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## Report, 2000-2001: New England Region

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## REPORT, 2000-2001: THE NEW ENGLAND REGION

The New England Region of the Mariological Society of America held its Annual Meeting at Providence College, Providence, Rhode Island, on Saturday, October 21, 2000. The Reverend Matthew Morry, O.P., S.T.D., Director of the New England Region, opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. The Reverend Thomas J. Ertle, O.P., S.T.D., Executive Vice President of Providence College, brought greetings from the college to the members. Fr. Morry then introduced the Keynote Speaker, Reverend Bertrand Buby, S.M., S.S.L., S.T.D., professor at the University of Dayton. Fr. Buby presented: "The Marian Images of the Book of Revelation."

To ease our way into an examination of the Book of Revelation, Fr. Buby proposed first "the central scene of the Apocalypse and the symbol of the woman" (Rev. 11:19-12:18); then, "the relationship of the Bride to the Woman clothed with the sun" (Rev. 17-19 and 12).

To consider the central scene of the Apocalypse, Fr. Buby took Revelation 11:19 and joined it to the scene of the woman clothed with the sun in chapter 12. This helped us to see that the theophany of the Ark of the Covenant in the heavens is joined to the image of the woman. Further, the first covenant of God in the desert after Exodus is united to the second covenant with the churches and their dedication to the Person of Jesus, victorious Lamb of God. The Salvific Act of the Lamb is central to the Apocalyptic narrative.

Fr. Buby pointed out that the Ark symbolizes the covenant of Exodus and the *presence* of God, while the woman symbolizes the Church in the second testament. The symbol may represent Mary in a secondary way, yet always in relationship to the Church. Revelation 11:19 is an introduction to all sections of chapter 12. Fr. Buby noted that the celebration of the Assumption of Mary uses this introduction and suggests that the woman relative to the Ark of the Covenant joins both covenants. This will lead the believer

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to see the child as the Messiah Jesus, and the woman giving birth as symbol for the Church and secondarily for Mary.

In the fourth century, Methodious claimed that there was a lack of clarity in the understanding of the virgin birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus, Methodious noted, was a past event while Revelation is prophetic and futuristic, so the woman is the Church. Still, a number of the Fathers, and even contemporary scholars, make reference to a Marian interpretation.

Some scholars link Mary and the Church so closely as to render them one symbol. Thus, Mary is seen as a figure of the Church, as a type and archetype of the Church. Mary is also seen as archetype and symbol of both Israel (the Daughter of Zion) and the Church. Mary is surrounded by God's protection in the symbol of the sun; she is in continuity with Israel through the twelve stars, which represent both the tribes of Israel and the Apostles.

The Bride of chapters 17-19 is an image of the Church, for her adornment matches that of the woman of chapter 12—the beauty of her is her grace. Like Mary of Luke's Annunciation, she prepares herself for the wedding feast (i.e., the realm of God in the heavens). Fr. Buby proposed that "the image of the bride is a parallel and mirror-image of the woman of Revelation . . . a model for the covenantal relationship of God with the Church or with the individual's faith and God's love." While the primary meaning of these symbolic and mysterious designations is the Church, in the gospel of John (chapters 2 and 19), Mary is the "woman" of Cana and Calvary. And, as the woman of the first part of the Book of Revelation is related to the second part of the book, one notes that the "Woman" *clothed with the sun* takes on the image of the *bride of the lamb*. Mary is the Mother of the Messiah and would thus appear to be the "woman" of parts one and two of Revelation.

The liturgy and doctrinal statements of the Catholic Church emphasize the Marian interpretation. Mary has always been associated with the Church in the liturgy, as model of faith and of courage, and as Mother of the living.

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The period of discussion which followed was most active. The questions and observations of the members reflected their profound involvement in Fr. Buby's address, which they described as most illuminating and encouraging for their knowledge of God's Word, of Mary, and their devotion as God's people. After this stimulating discussion, the members assembled for the Marian Liturgy. The Most Reverend E. Bertrand Boland, O.P., S.T.L., D.D., assistant to the bishop of Providence, was the celebrant. The Reverend John Phalen, C.S.C., preached the homily, entitled "The Blessed Virgin Mary: Temple of the Lord."

Fr. Phalen recalled for us the importance of *place* in our prayer. How often do we relate "my room and the place of the rocking chair, which I use for prayer alone, as my *holy place*? We need a holy place in which to rejoice that God dwells with us. Necessity may refocus or change some aspect of the space—but it remains the holy place—the place for prayer which helps us to sense God's presence, to sense that we are the "temples of the Lord."

That image of *place* indicates God's presence: our homes are temples of the Lord because of the love which binds us together as families. *Places*, as well as people and things, can reflect the presence of God. Now the Body of Jesus is that Temple of the presence of God. As Jesus is thus the Temple, so the Church is a holy temple. And, the family—the domestic church—is a holy temple. It is in considering the Church as Temple—and the family by extension—that we rediscover Mary as "a holy Temple." Mary is the exemplar of prayerful attention to God's will and of humble obedience to His Word. This is what we struggle to do when we pray: to open ourselves to God's Will and to act as the "God-bearer," revealing God's presence to others. In the Upper Room, Mary's attitude of prayer makes that room a holy temple for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Thus, as Mary is the dwelling place for the Son and the Spirit, then we who form the Church as the "People of God" are also "temples of the Lord." God made Mary His Temple of Glory for His Son: she is God's tabernacle, God's house, the Ark of the

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Covenant, the womb from which God calls forth a new creation. And, the power of a holy place reminds us of our own place in the divine plan of salvation. Indeed, while the lofty temples draw attention to the transcendent God above, Mary inspires us to be a space—a temple—where the Lord dwells.

We note how the fullness of Mary as Temple of the Lord is stressed in her Assumption. God chose Mary to be the immaculate dwelling place for Jesus, so that He should raise her body and take her to heaven. We, then, learn the value of our own body as a *temple of God*, also to be raised up. Jesus first dwelt *within* Mary, then *with* Mary, and then *went forth from her* to bring God's Word and presence to all. As Mary, the Temple of the Lord, we the Body of Christ—the Church—also bear God within us, with us, that He may go forth from us to bring His Word and Presence to all people.

Luncheon followed for the members after the Marian Liturgy. A business meeting followed the luncheon. Fr. Matthew Morry, O.P., announced the annual meeting of the Mariological Society of America to be held in May 2001. Further, the next Annual Meeting of the New England Region will be held on Saturday, October 20, 2001. The Most Reverend Robert J. McManus, D.D., S.T.D., Auxiliary Bishop of Providence, will be the Keynote Speaker. The Meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

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