Postage stamp of the West German Republic to commemorate the papal visit and the Mariological Congress at Kevelaer

1987 Mariological Congress at Kevelaer

Twice in 1987, the eyes of the Catholic world were directed to Kevelaer, a town in northern Germany developed around the shrine of Our Lady, “Comforter of the Afflicted.” On May 2, 1987, Pope John Paul came as a pilgrim to this shrine, the first stop on his pastoral visit to Germany. Later in the year, from September 9 to 22, Kevelaer hosted two congresses devoted to a study of Mary in the history and life of the church. Three hundred scholars participated in the Tenth International Mariological Congress, September 9 to 17, and over fifty thousand people attended the Seventeenth International Marian Congress, September 17 to 20.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger celebrated the opening Eucharist for the Mariological congress. In his homily, the cardinal spoke of the relation between Annunciation and Pentecost: at both events there was a birth of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit; at both events, Mary was present and played a significant part. The present renewal of the church, he said, is a rebirth of Christ accomplished through the Holy Spirit and the presence of Mary.

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The Marian Library Medal to Father Heinrich M. Koester

Every four years at the International Mariological Congress, The Marian Library Medal is conferred on a theologian whose work has contributed to a profound awareness of the role of the Blessed Virgin in the tradition and life of the church. The 1987 recipient was presented to Father Heinrich M. Koester, S.A.C., who was honored before an assembly of three hundred scholars at the International Mariological Congress at Kevelaer.

Ordained in 1937, Fr. Koester is a member of the Society for the Catholic Apostolate (Pallotine Fathers). His doctoral dissertation, directed by Michael Schmaus, was a study of Hugh of St. Victor. From 1945 to 1976, he was professor of dogmatic and historical theology on the faculty of the Pallotine theologate in Vallendar, West Germany. He was a founder and, for more than twenty-five years, secretary of the German Mariological Society.

Fr. Koester’s bibliography contains over one hundred and fifty items on doctrinal, historical, and devotional topics, of which all are related to Mary. His first two books (Die Magd des Herrn, 1947, and Unus mediator, 1951) presented a new way of considering Mary’s co-redemption. Writers of the period had emphasized Mary’s identity with Christ in the work of redemption. Fr. Koester, however, proposed as starting point for Mary’s co-redemption her solidarity with humanity. Mary stood beneath the cross as a member of the redeemed church; in the person of Mary, the need and desire of redemption found highest expression. Mary’s role is distinct from that of Christ; in Mary, the redemption of Christ is completely consented to and fully accepted.

At the 1958 International Mariological Congress in Lourdes, Fr. Koester clarified his position by proposing the distinction between the Christotypical and ecclesiotypical ways of representing Mary’s role in the redemption. Fr. Koester’s position figures prominently in Vatican II’s statement on Mary: “...because she belonged to
Our Lady's Shrine at Kevelaer

The shrine of Mary, "Comforter of the Afflicted," had its origins in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which had devastated the region of northern Germany. In 1642, Heinrich Busman, a merchant, obtained an engraving of Mary pictured in front of the city of Luxembourg, and installed it in a shrine at the crossing of the Cologne-Amsterdam trade route. In 1654, the Chapel of Mercy, a hexagonal structure, was erected to house the picture; the image has remained in that shrine. A basilica and facilities for pilgrims were later built, but the Chapel of Mercy with its image of Mary is the heart of this shrine.

After World War II, Kevelaer became a place of reconciliation between French and German Catholics. In 1948, Bishop Pierre-Marie Théas of Lourdes, one of the founders of Pax Christi meeting, came as pilgrim of peace and reconciliation to Kevelaer. The first Pax Christi was held at Kevelaer in 1949. In commemoration of this event, there is a Pax Christi chapel containing a Lamp of Peace, lit at Lourdes in 1949; every Saturday, a Mass for peace is celebrated in this chapel.

Pope John Paul II's encyclical on the Marian Year, "Mother of the Redeemer," speaks of the "geography of faith and Marian devotion," a reference to the presence of Mary, embodied in many cultures and devotions, in shrines and places of pilgrimage throughout the world. The pillars of the Pax Christi chapel are inscribed with the names of the places of pilgrimage to Mary—a reminder that all pilgrims are with Mary in a unity which transcends the characteristics of each Marian shrine.

Each year more than half a million people from Germany and the Benelux countries come on a pilgrimage to Kevelaer. Over the centuries people have been drawn to the unpretentious picture of the Virgin "Comforter of the Afflicted," and it is this attraction which may provide the real message: "The manifestation of the will of God is not to be found in the magnificent, the prodigious, the awe-inspiring, all-encompassing irreversibility—on the contrary, there is nothing so inconspicuous that He could not elevate it to achieve greatness" (Richard Schulte-Staade, Pastor of Kevelaer).
Fr. Koester's Acceptance Speech

When I heard that I would be recognized at this international assembly, I wondered whether I should accept the honor. Were there not many who merited this honor more than I did? My conviction has always been that truth and virtue should be pursued for their own sake, without thought of recognition.

However, I remember and follow the counsel given by St. Francis de Sales—"Ask for nothing, refuse nothing." So I am happy to accept this medal conferred on me by The Marian Library of the University of Dayton; it will serve as a bond between me and the academic community where I once taught (1967). I wish to thank the International Pontifical Marian Academy, founded by Father Carlo Balic (1899-1977), now under the leadership of Fr. Paulo Melada and Father Dinko Aracic. Without this pontifical organization, international gatherings of this kind would not be possible. I accept this honor also as a recognition of the German Mariological Society.

Some people have reservations—expressed or unexpressed—about Marian studies. "Why spend much time and great effort on this topic?" they ask. "Aren't there matters of greater importance with which theology should be concerned?"

True, today there are great demands on theology, and theologians must respond to the complex problems presented by this world. However, the Mother of the Church, the one whom all generations will call blessed, cannot be passed over or consigned to oblivion. Rather than be silent about Mary, we invite the whole church to appreciate and experience the beauty of Mary, God's continued on page 6

Father Heinrich M. Koester

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the offspring of Adam she is one with all those who are to be saved. . . . She is hailed as the pre-eminent and wholly unique member of the Church, and as its type and understanding model in faith and charity" (Lumen gentium, 53).

Fr. Koester's writings on Mary display a familiarity with a wide spectrum of disciplines: Scripture, classical and contemporary theology, modern philosophy, psychology, and anthropology. His works manifest his conviction that there is a Marian dimension to all revelation. In 1961, he wrote: "In Mary we see what our fallen humanity can and must be so that God can enter anew and permanently into our world; Mary is a unique manifestation of the blessing conferred on humanity in the Incarnation. What Christianity says about Mary in turn influences Christianity—its teaching about God and Christ, about sin and redemption, about eternal life and the Church" (Die Frau, die Christi Mutter war. I Teil, p.6).

In addition to his work on Mary as cooperator in the redemption, Fr. Koester has also written about Mary in the life of the believer and of the church, about Marian prayers, hymns, and devotions. Recent works have focused on Marian devotion of St. Vincent Pallotti and the spirituality of religious congregations and orders dedicated to Mary.

Fr. Koester is a pioneer in ecumenism. Long before Vatican II, he strove to make the Marian dogmas intelligible to Protestants. For him, Mary is not a topic to be broached after other issues have been resolved. In many ways, he anticipated John Paul II’s conviction that Mary can bring to unity all believers in Christ (Redemptoris mater, 30).

Fr. Koester's outlined positions and formulated distinctions which others would later adapt, sometimes without being aware of their origin. In 1952, Father Laurentin wrote that Father Koester was an author to whom everyone was indebted—even those who disagreed with him.

In this Marian Year, which is also the fiftieth anniversary of his ordination, The Marian Library is happy to recognize Fr. Koester. For more than forty years, he has gracefully and capably written on a broad range of topics, all of which are related to the Mother of Jesus. May his writings be better known, and his approach to Marian studies be followed.
A Tribute—Reflections after an Interview with Fr. Koester

by Fr. Johann Roten, Director of IMRI

When Fr. Heinrich Koester received The Marian Library Medal at Kevelaer on September 16, 1987, the whole assembly of scholars was delighted as this seventy-five-year-old theologian, his health recently restored, delivered his acceptance speech in classical Latin, punctuated with phrases from Marian hymns and prayers in modern languages.

The honor was a tribute to the indefatigable efforts and perduring enthusiasm of this scholar. But something deeper was at the same time involved. Because of the originality of many of the positions advocated by Fr. Koester, his work was not understood or accepted, even by theologians such as Karl Rahner and Yves Congar. Nevertheless, Fr. Koester’s work made significant contributions to the Mariology developed at Vatican II, and his formulations have become common parlance for theologians.

So the honor and applause at Kevelaer were directed not only to the person, but they signified also belated recognition and acceptance of his approach by a distinguished international assembly.

However, Fr. Koester does not give the impression of being a rehabilitated scholar, nor of being a venerable master, who from a distance views his previous field of endeavor. No, he is a person with sensitive intellectual antennae, finely attuned to the vibrations emanating from many sources. He is an intellectually vibrant person with insights expressed in penetrating phrases. He strives for that finely crafted phrase which will be convincing through its logic and transparency. Fr. Koester has devoted his energies for many decades to the study of Mariology and in many ways he has been formed by what he has studied. He has so assimilated his sources that they have become an part of his character.

Perhaps here lies the reason that, despite his erudition and scholarship, Fr. Koester does not give the impression of being a solitary or private individual. His field of research is broad and extensive, going beyond ordinary paths of Mariology in the wide area of the history of doctrine, psychology, anthropology. His spirituality is not isolated from theology. His writings are theological and spiritual. This intellectual, whose work has been characterized as “profoundly systematic” by Fr. Rene Laurentin, is also a musician who writes Marian hymns, an organist with a deep love for Bach. Musical structure—themes, development, counterpoint—can be discerned in his Mariological writings. Were salvation history to be represented as a fugue, then Mary, stand-

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of redemption" is presented in neither an exclusively Christotypical nor ecclesiotypical role. However, Fr. Koester’s original contribution to both modern theology and to Vatican II lies in his recovery of Mary’s ecclesiotypical identity, that is, her role within the church.

Fr. Koester’s writing is characterized by sobriety and clarity. His Mariology is permeated with the conviction that doctrines should be capable of some rational explanation. His Marian writings abound in topics for fruitful ecumenical dialogue.

Mary is part of the fibre of theology: no spirituality or apostolic movement can thrive separated from its sources. Mary is integral to every topic of theological investigation, because, as Reinhold Schneider has written, she is “the interior of the church.” For Fr. Koester, a new spring for the church means a rediscovery of Mary. No renewal is possible without her, because she is in the church’s deep undercurrents, whose purity and strength will eventually reach and blend with the waters which flow above.

Fr. Koester is convinced that the task of the theologian is not to establish meaning and symbol but rather to search out and explain what is already present. Truth becomes apparent when the investigation begins with the correct starting point and is pursued to a sufficient depth. “What is already there must become apparent.” What is needed is the skilled and artful hand to put all together in a harmonious, attractive structure. To write about Mary is a type of musical activity: all the elements are present and await integration into composition.

For Fr. Koester, the three main obstacles to a healthy Mariology are sluggish thoughts, depressed hearts, and unwholesome values. He is convinced that whoever meets Mary in a healthy encounter will of necessity come to love her. The best resource for a contemporary Mariology is the language of conviction. Two preliminary qualifications are required before this language can be used: first, the hard and pressing questions must be posed and answered in order to arrive at personal conviction, and, second, the speaker must understand the world of the person who is being addressed.

Fr. Koester believes that Mariology today is healthy. Interest is rising. He wonders though where some spiritualities, especially those founded on emotion, might be leading. Whether interest is rising or waning, Mary always remains the significant one who works in the background. She illustrates the true power of the woman. She has power at all times—present, past, and future—because it has pleased God in his goodness to make her the complementary Other in his temporal and eternal plan of salvation.

Fr. Koester’s recent writings have been on the history of his religious congregation (Fallotines). He would like to issue a third and updated version of his first book, Die Magd des Herrn, which has become a classic. He believes that tradition can always be further explored, and that in the future Mariology must be deeply grounded in the Christian tradition. What is needed is patient and persevering exploration of the tradition, rather than some leap into an obscure and undefinable new world.

He would like to edit a critical edition of the homilies of cabasilas and an edition of the Monita salutaria of Widenfeld. Here also his work is comparable to that of a musician: building phrases between themes and allowing melodies earlier sounded to be perceived much later. Fr. Koester wishes to use his strength and talents to illustrate and make apparent the wondrous deeds of God in our time. In this endeavor he imitates Mary. He well merits The Marian Library Medal.

Resources for the Marian Year


Contains new and traditional prayers: praise to God in honor of Mary, Marian antiphons, prayers of intercession, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Litany of Loreto, novena in honor of the Immaculate Conception, biblical readings.

Celebrating the Marian Year: Devotional celebrations in Honor of Mary, Mother of God. United States Catholic Conference. 97 Pp. (Minister’s edition) $5.95. (Congregational edition) 50 copies/$19.50.

Contains services of celebration: the Litany of Loreto, an invocation for Mary’s intercession, a procession with an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Rosary, Evening Prayer.


Background on the Marian Year, a new look at Mary’s role in the Gospel and her significance today, a commentary on the encyclical Redemptoris mater.
Koester's Acceptance
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blessing to the church. Certainly, the people of God has sufficient numbers to sustain some competent theologians to elucidate the mystery of Mary for the church. There need be no fear that the treasury is exhausted or that nothing relevant can be found. Human activity has two characteristics: it reaches for the highest goal but it never quite attains the goal. Such also are the characteristics of those who study and write about Mary.

What many happy hours I have spent studying, reading, reflecting, and writing on the Blessed Virgin Mary! How many friends and colleagues throughout the whole world this study has brought me! I am already rewarded. This moment is in reality a recognition of the honor which is Mary's. To have been recognized because of something done for her is an acknowledgement that Mary is worthy of all praise.

Mariological Congress
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The topic for this Mariological congress was “Marian Devotion from 1800 to 1962.” This period witnessed the proclamation of the Marian dogmas, successive apparitions of Mary beginning in 1830, and a Marian devotion, based on authentic faith, which influenced the remarkable missionary movement and the many apostolic religious congregations founded during the period. The contribution of Vatican II was to give to the Marian devotion developed during this period a greater biblical, patristic, and liturgical orientation.

The Marian congress was devoted to the theme “Mary, Mother of the Faithful.” Cardinal Macharski, Archbishop of Krakow, was the pope’s personal legate to this meeting. In his letter to Cardinal Macharski, the pope noted the ecumenical dimension of the theme of the congress: “Mary, Mother of all believers,” he said, “invites us to look again and in a new way to that which divides Christians. The study of Mary contributes to the church’s self-understanding. I am convinced,” the pope concluded, “that today’s church, faced with new problems and challenges, is in need of a deeper and more adequate understanding of the place of the Mother of God in the plan of salvation for our time.”

As at the Mariological congresses at Saragossa (1979) and Malta (1983), Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Orthodox, and Catholic theologians continued at Kevelaer the ecumenical dialogue on the role of Mary in the communion of the saints. Their joint statement, issued at the conclusion of the meeting, spoke of the “bond of indestructible love” which unites the pilgrim church on earth with those who have died and are with Christ. “Those who have reached completion in Christ—and his mother belongs to that glad company—love in him and with him all who are still on earth. An expression of this love is their prayer for us, for which we are grateful.”

The work of the congresses was divided into conferences and discussions in plenary sessions and in language groups (German, English, French, Italian, Croatian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish). The religious services included daily Morning Prayer, Eucharist, and evening procession or devotion. Choral and instrumental concerts, art displays and films were offered.

At the conclusion of the Mariological congress, Father Paul Melada, O.F.M., president of the International Pontifical Marian Academy, used the occasion to assess the present state of Mariology. Though there were many indications of a renewed and wholesome Mariology present at Kevelaer, Father Melada cautioned that this gathering at Kevelaer did not represent the whole picture. The emphasis on pastoral theology, the reduction of all devotion to liturgy, an anthropological orientation to religious studies, a concern for ecumenism have influenced Mariology and have in many places resulted in a marginalization of Mary in the life of the church.

Devotional and popular books on Mary frequently lack an adequate biblical or doctrinal foundation. The challenge to theologians is to integrate the reality of Mary into theology and the life of the church in a way which is attentive to the needs of our time and the direction of theological studies. History, he said, shows that true Marian devotion has never detracted from Christ, but, on the contrary, has led many to Christ.

International Mariological congresses for theologians are organized by the International Pontifical Marian Academy and have been held every four years since 1950. This meeting at Kevelaer was the first to take place in a German-speaking land. However, in the early part of the century, Freiburg, Einsiedeln, Salzburg, and Trier hosted international Marian congresses.
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