

Howells joins a small but growing number of authors for whom mystical texts are not simply reliable guides to personal holiness but also significant theological sources. This book is an important contribution both to Carmelite studies and to current scholarship in the fields of Christian anthropology, Trinitarian theology, and Christology.

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### Mariologia

“La Madre Ágreda y la Mariología española del siglo XVII”, in *Estudios Marianos*, 69 (2003), 430 p. ISBN 84-607-7232-2. Eur. 35,00.

ENRIQUE LLAMAS, O.C.D. *La Madre Ágreda y la mariología del Vaticano II*. 2003, 121 p. Kadmos, Salamanca. ISBN 84-607-8014-7.

The anniversary of the birth of Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda (1602-1665) stimulated a resurgence of interest in this remarkable Poor Clare (a.d.a. Conceptionist Franciscan), of Spain’s Marian “Golden Age”, famous for her widely disseminated *Mística Ciudad de Dios* (=MCD). The Mother of Jesus, Son of God, is the “mystical city”, temple, tabernacle, shrine of the divinity. The initial threevolume edition was published in Madrid, 1670. The current edition, edited by C. Solaguren, O.F.M., Madrid, 1992, runs to 1509 pages. Composed between 1655 and 1660, MCD is an extended life of the Blessed Virgin, in its own fashion a complete Mariology. Very fanciful, relying on insights experienced in prayer, the book has had a rocky career. The Spanish Inquisition censured it in 1681, but under royal pressure the prohibition was lifted. The Sorbonne (University of Paris) did so again in 1696, scathingly.

Born in Ágreda (Soria) in 1602, María entered with her mother and sister in the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, becoming superior / abbess of the Poor Clares at the age of twenty-five. Among her achievements were twenty-two years of letters to King Philip IV. The cause of Ágreda never progressed beyond “venerable”, though in recent years there was hope of reviving it, exemplified especially by the Spanish Mariological Society, which met in September, 2002, at Osma-Soria under the title, *La Madre Ágreda y la Mariología española del siglo XVII*, papers making up *Estudios Marianos*, vol. 69.

In his *Presentación* and major paper (“Mary’s collaboration in the work of redemption and 17<sup>th</sup> century Spanish Mariology”), the president of the Spanish Society, the distinguished Discalced Carmelite theologian, Esteve Llamas, puts the study week in a perspective in a vigorous defence of the venerable author and her baroque masterpiece. In the long list of ill-informed denigrators of Ágreda, E. Llamas singles out Hilda Graef’s well-known history of Mariology (original German edition, 1964).

Students of theology concerning the Blessed Virgin will readily recognize the names of *Estudios Marianos* contributors. The opening paper by Antonio Ma Artola, C.P., is on the “*Mariología*” of MCD, as the flash-point in the process of canonization. Juan Esquerda Bifet applies to MCD the criteria of San Juan de Ávila for discerning extraordinary phenomena. Andrés Molina Pireto studies her Marian spirituality. Luis Díez Merino, C.P., considers the use of the Bible. The 17<sup>th</sup> century setting receives attention. Ismael Bengoechea, O.C.D., writes of “The same Mariology in different terms by three women religious: Valentina Pinelo (d. 1624), María de la Antigua (d. 1617), and María de Ágreda. The university and cultural ambience of Salamanca are studied by E. Llamas and Ágreda Rodríguez Cuz, O.P., Gaspar Calvo Moralejo, O.F.M., of the International Pontifical Marian Academy (PAMI), spoke of a major theme in MCD, “Mary, Mother of the Church, Teacher of the Apostles”. A paper by Juan M. Ferrer is “The Marian Calendar after Trent”. Germán Rovira Tarazona spoke of Ágreda’s reception in Germany.

Ángel Martínez Moñux, O.F.M., took up the “eco theology” of MCD, its cosmic sensitivity to creation. Describing himself as a convert from skeptical amusement about Ágreda’s writings to respect and conviction, Félix Ochayta Piñeiro presents “*Dos venerables: María de Jesús de ágreda (1602-1665) y Anna Catharina Emmerick (1784-1824): Los misterios de la infancia de María, convergencias y divergencias*”. The beatification cause of Catherine Emmerick has resumed, apparently without dependence on the “revelations” copied down by her amanuensis, the Romantic poet, C. Brentano. F. Ochayta’s study puts in parallel columns the relevant writings of the two visionaries.

The lead article by Artola sees private revelation as the key factor, since Ágreda based her presentation on the mystical experiences that taught her new insights on the mystery of Mary, countless details of her life, even as a child, ant in the early Church, about which the canonical scriptures are silent. The initial hostility to MCD attacked its defense of the Immaculate Conception. The Congregation of Rites approved the continuation of the cause for beatification, yet the Holy Office placed MCD on the index of forbidden books, 1679. Far more damaging was the condemnation by the theology faculty of the Sorbonne, 1696, in a climate roiled, not obly by controversy about the Immaculate Conception, but by Marian piety and Jansenism.

Efforts to revive Ágreda’s cause again failed, when Benedict XIV imposed silence on the issue in 1773. Meantime, MCD remained popular, continued to be circulated, also in translation. In 1973, the Franciscan Order petitioned the Holy See to reopen Ágreda’s cause, and B. Mendiá, O.F.M., answered exhaustively the principal objections to MCD. Paul VI ordered a re-examination of MCD. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith undertook that study; the bittersweet results were communicated to the Franciscan Postulator General in February, 1998. The positive aspect is that the Congregation found no doctrinal and heretical errors in MCD. The negative side is what Artola calls “a painful nightmare” (*penosa pesadilla*). The same dicastery that absolved Ágreda’s revelations of doctrinal error continued as follows, “The presentation of the

figure of the Mother of God in the aforesaid book (MCD) contrasts with what sacred Scripture offers us and is not compatible with the Mariology of Vatican II; hence the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has decided not to grant the *nihil obstat* to continuing the cause for beatification, considering that continuation of the cause would convey implicit approbation of the book on question and indirect promotion of it". Artola asks, "Does this mean that the Catholic Church approves only systematic-rational Mariology?" He goes on to explain and justify "mystical experience and Mariology", arguing that the key issue is private revelation, visions, prophecies.

"Other studies" heads five final chapters in this volume of 2002 proceedings. Two are a Spanish language Marian bibliography for 2001, and the necrology of Armando Bandero González (d. 2002). The other three are: Luis Díez Merino, C.P., with a history of the interpretation of divine maternity in Gal 4,4, carried over from the Huelva convention of 2001; Gonzalo Gironés, on San Juan de Ribera (1532-1611); Juan Cascante, with Mariological themes in Cristóbal de Vega (1595-1672).

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Enrique Llamas, O.C.D., may be said to have taken up the gauntlet of the 2998 decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in his book that serves as pendant to *Estudios Marianos*. He has done so in the 2003 title, *La Madre Ágreda y la Mariología del Vaticano II*. He considers and rebuts the arguments against re-opening Ágreda's cause. He stresses that MCD sprang from contemplative prayer, not formal study. Her exuberant writing is typical of the Baroque period. Llamas appeals to Pope Paul VI's advocacy of the "way of beauty" (the International Mariological/Marian Congress, 1975). Her writings are not contrary to the Scriptures, they are doctrinally sound, as judged by the same criteria used by the great theologians. Her "theology of mind and heart" anticipated Vatican II and current Mariology.

As Vatican II, so Ágreda, puts the Annunciation in first place. After the divine maternity, the most important question is Mary's collaboration in the redemption, well developed in MCD. Again criting Vatican II and subsequent statements of Paul VI and John Paul II (as *Redemptoris Mater* and the October 2002 Rosay Letter), Llamas makes much of MCD's depiction of Mary as teacher of the apostles after her son's resurrection and after Pentecost, linking her magisterial role to spiritual motherhood. This insight she received in prayer, claims Llamas, often overlooked by systematicians. She offers a "macro-Mariology" compared to the "micro-Mariology" of Vatican II, but there is no radical difference between them. Her theology is totally Christological. In some respects, she anticipates concerns about the Blessed Virgin that have come to the fore recently – such as her relationship to the Holy Spirit.

And there the case and Ágreda's cause rest!

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