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Preface: The Marian Dimension of Christian Spirituality: Historical Perspectives

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THE MARIAN DIMENSION OF CHRISTIAN
SPIRITUALITY:
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

52nd Annual Meeting of the Mariological Society of
America

The Mariological Society's 52nd annual meeting took place at the University of Dayton, May 30-June 2, 2001. The meeting's theme was "The Marian Dimension of Christian Spirituality: Historical Perspectives." The 2001 meeting was the first of a three-year series (2001-2003) devoted to an historical survey of Marian spirituality. This program dealt with the early period of Marian devotion; succeeding meetings will deal with the medieval and modern periods. Along with the historical developments, attention will be given to the various facets of the Virgin Mary's cooperation—her participation—in God's plan of salvation. This year's program dealt with Marian intercession, and succeeding programs will deal with her spiritual motherhood of all people and her mission to bring all to Christ.

The term "Marian spirituality" appeared in Pope John Paul II's 1987 encyclical, *Redemptoris Mater*. In explaining the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church, he distinguished between the "doctrine of faith" and the "life of faith." Marian spirituality refers to the way in which beliefs are expressed in the life of faith, in prayer, in life commitments and daily living. A rich source of Marian spirituality, the encyclical states, is the "historical experience" found first in the lives of many saints and teachers of spirituality, and then incorporated into various Christian communities. This three-year program will deal with witnesses—individuals and groups—who have integrated Mary's response to God's call into their life of faith and prayer.

The question of "How Can Spirituality Be Marian?" is given a thorough and comprehensive answer in Fr. Johann Roten's article, together with many trenchant observations on the future of Marian

devotion as we travel into the new millennium. Marian spirituality has a rich and specific content. It includes not only the biblical picture of Mary, but also her ongoing care for the members of Christ's body, as she encourages them in the life of discipleship. It includes the bond between Mary and the Church through which the Church finds in Mary not only its model but also its exemplar, which reveals its nature and purpose.

However, the term "Marian spirituality" can be easily misunderstood as something apart from, or alongside of, Christian spirituality. So, the title of the program attempts to convey this integration or this identification of Marian spirituality with Christian spirituality. In his letter of welcome, Archbishop Daniel Pilarczyk of Cincinnati commended the society for undertaking a program to integrate Marian devotion into Christian spirituality. "Too often in the past," he said, "Mariological studies have been compartmentalized. As a result, the role of the Blessed Mother in the life of the Christian becomes something of an appendix rather than a key element in the spiritual life." So, we embark upon this program wishing to show the influence of Mary in the lives of Christ's followers.

The conference of François Rossier, S.M., "A Biblical Perspective on Marian Mediation," was given in part through a telephone communication with the author, who was in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. In the Old Testament, God appears to reveal his plans for the future to the prophets and to invite their response, which is a type of intercession or mediation on behalf of the people. In a similar way, Mary's response to God's revelation is an intercession or mediation on behalf of others. Luigi Gambero, S.M. (Rome), uses the earliest formulations of the comparison between Eve and Mary—as found in Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus, and the text of the oldest extant prayer to Mary (third century) to show that, from a very early period, Christians sought the intercession of Mary. Deyanira Flores, S.T.D. (Costa Rica), spoke of the Marian spirituality of Guerric of Igny, a Cistercian abbot of the twelfth century, who described Mary's wish to assist her children, already brought to life by God's Word, to grow "until they

reach the stature of the perfect man" (Eph. 4:13). James Bell, Ph.D. (Lansing, MI), spoke of the earliest sources for the Franciscan notion of Mary's "active motherhood," which was part of Mary's role as Theotokos. Virginia Kimball (Westford, MA) spoke of the image of Theotokos as Mediatrix, as found in hymns of the Eastern Church, and in prayers of petition and icons.

The program's second day was devoted to a panel on the Marian spirituality present in the origins of the great medieval religious orders—Servite, Franciscan, Dominican, Carmelite. Conrad Borntrager, O.S.M. (Chicago, IL), narrated how the Servites' Seven Holy Founders, who considered themselves instruments in God's hand, established an order in which all would be servants of the Lord, servants of Mary. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm. (Nokomis, FL), spoke of the Carmelite origins on Mount Carmel, sacred to the prophet Elijah, and the official title of the Carmelites, "The Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel." Vincent Wiseman, O.P. (Washington, DC), described St. Dominic's entrustment of the Order of Preachers to the Virgin Mary, the Marian hymns and prayers which early became part of the Dominican way of life, and the similarities between Mary's bringing forth the Word and the Dominican ministry of preaching.

The meeting concluded with Eamon R. Carroll's annual Survey, a feature of every meeting of the Mariological Society for the last thirty-three years.

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