

Below is the letter I wrote and e mailed to the Journal last Sunday. It has yet to be printed.
Robert Martinez

Editor,

This letter is in response to the column titled 'Our Lady' Court Order Hogties Art Museums' by Peter Eller. First, Eller's grasp of Catholic art history and theology is almost non-existent, or in the least, selective and biased. The Virgin Mary has had, and has, a very important role not only in the theology of the Church, but culturally as well. Eller claims the Church did not recognize Mary or the feminine until the Middle Ages. Below I provide some basic examples to refute Eller's claim:

1) Both the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke left it unambiguously clear that it was as a virgin that Mary had conceived her son. There are countless examples of stories in the New Testament that not only contain references to Mary, but to other women as well, including Mary Magdalene and Elizabeth.

2) During the first three centuries of Christianity, there is documented proof that Mary played an integral part in the development of Christian theology and Christian art as well. For example, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons born ca. 130 A.D. and died about 200 A.D. wrote about Mary as the second Eve: "And Eve [had necessarily to be restored] in Mary, that a virgin, by becoming the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience."

3) During the third and fourth centuries it was common for Christians to speak, paradoxically, of Mary in terms of both mother and virgin. The Eastern Church deemed Mary Theotokos, or "Mother of God." More precisely, the term means "the one who gave birth to the one who is God." Nevertheless, the role of Mary in the salvation of humanity at that early period is indisputable.4) In the holy writings of Islam called the Koran, which dates from the seventh century, Mary is revered by Mohammed in the canonical collection titled "Maryam: Mary," while there is no similar place in those writings for Eve or Hagar, mother of Ishmael and Abraham. In the Koran, Mary is given a higher place in heaven even than that of the prophet's daughter, Fatima. These are but a few examples of Mary's significant role in Christianity, and in it's Catholic and Eastern forms in particular, since the time of Christ. Mariology has, no doubt, developed through the centuries, through divine revelation and the teaching of the Church. Eller claims that until the Middle

Ages, the Church was male-centric and objected to "so powerful a female figure as Mary." I challenge Eller to provide proof of this. I can provide innumerable primary documented examples that quell his argument. The writings of the Church fathers during the early Church as well as the medieval period reveal only a high reverence and love for the Virgin Mary. If Eller wants to quote heretics, then he falls prey to attacking Mary, which is what most heresies did.

Furthermore, any art historian worthy of the title, and who is honest enough to see the truth, knows that Mary has been present in Catholic culture since the founding of the Church. To argue that there exists a lack of such examples before the fourth century is irrelevant, since it was illegal to be a Christian in the Roman Empire before the year 313. Finally, in a free society, we are free to create any type of art we so choose. What we are not free to do is impose that art on others in an offensive manner, nor falsify the facts to make it appear that Alma Lopez's "art" is somehow on the par with other great Catholic works of art that have been handed down to us through the ages, or that the Roman Catholic Church supports her views.

Robert D. Martinez