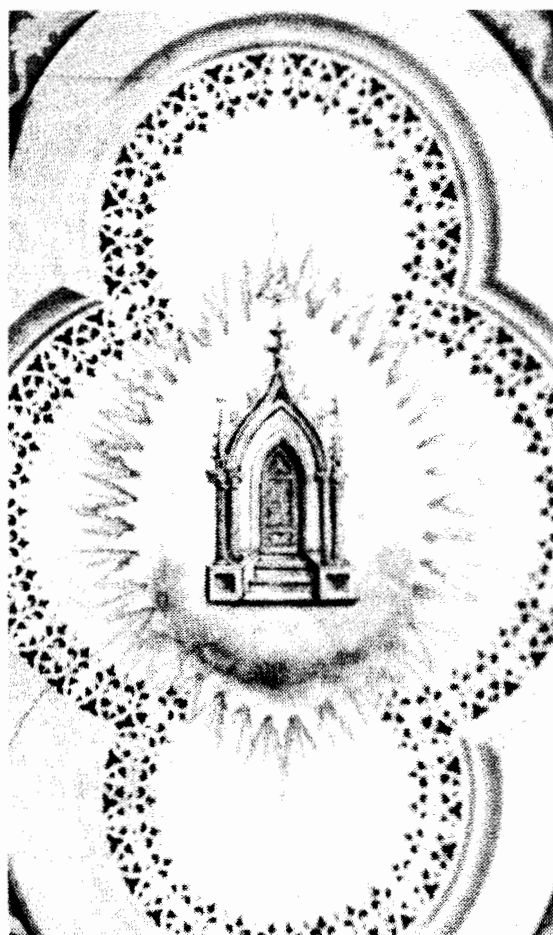
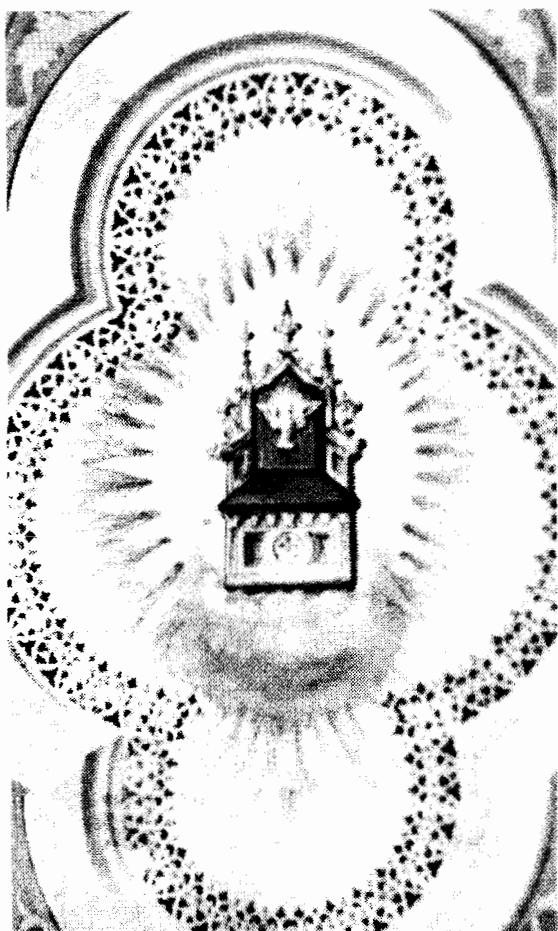


# Barquilla del Santa Maria

**BULLETIN of the Catholic Record Society -  
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"Seat of Wisdom" and "Gate of Heaven" are two of the twelve symbolic titles of our Lady by which her help is requested in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The photographs above show these two symbols, part of a set of ten of the twelve symbols which were painted on the ceiling of St. Mary church in Columbus in the 1890's. This double issue of the Bulletin contains the talk, given by Donald Schlegel at the May meeting of the Society, on the history of St. Mary church, the symbols, and possible interpretations of their meanings. A committee representing the parish and the diocese is now considering what should be done to restore this ceiling.

MARIAN SYMBOLS  
ON THE CEILING OF ST. MARY CHURCH, COLUMBUS

by Donald M. Schlegel

(The following article is based upon the talk presented at the Spring meeting of the Society on May 18, 1986.)

The Church of St. Mary Parish in Columbus, Marien Kirche as the Germans knew it, was the fourth Catholic church building in Columbus and Franklin County. Those which came before it were the tiny stone church of St. Remigius, which was built near the site of the present Holy Cross rectory in the 1830's, Holy Cross, built in 1846, and St. Patrick's, built in 1853. The German immigrants to Columbus settled in the southern part of the city, which until the 1850's meant an area centered in the vicinity of Main street from Third to Fourth. The German Catholics attended St. Remigius and later Holy Cross Church, which was almost exclusively German after the foundation of St. Patrick parish in 1851. By the 1860's, the southern end of the city was growing rapidly into the present German Village area and the Catholics of this area as early as 1863 began agitating for a church of their own because of the distance to Holy Cross and the crowded conditions there. The pastor of Holy Cross Church, Father J. B. Hemsteger, and a committee consisting of Louis Zettler, Peter Hinterschied, John Ranft, Frederick Weber, Frank Wagner, Peter Boehm, and Cornelius Lang selected and purchased the site of St. Mary's.

Father Francis X. Specht was sent to Columbus in March 1864 and under his supervision the schoolhouse behind the present church was built for the new parish. The schoolhouse cost about \$9,000. A report on examination of the books of the parish for the period April 16, 1865 to April 16, 1866 indicates a payment of \$6,711 to Mr. Wölfel for the school building; he must have been the major contractor. This interesting old report shows major sources of income for the new parish to have been a collection for the school house building (\$1,705), a concert, a picnic, a fair (\$3,556.11), and a loan (\$2,995). There also at this time was a St. Boniface Building Society which contributed \$289.50. To put these numbers in perspective, a typical laborer in one of the Front street breweries in that era made about \$500 to \$600 per year, while today's average factory worker earns just over \$20,000 per year. The site selected for the new parish facilities allowed the church to be laid out with its sanctuary to the east, in accord with ancient tradition. This had also been done with the three Catholic churches previously built in the city; the Cathedral was the first one which did not follow this pattern.

The firm of Blackburn and Koehler was hired to design the church, which is of European Gothic architecture. It is 140 feet long, 62 1/2 feet wide, and 75 feet high. Construction was begun in 1866 and in August of that year the cornerstone was laid by Most Rev. John B. Purcell, Archbishop of Cincinnati. It was under roof in 1867 and ready for dedication late in 1868, by which time the new Diocese of Columbus had been erected. No final report of expenses has been found, but as of January 18, 1868 the total parish debt was nearly \$17,000.

The dedication of the church on Sunday, November 29, 1868, was a glorious event. The following description of the proceedings was published in the next day's Ohio State Journal.

...The several Catholic Societies of the city marched to the depot on Saturday night to receive the Societies from Newark and Zanesville. There was a band of music from each place, and the procession, on its return after mid-night, with Hemmersbach's band reinforced by the other two, was noticeable for its good order and for the peculiar excellence and power of the music. Yesterday morning early the societies of the city received at the depot the societies from Dayton, and at 9 1/2 o'clock the procession formed at Holy Cross Church under the direction of Chief Marshal George J. Rodenfels, in the following order:

A file of the City Police, under command of Lieut. James Hanna.

The boys from twelve to fifteen years of age, with the Banner of the Holy Childhood.

St. Aloysius Young Men's Society of Dayton, O.

St. Laurentius Benevolent Association of Dayton, O.

St. Carl Borromeus Benevolent Association of Dayton, O.

St. Joseph Orphans Association of Dayton, O.

St. Nicholas Benevolent Association of Zanesville.

St. Francis of Sales Association of Newark, O.

St. Vincent de Paul, for the benefit of the poor of this city.

St. Patrick's School Society of this city.

Total Abstinence Association of this city.

St. Martin's Benevolent Association of this city.

St. John's Benevolent Association of this city.

St. Joseph's Widow and Orphan Association.

St. Boniface Church Building Association.

Hemmersbach's band, a band from Dayton, one from Newark, and one from Zanesville were placed at intervals in the procession, all furnishing excellent music.

The procession moved from Holy Cross Church on Fifth street to Town; west on Town to High; south on High to South [Fulton] street; east on South to Third, and south on Third to the Church.

The procession, with the decorations, rich and beautiful banners and flags, presented a very fine appearance, particularly as it moved south on High street, the whole length being visible, and also as it approached the Church, where an immense crowd had been long waiting its appearance. As soon as the procession had filed into the yard the ceremonies commenced, Bishop Rosecrans officiating, assisted by Father Hemsteger and other Clergymen.

The ceremonies inside were very impressive, and as the church was crowded to overflowing and hundreds standing outside, apparently joining in the service, the scene was a very peculiar one.

A sermon in German had been announced, but this was omitted, Bishop Rosecrans making a few remarks in English instead.

He thought the day to the congregation particularly one of thanksgiving. The completion of the beautiful temple; the pleasant day; the presence of so many friends from abroad made it so. The building was grand and should be such as an offering to God. This was the true Catholic spirit - to give the best to the Most High.

With service in the new church should be taken fresh resolves to do better.

The church is finished in handsome style, the painting and decorations being very fine. At the close of the service a collection was taken, over \$500 being received.

The exercises of the day closed with a grand sacred concert in the evening, which was well attended.

Jacob Studer's Columbus, Ohio: Its History, Resources and Progress, published in 1873, states that the church was "frescoed" at the time of its construction. The artists were Wenzelaus Thien and William Lamprecht of Cincinnati. A statement in a history of the Church in Columbus written by Father Dennis A. Clarke and published in 1892 makes it obvious that Thien and Lamprecht painted both the walls and the ceiling. There is a tradition in the parish that the present ceiling was painted in the 1890's. This tradition is based on a statement by Father Burkley, who was born in the parish in 1880, that he remembered seeing scaffolding up when he was a boy. The lack of any documentary evidence or mention in parish histories of this re-painting raised some doubt regarding the tradition and until a few weeks ago I thought that the present ceiling may have been the original ceiling which was in place when the church was dedicated in the grand ceremony described above. However, there exist copies of a photograph of the interior of the church, taken about 1889, which put the issue to rest: they show an entirely different ceiling. We must conclude that the tradition is correct and the present ceiling was painted about the time that the spire was completed in 1893.

The symbols are taken from the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which contains twelve invocations (out of fifty or so in all) which are symbols suitable for pictorial representation. There was space for ten symbols on the ceiling and so two could not be used; the two not used were Spiritual Vessel and Singular Vessel of Devotion. It may be that these were chosen because their representation would have similar to that of Vessel of Honor, which was retained. St. Joseph Cathedral has a less complete set of the symbols, one each in eight of its clerestory windows. These include Singular Vessel of Devotion, represented by what appears to be a censor, and Spiritual Vessel rather than Vessel of Honor. Construction of the Cathedral was begun in 1866, the same year as this church, but it was not consecrated until 1878, ten years after St. Mary's dedication. It is the opinion of Father Jack Maynard, who has done a considerable amount of research and study on the Cathedral, that its Marian clerestory windows were not ordered until that church's restoration in 1914 and were installed after the close of the First World War. The presence of the other two Vessel symbols, and not the one which appears here, makes it pretty clear that those windows were not inspired by this ceiling. The others missing from that set are Ark of the Covenant, Gate of Heaven, and Morning Star.

The Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary was approved by Pope Sixtus V in 1587 in essentially its present form; later popes have added six titles to the list originally approved. Previous to 1587, the litany was known as the Litany of Loreto, having been published at Dilligen, Germany in 1558 as Letania Loretana. Loreto, Italy is the site of a Marian shrine, where the house of the Holy Family appears to have been moved, from the basilica in Nazareth, in the year 1294. This litany seems to have been written near Paris between the years 1150 and 1200. A slightly older Marian litany, the oldest existing text known and containing several of the same invocations, is preserved at the library of Mainz in Germany. Earlier litanies or series of praises to Our Lady are known to have existed, one Gaelic version being in use as early as the eighth century.

The form of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary was taken from that of the slightly older Litany of the Saints, the earliest known text of which was written in Greek at Rome near the year 700 A.D. and widely used in Europe shortly after that date. Some trace the origin of the Litany of the Saints to the Greeks - and indeed the very word is the Greek litaneia or supplication - and especially to the supplications of the Kyrie, similarly alternating between voices. It has been said that use of the Litany of the Saints was spread over continental Europe by the Irish monks. The list of invocations of saints may have been suggested by the martyrologies, the lists of local martyrs and other saints and their feast days kept as early as the fourth century in Rome and shortly thereafter by other bishoprics, including the Irish. If the Litany originated with the Irish monks, this still would not preclude a Greek origin in the Kyrie, for many Christians from the Mediterranean, including the East, had sought refuge in Ireland from various persecutions.

Veneration of Our Lady in the Latin Church can be traced back to very early times, but these particular symbolic invocations in the litany appear to have been borrowed from the Akathist Hymn, used by the Greek Church, which was translated into Latin and circulated at Venice around the year 800. The present title of this hymn is "Ode to our Blessed Lady written on the Occasion of the Deliverance of Constantinople from the Barbarians, A.D. 626." It is now used on the first five Saturdays of Lent in Byzantine rite churches, Catholic or Orthodox. The popular name Akathistos means simply "Not-sitting" indicating that the people stand when it is sung.

The origin of this hymn is debated. The earliest form seems to go back to the fourth century. Others attribute it to St. Romanus, known as 'the singer' or 'the melodist,' who died in 556 at Constantinople. It became popular in 626 when Constantinople was delivered from the Avars. When the Persians and Avars attacked the city in that year, the patriarch led the people in procession around the city walls, the clergy carrying images of Our Lord, Our Lady, the great relic of the Cross, and other images and relics, asking Our Lord and His mother to protect them. A mighty wind arose and scattered the enemy fleet, throwing its vessels onto the shores. The hymn was used then in thanksgiving and has been used regularly since then. Some say its final form was not set until the ninth century, which was about the time it was first translated into Latin.

The praises and symbols in the Akathist Hymn were borrowed from St. Ephraem the Syrian, died ca 378; from St. John Chrysostom, died 407; and from St. Romanus the Singer, died 556, all of whom applied them to Our Lady. Others who refer to one or more of these symbols, with reference to Mary, were St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), St. Cyril of Alexandria (died 444), and St. Bernard (1091-1153). Of the ten symbolic invocations used here, some reference to eight can be found in the Old Testament. Taking the symbols in the order in which they occur in the litany, we begin over the north side of the choir loft, work our way to the front of the church, and then continue on the south side, ending over the south side of the loft.

#### Spiegel der Gerechtigkeit - Speculum Justiciae - Mirror of Justice

This first symbol is slightly vague and is open to a fairly wide range of interpretation, partly because there is no clear biblical reference. In

general, a mirror is an emblem of truth or a "shield which evil dare not face." Justice, besides being mentioned in the Book of Wisdom and other places in the Bible, is mentioned in Malachy iv.2, where the symbol "sun of justice" is sometimes interpreted to be Christ. We know that Christ will be our final judge and the Akathist Hymn calls Mary "tireless pleader with the just judge." One interpretation of the mirror of justice would then be that in Mary we would expect to see a true reflection of her Son, the just judge; in studying her life we should learn more about Him. We know this to be true in general and it is also borne out by the rest of the symbols here, which in many cases tell or remind us as much about Jesus as about His mother. A related interpretation, not in the sense of teaching but of protecting against evil, would have the mirror possessed by Justice personified; the Son holds up before us the living image of His holy mother, a true reflection of Himself, a "shield which evil dare not face." Similarly, with reference to the Tower of David she is sometimes called a rock on which all heresies dash themselves in vain and perish.

Another possible application of the symbol is in conjunction with Jeremiah 31:23:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: When I change their lot in the land of Judah and her cities, they shall again repeat this greeting: "May the Lord bless you, holy mountain, abode of justice." Judah and all her cities, the farmers and those who lead the flock, shall dwell there together. For I will refresh the weary soul; every soul that languishes I will replenish.

Here the diverse groups of city-dwellers, farmers, and shepherds all shall dwell together in peace on the holy mountain, the abode of justice. Whether one wants to call this the City of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, or the Church, we can see its reflection in Mary as Queen and Mother of all peoples, the new Eve in whom all mankind are again and immediately united as brothers and sisters.

#### Sitz der Weisheit - Sedens Sapientiae - Seat of Wisdom

The seat, not of wisdom but of the One Who knows wisdom, is mentioned in the Old Testament:

To whom has wisdom's root been revealed ?  
 Who knows her subtleties ?  
 There is but one, wise and truly awe-inspiring,  
 seated upon his throne:  
 It is the Lord, he created her,  
 has seen her and taken note of her.  
 He has poured her forth upon all his works,  
 upon every living thing according to his bounty;  
 he has lavished her upon his friends.

- Sirach 1:5-8.

In a mirror we see justice, but from a seat one can take wisdom -- justice is done or lived, but wisdom is internal. Mary gives her Son to us and she teaches or gives us wisdom. The New American Bible has a note to Chapter 24 of Sirach which sheds some light on the relationship between Mary and wisdom:

In this chapter Wisdom speaks in the first person, describing her origin, her dwelling place in Israel, and the reward she gives her followers. As in Proverbs 8, Wisdom is described as a being who comes from God and is distinct from him. While we do not say with certainty that this description applies to a personal being, it does foreshadow the beautiful doctrine of the Word of God later developed in St. John's Gospel. In the liturgy this chapter is applied to the Blessed Virgin because of her constant and intimate association with Christ, the Incarnate Wisdom.

The Akathist Hymn puts the symbol into more effective terms; here she is a "casket" rather than a "seat" of wisdom:

Hail! casket of God's wisdom.  
Hail! treasury of his providence.  
Hail! confounder of the wisdom of the wise.  
Hail! making babble of men's eloquence.  
Hail! for deep thinkers are made foolish.  
Hail! for the makers of myth have failed.  
Hail! thou who rendest the word-webs of Athens.  
Hail! thou who fillest the nets of fishers.  
Hail! thou who liftest from the deeps of unknowing.  
Hail! thou who enlightenest many in knowledge.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 18

The best summary I have found comes from Pope Pius XII, which summarizes both the above quotes from the Bible and the thoughts expressed in the Hymn:

Do not forget that true wisdom is that which she vouchsafed us, that which she teaches us in the name of Wisdom Incarnate. 'Hail, most abundant source from which spring out the streams of divine wisdom, and holds back, with the purest and clearest waters of orthodoxy, the curling waves of error.' - Pius XII, Radio message to the Marian Congress in Mexico, Oct. 12, 1945.  
(Ripley 160)

#### Ehrwürdiges Gefäß - Vas Honoribile - Vessel of Honor

It would probably be better to translate this title into English as honorable or venerable vessel, where, as in the German and the Latin, the focus would be on "vessel" and not on "honor." The symbolism of the ciborium in a historical sense is obvious: our Lady carried within her and brought into the world the Body of Christ. The corresponding contemporary truth is that the eucharistic bread upon consecration becomes that same Body. The form of the ciborium, which without the lid would be the same as that of a chalice, with the cup being the inverse of the base, is a symbol of interconnection between the upper and lower worlds. The same connection is represented by the gate and the tower symbols, but here the emphasis is on a connection by way of a dispenser, a pourer-out of God's graces upon this world from above. In this sense the ciborium is appropriate, as the vessel from which the faithful are given Communion. We can read of our Lady's role as dispenser in the words of Pope Pius XI, or Pope St. Pius X:

Trusting in her intercession with Christ Our Lord, who...wished to make his Mother the advocate for sinners and the dispenser and mediatrix of his grace. - Pius XI, Encycl. Miserentissimus Redemptor, May 8, 1928 (Ripley 231)

From this community of will and suffering between Christ and Mary she merited to become most worthily the reparaatrix of the lost world and dispensatrix of all the gifts that Our Savior bought for us by his death and by his blood... - St. Pius X, Encycl. Ad diem illum, Feb. 2, 1904. (Ripley 9)

And going back to the Akathist Hymn, the same idea appears, though with more imagery and not as explicitly:

Hail! thou who sendest forth manifold splendour.  
Hail! who wellest forth a many-streamed river.  
Hail! who imagest Siloam's pool.  
Hail! who cleansest the stain of sin.  
Hail! cleansing-vat that lavest the conscience.  
Hail! loving-cup brimming with gladness.  
- Akathist Hymn, strophe 22

An alternate interpretation of the vessel is based on the fact that although the word vas in Latin and its cognates in Greek, Spanish, and German have only the meaning of vessel as cup, in English, French, and Gaelic or Irish the word commonly also has the other meaning of boat. In this sense the word can be connected with Noah's Ark, which has been seen as a foreshadowing of Mary: Noah's Ark, the vessel which safeguarded the earthly life of the human race, floated on the waters which were flooding the earth; Mary floated on waters of concupiscence and sin. The earth was repopulated by those who took refuge in the ark; Heaven is populated by those who take refuge in Mary. This idea is at least as old as the Akathist Hymn, which says "Hail! barque for those who seek salvation." (Strophe 18)

#### Geistliche Rose - Rosa Mystica - Mystical Rose

The rose is a symbol of completion, of consummate achievement and perfection. Given this symbolism, the idea does not require any explanation; quotations from the Akathist Hymn, the Book of Sirach, and Pope Pius XII can speak for themselves.

Hail! flower unfading.  
Hail! crown of chastity.  
Hail! flashing token of resurrection.  
Hail! mirror of the life of angels.  
- Akathist Hymn, strophe 14

Listen, my faithful children: open up your petals,  
like roses planted near running waters;  
Send up the sweet odor of incense,  
break forth in blossoms like the lilly.  
Send up the sweet odor of your hymn of praise;  
bless the Lord for all he has done!  
Proclaim the greatness of His name,

loudly sing his praises,...

- Sirach 39:13 ff

O Virgin fair as the moon, the delight of heaven, on whose countenance the blessed gaze and the Angels see themselves reflected, make us, thy children, like unto thee, and let our souls receive a ray of thy beauty, which does not fade with the years but shines forth to eternity.

- Pius XII, Radio message,  
December 8, 1953 (Ripley 372)

The union between Christ and woman has its greatest charm and most perfect fulfillment in the person of the Virgin Mary... Her dignity as Mother of God brought singular graces and extraordinary privileges upon Mary; preservation from original sin and no personal fault, the splendor of the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and intimate participation in all the mysteries of the life of Christ...

- Pius XII, Allocution to the World  
Union of Women's Organizations of  
Catholic Action, Sept. 29, 1957  
(Ripley 121)

#### Turm Davids - Turris Davidica - Tower of David

For both this symbol and the next, the tower, like the X vessel, is a symbol of a ladder or connection between heaven and earth. The tower or ladder is mentioned in the Akathist Hymn and was also mentioned by Pope St. Pius X:

Hail! heavenward ladder by which God came down.

Hail! earthly bridge carrying the earth-born unto heaven.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 4

The zeal and love of the Blessed Virgin Mary have such influence in obtaining God's help for us that, just as through her, God came down to earth, so through her, man mounts up to heaven.

- Pius X, Apost. Const. Tanto studio,  
Feb. 19, 1905 (Ripley 1)

The Tower of David in particular is mentioned in the Song of Songs, as part of the charms of the beloved: "Thy neck is as the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks: a thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the armour of valient men." (4:4, Douay version) The reference to the thousand bucklers is to ornaments hanging about her neck. We find a similar reference in Ezekiel, who speaks this, addressing the city of Tyre:

Persia and Lud and Put were in your army as warriors; shield and helmet they hung upon you, increasing your splendor. The men of Arvad were all about your walls, and the Gamadites were in your towers; they hung their bucklers all around your walls, and made perfect your beauty.

- Ezekiel 27, 10-11

So one can see in the Tower of David the refuge to which human-kind of all races flee, which connects them with their heavenly goal; and this is the tower's beauty. The place of refuge is also mentioned by Pope Leo XIII:

Well may all, shepherds and flocks alike, fly with fullest confidence to the protection of the Blessed Virgin. Let them not fail to call upon her name with one voice, beseeching her as God's mother, publicly and in private by praise, by prayer, by the ardour of their desire: 'Show thyself our Mother.' May her motherly compassion keep her whole family safe from every danger, lead them in the path of genuine prosperity, above all establish them in holy unity.

- Leo XIII: Encly. *Adiutricem populi*,  
Sept. 5, 1895

The tower is mentioned in a slightly different sense, but still with reference to the warriors, in the Akathist Hymn:

Hail! the Church's unassailable tower.  
Hail! indestructible wall of the Kingdom.  
Hail! thou whereby war-trophies are set up.  
Hail! whereby foes are stricken.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 24

#### Elfenbeiner Turm - Turrus Eburnea - Tower of Ivory

This tower symbol is also taken from the Song of Songs, which says simply, "Your neck is like a tower of ivory." (Ch. 7, verse 5) Here, in contrast to the previous tower symbol, the emphasis is on the stateliness and whiteness of the neck. This is explained by St. Bernard, as quoted by Pope St. Pius X:

Mary, as St. Bernard justly remarks, is the 'aqueduct' or if you will, the neck by which the body is joined to the head, and the head transmits to the body its power and virtue: 'For she is the neck of our head, by which he communicated to his mystical body all his spiritual gifts.'

- Pius X: Encycl. *Ad diem illum*,  
Feb. 2, 1904 (Ripley 280)

This is also clear from the Akathist Hymn:

Hail! pillar of purity.  
Hail! gate of safety.  
Hail! beginning of spiritual new-making.  
Hail! leader of godly living.

...

Hail! thou who joinest to their Lord the faithful.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 20

#### Goldenes Haus - Domus Aurea - House of Gold

The first association made with the words "House of Gold" by one familiar with the Bible is with the Temple built by Solomon: "The entire temple was overlaid with gold so that it was completely covered with it; ther whole altar before the sanctuary was also overlaid with gold." (1 Kings 6:22) The Akathist Hymn brings in the temple by mentioning the tabernacle, the holy of holies, and the ark, but develops the thought much further:

Hail! tabernacle of God and the Word.  
Hail! holy beyond all holy ones.

Hail! ark gilded by the Holy Ghost.  
Hail! unfailing treasure-house of life.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 24

This development is explained more clearly in the recently published Dictionary of Mary:

The temple of Solomon...was the glory of the ancient world, for God was to reside there. In the new dispensation, God adorned Mary as His temple, with all the riches of His grace and virtues. She is the temple enclosing the real Holy of Holies within herself - she is the Temple of the Lord. (pp 216-217)

This interpretation is backed up by the words of Pope Pius IX:

The foundation of all our confidence...is found in the Blessed Virgin Mary. God has committed to her the treasury of all good things, in order that everyone may know that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For it is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary.

- Pius IX, Encycl. Ubi primum,  
Feb. 2, 1849 (Ripley 12)

A second interpretation of the House of Gold is based on the secular use of the symbols of gold and house. Gold, Latin aurum, is the same as the Hebrew aur, which means light. Gold is a symbol of solar light or divine intelligence. The second part, a house, is a symbol of the repository of wisdom, and the repository of wisdom is tradition. A House of Gold therefore would be a repository of Divine Wisdom; a sacred tradition. Here we see the Blessed Virgin's strong link with the living Tradition of the Church, which combines with sacred scripture and the magisterium of the Church to teach us faith and morals.

Arche des Bundes - Foederis Arca - Ark of the Covenant

As previously quoted, the Akathist Hymn contains this symbol in strophe 24: "Hail! tabernacle of God and the Word." and again, "Hail! ark gilded by the Holy Ghost." This symbol is perhaps the greatest of the ten, for the deeper we delve into it, the more we learn about our Lord. In the First Book of Kings we learn that when Solomon's temple was dedicated, "There was nothing in the ark but the two stone tablets which Moses had put there at Horeb, when the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites at their departure from the land of Egypt." (8:9) However, in the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, "In the ark were the golden jar containing the manna, the rod of Aaron which had blossomed, and the tablets of the covenant. (9:4) This is confirmed in Exodus 16:32-34; Numbers 17:16-26; and Exodus chapters 24-40 (especially 40:20)

The figure of the ark for our Lady goes back at least to the fourth century, when Ephraem the Syrian wrote (in Syrian):

Figurae tuae, o virgo, in Arca foederis reponuntur. Prophetia depinxit effigiem tuam eamque in libris sacris reposuit pro illo qui intelligit. Isti libri per urnam novam praedicarunt te.

(Your figures, o virgin, are preserved in the ark of the covenant. Prophecy depicts your image, and the same preserved in sacred books for him who understands. These books have foretold you through a new urn. [The urn was the container for the manna])

- Ephraem the Syrian, Hymne de Beata Maria, No. V, stanza 5

The manna, of course, was that given to the Israelites in the desert:

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp. In the morning a dew lay all about the camp, and when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like hoarfrost on the ground. On seeing it, the Israelites asked one another, "What is this?" for they did not know what it was. But Moses told them, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat."

- Exodus 16:13-15

The ark contained an urn which carried some of the manna; our Lady carried within her our Lord come down from heaven:

Jesus then said to them, "Amen, amen I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said therefore to him, "Lord, give us always this bread." But Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst..." "For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed."

- John 6:32-35, 56 (Conf. Ed.)

The second item in the ark was the rod. The rod is probably not familiar to many Catholics. It was Aaron's rod and the events concerning it were brought about to show that Aaron and the house of Levi were God's chosen ones to take offerings before the altar.

So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their princes gave him staffs, twelve in all, one from each tribal prince; and Aaron's staff was with them. Then Moses laid the staffs down before the Lord in the tent of the commandments. The next day, when Moses entered the tent, Aaron's staff, representing the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth not only shoots, but blossoms as well, and even bore ripe almonds!

- Numbers 17:21-23

In the New Testament, all of Hebrews 9 and 10 refers to the priesthood of Christ, the high priest of the New Covenant which completed the Old.

But when Christ appeared as high priest of the good things to come, he entered once for all through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made by hands (that is, not of this creation), nor again by virtue of blood of goats and calves, but by virtue of his own blood, into the Holy of Holies, having obtained eternal redemption.

- Hebrews 9:11,12

The third item in the ark was the pair of tablets of the law, the ten commandments. In the familiar story from Exodus, the people accepted the law

and were sprinkled with the blood of bullocks:

Taking the book of the covenant, he [Moses] read it to the people, who answered, "All that the Lord has said, we will heed and do." Then he took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words of his."

- Exodus 24:6-8

The prophet Jeremiah foretold the New Covenant with its law of love and the blood of the spotless Lamb of God:

I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt...I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts.

- Jeremiah 31:31 ff

The picture is completed by three familiar quotes from Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew:

"...for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."

- Matthew 26:28

"Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

- Matthew 5:17

"Therefore all that you wish men to do to you, even so do you also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."

- Matthew 7:12

Thus, within the Ark of the Covenant we find symbols of our Lord as the bread from heaven, the new high priest, and the embodiment of the law, acceptance of which is required for one to be "covered" by the blood of the covenant.

A second symbolism in the ark can be seen in Joshua 3:1-17, where it was carried before the Israelites on their way to enter the promised land and protected them from the flood-waters of the Jordan in their crossing. This can be seen as a foreshadowing of Mary as she precedes us and aids us in our journey through life.

#### Pforte des Himmels - Janua Coeli - Gate of Heaven

This is another case in which a slightly different translation might be better. Gateway, an opening in a wall, might be better than gate, the part which closes up the opening. The gateway of heaven is mentioned in Genesis, when Jacob or Israel had his dream at Bethel:

Then he [Jacob or Israel] had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's messengers were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him and saying: "I, the Lord, am the God of your forefather Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. ...In you and your descendants all

the nations of the earth shall find blessing"...In solemn wonder he cried out: "How awesome is this shrine! This is nothing but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven."

- Genesis 28:12-13,15,17

Here the gateway to heaven and God's promise are connected. The fulfillment of God's promises to Adam and Eve, Abraham, Jacob, and David is proclaimed by Mary, whom we call Gate of Heaven:

Then Mary said:

"My being proclaims the greatness of the Lord,  
my spirit finds joy in God my savior,  
For he has looked upon his servant in her lowliness;  
all ages to come shall call me blessed.

...

He has upheld Israel his servant,  
ever mindful of his mercy;  
Even as he promised our fathers,  
promised Abraham and his descendants forever."

- Luke 1:46-55

Additional references to Mary as the Gate of Heaven are found in the writings of the early Church and in the Akathist Hymn:

Maria est porta clausa; Christus per eam ingressus est in mundum,  
nec illam aperuit Taceant disputatores.  
(Mary is the locked (locking?) gate; Christ has been brought into  
the world through her, ...)

- Ephraem the Syrian, Hymni de Beata  
Maria, No. XV, stanza 5.

Was it not by Mary that God descended visibly upon earth, that by  
her men may merit to ascend to heaven ?

- St. Augustine, Serm. 18 De tempore.

Hail! the heavenly gateways opening.

Hail! for the heavens with us rejoice.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 8

#### Morgenstern - Stella Matutina - Morning Star

References to this symbol and its origins are very difficult to find. Like the Mirror of Justice, it does not have any obvious biblical reference point. It was applied to our Lady at an early date and it does have at least one obvious interpretation in the historical sense. Just as the morning star has no light of its own, but depends upon reflecting the light of the dawning sun which it precedes in the sky, we are taught that her Immaculate Conception, which preceded in time the works of her Son, depended upon His merits. A very early use of this symbol for Mary is found in the hymns of Ephraem the Syrian; he refers to what must have been a standard or well-known figure, but its origin seems lost in antiquity.

Oriens cum suis asteris figura fuit Maria, e cujus sinu ortus est  
nobis Dominus astrorum. Ille sua nativitate tenebras e mundo

fugavit et suis radiis dissitos illuminavit populos...

(The rising sun with his star was a figure of Mary, from whose womb [almost part] our Lord of the stars has been born. By his birth the former drove darkness from the world and his scattered beams have enlightened the people...)

- Ephraem the Syrian, Hymni de Beata Maria, No. XV, stanza 3

The Akathist Hymn also makes use of the symbol:

An angel chieftain was sent from Heaven to greet the Forth-bringer of God with Hail!

...

Hail! by whom true hap had dawned.

Hail! by whom mishap was waned.

...

Hail! O star that bore the sun.

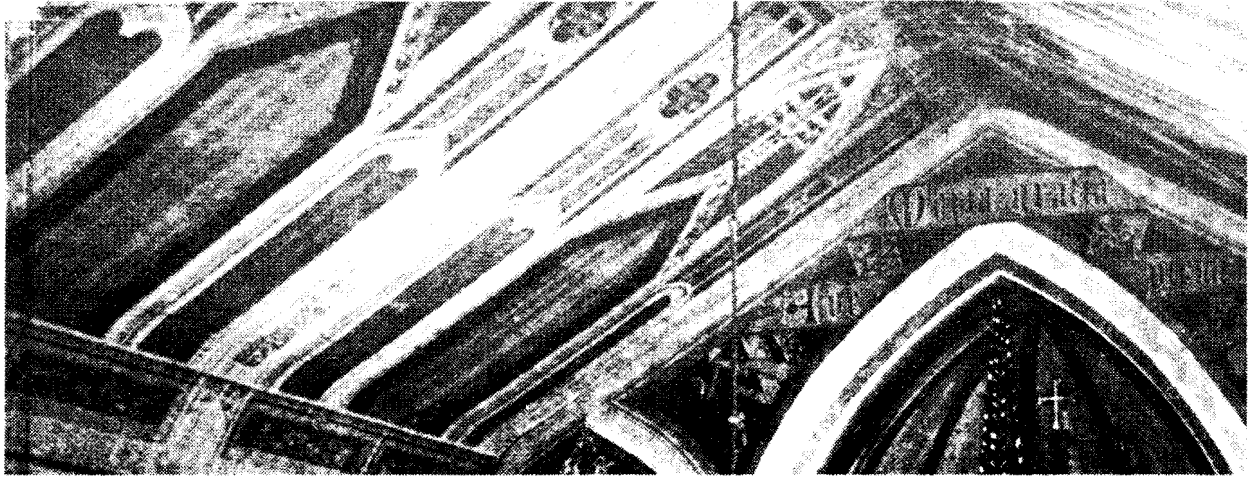
Hail! the womb of God-enfleshed.

- Akathist Hymn, strophe 2

All of the preceding nine symbols have a meaning rooted in history but also have a meaning in present reality. This last symbol also might be said to have a present reality, in terms of a present hope for the future. Our Lady at Fatima promised that in the end her Immaculate Heart would triumph over evil, over the errors spread by Atheistic Communism. We know that Our Lord sits upon His throne, waiting for His enemies to be placed beneath His feet and that at some time after that He will come again as judge. Our Lady's triumph, when it is seen and when it is unquestionably hers, whether it is in our lifetime or at some future time, will precede His return as Judge, just as the Morning Star heralds the dawning of the Sun of Justice. And here we have returned to the first symbol, the Mirror of Justice, and the cycle and our circuit of the church are completed.

#### Concluding Remarks

Several facts have come to light in the research for this talk which seem to have a bearing on the currently contemplated restoration of this church. First is the fact that the ceiling is not original but, as the parish tradition has it, was repainted in the 1890's. Secondly, the small amount of research which was completed on the symbols points out that, although the symbols are rich in meaning, the paintings do not convey nearly as much of this meaning as they could. For example, the two tower symbols are nearly identical as painted, and although they represent one basic idea of "tower," they represent greatly different facets of the idea. Lastly, having seen the paintings, one is aware that they are essentially small, difficult to see paintings in large frames. The restoration committee has a difficult task in deciding how to restore this ceiling. I would like to humbly suggest that, considering that the parish was not afraid to make a radical change in the ceiling in the past, they might now consider a less radical change to make the ceiling more beautiful and more meaningful. This could be done by replacing the present paintings with new, larger versions of the same symbols, researched and designed to explain more fully the truths they contain about our Blessed Mother and her Son. Restoration of the ceiling in 1987 would coincide with the fourth centenary of the approval of the Litany of the Blessed Virgin by Pope Sixtus V in 1587.



This corner of a photograph from about 1889 gives a glimpse of the original ceiling of St. Mary church, painted in 1868. (Courtesy of Leo Thurn)

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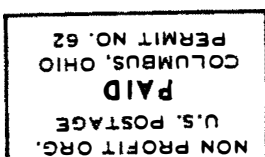
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