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Editor's Preface

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

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

Marian Spirituality and the Interreligious Dialogue

The forty-seventh annual meeting of the Mariological Society of America was held on the campus of Villanova University, Philadelphia, May 29-31, 1996. The theme for the 1996 meeting was "Marian Spirituality and the Interreligious Dialogue." Ecumenical dialogues have occurred between the Catholic Church and the other Christian churches during the last thirty years. Alongside the ecumenical dialogue, there is also the interreligious dialogue, between Catholicism and the major religions of the world. At one time, dialogue with other religions was thought to be the business of missionaries and travelers. But times have changed, and now Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists are our neighbors, students, and daily associates.

The interreligious dialogue had its origins in Vatican II's "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (1965). This document spoke of the respect which the Church has for "the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all people" (no. 2). The dialogue with the world religions is coordinated by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and, in the United States, the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Pope John Paul II has made no little contribution to advancing the interreligious dialogue. Many of his insights are contained in *Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclama-*

tion of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1991) from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. As the title indicates, dialogue and proclamation are inseparable, are both integral to the Church's evangelizing mission.

The interreligious dialogue, according to the pope, is not limited to theological exchange between scholars. It deals with social problems and the challenges facing humanity. The interreligious dialogue includes spirituality, in which persons, "rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute" (*Dialogue*, no. 42).

The Mariological Society's program was one of the first programs to relate Mary to the interreligious dialogue. In the presidential address, Walter Brennan shows the limitations of doctrinal language and describes the advantages of using a language familiar with cultural symbols in the interreligious dialogue. John Borelli of the United States Catholic Conference speaks of the Catholic Church's commitment to the interreligious dialogue and suggests many ways in which Mary is related to this dialogue.

The historical figure of Mary is present in some of the world's religions; in others, there are traits of spirituality which we identify as Marian. The spirituality of first-century Judaism contributes to a better understanding of Mary, daughter of Israel and true child of Israel. (See Lawrence E. Frizzell's "Mary and Biblical Heritage," *Marian Studies* 46 [1995]: 26-40.)

Mary is mentioned thirty-four times in the Qu'rān, the only woman mentioned by name, and Islam pays Mary its highest compliment, namely, that she is a person of faith and of submission to God, a model to be imitated by all Muslims. Dominic Ashkar outlines many of the sources for the Marian references in the Qur'ān.

In some parts of the Middle East, Muslims—particularly women—visit Marian shrines to seek her intercession. Otto Meinardus, who lived for several years in Egypt, describes some of the ways in which a common devotion to the Virgin Mary serves as a bridge between Muslims and Christians.

In the great religions of Asia, there are female images of compassion which bear a similitude to Mary. Maria Reis-Habito's

presentation at this meeting spoke of how Japanese Christians transformed the Buddhist deity of compassion into a thinly veiled image of Mary, known as *Maria-Kannon*.

In a recent study, Francis X. Clooney, S.J. (*Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 28, 3 [May, 1996]), has shown the similarity between some Christian and Hindu texts. Read the following poem of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, placing the verses of Mary's Magnificat alongside the lines:

Thou has made me endless, such is thy pleasure.
 This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with
 fresh life.
 This little flute of a reed thou has carried over hills and dales, and hast
 breathed through it melodies eternally new.
 At the immortal touch of thy hands, my little heart loses its limits in joy
 and gives birth to utterance ineffable.
 Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine.
 Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

The interreligious dialogue shows that Christians are not alone in their search for God. On October 27, 1986, at the end of a day of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage for peace shared with leaders of the world religions at Assisi, Pope John Paul II said: "Let us see here an anticipation of what God would like the developing history of humanity to be: a fraternal journey in which we accompany one another toward the transcendental goal which is set before us" (*Dialogue*, 79). In this journey to the one God, Mary, is both the mother of all humanity and the symbol of its desire and quest for the divine. "In Mary is summed up the longing and searching of the whole human race for God" (Society of Mary [Marianists], *Rule of Life*, 7).

The origins of the "Marian Advent," the time of preparation for Christianity's third millennium, are given by Fr. James McCurry, O.F.M. Conv., in "Mary and the Millennium: Woman, Son, and the Fullness of Time," and, for the twenty-eighth year, Fr. Eamon R. Carroll, O.Carm., contributes his survey of the year's Marian literature, including books and scholarly articles which have appeared in English and the European languages. The Mariological Society of America expresses its gratitude to

all who contributed to its forty-seventh annual meeting, especially the contributors to this issue of *Marian Studies* who generously responded to the Mariological Society's request.

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Editor