

THE LADY OF ALL NATIONS AND THE CHURCH

Because of many requests, we asked Bishop emeritus Jozef Punt to give a short summary of the development of the position of the Church regarding the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, as “The Lady of all Nations” or “The Mother of all Peoples,” (Amsterdam 1945 – 1959):

The Church and “the Lady of all Nations” have a long common history, on the diocesan level, as well as on the level of the universal Church. It started more than 70 years ago. Like most of my predecessors, I also had known the visionary very well. She was totally reliable and very down to earth. All her visions happened in the presence of others, and were recorded by others. As a bishop, we have a duty to “test the spirits,” to separate the “wheat from the chaff,” but also “hold fast to what is good.” I cannot describe 70 years of history in detail, but shall try to explain the central stages in this development.

In 1956, the first local Bishop, Johannes Huibers allowed the private veneration of the title, the image and the prayer of the Lady of All Nations, but prohibited public veneration. This was based on the advice of a diocesan commission, that could not yet establish a supernatural origin. Besides that, the apparitions were still going on. In 1957, Rome confirmed the Bishop’s disciplinary measure, adding that it did not rule out new information presenting itself in the future. After his retirement (1960), Bishop Huibers became more and more convinced of the authenticity of the apparitions, as is manifested in letters to his successor and to Rome, as well as in other documented testimonies.

In 1967, the then Bishop of Haarlem, Theodorus Zwartkruis, on the request of many faithful and in consultation with the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, decided to re-open the case. A new diocesan commission could not draw a clear conclusion, but tended to attribute a natural origin to the events. Yet, it advised the granting of permission for public devotion. In **1974**, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith did not state that the apparitions are false, but specified that the “non constat de supernaturalitate” position still existed, and in an official publication confirmed the prohibition of the public veneration from 1956 by Bishop Huibers.

In 1973, an unexpected development happened. The sisters of a convent of Eucharistic Adoration in Akita, Japan, had commissioned a wooden statue after the image of the Lady of all Nations, and daily prayed the prayer of Amsterdam. In July 1973, Sister Agnes Sasagawa heard a beautiful voice coming from the statue of the Lady of all Nations, giving messages. Also, healings, tears and other miraculous events at the statue happened, five times in the presence of the bishop himself. After extensive scientific investigation by the University of Akita, the local Bishop, John Shojiro Ito, on **April 22, 1984** approved “the supernatural character of the events.” He made a pilgrimage to Amsterdam, and shortly before his death, he wrote a letter (February 28, 1989) to the Bishop of Haarlem, in which he confirms that he had approved the events regarding the statue of the Lady of all Nations in Akita, as consisting of a supernatural origin. There is also a deep relation of the Lady of all Nations with the Holy Eucharist, both in Akita and in Amsterdam.

In 1984, Rome modified its position regarding Amsterdam. The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith advises the then local Bishop, Henricus Bomers, to consider making a distinction between the title and the apparitions, expressing that the Congregation was inclined to recognize the title. In the following years, there is ongoing correspondence between the local bishop and the Congregation about the possibility and the reality of such a distinction. On **April 6, 1990**, the Congregation states in writing that “the Bishop of Haarlem himself should judge the advisability” of this policy.

In 1995, Rome allows the public veneration. In that year, I was appointed auxiliary Bishop of Haarlem. At my introduction visit to the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, October 1995, the Prefect, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, brought up the issue of the devotion to The Lady of All Nations,

and asked my opinion on this topic. I responded that I was in favour of allowing public devotion, without yet giving a judgement on the authenticity, but await further developments. The Prefect gave permission to this policy. On **May 31, 1996**, Bishop Bomers, together with me as his auxiliary bishop, therefore released a decree in which we allowed the public veneration of “The Lady of all Nations,” and left the question of the authenticity to the conscience of the faithful. The devotion sharply spread.

In 2002, in my continued responsibility as the new Bishop of Haarlem, I had to take a position on the Amsterdam apparitions. Already for several years, I was confronted with many requests from bishops and faithful to give clarity about the authenticity, and also in the light of the approval of Akita. I asked some theologians and psychologists to again study all the available material. On their positive advice, and in my responsibility as local bishop, I then approved the apparitions as “in essence consisting of a supernatural origin.” In a pastoral letter, I added that the approval does not imply a guarantee on each word or image, because the influence of the human factor always remains. I also recalled that private revelation, even if recognized as authentic, “does not bind the conscience of the faithful.”

In 2005, Rome required a small change in the prayer. The last sentence of the prayer read as follows: “May the Lady of all Nations, who once was Mary, be our Advocate. Amen.” Of course, the Blessed Virgin retains the name, “Mary.” The name is used throughout all the messages. In fact, Our Lady presents herself with the words: “I am the Lady, Mary, Mother of all Peoples”. What is meant is that this humble young woman, Mary of Nazareth, was chosen and elevated by the Lord to become, as St. John Paul II refers to her under the titles, “the Mother of all Humanity” and “the Mother of all Peoples.” But to avoid misunderstanding, and in obedience, the clause was changed. Now the most current form of the clause reads: “the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

The devotion has spread all over the world and is presently supported by hundreds of bishops and cardinals. The prayer is translated in almost all languages of the world. The first sentence of the prayer reads: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, send now your Spirit over the earth,’ with special emphasis on “**now.**” Our world needs the Holy Spirit now, more than ever. If we honour Mary in the full greatness the Lord has granted Her, She then can fully execute her maternal power over the heart of her Son, and obtain for us a new descent of the Holy Spirit over our wounded world. That is the essence of this devotion. For this reason, millions of people are praying the Rosary and this prayer. At the Lady of All Nations prayer day in Germany, 2019, we were happy to receive a message of greeting and blessing on behalf of Pope Francis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' and 'P' with a cross-like mark to the left, all enclosed within a large, sweeping loop. A horizontal line is drawn below the signature.

Jozef Marianus Punt
Bishop Emeritus of Haarlem-Amsterdam
15 September 2020