



THE MAGAZINE OF THE Society of Mary



American Edition

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AVE

From the Superior

August 2025

Dear Members and Friends of the Society of Mary,

This issue of AVE might be called “the Turkish issue.” In June of this year, my wife and I participated in a pilgrimage to Turkey commemorating the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. I’ve contributed three articles based directly or indirectly on my experiences of that pilgrimage, and we are pleased to include the sermon preached at the House of the Virgin at Ephesus by my fellow pilgrim and esteemed colleague Fr. Richard J. Datos-Robyn, Rector of St. Mary’s Church in Tuxedo Park, New York.

An announcement: Mrs. Lynne Walker has decided to retire as Membership Administrator. We are deeply grateful for her faithful service over many years. The Council has appointed Mr. Adam Barner of Baltimore, Maryland, as the new Membership Administrator. A longstanding member of the Society and Council, he brings considerable knowledge, administrative experience, and computer skills to the position. The transition of responsibilities has already begun. We heartily welcome Mr. Barner to his new role.

A note about AVE: We would greatly appreciate hearing from potential new contributors. We cannot promise that all submissions will be published, but if you have an article, reflection, or meditation that you think might be suitable for this publication, we would love to see it. Please direct your submissions, or even just ideas for submissions, to Phoebe Pettingell, Editor of AVE (editorofave@somamerica.org).

The **Annual Mass** of the Society of Mary will be **Saturday, October 18th, at 10:30 am at Grace Episcopal Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin**. This will take place as part of Grace Church’s annual **Walsingham Pilgrimage**. The Rt. Rev. Matthew Gunter will be the celebrant at this Solemn Pontifical Mass, and I will be the preacher. I look forward to seeing our members and friends from the Upper Midwest and beyond on this joyful occasion.

Please contact Grace Church for more details of the Walsingham Pilgrimage, which will take place over two days beginning on Friday, October 17th, with a Quiet Day featuring retreat addresses by Editor of AVE Phoebe Pettingell. 

Faithfully in Christ and Our Lady,
Fr. John D. Alexander

A Pilgrimage to Turkey

By Fr. John D. Alexander

During the first two weeks of June, I participated in a pilgrimage to Turkey organized by *The Living Church* magazine to mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea (the First Ecumenical Council), which produced the earliest version of what we recite today as the Nicene Creed. We began with four nights in Istanbul. Over the next nine days, we traveled south to the Aegean coastal region and then east into the heart of the country. By my estimate, our tour bus covered over a thousand miles before dropping us off at Kayseri Airport in Cappadocia to fly back to Istanbul, where we transferred to our flights home.

Along the way, we visited the sites of all seven Ecumenical Councils and five of the seven churches mentioned in the Revelation of John. The pilgrimage leaders were Fr. Mark Michael, Editor-in-Chief of *The Living Church*, who brought extensive knowledge of the region's history and art, and Dr. Garwood Anderson, Professor of Biblical Interpretation at Nashotah House, who gave insightful talks on the background of the biblical sites we visited. On our last full day in Turkey, I took part in two optional activities: a sunrise hot air balloon flight in Cappadocia and, that evening, a demonstration by a team of Whirling Dervishes at an old caravan station on the Silk Road.

Istanbul is one of the most beautiful and exciting cities I have ever seen. Its strategic location, straddling Europe and Asia on the Bosphorus Strait, has earned it the nickname "crossroads of the world." Especially in the Levent section of the "new city" north of the Golden Horn, a sprawling skyline of high-rise office buildings highlights Istanbul's role as Turkey's business and commercial hub.

Although it hasn't been the capital since 1923, Istanbul retains the look



Hagia Sophia, Photo J. Alexander

and feel of an imperial city. Its sultans' palaces, public monuments, massive mosques, and soaring minarets reflect five centuries as the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Going further back, the great dome of Hagia Sophia—along with city walls, aqueducts, and cisterns—evokes Constantinople's thousand-year history as the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire.

For most of us, it was our first time visiting Turkey. The people were welcoming, warm, and friendly. The food was excellent. The terrain in the interior was rugged and mountainous, and not at all desert-like. Thick forests cover hillsides that slope down to valleys of rich farmland and orchards. For thousands of years, caravan routes crossed this land, formerly known as Anatolia or Asia Minor, connecting Europe to the west, and Syria, Persia, and ultimately China, to the east. The Romans built a network of roads along which towns grew into thriving centers of trade, commerce, and culture, often attracting sizable Jewish communities. In the ruins of Sardis (see Rev. 3:1-6), we walked through the beautifully restored foundations of the largest known synagogue of the Roman-era diaspora. Traveling through this landscape of ancient ruins, often situated beside or within modern Turkish cities and towns, I gained an appreciation of why Paul and other early Christian missionaries worked so hard to preach the Gospel and plant churches here.

The geography's susceptibility to change also caught my attention. Turkey is earthquake-prone because it sits on its own tectonic plate, separated by major geological faults from the Eurasian Plate to the north and west, the Arabian Plate to the east, and the African Plate to the south. Many of the ancient churches whose ruins we visited were destroyed, it turned out, not by invading armies but by earthquakes. In 740, for example, an earthquake submerged the basilica where the Council of Nicaea met in 325, so it now lies under ten feet of water in Lake Iznik. Its foundations were rediscovered by drone photography only in 2014. (On the lakefront, we said prayers and sang the hymn "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.") Conversely, two Aegean seaport cities mentioned in the New Testament, Ephesus and Miletus, are now located about six miles inland as silt from the Cayster and Maeander Rivers has gradually filled in their ancient harbors and estuaries.

Turkey rests not only on geological fault lines but also, to borrow a term from political scientist Samuel Huntington, on a civilizational fault line. During dinner on the cliff-top terrace overlooking the Aegean at our hotel in Kuşadasi, we had a clear view of the Greek island of Samos, just fifteen miles away. As soon as I realized what I was seeing, the thought struck me: here we are, at the edge of the Islamic world, gazing across the water at the Orthodox Christian world!

Although Turkey has been officially secular since 1923, about 98 percent of the Turkish population identifies as Muslim. We

visited several stunningly beautiful mosques and other Muslim holy sites, including the Chamber of Sacred Relics at Topkapi Palace, the former residence of the Ottoman Sultans. As Islamic societies go, Turkey is relatively liberal. Alcoholic beverages are sold and enjoyed freely in bars, hotels, and restaurants. Women are not required to wear the hijab, though many choose to. Christian churches and Jewish synagogues operate openly but sometimes keep a low profile.

During our pilgrimage, we visited only five active churches: St. George's Cathedral at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the nearby Bulgarian Orthodox Church of St. Stephen, the Anglican churches in Istanbul and Izmir, and the Lazarist Chapel at the House of the Virgin in Ephesus. By far, most of the Christian pilgrimage sites we saw were either repurposed Byzantine churches or outdoor ruins in government-managed historical parks. The former churches were typically converted into mosques in the fifteenth century, then sometimes turned into museums in the early twentieth century, and more recently, converted back into mosques, with certain sections designated as museum space. Pilgrimage in even nominally Christian countries, or to the Holy Land, is very different.

In modern times, the Turks have generally done a good job of conserving their pre-Islamic antiquities, partly because they genuinely value these cultural monuments and partly because of the revenue generated from tourism. At one of the sites we visited, Laodicea (see Col. 2:1, 4:13-16; Rev. 3:14-22), excavations over the past 25 years have uncovered and partially reconstructed a grid of city streets with the foundations of many Roman buildings, including a fourth-century Byzantine church with floor mosaics, an ambo, a templon, a baptistery, and even a latrine. On the Day of Pentecost, we celebrated Mass in the ruins of St. Paul's Church in Antioch of Pisidia (see Acts 13:14).

The most spiritually moving moment of the pilgrimage for me was visiting the tomb of St. John in Ephesus, open to the sky amidst the ruins of the basilica that once bore his name. The basilica was converted into a mosque by the Seljuk Turks in 1304 and destroyed by the Mongols in 1402. Gazing at the rectangular marble slab framed by four white pillars, I remembered the passage where, in response to Peter's question about the Beloved Disciple, the risen Christ answers: *"If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!"* So the rumor spread ... that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say that he would not die, but *"If it is my will that I remain until I come, what is that to you?"* (John 21:21-23). During Byzantine



Tomb of St. John, Ephesus, Photo J. Alexander

times, it was said that John was not dead but sleeping, so that his breath caused the rising and falling of dust in the air over his tomb.

Later that day, I was the celebrant at Mass in the chapel near the House of the Virgin, which sits atop a hill just outside Ephesus. The pilgrimage leaders accorded me this privilege because of my role in the Society of Mary. Local tradition identifies the house as the place where John brought Mary after being entrusted with her care by the dying Lord (John 19:26-27). It was a beautiful day, with a gentle mountain breeze rustling the leaves overhead. The hilltop, known as Mount Nightingale, is a “thin place,” where one can sense the nearness of the invisible world. However, I was so busy in the sacristy preparing and getting vested before Mass, and cleaning up and putting things away afterward, that I hardly had time to savor the house itself before we had to board our tour bus and depart. A young Muslim couple approached the house just ahead of us. She was wearing a hijab; he was wearing a Yankees cap. The shrine attracts both Christian and Muslim pilgrims because, in Islam, Mary is venerated as Maryam, the virgin mother of the Prophet Isa. It was a rare moment of interfaith convergence in our decidedly Christian pilgrimage.

Overall, Turkey felt to me like an Islamic society haunted by the architectural and archaeological remains of the Christian civilization it displaced long ago. It is a fascinating and beautiful country. Far from feeling like I can now check it off my bucket list, I am left with a strong desire to return soon and continue exploring. **AVE**

The Mother of God in Constantinople

By Fr. John D. Alexander

In 330, Constantine the Great, the first Christian Roman Emperor, moved his imperial capital to Byzantium on the Bosphorus Strait and renamed it Constantinople, the New Rome. This event marked the beginning of Constantinople's eleven centuries as capital of the Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) Empire, until it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. For most of this time, the Byzantines believed that the city was under the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The connection between Constantinople and Mary dates back at least to Empress Pulcheria (399-453), one of the most remarkable women in Christian history. Proclaimed Augusta in 414, she acted as regent for her brother, Theodosius II (402-45). To deter suitors, Pulcheria and her sisters publicly took vows of virginity. Under her influence, the imperial court took on a monastic atmosphere. After Theodosius began to reign in his own right in 416, Pulcheria continued to wield considerable influence as his sister.

Pulcheria later clashed with Nestorius, who became Archbishop of Constantinople in 428. Nestorius attempted to suppress hymns and prayers that referred to Mary as Theotokos (God-bearer or Mother of God), insisting she should only be called the Mother of Christ. When Pulcheria firmly resisted this policy, Nestorius launched a smear campaign against her, claiming, among other things, that she had taken seven lovers instead of remaining a virgin. Pulcheria gained a powerful supporter in Cyril, the Patriarch of Alexandria, who affirmed Mary's title of Theotokos. To resolve the controversy, in 431, Theodosius convened the Council of Ephesus (the Third Ecumenical Council), which ruled in favor of Cyril's position. Pulcheria then persuaded Theodosius to depose and exile Nestorius.

The Council of Ephesus affirmed Christ's divine nature and confirmed the title "Mother of God" for Mary. But it did not specify how Christ's humanity and divinity are related. In Constantinople, a priest named Eutyches, who led a large monastery just outside the city walls, taught that Christ's divine and human natures had merged into "a single nature of the Incarnate Word." This view,



Empress Pulcheria
Fresco

known as Monophysitism, appeared to Eutyches' critics to deny that Christ truly shared in our human nature. During the ensuing controversy, Pope Leo I of Rome wrote in 449 to Flavian, Archbishop of Constantinople, suggesting that Christ is one person with two natures, fully divine and fully human.

Theodosius died in 450 after falling from his horse. Since he had no male heirs, Pulcheria chose a certain Marcian to be the next emperor by marrying him, on the condition that he respect her virginity and live with her as brother and sister. To settle the controversy over Eutyches' teachings, Marcian and Pulcheria called the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451 at Chalcedon, just across the Bosphorus from Constantinople. The Council condemned Eutyches, endorsed Pope Leo's formula that Christ is one person with two natures, and reaffirmed the orthodoxy of Mary's title of Theotokos.

At the same time, Pulcheria was promoting Marian devotion in Constantinople by founding churches dedicated to the Theotokos. The three most important were located at Blachernae, in the northwest part of the city near the Golden Horn; the Monastery of the Hodegetria (or Hodegon), on the south side near the sea walls; and Chalkoprateia (the copper market), close to the imperial palace.

Pulcheria also began acquiring Marian relics from the Holy Land. One tradition says that during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 438, Theodosius's wife, Eudoxia, sent Pulcheria an icon of the Virgin and Child, believed to have been painted by St. Luke himself, along with some of the Virgin's milk, her spindle, and the swaddling bands of the infant Jesus. The icon was placed in the Hodegetria. (Whether it gave its name to the monastery or vice versa is unclear.) The other relics were sent to Chalkoprateia, along with the Virgin's belt, which Pulcheria's father, Emperor Arcadius, had earlier acquired from Jerusalem.

According to a tradition recorded by St. John of Damascus (675–749), during the Council of Chalcedon, Marcian and Pulcheria asked Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem, to send them Mary's body, which they believed was buried in a tomb near Gethsemane. Juvenal carefully explained that no corpse of the Virgin remained on earth, only her burial clothes. (This might be the earliest allusion in the historical record to belief in Mary's Assumption.) Marcian and Pulcheria then requested that Juvenal send the Virgin's coffin and shroud instead. The relics arrived in the imperial city the following year and were placed in the church at Blachernae.

Still another legend says that during the reign of Emperor Leo the Great (457–474), two patrician brothers, Galbuis and Candidus, traveled to the Holy Land. There, they stayed in the house of an elderly Jewish woman near Nazareth, and discovered among her belongings a casket with miraculous healing powers. The woman explained that the casket contained some of the Virgin's clothing, which Mary had left to a Jewish maiden, and that this relic had been passed down through the generations. Through trickery and

deception, the brothers stole the casket and brought it back to Constantinople, intending to keep it for themselves. Upon learning about the relic and its miraculous powers, however, the Emperor seized it and placed it at Blachernae.

The different versions of these legends often contain confusing and conflicting details. Regardless of their reliability, it is evident that high demand fueled a thriving trade in relics of Christ, Mary, and the saints throughout the Christian world in the fifth century.

In the following centuries, Constantinople increasingly became a center of devotion to the Theotokos, who was viewed as the city's special protector. During the siege by the Avars and Persians in 626, Patriarch Sergius carried the Blachernae icon of the Theotokos in a procession around the city walls. The defenders ultimately credited the lifting of the siege to Mary's intercession. In 718, the retreat and withdrawal of an Arab army besieging Constantinople on August 15, the Feast of the Assumption, strengthened belief in Mary's protection of the city. When the naval forces of the pagan Rus' attacked Constantinople in 860, Emperor Michael III and Patriarch Photius carried the Virgin's robe (maphorion) in a procession around the city walls and dipped its edge into the sea. According to tradition, a great storm then arose, scattering and wrecking the enemy ships.

In the early tenth century, St. Andrew the "Fool for Christ" had a vision of Mary during a crowded all-night vigil on October 1, 911, at Blachernae. St. Andrew was standing at the back of the church with his disciple Epiphanius. The Virgin appeared above the congregation at 4 a.m., holding a veil over her outstretched arms, as if to protect the worshipers. St. Andrew asked Epiphanius, "Do you see how the Queen and Lady of all is praying for the whole world?" Epiphanius replied, "Yes, Father, and I stand in awe." This apparition is celebrated annually in the Orthodox calendar as the Feast of the Protection of the Theotokos. Although the vision took place in Constantinople, it depicted Mary's protection as universal, extending to all faithful Christians everywhere.

While the Christian theological tradition generally affirms the legitimacy of prayers for divine protection against calamities such as war, famine, pestilence, earthquakes, fires, and floods, it also emphasizes that such protection is never guaranteed and cannot be taken for granted. Many contemporary Christians understandably question the legitimacy of praying for success in war. However, the traditional view was that, in response to these prayers, military victory should be received with gratitude as an undeserved gift of God's mercy, and defeat accepted as divine punishment for sin.

Mary's protection did not stop Constantinople from falling to the Latin Crusaders in 1204. The Crusaders stole many icons and relics, spreading them across Western Europe. For example, a relic that might be the Virgin's veil from the Church of Blachernae is now at Chartres Cathedral in France. Four bronze horses, originally from Constantinople's

Hippodrome, now adorn St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. When the Byzantines finally regained control of the city in 1261, their empire was severely weakened, and many priceless treasures had been lost.

The end came nearly two hundred years later when the Ottoman Turks breached the walls and captured the city on May 29, 1453. In the preceding days, several omens seemed to portend the impending disaster. There was a lunar eclipse on the 22nd. A day or two later, the Hodegetria icon fell from its platform during a procession held as a final plea for the Virgin's intercession. The bearers struggled to replace it, as it suddenly felt unnaturally heavy. After they had proceeded another hundred yards or so, a fierce thunderstorm erupted, flooding the streets and forcing the procession to be abandoned. The next morning, the city was shrouded in a thick fog, an unusual sight in May. That night, an unearthly red glow slowly spread from the base to the summit of Hagia Sophia before fading away. For the Byzantines, the only possible explanation was that the Spirit of God was leaving their city.

After the fall of Constantinople, the spiritual legacy of the Byzantine Empire continued to influence and shape the Christian world. Within the Ottoman Empire, a community of Orthodox Christians persevered as a minority adhering to the traditional ways, led by the Ecumenical Patriarch, who now held an official position in the Ottoman government. Byzantine liturgy, theology, and iconography, including a deep devotion to the Mother of God, flourished in the Slavic lands to the north. Meanwhile, Byzantine scholars fleeing to Western Europe with their Greek manuscripts helped spark the revival of ancient learning known as the Renaissance. As St. Augustine had noted after the sack of Rome a thousand years earlier, "here we have no abiding city, but we seek the city that is to come." Empires rise and fall, but God never leaves Himself without witnesses. AVE



Holy Wisdom

Sermon at the House of the Virgin at Ephesus

The Very Rev. Richard J. Datos-Robyn

Thursday, June 5, 2025

By now, we've had many wonderful experiences here in Turkey, exotic sights like the magnificent Ottoman palaces, sounds like the stirring call to prayer reverberating from the minarets in Istanbul, and of course, the tastes of the wonderful Turkish food we have been enjoying. We might call them all "Turkish delights."

The absolute highlight of Istanbul was, for me, Hagia Sophia. Seeing the huge lines of people waiting in the sun to enter the various sites around Istanbul

was discouraging. I was also disappointed to learn that we couldn't enter the main floor of that holy place, especially since we were free to wander around at every other mosque. It was so hot and physically taxing that I thought, "Do I even want to do this?"

I briefly considered just skipping it, and I thought, "No, we came all this way, we're gonna do it." We persist, don't we? We have had some moments in this pilgrimage: a few spills, a few



House of the Virgin, Ephesus, Photo J. Alexander

brushes with medical personnel. But we push on, don't we? Because we're seekers after all. We're seeking something that will inform our lives and our ministries, and we all have ministries to return to, whether we're lay or ordained, once we get home.

And so the inspiration I was looking for came to me when we finally entered Hagia Sophia. Many of us already knew what that name translates to: it is Greek for "holy wisdom." Seeking holy wisdom has been the theme for me throughout this pilgrimage.

Now we all can confuse wisdom with knowledge. Many of us here possess much knowledge about many different things. Wisdom, as we know, is different, and it comes with life and experience, and often with age.

And earthly wisdom is one thing, but holy wisdom is something different. What is it? Why is it different? There is a line from the prophet Isaiah that I know doesn't refer directly to the Virgin Mary, but I like to think of her, her ministry, and her relationship with God in light of these words: *"Forget the former things. Do not dwell in the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up. Do not perceive it?"* (Isaiah 43:18-19a)

Mary is our guidepost in living into this sort of perception, which is the gateway, I think, to holy wisdom: perceiving that God is always doing a new thing in our lives, participating through our prayer and scriptures, and in opening our hearts and minds to new possibilities.

God calls us into new and abundant life with him over and over and over again, and I believe Mary is the archetype for living into that call. The question is, do we listen? Remember Saint Paul's question to the Corinthians:

“Consider your call, brethren. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.” (I Cor. 1:26-28)

We heard the beautiful Magnificat in our Gospel reading today, but back up just a little bit, and of course, we know that part too, the part about the Annunciation. *“Hail favored one,”* says the angel, *“the Lord is with you.”* Mary’s response is much more poetic and beautiful in scripture, but in essence, it’s *“Who, me?”* Do not be afraid. You have found favor with God. With God, all things will be possible.

Have you ever had that interchange with God? *“I have something in mind for you.” “Me? What did I ever do to deserve this?” “Don’t be afraid. You’ve found favor.”* But, but... We put all kinds of excuses in the way, even though we know in the end that with all things, nothing is impossible with God.

And so after the Annunciation, we hear her song as Mary visits her kinswoman, Elizabeth. And in her song, we hear a fearless embrace of God’s plan, radiating with holy wisdom. The serenity in the Magnificent, I think, is quite remarkable.

Mary first praises God. We start by always praising God. And she acknowledges with humility that he has regarded her low estate. He has something in mind for me. And then she goes on to tell Elizabeth, through her song, exactly what Jesus taught throughout his ministry, what he tried so hard to drive home to his disciples, what he tries so hard to drive home to us over and over again. She got it. She got the inside-out, upside-down nature of the kingdom of God as it relates to the kingdoms of this world.

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things—holy wisdom. The rich, the haughty, those who rely on their status, possessions, and signs of earthly power—they don’t get it. He has sent them away empty. He remembers his mercy. He remains true to the promise that He spoke to our father Abraham.

So with quiet dignity, knowing that her beloved son was destined for something great yet unknowable, she glorified God in her humble nurture with Jesus until his agonizing death.

When I lived in Philadelphia, I was unofficially attached to the Church of St. Clement. And the late Father Reid of blessed memory once gave a sermon, I think it was on the Feast of the Assumption, talking about how one of the Cowley fathers who had been there back in the 19th century was also an artist, and over the arch going into the choir, he painted the walls with sunflowers, a very unusual motif in Christian art. (I think he was probably influenced by the aesthetic movement that was popular at the time.) But that work had a theological perspective as well, because we all know what a sunflower does. It

has this heliotropism; it follows the sun. Throughout the day, we can watch the sunflower constantly gazing at the sun. And so, he compared the sunflower to St. Mary, whose face is always turned toward her Son. And when we look to her, we can look to where she's pointing us, which is always to her Son.

So, like the sunflower, Behold your Mother. St. John heard these words spoken from the cross, and from that day, he took our Blessed Lady into his care until she returned to God. And we stand here today, near her earthly home, giving thanks for her example, and we pray for intercession from the Saint greater than the Saints. Just as we can't leave Jesus in the manger, neither can we leave Our Lady living out her dotage in a quaint retirement home in the hills.

Our heavenly Mother loves us as she loves her own Son because we have been adopted as brothers and sisters and heirs of his promise. She encourages us as we listen for the will of God and attempt in our own weakness to fulfill it. She reminds us that God uses what is weak to shame the strong, what is foolish to shame the wise. She reminds us that in saying yes to God, there is a cost. A sword will pierce your own soul too. But that in attuning ourselves to holy wisdom, Hagia Sophia, we are steeling ourselves for this life's journey, striving for truth, freedom, and peace, in the joyful expectation of life everlasting. **AVE**



Images of the Virgin In Constantinople

By Fr. John D. Alexander

Byzantine devotion to the Mother of God is beautifully expressed in the tradition of sacred iconography. Following are five mosaics of Mary found in three ancient churches of Constantinople: Hagia Sophia, the Chora Church, and St. George's Cathedral.

Blachernitissa Mosaic in the Chora Church

The Chora Church was constructed in the early fourth century in the open spaces outside the city walls. (One meaning of the Greek word *chōra* is "countryside.") Later, the church came within the massive land walls built by Emperor Theodosius in 413-414. The Chora Church was rebuilt in the eleventh century and again in the fourteenth century, when it was lavishly decorated with its present frescoes and mosaics.

The mosaic over the doorway on the outer narthex wall depicts Mary with her hands raised in the orans position, an ancient prayer posture. The medallion on her torso illustrates the Christ Child within her womb. Since *chōra* can also mean "container" or "receptacle," the Greek inscription plays



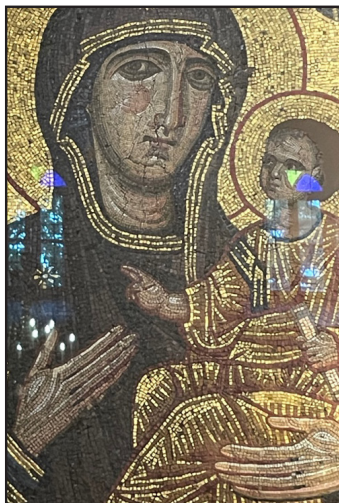
on the church's name, calling Mary "the Container of the Uncontainable" (hē chōra tou achōrētou). She bears the One whom even heaven itself cannot contain, much less buildings made by human hands (I Kings 8:27).

This mosaic is modeled after the famous Blachernitissa icon kept in Constantinople's Blachernae Church, which was especially linked to Mary's role as Protector of Constantinople. This type of icon is also known as the "Virgin of the Sign."

Portable Mosaic Icon in St. George's Cathedral

After the fall of Constantinople on May 29, 1453, and the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, the Patriarchal throne was first moved to the Church of the Apostles, then to the Church of the Theotokos Pammakaristos (the Most Blessed God-Bearer), and finally in 1597 to its present location at St. George's Cathedral in the Phanar district.

This icon was originally located in St. Mary Pammakaristos and accompanied the Patriarch to St. George's. Dating from between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, it is of the type known as Hogedetria ("She who Shows the Way"). Mary engages the viewer with her eyes and



gestures with her right hand toward the Christ Child, held in her left hand, as “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (John 14:6). The Christ Child’s gaze completes the circle by directing the viewer’s attention back to His Mother.

Another Hodegetria icon, believed to have been painted by St. Luke, was kept at the Hodegon Monastery. In keeping with the title “She Who Shows the Way,” a sacred spring at this monastery was believed to cure blindness and heal eye ailments. The focus of intense popular devotion, the Hodegetria icon was carried in weekly processions through the streets of Constantinople at various times in the city’s history.

Throne of Wisdom Mosaic in Hagia Sophia

Since the name Hagia Sophia means “Holy Wisdom,” it is no surprise that several images showing Mary as the “Throne of Wisdom” are prominently displayed in the building.

This tympanum mosaic in the southwest entrance vestibule dates from between 976 and 1025. It is one of the earliest representational mosaics installed in Hagia Sophia after the iconoclastic period. The Virgin sits on a throne, her feet resting on a pedestal. Sitting on her lap, the Christ Child raises his right hand in blessing and holds a scroll in his left hand. The medallions above the Virgin’s head are inscribed with the monograms MP and ΘY, abbreviations of Mētēr and Theou, “Mother of God.” To the right, Emperor Constantine, who established Constantinople as the “New Rome” in 330, presents a model of the city. To the left, Emperor Justinian I, who built Hagia Sophia between 532 and 537, presents a model of the cathedral. The placement of the Virgin and Child between the two Emperors highlights the building’s imperial character.



Dormition Mosaic in Chora Church

The walls and ceilings of the Chora Church in Istanbul are adorned with many mosaics and frescoes illustrating scenes from the Virgin's life, drawn from both the canonical Gospels and apocryphal writings. This mosaic depicts her Dormition (falling asleep). Contrary to popular belief, the Dormition is not a competing narrative but a precursor to Mary's bodily Assumption. At the end of her earthly life, Mary falls asleep with the disciples gathered around. Christ appears holding Mary's soul, depicted as a babe in swaddling clothes.

According to tradition, the apostles then carried Mary's body to her tomb. Three days later, the Apostle Thomas arrived and asked to see her body. When the tomb was opened, however, it was empty, and Thomas and the others present received a vision of Mary being assumed into heaven. (In some versions, she dropped her belt or sash to Thomas as a token of the reality of what he was witnessing.)

In Jerusalem, the Roman Catholic Abbey of the Dormition claims to be where Mary fell asleep, while the Greek Orthodox Tomb of the Virgin, outside the city walls in the Kidron Valley, claims to be the place from which she was assumed into heaven. At the House of the Virgin in Ephesus, however, a Dormition icon prominently displayed near the exit reminds pilgrims of that site's rival claim to be the place where Mary spent her final days on earth.



Deësis Mosaic in Hagia Sophia



Possibly the finest example of Christian religious art in Hagia Sophia—and, sadly, one of the most damaged—is the thirteenth-century Deësis (entreaty) mosaic in the south gallery. This type of icon shows Christ sitting on a throne, flanked by the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. The scene anticipates the Last Judgment. Christ looks directly at the viewer, while Mary and the Baptist turn inward toward Christ, with their hands raised in supplication on behalf of humanity.

The Hagia Sophia Deësis was installed shortly after the city's liberation from its 57-year occupation by the Crusaders in 1261. Its style reflects what art historians have labeled late-Byzantine naturalism—seen, for example, in the realistic depictions of human emotion in the subjects' faces. Although most of the figure of Mary has been lost, an idea of what she might have looked like can be gained from a similar mosaic installed in the Church of St Mary Pammakaristos around 1310.

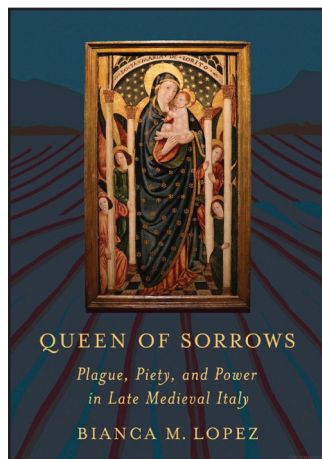


Book Reviews

Bianca M. Lopez. *Queen of Sorrows. Plague, Piety, and Power in Late Medieval Italy.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2024.

Travelers among the Ave readership may have had the opportunity to visit the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, the third-largest Marian shrine in Europe, after Lourdes and Fatima. The shrine is situated near Italy's Adriatic coast, approximately three hours from Rome, and dates to the late thirteenth century. As the last of the crusaders were making their way back home, laden with relics and devotional objects related to the Virgin Mary, her house arrived at Loreto in 1294. The Shrine of the Holy House of the Virgin Mary (Santuario Santa Casa), transported from Nazareth to Loreto, is traditionally considered the birthplace and family home of Mary, as well as the site where the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her to announce the incarnation – the Word made flesh in her womb. Santa Casa consists of a single room with three stone walls, containing a Black Madonna, an altar, and a blue ceiling with golden stars. Today, archeological evidence supports the thesis that the walls of Santa Casa originated in the Holy Land.

Bianca M. Lopez's book, *Queen of Sorrows: Plague, Piety, and Power in Late Medieval Italy*, is an innovative study of the Marian shrine at Loreto, which documents its popularity and growth as a pilgrimage site in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Interestingly, for a study on medieval Marian devotion, Lopez utilizes both quantitative and the more typical qualitative sources to document the patterns of giving and the social networks that supported the shrine. To support her argument, Lopez analyzed 1,904 notarial testaments to determine how the shrine grew in influence. She argues that in central Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the population encountered unprecedented suffering and mortality due to the plague. They turned to the Virgin Mary, the "Queen of Sorrows," not only because of her spiritual power as the mother of Jesus, but also because they believed her uniquely compassionate to their trials, having lost a son of her own. Lopez argues that the widespread mortality of the plague led to the devotion to the Queen of Sorrows spreading from the homes of the



nobility and monasteries into rural areas and then urban streets. New patterns of patronage emerged, especially among widows and migrants, as Marian devotion gained prominence among grief-stricken people, concerned with their families after death, and committed to providing relief for their loved ones in purgatory. As the popularity and wealth of Santa Casa grew, the papacy and local lords eventually sought to bring governance of the local shire under church control. “This book begins with ordinary townspeople giving small-scale donations to the Virgin Mary and concludes with the papacy transforming a humble Marian shrine into a monumental basilica” (p. 12).

Chapter one focuses on how migrating Marian devotion bridged the gap between rural and urban contexts after the Black Death. The following chapter discusses the Loreto shrine’s rise in popularity and increasing donations during the plague years, as pilgrims sought protection and comfort. Chapter three explores the role of notaries in managing bequests as mediaries between households and shrine administrators. Chapter four is an evocative example of the various household strategies employed to offer prayers and make bequests during times of heightened fear and mortality. Chapter five discusses the role of female piety at the shrine. As new widows gained independence and control over household finances, they increasingly made donations to Santa Casa. The role of migrants in the shrine’s rising popularity is the focus of chapter six, noting how Loreto functioned as a pilgrimage site for those who could not return to their homelands. Lastly, chapter seven traces papal and noble interest in the shrine after the Western Schism. “As the shrine became a great estate, it drew in the nobility, attracted the papacy, groups that pulled Loreto out of local lay and diocesan influence. By the mid-fifteenth century, the shrine was fully transformed into a papal basilica and began to acquire its reputation as the Holy House of Loreto, the Virgin’s birthplace.... By 1470, Mary took her place as an elite saint, and Loreto was recast as the Holy House, the birthplace of the Virgin, carried by angels over the Mediterranean Sea from Acre to eastern Italy” (pp. 16-17).

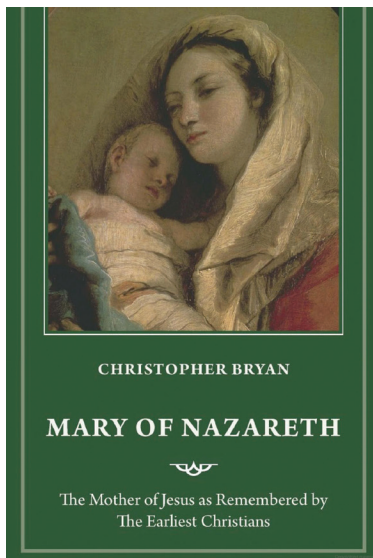
This book is written in an accessible and engaging style, making it suitable for readers with an interest in the history and development of Marian shrines. Although quantitative data was used, the reader is not presented with numbers; instead, the author draws us into a broader narrative of Marian devotion.

Christopher Bryan. *Mary of Nazareth: The Mother of Jesus as Remembered by the Earliest Christians.* New York: Seabury Books, 2024.

I was grateful to find Christopher Bryan’s new book, *Mary of Nazareth: The Mother of Jesus as Remembered by the Earliest Christians*. Soon after my first reading, it became one of my favorite books on Mary by an Anglican

author. Throughout, the author remains true to his purpose, that is, to explore the role of Mary of Nazareth through the writings of early Christian sources. The book is informed by his meticulous research skills, as he explores every reference to Mary in the New Testament, and combines an accessible academic narrative with his own catholic spirit and Marian devotion. Bryan also makes use of non-canonical literature, such as the Protoevangelium of James. Throughout *Mary of Nazareth*, Bryan situates her within the context of first-century culture and the evolving theologies of the incarnation among early church writers, including historical controversies. He also dialogues and collaborates with a wide range of other scholars, such as Brook Foss Westcott, Luke Timothy Johnson, and Elizabeth Schlusser Fiorenza, as he engages the texts. “No other woman in the New Testament – or, for that matter, in the Scriptures of Israel – has anything like such coverage as this. The proper question may then be not ‘Why is there so little about Mary in the New Testament?’ but ‘Why is there so much?’ If Fiorenza is right, then evidently Mary was perceived and remembered, even within the lifetime of some who might have been eyewitnesses or heard about her from eyewitnesses, either as ‘a problem’ or else as ‘exceptional.’ Why? Which? Maybe both? And in what ways?” (p. 2).

In the first chapter, Bryan surveys Pauline literature. While Paul does not mention Mary by name, Bryan argues that Paul undoubtedly knew the identity of Jesus’ mother; however, his overriding interest was in revealing how Jesus came among us as the Son of God. “‘Made of a woman’ makes the essential point, which is that Jesus shared the human condition” (p. 9). Bryan’s focus in chapter two is the gospel of Mark, a text without an infancy narrative, but with an interest in Jesus’ family relationships. It is also the first New Testament text to mention Mary, along with other family members. Throughout the chapter, Bryan discusses the hostility around Jesus’ mission during his lifetime, including those in his community of origin. The question, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” has less to do with Mary’s virginal conception and physical kinship than it does with Jesus’ chosen family of disciples. In chapter three, Bryan explores the genealogy of Matthew and Jewish marriage customs. “So the narrative directly places Mary in the company of those other women in Matthew’s genealogy...who were at once threats to the normal order of things



and themselves threatened by that order” (p. 33). After tracing what is known about Jewish betrothal and the relationship between Mary and Joseph, Bryan concludes that Matthew’s version of the story stresses that not only were the circumstances regarding Jesus’ birth abnormal, but his own status was questionable, consequently making him unsuitable for betrothal and marriage.

Hellenistic literary conventions and the chapters of Luke devoted to Jesus’ infancy and origins are the focus of chapter four. Here, Bryan gives a great deal of attention to the Annunciation narrative – unparalleled “in accounts of angelic visitations and promises elsewhere in scripture” (p. 50). He argues that in Luke, Mary is a figure of perplexity or uncertainty: “She is a paragon of faith not because she is able to understand and interpret everything correctly, but precisely because she remains faithful and obedient even when she does not understand” (p. 85). The gospel of John, like Mark, has no infancy narratives, nor is Mary referred to by name, but as “the mother of Jesus,” or “his mother.” In chapter four, Bryan explores the relationship between the unnamed mother of Jesus and the unnamed beloved disciple, who took over her care after the crucifixion. Here, Bryan notes, John turns our attention from the present to “the future life of the church, in which Mary’s motherhood – necessarily a symbolic motherhood – was understood as having a continuing role” (p. 113).

The Book of Revelation is the focus of the last chapter devoted to scripture, chapter six, where the focus is on Mary as the mother of all Israel. “So, as the daughter of Zion, Mary must also be the new Eve, that is, woman, now receiving fulfillment of the promise that was involved even in her curse and the curse of the serpent” (p. 121). In chapter seven, which brings together the previous chapters, Bryan makes a case for the importance of Mary of Nazareth, as she was remembered both as a woman and as an individual, at a time and in a society where it was assumed that women would not make an impression. In his postscript, Bryan makes a case for Mary’s significance today as a prophet who intercedes for God’s people: “...Mary is certainly the arch prophet, who brought the word of God to us not merely on her tongue, but in her own flesh” (p. 145). Two appendices on the attribution of the Magnificat in Luke, and an overview of twentieth and twenty-first century interpretations of the virgin birth are included. The book closes with detailed endnotes and a bibliography.

Readers of *Ave* may be familiar with other works by Christopher Bryan, an Anglican priest, New Testament scholar, novelist, and devoted pastor. From 1991 to 2021, he edited the renowned *Sewanee Theological Review*. Bryan is indebted to his Anglo-Catholic roots: “Christ came to me within the Anglo-Catholic tradition. There Christ called me, and there Christ has blessed me. While I have over time come to appreciate and value some aspects of the Reformation, it remains that Anglo-Catholic liturgy, Anglo-Catholic concern

for social justice and the poor, the Anglo-Catholic tradition of coming daily to God's table for the Eucharist, the availability of confession, joyful acceptance of the prayers and fellowship of blessed Mary and the saints – these things, by God's grace, are the basic furniture of my ecclesial home, and, in this life at least, I cannot imagine why I should ever either abandon or replace them." (Quoted from christopherbryanonline.com.) This fine book is a further example of the author's depth of devotion coupled with expert research and interpretation.

The Rev. Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, Editor-in-Chief, Anglican and Episcopal History, Historiographer of the Episcopal Church, Tucson, AZ



Annual Meeting of the Society of Mary

May 15, 2025, 7 pm (Eastern Time)

(Note: What follows is a digest of the minutes of the Annual Meeting, which remain unofficial at the time of publication as the Council has not yet approved them.)

The 2025 Annual Meeting of the Society of Mary (SoM) in the U.S.A. was held virtually. Of 39 registrants, 29 attended the meeting, all of whom were members of SoM. Thus, the constitutional requirement for a quorum of ten SoM members to conduct business was satisfied. Fr. John D. Alexander, Superior, called the meeting to order at 7 pm. In the Chaplain's absence, he led the opening prayers from the Manual.

Reports

Superior's Report. Fr. Alexander is pleased with the new arrangement of having the Annual Mass celebrated in person each year at a different location. The 2024 Annual Mass was held on Saturday, October 19, at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul the Apostle in Springfield, Illinois, where he received a wonderful welcome. The Rt. Rev'd Brian Burgess, Bishop of Springfield, presided; the Very Rev'd Andrew Hook, Dean of the Cathedral, celebrated the Mass; Fr. Superior preached. In addition to members of the Cathedral congregation, several members of the SoM were

in attendance from the dioceses in that region. Father went on to mention that in two weeks, he and Elizabeth would be participating in a pilgrimage to Turkey to celebrate the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.

Treasurer's Report. Fr. Yost reported that the Operating Fund budget is about \$12,000 per year and that all the bills have been paid. Budgeted expenses for printing and postage are up over last year. The fiscal year runs from June 1 to May 31. This fund is supported by membership dues. The Investment Fund is currently valued at approximately \$283,000, which is \$50,000 more than last year. This fund consists of gifts and bequests and is invested through the Raymond James brokerage. He thanked Assistant Treasurer Dr. David Chase for his continued help and guidance. Dr. Chase said that he continues to encourage payment of dues via PayPal or credit card and spoke of ongoing efforts to reduce the number of members who renew by mailing in checks.

Editor of AVE Report. Ms. Phoebe Pettingell reported that she is working to get the next issue of AVE out this summer and hopes to include reports from Fr. Alexander about the trip to Turkey. Ward reports should be sent in now for inclusion in this issue. She expressed her great pleasure at working on AVE. Fr. Alexander thanked her for all she does for this excellent publication.

Secretary's Report. Dr. Paul Cooper, Secretary, reported on the following developments since the last Annual Meeting:

SoM Membership. Members are those who pay dues, and there are currently 604 members (more accurately, "membership units," as approximately 20 more individuals are included as spouses). We have five dues-paying expatriate members – one each in Japan and France, and three in Canada.

Courtesy Recipients of AVE. Following the directions given at the October 2024 Council meeting, some of those previously classified as "members" have now been reclassified more accurately as "courtesy recipients of AVE." These include two religious orders and several officers of the English SoM Council.

Active Wards and Cells. The latest list of active wards and cells was posted on the website on May 7, 2025. This includes a formerly inactive cell that was reactivated in October 2024 at Christ Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Having become inactive, the cell at Chesterton, Indiana, has been removed from the list. So there remain 29 active wards and 10 active Cells.

Cathedral of All Saints, Albany, New York. The new Ward of Our Lady, Queen of All Saints continues apace under the leadership of Dean Harding, Ward Superior Fr. Jason Radcliff, and Ward Secretary, Deacon Sandy McGowan.

St. George's, Schenectady, New York. Secretary Wendy Madelone of the reactivated Our Lady of the Snows Ward sent photos of their activities for the year, including one from a recent meeting with their Ward Superior, Fr. Pettigrew.

Church of the Advent, Boston, Massachusetts. The Ward of Our Lady Queen of Heaven was reactivated under the leadership of assisting priest Fr. Jay James as they awaited the coming of their new Rector Fr. MacDonald-Radcliff, who, when he arrived earlier this year, wholeheartedly approved the Ward and asked Fr. James to continue as Ward Superior for now.

St. Barnabas Cathedral, Dunwoody, Georgia. The Ward of Our Lady of Perpetual Help was reactivated under the leadership of the Most Rev'd Chandler Jones. The Ward Superior is the Very Rev'd Daniel Trout, Dean of the Cathedral, and they continue with 14 active members.

Dedications of Active and Inactive Wards and Cells. This list posted on the SoM website shows 144 dedications of all Wards and Cells in order of their foundation, beginning with the Ward of Our Lady of Clemency at S. Clement's Church, Philadelphia, in 1962, and concluding with the Ward of Our Lady, Queen of All Saints at the Cathedral of All Saints in Albany in 2024. (Note: New Wards are no longer required to avoid dedications that already appear on this list, but only those of currently active Wards.—Ed.)

Ward and Cell Annual Reports. Each active Ward and Cell is asked to report annually to the SoM Council Secretary so that the Council may have an accurate picture of activity in the wider Society. These reports are also forwarded to the Editor of AVE. Recent reports include one from the Ward of Our Lady of Victory at the Church of the Ascension, Chicago. Ward Secretaries are urged to follow suit and send their reports to the Secretary with a copy to the Editor of AVE.

Guild of the Living Rosary (GLR) Report. Fr. David M. Baumann, Administrator of the GLR, reported on this Marian organization, which is affiliated with the SoM. He noted that the GLR was formed about 100 years ago in the UK. In its separate USA organization, the GLR has 40 members and over \$2,000 in its bank account. They have issued an excellent new manual. Mrs. Elizabeth Baumann, a member of the SoM Council, serves as the GLR Secretary. She sends out the prayer intentions for members who each recite one decade of the Rosary per day. More about the GLR can be found on their Facebook page.

New Business

Amendments to the Constitution. Fr. Superior discussed the need for amendments to the SoM Constitution that the Council endorsed at its March 2025 meeting. The changes affect the language used to describe

the qualifications for SoM Officers and Ward Superiors. Fr. Steven Rice moved that this revised Constitution be adopted, and Fr. Martin Yost seconded the motion, which then passed. (A link to the amended Constitution is on the website at the bottom of the “About” page.)

Election of Officers, Additional Officers, and Council Members.

Fr. Alexander announced the following nominations by the Council for election at this Annual Meeting:

Re-election of Fr. Alexander as Superior, Fr. Griffin as Chaplain, and Dr. Cooper as Secretary, to four-year terms ending in 2029.

Re-election of Dr. David Chase as Assistant Treasurer, and Ms. Phoebe Pettingell as Editor of AVE, both to a one-year term.

Re-election of the three members of the outgoing Council Class of 2025 to become the Council Class of 2029: Fr. J. Connor Haynes, Fr. Jonathan J. C. Ostman, and Dr. John P. Rosso.

Dr. Cooper moved that all of the above nominees be so elected. Fr. Warren Tanghe seconded the Motion, which then passed unanimously. (The list of Officers and Members of Council as of the end of this Annual Meeting is on the website on the “Officers and Council” page.)

Announcements

2025 Annual Mass. Fr. Alexander announced that the Annual Mass will be celebrated as part of the annual Walsingham Pilgrimage at Grace Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, on Saturday, October 18, 2025 at 10:30 am CT. He will be the preacher, and the event will be live-streamed.

2026 Annual Meeting. The tentative date for the next Annual Meeting is Thursday, May 7, 2026, at 7 pm ET. The date will be officially confirmed in the future.

Adjournment and Closing Prayers

There being no further business, Fr. Alexander asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. This was moved, seconded, and passed. He then led the Regina Coeli and the closing Prayer of the Society from the Manual. The meeting ended at 7:56 pm.



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Cover illustration:

Hagia Sophia, Kommenos Mosaic (Detail),
12th Century

For information on the Society of Mary
in the Church of England, including
the English edition of AVE, please visit
<http://societyofmary.weebly.com>

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