



THE MAGAZINE OF THE Society of Mary



American Edition

Presentation of the Lord, 2026

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From the Superior

Dear Members and Friends of the Society of Mary,

This letter comes with all prayers that 2026 may be a year of the Lord's favor for our Society and for all who work to advance the Catholic faith and honor the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints in our churches. Please note in your calendars two events in the coming year:

Our **Annual Meeting** is scheduled to take place via Zoom videoconference on **Thursday, May 7th, at 7 pm ET**. After Easter, login details will be sent to the email addresses we have on record for all SoM members in good standing.

Our **Annual Mass** is scheduled to take place at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Troy, NY, on **Saturday, October 17th, 2026, at 11 am**. More details will be forthcoming in future issues of AVE, via email, and on the American SoM Facebook page.

(If you have any questions about membership status, or if you need to ensure that we have your up-to-date email address or mailing details, please email Membership Administrator Mr. Adam Barner, at the email address given on the back cover. Alternatively, you may write him at PO Box 50065, Baltimore, MD 21211.)

In the meantime, we hope you find this issue of AVE informative, enjoyable, and inspiring. **AVE**

In Christ and Our Lady,
Fr. John D. Alexander, Superior

DEVOTIONAL SOCIETY OBSERVANCES IN 2026

Society of King Charles the Martyr—Annual Mass and Meeting at Saint John's Episcopal Church, Tampa, FL, on Saturday, February 7, at 11 am.

Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament—Annual Mass and Meeting at Saint George's Episcopal Church, Schenectady, NY, on Saturday, June 6, at 11 am.

Guild of All Souls—Annual Requiem Mass at Church of the Resurrection, New York, NY, on Saturday, November 7, at 11 am.

The 2025 Annual Mass

Grace Episcopal Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

By Phoebe Pettingell

The 2025 Annual Mass was held on Saturday, October 18th, in conjunction with the Walsingham Pilgrimage at Grace Episcopal Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, at the invitation of the rector, Fr. William Bulson. Grace has been home to the Walsingham Proto-Shrine since 1931. This appears to mean that its statue of Our Lady—a replica of the one commissioned by Fr. Alfred Hope Patten in 1922—was installed there in the year before its prototype was translated from St. Mary's parish church to the Norfolk Anglican Shrine on October 15, 1932.

Not only had Grace Church hosted the Society of Mary Annual Mass in past years, but I had also attended previous Walsingham Pilgrimages there, and I had known two former Rectors well, so it was old home week for me to be back in this warm and hospitable parish and to see many old friends. It was wonderful to talk about old times. Pilgrims gathered from across



Pilgrims in Outdoor Procession, Sheboygan, WI

the country, many visiting the Proto-Shrine for the first time, including 14 members of the Society of Mary Ward from the Church of the Ascension in Chicago. Each pilgrim received a gift packet containing schedules, prayer cards, and materials related to the Proto-Shrine's history, along with other trinkets.

The two-day event began with a quiet day. This year, I was asked to give the three meditations. They were organized around the Joyful, Sorrowful, and

Glorious Mysteries of the Rosary, as portrayed in art. The attendees had booklets with the pictures: two paintings for each mystery, drawn from the Pre-Raphaelite and High Northern Gothic traditions. My emphasis was on how this art can enrich our understanding of Mary's role. We also gathered at the Walsingham shrine, where Deacon Paul Aparicio led us in recitation of the Rosary. At Vespers, Bishop Brian Burgess of Springfield was installed as Bishop Visitor of the Proto-Shrine Guardians.



Walsingham Statue Ready for Procession

The following day, a glorious High Mass was offered by Bishop Matthew Gunter of Wisconsin. Our Superior, Father John Alexander, preached. A choir from Nashotah House sang. We processed around the block following the statue-bearers and singing the traditional Walsingham hymn, accompanied by a brass band. Afterwards, we gathered in the Great Hall for a festal luncheon, during which we heard a presentation on the new organization of Proto-Shrine Guardians, Oblates, and Associates. Grace is a beautiful church, and its Walsingham pilgrimage is always a deeply spiritual and joyous occasion. **AVE**

Note: Next year's Sheboygan Walsingham Pilgrimage is scheduled for October 8-10, 2026. The Quiet Day meditations will be given by Dr. Lauren Whitnah, Dean of Nashotah House Theological Seminary, and the Preacher will be the Rt. Rev. Brian Burgess, Bishop of Springfield and Episcopal Visitor of the Guardians.

Joy, Sorrow, and Glory in Religious Art

Three Meditations on the Holy Rosary

By Phoebe Pettingell

The following meditations were given at the Annual Walsingham Pilgrimage Quiet Day at Grace Episcopal Church, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, on Friday, October 17, 2025.

I. Joy

Art draws us in. The Anglo-Catholic Movement of the mid-19th century was in revolt against both 18th-century Rationalism and that period's neo-Calvinism. If you've seen 18th-century Episcopal churches, worshippers sat in white, unadorned churches in box pews, mostly listening to the preacher and occasionally singing a metrical psalm. The Anglo-Catholic Ritualists aimed to engage the senses through art, music, incense, and processions, often using rood screens or rood beams, such as the one in this church, to portray the crucifixion. Our Lady was too "Catholic" for Evangelicals. If mentioned at all, it was her obedience that was stressed. The Dark Ages, as the pre-Renaissance period was called, was seen as a time of superstition and oppression, with a corrupt and tyrannical Church/State that suppressed learning, science, and true religion.

The cultural reaction against this worldview was an aspect of the Romantic Revival. Across Western Europe and North America, various religious movements—not just Anglo-Catholicism—began to incorporate art and ritual into their worship.

In England, pictures began to appear displaying religious scenes in unconventional ways, signed with the mysterious initials "PRB." Soon it was revealed that this stood for Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Raphael was one of the supremely admired painters of the Victorian era, but the Pre-Raphaelites sought to look back further in history for earlier, often medieval, artistic models. Their quest was often controversial. A painting by the Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais, titled *Christ in the House of His Parents*, was castigated by Charles Dickens as

A hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-haired boy in a nightgown, who appears to have received a poke playing in an adjacent gutter, and to be holding it up for the contemplation of a kneeling woman, so horrible in her ugliness that (supposing it were possible for any



John Everett Millais, *Christ in the House of His Parents* (c. 1849-1850),
Tate Britain, London

human creature to exist for a moment with that dislocated throat) she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster in the vilest cabaret in France or in the lowest gin-shop in England.

We will be examining this picture in my second meditation.

One of the bitterest accusations against the Pre-Raphaelites was that they belonged to the dangerous Anglo-Catholic movement, as many of them did. Soon, the Pre-Raphaelite William Morris was decorating parish churches with stained glass, embroidered chairs, faldstools, tapestries, banners, and vestments.

Another public outrage was caused by Dante Gabriel Rossetti's painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini* in 1870. This painting departed from the Medieval pattern, showing Mary reading a book. Rossetti's Mary is in bed, clearly having just awakened, and in a nightgown with bare arms. The angel has no wings, but flames emanate from his feet, reminiscent of the Greek god Hermes. He, too, has bare arms and is suggestively naked under his white robe. He offers the Virgin a lily. She looks shocked and startled, a reaction that doesn't surprise us today, but was a departure from the artistic tradition. The painter used his brother and sister as models, but changed their hair color and complexion. In fact, the Rossettis were all dark, being the children of Italian immigrants. Christina Rossetti, a devout Anglo-Catholic, was one of the leading poets of her day, while her older

sister, Maria, became a Dante scholar and joined the All Saints Sisters of the Poor as a nun.

This painting helps the viewer feel what it might be like to be confronted by a supernatural being. It also reveals Mary's humanity in all her vulnerability and serves as a reminder that Joy, when confronted with the divine, may also involve awe, even terror.

Now we move on to another Pre-Raphaelite painting by William Holman-Hunt, *The Triumph of the Innocents*. The school I attended, although secular, put on a yearly Christmas pageant, usually from one of the Medieval Mystery Cycles. Unlike most Sunday school pageants, it included the Massacre of the Innocents and the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. Hunt spent time in the Middle East, and his Biblical pictures portray Jesus and his family as Jews, challenging the rather ubiquitous antisemitism of 19th-century Britain.

Generally categorized as one of the Sorrowful Mysteries, the Flight into Egypt becomes a joyful occasion in Hunt's painting as the newly awakened children are blessed by the infant Jesus in his mother's arms as she rides on a donkey, led by Saint Joseph. (This scene is adapted from the apocryphal gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, popular in the Middle Ages.) Both Christians and Muslims in the Middle East, and especially in Egypt, venerate sites described both in this text and in Coptic accounts. Christ seems to be holding palm fronds, symbolic of his later triumphal journey into Jerusalem.

One of the sites mentioned during the Holy Family's stay in Egypt is Zeitoun, today a district of modern Cairo. Beginning in 1968 and lasting until 1971, an apparition of



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* (1850), Tate Britain, London



William Holman Hunt, *The Triumph of the Innocents* (c. 1883), Tate Britain, London

the Virgin appeared amidst the domes of a church dedicated to her. This happened as often as three nights a week, and was witnessed by thousands, possibly millions, both Christians and Muslims. The Egyptian government investigated and concluded that the luminous figure was not faked. Later, in 2001, further apparitions were witnessed at a Coptic church in Assiut in Upper Egypt, and again in 2009 on the island of al-Warraaq in Giza, also among the domes.

Hunt's painting of the resurrected Holy Innocents reminds us of a significant episode of the Christmas cycle. We need to remember that the Christmas cycle is not just sweet pictures of the Stable, Shepherds, Angels, and Wise Men. It also encompasses and has the potential to redeem the violence with which our world is only too familiar. Even sorrow and tragedy can be transformed into Joy.

II. Sorrow

Christ in the House of His Parents, also known as *The Carpenter's Shop*, was painted by John Everett Millais between 1849 and 1850. The boy Jesus has driven a nail into his hand. Blood from the wound has dripped onto his bare feet. His distressed mother kneels beside him, kissing him. Saint Joseph holds the wounded hand from which his grandmother, Saint Anne, has just drawn out the nail with pliers. Cousin John the Baptist (with a camel's hair loincloth) brings water to wash the wound. The viewer sees tools hanging on the back wall, forecasting the Crucifixion. Through the window, we see

grazing sheep, symbolic of the Good Shepherd. A dove rests on the rung of a ladder, suggesting the Holy Spirit. Joseph has been constructing a door to which the adult Christ will compare himself (John 10:7-9).

For accuracy, Millais employed working-class people as his models: note Joseph's musculature and Anne's rough hands. The absence of haloes shocked many of Millais's critics. We heard earlier Charles Dickens's vitriolic review. But the renowned art critic John Ruskin applauded Millais's combination of realism and symbolism. The controversy led Queen Victoria to arrange a private viewing at Buckingham Palace, which made Millais's reputation.

The symbolism employed by the Pre-Raphaelites is taken from their medieval forebears, who read Scripture allegorically. However, some late Medieval painters employed a realism that was far more shocking than that of their Victorian descendants. Consider the High Northern Gothic painters, such as Pieter Bruegel, Rogier Van der Weyden, Jan Van Eyck, or Hieronymus Bosch. One artist probably unfamiliar to the Victorians was Mathias



Matthias Grünewald, *The Crucifixion* (c. 1512-1516),
Isenheim Altarpiece, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France

Grünewald. Although technically belonging to the Renaissance, he rejected the neoclassicism of his period in favor of a realism that still can shock.

In the High Middle Ages, Christ was often portrayed at his Second Coming, sitting over the rainbow in judgment, sending the saved to heaven and the damned to hell. Mary was primarily seen as an intercessor with her Son. Nonetheless, a new emphasis developed on her “Sorrows.” It was a tumultuous period during the transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. In Grünewald’s 16th-century life, plague swept Europe, along with ergot poisoning—a fungal growth on wheat that caused sores, bloating, and hallucinations.

Grünewald’s most famous and significant work is the Isenheim Altarpiece, originally painted for the high altar at a monastery in Alsace run by the monks of Saint Anthony the Great, a desert father of the 4th century, invoked against diseases affecting the skin, including plague sores, shingles, and “Saint Anthony’s Fire,” as ergot poisoning was called. The monks ran hospices for people suffering from these afflictions. (We will consider just the crucifixion panel here, but do look up the various views of the work online or in a book.)

Sufferers who came to the monastery would normally see this picture of the Crucifixion: one of the most vivid depictions of human suffering ever devised. Christ is writhing in agony with sores all over his body, and blood where the nails, the crown of thorns, and the spear have pierced Him. Three of the watchers are disfigured by their sorrow. Saint John the Evangelist holds the swooning Virgin. Mary is as pale as death; John’s face is swollen with grief. At the foot of the Cross kneels Mary Magdalen, also writhing in pity and terror at her Lord’s agony.

The figure standing on the other side is John the Baptist with the Lamb of God at his feet, bleeding into a chalice. In the Latin of the Vulgate, he is saying, “He must increase, while I must decrease” (John 3.30). Since Christmas Day was believed to be the shortest day of the year, and the Nativity of John the Baptist on June 24 was believed to be the summer solstice, the Middle Ages saw this prophecy as referring to the sun’s light waxing and waning, which reflected in turn the respective roles of Saint John and Christ in Salvation.

What would have been the effect of this painting on the afflicted? For one thing, it assured them that Christ had experienced all their suffering and more. Were they despised and rejected? Less so than He. Were they in agony? Perhaps less than He. It was a reassurance that God knew their pain and sorrow.

But there was, at the same time, the hope of Resurrection, not just that after death all tears will be wiped away, but even in this life, the hope

of a miracle. Have you known people who were told either that they were mortally ill, or that nothing could cure them of pain, and suddenly they recovered? I have.

Furthermore, the Sorrowful Mysteries can be a comfort in affliction. Let me speak personally. In a four-month period, I lost both my 40-year-old son and my 90-year-old mother, who had always been part of my life. Where I found my deepest consolation was in the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross, which my then parish celebrated weekly during Lent. I could not ask “Why me?” when Christ’s mother’s only Son died even younger and more horribly.

Grünewald’s painting already meant a great deal to me. But in my darkest hours, I returned to an understanding of how suffering can be redemptive. I don’t want to speak cheap grace or sappy comfort, but sorrow has lessons, too, which can lead to redemption.

III. Glory

Hans Memling’s 15th-century painting of the Virgin shows her seated on a throne in glory. She herself makes a throne for the Christ Child—the “seat of Wisdom.” Behind her hangs a tapestry, which not only denotes her regal status as Queen of heaven but also may evoke a curtain she once wove for the Temple in Jerusalem. This detail originates from the second-century Protoevangelium of James, an apocryphal writing that was highly influential in the medieval period. Among other things, it tells the story of Mary’s own conception, birth, and childhood, including the tradition that she was raised in the Temple.

In the painting, Mary is flanked on one side by Saint



Hans Memling, *Madonna Enthroned with Angel, St. George, and Donor* (c. 1480),
National Gallery, London

George and a donor, on the other side by a lute-playing angel. There is much to unpack here.

Saint George was invoked against the plague for his dragon-slaying. The donor, presumably the person commissioning the painting, might also have been named George, which would account for Saint George's presence in the painting.

Mary was herself considered a protectress against disease. In Rome, for example, the ancient Byzantine icon *Sancta Maria Salus Populi Romani*—Saint Mary the Health (or Salvation) of the Roman people—was invoked against outbreaks of the plague and other pestilences. It also portrays the Christ Child seated in her lap with a Gospel book, as this picture also does. Furthermore, the enthroned Virgin represents the Church itself, as does the statue of Our Lady of Walsingham.

I have chosen this work by Memling because the serenity of his figures shows us that they are in Glory, not bowed down with earthly cares. The walled garden is a symbol of Our Lady's perpetual virginity; the landscape beyond may represent the donor's castle and lands. The infant Jesus has one hand on the gospel book, while the other reaches out toward us.

What of the lute-playing angel? The 12th-century nun and polymath, Hildegard of Bingen, calls Christ "the music played in Mary's womb." Hildegard, herself one of the great composers of her era, sees something redemptive in the monastic singing of the sevenfold daily offices, a foretaste of the music of heaven—an idea echoed by Martin Luther, himself a composer, in his description of the importance of Church music. Hence, the singing and instrument-playing angels in Christian art.

The growth of Marian devotion in the High Middle Ages altered the status of women, as convents became schools of learning. While the Fall came through Eve, Mary was the new Eve: her Child reversed Sin and Death, redeeming humanity. The Virgin became identified with the Hebrew *Shekinah*, which Jewish mysticism identified with Holy Wisdom. As a former rector of this parish once said to me: "The statue of Our Lady of Walsingham is Holy Wisdom presenting the Divine Logos to the world."

Joy, Sorrow, Glory. Meditating on the mysteries of the Holy Rosary leads us into deeper spiritual lives and a more profound understanding of the mysteries of existence. Ultimately, Mary shows us what human life can be and points us to Salvation through her Son. And praying with all our senses, not just our intellect, can help us become the people God created us to be in the glory of his Vision. **AVE**

Phoebe Pettingell is Editor of AVE. She lives in northern Wisconsin.

The Society of Mary in the United States

By John D. Alexander

This address was given to a group of parishioners of S. Clement's Church, Philadelphia, on retreat at Holy Cross Monastery, West Park, New York, on October 23, 2025. It was the third in a series of three talks on the Anglo-Catholic devotional societies.

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Speaking on the Society of Mary is a bit of a challenge: having served as the American Superior for the past twelve years, it isn't always easy to step back from the trees to see the forest! Also, compared with the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament and the Guild of All Souls, very little information is publicly available about the Society of Mary's early history.

Here, I will draw mainly on the 1988 Howard University doctoral thesis of my predecessor, the late Fr. Richard Cornish Martin, SSC. His work focuses solely on the origins and development of the Society of Mary in the United States. It offers a lot of good material for reflection.

The Society of Mary was formed in England in 1931 through the merger of two older Marian societies: the Confraternity of Our Lady, established in 1880, and the League of Our Lady, founded in 1904. Little research has been published on either of these precursors.

By the time of the Society of Mary's consolidation in 1931, at least two other Marian societies were already active in the Church of England: the Guild of the Living Rosary of Our Lady and Saint Dominic, founded in 1905, and the Society of Our Lady of Walsingham, established in 1925 by Fr. Alfred Hope Patten, Vicar of St. Mary's Church, and Founder of the Anglican Shrine in Norfolk.

However, the Society of Mary remains distinct from both groups in that it is not tied to any specific form of devotion or any particular pilgrimage site. Instead, it seeks to promote all legitimate types of Marian devotion equally.

By the 1950s, the Society of Mary had about 100 members in the United States. The largest concentration was in the Philadelphia area. The only American Ward was at S. Clement's, under the leadership of Fr. Franklin Joiner, and kept alive through the valiant organizational efforts of its Secretary, Miss Tacey Hurst.

In 1960, however, Fr. J. Duncan Kenna, rector of St. Stephen's Church in Florence, New Jersey, began corresponding with the English Council

Secretary, Mr. Ronald Capps, regarding the establishment of a new Ward. Mr. Capps responded enthusiastically, and, in 1961, the southern New Jersey Ward of Our Lady, Queen of Peace was formed with 25 members. Fr. Kenna served as its Superior. He also began discussions with Fr. William Elwell, Rector of S. Clement's in Philadelphia, and Fr. Grieg Taber, Rector of St. Mary the Virgin in New York City, about the possibility of advertising to promote the Society's growth in the United States.

In further correspondence with Ronald Capps in England, Fr. Kenna boldly proposed the formation of an autonomous American region. Until this time, American members sent their dues to England and received back from England their medals, Manuals, and copies of AVE. Somewhat taken aback by this American aggressiveness, Mr. Capps responded by specifying the procedures outlined in the Society's Constitution for establishing an autonomous region. Also, the S. Clement's Ward would need to be consulted and give its approval. At the English Council's direction, a survey was sent to the American members, now about 150 in all, and its results were reported back to England.

In July 1962, the English Council approved the formation of the American Region. The English Superior, Dom Augustine Morris, Abbot of Nashdom Abbey, appointed Fr. Lathrop P. Utley of New Jersey as the first American Superior and Fr. Kenna as the first American Region Secretary. The first Council meeting was held at St. Mary's Church in Pittsburgh. The earliest Regional Council members included Fr. Taber, Fr. Elwell, and Miss Hurst.

The first Annual General Meeting of the American Region subsequently took place at S. Clement's, on May 25, 1963. Ambitious goals articulated at that time included forming a Ward in every state, publishing an American edition of AVE, and establishing a Society of Mary Shrine at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., along with an annual national pilgrimage.

Issues of AVE continued to come from England, but, beginning in 1964, an American Region insert was included for readers in the United States. In the same year, the Society of Mary was incorporated as a tax-exempt corporation in the state of Delaware.

Fr. Edward Hendricks, Rector of S. Clement's, succeeded Fr. Utley as the American Region Superior in 1965. Then, in 1967, Fr. Richard Cornish Martin, the young Assistant Priest at St. Paul's Parish in Washington, DC, began a distinguished and fruitful term of 47 years as Superior. During his tenure, dozens of Wards were established across the country, and membership approached 1,000.

This half-century was a tumultuous period in the Episcopal Church. A series of trial rites culminated in the issuance of a new Prayer Book in 1979. An often-bitter debate about women's ministries culminated in the ordination of women as priests in 1977 and the first consecration of a woman bishop in 1989. During an extended debate on human sexuality, the Episcopal Church consecrated its first openly gay and partnered bishop in 2003. Same-sex blessings were approved in 2012, and same-sex weddings in 2015.

The question of how far to accommodate conscientious dissent from these changes became highly contentious. Many Episcopalians left for other churches, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox, or Continuing Anglican. Perhaps the most significant departure happened in 2009, when dozens of parishes and four whole dioceses left to form the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA). No matter which side you were on, it was a painful time.

Against this background, Fr. Martin set an example of cool-headed and even-tempered leadership. He certainly had his convictions. But, apart from welcoming the addition of new Marian feasts to the Episcopal calendar, he was equally clear that it was not the role of a devotional society to take sides in Church politics. In a sermon at the Annual Mass at St. Paul's, K Street, in 1975, he proclaimed:

We are primarily a devotional Society, a community of Christians whose task is to honor the Theotokos, the Mother of the Lord, and to bear witness to his holy Incarnation, and her role in the scheme of salvation ... A devotional society such as ours is not called to be political ... there are many other organizations one can join for that.

Thirteen years later, Fr. Martin wrote in his doctoral thesis:

A devotional society is characterized by prayer and witness. For that reason, the Society of Mary has resolutely avoided and resisted any involvement in ecclesial politics ... Throughout the periods of controversy, the Society continued to grow but steadfastly refused to take a stand on any issue, leaving it to its members to pray and act according to their own consciences and convictions. The Society was determined to stick to its vocation of prayer and witness ... Devotional societies lose some credibility if they engage in activities beyond their purposes.

During the 1980s, under Fr. Martin's leadership, the American Region published three volumes of Marian essays, entitled *Studies and Commentaries*,

featuring such leading Anglican scholars as John MacQuarrie, Reginald Fuller, John Milburn, and Louis Weil. In 1984, the American Region helped underwrite the publication of Canon A. M. Allchin's book, *The Joy of All Creation*, by Cowley Press.

At the Annual Meeting on May 4, 2013, at S. Stephen's Church in Providence, Fr. Martin resigned as American Region Superior, and I was elected his unworthy successor.

During approximately the last two decades of Fr. Martin's tenure, a small but significant minority of Society of Mary members had left the Episcopal Church for other ecclesial jurisdictions. These included the Continuing Anglican churches, the ACNA, the Antiochian Orthodox Church, and the Roman Catholic Ordinariate. Many of these departing Episcopalians had remained members of the Society of Mary. Several Wards belonged to these jurisdictions, as did a few Council members and officers.

Unlike some of the other devotional societies, we do not require membership in the Episcopal Church as a condition of belonging to the Society of Mary. I came to see that it was a great gift to remain in fellowship with those from whom we might otherwise be estranged owing to our membership in churches not in communion with one another. Because much Marian devotion is extra-liturgical and non-sacramental, it is something we can continue to share. While most of our members belong to the Episcopal Church, we're happy to welcome anyone who subscribes to our objects and is willing to follow our Rule. Over the years, I've found this ecumenical dimension of the Society to be a real blessing.

Early in my tenure, we changed the format of the American edition of AVE, the Society's semi-annual magazine. Until then, we were still reproducing the English edition of AVE with an American Region Newsletter insert. In May 2014, during an official visit by the Council officers to Grace Church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, I asked our hosts how we could better serve their needs. A leading member of that Ward replied that AVE needed to be updated so that it no longer resembled a publication from the 1920s.

A year later, at the 2015 Annual Meeting at Saint Uriel's, Sea Girt, New Jersey, one of the attendees—I didn't get his name—complained about all the English content in AVE. He'd been a member of the American Church all his life and had never heard of most of these English people, parishes, and places. Many of those present vocally indicated their agreement. The Council took all these comments on board. So, since Easter 2016, we've been publishing a glossy color edition of AVE with all American content.

At the same time, I've done my best to maintain cordial relations with the English Society. In 2015, I participated in the May Devotion

and Annual General Meeting at Kentish Town, north London, and began getting to know the English officers. The following summer, my wife and I accompanied the English Society on a pilgrimage to Lourdes. Most recently, in 2023, we attended their October Devotion in Preston, Lancashire.

Nonetheless, like the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in 1868 and the Guild of All Souls in 1882, the American Society of Mary became fully independent in 2022. For legal reasons related to its status as a registered charity in the United Kingdom, the English Society undertook a comprehensive revision of its Constitution. The new English Constitution made no provision for overseas regions. At that point, we had no option but to revise our own Constitution to refer to ourselves no longer as the “American Region” but as the “Society of Mary in the United States.” In practice, we’d been functioning independently for many years. Nonetheless, friendly and mutually supportive relations with the English Society continue.

A key theme of Fr. Martin’s thesis was the dependence of the devotional societies on a small number of dedicated individuals who take responsibility for organizing and running the society’s work. When such an individual moves away, becomes incapacitated, or dies, the society’s presence and activity in a particular place often collapses and vanishes. A significant part of my role as Superior is thus to identify, recruit, and motivate the key players who will keep the work going, both in the Council and in the Wards and Cells.

In preparing these addresses, I’ve found it interesting to note your parish’s historic involvement in all three devotional societies. I would even venture to suggest that they’re part of your spiritual DNA. And I hope these addresses will inspire some of you to help revitalize one or more of the historic devotional societies at S. Clement’s. They can enrich the life and mission of such a venerable Anglo-Catholic parish. Your involvement will similarly strengthen the devotional societies’ life and witness in the Church at large. So, I look forward to continuing our collaboration as we move ahead into the future that God has planned for us. **AVE**

The Rev. Dr. John D. Alexander is Superior of the Society of Mary in the United States. A retired priest of the Episcopal Diocese of Rhode Island, he serves as Priest-in-Charge of Sts. Matthew and Mark, Barrington, RI, and lives in southeastern Massachusetts.

The Conception of the Mother of God

East and West

By Geoff Mackey

The major events in the life of our Lord are observed liturgically throughout the year—Annunciation, Nativity, Presentation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection. As the New Adam and the “first fruits” of humanity to be raised up, Christ has given all of humanity the opportunity to be made like him, conformed to his image, and ultimately brought to glorification through him (cf. 1 Cor. 15). Since the Church teaches that, among non-divine humanity, the Mother of God is the first to be granted this glory, it is logical that the Church should also celebrate her life in a comparable way. This is the first in a series of four articles to explore the origins and meaning of four feasts of the Virgin that correlate with or shadow the feasts of our Lord: her Conception, Nativity, Entrance into the Temple, and Dormition/Assumption. We begin with the Conception.

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The feast commemorating the moment of Mary’s conception in the womb of her mother is called in the Latin Church, “The Immaculate Conception” and in the East, “The Conception of the Theotokos by Holy Anna” (or “the Maternity of Holy Anna”). In the West, it is celebrated on December 8th. In the Byzantine East, it is observed on December 9th, one day short of nine months before the celebration of the Virgin’s Nativity (September 8th). In Byzantine thought, females were in the womb one day fewer than males.

The earliest extant record of this feast is in the typicon of St. Sabbas, dating from the 5th century, where it is titled “The Conception of St. Anna.” The Greek Catholic liturgiologist Msgr. Basil Sheregy notes that this typicon was a revision of an earlier one, though whether this feast was introduced in the revision is a matter of speculation. Nonetheless, he argues that the feast must be earlier than the typicon, based on parallels with the life of Christ and that of John the Baptist:

The feast of the Conception of the Mother of God is similar in its basic idea to the conceptions of Christ and John the Baptist as described in Sacred Scripture. The child-begetting of St. Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, was celebrated both in East and West as was the conception of Christ, the Annunciation. By virtue of this analogy, we

may deduce that the Conception of the Mother of God must have been celebrated about the same time, that is, in the fifth century.

At least from the eighth century, it was observed on December 9th. John of Eubea (d. 750) mentions the feast in a sermon, though he notes that it “is not known by all.”

The content of the feast, in the Eastern Church where it originated, largely draws upon a mid-2nd to early-3rd-century text, the Protoevangelium, attributed to St. James, the kinsman of the Lord. In this work, Joachim and Anna had been barred from offering their sacrifices at the Temple, the priest Reuben taking their barrenness as a sign of God’s displeasure with them. Joachim, being a righteous man, goes out into the wilderness to fast until the Lord visits him with an explanation. Meantime, Anna sings a lamentation in which she recognizes that she is not even as blessed as the birds, dumb animals, beasts of the earth, or water, for all of these things are fruitful. At the end of her lament, an angel visits her with an announcement:

“Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer. You shall conceive and bear and your offspring shall be spoken of in the whole world.” And Anna said, “As the Lord my God lives, if I bear a child, whether male or female, I will bring it as a gift to the Lord my God, and it shall serve him all the days of its life.”

While bearing some differences to biblical annunciation narratives, this nonetheless follows the biblical pattern of a formerly barren woman conceiving. As with Isaac, Samson, the Forerunner, and Jesus himself, so with Mary. “He makes the woman of a childless house to be a joyful mother of children” (Ps. 113.8).

The Eastern liturgical texts for this feast draw upon this imagery, God filling a formerly barren womb. “Today the bonds of barrenness are loosed,” the Byzantine troparion proclaims, “for God has heard the prayers of Joachim and Anna. He promised, beyond hope, the birth of their godly daughter.” And the kontakion announces, “Today the world celebrates how Anna becomes a mother by the power of God. She conceived the woman whose conception of the Word is beyond our words.”

In Western observance, however, the feast took on a different emphasis. The Tridentine Collect for the day begins, “O God, who by the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, didst prepare a worthy dwelling-place for thy Son,” and goes on to state that “thou didst preserve her from all stain.” Observed for a long time as the “Conception of the Mother of God,” it was made a

holy day of obligation during the Pontificate of Pope Clement XI in the 18th century. (In the East, it does not rank among the Twelve Great Feasts.) In 1854, Pope Pius IX promulgated the apostolic constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, which defined the Immaculate Conception as the dogma that Mary, “in view of the merits of Jesus Christ ... was preserved free from all stain of original sin.” The feast’s emphasis in the West had become no longer the answering of Anna’s prayer, but the sinlessness of the Blessed Virgin.

In his discussion of the dogma, Jaroslav Pelikan—at the time a Lutheran theologian—pointed out that, while much of Marian doctrine appeared first in the Christian East and was later adopted by the West, the historical development of this particular doctrine “was in great measure confined to the Latin West.” This is because of a difference in approach to the idea of original sin in Greek and Latin thought.

Both Latin Catholics and the Byzantine Orthodox agree that the Mother of God was free from actual sin, although they differ over original sin. Fr. John Meyendorff explains:

Byzantine homiletic and hymnographical texts often praise the Virgin as “fully prepared,” “cleansed,” “sanctified.” But these texts are to be understood in the context of a doctrine of original sin which prevailed in the East: the inheritance from Adam is mortality, not guilt, and there was never any doubt among Byzantine theologians that Mary was indeed a mortal being.

While a full discussion of the dogma is beyond the scope of this liturgical treatment, for the Orthodox, such a dogma is seen as, in the first place, an unnecessary show of papal power and, in the second place, in the words of Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, “an incorrect expression of a correct idea about the personal sinlessness of the Mother of God.” Even in the East, however, there is some precedent for the Immaculate Conception, as St. John of Damascus explicitly refers to Mary’s conception as a uniquely graced occasion.

It is unlikely that this disagreement between Latin and Greek Christianity will be settled in any definitive way soon. But there is significant agreement about Mary in this way: East and West agree that Mary was without actual sin, was uniquely prepared to be the Bearer of God, and is the most complete example of a human being submitting to the will of the Almighty. Bulgakov writes:

The Mother of God, by the power of her personal freedom and the grace of the Holy Spirit, is completely free of every personal sin during

and after her birth. Therefore, original sin has power in her only as an infirmity of human nature, but it is deprived of its seductiveness and is powerless to summon sinfulness even as an imagined assault of sin or an involuntary movement of lust.

Whether one's conscience leads one to the Greek or the Latin understanding, catholic Christians can be of one mind in celebrating this feast insofar as we can agree with Fr. Meyendorff that Mary was uniquely purified, prepared, cleansed, sanctified, and called, from the beginning of her life, to bear the Word of God Incarnate, her Savior and ours.

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Book Reviews

By Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook

***Marian Maternity in Late-Medieval England.* By Mary Beth Long. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2023.**

This expertly researched and accessible book focuses on the Virgin Mary as the ideal mother from the perspective of fifteenth-century European devotional literature. The author, assistant professor of English at the University of Arkansas, was interested in studying how different cultures shape their ideals of material practice and how these aids conflicted with actual child-rearing practices. What messages about motherhood were revealed in how the Virgin Mary mothered Jesus? The fifteenth century has the most extant manuscripts of devotional and vernacular documents related to the Virgin Mary available to current researchers. Long argues that mothers



endure intense pressure regarding child-rearing practices, while the Virgin Mary remains a symbol of motherhood into this century. As the introduction to the book states: “Medieval Christian doctrine depended heavily on Mary’s role as a human mother of the divine, as it was Mary’s humanity that allowed Christ to be fully human. Mary’s status as mother gave her divine standing and served as a link to her lay devotees” (pp. 3-4). Mary’s motherhood provided a model for late-medieval readers familiar with theology, liturgy, and their practices to interpret latent images of Marian maternity.

Long examined many medieval manuscripts to document her study and spent multiple summers in European archives. Partially researched during the COVID-19 pandemic for a dissertation, the complexity of “mothering” became more nuanced. Some of the manuscript authors studied are unknown, while others, such as Margery Kempe, Meister Eckhart, Marie d’Oignes, and Geoffrey Chaucer, are familiar to students of religion in the medieval era. Themes such as childbirth, grief, social support, and the raising of children emerged from the various manuscripts.

Chapters one and two focus on Margery Kempe and her maternity in contrast to the Virgin Mary, often drawing on the literature of Dominican mystics, such as Meister Eckhart. “Margery often deploys tangible objects or images to demonstrate her connectedness to Christ, Mary, or other holy women: white clothing, the love-token ring from Christ, the baby-Christ dress-up dolls, even the conscious lack of distaff that distinguished her from ordinary women in chapter 53” (p. 26). Margery further appropriates Mary’s maternity in those sections of her book where she relates to Christ’s Passion. “Not only does Margery experience Christ’s contemplative tears in Jerusalem, then, but in symbolically swooning the birth of Christ or the birth of the Church, she demonstrates that Christ has been in her, incarnated perhaps by her fruitful devotions and birthed on calvary, just as Mary’s delayed labor pains produced the Church” (p. 72).

Chapter three, one of the most insightful and complex in the book, investigates the Marian ideal of women’s bodies as a source of healing and spiritual aid. “Medieval maternity developed a working equation of material pain, compassion, and the healing of others: ultimately, Mary’s body remained available as a vessel for public benefit” (p. 104). Long delved into East Anglican devotional texts supporting chapter four’s focus on Mary’s kinship ties and relations with Elizabeth, Salome, and Anne. The theme of women’s shared pain connects chapters three and four as the pain that binds women together socially: “the pain of childbirth, the pain of infertility, the potential pain of transfer from natal to sororal family shared and witnessed by others. Every acknowledgment of a birth is also an acknowledgment of pain that binds them

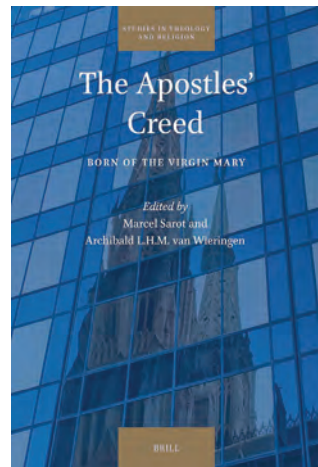
socially and, perhaps, spiritually to one another. Mary's pain, as Dolorosa, was certainly understood to be deeper, more knowable" (p. 176).

The last section of the book, chapters five and six, focuses on "Chaucer as matricentric poet," and offers a nuanced, vernacular approach to Marian poems and practices. Here, the Marian roles of wife and spiritual mother engage a reading audience familiar with the concept of Marian intercession. Long's brief conclusion asserts that fifteenth-century manuscripts supported a positive and inclusive vision of Marian maternity for all adherents: "they heal and nurture the sick, build friendships, share material labor, express vulnerability and emotional wholeness, act with authority, persuade others to do good" (p. 264).

While readers interested in the Middle Ages and scholars are likely the most direct audiences for this book, it is written in a style that draws others into appreciating the material. This is an example of some of the best scholarly writing. It is academically sound but accessible to broader audiences interested in learning about medieval representations of the Virgin Mary. This book leads me to take an interest in Long's next project—a critical study of the life and trial of the sixteenth-century English Roman Catholic Margaret Clitherow. Clitherow hid priests in her home and ran a home school; she was eventually pressed to death, likely while pregnant with her fourth child. Her story, Long suggests, raises critical questions that scholars have not undertaken.

The Apostles' Creed: Born of the Virgin Mary. Edited by Marcel Sarot and Archibald L. H. M. van Wieringer. Leiden, NL: Brill, 2024.

What is the significance of the phrase in the third article of the Apostles Creed, "born of the Virgin Mary?" A fascinating new anthology explores this credal clause from diverse perspectives, theological reference points, and interpretations of the virgin birth, its cultural reception, and relevance for today. Part of a wider series on the creed sponsored by the Netherlands School for Advanced Study in Theology and Religion, this volume comprises articles written by an international team of scholars with varying academic specialties, including scripture, systematic theology, biblical



languages, Christian spirituality, interreligious dialogue, doctrine, religion and culture, and pastoral care. The articles are brief, written in an academic style, and meticulously cited. Overall, the book achieves the goal set out in its introduction: to facilitate a conversation between the Apostles' Creed and us as contemporary interpreters. For AVE readers interested in interpretations of the virgin birth, the book offers discrete insights, promising to add layers of depth and meaning to our own reflections on recitations of the Apostles' Creed.

One of the key interpretive issues addressed early in the book is the juxtaposition of the first and second parts of the third article of the creed: "conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary," adapted from an older formulation in a Roman baptismal liturgy, and stating that Jesus Christ was the product of divine spirit and human nature. Here, the roles of the Holy Spirit and Mary are closely connected; however, as another scholar notes, it was not until after Irenaeus (c. 125—c. 202) that the Holy Spirit was given focus as part of the equation. There is agreement regarding the "double origin" of Jesus—both divine and human—and that the roles of the Holy Spirit and of Mary are not the same. Thirdly, and central to this volume, is the agreement among commentators that "the third article does not serve primarily to emphasize the special status of Mary; rather, it underlines the divine initiative leading to Mary's pregnancy. This pregnancy is not a human achievement but a divine act! There are theological allusions in *Luke 1:35* both to creation and to the Pentecost" (p. 3).

Seventeen chapters, including the introduction, illuminate a variety of interpretations and sources on the virgin birth. The introduction and first five chapters focus on the virgin birth from the perspective of scripture and the pre-Nicene tradition. The background to "born of the Virgin Mary" in the Hebrew Bible is a single chapter, as is Mary's role as "assistant" to God, as seen in *Luke 1:26-38*. The role of Mary in the non-canonical Infancy Gospel of James (Protoevangelium of James) is the focus of another chapter, as is the theme of virgin motherhood in the pre-Nicene tradition. Finally, this section includes a chapter on "Sarah and Mary" that examines the concept of virgin birth from both Jewish and Hellenistic perspectives.

The next group of articles focuses on the tradition of the virgin birth as found in medieval writers, including John of Damascus, Francis and Clare of Assisi, Hadewich of Antwerp, and Thomas Aquinas. A single chapter is devoted to seventeenth-century reformers, followed by a chapter on the interpretation of "born of the virgin Mary" in the writings of Italian-born German theologian Romano Guardini (1885-1968). Possibly not well-known among those in the Anglican/Episcopal tradition, Guardini was an important theological advisor to the papacy, a shaper of the Second Vatican Council,

and considered an independent thinker in his era. Interestingly, his focus is on Mary's freedom to respond to the angel's message. "Through the angel's message, Mary is addressed at the crucial moment of salvation history and invited to join God's action. The incarnation of God's Son does not only 'occur' to her, but Mary is called on in her freedom as a person" (p. 207).

The final grouping of articles relates to the concept of "born of the Virgin Mary" from contemporary perspectives. Here, with a nod to the Dutch commitment to interreligious dialogue, are interpretations of the virgin birth from Muslim and Hindu perspectives. Two additional chapters examine the third article from a Christian perspective, namely a practical theological approach to the virgin birth of a restored local shrine, Mary of Lakerlopen, and depictions of the virgin birth in Jesus films. Volume editor Marcel Sorot contributes a concluding chapter that attempts to integrate the various disciplinary perspectives throughout the book through the lenses of Christology, Mariology, the Bible, sexuality, spirituality, and perpetual virginity, relating these concepts to the contrasting notions of virgin and mother.

This book is research-oriented, yet the scholarly authors throughout address their task with respect for tradition and devotion. Those interested in the study of Marian doctrine will find a great deal of value here.

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