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Review of Mary in Different Traditions: Seeing the Mother of Jesus with New Eyes

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***Mary in Different Traditions: Seeing the Mother of Jesus with New Eyes.* Thomas G. Casey, SJ. New York, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2019. Paper, 88 pp. \$12.95, ISBN 978-08091-5513-2.**

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The burgeoning religious diversity in our communities where our parishes reside is a compelling reminder of the importance of our relationships as Catholics with those of other faiths. Unfortunately, there are few pastoral tools available that help us explore what it means to be Catholic in a multifaith world, both to share our own faith, as well as to learn from others. Thomas Casey's little volume on *Mary in Different Traditions* is a welcome and accessible resource to help Catholics rediscover Mary, Mother of God, through the eyes of other faith expressions.

The author begins by showing that Mary is loved and appreciated well beyond the Roman Catholic world and perhaps even more revered outside the Catholic fold than within it in different and inspiring ways. Along with our own Catholic sources, the author suggests that the insights of other traditions have much we can learn from, namely, Lutheranism, Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Martin Luther had a very profound devotion to Mary which he carried with him in his explorations of faith after having left the Catholic Church. Casey says: "Together with Luther, how can we sing the Magnificat with Mary, how can we be grateful with her?" Luther's devotion to Mary emphasizes what makes her like us, rather than what sets her apart, not from a doctrinal stance, but from the level of our emotional and attitudinal embrace of Mary.

On Luther's departure from an assembly in the German town of Worms in 1521 where he reaffirmed his new teachings, he was intercepted by masked horseman who pretended to kidnap him, staged by Prince Frederick III to protect Luther. Hiding in Wartburg Castle, he resumed his commentary on Mary's Magnificat started prior to the assembly. He focuses on what God achieves in Mary, and not what she herself does, modeling a response we all should have. His line-by-line commentary is an exercise in heightened spiritual awareness of heavenly providence. Casey then turns to other Lutheran figures, Soren Kierkegaard, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. They both show us how to grow in faith in hard times through the example of Mary and the power and forcefulness of her Magnificat that inspires courageous Christian witness.

Orthodox Christianity understands Mary through their liturgical prayer and devotion. Mary is a "living icon of God" through hymns, icons, prayer, and liturgy. Their understanding of Mary lies in her acquiescence to provide God his human nature. The ancient name they give her is "Theotokos", or 'God-bearer.' In this sense, the incarnation of Christ, as God who comes into the world as a defenseless child is at the heart of their devotion not only to the Son of God, but also the "creature in whom he took flesh through the power of the Holy Spirit", Mary. What

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distinguishes the Orthodox vision of Mary from the Roman Catholic is the liturgical and devotional expression rather than through doctrinal and theological expression. The *Theotokos* is venerated for her likeness to God and her closeness to Jesus, as she “allowed God to ‘paint’ her life according to his design.

The author explores the Judaism of Mary by looking at some extraordinary women of the Old Testament - Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, who help us understand as Catholics something of the Jewish spirituality that led her to say ‘yes’ to God’s plan of salvation. One woman of the Old Testament, Hannah, was not mentioned. Since the Magnificat of Mary seems to reflect the ‘Song of Hannah’ (1 Samuel 2:1-10) in many ways, the connection between these two women would have been profitable to explore as well. That said, it is her depth of faith, which Elizabeth first realized: ‘Blessed is she who has believed’ (Luke 1:45). Casey asserts that the Jewish faith of Mary can help us see her in new and astonishing ways through her sense of being chosen, how she saw herself as spiritually poor, and how some prophets of the Hebrew scriptures foreshadow for Christians the role of Mary as “Ark of the Covenant.”

Finally, what may be surprising for many Catholics, Mary is well regarded in the faith of Islam and has prominent place in their holy texts, the Qur’an. Muslims of course believe that Jesus is not the Son of God, but the last great prophet before Muhammad. As Jesus is given prominence however in their own fashion, Mary his mother is also highly regarded in the third and particularly the nineteenth chapter of the Qur’an. In fact, the author points out that Mary is the only woman named in the Qur’an with several details of her childhood, her parents, who have different names than in the Christian tradition. The virgin birth of Jesus and her life of prayer and submission to God are also featured to show her radical surrender to God’s will, an aspiration of all Muslims, and Christians.

The universal appeal of Mary and her global reach across faith lines allows us not only to see as Catholics that we share her benevolence and love with those of other faiths but that she also becomes a bridge not only to Christ but to each other. This short but down to earth portrayal of Mary in different traditions is easily accessible. It is also an interfaith and ecumenical tool to begin conversations not only among Catholics, but in our multifaith communities and neighborhoods.