

MARY IN GLOBAL AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE INTEREST GROUP

Topic:	Mary in Ecumenical and Interfaith Perspective
Convener:	Wendy M. Wright, Creighton University Dorian Llywelyn, S.J., Loyola Marymount University
Moderator:	Aurelie Hagstrom, Providence College
Presenters:	Mary Christine Athans, B.V.M., University of St. Thomas Walter Sisto, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto Amir Hussain, Loyola Marymount University

The session focused upon the figure of Mary from Eastern Orthodox, Islamic, and Jewish perspectives. Drawing upon her own interfaith encounters and the work of Elizabeth Johnson and Jewish Scripture scholars, Mary Christine Athans began her "Quest for the Jewish Mary" by asking five questions: (1) Why has Mary been portrayed as so un-Jewish over the centuries? (2) Why are we searching now for the Jewish Mary? (3) Has the search for the Jewish Jesus helped us find the Jewish Mary? (4) Can the Pharisees tell us anything about Mary? (5) How might Mary have prayed? Athans gave five answers: (1) pointing to the longstanding idea that the Jewish covenant was superseded by the Christian way and the anti-Judaism of the Christian past. (2) The search for Mary's Jewishness is lively now because of Vatican II's openness to interfaith dialogue and second-wave feminism. (3) Scholars recovering the Jewishness of Jesus shed light on the similarity of the teachings of Jesus and the Pharisees. (4) The work of Tal Ilan especially illuminates the possibility that Mary moved in a milieu in which women were included in prayers practiced by the Pharisees. (5) Recent Jewish liturgical practice, with its ancient roots, may open up reflection on the way Mary might have prayed.

Walter Sisto's study of Sergius Bulgakov's Mariology reveals that what is unique to the (heterodox) Russian Orthodox theologian is precisely his placement of Mariology within pneumatology. For Bulgakov, Mary is the pneumatophoric/ spirit-bearing hypostasis, a human hypostasis that was adopted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of the incarnation and personal glorification. To the extent possible for a creature, Mary shares in the Holy Spirit's hypostatic function and economic activity. Sisto showed that what results is a vivid Mariology that explicates the liturgical witness and piety of the Orthodox tradition but also places Mary squarely within the church, the community of spirit-bearers. Mary participates by grace in the life of Divinity itself. She transcends even the saints, yet she remains intimately close to the saints and the world because her will is united with that of the Holy Spirit to bring about salvation. We are called to be like Mary: to be divine mothers, to live the resurrected existence that involves participation in the salvation of others and become co-redeemers. In following Mary we are also called to embrace our femininity, to be actively passive in the sense that we give up our will so that we live completely for God.

"Mary, Mother of Jesus In Islamic Texts and Contexts" was offered by Amir Hussain with the observation that Christian-Muslim dialogue may be more fruitful when pursued through the avenues of Mariology and pneumatology than through Christology. He surveyed the Qur'anic perspective on Mary (the only woman mentioned by name in the text and who appears there more frequently than she does in the New Testament); including her stated connection with Zechariah, her descent from a privileged family, her being chosen and purified by God, and the elaborate story of the virgin birth (surah 19, on Mary). In addition Islamic commentators suggest her inclusion in the prophetic tradition and generally see her purity as

ethical in the manner of the sinlessness of the prophets. Hussain indicated that Jesus is 23 times referred to in the Qur'an as "Son of Mary" (in contrast to one mention in the New Testament). Mindful of the upcoming anniversary of Vatican II, Hussain recounted magisterial statements affirming the connections between Christianity and Islam: *Ecclesiam suam*, *Lumen gentium* and *Nostra aetate*. Questions for further research emerged about (1) how much the Mariological leanings of John Paul II (the pope most active in promoting Islamic dialogue) influenced his interfaith efforts and (2) the significance of Muslim women's frequent devotional presence at Christian shrines to Mary, e.g. Ephesus.

A short response to the three papers by moderator Aurelie Hagstrom yielded the insights that "there is a lot of room" in Mary, and she is a "space" of spirit hospitality for doctrine, devotion, ritual, and interfaith and ecumenical dialogue. She thus "holds things together" as a reconciling symbol and a convergence point. Mary as Mother allows for encounter with "the other" in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. As Virgin she provides space for newness, freshness, and the possibility of re-creation.

Further discussion focused around the need for more extended ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and interest in further study of Marian shrines, pilgrimage, appearances (especially global i.e. Rwanda), and Mary in culturally varying expressions.

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