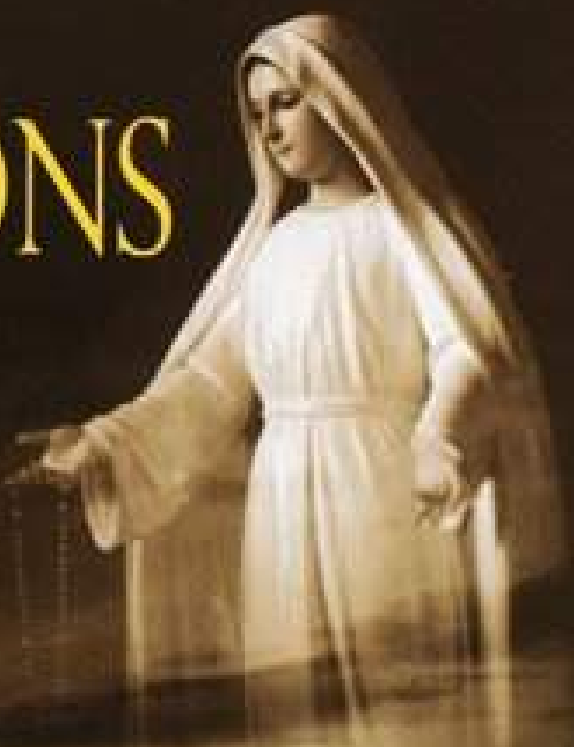


# REFLECTIONS



Most Rev. Mariano G. Gaviola, D.D., J.C.D.

# REFLECTIONS

of

**Most Rev. Mariano G. Gaviola, D.D., J.C.D.**

*( August 15, 1922 - October 13, 1998 )*

**ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS OF LIPA**

**ON MARY MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACE  
IN LIPA CARMEL MONASTERY  
FROM 1948 AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS**

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**REFLECTIONS ON MARY MEDIATRIX OF ALL GRACE  
IN LIPA CARMEL MONASTERY  
FROM 1948 AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS**

HIS EXCELLENCY

MOST REV. SALVADOR Q. QUIZON, D.D.

Auxiliary Bishop of Lipa

Chairman, Committee on the Reported Lipa Carmel Apparitions

Archdiocese of Lipa

Taal, Batangas

Dear Bishop Quizon,

.... "Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed"  
(*Jn. 20:29*).

When I was installed as Archbishop of Lipa on August 15, 1981, I, a true "Doubting Thomas", believed that the reported Marian visions and showers of roses at the monastery of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, Mediatrix of All Grace in Lipa City, were a "hoax".

I first heard the rumors about Our Lady Mediatrix in Lipa Carmel when I was a student priest at the UST Central Seminary in 1951-53. At the time, I adhered to the common belief that some nuns used blowers to simulate a shower of rose petals out of a desire, noble and sincere, to establish a monastery chapel.

It would not be the first time that lesser measures were resorted to, for greater purposes. That, I believed, would explain why the Mother Prioress contrived with Teresing Castillo to claim having visions and receiving messages from Our Lady. It would have been a surefire way to raise funds.

There were other rumors then that I also believed - that because of the hoax, the Prioress and Teresing Castillo were banished from the

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Lipa Monastery by order of the Ecclesiastical authorities. In fact, Teresing remained in Lipa Carmel for three years, but was advised by the Prioress to leave the monastery until such time that she fully recovered from a lingering ailment.

I never bothered to consult a Church Authority, nor read any official church document on the subject matter. My belief then was based entirely on hearsay. In retrospect, I wonder whether this could explain the beliefs of countless others who may also have prejudged the Lipa Carmel case.

### **PETITIONS TO ALLOW PUBLIC VENERATION OF THE IMAGE OF OUR LADY**

A few months after my installation as Archbishop of Lipa, several individuals and groups approached me, to request that the Image of Our Lady, Mediatrix of All Grace be brought out for public veneration. I politely refused to do so, explaining that I had no knowledge about the investigation and findings of the Commission of Bishops regarding the events that took place at Lipa Carmel in 1948. I asked for more time to pray over and study the case.

From the year 1984 onwards, the requests multiplied, and with greater intensity. But for reasons I cannot explain, and despite a keen interest to do so at the time, it was only in 1986 or 1987 that I finally launched my own investigation.

I wondered why only a few of these petitions came from the faithful in Lipa City, much less the Archdiocese. More disturbing still, it appeared to me that except for a very few, the Clergy of Lipa was cold to the idea. Inevitably the words of Our Lord came to mind: “. . . . No prophet is without honor except in his native place, indeed in his own house” (*Mt. 13:57*).

It therefore provided no small amount of relief when sometime in 1988, I received a petition letter signed by about a thousand of the faithful of Lipa, led by the Governor of Batangas, Mayor of Lipa City, and their

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respective wives. Comforting too were the number of lay leaders of the Archdiocese, mostly from the San Sebastian Parish in Lipa City, who were among the petitioners.

Moreover, some truly trustworthy persons volunteered to testify as personal witnesses to the shower of roses. They argued (convincingly), that the use of blowers could not have been possible, as there was no electricity at that time. More importantly, they claimed that the roses floated straight from above, perpendicularly, thereby disproving that they were blown away from the monastery. Otherwise, the petals would have formed an arc before fluttering downwards.

Let me here point out that Mother Cecilia was the Novice Mistress of the Lipa Carmel Monastery from the time of my installation in 1981 until her death in 1982, she was so self-effacing that I was never acquainted with her. I never even knew that she was the very same Prioress of Lipa Carmel when Teresing Castillo entered the monastery and reportedly experienced the visions of Our Blessed Mother in 1948. I only learned this after her death in 1983, when I was in Hongkong for treatment. Nonetheless, it can be gleaned from the biographical sketch that was issued by the Lipa Carmel Monastery after Mother Cecilia's death, that the good Mother led a holy life. Clearly, Mother Cecilia could never have perpetrated such a flagrant crime as the so-called "great hoax" of Lipa Carmel in 1948 and thereabouts.

### **OUR LADY MEDIATRIX OF LIPA AND HER FILE**

Allow me to explain the lack of exact dates and of full names of persons and places in this paper. I left my file on Our Lady, Mary Mediatrix of Lipa Carmel in the care of Archbishop Gaudencio B. Rosales, my successor. Before the Archbishop came, I entrusted the same file to Sister Vivian de la Cruz, MCST, who was then my private secretary. I instructed her to hand it over to Archbishop Rosales as soon as he settled in. I also informed the Archbishop of the existence of the file soon after he arrived.

A year or so before Archbishop Rosales assumed his post, I formed a Special Committee to study the events directly relating to Our Lady

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Mediatix of Lipa Carmel that transpired even after the promulgation in 1951 of the Decree of the CBCP Episcopal Commission which declared, among others, that no supernatural intervention took place in Lipa Carmel in 1948.

I informed the Special Committee of my private file on Lipa Carmel. Several times, I urged the members to view its contents.

Obviously therefore, I am working on this paper from memory. Nonetheless, I fear no scruples in attesting to the veracity -- in substance at least -- of what I shall lay bare in this "Reflections". May the light of the Spirit of Christ be my only Guide in my selfless quest for "the truth that sets (us) free" (*Jn. 8:32*).

### **THE SEARCH FOR INFORMATION FROM CERTAIN CHURCH SOURCES**

To my great surprise and disbelief, the only document of value for this purpose that we found in the archives of the Chancery office of Lipa, were copies of the CBCP Episcopal Commission Decree of 1951.

If I recall rightly, the Decree categorically declared that no supernatural intervention whatsoever took place in the so-called apparitions and showers of roses in the Lipa Carmel Monastery in 1948.

In addition, the Lipa Carmel nuns were strictly prohibited from talking about the said events. They were also ordered to destroy or burn all materials related thereto. Furthermore, the Image of Mary Mediatix of All Grace was to be placed in seclusion, if not destroyed. Faced with this blank wall, I proceeded to do the following:

1. I wrote a letter to the present Archbishop of Cebu, His Eminence Ricardo Cardinal Vidal, who is also my immediate predecessor in Lipa, requesting information concerning the investigation by the CBCP Episcopal Commission of the Lipa Carmel case of 1948, and its conclusions.

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Cardinal Vidal gave me his reply when he visited me at the Bishop's house in Lipa City. To my dismay, the Cardinal had not seen the records of the investigation. However, His Eminence heard much about the Lipa Carmel case from the revered Bishop Alfredo Obviar of Lucena, who was Auxiliary Bishop of Lipa in 1948, and evidently, a rich source of first-hand information. Although Cardinal Vidal spoke in general terms, I gathered that the late Bishop Obviar was a believer in the Lipa Carmel story.

I further surmised that Cardinal Vidal himself believed, veiled though his allusions might have seemed, that the Lipa Carmel story was credible, if not outrightly true.

2. I then addressed a letter to the Most Rev. Bruno Torpigliani, Papal Nuncio to the Philippines at the time, requesting for any record from his good office of the investigation of the CBCP Episcopal Commission. In reply, Archbishop Torpigliani apologized for sending back only copies of letters that were of practically no importance. The fact was that the Nunciature had no record of the investigation and decision of the same Episcopal Commission.

3. Soon after, I wrote His Eminence, Jaime Cardinal Sin, requesting that he permit Father Pio Bagamano, then secretary Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Lipa, to look into the archives of the Archdiocese of Manila and see whether documents relating to the Lipa Carmel investigations existed. Father Pio was assisted by a religious sister, the archivist of the Manila Archdiocese. But their long and arduous search was of no avail.

The foregoing is significant considering that the late Rufino Cardinal Santos was Archbishop of Manila, and concurrently the Administrator of Lipa. It was during his administration that the Lipa Carmel investigation was undertaken. Further, Archbishop Santos signed the CBCP Episcopal Decree as head of the Investigating Commission.

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It would be expected therefore that records, or copies of records of the entire process of investigation would be kept in the archives of Lipa or Manila, or both.

4. Just as baffling is the fact that we were not able to trace any similar record at the archives of the CBCP.

5. At about this time, Ms. June Keithley, a TV producer, was on her way to Rome to widen her own research about Lipa Carmel. She asked for a recommendation letter to the proper authorities at the Generalate of the Carmelite Fathers in order to gain access to their records about Lipa Carmel. Afraid that the fathers would not feel comfortable with Ms. Keithley as a media personality, I recommended instead Rev. Fr. Cecil Arce, of whose prudence and capability I had full confidence and who was taking up doctoral studies in Canon Law. I requested him to accompany Ms. Keithley to the Carmelite Generalate.

I was made to understand that the ranking superiors of the Carmelite Fathers in Manila had initiated the Lipa Carmel investigation.

But as if to compound my perplexity, Fr. Arce and Ms. Keithley came back empty-handed except for a few papers that were of practically no relevance to our purpose.

6. Then, like a shaft of light, the good Fr. Pablo Fernandez, O.P., came to my acquaintance. A professor at the UST Central Seminary, Fr. Fernandez confided to me his great love of books on spirituality and related subjects. He was very interested in private apparitions.

According to Teresing Castillo, the good old Father expressed surprise and concern when she told him that her last confessor and spiritual director was the late Cardinal Santos who passed away in September 1973. Teresing told me that Fr. Fernandez strongly advised her to have a new spiritual director.

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Fr. Fernandez revealed to Teresing that he had seen and read the records of the Lipa Carmel investigation in their seminary library. However, when he returned after some years in Spain (or Rome), to his amazement, the documents in the library were no longer there!

I was so impressed by Fr. Fernandez that I readily urged Teresing Castillo to have him as her spiritual director and confessor.

In 1991, I was overjoyed by a visit from Fr. Fernandez, who came all the way from Manila to Lipa, despite his age and bad heart. Teresing accompanied him. We had an animated conversation. It was obvious that he was not only interested in the Lipa Carmel story – he was also a believer. At one point he confided that he was convinced of the spirituality of Teresing Castillo.

Fr. Fernandez was called to his heavenly abode on June 1, 1993. Thanks to this man of God, we came to know that indeed, there had been a pile of records of the Lipa Carmel investigation and its conclusions.

## AN ASSUMPTION SISTER

Perhaps the most convincing healing I came to know about in connection with the rose petals from Lipa Carmel, was that of Sr. Melania Sunga, an Assumptionist sister. On her own volition, she visited my residence in Lipa City. Exuding reverence and sincerity, she narrated in detail the healing experience bestowed on her through Our Lady Mary Mediatrix of All Grace.

A native of Ilocos Sur, Sr. Melania was born with a right club foot. During her late childhood, her mother went on a pilgrimage to Lipa Carmel. She returned home with some water and rose petals that were given her by the nuns of Lipa Carmel. She applied the water and the rose petals on the afflicted foot of Melania. They then prayed a novena to Our Lady. Throughout the novena, they found petals of roses in different parts of their home. They then witnessed the foot of Melania turn completely normal. When Sr. Melania showed me her right foot, I could not believe that this was once a club foot from birth. It was truly normal.

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Perhaps a year after her visit, Sr. Melania wrote me a deeply touching letter. She must have been assigned in the Diocese of Malaybalay at that time. She appealed for a speedy reopening of the Lipa Carmel case of 1948. She wanted to see in her lifetime the triumph of Mary Mediatrix for she was convinced that Our Lady truly appeared to Teresing Castillo.

## TERESING CASTILLO

It must have been in the year 1989 when I finally invited Teresita Castillo to the Bishop's Residence in Lipa for an interview. Our talk started at 11:00 a.m., and lasted - without break - until 2:00 p.m. Teresing was completely at ease throughout the interview. Utterly open and free, she answered my questions with alacrity and spontaneity. She could not control her tears when telling me about how one priest interrogator treated her roughly and threateningly. More so, when a high ranking church dignitary called her a devil when she paid him a courtesy call. All this notwithstanding, Teresing never showed rancor or resentment. Instead she acted with reverence and charity.

From that time on, Teresing saw me for counseling at least once a month, until I left the Archdiocese. Always, she had the same humble, reverent disposition as when I first interviewed her.

Teresing Castillo was, for me, a person without guile. She is very much a woman of prayer, and throughout her life she retained the prayer life of a Carmelite nun. With childlike conviction she stressed that all she had narrated and written about Our Lady of Lipa Carmel in 1948 and in subsequent years was the truth. "Salvis de internis", I have no reason to question the genuineness of her piety.

Through all our conversation Teresing was invariably consistent in her answers to my questions. Not once was she evasive, nor did she engage in double talk. She spoke spontaneously and clearly.

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## NEW SHOWERS OF ROSES

It will be recalled that on November 12, 1948, the Lady Mediatrix told Teresing that the apparition would be her last. I do not know when exactly the shower of roses stopped, but it is likely that by 1951, with the Decree of the CBCP Episcopal Commission, the Showers also ceased.

Doubtless therefore, it was a most pleasant surprise for the devotees of Our Lady when in 1991 a series of showers of roses occurred once again. The first took place on January 21, 1991 at the altar on the right nave of the Lipa Carmel chapel, where the Image of Our Lady, Mary Mediatrix of All Grace had been once again exposed for public veneration (since 1990). This happened in the presence of Teresing Castillo and two male companions, a realtor, and her driver. The realtor companion of Teresing, exceedingly excited, repeatedly asked forgiveness for his sins and cried like a child.

Those familiar with the chapel of Our Lady would know that such a shower could never be explained by human machination.

More showers followed on different dates, particularly on January 24th and 29th, February 2nd and 11th, March 13th and 31st, and a few days, too, in May, all in 1991. Some showers occurred in the residence of Teresing in Parañaque, Metro Manila. Sometimes while she was miles away from home. Another occurred on October 29, 1991 at the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Higinio Custodio in Balayan, Batangas, when the Custodios had as their guests, Teresing Castillo and prominent members of the Center for Peace-Asia. Teresing, Nelly Lopez and Dely Mojares were napping in one of the bedrooms. When Ms. Mojares got up to go to the restroom, she was struck by the sight of petals of roses spread out across the room. She hurriedly awoke Ms. Lopez and Teresing Castillo. They then called in the Custodio family and the other guests. This made their day, as they prayed in thanksgiving.

The happiest of them all must have been Mrs. Eddie Custodio. Two days later, it would be her birthday. What a gift! Years before I became Archbishop of Lipa, Mrs. Custodio was already the Prioress of

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the Third Order of Carmel in the Archdiocese. Her devotion to Our Lady Mediatrix is outstanding.

On July 4, 1992 Teresing observed her birthday through a day of prayer at a retreat house in Tagaytay City. While lying prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, she felt drops on her head. When she stood up, she found that rose flowers - not merely petals - fell on her. Ever so thoughtful, Teresing gave each of the flowers to Ricardo Cardinal Vidal and myself when she visited Cebu the following month of August. I still have this precious gift with me.

Confronted with these facts, one thing comes to mind: Could this be a sign of our Lord Jesus' approval of my decision regarding the Image of His Mother? Is this not Mother Mary's affirmation likewise? Would to the good Lord that a better mind and more deserving person help us find light!

### **SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS**

Among the issues or questions which I deem of considerable consequence regarding the Lipa Carmel story are the following:

1. In the written account of Teresing Castillo's extraordinary experience at Lipa Carmel from September 12 to November 12, 1948, what stands out is the fact that she suddenly became blind. This happened when she confided to the late Bp. Obviar that while in a trance she experienced a three-hour agony on the cross. Was this not a psychosomatic disorder? At that time Teresing also had fits of vomiting and stomach pains. Because of her health, she was advised by the Prioress to leave until she was healed. Did Teresing at that time suffer from a psychological imbalance? Teresing herself revealed to me that her doctor prescribed tranquilizer drugs for her. After some time she feared addiction, and so stopped taking the drugs on her own. This is attested to in a handwritten letter addressed to me by Rev. Fr. Leo James English, CSSR.

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Because of the foregoing ailment, Teresing also consulted a lady psychologist on the advice, I think, of Rev. Fr. Vicente Marasigan, SJ. Fr. Marasigan has studied in even greater depth than I, the case of Teresing. It was clear to me that Teresing is very confident of herself, and the lady psychologist, apparently, had a positive impression of her.

I have always found Teresing to be sound and sharp of mind, straightforward, completely confident and honest. I saw no psychological imbalance throughout our acquaintance.

2. I also find it hard to understand the account of Teresing's having experienced three agonizing hours on the cross. Whether she was in ecstasy or in a trance when this occurred is not clear to me. What is more puzzling is that this agonizing experience happened hardly two months after she entered the monastery. However, the account adds that the devil tortured Teresing throughout her agony. At the same time, Teresing was comforted and strengthened by Our Lady Mediatrix.

In seeking to understand the above, I recalled the sacred scripture that says, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers . . ." (*Gen. 3:15*).

3. Also puzzling was the fact that in her last message to Teresing on November 12, 1948, Our Blessed Mother revealed that the apparitions would end. How then, that beginning from January 21, 1991 up until recently, showers of roses and a scattering of rose petals have resumed in different places on different occasions?

Faced with this seeming discrepancy, I have no doubt that Our Mother Mary can explain herself in her own special way to our fullest satisfaction. It is plausible that Our Lord Jesus allowed these things to happen in order to pave the way for the reopening of the cause of His Blessed Mother Mary Mediatrix of All Grace. This, too is my humble prayer.

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## SR. MARY ELIZABETH, OCD

Sr. Elizabeth was the first nun of the Lipa Carmel Monastery whom I invited for an interview. Having entered the monastery as an extern nun before 1948, she was a witness to most of the happenings in Lipa Carmel. Sr. Elizabeth is also well known throughout Lipa and other dioceses for her exemplary simplicity, contagious vivaciousness and childlike candor. Her tender love for the poor seems irrepressible. Because of her enticing personality, she has won quite a number of friends in Lipa Carmel.

Although I cannot recall the details of what she said during our conversation, one thing stands out -- her conviction that the happenings reported in Lipa Carmel regarding Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace, Teresita Castillo, and the showers of roses are true. She also affirmed that there was no human intervention in the reported events, much less malice or intent of deceit to induce people to contribute to the construction of a chapel. She was in tears as she recalled the innuendo and rumors that assailed the integrity of the Carmelite nuns. I find her a most credible witness.

## SR. BERNADETTE, OCD

Sr. Bernadette entered Lipa Carmel five years after the 1948 episode. Among the staunchest champions of the cause of Our Lady Mediatrix of Lipa Carmel, her exceedingly great devotion to Our Lady evoked a "mother and child" relationship between them. Time and again, tears flowed silently as she prayed and communed about her. Like a child, she makes "tampo" when Our Lady does not grant her prayers. (Deep inside her, though, she is always wholeheartedly resigned to God's will.)

When she was the librarian of their monastery, Sr. Bernadette sent me a volume of letters that they have received from foreign countries including Spain and the US. Mostly handwritten, the letters came from priests, religious nuns, and lay persons. They claimed miraculous healings through the rose petals they received from Lipa Carmel. Together with the letters, Sr. Bernadette sent me her own. Her letters unfolded at length. They manifested how intimately personal her devotion was, and her

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steadfast confidence that the cause of Our Lady in Lipa Carmel would be “vindicated” in God’s time.

Having carefully gone over all these precious letters, I would not blame Sr. Bernadette if she believed that they confirmed the Lipa Carmel incidents.

Incidentally as of this writing, I received a letter from Sr. Bernadette dated February 27, 1995. She could not have known that I was working on this paper at the time that she wrote the letter. With touching simplicity, she described what she shared during their “*Vintage Years Seminar*” held at St. Scholastica’s Center of Spirituality in Tagaytay City. Present were several nuns from different Carmel Monasteries in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, including a Carmelite Father. She explained to the group how and when she came to decide to enter the monastery. The immediate cause, according to the letter, was what she heard about Mary Mediatrix of All Grace as told to her by Sr. Stephanie, OCD, of happy memory. Before then Sr. Bernadette revealed that from her childhood she was not at all interested in anything religious. In fact, she was worldly. Her having embraced the religious life was just like the experience of St. Paul in Damascus - a sudden grace of conversion and mission. Also, her religious life evolved on the two-fold message of the Blessed Virgin to Teresing, mainly to pray for priests and to spread devotion to Our Lady, carried perhaps by the tearful narration of Sr. Bernadette, all those present, including the priest, were driven to tears.

I would like to pay tribute to the spirit of obedience of Sr. Bernadette when she consented that I keep in my private file all the letters regarding Our Lady Mediatrix which she entrusted to my care, including those of her own. Her sincere remonstrance notwithstanding, she finally acceded to my request that I preserve the letters, after I explained how much I prized them, adding that these could be of some help to the cause of Mary Mediatrix sooner or later.

It is my studied belief that Sr. Bernadette is an invaluable asset in favor of the cause of Mary Mediatrix of All Grace.

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## SR. ALPHONSE, OCD

Having made her perpetual profession on November 21, 1933, Sr. Alphonse joined the first batch of Carmelite nuns to establish their new foundation in the Archdiocese of Lipa. This was on May 31, 1946. Five months later, on October 15th, they moved to the new building of the present Lipa Carmel Monastery with the construction work still going on. The first mass on the new site was celebrated on the same day.

A picture of "*Lady Poverty*" and innocence, Sr. Alphonse struck me as a great religious nun. My acquaintance with her, which I treasure, started in 1988. I was informed of her pressing desire to see me about Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace. She sent a handwritten letter about Our Lady Mediatrix. Remarkable in its simplicity and shortness, the letter ignited in me a corresponding desire to see her in person. Not too long after, I paid her a visit. We spoke at great length about her impressions and convictions regarding the apparitions, the messages and showers of roses that took place in Lipa Carmel from September 12 to November 12, 1948. In graphic terms, she narrated her experience when she accompanied Teresing Castillo, who held on to her shoulder, from the visitor's parlor up to her cell on the upper floor of the monastery. This was after Teresing became suddenly blind during a talk with the late Most Rev. Alfredo Obviar, then Auxiliary Bishop of Lipa. Sr. Alphonse vividly recalled the petals of roses that were strewn like a carpet along the stairway up to the cell of Teresita Castillo.

The following quotation capsulizes my short-lived acquaintance with the late Sr. Alphonse and the imperishable impression she left on me.

"When we drew our Patron Saints for 1990, Sr. Alphonse was very happy because she got Our Lady, Mary Mediatrix of All Grace. She followed with keen interest the development regarding Mary Mediatrix (Lipa). Two years earlier, she had written to our Archbishop, Mariano G. Gaviola, to tell him that she was already old and sickly, and that she wanted very much to testify. She wanted to live to see Our Lady's triumph. One of her last and greatest consolations was the visit of our Archbishop early



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this year. For almost three hours she opened her heart to him and never tired afterwards of saying how happy she was that she was able to speak to him. On March 5, at her request, our good Archbishop entered to anoint her. In his homily at her funeral mass, he was to say that his visit with Sr. Alphonse had left a great mark on him. "Her faith was so alive, there was not even a shadow of painful resignation to the Will of God. All was gladness". He considered himself blessed to have known this "innocent soul, this great religious of Carmel". *(Taken from the resumé on the life of Sr. Alphonse as released by the Lipa Carmel Monastery after the latter's death.)*

### **EXPOSURE OF THE IMAGE FOR PUBLIC VENERATION**

After declaring that there was no supernatural intervention whatsoever regarding the events at the Lipa Carmel Monastery in 1948, the Decree of the Episcopal Commission of the Philippines Hierarchy also banned the Image of Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace from the public. The Image was withdrawn from the monastery chapel, and kept in complete seclusion.

It is a tribute to the nuns of Lipa Carmel that not one of them had ever approached me with a request that I allow the Image of Our Lady to be put back at their chapel again. In fact in 1983, while recuperating from a major surgery, I was visited by Mother Aimee who was then the Prioress of Lipa Carmel. She disclosed her deep anxiety as well as of her Community, when she learned that some persons had been going around to solicit support to have the Image of Our Lady brought back to the chapel for veneration. Mother Aimee then assured me that, obedient to the provisions of the Decree of the Episcopal Commission, they had nothing at all to do with the endeavor. She said they were completely resigned to the Philippine Hierarchy's Decree.

Then came that fateful night of May 20, 1990. While on my way to the chapel for night prayers, I was informed that the very dear Sr. Alphonse was called to her eternal abode. Thereafter, I immediately instructed my private secretary, Sr. Tomasa Lagman, MCST, to inform

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Mother Jacinta, the Prioress, that I would say the requiem mass for Sr. Alphonse the following morning.

On the morning of May 21st, while taking my shower, I suddenly decided to have the Image of Our Lady exposed in public during the funeral mass and throughout that day, until 6:00 p.m. In hindsight, I myself was surprised by this decision. Why did it come to me so spontaneously?

How come I did not for a moment think of consulting anyone? But the Lord God knows I was truly grateful to the Holy Spirit, Mary's divine Spouse, for this singular inspiration. It defies my imagination to think of the jubilation which engulfed the Carmelite nuns when they heard of the decision through my secretary, which was conveyed to them just about an hour before the funeral mass.

### **THE FUNERAL MASS OF SR. ALPHONSE**

Upon my arrival at the monastery chapel around 11:00 a.m. of May 21st, I was met by an extern nun who was jumping for joy. As I entered the chapel, I was exceedingly surprised by the number of devotees that had come despite the short notice. I learned later that they were already gathered at the chapel before the sisters received my message allowing the exposure of the Image of Mary Mediatrix of All Grace to the public as a homage to Sr. Alphonse.

Soon after we marched in procession towards the main altar I saw for the first time the lovely Image of Our Lady. In a simple setting, she was placed at the right side of the presbytery. I was deeply touched and could not describe my feelings then. I was in deep thought, when the realization came that this would be the first time the Image of Our Mother was seen in public after being banned for 40 years.

I felt comfort and joy to see the handful of priests who helped concelebrate the mass with me. I could not help but wonder whether the congregation in attendance was aware that Sr. Alphonse was the last golden link in the chain of events that led to my decision to allow the public to again venerate the Image of Our Mother. This was the constant prayer of

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Sr. Alphonse. As one of the Carmelite nuns said, "Sr. Alphonse obtained in death what she could not obtain in life."

## **FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MT. CARMEL JULY 16, 1991**

The solemn novena and masses in preparation for the feast of Our Lady of Carmel always draws a large number of devotees to Lipa Carmel. But as could only be expected in 1991, the turn-out was something else. The devotion to Mary Mediatrix was inflamed by the daily influx of pilgrims throughout the year. Devotees literally jammed the chapel on July 16, 1991.

The mass started at 10:00 a.m. and I was the main celebrant and homilist. Dozens of priests concelebrated with me together with Bishop Salvador Q. Quizon, Auxiliary Bishop of Lipa, and Rt. Rev. Alfredo Madlangbayan, P.A., Vicar General of Lipa.

Whether prompted by the Holy Spirit, I spontaneously felt this was the time for a solemn announcement. Towards the end of my homily, I proclaimed that from that day onwards the sacred Image of Mary Mediatrix of All Grace will be exposed for daily veneration, subject to the regular schedule of when the chapel is closed to the public. I emphasized however that proper church authorities can rescind or modify the decision.

In addition, I made it clear that in connection with the public veneration of the Image of Our Lady, the following instructions and conditions were to be strictly observed:

1. First and foremost, utmost reverence and veneration be accorded to the Blessed Sacrament at the main altar. Only after a visit to the Eucharistic Lord may the devotees of Our Lady Mediatrix proceed to venerate Her Image at Her altar.

2. Pilgrims and visitors should observe reverence, proper decorum, and silence in the chapel at all times.

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3. Let it be known that the chapel is an integral part of the Carmelite Monastery. Consequently, the rules of the monastery, especially those concerning the cloister, the observance of silence, of visiting hours, be religiously respected.

In conclusion, I explained the main reason for my decision, I simply wanted to find out, by the grace of God, what would be the spontaneous response of the faithful. Namely, whether the response would eventually develop into a form of "sensus fidelium", a factor vital to the cause of Mary Mediatrix of All Grace in Lipa Carmel.

### **A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REINVESTIGATE THE LIPA CARMEL CASE**

Lest it be overlooked, I hereby state that I was never alone in all the measures I took as earlier described. I sought the prayers of many, many devout people for guidance from the Holy Spirit. I constantly prayed for the Lord's blessing, and sought His will on whether his Mother's cause at Lipa Carmel be revived. I ceaselessly sought the intercession of Our Blessed Mother and of Her Holy Spouse, St. Joseph, patron not only of the Universal Church, but in particular, of the Archdiocese of Lipa.

Inspired by the overwhelming response of the thousands of devotees of Mary Mediatrix, confronted by the increasing number of healings, both spiritual and corporal, that came to our knowledge; urged by filial love and devotion to Our Blessed Mother, and by a prayerful yearning for the truth, I finally firmed up the conviction that the time had arrived to create a Special Committee that would study in depth whether there were enough grounds to raise the Lipa Carmel cause to higher church authorities to determine whether a re-opening of the Lipa Carmel case is warranted.

I finally created this Special Committee at one meeting of our Presbyterial Council of Lipa. It was agreed that the Committee would be composed of seven (7) members whom the Council will choose by secret ballots from among the Diocesan and religious priests of Lipa. Also, that the first seven (7) to get the highest number of votes would form the

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committee. More still, that in order to keep secret the members of the Special Committee, only the Bishop would count the ballots. Furthermore, that the elected members be informed by the Archbishop through a formal letter of appointment. The secrecy was important so as to prevent undue influence or pressure on the members of the Special Committee.

### **NATURE OF THE ASSIGNMENT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE**

The Special Committee having been formally organized, the members were informed that their work was not to pass judgment on the findings of the CBCP Episcopal Commission, much less to question its decision on the Lipa Carmel case. They were simply told to make all the needed investigations and to study the reports about the many extraordinary incidences that occurred after the Decree of the CBCP Episcopal Commission. In short, the Special Committee was supposed to focus their investigation only on reports about Lipa Carmel that took place *AFTER* the promulgation of the same Decree of 1951.

However, I also authorized the Committee to gather testimonies of personal witnesses to the Lipa Carmel events in 1948 and the early years thereafter. Far from wanting to impugn the findings of the Episcopal Commission, we simply wanted to know for ourselves what would be the testimonies of witnesses under the present circumstances compared to what they might have said under the circumstances when they were investigated by the CBCP Episcopal Commission.

The main purpose of the Special Committee was to verify cases of physical healings that were attributed to Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace after the Decree of 1951. For its guidance and information the committee was invited likewise to read for themselves the file on the Lipa Carmel case at the office of the Archbishop of Lipa.

The Special Committee was then to submit their findings to the Archbishop of Lipa, together with their considered opinion as to whether or not there were enough solid grounds to request from higher Church authorities to re-investigate the Lipa Carmel case.

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## THE EPISCOPAL COMMISSION DECREE OF 1952

As referred to earlier in this paper, the only document we found at the archives of the Lipa Chancery of the Lipa Carmel case is a copy of the Decree of the CBCP Episcopal Commission issued in 1951. In substance, the Decree categorically mandated that all matters and materials referring to the Lipa Carmel events in 1948 had to be destroyed. Moreover, the nuns were ordained to observe strict silence about the same reported events. The Image of the Mediatrix was to be withdrawn from the public or even destroyed.

I never questioned the decision in the Decree. I personally knew each member of the Commission and knowing their character, intelligence and moral integrity, I refused to believe the rumors being bruited about, that some of the members were under duress when they signed the document, at the instance namely, of the late Papal Nuncio to the Philippines, Most Rev. Egidio Vagnozzi. I found it hard to believe in fact that Archbishop Vagnozzi would even think of intimidating any member of the Commission.

All this notwithstanding, the fact is that we have also received reports, letters, and affidavits attesting the contrary of my contention. Neither can I question the credibility of the authors of the said communications.

I also submit that great importance and attention be given to the postscript in the same Decree of the Episcopal Commission. If I recall rightly, the postscript states that the provisions of the Decree were to be strictly enforced and observed until such time when the Holy See comes out with its own verdict. (Underscoring supplied). Whereas, to the best of my knowledge I do not think that the Holy See has ever come out with such a verdict.

Allow me also to maintain the obvious, namely that the Episcopal Commission which issued the Decree was not clothed with the gift of infallibility.

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## MY MASS ON THE GROUNDS OF LIPA CARMEL ON FEB. 6, 1992

Every first Saturday of the month is special to a vast number of Filipino Catholics. In response to the appeal of the Blessed Virgin of Fatima, many go to church and receive Holy Communion on that day. They pray for the sanctification of the Clergy, as requested by the Blessed Virgin through the children; Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia. At Cova da Iria, Fatima, in Portugal, She appeared every 13th of the month from May to October, except on August when She appeared on the 19th.

But the first Saturday of February 1992 was a "First" in the history of Lipa Carmel. On this glorious day, people from all walks of life and from many parts of the country streamed to Lipa City to pay homage to Mary Mediatrix. Thousands of pilgrims came and went the whole day. But some 20,000 to 30,000 remained and gathered for the special mass to the Blessed Mother at 4:00 p.m. The huge ground of Lipa Carmel overflowed with Marian devotees.

The afternoon mass was organized by a group of lay persons. The anxious Carmel nuns assured me that their only involvement was to allow the use of their grounds. With trepidation, I consented to be the main celebrant, but excused myself from giving the homily. I recommended instead, Msgr. Alfredo Madlangbayan.

To avoid traffic, I slipped into the monastery hours before the mass. I went to the chapel to pray and prepare for the mass, only to be besieged by people who wanted to make a confession. I found myself hearing confession up until the time for mass.

Going out of the chapel to the especially prepared altar at the portico, I saw, with disbelief and complete awe, the immensity of the crowd that filled the monastery ground. Just as impressive was their orderliness. One could feel their palpable fervor and filial devotion.

It was truly inspiring. At the same time, I was surprised by the

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number of priests who came to concelebrate with me - both the secular and the religious clergy belonging to different dioceses.

### THE SPINNING AND DANCING SUN

Before and during the mass on this unforgettable first Saturday of February 1992, the sky was overcast as though covered by a mantle which benignly protected the faithful from the sun.

The priest-concelebrants went to their places of assignment to distribute Holy Communion. Seated behind the altar, I started to perceive a stir among the crowd. In no time, the stir mounted into clapping of hands and cries of joy. Looking at the excited crowd, my first impression was that their clappings were to welcome an important or popular personality who just arrived. Then I realized that their heads were turned upward, and shifting my eyes towards what was drawing their attention, I saw in awe the extraordinary movements of the sun.

I also saw some of the priests who were distributing Holy Communion similarly attracted by the sun and unconsciously suspending the Holy Communion. Suddenly, the sun shot through the radiant and crimson-red clouds, at times spinning vigorously, at other times as though shooting downwards and backwards in a rapid succession. The rays were of different colors. It was striking that I was able to stare straight into the sun for several minutes without suffering any glare. The sun appeared perfectly round. It seemed like the Holy Eucharist in a golden monstrance.

The uncontrollable reaction to the ecstatic and overjoyed crowd, many of whom I was told were in tears, is simply beyond description.

The vastness of the crowd, their overwhelming reaction to the heavenly phenomenon, the behavior of the sun in the firmament, and the combined impact of all this was too much for me. Despite my original resolve, I decided to speak during the occasion.

Throwing caution to the wind, I spoke after the post-communion of the mass. Briefly I explained the Teachings of the Church as enunciated

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by Vatican II in "Lumen Gentium" about Mary and our Christian devotion to Her. While it is true that Our Lord Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man (*1 Tim. 2:5-6*), as Mediatrix of All Grace, Mary in no way obscures nor diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather, shows its power (*L. G. 62*). We simply understand by this that from the superabundance of the merits of Jesus Christ and because of His infinite mercy and love, Jesus allows Mary to participate in His unique mediatory power. According to the principle of cause and effect, the further the distance of the effect from the cause, the greater the power of the cause.

I recall having said also that if other countries had been blessed with the apparition of Our Blessed Mother, e.g., in Lourdes, France, and in Fatima, Portugal, why can't the Philippines be similarly blessed? Ours is the only Christian nation in the whole of Asia. The Philippines is Marian in and out. Our beloved nation is endearingly dedicated to the protection of Mary of the Immaculate Conception as our Patroness.

For the first time, I declared in public that personally, I was fully convinced that the happenings of Lipa Carmel in 1948 and subsequent events related to Our Blessed Mother are very much worthy of belief. I added that I am a firm believer of the veracity of the reported events.

In retrospect, it is significant that similar sightings of the dancing sun had been witnessed by many people two or three years earlier and on different occasions. On the other hand, I had never seen anything like it. Neither had I been desirous of having the same experience. The foregoing event therefore on February 6th appeared "loaded" with a singular message as far as I was concerned.

Considering that the Holy See accepted my resignation as Archbishop of Lipa on December 30, 1991, presumptuous though it be, it was all too natural for me to interpret this memorable experience as a gift from Our Blessed Mother. "What a beautiful farewell", I thought. (Come to think of it, was it not also possible that through the unusual behavior of the sun, our almighty and loving Father wanted to have His presence felt by the thousands of devotees to Our Blessed Mother as a reward of their devotion to Her?)

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Holy Scripture abounds with passages emphasizing the presence of God through the behavior of the clouds or the sun in the firmament.

The Transfiguration of Our Lord is described as follows: "He was transfigured before their eyes . . . His face became as dazzling as the sun, His clothes as radiant as light" (*Mt. 17:2*). Church tradition finds the words in the Revelation as referring to Our Blessed Mother: "A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (*Rev. 12:1*). In fact too, 70,000 people witnessed a similar behavior of the sun during the last apparition of Our Lady to Francisco, Jacinta and Lucia in Fatima, of October 13, 1917.

In this connection, it is not quite far-fetched, nor will I feel guilty of unbridled fanaticism or emotionalism, should I find it utterly possible that God, in His infinite mercy, by allowing the phenomenon of the revolving and dancing sun, placed His stamp of divine approval on the humble, unrelenting efforts of countless people to propagate devotion to Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace of Lipa Carmel.

Indeed, would it be too presumptuous of me to believe that Our Lord Jesus wanted to show through this phenomenon His joy when after 40 years of seclusion, the Image of His Mother was once more brought out for public veneration since May 21, 1991?

### **PARANORMAL OR DEVIL'S INTERVENTION**

In view of the foregoing I would be generous if I were to concede the possibility that the visions of Teresing Castillo, and the messages she received, the shower of roses, the healings that took place at different times and places, and all other events related to Our Lady Mediatrix were nothing but paranormal events. Paranormal means they simply cannot be explained scientifically. To my mind, paranormal things belong to the natural order. They do not relate to the sacred, much less the supernatural. But the case of Lipa is contrary because everything that we hear about Mary Mediatrix in Lipa Carmel is always related to the sacred and the supernatural.

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On the other hand, it is quite far-fetched, if not a contradiction, to conclude that what happened and continues to happen at Lipa Carmel in connection with the devotion to Our Lady Mediatrix of All Grace, are machinations of Satan. As a matter of fact, the messages received by Teresina from Our Blessed Mother are in substance, the same as the messages of Our Lady of Lourdes and Our Lady of Fatima. It is most unseemly of Satan to be giving messages that urge the faithful to pray for the sanctity of priests and religious, to do penance, and make acts of reparation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. As our Lord Jesus reminds us: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid to waste. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom last since you say it is by Beelzebul that I cast out devils . . ." (*Lk. 11:17-20*).

Obviously, Satan will be destroying his kingdom if he were the author of all the great events at the Lipa Carmel Monastery and related cases.

With regards to the dancing sun, we are told that some scientists explain the phenomenon as a natural effect caused by the interaction of the radiance of the sun and the movements of the clouds. Granting that this is true, I find it difficult to explain how it was that several of those present at the Lipa Carmel grounds when I said mass on February 6, 1992, did not see any unusual movements of the sun? Among them were several seminarians of the School of Theology who attested that they had seen nothing unusual on the occasion.

It behooves us to recall further the scriptural passages wherein God proclaims His presence or omnipotence through the movements of the sun, the clouds, and other celestial bodies. (*cf. Ex. 3:2-3; 14:24; 19:18-19; Mt. 27:45; 52:53; Acts 9:3-5; Rev. 10:1; etc.*).

## CONCLUSION

As earlier mentioned, these "Reflections" do not intend in any manner to impugn the integrity, capability and good intention of the Most Rev. members of the Episcopal Commission who came out with the Decree on Lipa Carmel in 1951. I have personally known each one of them,

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and I hereby vouch for their intelligence, prudence and wisdom. May they rest in peace. Placed under the same circumstances that obtained at the time of their investigation, and based on their own findings, I think I would have decided as they had done.

This humble presentation is rather focused on the happenings and findings that could be gathered throughout the period immediately following the issuance of the Decree up to the present.

Notwithstanding however my own inadequacy and the limited study and findings I present above, I doubt if I would have made the same decision under the present circumstances.

In conclusion, allow me to submit, Your Excellency, that there are sufficient reasons for your Special Committee to delve more deeply and intensively into the areas of its (Special Committee) concern. As delineated somewhere in this paper, I humbly submit likewise that there is urgency in this matter. I fervently pray that your Committee be constantly guided by the light of the Spirit through the intercession of Our Blessed Mother and the protection of St. Joseph.

May the Most Blessed Trinity and the Holy Family of Nazareth be with you always.

The Lord is Risen. Alleluia Alleluia Alleluia!



MARIANO G. GAVIOLA, D.D.  
Archbishop Emeritus of Lipa  
Easter Sunday  
April 16, 1995

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Subscribed and sworn to before me this 26th day of May, 1995.



HARRIET O. DEMETRIO  
Presiding Judge  
Branch 70, RTC  
Pasig City

*copy 11/3/98 rlb*

Archbishop Mariano Garces Gaviola pioneered in areas which touched on some of the most significant concerns of the post Vatican II Church: the development of National and continent-wide conferences of bishops; fostering of human and social development programs by the Churches and the "preferential option for the poor"; the growth of Basic Ecclesial Communities and new ministries; renewed missionary impetus, as part of the "new evangelization" thrust of the present decade and renewal of the devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, in line with the Council's Theological vision.

He began working as the Secretary General of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) in 1960 (before Vatican II), and remained in this post even after he became the first Bishop of the new Diocese of Cabanatuan, relinquishing it only to assume the post of Military Vicar and FABC Secretary General in 1974. He was the CBCP's "point man" in the most significant period of CBCP's renewal, the Council year<sup>7d</sup> Bangladesh in the West, Japan and Korea in the North, the R.O.C. (Taiwan) and the Philippines in the East and Indonesia to the South. As CBCP Secretary - General, he was the first bishop of the newly-created Cabanatuan diocese (1963-67), the first bishop to take up Military Vicariate on an almost full-time basis (1974-1981), the founding Bishop and the first National Director of the Share and Care Apostolate for Poor Settlers, the Philippine Bishops' outreach to the urban poor - a significant new area for Church involvement and the beginnings of grassroots ecclesiastical communities in the Luzon especially among the poor sectors. In 1981, he was placed in charge of the metropolitan see of Lipa, where he concerned himself with the lay people's empowerment and participation through parish pastoral councils, lay and youth formation, family life and new evangelization movements. In a diocese deeply committed to Marian devotion, he quietly but decisively renewed the cultus of Our Lady as Mediatrix of All Grace.

He also started and brought to completion a low cost housing project for poor families, making use of lands owned by the diocese: Villa San Jose, which now has over a hundred homes for the poor set up and completed.

Cover photo by Chito Segismundo