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REPORT, 1998–99: THE NEW ENGLAND REGION

The New England Region of the Mariological Society of America held its annual meeting at Providence College, Providence, R.I., on Saturday, September 26, 1998. The Reverend Matthew Morry, O.P., S.T.D., director of the New England Region, opened the meeting at 10:00 A.M. The Most Reverend George H. Pearce, S.M., D.D., offered a prayer and blessing for the one hundred and twenty-five members in attendance. Fr. Morry then introduced the Keynote Speaker, the Reverend Frederick Michael Jelly, O.P., S.T.D., professor of systematic theology at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary, Emmitsburg, Maryland. Fr. Jelly presented "Mary and the Holy Spirit."

Fr. Jelly noted that if we desire to be inspired to live as people of hope, it is important for us to center upon the contemplation of Mary in her unique relationship to the Holy Spirit. Now, the Church continuously perseveres in prayer with Mary. This highlights the intimate unity between Mary and the Church: from the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit at the Annunciation to the Spirit's descent upon Mary and the disciples at Pentecost.

Sacred Scripture nuances this special relationship. The Old Testament offers the *Ruab-Yahweh* in the creation and identity of the human being in the image of God. In the New Testament, the Spirit overshadows Mary for the New Creation in the conception and birth of Christ in Mary. Mary is the Ark of the New Covenant containing the presence of God in our midst; she conceives and gives birth to the New Adam. Fr. Jelly stressed how the witness of St. Luke recalls Isaiah and Ezechiel as they described the coming of the *Ruab-Yahweh*; the Visitation's witness of the Presence of the Holy Spirit with Mary; the parallel account of the birth of Christ in the gospel and the birth of the Church in the first two chapters of Acts. Thus, "The Spirit of our Risen Lord who made Mary the all-holy mother of God's own Son Incarnate at the Annunciation, at Pentecost made her mother of His Body, the Church." Mary's identity and role is further made explicit by St. John, in his description of Mary's role at Cana and at Calvary, where she stood in the shadow of the crucified Christ Who made her our Spiritual Mother.

St. Augustine echoes the Ecclesial Tradition in the Fathers in his observation that Mary "conceived and gave birth to Christ in her heart through faith before doing so in her virginal womb." The witness of Sacred Scripture and Tradition is concretized for us at the Eucharistic Liturgy, Fr. Jelly observed. The words and actions of the priest over the bread and wine invoke the Holy Spirit and offer us anew the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit of Mary at the Annunciation and, then, His descent and overshadowing of Mary and the disciples at Pentecost. This reality of the presence of the Spirit is our pilgrim identity.

As St. Thomas Aquinas notes: "The Church of Christ is a community of many distinct persons constituting one mystical person, living in dynamic union with, yet distinct from, the Head of the Body and having the Holy Spirit as the principle of unity with Christ and with one another." The Holy Spirit enters into a relationship with the body of the Faithful similar to that which the Word assumes with His human nature: "At the moment of the Incarnation, the Church is pneumatologically conceived within

Mary's womb." This unifying activity of the Holy Spirit in Mary makes the theology of Mary a truly useful criterion for the theology of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit, through his gifts and charisms, centered Mary's entire life in Christ, so He can accomplish a similar commitment in our daily lives. With Christ, the Holy Spirit brings forth one Church of a rich diversity of members with culturally conditioned customs, while preserving the gift of personal identity for the individuals.

Mary, then, is the model for us to be for others, always as instruments of the Holy Spirit. In the present day, this is of great need and importance for both ecumenical and interfaith movements in the unity of the Spirit. Even as we are reaching for unity with other persons in their commitments of religion, we remark the gift of the unity among ourselves in God.

After an engaging period of discussion, the members assembled for the Marian Liturgy with the Most Reverend E. Bertrand Boland, O.P., D.D., as the celebrant. The Reverend Thomas Bernard Confer, O.P., S.T.L., preached the homily: "Mary's Growth in the Holy Spirit."

In his homily Fr. Confer centered his theme in the words of God: "Behold I make all things new." God brought order into existence, and then Adam and Eve brought the chaos of sin into that order. Still, God inaugurated a New Order in Jesus Christ. The Book of Revelation presents this New Order as the Heavenly City, as a "bride adorned for her husband"—the Bride of Christ, the New Eve. In the New Eve, Mary the Mother of Jesus, the Church finds her pattern and exemplar, for Mary is formed by the Holy Spirit as the first fruits of a new creation. And this, then, is the basis for the Patristic insight: Mary is the New Eve, for as disobedience came through the virgin Eve, obedience came through the virgin Mary. Mary is the first and the perfect disciple of Jesus, the fruit of the action and work of the Holy Spirit. She, the New Eve, is the Immaculate One formed by the Holy Spirit as His perfectly apt instrument: She leads others to faith in her Son—as at Cana; she is the Mother of the Body of Christ, the Church. This woman, this Mother of the Savior and Redeemer, Mother of all the Faithful, stands before us as the model of perfect docility to the Holy Spirit to restore God's order in creation, to make all one in Him.

Luncheon for the members followed the Marian Liturgy. A business meeting followed the luncheon. Fr. Matthew Morry, O.P., announced that the next annual meeting of the Mariological Society of America, observing its fiftieth anniversary, would be held in Washington, D.C., from May 25 to May 29, 1999. Further, the next annual meeting of the New England Region would be held on Saturday, October 23, 1999, with the theme: "Mary, Tradition and the Fathers." The meeting adjourned at 2:45 P.M.

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