Book offers vivid picture of Mary

Maria Ruiz Scaperlanda has written *The Seeker's Guide to Mary*, a new addition to the Seeker Series published by Loyola Press. As I read her text, however, the thought kept recurring to me that it might have been called *Mary, the Guide of Seekers!*

There emerges a vivid sense of how the Mother Mary has been and is today a powerful, guiding presence in the lives of Christians. The author shares her own deeply felt experience of Mary in her own life as wife, mother and professional woman. These personal touches add depth but do not interfere with the presentation of the historical and theological material she summarizes. Her own comments and the "reader's guide" that appears at the end of the text help us to personally appropriate the discussion by raising the question of how we relate to Mary in our discipleship today, important during this time of "reconceptualization" and "reorganization" in the life of many Christians.
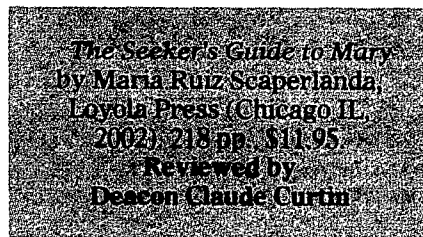
The author writes of Mary in Scripture, in history, in other faiths, in apparitions, in prayer and popular devotion and as patron. "A Word to the Seeker: There's Something

Mary

about Mary," orients us to the subsequent presentation.

The 19 references to Mary in the New Testament are studied briefly. Subsequent chapters demonstrate how Christians have taken up the very attitude of Mary and "pondered in its heart" the diverse levels of meaning suggested by the biblical witness, attempting in ever-new ways to penetrate the saving truths suggested by Scripture.

The author shows how deeply we rely on the unfolding tradition of faith, seeking understanding of it for the emergence of the full image of Mary we enjoy today. The formal assertion of the magisterium that Mary was conceived without sin did not occur until 1854; the doctrine of her Assumption into heaven was not pronounced until 1950; and the feast of Mary as Queen of Heaven was not inaugurated until 1954. Some of to-

day's most familiar titles and images of Mary came into particular prominence only in recent times, while having vitality over the centuries in various local churches.

The author suggests the various elements of this vital and evolving relationship in her discussion of the apparitions of Mary. We are told that nearly 80,000 visions of Mary have been claimed since the third century, very few having achieved the significant institutional support and widespread historical influence of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico and the events at Lourdes and Fatima. Christian's encounters with the guiding and supporting Mary, as they struggle to live the faith and persevere in hope amidst the terrors of history, demonstrate the unique way in which the ancient experience of the faithful becomes ever new.

The author emphasizes this same

point in "Mary as Patron." She notes how the experience of Mary is always highly enculturated, "attuned to the needs, desires, and lived experiences of every community in the world." In this way we might find in the experience of Mary a model of how "to proclaim the Good News with an awareness that respects diversity and native-ethnic individuality in the Christian community."

The author often reminds us of the deep image of Christian life suggested to us by the mother of Jesus and of the church. "This idea of allowing God to be born within us, in our hearts, is of the essence of who we are as Christians." Mary is the example of yielding the autonomy of one's own will and flesh to the power of the Holy Spirit so that the Word can become flesh in the always new circumstances of human history. If she is the "first Christian" it is because all of us, after her, must do the same. But Mary is not only a model. She is most especially a personal, powerful and compassionate guide to any seeker who might call upon her.

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