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Editor's Preface

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

*Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Mariological
Society of America*

Mary and Religious Education

Marian Studies is devoted to presenting the papers delivered at the annual meetings of the Mariological Society of America. The 1994 meeting took place, May 25–27, 1994, at Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

The theme of the Mariological Society's 45th annual meeting was "Mary and Religious Education." It was a well-timed meeting: the previous week, the first copies of the English edition of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* became available to the public. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ranks among the most significant documents of the postconciliar era, and it will have a great influence on religious education. In this work, the Marian references are not limited to one place nor to the customary concluding sentences. Rather the Virgin Mary is found throughout the four major sections, or "four pillars," which form the basis of catechetical instruction—Creed, liturgy, Christian life, and prayer. In this work, the Virgin Mary is presented as an integral part of Christian doctrine and living, inseparable from the mission of Christ and the message of the Gospel.

But religious education is much more than the catechetical texts, and our knowledge of the Virgin Mary is communicated in many ways apart from formal teaching. The meeting included conferences on Marian formation within the parish, on the ways in which Mary has been and can be presented within catechesis, on the images of Mary which are presented to us in hymns and art. In addition, an analysis of two extensive surveys conducted by the International Marian Research Institute

(IMRI) was presented; one survey dealt with the knowledge and attitudes of young Catholics towards the Virgin Mary, and the other with the teaching of Mariology in Catholic colleges and seminaries.

The papers on religious education presented in this issue prompt the following two observations. First, there is a great challenge facing all those in Marian studies of transmitting the product of a renewed Marian theology to a popular Catholic audience, especially to those who are involved in Marian prayer groups. Secondly, in religious education, in addition to a formal presentation, a message about Mary can be mediated in many ways—prayer, liturgy, pilgrimage, music, art. But a sensitivity for the means by which the message is communicated is always necessary.

Vatican II and the postconciliar period have produced an abundant literature on the Virgin Mary. Documents such as *Lumen gentium* (1964), *Marialis cultus* (1974), *Redemptoris mater* (1987), and *Mulieris dignitatem* (1988), together with the *Collection of Masses of the Blessed Virgin* (1986) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, offer a wealth of material on Mary's relation to the mission of Christ and her role in the Church. Unfortunately, the gap between these documents and the images which many Catholics have of Mary is wide. One wonders what influence, if any, these documents have had on some parts of the popular "Marian revival" which we currently experience.

In the past, an awareness of the role of Mary was not transmitted through formal catechetical instruction alone. The material on the Virgin Mary in the Baltimore Catechism was not extensive. What was influential was a certain atmosphere—feasts, devotions, songs and images—which imparted some message about the Virgin Mary. Educators may underestimate the power which ritual, popular devotion, religious art and music have to transmit a religious message. What is now needed is a "handing on" of the renewed Marian theology, not only through formal religious instruction but also through liturgies, prayer services, seasonal and liturgical rituals, music, hymns, and art.

In all of the forms related to devotion and worship, the Christocentric focus must be prominent. As members of the Mariological Society dedicated to "making known the role of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the mystery of Christ and the Church," we are aware that Marian devotion is one part of the totality of Christian life and worship. Catechesis, liturgy, and prayer may all mediate some message about Mary, while at the same time centered on the mystery of Christ of which Mary is a part. Marian devotion is both derived from and contributes to prayer, liturgy, and catechesis. Where there is no awareness of the inclusion of Mary in the mystery of Christ, reference to the Marian dimension may appear abrupt and extraneous.

Marian art and music are not isolated from the currents and developments which affect all art and music. An appreciation of the specifically Marian element is enhanced by knowledge of the form and context in which it is found. Grasping the meaning of Marian art and music depends on an understanding of the interaction between that which is specifically Marian and the form itself. The integrity of the form through which the message is communicated must be appreciated and respected.

Once again, the Mariological Society of America expresses its gratitude to all who contributed to its 45th annual meeting. We especially wish to thank the authors of the essays in this issue of *Marian Studies* for responding so generously to the Mariological Society's request.

Thomas A. Thompson, S.M.