interviews and the examination of the written declarations, I tried to determine if there was any loss of the sense of reality during the apparitions. I did not find such a phenomenon.

Of course, the visionaries are emotional but, with the exception of very few that faint as a consequence of the emotion, most of them maintain their sense of reality during the apparition: they speak of and compare among themselves the characteristics of what they are seeing, they even try to find natural explanations (as reflections of light, tricks, suggestion, etc.), until they are convinced that these reasons do not explain the reality of their vision. At most, some indicate they have become absorbed in thought during the apparition.

This characteristic made my investigation easier because I could do without the technical examination of the supernatural character or purely psychological character of the state of ecstasy, limiting my survey to the determination of the credibility of the witness and the value of the testimony.

CONCOMITANT PHENOMENA:

Along the course of the apparitions, phenomena that were present during the first three years of the apparitions were: the mist which seems to come out from the trees on the hill; intense luminosity that brightens the hill; profusion of flowers that cover it, especially roses; singing of an invisible choir; the perfume of roses coming from the water of the cascade, the play of lights, and movements of the sun, etc.

These phenomena have taken place before and after the apparitions, and sometimes without them. A great number of witnesses have seen these phenomena without seeing the apparition.

GENERAL ENVIRONMENT:

I could verify that the gatherings in Finca Betania are acceptable from a religious point of view. They are serious gatherings, centered in the prayer of the rosary, the Way of the Cross and other prayers and sacred songs. The public is respectful and orderly except for the normal playfulness of children. There have been cases of exaggerated emotionality and hysterical reactions, but in general the atmosphere has been moderately balanced.

There has been no commercialization. No sales of religious objects. No stands for refreshments or food, therefore people that come have to bring the necessary equipment for the day.

EFFECTS:

The effects have been good and some excellent. Those who assist receive a strong injection of faith and spirituality. People who never prayed are praying the rosary. People who did not go to Church now do so regularly, go to Confession and receive Communion. There have been remarkable conversions. It has been comforting to hear confessions at the place.

I have noticed that all the people interviewed had a disposition for what the Church should decide officially and accept that the Church would have the last word on this matter. All of them have experienced an inner change in the sense of drawing near God and toward living a more Christian life.

DECLARATION AND JUDGMENT

From the beginning of my investigation I realized this was not another case of fraud, collective suggestion or a promotion on the interests of a person or of a group of people, but rather that I was dealing with a serious subject which had to be investigated carefully.

Relatively soon, in the course of my investigation I became certain that the character of the phenomenon was supernatural. Still, I decided however to follow prudent practice and postpone all explicit statements. I would gauge the effects obtained and make critical pursuit of the religious movement produced by the events. I would then judge the opportune moment at hand for making public my judgment on these events.

I judge the appropriate time has come to make my judgment on the events public.

IN CONSEQUENCE, AFTER STUDYING WITH DETERMINATION THE APPARITIONS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IN FINCA BETANIA AND AFTER ASSIDUOUSLY ASKING OUR LORD FOR SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT: I DECLARE THAT IN MY JUDGMENT THESE APPARITIONS ARE AUTHENTIC AND OF SUPERNATURAL CHARACTER.

Therefore, I approve officially that the place where the apparitions have taken place should be considered as sacred, and that it be kept as a site for pilgrimages, as a place for prayer, reflection and worship; where all liturgical acts can be celebrated especially the celebration of the Mass and the administration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, always in accordance with the laws of the Church and the norms of the Diocese for Pastoral Unity.

SENSE AND WORTH OF THIS DECLARATION

COMPETENCE:

It is the competence of the Diocesan Bishop to watch and intervene for judgment, especially in the cases of presumed apparitions or revelations that take place in his diocese. This competence is derived from the hierarchical institution of the Church, and it has been expressly declared by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith when naming the norms that must be observed in such cases.

SENSE:

As I shall mention in a later paragraph this declaration does not have the magisterial value that the contents of faith of public revelation would hold, which God has given to his Church through Sacred Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition.

These contents are of divine faith and when being explained or declared by the Magisterium are of ecclesiastical faith: those who do not accept them sin against faith rebelling against God and the Church.

The present case is a religious event that is admitted by human faith founded on the testimony of witnesses and on my own testimony, this last one obviously especially authorized by the condition of pastoral guidance that a Bishop has. Not to admit it, does not constitute a sin against faith.

However, anyone who acts in such a non-believing manner must examine his underlying motivations: whether it is prudence and a reasonable critical sense, or if it is a prejudiced attitude consequent to the scientific naturalistic mentality of those who do not admit except what is necessary without reliable evidence from mathematical calculations or laboratory experimentation. The skeptical attitude of those who do not admit the possibility that God can communicate freely with his creatures and make visible the invisible realities.

PURSUIT:

With this declaration I do not intend to affirm that all and each one of the apparitions that have taken place in Finca Betania are authentic. As happens in similar circumstances, here there also have been cases of simple hallucinations provoked by expectation, suggestion, emotionalism and even psychological unbalance.

Worthwhile mentioning, at this point, is the fact that during the investigation of the apparition of Our Blessed Mother in Lourdes, an apparition repeatedly studied and acknowledged, pseudo-visionaries were detected and discarded.

In my investigation in the case of Finca Betania, I have also found a few cases in which I was inclined to believe and interpret as fantasies, which I have refused as valid testimony. I have judged therefore, that the presence of these cases, on the one hand predictable, did not lessen the validity of the appreciable volume of the numerous testimonies to which I do grant credibility.

PUBLIC REVELATION AND PRIVATE REVELATION

Faith is based upon revelation. Throughout the years it was the will of God to communicate with humanity through special people privileged by Him to this end. In order to preserve the multiple truths taught in this way, He brought up writers who under the motion of divine inspiration wrote the Sacred Scriptures. This is, therefore, the fountain from which we may drink the water that gushed from the spring of Revelation.

At the end of this process of salvation, God the Father sent us his Son Jesus Christ, the incarnated Word. In Him the divine Revelation culminates and is made perfect.

Jesus Christ, in turn, entrusted to the apostles as his authorized witnesses, the propagation of the total content of Revelation. Their testimony was gathered in the books that constitute the New Testament and kept also by his fellow contemporaries in what is named the "Apostolic Tradition".

The contents of Sacred Scriptures and Apostolic Tradition contain the Revelation of God and we must accept them with the same faith we worship God Himself. This is what it means in theology when it is said that these contents are "of divine faith".

On the other hand, Jesus Christ, when He founded the Church, appointed the Apostles and their successors, the Bishops, as the authorized Magisterium. On doing so, He entrusted in them the contents of Revelation in order to guard them and give them the authorized interpretation.

When the Magisterium of the Church intervenes in the area of Revelation to interpret it, to specify it, to explain it, etc., being instituted by Jesus Christ and given the virtue of the Holy Spirit, it has the charisma of magisterial authority; therefore its intervention must be accepted by all faithful Christians as a content of faith, and its rejection is a sin against faith. The contents, thus taught by the Magisterium are known in theological terms as of "Catholic" or "ecclesiastical" faith.

The divine Revelation culminates in Jesus Christ. As said in the Second Vatican Council: "He with his presence and manifestation, with his words and works, signs and miracles, above all with his Death and glorious Resurrection, with the coming of the Spirit of truth; He brings the fullness of Revelation and confirms it with divine testimony..., therefore another public revelation should not be expected before the glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ Our Lord" (Dei Verbum 4).

With regard to the interpretation of the Revelation the Council affirms: "Tradition and Scripture constitute the sacred deposit of the Word of God confided to the Church. The job of interpreting accurately the Word of God, oral or written, has been given only to the Magisterium of the Church, which exercises it in the name of Jesus Christ" (Dei Verbum 10).

The previous explanation does not imply that since the death of the last Apostle, the communication of God with man ceased, or that after Jesus Christ all revelations are impossible. That would contradict the history of the Church in which yes, there are many cases of pseudo-visionaries and false revelations, but there are also numerous visionaries, apparitions and revelations which incorporate the conditions that theological criticism requires as a sign of authenticity.

It implies on the contrary, an important difference. The Revelation contained in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Apostolic Tradition have, we can say, an institutional character. It is in this sense that theology refers to it as "public" Revelation. Any other revelation even though its purpose is the spiritual well-being of the community, will be referred to as "private" revelation.

What Jesus Christ entrusted to the Magisterium of the Church was the "public" Revelation, and as I indicated before when the Church intervenes, it is an obligation for the faithful to accept its decisions as of "Catholic" or "ecclesiastical" faith.

On the other hand, when the Church intervenes in "private" revelations, it does so in order to determine its compatibility with "public" Revelations. As a consequence, if it finds that "private" revelation contradicts "public" Revelation, it declares it false, as God cannot contradict Himself. If it finds agreement in both, it allows "private" revelations to be accepted. Generally the Church does not go further than this; it does not proceed to make an assertive declaration on the supernatural character of "private" revelations.

Nevertheless, although less frequent, on finding sufficient reasons that give credit to the supernatural character of a "private" revelation, the Church can declare it as such. But upon doing so, it does not oblige the faithful to accept this declaration as of "Catholic" or "ecclesiastical" faith, but guides them prudently so that they can admit it by human faith, on the guarantee of a serious investigation and the testimony of the ecclesiastical authority that issues the declaration. Such is the case of this document.

If anyone is willing to study the apparition in Finca Betania to form their own personal judgment I would be glad to provide all the documentation referring to it. To this effect, I have taken the precaution to make photocopies of all the declarations in order to preserve the original ones as I consider them irreplaceable for their historic value.

APPARITIONS AND VISIONS

Apparitions and visions can be referred to as a constant in the history of salvation.

Through them God gives the visionary the visible perception of invisible realities, as spiritual beings, or of visible realities but of another time and place.

Visions and apparitions include some kind of message or teaching, generally oral. This is what is ordinarily called "private" revelation, although it is possible for this kind of revelation to take place without an apparition or vision. Of course, an authentic vision or apparition, though without a message, is a revelation itself, while proving the existence of the supernatural by making visible invisible realities.

To admit or not to admit the possibility of visions and apparitions depends on the position we have concerning the possibility that realities, which transcend the material field of positive methods of investigation, could exist and be perceived. Those who deny the existence of such reality or the possibility of perceiving it, also reject the possibility of visions, apparitions, or any kind of revelation.

Who believes in God also admits that God can communicate with the beings He created. This possibility of course, does not hold by itself that a concrete phenomenon is a communication with God. It is necessary to critically analyze each phenomenon in order to guarantee it as a supernatural occurrence. The existing difficulty to reach this analysis is not cause to say they are not valid, and thus reject their authenticity "a priori" or to adopt a systematically negative or skeptical attitude.

The apparitions and visions described in Sacred Scriptures are numerous both in the Old and New Testament. Hence, they are confirmed in their supernatural authenticity by divine inspiration and by the Magisterium of the Church.

From the patristic period of the Church, up to our days there have been numerous apparitions which have turned the history of the Church. These apparitions form part of the charismatic dimension of the Church which is conjugated with its ministerial dimension, although we have to mention that the ministerial dimension is a charisma in itself.

As the Second Vatican Council expresses in its Constitution "Lumen Gentium", N° 12: "The Holy Spirit not only sanctifies, and guides the People of God through the sacraments and ministry, and adorns it with its virtues, but also distributes graces, even special ones, among the faithful of any kind or condition, distributing its gifts to each one as it wishes (1 Cor 12, 11), with that which makes

them able and ready to comply the diverse works and duties that are necessary for the renewal and greater edification of the Church.” And as for the extraordinary gifts, it observes: “The judgment over their authenticity and over their reasonable exercise belongs to those who have authority in the Church, those who have the responsibility above all, not to suffocate the Spirit but to test it all and keep what is good (Cfs Tes 5, 12 y 19, 21).”

The above text gives us an insight to understand the meaning that visions, apparitions and private revelations have in the life of the Church. They belong to its charismatic dimension, and constitute a demonstration that Christ is present among us unto the consummation of the world (Cfr Mat 28, 20), and that the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church, acts in it and gives it life.

In some cases, to enlighten and to guide a specific person; in others, to promote a certain style of spirituality or a certain form of pastoral action; or to renew and to actualize evangelic lines that routine had rendered inoperable or inconsequence had termed marginal; in others, for the solution of a crisis or the acceptance of a historical challenge. As Pope Pius XII wrote in his encyclical “Mystici Corporis”: “Christ always looks with particular affection at his Immaculate Spouse, exiled in this world, with special love, and when He sees her in danger, whether by Himself, or by means of the angels, or through she to whom we implore as Help of Christians, and by heavenly intercessors; delivers her from the waves of the storm, and calming the sea, He comforts her with that peace that overcomes all feeling.”

In the scheme of thought we can understand the providential purpose the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin have, that, from 1830 in rue du Bac, Paris, and all the following apparitions up to our days. It is typical of this century and a half for man to believe he is self-sufficient, that he is able to fulfill himself and solve all his problems through science, technology, social and political experiments, human creativity; without recourse to God, as well as denying all intervention of transcendental and supernatural factors in human life.

Therefore, the Blessed Virgin, who advanced in the pilgrimage of faith loyally accompanied her Son up to the Cross (Lumen Gentium 56), who preceded the Church being “the type of the Church in order of faith, of charity and of unity with Christ” (Lumen Gentium 63), and that as Mother of Christ is united in a special way to the Church the Lord constituted as his Body” (John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater 5): She accompanies the Church in its pilgrimage through this period of faith and atheism “in which the Blessed Virgin Mary continues to precede the people of God (Redemptoris Mater 6), and “continues being the Star of the Sea for all those who follow the way of faith” (Ibid 6).

In this way, we can conclude that God wanted Mary, our Mother in faith, who loyally kept the teachings of the divine mysteries (Cfr Luc 2, 19 y 21) and whose visit to Elizabeth was the first evangelization on the mystery of Christ (Cfr Luc 1, 39-45), to visit the Church in these last times as evangelizer in a period of crisis of faith.

RECONCILER OF PEOPLE

When the Blessed Virgin appeared at Finca Betania She presented herself as “Reconciler of People”. In the next paragraphs I will be giving clues to understand the theological meaning of this title.

The Blessed Virgin, in her person, her prerogatives, her activities are essentially centered in Christ, have sense in Christ and for Christ.

Jesus Christ is our only Redeemer and Mediator, as Saint Paul categorically affirms: “There is only one God and only one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, also a man, who delivered Himself as a ransom” (1 Tim 2, 5-6). Nevertheless, “the only mediation of our Redeemer does not exclude, but rather raises in his creatures, diverse types of cooperation that come from the only source” (Lumen Gentium 62).

John Paul II applies this doctrine to the Blessed Virgin: “The teachings of the Second Vatican Council present the truth about the mediation of Mary as a participation of this only source which is the mediation of Christ Himself” (Redemptoris Mater 38).

Being Mother of Christ, Mary is Mother of the Church which is Body of Christ; but also deserves this title for: “Conceiving Christ, giving birth to Him, nurturing Him, presenting Him to the Father at the temple, suffering when her Son was dying on the Cross; she cooperated in a very singular way in the work of Our Savior by her obedience, faith, hope and ardent charity, with the purpose of restoring supernatural life to souls” (Lumen Gentium 61).

The Virgin is therefore cooperator with Christ and his work of Redemption. And this cooperation did not end at the foot of the Cross; she was given by her Son as Mother of the newborn Church “Behold your Mother...” Her motherhood remains in the Church as a maternal mediation” (Redemptoris Mater 40). “The motherhood of Mary endures ceaselessly in the economy of grace... until the perpetual consummation of all the chosen” (Lumen Gentium 62).

On the other hand, Redemption can also be proposed as the Reconciliation of men with God and of men among themselves. Saint Paul densely expresses it in his letters to the Romans and Ephesians: “We have been reconciled with God through the death of his Son”

(Rom 5, 10). "He is our peace, He that of two people made one, tearing down the wall that separated them... to create in Himself, of the two, one new man, making peace... giving Himself death to hostility" (Ef 2, 14-16).

Being the Blessed Virgin cooperator in the plan of Redemption, she must logically be considered as cooperator in Reconciliation. This is the position that is understood and proclaimed in the title of "Reconciler" or "Mother of Reconciliation".

This condition of cooperator in Reconciliation is not limited to the life of Jesus on earth, but rather is prolonged in the history of the Church; this idea is implied in the description of Pentecost given by Saint Luke.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit takes place as a consequence of having realized the reconciliation of men with God, and produces reconciliation of men among themselves, symbolized in the breakdown of the obstacle which impeded understanding with the multiplicity of languages (Act 2, 5-12). Especially in those circumstances the Virgin is singularly mentioned as cooperating with her prayer.

This cooperation is prolonged indefinitely as I mentioned before: "This motherhood of Mary (as mediator) in the economy of grace endures ceaselessly... until the perpetual consummation of those chosen" (Lumen Gentium 62).

Now, if there is something characteristic of this last century and a half it is violence, hatred and fighting among people and social classes and nations, division of hearts and deeds, wars. Initiatives towards peace and union have risen; and there have been plans made for this purpose. But these plans have been ineffective because they only touch the surface of human life, they do not go deep into the hearts and souls, where the seed of hatred and division germinated as a result of original sin.

In the bosom of the Church, an ecumenical movement has risen, for the purpose of restoring the unity of the believers in Christ. But this movement comes up against the walls raised during centuries of opposition.

In this world and in this Church, the Blessed Virgin appears as **RECONCILER OF PEOPLE** insisting on a spirit of solidarity and mutual brotherly sharing. This title springs from the theology of the cooperation of Mary in Redemption and Reconciliation and the message holds much sense for the present day.

CONCLUSION

On concluding this Pastoral Instruction, I thank the Lord for He has given to our Diocese and to our Country the privilege of the visit of the Blessed Virgin; for in this period of our ecclesiastical history marked with a new evangelization, she encourages us to a renewal and deepening in faith, and to a projection of that faith in a complete conversion in prayer and in apostolic commitment; because in this divided world she has come as **RECONCILER OF PEOPLE**.

Through the visit of Our Mother, may the Lord grant us that outpouring of the Holy Spirit He granted Elizabeth when she visited her. And if on that occasion she proclaimed: "From now on all generations shall call me blessed, because the Almighty has done wonders in me" (Luc 1, 48-49); may her intercession do wonders in the faithful piously drawn near to the place she has chosen to manifest herself.

Los Teques, November 21, 1987

Pio Bello Ricardo
Bishop of Los Teques




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