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## Editor's Preface

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

### *Forty-sixth Annual Meeting of the Mariological Society of America*

#### **Faith, Mary, Culture**

The University of Dayton (Dayton, OH) was the site of the Mariological Society of America's 46th annual meeting, May 24-26, 1995. This was the first time that the Society met at the University of Dayton, which is the home both of the Marian Library (the largest collection of Marian books and printed materials) and of the International Marian Research Institute (the American branch of the pontifical theological faculty Marianum in Rome).

The theme for the 1995 meeting was "The Blessed Virgin Mary, Faith, and Culture." Both the liturgical season (Eastertide) and the location (the University of Dayton with its Marian Library) were appropriate for a study of the relation between Mary, faith and culture. During Eastertide, the readings in the liturgy from the Acts of the Apostles show how the Jewish apostles of Jesus responded to the challenge of presenting the Gospel to the culture of the Gentile world. During the meeting, the participants were able to visit the Marian Library: its book collection (the nearly 90,000 volumes in fifty languages) and its complementary collections (art, artifacts, etc.) give abundant evidence of how the figure of the Virgin Mary has penetrated and shaped the deep levels of Christian culture of East and West.

Seeing the Virgin Mary within the context of "the data of the faith" is the familiar and time-honored method of Marian studies: the Virgin Mary is present in the Scriptures, the creeds, the magisterium, the *sensus fidelium*. As the Letter from the Congregation for Catholic Education (March 25,

1988) states, "the Virgin Mary is an essential *datum* of the faith and life of the Church."

Relating Mary to culture presents new avenues of exploration. The word "culture" rarely appeared in our religious vocabulary before Vatican II. When it did appear, it indicated education, the "high arts," or even civilization itself (for instance, Western culture or civilization). Generally speaking, culture was regarded as something which we exteriorly observed and studied from the outside.

At Vatican II, the word "culture" appears on the horizon, and is found more than eighty-two times in *Gaudium et spes*. In many cases, the word continues to be synonymous with education, learning, and civilization. There is also, however, a new meaning present, one taken from the social sciences. Culture was no longer something which was only observed from without, but now it was also to be studied from within—a study of the language and symbols by which people communicated to each other. Examining a particular word or symbol within a culture indicated that the same word or symbol might have a different meaning in another culture. This recognition of difference among cultures led to the awareness that, in preaching the Gospel, it was necessary to know the culture of the people who were being addressed. The "law of evangelization" is that the message of the Gospel must be adapted or "accommodated" to the culture of the receiver. "In this way, the ability to express Christ's message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of the peoples" (*Gaudium et spes*, 44).

After Vatican Council II, the popes continued their call for a study of culture as a necessary prerequisite for evangelization. In his letter on evangelization (1974), Paul VI wrote: "Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life" (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 63).

Paul VI spoke of the relation between Mary and culture when he directed attention to the anthropological dimension

of Marian devotion. Symbols and expressions of Marian devotion from the past, he said, sometimes convey messages which are at variance with the legitimate aspirations of our age. As a result, people become disenchanted and conclude that Mary of Nazareth cannot serve as a model for our present age. It is here that the pope distinguished between the socio-cultural background of an expression of devotion and the "permanent and universal exemplary value" present with the devotion. The basis for Marian devotion does not rest on representations of Mary's life or on expressions of past devotion. Mary is an exemplar for believers today and worthy of imitation because "she fully and responsibly accepted the will of God and acted on it and because charity and a spirit of service were the driving force of her actions." She shines before our own age because she was the first and most perfect of Christ's disciples (*Marialis cultus*, 34).

The papers from this meeting of the Mariological Society approach the relation between Mary, faith, and culture from many different viewpoints. In the presidential address, Fr. Walter Brennan, O.S.M., explores the relation between faith, culture, and the Virgin Mary. The "data of faith" concerning the Virgin Mary remains the same, but the cultural expressions of Marian devotion must necessarily change. Fr. Lawrence Frizzell illustrates some of the ways in which the religious culture of observant Jews influenced the daily life and the activities of Mary and her family at Nazareth.

Fr. Martinus Cawley, O.C.S.O., has done extensive research on Miguel Sánchez (1594-1674), the author of the first book printed on Guadalupe (1648) and a leading representative of *criollo* culture in Mexico. His writings helped to establish Guadalupe as a focus of *criollo* identity and patriotism.

Fr. Joseph Cheah, O.S.M., stresses the effects of different images of Mary on Asiatic women. Certain Marian images assist while others hinder these women in their struggle to reform their cultures and to promote acceptance of the dignity and value of all people. Stephen Holler, Ph.D., outlines the cultural origins of many South and Central American Marian devotions and the problems encountered in maintaining these devotions among immigrants in the United States. Una Cadegan, Ph.D.,

studies how Marian devotion was perceived by secular journals in the United States in the first half of this century.

As he has done for the last twenty-seven years, Fr. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., continues his survey of the year's Marian literature, including books and scholarly articles which have appeared in English and the European languages. Also in this issue is a paper first delivered at the New England Regional Meeting of the Mariological Society by Fr. Michael Smith Foster, J.C.D., who writes on the canonical responsibility of the bishop of the diocese to investigate well-founded reports of apparitions or other miraculous events.

Once again, the Mariological Society expresses its gratitude to all those who helped make the 1995 meeting possible, especially to those who responded to the call for papers on the topic "Faith, Mary, Culture."