

MARY IN CONTEMPORARY AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE—  
INTEREST GROUP

- Topic: Mary and Culture  
Conveners: Dorian Llywelyn, S.J., Loyola Marymount University,  
Wendy Wright, Creighton University  
Moderator: Nancy Piñeda-Madrid, Boston College School of  
Theology and Ministry  
Presenters: François Rossier, C.M., University of Dayton  
John Fitzgerald, St. John's University, New York  
Patricia Lambino, Ateneo de Manila University

This third and final session of this interest group took as its theme the nexus between culture and the figure of Mary. The theological task at hand involves, *inter alia*, considering the often ambiguous relationships between, on the one hand, dogma and doctrine, and on the other, particular historical and cultural experiences while paying particular attention to the *sensus fidelium* regarding the role and importance of Mary in Christian belief, especially in the major context of the churches of the global South and their diasporic populations.

Cultural considerations have historically made Mary an effective tool of evangelization in Latin America. The protean figure of Mary, rather than Christ, was an important bridge in the introduction of Christianity into both Mesoamerican and Andean cultures, though in different modalities. The Guadalupe figure both included and yet superseded male as well as female pre-Columbian religious motifs, making of her a focus for devotion that was acceptable both to the indigenous and colonial populations; many of the *conquistadores* came from in Extremadura and Andalucía, where Marian devotion had a strong religio-militaristic strand. In Andean Catholicism, it was the assimilation of the chthonic features of *Pachamama* (Mother Earth)—rather than the suffering Christ of the later medieval Spanish piety of the colonizers—that made of Mary a potent force for Christianization. Mary's political role *vis-à-vis* the colonial forces was reversed, however, in 19th-century; in a number of countries particularistic devotions to Mary were important markers in the formation of independence movements. Today, as ever, Marian shrines continue to “earth” lived religion throughout Latin America, and Marian devotion remains a lynchpin of religious practice and theological imagination.

Cultural considerations are also at play in the complex phenomena associated with another shrine. Fátima, along with Lourdes and Guadalupe, attracts millions of pilgrims yearly, and the devotions to those shrines, particularly among Catholics from the global South, are flourishing. The famous “miracle of the sun” at the Cova da Iria in 1917 is susceptible to a range of interpretations—from the literal and the credulous, via paranormal explanations, to a radical skepticism. The original apparitions to the three peasant children must be understood at least in part in their socio-cultural milieu. Likewise, attitudes towards the original events, the development of the worldwide Fátima cult, and the attraction of the extraordinary in popular religiosity are also inevitably colored by often-unarticulated presuppositions. The meaning and relative importance of such ambiguous events is, at least in part,

constructed in the mind of devotees or skeptics, and according to their own socio-cultural loci and theological partialities.

Cultural context, too, in addition to authorial intention and readership, provides the key for understanding both commonalities and difference regarding the presentation of the Church's teaching on Mary in three Catechisms: the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), the 1997 *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC), and the 2006 *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (USCCA). While all three share the same fundamental literary genre, and draw on the same scriptural passages and conciliar documents, their Marian emphases vary: where twelve out of the twenty-eight paragraphs of the CCC on Mary's "privileges" deal with her virginity, the USCCA is less detailed, and concentrate more on rebutting the usual arguments against her virginity, and incorporates local and devotional perspectives, reflecting a background of cultural discomfort at praying for Mary's intercession. The CFC, referring to Filipinos as "a people in love with Mary," contains an understandably larger proportion of explicit references to Mary, emphasizing her privileges, but also seeks to correct incorrect or excessive Marian devotion.

The discussions of this interest group have been wide ranging, vigorous, and not infrequently impassioned. This year's papers involved questions of ecclesial and political authority, inculturation and evangelization, cultural style, and the relationship between psychological and spiritual experience, and discussion was characteristically spirited. Few people have no opinions about the complex figure of Mary, and Marian studies is a theatre *par excellence* of intercultural and interdisciplinary encounter, in which the particular and the universal interact in often unexpected ways. Bernard's classic adage, *de Maria numquam satis* remains true in the global contemporary Church, and has also been exemplified in the rich exchanges of the last three years.

DORIAN LLYWELYN, S.J  
*Loyola Marymount University*  
*Los Angeles, California*