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**A FEMINIST THEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF TEXTS AND TRADITIONS  
ABOUT MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS**

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**by**

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**M.A. in Feminist Theology  
The University of Durham**

**9 October 1992**



**16 APR 1993**

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## **ABSTRACT**

I have presented a feminist theological critique of the texts and traditions about Mary the Mother of Jesus. I see this as crucial to the task of discovering the values of being female and feminine in the late twentieth century Christian church. My exposition begins with an evaluation of what the documents of Vatican II and subsequent papal pronouncements do and do not say about women, and of what is said about Mary, appreciating the ecumenical constraints on the presentation of Mariology in those documents. I have then gone on critically to examine the work of Mary Daly for her assessment of what Mariology can and cannot offer women, and I have compared and contrasted this with Rosemary Radford Ruether's attempt to recover Mary as the feminine face of the Church. I have looked back in history to the rise of the ascetic tradition in Christianity and how that changed and continues to change our perception of the female body. I have then gone on to develop this theme of bodies / boundaries concentrating on two areas which I regard as being of crucial significance. The first area is "The Age of Mary" in the nineteenth century, and the second the New Testament material, focusing in particular on the work of Jane Schaberg and its possibilities of discovering a new symbol for women. Finally, I have examined Mary from the context of liberation theology

through the work of Leonardo Boff, and Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer.

The crucial question for me is whether traditions about Mary have anything to say to those who wish to emancipate themselves and younger women from the "Patriarchal feminine", or whether these traditions are positively harmful to those engaged in a conversion from sexism. If the Christian tradition is to offer resources for women, it needs to find a theo/theology which seeks the wholeness of their persons in relationship to the divine, and which will empower them to resist the forms of abuse they may and do experience.

I have seen this project as part of my development as a professional teacher working both within Roman Catholic schools and church communities, and with women outside ecclesiastical boundaries.

**This thesis was written for Lorraine, Katrina, Caroline,  
Kelly, Dione, Kathleen, Lisa, Sarah.**

**It is dedicated to the Killoury Family and to an  
extension of that family my best friend, Kate Harrington.**

**My sincere thanks to Ann Loades who agreed to supervise  
me and who gave direction to my work.**

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## CHAPTER I

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO WHAT THE DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND  
VATICAN COUNCIL AND SUBSEQUENT PAPAL PRONOUNCEMENTS DO  
AND DO NOT SAY ABOUT WOMEN**

**Introduction**

The announcement of a Second Vatican Council must have sent a wave of optimism sweeping through the churches. In particular, for the Women's Movement which had been immensely active in the sixties, one can imagine the hush of expectation as, at last, the Church(1) looked as if it was projecting itself into the modern age by clarifying and redressing crucial areas of its teaching. Never had such optimism been so misplaced. Firstly, this chapter will explore what The Documents of Vatican II(1), had to say about women. However, in a book whose contents span almost seven hundred and fifty pages, it is particularly alarming to discover from the index, that one half of humanity has been reduced to five fleeting inclusions - never more than a paragraph in length - and to a separate closing address that refers to women solely in terms of their sexual states: "women of all states -

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1 Where there is reference to the Church this refers to the Roman Catholic Church and not to the world-wide community of Christians.

2 Walter M. Abbott ed. The Documents of Vatican II: The Message and the Meaning of the Ecumenical Council (London: Chapman, 1965 [1967]) - abbreviated to The Documents.



girls, wives, mothers, and widows, to you also, consecrated virgins and women living alone" (pp.732-33). The idea that women have dignity and autonomy in themselves is painfully absent. If the background surrounding the calling of the council was a desire to bring theology into the twentieth century and to establish ecumenism amongst the churches, it soon became apparent that the Church did not even have in focus the need to redress sexism - by which I mean prejudice and discrimination against women - as a concern within the Church itself. It had failed to recognize and admit that it was in part responsible, operating as it does with a sexist structure.

With the feminine in the Church almost totally concentrated in the figure of Mary, radical feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether and Mary Daly acknowledge the importance of Mary as the only symbol of hope for women searching for an image of wholeness of themselves within Christianity(3). The word symbol is defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary as a "thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something (esp. an idea or quality) by possession of analogous qualities or by

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3 Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church (London: S.C.M., 1979) - abbreviated to Ruether, Mary. Mary Daly, Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1973; The Women's Press 1986) - abbreviated to Daly, Beyond.

association in fact or thought . . ." (4). For this reason much of what the Roman Catholic Church teaches about the role of women is either explicitly, or implicitly, to be found within Mariology. However, the Council admits that it does not give a sustained treatment of Mariology, a measure it took primarily in the interests of ecumenism. Ecumenism, not redressing sexism, is regarded as of vital importance for the Church. The oppression of half of humanity, it seemed, must rank a poor second to the ecumenical interests of a male-dominated Church.

The basic tenets of Mariology are stated in chapter eight, Lumen Gentium, of The Documents. Other sources of significance include the papal encyclical Redemptoris Mater (9 April 1987) (5) by John Paul II, which expounds and attempts to illuminate teachings about Mary, linking her to Liberation Theology and some concerns of the Women's Movement (R.M.[37,46], pp.760,762). Pope Paul VI's apostolic exhortation Marialis Cultus, (To Honour Mary, 2 February 1974) (6), is a document which proposed that Christianity already had a model of the liberated

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4 The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English based on The Oxford English Dictionary and its supplements, first edited by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, Seventh Edition edited by J. B. Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p.1082 - abbreviated to The Concise Oxford Dictionary.

5 Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater, as published in Origins N.C. Documentary Service, Vol. XVI: 43 (9 April 1987), pp.745-67 - abbreviated to R.M.

6 Abbreviated to M.C.

woman in The Virgin Mary. To these must be added Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter Mulieris Dignitatem, On the Dignity and Vocation of Women (15 August 1988) (7), and finally his post-synodal apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici, On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (30 December 1988) (8). This exhortation clearly identifies sexism, postulating that: "As an expression of her mission the Church must stand firmly against all forms of discrimination and abuse of women" ([49], p.47). Nevertheless, it goes on to identify women primarily as wives and mothers.

In the Church's attempt to confront the deeply held ethical belief that women should be treated as equal we need, secondly, to look at its anthropology, which correlates with its theology, for many presuppositions which have been used to subordinate women in the past are no longer tenable. In this connection it is essential that we explore thoroughly the ambiguous figure of Mary upheld as the paragon for all women. In the words of Redemptoris Mater: "This Marian dimension of Christian life takes on special importance in relation to women and their status. In fact, femininity has a unique relationship with the mother of the Redeemer" ([46], p.762). In this the Pope clearly confuses femininity

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7 Abbreviated to M.D.

8 Abbreviated to C.L.

with the female, and in the ambivalent figure of Mary the Church has combined many problematical traits - virgin / mother, mother / daughter, human / transcendent, corporate / unique, subordinate / equal - under the guise of theological rationality. As the back cover of Daphne Hampson's Theology and Feminism (1990) states, "this ethical challenge [women's equality] confronts the Christian religion over the issues of priesthood and ordination, language and imagery, and hermeneutics and theology" (9). It is now time to see how sensitively and how thoroughly these documents attempted to reconcile Christian theology with the equality of women: a cause they claimed to champion.

### **The Documents and Gender**

In some respects the papal documents do seem to state quite clearly the essential equality of men and women. We find written expression of regret in The Documents of Vatican II, such as in Gaudium et Spes:

For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits

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9 Daphne Hampson, Theology and Feminism (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass: Basil Blackwell, 1990) - abbreviated to Hampson, Theology.

equal to those recognized for men ([29], p.228).

Twenty-three years after Vatican II in the apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici, in its section devoted to "Promoting the Dignity of the Person"[37], Pope John Paul II establishes on theological grounds the truth of human equality when he maintains that the radical and elevating affirmation of the value of every human being was made by the Son of God in his becoming man in the womb of a woman([37], p.36). However, this favourable picture - even though it can be seen as a reflection on paragraph fifty-two of Gaudium et Spes in The Documents of Vatican II under the heading "All Must Promote the Good Estate of Marriage and the Family", where there is open acknowledgement of the active role of the father in the domestic sphere - disappears into a reaffirmation of the Church's unchanged and deep-rooted attitude to the place and role of women. We find written:

The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their [children's] formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account (The Documents, [52], p.257).

Despite the favourable introductory sentence about fathers, the Church fails to provide statements about what this active role should involve so as to emphasize the important and essential role of fathers in the development of their children. The Church has failed to take up the woman's cause. There is no attempt to free her from the confines of the private home: this "domestic role" is seen as "hers". By its silence the Church implies that there is no problem with the overburdening and restrictive roles women endure because of its unethical identification of gender stereotyping with nature itself. This restricted understanding of women is again reiterated in paragraph sixty which expresses the hope "that they should be able to assume their full proper role in accordance with their own nature" ([60], p.267). One is all too aware that whenever the Church writes about women's "proper role" and their "own nature" this is synonymous with subordination and inferiority.

In the closing message addressed only to women it is ironic that the stereotyping and demeaning of woman's creative powers and dignity, as a whole person, are preceded by the Church's proud claim "to have glorified and liberated woman" (The Documents, p.733). It excludes women from the messages to "Rulers", "Men of Thought and Science", "Artists", and "Workers". Ignorant of the injustice it has done to women it goes on to reduce women to vehicles for producing children and elevating men: "You women have always had as your lot the protection of

the home, the love of beginnings, and an understanding of cradles" (Ibid.). Such a statement completely ignores the point that in the so-called "protection of the home" women are reputed to have enjoyed, many have had their creative potential cut off outside the home. Behind such walls some men have found a haven where they can rape and beat their wives, protected from the consequences of what the civil law chooses euphemistically to dismiss as "domestic incidents". Women are then implored to "pass on to your sons and daughters the traditions of your fathers" (Ibid.), as Ann L. Loades writes, in her paper "The Virgin Mary and the Feminist Quest", "mothers not having any?" (10). Finally, after beseeching women to be "the guardians of purity, unselfishness, and piety", it asks them to aid men "to retain courage in their [my emphasis] great undertakings" (The Documents, p.733). This whole message recalls the candid perception of George Bernard Shaw who posited: "A woman is not considered womanly unless she is of use to a man"(11). This is the intolerable message in all Vatican papers. Behind the polite veneer of token "equality" - an empty word used in the papers - one never finds proof of its existence in practice. Daphne Hampson captures the

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10 Ann L. Loades, Chapter 10 "The Virgin Mary and the Feminist Quest", pp.156-78 in Janet Martin Soskice ed. After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition (London: Marshall Pickering, 1990), p.165.

11 Marina Warner, Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (London: Picador, 1985), here quoting Shaw, p.132 - abbreviated to Warner, Alone.

double task which is before women in wanting "to be present in the religion and the female to be represented in its symbolism . . . they need a false understanding of 'woman' and the 'feminine' to be overcome" (Theology, p.96). What the Church has done is to coat contempt in false flattery. It is necessary, therefore, to explore the anthropological basis behind the false stereotyping of women.

### **Anthropology and How it Relates to Theology in the Documents**

The Vatican documents could hardly fail to take into account the scientific advances which have marked not only this century, but even the last. However, in their attempt to tackle the creation stories in Genesis - the alpha and omega of all subordination of women in both canon and civil law - there is no acknowledgement of fallacious anthropology which embryology has now made untenable. We find in Pope John Paul II's Mulieris Dignitatem (August 1988) the most detailed attempt to reconcile Scripture to the promotion of the full equality of woman to man. He writes, "the image and likeness" are words that "constitute the immutable basis of all Christian anthropology" ([6], p.18). This likeness is said to be in terms of their rationality and dominion over the animals. However, Eve's special place in relation to the Fall has enabled theologians to argue that she is less rational than man. Pope John Paul II seems more intent on justifying and defending the text



which has damaged women so badly, rather than openly championing the women's cause by violently condemning the destructiveness of the myth. His silence only goes to convey the message that sexual oppression is not a problem (Daly, Beyond, p.45). He writes of the oppressive myth of Genesis 2:18-25 - in which the two passages which subordinate women in the New Testament find their source - that "it helps us to understand even more profoundly the fundamental truth" (M.D., [6], p.20). In 1 Timothy 2:13-14 we find Paul's words: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor". Despite the damage caused, Pope John Paul II ironically states, "there is no doubt [my emphasis] that, independent of this 'distinction of roles' in the biblical description, that first sin is the sin of man, created by God as male and female" (Ibid., [9], p.33). Whereas I might not dispute what the Pope is saying on one level, at another I believe that a simple look at the unegalitarian nature of theology throughout the centuries and today will show that theology is in "no doubt" that woman was to blame and not man. Adam is indeed portrayed as "more sinned against than sinning"(12) and Eve's disobedience has been subtly altered to portray her as a seductress who gained control over man's rationality and

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12 Jane Williams, "Jesus the Jew and Women", pp.86-99 in M. Furlong ed., Feminine in the Church (London: S.P.C.K., 1984), p.87.

brought him into sin and shame(13). It was for this reason that woman was punished more than man in having to endure pain in childbirth. This is interpreted as spanning menstruation, intercourse, labour, childbirth and lactation. It directly associates the reproductive organs of women with the consequences of sin. For this reason male psychology has been unable to apply the attributes of ordinary women to God since they conceive of them as contemptible. What has resulted is a displacement (via repression and stereotyping) of positive, i.e., non-threatening feminine traits as men see them on to the man-made woman - Mary.

### **The Exemption of Mary from Theological Anthropology**

The earliest account of this displacement and projection of Eve / Mary occurs in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho which clearly places the blame for sin entering the world squarely at the feet of woman: "'The First-born of the Father is born of the Virgin', wrote Justin, 'in order that the disobedience caused by the serpent might be destroyed in the same manner in which it had originated. For Eve, an undefiled virgin, conceived the word of the serpent, and brought forth disobedience and death'"(14). Similarly, Irenaeus and Tertullian see Mary

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13 Elaine Storkey, "The Significance of Mary for Feminist Theology", pp.184-99 - abbreviated to Storkey, Chapter 9 - of David F. Wright ed. Chosen By God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective (London: Marshall Pickering, 1989), p.190 - abbreviated to Wright, Chosen.

14 Dialogue with Trypho, 100 (Patrologia Graeca 6. 709-12); tr. T. B. Falls, Fathers of the Church, St. Justin

as the New Eve. Woman per se became synonymous with the worldly creature particularly prone to the worldly vices of ambition, lechery, and avarice. By contrast, however, Mary exemplifies the passive virtues of humility, obedience, silence, mortification, prudence, and modesty, and is consequently upheld as a perfect model of womanhood. The bitter irony is that Mary bears no relation to women: she is denied her biological functions as woman, her sensual and spiritual needs, and an interrelated nature as woman. She is not like women in very important ways:

A virgin not sterile, but fertile; married to a man, but made fruitful by God; bearing a son, but knowing not a man; forever inviolate, yet not deprived of progeny. A virgin pregnant but incorrupt, and intact even in childbirth. A virgin before marriage and in marriage, a pregnant virgin, a virgin giving suck, a perpetual virgin. A virgin without concupiscence conceiving the saviour. A virgin bearing a child in the womb without hardship, giving birth to God without pain (15).

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Martyr, New York, 1948, pp. 304-5 quoted by John de Satgé in Mary and the Christian Gospel (London: S.P.C.K., 1976) p.120 - abbreviated to de Satgé, Mary.

15 Peter Canisius, De Maria Virgine incomparabili 11.1, p.106. [1577] quoted in Ian Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Woman (London, Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.23 - abbreviated to Maclean, The Renaissance.

Ian Maclean writes: "She is, in fact, exempt from all female vice and imperfection, and thus can accede directly to heaven by assumption unlike any other human being. Far from being the glory of her sex, she is not of her sex in its malediction, tribulation and imperfection" (The Renaissance, p.23). Mary cannot be used as a model for women precisely because what is unique about her is so dissimilar to women's experience - so lying outside of history that it falsifies her claim to humanity. The supernatural solutions have placed the most essential elements of Mary's life beyond the horizons of human enquiry.

A series of consequences results from the incorporation into Scripture of this gender construction. In Genesis 3:16 we find women cursed: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you". In the words of Pope John Paul II, "'domination' indicates the disturbance and loss of the stability of that fundamental equality . . . . While the violation of this equality, which is both a gift and a right from God the Creator, involves an element to the disadvantage of woman, at the same time it also diminishes the true dignity of the man" (M.D., [10], p.37). However, he does not speak openly about redressing this balance. His concern is only that: "In the name of liberation from male 'domination', women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine 'originality'" (Ibid. [10], p.39). If one begins to wonder what is meant by

this "originality" of which the Church seems so confident, women are pointed towards the figure of Mary

as the full revelation of all that is included in the biblical word 'woman'. . . one finds 'woman' as she was intended to be in creation, and therefore in the eternal mind of God: in the bosom of the Most Holy Trinity. Mary is 'the new beginning' of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every woman (Ambrose De Instit. Virg. v.33, PL16, 313 quoted in Ibid. [11], p.45).

Yet, what has this fictive vision of woman to do with the essential nature of half of humanity, given what has just gone before? Virginia Woolf gives voice to the difficult task of finding an adequate definition of the female when she admits in "Professions for Women": "What is a woman? I assure you, I do not know . . . I do not believe that anybody can know until she has expressed herself in all the arts and professions open to human skill" (16).

### **Mariology: A Model for Women?**

The Church, at least in Marialis Cultus, seemed to acknowledge explicitly the changes in the situation of modern women and even went so far as to perceive that:

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16 Cheri Register, "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction", pp.1-28 of Josephine Donovan, Feminist Literary Criticism: Explorations in Theory (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), p.16 - abbreviated to Donovan, Feminist.

In consequence of these phenomena some people are becoming disenchanted with devotion to the Blessed Virgin and finding it difficult to take as an example Mary of Nazareth because the horizons of her life, so they say, seem rather restricted in comparison with the vast spheres of activity open to mankind today ([34], p.60).

Yet, the Church attempts to defend the cult of the Virgin Mary as exemplar par excellence and tries to instil into this archetypal figure some of the strength and passion that this, in the words of Karl Barth, "non-willing, non-achieving, non-creative, non-sovereign, merely ready, merely receptive, virgin human being" lacks so profoundly (17).

The Virgin and Mother Mary is clearly an impossible figure for women to identify with, for they can, at best, amount to half of what is claimed of Mary, but only by forfeiting naturally the other half. One cannot by nature be both virgin and mother. Unfortunately, the idealised Mary, free of sin, forever young, saved from putrefaction of the flesh, at the same time virgin and mother, has been upheld as a moral ideal for women. Such an idealization of a female stereotype can be as antifeminist as a pejorative one, since it can distract

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17 Karl Barth, "The Miracle of Christmas", p.191 of his Church Dogmatics: Volume 1, Part 2, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1956.

women from working towards real social change (Donovan, Feminist, p.6). In the words of Marina Warner: "The Catholic religion therefore binds its female followers in particular on a double wheel, to be pulled one way and then the other, like Catherine of Alexandria during her martyrdom" (Alone, p.336). This association of women with "martyrdom" is particularly appropriate. The word "martyr" is defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary as ". . . one who undergoes penalty of death for persistence in Christian faith or obedience to law of Church, or undergoes death or suffering for any great cause . . . ." (7th Edition, p.621). This is exactly what women have endured, in that the penalty of death has been of their very "Be-ing", a killing of their souls and mental powers(18).

Pope Paul VI at least attempted to convey the meaning of Mariology in a manner that would speak to the modern woman. The annunciation, that holy "*Let it be*", that has dictated to women the submissive role of obedience in imitation of Mary's first words, was used by him to uphold Mary as a figure for "the modern woman, anxious to participate with decision-making power in the affairs of the community, [who] will contemplate with intimate joy Mary who, taken into dialogue with God, gives her active and responsible consent" (M.C. [37],

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18 Mary Daly Websters' First Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1987; London: The Women's Press, 1988;), p.64 - abbreviated to Daly, Websters'.

p.62). Anne Hine, in her article "Mary: Model or Mentor", takes up the point that Mary's sinlessness did not disallow the possibility of a negative response. She maintains that Mary's being troubled at the angel's words (Lk. 1:28-9) is not consonant with an automatic affirmative response (19). The Pope's very argument has led some pro-abortionists to claim Mary as "patroness of reproductive choice", i.e., that Luke 1:38 portrays Mary controlling her own body and sexuality, and this is rationally what is being claimed if one pushes the argument beyond its "safe" Catholic position. One wonders, however, whether feminists can thus use this biblical text if, as John Wenham suggests, Mary is actually not being given a choice, for the passage may be read as if she is simply being told that this is going to happen to her(20). Certainly, this is more in line with a patriarchal God.

The Pope goes on to hold up to women Mary's choice of virginity, not as a rejection of the values of marriage, but as enabling her to consecrate herself totally to God, and so presents her as a figure of liberation theology, a claim also to be made in Redemptoris Mater ([37], p.759). However, Pope John Paul II clearly shows that the Church is no spokesperson for

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19 Anne Hine, "Mary: Model or Mentor", in Priests and People [Formerly The Clergy Review], Vol.2, No.4, May (1988), p.152.

20 John Wenham, "Modern Evangelical Views of the Virgin Mary", Surrey, ESBVM., January, 1988, p.6.



women. In 1980, he openly attacked the Women's Liberation Movement as contrary to women's vocation to motherhood(21). Once again we see women reduced in their essential natures in imitation of the Theotòkos - the Mother of God - which Pope John Paul II, in Mulieris Dignitatem, stated was "the fullness of perfection of 'what is characteristic of woman, of what is feminine'. Here we find ourselves, in a sense, at the culminating point, the archetype, of the personal dignity of women" ([5], p.15). The Church has consistently failed to offer single women a viable model. Rather, the single woman, if not in a religious order, represents a frightening anomaly the Church refuses to recognize. Even the Virgin Mary was not allowed to remain unwedded. Even if the marriage was unconsummated, she had to enter into that state called matrimony which may strip women of what little personal identity they may have and place them under the control of a man. The Pope's later comments in Redemptoris Mater (1987), concerning Mary's role in the annunciation, convey the same "reductionistic" view of women. He writes,

Mary entrusted herself to God completely, with the 'full submission of the intellect and will' manifesting 'the obedience of faith' to him who spoke to her through his messenger. She

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21 Mary Daly, Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1984; London: The Women's Press, 1984), p.56 - abbreviated to Daly, Pure.

responded, therefore, with all her human and feminine 'I'. . . (R.M., [13], p.750).

In Mulieris Dignitatem, commenting on Mary's words, He "has done great things for me", the Pope sees this as

*the discovery of all the richness and personal resources of femininity, all the eternal originality of the 'woman', just as God wanted her to be, a person for her own sake [my emphasis], who discovers herself 'by means of a sincere gift of self' (M.D., [11], p.46).*

Yet, many feminist readers might find Mary's "Yes" unacceptable precisely because there is no authentic "I" behind it. Mary does not exist for herself but for the creation of a patriarchal mythology. All these quotes are incredibly depressing, for they allot to women only passive virtues. As Marina Warner states: "And the type of virtues decreed feminine degenerate easily: obedience becomes docility; gentleness, irresolution; humility, cringing; forbearance, long-suffering" (Alone, p.190).

Of the four declared dogmas about the Virgin Mary - her divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity, her immaculate conception, and her assumption into heaven - only the first has basis in Scripture. With reference to the virginity of Mary, this appears to be based on a misinterpretation of the Hebrew "young girl" for "virgin" (Ibid, pp.19,48). However, Mary's role as Theotòkos is

seen as a balancing one for Pope John Paul II. In Mulieris Dignitatem he writes:

*This eternal truth about the human being . . . constitutes the mystery which only in 'the Incarnate Word takes on light' . . . . In this 'revealing of man to himself', do we not need to find a special place for that 'woman' who was the Mother of Christ? ([2], pp.7-8).*

It seems to have slipped his mind that throughout his ministry Christ himself continually showed that Mary's motherhood did not of itself provide her with any privileges, such as belong to faith alone. Surely it is Christ's humanity that should be emphasized since the Church's concentration on his maleness calls into question whether women are saved by his incarnation and resurrection. This mistake may connect with Mary as the ideal woman, virtually upholding her as a separate deity for women. Unsurprisingly, the Latin American theologian Jon Sobrino stated that men should emulate Christ and women Mary, which may easily verge on polytheism (Hampson, Theology, pp.74-5). Certainly the church of the Biblical era did not exalt Mary as its only model for women, but rather emphasized that we were all one in Christ. Technically, indeed, the Church acknowledges her as an intercessory figure, forever reliant on the male Father to offer salvation for her earthly children, e.g., women pray to the Virgin Mother during pregnancy. Marina

Warner points out that "it remains ironic that the mother who brought forth virginally and without pain should be invoked in sympathy. It is of course her very immunity that women plead to obtain . . ." (Alone, p.275). She continues to expand on this theme of Mary's role as intercessor and writes: "Such a concept mirrors faithfully the patriarchal family as it exists in the Mediterranean, and in southern Ireland, where a woman is considered to have sovereign powers in the family . . . and yet has little or no rights beyond her role as mother". However, the Church fails to add the prayers that many women must make, where contraception is forbidden, to be spared another pregnancy (Ibid., p.289). This is the reality of women's lives which the Church prefers not to see (M.C. [14], p.28)

If women complain that the Scriptures do not relate to them, Pope John Paul II would have us look at the figure of Jesus Christ. In chapter five of Mulieris Dignitatem, the Pope reminds us of all the dealings Jesus had with women - Lk. 13:11; Mk. 1:30; Mk. 5:25-34; Mk. 5:27; Mk. 5:34; Mk. 5:41; Lk. 7:13; Matt. 15:28 (M.D.[13], pp.50-1). By far the most important is to be found in John 11:21-27 (Ibid.[15], p.59). Although Jesus is always respectful to women it appears, as Judith Ochshorn stated, that: "Jesus was neither a feminist nor a misogynist. His central message simply lay

elsewhere"(22). Certainly, Jesus did not take up the women's cause directly. In John's Gospel, however, we have what is one of the most important conversations in the New Testament, which results in Martha's confession of faith: *"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world"*. Whilst the Pope acknowledges this, he fails to tell his readers that, unlike Peter's confession, Martha's confession - important as it is - is not a reading for a Sunday. Ann Loades, in chapter 4 of her work Searching for Lost Coins (1987), believes that this confession confers apostolic authority on Martha(23). Indeed, Martha's confession is a better example for the Church, for unlike Peter's, it is not followed by misinterpretation (Mk. 8:27-33). Women are left to contemplate why there should be such a distinct difference in how these two confessions have been viewed - the only answer lies in the distinction of the sexes of the two characters.

### **The Question of Egalitarianism in the Church in Relation to Priesthood**

If the Church, then, is truly egalitarian as it claims to be, is it not bound to open its doors to allow female delegates into the Synods, Assemblies,

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22 Judith Ochshorn, The Female Experience and the Nature of the Divine (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1981), p.173 quoted in Hampson, Theology, p.90.

23 Ann L. Loades, Searching for Lost Coins: Explorations in Christianity and Feminism, (London: S.P.C.K., 1987), p.62.

Conferences, not only as passive members, but as having a voice? Included in The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity is a footnote to paragraph 9. The note is by Martin Work and is not part of the conciliar material itself. He writes: "It is interesting to note that by the time the Council ended twelve laywomen and ten religious women were present as 'auditrices'" (p.500, ft.27), although Martin Work failed to add to his footnote that "no woman was allowed to read a paper before the assembly and that women journalists were barred from attending council masses or receiving communion"(24). Despite claiming in this paragraph that it is one of the few places in all of the Council documents where special attention is given to the contribution of women to the mission of the Church, and that women are included "whenever the general role of the laity was discussed" (Ibid.), women have every right to feel that the Church has refused to recognize their full equality. Mary Daly argues, in The Church and the Second Sex, that: "There will be no genuine equality of men and women in the Church as long as qualified persons are excluded from any ministry by reason of their sex alone"(25).

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24 Anne E. Carr, Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p.30 here quoted by Ann L. Loades in her paper "Beyond God The Father': An Introduction to Mary Daly's View of Christian Tradition", p.5.

25 Mary Daly, The Church and the Second Sex, (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1985ed.), p.197 - abbreviated hereafter to Daly, C.S.S.

The decree of the Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, speaks of the dignity of persons, men and women alike. However, it maintains that women cannot be ordained. Stranger still is the contradictory stand of Pope John Paul II, who explicitly states in his apostolic exhortation Christifideles Laici (December 1988) that "everyone [my emphasis], the whole People of God, shares in this threefold mission" of priest, prophet, king ([14], p.13), and yet refuses to allow women into the priesthood. Kallistos Ware, Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies at Oxford, writes:

The human person who expresses most perfectly this royal and universal priesthood . . . is not in fact a man but a woman, the blessed Virgin Mary . . . 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord'. At the annunciation, as throughout her life, the Mother of God exemplifies that priestly act of self-offering which is the true vocation of us all(26).

The question, however, which is now central to the issue of women's ordination to the priesthood is "whether *womanhood* is an appropriate carrier of the sacramental

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26 Kallistos Ware, Women and the Priesthood (St. Vladimir's Press, 1983, p.13), quoted in Edward Knapp-Fisher "Men, Women and Ministry" in Alberic Stacpoole ed. Mary and the Churches: Papers of the Chichester Congress, 1986, of the ESBVM. (Co. Dublin: The Columba Press, 1987), p.63 - abbreviated to Stacpoole, Mary.

and symbolic role of the priest"(27). David Wright informs us in the introduction to Chosen By God that:

Long before the emergence of a movement for the ordination of women, the Vatican found it prudent to condemn depictions of Mary as a priest - but only after Pope Pius X had prayed to her as 'Mother of the High Priest Christ, Priest likewise and Altar . . . Queen of the clergy, . . . Mary Virgin Priest' (pp.6-7).

One cannot help wondering whether the Church has not provided a spiritual vent for the sexual drives of its celibate clergy in portraying Mary as guardian of their celibacy and the waiting virgin bride, ignorant / innocent of the world, waiting passively for their embrace - the celibates' prize being infinite bliss in heaven.

In the past it was believed, following Aquinas' views - based on Aristotle's biological suppositions about male and female biology - that the priesthood signified authority and therefore women, because they were by nature in a state of subjection, could not be ordained (1 Tim. 2:12-14). However, in his Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard, Aquinas states that order pertains to the soul, and the soul is without sex, which could be presented as an argument in favour of women's

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27 Gilbert Russell and Margaret Dewey in Peter Moore ed. Man, Woman and Priesthood, p.91 of Stacpoole, Mary, p.66



ordination (Hampson, Theology, p.17). In emphasizing Christ's humanity, one could also bring in the fitting place of both man and woman in the Eucharist as the figure of Christ - "*in whom there is neither male nor female*".

Daphne Hampson believes that although Christ did call only men as his Apostles, this was solely of symbolic significance to represent the twelve tribes of Israel, and only a circumcised male could represent a patriarch of Israel. She states:

There is no indication that there was any direct connection between the twelve (of whom it is said in Acts that they stayed in Jerusalem) and the advent of ministry in the churches in the gentile world. Ministry seems to have grown up in a haphazard manner, basically in response to the need that various functions be performed. St Paul was not 'ordained' - and would not have known what the term connoted . . . . Thus to those conservatives who, arguing against the ordination of women, contend that Jesus ordained no 'priestesses', it must be said that neither did he ordain any priests!" (Ibid., pp.15-6).

Mary O'Connell, in her lucid paper "Why Don't Catholics Have Women Priests?", continues to expose the

arbitrariness of the Church's stance on the sex of the twelve apostles by asking why this feature and not that of number, i.e., the importance of maintaining a clique of twelve men, has been held as of paramount importance. Further, Bible scholar Father Carroll Stuhlmueller, C.P., of the Catholic Theological Union, makes the astute observation that Luke's mention of seventy disciples calls into question whether these too were all men; a question unanswered in Scripture(28).

The Vatican Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (1976), taking into account the erroneous arguments of the past, nevertheless continues to uphold the exclusion of women. The idea that the Church has been guilty of sexism by omitting women would become too apparent if a change were to happen, so for this reason the Church argues that tradition cannot be wrong. Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her paper "The Roman Catholic Story," states that: "Exclusion from priesthood is not based on any such concept of inferiority or subjection", which people had believed were its grounds in the past, "but rather on some mysterious sacramental bond between Christ, maleness and priesthood"(29). This attempt at a theological

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28 Mary O'Connell, "Why Don't Catholics Have Women Priests?" pp.87-93 - abbreviated to O'Connell, "Why" - in Kenneth Aman ed. Border Regions of Faith: An Anthology of Religion and Social Change (New York: Oribis Books, 1987), pp.87-8 - abbreviated to Aman, Border.

29 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Roman Catholic Story", pp.373-83 of R. R. Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin eds. Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and

construct lost the Vatican its credibility for 'infallibility'.

Mary O'Connell notes that understandably feminists are furious with any statements that deny that women bear the image of Christ. Sister Elizabeth Carroll, R.S.M., reminds the believing community that: "People see a natural resemblance to Jesus in the love conveyed, the service rendered, the self shared, much more than they look to a physical characteristic like sex" (O'Connell, "Why", p.91). Indeed, The Catholic Theological Society of America argues that the priest represents Christ by representing the Church. Women share in the faith of the Church and can thereby represent Christ. Agreement on the nature of this particular sacramental sign seems to be far from unanimous amongst theologians and unfounded on the basis of the New Testament (Ibid., pp.91-2). The Bishop of London's Newsletter (no.34, November 1985) states that:

In the whole of human instinct and understanding it is the masculine which is associated with giving and the feminine with receiving . . . so when God became man, took our human nature, he chose to express himself, I believe, in that mode which in human life expresses the giving, the initiative ...

so he calls upon men to do that within the Church.

Cheri Register, assistant professor at the University of Minnesota, writes:

Only experiences encountered by male characters are called 'universal' or basic to 'the human condition'. The 'female experience' is peripheral to the central concern of literature - which is man's struggle with nature, God, fate, himself, and, not infrequently, woman. Woman is always 'the Other' (Donovan, Feminist, p.10).

As long as men have this partial insight they will fail to describe reality accurately. "An exploration of female nature agreeable to feminists requires new psychological, anthropological and sociological methods, free of sexist bias, as well as a new literary criticism" (Ibid., p.16). I do not, as a representative of humanity, share the Bishop of London's evaluation of maleness as synonymous with giving; it is women who give birth, who sustain life and who therefore are just as representative of giving as men, unless we are to return to Aristotelian biological beliefs and perceive the sperm as the sole constituent of life and woman as its fertile receptacle. Alwyn Marriage, in her article "Praise Him Upon the Well-Tuned Symbols," argues that: "If the priest

must be male to symbolize the Bridegroom, then the congregation must be female to symbolize [and be] the Bride"(30). Constance Parvey, editor of The Community of Women and Men in the Church (1983), quotes an insightful comment made by a Latin American source which states that

the church as a body has often been described in feminine symbols (Eph. 5:25-32), and women therefore have been taught that their place is in this feminine 'body' rather than in clerical or headship roles. Such strong symbols have thus strengthened arguments for keeping women out of authoritative positions in church institutional life, although they are only allegorical (31).

Yet, as Alwyn Marriage continues, this maleness is culturally and arbitrarily determined and then hidden beneath vestments.

Given this, it seems that physical maleness can assume no importance whatever, and indeed I can think of no priestly office for which the male genitals can serve any useful purpose. So it

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30 Alwyn Marriage, "Praise Him Upon the Well-Tuned Symbols", New Fire, Spring, 1979, p.294 - abbreviated to Marriage, "Praise Him".

31 Constance F. Parvey, "The Section Reports", pp.116-27 of her ed. The Community of Women and Men in the Church (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), p.123.

must be some other attribute of maleness that is desired, and if it is not the body, presumably it is of personality ("Praise Him", pp.294-95).

It is what is symbolized that is important, not the symbol used, since the latter will possibly change in its meaning for each generation and need to be replaced. Catherine Irinson's letter (published in The Tablet, 10 May 1986) responded to Cardinal Mayer's support for the Bishop of Pittsburg's campaign for the exclusion of women from the washing of the feet at the Maundy Service on the grounds that by tradition the feet had all belonged to men. She writes cuttingly that he does not go far enough:

The argument against the ordaining of women is that Christ ordained only men. Let us, please, take these arguments to their logical conclusion. Let us exclude women from the Eucharist since at the last supper Christ shared his body and blood only with men(32).

The Church's arguments, on the symbolic and every other level, are simply not consistent. Daphne Hampson makes the valid remark that it is precisely at the level of symbolism that women have been most hurt by the Church

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32 Lavinia Byrne, Women Before God (London: S.P.C.K., 1988), pp.97-8 - abbreviated to Byrne, Women - quoting The Tablet.

(Theology, p.46). The Gospels can be read as teaching that God came as a servant, as one who suffers with the oppressed and that if anything can be known about the kingdom of God, it is that it is egalitarian. Clearly, the ordination of women to the priesthood would be one constructive piece of symbolism. However, what also needs to be emphasized about such egalitarianism is that the whole structure which exists between clergy and lay people needs re-thinking on a horizontal rather than a vertical framework. The failure to ordain women is nothing less than an instance of injustice for, in the poignant words of Rosemary Radford Ruether: "To exclude women from the priesthood is to reject their equivalent humanity and their equivalent status in redemption" (O'Connell, "Why", pp.92-3). Ordination is not a possession to be passed down through the male line. Ordination is about service, something women have been doing for as long as anyone can remember. Jesus' treatment of his mother and the lesson of his encounter with Martha and Mary illustrate that the Church is modelled on service not lordship, whilst at the same time freeing women from exclusive identification with the role of servant enjoining them to take their equal place as disciples(33). Lavinia Byrne points out that women today celebrate God at table within their own homes. It seems

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33 Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975) - abbreviated to Ruether, New Woman, p.66.

more than likely that in the Early Church women as well as men would have celebrated the Eucharist in their own houses as part of the believing community and with equal recognition to men. There should not be a divide between Church worship and everyday living. The barriers must come down if we are to follow Christ's example - a man who was very much the homemaker constantly entering into people's homes to talk and eat at table. The Church needs to be deinstitutionalized - as Byrne notes, priests "who minister to our human growth as believing people" could be committed to working at the personal level at home, street and everyday living, rather than solely at the level of institution (Byrne, Women, p.51). Women are already there - they should not be looked on as a threat or corrupting influence, but as a catalyst towards full human development.

### **Conclusion**

In the final analysis, the documents and papal pronouncements have far to go if they are to do justice to "one half of humanity". The Church faces a profound challenge as women become more aware of the dignity of the whole woman, not some masculine conception of femininity women have for centuries been forced to play out. In recognizing woman's increasing presence in all areas of society, the Church seems almost regretful and constantly reminds women to be true to their "*original*" nature upheld in the figure of Mary. It is apparent that



the Church is keenly aware of the existence of sexism. Having analysed the evil it has created, it then fails to take responsibility for its contribution and, as I have already noted, proceeds to conceal its oppressive stance within its structure behind a veil of false flattery. Mary is too far removed from women of the flesh. As Beverly Wildung Harrison states: "We have very far to go before Christianity acknowledges adequately its complicity in breeding and perpetuating the hatred and fear of the real, full, lived-world power of female persons!" (34). What feminists are campaigning for is the true realization of Christ's body as feeding, healing and teaching the message of salvation at the symbolic level. This in truth requires the incorporation of women as they are into that structure so that domination / subjugation disappear. For neither the male nor the female alone are the image and likeness of the Divine; only both together are in his / her image. Both men and women have the right to grow up and to share in the call to take on responsibilities and to become fully human. Mary Daly posits what needs to be done when she states: "What is required of women at this point in history is a firm and deep refusal to limit our perspectives, questioning, and creativity to any of the preconceived patterns of male-

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34 Beverly Wildung Harrison, "The Power of Anger in the Work of Love Christian Ethics for Women and Other Strangers", pp.194-214 in Ann L. Loades ed. Feminist Theology: A Reader, (London; Louisville, Kentucky: S.P.C.K./J.K.P., 1990), p.196 - abbreviated to Loades, A Reader.

dominated culture" (Beyond, p.7). The Church has yet to take up the challenge of allowing women's interpretation to shape it. Pope Paul II, in his text blessing the 1979 International Conference of the ESBVM, sent a letter quoting Lumen Gentium [68,69] which stated: "In its teaching on Our Lady and the Church, the Second Vatican Council presented Mary as 'a sign of certain hope and comfort to the pilgrim People of God'" (35), but what the Church has given is a certain symbol of comfort and hope to a hierarchical, sexist institution. We need to examine a radical feminist alternative perception of Mary as a symbol which women can claim as life - and hope-inducing. It is to radical feminism's most eminent representative that we now turn.

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35 Alberic Stacpoole, OSB., ed. Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue: Occasional Papers of the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary 1970-1980 (Slough: St. Paul Publications, April 1982), p.vii - abbreviated to Stacpoole, Mary's Place.

## CHAPTER II

## A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF MARY DALY

Introduction

Mary Daly is, undoubtedly, the most radical of feminist writers. By "radical feminism" Daly means three things:

1: the Cause of causes, which alone of all revolutionary causes exposes the basic model and source of all forms of oppression - patriarchy - and thus can open up consciousness to active participation in Movement, Transcendence, and Happiness 2: be-ing for women and all Elemental Life, which implies going to the roots of the oppression of all Others 3: way of be-ing characterized by (a) an Awesome and Ecstatic sense of Otherness from patriarchal norms and values (b) conscious awareness of the sadosociety's sanctions against Radical Feminists (c) moral outrage on behalf of women as women: WOMAN-IDENTIFICATION (d) commitment to the cause of women that persists, even against the current, when feminism is no longer "popular" (Websters', p.75).

Inspired by the work of Simone De Beauvoir in the 1950s, Daly's feminist philosophy and theology belong to a very different realm from traditional theology: one of immanence, not transcendence. Her books, spanning almost two decades from the publication of The Church and the Second Sex (1968), Beyond God the Father (1973), Gyn/Ecology (1978) (1), Pure Lust (1984) to the inclusion of a Feminist Post-Christian Introduction with the re-issuing of The Church and the Second Sex (1975, 1985), take the reader on an amazing journey into the "Background" - the Realm of Wild Reality (Websters', p.63) - as she unmaskes the destructive values of patriarchy at all levels - social, political, religious and cultural - which she compares to the brutal gang rape of women's bodies, minds and spirits. The journey is very much Daly's own, revealing the break with her original Christian feminist stance. Daly (1985) now recognizes the church to be necessarily and inherently sexist. In coming to this realization Daly sees herself as being projected into the post-Christian realm. Her anger is unrelenting. She appears as a prophet breaking images and cherished beliefs within religion. Her constant cry is for women to "Become" by breaking free from patriarchy and reclaiming the life-giving elemental powers which are their original birthright (Gyn, p.1). Her language is

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1 Mary Daly, Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1978; London: The Women's Press, 1979, reprinted 1984) -abbreviated to Gyn.

persuasive - its poetic flow not only raises the reader's consciousness to name oppressors and oppression, but also distracts them from her reductionism, fallacious anthropology, and inadequate arguments.

### **Christian to Post-Christian Daly**

When Daly first set out on her journey to "promote the full humanity of women," she did so from the position of radical Roman Catholicism, hoping for reform within Christianity. The most severe critic of The Church and the Second Sex (1968) - which expounds this position - is the post-Christian Daly of 1985. Daly (1985) accuses herself (1968) of "defending the indefensible" in believing that there is no alternative to the Church, that oppression is a distortion of the true doctrine of the Church, and that change will come from "outside" to reform it. Daly (1985) directs Daly (1968) to the fact that religious ideology shapes the "outside", that the Church is inherently, not accidentally, sexist, having a sexist history, culture, and images, based as it is on a sexist anthropology, and that it is the Church itself that provides a bulwark for legitimating patriarchy. Consequently, there can never be equality, or hope for purification: "where myths are concerned the medium is the message" (C.S.S., p.21). Daly scathingly writes:

Women are hooked into unreal loyalty through an embedded need for false love. This "love", or luv, is junk food for the soul. As spiritual

junk food junkies, robbed of Self-love, women go to the sovereign church. Their hunger is not really assuaged, since the cannibalistic "love" offered by a woman-hating priesthood does not nourish and strengthen; rather it assimilates/drains gynergy(2), increasing hunger, increasing addiction (Ibid., p.xxii).

A little later she goes on to say: "Hooked, the victim lacks the emotional distance that is necessary to see and to judge (Ibid., p.xxiv).

What Daly does in her methodology is to take the doctrines of the Catholic Church and, to quote Elaine Storkey, "reinterprets them within a new metaphysical framework. She aims to show how, in devising its doctrines, the Church very often stumbles on something fundamental, something which points to the true nature of the cosmos and of woman's centrality in it" (Storkey, Chapter 9, p.192), e.g., the Triple Goddess and the Tree of Life. This is particularly true in the case of Marian symbolism which, in patriarchal eyes, is supposed to compensate for the negative portrayal of women in Eve. What the Church neglects to say is that it essentially

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2 By "gynergy" Daly means "n: `the female energy which both comprehends and creates who we are; that impulse in ourselves that has never been possessed by the patriarchy nor by any male; women-identified be-ing'". This word was invented by Emily Culpepper. See Emily Culpepper, "Female History/Myth Making", The Second Wave, Vol.4, no.1 (Spring 1975), pp.14-7 (Websters', p.77).

identifies all women with Eve; Mary, Virgin and Mother, is forever other to women of the flesh (see Chapter III).

However, Daly (1985) neglects to emphasize Rosemary Radford Ruether's point, which she makes in a discussion paper with Daphne Hampson (another ardent post-Christian Feminist) called "Is there a place for Feminists in a Christian Church?" (New Blackfriars, Vol. 68, No. 801, Oxford: January 1987, p.7), that the Church is eschatological as well as historical, and that Christianity rejected any notion of closed revelation (Apoc. 22:18). Indeed, Jesus, the great iconoclastic teacher, has much about him that is later reflected in the Daly of 1985 and it is difficult to believe, as Daly (1985) so vehemently does, that there is no hope for dialogue, especially when changes are / have been occurring in developing new symbols and liturgies.

In Daly's next book, Beyond God the Father (1973), we see clearly that she wants a revolution in how we conceive of God. I think that in her depersonalizing of "God" to "Be-ing" as Verb, rather than as a male, or female God/dess noun (both of which are necessarily anthropomorphic concepts and therefore inadequate), that Daly may have hit on a way of overcoming this in finding a universal expression of "God". By "Be-ing" she means:

1: Ultimate/Intimate Reality, the constantly  
 Unfolding Verb of Verbs which is intransitive,  
 having no object that limits its dynamism 2:

the Final Cause, the Good who is Self-communicating, who is the Verb from whom, in whom, and with whom all true movements move (Websters', p.64).

Such a concept would enable all to have a personal relationship with God / Be-ing. Men and women, therefore, become active participators in Be-ing. God / Be-ing is no longer an outsider who commands, but is the centre of our innermost selves.

Daly's religious upbringing enabled her to perceive that Christian dualism had to be transcended. Unfortunately, her books begin to generate an increasingly mistaken assumption that such transcendence is to be found in immanence and that immanence is femaleness itself. Her books, consequently, become by nature reductionistic after The Church and the Second Sex and she eliminates verbally all who fail to take a "qualitative leap" into the liberation of radical feminism and out of patriarchy (C.S.S., p.17). Although Daly states that: "The becoming of women implies universal human becoming" (Beyond, p.6), her writings simultaneously present a Daly who no longer seeks human liberation, but an exclusively female self-discovery achieved by excluding men. What Daly has failed to realise is that she is not speaking for all women, despite the fact that she claims women's (sic.) experience as human experience. Susan Thistlethwaite, in



her powerful book Sex, Race, and God (1990) (3), points out that Daly, like Betty Friedan, in Feminist Mystique (1963) - a book which Thistlethwaite regards as the origin of the white women's movement - is guilty of the same myopia, universalizing the experience of white mainly middle-class women, i.e., that both are blind to issues of race and class (Sex, p.11). Rosemary Radford Ruether, too, illustrates, in her book New Woman New Earth (1975), that the liberation symbols used by Daly which are mainly Mariological (virginity, the immaculate conception, assumption), along with the judgmental symbol of castration are all symbols which embody racism (Ruether, New Woman, p.121). For it was precisely by denigrating the black body as something unholy, earthly, and of little value, except in its exploitability to the white-man, that this symbolism was elevated in the Church. It thereby justified the full horrors of colonialism. Regarded as less than wholly human because of the symbolic meaning the whites arbitrarily attributed to their black skins, slaves were seen by their possessors as lacking a spiritual dimension to their natures and, therefore, went unprotected by Church and law.

Daly's field of vision is, unfortunately, too narrow, for she seems capable only of seeing all men as

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3 Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White (New York: Crossroad, 1989; London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990) - abbreviated to Thistlethwaite, Sex.

"vampires" sucking the life-blood from women as a source of energy and leaving them in a state of the living dead. She sees the sacrament of the Eucharist to be the very ritual enactment of the Mystery of man draining women of their life-blood under the guise of love (C.S.S., p.xxii). Under the heading "Veiled Vampirism" Daly maintains that:

The transformations in the Tree of Life symbolism unveil the fact that in christian myth Christ assimilates/devours the Goddess. Whereas the Goddess had been the Tree of Life, Christ becomes this. Moreover, as the "life at work" in the tree, he becomes its juice / sap. When we consider that the tree had been the body of the Goddess, the violence of this assimilation becomes more perceivable. The "gentle Jesus" who offers the faithful his body to eat and his blood to drink is playing Mother Goddess. And of course the fetal-identified male behind this Mother Mask is really saying: "Let me eat and drink you *alive*" (Gyn, p.81).

In Gyn/Ecology, The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (1978), Daly investigates the horrific mutilations under patriarchy which have been performed on women. Furious as she is, she unmaskes the realities of the dismemberment of women through Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witchburnings, and

American Gynecology (Gyn, Chapters III - VII). Audre Lorde, in a letter reacting to Daly's Gyn/Ecology, writes that she was astounded to find inclusion of African genital mutilation in a book which uses only goddess images which are "white, western, european, judeo-christian". Why, Lorde asks, is there this marked "absence of any images of my foremothers in power?" "Where was Afrekete, Yemanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior-women of Dan?" Nowhere are African women portrayed by Daly as victors, only victims (4). Daly's basic mistake is that she wants to make her point, that all men are by nature demonic "necrophiliacs," universally accepted by women. By "necrophilia" she means:

n: ["fascination with the dead; *specif:* obsession with and usu. erotic attraction toward and stimulation by corpses typically evidenced by overt acts (as copulation with a corpse)" - *Websters'*]: the most fundamental characteristic and first principle of patriarchy: hatred for and envy of Life; the universal message of all patriarchal religion: death worship. *Examples:* Set your minds on

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4 Audre Lorde, Sister Outsider; Essays and Speeches (Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press, 1984), pp.66-71 - abbreviated to Sister Outsider - quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.18.

things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God - saint Paul (Col. 3:2-3 [R.S.V.]) (Websters', pp.83-4).

It is for this reason that Daly introduces chapter after chapter of graphically violent material in order to fuel her own generalizations, maintained by otherwise insubstantial arguments. She tried this technique earlier in Beyond God the Father, when she sweepingly stated "that violence against women is the source and paradigm of all [my emphasis] other manifestations of violence . . ." (p.xv). Again, she blinds the reader to questioning her position by linking rape, genocide, and war and plunging into graphic descriptions of horrific episodes. Clearly, Daly has simply replaced the concepts of sin and evil with men and in this she is mistaken; her anger has gone too far. Sandra Harding's article, "The Instability of the Analytical Categories of Feminist Theory," identifies the underlying problem of feminist theory in general, and Daly's theory in particular, when she states: "The patriarchal theories we try to extend and reinterpret were created to explain not men's experience but only the experience of those men who are Western, bourgeois, white, and heterosexual"(5), i.e., feminists may be missing some oppressive elements from

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5 Sandra Harding, can be found in Signs 13, no.3 (1988), p.646, but quoted here in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.14.

other directions, and undoubtedly for black women the feminist theory in general includes the benefits white women have gained at their expense.

Daly, however, does not just annihilate men from her picture for liberation. She is ready to shoot down verbally all who are not Dalyian radical feminists as non-human, too. Her anthropology cannot contain non-feminists, nor can it for that matter contain any prepared to work within the patriarchal framework for change. She labels feminist critics of her stance as "pseudo-feminists". The word "pseudo" is used to indicate male-identification and is prefixed to a number of words - "feminism, bonding, passion, virtue", much as the word "bourgeois" was used in the "Communist Manifesto" to attack contrary ideas. She has no desire to achieve human equality, since men are for her painfully non-human. Where there are insights exhibited by men, Aquinas and Tillich (6), Daly refuses to recognize them as products of male culture and regards them as belonging to the original female culture of truth, positing instead the notion that these ideas were therefore stolen. "No good can come from men and no good ever will" is Daly's message, for goodness is

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6 C.S.S., p.91, Aquinas believed that the soul came from God and was essentially the same in men and women. Daly originally regarded Tillich's way of speaking about God as ground and power of being as a way of avoiding the legitimation of any sort of oppression. However, in Gyn Daly no longer sees Tillich as even potentially liberating (e.g., pp.46, 377-78).

identifiable only with the female. Sheila Greeve Devaney, in an unpublished paper entitled "The Limits of the Appeal to Experience" (1986, p.24), argues that it is necessary to reject the notion that "any human perspective has a privileged access to ontological reality"(7). Daly believes this reality lies in the essential biophilic identification of women-identified women. She is thereby guilty of universalizing the experience of a particular group, and therefore of being blind to the differences which exist between various classes and races of women and men. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find Daly quoting Marilyn Frye: "Female denial of male access to females substantially cuts off a flow of benefits, but it has also the form and full portent of assumption of power"(8). It would be unthinkable that women could be denied a flow of benefits from men from a Dalyian perspective. Ironically, although in the labelling of women as lecherous, sinful creatures she manages to perceive that some husbands, fathers, sons would have found this impossible to think about their own wives, daughters, mothers, she does not equally perceive that some women will find her negative portrayal of men as necrophiliac demons as equally unthinkable about their husbands, sons, and fathers.

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7 Sheila Greeve Devaney quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.13.

8 Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power", Sinister Wisdom (Summer 1978) quoted by Daly, Gyn, p.xii.

The feminist challenge has always rested on an ideology which believes that the similarities between the sexes are much greater than the differences, and that where distinctions have occurred / do occur that they have no necessary basis in human nature. Whereas in her earlier work, The Church and the Second Sex (chapter 7 - "Toward Partnership: Some Modest Proposals"), Daly seems to maintain this, in her later writings she sees the differences between women and men to be so vast - life-loving / death-loving, human / demon - that she is no longer prepared to work with the similarities, claiming that women are too different and that dialogue is, therefore, impossible on equal terms. Audre Lorde makes the poignant remark, in "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", (Sister Outsider, p.116), in reaction once again to Daly's work, when she states that:

By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist(9).

Indeed, if we read Daly's definition of "sisterhood," it claims a bonding of women without any acknowledgement of fundamental differences that do exist. She writes:

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9 Lorde (see fn.4) quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.19.

"**Sisterhood** n: authentic bonding of women who Biophilically affirm individual freedom and Originality, refuse tokenism, and actively give primal loyalty to women" (Websters', p.96). There appears to be a fundamental fear of accepting differences, and I believe in Daly's case this is because she has not accepted the notion that differences should not be determined by a hierarchical structure. Susan Thistlethwaite picks up this point when she quotes Audre Lorde, who realizes that we have been programmed to reject difference either through ignoring it, copying it or destroying it. "But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals"(10). Instead of developing such patterns, Daly simply denies that they exist among women.

Daly cannot see that men, too, suffer under patriarchy and can be used as a resource for the liberation of humanity. She recognizes at one level that women's and men's lives are intrinsically bound up with each other, but is afraid that women will seek premature reconciliation, which I take to be synonymous with "pseudo-feminist" hopes in her terms (Beyond, p.25). Daly's alternative, therefore, is for women to bond with other women, not men. However, if women's liberation is about refusing to be the oppressed "other" without making another "the other" then Daly fails, for by their very

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10 Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex", Sister Outsider, p.115 here quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.19.



exclusion the male victims and oppressors, within patriarchy, become necessarily "the other".

We now enter that rich realm of language which brings Daly into her own. She correctly maintains that women's liberation is rooted in language and that the patriarchal language, ironically labelled the "mother-tongue", is a castrating language for and of women. By female castration Daly means: "the depriving of female vigor and vitality under patriarchy; the systematic physical, emotional, and mental weakening of women" (Websters', p.67). Ultimately, in the realm of language, it is depriving women of the power to communicate their thoughts and experiences because it is a language wholly developed and shaped by men's experience. For those in power define reality in their own terms and block out alternative visions by making oppositional thought impossible. In the acknowledgement of the mental crippling of women Daly quotes from George Orwell's futuristic novel Nineteen Eighty-Four: "In Newspeak it was seldom possible to follow a heretical thought further than the perception that it was heretical; beyond that point the necessary words were nonexistent"(11). Daly cleverly employs a number of methods, most noticeably the labryses, to cut away the falsehoods of the patriarchal foreground and reveal the hidden "Wild reality" of words (Websters', p.xvi) - she exposes reversals and antibiotic

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11 George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (New York: New American Library, 1961), p.252 quoted in Daly Gyn, p.331.

terms. Her work is at times more like poetry and there are several purple passages. Daly's enthusiasm is contagious as she presents us with the metamorphosing of language and women alike. The words help raise the reader's level of consciousness, but at the same time they also cut off areas where dialogue might be possible. Daly, in short, castrates the patriarchal language, inevitably labelling all men as the real enemies and castrators of women. Nowhere is this made more clear than in her 1984 work Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy where she deconstructs language to expose the absurdity which we have inherited as a religion. In case anyone should have cause to criticize or question Daly's own language system, she has forearmed herself in Gyn/Ecology with a catch-22 clause reminiscent of the fairy-tale "The Emperor's New Clothes". Daly states, as a warning in a footnote, that her language "may be a stumbling block both to those who choose downward mobility of the mind and therefore hate Big Words, and to those who choose upward mobility and therefore hate New/Old Words, that is, Old words that become New when their ancient ('obsolete') gynocentric meanings are unearthed" (Gyn, p.xiv). Now, no reader wants to be accused of having "downward mobility of the mind". It seems paradoxical that Daly, the chief exposor of the real message behind myths (see especially Gyn, chapter 1), should nevertheless subject her readers to the same patriarchal conditioning, i.e., of subjection to her

authority whilst at the same time presenting herself as vehement opposer of such trickery.

Daly's lust for change and the reclaiming of life-loving, female energy entails embracing once again the elemental powers - air, water, earth, wind. However, Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book review of Pure Lust, p.179(12), believes that Daly mistakenly equated Paul's mention of Christ's war against the "elementary spirits" with the embodiment of real life existence (Gal. 4:4). Daly does not even consider the possibility that Paul was referring to the war against patriarchal perversions in a similar quest to her own. Paul may, Rosemary Radford Ruether acknowledges, have misnamed the oppressors as the material elements of the universe, but so has Daly in equating the system of lies with male humanity. Consequently, Daly has failed to break away from patriarchal dualism; in claiming the elemental powers as the realm of true being, she has merely reversed the dualist hierarchical order, placing immanence over transcendence, rather than rendering it non-dualist and non-hierarchical.

### **Conclusion**

However, Daly has much to offer in raising feminist levels of consciousness. She points beyond the present sexist society by exposing and naming areas of oppression and giving voice to the horrors inflicted upon women in

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12 Found in New Blackfriars, Vol.66, January 1985, pp.774-75.

the past and in the present. Daly's is certainly a search for the ultimate meaning and reality. She does much to encourage the creative movement within women. Regrettably, she is not prepared for dialogue with men. She is in search of a female philosophy to the exclusion of the male and, as Susan Thistlethwaite has pointed out, Daly offers no resources for understanding the differences that exist between women of differing classes and races. Consequently, many hoping for a bonding of the female and the male in their struggle against the system of lies and oppression will find Daly's overall message to be acceptable to only a small élite: an élite who reject, as Daly instructed, all authority whilst embracing Daly herself as the Authority: an authority which Daly would and does imply in her writings. I agree with Elaine Storkey that feminist theology

is not about replacing a male tradition by an exclusively female one, but about reclaiming hidden history and restoring men and women to new unforeseen possibilities. It is about freeing them also from the crippling stereotypes of male theology and enabling them more effectively to live as the image of God and joint-heirs with Christ (Storkey, Chapter 9, p.187).

For Daly, however, Christology by its very nature has nothing to say to women - "if God is male, then the male is God" (Beyond, p.19). What, in fact, she ends up doing is changing one set of stereotypes for another.

Whilst Daly calls for the overthrow of patriarchy, she is still, as far as I know, lecturing within the system she calls others to leave. For one who appears to have so much vision, Daly does not seem to visualize herself working outside the sphere of patriarchy. This is just another of the many inconsistencies exhibited in Daly's writings which are, perversely, a consistent feature of Daly herself.

The following chapter continues this critique of Mary Daly but is concerned specifically with her assessment of what Mariology can and cannot offer women. In Chapter III she is compared and contrasted with Rosemary Radford Ruether and her attempt to recover Mary as the feminine face of the Church.

**CHAPTER III****RUETHER AND DALY ON MARIOLGY AND WHY THEY DIFFER****Introduction**

Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether are two of the most remarkable leading lights within feminist theology. Interestingly, they emerge from the same North American milieu and began their struggle with the Roman Catholic tradition at about the same time. Both writers are radically subversive, exposing the overt sexism within the Church whilst attempting to reclaim the image of God for women. They, like Lavinia Byrne, in *Women Before God* (1988), want to claim for women the words, "I am made in God's image and likeness and that this is my glory" (p.ix); to celebrate the identity of women, and to reflect upon the place of God in their own personal experience as being consistent with God's will. Neither writer believes that the Church has a monopoly on the truth. They are concerned to expose the artificial constraints that have shaped religious, social, economic, and political oppression - neither man nor a male God are the norm. What is needed is a new language for a new theology which remythologizes women's relation with God and God's relation with the world. Friedrich Nietzsche captured the challenge these writers pose when he analysed truth:

What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymics, anthropomorphisms: in short, a sum of human relations which become poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage, seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses, coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal(1).

For women in general, and for these two writers in particular, Mary is experienced as a problem as she has been traditionally portrayed by the Church rather than as a model and support in women's lives. As a vital core symbol in Christianity, Daly in her books, The Church and the Second Sex (1968), Beyond God the Father (1973), Gyn/Ecology (1978) and Pure Lust (1984), together with Ruether in her 1979 book Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church, Sexism and God-Talk (1983) (2), chapters dealing

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1 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Falsity in Their Ultramoral Sense" (1873) in Works 2:180 quoted by Sallie McFague, Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age (London: S.C.M., 1987; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1987), p.5 - abbreviated to McFague, Models.

2 Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology (London: S.C.M., 1989) - abbreviated to Ruether, Sexism.

with virginity and misogyny in Women of Spirit (1979) (3), and Religion and Sexism (1974) (4), explore the problem of sexism which has shaped Mariology. Both acknowledge the survival of a powerful image of the female in the religion hidden behind the figure of Mary. However, although Daly and Ruether start out on a similar journey at a similar time, and although their paths cross many times, they nevertheless arrive at very different destinations, with Daly being projected into the post-Christian realm by the time she writes Beyond God the Father (1973), and with Ruether still working within the Christian tradition, convinced that it is open to feminist restatement. The aim of this chapter is to discover, in the light of Mariology, how they finally came to part company.

### Survival of the Goddess

Both writers share the same passion, which Daly captured in the preface to Pure Lust (1985, p.vii): "Our passion is for that which is most intimate and most

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3 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Mothers of the Church: Ascetic Women in Late Patristic Age", pp.71-98 (abbreviated to Ruether, "Mothers") in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin, eds. Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979) - abbreviated to Ruether, Women of Spirit.

4 Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", pp.150-83 (abbreviated to Ruether, "Misogynism") of her ed. Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974) - abbreviated to Ruether, Religion.



ultimate, for depth and transcendence, for recalling original wholeness." As a symbol of hope, Mary, the anaemic and exalted "principle of submission and receptivity, purified of any relation to sexual femaleness" (Ruether, Mary, p.4), can, nevertheless, convey memories of women's original elemental powers embodied in the goddess. Both writers provide the reader with striking evidence of the links between Mariology and the goddesses of Egypt and the Near East (Ruether, Mary, Chapter I; Daly, Gyn, Chapter II) (5). Mary's depiction in art closely resembles that of the goddess Isis, the most prolific and important goddess that Christianity had to vie against. The goddess is symbolic of the goodness of nature, of women's creative powers; she speaks of the vitality, movement, autonomy, respect, strength, wisdom and passion of real women. Daly and Ruether wish to reclaim these for women and to affirm what the Church has negated - the "Self" of women - their innermost being. What these writers are searching for is an authentic portrayal of woman - a new model that will: "(1) serve as a forum for women; (2) help to achieve cultural androgyny; (3) provide role-models; (4) promote sisterhood; and (5) augment consciousness-raising" (6).

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5 Michael P. Carroll in The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), especially pp.91-102 - abbreviated to Carroll, The Cult - puts forward evidence that Mary is in fact closer to Cybele than to Isis.

6 Cheri Reister, "American Feminist Literary Criticism: A Bibliographical Introduction", pp.18-9 in Donovan, Feminist.

Daly and Ruether emphasize the power of the goddess and the reluctance of followers to give up worshipping her. The Church overcomes this reluctance not by opposition, but by a much more potent and successful means of assimilation. This is particularly evident in the incorporation into the cult of Mary of various items of regalia and paraphernalia identified with particular goddesses. Superficially, therefore, Mary could be seen as resembling these nature goddesses. The Catholic solution was therefore to retain Mary whilst "dogmatically draining this symbol of her residual vibrancy, slowly remolding and re-finishing her back into archetypal shape" (Daly, Pure, p.93). Daly defines "**archetype**" as "n . . . model/pattern designed to beat, defile, dishonor, and hurt Original Female Elemental Powers. *Examples:* the Great Whore of Babylon, the Eternal Feminine, the *vagina dentata*" (Websters', pp.62-3), or in other words the Church's "Mary".

In Pure Lust (1984), Daly elaborates on her conception of the goddess as the original embodiment of the Archimage - the Elemental Knowledge / Passion of real women. She maintains that through Mary, the "Arch-Image", the Archimage could be perceived by some women and that the Church, especially during the Middle Ages, lived under threat of its explosion into women's consciousness. For this reason the Church instigated the witch-hunts, burning away any signs of autonomy in women.

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The Church's elevation of Mary is a castration of the goddess. Its effect is comparable to that of a hologram, i.e., creating an illusion that a one or two dimensional shape looked at from a certain angle (in this case the male view-point) actually appears to have the added third dimension of depth. Daly, herself, provides us with another image:

As in the case of christmas trees, then, the Arch-Image has had metaphoric power because she is not merely a copy but rather a remnant of what once was alive and thus evokes memories of what had been alive, that is, the Goddess symbol in women's consciousness. The Arch-Image, then, can evoke memories of the Self-affirming be-ing of women (Pure, p.98).

However, although the goddess appears as an almost universal deity, Ruether believes that it would be a mistake to connect this with a time when women were equal or dominant. Rather, the worship of the goddess most probably relates to an earlier time of male domination over nature, with woman the symbol of "Nature" (Ruether, Mary, p.63). In New Woman New Earth (1975), Ruether asserts: "But this symbolic view of the woman as 'Mother Nature' does not promote female social equality, but represents the fundamental stage of the cooptation of the female into a power system seen from a male point of view" (Ruether, New Woman, p.6). The goddess was

portrayed as virgin and mother upon whom the god-king relies to achieve domination: the similarity between Isis and her son Horus and Mary and Jesus is obvious.

The female is seen as a life force, to be used or worshipped in relation to a male-centred definition of humanity, rather than as a person from her own point of view(Ibid.).

A little later she develops this idea further when she writes:

This transition [from maternal mythics to male-dominated systems] does not represent a change from female political rule to male political rule, for even in matrilineal societies the mother's brother, not the woman, exercises rule (Ibid., p.11).

Whereas Daly appears to point to a time when women were whole Ruether believes that we have yet to discover wholeness.

### **Artificial Constraints: Sexism**

The hostility towards sexuality and maternity within the Church is traced by both writers to Greek influence. In Greek mythology, virgins alone were elevated to a position which enabled them to be fit companions of men and able to converse with the gods. Rejected at first within Christianity because of the heretical Gnostic

sects, this dualism of body / mind, female / male, earth / spirit became readily accepted so that by the fourth century asceticism was widely practised within Christianity (see Chapter IV). Thistlethwaite comments that: "Ruether's basic interpretive paradigm is that the dualistic oppositions of patriarchy - mind / body, spirit / matter, God / nature, male / female - are illustrative of the 'male ideology of transcendent dualism' and 'the model for the inferiorization of other subjugated groups, lower classes, and conquered races'"(7). Thistlethwaite realizes that: "Ruether has understood, primarily from the Latin American theologians of liberation, that liberation begins when oppressed peoples who have internalized these dualistic categories bring them to consciousness and critically reject them" (Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.20).

Both Ruether and Daly emphasize the damage that Marian doctrines have inflicted on women who are forever "other" to Mary. Ruether's most telling indictment is found in her introduction to Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church (1979), when she states:

Thus official Mariology validates the twin obsessions of male fantasies toward women, the urge to both reduce the female to the perfect vehicle of male demands, the instrument of male

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7 Ruether, New Woman, pp.4,195 quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.20.

ascent to the heavens, and, at the same time, to repudiate the female as the source of all that pulls him down to bodiliness, sin and death. Mariology exalts the virginal, obedient, spiritual feminine, and fears all real women in the flesh (p.4).

Both writers see hidden behind the doctrine of the Virgin Birth a model which, for the first time, offered women freedom from marriage and childbirth. By living an ascetic life, they were granted autonomy over their bodies, elevated to equal status with men who identified spirituality with the male, and gained the support of the Church. Many women were able to turn their attention to study, freed as they were from the mundane demands of family life. However, this affirmation of women through Mary's virginity is undoubtedly an unintended by-product of the Church (Storkey, Chapter 9). Nevertheless, as Ruether notes, in "Mothers of the Church: Ascetic Women in the Late Patristic Age"(8), women were still not allowed to take part in the work of the church in a public capacity because their bodies were female and thus, even as ascetics, they failed to gain their rightful place (p.94).

Despite the positive element hidden in the formula, "*The Virgin will conceive and bear a son, whose name will be Emmanuel*", both Ruether and Daly see this as saying

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8 Found in Ruether, Women of Spirit, pp.71-98.

something about Jesus rather than Mary. In fact, Ruether provides us with alternative scenarios of what might have been the possible historical causes behind the birth - unimportant in the light of the above. First, she notes that "in the earliest Christian traditions the idea that God specially intervened in Jesus' birth did not exclude [the biological] fatherhood of Joseph" (Ruether, Mary, p.28). Secondly, the Greek version of the Old Testament has mis-translated the Messianic prediction of Isaiah 7:14. The original Hebrew word meaning "young woman" has been translated by the Greek word meaning "virgin". Finally, there is the possibility that Mary's pregnancy was the first evidence of her womanhood - there having been no previous menstruation to indicate this. Ruether, in New Woman New Earth (1975), brings in what she regards as the absurd Freudian psychological development as a means of explaining the myth. She sees psychoanalysis as the chief tool replacing patriarchal religion in its bid to rationalize and sanctify the inferiority of women. She states:

Only by giving up her masculinity-drive and shifting the form of her libido to that appropriate to her true biological destiny, namely, as a passive, dependent orifice that waits upon masculine activity for her needs, do women finally receive the compensation for their deprivation, i.e., a baby . . . . What

women desire primarily is a boy-baby - the 'penis-baby' through which they possess, vicariously in their son, what they have been deprived of in themselves (p.140).

What Ruether shows us here is that feminists need to offer different modes of thinking, insofar as psychoanalysis, too, is intrinsically "patriarchal", with little understanding of real women.

### **The Parting of the Ways**

It is at this point that we begin to perceive why Ruether and Daly part company, for Daly goes much further than Ruether by interpreting the basis of Mariology, in Pure Lust (1985), in the light of sado-masochism. To Daly the Virgin Birth is a rape:

The transsexed, broken spirit of the Goddess, guised as the holy ghost, rapes the broken and dis-spirited matter of the Goddess (Mary). Thus the myth-molding voyeurs have produced what could be designated the Purest Peep Show of the millennia, a male-identified counterfeit lesbian love scene, issuing in male offspring. The product of this fantastic feat is Jesus. This spectacle of the transsexed, divided goddess raping herself is the ultimate in sadospiritual speculation. It is an idiot's re-vision of parthenogenesis, converted into



rape. The myth of The Incarnation, then, logically implies the usurpation of female power. Moreover, since the Virgin Mother symbolizes matter to the myth-masters, the myth legitimates the rape of all matter (pp.130-31).

Disturbing in the extreme, Daly's thesis would be difficult to substantiate conclusively. Her language is unnerving and distracts one from perceiving that she has no logical grounds for assuming the legitimation of the rape of all matter based, in her eyes, on this "rape" of the Virgin, although one can perceive some truth behind her statement. Interestingly, Daly writes, "sadospirituality demands the destruction of women's ancestral Memory, the blocking of our capacity to conceive, speak, and act upon our own Original Words" (Pure, p.36). It is perhaps ominous and too much of a coincidence that the Church has women recall the original (first) words of Mary - "*Let it be done unto me according to thy word*" - (Lk. 1:38), words of obedience and subjection that have sometimes been the lot of women, legitimated by the Church. In the light of the Church, Mary represents the new Eve, yet women are not identified with her but with the Eve of Genesis.

### **Remythologizing**

In Sexism and God-Talk (1983), Ruether asserts that the Fall is about the patriarchal damage to relations of interdependence. They have been replaced with a

hierarchical relationship, reduced simply to conquer or "be conquered". Susan Thistlethwaite argues that white feminism has given insufficient attention to the Fall as a symbol of the depth of human intolerance for difference. She notes that Ruether is one of few white feminists who have been attentive to the fact that race and class make a difference to the way we interpret creation and feminist theology (Sex, p.20). Ruether sees the myth as a "Lie" for "The recognition of sexism as wrong, evil, and sinful brings about the total collapse of the myths of female evil" (Sexism, p.173). What is needed is for women to recognise the paralysing effect and to reject patriarchy in order to seek self-affirmation. Daly's approach to the myth is to exorcize the evil, i.e., to dislodge all that reflects and reinforces the prevailing patriarchal social arrangement. In this way she renames it "The Fall into Freedom" to eliminate feelings of guilt and inferiority in women and feelings of hatred towards women in men. The myth is "A hoax" - the male view has been projected onto God and the defect of patriarchal religion in justifying sexism is attributed to faults of women. Women can exorcize this by acknowledging that it is a lie and thereby fall into freedom no longer oppressed by the myth. Marina Warner sums up this antithesis thus:

Mary is indeed Eve's other face: the two female symbols excite that very emotion that

the story of the Fall sought to explain and the story of the Incarnate God sought to heal: the feeling that in its very nature humanity is fatally estranged from goodness, which, for a believer, is God. Any symbol that exacerbates that pain runs counter to the central Christian doctrine that mankind was made and redeemed by God, and, more important, it is a continuing enemy of hope and happiness (Alone, p.254).

In Daly's opinion, a male saviour is a contradiction in terms: a male is by definition incapable of saving humanity from the sin of the world - a sin which Daly identifies with sexism. With the collapse of Christology, Mariology and all else crumbles within Christianity.

By contrast, Ruether faced the same problems, but far from seeing feminism as incompatible with Christianity, she undertakes to work within the Christian Church, believing that it is one of many possible structures open to revitalization. In her paper "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy" (9), she acknowledges the problem implied by the male saviour, but instead of rejecting Christology, Ruether points to the universal elements and the need to emphasize Jesus' humanity rather than his maleness. She believes as the

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9 Ruether, "The Liberation of Christology from Patriarchy", pp.138-48 - abbreviated to Ruether, "Christology" - in Loades A Reader.

most fundamental guiding principle that the Church's message is one of liberation - the liberation of the poor and oppressed. Ruether, therefore, ties the Magnificat into the revolutionary spirit of liberation theology - women represent the "nobodies" made to be persons in the kenosis of Jesus. For Ruether, "if women cannot represent Christ, then Christ does not represent women" ("Christology", p.140).

Ruether sees the Church as sexist, but not necessarily so. Indeed, she sees women as having a real active role in the church, following the prophetic liberating tradition which knows no distinction. It guards against injustice in social structures and calls for re-evaluation of new social situations, particularly in regard to women and sexual oppression. Daly seems to neglect this side of the church's teaching. Ruether sees the need to affirm women as equally theomorphic. In her book Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church (1979), she provides female metaphors related to God such as Sophia, Israel as God's bride, Israel as mother, all later absorbed into Mariology although in unsatisfactory form. Ruether acknowledges glimmers of hope within the structure of Christianity, but her main emphasis is on shifting, in a very real way, the constant references to a "male" saviour figure. In New Woman, New Earth (1975), she investigates the feminine symbols in Christian Theology seeing their function as ecclesiological and sophiological. She traces the feminine gender of several

words - ruah, "spirit"; shekinah, "presence" in Hebrew, and sophia, "wisdom" in Greek. Behind the personification of wisdom as a feminine expression of God lies the Great Mother. In Jewish and Greek Christian sophiological tradition, Sophia parallels the Logos (Ruether, New Woman, pp.42-3). In Christianity, the feminine aspect was completely absorbed into the Logos. This was largely the work of Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher. He removed Sophia to heaven, repressing her into being a dainty goddess who needed to be protected from the contamination of the flesh. She now becomes ever-virgin, maiden. It is clear that Philo's elevation of Sophia helped prepare the way for the Mariology elaborated in the Christian tradition. He transformed significant feminine attributes into masculine ones - changing the sex of Sophia. This sleight of hand is reinforced in Christian theology by identifying the Logos with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:24,30) (10). Biblical studies have also shown how the Hebrew word for mercy is linguistically rooted in the term for womb, and consequently evokes the idea of "womb-love" for the one whom a mother has carried and shaped from her own flesh. This in itself would provide a universal model since it is the common origin shared by all humanity (Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of

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10 J. C. Engelsman, The Feminine Dimension of the Divine, (London: Westminster Press, 1979; Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1987), pp.95-107 - abbreviated to Engelsman, The Feminine.

Sexuality, [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978], pp.31-59). For as Elizabeth Johnson observed, in her paper "Mary and the Image of God", the Marian tradition is a rich source of divine imagery incorporating

Maternity with its nurturing and warmth; unbounded compassion; power that protects, heals and liberates; all-embracing immanence; recreative energy: thus is borne out the hypothesis that the Marian tradition is a fruitful source of female imagery of God(11).

In a footnote to this statement Elizabeth Johnson raises the question that relieved of divine imagery what pattern should a theology of Mary now take? Biblical scholarship, she notes, has reclaimed Mary as "a believing disciple" (see Redemptoris Mater, Marialis Cultus, and Lumen Gentium), whereas feminist and liberation theology focus on Mary as "a genuine woman, a poor woman of the people". The next step Johnson posits might be "an incorporation of these insights into a praxis-oriented theology shaped by categories of memory, narrative, and solidarity" (p.68).

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11 Elizabeth Johnson, "Mary the Image of God", pp.25-68 in Doris Donnelly ed. Mary, Woman of Nazareth: Biblical and Theological Perspectives (New York / Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), p.54 - latter abbreviated to Donnelly, Mary.

Daly, however, can see no hope for feminism within Christianity. She maintains that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception declared in 1854 by which

Mary was "preserved" from original sin by the grace of her son immediately at the moment of her conception - not only in advance of *his* birth, but also in advance of her own. . . . The immaculate conception is the ultimate depiction of (pre-natal) woman-battering, a mythic model of incestuous assault. It is the primal rape of the Arch-Image. . . . In the world of christian symbols, then, the immaculate conception exhibits a kind of ultimacy in undermining women - going far beyond the rape, killing, and dismemberment of the full-grown parthenogenetically conceived Goddess. Its target is her parthenogenetic (woman-identified) origin, and thus it undermines her original Power of Self-Naming, and Creation (Pure, p.104).

Whilst one can see that Mary was not given a choice in her purified state, Daly equates this purification with removal of her autonomous being, and for her the Annunciation simply makes Mary a double victim. Given such an interpretation of the myth, no wonder Daly calls women to refuse to collaborate in this killing and dismemberment of ourselves maintaining that by doing this

we begin to remember the Goddess (Gyn, p.111). Strangely, the same writer along with Ruether believes that through this same myth there are hints at another interpretation - that of the woman free from the Fall of sexism. In her book Beyond God the Father Daly believes that a redemptive content can be found in new mariological doctrines.

Mary's virginity can be understood as the symbol of female autonomy, her completeness and integrity in herself, apart from the male. The doctrine of the immaculate conception counteracts the myth of woman as Eve, the cursed source of sin. Immaculately conceived woman is woman without sin, good in her true, created nature. She is woman as norm of perfected and authentic humanity. The assumption overcomes the hierarchical split between soul and body, male and female. It reintegrates humanity as androgynous personhood and redeemed body (Daly, Beyond, pp.82-92 referred to in Ruether, New Woman, p.36).

Alternatively, one could take up the position adopted by Elaine Storkey, in her paper "The Significance of Mary for Feminist Theology", who argues that:

She is not singled out because she was immaculately conceived, or perpetually



virginal. In a very full sense she was simply a woman, and as a woman was as significant as all women are in God's eyes and in God's dealings with the world (Storkey, Chapter 9, p.196).

Certainly, this would be more consistent with the actual New Testament material, for neither the immaculate conception nor perpetual virginity can find their validation in Scripture. Indeed, Mary appears as an ordinary woman, even open to reprimand. Theodore Reik, in his essay "The Making of Woman" (New York: Avon, 1972), tells of the rabbinic technique of applying the principle of tomer verkerht, i.e., "perhaps the real meaning lies in turning the terms around" (12). This is what I believe feminist theologians are beginning to do.

### Conclusion

I maintain, however, that Daly was wrong to identify Christology as rooted to a historical past, whilst failing to perceive that it is not only historical, but primarily eschatological. Believing it was fixed to a sexist past, she found it incompatible with feminism. Dogmas killed Mary - the assumption, she writes, "beggars description" (Pure, p.125), once again involving the male god playing the active role in assuming the Virgin. In Gyn/Ecology (1978), seeing female mythic presence excluded from the divine being, Daly describes the

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12 Reik quoted in Ruether, New Woman, p.147).

Trinity as "the original *Love Story*, performed by the Supreme All Male Cast. Here we have the epitome of male bonding, beyond the 'best', i.e., worst, dreams of Lionel Tiger. It is 'sublime' (and therefore disguised) erotic male homosexual *mythos* . . ." (Gyn, p.38)

In contrast, Ruether closely aligns Sophia with the Logos as the transcendent source of being, God. Sophia is involved in the whole process of creation and redemption. Redemption is not solely the prerogative of the male, it is equally shared. For Ruether the Church is eschatological as well as historical. Symbols are not static, but open to transformation and further illumination. The Church is a liberation community and the Spirit is still at work speaking to us as old patterns cease to do so. To Ruether, Mary shares much in common with Jesus, that iconoclastic teacher whose original message became obscured. But for Ruether redemption is not confined to one person in history - she is as scathing as Daly about the historical Mary. Her concern is to find a new model whilst acknowledging the fertile glimmers within Mariology. Josephine Donovan captured the stance Ruether and Daly share in common when she wrote:

Thus, as feminist critics, our sensitivities must be negative in that we are saying no to a whole series of oppressive ways, images, and falsehoods that have been perpetrated against

women both in literature and in literary criticism. But, on the other hand, we must be sensitive, too, to the new imaginative perceptions, to the new shapes that are beginning to take form - partly as a result of our negations (Donovan, Feminist, p.76).

Here we conclude that the respective passions in their search for transcendence leave Ruether but not Daly prepared to continue that work of re-connecting Mary to present needs, acknowledging reforms that will be needed in culture itself. Ruether realizes the complexity of the task ahead. She maintains that:

The analysis of women's liberation must reckon with several different levels of problematics. The first stage of liberation is generally subjective and psychoanalytical. This is the process of raising consciousness, of exorcising debasing self-images projected upon the oppressed and internalized by them. In this case that involves the exploration of the history of sexism and the reconstruction of its ideology in order to loosen its hold on the self and to permit the gradual growth of self-definition over against a world defined in male terms. The second stage is one of social *praxis* (New Woman, p.29).

At the end of their respective journeys, Daly leaves the Church on what I hold to be erroneous grounds, believing that transcendence is only available outside of institutional religion and that Mary is positively dead and beyond redemption. Daly is left angrily spinning, still within the patriarchal structure, mistakenly believing she is offering a viable alternative outside patriarchy. For Ruether, the Bible provides insights into woman's full humanity; using the prophetic tradition she feels able to criticize injustice and to offer alternatives, claiming Mary as a figure calling for the liberation her son inaugurated, coming as he did as a suffering servant, offering his kingdom to the oppressed, a kingdom that begins on earth. This may involve ignoring some and reinterpreting other Scriptural passages as a result of her re-evaluation. She is seeking equality in sexual identification with the divine, believing that it should be emulated in our own interpersonal relationships (Engelsman, The Feminine, p.156). The question that remains, however, is what will happen to Mary as new perceptions are applied to God? (Anne Carr, "Mary: Model of Faith", in Donnelly, Woman, p.11). Whilst not ideal, Ruether, at least, offers a reasonable way forward.

This way forward will, undoubtedly, have to incorporate new symbolism for women and women's bodies in particular. Two periods seem to have been of critical importance for the development of this symbolism. The

following chapter traces the changes in attitude towards the female body from antiquity to the rise of Christian asceticism. I would argue that when one discovers the arbitrariness in conceptualizing women, one can begin to break free and form new models.

## CHAPTER IV

A STUDY OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE FEMALE BODY FROM  
ANTIQUITY TO THE RISE OF CHRISTIAN ASCETICISMIntroduction

To understand the Church's attitude towards women we need to realize that the body itself has a history and that religion is crucial to the social development of the human body. Mary Douglas, in Purity and Danger (1979 ed.) (1), provides an answer to the important use of body as a symbol. She maintains that: "The more personal and intimate the source of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message. The more the symbol is drawn from a common fund of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception" (p.114). The body, and the female body in particular because it is most closely associated with life and death, has been used to mark out the boundaries of society. Only by defending the boundaries could both Church and state banish disorder. It is particularly interesting to find that women were located in this boundary when one recalls Mary Daly's definition of the

**Boundary:**

n: the location of New Time/Space; Time and  
Space created by women Surviving and Spinning

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1 Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo ( London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, [1966] 1979) - abbreviated to Douglas, Purity.

on the Boundaries of patriarchal institutions; dimensions of be-ing experienced by Labrys-wielding Amazons who choose not only to combat the phallocratic order but also to wrench back our Archaic Heritage and Journey into the Background (Websters' p.67).

Like all defences which mark off order from disorder the boundaries are powerful and dangerous. Mary Douglas draws a parallel between the vulnerability of social structures at their margins and that of the vulnerability of bodily orifices which are particularly rich in the symbolism of power and danger (Douglas, Purity, p.121). Later, it evidently dawned on some of the hierarchical members of the Church that it could perpetually fortify the Church by elevating one who embodied its nature to the safety of the heavenly realm intact and assured of permanent protection. For power over the body was regarded as establishing power in the social order. In Mary the Church had power over the bodies of women.

Men and women who exercised this control were known as ascetics who would sometimes retire into solitude, practising severe abstinence, austerity, self-discipline especially for spiritual benefit. In times of trouble asceticism increased and intensified. It is particularly disturbing to find that control of the body meant quite literally the destruction of the female body through starvation. When society or Church felt threatened it

was, therefore, by destroying the female element that the patriarchal structure strengthened itself. It is ironic that women have helped to maintain patriarchy whilst failing (because they have been alienated from their own bodies) to realise their power to bond with women in general in order to overthrow it. Those who would argue that asceticism enabled women to gain equality may have some grounds for believing that women were offered a better alternative to arranged marriages and numerous pregnancies. However, Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her paper "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", and Elizabeth Castelli, in "Virginity and its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity"(2), both make the painful observation that this alternative perhaps was too great a price to pay for what they regard as the "negation of the feminine . . . profound self-abnegation, self-denial, even self-destruction." (Castelli, "Virginity", p.88). What is being offered is "pseudo-equality" and "not a genuine acceptance of her as person and partner" (Daly, C.S.S., p.60). In order to understand where this ascetic strain came from, and to analyze the beliefs it embodied, along with the changes which it underwent in Patristic times, we need to look outside the Judeo-Christian framework and back through the centuries. To use the opening lines

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2 Elizabeth Castelli, "Virginity and its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity", pp.61-88 in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, Vol.2, No.1, 1986 - abbreviated to Castelli, "Virginity".



from the introduction to Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers (1984) (3), "PREJUDICE AGAINST WOMEN, avowed or covert, institutionalized or personal, goes back to the very beginning of western culture, to its foundations in Greece, Rome, and Israel" (p.1). It is to Greece and Rome then that we primarily turn. It is important to keep in mind Aline Rousselle's observation, made in her well researched book Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity (1988), that: "All our information about the men and women of antiquity comes from male sources" (4). It is principally from the medical and legal sources that we are able to glimpse how men allowed women to live. What becomes painfully apparent is the absence of the women's perspective, although it is possible to speculate behind the silences.

### **Attitudes to the Body in Antiquity**

The oldest writings relating to biological and medical views have been attributed to Hippocrates of Cos (460-375 B.C.) a Greek physician who influenced all those who came after him. However, although Hippocrates believed that both male and female produced seed and that fertilization came about by a mixture of the two (as did

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3 John Peradotto, and J. P. Sullivan, eds. Women in the Ancient World: The Arethusa Papers (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984 - abbreviated to Peradotto, Women).

4 Aline Rousselle, Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p.2 - abbreviated to Rousselle, Porneia.

Galen, one of the greatest biologists of antiquity, A.D. 131-201), it was Aristotle's mistaken views which held authority in the medical schools down to Medieval and Renaissance times. When Aristotle discovered that orgasm was not necessary for conception in women and that they did not produce sperm he concluded that the female was impotent and a recipient contributing "merely a kind of raw material (the menses), while the male, by giving the principle of life or soul, contributed the essential generative agency" (5).

John Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan, in their introduction to Women in the Ancient World (p.2), put forward the hypothesis that Aristotle translated Aeschylus' myth Eumenides with its sexist biology, in which the father and not the mother is held to be the only blood-relation to the son, into the scientific myth outlined above. Throughout Greek myth there is a certain hostility shown to the goddess in her maternal role, e.g., Hera the nagging wife of Zeus. The elaborate mythology of Greece, more than any other mythology, reveals an on-going battle between male and female. As early as Hesiod we read of the negative portrayal of woman in the Greek version of Eve. Hesiod has been described as "a resentful, pessimistic, rural misogynist who liked the Pandora story" (O'Faolain, Not, p.4) - a

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5 Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, eds. Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p.118 - abbreviated to O'Faolain, Not.

woman sent as a punishment to man. Woman was consequently viewed as "a necessary evil", to quote Helen King from her paper "Bound to Bleed", a "*kalon kakon* (Hesiod, Theogony 585); an evil because she is undisciplined and licentious, lacking the self-control of which men are capable, yet necessary to society as constructed by men, in order to reproduce it"(6).

In Greek mythology all aspects of the Great Mother have been split into separate female deities: Artemis, Athena, Aphrodite and Hera. However, Athena, the virgin, becomes male-identified, issuing forth from the head of Zeus. She is the proverbial "daddy's girl" in mythological form. In Aeschylus' Oresteia, Athena casts the deciding vote in favour of the father-right over the mother-right, banishing the blood spirits of the murdered mother to inferior status. Patriarchy has thus separated daughter from mother and allied the former with the rule of the father. Mary Daly appropriately defines **Daughter**: "n: the Original Self; the Untouchable Integrity in every woman; the Wild Virgin within every woman who Lives beyond the confines of patriarchal rules and roles, reveling in be-ing Alone and fiercely bonding with her own kind" (Websters', p.70). In the myth of Athena is found the shattering of women's bonding and the male possession of the virgin in terms of her very be-ing,

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6 Helen King, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women", p.110 - abbreviated to King, "Bound" in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt eds. Images of Women in Antiquity (Kent: Croom Helm, 1983; Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984).

rather than physical being. For if they are to be regarded as wise in men's eyes they must bond with men; only by allowing themselves to be moulded by them can they hope for respect. Athena renounces sexuality, maternity, and the vindication of the blood rights of the female. She is no longer the virgin mother, but a virgin, not mother (Ruether, New Woman, p.38). She is independent only in becoming male identified and thereby losing her autonomy.

All physiology, male and female, at this time was based on inference since human dissection was not practised. Analogies were drawn from animal dissection and applied to the human body. The difficulties doctors had in gaining access to women's bodies, since women tended to examine themselves and did not allow men to be present at births, meant that their bodies were mysteries which tended to be compared with what was known about female animals.

Marina Warner, in Alone of All her Sex (1985), explains that the role of men in reproduction seemed clear to doctors, but the role of women was left to sheer conjecture which emerged as sexist, upholding the male as "the author of being". This myth persisted until the development of embryology in the nineteenth century when, as a result of the investigations of Von Baer in 1827, the mother emerged as a vital procreative force (Warner, Alone, pp.41-2).

Prior to this development, the male alone appeared to represent humanity. For more than a millennium before the dawn of the common era, the biological belief had persisted that the male fetus alone had realized its full potential: "For it is the semen, when possessed of vitality, which makes us men, hot, well-braced in limbs, heavy, well-voiced, spirited, strong to think and act"(7). The Greeks believed that the male sperm transmitted life through breath / air and that this was why men felt tired after intercourse. As it was important that this should not be wasted, too much intercourse was consequently considered dangerous, and by the end of the first century opposing schools arguing for and against sexual intercourse were agreed that sexual abstinence was the ideal (Soranus, Gynecology,1,30-31). It was from this observation that Aristotle formed his idea of the menses as "a type of impure sperm" (Generation of Animals, 728a). Peter Brown continues, "Women, by contrast, were failed males. The precious vital heat had not come to them in sufficient quantities in the womb. Their lack of heat made them more soft, more liquid, more clammy-cold, altogether more formless than were men"(Brown, The Body, p.10). A permanent fear

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7 Aretaeus, Causes and Symptoms of Chronic Diseases 2.5, (in F. Adams, trans. The Extant Works of Aretaeus the Cappadocian, pp.346-47) quoted in Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988; London: Faber & Faber, 1989), p.10 - abbreviated to Brown, The Body.

for men was that they might lose possession of heat and become 'womanish' (Ibid., p.11) (8).

No doubt the acceptance of Aristotle and the rejection of the Hippocratic theory by the patriarchal state was due to the fact that if two seeds were needed for the creation of the fetus and women provided both the menstrual matter and the seed, then she might impregnate herself and render the male superfluous.

The alienation towards the experiences of the body is linked to Aristotle and to the Greek belief that sperm transmitted breath which formed the pneuma of man. Aline Rousselle believes that it was for this reason that some men castrated themselves in the third century A.D. (Porneia, p.125). In doing this they saved themselves from the vagina dentata, the vagina with teeth, or the robbing of male power by the female (9). Both pagans and Christians believed that the passions enslaved a man and prevented reason. Greek and Roman medics differed on whether complete abstinence did or did not increase desire. Robin Lane Fox, in Pagans and Christians

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8 In antiquity the right testicle was believed to produce males and the left females. Doctors, therefore, encouraged men to tie up the left testicles if they wanted a boy and vice versa if they wanted a girl. Exposure of infants was common practice to preserve wealth and it is undoubtedly females who suffered this fate more often. The decision lay solely with the husband once the mid-wife had carried out appropriate checks laid down in Soranus' Gynecology, Bk. 2,10. The emphasis then was to produce male children.

9 Jill Raitt, "The Vagina Dentata and the Immaculatus Uterus Divini Fontis," in Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Vol.48, September 1980, pp.415-31.

(1986) (10), refers to Plato, who anticipated Christian success at asceticism when he maintained that there was little hope of limiting sex "without an extreme sanction, the fear of God" (p.351).

Women - the respectable ones - were bred for marriage. In Greece girls were married around the age of eighteen by means of a contract between their fathers and future husbands. Their consent was not required and they could live shut away from the world ever after. In Rome, the marriage contract was between the spouses and required the consent of both. This seems more egalitarian, but it should be remembered that the girl was usually only twelve to thirteen years of age. The Romans believed that the vagina was completely sealed internally and that this and the hymen made intercourse painful. They, therefore, tended to give their daughters in marriage before they reached puberty, believing that intercourse was necessary for the commencement of the menses (11).

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10 [Part 2, Chapter 7 "Living Like Angels", pp.336-74] - Robin Lane Fox, Pagans and Christians (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) - abbreviated to Fox, Pagans.

11 The demands of chastity for a particular section of females meant a demand made on sexually available women in Rome and Greece by its virile men. The Codex Theodosianus (9.7.1) of 326 A.D. contains the painful words of Constantine the first Christian Emperor: "for from those women to whom the law applies, chastity should be expected; but those girls are free from the severity of legal process whose worthless life puts them beneath observance of the law" (Brown, The Body, p.24). Under Roman law Augustus obliged men to have children for inheritance purposes placing restraints upon the legitimacy of their children.

Medically, women were reduced to sexual organs. Examined by a mid-wife on behalf of her fiancé, she would be accepted or rejected after a study of her genitals. Soranus of Ephesus, a second century physician and gynaecologist, laid down observations to ensure a fertile woman would be selected as a wife (Rousselle, Porneia, p.21). All women's ailments in The Hippocratic Collection were considered in relation to the uterus. In the Greek world, Aline Rousselle informs us: "Conception and pregnancy were thought of as the remedy for all female ailments, for a pregnant woman was a healthy woman, whose body was functioning normally . . ." (Ibid., p.28).

However, doctors were faced with a contradiction in terms of their observations of women. In the first place, they regarded sexual activity as essential in aiding the menses and labour. However, they also witnessed the damage caused by early pregnancies to women's bodies. In cases of early pregnancy, Soranus recommended abortion (Gynecology, 1,60).

It is perhaps not, therefore, surprising to find in Aline Rousselle's book a chapter bearing the title "On Virginité and Hysteria" which is said to occur in cases of involuntary continence, or sterility and in prepubescent girls. The symptoms were essentially hallucinations and suicidal tendencies, the cure for which Galen ironically prescribes marriage followed by pregnancy (Galen, On the Affected Parts, v). In the Peri Partheniōn, one of a series of gynaecological treatises



dating back to the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., there is a theory that delayed menarche causes mental disturbances, terror and the desire for death, often through strangulation (King, "Bound", pp.114-15). Only the male perspective is given in history. It is not difficult for the modern reader to surmise that for a child aware of the high mortality rate and the pain of childbirth, the prospect of marriage to a man far older than she, combined with the transition from childhood to adult responsibility by what can only be described as rape, was enough for some to take their own lives. In a patriarchal society this was the only act of autonomy they could ever make, for to step beyond the boundaries was to incur the punishment of death.

Pausanias (8: 23.6-7) relates the interesting story of Artemis, the Strangled Lady. Helen King writes:

Strangulation, for the Greeks, meant shedding no blood . . . . Strangulation can therefore be culturally opposed to unwanted sex . . . . In the *Peri Partheniōn* the afflicted *parthenoi* avoid not only the bloodshed of defloration but also that of menarche which ideally precedes it. Defloration may be feared if the *parthenos* is not 'ripe': these *parthenoi*, despite being 'ripe for marriage', are represented as fearing both menarche and marriage, preferring death (Ibid., p.119).

Pausanias presents Artemis as both the goddess who sheds no blood and the goddess who makes others bleed (Ibid., pp.118-19). Like Mary, she is ironically invoked to assist women during child-birth under the names Lochia and Eileithyia, although she has not given birth (Mary doing so without suffering the pains of Eve's curse), and as Lysizōnos she "release(s) the girdle" both in defloration and in labour (Ibid., p.122). It is, of course, her immunity from pain that women are invoking (point made in Chapter I, pp.20-1 of this thesis).

The role of blood is an important one for understanding women in antiquity. As women were regarded as of positive value as reproducers, i.e., as wives and mothers, gynē, so the unmarried girl was regarded negatively as virgin, parthenos. The main distinction between the gynē and the parthenos is the flow of blood which marks the various stages in the transition from parthenos to gynē at menstruation, defloration and childbirth. Helen King, in her paper, "Sacrificial Blood: The Role of the *Amnion* in Ancient Gynecology", makes a number of interesting points from the medical texts of the Hippocratic corpus which draws a comparison between female blood loss and sacrificial bloodshed. Primarily, blood distinguishes the human from the divine, and the human female from the male, and the gynē from the parthenos (12). Undoubtedly, one detects a hierarchy

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12 Helen King, "Sacrificial Blood: The Role of the *Amnion* in Ancient Gynecology", p.119 - abbreviated to King,

here. Helen King introduces us to another myth of Hesiod's found in Theogony (535ff), which links the sacrifice of an ox by Prometheus at Mekone with the creation of the first woman, Pandora. Sacrifice is regarded as a means of communication between man and the gods and sets humanity apart from the beasts which are taken as victims. Helen King then draws to our attention the fact that in myth and tragedy it is the parthenos of marital age who becomes the sacrifice and draws links between elements of a Greek wedding and animal sacrifice (Ibid., p.120). Finally, she points out that the word amnon means little lamb, or vessel to hold the blood of a sacrificial victim (Ibid., p.121). The links between this and defloration are apparent, and combined with the young girls' identification with the animal / victim, point to a male myth which has reduced real women to objects to be sacrificed in the male-orientated world. Christianity was to later absorb this symbolism into the crucifixion of Christ, i.e., that through his death he brought forth new life. It is ironic that Christ's blood was that which redeemed humankind and of which believers partake in the eucharist. On the other hand, the blood which issued from women was regarded as polluting, and menstruating women were denied entry into the Church during that time. In labelling women taboo during the menses, patriarchy

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"Sacrificial" - in M. Skinner ed. Rescuing Creusa, Helios, Women in Antiquity special issue, 13:2, 1986.

was denying them the power which could be seen in their very bodies. It was a reversal technique of what was so blatantly apparent - the life-giving power of women's bodies.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church (1979), argues that: "Greek thought is very important for understanding the fear of the body, of sexuality, and of women that began to shape classical society and that greatly influenced Christianity" (pp.13-4). However, like all patriarchal religions, the world was seen, to use the words of Brian Wren from his book What Language Shall I Borrow? (1989), "in terms of questionable oppositions based not on equality but subordination, not this-with-that but this-over-that: reason over emotion, soul over body, spirit over flesh, mind over matter, 'man' over nature, and men over women"(13). Ruether writes:

The primal matrix of life no longer encompasses spiritual power, gods and souls, but is debased as mere 'matter' (a word which means 'mother'). Matter is created by an ego-fiat from a transcendent spiritual power. Visible nature is posterior and created by transcendent 'Mind'. Sky and earth, once complementary, become hierarchical. Maleness is identified

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13 Brian Wren, What Language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology (London: S.C.M., 1989), p.12 - abbreviated to Wren, What.

with intellectuality and spirituality; femaleness is identified with the lower material nature. This also defines the female as ontologically dependent and morally inferior to maleness . . . . In his [Aristotle's] biological and political sciences, free Greek males represent the ruling 'reason', which must subjugate the 'body people', represented by women, slaves, and barbarians. In biblical religion and Greek philosophy we find patriarchal reversal myths which are designed to provide the aetiology of this male-dominated, dualistic world-view (New Woman, pp.14-5).

Aristotle's influence cannot be exaggerated in the subordination of women. His philosophy seemed to prove "that women are physically, mentally, and socially, although not sexually, inferior by nature to men. These ideas were to pervade the theological, philosophical, medical, and political writings of later ages" remaining "until quite recently, unquestioned assumptions about the nature of things" (Peradotto, Women, pp.3-4).

Although pagan cults had consecrated virgins, such as those associated with Diana of Ephesus and the Vestal Virgins of Rome associated with the well being of the community, it is nevertheless implausible that Christianity copied these practices, because they clearly

saw them as demonic. Marina Warner writes of the pagan goddesses:

They spurned men because they were preeminent, independent, and alone, which is why the title virgin could be used of a goddess who entertained lovers . . . . Temple virgins like the vestals were forbidden intercourse during their period of office largely because their exalted position gave them political power that might be abused by a lover . . . . There was one particular attitude toward virginity that the Christian religion did inherit from the classical world: that virginity was powerful magic and conferred strength and ritual purity (Alone, p.48).

Marina Warner also notes: "In pagan worship the virginity of the priestesses was, however, a ritual requirement, not an ascetic statement about morality and the corruption of the flesh" (Ibid., p.32). Christian sexual attitudes represented a departure from pagan and Jewish tradition (Ibid.). With the rise of Christianity in the Roman world, men and women had arrived at a different conception of the body. Clement of Alexandria, writing at the end of the second century A.D., stated: "The human ideal of continence, I mean that which is set forth by the Greek philosophers, teaches one to resist passion, so as not to be made subservient to it, and to

train the instincts to pursue rational goals". But Christians, he added, went further: "our ideal is not to experience desire at all"(14).

### **The Rise of Christian Asceticism**

Rosemary Radford Ruether argues, in her paper "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", that every religion in antiquity - Babylonian, Canaanite, Persian, Greek and Jewish - passed from naturalistic to otherworldly religious hope from approximately the sixth century down to the second century B.C. Christianity was born in Jewish apocalypticism and nurtured in the world of Hellenistic syncretism in its alienated antic cosmic stage of development. Renunciation of the world grew out of a Platonized spirituality and eschatology adopted by Greek and Latin Christianity (p.151). In New Woman New Earth she goes on to write:

A misogynism developed, both in Greek literature and in the later strata of Old Testament and talmudic Judaism. These texts expound the evilness of women and trace the origins of evil in the world to female figures, such as Eve and Pandora (who are probably debased mother-goddess figures). The Jewish

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15 Clement, Stromateis 3.7.57 (in Henry Chadwick, trans. Alexandrian Christianity, p.66) quoted in Brown, The Body, p.31.

tradition expressed its misogynism in language drawn from the patriarchal family, whereas the Greek tradition came to symbolize it in abstract philosophical language. But these two forms of patriarchal hierarchicalism were parallel and began to amalgamate in the Hellenistic period. Christianity fell heir to the fusion (p.15).

Elizabeth Castelli believes that S. P. Brock's paper "Early Syrian Asceticism" in Numen 20 (1973):2 may provide the answer to the mushrooming of asceticism in the four centuries marking the end of Christian persecution with Constantine's conversion in 313 A.D. (with the brief exception of the reign of Julian the Apostate). Asceticism becomes the natural successor of the martyr when this ideal was no longer attainable. In asceticism the persecutor was no longer human but demonic (Castelli, "Virginité", p.66). By about 300 A.D. virginity was the ideal practised by both men and women. It was regarded as a form of mediation between man and God. The grounds of the cohesion of society had shifted from procreation to maintaining intactness represented by the virgin body. Any threat to the virgin body was a threat to the body politic.

Paul and Jesus were used to promote the idea of an ascetic ideology. The notion of sexuality was very narrowly defined to heterosexual intercourse within



marriage with the goal of producing children (Ibid., p.68). The call for virginity can be traced back to Jesus' words in Matthew, 19, 12 and to Paul's development of these in 1 Corinthians 7. A century passed, however, before followers claimed to base their celibacy on his example through Ignatius' Letter to Polycarp 5.2. (Brown, The Body, p.41). What the ascetics were striving for was "singleness of heart" and women were regarded as the cause of "double-hearted" behaviour (Ibid., p.39). Kallistos Ware writes that the "heart" was the centre of the person: "The heart is the meeting point between body and soul, between the subconscious, the conscious and the supraconscious, between the human and the divine"(15). Paul stressed the holiness of the body which was forever under threat (1 Cor. 6:15). The stress on the common human condition, defined by sexual desire was necessary in maintaining cohesion among the Early Church (Brown, The Body, p.60). The virgin body was regarded as the appropriate vehicle for divine possession which was associated with the warm rush of vital spirits of intercourse (Ibid., p.67). Peter Brown writes: "Only slowly, in certain circles, did prophecy and sexual renunciation come to be linked in an unambiguous manner, as if the one depended on the other" (Ibid., p.69). However, as Aline Rousselle comments, "the most

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15 Kallistos Ware, "Ways of Prayer and Contemplation", in B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff, and J. Leclercq, eds., Christian Spirituality, p.401, here quoted in Brown, The Body, p.228.

interesting question is not so much the origin of the command to remain chaste as the way in which this was observed and the reasons for the popularity of this way of life." She believes that for many women it offered a real alternative to hysteria (Porneia, p.131).

### **Beliefs Embodied in Asceticism**

Undoubtedly, a crucial text for understanding the success of asceticism is Genesis 1-3. Elaine Pagels, in Adam, Eve, and the Serpent (New York: Random House, 1988) (16), attempts to show how "ideas concerning sexuality, moral freedom, and human value - took their definitive form during the first four centuries as interpretations of the Genesis creation stories, and how they have continued to affect our culture and everyone in it, Christian or not, ever since" (Pagels, Adam, p.xxviii). For the first four hundred years of the common era, Elaine Pagels concludes,

Christians regarded *freedom* as the primary message of Genesis 1-3 - freedom in its many forms, including free will, freedom from demonic powers, freedom from social and sexual obligations, freedom from tyrannical government and from fate; and self-mastery as the source of such freedom (Ibid., p.xxv).

Brown writes:

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16 Elaine Pagels, abbreviated hereafter to Adam.

Some Christian thinkers presented it [sexuality] as the first cause of death. Others, less drastic, saw it as the first, most blatant manifestation of Adam and Eve's loss of the immortality conferred on them by possession of God's Spirit. For all, sexuality edged itself into the center of attention, as a privileged symptom of humanity's fall into bondage. Consequently, the renunciation of sexual intercourse came to be linked on a deep symbolic level with the reestablishment of a lost human freedom, with a regaining of the Spirit of God, and, so, with man's ability to undo the power of death (Brown, The Body, p.86).

For this reason the Encratites added dietary restraints believing that certain food aroused the senses. Interestingly, in the Encratite Acts of Thomas women are called to reject men - a revolutionary thought in a patriarchal world.

Within Christianity there were different viewpoints expressed. Clement of Alexandria at this time believed that intercourse approached in the Stoic manner and in the service of God was good (Paidagōgos). However, although the Fathers may have defended marriage virginity was upheld as an ideal. Marina Warner tells us:

[The] Christian religion broadened the concept of virginity to embrace a fully developed ascetic philosophy. The interpretation of the virgin birth as the moral sanction of the goodness of sexual chastity was the overwhelming and distinctive contribution of the Christian religion to the ancient mythological formula . . . . And it was this shift, from virgin birth to virginity, from religious sign to moral doctrine, that transformed a mother goddess like the Virgin Mary into an effective instrument of asceticism and female subjection (Alone, pp.48-9).

"Men's bodies were not perceived to be integral in the same way: the absence of the unperforated hymen, caulking the body like tar on a ship's timbers, made a man's body an incomplete and imperfect symbol of wholeness" (Ibid., p.74). Cyprian uses Genesis 3:16 to convey the liberating aspect of virginity: "You virgins are free from this sentence", he wrote;

you do not fear the sorrows of women and their groans; you have no fear about the birth of children, nor is your husband your master, but your Master and Head is Christ in the likeness



of and in the place of a man; your lot and condition are the same (as that of men) (17).

Virginité was thus regarded as a means by which women escaped Eve's curse. Rosemary Radford Ruether writes: "Even the memory of female potency was suppressed for a dogma of female posteriority and impotency. The memory survived in the negative form of the dangerous uncleanness of 'mother blood'" (New Woman, p.26). She also maintains that: "Women, both in creation and through the fall, were representatives of 'carnality'. They must transcend, not only their bodily, but their 'feminine' nature in order to be saved . . . . Even the virgin must be subject to male 'headship'" (Ibid., p.92). Virginité and other ascetic practices were embraced very early on for both Clement of Rome in his letter to the Corinthians and Ignatius of Antioch send special greetings to virgins. By the second and third centuries of the common era treatises on virginité emerge, although as Aline Rousselle notes they describe the mediocrity of marriage compared with the ideal and beauty of virginité and fail to deal with the difficulties of abstinence (Rousselle, Porneia, p.136).

Enthusiasm for the ascetic life spread. By the second century the story of Thecla in the Apocryphal Acts

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17 Cyprian, De Habitu Virginum 22; trans. from Michael Andrew Fahey, Cyprian and the Bible: A Study in Third-Century Exegesis. Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Hermeneutik no.9 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1971), 59 quoted in Castelli, "Virginité", p.70.

of Paul and Thecla which celebrated a young woman's achievement of autonomy as a "'holy woman', an ascetic, evangelist, and healer" encouraged many women to become "new Theclas" (Pagels, Adam, p.87). With the average life expectancy at twenty-five for men and lower for women every woman would have to produce five children that lived for society's numbers to maintain the status quo (Brown, The Body, p.6). Peter Brown states: "As the opponents of Paul and Thecla pointed out, procreation, and not the chilling doctrine introduced by Saint Paul, was the only way to ensure a 'resurrection of the dead'" (Ibid., p.7). By 200 A.D. the role of women in the Church was unmistakable, for they were urged to remain widows and continent. Thecla's intact body spoke to men and women because: "It was a condensed image of the individual, always threatened with annihilation, poised from birth above the menacing pressures of the world" (Ibid., p.159). With such a model continence ceased to be appropriate largely in the post-marital realm and became a "Youth culture". Thecla appeared as the ideal Christian in an age of persecution. Her story summed up "a vision of human integrity imprisoned in a world that it is in but not of . . . always managing to avoid the one fate that is worse than death, the annihilation of one's identity" (18).

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18 Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance, p.86 quoted in Brown, The Body, p.158.

Female asceticism played a vital role in the spread of Christianity particularly in the case of Greek and Roman women. Elaine Pagels comments that the historian Elizabeth Clark, in her essay "Ascetic Renunciation and Feminine Advancement", showed that this way of life

`renouncing the world' sometimes brought wealthy and aristocratic women . . . practical benefits often denied to them in secular society. They could retain control of their own wealth, travel freely throughout the world as `holy pilgrims', devote themselves to intellectual and spiritual pursuits, and found institutions which they could personally direct (Pagels, Adam, pp.88-9 commenting on Clark).

Aline Rousselle comments that the contribution women made had more to do with material and social freedom than with spiritual fervour (Porneia, p.227 referred to in Castelli, "Virginité", p.85).

However, Elizabeth Castelli makes the poignant remark that: "The feminine has no place in this virginal order; it is explicitly banished, along with passion, materiality, and the body itself" ("Virginité", p.78). There seems to have been an underlying fear of identifying the female with God. Genesis 1:27, "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" had presented a problem to the Church Fathers. Although they

were clear about God's image referring to a man's reason or soul, they were troubled by the reference to bisexuality, which they interpreted as a bodily characteristic. It was apparent that woman could transcend the limitations of her sex through faith reflected in the ascetic life: "When woman achieves this transcendence which is, of course, not due to her own efforts but is a 'supernatural' gift, she is given the compliment of being called 'man' (*vir*). Thus there is an assumption that all that is of dignity and value in human nature is proper to the male sex" (Daly, C.S.S., p.89). Nowhere, even as consecrated virgins, are women recognized as fully human (Daly, C.S.S., p.89). Julia Kristeva makes the painful yet insightful remark that what Christianity demands of woman, in order to incorporate her into the symbolic system, is this: "while thinking of herself as a virgin impregnated by the Word, she lives and thinks of herself as a male homosexual. If not she will feel mortification culminating in masochism" (19). What asceticism does for women is to transform them into a male, whereas for men it is said to restore the male to his natural "spiritual virility" (Ruether, New Woman, p.17). Rosemary Radford Ruether continues:

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19 Julia Kristeva, "The Virgin of the Word", p.26 of her About Chinese Women ([Trans. by Anita Barrows], London: Marion Boyars, 1977).



The cult of the virgin mother arises, not as a solution to, but as a corollary of, the denigration of fleshly maternity and sexuality. Actual sexuality is analyzed as 'dirt', while the repressed libidinal feelings are sublimated in mystical eroticism, expressed by the spiritual sacred marriage of the virgin soul with Christ. The love of the Virgin Mary does not correct but presupposes the hatred of real women (Ibid., p.18).

In conclusion, Rosemary Radford Ruether surmises that "Christianity typically produces a schizophrenic view of women" (Ibid.). The reference to "schizophrenia" is particularly apt. It is defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary as "n. mental disease marked by disconnection between thoughts, feelings, and actions, freq. with delusions and retreat from social life". Etymologically the word originates from the Greek skhizein, to split, and phrēn, mind (7th Edition, pp.937-38). It is a splitting or breaking of women's "be-ing" that has been done to them by patriarchy.

As consecrated virgins and ascetics women were regarded as having Christ as their bridegroom: "To yield to passion is to commit adultery against the celestial bridegroom; virginity demands the mistrust of all flesh" - Gregory of Nyssa, De Virginitate, ([Aubineau introduction, 193-204; 2,2; 3,8; 4,7; 14,3; 15,1; 16,1-2;

20,1 and 3-4; 26,6], Castelli, "Virginité", p.71). The erotic language used to explain the eternal bliss which virgins and ascetics should reflect on in their spiritual betrothal to Christ seems to have functioned as a valve for pent up sexual frustrations. The writings of Jerome to various widows and virgins reflect the mind of a sexually repressed man given to sexual fantasies.

Unlike the men imitating Anthony of Egypt wandering out into the desert to live a solitary life, women lived in fear of rape and therefore tended to live in home communities. Karen Armstrong has pointed to "the similarities between these religious communities of women, living within a female-defined world, and the contemporary radical feminist movement. Both make the statement that women are complete without men, both sexually and emotionally" (Storkey, Chapter 9, p.188). Peter Brown writes: "by the end of the third century, attempts at sexual violence against dedicated women and threats of condemnation to the brothels (and no longer, simply, the threat of shameful execution) came to feature as a regular aspect of pagan persecutions of the Christians"(20). However, it should be noted that the desert fathers struggled with their bellies rather than sexuality. Indeed, it was even believed that the sin of Adam and Eve had been one of gluttony not sexuality. Far

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20 Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.5.1; Martyrs of Palestine, in H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton, trans., Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine, p.353 quoted in Brown, The Body, p.192.

from despising the body, the ascetics thought of themselves as people who had gained freedom to mourn for their sins and to suffer in this life "so that they might regain a future glory for their bodies" (Brown, The Body, p.222).

In the fourth and fifth century sexual seduction leapt into focus with woman portrayed as the source of perpetual temptation. Emphasis on the fragility of the monk's virginity generated a totally new sense of peril. However, many who embraced this life were sent there by poor parents confronted with famine, who hoped to reclaim their sons or daughters at a later date (Ibid., pp.242-48). It is important to note that unless a woman was a widow she was not at liberty to choose celibacy herself. Therefore virgins had been given that role by their guardians, usually their fathers, and in most cases because of a lack of wealth, or with an emphasis on avoiding mixed pagan marriages for lack of a suitable marriage partner. Christian families were not encouraged to marry their children to Jews, pagans or heretics, hence the large numbers of virgin men and women (Ibid., p.191). This was true for men and women in early Christianity. Peter Brown writes that Christianity had become a religion of the young. Many children, mostly girls wanted to remain unmarried.

An interesting feature of women's asceticism is the rigorousness of the fasts they inflicted upon themselves. With the onset of amenorrhea and the consequent negation

of feminine characteristics which fasting brings about the Church came to identify them with the new Eve. Germaine Greer, in The Female Eunuch (1970), emphasizes the fact that all girls know about the pain of the menses and childbirth but not the pleasures of sex(21). She contrasts this attitude towards menstruation - the silence and embarrassment that surrounds it - with the practice of the Aborigines. Among the Aborigines who lived along the Pennefather river in Queensland the menstruating girl is buried in warm sand up to her waist to help with the contractions. She is fed and cared for during this time in the sacred place by her mother, and afterwards her womanhood is celebrated with a feast (Greer, Female, p.50). With such rituals women would have a very different perception of their bodies.

Women ascetics were starving themselves in the belief that it provided them with an image of their bodies which was not by nature given to the female. They believed their emaciated bodies had removed the curse of Eve by their moral and spiritual perfection brought about by fasting. Undoubtedly, this starvation had to do with having and exercising control over her own body, something which was denied women within secular society and family life. What these ascetics were fighting for was a sense of freedom, an aspiration for the

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21 Germaine Greer, "The Wicked Womb", pp.47-52 of her The Female Eunuch (London: Paladin Grafton Books, 1989ed.), p.47 - abbreviated to Greer, Female.

transcendent. Hunger for women became the basic synonym for their desire for God. However, underlying this is the belief that only men represent humanity and woman can only be saved in as much as she comes to resemble man. For patristic exegetes argued that woman represented the appetites, and man the soul or intellect (22). Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell note that hagiographers are inclined to view female sin as bodily or sexual, arising from within, whereas male sinners are depicted as tempted from without (23).

We know from Apophthegmata Patrum, series alphabetica that Egyptian women, dressed as men, did live in the desert alone. Lavinia Byrne, in Women Before God (1988), reminds us that the intention of those who retired to the desert "was not to run away from but to run towards God's call to be Christian and to form community. Chastity, poverty and obedience came later, as means to an end rather than as absolutes in their own right" (p.88). Unlike the Greek and Roman women they could make the personal decision to become a nun - (Palladius, Lausaic History, 33,5). The Egyptians also

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22 Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages", p.175 in Fragments for a History of the Human Body, ed. Michael Feher and Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Urzone Inc., 1989), pp.161-219 - abbreviated to Bynum, The Female Body.

23 D. Weinstein and R.M. Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000 - 1700, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp.234-36; Dalarun, "Eve, Marie ou Madeleine?" here referred to in Bynum, "The Female Body", p.175.

recognized female sexual desire recording the struggles endured by some of the female ascetics and the suspicions of lesbian behaviour within the convents (Rousselle, Porneia, p.184).

Peter Brown draws our attention to the fact that married men excluded from roles of leadership within the community may have been demoted to the position of women. Alternatively: "Some women, however, edged closer to the clergy: continence or widowhood set them free from disqualifications associated with sexual activity" (The Body, p.146). However, men have never experienced the total negation of their sex which women suffered.

In the fourth and fifth centuries the interpretation of Genesis 1-3 changed under the influence of Augustine, and if loathing of the flesh, particularly the female flesh, was not the basis for celibacy prior to the emergence of Augustine's doctrine of the Fall, it soon became the accepted theology. Augustine believed "that sexual desire is sinful; that infants are infected from the moment of conception with the disease of original sin; and that Adam's sin corrupted the whole of nature itself" (Pagels, Adam, p.xix). We are no longer free but subject to mortality and sexual desire as punishment. Aquinas and Augustine held that Adam and Eve did have sexual intercourse since this was the sole reason for the creation of woman in their eyes, for had Adam required merely a companion God would have created another man. In the beginning, however, sex was untainted by

concupiscence and not flawed with the suffering of childbirth(Warner, Alone, p.52); it coincided perfectly with the conscious will. Peter Brown maintains that: "For Augustine, Mary's conception of Christ stood rather for an act of undivided obedience. It recaptured the ancient harmony of body and soul, in which the will was not the maimed thing that it so soon became"(24). However, Augustine had mistranslated Romans 5:12, the prepositional phrase upon which he rested his theology of the fall. He insisted "that Paul said that death came upon all humanity because of Adam `in whom all sinned'", which others translated "`in that [i.e., because] all sinned'" (Pagels, Adam, p.143). Perhaps it was because people would rather feel guilty than helpless, Elaine Pagels concludes, that Augustine's theology survived for sixteen hundred years as the basis of Christian doctrine (Ibid., p.146).

Under Augustine's influence

the male erection was the essence of sin, woman, as its source, because peculiarly the cause, object and extension of it. This, as we have noted, results in an essentially depersonalized view of the relationship to woman. She becomes literally an extension of

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24 Enarratio in Ps. 67 21.37: 826; Sermon 287.4: 39:1302 and de Trinitate 13.18.23: 42:1032; cf. Contra Julianum 4.13.62: 42:768 referred to in Brown, The Body, p.407.

the male body, to be used either in a masturbatory way for 'carnal pleasure', or, in a right ordering of the male body in relation to its 'head', in an instrumental way as a mechanism under male control for impregnation and incubation of the fetus. In neither case does she appear as a true 'other' or 'thou' to which the male relates as a person. Such a de-personalization of woman must be seen as a necessary consequence of the assimilation of the male-female relationship into the soul-body relationship, which implies a subject-object relationship between man and woman (Ruether, "Misogynism", p.163).

Having alluded to this development in her essay, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church", Rosemary Radford Ruether also presents us with the catch-22 situation this imposed artificially on women. She states:

By thus slipping back from what is the consequence of sin to what is natural, and attributing the effects of sin to woman's 'nature', the Church Fathers can simultaneously laud virginity as a liberation from sin, and yet, where women are concerned, prevent that from in any way being interpreted as a liberation for a boldness, integrity, or



independence unfitting the 'nature of a woman'  
(Ibid., p.159).

### Conclusion

I maintain that those who see some feminist idealism being achieved in female asceticism need to reflect upon the patriarchal structure in which it operated. Women and men were being called to take flight from nature rather than to find freedom within nature (Wren, What, p.146). As a means of striving towards the transcendent, men and women adopted the ascetic life. However, Elizabeth Castelli draws our attention to the fact that:

Women's sexuality, historically, has been appropriated as a tool of men's power, a sign in the masculinist system of communication, a commodity in the system of exchange . . . . In the realm of religious virginity, women's sexuality functioned in a similar way as a token offered to God as a sign of renunciation; the virgin's body belonged to the celestial Bridegroom, conceptually, in the same way that it would have to his earthly counterpart (Castelli, "Virginity", p.86).

What is called for from women is the alienation and killing of the self, something which continent men are not being asked to do. There was no challenge made to the patriarchal culture, but rather the concept of

virginity was absorbed and manipulated within it. Women became mere vessels waiting to be filled by Christ. Rape is portrayed with a sense of horror not from the victim's point of view, but from the objective stance that those virgins are now "damaged goods" (Ibid., p.87). What is painfully missing from these writings is the sense of outrage and wickedness of the men who sexually assaulted and raped women. To illustrate this point I will use Brown who quotes from the Draguet Fragment 2.7: Pachomian Koinonia 2, p.117 whereby a Pachomian monk, Apa Zanos meets a nun from the monastery of the Tabennesioles whilst on his return to Memphis:

And with these words the thought of fornication began to upset and disturb me. I was no longer able to stay the burning. I locked her in my embrace and, so it seemed, I tossed her down and stripped her naked; whereupon she gave me a slap, and I saw the whole place looking like fire. Then I arose, having ejaculated, but she had disappeared . . . . (Draguet Fragment 2.7: Pachomian Koinonia 2, p.117 quoted in Brown, The Body, p.247).

The price for an alternative from the constraints of family life was a high one indeed. Unfortunately, as Elizabeth Castelli concludes, because of the absence of women's testimonies it remains debateable whether that cost was worthwhile (Castelli, "Virginity", p.88).

The point of this chapter has been to alert the reader to different contexts and different meanings given to the female body and to watch these shift and change. Although it would have been interesting to pursue the themes of bodies / women / Mary / asceticism in the medieval period, via the work of Caroline Walker Bynum, I have had to be selective in the interests of time and the length of this thesis and have chosen instead to concentrate on another area - that of the nineteenth century.

**CHAPTER V****THE AGE OF MARY: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY****Introduction**

In the previous chapter we saw how women's bodies were used to mark out certain boundaries in a particular period. Here is a case for saying that in the very different nineteenth century, faced with the rising consciousness of women and with the threat from war, the Church made use of a Mary constructed in earlier centuries. It was she who embodied the Church's nature and who had been elevated above all women. By endorsing apparitions of Mary to her earthly counterparts with prophecies of divine vengeance, should the people fail to take heed, the Church had a powerful tool for reinforcing its boundaries and banishing counter-ideas. Consequently, the nineteenth century witnessed an explosion in Marianism which was to last into the middle of the twentieth century. Known as 'The Age of Mary' it is not difficult to discern several of the underlying factors which led to its emergence at this time.

**Background**

The eighteenth century had been marked by the spirit of rationalism, with its belief in progress and reason, which threatened the very foundation of Western civilization, insofar as those were entwined with the fate of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church increasingly felt itself to be

in a state of siege against the modern world. Hilda Graef, in Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion(1), draws our attention to the fact that there was a general outcry at this time against anything other than the essentials of Christianity which meant the sacrifice of legitimate(!) developments particularly in relation to Mariology. She also makes the perceptive observation that:

It is a frequently observed tendency of history that when one development has reached its saturation point its antithesis begins to appear or to reappear. With the French Revolution rationalism had overreached itself; it was followed by the emergence of 'romanticism', an attitude of mind that was favourable once more to irrational and suprarational influences, to emotional as well as mystical experiences . . . . Marian teaching and devotion profited from this new mood . . . (Graef, Mary, pp.78-9).

What we witness in the nineteenth century is the Church's identification with women, and a reshaping of the dominant image of the feminine from its previous synonymity with carnality to that of spirituality, morality, and piety, thus reversing previous typologies. By contrast, the

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1 Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, (Parts 1 and 2), (London: Sheed & Ward, 1985ed.) - abbreviated to Graef, Mary.

masculine sphere becomes identified with that which threatens the Church's order, i.e., as materialism, work, and scientific rationality. Rationality becomes divorced from the spiritual and is directed towards the manipulating of the material world (Ruether, New Woman, pp.76-7).

Barbara Corrado Pope, in her paper "Immaculate and Powerful: The Marian Revival in the Nineteenth Century" (2), writes about the appropriateness of the Church's elevation of Mary in times of crisis as a symbol of comfort (p.175). As the mother of Jesus, she is mother of the Church and like an earthly mother she was regarded as mediator pleading her children's cause before the father of justice - a cause regarded as theologically problematic to say the least.

Michael Carroll, in his book The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins (1986), examines the psychological, sociological, and historical processes that gave rise to the Marian cult. He writes:

So long as the Mary cult did not directly challenge any of the central Christological doctrines of Christianity, church leaders would have seen in the Mary cult a way of maintaining the allegiance of these new Christians by, in

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2 Article, pp.173-200, found in Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality, C. W. Atkinson, C. H. Buchanan, and M. R. Miles, eds. (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1985) - abbreviated to Pope, "Immaculate".

effect, giving them a type of Christianity that they wanted (Carroll, The Cult, p.84).

A number of apparitions in France, in particular, at Paris (1830), La Salette (1846), Lourdes (1858), and Pontmain (1871), were used by the Church as "an instrument of conquest, 'evangelisation', revival and agitation" (3). In the apparitions the Blessed Virgin identified with the masses and condemned materialism, rationality, political and social revolutions as the sins of the modern world and the work of the devil. Barbara Corrado Pope maintains that: "The political direction [the visions] augured was always backward rather than forward: in favor of kings and the old social order, and fearful of change" (Pope, "Immaculate", p.195). Undoubtedly, the nineteenth century was marked by economic and political goals, secularization and nationalism all of which threatened the Church's wealth and temporal power (Pope, "Immaculate", p.181).

Nor can one neglect to note the rise of feminism which had been a "hot potato" in the eighteenth century. On the 4 August 1789 the Constituent Assembly had proclaimed The Rights of Man. In September 1791, Olympe de Gouges published her Declaration of the Rights of Woman. It was a call to women to wake up and recognize their rights, a cause taken up again by Flora Tristan (1803-44) and later by Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, Under The Heel of Mary ([Trans. by J. Bowden], London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), p.1 - abbreviated to Perry, Under.

Jeanne Deroin, although these crusades of 1791 and 1848 were not rewarded until 1944(4). Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, editors of Not in God's Image (1973), inform us that "*the feminist cause in nineteenth-century France was often associated, unsurprisingly, with socialism*" (p.309). One can consequently deduce that the Church's recognition of the Marian apparitions, and its timely declaration of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, were "of the essence of a counter-revolution" (Perry, Under, p.118). The Church elevated the virtues of chastity and humility, glorifying the Virgin Mary [according to M. Daly, in The Church and the Second Sex, 1968], "only in accepting the subordinate role assigned to her" (C.S.S., p.61).

According to the Jesuit writings of B. Llorca, SJ., "the French Revolution, the upheavals of the nineteenth century and 'growing irreligiosity' convinced Rome of 'the need to proclaim the Marian dogma as a means of fostering piety among the faithful'"(5). Simone de Beauvoir, in Ethics of Ambiguity, made an ominous observation - which to a large extent reflects the critical nature of this chapter towards the alleged apparitions and dogmas - when she wrote:

The oppressed has only one solution: to deny the  
 harmony of that mankind from which an attempt is

4 O'Faolain, Not, pp.306-16.

5 B. Llorca, SJ., "La Autoridad eclesiastica y el dogma de la Inmaculada Concepción", Estudios Eclesiasticos (July/December, 1954), p.321 quoted in Perry, Under, p.118.



made to exclude him [her] . . . . In order to prevent this revolt, one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one cannot revolt against nature(6).

It was the intention of the Church of this era to put forward Mary as the representation of female consciousness, experience, and reality. She was the pre-eminent member of the Church, who made a sham out of the lives of women who were required to imitate her as the model. It was, no doubt, because women regarded their own experience as ambiguous and peripheral that they failed to perceive the artificial manipulative origin of this perfect model of woman, who was ironically unlike any woman known to them. The Church's giving truth to the lie of Mary's perfection in turn gave the lie to the truth of women's very be-ing.

### **The Rise of Marianism**

France was to play a major role in this rejuvenation of Mary's power. Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría state: "All the seminal apparitions - with their messages of submission to the Holy See, politicized pilgrimages, rejuvenated devotion to the rosary, scapulars, and indulgences - were French" (Perry, Under, p.72). The

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6 Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, trans. by Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1948), p.83 quoted in Daly, Gyn, p.56.

Church and monarchy were together in sponsoring Mary's power. In the mid-nineteenth century the démocrates - socialistes adopted the proletarian figure of Jesus as a symbol of the birth of egalitarianism. This accounts for the absence of Jesus in clerical discourse at this time, and the elevation of Mary (siding with the royalists) re-enacted in the ritual of crowning statues of Mary, a practice which spread throughout the world(7). Large numbers of religious congregations were founded related in their devotion to Notre Dame; these along with their lay subsidiaries formed the backbone of papal power in their battle against Christian communism, Jewish emancipation, Protestant expansion, and Masonic networks (Ibid., p.75). The impact of these Marian organisation activities, in education, pilgrimages, and retreats, sustained the apparitions and ensured that:

Through them millions were conditioned to an obedient life 'under her mantle' and found consolation amidst the miseries of the age. Refuge of Sinners, Mother of Mercy, Suppliant Omnipotent, Mary stood in diametrical opposition to Marianne, the allegorical figure who simultaneously personified the republic and was the mother of it(Ibid., p.85).

7 E. Berenson, Populist Religion and Left-Wing Politics in France, 1830-52 (Princeton, 1984), p.72 adapted in Perry, Under, p.72. However, Berenson ignores the Marian cult.

### The Marian Apparitions

What, then, is one to make of the timely apparitions? Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría set out on pages seventy-six to seventy-eight the "paradigmatic conditions of a modern apparition of the Virgin Mary". Basically, there are seven sets of criteria relating to background, seer, vision, message, miracles, reactions, and ecclesiastical action. It is appropriate to look at these criteria in more detail. First, with regard to the background of the apparitions, we find political turmoil, anticlericalism, severe economic crises, and social upheaval (Ibid., pp.76-7). Such timely apparitions tended to quell any unrest among the masses, for with the blessing of Notre Dame the people could ally themselves to the Church. "For Pope Leo, it seemed `expedient to encourage associations for craftsmen and working men, which, placed under the sheltering care of religion, may render the members content with their lot and resigned to toil, inducing them to lead a peaceful and tranquil life'" (Quod apostolici, 28 December 1878 quoted in Ibid., pp.137-38).

Secondly, the seer is usually an illiterate peasant girl and member of a Marian association (Ibid., p.76). Barbara Corrado Pope saw this as a deliberate assault by the Church on "the intellectual pretensions of the day" ("Immaculate", p.181). Those who are most pious and pleasing to God are not the educated, since education was

dangerous to the Church. The educated were already questioning the legitimacy of the Church's belief that what the Church required was blind obedience, as the proper response from the community could be vouched for by the appearance of Mary herself to visionaries who fell into this category.

Thirdly, the vision is of a lady who glows, and minute descriptions of the lady's appearance are given - all recall the vision of the Miraculous Medal (1830) by Catherine Labouré: a medal circulated around the world and undoubtedly known of by the seers, who may well have been in possession of the medal, as in the case of Bernadette Soubirous. With reference to the apparition of the Virgin at La Salette, Maximin, one of the two seers, confessed later that he did not actually see the Virgin, but that he believed that sticking to the story had done good.

However, this would certainly not explain the apparitions where several seers witnessed the exact same vision. The apparition at Pontmain (17 January 1871), is one such case. Hilda Graef introduces us to the notion of a psychological explanation, stating that "both children and adolescents have considerable eidetic gifts and are able to visualize as outside themselves objects that present themselves to their conscious - or subconscious - imagination" (Graef, Mary, p.145). In Karl Rahner's book, Visions and Prophecies, he mentions an experiment by C. M. Staehlin who tested the suggestibility of six boys aged

between fifteen and eighteen years of age, letting appear to them by suggestion a battle of medieval warriors above a single tree. Of the six boys, two saw nothing, two only saw the battle, and two saw and heard the noise, including the shouts of individual knights, and they agreed with each other in every detail (Ibid.).

Michael Carroll examines the apparitions in the light of his psychoanalytic position and uses the premise that they are produced by natural causes. He divides the apparitions into illusions and hallucinations. He defines an illusion as "the misperception of a physical stimulus whose existence can be verified by independent observers", and an hallucination as requiring two conditions:

First, the subject must perceive a stimulus and believe that it really exists [that is, it is not imaginary]. Second, independent observers must be unable to detect a stimulus of any sort that corresponds, however loosely, to that perceived by the subject (The Cult, p.117).

Michael Carroll explains that in the case of an hallucination (e.g., Paris, La Salette, Fatima, Beauraing, Banneux, Necedah, Garabandal and Bayside), one seer begins hallucinating and through suggestion a small group of others may believe that they too are seeing something. They are then led to conclude that they are seeing the same thing, information is exchanged and a consistent report built up

(Ibid., p.126). Michael Carroll takes each of the hallucinations listed above and produces a detailed and convincing breakdown of the accounts. In each case he is interested in what gave rise to the apparition. He notes that the actual identification of the vision with the Virgin Mary is not done initially by the actual seer, but by someone else suggesting that the lady is Mary. In most of the hallucinations Michael Carroll detects an unconscious desire for a mother figure.

Michael Carroll, however, has accepted Freud's hypothesis that hallucinations serve as a mechanism for the discharge of excess sexual energy, or that "the content of the apparition was shaped by the seer's desire to gratify an unconscious wish" (Ibid., pp.140-41). He also notes: "A recurrent finding in the clinical study of childhood hallucinations is that the children who have these hallucinations have usually, like Maximin Giraud, been neglected or abused by one or both parents" (8).

Interesting as Michael Carroll's explanations are, he sees the illusions of Mary in a slightly different light. In the case of illusions (e.g., Pontmain, Knock and Zeitoun):

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8 Laretta Bender, "The Maturation Process and Hallucinations in Children", Wolfram Keup, ed. Origin and Mechanisms of Hallucination (New York: Plenum Press, 1970), pp. 95-101 quoted in Carroll, The Cult, p.154.

The analysis of the three cases in this chapter suggest that a relatively large number of seers will see a Marian apparition only when, first, they confront an unusual stimulus of some sort; second they are experiencing great anxiety over the future; third, someone makes an explicit suggestion that an apparition of the Virgin Mary is in progress; and fourth, their religious world view legitimates the belief that an apparition of the Virgin Mary might be a sign from God that He is on their side (Ibid., p.218).

In relation to Pontmain, Hilda Graef points out how the vision changed with the arrival of the Curé introducing elements which, she claims, may have been suggested to the children by his arrival - the blue robe with the stars resembling the roof of the church, the four candles recalling the four candles the Curé lit during the war after Sunday vespers etc. (Ibid., p.105). Marina Warner, in Alone of All her Sex (1985), pays attention to the youthfulness of the Virgin in these apparitions and connects it to the idea of "the innocence of childhood" which grew up in Europe, particularly in nineteenth century France, where the seers and vision were often children (Alone, p.302).

Fourthly, the message given is apocalyptic, recalling the figure of Apocalypse 12 - "And now, in heaven, a great portent appeared; a woman that wore the sun for her mantle,

with the moon under her feet, and a crown of stars above her head" (Apoc. 12:1). Catherine Labouré's vision prophesied that the cross would be treated with contempt and blood would flow. This message was taken to refer to the prediction of the 1830, 1848, and 1871 revolutions in France. The fact that many earlier paintings portrayed Mary as the woman of the Apocalypse could account for the hopes and fears that were announced with each new declaration of Marian apparitions (Pope, "Immaculate", pp.175, 177). Many of the messages contained reference to the sins of that particular area. The best example of this is the apparition at La Salette on the 19 September 1846 where the vision spoke about famine "if the people did not stop blaspheming, learn to pray, and attend mass regularly" (Ibid., p.178). Hilda Graef points out that these sins would have been generally condemned from the pulpits at that time and goes on to state: "Nothing is said by the apparition about such much graver matters as flagrant social injustice, mere superficial religious observance and lack of charity, which were prevalent at the time..." (Graef, Mary, fn. p.101). Not once is Mary ever recorded as challenging the oppression of women. Mary Daly states that she believes the apocalypse is really about the uprising of women, which men fear (Beyond, pp.45,95). This is interesting if one looks at the words which describe the new heaven and earth in feminine terms in Apocalypse 21: 1-2:



*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband.*

It is perhaps significant that the visionaries are young girls, since the omission of any mention towards the injustice suffered by women at this time, of growing awareness of it would be concealed coming from the mouth of a girl, but not a man's. One should not, however, underemphasize that for the visionaries themselves their reputation as holy brought for them a certain power. Undoubtedly, for many Patricia Harrington's depiction of Mary as a numinous symbol of the mysterium tremendum, the dreadful and fascinating holy in feminine form is illuminating. Her maternal character set aside, she stands alone absolute in herself, complete in her perfections (9).

"Penance, fasting and the rosary are the only ways to avert divine wrath - expressed in wars, disease, famine, revolutions and natural disasters" (Perry, Under, p.77). As a comment on this we may cite Sallie McFague who tells us:

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9 Patricia Harrington, "Mother of Death, Mother of Rebirth: The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe" in the Journal of the American Academy of Religion, LVI, No.1, Spring (1988) pp.27,38.

In cruder versions of the traditional view, God is the king who fights on the side of his chosen ones to bring their enemies down; in more refined versions, God is the father who will not let his children suffer. The first way of thinking supports militarism; the second, escapism (Models, p.17).

A little later she adds:

The primary metaphors in the tradition are hierarchical, imperialistic, and dualistic, stressing the distance between God and the world and the total reliance of the world on God (Ibid., p.19).

Mary also asks for a chapel, which then becomes a centre for pilgrimages. Barbara Corrado Pope believes that pilgrimages had tended to be local in character prior to the well publicized apparitions mentioned above. With the rising consciousness of women these pilgrimages provided occasions for female meetings, thereby threatening the Church. She writes: "By 1873 the official attitude had changed, and the church had moved to tie these potentially subversive impulses to the sacramental system" (Pope, "Immaculate", p.175). Through the pilgrimage system the Church directed the emotional and potentially subversive

religious impulses in order to maintain and increase Catholic influence (Ibid., p.183). Pilgrimages were now

an expression of political discontent as well as religious fervor, yet the sheer number of pilgrims involved reinforced the religious legitimacy of the new symbols. This new form of devotion was also an adaptation to an increasingly urban and industrial society. In the end it sapped the power of local French shrines and created a mass rather than 'folk' religious culture, a culture tied to national and international rather than local systems (Ibid., p.175).

Undoubtedly: "This sense of being chosen provided French Catholics with a national unifying symbol when they most needed it" (Ibid., p.184).

Fifthly, we come to the miracles and the conversions which reputedly took place at these shrines. Publicity for these apparitions and healings brought economic prosperity to these poor remote areas and filled the Church's coffers, in addition to earning them more followers. One of the reasons Lourdes was favoured rather than La Salette in the Church's promotion of these shrines included, among other things, the presence at Lourdes of a railway station which would cope with the influx of large numbers of pilgrims. These miracles and conversions, however, are "no cogent

proof of the authenticity of the original apparitions" (Graef, Mary, p.103).

Sixthly, we note the usual reactions moving from disbelief to belief by the lay and clerical bodies culminating in the commercialization of the shrine. Finally, the apparitions which were given ecclesiastical approval indicate only that, in the Church's judgement, "they are in no way contrary to faith and morals and that there are sufficient indications for their pious and cautious approval by human faith"(10). Ecclesiastical action then takes the form of controlling the seer in her communication with the outside world for the rest of her life. Religious orders and lay associations are launched to promote the new cult, indulgences granted, and the canonization of the seer inevitable (Perry, Under, pp.77-8).

### **The Development of the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception**

Undoubtedly, however, these apparitions prepared the way, and later reinforced the Church's launching of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854), by which "Mary is said to be exempt and free from every stain of original sin, by the redeeming deed of her Son"(11). The question of the

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10 E. Schillebeeckx, O.P., Mary, Mother of the Redemption (London: Sheed & Ward, 1964), pp.197f quoted in Graef, Mary, p.84.

11 Leonardo Boff, The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions ([Trans. R. R. Barr and J. W. Diercksmeier], San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), p.129 - abbreviated to Boff, The Maternal.

Immaculate Conception had been going on for centuries. It was certainly commonly known in the East in the eighth or ninth century and is believed to have penetrated the West in the twelfth century. Eadmer, a disciple of Anselm's, had been called the first theologian of the Immaculate Conception (d.1124). Using Anselm's principle that, "Mary has, by his [God's] grace, the greatest conceivable creaturely perfection" (12), Eadmer made it fitting that Mary be free from original sin. Richard Bauckham in his paper "The Origins and Growth of Western Mariology" tells us that Eadmer's reasoning "is summed up in the principle: *potuit, voluit, \_\_fecit* (he could, he willed, he did). Plainly God could preserve Mary from original sin. Since it was fitting that she should be without all sin, he willed this. Therefore he *did* it. In this way *a priori* reasoning is used to establish an alleged fact" (Bauckham, "Origins", p.152). Certainly, public interest had been aroused by the vision of Catherine Labouré of the Miraculous Medal with the words written in gold letters: "O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you" (Graef, Mary, p.86). Hilda Graef writes that: "The tremendous popularity of the Medal, to which soon numerous miracles were attributed, had also a great influence on the definition of the Immaculate Conception, as it impressed the doctrine on

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12 Richard Bauckham, "The Origins and Growth of Western Mariology", p.148 - abbreviated to Bauckham, "Origins" - in Wright, Chosen.

the consciousness of Catholic people and led to a growing demand to have it solemnly defined" (Ibid., p.87).

After the 1848 revolution Pope Pius IX returned from his ignominious flight to Naples. He was bitterly opposed to all political change and took refuge in the glory of Mary which he planned to exalt, thereby exalting his own office (Perry, Under, p.115). In 1848 the Pope ordered the formation of a special theological consulta and pontifical commission to investigate the question. Bishops were asked to report on sentiments in their dioceses in 1849. Of the six hundred and three bishops asked only fifty-six were against it. Consequently, on the 8 December 1854, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary was proclaimed by the Constitution Ineffabilis Deus (Graef, Mary, pp.79-80).

The objections this dogma aroused related to the fact that as Mary was not born from a virgin she must have been subject to original sin. However, the papal definition does not envisage an "active" conception, rather it says that Mary's own state at the moment of her conception, her 'passive' conception, was sinless. The second objection maintains that if Mary was conceived without sin she has no need for a redeemer. Once again the Church rules this out by specifically teaching that she is conceived immaculate "in consideration of the merits of Jesus Christ" (Ibid., p.82).

As a means of creating religious fervour amidst a period of "growing irreligiosity" Pope Pius IX gained the support of the masses. Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría comment that it was "the triumph of irrationality, the definition is acknowledged by its supporters in more recent times as a master-stroke in the struggle against secular thought" (Perry, Under, p.118). And Archbishop Fulton Sheen wrote: "The dogma of the Immaculate Conception killed the false optimism of the inevitable and necessary progress of man without God . . . . Humbled in his Darwinian-Marxian-Millian pride, modern man saw his doctrine of progress evaporate"(13). This, indeed, appeared to be the case when the dogma was ratified by the Virgin in person at Lourdes (1858), the strategic significance of this revelation as it happened coinciding with the imminent publication of Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection, Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy, and John Stuart Mill's Essay on Liberty(Ibid.).

Not surprisingly, where women had fought along side men in the revolutions there was, after the 1848 Revolution which brought universal male suffrage, the demand from militant women that it be extended to them (O'Faolain, Not, pp.312-13). In the same year the First Women's Rights Convention was held in America at Seneca Falls which produced the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, 13 F. J. Sheen, The World's First Love, Dublin, 1953, pp.133-35 quoted in Perry, Under, p.118.

written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, setting out the injustices visited upon woman by man. Assaults on Christianity for its degradation of women were coming from all sides. Ruether informs us, in New Woman New Earth (1975), that:

The nineteenth-century women's movement allowed itself to remain limited to a civil rights and educational struggle. It backed away from a critique of socioeconomic relations and cultural stereotypes of maleness and femaleness. It tried to build a women's movement on the Victorian doctrine of spiritual femininity. They argued that, if women were the morally superior half of the race, they were needed all the more in the public sphere to 'moralize' society (p.24).

The Church can be seen as attempting to provide a focus for the emerging feminine element, for without the support of women the Church would soon disappear. Barbara Corrado Pope asks the question: "Can we see in the Marian revival a resurgence of the 'feminine principle' or a 'feminization' of religion or culture?" (Pope, "Immaculate", p.193). Unfortunately, the answer is a categorical no. What we have instead is a male-defined cult of Mary with serious limitations for women. The Virgin of the nineteenth century had no connection with fertility and sexuality, the two most obvious attributes of any symbol of female divinity (Ibid.,



p.194). To appropriate some words of Leonardo Boff, the message of the cult was that: "Mary never lived in or for herself. Mary was a woman ever at the service of others - of God, of Christ, of redemption, of the Church, of the ultimate meaning of history" (The Maternal, p.13). The apparitions of the nineteenth century, therefore, served as a reminder to women that they should imitate Mary and be at the service of men. For "What- ever advances women tried to make - in education, or employment, or political rights - were held to contradict the will and word of God . . ." (14).

Naomi Goldenberg makes a claim common to many when she says: "Scorn for the female in general and the female body in particular is a basic element in Christian practice and symbolism" (15). Certainly, in relation to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception the "primary, essential and creative role" in reproduction is given to the male, the woman thereby becoming "secondary, supportive and nurturant." Daphne Hampson, in Theology and Feminism (1990), raises the theological question: How can a revelation that has discriminated against women be a revelation of God? (p.11). Almost in direct answer to that question the Church seemed to endorse Mircea Eliade's declaration, which I shall apply

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14 E. Griffith, In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.210 quoted by Ruth Page, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton's The Woman's Bible", pp.16-23 in Loades, A Reader, p.18.

15 Naomi Goldenberg, Changing of the Gods (Boston, 1979), p.15 quoted in Storkey, Chapter 9, p.190.

to the dogma and apparitions of the Immaculate Conception. Eliade declared, "myths are `paradigmatic models'", and asserts that "In contrast, what men do on their own initiative, what they do without a mythical model, belongs to the sphere of the profane [i.e., that which is outside, not sacred, not hallowed by religious association]; hence it is a vain and illusory activity, and, in the last analysis, unreal"(16). With the Virgin herself appearing to endorse the papal dogma it entered into the realm of the supremely sacred. The ultramontane Count Lafond concurs: "The two dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and of Pontifical Infallibility were echoed on earth; one seems to be the reward of the other . . . . Pius IX said to the Mother of God, `You are Immaculate of your Conception', and the Mother of God said to Pius IX: `You are the Infallible Vicar of Truth'"(17).

Initially, there was opposition to the assertion of papal authority. Bismarck began his Kulturkampf against German Catholicism; the rising of the working classes became estranged from the Church especially in France; in Italy the national movement of the Risorgimento had resulted in the destruction of the temporal power of the Papacy. When, in

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16 M. Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, ([Trans. by W.R. Trask], New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961), p.96.

17 E. Lafond, La Salette, Lourdes, Pontmain: voyage d'un croyant (Paris, 1872), pp.194-96 quoted in Perry, Under, p.122.

1878, Leo XIII succeeded Pius IX the problems were enormous (Graef, Mary, p.127). As at other times of crises Mary was making her influence felt and was appearing to children especially in Germany. Leo's reign was marked, unsurprisingly, by another revival of Marianism. He consolidated the works of Catholic Action, sodalities, and workingmen's clubs - this served as a bulwark against the subversive theories of socialism and anarchism by rendering the proletariat obedient to the Church (Perry, Under, pp.141-42).

### Conclusion

Anticlericalism would continue to mark the century at various times. Under Leo XIII the rosary, indulgences and scapulars were used to regain authority and reestablish popularity / piety. One can see the manipulation of this lifeless marionette made to perform whenever the Church was threatened, and dangled before the devout as a reminder that apocalyptic promises would be fulfilled unless they bowed down to the Church. Mary was the ideal symbol who could be used / abused to provide the Church's propaganda framework and to mark out the boundaries against social, political, and economic threats which marked the nineteenth century. In this way it is hardly surprising to note that, despite all the Revolutions of the century and the vital role women played, there was not even "a momentary interruption in the tyranny of men over women" (Miles, Women's History, p.284).

This militant use of Mary was used to remind women of their male-designated places, unless they wanted to go against God directly. Nor did the twentieth century see any let up in the Church's use of Mary as a propaganda ploy as it allied itself with fascism, as well as appealing to the apparition of Mary at Fatima against the Red Army. Sallie McFague again makes the valid point that:

One of the serious deficiencies in contemporary theology is that though theologians have attempted to interpret the faith in new concepts appropriate to our time, the basic metaphors and models have remained relatively constant: they are triumphalist, monarchical, patriarchal (Models, p.xi).

The apparitions which have marked and continue to mark this century are no exception.

However, no investigation of Mary can be complete without a thorough examination of what the New Testament has to say in her regard. We are still working with Mary as a boundary figure when we turn to this material. Jane Schaberg has discovered an alternative reading within the text of the New Testament itself which is there if we listen to it. She presents us with a radically new symbol for women.

## CHAPTER VI

## MARY IN THE INFANCY NARRATIVES (I)

Introduction

This investigation of Mary in the New Testament is primarily an attempt to recover / discover Mary as an appropriate symbol that truly conveys women's experience. It is made in the light of perceptions made in the preceding two chapters about the use of bodies and boundaries, and my intention here is to show how this affects a reading of Scripture today. The chapter draws on two main sources. The first is the work of a radical feminist, Jane Schaberg, bearing the highly provocative title The Illegitimacy of Jesus(1). It is a book that offers "a brilliantly controversial, challenging and convincing set of arguments, possibilities, hypotheses, in order to give the illegitimacy tradition surrounding Jesus' conception a Christian hearing" (Back page). For Jane Schaberg the infancy narratives provide clues and silences that scream out a different story behind the distorted mask of the virginal conception. What she finds impossible to decide is:

Did the evangelists inherit a tradition in which it was clear that Mary was raped during

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1 Jane Schaberg, The Illegitimacy of Jesus: A Feminist Theological Interpretation of the Infancy Narratives (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) \_ abbreviated to Schaberg, Illegitimacy.

the period of her betrothal? Or are they (independently of one another) correcting an earlier tradition and / or rumour about her as seduced and an adulteress?" (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.146).

Shocking as this may appear to many, I believe that Jane Schaberg has found in the figure of the violated, exploited, destroyed, and socially rejected woman, who is liberated by God, a powerful symbol for all women. As Nicola Slee comments: "Perhaps it is precisely by exposing the sexism of the tradition for what it is and calling it to repentance that these texts can be reclaimed for contemporary women . . ." (2). I believe that this interpretation of the figure of Mary as rape victim is a symbol that all women can identify with, for some of those who have not already been raped may live in fear of rape. For God to embrace the raped woman and to restore her dignity above all others is a symbol of hope for real women in the flesh. This interpretation is not, however, without its problems. As Jane Schaberg presents it, we can only conclude that God allows a rape, thereby siding with the rapist, in order to appear as Saviour. I shall be investigating this aspect in more detail later.

The other source which I draw upon is a collaborative assessment by an American team of

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2 Nicola Slee, Letter to the author, 15 January 1989 quoted by Hampson, Theology, p.105.

Protestant and Roman Catholic scholars, bearing the conservative title Mary in the New Testament (1978) (3), which attempts "to see in a new light the old problems that had been separating the churches" (Brown, Mary, p.v). It is perhaps notable that although it considers its task-force balanced, in drawing on traditions other than the Lutheran and Roman Catholic for its researches, it nevertheless includes only a token woman among its twelve members - Elaine H. Pagels, then at Barnard College, New York, New York (Ibid., pp.3-4). This study, like Jane Schaberg's, employs the historical-critical method of investigation and goes beyond the former by dealing with Mary both within the Infancy narratives and elsewhere in the New Testament, as the title clearly suggests.

Brown et al believe that Matthew and Luke do convey a virginal conception and not a rape, although they find no reference to either anywhere else in the New Testament. Their findings will, no doubt, be challenging to many believers, as conservative readers discover that so much that has been claimed for Mariology has no foundation in Scripture. The task force agreed that "the question of the historicity of the virginal conception could not be settled by historical-critical exegesis, and

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3 Raymond E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. A. Fitzmyer, and J. Reumann eds. Mary in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1978) - abbreviated to Brown, Mary.

that one's attitude towards church tradition on the matter would probably be the decisive force in determining one's view whether the virginal conception is a theologoumenon or literal fact" (Ibid., pp.291-92).

Some nascent feminist concerns appear in Brown et al's book, including an emphasis on Mary as the first Christian believer, disciple, and model of faith. "However, the symbolic significance of gender, the pervasive androcentrism of the texts, and their patriarchal perspective do not provide an interpretive focus"(4).

That these two sources have so much in common is a bonus for feminist theologians, who have been belittled by objections to their "subjective" interpretations of Scripture. The word "subjective" is defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary as ". . . . giving prominence to or depending on personal idiosyncrasy or individual point of view, not producing the effect of literal and impartial transcription of external realities" (7th Edition, p.1061) and Jane Schaberg is right to argue that "all interpretation is subjective, and acceptable and unacceptable readings must be adjudicated by scholarly criteria" (Illegitimacy, p.7). It is to these scholarly criteria that we now turn our attention.

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4 Janice Capel Anderson, "Mary's Difference: Gender and Patriarchy in the Birth Narratives" in The Journal of Religion, Vol. 67, No.2 (April 1987), p.184 - abbreviated to Anderson, "Mary's".



Many traditional believers would, no doubt, want to ask why anyone would want to challenge the beliefs about the Virgin Mary to present an argument for her as a seductress or rape victim. How on earth does such an interpretation help women? It is offensive and threatens the very foundations of the Christian mystery.

What needs to be realized is that the portrayal of Mary is no innocent, idealised, purified symbol for women, no beautiful story of the wonderful marvels God can perform, no mystery to accept out of awe and reverence. Rather it is a symbol that has reduced all women to an oppressed half of humanity and provided justification for doing so. For all women are forever, and by their very natures, "other" than Mary who is virgin and mother. Jane Schaberg writes: "The Mary myth reduces woman to something less than a whole human being. This symbolic reduction then becomes a rationale for the unequal treatment of women and for women's self-devaluation" (Ibid., p.13). For this reason feminist theologians cannot simply regard the Church's portrayal of Mary as irrelevant. It is vitally important that they challenge the basis upon which Mariology is said to rest, in order to establish the validity of such claims. It is the belief of Jane Schaberg and Brown et al that such claims are unfounded. It is my belief that the patriarchal Queen of Heaven must be brought down from her throne and either rejected altogether, or else replaced with a verifiable and potentially hope-inducing symbol

that speaks to all women. Jane Schaberg comments: "The Virgin Mary at this point in Christian history is the symbol of the mother of men." The question remains: "How will women represent her as the mother of women?" (Ibid., p.14).

### **Matthew's Infancy Narrative**

We begin with Matthew's account of Jesus' origin. He begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus, but it is unusual on three accounts. The first unusual feature is the inclusion of women, since descent was always, in first century Judaism, traced through the male line - hence the use of patronymics. In Mary's case four other women prepare the way for her inclusion - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba). All four women have unusual histories, but as Niolitich, in his book The Wronged Woman Righted (1979), points out, they all share a similar sociological situation on four accounts. All four find themselves outside patriarchal family structures: Tamar and Ruth are childless widows, Rahab a prostitute, Bathsheba an adulteress and then a widow pregnant with her lover's child. Secondly, they are all thwarted by the male world. Thirdly, in their sexual activity all risk damage to the social order and so their own condemnation. Finally, all are vindicated in being drawn under patriarchal protection, legitimating them and their children-to-be(5). Both Jane Schaberg and Brown et

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5 Niolitich quoted in Schaberg, Illegitimacy, pp.32-4.

al draw attention to the fact that all four women were involved in extraordinary sexual unions, scandalous to the outside world, but vehicles of divine intervention making possible the messianic plan. However, the authors of Mary in the New Testament phrase this as "irregular or extraordinary marital union[s]" (p.82), which is not true of Tamar, since she was not Judah's wife, but his daughter-in-law. What is important here is that the inclusion of these women lead the reader to expect the final mention of a woman, Mary, to fit into the same pattern. Otherwise we are left with the insoluble problem as to why Matthew presents four sinners to contrast with the sinlessness of Mary when these women were never presented as sinners (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, pp.20-1). I believe, however, that Jane Schaberg has failed to take account of the possibility of sexual child abuse lying behind the virginal conception. The idea that Joachim was the father of Mary's child is consistent with the idea that whatever Mary's plight it was even more serious than Tamar's pregnancy by her father-in-law. This incestuous begetting, given that Mary was under her father's care until she would be handed over to her husband, would explain the hushing up of the incident and his absence from the genealogy to which we now turn.

The second irregularity in Matthew's genealogy has to do with the shattered pattern of "A begot B", which in verse 16 changes to "B begot C". "*Jacob begot Joseph the husband of Mary; of her was begotten Jesus, called the*

*Christ*" (Matt.1:16). Why, one wonders, is this pattern broken here? Jane Schaberg comments earlier that: "Feminist critics are beginning to study the silence in the text concerning women (male silence about women; women's own silence), and to understand that aspects of the reality of women have been erased" (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.18). Clearly, this is one of those silences that requires clarification. "It is not said that Joseph, the husband of Mary, begot Jesus. And it is not said who begot Jesus" (Ibid., p.35). Those, like Davis, who argue that the passive "*of her was begotten*" is intended to convey the action of the divine can only postulate this in the light of reading vs.18-25.

The third and final striking irregularity concerns Matthew's miscalculation in the number of generations in vs.17. That Matthew should include only thirteen and not the stated fourteen generations cannot be put down to a mere oversight on his part. Proposals for finding a fourteenth generation include attempts to count Jesus as the thirteenth and Christ the Messiah as the fourteenth. However, it is clear that Matthew intends Jesus to be understood as the Christ from his conception. Others see it as referring to the apocalyptic and Messianic age, or to Jesus' mysterious conception from the Spirit. Jane Schaberg believes that a divine begetting, such as Matthew presents here, does not negate human begetting and that Jesus' genealogy involves two kinds of human

fatherhood: legal (Joseph's via adoption) and the biological father (Ibid., p.39).

Both Brown et al and Jane Schaberg see behind Matthew's narrative reference to the laws concerning rape, adultery, and divorce which explain the dilemma Joseph faced, (vs.18-25). According to Deuteronomy 22:26 if a young woman was raped the law stated: "*You shall do nothing*" to her by way of punishment. In Deuteronomy 22:24 the fate of a woman judged to have been seduced is to be stoned to death with the partner. However, there is no reported case of this ever happening - Jane Schaberg understands the case found in the New Testament, in John 8, as a staged episode to trick Jesus. These laws help us to make sense of Joseph's dilemma. We are told that he was a Torah-observant man and as such he "would probably not complete the marriage with an adulteress" (Ibid., p.60). The best that could be expected for the betrothed raped woman was the completion of the marriage without a hearing to establish that it was rape and not seduction. The child would become the husband's adopted son and benefit accordingly (Ibid., p.57).

In Matthew's gospel the angel removes the suspicion of adultery and makes Mary acceptable to Joseph who arranges the home-taking. This does not, however, remove the suspicion of rape (Ibid., p.60).

The infancy narratives of both Matthew and Luke serve as overtures to the gospel as a whole. It is,

therefore, highly improbable that given what Matthew says about "porneia" in his passage on marriage and divorce that he would understand Mary as guilty of it in Matthew 1 (Ibid., p.61). We need now to investigate the arguments of those who claim that Jesus was conceived virginally.

Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 appears to be the first early Christian and only New Testament writing to apply these words to Mary and Jesus. Jane Schaberg writes: "Many commentators hold that the LXX translator probably understood the Hebrew text to mean that one who is (now) a virgin will conceive (in the normal way women conceive)", and goes on to ask, "how do we know that Matthew did not understand the verse as the LXX translator did?" (Ibid., pp.2-3). The actual reference speaks of a specific person (the young woman) known to both Isaiah and Ahaz who was about to give birth to a child naturally conceived. There is nothing in the text to suggest that "*the virgin*" remained a virgin (Ibid., p.70). Whilst Brown et al conclude that it is possible that the tradition of the virginal conception was in circulation and, therefore, Matthew was simply reminded of it by the Isaiah reference, this seems highly improbable given the particular Jewish nature of the infancy narratives. The misinterpretation of Isaiah 7:14 from the meaning intended by the original Hebrew into the Greek for virgin, combined with lack of previous

parallels in this belief would suggest that belief in a virginal conception has no strong basis in fact.

Although Brown et al believe that the virginal conception is the intention behind the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, Jane Schaberg believes that it was intended by neither. Other theologians who are of Brown et al's opinion include Austin Farrer who, in Interpretation and Belief (1976), maintains that: "The Church, that is, judged Christ to have been virginally conceived because they thought he must have been, not because they had evidence that he was"(6). Similarly, Tony Lane argues, in his article "The Rationale and Significance of the Virgin Birth", that

a miraculous birth is a sign or pointer to the significance of the child. It is therefore fitting and appropriate for the Son of God to have a miraculous birth; the virgin birth is the form that this took . . . . The virgin birth is credible and appropriate because it is the sign of the incarnation(7).

Karl Barth, too, sees the virgin birth as pointing to the incarnation in the same way as the empty tomb points to the resurrection (Church Dogmatics 1/2, pp.178f, 181-4,

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6 Austin Farrer, "Mary, Scripture and Tradition", p.112 of his Interpretation and Belief (London: S.P.C.K., 1976) - abbreviated to Farrer, Interpretation.

7 Tony Lane, "The Rationale and Significance of the Virgin Birth", pp.93-119 in Wright, Chosen, p.103.

187, 189, 202). But there appears to have been no real interest in Mariology in the pre-Nicene Fathers.

Jane Schaberg is of quite a different opinion. For her, Matthew and Luke provide cautious presentations theologizing this "potentially damaging and potentially liberating material" (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.1), of which Christians soon became unaware. The tradition became, in their hands, damaging in a different way, in that "Matthew and Luke embody male conceptions of female gender. . . . She gives birth to a son who is the Messiah, Son of David, through her husband's Davidic heritage as well as Son of God through God's creative act" (Anderson, "Mary's", pp.184-85). Esther Fuchs argues convincingly "that the annunciation convention also defines motherhood as a patriarchal institution designed to ensure male control of female reproductive powers and relationships with children"(8). Janice Capel Anderson continues to develop this point, stating: "The divine messengers are male. The child born is a male heir. God, portrayed as a male, controls the women's reproductive powers". Adding a little later: "Is God the Father a cosmic symbol of male dominance or an image that undermines male dominance by devaluing human fatherhood and patriarchal institution?" (Anderson,

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8 Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible", in Adela Yarbo Collins, ed. Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, No.10 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985), pp.128-29 quoted in Anderson, "Mary's", pp.193-94.



"Mary's", p.195). The question as yet remains unanswered.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, in his book The Virginal Conception of Jesus in the New Testament (1973), argued that without prior knowledge of Matthew a reading of Luke would lead one to understand "a child born to Mary in the usual way." However, the phrase in Luke 3:23 - "*Jesus being the son, (as was supposed) of Joseph*" - does raise the possibility of Luke's desire to convey a virginal conception. Although later Joseph A. Fitzmyer was to change his mind and agree with Brown et al that the text does indeed present the virginal conception of Jesus, it was not unanimously apparent to all the task-force, and it was agreed that Luke does not make this point as clearly as Matthew (Brown, Mary, p.120). By contrast, Jane Schaberg, whilst believing a virginal conception to be untenable, also regards Luke 3:23 as ruling out Joseph's biological paternity. Thus we are left with "the biological fatherhood of some unnamed person" (Illegitimacy, p.83). The question remains as to whether this man could have been Mary's father.

### **Luke's Infancy Narrative**

"The Story of Mary: Luke's Version", written by Deborah F. Middleton, provides a reading which to some degree enhances the work of Jane Schaberg. She sees the gospel as found in miniature in the infancy narrative and it is primarily in the figure of Mary that Luke's themes

relating social justice, women, true discipleship, the relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist, Christology, the miraculous, and the Holy Spirit, are initially introduced (9).

There is a step-parallelism going on in Luke between the birth of John the Baptist and that of Jesus. Everything is designed to show the superior greatness of Jesus over John (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.101). Deborah F. Middleton emphasizes the appropriateness of Gabriel's visit to Mary breaking the story of John the Baptist so that the reader will compare and contrast the two annunciation stories directly. In this way the emphasis on the contrast in gender is achieved - news of the birth came to a woman, not a man, in Jesus' case (Middleton, "The Story", p.557). Nowhere else in Scripture is a woman's consent first extracted before divine intervention occurs. In this Deborah F. Middleton sees Mary's "yes" to God as a response that puts her on the level of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-4) and she becomes the mother of the new Israel. Mary is in charge of her own destiny and that of all humanity. She appears as a woman making choices (Ibid., p.563). This idea is taken up in Marialis Cultus, although any evidence for the active participation of Mary lies debateably in Luke alone. For

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9 Deborah F. Middleton, "The Story of Mary: Luke's Version" (New Blackfriars, Vol.70, December 1989), p.556 - abbreviated to Middleton, "The Story".

Marie Isaacs and Deborah Middleton she is not only one of the anawim, but the epitome of their faith.

However, there are clues that reflect a more sinister and uneasy story behind both the Matthean and Lucan narratives examined so far. First, there is the strangely inappropriate question of Mary as a young betrothed woman, "*How can this be? I am still a virgin*" (Lk. 1:3). That Mary would become pregnant by her husband in the future would be a most natural expectation. It is, moreover, completely out of harmony with Jewish mentality at that time for a young girl to make a vow of virginity as some later critics have read into the text (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, pp.86,88). Anthony J. Tambasco makes the astute remark that "it seems that the desire to find a vow in the story comes more from a Mariology "from above" which tends to stress Mary's difference from humanity at large"(10). Undoubtedly, it serves as a literary device to convey how Jesus was the "Son of God", but this does not rule out a normal conception.

Secondly, Luke writes that Mary went to visit Elizabeth "*with haste*" (meta spoudés) vs.39, a phrase Jane Schaberg picks up on as pointing toward a situation of violence and / or fear in connection with Mary's pregnancy. The words "*with haste*" have negative

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10 Anthony J. Tambasco, What Are They Saying About Mary? (New York / Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1984), p.22 - abbreviated to Tambasco, What.

connotations in passages such as Wisdom 19:2, Exodus 12:11, Psalms 77:23, Daniel 13:50, Mark 6:25. However, it is also possible that it has the more positive reading, connoting eagerness, as in its use in 3 Maccabees 5:24, Josephus, Ag. Ap. 2.4.42, Romans 12:8,11 (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.89-90).

Thirdly, Schaberg believes that Luke 2:5 is a vague allusion to the law concerning the seduction or rape of the betrothed virgin (Ibid., p.91). She backs her evidence by the tone and aspects of the content of Mary's Magnificat, although some critics have argued that it is inappropriate to Mary and was originally said by Elizabeth as attested to by a few Latin manuscripts and Latin patristic citations(11).

Jane Schaberg and Marie Isaacs argue that it truly belongs to Mary. Marie Isaacs believes that the broken order of John first and then Jesus makes sense: "Precisely in inverting his usual order, John - Jesus, Luke is making a theological rather than a chronological point; that Jesus, as the Messiah, has the priority and preeminence over John, his precursor"(12). For Jane

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11 S. Denyer in his paper "Mother of Jesus - Magnificat" (Surrey: ESBVM, 2 October, 1969) states: "Two old Latin texts, along with Irenaeus, Niceta of Remesiana (4th century author of Te Deum), and possibly Cyril of Jerusalem, have the name of Elizabeth instead of Mary as the speaker of the Magnificat. This is also attested by Jerome in his Latin text of Origen's homily on Luke. But all Greek MSS and the Hebrew versions say 'Mary'", p.2.

12 Marie E. Isaacs, "Mary in the Lucan Infancy Narrative", pp.80-95 in The Way, Supplement 25 (Summer 1975), p.90 - abbreviated to Isaacs, "Lucan".

Schaberg it is "appropriate only in the mouth of a character who has experienced injustice and justice, oppression and vindication." She believes that Mary can be seen as a symbol of the anawim (1:28,30; 2:14): "But still, the song must be considered as an expression of the speaker's praise of God for what has happened to her" (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.92).

Dick France argues: "The song is not an adaptation of any one or more specific Old Testament passages, but rather a magnificent distillation of familiar words from the praises of Israel". Israel's salvation is to be brought about through Mary(13). However, the hymn parallels that of Hannah, the once barren woman, and for that reason seems more appropriate to Elizabeth, especially falling as it does in the text - unless, of course, one accepts Marie Isaacs' hypothesis. Jane Schaberg argues that: "Hannah's canticle is appropriate as a model for Mary's because Mary, in the tradition Luke inherited, experienced a disaster worse than barrenness: sexual violation" (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.95).

Janice Capel Anderson clearly makes the point that: "Virginité is not the locus of Mary's lowliness(14). The

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13 Dick France, "Mary's Song: The Magnificat", pp.34-47 in Wright, Chosen, p.38.

14 Anderson, "Mary's", p.197 notes that this is implied by Brown, Mary, p.361 and explicitly by Michel Allard, "L'annonce à Marie et les annonces de naissances miraculeuses d'Ancien Testament", Nouvelle Revue Theologique 78 [1956]: 731-32 who sees Mary's virginity as a chosen barrenness.

barrenness of Hannah, Elizabeth, and other married women may be presented as a matter of reproach and pain, but the virginity of someone betrothed is not" (Anderson, "Mary's", p.197). For this reason Brown et al's judgment that the expression found in Luke 1:25, "low estate", fits Elizabeth better is clearly overturned if Mary was a victim of rape (Brown, Mary, p.139).

Mary Daly is another writer who presents the powerfully disturbing picture of Mary as a rape victim in her book Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy (1984). In Daly's opinion God is the rapist. She writes:

Later, by her inevitable acceptance of Gabriel's message, she seeks salvation by the rapist . . . . Conditioned to believe that she is to blame for the rape, she seeks to undo it by seeking male approval, for she no longer trusts the power of her own judgment. Believing that, through her own fault, a male has succeeded in degrading / defiling her, she concludes that only a male can save her. Thus rape implies the need of a male saviour (Pure, pp.105-106).

The effects of rape are described by Daly as circular. What Daly does not say is that if Mary was raped by her earthly father one can see her theory in action in Mary's seeking salvation from her heavenly father.

For Daly, Mary is the absorbed and drained figure of the Goddess. Unlike Jane Schaberg, she completely parts company with Christianity, which she regards as inherently sexist (Daly, C.S.S., p.17). Jane Schaberg, on the other hand, believes that whilst the traditional picture of Mary as perpetually purified virgin has been turned on its head, God intervened in history to side "with a socially rejected woman and her child" (Jacket of Illegitimacy). This, indeed, is the core message of the New Testament call to human liberation. However, Jane Schaberg's interpretation is not without its problems. Had Mary already been raped when Gabriel came with the news of God's saving work? This seems highly improbable as both Matthew and Luke assert that Mary was a virgin at the time of the annunciation. Did God then elicit Mary's consent knowing of her future plight as rape victim? Did Mary then in ignorance allow herself to be raped in order to be saved? If, as both evangelists portray it, Mary's innocence in the conception is to be credited, then the reader is led to see it as a rape, not seduction (Ibid., p.146). The crux of the problem is that, as the account stands, God can be seen as condoning the rape in order then to elevate Mary. Perhaps it is even more disturbing that her fiat, the "*Let it be done to me*" is, in one sense, a male fantasy reinforcing the idea that all women who are raped are / were asking for it.

Certainly, an incident of rape would explain why Jesus did not receive honour among his own kin (Mk. 3:21;

6:4), for an illegitimate child would always suffer that shame. Austin Farrer argues that there is no difficulty in supposing that Mary's story (if she disclosed it) was doubted in the family until after the resurrection, especially if Joseph, who might have confirmed it, was dead (Interpretation, fn.4, p.108). Mark also uses the unusual designation "Son of Mary", which as Brown et al point out is found nowhere else in the New Testament (Mary, pp.60-1). Austin Farrer argues that Joseph's death does not explain the use of this title, given the Jewish tradition of using patronymics. "What we should expect would be: 'Is not this Joseph's son? Is not his mother Mary still with us, and his brethren . . . ?'" (Interpretation, p.106). Whereas it is possible to argue that this may be hinting at a virginal conception, this seems highly unlikely, given Mark's negative portrayal of Mary. However, Brown et al conclude that the most likely answer to the designation is simply that Joseph was dead (Mary, p.64). We are still left with other references which imply something of a tradition of illegitimacy behind the birth of Jesus.

In John's Gospel, Paul's Epistles, as well as in Mark there is no notion of a virginal conception. Further, Jane Schaberg draws attention to the verb eperchesthai, the overshadowing in Luke 1:35, which always carries a negative connotation, often of attack (Illegitimacy, p.113). This she takes to be related to the rapist / seducer of Mary. Although critics have



argued for a symbolic reference to Mary as the ark of the covenant here, such claims are carefully refuted by Marie Isaacs on pages ninety-four to ninety-five of her paper "Mary in the Lucan Infancy Narrative". Elsewhere John has the Jews say to Jesus: "*We were not born of fornication*" (8:41), implying that Jesus was. Nevertheless, in the light of John. 6:42, "*Is not this Jesus the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and his mother?*", Brown et al argue that such an interpretation was not John's intention, and believe that it is Jesus' divine, not human parentage, that is under attack here (Mary, p.205).

### **Conclusion**

In my opinion Jane Schaberg presents us with a new symbol. She, herself, writes of the book, "It presents us not with a Goddess, but with woman in need of a Goddess, with a woman we look at, not up at" (p.197). She does not deny the uniqueness of Christ or the salvation he brings, but what she does do, so convincingly, is to attack the sterile symbol that Mary represents for many women. Jane Schaberg turns this figure of male fantasy on its head, and presents us with the hopeful symbol of God's vindication of the oppressed and violated by elevating Mary and her illegitimate child. However, whilst such a symbol can find a place within the lives and experience of women and provides a source from which they can draw strength and affirmation

of their own integrity, there are areas, such as Mary's fiat, which cause unease. Jane Schaberg needs to give this more attention unless she wishes male fantasies to claim this figure of Mary as one which represents the legitimation for raping all women, i.e., namely that women are asking for it.

Brown et al admit to possible allusions to a virginal conception, but acknowledge no other foundation of Mariology in Scripture. Raymond E. Brown himself writes that although many Christians would be greatly offended by the illegitimacy tradition there would be

"some sophisticated Christians [who] could live with the alternative of illegitimacy; they would see this as the ultimate stage of Jesus' emptying himself and taking on the form of a servant (Philip 2:7), and would insist, quite rightly, that an irregular begetting involves no sin by Jesus himself" (15).

The fact that both sources recognize the Church as not having a monopoly on truth is a sign that perhaps deeper dialogue can go on in the future to reclaim Mary as a symbol which speaks to women today. It is precisely for those women who have been violated that the symbol of Mary as Virgin / Mother has been a source of undeniable

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15 Raymond E. Brown, The Birth of the Messiah: A commentary on the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke (London, New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977), p.530 here quoted by Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.194.

harm. It serves to keep all women in their male-designated places and provides not hope, but despair, serving as a reminder of the violation which they have endured, and which forever keeps them "other" to Mary. That God intervened in history to save the oppressed, seems strangely forgotten and is precisely what Jane Schaberg claims Mary potentially symbolizes. Susan Thistlethwaite, in Sex, Race and God (1990), captured the full intensity of this point when she wrote:

Over the years I have learned that if Jesus rose anywhere for me, he rose in the survivors of abuse. This is what resurrection means to me - as the words that make up the acronym VOICES state: Victims of Incest Can Emerge Survivors. It is to those abused through sexual and domestic violence that I turn in compassion and rage, and say it shall not be. And I know my rage is claiming healing even as it respects the bones of the ancestors of others, the rights of others to say who is the Messiah of Israel, the claim of others that 'your experience is not my experience.' This is my encounter with the struggle to survive and to prevail (p.108).

**CHAPTER VII****MARY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT (II)****Introduction**

This investigation of the passages about and possible symbols of Mary in the New Testament needs to be read as a continuation of the previous chapter, for it deals with some texts and symbols which belong to the so called 'Infancy Narratives' (Matt. 1-2; Lk. 1-2), but which were not covered in that chapter. In brief, the two chapters form a whole and should not be read in isolation, for in order to understand the birth narratives a reader has reason to look outside at the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In turn, if s/he is to understand texts and symbols in the main body of the Gospels, it is necessary at times to look at the birth narratives. Many of the comments on the texts under present investigation are written in the light of the challenging and radically controversial interpretation of Mary as possible rape or abuse victim, which Jane Schaberg gave to the narratives.

This chapter also draws on the collaborative study of the American team(1). In addition, other principal resources include John McHugh's Roman Catholic study of Mary in the New Testament, entitled The Mother of Jesus

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1 Brown, Mary.

in the New Testament (1975), Hilda Graef's chapter on "Mary in the Scriptures" in Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion (1985), Anthony J. Tambasco's What are they saying about Mary? (1984), David F. Wright, editor of Chosen by God: Mary in Evangelical Perspective (1989), Austin Farrer's chapter "Mary, Scripture and Tradition" in Interpretation and Belief (1976), Marie Isaacs' article "Mary in the Lucan Infancy Narrative" (1975), and Deborah F. Middleton's article "The Story of Mary: Luke's Version" (1989).

When investigating the various interpretations it is imperative that one realizes that we are dealing with a set of texts / symbols which may be (a) fully loaded with male fantasies and (b) which may have been manipulated to keep women from realizing their full potential as human beings. As long as Mary continues to be upheld as some asexual, receptive vessel, unable to err in any way because incapable of sin, alienated from her own body which is only to be put to the service of others (interpreted by the Church as the service of God) women cannot find in her an image of the wholeness and self-affirmation they seek. The Church disguises how costly self-sacrifice is for women by upholding the non-complaining symbol of ideal womanhood in Mary, and present-day medicine disguises it by administering tranquillizers and anti-depressants rather than trying to change the root cause which may lie in the actual structure of society.

Hilda Graef captures the movement of this chapter as it attempts to unearth the meanings behind the texts / symbols when she writes: "Thus Scripture presents Mary 'through a glass in a dark manner'. (1 Cor. 13.12.) Almost every passage referring to her can be - and has been - interpreted in quite different ways" (Graef, Mary, p.31). This is the difficult task which lies ahead, but having been supplied with a new critical direction by Jane Schaberg we proceed with the foreknowledge that "such contexts are patriarchal and androcentric, and that the Bible should be approached with a hermeneutics of suspicion" (Illegitimacy, p.8). The existence of a canon suggests the existence of other texts such as the Gnostic texts excluded from the canon which contained powerful female symbolism. What we have here, in the words of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, is "the myth of a woman preached to women by men" (2).

Virtually all the interpreters are agreed that it is not the role of the historical Mary which is of importance, or of interest to the evangelists, but her role as symbol (Isaacs, "Lucan" p.84). Deborah F. Middleton and Rosemary Radford Ruether argue that "devotion to Mary and allegiance to feminist ideals do not have to be mutually exclusive" (Middleton, "The Story", p.555). It is precisely at the level of

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2 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Feminist Theology as a Critical Theology of Liberation", T.S. 36 (1975) 605, 621, 623 quoted in Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.12.

symbolism that women need to find a viable model. The traditional model upheld by the Church has caused women untold suffering. The question which faces all those concerned with justice and equality in relation to Mary is, can anything that belongs to Mariology be reinterpreted as a symbol which speaks to women today?

### **The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple**

One detects in this seemingly innocent text a blatant misogyny which makes ritually unclean and therefore pollutes any woman who has exercised her own special creative powers in childbirth. Mary Daly has insisted that redefinition of power is a central goal of the women's movement. Women need to empower one another as well as themselves through the reaffirmation of their bodies as an instrument of communion not alienation(3). Evon Vogt writes: "Ritual perpetuates knowledge essential to the survival of the culture"(4). The ritual in question, however, is yet another example of patriarchal reversals. Its hatred of women is emphasized by the degradation of motherhood and the doubling of the impurity on the birth of a daughter - Leviticus 12(5).

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3 Mary Daly, "The Qualitative Leap Beyond Patriarchal Religion" in Quest, 1/1, p.21, quoted in Kay Turner, "Contemporary Feminist Rituals", p.76 in Aman, Border.

4 Evon Vogt, Tortillas for the Gods (Harvard University Press, 1976, p.8), quoted by Kay Turner, "Contemporary Feminist Rituals", pp.78-9 in Aman, Border.

5 Leonie J. Archer's "In thy blood live': Gender and Ritual in the Judeo-Christian Tradition", pp.22-49 looks at a nature hierarchy which brought about dualism separating women off as negative. The blood shed in male

We have already made reference to Mary Douglas' theory which links the anxiety of bodily orifices with political danger (see Chapter VI of this thesis). Perhaps it is for this reason that Mary's continued virginity after the birth of Jesus came to include the intactness of her hymen during his birth. But how can one reconcile the belief upheld by the Church with what is said by Luke who describes Jesus in graphic biblical imagery as "a male who opens the womb" (Lk. 2:22)?

D. Ryan, in his article "Perpetual Virginity", argues that theologians who maintain that these words say nothing about the actual birth and mean only "first-born", nevertheless "give one the impression of doing what they sometimes accuse Scripture scholars of doing, viz. stating that the words of Scripture do not really mean what they say"(6). It seems hard to believe that if

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circumcision was regarded as holy whilst that of women shed in menstruation or childbirth was regarded as profane. The shedding of male blood was controlled, that of the female was natural and beyond control. Archer writes, "the flow of female blood, again in symbolic terms, could be seen as the negative side of the ideal concept of society as whole and self-contained", p.31. By contrast Linda Sireling's paper "Jewish Woman: Different and Equal", pp.87-96 argues that Jews were aware of the power of women's sexuality as something positive. She maintains that Jewish women are free from being sexual objects and that the religion is in harmony with a woman's body. The restrictions on the menstruating woman are those placed upon the man who has had a night emission and are seen as indicating a loss of potential. Both papers can be found in Alison Joseph ed. Through the Devil's Gateway: Women, Religion and Taboo (London: S.P.C.K., 1990).

6 D. Ryan, "Perpetual Virginity", p.125f in D. Ryan ed. Mother of the Redeemer quoted in Graef, Mary, p.15.



Luke was writing of a virginal conception, as most theologians agree, he would not have taken more care and "would have avoided this expression if he had had the idea or had received the information that Jesus had not opened Mary's womb at his birth"(7). A. Mitterer, in Dogma und Biologie (1952), argues strongly that belief in virginity in partu "would detract from the true motherhood while adding nothing to her virginity" (Graef, Mary, p.14). In such a belief it is blatantly apparent that the female body is being negated as something problematic. Those theologians who argue for virginity in partu as the supreme symbol of wholeness - a corked vessel - do so at the inestimable cost of labelling one half of humanity broken symbols in the flesh. Susan Thistlethwaite commenting on Ruether states:

Sexism is the correlate of the 'war against the Mother' or nature, the desire of the ego to be free from bondage to material finitude. The religions created by this search for freedom from nature have been interpreted by white feminists as the transcendence and domination of the deity (and his followers) over women (sic) and nature (Thistlethwaite, Sex, commenting on Ruether, New Woman, esp. pp.194-95).

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7 J. Galot's article "La Virginité de Marie et la Naissance de Jésus", Nouvelle Revue Théologique, 82 (1960), p.453 quoted in Graef, Mary, p.16.

But why does Luke see this need for the purification if Mary, as the Roman Catholic Church maintains, was herself the Immaculate Conception, and who conceived virginally, and without pain or spillage of blood gave birth with her hymen intact (a belief not firmly laid down as such)? The purification, John McHugh writes, cannot refer to Mary and Joseph; it is usually understood to refer to Jesus and Mary. But why does it refer to Mary in the light of what has been said above? Moreover, the eternal Son of God would not be in need of purification. Other theologians have argued that Mary had to abide by the law: "*God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law in order that he might redeem those under the law*" (Gal. 4:4-5). Yet one would want to raise the objection that if these theologians are to be consistent they must also argue that Mary conceived in the normal way according to the law.

John McHugh, however, unable to provide a satisfactory answer includes the comment made by P. Benoit, which states: "What was important for Luke was to present Jesus in the Temple, where he had to be recognized as Messiah"(8).

This brings us to the strange prophecy uttered to Mary by Simeon. Brown et al gives us a literal translation of Lk. 2:34-5:

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8 M. J. Lagrange Catholic Biblical Quarterly 25 (1963), p.258, fn.27 quoted in McHugh, The Mother, p.100, fn.2.

34c *Behold, this [child] is set for the fall  
and rise of many in Israel*

34d *and for a sign that is [or will be] spoken  
against.*

35a *And a sword will pass through your own soul*

35b *so that thoughts [dialogismo] from many  
hearts will be revealed (Brown, Mary, p.154).*

Although the words directed to Mary portend intense suffering on her part, and have led many theologians to connect this with Mary at the foot of the cross, others like Brown et al argue that this cannot have been the intention of Luke since he does not include Mary in the crucifixion scene. Instead, they postulate that these words refer to the learning process which Mary undergoes which is not without its perils and sufferings.

John McHugh provides the reader with a number of possible explanations for the words of Lk. 2:34-5, in chapter 12 of The Mother of Jesus in the New Testament (1975), e.g., he draws our attention to Ezechiel (6:2-3; 5:1-3; 12:14; 14:17; 17:21), where the sword appears as a symbol not only of punishment, but as the instrument whereby God divides his people into the remnant and the dead. Mary is thus the symbol or personification of Israel. However, the classical rendition of this passage links Mary with the cross (Ibid., p.106). Hilda Graef maintains that recent research has discovered "signs of a

deeper relationship than normally supposed"(9) between Luke 1-2 and John's Gospel, and so further weight is given to the classical reading. John McHugh notes one objection to it: vs.35b becomes impossible to explain. How can the mental sufferings of Mary on Calvary "reveal the secret thoughts of many hearts?" He then provides a possible solution by restating the classical interpretation of vs.35a. Mary can consequently be regarded as one who suffered a double agony - the physical agony of watching Jesus suffer and the "far greater sorrow of knowing that the appointed leaders of God's chosen people had refused the message of salvation" (McHugh, The Mother, p.111). No conclusive evidence can be given, although this latter explanation will be expanded upon later when we come to investigate the role of the mother of Jesus at the cross in John's gospel itself.

### **The Finding of Jesus in the Temple**

Luke 2:41-52 gives the first indication of Jesus' messianic authority. Interestingly, parallels occur in classical literature where an incident from a hero's life around the age of puberty sets the scene for their subsequent greatness, e.g., Cyrus and Alexander the Great. John McHugh points out that the whole story hinges on the words of Jesus in vs.49: "*Did you not know*

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9 F. -M. Braun, "La Mère de Jésus dans l'oeuvre de saint Jean", in Revue Thomiste, 50 (1950), pp.429-79 quoted in Graef, Mary, p.17.

that I was bound to be in my Father's house?" Rudolf Bultmann calls this a "pronouncement story". McHugh maintains that concealed behind v.49 is the assertion that "ultimately he was called by his heavenly Father to Jerusalem, there to accomplish the salvation of the world" (Ibid., p.121).

No doubt, it will strike many readers as strange to discover that Mary and Joseph, who were well aware of the exceptional nature surrounding their son, should have seemed to have forgotten what the angel had said (Matt. 1:18-25 and Lk. 1:26-38). Those who maintain that Mary knew all about the destiny of her son from the annunciation must, therefore, explain why it was that both she and Joseph did not comprehend the words of Jesus. Others who adopt a "Mariology from below" assume that Mary's insights had to grow over time and that it was only at the end of her son's death and resurrection that it all made sense: "because even Mary, despite her sinlessness and spiritual perfection, was subject to the limitations of the human intellect" (Graef, Mary, p.18). Yet, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in The Woman's Bible (1985 ed.), makes a comment which many historians trying to save Mary from the errors of humanity must have silently shared with her:

It was a great mistake that some angel had not made clear to Mary the important character and mission of her son, that she might not have

been a seeming hindrance on so many occasions, and made it necessary for Jesus to rebuke her so often, and thus subject herself to criticism for his seeming disrespect (Woman's Bible, p.134).

Interestingly, there is no indication that the Holy Family comprised of more than three members at this time. The emphasis of the above passage is on the words of Jesus in vs.49. It is not, therefore, surprising that no direct mention is made of other members of the immediate family since that is not of concern to the evangelist at this point.

### **The Brothers of Jesus**

There are several texts in the New Testament which mention the family of Jesus (Mk. 3:31-35, 6:1-6a; Jn. 6:42; 7:1-10, 8:41), and for that reason have been texts which required exegesis, especially for those theologians who maintain that Mary was ever virgin. Anthony J. Tambasco is right to point out that: "The problem of determining the exact relationship of the 'brothers and sisters' of Jesus arose only in later history when the Church began preaching the perpetual virginity of Mary" (What, p.23). Certainly, the view that Joseph did "know" Mary was held by Tertullian (d.220) and in the fourth century by such writers as Helvidius, Bonosus and Jovinian Mary (McHugh, The Mother, p.202). Matthew writes: "*Joseph did as the angel had directed him; he*

took Mary home to be his wife; but had no intercourse with her until her son was born" (Matt. 1:25), and it would seem logical that this reading is implied by Matthew. This stance has been known as the Helvidian theory (McHugh, The Mother, p.200)(10). Outside of the Roman Catholic and Eastern churches this theory is widely accepted. The principal text used to support it is Mark 6:3: "*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?*" Many have seen in the phrase "*son of Mary*" a hint of the illegitimacy charge, along with John 8:41: "*We were not born of fornication*" implying that Jesus was. Jane Schaberg uses these two passages, along with others (see Chapter VI of this thesis), to provide further evidence of the dangerous explosive material concerning the possible rape or seduction of Mary which lies behind the "Infancy Narratives".

The denial by theologians that Mary did have sexual intercourse rests ultimately in their determination to uphold the Virgin Mary as a symbol / sign "that God has intervened in our history with a new creation" (Tambasco, What, p.25). Their concern is primarily Christological not Mariological. They assume that having been chosen by God to bear his son she would have dedicated her life to

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10 The "Helvidian", "Epiphonian" and "Hieronymian" theories are named after their fourth century protagonists - see McHugh, The Mother, p.200.

Him alone. The fact that this has no basis in Scripture does not seem to unduly worry them (See A. Farrer's argument in Chapter VI, p.152 of this thesis).

Marina Warner notes that the Jews had a limited vocabulary for relationships - brothers, cousins, friends were all brethren - and the vagueness of the Hebrew designations may have influenced Mark and Luke, who in the Greek used the word adelphoi - with the stricter meaning of sibling. St. Jerome declared of Joseph: "He who was worthy to be called the father of the Lord, remained a virgin" - the Latin Church has honoured Joseph as a virgin since this time (Warner, Alone, p.23).

Turning then to Mark 6:3 it is worth noting that although the designation "*Son of Mary*" is unusual it does appear in the Old Testament without disparagement. John McHugh writes that it is fairly regular in New Testament times when the father was dead and the widow had no other sons (Cf. Lk. 7:12). "Thus this Markan phrase gives no direct or positive support to the doctrine of the virginal conception, though it does confirm the view that James and Joses, Simon and Jude were not sons of Mary" (McHugh, The Mother, p.272). However, Austin Farrer is not convinced by the above hypothesis, also adopted by Brown et al (see Chapter VI, pp.160-61 of this thesis). The text continues with the words of Jesus: "*A prophet will always be held in honour except in his home town, and among his kinsmen and family*" (Mark 6:4). John McHugh argues that the choice of "*kinsmen*" in this verse



immediately following vs.3, and its inclusion of four brothers might be taken to indicate that they were not full blood-brothers (McHugh, The Mother, p.241). Similarly, John McHugh draws attention to Mark 3:20-1, 3:1-5 and wonders why the phrase "*his people*" (vs.21), has become "*his mother and brothers*" (vs.31). He draws the conclusion that: "If the brothers were sons of Mary, it is difficult to see why Mark did not write 'his mother and his brothers' in v.21; it would seem clear that Mark at this point (v.21) is referring to a wider family circle" (Ibid., p.239).

Jane Schaberg looks at this passage which is toned down by Matthew and Luke. Indeed, in Luke 8:19-21 she regards the passage as so ambiguous that it can be read as praise of his family. It is written in the light of Luke's annunciation scene where Mary is depicted as the ideal disciple, the one who hears the word of God and does it (Illegitimacy, fn.69, p.244).

By contrast, Mary Daly, in Pure Lust (pp.105-106), sees that what we have at the annunciation is the epitome of a rape (see Chapters III, VI of this thesis). Luke has been interpreted as projecting this scene onto Mark 3:31-35 in his rendition of it to uphold Mary as one who "meets the criterion of the eschatological family which Jesus will call together" (Brown, Mary, p.126). This is most notably seen in Redemptoris Mater ([20], p.753). However, Jane Schaberg makes the comment in a footnote that the text in Luke has been taken as a reference to

the "continued criticism of Mary, working out the theme of the sword piercing her (2:48-51) and the sword of Jesus' rejection of her" by Danker, in Jesus and the New Age, p.105 (Illegitimacy, fn. 69, p.244).

Brown et al make the observation that there is no explicit reason in the Gospels to think that Mary was a disciple of Jesus during his lifetime, and in the light of John 7:5 it is clear that the so called brothers of Jesus were not disciples during that time - "For even his brothers did not believe in him"(Brown, Mary, p.196). Indeed, perhaps Jane Schaberg is correct when she hypothesizes that the reason for the brothers' unresponsiveness was that he had no honour among his kinsmen, because they knew of his illegitimate birth (Illegitimacy, p.162). If Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier, as is asserted in The Toledoth Yeshu (Ibid., p.175), this would indeed explain his rejection in his own town. One can compare this situation with the attitude towards French prostitutes who slept with German soldiers during the Occupation - perhaps this would also explain Mark's harsher treatment of Mary in his gospel. In the Old Testament it is written that in war all women and children were killed although virgins could be taken for booty(11). Elizabeth Cady Stanton writes:

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11 Stanton, Woman's Bible, p.126 referring to Deut. 1.

This utter contempt for all the decencies of life, and all the natural personal rights of women as set forth in these pages, should destroy in the minds of women at least, all authority to superhuman origin and stamp the Pentateuch at least as emanating from the most obscene minds of a barbarous age (Woman's Bible, p.126).

The second theory John McHugh presents to explain the mention of Jesus' "*brothers and sisters*" is the so called Epiphonian Theory. This postulates that the children were born to Joseph by a previous marriage (McHugh, The Mother, p.200): a position that has found adherents, among them Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, St. Hilary, 'Ambrosiaster', St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Epiphanius, St. Ambrose and St. Cyril of Alexandria as well as being expounded in such apocryphal works as The Gospel of Peter and The Protoevangelium of James. Rejected by Protestants as an invention to safeguard the virginity of Mary it is nowadays accepted only by the Orthodox Church (Ibid., p.209).

Finally, there is Jerome's theory that the brothers were in fact cousins of the Lord; although there is not a single ancient author in favour of this interpretation (Ibid., p.202). However, Jerome's treatise "On the Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mary" has been the

constant teaching of both the Western and the Eastern Church, i.e., that Mary was ever virgin.

Following Jerome's theory modern Catholic theologians - as Hilda Graef points out (Graef, Mary, p.13) - have interpreted Matthew 1:25 "*till*" in its Hebraic sense as a word which "only emphasizes that he [Joseph] did not consummate his marriage with her [Mary] before the birth of Jesus, without implying at all that afterwards it was consummated" - a point which is also made by David Wright in Chosen By God, p.21. As for the phrase "*first born*" (Lk. 2:7) "this was a term generally given to the eldest son regardless of whether there were younger children or not". This leaves us with the question of the "*brethren of the Lord*". They are considered to be cousins in the West due to the lack of a simple Hebrew term for this relationship. Hilda Graef adds that The Adler Papyri, The Greek Texts, edited by E. N. Adler, J. G. Tait and F. M. Heichelheim (1939), support this position (Graef, Mary, p.13). As there is no further reference to Joseph outside the "Infancy Narratives" it is assumed that Mary would have lived with her nearest relations whose children were called brothers and sisters of Jesus (Ibid., p.14).

In the Eastern Church, however, Hilda Graef points out they agree with The Protoevangelium of James (8.3: 9.2 etc.), that these children were Joseph's from a previous marriage (Ibid., p.13), and hence step brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Brown et al state, "there is no convincing argument from the NT against the literal meaning of the words 'brother' and 'sister' when they are used of Jesus' relatives" (Brown, Mary, p.292). However, Brown et al also say, "it cannot be said that the NT identifies them [the 'brothers' and 'sisters' of Jesus] *without doubt* as blood brothers and sisters and hence as children of Mary" (Ibid., p.72).

John McHugh puts forward the innovative theory that "the brothers" were in fact cousins on Joseph's side rather than on Mary's (Ibid., pp.234-54). David Wright, however, draws our attention to the debateable wording of Mark 3:21 - "*His family*"; literally "*those around him*" - perhaps "*His people*" and Mark 6:4 - "*His own kin*". He accuses John McHugh of using this debateable material along with the dubious problem of sorting out the numerous Marys to arrive at his somewhat novel conclusion (Wright, Chosen, p.21).

Perhaps it is Anthony J. Tambasco who postulates the most rational synopsis of the above texts. He asks of the attempts by theologians to safeguard the virginity of Mary - a claim which can only be partially realized by establishing that the so-called "brothers" and "sisters" were not children of Mary - "whether this teaching of the ordinary magisterium posits historical fact or theological symbol which has simply been presumed to be historical" (Tambasco, What, p.23).

### **The Fourth Gospel**

What, then, are we to make of the role of Mary in John's Gospel? In Austin Farrer's opinion: "St. John's Gospel adds little that is positive to Mariology" (Interpretation, p.110). But is this true? Certainly, we find in the fourth gospel two stories that do not occur in the Synoptics which, at least on a superficial level, appear to be favourable towards Mary. It is to the first of these stories, "The Wedding Feast at Cana" (Jn. 2: 1-11), that we now turn; although it will be necessary to have recourse to the second story of Mary at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19: 25-27), to explore all of its possible meanings.

### **The Wedding Feast at Cana**

It is essential first of all to draw attention to the designation of Mary as "*The Mother of Jesus*" throughout John's Gospel (Jn. 2:1,3,5; 19:25,26). Nowhere is she ever addressed as "*Mary*". The Belgian Dominican, Père F.-M. Braun makes the point that it is "as if the evangelist meant to stress that her role in the gospel lay only in her relationship to her son"(12). However, the words which have caused much disagreement are those which address Mary as woman not mother - "*Woman, what have I to do with you?*" This meaning,

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12 Père F.-M. Braun, "La mère de Jésus dans l'oeuvre de saint Jean" in the Revue Thomiste 50 (1950), pp.429-79 and 51 (1951), pp.5-68 quoted in McHugh, The Mother, pp.361-62.

according to Hilda Graef, is the most obvious reading supported by Greek usage. The harshness of these words has led many Catholic exegetes to look for different interpretations; the Douai version following the Vulgate, translates, "*Woman, what is that to me and to thee?*" (Graef, Mary, p.19). This enables Mary to be aligned with Jesus. However, both John McHugh and Brown et al agree that Jesus' use of "*Woman*" in addressing Mary points away from any maternal relationship because earthly relationships are now at an end (McHugh, The Mother, p.394; Brown, Mary, pp.188-90). Reverend William J. Bridcut of the Church of Ireland states:

The first human relationship spoken of in the bible and the strongest and closest, from which all others spring, is that of husband and wife. If, as Jesus makes clear, there is no husband and wife in heaven, there is, as regards continuing relationships, no mother and son either (13).

John McHugh investigates the use of "*Woman*" by the evangelist in connection with the Samaritan woman (4:21), Mary Magdala (20:13), the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:28), the woman crippled with arthritis (Lk. 13:10) and the woman caught in the act of adultery (Jn. 8:11). He concludes that "it was a normal form of courteous address

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13 William J. Bridcut, "Our Lord's Relationship with his Mother", p. 111 in Stacpoole, Mary.

(like the French *Madame* or the Italian *Signora*) to someone outside the family; but when a Jew addressed his mother he said *'imma* ('mother'). Jesus was therefore drawing attention away from Mary's blood-relationship with him by addressing her as *'Woman'*" (McHugh, The Mother, p.363). He also notes that the phrase "*Why should you have anything to do with us? What have you got against us?*" is always a protest and occurs only in the mouth of the possessed, and in certain contexts (2 Sam. 16:10; 19:22; 2 Kgs. 3:13), it is used as a refusal to a request (Ibid., p.364).

The interpretation which sees the words as a deliberate rebuke has a respectable tradition ranging from the early Fathers through Aquinas to Newman and is admitted by most contemporary mariologists and exegetes (Graef, Mary, p.20). A. Feuillet maintains that "the abruptness of his answer to his Mother ought not to be played down, because it signifies his transcendence. While Mary thinks only of the temporary embarrassment of their hosts, Jesus has in mind the messianic wine to be administered by the Church after his 'hour' will have come" (14).

Redemptoris Mater, however, presents a very different scene. David Wright attributes this papal interpretation to "extraordinary exegetical ingenuity".

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14 A. Feuillet, "L'Heure de Jésus et le signe de Cana" in Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, 36 (1960), p.19 - abbreviated to Feuillet "L'Heure" - referred to in Graef, Mary, pp.20-1.



In paragraph 21 of that papal encyclical several claims are made for Mary. Primarily it is taken that the story at Cana revealed "*Mary's solicitude for human beings*," secondly Mary's role as a *mediatrix*, and finally as "spokeswoman of her Son's will," pointing out what needs to be done so that "the salvific power of the Messiah may be manifested" (Wright, Chosen, p.29).

Mary has also been seen by some to represent the Church. The words "*My hour has not yet come*" have been read as implying that Mary, too, has her hour which is also the hour of the Church once the passion has been completed(15).

Whatever interpretation is decided upon, nothing can be stated categorically. Is Mary, then, a symbol which the Church has manipulated as a symbol of her fitting to the "Infancy Narratives"? If so, then the question remains as to how much manipulation has gone on in the Church to construct the symbol of the Virgin Mother. A symbol which it maintains is historically true from the Infancy Narratives themselves.

### **Mary at the Foot of the Cross**

Newman argued that "for a full understanding of the words spoken at Cana, one must turn to the scene at the foot of the cross" (McHugh, The Mother, p.370). Within Roman Catholicism Mary has been seen as a believing

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15 Feuillet, "L'Heure", p.20 referred to in Graef, Mary, p.21.

disciple who lovingly consents to the immolation of Christ to the extent of participating in the redemptive work of the cross: "As Jesus sacrificed himself to God the Father on the cross, Mary sacrificed her Son to God in her heart" (Bauckham, "Origins", p.157). Hence she was called redemptrix and in the fifteenth century co-redemptrix. For the Catholic Church Mary at the foot of the cross is the representative of the Church (Ibid.). David Wright explains the reasoning behind the Church's position found in Redemptoris Mater [5], by stating: "Mary is the mother of the incarnate Christ; the Church, the body of Christ, is an extension of the incarnate Christ; therefore Mary is the mother of Christ's continuing body, the Church" (Wright, Chosen, p.28). He then notes Brown et al's point which states that it is because many see the unnamed disciple to be of symbolic significance as the perfect disciple that they have seen the figure of the unnamed woman to merit symbolic significance as well (Ibid., p.28). Indeed, John McHugh emphasizes the richness in prophecies in this particular scene. It, therefore, seems unlikely that his words with his mother are only to be read at a superficial level. However, John does not have Jesus' mother present at the resurrection. If the words spoken to Mary are a prophecy, Genesis 3:15 has been regarded as the only reference to the mother of a saviour which could conceivably be relevant. Braun and Gächter agree with John McHugh and regard the words at the hour of the

passion as claiming, albeit indirectly, that Satan has been vanquished (Jn. 13:27) (16). Mary is once again addressed as woman as she was in John 2 and thus "truly signifies the figure of the Second Eve that shines forth in the Protoevangelium, from whom salvation was to come" (Ibid.). This, then, is Mary's hour, the hour of the Church. Symbolically, therefore, the crucified Christ leaves behind him at the foot of the cross a small believing community (Brown, Mary, p.212). Anthony J. Tambasco and Brown et al interpret Jesus' words about the completion of his work as referring to the bringing into existence of this community (Tambasco, What, p.30; Brown, Ibid.).

However, Rosemary Radford Ruether, in Mary: The Feminine Face of the Church (1979), makes the sobering point:

Rather, it would seem that here, as at Cana, Mary represents the old Israel. John is presented as Jesus' heir and the embodiment of the spiritual people. Jesus' mother after the flesh is presented to the heir of Jesus' spiritual sonship to show that here the fleshly Israel passes over into the custody of the spiritual Israel (19:25-27) (p.33).

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16 Gächter, "Die geistige Mutterschaft Mariens" in Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie, 47 (1923), Graef, Mary, p.25.

Further, one can note that there is no evidence that John is trying to present Jesus as the Second Adam so why would he be concerned to convey Mary as the Second Eve? That this scene is of symbolic importance is apparent, given the omission of Mary from the crucifixion scene in the synoptics, but what remains unclear is how to interpret it.

### **Mary in the Upper Room**

Mary is present amongst the community of believers, including "the brothers" of Jesus. David Wright makes the observation that without Acts 1:14 the reader of Luke-Acts would have little confidence that Mary became a believing member of her Son's Church. The function of this verse is, therefore, to resolve that uncertainty. It is principally to remind us that Mary had not changed her mind after she uttered her fiat. Those theologians who would argue for the importance of Mary here, such as is maintained in Redemptoris Mater, do so on no ground whatsoever, for the mention of Mary disappears from the records after this incidental inclusion among a list of other believers (Wright, Chosen, p.19).

### **The Woman Clothed with the Sun**

Austin Farrer writes that Mary appears in Scripture as a glorified figure only in the Apocalypse (Apoc. 12), although this reference is highly debateable (Farrer, Interpretation, p.123). Redemptoris Mater [24], sees Mary as "The woman" spoken of in Genesis 3:15 and in the

Apocalypse (12:1) at the end of history. Hilda Graef, however, points out that a mistranslation of the Vulgate which read "she" instead of "it" led theologians to link this reference with Mary (Graef, Mary, p.1).

Most Catholic theologians agree that the "seed" envisaged by the author is the Messiah and then go on to state that the woman must, therefore, be Mary. If one remains within the limits of the text the woman must be Eve, for no other woman has been mentioned and the words are addressed to her.

Many theologians have compromised by asserting that the passage is a divine oracle and refers to both Eve and Mary (Ibid., pp.1-2). Anthony J. Tambasco and Brown et al ask whether any first century Christians could refer to the mother of the Messiah without thinking of Mary. (Tambasco, What, p.45; Brown, Mary, p.235). John McHugh, however, points out that "the first known reading of the passage in terms of Mary is not found until the sixth century, although two fourth-century writers attest that such a reading was current in their day" (Wright, Chosen, p.16 commenting on McHugh, The Mother, pp.470-71). Hilda Graef writes that the first Marian interpretation appears in the fifth century "in a dubious Epiphanius passage in the East, in St. Augustine's disciple Quodvultdeus in the West" (Graef, Mary, p.28).

John McHugh argues that the passage does not make sense if it is interpreted as the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, for it implies that immediately after being

born "the Messiah was caught up to God and to his throne" (vs.5) (The Mother, p.410). Further, what is one to make of the birth pains since Mary is, on the grounds of her Immaculate Conception, preserved from the punishment given to Eve according to the tradition. The primary reference of the woman is to the people of God, Israel and the Church which gives birth to the Messiah and his salvation, although a secondary reference to Mary cannot be excluded (Ibid., p.410). Hilda Graef points out that the Old Testament frequently represents Israel as a woman in labour (Isa. 26:17) (Graef, Mary, p.28).

John McHugh, however, believes that M. A. Feuillet solves the problem with the hypothesis that vs.5 is describing the events of Easter morning and, therefore, the immediate birth pangs are explained by the sufferings on the cross (17). It is given further credibility by the fact that in both John and in the Apocalypse the death and resurrection are viewed as one and not two events. The idea of the events at Calvary as pains of birth occurs again in Acts. 2:24 and John 16:20-22. John McHugh also notes that the words "*in anguish for delivery*" in the Greek are never used in the New Testament, apocrypha, papyri or Fathers to refer to physical birth and concludes: "The word can perhaps best

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17 M. A. Feuillet, "Le Messie et sa mère d'après le chapitre 12 de l'Apocalypse", Revue Biblique 66 (1959), pp.60-1 referred to by McHugh, The Mother, p.410.

be rendered as 'going through torment or torture'" (McHugh, The Mother, p.411).

The attacks by the dragon make perfect sense if the woman who flees into the desert is seen as a symbol of the Church and the rest of her children as individual Christians, both persecuted by Rome (Ibid., p.419).

We come now to look at "the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Apoc. 12:1), and to determine what these symbolise. Hilda Graef attacks those who look to the cult of Isis or Cybele for answers. She regards the symbolism as denoting the twelve tribes of Israel and links it with Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9 (Graef, Mary, p.28). Certainly, like John McHugh, one could see reference to the twelve tribes or to the twelve apostles and therefore to the Church.

In Genesis 37:9 the sun and moon can be interpreted as the father and mother of Joseph, but John McHugh sees a closer parallel with The Song of Solomon 6:10. Using this text Apocalypse 12:1 is saying "The totality of the cosmic light surrounds and adorns this heavenly bride". John McHugh also draws our attention to the significance of numbers. The number three symbolizes God who was, who is and who is to come. The number four symbolizes the number for the world with its four compass points. The number seven made up of three and four constitutes fullness. The number twelve arrived at by multiplying three by four gives us that significant number twelve

which is never used of earthly realities and refers to "that fullness of perfection which will not pass away" (McHugh, The Mother, p.423). Mary is then seen as the archetypal symbol in Apocalypse 12. She is the archetypal Church (Ibid., pp.421-23). Hilda Graef agrees that an "exclusive Marian interpretation is untenable" (Graef, Mary, p.30). However, Daly would not fail to see the glimpse of the Archimage behind this text which speaks of women's elemental powers absorbed and distorted by a sexist Church to point away from women (Daly, Pure, pp.96-7).

### **The Daughter of Zion**

We come now to the representation of Mary as "*daughter of Zion*", a role she plays under the cross, and at the coming of the spirit, and finally in the vision of the Apocalypse (Graef, Mary, pp.30-1). Anthony J. Tambasco writes:

The daughter of Zion is a synonym for the people of Jerusalem, but seems to symbolize a particular section of the city filled with the poor and outcasts who needed encouragement and hope (Mic. 1:13; 4:8; 10,13) (What, p.32).

Above all the expression is linked with the post-exilic theme of Zion as the mother of a new people (Isa. 54:1; 66:6-10, etc). The two major ideas of Luke, the universality of salvation and love for the lowly, are



both continued in this symbol of "The Daughter of Zion" (McHugh, The Mother, p.34).

The words of greeting have been given a deeper meaning by Père Stanislas Lyonnet, SJ., who challenges the angel's "Hail" - ~~Χαίρε~~ in Biblica 20 (1939), pp.131-41, as far from a conventional courtesy. Rather, it refers to the joy attendant at the deliverance of Israel (Zephaniah 3:14; Joel 2:21; Zechariah 9:9). Some, like the Finnish scholar Dr. Heikki Räisänen, are unconvinced that this theory provides sufficient proof (McHugh, The Mother, pp.38-45). Marie Isaacs, in the article "Mary in the Lucan Infancy Narrative", agrees that: "The verbal parallels between the prophecies concerning the daughter of Zion and the annunciation to Mary (usually cited as irrefutable evidence of dependence) are, in fact, slight". However, similarities are apparent which suggest Luke was influenced by this image of the daughter of Zion in his presentation of Mary (Isaacs, "Lucan", p.93). Marie Isaacs sees three such similarities. Firstly, "Just as Israel can be described as Yahweh's servant (*doulos*) and the suffering servant of Second Isaiah be identified with Israel, so Mary is the servant (*doule*) of the Lord , who also suffers" as Simeon predicted (Ibid.). Jane Schaberg picks up on this idea to argue that the term doule applied to Mary, as to any woman, has the associations of sexual abuse which the masculine doulos does not have (Illegitimacy, p.136). In this way Mary is the symbol of the oppressed and

violated and is "Daughter of Zion" precisely because she herself suffered and yet was chosen by God. Secondly, it follows that she is the symbol of the remnant, the anawim, not Israel in general. "Finally, in the depiction of Mary as the faithful mother, we are reminded of the daughter of Zion, the recipient of the eschatological promise of the presence of Yahweh" (Isaacs, "Lucan", p.94).

John McHugh, however, poses the question whether Luke was using this image of the "Daughter of Zion" in a different way from the prophets who never see her as an individual. In answer to this he turns to H. Wheeler Robinson, one of the greatest English Old Testament scholars, who coined the phrase "*corporate personality*" in an essay on "Hebrew Psychology" in The People and the Book (1925), and who asserts that it is found in St. Paul who believes that "*all men were made sinners in Adam, and that all were redeemed in Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 5:12-19) (18).

Other opponents of the image of the "Daughter of Zion" point out that the texts which address her as virgin are very disparaging (Jer. 31,4,21 and Lam. 2,13). Marie Isaacs comes to their defence by arguing that it is only the Greek translation of the Hebrew almah, which simply means "young woman", which conveys the sense of

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18 H. W. Robinson, "Hebrew Psychology", pp.353-82 in A. S. Peake, ed. The People and the Book (Oxford: 1925), pp.353-82 referred to in McHugh, The Mother, pp.51-2.

"virgin". She maintains that the original prophecies made no reference to virginity. Although Matthew and Luke, she adds, applied Isaiah 7:14 in its Septuagint form to the virginity of Mary - a point forcibly argued against by Jane Schaberg (see Chapter VI of this thesis) - neither identified the virgin daughter of Zion with the virgin of Isaiah. Therefore Mary's virginity is not used to identify her with Israel (Isaacs, "Lucan", p.94).

John McHugh concludes that, although we cannot arrive at a decision conclusively one way or the other as to whether Luke did consciously link Mary with the image of the Daughter of Zion, had anyone asked Luke "he would have replied that this title summed up perfectly all that he meant to say" (McHugh, The Mother, p.52).

### **The Ark of the Covenant**

Finally, we come to the last part of our investigation which looks at Mary as an image of the Ark of the Covenant. The crucial phrase used to support this reading is the word "overshadow" (Lk. 1:34), steeped in the language and imagery of the Old Testament; parallels have been seen with events in Exodus 40:35, where the glory of Yahweh "overshadows" Moses and the tabernacle (cf. Exod. 24:15-18). The word

"Overshadow" refers to the Shekinah, the cloud of God's presence which went with the Israelites in the desert, filled the temple of Solomon, appeared at the transfiguration and

the ascension, and according to Israelite tradition, covered with its shadow the Ark of the Covenant (cf, Exod. 40:35). Thus Mary, like the Ark, becomes God's resting place on earth (19).

Marie Isaacs, however, exposes the dubious arguments which have been proposed in attempting to connect Mary with the Ark of the Covenant. She takes Laurentin to task for equating the words "*In your womb*" with "*in the midst*" in order to identify Mary's conception with the dwelling of Yahweh in the midst of the Daughter of Zion.

Secondly, she draws our attention to the fact that the Shekinah was not confined to the tabernacle or ark, yet Laurentin assumes that Luke has this reference in mind. He goes on to provide an interesting parallel between the story of David taking the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and Mary's visit to Elizabeth to justify his typology. Undoubtedly, certain similarities are striking - David's words "*how can the ark of the Lord come to me?*" (2 Sam. 6:9), are echoed in Elizabeth's words to Mary: "*And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?*" (Lk. 1:43). Just as David danced before the ark we have the reference to John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb. However, Marie Isaacs informs us that the words for "*dance*" and "*leap*"

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19 D. R. Russell, "The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Bible", p.46 in Stacpoole, Mary's Place.

in the Greek are not the same (Isaacs, "Lucan", p.95). Hilda Graef adds that the ark resided three months in the house of Obededom, the same amount of time as Mary stayed with her cousin (Graef, Mary, p.10). Marina Warner makes the point that:

Luke's paramount concern with the typology rather than the story gives commentators anguish, for on a psychological and narrative plane, Mary should have stayed with Elisabeth to help with the birth, yet Luke leaves this completely ambiguous (Alone, p.12).

However, all the evidence is inconclusive and Marie Isaacs is so doubtful as to deny the validity of the symbol in connection with Mary.

Jane Schaberg sees in the phrase "overshadowing" not some vague allusions to the Ark of the Covenant, but a most sinister paralleling, where the verb eperchesthoi carries the negative connotation of attack and is a clue to the act of violence which Jane Schaberg considers is hidden behind the Infancy Narratives (Illegitimacy, p.112).

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper it is clear that Mary as a historical figure and symbol has been twisted this way and that in order for her to conform to the image theologians of one school or another want her to portray.

The path to reclaim / rediscover Mary for women is just being discovered. Donald Senior captures the potential healing power Mary contains when he writes of Matthew and Luke's presentation of Mary as an unconventional / scandalous figure with whom God identifies:

Mary as vessel of poverty whom God enriches; Mary judged powerless yet crafting history's most explosive transformation. These same prophetic dynamics of reversal are applied to Jesus in the gospels and become the bedrock of their paschal mystery . . . . Neither of these motifs allows the mother of Jesus to be put on a patriarchal pedestal or to be iconized out of our experience. The battered woman, the single parent without resources, the displaced family, the young who live with despair, the old who are discarded - these are the children of God addressed in the distaff side of the gospel mariology. From such biblical roots can come new and powerful impulses for the church's spirituality (20).

This powerful impulse has been felt in Liberation Theology. The following two chapters will investigate the work of representatives of liberation theology in the

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20 Donald Senior, "Gospel Portrait of Mary: Images and Symbols from the Synoptic Tradition", pp.107-108 in Donnelly, Mary.

figures of Leonardo Boff and Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer to see if they offer a viable way forward.

## CHAPTER VIII

## A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF LEONARDO BOFF'S "THE MATERNAL FACE OF GOD"

Introduction

The Latin American theologian Leonardo Boff's The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions(1), written after and in the light of The Second Vatican Council, is essentially an attempt to project Mariology into the latter half of the twentieth century. Aware of feminism at its most basic level, as a movement seeking justice for women, Boff's concern is to reflect upon and revise the position of the feminine in religion, and examine how the feminine reveals God, that is, how God is revealed in the feminine and whether we can regard God as our Mother as well as our Father. Boff attempts to reform Mary into a woman with whom women today can identify.

To Boff's credit he sets out to promote the full humanity of women using scientific research into embryology to undermine the anthropological basis upon which theology has been based. However, in concentrating on Mary's femininity to elevate the status of woman, Boff merely succeeds in emphasizing gender differences. For on the one hand he begins by stating that he does not

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1 Leonardo Boff, The Maternal Face of God: The Feminine and its Religious Expressions ([Trans. R. R. Barr and J. W. Diercksmeier], San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987ed.) - abbreviated to Boff Maternal.



specifically identify the feminine with being a woman, whilst on the other he goes on to identify in Mary the ideal of femininity but not of masculinity. Inevitably, he leads the reader to question the importance of Christ as man, and most seriously to question whether he is also the saviour of women. To a large extent Boff is perilously close to deifying Mary through his pneumatology and Christology, converting the Holy Trinity into a Holy Quaternity. Here, Mary emerges as a saviour figure for women as she re-enacts her Son's conquering of death and resurrection.

Boff begins his journey already accepting the mariological dogmas, and his aim is to establish them on firm 'rational' ground. To this end he steers the evidence, and at times has to enter into the realm of invention in order to sustain them. Elsewhere, when documentation clearly argues against the truth of the mariological dogmas, Boff employs such devices as (a) appropriate silence, e.g., "a deep and loving respect hushes our voices in the presence of Mystery" (The Maternal, p.163), or (b) by affirming that the conclusion is theologically true because: "True, by virtue of its own internal logic" (Ibid., p.3). The latter point is one which post-christian feminist theologians, like Mary Daly and Daphne Hampson, would maintain is internally illogical.

At its root Boff simply misunderstands the feminist challenge to religion, believing it to be the attainment

of an equal place with men, which is why he elevates Mary. Rather, as Daphne Hampson states, in Theology and Feminism (1990), it is about expressing an understanding of God in a different thought structure. It is not about discovering a lost side of men, which is basically what Boff does in arguing for God as Father and Mother (Theology, p.4). Nowhere does Boff challenge, or even question, the masculine nature of God; he simply takes this as read. His concern is to question whether we can talk of a feminine side to God, a question which is a matter of uncertainty and which must be argued with supporting evidence. This is the challenge Boff has taken upon himself.

### **A Systematic Approach to Mary**

Unlike Vatican II Boff believes that Mary is a fundamental topic in her own right, in whom God is ultimately encountered. Simply adopting such an approach to her as in The Documents of Vatican II, which sees her as one who never lived in or for herself, risks omitting much of what faith confesses in her regard. The Documents portray this picture of Mary: "Mary was a woman ever at the service of others - of God, of Christ, of redemption, of the Church, of the ultimate meaning of history" (Boff, The Maternal, p.13). Boff is concerned with investigating the linchpin, as he sees it, of Mariology and that is to find out what it means to be a feminist. He believes that the fact that Mary was a

woman was of essential and paramount importance, and he recognizes that it is precisely the womanhood of Mary that has been neglected by theologians of the past.

Woman is Not a "Misbegotten Male"

Primarily, Boff acknowledges that research into embryology and genetics has shattered once and for all any notion of women as "misbegotten males", or as mere vehicles in reproduction, from resting upon anything but fantasy. Like Genevieve Lloyd, in her paper "Augustine and Aquinas", he traces the destructive influence of Aristotle and ancient gynaecology on the conception of the feminine which is identified with woman and which filtered down through Augustine and Aquinas(2). Boff, too, realized, in the words of Ann Loades, that: "A crucial element of this has been to make bodily difference from the male the symbolic representation of 'lesser' intellectual function"(3).

Science has discovered that the female is determined by the XX chromosome and the male by the XY chromosome. Boff acknowledges that: "only the female has all four arms on each sex chromosome, while in the male one of the sex chromosomes is without one of its arms, hence its Y shape" (The Maternal, p.37), which one might use in a bid

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2 Genevieve Lloyd, "Augustine and Aquinas", pp.90-8 in Loades, A Reader.

3 Ann Lomas Loades, "Feminist Theology: A Challenge within Liberal Education" (Convocation Lecture, Illinois College, 1989), p.13.

for reversing the male myth of misbegotten, misshapen female by arguing that it is the male, if anyone, who is misbegotten, misshapen. However, although Boff recognizes that the female also provides half of the genetic material for the child to be born within the ovum he fails to make any attempt to have this incorporated symbolically into theology, or even to express a need for this active creativity of women to have a place in myth and ritual(4).

This false anthropology undoubtedly owes its origin to the Yahwistic account of creation (Gen. 2:18-25), and the Fall (Gen. 3:1-19). Although Boff acknowledges that scientific evidence has now shattered the primacy of Adam as the origin of woman, he nevertheless attempts to defend the myth that has made woman, to quote Elizabeth Cady Stanton from The Woman's Bible, "a mere after-thought in creation; the author of evil; cursed in her maternity; a subject in marriage; and all female life, animal and human, unclean" (Part II, p.8). This is clearly evidenced in Tertullian's verbal misogynistic deluge:

Do you not realize that Eve is you? The curse  
God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the

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4 Carol Delaney, "The Meaning of Paternity and the Virgin Birth Debate", in Man, Vol.XXI:3 (1986), pp.454-513 quoted in Ann Loades' paper "The Virgin Mary and the Feminist Quest", pp.156-78 in J. M. Soskice ed. After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition (London: Collins, 1990), p.168.

world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the devil's gateway, you desecrated the fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man against whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child's play to you. You deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die!(5).

Boff believes that originally the passage was intended to demonstrate unity and equality: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" and that it was only later in rabbinic thought that the primacy of Adam was interpreted as evidence of male superiority. Boff does not, as he does so often elsewhere in considering myths from all angles, emphasize an alternative interpretation by criticizing the grounds for male superiority. One could, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton points out, show that Eve is tempted by the acquisition of Wisdom, that she does not disobey God directly since it was Adam whom God directed "not to eat" before Eve was born. Nor does Adam try to prevent Eve from eating the fruit and when the wrath of God is about to descend he

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5 Tertullian, Disciplinary, Moral and Ascetical Works (New York, 1959), trans. by Rudolph Arbesman, Sister Emily Joseph Daly, and Edwin A. Quain, SJ.; quoted in France Quéré-Jaulmes, ed., La Femme: Les Grands Textes des Pères de L'Église (Paris, 1968), p.138 quoted in Warner Alone, p.58.

hides behind Eve and blames her. Is it really upon this that men claim superiority? (Stanton, Woman's Bible, pp.26-7). Yet, upon such a story both canon and civil law base their authority.

In recognizing the incalculable discrimination that has gone on by falsely identifying the feminine with the female and masculine with the male Boff, via analytical, philosophical, and theological approaches (The Maternal, pp.35-103), acknowledges that the difference in gender is one of quantity of feminine / masculine traits, rather than quality. Whilst appreciating that we do not fully recognize the range of the feminine and masculine, he nevertheless goes on to express what he believes femininity is by holding Mary up as its ultimate fulfilment, and then conveniently loses the evidence for his definition in Mystery. He believes that Mary is the ideal human being, not just the ideal woman. Yet, whilst he recognizes the harm done by isolating the feminine via the figure of Mary, his own exaggeration of gender does exactly this.

### **Mary's Virginity**

In taking the first dogmatic assertion about Mary found in Lumen Gentium [55], "The Virgin will conceive and bear a son, whose name will be Emmanuel", we begin to see that Boff is not seriously taking historical information into account, and consequently speaks "of a new Christian mythology of Mary, developed through

fantasy", which he warns the reader against (Ibid., p.126). He believes Mariology to have no real basis in the New Testament. It contains very little mentioning Mary only eight times, and only in reference to her Son (Lk. 1-2; Matt. 1-2; Mk. 3:21, 6:3; Jn.2:33, 19:25-27; Acts. 1:14; Gal. 4:4). In relation to the infancy stories these are related in terms of portraying Mary as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy; she is the awaited "virgin". Ironically, Boff fails to give weight to the classic mistake associated with the prophecy of the word "virgin". Far too much has been based on the erroneous translation of the Hebrew "young girl" by "virgin" in the Greek. In the construction of Mariology these texts - Luke, Matthew, and Isaiah - are taken "as given" and theological reflection has been built upon this mistake. Whilst Boff admits that there are many myths, especially among the Greeks, of virgins giving birth via the gods, he writes, "The latter (Mary), unlike the shameless myths, does not deal with sexual relations" (The Maternal, p.136). Why one wonders does Boff regard sexual relations as shameless? Yet, such statements give the reader insight into this writer's interpretative scheme, for he does not seem to see the potential for healing that sexual relationships have. Marina Warner writes:

The most immediate act of fusion, the one experience every human being has of combining

two in one, is forbidden. The icon of Mary and Christ side by side is one of the Christian Church's most polished deceptions: it is the very image and hope of earthly consummated love used to give that kind of love the lie. Its undeniable power and beauty do not heal: rather, the human sore is chafed and exposed (Alone, p.133).

Moreover, I would argue that the word "overshadow" has possible connotations with the sexual position a man takes with a woman. If the gospels were written at the time when they were vying for followers among the Greek mystery religions the story of a God having sexual relations with a mortal makes perfect sense since it would appeal to these very people. Boff acknowledges the possibility of the story as a literary device adding to Christology, but then rejects it on the basis that, had Joseph been the earthly father, he would surely have been venerated as was / is Mary as earthly mother - an argument which is tenuous to say the least.

It is clear that the Church primarily wishes to establish that Jesus is from God and not from male seed. The Church maintains that Mary's virginity is not the cause of her greatness, rather her greatness lies in being the woman chosen to receive the humanized Word in her womb. Indeed, Boff points out that virginity in Judaism was a sign of contempt and poverty. However, he



also informs us that for the Greeks virginity "symbolizes freshness of life, stored energy, a pent-up vitality that, when coupled with innocence, has special salvific value. Here virginity has a cultic, ritual meaning. But this is not Christian virginity or chastity" (The Maternal, p.137). Consequently, it is hardly surprising that this is reflected in the gospels of that time.

But if Mary's virginity was not important it has been a theme of much debate posing a threat to Church unity in the maintenance of Mary's virginity before, during and after the birth of Jesus(6). Serious consideration is given to whether Mary's hymen did or did not remain intact after the birth of Jesus. It is all the more incredible that theologians could debate such matters whilst the Church's rampant sexism went unnoticed. Boff is really no better.

Much is made in the Church of Mary as the new Eve, who through obedience won back humanity to God. However, women are not identified with the new Eve who according to theological tradition, suffered no pain whilst her hymen remained intact during the birth of Jesus. Boff fails to examine the story from another angle, taken for example by Mary Daly in Beyond God the Father (1973), a book in which she parts company with Christianity (see Chapter III of this thesis). Boff, along with the Church, seems blindly intent on conveying a picture of

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6 Officially proclaimed by Pope Paul IV in 1555.

Mary as a receptacle which must be made clear for the Son of God, rather than on giving women any autonomy.

### The Immaculate Conception

Here we come to perhaps the most fantastic piece of theology yet devised. Boff has no difficulties in accepting the Immaculate Conception as dogma, by which "Mary is said to be exempt and free from every stain of original sin, by the redeeming deed of her Son" (The Maternal, p.129). She is chosen by Jesus Christ in eternity before she engenders him in time. Marina Warner writes: "Predestined and incapable of error, Mary was conceived in all purity in the mind of the creator, like the birth of an idea - Athene from the splitting head of Zeus" (Alone, p.247), thus getting round Mary's autonomous position of not needing the saviour. She has been saved in advance of Christ winning salvation in time. To be fair Boff realises credulity is stretched to the utmost in this matter for he writes, "Here we have relationships whose human and divine fabric escape the cold discourse of theology" (The Maternal, p.162). Again, for Boff the meaning is not to be sought in Mary herself, but in God's wish to become incarnate. Yet, there is nothing in the New Testament to imply that Mary was conceived free from sin. John Wenham, in his paper "Mary: An Evangelical Viewpoint", writes:

I understand Romans 3:23 to mean `All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God -

save one: Jesus the Son of God'. Or are we to understand it to mean 'save two: Jesus the Son of God and Mary His Mother'? . . . . Indeed I find Mary quite explicit on this. She describes God as 'my saviour' (Lk. 1:47). The title Saviour speaks clearly of a salvation needed(7).

### **Holy Quaternity**

Boff in attempting to elevate Mary to the level of the divine at least permits her some creative part in proposing that Jesus received his human personality from Mary. He believes that Mary has been portrayed as too passive, anonymous, and submissive. He maintains that: "The pneumatological dimension in tandem with the christological, re-establishes the equilibrium of an adequate Marian reflection" (The Maternal, p.103). Boff comes into his own in regard to pneumatology, since Christianity has always resisted the idea that Mary was part of the Godhead. Instead, Boff establishes a special relationship between the Holy Spirit and Mary whereby Mary is taken into the Godhead because she has a permanent and special relationship with the Son and the Holy Spirit, and thus with the Trinity. He states:

We maintain the hypothesis *that the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and of all men and women,*

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7 Paper delivered to the Oxford branch of the ESBVM on 27 October 1987, published by ESBVM., January 1988.

realizes the feminine absolutely and eschatologically, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit has made her his temple, sanctuary, and tabernacle in so real and genuine a way that she is to be regarded as hypostatically united to the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity (Ibid., p.93).

This is Boff's attempt to divinize the feminine (Ibid., pp.93-4, pp.160-61). Ludwig Feuerbach points out: "It is in fact difficult to perceive why the Mother should be something unholy, i.e., unworthy of God, when once God is Father and Son"(8). The so-called harmony of the Trinity in fact is blatantly disharmonious, for the true harmony is reflected in Mother, Father, and a particular Child, and Boff at least attempts to make amends for this.

However, far from helping women achieve equality, Boff merely emphasizes that if the Holy Spirit absorbs the feminine into the Godhead there is still the ratio of a God with a two-thirds masculine nature to one third feminine. The situation becomes most problematic, for in Boff's attempt to deify Mary as woman as a parallel to Christ as man, he necessarily makes us ask if women are saved by the male. Surely, it was Christ's humanity that was of significance, not his maleness, yet Boff's

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8 Ludwig Feuerbach, Chapter 6 "The Mystery of the Trinity and the Mother of God", pp.64-72 of his The Essence of Christianity, ([Trans. by M. Evans], London: Chapman's Quaterly Series No.vi, MDCCCLiv), p.69.

analysis of Mary makes us question this. Boff states: "But Jesus' humanity, being male, contains the masculine and the feminine in the proportion proper to a male. Thus, while the masculine acquires an ultimate, divine meaning in him directly, the feminine does so only implicitly, as the recessive component" (Ibid., p.91). This hardly does justice to the feminine.

In investigating the role of Mary as paradigm of the Church Boff does not criticize her absence in Scripture, which strongly suggests that Mary was not important. Instead, he patches together the references and interprets even those passages where Mary is reprimanded as the inverse of their literal meaning, going so far as to maintain that these passages actually praise her (Ibid., pp.108-109).

Boff ignores the counter-evidence and has Mary portrayed, as does Lumen Gentium [58], as the prototype Jesus praises. Only John's gospel has Mary situated at the foot of the cross (Jn. 19:25-7); Boff clings to this and interprets Mary as a co-offerer with Christ. There is nothing in John's gospel to suggest such a reading and, if anything, Mary could be seen to represent the old Israel being handed over to John who is portrayed as heir to Jesus' spiritual Church (Ruether, Mary, p.33). Invention certainly seems to be the only way to maintain a belief in Mary as ideal pilgrim of the Church.

### **The Assumption**

With regard to Pope Pius XII's dogma of 1 November, 1950, the Apostolic Constitution Munificentissimus Deus states, "the Immaculate Mother of God the Ever-Virgin Mary, having completed her earthly course, was in body and soul assumed into heavenly glory"(9). Consistent with Boff's reasoning powers he is totally thrown by how to justify or establish this dogma on any rational ground. The silence of the Early Church on such an amazing event comparable to the Resurrection and Ascension leads him to state: "With consistent, intuitive logic, Christian believers have come to the following conclusion" (The Maternal, p.168). The whole incident is unrecorded because Mary was relatively unimportant to the Early Church as evidenced in the New Testament. Carl Jung wrote, concerning the dogma of the Assumption, that it was

'the most important event since the Reformation.' And further: 'The equality of women . . . requires to be metaphysically anchored in the figure of a 'divine' woman, the bride of Christ. Just as the person of Christ cannot be replaced by the Church, the feminine, like the masculine, demands an equally personal representation'(10).

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9 John Seward, "The Assumption", p.108 quoting ASS, ser.2, v.17, n.15 (4 November 1950) 761, in Stacpoole, Mary's Place.

10 Carl Gustav Jung, Answer to Job ([Trans. by R. F. C. Hull], London: 1954), p.171 quoted in Warner, Alone,

Marina Warner, however, comments that, "Jung chose to overlook the kind of woman who had been permitted this equality" (Alone, p.132). Far from the Assumption saying no to women being identified with matter, sex, and evil, it is apparent that it, like all doctrines about Mary, may be seen by women to suggest the denigration of all "other" women.

### **Conclusion**

There is in Boff a conscious attempt to make something of the feminine, but he fails to get away from the sexism of the Church, or to offer any serious alternative. Even presenting Mary as a figure for Liberation in Latin America, based on the Magnificat, does not equate Mary directly with women and overcome, or even confront the evil of sexism. Rather women's energies, as always, are being turned towards other manifestations of oppression other than their own. His understanding of the feminine is basically a male understanding and his concepts are rooted in andromorphic ideas of God. He believes vehemently that men and women should welcome God into their lives, but he has failed to

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p.132. Donald G. Dawe's paper, "The Blessed Virgin and Depth Psychology - A Theological Appraisal" delivered at the Ninth International Congress of the ESBVM., at Winchester, 1991, maintains that Jung argued that "Marian devotion . . . is a necessary link in the actualization of the divine in human experience . . . that through the Virgin Mother it becomes possible to own the generative feminine dimensions of the human psyche as part of the divine", pp.10-11. Dawe sees Jung as being in search of Human Psychic wholeness. Dawe is also aware that depth psychology and theology are boundary disciplines, p.12.

grasp that for many women the God portrayed is not one they would want to welcome. Although Boff speaks of the appropriateness of symbols he does not offer any that truly convey women's experiences, which are by and large missing from Scripture. We are left with the figure of Mary not really radically any different, appearing as an awkward appendage hooked onto the Holy Trinity, enabling us to call God Mother as well as Father. In short, what we have is the creation of a myth, not mystery as Boff himself would define it: "Mystery has its origin not in myth, but in God" (The Maternal, p.256).



## CHAPTER IX

## A FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE WORK OF IVONE GEBARA AND MARIA CLARA BINGEMER

Introduction

Although Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor (1989) (1), written by two leading women theologians of Brazil - Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer - is an attempt to provide a Marian theology for the modern world using women and Latin America as their starting point, one is, nevertheless, left with a feeling that they have not gone far enough. Their intention is to create a challenge to the Church through "a renewal of faith lived in solidarity with the poor and oppressed" (Gebara, Mary, p.v). However, whilst it is aware of the patriarchal mould of religion and the need to break this, in order to move forward from a male-centred to a human-centred theology, what Gebara and Bingemer produce is another theology, but not a radically different theology. They are still working with the "Master's tools", and this is particularly in evidence in their acceptance of the dogmas laid down by the Church, and in their restricted interpretation of Scripture. Susan Thistlethwaite's challenging question, which she poses in her book Sex, Race, and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White

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1 Ivone Gebara, and Maria Clara Bingemer, Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor ([Trans. by Phillip Berryman], Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1989) - abbreviated to Gebara, Mary.

(1990), "What happens in white feminism if we begin to give up *all* the master's tools and not just some? What happens when the *differences* between black and white women become the starting point for white feminist theology?" (Sex, p.2), as yet remains unanswered.

Gebara and Bingemer are disappointingly far from the iconoclastic writers one would perhaps have expected given the personal factors conditioning their hermeneutics (Gebara, Mary, pp.29-31). Although Gebara and Bingemer move away from the male anthropologico - theological vision by using a hermeneutics of suspicion and experience they fail to follow this approach convincingly with regard to Scripture and dogma, thereby failing to explore the wealth of silenced possibilities Jane Schaberg outlines for us (see Chapter VI of this thesis), using the same tools.

Instead, Gebara and Bingemer load a collective aspect on to Mary - she is the face of the oppressed, the servant of Yahweh, Ark of the covenant, Daughter of Zion, Mother of Mercy, and Protector. In many ways the following quotation from Émile Rousseau has still many resemblances to the Mary who emerges at the end of Gebara's and Bingemer's book. To be a perfect mother a woman ought

to be pleasing to his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make

his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time(2).

What Gebara and Bingemer appear to add on to this portrayal are elements from the Magnificat. Above all, however, they appear to hold up Mary as "Servant", invoking a service which Anne Borrowdale points out, although christian, is particularly attached to the feminine role (Borrowdale, A Woman's Work, p.3). In Latin America Mary appears as the Mother of this oppressed people, identifying with them and they with her. Again, on this point, Anne Borrowdale gives us food for thought:

Perhaps women's readiness to serve others contributes to their oppression and is sometimes harmful, but the fact that it looks so much like Christian service prevents the problems associated with it from being recognized (Ibid., p.1).

One wonders whether Mary's active role as protector of the oppressed has really moved women forward from a state of oppression as they again are called upon to internalize this model towards "others" rather than to women in particular thereby bonding with those women who

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2 Émile Rousseau, quoted in M. Eichler, "The Origin of Sex Equality", Women's Studies International Quarterly, Vol.2, No.3, 1979, p.343 here quoted in Anne Borrowdale, A Woman's Work: Changing Christian Attitudes (London: S.P.C.K., 1989), p.4.

share their double oppression in Latin America. Hence we find these writers making the comment that the point of Marian theology "is to show that without her, without the dimension she represents, one half of us is missing, a half of humanity and hence a half of divinity, since human beings are the image of God" (Gebara, Mary, p.37).

### **An Insightful Hermeneutic**

Whilst recognizing that Mary's traditional portrayal has been the product of a male vision, Gebara and Bingemer attempt to arrive at a new anthropological perspective which will no longer be male-centred, dualistic, idealistic or one-dimensional, but rather human-centred, unifying, realist and pluri-dimensional (Ibid., p.3). In an attempt to bond men and women together as equals Gebara and Bingemer are at least aware that men and women may actually require different theologies, but do not attempt to take this up. They recognize, too, what radical feminist theologians like M. Daly have not, i.e., that women will not discover what it is to be "feminine" because it differs from one culture to another (Ibid., p.13).

In their hermeneutics for a Marian theology Gebara and Bingemer exhibit, once again, insight into the different interpretations they as Latin American women - conditioned by their background and having shared the experiences of the poor women by getting to know them - will bring to the reading of the Bible (Ibid., pp.30-1).

It is, indeed, refreshing that these writers do seem to be aware of the differences sex, race, and class impose on one's interpretation and experience of life.

Gebara and Bingemer using a hermeneutics of experience realize that this will shape devotion or relationship to Mary. It is not enough to simply analyze the biblical texts and traditions about Mary. Rather we need to ask what yearnings for the unlimited - harmony, perfection, health, wholeness, safety, fulfilment, love - are being sought by those who "live in history" from those, like Mary and the saints, who are "alive in God" (Ibid., pp.21-6). In short, it is a re-reading of Mary from the needs of our age. What Gebara and Bingemer are presenting is, in the words of Anthony J. Tambasco, a Mariology "from below" (Tambasco, What, p.8). Certainly, prior to Vatican II the Church was using a "Mariology from above", relating Mary by analogy to the role of Christ in redemption. By contrast a "Mariology from below" emphasizes how much Mary is part of the Christian community, rather than apart from it. More stress is placed on Mary's faith commitment as she too joins the Church in facing Christ in receiving redemption (Ibid., pp.8-10), thereby serving as the paradigm for all disciples of Christ.

The question which still nags at one is, why Mary? Why not Jesus, since a Christology from below has been developed? The answer seems to lie in the development of Christianity once it was the recognized religion of the

Roman Empire from the reign of Constantine onwards. From this point Jesus takes on a character very like the Emperor who wields power, and art work reflects this assimilation. Whilst such an image would hardly appeal to the masses, changes have occurred over time to present Jesus as Lord of Sorrows. Other images such as Christ the king, and the sacred heart of Jesus also underwent changes. These have had their appeal to the people but none of these ~~changed~~ images / devotions is the predominant devotion throughout Latin America (Gebara, Mary, p.123).

### **Anthropological and Psychological Viewpoint**

Gebara and Bingemer very interestingly take up an anthropological and psychological viewpoint, pointing out that "the figure of Jesus sometimes merges into the figure of God, and sometimes into that of the Son of the Father: Therefore with Jesus comes a relationship of children to the father or one in which the Son of God is viewed almost as a brother" (Ibid.). They go on to conclude that: "Because of the historical and cultural experience of our Latin American peoples, the relationship with father figures is quite problematic due to the absence of the real father from the family or the cruelty of father figures in our *macho* and patriarchal cultures". In contrast the relationship with Mary is one they can identify with and one to whom they turn as "Mother of Sorrows". She is one who knows about

oppression, joy, fear, pain, comfort, life, death (Ibid., pp.123-24).

I cannot help feeling, however, that Gebara and Bingemer are merely substituting the figure of a reliable Father who does not speak to these people with that of a reliable Mother. They fail to realize that some of humanity will have a negative experience of mothers as abusers, just as patriarchy has failed to realise the negative experiences that some of humanity will have of fathers as abusers. In the book Mary is portrayed as the Great Mother with the real people miniaturized around her. Although Gebara and Bingemer have made some notable observations there is still a sense in which Mary is an inadequate model for women of Latin America. As a symbol she is in some respects removed from reality.

### **Mary in Scripture**

Undoubtedly, Gebara and Bingemer are extremely limiting and disappointing in regard to their interpretation of Mary in Scripture. One almost expects to find a continuation of the work of Jane Schaberg (see Chapter VI of this thesis) who, like Gebara and Bingemer, tries to read behind the silences in the biblical texts, using clues provided in the narrative, to discover a different story. Both books are attempting to expose the sexism of the tradition, but Gebara and Bingemer produce a narrow and highly dubious interpretation of the texts, enveloping much of the patriarchal material and staying

within its framework. By contrast Jane Schaberg tears away at the text to present a radically new symbol - Mary as rape victim along with her illegitimate child. That God intervened in history to save the oppressed is something both books are out to reclaim. Jane Schaberg finds this in the figure of the violated, exploited, destroyed and socially rejected woman, who is liberated by God, whereas Gebara and Bingemer find this in the less challenging and less convincing figure of Mary the mother as the face of the poor.

Of vital importance, however, to Gebara and Bingemer is to produce a Marian theology on the basis of the Kingdom of God.

We cannot do Marian theology on the basis of God's Kingdom simply in connection with Christology and in a way that would dilute what is specific to the female way of living and proclaiming the Kingdom . . . . Marian theology on the basis of the Kingdom also enables us to recognize Mary's 'passion' for the poor, Mary's 'passion' for God's justice, and thus to recover the power of the Spirit acting in women of all ages, even if written history has little to say about this activity. It means recovering the 'dangerous memory' or 'subversive memory' that can change things for it 'not only keeps alive the suffering and



hopes of Christian women in the past but also allows for a universal solidarity of sisterhood with all women of the past, present, and future who follow the same vision'(3).

In this way they wish to present Mary as active in the struggle for liberation. She is life-giver and her mission is seen as closely connected with Jesus': an interpretation far from justifiable given the information available from the biblical texts. Aware also of the particular historical, social, economic, political and religious structures surrounding Mary and other Jewish women of her time Gebara and Bingemer attempt to uphold Jesus as some kind of early feminist. They point out that Jesus raised women above the level at which custom kept them (Ibid., p.52). However, Judith Plaskow in the fall of 1978 dissented significantly from this type of argument in a paper entitled "Christian Feminism and Anti-Judaism". In short, she argues that the price for maintaining that Jesus was a feminist "was yet another slam at the Jews" who are held responsible for the misogyny incorporated into Christianity. As Judith Plaskow herself puts it, this is "hardly to dissent from traditional patriarchal theology"(4).

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3 Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974), p.31 referred to in Gebara, Mary, p.37.

4 Judith Plaskow, "Christian Feminism and Anti-Judaism" in Cross Currents, Fall 1978 (reprinted in "Dialogue

Gebara and Bingemer believe that Mary's role became distorted in time, that her life was "reduced to a handful of mysterious biological phenomena, questions about Mary's physical virginity multiplied, and that meant a turning away from the essential aspect she represents" (Gebara, Mary, p.44). In this way they completely dismiss the illuminating possibilities Jane Schaberg sees behind the genealogy in Matthew with its inclusion of four unusual sexual relationships prior to Mary's and the omission of a fourteenth generation. Instead of emphasizing a possible tradition of illegitimacy and adopting this as a symbol of hope for the oppressed peoples of Latin America who can nevertheless look forward to vindication as did the raped / seduced Mary and her illegitimate son, they see behind the virgin birth a symbol of "the birth of the new people of God, begotten in the woman who is the figure of the people" (Ibid., p.58). With a brief survey of Matthew's genealogy Gebara and Bingemer conclude: "Hence, `it is by the Holy Spirit that she (Mary) has conceived . . .'" ([Matt. 1:20], Ibid.), whereas I along with Jane Schaberg and others would want to argue that there is no "hence" about it. Gebara and Bingemer appear to have developed tunnel vision, not picking up on "silences" which can be identified in the text. Gebara and Bingemer appear to have been blinded by what Herbert Marcuse calls

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Between Christians and Jews", New Conversations, Spring 1987, pp.20-2) here quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.94.

"the success of the system [which] is to make unthinkable the possibility of alternatives"(5). They omit to explore alternative readings for the word "overshadow" seeing here only a reference to Mary as the Ark of the Covenant, i.e., Mary is once again reduced to a vessel. This symbolic reference is carefully refuted in Marie Isaacs' paper, pages ninety-four to ninety-five (see Chapter VII of this thesis). Gebara and Bingemer fail to search for the original words behind "*Hail full of grace*". They also pick up on such words as the shepherds' "*haste*" as their recognition in Jesus of new hope and fail to pick up on the sinister tone possible behind Mary's "*haste*" going to Elizabeth, because of the danger she was in from her condition as a prospective mother.

Ironically, Gebara and Bingemer write in respect of Luke's silence about Mary that because of this "we have a right to use our creative historic imagination to go beyond what is said" (Gebara, Mary, p.77), and then fail to employ this in a radically different way from the patriarchal reading of the text. For example, in relation to Mary's apparent rejection of her Son in Mark's Gospel, Gebara and Bingemer attempt as much of a sentimentalization of these passages as may be found in

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5 Herbert Marcuse quoted by Jo Vellacott, "Women, Peace and Power" in Pam McAllister, ed. Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982), p.38 quoted in Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.46.

the papal encyclical Redemptoris Mater (1987)[20]. They write: "We cannot believe that Mary thought her son really 'out of his mind' and that she was bewildered by his actions. To some extent that would reinforce a *macho* vision of the weakness and limitations of women when it comes to understanding crucial situations" (Gebara, Mary, pp.61-2). What seems clear from the biblical texts is that Mary was far from the ideal disciple and her omission from the Synoptics can hardly be the result of the culture of her time, since this would hardly explain why Mary Magdala plays such an important role.

Disturbing, too, is the way in which Gebara and Bingemer use the woman of Apocalypse 12 to refer to Mary(6). They regard Mary as "the figure of the humble and hard-working faith of the people who suffer and believe in the crucified savior, without losing hope. She is also the figure of the church persecuted by the world . . . . Finally, she is also a figure of victorious humankind which actually has God, born of woman . . ." (Ibid., p.86). They fail to pick up on the ominous links with Genesis in the crushing of the serpent. Susan Thistlethwaite, in Sex, Race and God (1990), draws our attention to the serpent's role as an integral part of goddess worship in the Near and Middle East as well as in Crete and Mycenaean Greece. Susan Thistlethwaite, therefore, sees Genesis 3 as representing

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6 See Chapter VII of this thesis for critique of Apocalypse 12.

an underlying struggle with goddess worship. Gebara and Bingemer are, however, keen to link Mary with Eve, the new Eve and "Mother of All the Living". Interestingly, the Yahwist writer links Eve's name hawwah, with the Hebrew hay ("living"), which in the cognate Arabic and Aramaic is related to the word hawway meaning "serpent" (Thistlethwaite, Sex, p.62). With a bitter irony one is called to remember the traditional image of the Immaculate Conception portraying the serpent crushed with the heel of Mary. It is a sad reminder of the ability patriarchy has had of convincing women, both real and symbolic, into oppressing real women. Once again, Gebara and Bingemer appear to be oblivious to this destructive imagery they are sweeping over.

### **The Marian Dogmas**

Gebara and Bingemer simply accept the Marian dogmas as given. Although they acknowledge that a re-reading is necessary along the lines of their human-centred, unifying, realist and pluri-dimensional anthropology, they seem completely oblivious to the fact that these are male-centred dogmas which have oppressed women for too long. Instead of rejecting the sexist dogmas as ungodly they actually embrace them as part of the Church's tradition, which they argue includes both men and women (Gebara, Mary, p.182, fn.4). Gebara and Bingemer thereby seem to suffer from temporary amnesia on the very point they seem to be well aware of at the beginning of their

work, i.e., the omission of women playing an active part after the very early years of the Church.

What the dogmas embody is a male perspective not a female one. Gebara and Bingemer do, however, explain in a footnote that they have retained the dogmatic formulations because there are no Mariological works written by women (Ibid.). They, ironically, fail to perceive that they have "the right to use [their] creative, historic imagination" in the regenerating of dogmas; a method they advocated for a re-reading of Scripture (Ibid., p.77).

They argue that: "Marian dogmas, which exalt Mary, immaculately conceived, assumed into heaven, virgin and mother, must reflect a knowledge that in exalting her, they exalt precisely her poverty, her dispossession, and her simplicity". Gebara and Bingemer see this as the only key to understanding the mystery of the incarnation, church as community of salvation, and the only condition that will enable the Church to see the symbol of itself as Mary (Ibid., pp.92-3). This is certainly not the way many women and men have understood such inherently sexist dogmas.

In their analysis of the virginity of Mary, Gebara and Bingemer argue that: "God's preference for the poor becomes clear and explicit when God becomes incarnate in a virgin's womb" (Gebara, Mary, p.108). As virginity appears to have had an ambivalent status in Mary's time, rather than meaning an abhorrent and infertile state as

Gebara and Bingemer would have us believe, I do not see how God's preference for the poor is at all clear and explicit from the text. Once again it is Jane Schaberg's symbol of Mary as rape victim which would make clear for me God's preference for the poor. In many ways Gebara and Bingemer appear to prefer the rosy picture of the idyllic Christmas story to the cold, violent, and frightening reality of oppression and what that ultimately comes to be symbolized: a rape victim.

Both Jane Schaberg and Gebara and Bingemer emphasize the importance of the Magnificat in reclaiming Mary as a symbol of and for the oppressed. Although Gebara and Bingemer also attach the symbolism of "the Daughter of Zion" and "Ark of the Covenant" to Mary, these are the subject of much controversy as seen in Chapter VI of this thesis. However, where there does appear to be unanimous consent is in an image in which Mary epitomizes the poor of Yahweh in the Old Testament, known in Hebrew as anawim. These were the faithful remnant of Israel who were physically poor and to whom was promised the Messiah. Both Gebara and Bingemer and Jane Schaberg read this imagery into the Magnificat, but whereas the former emphasize the collective symbolism, Jane Schaberg draws our attention more towards the personal element of liberation which Mary proclaims (Lk. 1:25) and argues that "Hannah's canticle is appropriate as a model for Mary's because Mary in the tradition Luke inherited

experienced a disaster worse than barrenness: sexual violation" (Schaberg, Illegitimacy, p.95).

### Conclusion

Although Gebara and Bingemer have raised viable points concerning their hermeneutics, which others would do well to bear in mind in reading / interpreting any text, I think that they have failed to do what they set out to achieve. I think this primarily because, whilst the causes of oppression in Latin America go back to European colonialism in the sixteenth century, those of the subjugation of women may go back to prehistoric culture (7). Gebara and Bingemer fail to see that this is a fundamental and additional problem for the women of Latin America. The oppression men suffer to some extent parallels that of their women, but the latter goes beyond this in a dramatic way. The gender division has not been redressed despite appearances. To the extent that Latin American men are oppressed they have identified with their women and sought solace and hope in the figure of a woman / mother - Mary - against the wicked "male" aggressor. Gebara and Bingemer have failed to produce a symbol that will reach out to the double oppression women suffer. In my opinion Jane Schaberg with her far "less orthodox" attempts at answering the silences behind the

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7 See Gerda Lerner, "Dominance first practised on women of one's own kind was more easily transferred to captured women than it was to men", The Creation Of Patriarchy (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.86.



text has caused an explosion in thought that helps to push religious consciousness outwards. If the symbol can be found which speaks of / for women as the doubly oppressed, one can perhaps hope to see in this new awakening of a different Marian theology a symbol that will also help men to reshape / realize the destructiveness of patriarchy and speak of / and for them too. Virgil Elizondo captures the thrust of this argument when he writes:

Even though the world might prostitute poor women and men might suffer castration, God can virginize and give potency to that which the world prostitutes and makes impotent. Guadalupe responds to the pain and the agony and the shame of violated womanhood and violated manhood and restores and begins to give a new sense of self-worth to that which the world has condemned as worthless(8).

Gebara and Bingemer are guilty of writing from, what Carol P. Christ calls, "a male-centred perspective in which the experiences specific to women are ignored, suppressed, or treated only in relation to the interests

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8 Virgil Elizondo, "Mary and Evangelization in the Americas", pp.146-60 in Donnelly, Mary, p.159.

of men"(9) - in this case the oppressed men of Latin America.

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9 Carol P. Christ, "Heretics and Outsiders: The Struggle over Female Power in Western Religion", pp.7-20 in Aman, Border, p.7.

**CHAPTER X****CONCLUSION**

What this study has enabled me to perceive is that the Roman Catholic Church faces a profound challenge as women seek symbols to embody wholeness of being. Aware of sexism, it has nevertheless refused to take responsibility for it, whilst what is required for women is the true realization of Christ's body at the symbolic level. The Church has so far denied dignity and autonomy in women. By directly associating the reproductive organs of women with the consequences of sin, the tradition of the Church has disqualified women from the priesthood because they do not bear the image of Christ. However, the Church's concentration on the maleness, rather than the humanity, of Christ raises profound theological questions concerning the salvation of women. Yet the Church's arguments on the symbolic level are far from consistent, for ordination may symbolize service and self-offering which can surely be exemplified by women. What the Church requires if it is to recognize women's equivalent status in humanity and in redemption - a claim it professes to uphold - is the incorporation of women into its structure and women's interpretation in creating and shaping texts. Much of what the Church teaches about women is contained primarily within Mariology.

The Reverend S. Denyer, in his paper "Mother of Jesus - Magnificat", tried to reclaim Mary universally for women in the following way:

Every aspect of womanhood: the pure virgin, the espoused maid, the pregnant woman, the young mother, the loving nurse, the careful parent, the devoted follower, the bereaved mourner, the faithful believer, the dying friend, the enthroned queen, the heavenly bride, are gathered up in Mary, virgin, mother, queen, pre-eminent among the saints of God (1).

My concern, however, is with the Church's need to break away from the passive, subservient, and desexualized roles which Mary embodies, since these deny women's biological, sensual and spiritual needs. This limited and unnatural portrayal of Mary is positively harmful and damaging to women. It is based upon a fallacious anthropology with paradoxical traits, e.g., virgin / mother, concealed under the guise of theological rationality. Where, one wonders, is the model for those broken through seduction, rape, prostitution, the single mother, the battered wife, the old, as well as for the independent woman? Gloria Durka includes in her research paper, "The Changing Faces of Feminism; A Religious

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1 S. Denyer, "Mother of Jesus - Magnificat", No.7 (Lecture given to the Society, October 2nd, 1969), Surrey, ESBVM., p.8.

Educator's View From the United States" (1990), the following staggering statistics:

- The single most frequent cause of injury to women in the United States is domestic violence. It exceeds illness and accidents.
- One in every three female children and one in every six male children in the U.S. will be sexually abused by the age of 18. In 85% of these cases, the abuser is someone known to and trusted by the victim.
- One in three women in the U.S. will become a rape victim.
- In the U.S. at least one million children are physically abused by their parents or caretakers every year. Two thousand die of physical abuse and neglect.
- One in every 25 elderly persons in the U.S. will meet with physical abuse at the hands of his or her adult children. (Source Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1988) (2).

This is the reality the Church has failed to acknowledge. Its silence renders those who have suffered doubly

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2 Gloria Durka, "The Changing Face of Feminism: A Religious Educator's View from the United States", p.63 in Panorama: International Journal of Comparative Religious Education and Values, Vol.2 / No.2/ Winter 1990.

victims, subjecting them to further isolation. What is needed is a model that will give these people a voice, offer comfort and healing power to the broken, as well as a model that rejoices in the creativity at all levels of women's potential and not just the reproductive and "maternal". Women need an external image that connects with an inner image, no matter who the person is and what their story happens to be. Simone de Beauvoir captured an essential aspect of personhood when she wrote: "Not to have confidence in one's body is to lose confidence in oneself"(3). This has been the common story of women to date.

It must be acknowledged, however, that Mary Daly and Rosemary Radford Ruether have done much to heighten feminist levels of consciousness by naming areas of oppression. They expose the artificial constraints that have shaped religious, social, economic and political oppression. For both, Mary as she is portrayed by the Church is problematic. She is a vital core symbol, yet sexism has shaped Mariology. Ruether attempts to reclaim Mary as the feminine face of the Church, perceiving her to give off fertile glimmers of the elemental nature goddesses. Both seek an authentic portrayal of women in the flesh. They clearly discern the need for a revolution in how we see God using a new language and new theology which remythologizes women's relation with God

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3 Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex ([Trans. and ed. by H. M. Parshley], London: Picador, 1988ed.), p.355.

and God's with the world. However, Daly's myopic vision fails to perceive that there is no universal experience among women, since experience will differ according to one's sex, race, and class. What needs to be realized is, as Audre Lorde points out, a way of relating to differences as equals. Daly simply places immanence over transcendence, but fails to render it non-dualistic or non-hierarchical. Unfortunately, Daly's is a search for an exclusively female philosophy rather than creating new possibilities for women and men as joint-heirs with Christ. For Daly Christology has nothing to say to women, for she erroneously perceives Christology to be rooted in an historical past whilst ignoring that it is also eschatological. However, for Ruether the problem of Christology can be overcome by pointing to what is of universal significance for women and men alike, rather than Christ's maleness. The fundamental message of the Church, Ruether realizes, is one of liberation of the poor and oppressed, amongst whom are women. The Church, as she sees it, is sexist, but not necessarily so. Women can have a real active role within it following the prophetic tradition, and transform society outside too.

It is important to realize that attitudes to women were shaped by the history of the body. Mary Douglas, in Purity and Danger, draws attention to the use of bodies to mark out the boundaries of society. Indeed, vulnerability at the margins of society seemed to have its natural correlate in the vulnerability of bodily

orifices. This meant that asceticism became prevalent during times of crisis. The history of the body, expounded in Chapter IV of this thesis, traces among other things, the major influence Aristotle's mistaken biological beliefs had in the subordination of women. The concept of virginity was broadened to embrace a fully developed ascetic philosophy for Christianity. Mary became an effective instrument of asceticism, demanding the integrity of women's bodies. Men's bodies were not integral, as women's could be, and therefore were not as appropriate as a symbol of wholeness. Although many women embraced the ascetic life as a way of gaining autonomy and escape from marriage and childbirth it could be at the cost of their feminine natures, and it was associated with loathing of the flesh and an alienation and killing of self. Even as female ascetics they were held by patriarchal constraints, since they were spiritually married to Christ and portrayed as vessels waiting to be filled by Him.

What is consequently required is an exorcism of the past, an owning up to the damage it has caused, and a seeking of forgiveness from all women and a transformation of symbols. Throughout this thesis I have used the word "symbol" (as I defined it in Chapter I, p.2) to mean "a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something (esp. an idea or quality) by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought



. . ." (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 7th Edition, p.1082). In my opinion, the traditional portrayal of Mary has failed to do this. Some theologians, like James P. Mackey, are beginning to expose this failure. He makes the interesting point in regard to the most important aspect of Mary - giving voice to the obvious that has so long been denied - in stating that:

Virginity, as an image or symbol, has its base in a genital sexual state, and it symbolizes closedness, if anything at all, certainly not openness; and the failure so far to realize any possibilities whatever. It forces imagery beyond the range of intelligibility to suggest otherwise; and it borders upon the perverse to choose the virgin rather than the married woman as a symbol of fidelity(4).

In the nineteenth century it appears that Mary was used by the Church as a tool against the tide of rationalism. Here the Church identified with women and altered the dominant associations of women with carnality to an association with spirituality, piety, and morality. The masculine was perceived as that which threatened the Church, i.e. materialism, work, scientific rationality. So long as the Marian cult did not threaten the central

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4 James P. Mackey, "The use and abuse of Mary in Roman Catholicism", pp.99-116 in Richard Holloway ed. Who Needs Feminism? Men Respond to Sexism in the Church (London: S.P.C.K., 1991), p.108.

Christological doctrines of the Church its leaders saw Mary as a way of maintaining the allegiance of the masses. The apparitions to peasant girls looked like a direct blow at the intellectual pretensions of the day. The declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception served as a kind of counter-revolution, ratifying papal infallibility, idealizing Mary and all women, whilst also stifling them, and making it appear that such confusion was part of the natural order.

By contrast, in the twentieth century Elizabeth Johnson makes a valid point that the female "never appears as icon of God in all divine fullness" in the tradition. Alternatively, to acknowledge "male and female created in the divine image and called to equal responsibility and dignity (Gen. 1:26-29; Gal. 3:28)", to find both sexes equally capable and "equally incapable of imaging the holy mystery"(5), we need to affirm that: "Maternity with its nurturing and warmth; unbounded compassion; power that protects, heals and liberates; all-embracing immanence; recreative energy: thus is borne out the hypothesis that the Marian tradition is a fruitful source of female imagery of God" (Ibid., p.54). Whereas Johnson wishes to reclaim divine elements from the traditional portrayal of Mary and to add on to these elements from the Magnificat I want a different portrayal, along the lines of Jane Schaberg's,

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5 Elizabeth Johnson, "Mary and the Image of God", pp.25-68 in Donnelly, Mary, p.49.

positively acknowledging the victims of abuse and reclaiming this lost tradition for women within the New Testament material.

We, most certainly, cannot remain with the romanticizing of such a theologian as Leonardo Boff. Though it is to his credit that he attempts to discuss whether we can talk about the feminine side of God, given that he acknowledges the creative role women play at the genetic and nurturing level he unfortunately elevates Mary almost to the level of deity, therefore coming perilously close to polytheism, and fails to convey women's experiences such as those I wish to have acknowledged.

As we have seen two other liberation theologians, Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, attempt to provide a Marian theology for today through solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Yet they too fail to break the patriarchal mould. They break away from the former anthropologico - theological vision using a hermeneutics of suspicion and experience, but they fail to explore the silences in the text or radically to question the dogmas of the Church. To their credit they at least realize that there is no homogeneity of experience of what it is to be feminine because of cultural differences. They, indeed, present a mariology "from below" emphasizing Mary's faith as a paradigm for all and how much she is a part of the Christian community, but fail to acknowledge that some people will have had negative experiences of

mother figures, and therefore that their portrayal of Mary will be damaging for them. And they have not appreciated the weighing of another aspect of the liberation tradition, another source of damage, for when Mary's role as a Servant is elevated it is perhaps this readiness to serve, masked as Christian service, which has contributed to women's oppression including their sexual oppression.

What I have come to realize above all from this discussion is that we are still at the stage of asking and forming the right kind of questions, the answers to which have yet to be found. Whatever is yet to be said, Mary for me must be a symbol of tremendous healing power for many women including those whose experience we find almost impossible to address. For them there may yet be a beginning, a new kind of "resurrection" for the Church.

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