"May is Mary’s month, and I
Muse at that and wonder why..."

In The May Magnificat, the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins asks why May is Mary’s month. Mary’s different feasts, he reasons, are liturgically “dated due to season.” May as Mary’s month, he continues, must have something to do with “Spring,” which means “Growth in everything.” All things rising, all things sizing, Mary sees, sympathizing With that world of good, Nature’s motherhood. The poem continues, “Spring’s universal bliss / Much, had much to say / To offering Mary May,” and it concludes This ecstasy all though the mother earth Tells Mary her mirth till Christ’s birth To remember and exultation In God who was her salvation. Popular religion spontaneously dedicated the months of the year to various patrons and devotional practices. Already in the early church, Christians in the East dedicated months to Mary: the Copts had a month corresponding to our month of December, and Byzantines marked a thirty-day observance centered on the Assumption. In the northern hemisphere, the month of May was hailed in the pre-Christian era as the time of new life and growth. The Greeks celebrated Artemus, and the Romans, Flora, with festivities, games, garland decorations. Exuberant celebrations developed in the middle ages, and church authorities had to deal with the carousing and riotous conduct which erupted as May approached. The feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross (formerly on May 3) suggested a relation between the ancient Maypole and the tree of the cross, a symbol of new life. In 1549, Wolfgang Seidel, O.S.B., published at Munich Spiritual May (Der geistliche Mai), which began giving the month a new meaning. The earliest recorded association of Mary with the month of May is found in the thirteenth-century Cantigas de Santa Maria of Alfonso X. St. Philip Neri, sometimes credited with beginning May observances in Rome, encouraged youth to gather for floral and musical tributes to Our Lady. In Rome and other parts of Italy, customs and observances marking May as Mary’s month spontaneously arose in families and religious communities. A new stage in the month’s history was reached in the eighteenth century as Italian Jesuits wrote books of meditations for the month of May. The first, The Month of May or the Month of Mary (1725), by A. Dionisi, S.J., appeared to describe already existing practices -- floral decorations before a Marian image, prayers, suggested “good works” to be practiced daily. In 1758, F. Lalomia, S.J., wrote The Month of May, daily meditations for May, based on the life and attitudes of Mary; Fr. Lalomia is credited with introducing May devotions to the sodalists of the Jesuit college in Rome. The most influential of the early writers, and an ardent promoter of May observances, was A. Muzzarelli, S.J., whose The Month of Mary (1785), was reprinted over 150 times in the nineteenth century and several times in the twentieth century. Muzzarelli’s work dealt with the basic themes of the Christian life—creation, the immortality of the soul, sin, salvation, grace, the sacraments—each meditation containing references to the Virgin Mary. These meditations were intended for private use in the home, with family or friends. Fr. Lalomia’s The Month of Mary, the oldest extant work currently available on May, merits further examination. The French translation of the work (1816)

(continue on next page)
introduced French readers to the designation of May as Mary’s Month. Lalamia’s meditations were translated into German by P. Beckx, S.J. (who later served as the General Superior of the Society of Jesus, 1853-1887). Each of Lalamia’s Marian meditations consisted of three succinctly-stated points, dealing with Mary’s holiness, her role in the Incarnation, her offering of self and her cooperation with God as seen the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Purification, the joys and sorrows of her life. Directions were given on how the devotions were to be conducted: The family or the community was to gather in a fitting room of the house before an image of Our Lady... decorated with flowers.” The three points of the meditation were to be “read, slowly and distinctly, a pause sufficient for meditation being made between each point, so that the truths forming the subject of contemplation may take the deeper hold upon the mind, be applied by each to his own individual case.... The teaching or practice is also to be carefully studied.” The May observance were to begin on the eve before the first of May,” and, on the final day, there was to be an “offering of one’s heart to the Mother of God that she might strengthen it with holy fear, unshaken confidence, and ardent love of God.”

From Italy, meditations for May, “Mary’s Month,” spread rapidly through nineteenth-century Europe. In Germany, writers frequently combined the moral tradition of “practicing virtue” with the German love of flowers: each day of May was associated with a Marian and Christian quality or virtue and illustrated by a specific flower. “God is to the soul, what the sun is to nature, its light, its warmth, and its life.” French writers offered meditations for Mary on the Litany of Loreto or the mysteries of the Rosary. Although St. Alphonsus de Liguori seems not to have been aware of special May observances, his Marian writings, in English translation, were quickly adapted and proposed as May meditations. Following the example of St. Philip Neri, Cardinal John Henry Newman wrote both poetry and meditations for the month of May. His May meditations begin, “Because in this climate we have sometimes a bleak, inclement May, it is nevertheless a time of promise and hope that begins and heralds in the summer.... May is a time of promise; it is the month of Mary, the sure promise of the coming Savior.” (The Marian Library’s collection contains about a thousand books of meditations for the month of May).

At the end of the nineteenth century, Fr. Frederick Faber wrote that what began as a family devotion in Rome “has overrun the world we can hardly tell how.” Specific May practices developed. A May altar – an image of Mary with fresh flowers of the season – was a prominent feature in homes, schools, churches, the town center. Hymnals, first in Germany then in the United States, included a new type of hymn—for May devotions and processions. Programs in schools included musical and literary offerings, processions, and May crowning. May devotions were included in the evangelization and missionary movements of the nineteenth century. French, Italian, and German missionaries implanted May devotions in Asia, Africa, and South America.

After Vatican II, the celebration of special devotional months and some features of May celebrations appeared to be at variance with the liturgical calendar and the Scriptural orientation of Marian devotion. May usually falls during the Paschal season, and commemorations of the Virgin Mary during that period were to reflect the spirit of the liturgical season. Slowly, materials with a broader orientation are being developed.

Cardinal Newman observed that May belongs to the Easter season: the great feasts of the Ascension, Pentecost, and, not infrequently, the feast of the Holy Trinity are in May. “It is the time in which there are such frequent Alleluias, because Christ has risen from the grave, Christ has ascended on high, and God the Holy Ghost has come down to take His place. Here then we have a reason why May is dedicated to the Blessed Mary. She is the first of creatures, the most acceptable child of God, the dearest and nearest to Him. It is fitting then that this month should be hers, in which we especially glory and rejoice in His great Providence to us, in our redemption and sanctification in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost” (Meditations and Devotions, Pt. I. The Month of May [London: Longmans, Green, 1920]).

Resources for May:
Celebrations for the Millennium 1998. Come Holy Spirit. An adapted Rosary service with the “Mysteries of the Holy Spirit”: the Holy Spirit’s presence at the Annunciation, Visitation, the Cross, Pentecost, and in the Hearts of Christians

A Rosary for Peace (for the National Day of Prayer, January 1, 2002). Liturgical verses to accompany the Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary (USCCB Publication, No. 5-489).

Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary: 4 Masses for the Paschal Season.

For the spread of May devotions in 19th century Germany, see Kurt Küppers’ Marienfrommigkeit zwischen Barock und Industriezeitalter
Paul Hume on Church Music and Marian Hymns

Paul Hume, the music critic of The Washington Post, who drew a famous rebuke from President Harry S. Truman when he panned a vocal performance given by the president's daughter, died Nov. 26, 2001, in Baltimore. In his 1956 history of Catholic Church music, he lamented the poor taste manifest in many of the popular hymns sung at evening novena services and at May crownings.

He was greatly encouraged by Pius XII's encyclical on church music, Musicae Sacrae (1956). The encyclical stated that the texts should be in "full conformity with the doctrine of the Catholic faith...and express and explain that doctrine accurately." They should possess a religious dignity and decorum. Also, they should "use plain language and a simple melody and must be free from violent and vain excess of words." (no. 63).

In 1956-57, Mr. Hume wrote three articles for The Marianist, a magazine from the Marian Library. In the first, "Mother Dearest, Save Us" (May, 1956), Mr. Hume recalled how he had received a call from a Catholic layman who apparently was of the opinion that all Marian hymns were beyond criticism and who was irate because Hume had reviewed unfavorably the rendition at the previous evening's concert by a popular baritone of Ethelbert Nevin's "The Rosary." Hume described the melody as a "sentimental turn-of-the-century love ballad." After the phone call, Hume mused: "What, then, would he think if he knew the horrible truth about some of the musical atrocities that really are supposed to be doing honor to the Mother of God?" Some hymns sung in the Catholic Church "are very bad hymns indeed. And it is infinitely regrettable that so many from the absolute bottom of the barrel are hymns about the Blessed Mother."

The hymns were bad, not only because of the texts ("execrable poetry") but also because of the melodies: "They are anything but simple and easy to sing. Wide, swooping intervals and an unconscionable use of the sixth (or what I always think of as the 'Liebestraum leap'), rampant chromaticism (or barber-shop harmony) do not combine to make an easy-to-sing hymn. Nor does the 3/4 time in which many of these hymns are written help. Most of them, remember, come from the era when the waltz rhythm was at its height."

In the second article, "More on Mother Dearest" (November, 1956), he offered examples of good hymns which were being written by contemporary composers to replace the traditional potboilers. "Modern Church musicians are simply knocking themselves out providing you something better, friends, if only you'll listen to what they have to offer and stop fussing about 'tradition.' How, by the way, can these hymns be called 'traditional' when their average age is about seventy-five?"

The third article, "Those May Processions" (March, 1957), dealt with the "old favorites" sung during the May processions.* Why, he asked, when the Sisters in Catholic schools were promoting good music and a "solid repertoire of excellent Masses," were such bad hymns taught in the school?" The answer, "even though most of the Sisters were too tactful to come right out and mention the reason, is the man who lives in the rectory." Why such bad music in the schools? "Because there is a small, loud group of parishioners who will complain about the absence of the 'old favorites' from the May procession? What would you say to a group who called on you to insist that Elsie Dinsmore and Horatio Alger be used as reading texts in English class? These items are literary equivalents, in point of time and value, of most 'old favorite' hymns."

Hume's three articles elicited more response than any article previously or subsequently published in The Marianist. In the introduction to the third article, the magazine's editor noted that the previous two articles had brought "orchids and brickbats from all over the world." The Letters to the Editor covered the gamut. A lady in Chicago wrote, "Do you know, Mr. Hume, the more you continue to persecute the precious 'old time' hymns of Our Lady, the more they will survive: keep it up; they cannot die!" Frank J. Sheed (Catholic author and publisher) wrote: "Some hymns, like old soldiers, never die. They only sound that way."

A salute to the intrepid editor who, forty-six years ago, published Paul Hume's three articles in The Marianist, and who, on April 2, 2002, marked his ninetieth birthday--Fr. Philip J. Hoelle, S.M.

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*The "mainstay" of May processions hymns was "Bring Flowers of the Rarest, Bring flowers of the fairest..." written by Mary E. Walsh, known as the Crowning Hymn (with the refrain, "O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today, Queen of the Angels, Queen of the May"). It first appeared in the Wreath of May, 1883, and later in the St. Basil's Hymnal (1889). Another favorite was "There blooms a wondrous flower in fair Elysian fields..." (Es blüht der Blumen eine) from the St. Cecilia Hymnal, 1929.
Marian Studies in the Future

The Pontifical International Marian Academy (PAMI) has addressed a letter to students of Mariology, to those engaged in Marian apostolates, and to everyone interested in Mary of Nazareth, the woman who has been "the most powerful and popular cultural symbol of the last two thousand years" (La Madre del Signore. Memoria, presenza, speranza. Lettera della PAMI ai cultori di mariologia. Edizioni PAMI, 2000).

The letter is a type of epistemological constitution," summarizing what has been said previously and situating it within the contemporary ecclesial, social and political context. It affirms that Mariology is not an autonomous discipline, nor something apart from our current existence with its anxieties, hopes, and dangers. Mariology should continue on the path, recently undertaken, of interdisciplinary research that begins with pondering the Scriptures and continues on to embrace all areas of human knowledge and all new methodologies.

The letter is a "compendium" that covers the whole field of Mariology: its methods and principles, the challenges and prejudices it faces, its role in worship and devotion. The Mariological issues that are the subject of current debate are not ignored, nor are areas that once seemed far removed from Mariology—ethics, social life and politics (S. Cecchin, Marianum Notizie-News, n. 17).

Call for Papers: MSA 2003

The 2003 meeting of the Mariological Society of America (MSA) will be the third of three meetings on The Marian Dimension of the Christian Life: Historical Perspectives." The 2003 meeting will cover developments in the 19th and 20th centuries, with special attention to Mary's role in evangelization. Particularly desired are papers on Marian devotion in religious congregations, contemporary ecclesial movements, and the renewal of Marian devotion in older foundations after Vatican II. A preciso should be submitted to the MSA Secretary by November 1, 2002.

Books . . .


This collection of essays, to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Fr. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., was presented by the members of his Carmelite province. The work contains introductory tributes and congratulatory letters from the Prior General and the Prior Provincial of the Carmelites, nineteen essays, and, finally, a bibliography of Fr. Carroll's writings from 1941 to 2000.

Fr. George Kirwin's study, "Theologian Specializing in Marian Studies: His Contribution to a Deeper Understanding of the Marian Reality" speaks of Fr. Carroll's constant zeal in preaching and teaching "the Marian reality," in his Carmelite family and in his teaching career at the Catholic University of America, Loyola University of Chicago, and the International Marian Research Institute. Almost a founding member of the Mariological Society of America, he has contributed to virtually every meeting for the last fifty-two years.

Of the twelve essays from Carmelite authors, several deal with Carmel's history: its Marian shrines and images; its chants, feasts, and traditions; a translation of a work by Arnold Bostius (the subject of Fr. Carroll's doctoral dissertation). Other Carmelite contributions deal with current ministries and apostolates, such as the Lay Carmelites and service to poor of Guatemala ("Garbage pickers at the Nejap Dump"). Finally, there are interpretations for contemporary audiences of the meaning of traditional Carmelite traits of contemplation, silence, ministry, community.

Other essays deal with the relation of Marian studies to theology, the changed context for the expression of Marian doctrines, suggestions for Marian preaching, and the symbolism related to the ordination of woman.

The many offerings will appeal to diverse palates. Among this reviewer's favorites were John Macquarrie's essay on early Scottish religious poetry; David Blanchard's account of the scapular of Carmel as a symbol of solidarity with the poor; John Welch's contemporary interpretation of Carmelite mystical tradition; and Ernest Larkin's analysis of John of the Cross' The Dark Night.

Fr. Carroll's 80th birthday occurs as Carmel's marks its 800th anniversary. Mutatis mutandis, we extend to Fr. Carroll the wish for Carmel expressed by one of the volume's contributors: "Carmel has had 800 years of ministry in response to the Church and God's people, and, God-willing, will have many more centuries of unselfish service."


Bishop Philip Boyce outlines the place the Virgin Mary occupied in Cardinal Newman's own spiritual quest. As an Anglican, Newman had, in his own words, a "true devotion" to the Virgin Mary: his first sermon to appear in print was on Mary. After he entered the Catholic Church, he was critical of devotional practices imported from Sicily which were "not necessarily to the taste of a less exuberant race like the English." His efforts to accept the Catholic understanding of Mary involved a struggle towards a broader view of doctrinal development and a more profound grasp of Mary's role as intercessor and advocate. This second part of the book contains a selection of Newman's writings on Mary. This valuable compendium makes clear that his growing understanding of Mary was rooted in a life which, as he said, was "ever under her shadow."

Sr. Mary Catherine’s reflective work introduces us into the world of the Magnificat, which itself is a wonderfully convenient summary of themes found in the psalms and the Gospel. These themes take on new meaning as read from the loving heart of Mary and her living faith in the God of the Covenant. As the psalms speak of God’s concern for the poor, so in her song, Mary identifies with and gathers together the anawim—the poor and marginalized people of history.

Through fourteen meditations, corresponding to the verses of the Magnificat, the Scripture verses are first unraveled and then inserted into daily experience. The themes are focused and encourage a wholesome response to God’s gifts: life, gratitude, joy, humility, mercy, compassion, remembrance, servanthood, the thirst for justice, the exaltation of the lowly. The Magnificat’s concern with justice and liberation is a recurring underlying motif. The commentary has a personal anecdotal style, with directed questions and invitations to prayer. One leaves the work strengthened by the gentle lessons in prayer so well presented in Mary’s Song.


For well over a thousand years, some type of a “Marian Office” (The Little Office, the Primer) has been the vehicle for encouraging Marian devotion, and such collections have provided a more accessible and less bulky way of participating in the Church’s office of prayer. This “Marian book of hours” includes those psalms, Scripture readings, and prayers which through the centuries have been given a Marian interpretation and have nourished daily prayer. For Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, seasonal offices and readings are provided. It is a useful resource for individuals and groups. It is unfortunate that no material from The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Mary (1986) is included.


Dr. Donald Charles Lacy, “a son of Indiana,” has pastored United Methodist churches in Indiana since 1958, and for more than forty years, this seasoned preacher has written on many topics related to ecumenism. His writings stem from “a warm heart, open mind, and willing spirit, with the joyous imperative, ‘woe be unto me if I leave these words unsaid,’ persistently present.” In 1979, his *Mary and Jesus*, a series of Advent meditations for clergy and laity, described the relation between mother and son in well-organized essays which skillfully combined Scripture, doctrine, and pastoral experience. In his newspaper columns, he writes that Mary “transcends all denominations,” and he suggest a way that all Christians can pray the Hail Mary. His tips for writers include the suggestion that “writing that is truly significant is born from the wedding of the human and the Divine.” These writings reflect that wedding of faith and experience, and they are evidence of the ecumenical spirit which characterizes the disciples of John Wesley.


The phoenix is a symbol of beauty, and, as it rises from its ashes, a symbol of immortality. Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Mexican phoenix refers both to the beauty of the image but also to its recrudescence at crucial moments of Mexican history. This work of social and intellectual history by David Brading, University of Cambridge, covers five centuries of Mexican and Guadalupan history. It deals with the sources and the transmission of the original account of the apparition, and, significantly, includes the Scriptural, and even sacramental interpretations, which early preachers ascribe to the apparition and the image. It also deals with the consequences that Guadalupan history has on the Mexican ethos and character. In 1645, Miguel Sanchez first wrote in Spanish the oral tradition of the apparition of 1531.

He also extolled the image in panegyric, almost apocalyptic language, motivated in part to elevate the Spanish Mexicans (criollos) to the level of those born in Spain. There was also an account of the apparitions in Nahuatl—the Nican Mopohua (subject, in the last decade, to intense investigation). The principal events in Guadalupan history—1746, declaration of Our Lady of Guadalupe as patroness of New Spain; 1895, the solemn coronation of the image; 1990, the beatification of Juan Diego (the process began in 1939)—have all been rallying points for the Mexican Church. Guadalupe was prominent in Miguel Hidalgo’s struggle for independence from Spain in the nineteenth century and in the flags of the Cristeros in their opposition to the Mexican anticlerical governments of the twentieth century. And, although this is only suggested in Brady’s work, the normalization of Church-state relations which occurred in Mexico in 1992 could in part be attributed to John Paul II’s words at Guadalupe and to the beatification of Juan Diego, a representative of all of Mexico’s indigenous peoples.

The last sections of the book, outlining the controversies which have erupted in the last century over the “historicity” of the apparitions, the beatification of Juan Diego, and the current investigation of the Nican Mopohua may be the most interesting. The conclusion—that Guadalupe is a divinely-inspired work, inspired even though its “historicity” may be wanting—may disappoint some but it also may convert skeptics. Reading this impressive and at times ponderous work requires discipline, but the efforts are rewarded by insights into Mexican character and by intimations on how divine messages are communicated.
Updates...

On February 25, 2001, Pope John Paul II appointed Fr. Vincenzo Battaglia, O.F.M., of the Pontifical Antonianum Athenaeum (Rome) as president of the International Pontifical Marian Academy.

The René Laurentin Pro Ancilla Domini Award was conferred upon the Group de Dombes, an ecumenical organization composed of Catholics and Protestants, for their document addressed to the churches, Mary in the Design of God and the Communion of Saints (Paulist Press will soon publish an English translation of this important text). The document is the result of several years of work and indicates how areas of disagreement could be converted into areas of agreement.

The citation for the award affirms the study's conclusion: based on the investigation and suggestions proposed, "nothing permits us to make Mary a symbol of what divides us."

On June 7-8, 2001, Msgr. Jacques Perrier, bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, hosted a meeting at Lourdes, "Mary in the Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue." In his address, Cardinal Francis Arinze (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) spoke of references to Mary in Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and proposed that the world's religions seek convergence in Mary as an example for women, an inspiration for cultivating family and life values, and a model of openness to God (Documentation catholique, #2265 [3 March 2002]).

Dedicated to promoting family unity through the rosary, The Holy Cross Family Ministries' website (www.hcfm.org) has reflections on the Family Rosary and on family prayers.

John M. Haffert, a man whose entire life was dedicated to making known the message of Fatima and promoting the Brown scapular, died October 31, 2001. During the 1940s and 1950s, he made the message of Fatima better known in the United States than perhaps anywhere else. In 1946, he developed the "Fatima Message Pledge" and assisted in the founding of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima (World Apostolate of Fatima), which now claims millions of members all over the world. In the 1950s, he traveled across the United States with the International Pilgrim Virgin Statue of Our Lady of Fatima. He was responsible for the construction of the Blue Army's International Headquarters in Washington, New Jersey, and Domus Pacis in Fatima, Portugal, through which millions have heard the message of Fatima.

Christianity and the Arts (Fall, 2001) In addition to essays, poetry, and fiction related to "the Madonna," there is a section where readers identify and comment on their favorite image of Mary. Among the images were Our Lady of Czestochowa (Fr. Richard John Neuhaus); Christ and the Virgin in Michelangelo's Last Judgment (Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.); the Belle Verrière (Rev. Frank T. Griswald).

The Missale Romanum, (editio typica teria) was approved by Pope John Paul II on March 18, 2002. New material includes eight Masses from The Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1986). Among the new twenty-nine new commemorations added to the calendar are Our Lady of Fatima (May 13), and the Most Holy Name of Mary (Sept. 12).

From IMRI . . .

The following have presented and successfully defended their written theses for the Licentiate in Theology (Marian Studies) at the International Marian Research Institute:

- P. Antonio Larocca, S.M.C. (Barquisimeto, Venezuela): Magisterio y Sentido de la Fe: Estudio de la Relación entre Textos Mariológicos del Magisterio y la Devoción Mariana en Latino America, Venezuela y la Arquidiócesis de Barquisimeto (November 30, 2001).
- Mr. Michael A. Scherschligt: To Jesus through Mary: History and Theology (March 16, 2002).

An online course, "Mary in Catholic Teaching," with the possibility of gaining CEU's will be offered through the University of Dayton's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives. Fr. Bert Buby will be the coordinator. For more information: www.udayton.edu/mary/intro.htm

On August 31, 2002, the Marian Library/IMRI will remember with great gratitude Arthur W. Clinton, Jr. on the tenth anniversary of his death (1992). In his will, Mr. Clinton bequeathed a substantial sum to the Marian Library. Because of his generous bequest, this newsletter is coming to you. All contributions help our work. Do remember the Marian Library/IMRI in your will.

Maiden, Woman, Mary

Maiden of Nazareth,
Your heart was open
To hear and embrace God's holy Word.
Teach us to listen and, with you, to pray:
Fiat! Magnificat! Glory to God.

Woman of Nazareth,
Your arms were open
To welcome the poor, to comfort the weary.
Teach us to be like you, humble and loving.
Fiat! Magnificat! Glory to God.

Mary of Nazareth,
Virgin and Mother,
Daughter of God and Spouse of the Spirit,
Teach us to learn from you
How to bring Christ to earth.
Fiat! Magnificat! Glory to God.

Agnes Cunningham, SSCM
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