The Immaculate Conception:
Gift and Sign

The year 2004 marks the 150th anniversary of Blessed Pius IX's solemn definition of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854, a "day forever memorable in the Church's annals." The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, defined by Blessed Pius IX, was the result of a long historical process, involving the faithful people's sense of what is from God (sensus fidelium), the work of theologians, and the responsibility of the popes for overseeing, moderating, and defining beliefs. After centuries of discussion and the 1849 consultation with the world's bishops, the pope proceeded with the solemn definition that "the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her conception, by a singular privilege and grace of God, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, was preserved free from all stain of original sin . . . ." The doctrine as defined in 1854 is couched in precise language, the product of a specific cultural and historical context, but it was not intended as the end or the final word on the doctrine. The great blessing given to Mary was unique, but not something isolated or unrelated to us and the Church. Doctrines are defined not to satisfy theological curiosity, but to complete our knowledge of God's plan for us. "Dogmas are lights along the path of faith; they illuminate it and make it secure" (CCC 88).

The Immaculate Conception challenges us to believe in God's love and providence for us long before we came to be. It urges us to think about the good God's original design for our existence. The Letter to the Ephesians tells us that Christ was part of God's original design. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing . . . to be holy and without blemish before him" (Eph. 1, 3). In Mary's sinlessness, the blessing of God is complete and manifest. "The splendor of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is 'enriched from the first instant of her conception' comes wholly from Christ: she is 'redeemed in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son.' The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person, 'in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' and chose her 'in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him in love' (CCC 492).

Mary's sinlessness is a part in God's plan of coming to dwell with us. In the Scriptures, God speaks of his desire to be with us and that we become his people. The Ark of the Covenant, the Temple, the symbols prefiguring the sacraments are all part of God's initiative to be with us. The most important part was the preparation of a human person to become God's "worthy dwelling place." Within Mary, humanity's restoration to God's love and grace was completed. "To become the mother of the Savior, Mary 'was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.' The angel Gabriel at the moment of the Annunciation salutes her as 'full of grace.' In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace" (CCC 490).

Mary's holiness is a "sign of favor to the Church at its beginning." The Immaculate Conception speaks about the Church who looks to Mary as its model and icon anticipating that which the Church hopes one day to be. We profess our belief in the holiness of the Church, while painfully aware of our own sinfulness. Although sinful in its members, at the Church's center is Mary: "But while in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle, the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary," in her the Church is already "all-holy" (CCC 89).

Similarly, the Church sees in the Immaculate Conception "the promise of its perfection as the bride of Christ, radiant in beauty." It is the sure sign that Christ will never abandon the Church, his spouse. It is the sign that Christ will continue to purify the Church and prepare it to be united with himself as the bride without spot or wrinkle.

The Immaculate Conception also speaks to us of Mary's love for God. Mary is the "most excellent work" of Christ's salvation, redeemed by a "sublime grace." The Immaculate Conception is a divine gift establishing Mary in the dominion of love. She is humanity's "original face" - the one person with an undivided heart who represents the hope of humanity searching for a future of peace, justice, harmony, and community.

In her sinlessness, Mary is the "beginning of the new cre-
The Immaculate Conception – From Liturgy and the Popular Devotion

Witness of the Liturgy

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, defined on December 8, 1854, involved to a greater and longer extent than any other doctrinal development the participation of the people. The definition of doctrine was preceded by centuries of theological debate, especially between the Franciscans and the Dominicans. However, the decisive and persistent factors confirming Catholic belief in the Immaculate Conception were, as St. Alphonsus de Liguori noted, its spontaneous adoption in the liturgy of local churches and religious orders, long before there was central regulatory authority, and the prolonged witness of the faithful that this truth was part of divine revelation.

The celebration of “St. Anne’s Conception” first occurred in the Byzantine East about the seventh century. The feast entered the West through southern Italy about the ninth century. There are some claims that the feast, known originally in the West as “Mary’s Conception”, was celebrated in England and Ireland in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and in Normandy in the 1100s. We know that the feast was observed by the Canons of Lyon, much to the disapproval of St. Bernard. The feast was found in the calendars of many dioceses and religious orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines, Cistercians) with a great variety of hymns, lessons, prayers. In the middle ages, the feast was known as the “Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” and, in Dominican circles, as the “Sanctification of the Virgin Mary.” In 1477, Pope Sixtus IV introduced the feast in the churches of the city of Rome. It was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the feast was universally termed the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.

Popular Devotion

While Mary’s holiness and freedom from sin were affirmed in Christianity’s first millennium, the question of Mary’s freedom from original sin was initiated by a monk, an associate of St. Anselm, Eadmer of Canterbury (+1150) who, in his work The Conception of the Virgin Mary, asked whether the power of God could preserve someone from original sin. While this teaching was generally rejected by the Scholastic theologians as contrary to Christ’s redemption extending to all who were saved, it was Blessed Duns Scotus who held that God was capable of preserving a person from original sin, and that the “perfect mediator requires some perfect act of mediation . . . greater gratitude is due from one who is preserved from sin than from one who is rescued from sin.”

From the fifteenth century on, Catholic people at all levels became involved in the “pious belief,” as it was then known, concerning whether, when, and how Mary was exempted from all stain of sin. At the Council of Basle, 1439, a debate on the subject occurred, and it was proposed that the people’s allegiance to the “pious teaching” be the reason the council should offer a definitive statement. The council did state that Mary “in virtue of a singular prevenient and operative divine grace was never really subject to original sin.” Because of the many difficulties surrounding the council, the statement never received a papal approval. It was primarily through the liturgy and Catholic devotion that the doctrine survived.

Interest in the question increased after the Council of Basle, especially in Spain and France. Confraternities and religious organizations dedicated to Mary’s sinlessness were founded. Parish and religious families began taking oaths to defend the “pious teaching.” A few years ago, the Marian Library received a letter from the parish community, San Nicolás (Villalpando, Zamora), claiming that on November 1, 1466, representatives from the twelve areas served by the parish assembled “binding both the leaders and the entire area to defend even at the cost of their blood and of their lives, that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived free from sin . . . .”

The universities weighed in on the discussion. In 1497 the Sorbonne required an oath to uphold the teaching from all those acquiring academic degrees, as did Oxford, Cambridge, Toulouse, and Bologna. Towns and churches erected signs at their entrance speaking of their pledge to defend the teaching. We know that, shortly after his conversion, St. Ignatius of Loyola was ready to attack a traveling companion who denied Mary’s sinlessness. Many religious communities in their dedication to Mary “pledged themselves to defend the Immaculate Conception.”

Several factors combined to produce in 17th century Spain an atmosphere contributing to an animated participation of the people. The stirring preaching of the “maculists” (generally Dominicans) against “immaculists” (generally Franciscans) frequently caused unrest. Estimates are that in the 17th century
over 6,485 treatises (pamphlets) were published favoring “the immaculata” position, with a comparable number taking the contrary view. This was the era which produced the great paintings of Murillo, de Velázquez and others.

The Spanish monarchs were involved in the discussion. Philip IV carried on a 22-year correspondence (1643-1665) with a cloistered Franciscan and mystic, Sor María de Agreda, who strongly favored the teaching. Philip made the matter an “affair of state” by regularly sending legates to Rome to promote the teaching. The Spanish Plaza (Piazza di Spagna) in Rome, with its column surmounted with the statue of the Immaculate Conception, decorated each December 8, is a reminder of this period. In reply to the Spanish intervention, Alexander VII issued in 1661 a decree (Sollicitudo omnium ecclesiarum), frequently considered the “turning point” in the development of the doctrine, which, without condemning the opposing opinion, stated the preference of the Holy See for the “pious belief.” In 1695, the observance of the Office and Mass of the Conception of Mary was granted to the whole church, and in 1708, it was established as a holy day of obligation.

**The Immaculate Conception – Victory over Evil**

In post-Tridentine Catholicism, belief in Mary’s sinlessness was coupled with a confidence in her power over evil and her assistance to the Church. When Pius V approved the rosary in 1569, he noted that the “Virgin Mary alone had crushed all heresies and the head of the serpent.” Genesis 3: 15, the key text related to the Immaculate Conception, was interpreted as Mary’s victory over evil, and presentations of the Immaculate Conception almost always included Mary’ crushing the head of the serpent.

After the French Revolution, immediately upon his return from exile, as a first step in “the rechristianization of France,” Blessed William Joseph Chaminade founded the Bordeaux Sor­dality of the Immaculate Conception on February 2, 1801, in the hope, as he later confided, it would be “in all humility, the heel of the woman.” In 1839, he wrote, “Every period in the history of the church has its record of the combats and glorious victories of the august Mother of God. Ever since the Lord has sown dissension between her and the serpent, she has constantly vanquished the world and the powers of hell. Today the great prevailing heresy is religious indifference ... It is our firm belief the she will subdue this heresy like all the rest, for she is today as she ever was, the incomparable Woman, the Woman of promise, who is to crush the head of the infernal serpent.”

**The Medal of the Immaculate Conception**

An important step in the development of the belief was the Miracu­lous Medal, originally the Medal of the Immaculate Conception. In the second of three apparitions, on No­vember 27, 1830, St. Catherine Laboure, at the time a novice of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, saw an image of Mary standing on a globe with rays of light coming from her hands, a sign of the help she wished to bestow. The image was framed with the words, “O Mary, con­ceited without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.” The reverse of the medal showed the letter M surmounted by a cross with a bar; below it were the hearts of Jesus and Mary, all sur­rounded by the Twelve Stars of the Apocalypse. Catherine was instructed: “Have a medal struck from the image and those who wear it will receive the protection of the Mother of God.”

The first medals were made in 1832 and distributed in Paris, mainly through Catherine’s confessor, Fr. Aladel. Mary’s prom­ise of protection assured a great demand for the medal. 50,000 were distributed in 1832, and 500,000 in 1834. By the end of the nineteenth century, more than a 100 million medals covered the entire world. Distributed by the disciples of St. Vincent de Paul, the Apostle of the Poor, it was cast in the cheapest metal available, and became known as the Medal of the Poor, particu­larly sought in time of plague or war.

Cardinal Lambruschini, later papal secretary of state, referred to the medal as a “providential sign,” and, at her canonization in 1947, Pius XII said that Catherine was one of those “chosen by heaven, to quietly contribute to the enrichment of the definition.” The events in the chapel of Rue du Bac were responsible for the establishment of influential Marian associations in Paris, among them the Archconfraternity of the Immaculate Heart, and for notable conversions—especially that of Alphonsus Ratisbonne in Rome, 1843.

**The Immaculate Conception as Patroness of the United States – 1846**

In 1846, the American bishops at the Sixth Provincial Coun­cil of Baltimore, led by Archbishop Eccleston, with twenty-two bishops in attendance, chose the Immaculate Conception as the patroness of the United States and made December 8 the patronal feast of the country. In their Pastoral Letter of 1846, the bishops wrote, “We take this occasion, brethren, to communicate to you the determination, unanimously adopted by us, to place ourselves, and all entrusted to our charge throughout the United States, under the special patronage of the holy Mother of God, whose Immaculate Conception is venerated by the piety of the faithful throughout the Catholic Church.” The bishops also requested that the word Immaculata be inserted in the Office and Mass of December 8 and the invocation “Queen conceived without original sin” become part of the Litany of Loreto. (In 1791, Bishop John Carroll’s Baltimore Synod had named the Virgin Mary as patroness of the Diocese of Baltimore, which then embraced the whole United States.)

**Lourdes and the Immaculate Conception – 1858**

The Catholic world was profoundly influenced by the appar­itions to St. Bernadette Soubirous which occurred at the grotto of Lourdes in 1858 and by the consequent miracles reported there. On March 25, 1858, at the repeated request of Bernadette, the lady revealed her name: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” This
identification, a confirmation of the doctrinal pronouncement made in 1854, immediately forged together the long movement of popular devotion with the doctrinal pronouncement. Pius IX referred to the événement of Lourdes as a “brilliant truth.” His successor, Leo XIII keenly followed the events at Lourdes, and, in 1883, the silver anniversary of Lourdes, began his series of twelve encyclicals on the rosary, the prayer central to the message of Lourdes.

December 8, 1854 – “A Day Forever Memorable in the Church’s Annals”

Elected pope in 1846, Blessed Pope Pius IX could not help being influenced by the burgeoning Marian devotion of the period. The papal secretary of state, Cardinal Lambruschini promoted, especially through his writings, the definition of the Immaculate Conception. Among the hundreds who wrote on the topic, three were particularly significant: in 1847, Giovanni Perrone, S.J., papal advisor and a most respected theologian, wrote a work, which went into ten editions, affirming that the Immaculate Conception could be defined as a dogma of faith; Carlo Passaglia, S.J., compiled three volumes of testimony from the early Church favorable to the Immaculate Conception; and the influential Dom Prosper Guéranger wrote a work which the pope said was “the best thing he had seen... on the subject.” At the same time, three volumes of the petitions to the Holy See to define the Immaculate Conception were published.

In 1849, Pius IX, from Gaeta, his residence-in-exile, sent an encyclical to the world’s bishops asking that “you make known to us as soon as possible what devotion your clergy and faithful people entertain towards the conception of the Immaculate Virgin, and what may be their disposition to see this matter defined by the Holy See.” Of the 603 bishops consulted, 546 replied favorably to a definition; 56 opposed it for various reasons - four or five opposed “defining” the doctrine, others questioned the “opportueness” of the declaration.

The final text of the apostolic letter, Ineffabilis Deus, was written by the pope, who worked with his secretary. The document relied on the way in which the relevant passages of Scripture were understood and preached by the ancient ecclesiastical writers:

a) Genesis 3:15 “I will place enmity between thee and the women, between thy seed and her seed.' [The Fathers and writers of the Church] taught that in this divine prophecy the merciful Redeemer of the human race was clearly foretold, and that his most Blessed Mother was designated, and that the enmity of both against the serpent was at the same time remarkably expressed.”

b) Mary, the Second Eve – “The Blessed Virgin constantly added to the gift originally given her, and not only never lent her ear to the serpent, but, by a power divinely received, utterly shattered his strength and power.”

c) Mary’s Sinlessness — The Blessed Virgin was “never in darkness, but always in light; she was, as a result, a perfectly suitable dwelling place of Christ...”

d) Mary’s Dignity as Mother of God – Our ancestors in the faith spontaneously referred to the Mother of God as immaculate, all-immaculate.

e) The Liturgy as a Witness – Reference to Mary’s sinlessness has passed almost spontaneously into the liturgy where she is invoked as the spotless dove of beauty, the rose ever blooming, the second Eve, who brought forth Emmanuel.

The papal pronouncement concluded: “... We, by the authority of Jesus Christ our Lord, of the Blessed Apostles, Peter and Paul, and by Our Own, declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Blessed Virgin Mary, at the first instant of her Conception, by a singular privilege and grace of the omnipotent God, in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind, was preserved free from all stain of original sin, has been revealed by God, and therefore is to be firmly and constantly believed by all the faithful.” A witness to the event, Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman, Archbishop of Westminster, termed December 8, 1854, “a day forever memorable in the Church’s annals...”

Anniversaries

1904

♦ On the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation, Pope St. Pius X wrote the encyclical (Ad Diem Illum) dedicated to the Immaculate Conception where he spoke of Mary’s spiritual motherhood and of her mediation. He also referred to “the wonderful manifestations of the Virgin herself began in Lourdes which have resulted in those two temples dedicated to the Immaculate Mother, where the prodigies which still continue to take place through her intercession furnish splendid arguments against the incredulity of our days.”

♦ In 1904, students at the University of Dayton (then St. Mary’s Institute) organized the “Jubilee Monument” of the Immaculate Conception — an idea coming from the sodality group of Fr. Augustine Frische, S.M. The Monument Fund Association, headed by Mr. Alex Schoen, ’04, sponsored a number of activities to raise the $3,000 for the statue. Groundbreaking occurred on June 18, 1904. The American granite pedestal and column was from Barre, Vermont, while the statue of white Carrara marble came from Italy. The image of Mary was that of the Miraculous Medal, as described to St. Catherine Labouré. The statue was blessed and dedicated on Sunday, December 9, 1904, by the Archbishop of Cincinnati, the Most Rev. Henry J. Moeller, in the presence of the faculty, students, and representatives of the parishes in Dayton. Present were Clement Barnhorn, the designer, and Frank Kronauge, an alumnus, the constructor of the monument.
Now, the author feels able to present an image of Mary which is "theologically sound, ecumenically fruitful, spiritually empowering, ethically challenging, and socially liberating." The search took many turns. In preparation for this work, the author researched the image the Virgin Mary in previous eras. From these earlier studies, she concluded that the patriarchy of the Christian tradition had shortchanged the image of God. Although Mary may have imaged the female qualities of God, "restoring to the holy mystery those elements borne by the figure of Mary can be one contribution toward a doctrine of God freed from the biases and restrictions of patriarchy. Concomitantly, relieving the figure of Mary of its historic burden of imaging God in female form can also remove from the Marian tradition one source of its tendency to distortion and set it more firmly on a gospel path, to ecumenical advantage" ("Mary and the Female Face of God," Theological Studies [1989] 504).

The book is lucidly structured, with interlocking chapters, each presenting an impressive summary of contemporary scholarship. The feminist hermeneutical principles which guide the work are given in the opening chapters; Mary is to be presented not as "transcendent symbol" but as an "historical person." In the description of Miriam of Nazareth's world, there is much valuable material on first-century Galilee: its social, cultural, political, economic situation, the recent archaeological excavations in Galilee, and the religious world of Second Temple Judaism.

The last section begins with impressive commentary on twelve passages of Scripture – featuring the Holy Spirit's relation to Mary, as well as the similarity of Mary's plight to that of so many of the world's marginalized. The final chapter on the Communion of Saints is the glorious denouement, where the Spirit-Sophia who weaves connections brings all together. All separating boundaries are broken down, and a vastly diverse people become one. Within "cloud of witnesses" are "paradigmatic figures" who accompany us and wonderfully exemplify what we are called to be.

The final chapters are truly exhilarating. Nevertheless, questions arise, some of which may be left over from the author's previous work – She Who Is. Much as we try to purify the Trinity of "a dreadfully masculinized conception of the Godhead" (Teilhard de Chardin), we cannot abandon the language of the Scriptures or the Creed. We wonder too whether presenting Mary and the saints as "paradigmatic figures" but rejecting the notion of them as "transcendent symbol" as patronizing accomplishes much. Many feel the need for being lifted and transformed.

The Communion of Saints surpasses the limits of the Church. It stretches "backward and forward" in time, including the "great and diverse multitude of people who are continually being connected to God and one another in a unique history" – a description similar to the eschatological communion where God will be all in all. But in the meantime, what images might help us to cope with the sinful realities in which we find ourselves?

One book cannot say everything. This is a work, one of few there are, which speaks almost exclusively of Mary as the woman related to the Holy Spirit. The author notes "I have not forgotten Mary as the mother of Jesus," but, "the Christian tradition of art and liturgy has forgotten [Mary and] the Galilean Jewish women with her..." But just as Christ without the Holy Spirit is incomplete, so we wonder about a work on Mary and Holy Spirit with little reference to Christ. It is a most rewarding volume, we hope not the final word, written perhaps, as Augustine said of his own work, "while we continue to search."
Mary in the Church: A Selection of Teaching Documents
USCCB Publishing, 2003

A collection of recent documents on Mary from the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, intended as a resource for those "desiring a deeper understanding of Mary's role in Christianity." In the Foreward, Bishop Wilton D. Gregory writes, "It is to be hoped that this compendium of important Catholic documents on the Mother of God will enrich the faith and love of all who seek to imitate her on their way to Christ."


My Soul Magnifies the Lord: A Scriptural Journey with Mary.

Suitable for personal reflection or group discussion, twelve chapters present scenes from Mary's life together with the Scriptures and well-chosen explanatory comments. Each chapter also contains Pondering the Word, with questions on the Scriptural data, and Living the Word, with the challenges to live the Word in daily life.


Frequently, the selection of music for liturgy at a Sunday during one of the "Marian months" sets liturgists on one side and advocates of Marian devotion on the other. The recent Directory of Popular Piety and Liturgy suggests that some traditional Marian hymns might be revised to include a biblical and ecclesial dimension, and that the Marian seasons could be harmonized with the current liturgical season. Five sound liturgical considerations are given indicating how the Marian presence can be highlighted in the liturgy, as well as five suggestions for selecting music both in accord with the spirit of the liturgy and with Marian devotion. Among the suggestions are a close examination of the suitability of a text, the use of a traditional hymn with a Marian reference or "flavor," and the possibility of a Marian "hymn festival."


At the beginning of the 19th century, the dossier of the writings of Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort submitted to begin his canonization process inadvertently contained items which were not authentic works of de Montfort, such as compilation of texts made by preachers for their personal use and The Love of Eternal Wisdom, written after de Montfort's death by Charles Besnard (1717-1768). When, in the 1980s, the movement developed, encouraged by John Paul II, to have de Montfort declared a Doctor of the Church, the same dossier of his writings was submitted. In 2001, the Congregation for the Cause of the Saints replied that the writings, as submitted, did not give evidence of "balanced doctrinal synthesis" and suggested that the inauthentic writings be withdrawn from the dossier.


• Peter Phan, "Mary in Vietnamese Piety and Theology," Theology Digest 49:3 (Fall, 2002)

Vietnamese Catholicism bears the imprint of four centuries of missionary activity, especially the French Société des Missions-Etrangères de Paris, which left an indelible mark on Vietnam with its activities from the 17th century to 1975. Another influence was the Congregation of Mary Co-Redemptrix, founded by a Vietnamese priest in 1941 (170 members of this congregation settled in Carthage, Missouri, after the fall of Saigon, 1975). Alexandre de Rhodes, most responsible for the transcription of the Vietnamese language into a Romanized script, introduced traditional Vietnamese postures of bowing as part of Marian devotion. Two Marian apparitions occurred, both during time of persecution: Our Lady of La Vang (1802) and Our Lady of Tra Kieu (1885). Vietnamese culture and tradition would welcome an image of Mary compassionate and all powerful, as a response to Confucian patriarchalism and to androcentric dominance. In a land where Catholics form less than one-tenth of the population, Mary could also be the topic of dialogue with Buddhism and Confucianism.

Once again, Christmas crèches from the Marian Library's Collection of Nativity sets were on display at the Dayton Art Institute; St. Peter in Chains Cathedral, Cincinnati; The Marian Library; and St. John Gallery/Bergamo.

The Marian Library appears twice yearly and is sent to those interested in the Marian Library and the International Marian Research Institute. Contributions to cover printing and postage costs - and to support the activities of the library and institute - are gratefully accepted. If you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, just write "cancel" on the mailing address and return it to the Marian Library.

Editor: Fr. Thomas A. Thompson, S.M.
Marian Library/IMRI: (937) 229-4214
FAX (937) 229-4258
Maristological Society of America (937) 229-4294
johann.roten@notes.udayton.edu
thomas.thompson@notes.udayton.edu
On September 4, 2003, an introductory lecture and a gala reception, attended by more than two hundred people, marked the opening of the “The Mother of God: Art Celebrates Mary,” an exhibit in the Marian Library and Roesch Library galleries. Described as an “intimate collection of Marian art,” the exhibit included thirty-eight paintings and sculptures from the permanent collection of the Vatican Museums, drawn from several collections – Antiquities, Pinocoteca, the Missionary-Ethnological section. The exhibit spanned seventeen centuries of Christian art and reflected many cultures. The oldest pieces were marble fragments from fourth-century tombs with references to “eternal life” and a seated Mary presenting the Christ to the Magi. The two largest pieces were paintings – “Madonna and Child” from Giovanni Battista Salvi (called Sassoferrato) and “The Vision of Cajetan of Thiene.” From the Missionary-Ethnological Collection were an indigenous Madonna from Papua, New Guinea (which the local bishop donated to the Vatican), and the remarkable eight-inch high “Madonna and Child,” an ivory carving from the Ming dynasty, which followed the natural curve of the tusk, full of intricate detail, including a lotus flower, symbol of purity and longevity, and a Chinese dragon.

Over 10,000 persons visited the exhibit, including many school groups and seniors’ organizations. The exhibit was unpacked and set up by three workman who came from Rome and who returned at the exhibit’s end to repack the items and prepare them for the return trip. Volunteers acted as docents, tour guides, and attendants. Thanks are extended to the personnel of the Marian and the Roesch Libraries of the University of Dayton for their many hours of service which made possible this extraordinary exhibit. The entire collection can be see at udayton.edu/mary/gallery/vatican-page.html

Visitors to the Vatican exhibit were able to see the Marian Library’s exhibit of over 400 rosaries from around the world, an eclectic exhibit from Japan, Korea, Vietnam, France, Italy, Ireland and Czechoslovakia, among other countries. Some rosaries are dedicated to specific saints, such as Raphael, Anthony and Bernadette. The number of beads also varies: some have 33 beads for the life of Jesus on earth; others hold 63 beads for the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The exhibit includes rosaries from the Marian Library’s own collection, 300 from the collection of Mike Berhorst in St. Louis, along with contributions from the Immaculate Heart of Mary Ministries in Oregon and from Fr. Robert Hughes, S.M.

The next meeting of the Mariological Society will take place in Houston, TX, May 19-22, 2004: “The Immaculate Conception: Human Destiny and Vocation.”

The 25th International Marian-Mariological Congress will be held in Rome, December 4-8, 2004: “Mary of Nazareth Welcomes the Son of God into the World.”
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