Crèches International
Nativity Sets Worldwide

From December 6, 1998 to January 10, 1999, the Marian Library is sponsoring an exhibit of Christmas nativity sets — Crèches International — at the Gallery St. John, Dayton, Ohio. Featured are forty-two sets from many countries — Austria, Africa’s Ivory Coast, Egypt, Germany, Slovakia and Sicily. An exhibit booklet contains information on the artist and the art form or medium, a descriptive title for each set, and an interpretation of the scene.

Each set contains the usual figures — the Christ Child, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, magi — with a great variety of secondary characters ranging from (in the French settings) the mayor of the town, the pastor, musicians, monks, butchers and bakers, to (in modern settings) casual visitors, backpackers, people on picnic. Each of the sets has a distinctive background — a mountain, a village, a stage, the ruins of a classical temple. Michel Forest, an artist from St. Joseph’s Oratory, Montreal, came for two weeks to design the setting for eleven sets, and local artists — Marjorie Yefchak, and Marianist Brothers Don Smith, A. Joseph Barrish, and Brian Zampier — provided the background for others. A central work by Kevin Hanna (Norwalk, Connecticut) is a 150-piece set which depicts the whole story of salvation with the Nativity at its center.

The following are descriptions of a few settings (from the exhibit booklet):

• Flight to Egypt on Wheels (Jil Gurule, USA). The Holy Family is pictured in a cart similar to a Sicilian donkey cart or wagons going to the Western areas.
• From the Mountain Tops (Gilberte Schneider, Switzerland). Located in the Alpine regions of Europe, Mary and Joseph take refuge in wooden shelters, covered with slabs of granite, used by shepherds in mountainous regions.
• A Labor of Love (Peter Palka, Slovakia). Winner of the 1996 International Crèche Festival in Bellingham, WA. This setting, made of corn husks, contains great detail. Because of the difficulty of working with the medium, it can be called a labor of love.
• Hymn of Creation. (Jose E. L. Tomas, Mexico). In the style of Mexican nacimiento, the figures are covered with artful ornaments, luxurious flora, and mythical animals. This hymn to life and its manifold plenty includes fish and fowl, rabbits and deer.
• To the Center of the Earth. (R. Himmelbauer, Austria). A stylized mountain with musician angels, frolicking sheep, and richly vested shepherds and kings symbolizes the new creation which Jesus’ birth heralds.
• Breaking and Sharing the Light. (Jo Leach, USA). Characters of simple lines and colored glass converge toward the star in the center. These transparent figures capture and diffuse the light of Christ’s birth.
• Family Portrait. (S. Apriasz, Poland). A woodcarved set in which the figures with their broad faces and red cheeks are messengers of good health and prosperity. The images reflect the blessings which Christ’s birth brings to the family.
• In Deep Winter (John Schnegg, Canada). The setting is a typical Canadian stable within a barn, next to a garage, and water pump. The Holy Family is found next to animals who sense the presence of something wonderful.
• A Heavenly Ballet (Franklin Mint, USA). The Baroque figures convey a heavenly atmosphere. The child is surrounded by characters in graceful poses and gestures. The gracefulness of the scene speaks of the “lightness of being” which the Incarnation inaugurates.
The Rosary

"The rosary is an exceptionally versatile instrument of prayer. It can be prayed privately as an individual or collectively as a small community. It combines vocal prayer with meditation and can be utilized in almost any setting. I find, as do so many others, that reciting the rosary while driving not only converts a time-consuming activity into a moment of communion with God but also helps reduce the frustrations and temptations to impatience and anger that are increasingly a part of driving in urban settings.

"For many of us, the rosary also satisfies another human need — to pray to God in private. Personal prayer is essential to living the Christian life. This is the daily link to God which transforms both our character and our life. Personal prayer helps prepare each of us as a Christian for the public prayer to which we are all called — liturgical prayer. Regular private daily prayer is the best preparation for a full, rich participation in the public prayer of the church. Praying the rosary is an example of this regular private daily prayer."

Bishop Donald Wuerl
Pittsburgh Catholic, October 23, 1998

 Marian Shrines and the Church

In a recent interview during a pilgrimage to Lourdes, Christoph Cardinal Schönborn, Archbishop of Vienna, Austria, offered some thoughts on the meaning of Marian shrines in the life of the Church. "In general, wherever the Church is alive and renewed, there Mary is present; and where Mary is present, the sense of the Church is strengthened. At Marian shrines, we can experience the Church not primarily as an institution, as is unfortunately so often the case; here we can sense that the Church is that Bride for whom Christ has given his life, and that the Church is the mother of all people. It is no accident that many apostolic movements which have arisen in the Church have originated at Marian shrines and still retain a connection with them."

"Dialogue," continued the cardinal, "about the Church is always necessary, but dialogue alone is sufficient neither for an organization's nor a person's life. In Mary, the Church finds a personal way of communicating. In Mary, the Church is sensed not as a gigantic institution, nor as a theological system. In Mary, the Church expresses, in a visible and experiential way, that her essence is maternal, a bride, a beautiful and lovable creation."
The Mariological Society of America


“The Virgin Mary in Art”

The forty-ninth annual meeting of the Mariological Society of America took place at the International Schoenstatt Center, Waukesha, Wisconsin, May 27-29, 1998. The meeting’s topic was “The Virgin Mary in Art.” During the meeting, the various pieces of Marian art, submitted as part of the Mariological Society’s “Call for Marian Art,” were displayed. Over seventy pieces — icons, paintings, and sculptures — were featured. This exhibit of Marian art will travel to Dayton, Ohio, and other cities; in 1999, it will be in Washington, DC, as part of the Mariological Society’s fiftieth anniversary meeting.

The 1998 program was innovative in many ways. The Mariological Society has sponsored many programs on Mary in the Sacred Scriptures and in doctrine. But this was the first program devoted to artists’ representations of Mary. Religious art has a specific purpose: it is not “art for art’s sake.” It reminds and instructs us of God’s presence, and it directs our gaze to the divine beauty present within creation. Because religious art speaks the “language of beauty” (Pope John Paul II, De profundis, Sacrae Meditatio), it is capable of reaching hearts and conveying a message which the spoken word alone cannot communicate. Because it contains “a certain resemblance to the truth” (Gattchtem of the Catholic Church), religious art affirms that the creation mirrors divine truth and beauty.

The program focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century representations of Marian art. For many, religious art is limited to the Renaissance and Baroque periods which have furnished innumerable images of Mary. In addition, our own period has many religious artists who, fascinated by the divine presence in the Virgin Mary, attempt to present her in a way suitable to contemporary audiences, sometimes in new and striking ways. In 1973, at the inauguration of the permanent collection of modern religious art housed in sixty rooms in the Vatican Museum, Paul VI reflected on the possibilities of modern religious art. “The Church,” he said, “has been known as the lover and teacher of the arts.” Should museums of religious art be seen as “magnificent cemeteries” offering only the work of the past? Modern art, he pointed out, is much more subjective than classical art, but for that reason it can be perceived as more human. The pope observed that modern art has a “prodigious capacity for expressing the religious, the divine, the Christian to the secularized world” (The Pope Speaks 18.2 [1973]: 141-144).

In the presidential address, Fr. George Kirwin, O.M.I., spoke of the challenge which Pope Paul VI presented to the Mariological Congress in Rome in 1975. “In what new and suitable way,” he asked, “can the Virgin Mary be presented to the attention of the Christian people so that they will be stirred to a new zeal in their devotion to Mary?” This question, he said, was important for both pastoral and catechetical activities. His reply was the “way of beauty” (via pulchritudinis). Beauty is perceived in the pleasing and harmonious forms presented through works of art. Art cannot be fully explained; it can only be experienced. “Aesthetics summons language into an articulation of what cannot be articulated.” Both art and spirituality try to convey some experience of that which the “eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not heard.” Because they point to this real but invisible reality, religious artists are “messengers of hope.”

Fr. Johann Roten, S.M. (Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute, Dayton), developed the theme “Mary and the Way of Beauty.” In the 1975 address in which Pope Paul VI challenged Mariologists to cultivate the way of beauty as a way of presenting the Marian mystery, the pope spoke of Mary’s relation to the Holy Spirit. The source of Mary’s beauty was the Holy Spirit operative within her. In Mary, the Holy Spirit produced the one who is all-beautiful. Spirit-centered Mariology is found in The Catechism of the Catholic Church: Mary is the “masterpiece of the mission of the Son and the Spirit in the fullness of time . . . the dwelling place for the Son and the Spirit.” In the liturgy, Mary is acclaimed as “Seat of Wisdom.” In her, the “wonders of God” that the Spirit was to fulfill in Christ and the Church were manifested. (CCC 721). From the moment of her Immaculate Conception, Mary is the one who most perfectly reflects the divine beauty (Vita Conscerata).

Fr. Michael T. Morris, O.P. (Dominican School of Theology, Berkeley, California), spoke of various representations of Mary from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In nineteenth-century England, the pre-Raphaelites wished to return to a more medieval and “catholic” concept of art. Their works included many representations of the Virgin Mary. Among those influenced by this movement were John Ruskin, Holman Hunt, Henry Tennyson, and Eric Gill. In France, Maurice Deri, Père Couturier, Georges Rouault and Henri Matisse initiated a more abstract style. Perhaps the most well-known example of modern Marian art coming from France is Rosary Chapel of Vence.

Fr. Nicholas Glisson (St. Vincent’s Seminary, Boynton Beach, Florida) spoke of the images of Mary as found in the apparitions of the last century and a half: the Miraculous Medal, La Salette, Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorge. With time, the representations change, the human attributes diminish, and a more stylized figure is presented.

Paul Rhetts and Barbe Awaal (Los Ranchos, New Mexico), founders and publishers of the Tradición Rivista (a periodical devoted to the religious art of New Mexico), spoke on “Traditional and Contemporary Images of Nuestra Señora in New Mexico.” Their presentation focused on a specific type of art called santos, which were simple wood carvings originally brought to the New Mexico region by the Spanish Franciscans in the 1500s. This art is rooted in the medieval tradition and never experienced the more elaborate Renaissance style. The santos are simple two-dimensional figures which represent a distinctive iconographic tradition. Most of the surviving santos date from the period 1776-1800. Among the most popular Marian representations are Our Lady of Sorrows (la Dolorosa), Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (Carmen), Mary at the Cross (Soledad), and Our Lady of Guadalupe. After 1880, the santos were replaced by other types of art.

A concluding open forum brought artists and theologians together to discuss a wide range of topics — from the relation between spirituality and art, to the economics of the art world. Religious art has many different functions: to console and confirm, but also to stimulate and challenge. Religious art

"Mother of God of Ostrobramsk" by Jan Solowianuk
On New Titles and Possible Occasions for Using the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin: Notes on the Liturgical Calendar

In 1997, the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments issued "Notes on the Liturgical Calendar and on Liturgical Commemorations" (Notitiae 372-374, vol. 35 [1997]) dealing especially with the insertion into the calendar of the memorials and feasts for the many who have been recently canonized or beatified, and with requests for liturgical commemorations for new titles of the Lord and the Virgin Mary. Some of the "Notes" are related to Marian titles and the use of the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

1) The Congregation suggests integrating the titles of the Lord and the Virgin Mary with great local significance into one of the already established feasts. It is not necessary to create a liturgical commemoration for every title. "A good practice, in regard to the liturgical celebration of traditional devotional titles of the Lord Jesus Christ or of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is to tie them to one of the feasts or solemnities of the Lord or the Virgin Mary that is found in the General Calendar . . . In the case of the Blessed Mother, it is also customary to associate them with the feast of September 12th, which was previously the feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary in the Roman Calendar. At the same time, in the same spirit of integration and clarification, it would be advisable to avoid the creation of new titles or devotional feasts for the Lord or the Blessed Mother, limiting these to the ones already in use in the liturgical books, unless they respond to a devotional feeling widely diffused among the Christian faithful and have received a prior or careful examination from a doctrinal point of view."

2) A second suggestion is a reminder and slight modification of the conditions when, during Advent, Christmas, and Easter season, some choice in the text for the Mass is permitted. This clarification is useful for determining when Masses from the Collection of the Masses of the Blessed Virgin may be used on Saturday or other times during those seasons.

The 1969 Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar wished to promote a greater consciousness of the weekdays of the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. For that reason, votive Masses during those seasons were prohibited. The optional memorial of the Blessed Virgin on Saturdays was indicated for Ordinary Time only. Following the 1969 Norms, the dioecesan calendars indicated the possibility of the Saturday commemoration of the Virgin Mary only during Ordinary Time. The Roman Missal (1974) did however allow for some "choice in Mass" on the weekdays of the Advent, Christmas, and Easter season, provided there was "genuine need and pastoral advantage" (Roman Missal 333).

The Roman Missal, since Trent up to the 1962 edition, had included formularies for the Saturday commemoration for the various seasons of the liturgical year. The elimination of the possibility of the Saturday commemoration during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter was puzzling especially after the publication of the Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1986, which contained several original votive Masses for those seasons. Although the Masses in the Collection for those seasons were intended primarily for Marian shrines, some ecclesial communities wished to have the possibility of using them occasionally on Saturday or on days when there was obligatory commemoration.

Those who wish to use the Collection outside of Ordinary Time should consider the distinction made in Table of Liturgical Days and the Roman Missal (316b and 316c) between the "high points" of the liturgical seasons and the ordinary weekdays of the season. December 17-24, Christmas and its octave, and Easter and its octave, are distinguished from the rest of the Advent, Christmas and Easter season. During the "high points" of the liturgical season, a Mass other than that assigned for the day is not permitted.

However, the weekdays of Advent before December 17, and those of the Christmas season (January 2 to Saturday after Epiphany), and during the Easter season (beginning the Monday after Easter week) have a lower rank in the Table of Liturgical Days. During those weekdays of "lower rank," the 1974 Roman Missal (316b) had stated that "any Mass inscribed in the calendar for that day may be used." The 1998 Notes appear to enlarge that possibility: during those times, "it is perfectly legitimate to celebrate a saint inscribed neither in the General nor in the dioecesan calendar for that day" (1998 Notes, #33).

In places where the Mass of the Blessed Virgin is regularly celebrated on Saturday, its judicial use during the Advent, Christmas, and Easter seasons (outside of the "high periods" of the seasons) is warranted. The Scriptural readings of the day could be retained with the eucharistic texts in the Collection. The Collection's arrangement is based on Mary's association with Christ celebrated in liturgy throughout the year. The Masses from the Collection for the Advent, Christmas, and Easter season do not detract from but enhance the liturgical season. In all cases, however, the principle from the Introduction of the Collection should be kept in mind: "...genuine Marian devotion does not demand the multiplication of Masses of the Blessed Virgin, but that in the celebration everything — readings, songs, homily, general intercessions, the offering of the sacrifice — be done with propriety, care, and a vital liturgical spirit" (Int. #37).
News from IMRI

Academic Degrees


A recent custom at Rome is the annual meeting of the pope with the pontifical academies and theological faculties of the city. The topic for this year's meeting, on November 7, 1998, was "The Virgin Mary, Icon and Model of Humanity Redeemed by Christ." The annual meeting is also the occasion for recognizing some of the outstanding academic dissertations from these academies. After his address, the pope presented the first award, which included a grant of about $35,000, to Deyanira Flores Gonzalez for her dissertation, presented at the Marianum, "The Virgin Mary at the Foot of the Cross in Rupert of Deutz." (Dr. Flores taught in the IMRI program this past summer.)

The pontifical medal was awarded to Marielle Lamy for her dissertation, "The Marian Cult between Doctrine and Devotion: Stages and Challenges in the Controversy over the Immaculate Conception in the 12th-15th Centuries" (presented at Nanterre University). The other recipient was the Austrian Johannes Schneider, O.F.M., for his thesis, "Virgo Ecclesia Ficta: the Presence of Mary on the San Damiano Crucifix and in the Officiium Passionis of St. Francis of Assisi," presented by the Antonianum Pontifical Athenaeum of Rome.

Book Notes

- Mary is for Everyone: Essays on Mary and Ecumenism contains the papers given at recent International Congresses of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The 24 papers, written by Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Melkite, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Lutheran scholars, deal with Mary in the Scriptures, systematic theology, liturgy, and spirituality. Attention is devoted to the Malines Conversations, whose 40th anniversary celebration in 1967 led to the establishment of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Edited by William McLoughlin and Jill Pinnock (available in the USA from Morehouse Publishing, PO Box 1321, Harrisburg, PA 17105).

- "Maria ispiratrice di letteratura," by Ferdinando Castelli, S.J., in Civiltà Cattolica, (Agosto 1-15, 1998): 213-226. Since the fifth century, the Virgin Mary has been part of the poetry, narrative, and drama of every Christian culture. The bibliography refers to a work of more than 700 pages of references to Mary in literature. The works of Bernados, Rilke, Sartre, Verlaine contain many Marian references.

- "Father Bede's Breakthrough," The Tablet, (12 September 1998). Bede Griffiths was an English Benedictine who, during a lifetime in India, explored the relation between Christianity and Eastern religion. In a recent book, Beyond the Darkness, Shirley du Boulay tells of his discovery of the "other half" of his soul by his "surrender to the Mother." The religious experience of the feminine led to a profound inner transformation and a "new appreciation of Mary. He found himself, though it had not been his normal custom, praying the Hail Mary constantly, finding in the Mother of God the channel through which the Holy Spirit comes into the world."


- Finally, not to be missed, is "Hidden Treasures of the Church: Art by Catholic Nuns," Christianity and the Arts (Fall, 1998). The entire issue is devoted to religious Sisters who were artists. Pictured are the works of Margaret Beaudette, S.C., Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P., M. Thomasita Fessler, O.S.F., Rita Keshock, O.S.B.M., Paul Turnbull, S.N.J.M., and many others. Requests to religious houses for this issue brought over 1,000 responses, "the largest single category of submissions dealt with the Virgin Mary and female saints." For the issue, call 312-642-8606.

The Marian Library Newsletter

Appears twice yearly and is sent to those interested in the Marian Library and the International Marian Research Institute. Donations to cover printing and postage costs—and to support the activities of the library and the institute—are gratefully accepted. If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, the return of the mailing address label would be appreciated.

Editor: Fr. Thomas A. Thompson, S.M.
Marian Library/IMRI: (937) 229-4214
FAX: (937) 229-4258

Marian Library Newsletter:

Box 1321, Dayton, Ohio 45409-1321
thompson@data.lib.udayton.edu
roten@data.lib.udayton.edu

Mary Page: http://www.udayton.edu/mary
The Marian Library/IMRI
University of Dayton
Dayton, Ohio 45469-1390

Enclosed is my contribution of ___________ to The Marian Library and IMRI.

Name ____________________________
Street __________________________
City/State/Zip ____________________

Supporting Member ........... $25
Patron ................................ $100
Benefactor ...................... $250
Any amount welcome.