

# "AN OPENNESS TO OTHER RELIGIONS"

(Oblate-Patriot retreat at Spiri-Maria, October 19, 20 and 21, 2018)

Numerous retreats are organized at the Eucharistic and Marian Center Spiri-Maria. They are usually preached by a Son of Mary or another priest from the Lady's Work on a theme announced well in advance (cf. page 23 of each issue of the review *Le Royaume*). They can also be intended for special groups such as young people, young couples, English-speaking members, Army of Mary Animators, Mothers of the Family of the Sons and Daughters of Mary or Oblate-Patriot Knights. Ordinarily, since there are quite a number of them, an account of these retreats is not given in the review.



However, last October 19, 20 and 21, under the initiative of Donald Aubin, General in Chief of the Oblate-Patriots, a retreat was organized which stood out from all the others preceding it. Its theme was:

"An openness to other religions", based on the definition of the Community of the Lady in which Marie-Paule wrote that this latter, amid many other distinctive characteristics, would have to bring together, in particular, "all religions". Moreover, the retreat was placed under the patronage of Saint John Paul II who, more than anyone else, worked diligently throughout his pontificate to bring together the religions and the peoples. Thus, 37 Oblate-Patriot Knights came to the retreat in which no less than seven speakers addressed the participants.

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FRIDAY EVENING – After an introductory message from Donald Aubin who very clearly defined the spirit and objectives of the retreat, it began with a conference by Marc Bosquart entitled, "The Religions of Men, Paths to God". In it, Marc clarified, first of all, what was



to be understood by an "openness" to other religions, and he showed that this "openness", begun in the Catholic Church by His Holiness Paul VI and carried on in an extraordinary manner by His Holiness John Paul II, was currently experiencing a sort of fulfillment in the Church of John. This is borne out in particular in its liturgy which has started making room for readings from all origins, brought together under the title of "Spiritual Heritage of Humanity". This initiative is in direct line with John Paul II's thinking which took



Marie-Paule



His Holiness John Paul II

concrete shape in the Meeting at Assisi in 1986, and it is in conformity with Marie-Paule's thinking who, as the Lady of "all peoples", is also, in a way, the Lady of "all religions".

SATURDAY MORNING – This time, the Knights gathered in order to listen to the first conference

by Father Leander Van Renterghem on the theme: "All Religions, One Single Community". Above all, the retreat master distinguished between the good ways and the not-so-good ways of being open to other religions, the best one being, obviously, the will to build together the future of humanity by recognizing the principal qualities and the validity of the other religions as well as the values that are common to all religions. In fact, it is a matter of not denigrating anything of what God sowed almost everywhere on earth, but to have everything contribute to the coming of the Kingdom which He has been preparing for such a long time.



SATURDAY AFTERNOON – This part of the retreat was certainly

the most obvious innovation and the most remarkable of the entire weekend. In fact, the Knights were able to listen to the testimonials of three persons who were raised in other religions, testimonials introduced by Bertrand Desbiens.

There was, first of all, a video recording of an interview with Lee Standing Bear Moore, "the guardian of Manataka" (Indian name for Hot Springs, Arkansas) and Secretary of the Manataka American Indian Council. He had been interviewed by



Father Bruno Ruel a few weeks earlier, and in a presentation that lasted almost a half-hour, he provided a very enlightened comparison between the Christian faith and the faith of American Indian societies in general. Moreover, in his community, the "Rainbow Lady" is venerated, she who presides over the peace of their sacred places. She is the one who would have favored the contact with the Sons of Mary in Arkansas and the Work of the Lady of All Peoples. The interview was



conducted in English; the editing was done by Brother Philippe Roy and the translation and subtitling by Sister Rosalie Carrière.

He was followed by Saïd Mouhibi, a Muslim of Moroccan origin who has been living in Quebec for two years. This latter, present in person and already very familiar with the spirit of the Community of the Lady, explained that we are not to confuse true Islam – in which is advocated an authentic *jihad* which is equivalent to interior reform – with the caricature of it presently circulating in the media. Using well-chosen examples, he also showed that between Christianity and Islam, there are many more similarities than differences, a fact which Pope John Paul II himself had already brought out. As a Muslim with strong beliefs, he deplored the fact, besides, that Western societies have very obviously lost their Christian faith, even becoming hostile to it at times. On the other hand, he expressed his joy at knowing the Army of Mary in which the new faith is intensely lived.



Finally, it was Neil Riddell's turn, also present, to talk to us about his personal journey. Raised in the Protestant faith within a family belonging to the United Church of Canada, of a Methodist formation, he emphasized all the spiritual and human qualities of openness and charity in which he was immersed during his childhood and which are advocated by the Protestant faith. Thus, the example in his family and his community, but especially of his father, indirectly contributed to what was one of the major events of his life, his meeting with a young woman from the Army of Mary. From that moment, he was able to adhere, without any particular difficulty, to the extraordinary role and mystery of Marie-Paule and he became a member of the Community of the Lady of All Peoples. Married for 18 years, he and his wife Marie-Ève are the parents of six children.



SATURDAY EVENING – Another highlight or important moment of the retreat was this evening of open discussion between the

group of retreatants and, facing them, Donald and Father Leander. Many points were dealt with, all of them conscientiously noted down by Bertrand: the positive surprise concerning the values of the other religions, the need to adjust the perception each one has of the others, the manner of being open to other believers (fears, hopes, necessary preparation), the incomparable example of Saint John Paul II and, finally, the attitudes to be developed or fostered in families, schools, the different milieus in society, without forgetting, of course, within the Lady's Work itself.

SUNDAY MORNING – The last gathering of the retreat before the fraternal meal on Sunday noon was given over to Father Leander's second conference which, this time, had as a title: "The Mother Who Will Soon Unite All Peoples". It was an interesting trip through space and time, for from Antiquity to our day, in many places on the globe, there has been a devotion which now appears to us to have been common to so many peoples, the devotion to the divine Mother or the "universal Mother". It can be found in Egypt, India, China, among the black peoples of Africa, among the Celts as well as among certain American Indians. Having been abandoned for a while in the West by the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims, it has re-appeared today, even under Marie-Paule's pen when she spoke to us of the "universal Maternity" of Mary, fulfilled, she said, by "the other Mary" in our time and "with a view to the Kingdom on Earth". (cf. *Le Royaume*, no. 152, p. 4)

So it was with a heart filled with new hope and all imbued with the magnitude and beauty of God's plan that the Oblate-Patriot Knights were able to take back to their families and their regions the teaching received during this weekend, in the spirit of the Community of the Lady of All Peoples which, as Marie-Paule told us, must bring together "all religions". This prospect remains a great mystery, but an initiative such as the one of this retreat clearly belongs in the continuation of the prophetic action of John Paul II at the same time as it follows the direction announced by the Lady who always described the Kingdom to come as having to be a time of unity, love and universal peace.

M.B.

## The First Meeting at Assisi

The first inter-religious meeting at Assisi was wanted and organized by His Holiness John Paul II himself. He had invited representatives of the world's largest religions to gather together to pray for peace. The meeting took place on October 27, 1986, and brought together more than 130 religious leaders from all over the world.

Besides the Christian religions, there was representation from Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism (India), Shintoism (Japan), Zoroastrianism and Baha'ism (India and Iran) as well as the Animistic cults (Africa and North America).

Each religion had its assigned place of prayer, but at the end of the day, all the representatives gathered on the square in front of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi so that each group could present its prayer before the other delegations.



John Paul II's initiative raised enthusiasm in the world but also the hostility of certain Catholics. And yet, it is a fundamental and "founding" act from the perspective of the Kingdom announced by the Lady of All Peoples.

Subsequently, other similar meetings were held (in 1993, 2002, 2011 and 2016), but their spirit having moved away, little by little, from what it was at the outset, they did not have the same impact. ■