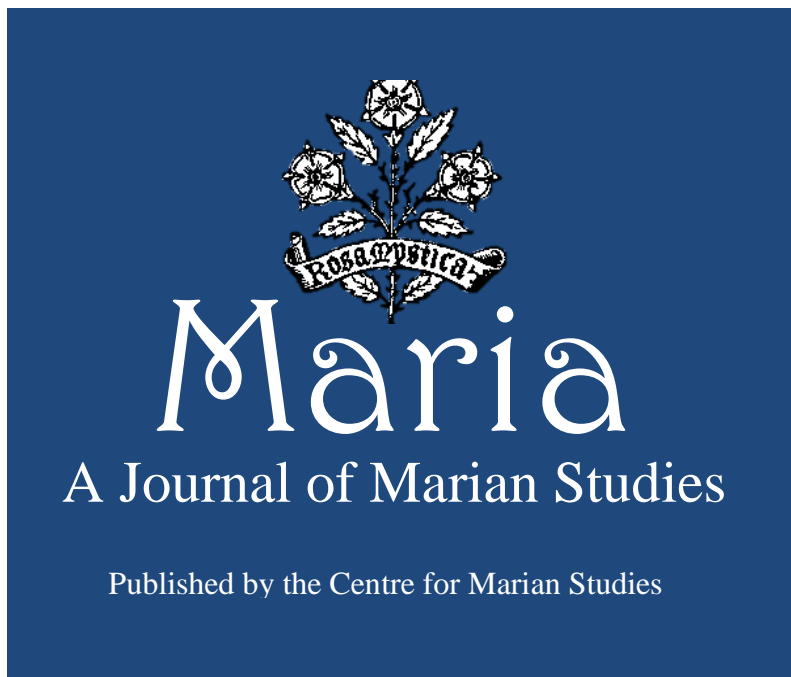


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Author: Sarah Jane Boss and Sr Cathy Jones

Title: Editorial

From the Editors of *Maria*, Sarah Jane Boss and Sr Cathy Jones

As promised, the November issue of *Maria* (4.2) is another special publication that includes three more contributions that relate to the theme of our 2023 conference entitled 'More universal than Catholicism? Mary among Asian religions'. We are delighted to share research that draws fresh attention to the importance and veneration of the Virgin Mary in Asia.

William Peterson explores the gendered ritual practices connected with 'Our Lady of Peñafrancia' at the annual festival in the Bicol region of the Philippines. Whereas the official bearers of Our Lady's statue and the image of the Holy Face are exclusively men, the principal devotions connected with the festival are undertaken largely by women. Peterson's study draws on his important field work, including interviews with participants and observers, and his text includes his own impressive photographs that reveal the scale of the event.

The manner in which Christians and Hindus are drawn to the Mother of Health, *Arrokiya Matha*, at the famous shrine of Vailankanni in Tamil Nadu, is the focus of Flynn Fernandes's article. He discusses this significant example of the way in which the Virgin Mary serves as a symbol of religious and multicultural unity at local, regional, national, and international levels, partly by way of syncretism between devotion to the Virgin Mary and devotions offered to Hindu goddesses. Where Peterson considers the gendered character of devotees' veneration at the festival of Peñafrancia, Fernandes compares the relationship of devotees to Our Lady of Health with the relationship that devotees may have with Hindu goddesses, finding points of both continuity and contrast.

We are especially pleased to include Michel Chambon's fascinating examination of Mary's appropriation by the Origin of the Self (OOSS), a new Chinese religious movement with its headquarters in Singapore. Chambon's paper describes a syncretistic religious philosophy in which the Virgin Mary is exemplary as a meditator and as someone who has brought the divine to birth spiritually within herself. Chambon argues that Mary's gender and biological sex are not important for the OOSS philosophy, and he implies that the matter of gender may be over-emphasized in standard studies of Marian devotion.

Michel was the co-organiser of our Marian conference, and his work for the Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics (ISAC), at the National University of Singapore, was the inspiration for the event. We are grateful to Michel and his colleagues for inviting us to join them in this international joint venture.

This issue concludes with Tina Beattie's thorough and thought-provoking analysis of *Mother of the Lamb* by Matthew J. Milliner. We are eager to provide reviews of important Marian texts like this one, and we would welcome any suggestions for books that should be reviewed in future editions of the journal.