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## Preface: The Marian Dimension of Christian Spirituality: The 19th and 20th Centuries

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## THE MARIAN DIMENSION OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY: THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

Los Angeles, 2003

54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Mariological Society  
of America

The Mariological Society of America's 54<sup>th</sup> annual program was held, May 21-24, 2003, at Mount St. Mary's College (Chalon Campus), perched on the steep and sunny slopes of the Santa Monica mountains in northwestern Los Angeles.

This year's meeting—"The Marian Dimension of Christian Spirituality: The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries"—concluded a three-year series of programs on Marian spirituality. Fr. Thomas Buffer, S.T.D., presented a comprehensive report on the place of the Virgin Mary in the writings of the eminent Swiss theologian, Cardinal Charles Journet (d.1975). The Virgin Mary, in Journet's view, was the image of the Church. In her sinlessness, Mary is the personification of "the church without spot or blemish." Journet's writings appear to have influenced both Paul VI and John Paul II and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (#732).

A study of the Trinity in Gerard Manley Hopkins' "The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air We Breathe" was presented by Mary McDevitt, Ph.D. Hopkins used "theopoetic" language to describe Mary's relation to the communion of love within the Trinity. Mary's presence is similar to the air we breathe—vital but hidden. In her is made present the Trinity's communion of love.

This three-year series of programs on Marian spirituality featured reports on the Marian spirituality of religious congregations. At this meeting, Bro. Bernard Beaudin, F.M.S., Ph.D., spoke of the Marist Brothers, founded in January, 1817, near Lyon, France, by Saint Marcellin Champagnat, a man with "the fire of a simple Christian faith in his heart and the power of a

holy purpose in his will." He bequeathed to the Marist Brothers a practical and radiant Marian spirituality. The Marist Brothers' spirituality involves living in God's presence and witnessing to the Marian virtues of humility, simplicity, and family spirit. The Brothers are to work with "the most neglected people of society, especially the young."

Another nineteenth-century religious congregation, the Marianists (Society of Mary), begun in Bordeaux, France, on October 2, 1817, was founded to respond to the new situation which the Church encountered after the French Revolution. Blessed William Joseph Chaminade, founder of the Marianists, channeled a dynamic sense of mission derived from the Church's great confidence in Mary's assistance to Christian communities of faith and mission. His communities were to reflect Mary's faith and love, and her maternal qualities of welcoming, accompanying, and nurturing, while at the same time sending the members forth to participate in Mary's apostolic mission—to bring all people to the knowledge and love of Christ, her son and the savior of the world.

Sr. Marianne Lorraine Trouve, D.S.P., spoke of the Marian spirituality of the Pauline Family—the Society of St. Paul and Daughters of St. Paul and three other groups of women religious. Founded in the first hours of the twentieth century (January 1, 1900) by Blessed James Alberione, the Pauline Family was to use "all the means of communication" to make known the message of the Gospel. Centered on the Eucharist and the Virgin Mary, the spirituality of the Paulines wishes to form Christians who are conscious that they are apostles of Jesus and who live in the presence of Mary. As Jesus was "apostle of the Father," so Mary was the "apostle of her son, Christ."

In addition to religious congregations with a Marian charism, there are numerous ecclesial movements and associations founded in the twentieth century which represent new forms of the consecrated life, involving unions of lay people, consecrated religious, priests—all joined together "conscious of their baptismal identity, and of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world." Pope John Paul II has said that "these movements are a response to a critical need at the end of the millennium."

The Schoenstatt movement, begun in 1914, is among the oldest of these ecclesial movements. Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, member of the Schoenstatt Fathers, reported on the spirituality of Schoenstatt and its founder, Fr. Joseph Kentenich. Schoenstatt is a response to the secularization and depersonalization of modern society. Schoenstatt wishes to foster interior liberty so that the individual can freely choose to serve God's kingdom with a vital faith. The centrality of Mary is evident in the unique form of Marian consecration known as "the covenant of love" and in the prominence accorded to the representation of Mary as Mother Thrice-Admirable.

Bro. Lawrence Scrivani, S.M., reported on the Legion of Mary. Founded in 1921 in Dublin by Frank Duff, the Legion proposes a way in which everyone can respond to the baptismal call to holiness and be engaged in a practical Marian devotion. The Legion emphasizes the need for active works, performed in a spirit of faith, in union with Mary. Its program of evangelization is not theoretical, but always a "face-to-face" encounter with another person in which one witnesses to his/her belief. The apostolic work is the test of one's interior convictions.

Dr. John Janaro spoke of Communion and Liberation, an ecclesial movement founded by Msgr. Luigi Giussani in 1954 in Milan, which today has over 100,000 adherents. For Msgr. Guissani, the Christian faith corresponds to the deep longings of the human heart, and so understood it is truly a "reasonable endeavor." Communion and Liberation is centered on three dimensions of experience—culture, works of charity, and mission, and the communities are places of catechesis, friendship, and mission. It proposes "an experiential recognition of Christ as the meaning of life and the development of authentic interpersonal relationships which reflect Christ's loving embrace." Mary is presented as the "masterpiece of God's plan," the model who allowed Christ's vital truth to form her attitudes and character.

The spirituality of Opus Dei was outlined by Fr. Thomas Buffer. Founded by St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer in Madrid, in 1928, Opus Dei (since 1982, the prelature of the Holy Cross) is composed of priests and lay people; it proposes to be

"neither more nor less than a small part of the Church." Highlighting the mission of the laity in the Church and society, it wishes to make all the baptized conscious of their call to sanctity through the sanctification of daily work. St. Josemaría proposed Mary as "model of correspondence to God's gifts" and as a firm support for family life and fidelity.

Rosella Bignami reported on the spirituality of St. Maximilian Kolbe as interpreted by Fr. Luigi Faccenda, O.F.M.Conv. In 1954, Fr. Faccenda founded the Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculate, a secular institute for consecrated women, and the Fr. Kolbe Volunteers of the Immaculate. Fr. Faccenda interpreted St. Maximilian's "total consecration to the Immaculate" as an apostolic and evangelizing spirituality which was to use all the means of communication to transmit the Gospel message. The members of the institute are called to be "the living presence of Mary in the world."

Fr. Myles Murphy (the Mariological Society's current president) presented a commentary on Pope John Paul's Apostolic Letter "The Rosary of the Virgin Mary." He also spoke of his own experience with the Rosary in pastoral situations. The Holy Father's letter has a personal tone, an invitation from a spiritual guide "to investigate or rediscover the value of the rosary." The rosary "belongs among the finest and most praiseworthy traditions of Christian contemplation." It includes both meditation and supplication. When its Christocentric orientation is correctly presented, this prayer is compatible both with the liturgy and also with the search for the unity of all Christians.

The meeting included Fr. Eamon R. Carroll's annual "Survey of Recent Mariology," a feature of every program of the Mariological Society for the last thirty-five years.

Highlights of the 2003 program included an evening at the J. Paul Getty Art Center, located nearby in the Santa Monica mountains, and a pilgrimage to the new cathedral in Los Angeles—Our Lady of the Angels. Located in the heart of the city, the cathedral's huge blocks of soft earthen tones absorbed and radiated Southern California's rich sunlight and warmth.

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