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Preface: The Marian Dimension of the Christian Life: II. The Middle Period

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THE MARIAN DIMENSION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: II. THE MIDDLE PERIOD

**New York, 2002
53rd Annual Meeting of the Mariological Society
of America**

The Mariological Society of America's 53rd annual program, "The Marian Dimension of the Christian Life: II. The Middle Period," was held at the Cardinal Spellman Retreat Center, Riverdale (Bronx), New York, May 22-25, 2002. The program, the second of three dealing with spirituality, was devoted to medieval witnesses and testimonies of Mary's role as spiritual mother.

Located in Riverdale (Bronx), New York, the Cardinal Spellman Retreat Center overlooks a beautiful part of the Hudson River. An advantage of having a meeting in New York City is the opportunity to encounter the rich variety and vitality of the local church. The Archdiocese of New York includes over two-and-a-half-million Catholics and has many well-established educational, cultural and charitable institutions. This is the archdiocese which throughout its history has welcomed the immigrants to American shores, and which continues today its ministry to the many new immigrant groups.

The opening Mass of the program was celebrated by Edward Cardinal Egan, Archbishop of New York City, who extended a warm welcome to the Mariological Society and spoke of the great diversity of ministries present in the city. On any Sunday, the churches of the archdiocese celebrate Mass in forty different languages. Other representatives of the church of New York who addressed the Mariological Society were Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., who resides at Fordham University; Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., known for his appearances on the Eternal Word Television Network; Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, a

former Lutheran pastor, now Catholic priest, founder and editor of the influential journal, *First Things*. An afternoon of the meeting was spent at The Cloisters, the branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art devoted to medieval art which includes many representations of the Virgin Mary.

The opening conference, "Mary since Vatican II: Decline and Recovery," was given by Avery Cardinal Dulles. With the clarity and precision which mark all the writings of this "model" theologian, Cardinal Dulles first outlined the pre-conciliar developments in Mariology leading to Vatican II's inclusion of Mary in the eighth chapter of the Constitution on the Church. The writings of John Paul II, especially his encyclical "Redemptoris Mater," stress the divine motherhood and Mary's motherhood of grace—the basis for her maternal intercession. In the post-conciliar period, Hans Urs von Balthasar appears to have transcended the Christotypical-ecclesial-typical discussion by proposing the virginal fruitfulness of the Church as the basic Marian principle. (In the discussion following the conference, Cardinal Dulles was asked how he would relate Mary to the images of the Church which he proposed in his influential book *Models of the Church*. After some reflection, the Cardinal acknowledged that he was not sure, at this point, how to relate Mary to his five models of the Church and that he may revise his typology in the future.)

Professor Mary McDevitt (Stanford University) spoke of two medieval English works—primers for mothers teaching reading—which alluded to Mary instructing her children on acquiring wisdom and knowledge of the faith. Fr. Charles M. Mangan (Congregation for the Institute on Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life) spoke of Mary's spiritual motherhood in the works of St. John Fisher (1469-1534), Bishop of Rochester, England.

"Two Gifts Are Better Than One: Mary as Mother of Christ and Mother of All Graces in Fifteenth-century Popular Sermons" was the title of the presentation given by Dr. Donna Spivey Ellington, Ph.D. (Gardiner-Webb University). The first part of the title is taken from the works of Jean Gerson who, after asking whether Mary's greatest grace was her physical

or her spiritual relation to God, concluded "Two gifts are better than one."

"Mother of our Savior and Cooperator in our Salvation: *Imitatio Mariae*: Imitation and the Biblical Mystery of the Visitation in St. Francis de Sales" was presented by Fr. Joseph Chorpenning, O.S.F.S. (St. Joseph's University Press, Philadelphia). In the Visitation, St. Francis de Sales found "a thousand spiritual particularities that gave him a special light concerning the spirit that he desired to establish in his institute [the Sisters of the Visitation]." Francis viewed the Visitation as an illustration of Mary's active cooperation in Jesus' redemptive mission which began in the womb; the Visitation also illustrates the active and contemplative dimensions of Marian spirituality. "Charity is never idle . . . and the Blessed Virgin was filled with it, because she bore Love Itself within her womb."

"Miguel Sanchez: Guadalupe's First Evangelist and His Four Loves" was presented by Fr. Martinus Cawley, O.C.S.O. (Our Lady of Guadalupe Abbey in Guadalupe, Oregon). Miguel Sanchez (1594-1674) was the Mexican *criollo* who, in 1645, first wrote the Spanish account of the oral tradition of the Guadalupe apparition in 1531.

A feature of these annual programs on Marian spirituality has been presentations on the Marian charism of religious orders and congregations. This year, Sr. Marie Azzarello, C.N.D., reported on the spirituality of St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, the foundress of the Congregation of Notre Dame, who regarded the Visitation scene as an ongoing mystery which exemplified the mission of the community: "We have," she said, "no other constitution than the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

Fr. Samuel Maranto, C.Ss.R., spoke of the influence which the personal example of St. Alphonsus de Liguori and his *Glories of Mary* had on the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists). When the early foundation was besieged with many problems and appeared on the verge of extinction, St. Alphonse exclaimed that "Only Mary could save the congregation." Alphonsus regarded the Virgin Mary as the exemplification of Christ's "copious redemption."

A special feature was a power-point presentation from Sr. Ann Marie Harrison, I.H.M., on a Marian invocation, "Mary

Beloved of the Trinity." Sr. Ann Marie was first inspired to formulate the title in 1981 after reading the poems of St. John of the Cross. She has promoted the title for the last twenty years. The title may appear in many contexts—prayer, poetry, music, and art, but it is always to remain a primarily "verbal icon," drawing persons into the relation of love between Mary and the Trinity.

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

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