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Coronasti Annum Benignitate Tua

Johann G. Roten

University of Dayton, jroten1@udayton.edu

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“CORONASTI ANNUM BENIGNITATE TUA”

There are many ways to celebrate someone's personal accomplishments and to mark that which life achieves in all of us in spite of ourselves: the growing number and weight of years and decades. Lucky are those whose years not only match their accomplishments, but who also measure up, at the same time, to some of life's toughest challenges. We may think, in particular, of the challenge to accept serenely the inevitable finiteness of human destiny and – simultaneously – the indestructible hope of one day bringing all of this earthly existence to fruition in timeless and limitless joy. Father Théodore A. Koehler, S.M., seems to be an ideal candidate for a celebration of this kind, because he gingerly carries the weight of years and the number of personal achievements, without ever forgetting that they are but living stones toward a more definitive homestead on God's own green pastures.

Characteristically, the way scholars honor and celebrate one of their own is by doing what they should do best, that is, they produce a volume of collected essays. The French call this sort of publication *Mélanges*; the Germans want it to be a *Festschrift*. And so we honor Théodore Koehler – “we” meaning his friends, confrères and colleagues – with a collection of essays whose primary intent it is to be a *Festschrift*, and whose unfortunate liability happens to be with its inevitable character as *Mélanges*.

The label *Festschrift* stresses the happy and festive circumstances which brought this publication to the fore. It seems to be indeed a suitable reason, both happy and festive, to rejoice with Théodore Koehler on his 80th birthday (1911-1991). Our joyful message reaches out to a man, who has more than just barely made it. We salute a humble, beret-topped Frenchman and Marianist priest, whose infectious smile, despite the telltale signs of age, claims youth and life and faith (see photograph). Valiant and lucid, Théodore Koehler has not lost any of his lifelong incentive to explore ever more deeply the mysteries of the human mind and to break new ground for the coming of God's Kingdom. More than authoring articles and books, it is this fundamental attitude of active and relentless trusting in life's God-given goodness that constitutes and embodies his most genuine accomplishment. As a living witness to what he has always stood for, he sums up in his own person some of the

most precious features of the considerable *scientia sacra* he has so sedulously gleaned and amassed all through his life. Therefore, this *Festschrift* is offered in gratitude and with joyous admiration.

The French, with their inevitable flair for life's many incongruities, give this same kind of publication the name *Mélanges*. It represents indeed a wide variety of contents. The broad assortment of topics stretches across many disciplines of human knowledge and connects most periods of Christian life and thought. Moreover, the *Collected Essays* in honor of Théodore Koehler reflect a medley of languages, and a miscellany of philosophical and theological viewpoints. Some may be reminded of an *omnium-gatherum*; we believe that this variety most appropriately attests to true Catholic identity, namely, that "truth is symphonic." There is no *sym-phony* without tension, and harmony exists only in the ultimate unity of multiplicity which is in the fullness of Christ's person.

The varied contributions to this *Festschrift* display the variety and riches of Théodore Koehler's ties and affinities. They all witness to some degree of personal connectedness: friends, who stood by his side at the crossroads of important decisions and in the "heat of the day"; confrères, who travelled the same road of peaceful and exacting monotony and shared with him years of blessed fruitfulness; colleagues and fellow scholars, with whom he took part in many a common challenge and savored the victories of the Spirit. Yet, to stand by Théodore Koehler, to travel the same road, even to meet with him only occasionally, has always meant and means to be under the spell of Mary, the Mother of God and all of humanity. That is how and why this *Festschrift* came to bear the title *Mater Fidei et Fidelium*; more important, it is because of her, of Mary, that it came into being. For how could Fr. Koehler have accepted a *Festschrift* in his honor, if it had not been, in the first place, for the greater honor of Mary?

And so we called these collected essays *Mater Fidei et Fidelium* to highlight that all of their contents either address Mary's person directly, were inspired by her or were written in her name. Furthermore, the title was chosen to stress the fact that Mary's spiritual motherhood represents an important and fruitful area of Théodore Koehler's own mariological research. One of the cornerstones of her spiritual motherhood is her personal faith. In Mary, the personified Christian "Existential," faith is fully incarnate; its exemplarity is truly personal and its efficaciousness fully existential. The genetic code of Mary's religious personality is grounded in faith; the story of her vocation is the progressive explication and fulfillment of faith's meaning and promise. The ultimate achievement of her existence in God at the Assumption made her the "Mother of faith," for – paradoxically – the only self-realization human beings will ever attain is through faith. Not only is the very profile of faith patterned according to Mary's religious personality, but, there is also no genuine expression of Christian

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faith without its bearing the hallmark of Mary's faith, her faithful *Fial* to God's grace and will. Far from being a mere archetype, Mary contributes as Mother, with tender solicitude, to the birth and development of faith in the hearts of the faithful.

The many engravings dispersed throughout this book attempt to visualize Mary's faith-story and to illustrate how it relates to important events of her life and mission. These images are taken from one of the many precious rare books The Marian Library has in its possession (Domingo de Arteaga, *Thesoro de devoción*, en latin, hallado en el Rosario de Nuestra Señora, Valladolid 1556). The images on the cover and on the title page depict the two key events which undergird the theme "*Mater fidei et fidelium*." The Assumption not only captures the fulfillment of Mary's faith-life in God, but it also expresses her ultimate fruition as our mother in faith. The engraving of the Annunciation, on the title page, marks a dialectical stance: it takes us from the Assumption back to the concrete historical conditioning within which Mary's faith developed and matured. The remaining illustrations appear on the pages which introduce each major section; they represent scenes reaching from the Nativity to Pentecost and, again, to the Mother-Queen of Heaven – typifying major stages in Mary's faith-journey. Likewise, they exemplify the truly motherly character of her faith in a variety of real-life situations.

Given the nature of "collected essays," the arrangement of this volume – a special issue of *Marian Library Studies*, for which Théodore Koehler remains principal editor – follows no strict logical pattern. However, three major, but loosely organized, sections can be singled out. The first comprises a brief sketch of the jubilarian, his person and work, advantageously complemented by a thorough chronological profile and a comprehensive bibliography. The second section groups a number of congratulatory messages by friends in positions of authority.

We would like to extend our gratitude, and that of Fr. Théodore Koehler, especially to His Eminence William Cardinal Baum and to His Excellency Daniel Pilarczyk, Archbishop of Cincinnati. In similar ways, each of them has been faithfully supportive of The Marian Library and the International Marian Research Institute (IMRI), by lending an open ear and a helpful hand to a constantly striving and struggling institution.

Similarly, we would like to express our deep appreciation to Bro. Raymond Fitz, S.M., president of the University of Dayton, and to Fr. Ignacio Calabuig, O.S.M., president of the Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum in Rome. The University of Dayton and the Marianum are the two pillars, academic and financial, upon which rest the present and the future of IMRI and The Marian Library. In particular, the publication of this Festschrift would not have been possible, if it were not for Bro. Raymond Fitz's generous financial contribution. Finally, a most cordial thank you is offered to the Very Reverend Father José María Salaverri, S.M., superior general of

the Society of Mary, for his long-standing and active support of all things marian. It is largely thanks to his intervention that IMRI and The Marian Library have been put on the map of the Society of Mary.

The congratulatory messages are followed by a series of personal recollections. Many of these memories, offered by friends, confrères and colleagues – the three categories being by no means mutually exclusive! – are tinted with humor, thereby reflecting the kind of genuine affection which exists only where love and truth correct and complement each other.

The third part, and lion's share of the *Festschrift*, is devoted to fifty scholarly contributions. Since most of the contributed essays were intended to give homage in some way to Théodore Koehler's scholarship on behalf of Our Lady, it seemed suitable to arrange them in broad categories, based for the most part on chronology and contents. We are particularly pleased to be able to present the jubilarian with an important number of essays and notes in fields and on topics dear to his heart and familiar to his mind, namely Scripture, patristics, medieval mariology, Marianist heritage and ecumenical marian dialogue. The majority of the contributions published in this volume are works of original research. Some of them have materialized in the publication of hitherto unpublished manuscripts; others follow up on Théodore Koehler's own scholarly work and develop new aspects thereof. Still other essays present variants and variations on themes cherished by the jubilarian or offer new insights into an author's own continued research. As a whole, they constitute an impressive mine of information on mariology and related fields, and not few among them contribute significantly to the progress and deepening of our knowledge about Mary's person, her ways, and our ways to better love and serve her. To each and all of the fifty scholars and authors we would like to say a word of thanks. May their learned gifts not only honor Théodore Koehler, but also encourage and inspire many readers of this *Festschrift*.

Last but not least, I would like to recognize the skillful and generous efforts of two close cooperators in the venture of bringing forth this volume. Indeed, without the intrepid endeavors of Mrs. Cecilia Mushenheim and Mrs. Patricia Phipps the "collected essays" commemorating Théodore Koehler's scholarly achievements would have never seen the light of day. Cecilia Mushenheim, an expert in semantics and grammar, took care of the always tedious editing process, while Patricia Phipps, a specialist in logistics and automation, greatly facilitated the planning and supervising of a complex work process. We owe Théodore Koehler's smiling portrait to the photographic skills of Fr. Thomas A. Thompson, S.M., and the overall quality of the typesetting and printing to our dear Belgian friends, Misters René and Jan De Meester.

In short then, this *Festschrift*, *Mélanges*, and volume of *Collected Essays* would like to be a tribute to God's goodness and many blessings: *Coronasti annum benignitate*

"Coronasti annum benignitate tua"

tua ("You crown the year with your goodness" – Ps. 65). There are the many blessings we – that is, friends, confrères and colleagues – have received in and through the person and the work of Théodore Koehler. More important still, there is God's abounding goodness manifest in and through Mary, without whom there would be neither a host of rejoicing companions nor *Collected Essays to Honor Théodore Koehler on His 80th Birthday*.

Dayton, May 1991

Rev. Johann G. Roten, S.M.
Director
International Marian Research Institute

