In 2016 and 2017, the two religious communities founded by Blessed William Joseph Chaminade commemorate their 200th anniversary. The Bicentennial Jubilee began on May 25, 2016, the anniversary of the founding of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate by Venerable Adèle de Batz de Trenquelléon and Fr. Chaminade, and concludes on January 22, 2018. The bicentennial anniversary of the Society of Mary will be commemorated on October 2, 2017.

The decision of the General Chapters of the two congregations was to celebrate the two anniversaries together. The Bicentennial Letter from the Marianist superiors general of both congregations, Sister Franca Zonta, FMI, and Fr. Manuel J. Cortés, SM, reads, “Both religious institutes have been ‘siblings’ from the beginning, according to the mind of the founder. Rather than separate celebrations, the General Chapters in 2012 decided to celebrate the anniversaries together, as brothers and sisters.” On September 16, 1838, when Blessed Chaminade wrote to the pope for approval and recognition, he presented the two congregations as a single unit in his missionary vision. He wrote: “In the sight of God, Most Holy Father, I believed it necessary to found two new Orders, one for young women and one for young men, who would prove to the world by the fact of their good example that Christianity is not an archaic institution and that the gospel can still be practiced today as it was 1800 years ago.”

The Bicentennial Letter continues, “We hope that the celebration of our second century might penetrate our personal lives, our communities and works, wherever we might be present.” This bicentennial celebration is an opportunity to review and renew the mission for which the congregations were founded. To assist in this endeavor, three symbols were proposed for study and reflection: a motto, a logo, and an icon.

Motto

The motto proposed for the Jubilee consists of the three words: know, love, and serve. These words involve the whole person: to know in order to love; to love in order to serve; to love and serve in order to know. The service is rededication to the mission of the congregation, which is, in Chaminade’s words, “to show that the Gospel can still be practiced today.” (Some may recall three words — know, love, and serve — from the Baltimore Catechism as an explanation for our lives: “We are here to know, love, and serve God, to be happy with God in this life and in the next.”)

Logo

The logo (above) brings together the elements of the Bicentennial: the number 200 with the foundation dates of the two congregations; the cross with the symbol of our Marianist charism; the motto of the celebration (To know, love and serve). In the figure 200, there is a portion of grapes, representing the apostolic service of both congregations for 200 years. The two zeroes intertwine and are mutually supportive, evoking the two rings proper to each institute: the silver ring of the Daughters of Mary and gold ring of the Society of Mary. The color blue expresses the alliance with Mary and evokes tranquility, serenity, discernment, and interiority. (The logo was designed by Bro. Sergio Miguel, SM, of the Province of Spain).
The Icon – ‘On Pilgrimage’

Part of the Marianist Bicentennial is the icon of the Wedding Feast of Cana, written by Fr. Salvatore Santacroce, SM of the Region of Italy. The icon, at the center, has panels on both sides with writing from original letters from Fr. Chaminade and Mother Adèle. The icon will be “on pilgrimage” during the Bicentennial throughout the Marianist world, arriving in January 2018 at Singhpur, India, where there is a recent Marianist foundation involving both congregations and multiple communities.

Cana and Marianist Bicentennial

The icon of the Wedding Feast at Cana brings into focus several key figures: Christ, the Virgin Mary, the servants, the amphorae (jars), and the table prepared for the feast.

Mary’s eyes express concern as she says with outstretched hand, “Do whatever he tells you.”

The other persons and images usually found in representations of Cana — the couple, the servants, the feast — are omitted. Space and time are compressed. These are transformed so as to open us to the symbol and metaphor of the new times.

Urged by his mother into the reality that awaits him, Christ looks beyond the immediate, seeing his “hour” in the water becoming wine and in the bread on the table anticipating his sacrifice.

The servant was witness to the water turned to wine. Fixing his gaze on Christ, he senses what has occurred and welcomes the infusion of the divine into human scene. The huge jars represent humanity’s thirst for God’s love and truth. There must be enough wine for everyone.

At the top, the Marianist cross reaffirms the alliance with Mary to bring to the many at the tables of humanity “the good wine,” the wine that has been “kept until now.”

– Fr. Salvatore Santacroce, SM

Bicentennial Prayer

Gracious and loving God,
God of our founders,
You have blessed us with 200 years
Of mission and mercy.

Lead us on, Lord.

Make us good stewards
And attentive listeners,
Ready to do whatever you tell us
To accomplish Mary’s mission
In our world today.

With great thanksgiving
And loving praise,
We say Amen.

May the Father and the Son
And the Holy Spirit
Be glorified in all places
Through the Immaculate Virgin Mary.

– Prayer by Sr. Laura Leming, FMI
If Mary’s prayer of intercession is efficacious, it is not primarily because of the privileged position which unites her to her Son, but because it unites Mary with those for whom she is making intercession. God does not hear Mary’s plea because she is his Son’s mother, but because she is a mother who is pleading for her children. … At Cana, Mary’s request was granted, not because Jesus was her son, but because of Mary’s compassion for the newly married couple. … The bond which unites Mary to her children, the disciples of Christ, was in a way ratified by Christ on the cross. As a result, the disciples of Christ were from that moment assured of Mary’s solidarity with them and of her maternal solicitude.

What is the purpose of study of the Virgin Mary? François would answer, “We study Mariology not to accumulate knowledge, but to arrive at the personal encounter with the Virgin Mary.” We come to know people through their words, their stories. For that reason, he was particularly interested in the ways that the story of Mary can take new meaning in contemporary novels and literature.

Ultimately we study Mary not in order to accumulate knowledge, but because knowing her leads us to loving her. That was Blessed Chaminade’s experience. He invited the Marianists not only to know Mary, but also to love her, to serve her. Who can be more easily loved than a loving mother?

François Rossier, SM
(1957–2017)

In March 2017, the following notice was sent to Marianist communities all over the world: “Blessed be our God! Our Brother, François Rossier, priest, has been called to an everlasting dwelling place with the saints, at the age of 59 with 33 years of religious profession. Let us thank God for the gift of his life; let us thank Mary Our Mother for the gift of his perseverance. Together, let us pray that he may rest in the peace of Christ.”

François was a native of Fribourg, Switzerland. He became acquainted with the Marianists while teaching, fulfilling volunteer service, in a school maintained by Swiss Marianists in Togo. He made religious profession in 1984 and was ordained in 1991. His seminary studies were in Rome at the Gregorianum. He spent a year at the Marian Library in 1993 working on his doctoral thesis. After receiving his doctorate from the University of Fribourg, he returned to Adidjan, Ivory Coast, to work with the young Marianists there. In 2003, he began teaching at the International Marian Research Institute (IMRI), and in 2010, he became the Institute’s director.

François was a person who truly cared for people, their families and lives. He was a man who thrived on personal relations, especially with the young. He loved God’s good earth, a quality allowing him to be at home in many parts of the world. For an extended project of gathering information on Marian shrines and Nativity sets in South America, he traveled much on foot and on local buses. He was talented in languages (as befits a man from Switzerland). He had a deep interest in African and South American cultures. He studied the earth’s geography, the contour of the terrain, the newly developing countries and cities.

What he professed and believed about the Virgin Mary was exemplified in his life. From his doctoral dissertation, he was interested in the concept of Mary’s intercession and mediation on our behalf. Here, the question frequently arises: Is Mary’s intercession a way of trying to change God’s mind? François’ response was that God wishes us to pray for one another: such prayer brings about solidarity among people. He wrote:

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It has been a busy season in the Marian Library, marked by the sudden passing of Fr. François Rossier, Executive Director of the International Marian Research Institute, in March.

I only knew Fr. Rossier for a year, but in that year we found so many curious areas of common ground that I felt like I had known him much longer. This is because he made an effort to find common interests with people. He wanted to know who we were outside of work, so he asked questions and told stories from his own life, learned the names of our family, asked our thoughts on books, and so on. Please read Fr. Thompson’s tribute on page 3 for more about this wonderful man, who we trust has been welcomed to heaven by the Blessed Virgin.

Personnel in the Marian Library have been busy with several special projects this spring. As part of our public outreach, we are celebrating the fruitful abundance of “Mary’s Gardens,” a group of exhibits on three floors of the Roesch Library building. On the seventh floor, new artworks by Holly Schapker are on exhibit. They depict different episodes in the life of Mary, each accompanied by symbolic flowers connected to that event.

On the second floor is an exhibit of the John Stokes and Mary’s Gardens Collection, from the Marian Library’s archives. This collection arrived in the Marian Library in 2013. Jillian Ewalt, an archivist in the Marian Library until spring 2016, organized and re-housed the materials, making it useful and accessible for researchers. The exhibit draws on a small selection of materials from the collection, the whole of which fills approximately 100 archival boxes. It tells the story of John Stokes (1920–2007), who promoted the practice of planting gardens as a devotional practice.

On the first floor of the Roesch Library building is a living garden, full of plants with symbolic and folkloric associations with Mary. Did you know that foxglove can also be called “Our Lady’s Glove”? Or that “marigold” refers to the legend of an attempt to steal money from the Holy Family?

If you do not get a chance to see the exhibits in person, please visit our website (go.udayton.edu/marysgarden) to read a selection of gardening guides and plant lists. There are Mary garden options for all levels of expertise, from novices to master gardeners. Gardens are a place to contemplate what we lost in Eden and what we hope to regain in Paradise. They are also an opportunity to care for God’s creation by growing plants that will support pollinators such as bees and monarch butterflies.

Behind the scenes, library personnel have been busy moving rare books and archival collections to our “new” space on the third floor of the building. This space was previously occupied by the Marianist Archives, which moved to San Antonio in summer 2016. The space offers improved temperature and humidity settings. In the process of moving collections, we have been conducting an inventory and flagging conservation needs in the rare book collection. Many of the books in the Marian Library collection have been well-used; as you might imagine, they have been used to pray and to preach and have been consulted by multiple people over generations. This means that some books could use conservation care, so we decided to use the move as a chance to gather further data on the level of this need.

Improving conditions for these books is an opportunity to be good stewards of this collection, but we always endeavor to balance preservation with access. Please visit the Marian Library. Our hours are on our website, along with links to our online catalog and digital collections. And if you use any of these materials in your own research or devotional practice, please let us know!

God bless you.
Mary B. Cunningham

*Gateway of Life: Orthodox Thinking on the Mother of God*

Yonkers: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2015

The Virgin Mary is central to the Orthodox Church: She is prominent in its liturgical texts, in the hymnody of the liturgy, and in its iconography. References to the Virgin Mary in the liturgical texts of the Eastern Church occur more frequently than in the Western Church. The major Marian feasts celebrated in the Western Church originally came from the East.

In Orthodoxy, liturgy, Scripture, theology, the apocrypha, and hymnology are all intertwined. We from the West stand in admiration of the place the Virgin Mary has in the Eastern Church. Yet, without some explanation of the theological foundation for this Marian devotion, it is difficult for us to come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the role of Mary in the Eastern Church. It is precisely here that Mary Cunningham’s book is of inestimable value.

Authoritative sources for Orthodoxy are the Christian Scripture (the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew) and also the apocrypha, especially the Protoevangelium of James. Central to Orthodoxy the is integration of the Old and New Testaments: the Old Testament presents individuals, events, and symbols — types or allegories — that find their completion and fulfillment in the New Testament. St. John Damascene describes Old Testament types as “images of the future.” Events, persons, and objects are lifted out of their historical context and given a new and fuller mystery. One example: The consecrated temple in the Old Testament is completed in Mary, the dwelling of the Lord.

Typology is not only a way of uniting the Old and New Testaments. Byzantine writers never lost contact with larger dimensions of the mystery of the Incarnation, and they wished to show the imprint of Christ and Mary on creation. Mary was seen as the physical link through which the divine and human are wedded. Mary’s virginity and motherhood are symbolic of the remaking of creation, the new beginning but also the continuation. She is invoked as the “Second Eve, the associate of Christ, the Second Adam.” In the *Akathistos* hymn, Mary is the “bride unwedded”: “Hail, for through you joy shall shine forth; Hail, for through you the curse shall cease; Hail, deliverance from the tears of Eve.”

In the Orthodox and interreligious dialogue, Mary is the “symbol of wisdom and model for humankind.” Mary was the woman most receptive to God’s creation. She is the all-holy while still possessing her full humanity. Mary’s virginity and motherhood are symbolic of the remaking of creation, the new beginning but also the continuation. She is the highest example of a deified human being, a state to which all creation aspires.

This small work abounds in theology and spirituality and is well-organized and comprehensible—a book to be frequently reviewed. As Peter Bouteneff writes in the foreword: “We can learn a great deal from an informed and engaged exploration of the ways Mary, the Mother of God, has been understood in the Church. This book, by a scholar and person of faith, provides exactly that.”
A recurring question in Marian studies deals with Marian devotion in the first four centuries of the Church. Because of the relatively few references to Mary in the early centuries, some treatises convey the impression that Marian devotion was an “innovation” in the early Church, brought about by the Council of Ephesus (431) through its proclamation of the divine motherhood (Mary as Theotokos). Or, is there more to the story that has not been uncovered?

In his past work on the dormition and assumption accounts, Stephen Shoemaker has thoroughly investigated the extant documents on Mary in the early centuries. He has a prodigious knowledge of languages. Whereas many scholars were limited to texts in Greek or Latin, Shoemaker now brings to the study references from the Ethiopic and Georgian traditions, but also from the Arabic, Armenian, Coptic, Greek, Irish, Latin, and Syriac traditions.

Now, Shoemaker asks why the dormition accounts, in addition to speaking of Mary’s final days, are not also evidence of the Marian devotion of the people in the first four centuries. Some of the texts may come from apocryphal or esoteric sources; nevertheless, they are evidence of prayer, interest, and devotion to Mary.

A popular work from the second century was the *Protoevangelium of James*. Originally written in Greek, it was quickly translated into Latin and other languages. The work was “the first Marian biography,” dealing with Mary’s miraculous conception; her parents, Joachim and Anna; and her presentation in the temple. The work is related not only to the infancy of Christ, but also to the holiness and purity of the Virgin Mary. The work would have great influence on the Orthodox Church and its liturgy: Of its 12 major feasts, three were found in the *Protoevanglium*. The Odes of Solomon are a collection of early hymns from the second century affirming Mary’s motherhood and virginity: she is a “mother with great mercies who protected with great kindness.”

The *Sub tuum praesidium* is a prayer found on a fragment of a papyrus in Egypt dated toward the end of the fourth century. It became part of the Greek, Coptic, and Latin liturgies: “We take refuge beneath the protection of your compassion, O Theotokos. Do not disregard our prayers in troubling times, but deliver us from danger, O only pure and blessed one.” The prayer refers to Mary’s compassion and her intercession; it also addresses her as Theotokos (an indication that the title was in use before the Council of Ephesus). That it is written in the plural may indicate that it was a prayer used in the liturgy.

In the third and fourth centuries, evidence for Marian devotion is found in the Book of Mary’s Repose, where she is referred to as “mother of the Great Cherub of Light ... Light and Mother of the Apostles.” In the Six Book Dormition Apocryphon, there are prayers for Marian intercession and references to the celebration of Marian feasts. In Jerusalem, evidence of Marian devotion can be found in the liturgy of Sunday.

Why has this devotion to the Virgin Mary on the part of the people been overlooked? In the past, Mariological studies were most interested in what the people believed, not in evidence of their belief in Mary. And, as Shoemaker mentions, the history of the early Christianity in English was written more than a century ago by academicians not favorably disposed toward Catholicism, who may have wished to consign evidence of Marian devotion to the “dustbin of popery.”

Shoemaker’s clear and convincing work, with an abundance of diverse sources, will make obsolete a generation of previous interpretation of this period. From an ecumenical viewpoint, this revisionist account affirming the presence of Marian devotion in this early period may influence how the various churches regard the first four centuries of Christianity, a period which in the past has been subject to differing interpretations in ecumenical discussion.
Benfactors

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May 16-19, 2017

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