

FAITH AND REASON

Freeing Marian devotion from the influence of organized crime: Pope Francis was pleased to learn of the initiative undertaken by the Pontifical International Marian Academy, to launch a new sector, (officially at a meeting on 18 September), namely the Department of analysis and study of criminal and mafia related phenomena, conceived and realized “in order to free the figure of Our Lady from the influence of organized crime”.

“I would like to express my appreciation for the important initiative and I offer my cordial greeting to the promoters, speakers and all the participants in the significant day of study aimed at involving various sectors of civil society so that, in cooperation with Church authorities and public institutions, effective proposals can be identified for the necessary cultural work of raising awareness and adopting appropriate procedures”, the Pontiff wrote in a letter addressed to the President of the Marian institution, Fr Stefano Cecchin, OFM. The letter written for the occasion attests to the Pope’s attention to the new process with which the Pontifical Academy has been involved for some time: new visions, new programs, new perspectives and methodologies, and an increasingly less “academic” Mariology, closer to society, fully in line with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and in complete harmony with the Magisterium of Pope Francis, who had previously addressed his greetings to the institute’s community on 4 December 2019.

This time, the letter addressed to the President regards in particular the new department that is taking shape within the Pontifical Academy: The Department that will be concerned with freeing the figure of Mary from criminal influence. The ambitious project, whose inauguration meeting will be held at the Court of Appeals in Rome on 18 September, will include important figures of civil society, joined by a shared “dream” that aims to remain not just a dream but rather a concrete reality: the common good that is so necessary in the difficult time we are experiencing. Considering that the figure of Mary, as well as the places, rituals and symbolism associated with her, are the subject of a “systematic reconfiguration” by the mafia and organized crime affiliations, not only in Italy, but also in other countries on a global scale, the Academy has promoted this important new Department which will study and monitor these problems. Pope Francis himself emphasizes this delicate point in the letter which bears the date of the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary: “Marian devotion is a religious and cultural legacy to be safeguarded in its original purity, freeing it from superstructures, powers or conditions that do not respond to the evangelical criteria of justice, freedom, honesty and solidarity”. What inspired the Academy to establish this new Department? The concerning “cultural operation” that has been perpetuated for decades through criminality sought to create in the collective consciousness of various Italian and foreign communities a distorted and historically delusive view of the Mother of Christ. From this fact a sort of “occupation” of Marian places and rituals by organized crime arose, so as to strip the figure of Mary from her authentic evangelical significance. In order to counteract this scenario, the Pontifical Academy believes that a “cultural operation” that is just as strong and cohesive is necessary to restore the truth of the figure of Mary. And it will provide this not only from the Christian perspective but also by looking to Islamic tradition, as Mary herself is the “model” for the conduct of believers in both religions.

A note by the Academy indicates that the Department aims to restore to Mary “her natural context, not only multi-religious and multi-cultural, but also trans-religious and trans-cultural not only in fact but also by right”, by finding precisely in her figure the opportunity “to promote dimensions that are not secondary and all but extraneous to the common good of the civitas, but that can rather become a powerful element of it, capable of enhancing all that in name of a common humanity contributes to the building of peace, of well-being for all, of care for the planet and for its sustainability”.

The Department will involve nine new subject areas: local organized crime affiliations; eco-mafia and environmental crimes, archeomafia [archaeological mafia], zoomafia [illegal trade in animals]; repossession, requisition and management of assets of mafia related crime; history of national terrorism; international terrorism; interfamily violence; gender-based violence; and lastly, prevention and analysis of drug use among minors. Thus, the new Department will oversee a wide-ranging program, in which the Pontifical Academy will be committed in the first person in a courageous, ambitious and highly innovative projects...**Antonio Tarallo, L’Osservatore Romano**

A Hidden Treasure, and Open Book: Lord, reveal to all of us the interior world of the soul, the hidden treasure within us, the luminous castle of God. Make the exterior world preserve the imprint of the Creator, and may it be an open book that speaks to us of God..... **St John Paul II**

A little spiritual direction: St Augustine says that whatever we love outside God, so much the less do we love him. It is like a brook from which part of the waters is turned aside. Such a diversion takes away from what belongs to God and gives rise to trouble. God desires to have everything, and his love cannot endure a divided heart. The slightest affection apart from him causes a hindrance and causes indifference and consequent separation. One soul can expect to find peace only through love that holds nothing back. Give a quiet, calm attention to those things assigned to your care by God at proper seasons, and be sure that we can accomplish a great deal more by quiet, thoughtful work done as in God's sight, than by all the busy eagerness and overactivity of our restless nature.

A Thought For the Day

Sunday Prolonged idleness paralyzes initiative.
Monday Nothing helps a man more than prayer.
Tuesday Obedience is a short cut to perfection.
Wednesday Blessed is the influence of one true loving soul on another.
Thursday Dare to do your duty always, this is the essence of true courage.
Friday A man of integrity will never listen to any plea against conscience.
Saturday If a man's eye is on God his intellect will grow.

Humans are Dependent: Humans are dependent. They cannot live except from others and by trust. But there is nothing degrading about dependence when it takes the form of love, for then it is no longer dependence, the diminishing of self through competition with others. Dependence in the form of love precisely constitutes the self as self and sets it free, because love essentially takes the form of saying "I want you to be". It is creativity the only creative power, which can bring forth the other as other without envy or loss of self. Humans are dependent that is the primary truth about them. And because it is, only love can redeem them, for only love transforms dependence into freedom. Thus, human beings will only-succeed in destroying their own redemption, destroying themselves, if they eliminate love "to be on the safe side". For humans, the crucified God is the visible certainty that creation is already an expression of love: we exist on the foundation of love. It is therefore a constitutive part of Christian faith to accept mystery as the center of reality, that is to say, to accept love, creation as love, and to make that love the foundation of one's life. **Pope Benedict XVI**

Genuine Love: "Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful... It bears all things, believes all things, endures all things (I Cor 13:4-7). Genuine love to which the Apostle Paul devoted a hymn is demanding. But its beauty lies precisely in the demands it makes. Only those able to make demands on themselves in the name of love can then demand love from others. Young people of today need to discover this love, because it is the true and solid foundation of the family. Forcefully reject any of its false substitutes, such as free love'. How many families have been destroyed because of this! Never forget that blindly following the impulse our emotions often means becoming a slave to our emotions. **Discourse to the Young People of Cuba, Camaguey, January 23,1998**

It was pride that caused the fall of Lucifer and Adam. If you should ask me what are the ways of God, I would tell you that the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is still humility. Not that there are no other precepts to give, but if humility does not precede all that we do, our efforts are fruitless. **St Augustine of Hippo**

I Needed the Quiet: I needed the quiet so He drew me aside, Into the shadows where we could confide. Away from the bustle where all the day long, I hurried and worried when active and strong. I needed the quiet though at first I rebelled, but gently, so gently, my cross He upheld, and whispered so sweetly of spiritual things. Though weakened in body, my spirit took wings to heights never dreamed of when active and gay. He loves me so greatly He drew me away. I needed the quiet. No prison my bed, but a beautiful valley of blessings instead – A place to grow richer in Jesus to hide. I needed the quiet, so He drew me aside...

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